

Brian Wren: What Language shall I Borrow? God talk in Worship: a male response to Feminist Theology. Crossroad, NY 1989 p195 ff

Tertullian (b.160) in his treatise Against Paxeas he began from primary scriptural data that Father and Son were in equal relationship - so Son was equally to be worshipped. Like Son, the Spirit was recognised as divine from earliest times. But it was a polytheistic environment so his images are carefully selected.

1. Root, Shoot and Fruit.
2. Spring, river, irrigation canal.
3. Sun, sunbeam, ground lights up.

These images lost the distinctiveness at the expense of oneness.

Cappadocia

Basil (b.330) Gregory of Nyssa (b 334) Gregory Nazianzus (b.330)

They inherited a tradition of sequence of the 3Ps. They never act alone but every act of God to creation has its origin in the Father, proceeds through the Son, and reaches completion in the Spirit.

Cappadocians knew that this inadequately stressed the equality of the 3Ps.

“Whoever receives the Father virtually receives at the same time both the Son and the Spirit” (Basil Letter 38 to G of Nyssa)

G Nazianzus rejected all images as adequate but used three persons, Adam Eve Seth.

Augustine

De Trinitate. His metaphors, like Tertullian’s stressed unity (memory, intellect, will) But he began to speak of the 3Ps in terms of Love, which potentially can be non-sexist and biblical. In a love relationship there are 1. The lover, 2. the beloved, 3. The love between them. (De Trinitate, 7:3-6, 8:10-14)

So: in Trinitarian thinking they were endeavouring the following -

1. Not to engage in free speculation but base on revelation through Christian history.
2. To balance unity and three.
3. Remain close to original metaphors. These stress the interpersonal relationship between Father and Son, a different metaphor of the third person, a sequential mind-set of F giving orders to S and Father (& S) sending Spirit.

These traditional trends continue into modern times.

Moltmann starts from the 3Ps and asks how can they be one, only answerable at Parousia.

He also begins from Crucifixion - how can oneness be so rent asunder/”forsaken”?

Problem is he stresses that obedience and surrender not required in Kingdom (non-hierarchical) then why argue that Son responds in crucifixion through obedience & surrender? (p.58) He has slipped into the old patriarchal framework.

Indeed the language is male too : cf. the Council of Toledo in 675 “It must be held that the Son was created, neither out of nothingness nor yet out of any substance, but that He was begotten or born out the Father’s womb [Latin: *de utero Patris*]” The male stays in control. Incorporating female functions into a divine life imaged in male terms.

Moltmann criticises Augustine and Barth for thinking that the Spirit is only the relationship between the first Ps and not a P in her own right. An energy but not a Person. The problem for Moltmann is that as with traditional metaphors, the F and S are together in relationship,

and the Father breathes the Spirit of the Word so the Sp and Son are in relationship, but how to hold all three together?

But Moltmann has subordinated the Son and Spirit to the Father anyway!

[note on

*“Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer” - three functions belonging to whole Trinity.
This is Sabellius’ mistake to see one God from three angles, not 3 Ps.*

“God un-begotten, God incarnate, God among us” - too abstruse to convey personhood.]
Our metaphors usually veer to tritheism or polytheism

“Mother, lover and friend” Sallie McFague. In relation to the world, although maybe not in relation to the other two Ps?

John of Damascus in seventh century used *Perichoresis* [to dance around]. The latin translators used a word meaning to “sit together”

“Person” has problems too: individualistic in our culture. But we learn to be a real person in relationship, so perhaps “centres of personhood” is useful.

The Personhood of the Spirit

Is word “Spirit” amorphous, vague and colourless? It is so focused on human activity and inwardness that it fails to connote the divine energy in all things; it reinforces the soma/sema trap. So it is important to consider “Spirit” along with its attachments - rushing wind, fire of empowering and inspiration, and the hovering wings of the eagle dove., water, breath, etc. suggest that HS cannot be pinned down. HS is wild and unpredictable.

HS always known as the one who creates unity. John V Taylor talks of the anonymous go-between. Between Ps and people the HS creates love relationships. Making us thus aware is a work of love and vulnerability. We do not know the Spirit but are brought together by it and so experience its life-giving quality. It gives itself away. So we try to find a name for the 3rd P but it is illusive.

The Keynote is Love: Trinitarian Possibilities:

Connected metaphors for God:

creator as birth-giver; spinner and weaver; gambler spinning the wheel of randomness and chance; Lover who creates by letting be.

Womb; Birth of Time; , Nudging Discomforter; Weaver of Stories; Strong Mother; warm Father; Listening Sister; Loyal Brother; Life-giving Loser; Companion & Friend.

All these metaphors relate to Love - a non-sexist, relational metaphor. F & S are thus named as Lover and Beloved but HS needs something like “Match-maker, Mutual Friend”

So at the crucifixion, the F and S are separated [the F separating so that the S may know the human experience to the full, the S experiencing that as being forsaken] and the HS is so torn with grief at their separation that she is so strong in her love that the Lover and Beloved are held in unshakeable unity.

Perichoresis:

the Great dance of all things is included, hence ecological wholeness: people, institutions, civilisations, arts, sciences, individual entities, flowers, insects, a storm, stars etc.

“As in a dance the diversity and unity co-exist; the unity of the dance is an active common life created by the dancers, whose very being as dancers is established through their full participation in the unity of the dance. In the universe the divine perichoresis summons everyone to join it in trinitarian eternal harmony.” Patricia Wilson-Kastner, Faith, Feminism and the Christ p.127

C.S.Lewis: Perelandra (Voyage to Venus)

Hero, Ransom sees the great dance of God:

It seemed to be woven out of the intertwining undulations of many cords or bands of light, leaping over and under one another and mutually embraced in arabesques and flower-like subtleties. Each figure as he looked at it became the master-figure or focus of the whole spectacle, by means of which his eye disentangled all else and brought it into unity - only to be itself entangled when he looked to what he had taken for mere marginal decorations and found that there also the same hegemony was claimed, and the claim made good, yet the former pattern not thereby dispossessed but finding in its new subordination a significance greater than that which it had abdicated.”

Social Ethics:

Shalom, co-equality and mutuality ethic an implication. Abolition in the dance of domination, subordination, enmity.

Chapter 9: Consequences:

“Deacon served seven rectors. In the afterlife whose associate will she be??”

Worship:

processions? Lay participation? Doxologies starting elsewhere than Father?

A drama of different metaphors for God. The arts. Creeds opened up to be shared and inviting stories. Sermons to use participatory methods. Hierarchy? Caste priests?

Ordination is a matter of Order not Power. Function not status.