Understanding Pluralism, Ecumenism and Religious Dialogue in Light of the Conciliar Doctrine of the Trinity
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Introduction
The Conciliar doctrine of the Trinity cannot be defined outside the auspices of Scripture and Tradition, given that all doctrine is shaped by these two fundamentals. They are the source and foundation of faith. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Trinity, both in essence and in persons, in unity and in diversity, is explicit from the very outset of the creation narrative (Gen. 1:1, 27). In like manner, the practices and teachings of the Church fathers throughout history could not be found wanting insofar as defining the Trinity is concerned, nor did ecumenical councils. It is therefore against this backdrop that the researcher endeavours to provide a concise definition of Conciliar Doctrine of the Trinity prior to demonstrating its nexus with Pluralism, Ecumenism and Religious Dialogue.

Conciliar Doctrine of the Trinity
Following the controversies and heresies, mostly around the divinity of Jesus Christ in the early centuries, it became incumbent upon the Church Fathers to critically and constructively look into the matter. The difficulties in trying to reconcile the incarnate God and his divinity in the whole economy of salvation proved unfathomable to the likes of priest Arius who propagated the Arian heresy. His argument thereof was, "the Son was a created, mediating figure through whom the one God made the world, and so was different from the Father".[1] The Nicaean Council called over by Constantine in 325, which was attended by over three hundred bishops and churchmen dispelled the Arian Heresy in favour of Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria.[2]

The doctrine, as formulated by the Church Fathers in the early ecumenical councils from the second century AD to the fourth century AD defines that, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct yet identical. They are distinct as persons, yet identical as God.[3] Arias David further reinforces Friedman's submission by asserting that, "The Son of God, who is the person of Jesus Christ, is consubstantial with God the

Father and is therefore God".[4] He further reiterates that, this statement of the Creed was directed chiefly against the Arians who denied the divinity of the Son of God.[5]

The ecumenical councils recognize the teachings of Origen as presented by Dyrness that, the Son is co-eternal with the Father, and of the same nature. In the same vein, Dyrness advances Tertullian's expression of the distinctness between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit arguing that Tertullian was the first to use the term 'person'.[6]

Constantinople 1, 381 AD was very much definitive in dealing with the residue of the Arian heresy. This was the Neo-Arian error propagated by Eunomius, and the ecumenical council advances that, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons who are identical and indivisible in being, possessed of the fullness of deity.[7] Buttressing the Constantinople Creed, Augustine says, "The works of the Trinity are indivisible"; arguably, he sees the Spirit as a bond of love between the Father and the Son.[8] Contrary to Augustine's view of the Holy Spirit, Friedman underpins and reiterates that, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct as persons, yet identical as God.[9] According to Anatolios, both Athanasius and Basil propagate that, the Holy Spirit has the same nature and order with respect to the Son as the Son has with the Father.[10]

Pluralism

Pluralism is not an ideology whose initiates are mortals. Rather, it is a divine characteristic pronounced in God's self-disclosure. In Genesis 1 we witness the manifestation of God in a pluralistic form. From the onset we see the beginning of God's involvement in human life just as Newland further asserts that, this is common to most religions.[11]

According to Newlands, the Trinity is the model of unity and mission, whereby the three persons are united, yet discharging their mission in diversity. As such, the plight of pluralism is for other religions to be recognized as possessing certain values, and these are pointers to God.[12] This is the trajectory which was adopted by the Second Vatican Council in the quest to foster unity and tolerance. It is assumed that humanity is one in God despite their metaphysical structure, further to that, their experiences exhibit diversity; this pluralism is the hallmark of man's humanness.[13]

In concurrence with Rahner and Vorgrimler, O'Collins and Farrugia postulate that, "Over against a rigid uniformity, the Second Vatican Council endorsed a proper diversity in Christian Tradition and worship".[14] It is therefore imperative to underscore that such a shift in the theological paradigm was born out of clear understanding of the Trinitarian Agenda as portrayed in the creation narrative.

In the trinity, we see a community which is bound together in selfless love. In his Essays in Christian Apologetics, Kreeft advances that, "The Father loves the Son, not himself; the Son loves the Father, not himself; the Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son, a love so real that it is a third Person".[15] This is expressly illustrated in a family relationship where, the husband and wife become one, knit together with the bond of love. The lover feels more complete with the loved than with himself. In like manner, one person of the Godhead feels absolute in unity with the other two. Kreeft further advances the centrality of love, family, community and relationship as essential and core to human existence.[16]

Ecumenism

According to Brauer's Dictionary of Church History, Ecumenism refers to that which is concerned with the unity and renewal of the Church. This also includes concern with regard to the oneness of the church as confessed in its Creeds.[17] Dyrness and Karkkainen, defines Ecumenism as the practices of Churches and Christian groups in which they seek and work for the unity that binds them together as Christians. The ideology became popular and propagated by the Roman Catholic Church following the second Vatican Council (1962-1965).[18]

While ecumenism is defined in relation to the church and its members who are expected to exhibit the unity of the Spirit, it is fundamentally important to demonstrate that the Trinity is the true example of what true ecumenism is all about. The church being the reality of the oneness of the three members of the Trinity, Christians must indeed and in creed mirror the divine.

The Trinity is absolutely united in essence as all God yet manifesting their persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in perfect union. This must most supposedly be the endeavour of all those who call upon the

name of the Lord and claim to be members of the Church across traditional divides. There is promotion of Unity and diversity. The ecumenical Dialogue between the American Baptist and the Roman Catholic held between April 1967 and April 1970 came with a consensus that, the Church as a whole "...found its authority in the Triune God, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, who communicated himself in a unique way to the Church...".[19]

Peter Kreeft puts it across profoundly in his postulation that what provides Christianity with a unique concept of unity is the Trinity; and nothing is more one than God, yet plurality is not only an assumption but an absolute reality.[20]

The persons of the Trinity are not withdrawn from each other, but there is a complete pouring of oneself toward the others.[21] This writer supposes this to be the essence of true Ecumenism, whereby every member involved is not withdrawn from the rest because of selfish ambitions. The lessons that are drawn from the Trinity as the pacesetter and pioneer of unity and diversity includes, but are not limited to; firstly, that whatever unity Christians wish to embrace must issue from the already existing unity of the Godhead, who, according to St Augustine as quoted by Hodgson, says, "The Trinity as a whole indwells in the Christian".[22] Secondly, Communion; there is perfect communion among the persons of the Holy Trinity. And lastly, there is collaboration and partnership.

It is supposed and therefore upheld that the Trinity, being a perfect union of three persons, is always in perfect communion and communication. Fortman buttresses the divine aspect of communication and unison by supporting the ideas of Scheeben who says," ...unity rules throughout; the divine nature and substance is one in all 3 persons, and these in turn are one with the essence. ..The communication of the essence from one person to the others involves no separation or partition of essence".[23]

Writing his consultation report on confessing the Apostolic Faith from the perspective of Pentecostal Churches, Jerry L Sandidge of the Assemblies of God submits that, Pentecostals need to remove their misunderstanding of ecumenical movement as super world-church. He emphasises that, it should be understood as a communion of communions.[24] It is therefore reasonable for this presentation to concur with

both Fortman and Sandidge and further add that inter-church organization dialogue is a divine initiative whose foundation is embedded in the Trinity, and therefore a Trinitarian agenda.

The Church Fathers saw the need to improve communion and collaboration among Christians across traditional divides. According to Burgess and Gros, in their reference to the *Decree on Ecumenism*, dialogue was a necessary means of solving theological and ecclesiastical issues of faith and order (1).[25] The Church as "the people of God and the sacrament of Christ present on earth, and the communion of the faithful by the power of the Spirit"[26], considers bilateral dialogue and church-to-church ecumenist to be so important in maintaining the Trinitarian unity.

Trinitarian unity and equality are vital in shaping Religious Dialogue. The Father, Son, and the Holy are not only diverse, they are also in absolute unity and the basis of this unity in Pentecostalism is "Koinonia" which issues from the Holy Spirit and evidences personal relationship with God through Christ.[27]

These inter-church dialogues aimed at archiving peace, unity and cooperation within the body of Christ best define Ecumenism, its aims and objectives.

Religious Dialogue

A pluralistic approach to and understanding of the Trinitarian agenda in the economy of salvation are key in inter-religious engagements. Just a simple understanding that all humans are equal in the eyes of God and must exercise mutual respect is enough to unlock dialogue. Hence, we should treat each other with utmost respect. It is from this perspective as derived from the inclusivism of God that we witness the Second Vatican moving adrift from rigidity of uniformity to proper diversity.[28]

This must of course be an all-encompassing undertaking, involving all God's people without necessarily sacrificing principles of faith on the altar. When the church extends the hand of unity and fellowship to different world religions, it must always retain its taste. Religious dialogue seeks to endear and accommodate with respect people of different persuasion.

Conclusion

From the discussion presented above, the author submits that, indeed the conciliar doctrine of Holy Trinity is not only the foundation of Pluralism, Ecumenism and Religious Dialogue but it also encourages the same.

Trinity is the model of society, whereby the three persons of the Trinity represent a perfect society. A society characterised with unity and diversity. This is the whole essence of Pluralism as it borrows a leaf from the model set by the Godhead. Diverse as people really are yet united by the reality of humanness.

The unity of the Godhead is demonstrated in every aspect of life; from the individual as he or she assumes different roles and responsibilities, either as mother, to the children or wife to the husband. What changes are functions and not the essence, so is the case with the persons of the Trinity who are not only united, but promote the same unity, communion, communication, collaboration, coexistence, diversity and functional differences.

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