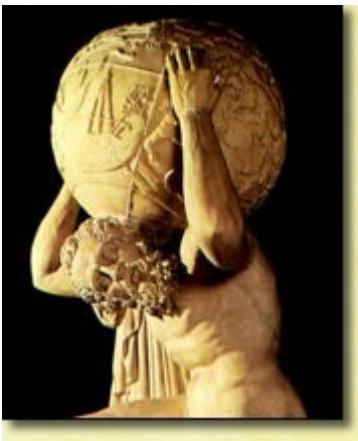


The Perils of Bootstrapping or What is Christian Ethics? A Sermon

This is the first sermon I preached right after The Episcopal Church's General Convention 2003. At the time, I was an aspirant for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. Within a month I had withdrawn from the ordination process. Two years later, on July 13, 2005, Bishop Andrew Smith invaded St. John's Episcopal Church, changed the locks and deposed Mark Hansen, our priest, and imposed a priest-in-charge, who later removed those of us on the vestry for "numerous offenses" (unspecified).

I now live in the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh, and Archbishop Robert Duncan is my bishop. With the inaugural meeting of the new Anglican Church of North America this week, of which I am a member, I thought it appropriate to repost this sermon.

Psalm 147
Eph. 5: 15-20
John 6:53-59



At General Convention 2003, the Episcopal Church made two decisions that have put the Anglican communion in an uproar. They decided to ordain an Episcopal priest who

had divorced his wife, and has been living in an ongoing homosexual relationship with another man, and they decided to allow individual dioceses to provide rites of blessing for homosexual relationships, at the discretion of the local bishop. The issue of controversy in the Episcopal Church today has to do with a disagreement about ethics or morality. So I have decided to talk a little this morning about Christian ethics.

The first thing that I think needs to be said is that it is quite difficult today to think about ethics from a Christian perspective, even for those inside the Church. The reason for this is that there is a competing ethic in our culture that has nothing to do with Christianity, but which we can hardly avoid. This is an ethic that has so permeated our culture that even Christians fall into its ways of thinking. I am going to refer to this as the "do-it-yourself" ethic. "Doing-it-yourself" is the idea that morality is about doing the best you can—pulling yourself up by your boot straps. If you do the best you can, you'll be all right.

This "do-it-yourself" ethic comes in two varieties, a conservative variety and a liberal variety. The conservative variety aims for perfection. The conservative "do-it-yourselfer" does not allow for any failures, and tolerates no half-hearted efforts. Sometimes this view is called moralism or Puritanism. The liberal "do-it-yourselfer" is more tolerant. He realizes that not everybody is perfect, so he thinks that God grades on a curve. As long as you try, you get an A for effort.

A lot of people think that "do-it-yourself" ethics is just what Christianity is all about, that Christianity is kind of like the boy scouts' motto: "Do a good deed daily." If they like the idea of doing good deeds, then these people approve of Christianity, even if they're not Christians themselves. They say things like, "I admire Jesus' moral teaching. I think

he was a great man . . . but I don't go to church or anything. I'm not a fanatic." On the other hand, if they're not so sure about their own stock of good deeds, if they're concerned that they don't measure up, then they won't like Christianity at all. One sometimes hear people complain that Christians are "goody two shoes" or "killjoys" who like to keep other people from having a good time.

And you can hear both sides represented in the public media discussions of what happened at General Convention. The conservatives were horrified. Even if they don't go to church themselves, they think that Christianity is about keeping the rules, and Bishop Gene Robinson is a bad example. He hasn't kept the rules. On the other hands, the liberals were pleased. It is about time that those Puritan Christians got off their high horse, and accepted the changes that are going on in the real world. Of course, these folks don't go to church, and they're not going to start now, not even if the Episcopal Church comes around to their way of thinking. But they are happy to know that they were right all along.

The problem with both of these groups is that they do not understand the Christian gospel, and so they do not understand Christian ethics. Since they don't understand Christian ethics, they can not provide a Christian evaluation of what has happened in the Episcopal Church.

For the last few weeks, the epistle readings in the lectionary have come from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and what Paul has said has largely had to do with issues of Christian behavior. So I think Paul can give us some tools to help us think about Christian ethics. What does it mean it mean for Christians to act and to live in a moral manner?

The heart of the Christian gospel is about two things: forgiveness of sins and transformation of life. We see this earlier in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. He says in chapter 1, "In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the

forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” In chapter 2, Paul says, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.”

The problem with “do-it-yourself” ethics is that it has no room for forgiveness, and it has no room for redemption and transformation. Since the conservative “do-it-your-selfer” insists on perfection, there is no room to be forgiven, or to start over. For the liberal “do-it-yourselfer,” no one needs to be forgiven. We’re just fine the way we are.

But Christian ethics is an ethic for people who realize that they are sinners, and that they need forgiveness. It is also an ethic for people who know they need to change, but realize that they are powerless to change without divine help.

Christian ethics is about becoming a follower of Jesus. But what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? It means that we enter into a new kind of life, a life that would not be possible if there had been no Jesus. Christian living is about our coming to share in the very life of this Jesus who lived, was crucified, and was raised to new life. The Bible talks about this in different ways. Again in Ephesians, Paul says that “God has raised up up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places.” Later he uses the imagery of a head and its body. Paul says, “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body . . . when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” In chapter 4 of Ephesians, Paul compares becoming a Christian to putting on a new suit of clothes. Paul says that through Christ, we have “put off [our] old self,” and have put on a “new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Scholars believe that Paul is using the image of baptism here. When the early Christians were baptized, they took off their old clothing, and were

immersed in a pool to symbolize that they had died to their old life. After they rose from the water, they put on a new white robe, to illustrate that they had been raised to a new life. When we are baptized, we put aside our old life, our old ways of living and thinking, and begin a new kind of life, a life that is lived because the Holy Spirit lives in us, and unites us to the risen Jesus.

In John's gospel, Jesus says: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing" In this morning's gospel reading, John uses the language of the other central New Testament sacrament, the eucharist or the Lord's Supper, to speak of how we come into union with Christ, and so come to share in this new kind of life. Jesus says: "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in them. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."

By being united with Christ, we come to share in the life of Christ. Because Jesus Christ is God incarnate, we can come to share in the very life of God, which Jesus has because he is the Word made flesh, the second person of the Trinity become a human being.

That is the heart of Christian ethics, and it has nothing to do with doing the best we can, or doing it by ourselves. Christian ethics is all about being forgiven, and allowing ourselves to be changed and transformed, as we become more and more like Christ.

And because Christian ethics is not about self-improvement, but God-improvement, that is, about God making us all over again, its characteristic attitudes are neither the scolding we find among Puritan "do-it-your-selfers"—"You've just gotta try a little harder!", nor the kind of defensiveness we often

find among compromising “do-it-your-selfers”—“I’m as good as you. Where do you get off telling me what to do?”

The characteristic attitudes of Christian ethics are the attitudes of those who realize that they have gotten what they do not deserve, not those who think they deserve what they’ve got. What are those attitudes? In the chapter in Ephesians from which this morning’s reading comes, Paul mentions two that are certainly among the most important. First, in this morning’s reading, there is gratitude. Paul says we should “give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Second, at the beginning of the chapter that was last week’s epistle reading, Paul mentions love as characteristic of those who wish to imitate the God who has come near to us in Jesus Christ. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” You probably recognize that verse, since it is one of the offertory sentences in the Prayer Book, one of the verses of scripture that is read just before the gifts of tithes and offerings, and bread and wine are presented at the Lord’s table for the celebration of the eucharist.

This then is the heart of Christian ethics. Christian living is about being forgiven, and starting over, and living a new kind of life, a life that depends on the very life of the risen Christ. In Jesus Christ, God become human, died for our sins, and was raised from the dead. Through the Holy Spirit, we are made one with the risen Christ, who shares his life with us, and enables us to live a life of holiness like the life he lived on earth. The Christian life has to do with following Christ, with responding to God’s gift in Christ with gratitude and with love. It is not about just following the rules, nor of saying that I do not have to follow the rules because I am all right just the way I am. Christian ethics is about entering into a new kind of life.

Unfortunately, there is a way of hearing the gospel message so that it is not a message that challenges us to live a new kind of life, but a message that endorses the kind of life we were living anyway. But the gospel message in the New Testament is not that kind of message. If Christian ethics is about sharing in a new life by following Christ, if it means (as Paul says) putting on a new self, then we have to ask, what about that old self? And Paul is very clear, that old self has to die. As Paul says, the old self “belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.”

Paul begins this morning’s epistle reading with some very negative instructions: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” In the current climate of disagreement that characterizes discussion in today’s Episcopal Church, there is sometimes a tendency to contrast love and law. Those who want to change the church’s historic teachings claim to be motivated by love, and to be following a new leading of the Holy Spirit. Those who resist the changes are accused of being unloving, and being bound by rules and regulations. I think this contrast is pitifully inadequate. We have heard Paul tell us to “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us.” But to walk in love means to do certain kinds of things and not to do others. Later in chapter 4, Paul gives a list of instructions that tell us what it means to walk in Christ’s love. He marks a contrast between darkness and light. Paul says, “Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” Surely Paul’s point is that certain kinds of behaviors are behaviors that are appropriate to the children of light, the behaviors that are good and right and true. And certain kinds of behaviors are not appropriate to the children of light because they are the

works of darkness. To walk in Christ's love is to walk as a child of the light. To walk in darkness is to reject Christ's love.

And throughout Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, Paul contrasts various kinds of behavior which are consistent with Christian love with kinds of behavior that are not. He tells us positively that we should speak the truth in love. Negatively, he tells us that if we become angry, that we should not let the sun go down on our anger. He says the thief should no longer steal, but should do honest work so that he will have something to share with others. Paul says that we should not speak language that will corrupt others, but only things that will build others up, and will give grace to our hearers. He says that we should put aside bitterness and anger and slander, and that instead we should be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as Christ has forgiven us. Lots of negatives there, but each is balanced by a positive.

And, yes, Paul does say some things about sex. He says that those who are sexually immoral have no place in God's kingdom. But Paul is consistent here. What Paul says about sex is not merely negative, for the verse just before Paul condemns sexual immorality is the verse where Paul says that we should walk in love, as Christ loved us. Paul knows that what makes Christian ethics work is that it is about love. All human actions are rooted in desire, but some desires are illusory because they are loves for things that are ultimately not good for us. So Paul says that our old self belongs to a former manner of life that is corrupt through "deceitful desires."

Sexual immorality is one of those loves that ultimately is a false love. It is an attempt to fill a hunger and thirst that can only truly be satisfied by Christ with a substitute. As Jesus says, "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." Do-it-yourself religion can offer no hope to the one who is caught in the false love of sexual sin. The high minded Puritan "do-it-yourselfer" can only point fingers, and accuse.

The more open minded “do-it-yourselfer” can only say, “Well, we all do it, don’t we?” But what Paul realizes is that the love of Christ offers hope where “do-it-yourself” religion does not. Christ’s love forgives, and Christ love transforms, and Christ’s love offers the alternative of a holy love for one that is ultimately self-observed. And this offers hope to all of us, for haven’t we all followed deceptive loves from time to time, even if they are not the love that has created the crisis in the Episcopal Church?

Is it too late for the Episcopal Church? I do not know. I do know that speaking the truth in love will not allow the Christian to endorse a false love that separates from Christ even if Episcopal bishops endorse it. But I also know that Christ’s love still offers a way beyond the choice between cold anger and easy acceptance that are the only choices for our contemporary culture. Christ’s love offers forgiveness, and Christ’s love offers transformation. Do we dare to risk that love for ourselves? Can we hear Paul’s words that speak even to us?:

*“Awake, O sleeper
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”*

The Practical Doctrine of the Trinity: A Trinity Sunday Sermon



The Easter season begins with the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, and it ends with Trinity Sunday. The resurrection is concrete and specific, something that even children can relate to and understand. Easter eggs and baby chicks speak of new life. We celebrate Easter with the singing of exuberant hymns—"Up from the grave He arose!"—and churches decorated with lilies. However, in contrast to the resurrection, the doctrine of the Trinity is abstract, impossible to understand we fear, and something best left to theologians who like to speculate about things such as how $1 + 1 + 1$ add up to 1, something about as practical as the question of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Besides "Holy, Holy, Holy," how many hymns about the Trinity can the average churchgoer bring to mind?

I would suggest rather that the resurrection and the Trinity are the two most important doctrines of the Christian faith, both belong together, and both are imminently practical. Without either one of them, Christianity would collapse. If Jesus had not risen from the dead on the first Easter Sunday, there would have been no people called Christians. If God were not Trinity, Jesus would not have risen from the dead. The resurrection is about what God has done. The Trinity is about who God is. We know who God is from what he has done. We understand the meaning of what God has done when we understand who God is.

The Christian God is a God who acts, a God who is known by

what he has done. We see that in this morning's Old Testament readings. In the Exodus reading, the account of God's appearance to Moses in the burning bush, we have the most fundamental account of God's identity as known by Israel. Who is this God? This God tells Moses that is he is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob. This God is also the one who will lead Israel out of bondage from Egypt, into the Promised Land. And so this God became associated with a particular people. This God is the God of Israel because he has delivered Israel from slavery. And this God has a name. A few verses after the passage we have read this morning, God tells Moses that his name is "I am who I am." "Tell the people that I Am has sent you. The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent you." What does it mean when this God tells Moses that his name is I am Who I am? Some modern biblical scholars think it means that God simply refused to tell Moses who he was, but the Church Fathers and the Medieval theologians said it meant that God is Being. God is the One Who Is, and who always is.

In the second reading, we find a further description of the biblical God. This God is the One who creates everything that is. "The LORD has made the world so sure that it cannot be moved." Of course, scientists now tell us that the world moves, but the point is still the same. God is from everlasting. God always is and always has been. The world is because the God who always is has made it. And the world is good because God is good, and God has made it good. As the writer of Genesis said, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." The LORD is King or ruler over the world because he made it, and his Word is sure and to be trusted because he is more powerful than that which he has made. If the world is stable, then God's Word is more stable. If the LORD is powerful enough to bring the world into being, then the LORD is powerful enough to bring his Word to pass. His promises can be trusted.

These are the central elements of the Hebrew understanding of God. God is the One who exists necessarily, and who always is. God is the One who created the world, and so God is Lord of the World. The creation is good because the God who made it is good. God has delivered Israel from slavery, and so God is Israel's God. God has spoken his Word to Israel, and this Word can be trusted.

And there is an additional element that came to be added toward the end of the Old Testament period. Just as God had created the world, and God had delivered Israel, so God has a future plan for the world he had created. God was going to bring the world he had created to a completion—a re-creation—in which God would become the God not only of Israel, but of the whole world, and of all peoples, and in that new re-created world, God was going to deliver not only Israel, but all of creation, from all the suffering, pain, and evil that have marred this world that was originally created good.

In the New Testament writings, all of these elements of Israel's understanding of God continued to be embraced, but something else is now known about the God who delivered Israel, because this God has done something new. In the New Testament, God is not only the One who created the world and delivered Israel from bondage. God is also the One who raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. That God raised Jesus from the dead tells us something new, not only about what God has done, but about who God is.

Jesus' resurrection cannot be understood apart from what Jesus did and what Jesus said. And Jesus brought a new understanding of God. Where Israel's prophets had spoken of bringing a Word from God, Jesus spoke his own Word with the very authority of God. Where the prophet said, "Thus says the Lord," Jesus said, "Truly, Truly, I say unto you."

Jesus also spoke about God and to God in a unique way. The New Testament scholar, Joachim Jeremias summed this up by saying,

“For Judaism, God was primarily the Lord . . . for the disciples of Jesus, God is the Father.” It is true that there are a few instances in the OT where God is referred to as the Father of the nation, and sometimes as the Father of the King. But Jesus spoke of God as his own Father, and of himself as the Father’s Son. Biblical scholars have made much of the fact that although the NT is written in Greek, the one word that Jesus spoke that has been preserved in the original Aramaic that Jesus spoke is the word “Abba,” which is a familiar Aramaic word for “Father.” In a passage that shocks some modern biblical scholars, Jesus said, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” Matt 11:27. In the Lord’s Prayer, the prayer familiar to all Christians, Jesus taught his followers to pray “Our Father” because he had first called God his Father.

Jesus also spoke about his mission. He spoke of being sent to the lost sheep of Israel. He said that those who accepted him accepted the Father who sent him. He said that he had come to seek and to save the lost, to call sinners to repentance, not the righteous. He said that he had come to serve and to give his life as a ransom. This notion that Jesus is the Son who has been sent with a special mission from his Father appears in that familiar verse in this morning’s gospel reading: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Jn 3:16-17.

So in light of the special authority Jesus claimed for himself, and his special relationship with God as his Father, in light of the special mission Jesus had been given, not simply to provide an example, but to deliver sinners from their sins, in light of God’s having put his own stamp of approval on that mission by having raised Jesus from the dead,

it is not enough simply to think of Jesus as another good man among many. His own identity was shaped in a special way with the relationship with the God he called Father, the Father who had sent him as his Son.

After Jesus' resurrection, the New Testament writers began to speak of God in a new way. They began to ransack the Old Testament for language that had first applied to the God who had created the world and who had redeemed Israel, and now applied it to Jesus. So where "LORD" was the characteristic way in which God was understood in the Old Testament, so now Jesus was called Lord. As Isaiah had said that every knee would bow to God and every tongue swear him allegiance, so Paul says in Phillipians that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. As Jesus had called God his Father, so now the characteristic way for Christians to address God is as Father, and Jesus is called not only Christ (or Messiah), and Lord, but also the Son of God. Where the Old Testament had described God as Creator, the New Testament writers now said that God had created the universe through his Son. Where the Old Testament had said that the God who is King would eventually bring the world to salvation and re-creation, now the New Testament writers said that Jesus would return in glory and set up his Kingdom. Where Jesus had spoken of being sent by his Father, writers like Paul and the writer of the Gospel of John spoke of Jesus as having existed with the Father from all eternity, before his Father sent him.

The New Testament writers were conscious of a third way in which God was known after the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus' mission had been to bring about a new relationship between God and humanity, and if his crucifixion and resurrection had made that possible, then now was the time during which that new relationship had begun to be lived out. Certainly the new earth did not yet exist, but already among the followers of Jesus there were hints and signs that this new redeemed world

had already begun, that it was not only on its way, but already beginning to be. Jesus had gathered a new people of God, growing from his twelve apostles who represented the twelve tribes of Israel, and that community was now the Church. Though the earthly Jesus was no longer physically present in the sense that he could be touched and seen, yet the risen Jesus was not completely absent either. There were many ways in which these early followers of Jesus spoke of his continuing presence in his Church. They spoke of the waters of baptism as bringing about a new birth in which the baptized were united with Jesus in his death and resurrection. They spoke about the bread and wine of the eucharist as the Body and Blood of the risen Christ. They spoke of their own gathered community, the Church, as the body of Christ. They spoke about grace and forgiveness of sins. But all of these things were made possible because after the resurrection of Jesus, God was in their midst in a new way as the One whom they called the Holy Spirit, and who made the risen Jesus to be present even while he could not be seen or touched. And so in today's epistle, we see Paul adopting the language that Jesus had used to speak of God as his Father, and of himself as God's Son, to speak of the way in which the Spirit enables us to share in the very life that flows between Father and Son. Paul says, "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Similarly in this morning's gospel, Jesus speaks of the way in which faith and baptism bring us into the life of the Spirit: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. . . as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

These then were the beginnings of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. For Christians came to realize that if God had revealed himself to his people as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in Gods' creation of the world and his redemption of Israel, in Jesus' mission, life, death, and resurrection, and

in the Spirit's presence in the Church, then God had to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in himself. If the relationship between Jesus and the God he called Father was a true revelation of who God really is, then that relation has to be part of God's very being from all eternity. The love between Father and Son that led the Son to give himself to the Father all the way to death on a cross, and led to the Father raising the Son from death was a playing out of a love between Father and Son within the very heart of God that had always been. The mission that the Son lived out in history reflects an eternal mission in which from all eternity the Father begets the Son. The loving obedience in which the Son obeys his Father even to death, reflects an eternal giving back of the life that the Son receives from the Father from all eternity. If the Spirit truly unites us to the Risen Son so that although Jesus is bodily absent, yet through physical things like water, we can share in his death and resurrection, and through bread and wine the risen Jesus can come to us in his body and blood, this can only be because the Spirit who brings the risen Jesus to us, is himself already one with God as part of the eternal giving and receiving from all eternity that is the Father and the Son. Or, rather, as St. Augustine suggested, the Spirit is himself the Love that both flows between the Father and Son, and unites them together from all eternity.

Is the doctrine of the Trinity abstract? If by the doctrine of the Trinity we mean the statement that God is three persons in one substance, which is the official doctrine, that is, of course, abstract. But three persons in one substance is simply the shorthand formula we use to describe the Trinity. The Trinity is not a formula, but the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit living and sharing one life as God from all eternity. To draw a comparison: Is water abstract? The formula for water is H₂O, and that is certainly abstract, although a physicist or chemist sometimes can find the formula quite helpful, indeed necessary. However, when we come in from the outside on a hot muggy day, and turn on the tap to refresh

ourselves with liquid refreshment, there is nothing abstract about it. In the same way, the formula for the Trinity is beyond the reach not only of the average person, but even of the most profound theologian. Nonetheless, the way to understand the Trinity is the same way in which we would understand that glass of water on a hot day. If the Trinity is the eternal life and the eternal love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and God has shared that life with us first by making us, and then by redeeming us, and now by being present among us, the way to know the Trinity is by entering into that eternal communion for ourselves, by being united with Christ in his death and resurrection through the waters of baptism, by becoming one with Christ through sharing in his body and blood. "Taste and See that the Lord is good," says the Psalmist. "If anyone thirsts," says Jesus in John's gospel, "let him come to me and drink" "I am the Bread of Life," says Jesus, "whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

So, far from being an abstraction, the doctrine of the Trinity is a most practical doctrine. Our entire Christian life is made possible because God is Trinity. We exist because God the Father created us. We are re-created in God's image as we come to share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are united to the risen Christ because God's Holy Spirit lives within us. Our prayers, our worship, our love of God and neighbor, all are made possible because the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has come to share his life as Trinity with us. Finally, God's ultimate goal for us will be our own resurrection on the last day, when we will be changed to see God as he is, when the union with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit which we share now to a limited extent, will become fully realized, and we will enter as fully as possible as it is for human beings to enter into the harmonious unity of God's life as Trinity.

Batter my heart, three-person'd God ; for you

As yet but knock ; breathe, shine, and seek to mend ;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy ;
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

John Donne