

that humanity can have peace with God, and indeed enjoy the peace and rest in God. God exemplified to us the spirit of forgiveness and the generous act of proactively reconciling the offending party to himself at his own great cost. The natural human inclination would have been for the offended party to exact judgment and take revenge on the offending party. However, God is above human inclination and thoughts; his love is stronger than human hatred; his sheer gift of reconciliation is loftier than human revenge; his amazing generosity is higher than human calculation of justice. Human revenge can only breed more human revenge. Only the radical spirit of divine reconciliation, imparted to human beings by the power of the Holy Spirit, can free them and cause them to reach out generously, sacrificially, proactively, “miraculously”, and lovingly towards their enemies. Only this radical spirit of forgiveness and divine unconditional love, as embodied by the Father and the Son and imparted by the divine Holy Spirit to human persons, can liberate mutual enemies from the perpetual cycle of conflict, violence and hatred. (The discussion here on reconciliation also applies to personal conflicts.)

6.6 Trinity and Human Society

Our discussion so far has focused our minds on the concept of reaching out to the other. The will and act to reach out to the others is intrinsic to the three persons of the Trinity; the persons of the Trinity are not self-interested, self-centered individualistic persons; they are perpetually in the act of reaching out to the others and honoring others. And the act of reaching out to and honoring the others is not in vain, for this act is received and responded to with love in the divine communion in the Trinity. In this divine *perichoresis*, in this mutual indwelling in the Trinity, self-centeredness is banished and individualism is excluded. This notion of reaching out to one another and receiving from one another in the Trinity warns us against the harm and inappropriateness of individualism, which often is rife in Western societies. Modern technologies in these societies are so advanced that often people do not need to interact with and depend on one another. They can depend on sophisticated machines to help them, entertain them or work with/for them. The community spirit in the past

generations has become diluted so much so that the “meaningful” exchange between neighbors can often be reduced only to occasional polite greetings.¹⁵ But this is inappropriate to our original human nature. Human beings are created in the image of God—the Triune God, the Trinity. As the will and act to reach out to the other is intrinsic to the three persons of the Trinity, *human beings created in the image of God inherently have the need to reach out towards others and receive from others in human fellowship*—the need for sociality in our human nature. If this need is not met, a person becomes lonely, as is often the case amongst people living in urban areas. God declared that “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18) because human persons are made in the image of the Triune God. This understanding of the social nature, or communal nature, of human personhood has very far-reaching and innumerable implications for all areas of our lives in the context of a human society. If we take this essential aspect of our human nature seriously, then we need to rethink how our family life should be lived in order to enable us to treasure our time *together*; how our workplace should include meaningful *human interaction* as a vital component of work (or *team-work*); how our schools and education institutions should reflect the spirit of *group* as well as *individual* learning; how our cities, towns and villages should be designed and planned to facilitate *neighborliness* and human *fellowship*; how our transport systems should be conducive to human *conversation*; how our sports activities are not to be seen as the opportunities for exaltation of the ego but as the opportunities for building *friendship*. Indeed, we need to think how different groups of a society and the society as a whole should function in the light of this understanding of our human nature imprinted with the image of the Triune God.

While emphasizing the importance of reaching out to one another and the social or communal nature of human persons, one should not forget about the individuals and the distinctive roles each individual plays in a family, a group, an organization or a society. No two persons are completely identical. People have different talents and gifts, and they exercise and express these in different ways in a

15. However, it needs to be noted that there are virtual communities springing up over the internet. Still, these communities cannot replace physical communities with face to face interaction.

community. This raises the question of equality and honor in any community, for example, gender equality. With regard to this, our understanding of the Trinity gives us some light. The three persons of the Trinity, while maintaining their unity, played different roles in the task of reaching out to the world. The Father sent his begotten Son, the Son was sent by the Father, the Spirit conceived Jesus in Mary and dwelt inextricably in him. Jesus the Son remained united with his Father through the Spirit in his earthly existence, but he was the one sent into the world, not the Father. However, the fact that he was the sent one, that he was to obey his Father throughout his life, did not diminish his divinity, honor or glory. Rather, it was in his obedience throughout his life and willing sacrifice in his death that his glory and his Father's glory were revealed. In the last supper before his arrest and crucifixion, he prayed to his Father, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." (John 17:1) The Son retained his honor and glory despite the fact that he obeyed and subjected himself to the will of his Father. This is also clear in John 5:23—"that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him." Equality of honor between the Father and the Son does not mean identity in roles. Indeed, Jesus and his Father played different roles while having equality of honor. This is a very important concept for human society or community.

For example, in a family the husband and the wife play different roles but each, being made in the image of God, has the same honor as the other. There is equality of honor while there is distinction in roles. Distinction in roles in human communities is a fact of life because it is not possible for everyone to be performing the same function and role—not only is this extremely monotonous and boring, the community will grind to a halt. There will be roles with higher authority for decision and other roles with significance in terms of execution. A community will have some kind of hierarchy for effective operation but the functional differences in the hierarchy need not mean inequality of dignity or honor, since all human persons are made in the image of God and have equal dignity and honor. However, unfortunately the latter aspect of equality of dignity is often neglected in a community with a hierarchy—those who have less authority are often treated with less honor and dignity. This is a huge challenge indeed for any senior figures of a community. But Jesus Christ, the

Lord from heaven, was willing to humble himself and washed his disciples' feet at the last supper. He treated his disciples with honor despite the fact that he was their teacher, master and Lord. He taught his disciples, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matt 20:25–28) How can we have harmony in a society or a community? This is possible if each member of the community is treated with respect and dignity no matter how "high" or "low" his or her role is within the hierarchy of the community.

There are situations where even though one is treated with dignity and respect by others, because of the low position one occupies there could be the problem of low self-esteem. This raises the question of how one is to see oneself, the question of self-image, the question of identity. This is not a simple topic but the most solid foundation to view this question of identity is to see how Jesus himself viewed his own identity. The most important identity description for himself is the Son of God. This is clear in the gospel story. His frequent reference to his Father, his profound sense of Sonship to his Father, his resolute obedience to his Father throughout his life, and his rest in his Father, all witness to this fundamental identity of Jesus in his own thinking and experience. With the knowledge of his own identity before his Father, he knew himself (as the divine Son of God) and his Father; he knew where he came from and where he would be going to. John's gospel describes him in the last supper before washing his disciples' feet, "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God." (John 13:3) His profound sense of Sonship to the Father was the basis of his acts of obedience and his rest in him (see section 1.0 above). Being loved by his Father, he was content to be Son and did not wish to be someone else. Even though he was to die in the end on the cross of crucifixion—a symbol of shame, there was no sense of low self-esteem in him. His self-esteem was not based on what he did or did not do; it was based on his identity before his Father in heaven. He knew his own honor and dignity as the Son of God, and he was not to be shaken by what others did to him, however dishonoring these may be. That was how Jesus found rest, and that was how his yoke was easy and his

burden was light in his Father's loving presence. It is very easy for an individual in a community or society to measure his or her worth and honor in terms of his/her role and function within the hierarchy of the community, or in terms of his/her achievement in the eyes of the community. But this way of measuring, though happening frequently, is highly problematic, for it confuses role or function with intrinsic worth and honor (see above). Our understanding of the Trinity informs us that there can be equality in honor and dignity while there is a difference in role or function. Human persons are to be respected because of their inherent honor and dignity in being made in the image of God. This is the firm and true basis for speaking about human rights. Furthermore, for Christians they should be aware that they have also become precious beloved children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of Sonship dwells in them and confirms their sonship (Romans 8:14–17; Galatians 4:6–7). Their identity as beloved sons and daughters of God should be the firm foundation for their healthy self-esteem and self-image, which should not be undermined by anything in heaven or on earth.¹⁶ As Jesus found rest in his Father, they as beloved children of God, *greatly treasured in his eyes*, should also find rest, security, and self-esteem in their Father in heaven.

Jesus Christ, knowing who he was and to where he was going, was free not to seek his own honor and glory but to seek his Father's honor and glory on earth (see, e.g., the Lord's prayer). There was not the faintest sense of his competing for glory with the Father; his will was to obey and honor his Father, even through his death on the cross. The life of Jesus Christ was a life of freedom and is truly worth celebrating. A healthy and peaceful human community or society needs to have individuals who have healthy self-image and self-esteem. Many people who do not have healthy self-image and self-esteem often commit various kinds of damaging deeds in order to "enhance" their self-image and self-esteem. But invariably the consequence is troubles, pains, and injuries to others, to themselves, and to the community. People can be truly free only if they have faith

16. It is true that not everyone has a good experience of one's earthly father and this may distort one's appreciation of the heavenly Father. In such cases, it will take time to remove the distortion by looking more closely and clearly the Father whom Jesus revealed to us. From there, one may have a truer understanding of God as Father.

in Jesus Christ and know who they are before God—as God’s beloved children. These people have found their ultimate identity, self-esteem and honor, and are thereby freed not to seek their own honor; they are freed to honor others and honor God without any sense of dishonor. Indeed, they find it their privilege to honor others and to honor God. There we find the Kingdom of God, there we find freedom and the sought after harmonious society.

The importance of *community* (or sociality) for human society has been stressed in the discussion above, and the precious *individual* identities before God as made in his image and called to be his children has been highlighted. The two notions of *community* and *individuality* have been brought close to one another. It is important to note that neither one should be sacrificed for the sake of the other. While we see Jesus moving amongst his disciples and many other needy people in his ministry, that is, he spent much time in community and fellowship with others, there were times when he was on his own, e.g., in the forty days in the wilderness where he was fasting, meditating, and praying; in the Garden of Gethsemane; and in other personal retreats (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; John 6:15). Invariably, during these times of solitude, he was drawing close to his Father in prayer. Even though he was not in fellowship with other human persons at these times, he was very much in fellowship with his Father through the Holy Spirit—he was not alone in the absolute sense. It is true that the presence of God can be mediated to us through our fellowship with one another in a *community* (see below). However, there are times when we as *individuals* need to be on our own before God to seek his personal presence and his will for us in prayer and meditation. In our relationship with God, the complementarity between the *community* dimension and the *individual* dimension has to be kept in good balance.

6.7 Trinity, Church and Mission in the World

For the churches, fellowship with and worship to God in the Spirit, and fellowship with one another in the Spirit should be two of the most important and valuable activities amongst the believers. And the two cannot be separated from one another as the same Spirit threads

through both and unites them together. Jesus prayed in his high priestly prayer in John 17:

²⁰My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20–23)

The fellowship and unity of Christians is a reflection of Jesus' unity with his Father through the Spirit (v. 21a). The fellowship and unity of Christians is inextricably entwined with their *corporate* fellowship with the Father and the Son, who have always enjoyed divine fellowship ("May *they* also be *in us*"). Put in more explicit theological terms, Christians in their will and act to reach out to one another in loving fellowship are united together in the Spirit of divine love, and they are at the same time drawn into the divine fellowship of the Trinity through the same Spirit. The Trinity has always enjoyed the fellowship of divine love and holiness from eternity to eternity, but believers in Jesus are now *graciously* invited to participate in this fellowship. *Those who follow the way or the spirit of Jesus Christ are joined together by his Spirit and are also drawn by the same Spirit to participate in the Trinitarian life of holy communion within the Trinity, who embrace them in divine love.* (See the crucial role of the Spirit in inter-personal communion, both between believers and between believers and the Trinity.) And what is the consequence of this? According to the words in Jesus' prayer to his Father, "So that the world may believe that you have sent me. . . . Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." The consequence of Christians being united in the fellowship of divine love and holiness in the Trinity is that they become such an attractive community of people that their lives together will solicit faith in others who are thus drawn not only into the human fellowship of the church, but also into the divine fellowship of the Trinity! *The mission of the church becomes drawing more people into the human fellowship of love and into the divine fellowship of the Triune God. Viewed from this angle of the value of loving fellowship (human and*

divine), all church activities have to be evaluated in the light of this supreme value found originally in the divine Trinity.

The above discussion of course does not mean that the church should be content with a warm and loving fellowship within the church, and merely open the door of the church so that others may see the love and warmth inside which then attracts them to join in. This is of course extremely important but this does not exhaust the full sense of unity and fellowship of the church given in John 17:20–23 in particular, and in Scripture in general. Here again the Trinity gives us some valuable insight. As the Triune God looks beyond the divine fellowship within and looks towards the world with all its groaning, suffering, and needs, the three persons of the Trinity, out of their compassion, set themselves the task of reaching out to the lost and needy world while maintaining their divine and holy communion of love. The three persons of the Trinity, while maintaining their unity, play different roles in this task: the Father sent his begotten Son, the Son was sent by the Father, the Spirit conceived Jesus in Mary and dwelt inextricably in him. At the same time, the Father was present in his Son through the Spirit and worked with and through his Son in the power of the Spirit, that is, the three persons of the Trinity maintained their unity and loving communion in the task of reaching out to needy humanity. This understanding of the Trinity in action in the world outside the Trinity should provide a good model for the church to reach out beyond herself to the needy world in compassion, while maintaining the unity of the church in the Spirit. Furthermore, as different members of the church play different roles in this reaching out, their very act of exercising their different gifts *together* for the *common* purpose of touching the lives of the needy may also serve as an avenue for expressing and strengthening their unity functionally through concerted actions in the world. This expression of functional unity in reaching out to the world can also be a positive witness to the world, which is thereby attracted towards the Kingdom of God. Thus, we have collected two notions of unity of the church—its loving fellowship within the “walls” of the church, and its loving unity expressed and strengthened in the concerted effort to reach out to the needy world. In all these, *members of the church are drawn to one another, others are drawn into the church through its attractive community lifestyle and through its reaching out to the world in love and in unity, and they are all drawn into the divine fellowship of the*

Trinity. The mission of the church, the fellowship of the church, and the fellowship of the divine Trinity are all inextricably linked together in the most elegant and fruitful manner. Yet, both the source of human fellowship in the church and the source of the mission of the church are one and the same—the divine Trinity.

It is fitting that at the end of Matthew's gospel, when giving the instruction to his disciples about the mission of widening the circle of disciples, Jesus linked this mission very much with baptism in the *name* ("name" is singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt 28:19–20) Baptism in that unique name draws more disciples into that special communion of the divine Trinity, whereby the Holy Spirit inspires them to cry out to God, "*Abba, Father,*" and the same Spirit enables them to call out to Jesus, "*Lord.*"¹⁷

7 Conclusions

Jesus came to do his Father's will; he came to bring the Kingdom of God to earth; he came to honor his Father's name (cf. the Lord's prayer). He came to set the people free from their sins (Matt 1: 21); he came to free them from their bondage and oppression (his Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4: 18–19). He came to reveal his Father (Matt 11:27), and bring peace and rest in his Father (Matt 11:28–30). All these works of Jesus are closely related to one another and can be covered by the overarching theme of the coming of the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God, there is true freedom and life. Jesus himself exemplified this freedom in his own life, which is truly life. He proclaimed, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well." (John 14:6) In living his life of freedom, truth, grace, and Lordship while maintaining unity with his Father through the communion bond of the Spirit, he thus revealed his heavenly

17. For the Spirit enabling believers to reach out to Jesus as Lord, see 1 Corinthians 12:3. For the Spirit enabling believers to call out to God as *abba*, see Romans 8:14–16 and Galatians 4:6.

Father on earth in the power of the Holy Spirit. “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” (John 1:18) Jesus in the process of revealing his Father also revealed his profound relationship with his Father through the Holy Spirit. In knowing Jesus, we know his Father, but we also come to know his unity with his Father through the Spirit—the Trinity. Jesus thus becomes the window for us to look into the Trinity, the mystery which had been hidden from the beginning of the world until Jesus came. The Trinity still remains as a mystery to us, but Jesus has afforded us with some precious revelation. As has been sketched out above, that revelation of the Trinity has much to teach us about ourselves as individuals, as families, as communities, as human societies, and as the global community.

The example of Jesus has taught us how as individuals we can find our self-worth and dignity in God our Father who loves us with deep, affectionate, compassionate, and unconditional love, which was supremely revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ his Son, both *with us* and *for us*. In this love of our Father revealed in Jesus, we find *rest* in our hearts, *peace* with ourselves, and *peace* with God. Furthermore, apart from being the beloved *children* of the *Father*, we are also the beloved *disciples* of our *Lord* Jesus Christ, and we are at the same time the *temple* indwelt by the *Holy Spirit* (1 Cor 6:19). This is our threefold identity in the Trinity and it is the healthy basis for an individual to live with others in a community. When it comes to living in a community, the Trinity has much to teach us because the three persons of the Trinity are the archetypal and primordial community in holy and loving unity. Their mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*), their dynamic communion of holiness and love, their honoring of one another, their concerted action of reaching out towards needy humanity, their eternal distinction, equality and unity have enormous implications for us as we seek to live in *peace* with one another in community. Our families, churches, workplaces, education institutions, leisurely activities, villages, towns, cities, countries, the global community, and all our activities in God’s creation should reflect the supreme value of *inter-personal fellowship*, echoing the divine Trinitarian fellowship of mutual love, mutual respect, and mutual honor. There we find *shalom* (peace), life, freedom, and the Kingdom of God on earth.

The word “kingdom” itself implies that the Kingdom of God involves more than one person. That is, it implies a plurality of persons. Christianity is never an individualistic faith, a private faith between oneself and one’s God only. The Kingdom of God always involves other human persons and the presence of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Kingdom of God is “peace with one another and peace with God,” where peace with oneself is already implicit.

The above discussion about peace, freedom, community, and the Kingdom of God can be seen as rather idealistic. How often do we see individuals, communities, and countries completely freed from their self-interests and reach out to others in unconditional or reconciling love? Is it possible for humanity to be anywhere near to this ideal? If we are honest with ourselves, and history has taught us, we will not be able to approach this ideal in any form if we merely depend on our own goodwill, our good nature and our own strength, for these are not really dependable as we have learnt through hard lessons in history. That is why humanity truly needs a savior to free us and help us. The Savior has come and gone two thousand years ago. Are we not left on our own again? No, because he has promised to be with us until the end of time. How is he with us? He is with us by his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ who is at the same time the Spirit of the Father. How does the Spirit of Christ help us? As the Spirit was the *Spirit of inter-personal fellowship/communion* between Jesus and his Father while he was on earth, so the Spirit of Christ is *the Spirit of inter-personal fellowship/communion* between the risen Jesus and his followers. The Spirit of Christ mediates the mind of Christ, or the spirit of Christ, to his followers who are thus inspired and energized by him from within, *in their spirits*, to follow him in his Spirit. Jesus Christ had walked the path of a perfect human life before, and he is the eternal Son of the Father. He can teach us how to lead our lives, and how to be the Father’s children, by implanting his own spirit in us by his Spirit (in a way that cannot be controlled or fathomed by us as it is a divine action). And as we *together* in humble dependence walk with him and follow him in his spirit through his Spirit, we have fellowship with one another, we *together* have fellowship with him, and we *together* have fellowship with the Father through the Spirit (1 John 1:3)—we are thus drawn into the eternal spiritual life of the Trinity.

If we are honest with ourselves, most of us would say the greatest treasure we have on earth is loving friendship with others (or friendly and loving relationships with others), not money, power or fame. Without these relationships, we can still be very lonely even if we have money, power and fame, and we will find that our lives are still not fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of loving relationships, relationships with other human persons and with the Triune God.

Now that Kingdom has come in Jesus but the Kingdom is yet to fully come. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, we have the foretaste of the fully consummated kingdom. Yet, we know we have not been perfected and the world with all its pains and groaning has not been perfected. We await for the Kingdom to fully come. When will it fully come? It will fully come when Jesus the Son of God returns to this world. Then, there will be a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). There we will see God face to face. Our Father will wipe away every tear from our eyes. “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4) We will arrive at our eternal home of perfect rest where we will see Jesus the Son of God as he is, where we will be embraced by our Father, and the Spirit will fill our hearts with unspeakable joy and gratitude. We, with all the saints, will enter fully into the Trinitarian life of perfect, holy, and loving communion in the divine Trinity. There in spirit and in truth, we will worship the Father and the Son in the unity of the Spirit, and in the Spirit of true freedom:

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!
(Revelation 5:12–13)

Amen.