

IMAGING THE IMPERSONAL: The action of the spirit and 'vestigia trinitatis'

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Abstract

The Bible, from which the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamentally derived, does not clearly present the Holy Spirit as a person, in that there are several aspects of his activity, such as 'filling', that rather indicate impersonality. At the same time, activities more characteristic of a person could rather be seen as that of God, working through the Spirit. Dogmatic considerations, largely stemming from the Arian controversy, have resulted in an affirmation of personality, but these may apply to the immanent Trinity only, and do not necessarily have to imply that the Spirit manifests personally in the economy. A consideration of the vestigia Trinitatis then supports the suggestion that the economic Trinity can be seen as a distinction between the transcendent, personal and impersonal manifestation of God, and so confirms that the Spirit's action is fundamentally impersonal.

1. Introduction

The personality of the Spirit is accepted in Christian orthodoxy, not least in the usual definition of the Trinity as God being one essence in three Persons. Unlike the first and second Persons, however, this is not obvious, and must be questioned as to whether it really reflects the evidence that we have.

It must be noted immediately that there are several instances of the Spirit's action, especially in the New Testament, which are typical of a person. Olyott¹ and Bavinck² among many others, provide many examples of actions, such as being lied to (Acts 5:3), which imply personality.

Secondly, there are a number of instances where the grammar indicates the personality of the Spirit. Jesus refers to the coming the Spirit as another 'comforter'. Here the natural inference is that as Jesus is a person, so would the Spirit be; indeed the word for comforter, *parakletos*, is masculine in the Greek, so naturally refers to a person. More strikingly, although it does not really come over in the translation of the Greek into English, is that in John 16:13, the pronoun referring to the Spirit, which grammatically is neuter, generally used of things, is in this case masculine, and, almost to stress the point, is immediately followed in the text by 'the Spirit' in the neuter. It would seem that the writer intended to stress the personality of the Spirit.³ It must be pointed out however that a masculine pronoun also occurs in John 16:7, but in that place it is governed by the word *parakletos*, and thus takes its gender; the same reason could then apply in the later verse. Elsewhere, such as in John 14:17, neuter pronouns are indeed used of the Spirit.

1. Olyott S *The three are one*. (Darlington, Co Durham: Evangelical Press, 1979) p. 47.

2. Bavinck, H *The doctrine of God*. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1977) p. 272.

3. It must be observed that it has been suggested (cf Sanders, JN (& Mastin BA (ed)) *A commentary on the Gospel according to St John*. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968). p324) that the relevant Johannine passages, which provide most of the evidence, have been viewed as interpolations. Barrett (Barrett, CK *The Gospel according to St John: an introduction with commentary and notes on the Greek text*. (2nd Ed London: SPCK, 1978). p75f) however rejects this as lacking any manuscript evidence.

At the same time, it may well be felt that the equality of Persons in the Godhead does demand the full personality of the Spirit.⁴ Olyott⁵ suggests that coupling with the other two Persons (Matt 28:19, 2 Cor 13:14) implies not only his deity, an argument that impressed several of the early Fathers,⁶ but also his personality. The former is fairly obvious, and although it was not really an issue in the Arian controversy, except in the case of the Macedonians,⁷ full divinity followed from the acceptance of the divinity of the Son, and for similar reasons; only a fully divine Spirit could really be effective, both for salvation and for the continued life of the Church.

Such argument does not, however, demand that the Spirit is personal. It is firstly wellknown that the Old Testament hardly presents a picture of a personal Spirit. Wainwright⁸ in particular notes that there is no description of interaction between God and the Spirit; the action is one-way, God through the Spirit. The Spirit would then rather be seen as the expression of the power of God. Gesenius, as others, sees the Spirit as God's influence.⁹ Spirit is often referred to in distinctly impersonal ways, such as in 'a double portion' (2 Ki 2:9), or 'some of the spirit' (Num 11:17); much of this could however refer to human ability and strength (eg 1 Ki 10:5), an idea easily transferred to the Spirit of God. Then secondly, even the New Testament can hardly be said to present a fully consistent picture. Linguistically, 'Holy Spirit' is commonly without the article, and practically, there is much of the action of the Spirit that is difficult to equate with personality. Moltmann¹⁰ notes that the records of the experience of the Spirit often use impersonal words. The baptism and filling with the Spirit almost demand impersonality, and even the phenomena at the day of Pentecost, the fire and the wind, are far from experiences of a person. It is not surprising that in the early Christian centuries, when the doctrine of the Trinity was in the process of formulation, '... orthodox theologians recognized ... that direct scriptural evidence for the deity of the Holy Spirit as a distinct hypostasis was hard to find'.¹¹ Indeed, it has been suggested that the doctrine of the personality of the Spirit was accepted without full consideration at the time of the Arian controversy, out of fear of a second subordination.¹² Such hesitation to accept the doctrine, despite its dogmatic affirmation, is common. Several writers state that the idea of 'person' must be applied in different ways to the three of the Godhead; perhaps they would be happier simply to accept impersonality of the third. Unease with the idea of 'person' can also contribute to the reticence of such as Barth or Rahner to use the term, even to the extent of approaching modalism.

This in itself does not demand that the Spirit is impersonal; it must not be forgotten that persons may also act in impersonal ways. Their personality is expressed in the fact that they can act in personal ways, but this should not exclude the other aspect. In this case, the Spirit

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4. Gelpi, DL *The divine Mother: a Trinitarian theology of the Holy Spirit*. (Lanham, MD: University press of America, 1984) p. 117.
 5. op cit p. 48.
 6. Lampe, GWH *God as Spirit: the Bampton lectures 1976*. (London: SCM, 1983) p. 218. Basil, however, was hesitant. He never referred to the Spirit as God or used the term '*homoousios*' (Mackey, JP *The Christian experience of God as Trinity*. (London: SCM, 1983) p. 150), preferring '*homotimos*' (of equal honour) or '*homodoxos*' (of equal glory).
 7. Bavinck, op cit p. 310.
 8. Wainwright, AW *The Trinity in the New Testament*. (London: SPCK, 1962) p. 31.
 9. Alexander, JA *Commentary on the prophecies of Isaiah*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953) p. 249.
 10. Moltmann, J *The Spirit of life: a universal affirmation*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) p. 10.
 11. Lampe, op. cit., p. 217.
 12. Webster, J *The identity of the Holy Spirit: a problem in Trinitarian theology*. *Themelios* 9(1) 1983. p4.

may be acknowledged as fully personal, in line with traditional Trinitarian doctrine, but nevertheless usually acting impersonally.

At the same time, the dogmatic affirmation of the personality of the Spirit may well be applicable to the immanent Trinity, but not to the economic. Indeed Congar makes the fascinating suggestion that while in his essential nature, in the immanent Trinity, the Holy Spirit is fully personal, there is a sense in which he empties himself of personality (by which he means distinctiveness), in the economy.¹³ This 'kenoticism' enables a concentration on the relationship of people to God in Christ.

It may then be suggested that at least in the economy, the Spirit may be viewed as essentially impersonal. This will incidentally make a clear distinction from the Son, who acts personally.¹⁴ However, attractive though such a suggestion may be, it must be asked if it can be supported in any other ways. Certainly the Biblical evidence cannot be said to be conclusive. It must be asked if there are other reasons for accepting either personality or impersonality.

It is here that the old idea of the *vestigia Trinitatis* can make a contribution. Indeed, this is the case, as it is not hard to provide examples which demonstrate firstly a transcendent aspect, reflecting the Father who indeed rarely, if ever, acts directly in the world,¹⁵ and then personal and impersonal aspects. Particularly with the realization that the key idea of a person is relational, the emphasis falls on the similarity of relationships, not of substance.¹⁶

2. The use of the *vestigia*

Writers such as Augustine have found the idea of the *vestigia Trinitatis*, 'vestiges of the Trinity', useful as a tool to illustrate what can be a very mystifying doctrine. The idea is simple enough, that the creator has left some trace of the divine nature in the things that have been made. Biblically, 'his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made' (Rom 1:20), or 'the heavens declare the glory of God' (Ps 19:1). Bonaventure sees a Trinitarian unity in the whole created order; creation reflects God throughout.¹⁷ Teilhard de Chardin sees creation as a replica of the Trinity.¹⁸

Now naturally no example can be adequate to illustrate the Trinity completely; obviously the infinite cannot be reflected fully in the finite. Certainly also, examples in the created world cannot be used as evidence for the Trinity; it would no doubt be possible to 'prove' any idea of God by finding some supposed parallel in the world. The main source of information from which we derive the doctrine of the Trinity must be the Bible. It is only from an attempt to reconcile the various statements concerning God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit that the doctrine emerged. In this the medieval attitude, and that of Barth, that the Trinity can only be known by revelation and not by reason¹⁹ must be correct. This does not however negate the

13. Congar, *YMJ I believe in the Holy Spirit vol 3: The river of the water of life (Rev 22:1) flows in the East and in the West.* (New York: Seabury / London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983) p5.

14. It is otherwise quite hard to avoid treating the Spirit as a 'second Son'. Theology has had to resort to distinguishing between 'generation' and 'procession', both terms which are in any case really incomprehensible!

15. It is not the place to argue this point, but it is obvious that the Biblical record contains little that is attributed to the direct action of the first Person. It may then be suggested that even this is done by agency, whether of the Son or Spirit (Irenaeus' 'two hands'), or by such as angels.

16. *The Forgotten Trinity: the report of the BCC study commission on Trinitarian doctrine today.* (London: British Council of Churches, 1989) p. 24.

17. Santmire, HP *The travail of nature: the ambiguous ecological promise of Christian theology.* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) p. 100.

18. Fortman, EJ *The triune God: a historical study of the doctrine of the Trinity.* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) p. 289.

19. Fortman, op cit p. 190.

basic idea that the Trinity may be expected to be reflected in the world, and it is probably not too much to suggest that the very number of such examples does add some evidence for the truth of the suggestion.

Various examples have indeed been suggested.²⁰ Water emerges from a spring, flows through a river to a lake. One substance of water occurs in three ways. A tree is all wood, but is comprised of trunk, roots and branches. Perhaps less crudely, there are three states of matter in solid, liquid and gas, all having the same substance, and there are three dimensions of length, breadth and height. Such serve to illustrate the Trinity and perhaps also the incarnation,²¹ helping comprehension of what are difficult concepts.

Such are helpful not because they are in any sense divine, but because by their nature they indicate what God is like; smoke is not fire, but shows what fire is like, as it is caused by fire.²² Similarly, simply by looking at the style of writing, it is possible for an expert to deduce a considerable amount of information about the writer. Signatures are of course used in this way; they are totally individual to the signer.

Criticisms of the approach

Karl Barth devotes a considerable section of the first volume of his 'Church Dogmatics' to the question of the *vestigia*.²³ His view is well known, that no form of natural theology, a deduction about God from nature, is valid, and so for him, scripture is the only valid source for the idea of Trinity. The *vestigia* are even a hindrance as detracting from revelation.²⁴ Despite this, he has referred to creation as a 'temporal analogue, taking place outside of God, of that event in God himself by which God is Father of the Son', so a 'created correspondence' to the Trinity.²⁵

Part of the problem is that just about anything can be justified by this sort of analogy. Examples of threeness may be said to demonstrate the Trinity, but there are many examples of duality which, it could also be suggested, may indicate a binity. Humanity is in two sexes, an individual may be divided into two almost identical mirror images, and so on. Then the fact of four limbs in most animals could possibly suggest a quaternity in God. It is even perhaps more logical to see the mind in terms of twoness than Augustine's threeness.²⁶ Indeed the use of the *vestigia* is likely to impose ideas of threeness on the Trinity which perhaps should not be there, as Augustine is accused of having done.²⁷ In the light of such problems, it would certainly be illegitimate to try to deduce or prove a doctrine of the Trinity in this way. It cannot be enough simply to view any example of threeness as reflecting the Trinity; valid *vestigia* must be more than this.

20. cf Bavinck, *op. cit.*, p. 321f.

21. Bozack, MJ Physics in the theological seminary. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36(1) (1993) pp. 65-76.

22. Merriell, in LaCugna, CM *God for us: the Trinity and Christian life*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993) p. 159.

23. Barth, K *Church Dogmatics vol 1(1): the doctrine of the word of God*. (2nd ed. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975) p336f.

24. *ibid* p. 347.

25. Barth, K *Dogmatics in outline*. (London: SCM, 1949) p. 52.

26. Brown, DW *The divine Trinity*. (London: Duckworth, 1975) p. 273.

27. Gunton, C Augustine, the Trinity and the theological crisis of the West. *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1990) 43(1) p. 45.

Barth's rejection goes even deeper than this problem. For him, even illustration of revelation, which is all that Augustine was trying to do,²⁸ is wrong; all that is permissible is to interpret it.²⁹ His reason is that illustration is a short step from idolatry. However, whether such a position is really tenable is questionable, as theology, especially when it concerns the nature of God, must use illustration to some extent. Even the picture of Father, Son and Spirit must be an analogy and so not an accurate reflection of the nature of God. The very idea of the Trinity is in fact itself a *vestigium*, in logic,³⁰ an attempt to describe in words, really to illustrate, the actual revelation. Aquinas wrote that 'once the Trinity is given, analogical reason has its place'.³¹ Jüngel³² in fact suggests that this use of analogy is indispensable. Different analogies are possible and reflect different aspects of God. Thus to cite an early example, the second Person was pictured as the 'word', the *logos* of God, a picture with Biblical endorsement (Jn 1). This preserves aspects, such as expression, that 'Son' does not. Other pictures are also possible, such as 'wisdom', common in the Fathers, such as Tertullian.³³ Likewise the Spirit can be reflected by 'wind', 'breath', or itself 'wisdom'.³⁴ Wells³⁵ points out that all the pictures were originally examples of contextualizing, seeking to describe the Trinity in categories understandable at the time.

In fact, the use of multiple metaphors does meet Barth's objection, so that no one picture becomes absolute. Such a lack of diversity can indeed cause problems, as when Arius fastened on the metaphor of the 'Son', and then drew out inaccurate implications. It would therefore be wrong to limit thought to one metaphor, which would in any case be a denial of the richness in God and also of the Biblical revelation. Following Aquinas' *via negativa*, it is a misrepresentation of God to use only one image. Such a temptation must be firmly resisted.³⁶

It does need to be clear in which way the Trinity is reflected in the world; it would otherwise seem to be fairly arbitrary. Thus although it may well be arguable to see a reflection of the Trinity in humanity, and indeed this may well be suggested in the idea that humanity is *imago Dei* (the image of God) (Gen 1:26), it is by no means obvious how this should be applied. There has been continual discussion as to where, and in what way, the image of God is present in humanity.³⁷ Thus it may well be arguable that humanity reflects the spiritual nature of God, or that it is seen in the dominion over creation, and it has even been suggested,³⁸ that it is seen in the physical form of people. Great care must be taken; although people make coins and indeed something about the nature of people can therefore be deduced (eg technical ability, commercial activity and so on), this cannot be pressed. After all, people are not flat metal discs.

28. Bavinck, *op cit* p. 325.

29. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, p. 345.

30. *ibid* p. 340.

31. Kelly, A *The Trinity of love: a theology of the Christian God*. (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989) p. 91.

32. Jüngel, E *The doctrine of the Trinity: God's being is becoming*. (Edinburgh & London: Scottish Academic press, 1976) p. 12.

33. Fortman, *op cit* p. 110.

34. Gelpi, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

35. Wells, HG Trinitarian feminism: Elizabeth Johnson's Wisdom Christology. *Theology Today* 52(3) (1995) p. 331.

36. LaCugna, CM & McDonnell, K Returning from 'the far country': theses for a contemporary Trinitarian theology. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41(2) (1988) p. 205.

37. Clines, DJA The image of God in man. *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968) pp. 53-103.

38. *ibid* p. 58.

Inadequacy of the traditional examples

One of Barth's complaints about the *vestigia* is that they do not really indicate any more than the threeness and oneness of God.³⁹ They do not reflect much of the inner structure of the Trinity. Indeed the usual intention went no further than the traditional Trinitarian distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, essence and person, to indicate how God could be at the same time one and three. More useful *vestigia* should show the distinctions between the Persons.

More importantly, the traditional *vestigia* deal, as Western theology has tended to, only with the immanent Trinity, and not with the economic Trinity, its expression in the world. In fact, Augustine, who provided the classic presentation of the idea of the *vestigia* in *de Trinitatis*, was working from a premise that the whole Trinity was involved in creation. His view was that the only difference between the Persons of the Trinity is in their internal relationships, and that every external act of God is then an undivided work of the entire Trinity; *opera ad extra indivisa sunt*. He was then only able to seek valid *vestigia* in the immaterial, so in the human mind. Just as the Trinity, the mind manifests as a unity, not revealing inner structure. It would then be invalid to see evidence of the Trinity in anything in which a structure could actually be observed. Reason cannot then be used to deduce the Trinity.⁴⁰ The traditional *vestigia* are actually then impossible.

Nevertheless the Augustinian and Western standpoint on the Trinity has been criticized. It may well be suggested that with his stress on the unity of God, Augustine was moving away from the Biblical portrayal. This is always the danger in the use of reason, and so behind Barth's rejection of the *vestigia*. Since the Trinity is based on the Bible, and the Bible would appear to attribute specific acts to individual Persons, this idea may be questioned Biblically. It may well even be asked how, if external acts of God cannot be the works of distinct Persons, the Trinity can really be known at all.⁴¹ Thus, as in Colossians 1:16, it would seem that it was the Son only who was the agent of creation (cf Jn 1:10, 1 Cor 8:6). In fact it is usually the case that if the belief is that operations by God do not reflect the Trinity, then acts of God are 'appropriated' to each Person. It may well be asked whether this is not little more than a convenience, and an avoidance of the plain understanding of the Bible. Jüngel⁴² even refers to it as a 'hermeneutical procedure'. Surely, rather, God's activity in the world does show real Trinitarian distinction, in which case the world could reflect the Trinity. This would also mean that it would not seem to be right to restrict attention to the mind or spirit. Osiander pointed out that the body is also part of the image of God.⁴³ In this case it would seem to be right to see some *vestigia* in material things.

What is then looked for are *vestigia* that on the one hand reflect not just threeness, but something of the relationships between the three Persons, and also how God manifests to the world. If the three Persons do reveal in distinctive ways, any valid illustration should reflect that distinction.

3. Developing the analogies

One old idea is that of the tree. The one substance of wood manifests in three ways, as roots, trunk and branches. The key idea here is not of composition, that the tree has three parts, which would reflect a tritheism, but the point is that all have the same substance, that of wood. Moreover, trunk and branches are seen as dependent on the former, just as Son and

39. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* p. 343.

40. Bavinck, *op cit* p. 328.

41. cf Brown, *op cit* p. 285.

42. *op cit* p. 36.

43. Moltmann, *J History and the Triune God: contributions to Trinitarian theology*. (London: SCM, 1991) p. 62.

Spirit receive divinity from the Father. Such continues to be a helpful illustration, but perhaps the same idea can be developed a bit further. Here however the exact identity of the 'Persons' would not be retained, but it is possible to see a different trinity, illustrating a fuller understanding. Firstly, the essential nature of a tree is that it is a living being. Life is however not something that can be experienced directly, but only through its effects. It is, in effect, transcendent. The effect of the life then manifests in two distinct ways, one of which could be termed 'personal', and the other, 'impersonal'. It manifests in a 'personal' way in that it directly affects other things in the world. If a car runs into the tree, each is affected in a very direct way. Likewise, it provides shade and perches for birds. The way in which it does this is by means of a 'hypostatic union' between the immaterial life and the actual material, drawn from its physical environment, predominantly the soil. The life of the tree is in effect incarnated. On the other hand, the tree also has very definite 'impersonal' effects upon its environment. It affects the climate, adds to the oxygen content of the air, and participates in various food chains. Such are done without any necessary direct physical contact whatsoever, but again are totally dependent upon the life process in the tree. Incidentally, these latter can be seen to have personal effects as well as impersonal, in that other living beings are directly affected by the actions of the tree.

A second traditional example is that of water. The substance of water has been felt to subsist in three equal 'persons', the spring, the river and the lake, in which the relations between them again picture the Trinity. Again there is no reason to reject the example, despite its very obvious limitations, but again the same example can be applied in a different way. Basic to the properties of water is its underlying chemistry, the way in which the atoms of hydrogen and oxygen combine, and so cause the way in which the molecules interrelate, and which in turn cause its physical properties. Once again, these do not impinge on the world in a way which can readily be observed, but they nevertheless are the source of the ways in which water does relate to the world. This aspect, or 'person', could thus be said to be 'transcendent'. Then water relates to the world in two sorts of ways which could be likened to personal and impersonal. Firstly it contacts or wets. This phenomenon is a direct result of the particular features of the chemistry of water, so again could be regarded as a 'hypostatic union' between the properties and the actual substance of water. Secondly, and 'impersonally', it is commonly the medium for the transfer of materials, often in solution, from one place to another. It is then, incidentally, essential for life, and in this way parallels the work of the Holy Spirit (cf Titus 3:5). Such action is once more a feature of the chemical properties of the substance.

It would naturally be possible to extend the principle to other examples. A prime candidate is light, which perhaps can be seen as energy, manifesting in a personal way as illumination and heating, or impersonally as the means of information transfer. In its dual wave and particle nature, it has both 'personal' and 'impersonal' effects. Light is interestingly a component of one of the first examples of the *vestigia* known, that of Theophilus of Antioch in about 170 AD.⁴⁴ He equates the three Persons with the first three days of the Genesis creation, so that the Father is illustrated by light, being immaterial, the second Person is material creation, and the third is life.

Particularly with traditional use of water and the tree, and with very many other examples, the threeness could be said to be arbitrary. It could well be possible to describe features of the substances in ways such as to justify a binity or even a quaternity. Such is more difficult with the examples as described above, their threeness being much more fundamental. In fact there

44. Williams, AH The Trinity and time. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39(1) (1986) p. 79.

have been some other proposals in which threeness is inherent. Bozack⁴⁵ uses the example of the 'triple point', the particular set of physical characteristics of temperature and pressure whereby a substance can exist simultaneously as solid, liquid and gas. This can justify a simply tripersonal paradigm for the Trinity, but loses the full relationships that should be present. It is also perhaps too unique a phenomenon, and as it is only known to most as a theoretical possibility cannot be really valuable. It perhaps also tends to Sabellianism.

The three states of matter may however be described in a different way, with a transcendent aspect, the physical bonding between molecules, the direct manifestation of the substance, and the indirect effects of the states of matter, used in such things as refrigeration. Here the threeness of the states of matter is in fact irrelevant. Similarly dimensions, length, breadth and height, although time is a strong contender to be a fourth, and mathematicians commonly add more, at least theoretically. Could the features of extendibility, size, in that everything has a physical size, and of course the application of these in several indirect ways such as pressure, useful in such as hydraulics, be another possible trinity?

The search for adequate analogies, as with the traditional *vestigia*, is endless, and perhaps very subject to personal preferences and interests. Johnson⁴⁶ provides an interesting set of modern examples. Here the example of the authoress of detective novels, Dorothy Sayers, comes to mind, as she saw a trinity, and arguably very validly, in the whole process of the production of a literary work. There is a trinity of creative idea, its exposition and incarnation, and its effect.⁴⁷ This preserves the idea of transcendence in the idea, and the twofold expression. However, it is a concept open to the charge of Arianism, in that the idea is prior.

4. The image of God

The example of Augustine should alert us to the one area where it is most likely that a proper *vestigium Trinitatis* is to be found. It must not be overlooked that the Bible itself does provide help in picturing the Trinity. A significant way in which this is done is in the references to the image of God, which ought to be seen in a Trinitarian context, as common in Patristic tradition.⁴⁸

Here Augustine rejected other analogies, but felt that it was to some extent justifiable to search for a *vestigium* in humanity because of the Biblical reference. He made several suggestions, such as a lover, its beloved, and their love.⁴⁹ Like everyone else, he was subject to his background and environment, so sought the image in the immaterial aspect, and specifically in the mind of the individual. His final choice was of the memory, understanding and will of the mind, specifically remembering, understanding and loving God. This was an analogy that was very influential later. Medieval theologians, such as Aquinas, saw the difference between the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit as the difference between production by way of nature, and by way of will.⁵⁰ Augustine however felt that all of his pictures were far from adequate.

His self-confessed failure is perhaps not surprising, but this is not to say that a valid *vestigium* is not to be found in the human individual, although the search must not be limited

45. op cit.

46. Johnson, EA *She who is: the mystery of God in feminist theological discourse*. (New York: Crossroad, 1993) p. 210.

47. Thurmer, J *A detection of the Trinity*. (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984) p. 50.

48. Forte, B *The Trinity as history: saga of the Christian God*. (New York: Alba, 1989) p. 184.

49. Fortman, op cit p. 149

50. *ibid* p. 234.

to the immaterial. That restriction is probably too much due to a Platonism which presupposes that the material is inherently wicked and so cannot adequately represent the divine.

Nevertheless, the spiritual nature of people can well be a fitting picture of the first Person, as this is essentially transcendent and hidden from investigation, and separate from the physical world. It does of course still act, but not directly, despite the search of those who want to detect phenomena such as the movement of objects by mind control. Rather, at least in general, the transcendent acts by agency, whether by the body, a real 'incarnation', or by the action of others after due communication. As Thurmer⁵¹ points out, there is a valid distinction between the inner self and its expression. In that way the transcendent acts in a distinctly personal way. At the same time, there is indirect action, through such as attitudes and opinions, all of which change situations. Thus if a tripartite division of the human person, as body, soul or mind, and spirit is accepted, these would be paralleled by the Son, the Spirit and the Father, in that order. It is then by no means accidental that Jesus not only condemned direct acts of sin such as murder and adultery, but also the attitudes of hate and lust, which are still wrong even if they never issue in specific deeds (Matt 5:21f). Both are culpable, and both reflect, as with the specific activity, on the state of the transcendent. It is this which is affected by the atonement of Christ, and where its regeneration results in changes in activity and attitude.

A community 'image'

Barth⁵² has pointed out that the key Genesis text (Gen 1:26) actually locates the image not in the individual but in a plural humanity. In this case *imago Dei* can well be *imago Trinitatis*.⁵³ Barth therefore stresses the importance of relation, and most importantly that between the sexes, as imaging the Trinity. For him it is not so much a parallel of substance, but one of relation. Of course, the Genesis text would have primary application to the primal couple, and so it is not surprising that the human family of mother, father and children is often seen as a good *vestigium*. Knight⁵⁴ says that people do not know a full life until they are part of a fellowship of two, and possibly of three, man, woman and child. Thus Franks⁵⁵ refers to Gregory of Nazianzus' analogy. This was of Adam, Eve and Seth, with Eve as the picture of the Holy Spirit as she 'proceeded', and was not begotten by Adam. The overall picture may well be valid, although Seth would better be said to 'proceed', and with both parents involved. Naturally the identification of Seth with the second Person is strongly influenced by the Biblical 'Son' of God, but in fact Eve may well better picture the second Person, particularly in the light of the ancient view of the 'feminine' wisdom (*sophia*) as the preincarnate Son.⁵⁶

In practice, the family does tend to act through the wife, as the husband is so often absent at work. The phenomenon of the 'absent father' is not a modern one, indeed despite Moltmann,⁵⁷ modern life means that the family does have more contact with fathers than in days when men spent months and even years away, such as on military service. What of course can be condemned is when a father takes no interest in his family, and at the extreme divorces his wife; such is no reflection of the Trinity, where although the Father is transcendent, he constantly relates to the other Persons.

51. op cit p. 54.

52. Barth, K *Church Dogmatics* vol 3(1): *the doctrine of creation*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958) p. 197.

53. Moltmann, *Spirit* p. 221.

54. Knight, GAF *A Biblical approach to the doctrine of the Trinity*. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953) p. 58.

55. Franks, R S *The doctrine of the Trinity*. (London: Duckworth, 1953) p. 120.

56. *ibid* pp. 45, 110.

57. Moltmann, *History* p. 3.

Augustine rejected the human family as an adequate picture of the Trinity.⁵⁸ Perhaps understandably, he felt that the picture was unfair to the unmarried, who could then not image the Trinity. Celibacy was viewed as superior in any case, again due partly to the negative view of the material. It would be ironic if a celibate priesthood could then not image the Trinity! More importantly for him, he felt that the unity of the Godhead demanded a picture in the unity of the individual. Such a view of unity is however questionable; Hodgson⁵⁹ for example has defended a social Trinity on the grounds that interpersonal unity is not only possible but common, in such as committees, and of course in the family.

In fact, New Testament reference to the image does indicate that it resides in the community rather than in the individual.⁶⁰ Only in the enigmatic 1 Corinthians 11:7 does it seem to have an individual reference, although even here it can be collective. It should probably also refer to Adam in the sense of including Eve, that is before her generation. Otherwise there is the understandably offensive idea that a woman is not in the image of God.⁶¹ In this case, of course, it is then the couple which is in the image of God, as Barth proposed. Whereas of course Christ is the image of God in the most perfect sense, he may be seen as both the fulfilment of the old community of Israel, and as the fount of the new in the Church. Other references (Rom 8:29, 2 Cor 3:18, Col 3:10) are to the community more specifically.

Again a community can be a very satisfactory *vestigium Trinitatis*. Here its very plurality forms an aspect of its basic nature, its transcendence, as well as the spirituality that was the feature of individuals. Indeed these are related, in that the Spirit, just as the bond in the Trinity, is the creator of the human community.⁶² With plurality comes the possibility of interaction within the community, which again is not visible to the outside, but is nevertheless real. This aspect however is expressed and affects the environment of the group in a direct way. Civilization and the dominion of the environment, both animate and inanimate, are not really possible for an isolated individual, but become possible for groups. In particular, it must be observed that this is not just a matter of numbers, in that ten people are more effective than one, but that in a group it is possible to be more efficient by means of a division of labour, where each person works for the others, and by restriction of activity, can then be more efficient. Each then acts as the agent of the others. Some of these will be particularly concerned with activity outside of the group. Here the second Person can be seen as the agent for the Trinity as a whole, working on their behalf. Technology is, incidentally, a similar activity, but where the immaterial and animals are used as agents of humanity.

It is of course also clear that a group affects those outside, and the rest of the world, also in an indirect way. One example of this in the modern world is the system of capitalism which has strongly influenced most of the non-Western world, even if its primary application is still in the West.

It must also be observed here that sin can be committed by a group, even when it is hard to condemn any specific individual within that group. People are caught up in the workings of the system, and in their often innocent participation in its processes, contribute to great wrong and to human suffering. The solution to this lies in a change in the interaction between

58. Moltmann, J *God in creation: an ecological doctrine of creation. The Gifford lectures 1984-1985*. (London: SCM, 1985) p. 235.

59. Hodgson, L *The doctrine of the Trinity: Croall lectures 1942-3*. (London: Nisbet, 1943).

60. Cairns, D *The image of God in man*. (London: SCM, 1953) p. 43.

61. Farley, MA *New patterns of relationship: beginnings of a moral revolution. Theological Studies* 36 (1975) p. 640.

62. Moltmann, *Spirit* p. 219.

individuals, not primarily in the individuals themselves. Again sin is seen to be possible due to both direct and indirect action, this time of a group rather than an individual.

The Church as vestigium

In fact the New Testament only once applies the idea of the image of God to humanity in general (Jas 3:9), but where it refers to a group, that group is the Church, and moreover, it is always in the context of Christ, who is then the image of God in the full sense. The Church is only the image insofar as it is united to him, and becomes more the image as it becomes more like him. Thus Paul says that we shall, or should, bear the image of Christ (Rom 8:29, 1 Cor 15:49, 2 Cor 3:18, Col 3:10).

It is hardly surprising that the Church should be understood in a Trinitarian way.⁶³ As Christ was the expression of the Trinity in the world, so the Church, as the body of Christ, continues that role. Then the Church images the Trinity. It has a transcendent aspect; Christians, and so the Church, only exist because of their link to God, and have divine life by their union with Christ by faith. The plurality of the community, which was its transcendent aspect, is now enhanced by the community with Christ. This is of course not visible, but is vital. From this divine life is generated the impact that individual Christians, and so the Church, has upon the world, in ministry both in deed and word. Then individuals and the whole body affect the world in an indirect way, as salt and light (Matt 5:13-6). Lives of holiness exert a profound and lasting influence on the rest of humanity. There is a *perichoresis* between these elements; obviously the relation to God affects the others, but the direct and indirect effect of Christian life also in turn affects that relationship.

Christ as vestigium

It hardly needs to be said that the Church, and far less humanity as a whole, is the image of God in a very imperfect way. It is only as it is conformed to Christ that it reflects the image of God in a better way. Indeed, many of the references to the image of God in the New Testament are applicable to Christ himself (2 Cor 4:4, Phil 2:6, Col 1:15, Heb 1:3). John 1:18 and 14:9 are also relevant here, as are texts referring to Jesus as the 'new Adam' (Rom 5:12f, 1 Cor 15:22, 45). In this case it is not only that the whole question of the Trinity is intimately linked to Christology because the major reason for belief in the Trinity is the deity of Christ, but because Christ himself reflects the Trinity. He is, after all, the *logos*, the revelation of God. For Barth, Jesus is the genuine *vestigium Trinitatis*.⁶⁴ Thus indeed the Trinity is always in the context of Christology.⁶⁵ In Christ himself there is the reflection of the Father, the transcendent divine nature, not visible from the outside; there is the expressed nature, the humanity of Christ, and thirdly there is the unity of the two, whether in the Trinity or in the Person of Christ, the Holy Spirit. In this last case, Christ, as when he was in the world, does continue to work subjectively by the Holy Spirit whom he sent from the Father (Jn 15:26).

5. Conclusion

The multiplicity of possible *vestigia*, particularly those with Biblical sanction, involving the threefold transcendent / personal / impersonal pattern adds weight to the validity of the concept and so to the affirmation that in the economy at least, the Spirit is to be understood as impersonal. It is certainly easier to suggest such *vestigia* than to find some which pattern a fully tripersonal understanding.

63. Gunton, CE *The promise of Trinitarian theology*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991) p. 58f.

64. Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1(1)* p. 334.

65. Franks, op cit p. 3.

The real value of such a study is its contribution to an understanding both of the Trinity and of Christian experience, but then in application to Christian life. If the world helps us to understand the Trinity, then the Trinity should help us to understand the world. As Forte⁶⁶ says:

Herein lies the real value of all the analogies or 'traces' of the Trinity which faith reflection in time has come to discover in the human spirit. Certainly the traces were never meant to explain the trinity by man. Rather, these analogies have sought to understand man by starting out from the trinitarian revelation so as then to more fully enter into that mystery of which the human creature is the image.

In this case, and very importantly, the doctrine of the Trinity, far from suffering the neglect of the last millennium and a half, should again rise into prominence. It should, by analogy with the economic Trinity, provide a paradigm for correct human action to deal with the pressing problems of the next millennium. At the same time, by analogy with the immanent Trinity, it should provide a pattern for correct human relationships. It is encouraging that interest in the Trinity is currently rising, with a significant output of new books and articles. It is to be hoped that this interest will move beyond the academic to see the application of the doctrine.⁶⁷

66. *op cit* p. 187.

67. I have published several articles on this theme, which are being collected in my *Christianity is Trinitarian* (Alice, University of Fort Hare, 1999).