

Chapter 2 – Discovering the “New” in the “Old”

[Jesus] said to them, “...Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

After that experience I was hungry for *authoritative* information about Jesus. At some point I had heard my grandmother speak highly of Billy Graham, so I went to the library and grabbed one of his books. He in turn pointed me toward the New Testament and regular prayer, a combination allowing a seeker to hear from Jesus Himself.

The next two chapters are not light reading, but they are essential for understanding *Who* I found myself dealing with. What does Christianity mean when it says God is a *Trinity* of Persons? And why is it so important for understanding the Christian view of humanity, sin, and redemption? With this foundation in place we can better understand God’s action in the life of Israel, and then in the next chapter, how it culminated, to the benefit of the entire world, in Jesus of Nazareth. So in the space of two short chapters we are going to try and glimpse the thread running throughout the Bible: Jesus, loving His Father, in the Holy Spirit.

The Triune God⁴

Throughout elementary, and then high school, everything religion teachers and ministers taught me about the Trinity could be summed up in three points: It is a mystery. It is impossible to completely understand. And finally, the best image of which, is the shamrock. Tragically, a vast number of us never progress further. Why is that a tragedy? Because without the understanding of God as a Trinity of Persons, the heart of Christianity will always be elusive. Everything progresses, everything comes into sharper focus, with the realization that God is *interiorly* a relationship of unfathomable, reciprocal Love. To arrive at this, however, we will have to get a bit “abstract” first.

⁴ I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude for the thoughts shared here to Frank Sheed, *Theology and Sanity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986); Gerald O’Collins, *The Tripersonal God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984); and Scott Hahn, *The Catholic Gospel* (Audiocassette Series by St. Joseph Communications).

burned upon the altar in offering to God, part of it held back to be eaten by the priests, and part taken home to the family making the offering. The unleavened bread was also placed on the altar and wine poured out at its base – again, the very elements of *life* for an agricultural people such as the Israelites (Exodus 29:38-42; Leviticus 23:18). In offering sacrifice the Israelites were symbolically offering themselves to God. As in the Passover and the ratification of the covenant, so too in the Tabernacle worship - God and His People were being united in the *life* of the sacrificial victim. Communion, a family bond, was being reestablished after a lapse into sin; or in cases of thanksgiving and petition, the bond was reaffirmed and strengthened.

Thus far, worship has not progressed *into* the Tabernacle but has been reserved to the outer court. Only the priests were allowed to proceed inside the structure to offer fragrant incense. Entrance into the innermost room, the Holy of Holies, was reserved to the high priest - and only once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day the sins of the entire nation were atoned for and the Temple purified from being surrounded by the world's sins. The high priest would sacrifice a bull and a goat and take their blood with him as he entered the Tabernacle. Only after sprinkling the blood, the life, on the great veil could he enter the Holy of Holies. Once inside his task was to sprinkle the life-blood on the Ark, to symbolically offer God back the gift of life He had originally bestowed. (An image of the Son? Of man and woman *prior* to the Fall? Of the seed of the woman, the descendant(s) of Abraham yet to come?)

Building a Kingdom

God molded His covenant People by keeping them in the desert wilderness for forty years. We are told of rebellion, discipline, and finally the achievement of an obedience sufficient for following God's instructions to take possession of the land. Just prior to his death, Moses foretold the coming of a great personage:

The Lord said to me, "I will raise up a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that

the prophet speaks in my name, he will be cut off from the people”
(Deuteronomy 18:18-19, NIV).

The Israelites entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses’ successor Joshua (“Jesus” in Greek). For a time they were governed through judges like Samson and Samuel (who also functioned as a prophet). Eventually, the people asked that a king rule the Twelve Tribes in imitation of the surrounding nations. In response, the Lord sent Samuel to anoint first Saul, and then David, as king.

Under David Israel entered a golden age. They had peace from their enemies and plans were laid for the construction of the Temple, the “Lord’s House.” Nathan the prophet was sent to David with an amazing promise:

The Lord declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son...I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; *your throne shall be established for ever* (2 Samuel 7:11-16).

The Psalms of David

While successful as a warrior, David was first and foremost a man of prayer, prayer set to music to be specific. Almost half of *The Book of Psalms* is attributed to him. The Psalms were unique prayers in that they were acknowledged to be the product of God’s Spirit moving the psalmist. As such, portions of The Psalms were looked upon as having a prophetic character. Listen as David gives voice to a righteous sufferer in *Psalms 22*; Jesus quoted the first verse from the cross:

*My God, my God, why hast
thou forsaken me?*
Why art thou so far from helping
me, from the words of my groan-