

“For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.” (Ps 36:9)

✠ Lecture V: Trinitarian Analogies ✠

In lecture I (*Theological Preliminaries*) of this section, we have discussed how analogies are not perfect and that they break down at certain points. Indeed it is written, “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?” (**Is 40:18**), “To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike?” (**Is 46:5**) Nevertheless, Holy Scripture has used many analogies about God, which in their totality complement each other and make up for any deficiencies or limitations that a single analogy may have. St. Cyril of Alexandria once said, ‘when things concerning God are expressed in language used of men, we ought not to think of anything base, but to remember that the wealth of divine Glory is being mirrored in the poverty of human expression.’

✠ Examples & Analogies:

1. The Human Being:

Pope Shenouda said that man who is created “in the image of God” (**Gen 1:26**) is one of the best analogies for the Truth of the Holy Trinity; man is of one humanity possessing a mind and a spirit. Personality, mind, and spirit comprise just one human being. In the same way, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is One Self. No one can say that God has no Mind or Spirit. God, in His Mind and Spirit is One God not three gods. The Mind is also called the Logos or the Son. God created the world by His intelligent mind, or by His Son, or by His Logic or Wisdom – all of which mean the same. For God and His Mind are the same Being. An example of this is when we say, “you solved the problem with your mind.” Is it you who solved the problem or your mind? Both are the same being. The distinction between you and your mind does not mean separation. If God were without His Mind He would not be God, or if He were without His Spirit He would not be God either. Thus, God, of necessity has to be with His Mind and Spirit a Trinity of Unity.

2. The Fire:

It is written, “Our God is a consuming fire” (**Heb 12:29**) Fire can be used as an analogy for the Holy Trinity for fire generates light and heat. Nevertheless, the flame, its light and its heat are one entity. From the moment the flame begins, from that moment light and heat also begin.

3. The Sun:

It is written, “The Lord God is a sun...” (**Ps 84:11**) The sun has been used as an analogy for the Holy Trinity in much the same way fire was used; the sun has ray and light. You cannot separate the light from the ray and you cannot separate either from the sun.

4. The Spring of Water:

It was written, “The wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook” (**Prov 18:4**) The well, spring and stream have been used also as an analogy for the Holy Trinity: Just as the spring and the stream produced from a well are not separate and yet there are in fact three visible objects and three names yet they all have the same water.

→ Even though St. Gregory of Nazianzus used some of the above analogies to explain the relation between the Father and the Son, he said:

“I have very carefully considered this matter in my own mind, and have looked at it in every point of view, in order to find some illustration of this most important subject, but I have been unable to discover anything on earth with which to compare The Nature of The Godhead. For even if I did happen upon some tiny likeness it escaped me for the most part, and left me down below with my example. I picture to myself an **eye**, a **fountain**, a **river**, as others have done before, to see if they first might be analogous to The Father, the second to The Son, and the third to The Holy Spirit. For in these there is no distinction in time, nor are they

torn away from their connection with each other, though they seem to be parted by three personalities. But I was afraid in the first place that I should present a flow in The Godhead, incapable of standing still; and secondly that by this figure a numerical unity would be introduced. For the eye and the spring and the river are numerically one, though in different forms. Again I thought of the **sun** and a **ray** and **light**. But here again there was a fear lest people should get an idea of composition in the Uncompounded Nature, such as there is in the sun and the things that are in the sun. And the second place lest we should give Essence to The Father but deny Personality to the others, and make Them only Powers of God, existing in Him and not Personal. For neither the ray nor the light is a sun, but they are only effulgence [radiance] from the sun, and qualities of its essence. And lest we should thus, as far as the illustration goes, attribute both Being and Not-being to God, which is even more monstrous.”

(Adapted from the 5th Theological Oration on The Holy Spirit, Articles XXXI and XXXII)

* This lecture is adapted from a lecture by H.H. Pope Shenouda III and a lecture by H.E.M. Bishoy.