

THE TRINITARIAN DIMENSION OF CMI WAY OF LIFE

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Abstract: The doctrine of the Trinity as foundational to the Christian faith in general and to the CMI Way of Consecrated Life in particular. Each Divine Person plays a distinct and irreplaceable role in the life of a person to grow into a member of the Trinitarian Family here on earth and beyond. The three Persons in the Trinity are: (1) the Transcendent God, the Father, who is the incomprehensible, unknowable and unsearchable Creator existing outside of space and time. (2) the Transparent God, the incarnated Jesus Christ is the Saviour who lived among human beings and (3) the Immanent God, the Holy Spirit, who indwells in every human being as the helper and counsellor through timely promptings. The CMI Constitution is a living proof to the fact that the Congregation as a '*Darshana Kutumbam*' is the reflection of Trinitarian Life with each of the three Persons playing a vital role at every stage from its very inception to what it is today. The CMI Religious life, as defined by the Constitution, "requires closer following of Christ in intimate communion with the Father in the Spirit, through a life of

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prayer that manifests to all, the presence already here of the Kingdom of God."

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1. Introduction

The Gospel of Mathew concludes with the Great Commission: "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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" (Mt 28:16–20).

It is a mandate given to any follower of Jesus. However, a Christian is officially initiated into the Trinitarian Life through the Sacrament of Baptism. If the rite of 'baptism' with a Trinitarian formula could be boiled down, that would mean a change of identity into the household of the Holy Trinity through an act of purification, sanctification, or initiation. Every Christian child is taught to begin the day with the Holy Trinity through a sign of the Cross and a prayer: "By the sign of Cross, deliver us, O Lord, from our enemies, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen". St. John Chrysostom describes baptism as giving birth to a "new way of creation." This process of consecration to the Trinity was already begun even before the birth of a person: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5). Every human is therefore consecrated to reflect the Trinitarian life of unity and sharing to the world. St. Chavara, the founder of the CMI Congregation, conceived of four types of families - Trinitarian Family (*Thritva Kutumbam*), Holy Family (*Thiru Kutumbam*), Religious Family (*Sanyasa/ Dharsana Kutumbam*) and Wedded Family (*Dhambatya Kutumbam*). To him the earthly families are to be the mirrors of Trinitarian Family wherein the Holy Family is par excellence.

2. Trinitarian Mystery Unveiled

The doctrine of the Trinity with the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three persons in one God-head is considered to be one of the central Christian affirmations about God. It is rooted in the fact that God came to meet Christians in a threefold figure: (1) as Creator, Lord of the history

of salvation, Father, and Judge, as revealed in the Old Testament; (2) as the Lord who, in the incarnated figure of Jesus Christ, lived among human beings and was present in their midst as the "Resurrected One"; and (3) as the Holy Spirit, whom they experienced as the helper or intercessor in the power of the new life. The concept of Trinity could be derived from the Bible: (i) There is only one God: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut 6:4). (ii) The Father is God: "God also said to Moses, say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation" (Ex 3:15). (iii) Jesus Christ is God: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God..." (Phil 2:5-6). (iv) The Holy Spirit is God: "Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit.... You have not lied to men but to God'" (Acts 5:3-4). (v) Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct: "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased'" (Mk 1:10-11). "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

Taking cue from the above Scriptural revelations, the Three Persons in the Holy Trinity could be described as God the Father, the *Transcendent God*, God the Son, the *Transparent God* and God the Holy Spirit, the *Immanent God*.¹ Each Divine Person plays a distinct and irreplaceable role in the life of a person to enable to grow into a member of the Trinitarian Family here on earth and beyond.

2.1. The Transcendent God

'God is transcendent' means "to exist above and independent from, to rise above, surpass, succeed." The idea of a transcendent God has roots both in Neoplatonic philosophy and Judaism. Neoplatonism is a form of idealistic monism which is largely derived from the interpretation of Plato's philosophy by Plotinus who taught the existence of an ineffable and transcendent One, which exists in it of itself and transcends all categories of being, and thus no attributes can be placed on the "One"

¹ This reflection is based on the former depiction of the Trinity in three overlapping triangles at the rear wall of the altar at CMI Prior General's House, Chavara Hills, Kakkanad, by the artist, Fr. Joy Elankunnappuzha CMI.

(which is also the Good in itself). Plotinus conceived the One by way of negation of multiplicity and diversity, which characterize the phenomenal world we live in. Neoplatonic philosophy emphasized the idea that God is so pure and perfect that it completely transcended all human categories, ideas, and concepts. Biblically, this concept is marked in a variety of ways. (i) "God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). Since He created all things, He clearly holds power over creation. (ii) The Lord told Moses, "You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live" (Ex 33:20). His holiness was so great that no human could withstand it. (iii) God is transcendent in terms of His '*sinlessness*': "We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (Is 64:6). (iv) God is transcendent in the sense that He is eternal. "He, everlasting God...will not grow tired or weary...he gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Is 40:28). (v) God is transcendent in His power: "But the thunder of his power who can understand?" (Job 26:14).

A Transcendent God is the incomprehensible Creator existing outside of space and time and thus is unknowable and unsearchable. Neither by an act of our will nor by our own reasoning we can possibly come to understand God or experience Him personally. God wants us to seek to know Him, yet how can the finite possibly know and understand the infinite: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him is the glory forever!" (Rom 11:33-36). To see the fullness of the glory of God would be too much for any human to bear; it would break the earthen vessel in pieces. The full revelation of God is therefore reserved for the future, when all things will be seen as they are, and men will be in a condition to receive them.

In Christian theology, the transcendentals can be described as the ultimate desires of Human being. Human being ultimately strives for perfection, which takes form through the desire for perfect attainment of the transcendentals. The Catholic Church teaches that God is Himself truth, goodness, and beauty, as indicated in the Catechism. Each transcends the limitations of place and time, and is rooted in being. The transcendentals are not contingent upon cultural diversity, religious doctrine, or personal ideologies, but are the objective properties of all that exists.

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam said, "Look at the sky. We are not alone. The whole universe is friendly to us and conspires only to give the best to those who dream and work". God the Father, though transcendent, always attracts and pulls upwards each and every human being to dream and strive hard to reach out to the heights of transcendence. Jesus Christ himself has encouraged us to aspire or practice any virtue to that of Father's standard: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.... 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'" (Mt 5:44-48). Even in practicing the virtues like forgiveness, our frame of reference should be that of the heavenly Father: "Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times...'" (Mt 18:22).

God the Father inspires and attracts humans not only to strive for perfection in spiritual matters but in every domain of life and existence. That is why Dr. Kalam once said, "Great dreams of great dreamers are always transcended." If man could make his foot print on the surface of moon - an idea which was earlier confined to the dreams and poetic imaginations, - it was Heavenly Father who instilled the flame in humanity to dream to venture out in to Moon. Every scientific discovery and advancement in knowledge and discoveries right from the human existence has derived from the motivation instilled in each individual by the Father who watches over us like any earthly father who encourages his toddler with the faltering steps to walk ahead with perseverance and confidence. Consequently, no limit could be set to any enterprising activity of man in any realm of development and progress.

At the same time, the Transcendence of God reminds us of the fact that humans are pilgrims on earth whereby none have permanent abodes here on earth, nor can have total perfection in anything that is done, yet they are consistently and constantly prompted to strive hard to reach out to the horizons of perfection which would be fulfilled in the world to come. This is true in any sphere of activities. This is the reason why some flaws or imperfections are invariably found in anything in this world making always room for further improvement and modification. The perfect beauty towards which our mind inclines is the Form of Beauty as in Platonic Triad. In the same vein, even an expert painter would not be satisfied with his own piece of art and so also the case with any other acclaimed artist or scientist. St. Augustine, musing over heart's

such longings or disappointments, concludes: "Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in Thee."

2.2. The Transparent God

The characteristics of transcendence and transparence appear to be in conflict. The more God's transcendence is emphasized, the less God's transparence can be understood and vice-versa. A transcendent is the one who is beyond perception, independent of the universe, and wholly "other". There is no point of comparison, no points of commonality. In contrast, the transparent God is one who exists within us or the universe and, hence, very much a part of our existence. There are all sorts of commonalities and points of comparison. How can these two qualities exist simultaneously? It is found in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh and dwelt among us. The transparence of God means that he is knowable, perceivable or graspable. For example, Jesus Christ is God incarnate (in the flesh) and therefore he was transparent in the first century among those who knew him, perceived of him or experienced him with one or more of their five senses.

Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus replied, "Philip, I have been with you all this time, and still you do not know Me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you, I do not speak on my own. Instead, it is the Father dwelling in me, performing His works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me — or at least believe on account of the works themselves" (Jn 14: 8-11). Jesus came to the world as 'God in human form': "He was like us in all ways except that He was without sin. His sinless nature transcended all humanity" (Heb 4:15). "Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, '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. From now on, you do know him and have seen him'" (Jn 14:5-6).

2.2.1. The Way

Jesus is the only way to really know the Father in heaven. On our long trips we used to turn on GPS to know the way as well to get an idea of how long it will take to get to our destination. Thomas was looking for the same kind of information. However, Jesus makes it clear that we don't have to define a route but simply know and trust in Jesus daily. When we abide in him, we are before his eyes, walk with him or

constantly converse with him as St. Chavara has instructed us, we need not define route, but surrender to Him who will lead us exactly where we need to go. Jesus compares himself to a shepherd. Sheep don't choose their own path to safety and protection, but rely on the shepherd to guard and care for them. In order to be safe, we have to trust the shepherd, and not wander off on our own adventures and try to find our own way. That will lead us to danger and pain. But when we follow Jesus, he leads us to exactly where we need to be.

2.2.2. The Truth

When Jesus tells, "I am the truth", he can testify to the truth and teach the truth because he himself is the truth. In him there is nothing false, nothing misleading, and nothing fake or uncertain. Each of us is capable of knowing truth, but none of us can claim to actually be truth. There are too many things we don't know, and too many things we get wrong throughout our lives. When Jesus claims to be truth, he claims to be one with God. The words of John 1:1 set the stage for this very fact: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When we seek to figure out what is truth and what is a lie, we can measure it against the words of Jesus.

2.2.3. The Life

In John 10, Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. ... "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep". Jesus is not only painting a picture of how he defends and leads his sheep, but also foreshadowing his death on the cross for the eternal life of all. This life is not our ultimate goal and does not encompass the entirety of who we are. This life is a mere drop in the ocean of eternity and serves as the starting block on the marathon that leads us to our goal of eternal life. We can slow it down, we can spend time, money and energy working to fight against it, but we can't stop it from marching forward. Jesus teaches us what we are to really be concerned with is not this life, but with eternal life. As we follow the voice of our shepherd, we can grasp what the eternal life is here and now. We can live this life in such a way that we are not chasing things that don't last but the things that do last and have eternal significance. This type of life has eternal impact not only for us but for others around us.

As consecrated persons our vocation is to show the characteristic features of Jesus – the Chaste, Poor and Obedient One – to the world around. According to *Vita Consecrata*, we have to be a living memorial

and tradition to the message, actions and life of our Saviour. We are exclusively chosen to closely follow Jesus and to be another Christ with 'ears to listen and forgive, with hands to bless and console, with legs to walk an extra mile to the needy and marginalized and with a heart burning with the zeal and passion for the Lord' as expressed in the CMI motto – *Zelo zelatus sum pro Domino Deo*.

2.3. The Immanent God

The immanence of God refers to God's relationship to the world that He actively operates within it, sustains it as its effective cause, and is continually present (i.e., omnipresent). Immanence is the balancing concept to God's transcendence, which describes God as being of a completely different kind or substance from and completely independent of the universe He created. While God is far above and "transcendent" of this world, He has also chosen to place Himself in direct connection with it as its creator, sustainer, and savior. The idea of an Immanent God can be traced to both Judaism and Greek philosophers. The Old Testament depicts a God who is very active in human affairs and the working of the universe. Christians, especially the mystics, have often described a God who works within them and whose presence they can perceive immediately and personally. Various Greek philosophers have also discussed the idea of a God who is somehow united with our souls. In religion, transcendence is the aspect of a deity's nature and power that is wholly independent of the material universe, beyond all known physical laws. This is contrasted with immanence, where a God is said to be fully present in the physical world and thus accessible to creatures in various ways.

God's transcendent nature keeps Him distant and remote from His creation both in space and time, yet on the other hand, His immanent nature works to draw Him near to His creation and to sustain the universe. 'Am I a God nearby,' says the Lord, 'and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?' declares the Lord. 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' declares the Lord" (Jer 23:23-24). God's love for His creation is so great that we see His immanence overshadowing His transcendence. This becomes clear in His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, as He breaks through the barrier of sin and separation to draw all mankind back into a close, personal relationship. We see God not only choosing to draw near to His creation but to personally come into the hearts and minds of His people through the indwelling power of His Holy Spirit. This is the miracle of God's transcendence.

Jesus reveals the Holy Spirit, the Immanent God: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you do know Him, for He abides with you and will be in you. All this I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have told you" (Jn 14). The emphasis of the passage is on transformation wrought by the Spirit of God. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:5-8). Our lives are formed by heredity, environment, and will. When Jesus says "that which is born of flesh is flesh," he stresses our heredity which cannot produce a spiritually transformed life. Our environment and waywardness further limit us. Something new has to take place. This something new is being born of the Spirit. "There is a mystery about the new birth, as about every act of God. One who is born of the Spirit is like the wind. We cannot tell its direction or source, yet we can see its effects. It is the manifestation of an unseen power. So the life of the regenerate soul will always be a puzzle and an enigma to men of the world; yet even they must be able to test its genuineness by its acts of humility, of purity, of love" (Eerdmans).

Jesus promised the apostles, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Act 1:8). The emphasis on the Holy Spirit is the key throughout the book of Acts especially in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8: 26-40. The story unfolds with the Spirit taking over the task of directing Philip: "Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goes down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert", then telling him to join himself to the eunuch's chariot and finally snatching him away at the conclusion of the story.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones in 'The Sovereign Spirit' infers from the story, "Now there are leadings such as that.... If you read the history of the saints, God's people throughout the centuries and especially the history of revivals, you will find that this is something which is perfectly clear and definite – men have been told by the Holy Spirit to do something;

they knew it was the Holy Spirit speaking to them, and it transpired that it obviously was his leading. It seems clear to me that if we deny such a possibility, we are again guilty of quenching the Spirit”.

Wherever the Spirit works, there is abundance of joy. The Ethiopian went away from the experience “rejoicing.” Luke does not say anything about receiving the Spirit, but joy is a part of the work that the Spirit performs. When disciples (Acts 13:52) see spiritual results, they often have an accompanying joy. It is Paul, however, who writes about joy as a fruit of the Spirit. Only when the missionaries begin with the wishes of Imminent God asking always, “How does God desire that we minister within this context?”, their mission would be fruitful. The book of Proverbs says, “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (Prov 16:9) and “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed” (Prov 16:3).

3. CMI Way of Trinitarian Life

The CMI Constitution is a living proof to the fact that the Congregation as a *Darshana Kutumbam* is a reflection of Trinitarian Life with each of the three Persons playing a vital role at every stage from its very inception to what it is today. The first article of the Constitution underscores this fact: “Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they (the founding fathers) committed their life to intense prayer and deep recollection and the building up and renewal of the Church” (C-1, p.9). Apart from this inspiration to start, “It (the CMI Consecrated life itself) was a life of communion with the Triune God: experiencing the freedom of the Spirit, and making “the Word our sole food and drink” (St. Kuriakose Elias, Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*), they became powerful heralds of the same Word and formed themselves in the likeness of the Son” (C-3, p.10).

The CMI Religious life, as defined by the Constitution, “requires closer following of Christ in intimate communion with the Father in the Spirit, through a life of prayer that manifests to all the presence already here of the Kingdom of God. Yet, as the pilgrim Church on the way to the Father’s home, we have to exercise a radical renunciation through the profession and practice of the evangelical counsels in the true fellowship of the religious community” (C-8, p.12). The “call to perfect love (PC 1) invites CMIs to a deepening of our baptismal consecration (ET 4) through a total surrender of ourselves to God in the profession and practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Through these vows we dedicated ourselves to the Father in Christ who communicates himself through the Spirit intimately to the innermost core of every man” (C-17, p.15). “By the profession of the Evangelical Obedience, we identify

ourselves with Christ (PC 14) who learned obedience through suffering (Heb 5:8) even unto death on the cross and carried out the Fathers' plan of love" (C-37, p-19). Further, "Listening to the Spirit acting in every individual and community, we seek the Father's plan for each one of us as well as for the community" (C-39, p.20). Underlining the inevitable place of Community life, the Constitution elaborates: "Giving ourselves to one another, we show forth the unity of the Body of Christ, the people of God called to participate in the fellowship of the Most Holy Trinity" (C-45, p.21). The CMI Missionary Charism demands in sharing Christ's Mission from the Father: "Made disciples of Christ through Baptism and in a special manner by our religious consecration, we participate in the mission of Christ from the Father to make all men share in his son ship" (C-62, p.26). The Supreme Model to which every CMI has to be formed is "Christ praying on the mountain and proclaiming God's Kingdom to the multitudes, identifying himself with the poor and always obeying the will of the Father" (C-79, p.310. "The Holy Spirit, the author of our sanctification who dwells in us, forms us into the image of Christ" (C-80, p.32). To cap it all, the CMI formula of Profession of three Vows is a radical commitment to the Most Holy Trinity (C-110, p.41).

4. Conclusion

The transcendence of God means that He is outside of humanity's full experience, perception or grasp whereas the transparenence of God means that he is knowable, perceivable or graspable. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons that exist in perfect harmony as one God. Each member of the Trinity fulfills the specific role as Transcendent God, Transparent God and Immanent God respectively. The verse of Paul, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14) provides the most complete and explicit summary of their functions. In simple sense, the Transcendent Father creates a plan of highest perfection, the Transparent Jesus Christ in human form implements the plan tangible to the human beings in perfect obedience to the Father and encourages the people to live according to the promptings of the Immanent Holy Spirit who administers the plan in the day-today lives of each individual and empowers and enables them to strive to be perfect as the heavenly Father is.

Every CMI, consecrated to the Holy Trinity by their religious profession is called to be a constant '*learner*' about the way, laid out by Jesus Christ, the Transparent God, who lived among human beings. A way of life sets a paradigm to the behaviour and habits, that are typical

of a particular person or group, and leads everyone towards the Transcendent God striving to be Perfect in every aspect of their lives both temporal and eternal. This Way modelled by the Transparent God during his earthly life is “*loving*” Jesus in and through the little ones, and “*to live*” a CMI way of life guided by the Holy Spirit doing the Will of the Father in everything and everywhere and thereby transforming the Congregation in to a radical Spiritual Movement in perfect tune with the saintly lives of the Founding Fathers.