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## The Indwelling of the Trinity In the Heart of the Believer

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Graebner: The Indwelling of the Trinity In the Heart of the Believer

## **The Indwelling of the Trinity in the Heart of the Believer.**

Essay read before the convention of the Missouri Synod in June, 1929.

### **I.**

The indwelling of the Holy Trinity in the heart of the believer is an article of Christian faith. We do not misunderstand the attitude of our own time toward the discussion of articles of doctrine. There is a tendency away from dogma, from creed. The slogans are, "Not dogma, but life!" — "Not creeds, but deeds!" So general is the decline of confessional consciousness that we might be impressed, even alarmed, by it did we not know the reasons for this decline. There has been a great incursion of unbelief into the Christian churches. It has eaten the heart out of some, leaving only the outward shell of Christian forms, ancient symbols, carved altars, and the Authorized Version vocabulary. Even in the denominations which have not yet left the evangelical moorings there is a conflict on between those who would stand by the old confessions and those who would discard them. There is the squatting of a doubt where certainty once stood erect. I am not going to discuss the practical results of Modernism, which sinks a dagger into the heart of enthusiasm for spiritual church-work. My point is that theology has been given a bad name by the skilful tactics of its enemies, whose contention that we are saved by religion rather than by theology has been so often repeated that even the elect, if it were possible, would be induced to discard confessions, creed, and dogma.

By choosing a severely doctrinal theme for our lecture half-hour, we proclaim the fact that we do hold Christian doctrine to be an essential part of church-life; that saving truth is a legitimate object of study and research, even of classification and formulation; that articles of faith are necessary for clear Christian conviction; that our confessions are up to date; and that even the modern mind, when Spirit-led, can appreciate the wonders and beauties of the ancient Christian Creed.

A wonderful doctrine it is, the doctrine of the mystic union of God with the believer. That God personally dwells in the Christian is certainly a teaching so lofty that, if we did not find it taught on many pages of Holy Writ, we should not dare to make any such claim. Ours is not a deistic absentee god who once started the universe, fashioned it as its architect, but then withdrew from its governance and permitted the worlds to spin on by inherent



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 forces. The god of Deism is not a god who cares for us; to worship him would be really a meaningless gesture. Our God is an Infinite, a vital Presence throughout, and far transcending, all creation.

Now, what is that mystic union which we are about to discuss? In the definition of Abraham Calov: It is a union of the believer with God which is more than simply an agreement of his will with the divine; for it is a real presence, an actual union and communion, by which the divine essence in a mysterious way joins itself to the believer's person.

As is evident from this definition, our Church distinguishes between the doctrine of God's omnipresence and the doctrine of His presence in the believers. Concerning all men indeed it can be said that "in Him we live and move and have our being." As the Absolute, God upholds all things and is the true reason of their existence. As the Infinite, He dwells in everything, also in every human being. But while He upholds all things by His mighty power, He is present in a spiritual way only through the operations of the Word of God. Where the message of the Gospel is proclaimed and savingly apprehended, there the Spirit occupies heart and mind, draws the soul into communion with Christ, and makes it a dwelling-place of the Holy Trinity.

As our Lord was about to depart from this earth, in His last sayings as recorded by St. John, He first revealed to His disciples that intimate and blessed union which would follow upon His return to the Father. Withdrawing from their circle, about to be separated from them in terms of physical space, our Lord promises a union which is not only spiritual and real, but is a bodily presence among them and in them. It was then that He told the parable of the Vine and the Branches. Vine and branches have one life, are one thing. More plainly than in this parable He spoke in His Sacerdotal Prayer. When addressing the Father, He speaks thus: "As Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, [I pray] that they also may be one in Us, that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them."

All that is promised in the gospels is fulfilled in the epistles. The indwelling Trinity is proclaimed a simple fact as soon as we open the apostolic letters. "The Spirit of God dwells in you," writes Paul to the Romans. "Know ye not your own selves," he asks the Corinthians, "how that Jesus Christ is in you?" From ancient times the Church has applied the word mystic union to the indwelling of God in the hearts of the believers. The term itself



is derived from Eph. 5, 32, where the apostle speaks of the union between husband and wife as symbolical of that between Christ and the Church and says: "This is a great mystery." Once more, writing to the Colossians, he speaks of the "mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." We begin to sense something of the depth of this mystery when we hear Paul exclaim Gal. 2, 20: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," or when we read Paul's distinct assertion that "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit," 1 Cor. 6, 17; and again: "We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones," Eph. 5, 30; or, most astounding of all New Testament assertions on this subject, when Peter in his second letter proclaims that the believer, every believer, has "become a partaker of the divine nature."

Astounding as these statements are, the truth which they proclaim was already embodied in the Old Testament prophecy and prefigured in Old Testament revelation. "I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God," was the fundamental article of the covenant between God and the people of Israel. It was typified, symbolized, through the presence of the luminous cloud in the Sanctuary, where it hovered over the Ark of the Covenant between the Cherubim. That was the living presence of God among His people. During the days of the Exile, Ezekiel saw the glory depart from the Sanctuary, but this same prophet foretells the age when in a new and more spiritual, yet none the less real and personal manner God would again be united with His chosen ones. "I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh. . . . They shall be My people, and I will be their God." And again, to the Israelites in Captivity, Jeremiah foretells the better days to come, the days of the New Covenant, or New Testament: "I will put My Law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts and will be their God, and they shall be My people." And how shall this union come about? "I will forgive their iniquity and will remember their sin no more." In that age, still shrouded to the prophets' eyes by the mist of overlapping centuries, Jehovah would find His bride, the Church, and He would make her His own and enter into such union with her that He is able to speak through Hosea to the Church of the Gospel Age: "I will betroth thee unto Me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies."

The source and beginning of the believer's union with God is



his regeneration. To speak with Luther: "Being rooted in Him through faith and drawing from Him the elements of a new life as the branches from the vine, He and I became united in substance and essence, so that the fruits which I bear are not my fruits, but the fruit of the Vine in which I am a branch. Thus from the regenerate heart flow such fruits as confession of the Gospel, the works of love, the new obedience."

"Not only," says Luther in his greatest work, *The Freedom of a Christian*, "not only does faith effect a blessed and full assurance of free grace, but it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her betrothed." And in his great *Commentary on Galatians*: "Christ is so closely inwardly present with us as light and color are united with a wall. The Christian can say, Christ and I are one. Through faith you are so closely united with Christ that you and He become, as it were, one person, which can no longer be separated or distinguished."

Observe in these quotations the specifically Lutheran doctrine that the union of the believer with Christ is established by faith, hence is not an immediate, but a mediate union. The teachers of our Church have carefully guarded themselves against the doctrine that there is an actual fusion of the divine and the human substance. God remains God, man remains man. But our Confessions, on the other hand, also reject the teachings that God is present in the believer only inasmuch as He operates on his soul or produces effects in his heart. The Augsburg Confession distinctly says that those who say that only the gifts of God, and not God Himself, dwell in the Christian are guilty of false doctrine. Our Confessions distinguish justification, which is the divine act of bringing man into the right relation with God, from the mystic union, which flows out of justification by faith as a result. The Formula of Concord says: "Christians, being justified through Christ and reconciled with God through faith, are temples of the Holy Trinity." But this indwelling of the Trinity is not the same as the righteousness of faith through which we are justified. This indwelling follows upon the justifying act of divine pardon.

How real and intimate Luther conceived of this union may be understood from such passages as the following: "Faith appropriates Christ and all that is Christ's; it is the personal union with Him, with the result that Christ and the believer become one body." Elsewhere he says: "If some one raps at my heart, its door opens, and I say: Luther is gone out, the Holy Spirit is now at home."



Luther emphasizes the fact that the entire Christ, the God-man, dwells in us. "In and with Christ we have that person in which the Father lives bodily, so that I become one with Christ and with the Father."

On John 14, 20 Luther has the following notable comment: "This is the heart of all Christian conviction, that the believer is assured first of all that the man Jesus Christ is true God and God in Him; secondly, that He, Jesus, in whom God is essentially, also is within us and we in Him. The Son comes from the Father and inheres in us; we inhere in Jesus and through Him come to the Father. Thus an endless chain has been made between Him and us and the Father, and through this union and communion, sin and death have been abolished, life and salvation have become our own." And again: "Through faith we became one body with Christ and He with us. Through the Word and the Sacraments He united Himself with us. Thus we have the three great unions: the Father and the Son united in the Deity; God and man united in Christ; Christ united, becoming one, with the Church."

Christ's ascension into heaven is not a local removal, as if one climbs up a ladder into a house, but it is simply this, that He has been exalted over all creatures, is in them all and above them all. His bodily ascension is a token of this truth. By it He has become closer to us than any creature can come to another. Yet we are to find Him only in one place, and that is in His holy Word. Luther proclaims this a greater miracle than the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament. He asks: "If we believe that the entire Christ lives really and truly in the heart of every Christian through the Word of the Gospel, is it, then, so difficult to believe that His body and blood are in the Sacrament? He can enter our hearts and spirits and live in our souls. This is a loftier doctrine than even that of His presence in the bread and wine." "Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, but He is also in your heart—the same Christ who fills heaven and earth. I say He is seated at the right hand of God and rules over all creatures, sin, death, life, world, devils, and angels; if you believe that, you have Him in your heart. And so your heart is in heaven, not figuratively or in a dream, but really and truly. For where He is, there you are. John 17, 23. And this is the experience of the Christian."

Lest we gain the impression that, after all, the indwelling of the Trinity is a special grace, reserved for those who have had mighty conflicts to sustain within and without, like Luther and



Paul, let us note how in one of the most familiar verses of our hymnal, Luther brings this high doctrine down to the level even of the babes in Christ, yes, babes in years:—

*Ach mein herzliebtes Jesulein,  
Mach' dir ein rein, sanft Bettelein,  
ZU RUHEN IN MEIN'S HERZENS SCHREIN,  
Dass ich nimmer vergesse dein!*

Thus out of the mouths of babes and sucklings has God perfected grace.

(To be continued.)

TH. GRAEBNER.

## Die Inspiration in den Realien.

Das Wort Inspiration wird in diesem Artikel mit einer definitiven Voraussetzung gebraucht, nämlich der, daß alle wirklich christlichen Theologen den Terminus so gebrauchen und anwenden wollen, wie er in der Schrift klar definiert und gebraucht wird. Diese Voraussetzung schaltet von vornherein alle von Menschen erfundenen Definitionen und Theorien aus, als da sind:

die Intuitionstheorie, nach der die Eingebung nur eine höhere Entwicklung der natürlichen menschlichen Einsicht und andachtsvollen Stimmung ist, infolge deren jeder Mensch auf der Suche nach Wahrheit ist;

die Illuminationstheorie, nach der die Eingebung lediglich eine Verschärfung und Erhöhung der allen Gläubigen verliehenen Einsicht in göttliche Dinge ist;

die dynamische Theorie, nach der die menschliche Seite der Autorschaft biblischer Schriften so stark betont wird, daß man eine Evolution in der Offenbarung zur Seligkeit annimmt und dabei die Fehlerlosigkeit der Schrift in allen Stücken, die sich nicht unmittelbar auf diesen Punkt beziehen, in Frage stellt;

die Theorie der göttlichen Unterstützung, mit der vorigen eng verwandt, nach der man sich die Wirkung des Heiligen Geistes so vorstellt, als habe er das Schreiben der Schriften nur veranlaßt, Unterstützung gewährt und Fingerzeige gegeben, so daß man einen Unterschied machen müsse zwischen inspirierten und nichtinspirierten Teilen der Schrift;

die Theorie der Gegenstandsinspiration, nach der nur die Gegenstände und Themata, die zu behandeln waren, allenfalls auch die Gedanken, den heiligen Schreibern mitgeteilt wurden, während die Wahl der Form und der einzelnen Wörter ihnen überlassen blieb;

die Theorie der teilweisen oder begrenzten Inspiration, nach der man nur gewisse Teile der Schrift, wie z. B. das Neue Testament allein oder das Alte Testament allein, als inspiriert annehmen müsse, sowie daß Grade in der Inspiration anzunehmen seien;