

The Holy Trinity

A POWERFUL COMBINATION

Matthew 28:16-20

The Holy Trinity

Analysis by Paul Jaster

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

DIAGNOSIS: A Weak Cell (Singular)

Step 1: Initial diagnosis (External Problem) – *Physically Missing*

"Eleven" disciples go to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus directed them. There should have been "twelve" (all). One is missing: Judas. Like one cell missing in a bank of batteries, the total output of the rest is weaker because of it. But is Judas not the only "one" missing. So are a host of other "ones" from all the nations of the world: those who don't worship God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through the risen and exalted Jesus standing right in front of them. And even among us who are baptized in the Triune name, there is a part of us that is not there. We do not put our whole selves into that identity. We are

not always present and ready for duty when and where we should be. There is a bit of Judas in us that betrays Jesus, particularly by bugging out when the cross comes and the real work of cruciformed ministry is about to be done.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Drained by Doubts

When the eleven arrive, they see and worship Jesus; “but some doubted” (v. 17). Doubt is like an electrical short that drains a battery, and the battery gets weaker and weaker. We are not told what the doubts are, but it is not difficult to imagine since we have doubts of our own. Worshiping Jesus implies equating the crucified and risen Jesus with God. How can a man who dies be God too? And how can God be anything but one? And since this meeting of the risen Jesus took place on a mountain much in the same way God first revealed himself to Israel on Mount Sinai, perhaps some of them wondered if the “Jesus way” (promise) really did replace the “Moses way” (command). Could Jesus really be greater than Moses? Or, maybe they wondered what good could come out of meeting on some lowly hill in Galilee, “the circle of the nations,” rather than on Mount Zion in Jerusalem as was once promised and expected. Perhaps they questioned if Jesus’ mission could or should be as global as this locale implied—a question that also occurs to us out of our own natural self-centeredness.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Eternally Dead

Drain any battery long enough and it dies. Without being continually connected and energized by the one living God who is at the same time Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we die. The example of Judas is instructive. Judas separated himself from the God who comes to us in Jesus. He repented and realized the horror of his error. Yet he was not able to receive the promise of Christ’s forgiveness with trusting faith (as does Peter who also sins and betrays Jesus). And so, in his despair Judas

committed suicide. We may not take the initiative Judas did in ending his own life, but the end result is the same: Dead forever. Not part of the living community of saints. Alone. Dying one by one.

PROGNOSIS: A Powerful Battery (Triune)

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – A Powerful Jump

When a car battery is weak/drained/dead, the way to revive it is by a powerful jump from an outside source. Jesus is not just another Moses. The crucified and risen Jesus is Emmanuel, “God-with-us” in our sin and death-physically and bodily. Somehow, imagining the Holy Trinity at work like electricity is more dynamic, powerful and satisfying than the old trinitarian clichés we’ve been offered (eggs, interlocking circles, and triangles). Think “generative power” (the Father); think “physical connection” or “interface” between the powerful and powerless that simultaneously is negative (-) and positive (+), law and Gospel (the Son); and think “energy” conveyed to enliven the dead and powerless (Holy Spirit). The Matthean Jesus does not ascend into heaven, but remains “with us” grounded in our midst to the end of the age to empower the church. To proclaim the wonder of all this results in the trinitarianism of Christianity rather than the monotheism of Judaism.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Energized and Charged

Those who believe and are baptized in the name of the Triune God are energized and charged. They are given the powerful authority to make more disciples by baptizing and by teaching-that is, by Word and Sacrament-the preaching and the doing of the Gospel. This mission is directed not only to the “in group” but to “all nations.” The electricity generated by the “Jesus way” is more powerful than the “Moses way” just as three-phase AC is to DC. We are not only given power, but power of a different kind. The

“Moses way” is DC (direct control): “Do this or else.” Like DC power it doesn’t go very far. The “Jesus way” is three-phase AC (alternating compassion generated by the Holy Trinity): “Love one another just as I have loved you.” This is a giving of the self that enables others to give of themselves and helps us to bear one another’s burdens. This love is a force that gets more powerful as new believers are baptized and new cells are added and the entire network gets interconnected. We are not alone. We are not weak. We are not dead. We are powerfully connected to the living God and each other through Christ. And this God’s own self is a powerful, dynamic tri-unity.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *A Physical Mission*
Connect the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to a battery of believers and you get a powerful combination with an electrifying result—a physical going out, baptizing, teaching and obeying. The dictionary defines a battery as “a combination of apparatus for producing a singular electrical effect.” And what better definition for the Holy Trinity! The Holy Trinity is the way that the living God is and acts to produce a singular electrical effect: the mighty saving mission of Jesus and his gospel, taken out into the world by those who have been charged with it.