LOVE GIVES EVERYTHING!

The Trinity as Ground for Mission, Interculturality, Inculturation, and JPIC
As you see from my title ...

- What you have asked me to do in one talk, I should really do in four!
- What I can only do here: an introduction to the four topics above.
- However, important to see that all four topics are interrelated.
- In a kind of perichoresis, a kind of dance among Holy Mystery, Word, and Spirit.
- They explain, enrich, play with one another.
- Like the Trinitarian persons, we can only fully understand them if we grasp them all together.
- They are each, one and all, different ways of understanding that LOVE GIVES EVERYTHING!
LOVE GIVES EVERYTHING!

• What a wonderful way of expressing the inexpressible reality of our Triune God
• And our own participation in God’s life of mission
• Love Gives Everything—points to the metaphor that God is a verb,
• A Mystery, as Gloria has shown us, of flourishing relationship
• A loving that moves out and draws others in
• Humans, animals, every particle of creation
Theology in its own stuttering way

• Tells us that the divine “persons”
• Are “persons” not in their own right
• But only insofar as they participate in relationship—

• With one another and with everything that exists
  • And so it is with us!

• Famous African proverb: “I am because we are”
• And that is true because we are made in God’s image
As Richard Rohr puts it ...

- God is not being...
- ...but *Interbeing*
- Trinity is not the dancers...
- *But the Dance Itself!*
- And so it is with everything.
- As images of God, we exist as interbeings
  - Caught up in the dance
  - Everything is related
- As physicists tell us and Gloria has reminded us
The Triune God is Love Giving Everything

- “Before” the world’s creation
- (to use another metaphor!)
- And from its first nanosecond
- And every nanosecond thereafter
- And into the future

“Christ acted as he did because that is the character of true divinity”

- Michael J. Gorman
- Philippians 2:6-11
- Although / Before
- “surface structure”
  - Christ acted differently from how “normal” gods act
- “deep structure”
Perhaps not out of place to paraphrase Aquinas

“It is proper to God to empty Godself, through which God’s omnipotence is manifested in the greatest degree”

God is Love Giving Everything: Holy Mystery Emptying Godself into creation through the Word made flesh Through the gentle and tender power of the Spirit
It is this Love Giving Everything

• This “Verb in which all beings participate, move and have their being ... not limited by any object but soaring everywhere”

• This is the ground of the church’s mission

• Its commitment to interculturality and inculturation

• And its commitment in mission to justice and peace

• The ground of these is what this presentation will explore
Mission
In January, 2021

God *could* have done it by Godself but *chose* to do it with others!

A lovely, faith-filled reflection, and very well done
This fine reflection, however

- Stimulated me to think in a different direction
- I was already thinking about this presentation on the Trinity
- And my creative juices were already flowing
- Perhaps Jesus’ choice of disciples to help him was no caprice
- Maybe Jesus, because he was God, could not have done it by himself
- BECAUSE GOD CAN NEVER DO ANYTHING BY GODSELF!
This is the point of the Trinity!

• God NEVER acts alone!
• In fact, to be God is never to be alone
• And so in calling disciples Jesus reveals the true nature of God as a communion of persons
• A communion-in-mission
• Holy Mystery that is Godself by uttering God is never alone
• The breathing forth and breathing back of which is the Holy Spirit

God is never alone
God is Love Giving Everything!
And because God is never alone, God never acts alone

- It is God’s nature to be a partner.
- When God creates, what is created becomes a partner
- Invited to freely participate in God’s continuously creating work
  - Elizabeth Johnson:
  - “It is as if at the Big Bang the Spirit gave the natural world a push saying, ‘Go have an adventure, see what you can become’”
When God reveals Godself, those to whom God reveals Godself become partners

When God works to heal the world from the power of evil and sin, those whom God heals and redeems become partners in healing and redemption

For revelation is not simply the communication of knowledge, but an offer of friendship, an offer to share God’s very life.
Holy Mystery, the Love that Gives Everything, is revealed in the world by the Word made flesh…

... Jesus of Nazareth, who is anointed by the Spirit at his baptism …

... To bring good news to the poor, ... to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free (Lk 4:18)
Here we see the essence of God’s mission

In this way the mission of God is shared with the church

And so the church is truly “missionary by its very nature”

A “community of missionary disciples”
Eastern Tradition—*Theosis* or Deification

- Strong Pauline (adoption) and Johannine roots (vine and branches)

- God has given us the power to become participants in the divine nature

- One could get the impression that this is something personal and spiritual

- Michael J. Gorman: *theosis* is always missional

- Baptism plunges us into the very life of God, who is a missionary God, and to share God’s life is to participate in God’s very mission

- Alluded to in paragraph 2 of SSND Constitution

- World Council of Churches: “Discipleship is both a gift and a calling to be active collaborators with God for the transforming of the world ... In what the church’s early theologians called ‘theosis’ ... we share God’s grace by sharing God’s mission”

- Gorman: *theosis* is missional *theosis*
Mission and its Trinitarian Ground

• Intimately connected to the other three topics that I will reflect on in this presentation
• And more developed as we reflect on them
• What I want to stress here:
  • God, in God’s triune nature as Loving Giving Everything
  • Incorporates us into the divine life so intimately that we become ourselves partners in that Love that Gives Everything

• This is the essence of Mission!
Interculturality
The SSND Directional Statement

How, however, is interculturality connected with *Trinitarian* life and mission?
One powerful way to think about mission

• Connect it with the completion of God's mission, in which Christians are called to participate, and completing God's dream of creation's full flourishing.

• Israel called to work with God in bringing a blessing to all nations.

• Jesus spoke of it in Mark’s gospel as the kingdom/kin-dom of God, “revolutionary intimacy” and “radical kinship.”

At the heart of Jesus’ vision was intercultural harmony and energy.
Jesus of Nazareth

• Like us in all things but sin
• Was thoroughly a Jew, with prejudices about foreigners and non-Jews
• Adriana Milmanda: but was able to overcome his prejudices as he encounters the Canaanite/Syro-Phoenician woman

What a marvelous portrait of Trinitarian mission in action!
Amy-Jill Levine on the Good Samaritan

• “The man in the ditch is an Israeli Jew; a rabbi and a Jewish member of the Israeli Knesset fail to help the wounded man, but a member of Hamas shows him compassion”

• Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*:

• Links the message of the parable with the Triune God:

• “If we go to the ultimate source of that love which is the very life of the triune God, we encounter in the community of the three divine persons the original and perfect model of society” (85)
Francis’s words point to an important move in Trinitarian theology

- First articulated by Karl Rahner in theological language
- Later expressed more simply by Catherine LaCugna and Kathleen Cahalan:
  - Who God is in God’s essence is what God does
    - And vice-versa
  - Or by Elizabeth Johnson:
    - “If God is thus, thus is God”
What this means is that

Trinity is Love Giving Everything, calling us to do the same with one another!
Interculturality is intimately tied to mission

• As *You Are Sent* observes:
  • “Membership in our world-wide community broadens the scope of our concern and fosters in us a readiness to be with and to serve people of various cultural backgrounds within our own nation or in another country”
  • The mutual inspiration, enrichment, and challenge of inculturation is at the heart of God’s and our mission!
Inculturation
What is always important when we reflect on the Trinity

- Cultivate a healthy *apophatic* sense
- We need to know that we are dealing with mystery
- And that any language we use is more untrue than true
  - Christian Wiman:
  - "My bright abyss"
We must not portray you in king’s robes, 
you drifting mist that brought forth the morning

Once again from the old paintboxes 
we take the same gold for scepter and crown 
that has disguised you through the ages.

Piously we produce our images of you 
till they stand around you like a thousand walls. 
And when our hearts would simply open 
our fervent hands hide you.
Denise Levertov:

“I know so little.
You have brought me so far.”

William Cleary:

“I know enough about you to hesitate to name you in any particular way”
In her beautiful chapter on the Trinity...

• Elizabeth Johnson admits that language about God in general and the Trinity in particular
• “is not a literal description of the inner being of God who is in any event beyond human understanding.”
• This is because “we cannot know what God is, but only what God is not” (Aquinas)
• “no concept is adequate, no model mirrors directly”

We know God, as Rilke says, “when our hearts would simply open,” in our experience of being taken up by the Spirit to recognize God’s saving power in Jesus the Christ.
But this does not mean we must remain speechless!

• Or that language about God is totally meaningless
  • This is because, from the first moment of creation
• The Holy Spirit has been present and active:
  • “The world is charged with the grandeur of God ... because the Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings”
Language about God is not meaningless

• Graham Kings:
  • “For God matter matters / for the Word became flesh”

• David Burrell:
  • Our language about God is like shooting an arrow at a target...
  • Hits the target, but never the bull’s eye!
Both these truths--that we cannot speak of God but that we can—“allusively”

- Express the Trinitarian ground of inculturation
- God is Love Giving Everthing—we cannot take it all in

- But Love Gives *Everything*, and so *anything* is able to reflect the mystery
- As long as we are aware of language’s, images’, ritual’s limitations
The ineffable nature of God and the sacramental nature of God’s world

- Allows us to be creative, daring, innovative in our theologies and liturgies, our teaching, and our witnessing to and proclaiming the gospel
- Our bodies, our cultures, our social locations, our history
- Are all shot through with the Spirit’s presence
- With the holiness of the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth—now the Risen Christ

Whose body, like ours, like every rock, every drop of water, has its origins—as Denis Edwards says—in stardust!
Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation
The SSND Directional Statement commits you to:

- To “discern as a congregation which urgent and critical global concerns” you “are called to address”
- And “dare to respond boldly in unsuspected ways”
- THERE ARE SO MANY!!!
- Gender justice, gender equality, ecology, migration, human trafficking, poverty ………

In sum, you are called to be prophets of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation

And in this you are rooted in our Trinitiarian God

Who IS a community of justice and flourishing, and works for justice and peace in all creation
Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff

• Reflects on this aspect of the Triune God by starting with what Kathleen Cahalan and Catherine LaCugna call God’s essence
  • What God is in Godself
  • For Boff, in the beginning is not the One but the Three-in-One
  • A communion, a perfect community of perfect equality and sharing
    • The pattern for justice in the world
  • This reality of unity and diversity in communion—Love Giving Everything—
    • “origin, mediator, and driving force of liberation”
  • Lays the foundation for JPIC
How do we know that God is like this?

• **BECAUSE OF GOD’S ACTIONS IN HISTORY!**

• Once again: what God *is* in God’s deepest self is what God *does*

• The entire history of Israel attests to God’s working for true justice and *shalom*

• Empowered by the Spirit, Jesus embodies, demonstrates, and proclaims in his ministry the “revolutionary intimacy” of God’s kindom
When Jesus commission the church for mission

- He charged his disciples to continue his mission of embodying, demonstrating, and preaching to
- *Every creature* (Mk 16:15)
- And at Pentecost, this is what the Spirit empowered them to do
- There is a strong Trinitarian foundation to our mission of justice, peace, and integrity of creation
Conclusion: Joining in the Dance
A friend of mine recently told me a wonderful story. He was visiting a church in the Congo. At a certain point in the service, all the people began to dance. Dancing, of course, is common in the African church. But this was at a point with which my friend was unfamiliar. So he asked why the people were dancing.

“Oh, they are dancing the creed. They’ve just discovered it.”

“Oh, yes,” said his guide, “but they never really understood it until they danced it!”
I think—in a metaphorical way, of course

• This is how we discover the Trinity in our own lives
  • We join the Divine Dance, as Richard Rohr has called it
  • A play on words that is derived from the formal term perichoresis
  • the interrelation, interweaving that expresses the Trinity's intimate unity but clear difference
  • We join the dance as we begin to engage in mission

When we practice, succeed, and make mistakes in a life of interculturality

Risk new ways of thinking about and communicating the gospel as we engage in inculturation

Struggle with and for the poor and our hurting earth in working for JPIC
We join the dance

"whirl and intertwine in unusual patterns; the floor is circled in seemingly chaotic ways; rhythms are diverse; at times all hell breaks loose; resolution is achieved unexpectedly"

"we can say that the eternal flow of life is stepped to the contagious rhythms of spicy salsas, merengues, calypsos, or reggaes where dancers in free motion are yet bonded by the music"

In the dance, like the African Christians in the Congo, we discover the creed: “I believe in one God ... Creator ... Word made flesh ... Life-giving Spirit
The great 14th century poet Hafez

Every child has known God.
    Not the God of names,
    Not the God of don’ts,
Not the God who [n]ever does anything weird.
    But who only knows
        Four words.
    And keeps repeating them, saying:
        “Come dance with me.”
            Come
            Dance