

Spirit & Trinity Quotes

1) The Trinity is, for the Orthodox Church, the unshakeable foundation of all religious thought, of all piety, of all spiritual life, of all experience. It is the Trinity that we seek in seeking after God, when we search for the fullness of being, for the end and meaning of existence. Primordial revelation, itself the source of all revelation as of all being, the Holy Trinity presents itself to our religious consciousness as a fact the evidence for which can be grounded only upon itself. According to a modern Russian theologian, Father Florensky,¹⁰⁰ there is no other way in which human thought may find perfect stability save that of accepting the trinitarian antinomy. If we reject the Trinity as the sole ground of all reality and of all thought, we are committed to a road that leads nowhere; we end in an aporia, in folly, in the disintegration of our being, in spiritual death. Between the Trinity and hell there lies no other choice. This question is, indeed, crucial—in the literal sense of that word. The dogma of the Trinity is a cross for human ways of thought. The apophatic ascent is a mounting of calvary. This is the reason why no philosophical speculation has ever succeeded in rising to the mystery of the Holy Trinity. This is the reason why the human spirit was able to receive the full revelation of the Godhead only after Christ on the cross had triumphed over death and over the abyss of hell. This, finally, is the reason why the revelation of the Trinity shines out in the Church as a purely religious gift, as the catholic truth above all other. (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 65-66.)

2) Revelation sets an abyss between the truth which it declares and the truths which can be discovered by philosophical speculation. If human thought guided by the instinct for truth—which is faith, though confused and uncertain—could, apart from Christianity, grope its way towards certain notions which approximated to the Trinity, the mystery of God-in-Trinity remained inscrutable to it. A ‘change of spirit’ was needed—a μετένοια, which also means ‘penitence’, like the penitence of Job when he found himself face to face with God: ‘I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.’ (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 49.)

3) Discussion of theology is not for everyone, I tell you, not for everyone - it is no such inexpensive or effortless pursuit. Nor, I would add, is it for every occasion, or every audience; neither are all its aspects open to inquiry. It must be reserved for certain occasions, for certain audiences, and certain limits must be observed. It is not for all people, but only for those who have been tested and have found a sound footing in study, and, more importantly, have undergone, or at the very least are undergoing, purification of body and soul. For one who is not pure to lay hold of pure things is dangerous, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun’s brightness. (St Gregory Nazenzen, *First Theological Oration*.)

4) St. Gregory Nazianzen, who is sometimes called the minstrel of the Holy Trinity, tells us in one of his theological poems: 'From the day whereon I renounced the things of the world to consecrate my soul to luminous and heavenly contemplation, when the supreme intelligence carried me hence to set me down far from all that pertains to the flesh, to hide me in the secret places of the heavenly tabernacle; from that day my eyes have been blinded by the light of the Trinity, whose brightness surpasses all that the mind can conceive; for from a throne high exalted the Trinity pours upon all, the ineffable radiance common to the Three. This is the source of all that is here below, separated by time from the things on high.... From that day forth I was dead to the world and the world was dead to me.' At the close of his life he longs to be 'there where my Trinity is, and the gathered brightness of Its splendour.... Trinity, whose dim shadows exalt me'. (Lossky, *Mystical theology*, 44-45.)

5) It is in such a spirit as this that St. Gregory Nazianzen speaks in his oration on baptism: 'No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three, I think of Him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.' (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 46.)

6) The contemplation of this absolute perfection, of this divine plenitude which is the Trinity—God who is personal and who is not a person confined in his own self—the very thought, the mere 'pale shade of the Trinity', lifts the human soul beyond the world of being, changing and confused, in bestowing upon it this stability in the midst of passions; this serenity, or ἀπάθεια which is the beginning of deification. For the creature, subject to change by nature, can by grace attain to the state of eternal stability; can partake of infinite life in the light of the Trinity. This is why the Church has defended so vehemently the mystery of the Holy Trinity against the natural tendencies of the human mind, which strive to suppress it by reducing the Trinity to unity, in making it an essence of the philosophers with three modes of manifestation (the modalism of Sabellius), or even by dividing it into three distinct beings, as did Arius. (Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 48.)

7) Supernal Triad, Deity above all essence, knowledge and goodness; Guide of Christians to Divine Wisdom; direct our path to the ultimate summit of your mystical knowledge, most incomprehensible, most luminous and most exalted, where the pure, absolute and immutable mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories surpassing all beauty. (St Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*.)

8) Orthodox theology regards the sacraments as sacred actions through which the encounter between God and the human person takes place. In them our union with God, in so far as it is possible in this earthly life, is realized; the grace of God comes down upon us and sanctifies our entire nature, both soul and body. The sacraments bring us into Communion with the Divine nature, animating, deifying and restoring us to life eternal. In the sacraments we experience heaven and a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, that Kingdom which we can only ever become fully a part of, enter into and live in, after our death. (Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Christ*, 130.)

9) The inward life of the Church is mystical (or sacramental). It does not at all coincide with the history of the Church, which shows us only the outward facts of the Church's existence, and especially its coming into conflict with the life of the world and the passions of the world. The inward life of the Church is the mystical cooperation of Christ as the Head, with the Church as His Body, in the Holy Spirit, by means of all mutually strengthening ties: "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church, instructs the Apostle" (Eph. 5:32)... Therefore it is entirely natural that in the Church's life the series of special and most important moments of grace-given ministry, the series of sacred rites, gradually acquired preeminently the name of "mysteries."... The sacred rites called "mysteries" are, as it were, peaks in a long mountain range composed of the remaining rites and prayers of the Divine services. In the Mysteries, prayers are joined with blessings in one form or another, and with special acts. The words of blessing accompanied by outward sacred acts are, as it were, spiritual vessels by which the grace of the Holy Spirit is scooped up and given to the members of the Church who are sincere believers. Thus, "a mystery (sacrament) is a sacred act which under a visible aspect communicates to the soul of a believer the invisible grace of God. (Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 266–267.)