

Holy Trinity.09

Did you read in the paper or see on the television that President Obama gave a speech in Cairo, Egypt, last Thursday in which he said that “as long as our relationship is defined by our differences, we will empower those who sow hatred rather than peace, those who promote conflict rather than the cooperation that can help all of our people achieve justice and prosperity.” The relationship he is here describing is that of the USA to the Muslim world. Today most of the people of Egypt are Muslims, even though there is still an ancient Christian community there, the Coptic Church, and even though in the early days of Christianity Egypt was a very important part of the Catholic Church. St. Augustine came from nearby Algeria, and the city of Alexandria in Egypt was an important episcopal see in the 4th and 5th centuries when the Church had to state clearly what it believed about Jesus as God—whether it did or did not believe that Jesus was divine. For a priest from Alexandria named Arius said that the Word of God which became flesh in Jesus was not really divine. It was the first of all God’s creatures, but it was a creature. But the Church, in its first ecumenical council held in 325 at Nicea outside of Constantinople, today Istanbul, in Turkey, rejected Arius’ teachings and taught instead that the Word is in fact part of God himself, is fully divine. And we repeat this

council's teaching each time we pray the Nicene Creed and say against Arius that the Word of God which became human in Jesus is begotten eternally of the Father and therefore was not created but is divine. In rejecting Arius' position the Church believed she was following her traditional way of praying and her traditional understanding of the Sacred Scriptures. For example, in John's Gospel the Word of God is described as being with God in the beginning and indeed as being God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Thus the Church was proclaiming its belief in God as being both Father and Word, or Son, and then it added, again on the basis of the Scriptures and its prayers, that the Father and the Word shared the divine life in and with the Holy Spirit.

And that is what we celebrate today on this feast of the Most Holy Trinity, God who though one is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But let me return to the speech which President Obama gave in Cairo this past week. There he said: "This cycle of suspension and discord must end. I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and respect, and one based upon the truth

that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition.”

Mr. Obama is trying the carrot rather than the stick which the previous US administration used. He is also trying to restore a balance in our country's relationship with Muslims and Israel. Under the previous administration our country was heavily in favor of Israel. Now Obama is acknowledging the sufferings of the Palestinians in Israel and asking Israel to recognize a two-state resolution and therefore to stop taking more and more land in the West Bank where this new state of Palestine would in large part exist. This is also the position of Pope Benedict. We will see if Israel will listen to these words. Its present government is not doing so, despite papal and US pleas.

Is it not interesting that despite the secularity of the Western world the world's problems at the moment continue to be rooted in religion. Fundamental Jews keep building more settlements in the West Bank because this land has been given them by God. Fundamental Muslims believe that they are fighting the devil himself in fighting the western world and its religion, Christianity. In the midst of these extremes our president is trying to find common ground with those who are not extremists. In doing that he

is, I believe, on the side of the true God who is a God of peace. Many among us fault this president for his positions on abortion and stem cell research, and we are right in doing so. But on the world stage he is bringing a message of respect and peace, and in doing that he is in line with our understanding of God and His intentions for our world.

Yes, religion remains paramount on the world stage, and in a sense we could say that one day Jews and Muslims could join hands and confront us Christians with their conviction that we deny the first premise of their religions, that God is one, and there is no other God. If and when that happens, we will have to attempt to explain to them that we too believe that God is one, but within that unity there are relationships, relationships of love, a love which is fruitful and gives life. We will try to explain to them that we believe that God so loved our world that He became part of it in Jesus of Nazareth, who is the divine Word made human, and that that the Father and the Son have poured out their very own Spirit, so a divine Spirit, into our human hearts, the Spirit of love and peace. And then we hope that in and through their dealings with us they will be able to experience this Spirit of God alive in us, a Spirit which they will then recognize as not foreign but natural to them and their religions as well. That is our prayer as we celebrate

the divine love manifested to us in life of the triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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