

The Trinity

The Trinity is generally regarded as the most glorious and yet most mysterious of the truths of our faith. Sad to say, theologians have concentrated on the mysterious character of the doctrine and how to resolve the apparent contradiction between asserting that within the one God there are three distinct persons, all equal, all possessing the entire divine nature.

What a tragedy. For the Trinity is the most important of all our beliefs and is what gives those beliefs their unity and meaning. So let's forget the intellectual problems posed by it and ask a simple question: what does the Trinity reveal to us about God that gives us a radically new idea about what it means to be God?

The answer is the simple but stunning truth that the God we believe in is not an isolated God, trapped in loneliness. No, our God is a community, a community of love where love unites the members of that community so closely that, as Jesus put it, they live in each other, filling each other with their presence, flowing into and out of each other in an eternal embrace of love. The divinity has a structure – and that structure is love.

Now precisely because God is love, Father, Son and Spirit were moved to create another community, which would become integrated into God's own community and enjoy the happiness of love that it does. And so we read in the book of Genesis that God made human beings in the divine image. In other words, God made humanity a community.

God could have left it at that. God could have said: "now you have your community and we have ours. Enjoy yours like we enjoy ours." But God's love is so great that the heart of the divine plan was that the two communities should become one. And they did become one through Jesus becoming a human being and the Holy Spirit, the bond of love between Father and Son, being poured out on human beings to join them together with the same love that will one day transform us and our entire universe. This plan for the two communities to become one by Jesus being born one of us was not God's plan B, one designed to deal with humanity's sinfulness, so that if Adam had not sinned, Christ would not have come. There was never a plan B, only a plan A - God's passionate desire to be one with us and for us to be a member of God's own community life. What sin did do was to cause God and us to suffer. God could very easily have said that now that sin has entered the picture the deal was off. But the love binding God to us led God to take the awesome step of becoming a member of a sinful community and suffering the consequences: the ultimate one being the cross.

This is the core of our faith. Take it away and you have nothing left. The rest of our faith is but the unpacking of all that is contained in that core. For example, the Church is where we see the God-humankind community taking shape before our eyes. For the church is a community of people who profess God as their Father, Christ as their brother and the Holy Spirit as the bond of love binding them altogether. The sacraments are ceremonies that symbolise and make real for people that they share in one or other aspect of the God – humankind community's life. Another example is the resurrection of our bodies. Its main purpose is not simply to get our bodies back but is the final transformation of the Love that dwells within us. It is a transformation that will make our unity as perfect as it can be. They will be glorious bodies, like that of Jesus, which will allow us to be as close to each other as Jesus is close to us, living 'in' us.

Much more can be said but I hope I have made it clear why the Trinity is more than a puzzle – it is the core of our faith, the foundation on which God's plan for the universe is built.

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