

**Trinity Sunday May18 2008 Year “A”**

**Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Canticle 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, Matthew 28:16-20**

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When you open the Book of Common Prayer to page 283 you will discover there some rather interesting Historical Documents. The first one is from the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451. Despite its archaic language it's worth reading:

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance, with the father as regards his Godhead; and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ, even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.”

In other words, in opposition to those who believed that Jesus was either a God assuming human form, or truly human and possessed by God, or some combination of these, the Bishops at the Council of Chalcedon, two hundred years after the Council of Nicea, further clarifies that Jesus is both God and man, has a human and divine nature which are not separate but form a unity. This then became the doctrine of the church.

Whatever lingering questions there may have been about the Trinity were answered in the formulation of a Creed ascribed to St. Athanasius toward the end of the fourth century. The Creed begins like this;

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this; That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, the Son is and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible....”

If you are not thoroughly confused by now you probably will be by the time you complete the reading of Anathasius’ creed. One thing he did get absolutely correct and it is that the concept of God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost is incomprehensible.

How do we explain a Triune God to a twenty first century person when we have to keep in mind that the people for whom these creeds were written believed in a multiplicity of Gods; believed that Gods came down from the heavens and mated with humans and that the earth was flat?

At the time of the Reformation there were a number of anti-Trinitarian speakers, it wasn't until the eighteenth and nineteenth century that major attacks on the Trinity began in earnest. Doubt was raised about the authenticity of St John's Gospel and with it doubts about the Bible itself.

In the past twenty five to thirty years there have been many attempts to ditch the doctrine of the Trinity and yet with each attempt came a renewed effort to explain the concept of a Triune God to a new generation. Despite the proliferation of books and articles about the Trinity it remains now, as was in the beginning, a mystery.

The great twentieth century theologian, Karl Rahner, in his attempt at a theological explanation said that the use of the word “Person” is not satisfactory in speaking of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He also acknowledged that while many Christians profess to believe in the Trinity, the majority of them are in fact Unitarians.

Another outstanding theologian, Wolfgang Pannenberg, acknowledged that we can only know of the Trinity through the events of the cross and resurrection. And a colleague of his, Jurgen Moltman, agrees with this in his writing that, “The death of Jesus is a "trinitarian event" between God and God. In the cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender. What proceeds from this event between Father and Son is the Spirit which justifies

the godless, fills the forsaken with love and even brings the dead alive...”

Moltman goes on to say that “Gods own being is an open fellowship of Love.” This means that the communion of the Trinity is the source and model for genuine human community focused on inclusion, respect and freedom.

In their attempt to explain the Trinity theologians like Leonardo Boff and Catherine LaCugna see divine unity existing between the three persons of the Trinity as being reflected in humanity living in community. For them, just as God is a union of ‘three uniques,” so society has a unity of free persons who live in community. Boff embraces both masculine and feminine dimensions in the triune God and sees every human being as a mystery with a depth that is not totally communicated to self or others. This deep mystery is the Father. In each person there is light and wisdom which expresses the Son. The urge of human beings to communicate and live in harmony is the Holy Spirit.

Boff goes on to say that, “What the Trinity is in itself is beyond our reach, hidden in unfathomable mystery, mystery that will be partially revealed to us in the bliss of eternal life, but will always escape us in full, since the Trinity is a mystery in itself and not only for human beings.”

Catherine LaCugna writes, "Trinitarian theology could be described as par excellence a theology of relationship, which explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood and community within the framework of God's self-revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Spirit."

Like Karl Rhaner, LaCugna believes that most Christians are monotheistic, that is, they believe in One God, not a Triune God. Toward the

end of her book she says that, "The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about 'God' but a teaching about *God's life with us and our life with each other*. It is the life of communion and indwelling, God in us, we in God, all of us in each other." She uses the term '*perichoresis*,'( *peri cho resis*), to describe this mutual interdependence that Jesus' speaks of in the Gospel of John. For her, the questions about Trinitarian theology is, "How are we to live and relate to others so as to be most Godlike?"

In the twelfth Century St Thomas Aquinas said that we cannot prove the existence of God, and then proceeded to offer a number of proofs at the end of each one he said, "this is what we call God." The same can be said for the mystery we call the Trinity. Just as we arrive at the understanding of God from creation etc, so too do we come to an understanding of the Triune God from studying relationships and looking within them for deeper spiritual meanings.

We cannot prove there is a triune God, but we may be able to describe God as triune as we come to a deeper understanding of the spirituality of interpersonal relationships. We all seek oneness with God, and Jesus said, the Father and I *are one*.

In our attempt to understand the ramifications of this statement for daily living we will be somewhat closer to knowing what we are called to be in life; what it means to imitate Jesus; and how we are to live a Godly life.