

TRINITY SUNDAY 2019

There was a time when Christians took the names of their new institutions from the creed. We think of Trinity College Oxford, Trinity College, Cambridge, Trinity College, Dublin, Trinity and All saints, Leeds, and so on. Oxford's motto to this day is *The Lord is my Enlightenment*—taken from the first line of Ps 27: The Lord is my light and my salvation. Unsurprisingly in the Scriptural readings at today's Mass the word Trinity is not used at all. This actual name for the Christian God came long after the Scriptures were written. "The first defense of the doctrine of the Trinity (using the Latin word for Trinity) was in the early 3rd century.... by [Tertullian](#). He explicitly defined the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Wikipedia, *Trinity*).

The Background

In the New Testament we know of the Holy Trinity because Jesus told us of his heavenly Father, and of the Holy Spirit, and because of the claims he made for himself. He talked of his Father in touching and intimate terms. He called him Abba, the ordinary language used by a son for a father in that society. Indeed some of his listeners were shocked at such intimacy. How could a man of an inferior social class with no formal education presume to be so familiar with the God whose name they would not even pronounce, because of awe and reverence (Jn 5:17). Yet Jesus called him Father and in such a way that those who followed him could also use that mode of address as their own: Our Father. Jesus was clear about his relationship to God as Son. I have honoured my Father and you have not honoured me. The Father and I are one (Jn 17:21 ff.). He who sees me sees the Father (Jn 12-17 passim). No one knows the Father except the Son and none knows the Son except the Father and those to whom he chooses to reveal him (Mt 11: 25 ff.). In John's gospel he promises to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples (Jn 15:26). The final farewell from Jesus in Matthew's gospel was: Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19-20).

The Nature of the Son

Because of Jesus of Nazareth we have come to know what the origin of his sonship is. Our first reading today provides the Old Testament background for this thought: The Son was with the Father at the creation of the world. The New Testament tells us that this Son came as a man with a human mother, sent by the Father because he so loved the world he had created (Jn 3:16). "I do everything that pleases him", said Jesus the Son (Jn 14:31). He assured the disciples that the heavenly Father knew they had need of all the things they worried about, that the very hairs on their head were numbered (Mt 10:29-30). As the disciples had lived with Jesus God seemed ever more a loving Father while they learned anew what sonship was: devotion and care, care for what the Father cared for – following the path of love, even to the point of death. With his departure the Son would not leave the disciples orphans (Jn 14:18) The Holy Spirit, expressing the love of the Father and the Son, would be sent to them to comfort, to console, to enlighten and give strength and so on. It is all experienced in such a human way. Emotions are engaged, not elided. These realities are

expressed beautifully in the hymns of Pentecost: Come Holy Spirit and Come Down O Love Divine.

Conclusion

The family image of The Trinity remains essential. We go back to the Creation Narrative in the Book of Genesis. God made persons in his own image and likeness-male and female he created them (Gn 1:27). He who is love (1 Jn 4: 7-21) is mirrored in all his creation but especially in human beings. And Jesus is the perfect image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15), living in the ordinary world, and sharing the world that is our world in the way we participate in it. *St. John's Gospel* and the *First Epistle of John* spelt this out. The way people actually interrelate shows precisely what love is. "God is love and he who abides in love abides in God" (1 Jn 4:16). The purpose for which human beings exist is love.

The other day (BBC Wed. June 12th 2019) a scientist, Professor Brian Cox, said that science cannot explain everything. It is worth mentioning him because he is so well known also as an accomplished broadcaster. He even said that he does not know if God exists- which implies a humble acknowledgement that people who do believe in God are not silly. Believers say belief is a gift. Mystery and wonder, of which love is a fundamental example, indicate a disposition that cannot be subjected to any kind of scientific enquiry. Science can explain everything, it used to be thought. This was a major concern for John Henry Newman who rejected such optimism among nineteenth century thinkers. He kept asking for humility where arrogance tended to overestimate human reasoning. Lord Kelvin, a Christian physicist, wrote in 1889: "There is nothing new to be discovered in physics now. All that remains is more and more precise measurement." Were he alive today his faith is shared by major scientists, but not his scientific optimism. They write that they do not even know what an electron is, only what it does*.

We recall a couple of verses from Cardinal Newman's hymn to The Trinity:

Firmly I believe and truly
 God is three and God is one,
 and I next acknowledge duly
 manhood taken by the Son.

Adoration aye be given,
 with and through th'angelic host
 to the God of earth and heaven,
 Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Amen. A happy feast to you all.

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There is an excellent recent book by three practising Christians- professors of quantum physics, A. Briggs, H.Halvorson, A.Steane: *It Keeps Me Seeking*, OUP, 2018, precisely asking for the humility necessary in the pursuit of truth.