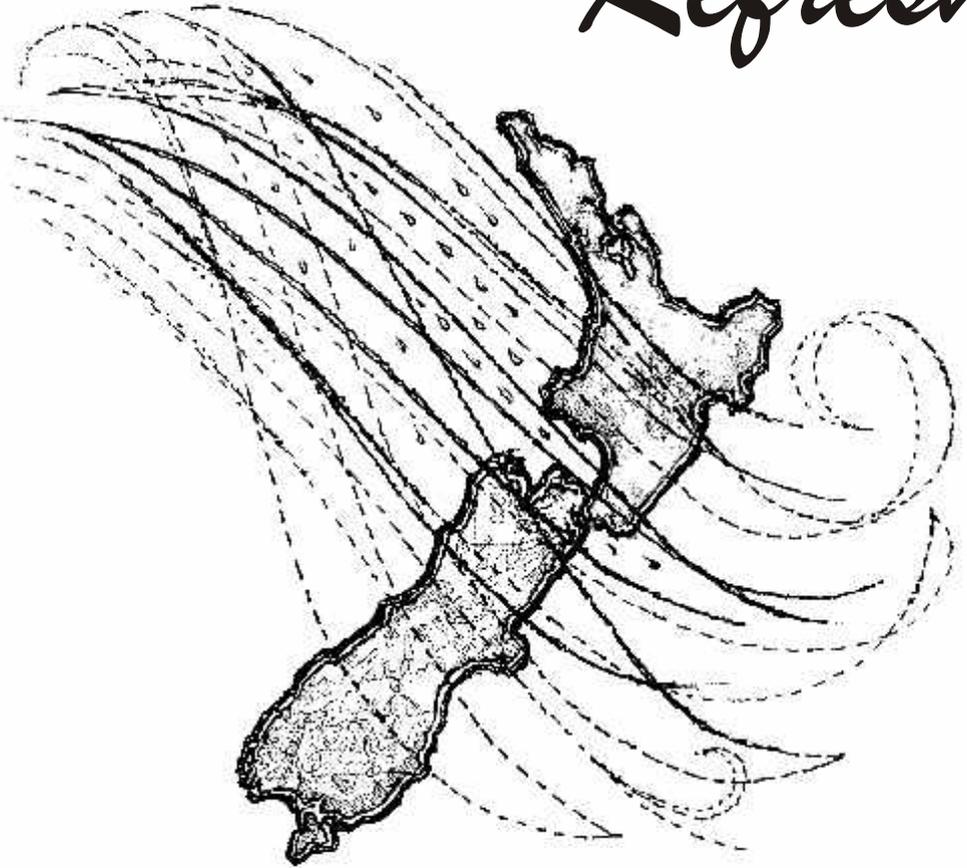


*Refresh*



# Trinity and Spirituality

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### *Andrew Dunn*

*The Forgotten Trinity* is the title of a small book published by the British Council of Churches in 1989 as a discussion starter and study guide on the Trinity. Since that year, the burst of interest in things Trinitarian has brought an amazing amount of creative thinking and writing about this fundamental view of God. We hope to distil some of this and encourage a continuing exploration of the richness and mystery of our God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and its impact on prayer and spirituality.

Recently I was sitting on the edge of the volcanic caldera that forms Rabaul Harbour in the far north of the island of New Britain, a province of Papua New Guinea. Across the harbour from where I was sitting amongst the lush tropical growth (I was there leading a guided retreat for 30 United Church leaders), was the erupting Tavorvur Volcano that has been spouting ash, gas and steam for the past 14 years. It dawned on me that this was something primal, something profoundly basic to life on earth with this planet itself venting from deep within as the pressures of fire, magma and water produce a continual flow of vigorous energy. And that thought led to the next, that in pondering the scripture revelation and personal experiences of God as relationship and communion, we are invited to wonder at the primal nature of God. Not as a museum piece of past doctrine or disputes but as a relating, loving, communing union of persons who illustrate for us the wonder and richness of God at the core of everything that keeps erupting into life and faith.

And there among the richly ash-fertilised gardens, the constant visual and sound effects of the daily unfolding drama, I couldn't help but be part of it. The air we breathed smelled volcano, the water in the tanks tasted volcano, the earth-shuddering sounds and movements in the night were all volcanic. Rabaul town had been smothered by it a few years ago giving rise to the new centre of Kokopo and the new airport at Tokua. As the poetry of Athens suggests, we live, move and have our being in the one who loves us and enjoys us, and with whom we are invited to engage.

As Margaret Butler writes in one of her poems,

All are called to dance,  
To weave in and out  
To grow in relationship  
To belong  
And heal and serve  
In relationship  
In the life of the Divine,  
Who is Trinity,  
The God who loves.

I'm sure I grew up with the notion that Christian belief about God as trinity was a construct, the hardened, distilled truths of centuries of thought and debate that never really delivered on the richness of God we all sought. How much better to see with Alister McGrath that

*The doctrine of the Trinity wasn't invented - it was uncovered. It is something implicitly within all Christian thinking about God, and all that theologians have done is to make it explicit. It's like someone drawing a map which shows different features of the country, thus allowing you to establish how they relate*

to each other. Those relations are already there - the map just helps make them clearer. (*Understanding the Trinity*. Page 148)

This issue of Refresh seeks to point us further into the richness of this uncovering, making clearer in terms of relationship, communing, nourishing, loving, enjoying, praying, accompanying and encouraging our journey of faith, service and witness.

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## TRACES OF THE TRINITY IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

Derek Tovey

There is no doubt that what the writer of John's Gospel had to say about God, about Jesus, and about the Spirit helped to push the Church towards its later formulation of the doctrine of the trinity. As C.K. Barrett says in his commentary on the Gospel, 'More than any other New Testament writer, [the fourth evangelist] lays the foundations for a doctrine of a co-equal Trinity'.<sup>1</sup> In a book entitled *The Trinity in the New Testament*, Arthur Wainwright maintains that of all the New Testament writers, the fourth evangelist was 'conscious of a threefold problem of the mutual relationships of Father, Son, and Spirit'.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, a developed doctrine of the trinity is nowhere found in the New

Testament, not even in John's Gospel. This article attempts to discern "traces" of the trinity in John's Gospel. This is not an article, then, that attempts an exposition of the doctrine of the trinity, nor yet an exploration of how trinitarian doctrine emerges from John's Gospel. It simply attempts to lay out some of the ways in which the Gospel speaks about God, and the relationship of God to Jesus and the Spirit; and to draw out some implications for our reflection on the trinity, and on our experience of God.

I begin with some observations on the way in which the Gospel portrays the relationship between Jesus and God. It must be said at once that the preferred way in which this Gospel speaks of this relationship is that of "the Father" and "the Son", which provides us with the terminology that has traditionally been used for two of the three persons of the trinity. I am going to be descriptive of the relationship portrayed in the Gospel, rather than get into an exegetical analysis of the meanings that might have lain behind these words, or the religious thought (whether Jewish or Hellenistic) that might have informed them.

The Gospel begins with a statement about Jesus, under the guise of the metaphor "the Word", which tells us that from the beginning "the Word" was both "with God" and "was God".<sup>3</sup> By the end of "the prologue" we know that the Word is the

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<sup>1</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1978), 92.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 266, see also 260-66.

<sup>3</sup> I base my reading of the Gospel on the New Revised Standard Version. Reading this verse, and those that follow, in the Greek throws up a host of questions of translation and interpretation: in verse one for instance, scholars debate whether the evangelist intended to say that "the Word was God", or "the Word was divine" (which is a subtly different statement). For an interpretation of "the prologue" (i.e. John 1:1-18) as a whole, you might like to see the first chapter of my book, *Jesus, Story of God: John's Story of Jesus* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2007).

human person, Jesus Christ, who as an “only Son”, in close relationship with God, has made God known. Near the end of the Gospel, Thomas encounters the Risen Christ, and, finding his scepticism about the possibility that Jesus is alive overcome, proclaims Jesus as “my Lord and my God” (20:28).<sup>4</sup> Between these two points, we have a story of Jesus which has him saying and doing things that put him on a par with God, or “the/my Father”. In the prologue, for instance, we are told that “the Word” participated in creation as “all things came into being through him” (1:3). When Jesus meets opposition because he has healed a man on the Sabbath, he defends himself by saying: ‘My Father is still working, and I also am working’ (5:17). The implication is, I think, that just as God continually sustains the world (even on the Sabbath), so “the Son” (Jesus uses this terminology later in the debate) also heals and restores creation (specifically the paralysed “creature” he has just healed).

Not only does the Son “co-create” the world, and join in sustaining the world, but the Son also shares in the prerogatives of the Father in judging and giving life (5:21,22,26). On one occasion when the disciples ask for a revelation of “the Father” (i.e. God) Jesus says that to see him is to see the Father: in fact, he claims that to know him is to know the Father, for the Son is “in” the Father, and the Father is “in” the Son (14:8-11). In 10:30 Jesus claims that “the Father and I are one”. Indeed, on at least three occasions, Jesus makes claims that have his Jewish audience seeking to kill him because they perceive him to be

“making himself equal to God” (5:18; 8:58; 10:31-33).<sup>5</sup>

While, in what he says, Jesus often appears to be putting himself on a par with God, or “the Father”, he also makes statements that suggest that what he does and says, he can only do and say on the authorisation of his Father. This raises the question of whether “the Son” is in fact “subordinate” to the Father. It is certainly the case that Jesus claims to be dependent on the Father, and only able to do what God the Father has done and allows, and can only teach what he receives from the One who sent him (see 5:19, 30; 6:37,38; 7:16-18; 8:26-29). Jesus has glorified God in what he has done, and yet also shares in that glory (12:27,28; 13:31,32). But speaking to his disciples about his impending departure, Jesus says they should rejoice that he is going to the Father, ‘because the Father is greater than I’ (14:28).

This “subordinationist” language is set in tension with other language where Jesus speaks of the Son having an “authority” that appears to be “alongside of” that of the Father (see again 5:21,22,26,27; 10:17,18 note the power to lay down and take up his life is a “command” Jesus has from his Father). A note in my Study Bible on John 14:10 reads: ‘Two of Jesus’ most characteristic claims in John [are]: *I am in the Father and the Father is in me* (14:20); also 10:30, 38; 17:11, 21-23) and *I do not speak on my own but speak the Father’s words* (14:24; also 5:19-23, 30; 6:38; 7:16-18; 8:15-16, 28-29, 38; 12:49; 15:15; 17:7-8).<sup>6</sup> It seems as though we cannot speak of the Son as

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<sup>4</sup> Some scholars would see this episode as the last in the original edition, as it were, of the Gospel while chapter 21 is an appendix.

<sup>5</sup> In the claim, “before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:58), Jesus may be understood to be claiming the divine name, see Ex. 3:13-14.

<sup>6</sup> David K. Rensberger, “The Gospel According to John,” in *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (ed. Wayne A. Meeks; New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 2042.

subordinate to the Father, but rather in a partnership with the Father. Below I shall suggest an analogy for this. But for the moment, we note that this interrelationship of Son and Father extends as far as a shared authority to testify and judge to the Son's authenticity. Jesus goes as far as claiming that he can fulfil the Jewish requirement of providing two witnesses to guarantee his authenticity by testifying on his own behalf together with the Father (see John 8:12-20).

speaks of himself sending the Paraclete from the Father (15:26). Indeed, the Risen Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit onto/into the disciples, having just commissioned them to go into the world, sent by him in the same manner that the Father sent him (20:21,22).

We might understand the Spirit breathed on the disciples by Jesus as "the Spirit of Jesus" (cf. Acts 16:7), who is "the Spirit of truth" (John 15:26), just as Jesus is "the truth" (14:6). While it seems that the Spirit replaces Jesus, and cannot come to the

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### **He will not leave them "orphaned" (14:18) but will come to them**

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We must now draw the third person of the trinity into the discussion: the Holy Spirit. John's Gospel clearly shows that the Spirit is to be understood in personal terms and as distinct from both the Father and the Son. The Gospel does this by providing a unique title for the Spirit: that of "the Paraclete" (variously translated as "Helper", "Advocate", and "Comforter").<sup>7</sup> The Paraclete is "another Advocate" (14:16, NRSV), who will replace Jesus; and unless Jesus departs, the Paraclete cannot come (16:7).

Nonetheless, the Paraclete does not work independently of the Son, but will rather receive from the Son what is the Son's (which is also the Father's) and declare it to the disciples (16:13-15). The Paraclete is sent by the Father in the name of the Son (14:26); in fact, the Son requests the Father to send the Paraclete (14:16), and Jesus also

disciples until Jesus goes away to the Father, Jesus also speaks of himself returning to the disciples. He will not leave them "orphaned" (14:18) but will come to them. Indeed, those who love Jesus and keep his word will find that not only Jesus, the Son, but the Father also will come and together they will make their home with them (14:23).

What are we to make of the traces of the trinity in John's Gospel, where Father, Son and Spirit emerge as distinct and individual "persons", and yet where roles and functions seem to blur? In terms of the sending of the Spirit, the "sending authority" seems to be both the Father and the Son. In terms of an ongoing "support person" for the disciples, this function seems to fall to the Spirit, and yet the Johannine Jesus might well also echo the words to the disciples in Matthew 28: 20 "I am with you always...".

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<sup>7</sup> "The Paraclete" is a transliteration of the Greek *paraklitos*: it means "one called alongside" to help, or to act as an advocate. It is clear, though, that while the Paraclete, like Jesus, provides support and help for the disciples, the Paraclete also acts as a "prosecuting attorney" (John 16:8-11), just as Jesus is a judge.

I conclude with three thoughts about the teaching of John's Gospel on "the trinity", which may inform our reflection on the being and nature of God. First of all, the Gospel helps us remember that an understanding of the trinity cannot be tied down to propositions, nor can it ever be adequately explained. The doctrine of the trinity, as an attempt to explain the being of God is ultimately a mystery. I don't believe I have yet to hear a discussion about the trinity, without hearing someone expressing thoughts that seem to stray into regions that the Church has described as "heresy". As great a theological colossus as Karl Barth has been considered to have promoted an understanding of the trinity that is "modalist"; that is God revealed in three "modes of being", so how may lesser theological minds escape muddle?!<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the best course is to follow the Gospel in providing a narrative where loose ends are not all tied up, or where tensions may remain.

Secondly, the trinity is a matter of relationships and the interrelation of the three "persons" Father, Son, and Spirit. Here an image might help: though, all images, like all "doctrines", ultimately fail to do justice to the reality. Recently, my wife and I had the pleasure of hearing Natalie Clein and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (under the baton of Finn, Pietari Inkinen) perform Elgar's Cello Concerto in E minor Op 85. We had seats in the second row from the stage, and so had a wonderful view of Clein, the soloist, the concert master and some

members of the wider orchestra. I was fascinated to watch Clein playing, with passion and feeling, without a musical score in front of her, and much of the time with her eyes seemingly closed. Yet, from time to time, she would glance at the Concertmaster, perhaps giving a slight nod of the head, and over her shoulder to glance, it seemed to me, at the cello section. (Of course, she also looked to the conductor as well). Just as fascinating to me was to watch how the Concertmaster (a "first violin"), and one of the cellists (whom I presume was that evening the "Section Principal") watched Clein, and followed her lead. In fact, the "Section Principal", it seemed to me, kept his eyes fixed on Clein, and scarcely glanced at his score (while many of the other cellists looked at their music and occasionally at the conductor). Each of these three, Clein, Concertmaster and Section Principal kept in touch with each other (and with the conductor). Here, it seems to me is an analogy of the trinity along Johannine lines! Each is a musician with her or his own instrument: each is following a score (even when from memory). In a very real sense the rendition of Elgar we heard that evening was Clein's interpretation, yet not hers alone, and one could tell that she was always conscious of the rest of the orchestra, and keeping in touch with key players such as the Concertmaster and the Section Principal.<sup>9</sup> When the piece ended, there was thunderous applause: we clapped Clein and she took a bow, but she also indicated the conductor and the rest of the orchestra, rightly so, and we clapped

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<sup>8</sup> See here Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 335. McGrath clears Barth of this charge, but recognises weaknesses, especially in Barth's exposition of the Spirit.

<sup>9</sup> This analogy might well have drawn on the relationship between, say, Clein, or the Cellist, the Conductor and the Concertmaster (which would provide a nice alliteration!); but I wanted to concentrate on the instrument players.

them as well. Here were three players all intent on producing the best rendition and interpretation possible of Elgar's Concerto. They were united in purpose, each leading their particular parts of the music (Clein most particularly), and each conscious of, and supporting the part of the others. Just so, in John's Gospel, Father, Son and Spirit, share in mutual glorification, mutual support, and mutual love.

Finally, a careful reading of the Gospel tells us that the Christian believer is also drawn into the trinitarian experience of God. We share in the relationship; and interrelationship. As we love the Son and keep his word, so the Father loves us and with the Son makes a home with us (14:23). We know the Spirit, who abides with us, and is in us (14:17). The Risen Jesus says that Mary is to tell his "brothers" that he ascends to "my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (20:17). Jesus prays that all who believe in him through the testimony of the first disciples may be "one" in the Father and the Son, just as the Father and Son are "one" in each other (17:20-23).

Tracing the trinity in John's Gospel is dizzying stuff. But perhaps this is because, in the end, the writer does not so much want the reader to understand the trinity, as to experience the God who is known as Father, Son, and Spirit.

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The doctrine of the Trinity ... is the Christian's last word about God. It is not something which we begin with, but something we end up with. When you're trying to explain Christianity to someone, the last thing you'd want to talk about is the Trinity. Instead you might begin by talking about Jesus Christ, about his death on the cross and resurrection, or you might talk about the possibility of encountering or experiencing God here and now. But even as you begin to talk about God in such ways, you are working within the framework established by the doctrine of the Trinity.

Alister McGrath.

*Understanding the Trinity.*  
Kingsway 148

# Challenges to the Holy Trinity

Brian Smith

"Despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity," lamented Catholic theologian Karl Rahner in 1970, "Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere monotheists."<sup>1</sup> While the charge of "monotheism" is somewhat confusing (Christianity has always been monotheistic and insisted there is only one God), Rahner is right in his concern. Christians, in general, tend to think of God as singular, rather than Trinitarian. The doctrine of the Trinity remains on the Church's books, but it is an isolated article of faith that has little to do with everyday life. Indeed, there is often the suspicion that the Trinity is an unnecessary complication dreamed up by dusty theologians who love nothing better than to make simple things difficult.

## A difficult doctrine

Right here is the first challenge to the idea of the Trinity - it is difficult. Ordinary faith requires something more straightforward. To be sure the notion of Three Persons in one Being is difficult. But it is difficult for the same reason as physics or biology are difficult - it is dealing with fact. As C. S. Lewis put it in his *Mere Christianity*: "If Christianity was something we were making up, of course we could make it easier, but it is not. We cannot compete, in simplicity, with people who are inventing religions. How could we? We are dealing

with Fact. Of course anyone can be simple if he has no facts to deal with."<sup>2</sup>

## No Trinity needed

The central fact we have to deal with is Jesus of Nazareth, also called the Messiah or Christ. How are we to think of him? In particular how does he relate to God? The easiest solution is to say that he doesn't, at least not in any unique way. This is the solution adopted by such odd bed-fellows as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the more recent Jesus Seminar. Jesus is a wise man par excellence, having what Friederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) called an "absolutely powerful God consciousness".<sup>3</sup> But since Jesus remains within the limits of general human potential there is no reason for him to be included in our concept of God. A doctrine of the Trinity is therefore unnecessary. Such a doctrine may exist, but as Professor Lloyd Geering assures us, "those who think it tells us something about the nature of the theistic God have certainly got it wrong."<sup>4</sup>

From a different direction, the same challenge is made by an increasingly assertive Islam. With its central creed "There is no god but Allah (the God)", Islam insists that God is absolutely singular. For Muslims the unforgivable sin is that of *shirk*, the associating of another with Allah. A doctrine of the Trinity is, by definition, a non-starter. Jesus may remain, but he remains within the bounds of human possibility, a prophet.

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1. Rahner, Karl. *The Trinity* ( Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns and Oates, 1970), p.10.
  2. Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), p.165.
  3. Schleiermacher, Friederich. *The Christian faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), p.387.
  4. Geering, Lloyd. *Christianity without God* (Santa Rosa, California: Polebridge Press, 2002), p.65. In Geering's view, while there is no place for the traditional figure of Christ as the divine Saviour, there is certainly a place for Jesus the teacher, the man of wisdom, the one who revitalised the path to freedom. (ibid. p.145)

## One God, many names

In contrast, orthodox Christianity has always insisted that Jesus relates to God in a special and unique way. But how? A solution that appeared early in Christian history was that of modalism. Jesus can be accommodated in "God", if Father and Son (and Spirit) are simply modes in which God's expresses himself. Thus God is one, but on occasion he is discerned as Father, again as Son, and yet again as Spirit.

Despite the fact that the Church has long rejected modalism, it still continues to challenge the Trinity. Modalism lurks in not a few of the worship songs offered by contemporary musicians. In these songs the congregation addresses God, who is variously called Father, Son, Lord, King, Saviour, Holy One or simply "You". The object of worship is single (Rahner's "mere monotheism"), but has a number of different names and titles. These are essentially interchangeable and can be flipped around to suit. As Calvin noted in regard to Sabellius, a third century modalist, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are nothing more than calling God powerful and just and wise.<sup>5</sup>

Modalism also appears in extempore prayer. While "Thank you Father for dying for us" may be nothing more than a momentary confusion, much more serious is the all too frequent concluding formula, "We ask this in your name". In a Trinitarian understanding where Father and Son are distinct, it makes complete sense to pray to God the Father and to ask "in the name of

Jesus" (the Son). Indeed Jesus himself encourages us to do this. (John 15:16, 16:23) It makes no sense to pray to God as One and say at the end "We ask this in your name".

Modalism is found yet again in the ubiquitous "explanation" of the Trinity in terms of water. Water, it is said, is one thing, but has three forms - ice, water and steam. In the same way God is One who is three Persons. But this "explanation" is modalistic. Ice, water and steam are appearances only. The three are not what water is in itself.

Over against modalism, the doctrine of the Trinity boldly asserts that God is three, not just in expression. The threeness is who God is. God is Father, Son and Spirit. The problem with modalism is that it shortchanges us. It says that what we see of God is three appearances, three masks. But we are none the wiser as to the One behind them. Trinity knows who that One is - he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## The unitarianisms

Yet another challenge to the Trinity is what the theologian Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962) called "unitarianism" in regard to the Trinitarian Persons.<sup>6</sup> This occurs when "God" is identified with one or other of Father, Son or Spirit, to the virtual exclusion of the other two. A unitarianism of the Father, for instance, is a religion of the Creator. God is the Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth, the God of the Old Testament and the God of whom Jesus spoke. In this unitarianism the primary

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5. Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Vol.1 (London: James Clarke and Co., 1957), p.112. Calvin accuses Sabellius of regarding the names of Father, Son and Spirit, as almost non-entities, maintaining that they were not used to mark out some distinction, but that they were different attributes of God, like many others of a similar kind.
  6. Niebuhr, Richard. "The doctrine of the Trinity and the unity of the Church." (*Theology Today*, Vol.3, 1946-47), pp.371-384).

way of apprehending the divine is through the natural world, to the relative neglect of Scripture and the experience of the Spirit.

A unitarianism of the Son, on the other hand, celebrates Jesus Christ more or less independently of his relation to the Creator and the Spirit. This occurs (again) in some of the contemporary worship songs. Jesus is addressed without qualification as "our God". Now it is true that the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., addressing the question of the relationship of Christ to God, declared that the Son was "of the same being as the Father". In that sense Christ is "God". But Jesus has never been the Christian God in the sense that Allah is the Muslim God. The Christian God is the Holy Trinity.

## **The Trinity our life**

Despite the various challenges, we must hold fast to the doctrine of the Trinity. It is vital. Take the basic matter of prayer. Delete the Trinity and what is prayer? It is me (down here) conversing with God (up there), or more accurately, conversing with My-idea-of-God (up there).

Christian prayer is utterly different. First of all, the God to whom I pray is not simply my idea of God. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; 1 Pet 1:3).

By nature God is Father only to Jesus, the Son. According to the gospel, however, God has given us the Spirit of his Son. This

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## **Irrelevant, overly-complicated doctrine? Never! The Trinity is our life.**

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In the third unitarianism God is not only Spirit, but the reverse is understood to be true, spirit is God. In this way the Holy Spirit is identified with our spirit and God is encountered directly, independent of creation or the story in Scripture. Here our inner, spiritual experience becomes the reality on which we depend and from which alone we find truth and goodness. Christian mysticism of any kind inevitably tends in the direction of a unitarianism of the Spirit.

Each of these unitarianisms is inadequate. A unitarianism of the Creator is inadequate, because God cannot be Father without the Son. A unitarianism of the Son is inadequate, because it omits the faith of Jesus Christ whose whole life was centred on the Father. A unitarianism of the Spirit is inadequate, because in all the vagaries of our spirit only Jesus Christ can determine what is and what is not Holy Spirit.

means that by the Spirit we can now do what Jesus did say "Father" to God (Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:6).

But to Christian prayer there is even more. Why on earth should we imagine that our petty petitions reach, let alone affect, the Majesty on high? The truth is we don't know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit of God comes to help us in our weakness. He prays on our behalf in God's name (Rom 8:26-27). At the same time Jesus, now at the right hand of the Father, is our high priest (Heb 4:15) who ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25). God himself, in the Spirit and the Son, is the true Pray-er. Our feeblest prayer calls for the Holy Trinity!

Irrelevant, overly-complicated doctrine?  
Never! The Trinity is our life.

Jesus says,

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me.

John 17:21-23. NRSV

## RUBLEV'S ICON: CONTEMPLATING THE TRINITY, INWARDLY AND OUTWARDLY *Paul Fromont*

### **The Hospitality of Abraham.**

For many of us, any talk of Trinity brings to mind Andrei Rublev's 15<sup>th</sup> century icon, painted it is believed, sometime around 1410. Type "Trinitarian icons" into *Google Images* and the predominant image you'll get is this well-known icon.

I have in my library a beautiful copy of it written by the Benedictines from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, a gift from one of my sisters. Called by its traditional Eastern name it is known as "The Hospitality of Abraham."

It depicts the three angels who visited Abraham near the great trees of Mamre (Gen 18: 1-15), but has long come to be seen as an icon of the Trinity; although it must be said that it is far from clear that the intention of the "writer" was to identify each of the three figures as a particular member of the Trinity. Tradition does however suggest that the central, and thus pivotal figure in the icon, is Jesus Christ incarnate.<sup>1</sup>

*"If it pleases you, stop for a while with your servant [Abraham]. I'll get some water so you can wash your feet. Rest under this tree. I'll get some food to refresh you on your way, since your travels have brought you across my path." They said, "Certainly. Go ahead."*

*Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. He said, "Hurry. Get three cups of our best flour; knead it and make bread."*

*Then Abraham ran to the cattle pen and picked out a nice plump calf and gave it to the servant who lost no time getting it ready. Then he got curds and milk, brought them with the calf that had been roasted, set the meal before the men, and stood there under the tree while they ate."*

At its most obvious level this icon depicts three angelic persons gathered around a square, or perhaps a rectangular table. On the table appears to be a chalice of wine, with Christ's hand extended in blessing over it. In the background are the portico of Abraham and Sarah's home, and presumably a creative representation of one of the oaks of Mamre. The spatial sense of the icon is a little difficult to grasp but most interpreters suggest that as we look at the figures in the icon, the eyes of each defer to the other in a circling movement around the table.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, *The Dwelling of the Light: Praying with Icons of Jesus*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 57.

At theological level we can talk of these “three” as God, yet we also understand that “God, [though] three persons...is *one in nature, substance and essence.*”

While at yet another level we can say that to reflect on Rublev's icon is to sit with a continuing awareness that beyond our words and attempts at definition and description, God remains “mystery”<sup>3</sup> - a mystery of *being*, relationality and action. Indeed, we are told that the Trinity “is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life”.

In what follows, I want to (briefly) reflect on *how* it is that we are invited *into* this mystery of trinitarian relatedness. I want to say a little about the *action* or direction of trinitarian spirituality. And finally, I want to *earth* an engagement with Rublev's Trinity in the ordinary and everyday<sup>4</sup> by suggesting that mission, or action, is the needful outworking of a contemplative life that takes seriously one's location within the divine relatedness of the Trinity.

## **Returning to the Centre: *Participating in the Trinity***

“To look at Jesus is not to enter into a simple one-to-one relation. It is right to think of Jesus as my personal Lord and Saviour [and] to express that in terms of loving devotion; but we need to be careful that we do not stop there... we must never lose sight of the fact that the thrust, the direction of all Jesus is and does and suffers is *toward* the

Father from whom he came... To understand Jesus and to relate rightly to Jesus *is to be with him in his movement toward* the ultimate source of divine life...”<sup>5</sup> (Italics, mine).

One of the first features to draw your attention in Rublev's icon is its inherent invitation - an empty seat at the table beckons *you*. But, “how?” How is it possible for us to *enter into* this relational mystery to sit, as it were, at the table? How do we move from talking about God (as Trinity) to a way of relating to and being in relationship with this tri-personal God?

US theologian Kathryn Tanner<sup>6</sup> offers an evocative response to these questions:

“...*In Christ* the ... human [*is incorporated*] *within the divine* Trinitarian life. By joining us to those relations, Christ gives us the very relations of Father, Son, and Spirit for our own. By becoming incarnate, the second person of the trinity takes [our] humanity ... into [his] own relations with Father and Spirit ... In Christ we are shown what the trinity looks like when it includes the human and what humanity looks like when it is included in the trinity's own movements ... By being taken up into them as the very creatures [we] are, [we] come to share a divine form of existence ...by becoming [incorporated into] it...” (Italics, mine).

Michael Downey<sup>7</sup> locates this act of “incorporation” in baptism. In fact he

<sup>3</sup> No matter how seriously I take the incarnation and Christology, this always seems to be the case for me.

<sup>4</sup> It doesn't get more ordinary and everyday than the scene depicted in Genesis 18:1-15 and Rublev's iconic representation of that event.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, *Ibid*, p.54.

<sup>6</sup> In a lecture in Auckland in 2007 titled: *Kingdom Come: The Trinity and Politics*.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Downey, *Trinity and Spirituality in The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. London: SCM Press, 2005, p.625. See also Downey's very helpful little book *Altogether Gift: A Trinitarian Spirituality*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000, especially chapters 4 (“Participation in the mission of Word and Spirit”) & 5 (“Living freely from the Gift”).

argues, rightly I think, that “Trinitarian spirituality is nothing more, or less, than baptismal spirituality. In baptism we are conformed to Christ, anointed by the Spirit, gifted by the Father to *live as* sons and daughters of God.” We live within the *circle* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Jesus *space* is made for us on the 'vacant' side of the table. But more than that, this 'vacant' space at the table serves to remind us that Jesus is God's “self-gift” for whom *we must make increasing space*.

### **Emerging from the Centre: Contemplation and the invitation to mission**

“The doctrines of Christ and of the Trinity can seem ... remote and theoretical to most people ... [but] what we seem to forget is that they were designed in order not only to tell us the truth about God *but to make us live that truth. They are invitations...*” (Italics, mine).<sup>8</sup>

“To *know* God is to participate in his mission; what he is doing in the Son through the Spirit.” (Italics, mine).<sup>9</sup>

Episcopalian priest, author and teacher Cynthia Bourgeault has been helpful to me in terms of thinking about the Trinity and the contemplative life; particularly in terms of the way we are carried from contemplation to action. In a wonderful interview on centering prayer and inner awakening, she describes the Trinity as being like a “great paddle wheel”.

“... [The Trinity] works by self-giving love. [This] describes a process. The one point, call it the Father, spills [over and] into the other point called the Son; spills [over and] into the other point called the Holy Spirit; spills [over and] into the point called the Father, just like a great paddle wheel. And, what is generated [*out of that continuous movement*] is love made visible... The way that we will always know and be connected to God in this life, at the deepest level, is through this process. And the whole process is Father, Son and Holy Spirit undivided unity”.

So, in Christ our full humanity is “incorporated into” or immersed within a “circling movement” of love between the persons of the Trinity. “Knowing the Trinity is being involved in this circling movement: drawn by the Son towards the Father, drawn into the Father's breathing out of the Spirit *so that the Son's life may be made real in the world*. [This] is where contemplation and action become inseparable.” (Italics, mine).<sup>10</sup>

This act of “deflection”,<sup>11</sup> or to use Bourgeault's paddle wheel image; this generation of “love made visible”, is an *outward* movement that is always towards the “other”, i.e. self-emptying (*kenosis*) for the love of the other.<sup>12</sup> This outward

<sup>8</sup> Williams, *Ibid.* pp. 57-58.

<sup>9</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer. Asbury Seminary 2007 *Theta Phi* Lecture: *The Stage, the Story, and the Script*.

<sup>10</sup> Williams, *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> In an essay titled *The Deflection of Desire: Negative Theology in Trinitarian Disclosure*.

<sup>12</sup> C.f. Philippians 2:5-11. “...Kenosis means self-emptying, always with the proviso that one hopes to make more room for God and one's neighbour.” James K. Baxter *Jerusalem Daybook*, Wellington: Price Milburn, 1971, p.40. This deeply practical notion of Trinitarian “self-giving love”; the generation of *love made visible*, “puts us”, as Greek Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware says, “under an obligation to struggle at every level, from the strictly personal to the highly organized, against all forms of oppression, injustice and exploitation.” (*The Orthodox Way*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, revised edition 1995, p. 39.)

movement, I believe, lies at the heart of a trinitarian understanding of the action of God in God's creation. To emerge from the contemplative experience, the "centre" if you like, is "*in order to do compassionate action.*"<sup>13</sup>

Again, Kathryn Tanner captures this sense wonderfully when she tells us that:

"...The character of [God's] mission, as Jesus' own way of life makes clear, is to inaugurate a life-brimming, spirit-filled community of human beings akin to Jesus in their relations with God: the mission means bringing in the kingdom or new community that accord with Jesus' own healing, reconciling, and life-giving relations... We are to participate in the Father's mission for the world, mediating the life-giving Spirit of Christ, through union with him"<sup>14</sup>

In Jesus Christ we enter into what Meister Eckhart describes as the "flow of the Trinity into Creation."<sup>15</sup> The contemplative and the mystical are given expression through our *sentness* ('missio'). To put it another way, the authentic contemplative experience and the *wisdom* that emerges from it, are given flesh in our down-to-earth love of neighbour.<sup>16</sup> We become "contemplatives in action".<sup>17</sup>

## Eucharist a concluding thought

Rublev's icon and trinitarian spirituality remind us that contemplation is not an end unto itself. Indeed, I wonder, thinking of my earlier reference to Jesus' Eucharistic action in the icon, if this doesn't also serve as a reminder of this point. We are gathered to the table, at the cost of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, to be fed. To be fed in order that we, being "filled with" God's "life and goodness" are strengthened "to do [God's] work"; and "to be [Christ's] body *in the world.*" A Trinitarian spirituality holds in tension both an "inward" or gathered dimension, and an "outward" or sent dimension. Both are needful.

I would suggest therefore, in closing, that we could do no better than to turn our attention from Rublev's icon to prayer; prayer that names the both/and realities of our being *gathered into* "holy fellowship", and our being *sent out* on the wind of the Spirit in the service of God's love made visible through us, for the sake of all creation:

*Therefore, everliving God, keep us steadfast in your holy fellowship. And now we offer ourselves, all that we have and are, to serve you faithfully in the world...*

*Send us out in the power of your Spirit, to stand with you in your world.*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Rohr.

<sup>14</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Kingdom Come: The Trinity and Politics*.

<sup>15</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Apophatic Spirituality in The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. London: SCM Press, 2005, p.118.

<sup>16</sup> St. Teresa of Avila.

<sup>17</sup> A description often attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola.

<sup>18</sup> Quotes in this closing paragraph are from *Liturgies of the Eucharist in A New Zealand Prayer Book He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*.



Trinity Icon  
by Phil Dyer

# WELLSPRINGS FOR GIVING FLESH TO GOD AS COMMUNION

*Kathleen Rushton*

Perhaps the most well known depiction of the Trinity is the early fifteenth century icon written by Andrei Rublev. Three angels are seated around a table on which there is an eucharistic cup. The inspiration for this icon, and others, was the story of Genesis 18 which tells of the visit of three men to the home of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham met these strangers, called Sarah and together they extended outstanding hospitality. While their visitors rested under the oaks of Mamre, Sarah baked bread and Abraham prepared the meal. Later in the very process of sharing the resources of their household, the identity of the visitors was revealed to be YHWH and two angels. YHWH then promised the elderly couple that they would have a child.

Icons render the invisible visible. How apt that hospitality and the ordinary setting of a household gave rise to the inspiration for this icon. The position of the three figures is suggestive. They are portrayed in a circle which is not closed. When contemplating the icon, the impression is that of not only being invited into this communion but of being already part of it. The eucharistic cup in the centre is the sacramental sign of our communion with God and with each other.

All this captures so well the fundamental insight of the doctrine of the Trinity that God is very near us and lives among us in a communion of persons. I shall explore how the gospel according to John is a wellspring for a spirituality centred on

God as a communion of persons. However, before doing so and at the risk of distorting a complex area, I want to look in broad strokes at two early Church traditions of considering the Trinity. These are important to sift through because consciously or unconsciously our understanding of God underpins our spirituality.

The doctrine of the Trinity evolved from efforts to understand the roles of Jesus and the Spirit in salvation. How God's saving acts were carried out in the economy of redemption (*oikonomia*) and what this suggests about the nature of God's eternal being (*theologia*) were the focus of early Christian theologians. The questions raised by Arius and others over whether Jesus had the same nature as God and how the sufferings of Jesus could be reckoned with God led to an emphasis on the "intradivine" life of God, that is, what went on within God. Thus, in theological thinking the focus shifted from the diversity and uniqueness of divine persons within the economy of salvation to the equality of persons within God.

Western spirituality has been greatly influenced by this shift. For example, Augustine centred his theological reflection on the "intradivine," that is, the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to one another. He gave preference to images of the Trinity drawn from the psychology of the human person and the faculties of intellect, will and memory. The structure of the human person was a mirror image of the Trinity. By knowing oneself one could know God. This has led to much contemporary spirituality focusing on an ever deepening journey inward. Knowing God is to know oneself. It can lead to self-absorption and self-preoccupation. While Augustine was

surely correct that the human person is the locus of the divine self-disclosure, it is not adequate to see the human person or God as "individuals." Certainly, we are created in the image and likeness of God but as Genesis 1-3 reminds us the image of God is not found in the solitary self but in "let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness," in relationship, male and female God made them.

The Eastern tradition shows not so much concern for "nature" and "substance" but stresses "person," "relationship" and "communion." There is a *perichoresis*, a being-in-one-another, a continuous dynamic interaction between persons mutually permeating each other, mutual interdependence, the divine dance, the mystery of the one communion of all persons, divine as well as human. As Catherine Lacugna points out the doctrine of the Trinity ultimately is not "a teaching about "God" but a teaching about *God's life with us and our life with each other*"<sup>1</sup> We see this infinite capacity for communion made visible in Rublev's icon. The icon is also the visible equivalent of communion found in John's gospel.

### ***A Gospel of Relationships***

In the fourth gospel we are drawn primarily into a web of relationship and communion. Prominent in the unfolding story is the relationship of: God to Jesus; Jesus to God; God to the world; Jesus to disciples; disciples to Jesus; the ongoing relationship of Jesus and disciples; Jesus and disciples to the world; disciples among themselves; relationships between groups in the new family of God. These relationships which are woven throughout this gospel are glimpsed in the language of the "I am" statements, abiding and

friendship. No one image captures the mystery of God and our life with each other in God. One image is like one surface in an exquisitely cut diamond.

### ***"I am" statements***

The "I am" statements are a special feature of the imaging of Jesus in John's gospel. "I am" echoes God's revelation to Moses as "I AM." Jesus tells us in a parable which the disciples failed to understand: "I am the gate of the sheepfold." (Jn 10:7). Then in response to Thomas' question about "how can we know the way?" Jesus replied: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (14:6). In these, and the other "I am" images, both evocatively and provocatively, Jesus presses his relationship with God. Like the earliest disciples we, too, are invited not only to recognise that communion but to enter trustingly into communion with God or to use a specifically Johannine word "to abide."

### ***"Abiding"***

"Abiding" (*menein*) is associated commonly with John 15. However, that Greek word (and related words) are found some 41 times throughout the gospel being variously translated by 'abide,' 'remain,' 'dwell,' 'stay,' 'continue,' 'endure,' and 'live' thereby obscuring the poetic image of abiding in Jesus' invitation to those seeking him (1:38-39). It is found in the question of the disciples (1:38). It is used to describe the relationship of Jesus and the Spirit (1:32, 33); the relationship of Jesus and God (14:10); the many dwelling places in God's house (14:2); Jesus and disciples (6:56; 8:31).

In the vine and the branches image, "abiding" is found fifteen times to suggest a community of interrelationship,

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. HarperCollins, 1992, 228.

mutuality and indwelling. It expresses Jesus' relationship to God (15:10), Jesus' relationship to the community (15:4, 9) and the community's relationship to Jesus (15:1,7). "Abiding" suggests wholeness and intimacy as well as evoking the life and the fecundity that comes through pain and death, through pruning and the pierced side (7:38; 19:34). "Abiding," and the vine and pruning offer a language of love (13:35) which suggests a language of discipleship as fullness whereby persons, like the vine, are pruned to bear fruit by abiding. This is a different discipleship language than that of self-sacrifice and self-denial in the synoptic gospels (Mk 8:34; Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23).

For the one who abides in Jesus as the branch abides in the vine, there is a radical change in the relationship between Jesus and the believers because they are no longer servants or slaves but friends (15:13-17). Amazingly, Jesus hides nothing from the believer of what he has learnt from his Father. There is no sense of the vertical or the hierarchical. Abiding in relationship and communion is linked to friendship.

### **Friendship**

Enduring friendship is used to image our relationship with God and with each other in two ways. The portrayal of Jesus draws on the biblical Wisdom tradition. Wisdom declares that "in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets" (Wis 7:27). The Johannine Christians also use aspects of the highly valued ideal of friendship

which gave cohesion to ancient society. Jesus is not called "friend" explicitly. However, two qualities of friendship from the ancient world are attributed to him.<sup>2</sup> The first concerns love and death.

Ancient writers such as Plato (*Symp.*179B) and Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 9.8.9) attest to the love which led one to lay down life one's life for friends. Jesus' life is the incarnation of this teaching. He declares that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (15:13). This understanding of friendship is found also in Jesus' reference to the good shepherd laying down his life for the sheep (10:11, 15).

The second quality is boldness of speech and action. A person had to distinguish between a friend and a flatterer, a term not found in John. However, the word for speaking "openly" or "frankly" (*parresia*) was the opposite of what the flatterer is.<sup>3</sup> The words and actions of Jesus show his life and ministry are lived speaking openly or frankly. He makes several journeys to Jerusalem, the centre of religious and political power. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus visits the temple speaking and acting openly. He behaves in this way at his arrest and at his trial before Pilate.

Wisdom Sophia cries out at the street corners (Prov 1:20-33; 8:1-36).<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the healings and actions of Jesus take place usually in public. In public places and outdoors, Jesus gathers the first disciples, meets, teaches and heals people. Townspeople were present at the wedding in Cana. At the well Jesus meets the

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<sup>2</sup> Gail R. O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 58.2 (2004):144-157.

<sup>3</sup> John 7:4, 13, 26; 10:24; 11:14, 54; 16:25, 29; 18:20.

<sup>4</sup> On Wisdom in John, see Sharon H. Ringe. *Wisdom's Friends: Community and Christology in the Fourth Gospel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

woman of Samaria. In the portico of the temple he heals the paralysed man. The incident with the man born blind takes place as Jesus is walking along the road near the Temple. Among the sellers and money changers in the temple outer court, Jesus speaks and acts in public. Jesus feeds and teaches the crowd on a mountainside and teaches by the sea. His conversations with Mary and Martha take place on the way to their house or to Lazarus' tomb. What has speaking openly and boldly to do with the Trinity? It is about the economy of salvation: *God's life with us and our life with each other*. This thread - what we might call mission - runs constantly through John: God so loved the world that God sent the Son into the world; as Jesus is the one sent into the world so he sends the disciples into the world; when Jesus goes he will send the Spirit.

### **Mission**

Jesus' commission (20:23) differs from that of Matthew which is based on Jesus' power and authority (28:18-20), limited to a few (16:19 and 18:18) and is arguably underpinned by the missiology of conquest.<sup>5</sup> The basis in John is Jesus' peace which he breathed into the disciples. Then he invited them to receive the Spirit to continue his mission as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29) by forgiving sins and holding fast in communion those who are thereby reconciled with God. Previously, the description of how this is done is found in the account of the washing of the feet. Mission empowered by the Spirit is a matter of abiding in the communion of friends in equality and mutual service. Thus others are drawn to seek and share in the source of that life. This missionary programme is about communion: *God's life*

*with us and our life with each other.*

### **Community of Friends**

Jesus is with friends near the end of his life. Lazarus, Martha and Mary offer hospitality to their friend and guest. The Risen One prepares breakfast for friends on the beach. Some interpreters find this gospel inward looking as regards community. However, reading Johannine meals through the lens of Wisdom-Sophia and friendship shows a different story.

The emphasis on the communion of friends is to strengthen them to be "friends of God and prophets" in their daily lives. As Wisdom-Sophia gathers her friends, so Jesus Sophia gathers his friends, and the living Jesus gathers twenty-first century Christians in the Eucharist as meal. As Wisdom Sophia cries out publicly in the streets, so too, the healings and actions of Jesus in public result in rejection, suffering and death. Likewise, the living Jesus gathers twenty-first century Christians in the Eucharist as sacrifice which implies the self-giving of taking risks, transforming sinful structures, commitment to right relationship and celebrating the presence of Jesus with the broken.

The act of friendship, that is, speaking frankly, links Jesus with the ideal of friendship. In John 9 and 11, part of healing is Jesus' extended dialogue and interaction with those healed and those who stand by. Healing is an act of friendship. These actions, however, place Jesus the healer in danger. His love for his friends, Lazarus, Mary and Martha, leads to increased hostility towards him and the authorities plan his death (11:45-47). Likewise, Nicodemus' act of friendship in requesting the body of one executed by the Roman

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<sup>5</sup> Sandra M.Schneiders. *Selling All*. Paulist, 2001, 303.

authorities possibly incurs considerable political risk.

The greatest example of friendship is found at the farewell meal where we would expect to find the account of Jesus instituting the Eucharist. Instead, Jesus takes a towel and washes the disciples' feet. We can look at this in one of three ways: 1. an action that must be done which places one person in a fundamental condition of inequality; 2. an action which a person can do freely, however, the server remains superior; 3. an action which a person can do in friendship which is based on equality.<sup>6</sup>

Peter refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Perhaps, he understood all too well that to do so would mean having to change his way of viewing the world and to enter into a conversion he was not willing to undergo. In other words, it was like Peter's rejecting the death of Jesus as understood as laying down his life for his friends. This meant a whole new order of human relationships and self giving. The new commandment is about mutual love (13:34-35). The foot washing for us today is not about self-humiliation but about participating in Jesus' work in order to change and transform the sinful structures of domination in our society and church into a communion of friendship which takes its origin from God as communion.

To conclude let us return to Rublev's icon which was, and is valued, for its theological emphasis on God as communion. It is equally important to remember that Rublev wrote this icon in the political and social unrest and land struggles of fifteenth century Russia. In that turmoil, he hoped this icon would draw a wider spectrum of believers, both the powerful and the powerless, into the just trusting relationship which they would contemplate in the all-encompassing relationship of the three figures evoking God as communion. The imaging of God in John's gospel arose, too, in a context of suffering and persecution under the military might of imperial Rome. In the first decade of the third millennium, we live in a global context in our land of Aotearoa New Zealand and face immense challenges to give flesh to right relationships. Thus, we too, are invited into the wellspring of this visible icon and into its invisible equivalent of the gospel according to John to give flesh to God as communion in our particular context.

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<sup>6</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders. *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*. Crossroad, 2003, 192-194.

The common overriding challenge presented by the language of One God in community, to ancient and postmodern cultures alike, is to stop talking about God and the world as if we were distant spectators and begin to engage with God and each other as in a committed relationship.

Myra Blyth. *Celebrating the Trinity*. Grove 2003

# GOD IS COMMUNION: A SPIRITUALITY OF BEING

Andrew Shepherd

In our contemporary world “community” has become one of the ubiquitous ‘buzz’ words that punctuates our everyday discourse. Whether used to describe online chat groups, to refer to “marginalised communities” who become the fortunate (or one could argue unfortunate) recipients of social program or policies to re-incorporate them into the global market; or, used as a realtor’s marketing tool to attract potential investors to buy into exclusive ‘gated communities’, the term “community” pops up everywhere. Likewise the word has entered the common parlance of church life. One constantly hears discussions of the desire of congregations to connect with their local “communities” (and the accompanying designing and implementation of programs to bring this about) and the expressed aspiration to *build* a clearer sense of “community” within the church itself.

While the use of the term “community” can be understood as a response to the loss of social capital which seems to characterise contemporary western societies and points to a genuine yearning for a more authentic and richer expression of shared life, one wonders whether “community” and the experience of “communion” can really be reduced to a program or a series of tasks that one can implement, an experience that

can be marketed and consumed? For all the bandying around of the word “communion” do we actually have a clear idea of what *communion* is and therefore of what it is that we aspire to? Below, I will suggest that a Trinitarian spirituality - a spirituality of *communion* - rather than being co-opted and reduced to a series of commoditised and marketable processes or programs, responds to the deep yearning we see in contemporary society, by offering an inversion of both our understanding of *communion* and of *spirituality*.

Like all concepts in Christian theology, the word “communion” gains its content, not from an elaboration of human philosophies, but rather is grounded upon our reflection on “communion” as evidenced to us in the revelation of the Trinitarian God. As Colin Gunton states: ‘it is only through an understanding of what kind of being that God is that we can come to learn what kind of beings we are and what kind of world we inhabit.’<sup>1</sup>

While ostensibly Trinitarian, western theology of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century following the influence of Schleiermacher generally viewed the doctrine of the Trinity as an irrelevance. The belief, espoused by Immanuel Kant, that ‘From the doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, nothing whatsoever can be gained for practical purposes...’<sup>2</sup> was one seemingly shared, in general, by Christian theologians.<sup>3</sup> While the last half century

<sup>1</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), xi Preface to 1st edition, included in the second edition.

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, Ph. B. 252, 33, quoted in Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, commenting on the absence of the doctrine of the Trinity in theological writing, stated provocatively, that ‘should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.’ For Rahner, the great problem facing the Western church stemmed from its failure to realise the ‘existential relevance’ of the doctrine of the Trinity. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), 11, 14.

has seen a renaissance in Trinitarian theology, Western theology,<sup>4</sup> stemming from its Augustinian legacy - which begins by stressing the one divine essence of God and then, only *afterwards* interprets God as three persons - has tended to dichotomize between the understanding of God as One and God as Trinity (*De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*) and therefore has struggled to provide the necessary theological resources for the development of a spirituality of "communion". It is this seeming failure of Augustinian Trinitarian thought to be able to respond to the issues of contemporary life that has led to a burgeoning interest in non-Western theologies, and, in particular, the theologies of the Eastern tradition, in which the starting point for any discussion on the Doctrine of the Trinity, is not the oneness (essence/*ousia*) of God, but rather the three *hypostasis* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

### The Theology of John Zizioulas

One particular theologian, whose work has gained considerable acclaim and influence, has been Eastern Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas.<sup>6</sup> Zizioulas, influenced by his reading of the

Cappadocian Fathers, argues that critical to our theology and spirituality is an understanding that *God is communion*. In contrast to western thinking - shaped by Greek philosophical presuppositions in which *being-existence* is understood in *substantial* terms, and, which following Augustine begins its theology with the *oneness* of God, the *substance* of who God is - Zizioulas, argues for a *personalist* ontology.<sup>7</sup> In Eastern thought, the hypostases, that is, the personhood of the Father, Son and Spirit, are not added-on extras that flow from the nature of God, but rather are themselves the ontological nature of God. For Zizioulas,

"The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God.... The Holy Trinity is a *primordial* ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather which follows it.... The substance of God, "God" has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> It is in the mid 20th-century, in the face of the challenges posed by modernity and the turbulence and violence that seemed to stem from the "modern" man, that Western theologians notably Karl Barth and Karl Rahner begin to actively explore the relevance of the Doctrine of the Trinity to the living of contemporary life. This rediscovery of the importance and relevance of doctrine of the Trinity has continued to the point where as Colin Gunton now suggests "Suddenly we are all Trinitarians, or so it would seem." Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, xv.

<sup>5</sup> While some believe that Rahner and Gunton, in their criticism of Augustine over-state their case, their critique has stimulated both the rediscovery of the work of the Greek Cappadocian Fathers and likewise has led to a reinterpretation of Augustinian thought.

<sup>6</sup> Though having taught at the University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow, it is Zizioulas' role as Visiting Professor at the Research Institute in Systematic Theology of King's College, London, and his friendship with British theologian Colin Gunton which has led to the broader dissemination and reception of his theology. Zizioulas' two critical works are: John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 2002 ed. (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985). and the later John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartlan (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2006)..

<sup>7</sup> That is, a personalist understanding of *being-existence*.

<sup>8</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 17.

This understanding of the Trinity, of the Divine persons, Father, Son and Spirit, not as independent, nor even interdependent identities who influence one another, but rather, as *personally interior* to one another as a *communion of divine persons*, is expressed through the Greek notion of *perichoresis*. Within this conception of the Trinity in which 'in eternity Father, Son and Spirit share a dynamic mutual reciprocity, interpenetration and interanimation,<sup>9</sup> relations between the divine persons are not seen as secondary to the divine *ousia*, but rather are *constitutive* of the very being of God. As Colin Gunton states: 'the persons [of the Trinity] do not simply enter into relations with one another, but are constituted by one another in the relations.'<sup>10</sup> For Gunton, 'God is not God apart from the way in which Father, Son and Spirit in eternity give to and receive from each other what they essentially are. The three do not merely co-inhere, but dynamically constitute one another's being.'<sup>11</sup>

From this foundational premise that God is a *communion of Divine persons* Zizioulas develops his theology accordingly:

- 1) That *being-existence* owes itself to the free gift-giving of a personal God. That is, that *being-existence* is not one of *necessity* but rather of *freedom*. All of creation therefore is a gift - brought into being freely by the *ekstasis* of the Divine Persons - by a God who opens himself up to share his life and love in the act of creation.
- 2) All of creation therefore is designed to be *in communion* with its Creator, and humanity, made in the 'image of God', is specifically made to be *like God*. Humanity reflects the *imago Dei*, not through our nature - our substance/*ousia* - that is, through *what* we are, but rather through our mode of being, that is, through *how* we exist. Humanity, as *created*, and therefore with a beginning and an end, can never be God by nature, but we are 'called to exist in the way God exists.'<sup>12</sup> God's mode of being, God as Father, Son and Spirit, who freely and in love 'make room' and space for the Other, is the ultimate and genuine form of human life.
- 3) Sin therefore is the failure of humanity to live as image-bearers, to receive God's gift of *being*, to live in communion with the Creator. Rather than choosing to walk in the cool of the garden with our Creator we violate the otherness of both creation and each other and hide from God. Death comes, not as a divine punishment inflicted upon us for our moral failings, but rather is the consequence of a creation living separate from divine communion. Cut off from the very breath of God (*ruach*) that brought us into existence, divorced from the loving communion and life-giving embrace of the Trinitarian God, and therefore isolated as individuals, our 'biological' existence slowly decays and moves towards death.

<sup>9</sup> Colin E Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity - the 1992 Bampton Lectures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 163.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>12</sup> Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 165.

- 4) Though humanity is incapable of living in *communion* with one another and with God, Jesus, the God-Man, lives a human life in which he both accepts God's gift and offers it back to God. Living, not as an individual, but in *communion* with the Father and for the other, Jesus, the second Adam, the true human person, paves the path for humanity - creating a new way to *be*.
- 5) For Christians, in receiving the gift of God's grace and surrendering our self-controlled lives, a twin process takes place. Through the ritual of baptism, we enter into the body of Christ - our lives are hypostasised into Christ and we enter into the *ecclesia; the called out community* - a community in which a new form of life is being lived: a life of communion. At the same time as we enter into the body of Christ, so the Spirit of Christ enters into us and begins renovations - expanding our contracted living space, making room for others, and preparing us and ushering us towards our true home - *communion* with the Father.

### A Spirituality of Communion

While the richness of Zizioulas' Trinitarian theology provides a number of avenues for deeper reflection, there are two particular aspects of Zizioulas' thought which I believe are worth highlighting in their contribution to the development of a *spirituality of communion* able to respond to the deep yearning within our world for "community", while avoiding the pragmatic, programmatic and commoditising tendencies of our contemporary culture.

Firstly, and perhaps most significantly, an understanding of God as *communion* offers

for many Western Christians a new insight into the nature and character of God. In contrast to Western-Augustinian Trinitarian thought in which personhood is understood in psychological terms and the *image of God* is correlated with our ability to be *rational*, a God of *communion* lays greater emphasis, not on our *rationality*, but rather on our *relationality*. A cerebral and rationalistic spirituality gives way to an emphasis on relationships and intimacy - a mystical and contemplative spirituality. The Doctrine of the Trinity becomes less a philosophical conundrum to be solved, as a reality to be experienced. Accordingly, Western theology, with its emphasis on *justification* and *moral sanctification*, so often accompanied by an *active* spirituality where one "*works out their salvation with fear and trembling*" is held in balance with a *passive* spirituality that recognises that *baptised into Christ* we are already a new creation, and that *theosis* - our transformation into the likeness of the Son, the preparation for our participation in the eschatological divine embrace - is not *a task we do*, but rather a work of the Spirit within us.

Secondly, Zizioulas reminds us that made in the *image of God*, there is no such thing as an individual person. To be a person is to recognise that we are constituted by the gift of the Divine Other (God) and called into relationship with the other. As Zizioulas states,

"The person is an identity that emerges through relationship...; it is an 'I' that can exist only as long as it relates to a 'thou' which affirms its existence and its otherness. If we isolate the 'I' from the 'thou' we lose not only its otherness but also its very being; it simply cannot be without the other."<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly in a spirituality of communion, the other is not additional to the self, but rather is part of the self - that is, our very identity is shaped by our engagement with the other. Authentic personhood therefore involves not *freedom* from the other, but rather is a *freedom* for the other. Our mystical experience of the divine communion does not draw us away from the world, but rather leads us back to the world, to an engagement with the human other.

This understanding of *communion* as the nature of God and therefore the nature of genuine human existence is perhaps most clearly expressed in the practice of hospitality. In Luke 10:38-42 at the home of the sisters Mary and Martha, Jesus reminds us that the practice of *hospitality*, the forming and performing of *community*, begins not with *our* actions of hosting, but rather originates in our receiving of hospitality from the divine host. Thus, a Trinitarian spirituality of communion is not primarily one of *doing*, of engaging in a new series of activities or performances, but rather is fundamentally one of *being*, of becoming recipients of God's gracious act of hospitality and thus participants in God's *communion*. It is in the seemingly

idle sitting at the feet of the Saviour and receiving his welcome that we become people of *community*, able to bring words and actions of hope to our "dislocated" world.

Gunton, Colin E. *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity - the 1992 Bampton Lectures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Gunton, Colin E. *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997.

Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. London: SCM Press, 1981.

Rahner, Karl. *The Trinity*. Translated by Joseph Donceel. London: Burns and Oates, 1970.

Zizioulas, John D. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. 2002 ed. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985. *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Edited by Paul McPartlan. London / New York: T&T Clark, 2006.

**One thing is clear. To get to know someone better, we have to spend a bit of time at it. But if we want a more personal relationship rather than a vicarious one with another, we have to take the chance of a personal encounter. In the case of God even making the effort ... can open the door to a personal encounter. God seems to take any opportunity for closeness!**

William Barry *God And You Prayer as personal relationship*.

Paulist Press. 1987. 17. Adapted.

# THE TRINITY IN THE CREATED ORDER

*Nicola Hoggard Creegan*

In 1963 at the Second Vatican Council in Rome, Pope John the 23<sup>rd</sup> prayed: "Renew Your wonders in this our day, as by a new Pentecost... Come, Holy Spirit, in your power and might to renew the face of the earth."<sup>1</sup> Three years later the charismatic movement began to change the Roman Catholic church as much as the edicts of the Council which had gone before it.

In spite of the turmoil and horror of war the twentieth century became the century of the Spirit, from the early Azusa Street Pentecostal revivals to the charismatic renewal of the 60s and 70s, and the Toronto Blessing of the 90s. It was also the century in which the trinity was rediscovered, especially in the monumental work of Karl Barth. Perhaps a greater acceptance of ecstatic gifts is associated with an increased understanding of mystery and trinity; the trinity had fallen out of favour at the height of the Enlightenment. In an age of renewed miracle and experience of healing, belief in trinity was also possible. For that reason an awareness of the Spirit's presence is often linked to an increased theological emphasis upon the trinity.

The trinity in creation, however, is another matter. The revivals stressed God's spirit in human life and not necessarily in creation. Barth drew attention away from nature to the Christ revealed in the Word. Only as the focus has been drawn to the fate of the earth and the ecosystem has Christianity come to a full realization that

God's Spirit, known so powerfully to many in person, also permeates the natural world, the whole of creation. If the Spirit is immanent in creation, the Father created the world out of nothing, and Christ, in the Word, is the one through whom all things are made, then the trinity itself is intimately associated with nature. Western theology has also begun to take more heed of Greek and Russian Orthodox understandings of God and creation in which nature has long been seen as permeated by the energies of God.

One person who has written clearly on the Spirit in creation is Australian Catholic theologian Denis Edwards. In *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* he tells the story of the whole of creation from the beginning, the Big Bang, and of God's Spirit as upholding and giving existence to each moment of this process.<sup>2</sup> "The spirit pervades the whole universe and sees to the 'the depths of God,'" (1Cor 2:10)" he says.<sup>3</sup> Edwards also draws on the early church Father, Basil of Caesarea (330-379), who wrote and taught extensively on the immanence of the Holy Spirit in the fourth century AD. Basil participated in the debates surrounding the Holy Spirit and the trinity which waged between the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the Council of Constantinople in 381. Basil noted that the Spirit gives the breath of life in Genesis, and this is the same Spirit which brings resurrection in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup>

Edwards goes on to describe the work of each one of the persons of the trinity in the creation. In Word, or Wisdom, he quotes Bonaventure as saying, "every creature is

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<sup>1</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p14  
<sup>2</sup> Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004)  
<sup>3</sup> Edwards, p129  
<sup>4</sup> Edwards, p26

of its very nature a likeness and resemblance to eternal wisdom.”<sup>5</sup> Edwards draws on the work of Pannenberg to argue that the “otherness” of distinct creatures is grounded in otherness of distinct persons of the trinity.<sup>6</sup>

In the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann we get the strongest expression of divine immanence. He sees the “world of nature as bearing the prints of the Triune God.”<sup>7</sup> Clark Pinnock, a contemporary Canadian theologian, wrote very powerfully of the Spirit in the *Flame of Love*. He says the Spirit is “choreographing the dance of creation.”<sup>8</sup> Pinnock understands God as love as being very close to us, and to all life and to all of creation.

This immanence of God in the creation is associated with the promise of creation, its future fulfilment or perfection. We find biblical testimony to this idea in Colossians 1:15 where Christ is spoken of as the one in whom all things hang together. This is the Christ who is God made human, and the human redeemer, but also the centre and end of the universe. Romans speaks of the whole creation groaning in the Spirit as it awaits its redemption, which in some mysterious way has something to do with humanity.

We are well aware that the whole creation, until this time, has been groaning in labour pains. And not only that: we too, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we are groaning inside

ourselves, waiting with eagerness for our bodies to be set free. (Romans 8:22-23)

The fate of the creation and the fate of humanity are linked. God is present to both in a remarkable way. Tom Wright, the Bishop of Durham also speaks to the intensity of God in creation when he says,

God has promised that, through his Spirit, he will remake the creation so that it becomes what it is straining and yearning to be. All the beauty of the present world will be enhanced, ennobled, set free from that which at present corrupts and defaces it. Then there will appear that beauty for which the beauty we know here and now is simply an advance signpost.<sup>9</sup>

But how is it that the creation can be free if God is immanent? This sense that freedom must come only if God is not present has been behind the move to deism that is in many ways the default belief today and the position on God preferred by many scientists. This is as far away as is possible from a trinitarian view of creation. Kathryn Tanner has looked at the problem of God's immanence and transcendence and has argued that the Christian God is *radically transcendent in a way that makes it possible to be present* to the whole of creation all the time.<sup>10</sup> A transcendence which is like the creation but contained within it would not have this power. A transcendence that is defined in *opposition* to all that exists could not then be understood as

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<sup>5</sup> Edwards, p126

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (Harper & Row, 1985), p65

<sup>8</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p56

<sup>9</sup> Tom Wright, *The Holy Spirit in the Church*, <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/events/2005/inthechurch.cfm>

<sup>10</sup> Kathryn E. Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005),

interacting with the creation. "Because it is not based essentially on an opposition with the non-divine, this radical transcendence of God can be exercised in both God's otherness over and against the world and God's immanent presence within it," argues Tanner.<sup>11</sup>

One of the repercussions of seeing the trinity in nature is that nature is "re-enchanted." Throughout the scientific age our view of nature has become more and more mundane and mechanical; it has become an object for our endless manipulation, quite other to us, quite dead, and certainly quite separate from God. Yet this is not the biblical understanding of nature at all. One philosopher of nature recently made this point:

In the Psalter, that classic anthology of Hebrew poetry and song, is to be found an aesthetic appreciation of the inner

life. .. Here nature presents a face here, expresses an inner life, only because it is at the same time disclosed as being turned radically and ecstatically toward a distance unto which all the resonance of that life is directed, and from which that life is itself derived.<sup>12</sup>

Seeing the triune God in nature enables us to appreciate how close we are to God, and how visible God becomes in the intensity and depth of nature. Not that we see God. Not that God is a part of creation, but in touching creation the trinity lends enormous depth and resonance to our appreciation of nature. We can believe, perhaps, that the trees do really clap their hands in worship. As I finish this article it is Pentecost Sunday, the feast day of the Spirit. This day in which we welcome the Spirit anew and celebrate God's Spirit with us is a good place to end a reflection on trinitarian eco-theology.

<sup>11</sup> Tanner, p79

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Foltz & Robert Frodean eds, *Nature's Other Side: The Demise of Nature and the Phenomenology of Givenness*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004) p334



## A Spiral-Shaped God

The Celtic symbol of the triple spiral, signifying the Trinity, is evocative of the life, energy, interconnecting relationships and mystery of God.

It was used by the illustrators the Book of Kells in the early medieval period.

# TRINITY AND SPIRITUALITY

*Kevin Giles*

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards in Western Christianity the doctrine of the Trinity went into exile. Christians were, in practical terms, monotheists. They believed in God. True, the Gospels were still read and so Jesus' life and ministry were never forgotten and the Spirit was named in sermons and included in the benediction, but not much more was said on the Son and the Spirit. In theological text books it was God and his attributes that got most attention. The doctrine of the Trinity was formally outlined in brief at a latter point. How things have changed in the last thirty years! Now theologians recognise that the primary doctrine of the Christian faith is "our" doctrine of God, and "our" distinctive Christian doctrine of God is of a triune God. The one God of Christian revelation is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We Christians do not simply believe in God. The vast majority of people in secular countries say they believe in God, Muslims believe in God, Buddhists believe in God, Hindus believe in God. We Christians believe in God the Father revealed in Jesus Christ and made real and powerful in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

## **The Christian triune God in human experience**

If we are asked, "What is God like?" we should point to Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "If you know me you know my Father also" (Jn 14:7); "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9); "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn 14:10). If we are asked, "What is involved in being a Christian?" we should reply, "Believing,

knowing, and following Jesus". Other great religious teachers have pointed away from themselves to a god they have discovered. Jesus pointed to himself as God *revealed* in human form. Thus he called on men and women to believe in him and to follow him. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father" (Jn 14:6-7). If we are asked, "How are the Father and the Son related?" we should first of all remind our questioner of Jesus' words, "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30; 17:22) and then thinking of their revealed relationship add, "intimately and in self-giving love".

When Jesus, the Son of God, returned to heaven to reign in all power and might after his death and resurrection (Phil. 2:4-11), God the Holy Spirit came to be with and in his followers to sanctify and empower them. The Holy Spirit is God in human experience. When we ask, "What is different for Christians?" the answer is not that Christians are better, or cleverer, or healthier, or physically stronger than non-Christians. The answer is that Christians are forgiven sinners in whom the Spirit is working a life-long project to make them like Jesus Christ.

In Christian corporate worship, what we cannot comprehend in our minds about God we get right in our words, songs and prayers. We pray to our loving heavenly Father, through the Son, as the Holy Spirit prompts and leads us to pray. As we pray, so we believe. We hear as the scriptures are read that we have been chosen by the Father from the foundation of the world to be in Christ and baptised in the Spirit. Filled with the Spirit we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to Christ,

# The Baptism of Christ

Kees Bruin

Photo by  
Alan  
Simpson





**“You are  
my Son,  
the  
Beloved;  
with you  
I am  
well  
pleased.”**

**Mark 1:11  
NRSV**

making melody to God the Father (Eph. 5:19).

### **The Christian triune God in Scripture**

What we discover in living the Christian life we find revealed and confirmed in scripture. We meet in the pages of Holy Writ three divine "persons" - no other word is adequate - who, though distinct, are never separated or divided.

God the Father is God, all agree. The big question that has divided the church from time to time is whether or not Jesus, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit are likewise God in the fullest sense of this word. We first note in answer that Jesus can be called God (Jn 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 19:5; Heb.1:6 etc) and so too can the Holy Spirit

eschatological texts. In the Old Testament, the end of this world as it is known entails the final visitation of *Yahweh* in judgment. In the New Testament Paul speaks of the visitation in judgment of "our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Th. 5:23; 4:15-17; 1 Cor. 1:7-8; 4:1-5; etc.). What this indicates is that although Paul continued to affirm monotheism, he no longer thought of God as a solitary unitary being. His understanding of monotheism included the Father, Son and Spirit. Nowhere is this expanded monotheism more clearly seen than in 1 Cor. 8:5-6 where Paul confesses both "one God the Father" and "one Lord Jesus Christ." In this bold association of the Father and Christ, Paul adapts the wording of the foundational Jewish confession, the *Shema*, from Deut. 6:4, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one

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## **"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord"**

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(Acts 5:3-4) but what is most decisive as far as Jesus is concerned is that he is called "the Lord" more than 200 times in the New Testament. The title "Lord" (Gk *kurios*) in every day usage in the first century designated someone in authority. It is paired with either servant or slave. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint or *LXX*) it is used to translate the Hebrew name for God, *Yahweh*, and Paul continues this usage (2 Cor. 6:16, 18; Rom. 14:11 etc). What is surprising is that Paul and other New Testament writers freely give this title to Jesus as well. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than when Old Testament texts that spoke of *Yahweh* as the Lord are used in reference to the resurrected Jesus (Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 1:31; 10:26; 2 Cor. 10:17; etc. Cf. Acts 2:21). This transference of the name of God to Jesus comes to the fore in

Lord." He keeps the "one" intact as a monotheist but confesses that he believes the Father and the Son are this one God. At this point the Spirit is not mentioned.

That the three divine persons are all God in the fullest sense of this word is seen in more than 50 passages in the New Testament where they are mentioned together on an equal footing. I note the best known examples. As we come to the end of Matthew's Gospel we hear Jesus sending out his disciples with the commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). In concluding his second epistle to the Corinthians the apostle Paul gives the benediction, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (note in this instance Jesus is mentioned first), the love

of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Cor. 13:13). In his earlier epistle to the Corinthians, he tells them that all the gifts of ministry evident in their midst are distributed by the Father, Son and Spirit (1 Cor.12:4). Diversity in the one God is manifest in diversity in the one people of God.

### Equal in authority?

Closely connected with the question, "Are the divine three equally God?" is the question, "Are the divine three equal in power and authority?" This question was first given prominence by the radical Arian Eunomius in the fourth century and has come to the fore again today. Some evangelicals who believe God has permanently subordinated women under the authority of men in the home and the church believe the Trinity supports and models this hierarchical ordering. The Son is set under the authority of the Father, although he is equal with God in some sense. We immediately suspect this must be special pleading because every theological text book says that the Bible teaches that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are alike omnipotent, all powerful. This is a superlative term; there can be no degrees of omnipotence. The absolute power and authority of each of the divine three is indicated in scripture by the calling Father, Son and Spirit, alike, "Lord." Furthermore, to suggest that the Son is subordinated in authority to the Father directly contradicts the Athanasian Creed, the standard of orthodoxy for more than 1500 years for Western Christians. In this creed all three "persons" are said to be "almighty" and "Lord" and "none is before or after, greater or lesser (all hierarchical ordering is excluded) and "co-equal".

Rather than thinking that the Trinity justifies and endorses fixed hierarchies most modern discussions of the Trinity see this primary doctrine of the Christian faith as a model for co-equal, mutual, self-giving relationships. The Catholic theologian, Leonardo Boff, even calls the Trinity "a charter for human liberation."

## COUNTING ON GOD

*Kathy Hughes*

One  
True God.  
Triune God.

In the name of the Three  
Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
God be in my mind, heart and being.

Or maybe You are Nurturing  
Mother - life giver,  
Incarnate Brother - one of us,  
or Life-giving Breath -  
within till the end.

Or perhaps Prison Breaker - bestower of  
Five Freedom Keys Virginia Satir  
points out. More than  
Boat Rocker - Wave Walker.  
Then again, some can't  
see past the opposites -  
the Seven Deadly Sins,  
stuck in a mirror-go-round spinning  
round and round and round.

And how about Two -  
You in me and  
me in You.

Or 'I am  
who I  
Am'

1.

# WRITING PRAYERS FOR TRINITY SUNDAY

*Neil Churcher*

Trinity Sunday is always a challenge for me; not because I don't accept the doctrine, but because the doctrine, of itself, is mind-based and difficult. The attempt to express the fact of the Trinity is important, but to pray in Trinitarian terms runs the risk of forcing prayer-language into a mould that is unhelpful for devotion.

When I was asked to contribute this article, I looked at one commentary on this year's Trinity texts. It begins: "The character of God is endlessly urgent in the church, and enduringly the subject of reflection and articulation. Trinity Sunday is an appropriate time for the church to reflect on the dynamic tension between what we know of God and our mumbling attempts to formulate and articulate what we know. One danger is to imagine that we do not know God at all, as though nothing has been disclosed. The other danger is to imagine that we have the inscrutable character of God fully captured and domesticated in our familiar formulations... The Trinitarian formula is a treasured break-through in the church's thinking; but in the end it is not our theological formulation but our embrace of God's gracious majesty that counts in our life. All these texts assert that the community of faith must endlessly struggle to know more fully the God both disclosed and profoundly inaccessible."

And Donald Baillie: "To detach the doctrine from the experience of God, the whole mystery of God, is to make it irrelevant, if not impossible." So, rather than working with the doctrine itself as I write the prayers for Trinity Sunday, I

begin with the given texts. In fact, that is true for every Sunday; I write or choose the prayers only after I have spent time with the texts and written the sermon.

The first text for this year is Genesis 1:1-2:4a. As I read the Bruggemann commentary I was struck by the way he talks of both closeness and distance between the Creator and the creation; a closeness of trust and yet a distance which allows the creation its own freedom of action. "The grace of God is that the creature whom he has *caused* to be, he now *lets* be." (Genesis: Interpretation p.28) That feels to me like loving parents who allow the children they have created the freedom to be themselves and yet surround them with love and presence and, if need be, withdrawal.

## **So a prayer of Praise and Confession:**

God -  
what else shall we call you  
God of many names.  
When we think we have you sorted  
you reveal yourself in some new way  
and we want to call you something  
different.  
You are more than parent  
even though we understand you to hold us  
in your care.  
You are more than lover  
even though we sometimes know  
the intensity of your feeling and presence.  
You are more than creator  
even though we wonder at the intricacies  
and splendour of your creation.  
But what we can do with certainty  
is to praise you  
God of many names.

We see you in Jesus  
and we know that, in him,  
we can be real with you and with

ourselves.  
Through him you know our names,  
all of us,  
who we are and what we do.  
We are blown away by the truth that,  
because you know us so well  
you are moved to love us  
and call us your forgiven ones.  
Will you listen to us now, please,  
as we open ourselves before you.

*(a silence)*

God,  
healer of our hurts,  
cleanser of our grubbiness,  
restorer of our wholeness,  
receive us now  
and redefine us as your people:  
in the name of Jesus your Christ  
and our brother.  
Amen.

The Assurance:

It is true!

The Gospel declares that God is love.  
In that love we are forgiven and free.  
Thanks be to God!

I made a mistake when I looked at the epistle. I looked at 1 Corinthians 13 instead of the second letter. It makes sense to look at both letters vv.11-13. They speak of the mystery and promise of God on the one hand, and the fact that The Grace places the grace of Jesus first rather than the traditional Trinitarian formula of Father, Son and Spirit.

### **A Prayer of Thanksgiving:**

God,  
there are so many difficult and wrong things in the world.  
We pray now for the grace to see beyond them  
to sites of beauty, instances of loving,  
people of quiet hope and resourceful living.

We thank you for news reports that make us believe  
that the life Jesus lived for people is still alive.

We thank you for things that make us laugh  
and for the elements of courage  
and change in our society  
that move us and make us aware  
of the joy that underlies and supports all things.

We thank you for the prayers of many people,  
known and unknown to us,  
offered in a moment  
or in times of meditation and silence.  
Thank you that you know it all  
and that, in the end,  
you will reveal it all to us.  
We pray in the Spirit of Jesus.

And finally, leaping off from somewhere  
near the last verses of Matthew,

### **A Prayer of Commitment:**

God,  
Hold your Son Jesus before us now  
as we go from worship into your world.  
Let the Spirit that enlivened and encouraged him  
inhabit our living and doing in the days to come.  
We will praise you as we go,  
saving Parent, lively Spirit,  
Whom we know in Jesus.  
Amen.

These are prayers such as I may, possibly, write for Trinity Sunday in the Year of Matthew. I would encourage others to write their own as they arise out of their own understanding and preparation. And may all who prepare and all who share know the blessing of the Eternal God, who is Creator and Saviour and Giver of Life.

# THE TRINITY IN CELTIC SPIRITUALITY

*John Hunt*

## **Relationship**

### *The Creation*

For the Celts, at the heart of the creation is relationship. The Celts could see everything in the creation is in relationship with every other thing. We have relationship expressed in the classic Celtic interlacing pattern. They could see the well-being of the whole is related to the well-being of each part. When a flower is carelessly trampled, the whole creation is damaged. When one person is hurting, everyone shares something of their pain. The Celts lived in relationship with the natural world, with the rhythms of night and day, the seasons passing, the tide turning, the eternal cycle of endings and new beginnings. They knew the love of the Creator in the wonder and in the harmony of the world around them.

### *The Trinity*

And the Celts could see, to their delight, the very heart of God is relationship: the loving relationship between Father, Son and Spirit.

## **The Spiritual and the Physical**

### *Every Place is Holy*

The Irish Celts in the early period were not troubled by Greek Dualism: the separation of the spiritual and the physical, calling the spiritual perfect and the physical imperfect. For the Celts, the creation is redolent with the love of the Creator. They could see every place is holy. For the Celts, the world is the place where we know God.

### *Every Person is the Christ*

The Celts believed God's love became incarnate in the baby Jesus. For them,

God's incarnation is not a one-off, historical event in Bethlehem however. They could see God's love comes in every baby! They called Jesus 'Jesus MacMary' ('Mac' son-of). For the Celts, Mary was one of their Irish girls and Jesus one of their little boys. They knew Jesus in one another, in friends and in strangers. We have the wonderful song of Columba.

*I saw a stranger yestere'en,  
I put food in the eating place,  
drink in the drinking place,  
music in the listening place,  
and in the sacred name of the Triune,  
he blessed myself and my house,  
my cattle and my dear ones,  
and the lark said in her song,  
often, often, often  
goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.*

From *The Book of Cerne*.

## **The Spirit is Everywhere**

Life for the Celts was harsh. The winters were cold and long; they would lose some of their babies and their old ones. A man from Belfast told me, it had rained every day for a month. The Celts were not overcome by hardship however. They are a generous, singing, laughing, story-telling people. Where does that attitude come from? They live in the loving Spirit of God they see in the world around them, they embrace in one another and they know in their own hearts.

I had time on Iona with Father John O'Donohue, a teacher in Celtic spirituality. As he spoke, the wind was whistling around the abbey, the waves were crashing on the shore. He said, 'This afternoon, walk this island and the Spirit will get you!' He was thinking about the *ruach*, the *pneuma*. So truly, I was invigorated in the wind, the Spirit of God.

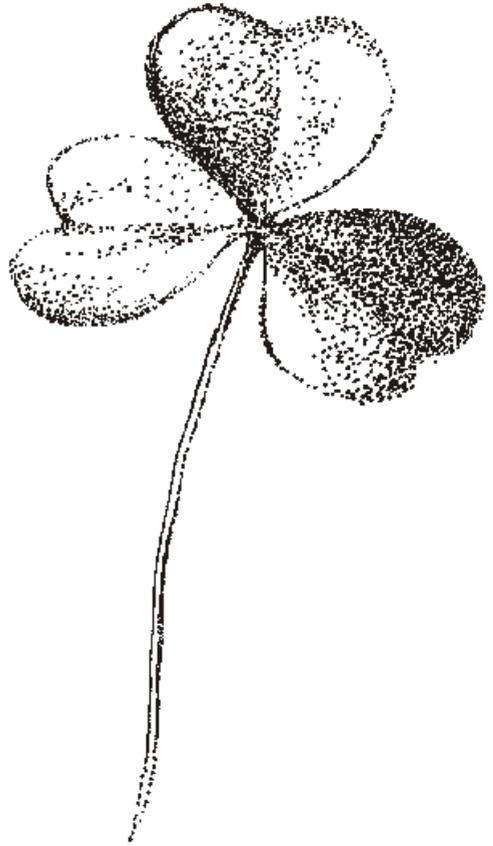
## Heaven and Earth

For the Celts, heaven and earth come together. The Celts knew, all those who have gone before us are present with us. Those we have loved and lost are with us. (The DNA. people tell us the same.) Those of our faith story are with us. As Elijah and Moses were with Jesus on the mountain, so they are with us. A woman with a lovely Irish accent phoned me, 'I heard you interviewed on the wireless. I would like six copies of your book for my family. Where can I buy them?' I asked her where she lives and discovered she lives next-door to me in the (then) Presbyterian Support Rest Home. I said, 'I'll bring them to you.' Two or three minutes later she answered my knock, looked at the books in my hand and said, 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph it didn't take you long!' The 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph' rolls off the tongue, but she welcomed the Holy Family with me or maybe the Holy Family were with her, welcoming me or both!

A man settles down to sleep.

*As is due I am laying me down tonight,  
The Christ my friend,  
Son of ringletted Maid,  
Father of glory my friend, of gracious light,  
The Holy Spirit my friend, of mighty aid.  
from Ian MacInnes, South Uist*

The Celts know the Trinity not as a doctrine but in their own experience.



The beginning and end of contemplation is (with) God. This is something that neither directee nor director can control, but is something to marvel at and to enter into with gratitude.

Anon.

# TRINITY

A sense of wonder and awe.  
Thinking about the Trinity confuses.  
One in three, three in one.  
Augustine and the hole in the sand.  
The fish swimming in the water,  
Looking for the ocean,  
Saint Catherine and her images -  
Each tells something about Trinity and  
mystery  
But hides much more.

Creator, redeemer, sanctifier, -  
Job descriptions -  
Helpful but not enough.  
Father, Son and Spirit -  
Relational, beginning to have meaning,  
But what about mother, daughter ...?  
We haven't the words to express the  
relationship.

Without relationships I am no one.

I struggle to find myself.  
No longer just my father's daughter,  
My mother's daughter,  
My brother's sister,  
My aunt's niece,  
My friend's friend.

I strive to be separated and unique  
Only to find that without relationship  
I am no one.  
I yearn to be alone  
Yet to be connected.

As each relationship fails to satisfy  
I realise, once again,  
That the relationship I am seeking  
Is relationship with God.  
The God of relationship - the Trinity -  
Reaches out in love  
And creates, redeems, sanctifies,  
Calls into relationship.

This God, this Trinity,  
Calls me into relationship with Godself.

I am stunned.  
I stop trying to work it all out  
And just enjoy revisiting the realisation:  
God calls me into relationship  
With other people,  
With all of creation,  
With myself  
And with the Trinitarian God.

Margaret Butler OP

You are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you,

he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you. ... For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry "Abba!, Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ - if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:9-17. NRSV

## TRINITY

*Trish McBride*

I was quite small when I first met, so to speak, the Blessed Trinity. Six or seven, probably, and in the Penny Catechism. 'How many persons are there in God?' 'There are three persons in God.' 'Who are the three persons in God?' 'The three persons in God are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, known as the Blessed Trinity.' 'How can we understand the Blessed Trinity?' 'We cannot understand the Blessed Trinity - this is a mystery of our Faith.'

'Don't tangle with this' was the message. That would be a sin of arrogant presumption. The Trinity is out there somewhere. Just believe it! No answers this side of heaven. And so the theory was instilled. You can't understand It but believe It anyway. That was Tertullian's 'one substance, three persons'!

As an adult reading theology, trying to make experiential sense of this religion of mine (because if it didn't, what was the use of it all?) I met the Augustinian explanation. God the Father, the First Person of the Blessed Trinity, knew himself so profoundly that the Son, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, was generated by/from this knowledge from all eternity, and eventually became man in the person of Jesus. And, the story went, the love between the Father and the Son was so intense that this 'became' the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. A Community of three consubstantial co-equal Persons bound together in one will by their mutual love. It all sounded logical enough, even if it didn't feel like it had very much to do with me.

Then came a period of metaphors. Most folk have heard of St Patrick's sermon on

the Trinity, using a shamrock leaf to illustrate the message of three distinct persons with one shared life. Into my ponderings around this came other images. How about a plait of three gold threads - three in one, just like they said, and one strand looped down to thread the beads of our hollow humanity and bind us into the being of the Godhead. I was quite proud of that one! Less fanciful was the image of the three forms of H<sub>2</sub>O: I could equate the Father with water, as the essence and giver of all life, the Spirit with steam: airy, unfathomable breath, ever present, but only visible on frosty mornings. And Jesus, well, he was the ice. No analogy is perfect, and I had to disregard the temperature of a block of ice. But he was the holdable, touchable, solid form of God. 'Something which has existed since the beginning... which we have touched with our own hands.'

During a lengthy charismatic phase, I learnt to pray to all three members of the Trinity in different ways. It certainly felt more even-handed than giving one of them, or even two all the attention. The indwelling Spirit, received in Baptism we were now told, not simply at confirmation, was invited to manifest His power in our lives. And He did - in ways that were sometimes awesome in their intensity, with physical sensations on occasion that shocked my faith into a new dimension. This God was too close, and far more involved in the nitty-gritty of our lives than I had ever imagined!

Later I came to understand the Spirit as the feminine principle of God, a role hitherto reserved for Mary. But with the post-Vatican II theological developments, she found herself firmly back in the human race. I can only imagine her relief! Given the Father and the Son, there just had to be

Somebody somewhere in whose image I was made! And all those wonderful 'feminine' gifts of the Spirit - now returned to sender, so to speak, the 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self control'. It was obvious to me that the Spirit was indeed She. I began to get very uptight when I heard the Spirit referred to as He, and when I realised that yet-another generation of little girls was learning subliminally through the language of the mass that God is 'like them' and 'not like us'.

describing a God that women can feel at one with, as men must be able to do with the Father. A recognition that all God-language is of necessity metaphor. As Augustine said, 'If you think you have understood God, what you have understood is not God'.

And then this year, a researcher who has been exploring the spiritual journeys of many New Zealanders asked me that most deceptively simple of questions. 'How do you know there's a God? How do **you** know there is a God?' How indeed? And

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## Life-Giver. Pain-Bearer. Love-Maker

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Later again, as I was becoming disillusioned with the male God as presented by the Church, Sandra Schneiders' description of the Trinity as 'more than two men and a bird' touched a deep chord. Theologically, clergy I talked to were really ready to admit that God was beyond gender, but many were fixated on how saying 'She' would be just as inaccurate. This ignored altogether the problem of the inaccuracy of 'He'. Why should one inaccuracy be used 97% of the time? That is just the way it is! I honour those who see, understand and make the effort.

An exultant 'YES' to Jim Cotter's original naming in his magnificent reworking of the Lord's Prayer: Life-Giver, Pain-Bearer, Love-Maker. And to the somewhat censored version used in the New Zealand Anglican Prayer-Book: Earth-Maker, Pain-Bearer, Life-Giver. That felt like getting somewhere.

Elizabeth Johnson's book, *She Who Is*, filled a great hunger. A work of profound theological/theological significance

the experiences of over half a century, a kaleidoscopic cloud of witnesses whirled around me, and settled into a shape that I could begin to put into words. I know there's a God when I look at the stars, at a silver snail-trail in the morning sun, and at the self-sown white lily flowering amidst my red carpet rose. That is transcendence. I know there's a God when I look within, and Someone is bringing wholeness, giving strength, leaping joyously in whatever creativity I discover, and according to the promise in John 16, leading me into all truth. That is immanence. I know God in my relationships. God is love. God 'happens' when I cry and someone holds me, when I laugh with a friend, when our compassion is stirred for each other or someone else. That is the God between.

That's - that's three ways - wait a minute - why does that sound familiar? Could there be some trinitarian connection? A ReWorded Trinity? Is that what it is? Easy enough to see the Creator connection - then the Spirit at work within, in Quaker language, the Inner Light, 'that of God in

everyone'. And yes, there is my Friend Jesus at work in and through others, affirming, encouraging, present in the deaths and resurrections of our lives just as he was in the gospel stories. A flood of recognition, of relief! Maybe The Blessed Trinity is not so mysterious after all! 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.' Is that the most profound trinitarian statement of them all? The actuality of where we are, how we are and who we are - all inextricably interwoven with God-presence.

Oh my God! Oh my, God! Oh, **my** God!

It was one of those extraordinary homecoming moments described so

succinctly by TS Eliot in Little Gidding: 'And the end of our exploring/ Will be to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time'.

Then I was able to name the different approaches as the old 'descending theology' and the newer 'ascending theology'. It depends which end of the telescope you look through! And a sadness! Knowing God, and **knowing** that we know God is our birth-right. These are such simple ways that we can begin to recognise the God who is so intimately concerned with each one of us. Why did they make it sound so complicated?

1998

**It is only from the  
perspective of the  
trinitarian God that we can  
claim that "God is Love",  
because love is never alone.  
Instead, it brings together  
those who are separate  
while maintaining their  
distinct characters.  
From the perspective of  
the triune God,  
one can say, along with  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer,  
"Only a suffering God can help."  
The God who is with us and  
for us in his suffering love  
can understand us  
and redeem us.**

*Jurgen Moltmann* recent sermon

# TRINITY SUNDAY

## 2 Corinthians 13:5-14

*Warren Deason*

Today many traditions within the Christian church celebrate Trinity Sunday, as someone said, the only major church festival that celebrates a doctrine rather than an event. If ever there was a doctrine about which there has been constant argument and discussion, it would be the doctrine of the Trinity. If, like me, you grew up within the church, you will have at some time been subjected to all sorts of illustrations to try to explain what seems to many a totally impenetrable dogma. You will have heard about three-leafed shamrocks, water in three forms: ice, liquid and steam and even more inventive attempts, which to the adolescent mind sometimes smacked of desperation. You may have given up on the doctrine altogether saying that the mathematics of it were simply beyond you or decided it's just a mystery and treat it as you might the engine of your car. As long as it gets you somewhere you leave it to others (theologians) to work out what's going on under the bonnet.

But it's this "getting you somewhere" which I think is very important. The Trinity is often presented as some sort of abstract idea - an insight into the inner workings of God that don't have much to do with us. But today I want to suggest that we ponder the thought that this particular understanding of God didn't just arise from groups of bored theologians with nothing better to do, but was at the heart of the Christian community's reflection on their experience of the God they met in Jesus and who indwelt them in the Spirit. I've often thought that if I were asked to

give a simple statement of faith then I would choose Paul's' concluding blessing in the reading this morning. I believe in "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit..." or as Eugene Peterson paraphrases it in *The Message*:

"The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you."

I don't know whether Paul had any particular understanding of Trinity in mind in these words but for me, he expressed something quite profound. He's offering us not an abstract idea, but a way of experiencing God as a Trinity of sorts: the God of grace, the God of love, and the God of fellowship (communion). It's saying that this God we meet in Christ is relational, this God seeks relationship with us, to be a reality in our life and experience. That's why it is so appropriate that Paul should bless his readers in the way that he does. It lies at the heart of Christian life and worship rather than being a subject of abstract discussion.

So this morning we might take time to reflect on this blessing, and each of these three words: grace, love and fellowship as ways that our relational God meets us.

1. **"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ..."**  
Grace, amazing grace, we meet in the visible expression of God with us, Jesus of Nazareth. Our experience of the compassionate one, the one who meets us in the midst of whatever place of doubt or desperation we find ourselves. The one who challenges our way of looking at others and ourselves, who seeks to drag us from the relentless treadmill of attempting to

perfect ourselves and simply love us into change.

Grace is speaking of God as the one who gives more than we expect. Grace always suggests abundance and even extravagance. More, much more than we deserve. Perhaps even, as one writer suggested, Trinity was simply another way of our expressing this abundant and extravagant way of God's being and relating and creating that we experienced.

(As if to underline this, One Jewish writer speaking out of the Jewish mystical tradition and reflecting on the Christian Trinitarian understanding of God, asked why Christians stop at three? Surely God is worthy of even greater numerical abundance!!)

2. **"The love of God..."** Love is at the heart of God, as we know. John (in his epistle) even goes so far as to say that God is Love. To say that is to say that God is God-in-relationship, for how can there be relationship without another: one to whom we show love? One early theologian spoke of the way that this inner relational dynamic of love at the heart of the community of the Trinity somehow actually spills over into our lives.

This love is a creating love, a healing and restoring love, and a love that forms and shapes all that is and whose presence still fills it. But it is a love that has uncomfortable edges, a love that fuels a passion for justice in the world. When love looks on the exploited and abused it seeks justice for them. If God is relational then God desires reconciliation and resolution for those who are alienated.

For Christians this love is also a suffering love. Many artistic representations of the Trinity include the crucified Christ: the Father embraces the crucified Son and the Spirit wings its way upward. So suffering has been taken into the very heart of the community of God and it made me see those final words of Jesus on the cross in a whole new way: "Father into your hands I commend my Spirit!"

3. **"The fellowship of the Holy Spirit..."** If God is God above us, and if God is God with us, alongside us, God is also God *within* us. We enjoy the fellowship or as Eugene Peterson says, "the intimate friendship" of God. We can know the constant inner companionship of God. We become the dwelling place of God. We both find our home in God as God makes a home within us. We are invited over a lifetime's journey to go deeper in the very source of our life and being. A journey that underpins all that we seek to be as we live out the gospel in the world.

The word fellowship implies community and in recent times some have challenged the view of trinity as a cosy domestic arrangement akin to an elderly man, his bachelor son and a budgie. A friend suggested to me that this reminded him of the British comedy series *Steptoe and Son*, except in that case the budgie would be stuffed! This criticism challenges the way we see the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit as linear and hierarchical, a divine chain of command, a way of seeing God that some have used to justify their subordination of others (particularly women).

Instead, why not think of God as dynamic community - a circle of love. That's a way of seeing God that then provokes us to think of ourselves not as self-centred individuals seeking dominance and power over others, but as those who find ourselves, insofar as we relate to others, as equals. This challenges our selfish individualism without suppressing our individuality and reminds us of the Spirit's desire to create community: a community in which we ought to be most truly ourselves.

Finally, it also has great significance for our prayer. If God's being is a circle in which there

is a constant and vibrant exchange of love between the members of that being, then prayer is not so much petition aimed at a lone super-being but an invitation to enter into this exchange and current of love. So prayer for us is simply entering into this loving space, a posture that doesn't expect words but for which silence may be the best response we have.

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.**

## DISCUSSION STARTERS ON THE TRINITY

These questions work well in a small group setting.

1. What Biblical passages, images, metaphors or associated ideas of the Trinity are most meaningful to you at present?
2. In what ways have your life experiences shaped your view of the Trinity?
3. When did you begin to sense a differentiation in your experiences of God's threesomeness?
4. How does your understanding of the Trinity function in your journey of faith and life at present?
5. How do your Trinity experiences of God nourish your prayer life and faith?
6. How do your Trinity understanding and experiences affect your roles and leadership in your church or work?

## ST. PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE

I bind unto myself today  
The strong name of the Trinity,  
By invocation of the same,  
The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind this day to me for ever,  
By power of faith, Christ's Incarnation;  
His baptism in the Jordan River;  
His death on cross for my salvation;  
His bursting from the spiced tomb;  
His riding up the heavenly way;  
His coming at the day of doom;  
I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself the power  
Of the great love of the Cherubim;  
The sweet 'Well done' in judgment hour;  
The service of the Seraphim, Confessors'  
faith,  
Apostles' word, The Patriarchs' prayers,  
the Prophets' scrolls,  
All good deeds done unto the Lord,  
And purity of virgin souls.

I bind unto myself today  
The virtues of the starlit heaven,  
The glorious sun's life-giving ray,  
The whiteness of the moon at even,  
The flashing of the lightning free,  
The whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,  
The stable earth, the deep salt sea,  
Around the old eternal rocks.

I bind unto myself today  
The power of God to hold and lead,  
His eye to watch, His might to stay,  
His ear to hearken to my need.  
The wisdom of my God to teach,  
His hand to guide, His shield to ward,  
The word of God to give me speech,  
His heavenly host to be my guard.

Against the demon snares of sin,  
The vice that gives temptation force,  
The natural lusts that war within,  
The hostile men that mar my course;  
Or few or many, far or nigh,  
In every place and in all hours  
Against their fierce hostility,  
I bind to me these holy powers.

Against all Satan's spells and wiles,  
Against false words of heresy,  
Against the knowledge that defiles,  
Against the heart's idolatry,  
Against the wizard's evil craft,  
Against the death-wound and the  
burning,  
The choking wave and the poisoned  
shaft,  
Protect me, Christ, till thy returning.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me,  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the name,  
The strong name of the Trinity;  
By invocation of the same.  
The Three in One, and One in Three,  
Of whom all nature hath creation,  
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:  
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,  
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.

Written in the 8<sup>th</sup> Cent. but  
attributed to St Patrick (d. 493AD).

This translation is by  
Cecil F. Alexander, 1889



**Tavurvur Volcano, Rabaul,  
Papua New Guinea**

One of the most primal activities from the core of the earth.  
Similarly, the loving relationship of the Trinity is  
primordial, from the heart of God.

Photo by Andrew Dunn, 2008

### *Andrew Pritchard*

Recently I have been reflecting on John of the Cross' powerful image of spiritual transformation and union with God ... the log of wood that gradually becomes transformed through being immersed in the fire and at last takes on the fire's own properties. For me this was, and is, a personal pondering, a wondering about my life and how it is being transformed. As I turn my attention to writing this column today though, I wonder how the image might be relevant and inform our thinking about this mysterious and wonderful collection of people and relationships that is Spiritual Growth Ministries? Do we recognise that God has an interest in refining and transforming groups and organisations as well as individuals?

Some aspects of change for SGM that come to mind are:

Renewal as some retreats, workshops, quiet days are discontinued and new ones are offered. As some area representatives, facilitators, directors, supervisors move or take a break and others emerge. After several years of promoting the work of SGM at Parachute Music Festival, Workgroup decided at the March meeting that we would not continue this in 2009 but see if other opportunities emerge for raising awareness of who we are and what we are about as an organisation.

Ebbs and flows in numbers attending events offered through the programme. There is always some variation and we don't always receive feedback on all events but attendance at 2007 events was encouraging. By contrast, after several years of high enrolments in the Spiritual

Directors' Formation Programme the 2008 intake is significantly smaller than the norm. We are not discouraged by this, rather seeing it as an encouragement to openness to God and expectation for what lies ahead. It provides an ideal opportunity too to review the programme. We are aware that while most graduates of the programme continue to work as directors in the usual one-on-one setting, there are a significant minority who also apply what they have gained in broader contexts - in chaplaincy, spiritual formation groups or pastoral care contexts for example. This year as well as the regular 'fine tuning' of the programme we will be considering whether we can better prepare those who complete the programme knowing that their ministry will be in a broader context.

As I write, at least three workgroup members are, or are soon to be, overseas;

- Sue Pickering is having a well-deserved holiday in the UK where she will take the opportunity to catch-up with people involved with the publication of her second book due out before too long.
- Our congratulations and best wishes are with David Crawley and Sarah Penwarden as they travel to the UK for their wedding in July before returning to NZ for the New Zealand celebration!
- Mike Wright is travelling to Europe for study leave from his position as a tertiary chaplain, returning just in time to be on the team for the Formation Programme 'Waikanae Week'.

And so to all who read this column - thank-you for your continued involvement and support in the work of Spiritual Growth Ministries. May this winter bring ongoing transformation for each of us.

# Threefold God

Words - Bill Wallace  
 Music - Peter J. Atkinson

1. 5 O three fold God of ten - der u - ni -  
 2. O blaze of ra - dience, source of light that  
 3. Most lov - ing Pa - rent, Child of joys and  
 4. In ev - ry make - ing, each cre - a - tive

Chords: D/C, G, G/B, C(♯d2), C/B

Lyrics: ty, blinds, pains, dream, fierce burn - ing Spi - rit cre - and in the

known fire ate - flow -

that binds and sets us in clear pro - plet - ic ing, life - force that su - ing of life's heal - ing

felt You ti - when

our in in and is

free, minds, stains, stream,

Chords: Am<sup>9</sup>, D/C, D(♯d2)/F<sup>♯</sup>, D/C

Grade 2/B

Em<sup>9</sup> D

lov - - ing grea - ter than our  
 my - - st'ry; yet wi - thin us  
 bene are lou - ches of Your  
 born or peo - ple re - con -

C<sup>(add2)</sup>

thought,  
 dwell,  
 hand  
 cled,

You are the  
 Life springs from  
 Your face we  
 we share Your

G/D

1, 5

my - st'ry found

D<sup>7</sup>sus<sup>4</sup>

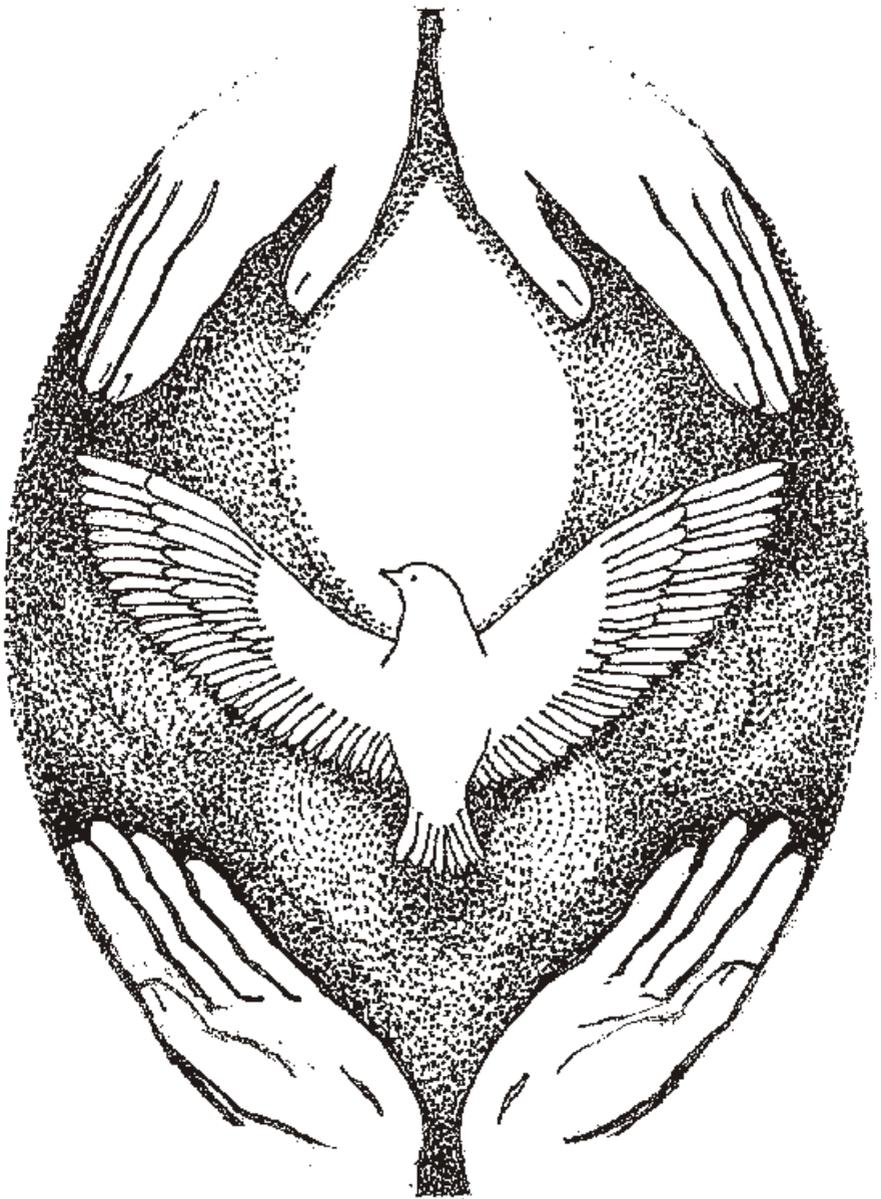
the my - st'ry

2 - 4

G

as in O  
 Pa - ter - n - dum, Spi - rit  
 li - ving air and  
 from a - ter - rent, Spi - rit

sought.  
 well.  
 land  
 Child.



Artist - Jo O'Hara

# RESOURCES

## JOURNALS

### Tui Motu - Interislands

An independent, Catholic monthly magazine published in Dunedin. It invites readers to contribute to its discussion of spiritual and social issues in the light of Gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-church and inter-faith dialogue is welcomed. Details at [www.tuimotu.org](http://www.tuimotu.org)

## WEBSITES

Websites featuring Trinity material abound. Google and Yahoo search engines unearth them. A search of the term "Filioque" illustrates the power of Trinitarian disputes and their impact on the Church worldwide.

## CDS

### The Divine Dance: Exploring the Mystery of Trinity

4 CDs by Richard Rohr.

Available from Pleroma Books, [www.pleroma.org.nz](http://www.pleroma.org.nz), \$84.99.

*Reviewed by Andrew Pritchard*

This set of four CDs records talks that Richard Rohr, O.F.M. gave, first at an International Conference on Religious Education which he subsequently later expanded in a series of three addresses a year later. It is presented with the gentle, inviting and stimulating style that those

who have heard Richard's presentations before will be used to.

Rohr recounts how he was unexpectedly attracted to a book in the monastery library as he was ending an extended retreat. He had gone into the library to read over his journal of the preceding days, but found himself drawn to a book that was lying on the table - Catherine LaCugna's, '*God For Us The Trinity and Christian Life*'. (<https://www.goodbooksnz.co.nz/book/US-9780060649135> to a source for this and other books, priced in NZD with profits going to Oxfam)

As he began to read Richard was drawn into the book which began to resonate deeply for him. Perhaps it was this that prompts him to introduce these talks with, '*My desire is that something I say during this time could resonate with your own experience and you could say "I know that, to be true for myself! ... (that it) moves from the level of dogma to the level of experience."*'

Rohr's hope is that his talks will be '*Akin more to a meditation than a lecture*' - that hope is certainly being fulfilled for me. I say 'being' intentionally. There is some three and a half hours listening on these four CDs and I find that repeated contemplative listenings are well worthwhile. Since I've had my set I have spent many enjoyable hours pottering in my shed in the presence of Richard and God!

CD 1 is the original talk, being an introduction and overview that introduces major ideas and themes. For example:

- The derivation of the metaphor of dancing from the word *perichorisis*,

used by 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Century Greek Fathers in relation to trinity. *Perichorisis* is best translated Rohr says by the word *dancing* = a flow like a dance, where God is not the dancer but the dance itself.

- The invitation to participatory knowing - not knowing about the trinity, but participatory experience in the life of trinity.

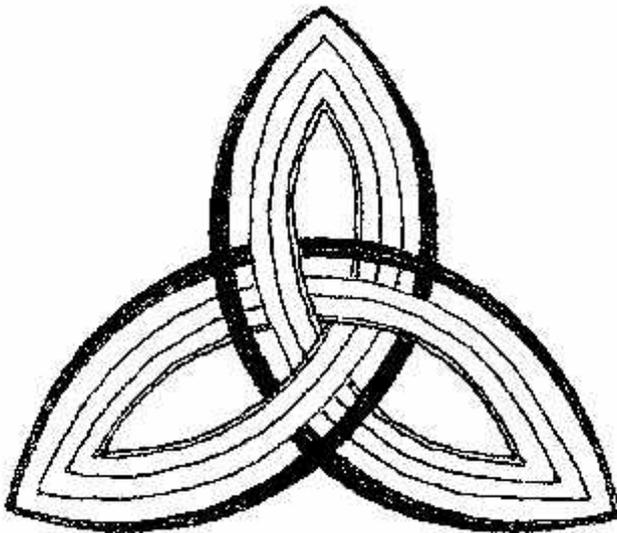
In CD 2 Rohr develops the argument that the usual pattern of beginning with the unity of one God who is seen as three in the trinity involves difficult “mental gymnastics”. Only, Rohr says, as we begin with the three engaged in full self-giving, communion and community do we begin to really encounter the one God. The remainder of CD 2 then examines trinity and the dance with the perspective of God

is Father, CD 3 with the perspective of God is Jesus and CD 4 with the perspective of God is Spirit.

Because the talks were originally given to two different audiences at different times there is some repetition between CD1 and the remaining 3 CDs. Rather than being off-putting however, I found it helpful to hear the material repeated and aspects introduced in CD 1 expanded and developed in later CDs.

Rohr's approach stimulates the listener's reflection and interaction. He invites response in our communication and relationship with God.

Highly recommended for those who want 'to grow towards' an understanding of trinity.



## BOOKS

Lynne M. Baab. *Sabbath Keeping: finding freedom in the rhythms of rest.* Intervarsity Press. \$24.99.

William Barry. *God and You - Prayer as Personal Relationship.* Ave Maria Press. 1987. pp83.

Myra Blyth. *Celebrating the Trinity.* Grove Books. S84. 2003.

Tony Campolo and Malry Albert Darling. *The God of Intimacy and Action: Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism and Justice.* Wiley San Francisco. 2007. pp229.

Joy Cowley and Terry Coles. *Come and See.* Joy's latest book of meditation with Terry's photographs which lead us to Jesus. 2008.144 pp. \$25.00.

Michael Downey. *Altogether Gift - a Trinitarian Spirituality.* Orbis Books 2002.

Kevin Giles. *Jesus And The Father.* Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity. Zondervan. 2006.

Colin Gunton. *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology.* T & T Clark. 1997.

James Houston. *The Holy Spirit in Contemporary Spirituality.* Grove Books No. 47. 1993.

Elizabeth Johnston. *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God.* Continuum, New York. 2008. pp234.

Alvin Kimmel. Ed. *Speaking The Christian God.* The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism. Eerdmans 1992.

Alister McGrath. *Understanding The Trinity.* Kingsway Pub. 1990.

Philip Sheldrake. *The New SCM Dictionary Of Christian Spirituality.* SCM Press. 2005. pp680. \$150.00.

Karen E. Smith. *Christian Spirituality.* SCM Core Text. SCM Press. 2007.

Mother Teresa. *Come Be My Light.* The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta. Doubleday. 2007. pp404.

Benedicta Ward & Ralph Waller. Ed's. *Joy of Heaven Springs of Christian Spirituality.* SPCK. 2003.

Heather Webb. *Small Group Leadership as Spiritual Direction.* Zondervan. 2005. pp137.

John Zizioulas. *Being as Communion.* Studies in Personhood and Church. St Vladimir's Seminary Press. 1985.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality**

Edited by Philip Sheldrake. London, SCM Press, 2005.

(Published in the USA as **The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality**)

*Reviewed by Warren Deason*

Those of you, who like me have had a copy of the 1983 edition of *The Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* sitting on your shelves as a valued reference companion, will welcome *The New SCM Dictionary of Christianity Spirituality*. This new Dictionary similarly begins with *Abandonment* and ends with *Zen (and Christianity)* but with a further 200 articles in between with a total length of almost 700 pages.

Some entries in the 1983 edition do not feature in the new dictionary but bearing in mind the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many new articles have appeared. Philip Sheldrake, currently William Leech Professorial Fellow of Applied Theology at the University of Durham, who edits the new dictionary, notes that there has been a profound shift in the last twenty years to an understanding of spirituality that is much more holistic - that is, one which embraces the whole of human life and experience. So it's not surprising to find articles on business and spirituality, music and spirituality, sexuality, leisure, clothes and food.

The dictionary is also more conversant than its predecessor with the world of contemporary culture, arts, literature and film. I was initially surprised to find no

entry for *Mysticism* until I discovered that mysticism along with twelve other issues are treated to more lengthy and expanded discussions as a preface to the dictionary. For example, Sandra Schnieders contributes a thoughtful essay on definition, methods and types of Christian spirituality.

The contributors are drawn from a broad spectrum of the Christian tradition and those of you who have parochial interests will welcome entries on *Australasian spirituality* by Australian Jesuit Andrew Hamilton and *Devotions* from Anne Gilroy from the University of Auckland. This dictionary is a thorough and invaluable volume of relevance to any one interested in the Christian spiritual tradition. The editor has deliberately refrained from a broad generic approach to Spirituality rightly maintaining the particularity of historical-cultural contexts.

Those of you who are frugal about your book budget may balk at the NZ price of some \$150. I discovered that if you order the American Westminster Press edition from Amazon.com, you could have it for around \$60 (NZ) including P&P!

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### **A Religious Atheist? Critical Essays on the Work of Lloyd Geering**

Edited by Raymond Pelly & Peter Stuart  
Published by Otago University Press  
2006

*Reviewed by Lionel Brown*

This book is a compilation of essays written by a number of scholars analysing Lloyd Geering's work. Following an

introduction by the editors the book is divided into three parts:

Part 1 Perspective Raymond Pelly examines Geering's methodology in particular his limited vocabulary and his scientific rationalism which has little use for poetry, metaphor, myth and symbol as other methods of truth telling.

Part 2 Fundamentals refers to the main three pillars of Geering's writings:

- His dependence on writers like Feuerbach and Freud to prove that beliefs are human projections.
- His development of the idea that history since the 18th Century Enlightenment has culminated in a global secular world dominated by scientific rationalism.
- His denial of the resurrection and immortality together with other supernatural facets of Christianity.

Kai Man Kwan, Christopher Lewis and Christopher Marshall examine one topic each.

Part 3 Specifics: In this section a number of writers deal with various issues raised in Geering's writings.

- John Bishop looks at his non-realist understanding of God.
- Gregory Dawes analyses his use of Feuerbach's writings as they relate to the use of religious language.
- Neil Darragh takes a look at Geering's view that the world is getting better.
- Ken Booth examines the question of the Church, worship, prayer and spirituality.
- Peter Donovan searches for a mystical side to his work.
- Paul Morris, a practising Jew, examines Geering's view of Judaism.

This is a significant book because it is not written from one point of view. The writers have been given the freedom to write from their perspective. The result is a carefully reasoned set of essays which well repay the effort taken to read them.

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***Reflect: Collected columns***  
**by John North**

Published privately by John North  
NZ\$15.00, and available from the author  
at 61A Diamond Ave, Spreydon  
Christchurch, 8002.

*Reviewed by Sheila Pritchard*

This 212 page book is a collection of the columns Rev John North wrote for the *NZ Baptist* magazine between 1992 and 2005 (Published 2007).

John North will be well known to some *Refresh* readers as a past SGM Workgroup member, a Baptist minister and a spiritual director.

*Reflect* is a perfect title! I felt I was sharing in John's reflections on a very wide range of topics and his reflections spurred my own. There's humour, serious theology, contemplative delight and a range of references to books, poetry, art and music.

The columns have been grouped into 11 sections with a common theme: *Prayer, Worship, The World Around Us, The New Year, Easter, Christmas, The Church, The Power of Nature, The Bible, The Christian Life, Put it Together with Faith.*

I have found this a wonderful book to "dip into". Each column is, of course, complete in itself so there is no need to read the book from beginning to end. The topic headings are helpful if the reader wants to reflect on a particular theme. But I've enjoyed

browsing and letting a particular heading catch my eye to draw me in.

Writing a monthly column for such a long period of time is no easy assignment! John's columns are always related to everyday life and current issues. There is no ivory tower speculation here. Even though some were obviously written quite a few years ago I didn't find that that made any of them redundant or irrelevant.

The final chapter *Putting it Together with Faith* is the text of a message given to graduating ministers in 1980. It is longer than the columns and a fitting conclusion to the book. It is just as relevant today as it was then and not only for ministers!

I recommend this as a book to keep by your bed or on your coffee table. A few minutes to read a column could provide enough to chew on for the whole day.

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## **A Brief History of Spirituality**

by Philip Sheldrake (Blackwell, 2007)

*Reviewed by Paul Cowpertwait*

Philip Sheldrake's book outlines the development of spirituality, progressing mainly in a chronological order from the writers of the New Testament to the present day. The book is concerned only with Christian spirituality, noting (on p3) that the word 'spiritual' essentially has New Testament roots associated with the letters of St Paul. However, in my view, the book is not narrow and Sheldrake does a superb job of weaving cultural influences, historical events, and the developing theology, into a rich story, which helps us understand why certain spiritual ways of life came about.

The writing style is clear and concise,

fortunately lacking in technical jargon. Sheldrake is authoritative and obviously an expert in the field (although I did disagree with his rather too certain statement in my view that not all the letters ascribed to St Paul were written by him -- see, for example, Bartholomew's discussion on p210 in "*Uncertain Belief*", Oxford University Press). The book is divided into sections that can be read relatively easily in one go, making the book one that can be "dipped into". Notes are placed at the end of the book, which also makes reading easier.

The book is divided into six chapters, which briefly cover: the foundations and early church, including Origen, Augustine, and theories of spirituality, such as the concept of the 'journey' (1); the monastic movement, including the desert fathers, monastic rules, Eastern orthodox spirituality (2); urban spirituality and the renaissance, including the construction of cathedrals and the development of universities, the mendicant movement e.g. as initiated by St Francis (3); the reformation period, including Calvin's reformed spirituality, Anglican spirituality, Ignatian meditation (4); the Age of Reason (5); to postmodern spirituality, including the influence of Evelyn Underhill, Bonhoeffer, and Merton, and sections on Taize, the retreat movement, and the charismatic movement (6).

None of the above topics are covered in great detail (the book is only about 200 pages long, and is of compact size), but the topics are covered in sufficient detail to give the reader a good overview of how the church has developed from a spiritual perspective. The reader can draw on the extensive and up-to-date bibliography at

the end of the book should they want to study any of the topics further.

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## **The Little Book of Contemplative Photography**

Howard Zehr

Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005,

82 pp \$10.00

ISBN : 1-56148-457-1

*Reviewed by Sue Pickering*

Perhaps better known for his major contribution to Restorative Justice, Howard Zehr, in this small but sensitive book, invites us to approach photography from a contemplative stance rather than with the aggressive approach highlighted by contemporary paparazzi who 'capture' and 'shoot' images often without permission or consideration. A small personal story may illustrate this transition:

A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of rattling around on the back of an old tractor, past quake-formed cliffs, along the shingled-beach and through the ebbing waves on the way to the colony of gannets at Cape Kidnapper. We walked the last twenty minutes uphill with anticipation and we were not disappointed: on the headland, less than a metre away from us, were hundreds of gannets newish fluffy chicks, strutting but earth-bound adolescents testing their wobbly wings, and adults flying, landing, flying, wheeling, circling ... it was, to borrow a phrase from today's youth, 'cool'.

So what did I do? I tried to capture some of the action with my too slow camera and found myself caught between fascination and frustration until I stopped and thought about what I was doing and why I was there. Then I began to 'pay close attention', to contemplate and see the little struggles and dramas, the jostling for places, the demands for food from urgent

youngsters, the occasional mistimed landings and resulting squawks, the demonstrations of affection between bill-banging, head-dipping dancing pairs and the effortless grace of the wide wing-spanned adults. I began to let the images come to me, instead of the other way round. This shift in approach is what *The Little Book of Contemplative Photography* is all about.

For Zehr, photography can be an entry to meditation, a spiritual discipline, as we slow down and change our approach from 'taking' to 'receiving' a photograph. By offering practical exercises and succinct descriptions of key elements of photography, he helps us develop or 'tune up' our eyes so we may begin to see more clearly the heart of our subjects. Chapter headings give us a glimpse of riches to come: 'Changing our Lens', 'Practising Mindfulness', 'An Attitude of Wonder', 'Seeing the Light', 'Exploring Metaphor', 'Making Meaning', 'With Respect and Humility'. Look for example, at a small portion of a revealing comparison between the dominant approach to photography and Zehr's contemplative approach, found on page 17 of his book:

### **Photography as taking**

Images *taken*

Images as *booty*

Camera as *weapon*

Photography as *conquest*

Subject as an *object*

Exclusive focus on *final product*

### **Photography as receiving**

Images *received*

Images as *gifts*

Camera as a *receiver*

Photography as *contemplation*

Subject as *co-creator, collaborator*

*Process important*

Enhancing Zehr's practical but thought-provoking text are quotes from some who have already 'changed their lens', photographers who know the wisdom of waiting and welcoming an image and who, with Zehr, encourage us to try this for ourselves.

This book both invites and challenges, delights and dares us to integrate our contemplative spirituality into our daily life. Next time you're out there with your digital camera, take a moment to 'contemplate', to take, in Burghardt's words, 'a long loving look at the real', and receive what is given with humility and gratitude.

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**Chrysalis: the hidden  
transformation in the journey of  
faith**

By Alan Jamieson

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007,

119 pages

*Reveiwed by Andrew Pritchard*

In his opening chapter Alan says, 'This book is a practical book. It is an easy read ... that opens up insights about the difficult phases of Christian faith, using the life cycle of the caterpillar as a metaphor for our own journeys.'

The book then has several chapters that each examine a particular phase of the caterpillar-butterfly journey, developing parallels with stages on the spiritual journey. Chapter ten then looks back over the transforming journey as a whole. For some people the multiple metaphors and analogies that Alan uses will be most helpful; for me there were one or two occasions where I found multiple metaphors used to describe the same

phase of transformation mildly distracting.

The final two chapters *Monarch Waystations* and *Butterfly House* focus on Churches, faith communities, individuals or groups as they give support and care to people in the process of transformation.

My two favorite chapters? Chapters six and nine. Chapter six *Being Alongside*, tucked in the middle of various stages of growth and transformation, emphasizes the value of small groups, Spiritual Direction, wise friends and unexpected companions. This chapter closes with a wonderful section on listening - would that all of us who accompany others would read and embody this again and again. Chapter nine, *Butterfly Effect* focuses helpfully on prayer, not techniques or styles, but inner attitudes and values of prayer appropriate to the emerged butterfly.

Alan wrote this book first for people making sense of their own journeys and then for those who may accompany them - pastors, ministers, spiritual directors and church leaders.

The chapters are short and well focused. They invite reflection and pondering of the material rather than being a quick read. I can see many spiritual directors and pastors wanting to read this book and have it to lend, at appropriate times, to those they accompany.

\$30.00 including postage in NZ, and is available from Portland Trust. Email [aj@portland.org.nz](mailto:aj@portland.org.nz)



## ***SPIRITUAL GROWTH MINISTRIES TRUST***

### **Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme 2009 - 2010**

This comprehensive and proven, 2 year part-time course is open to mature Christians of any denomination. Details of some exciting developments currently being explored, will be available on application.

The course offers:

- Systematic study of spiritual direction
- Regular workshops conducted by an ecumenical team of qualified leaders
- Supervised practical experience

For details contact the Co-ordinator:

Rev. Sue Pickering,

83 Vivian St, New Plymouth

Ph/fax ( 06 ) 759 2331. E.mail : [sgmtp@xtra.co.nz](mailto:sgmtp@xtra.co.nz)

or visit our website : <http://www.sgm.org.nz>

**Applications due by 20<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2008**

Early applications are appreciated. Late applications may be accepted.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Peter Atkinson is a member of Albany Presbyterian Church.

Lionel Brown is Area Chaplain for Canterbury in the New Zealand Order of St Luke.

Kees Bruin is a Christchurch artist. He trained at the Canterbury School of Fine Arts and works as a visual realist.

Margaret Butler OP works at the Catholic Education Centre in Wellington.

Neil Churcher is a “retired” Presbyterian minister, spiritual director and supervisor who loves living in Dunedin and still occasionally enjoys the challenge of leading worship.

Paul Cowpewart lectures in statistics at the Albany campus of Massey University.

Nicola Hoggard Creegan lectures in theology at the Bible College of New Zealand. She is interested in ecotheology, and writes on issues at the interface between theology and science.

Warren Deason is a pastor of Albany Presbyterian Church.

Andrew Dunn lives and works at Oasis Retreat and Study Centre, Albany.

Phil Dyer is Warden of Houchen House Retreat Centre, Hamilton.

Paul Fromont lives in Cambridge but wanders via the spiritual discipline of blogging. He can be accompanied at <http://prodigal.typepad.com>

Kevin Giles has been an Anglican Rector in Australia for most of his working life. He now writes, lectures and helps in the parish he attends.

Kathy Hughes loves poetry, gardening, walking in the hills, playing and watching people discover God loves them besottedly and doesn't have a big stick after all.

John Hunt is a minister of St Giles Presbyterian Church, Papanui.

Trish McBride is a Wellington spiritual director, writer, grandmother, and chaplain in a mental health context. She is particularly interested in the spiritual journeys and God-images of older women. Her article was first published in *Tui Motu* and is included in her book *Faith Evolving: A Patchwork Journey* (2005, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2007).

Sue Pickering leads SGM's Spiritual Direction Formation Programme and is a spiritual director, supervisor and writer and lives in New Plymouth.

Andrew Pritchard is Convenor of SGM, a self-employed spiritual director, supervisor and teacher, and lives in Shalom Christian Community on the Kapiti Coast and relaxes by pottering in his shed and playing golf.

Sheila Pritchard enjoys a self-employed lifestyle offering spiritual direction, supervision and retreats, with seminars and some teaching, and enjoys walking the North Shore beaches.

Kathleen Rushton of Nga Whaea Atawhai Sisters of Mercy lives in Christchurch where she works in Scripture and Theology.

Brian Smith served with the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society in north-east India for 15 years, then was a lecturer in the Baptist Theological College becoming Principal in 1984, retiring 1997.

Derek Tovey is a lecturer in New Testament at St John's College, Auckland, and within the School of Theology, University of Auckland. The Gospel of John is his main area of research interest.

Andrew Shepherd does contract teaching for various educational and training organisations and is currently working on a PhD in Theology through the University of Otago.

Bill Wallace is an internationally published hymn writer and retired Methodist Minister who lives in Christchurch.

**Jesus drew near and said to them,**

**“I have been given all authority  
in heaven and on earth.**

**Go, then, to all peoples everywhere  
and make them my disciples:  
baptize them in the name of  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
and teach them to obey everything  
I have commanded you.  
And I will be with you always,  
to the end of the age.”**

**Matthew 28:18-20**

**Good News Bible.**

**“Thankyou” to all who have contributed to this issue.**

**The Summer 2008-2009 theme will be *Ecology and Spirituality* and  
we are interested in articles, verse and photographs on this theme for consideration.  
Send it to the Editor.**

**The amazing grace  
of the Master,  
Jesus Christ,  
the extravagant love of God,  
the intimate friendship  
of the Holy Spirit,  
be with all of you.**

2 Corinthians 13:13.  
The Message.