

The doctrine of the Trinity, simply stated: **There is One God and this One God is known to us as three “Persons,” classically known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.** (And, by the way, this doctrine is too ancient, and *too* classic, to reduce to “politically correct” but theologically insufficient terms such as “Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.”) The three Persons of the Trinity are equally God, “co-equal and co-eternal,” as the ancient Athanasian Creed puts it. One is not more divine than another. One is not subordinated to any other.

But hold it a minute. Do we really want to reduce God to two things many of us like to avoid – ***theological jargon*** and ***mathematics***? Do we really want to define God with technical terms? It seems to me the question for us today is: ***“Do we still need the doctrine of the Trinity?”***

Obviously, in one sense we do – it’s who God *is*, whether we’re comfortable with it or not. But what about this peculiar doctrine that manages to combine the inadequacy of human language with an attempt to explain the unexplainable? Do we want to use terms in making this attempt that puzzle us perhaps even more than we were already puzzled? Words with very philosophical meanings: ***Substance, Person, Co-eternal?***

More disturbingly, the doctrine of the Trinity seems to attempt to describe the inner life of God – the *relationship* of the three Persons, in themselves, one to another – and this is something we mortals really don’t know anything about and, even if we *could* know about it, we don’t see how it could affect us. So, the question remains: ***Do we still need the doctrine of the Trinity?***

Before we dispense with the doctrine altogether, we really ought to look at the Bible. Naturally, the passages of Scripture which best relate to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity are those appointed for this feast of Trinity Sunday. For instance, we just heard St. Paul assure the Romans that when they cry out to God, “Abba, Father!” it is the Holy Spirit bearing witness that we are children of God and joint heirs with the Son of God, the Christ. The Spirit bears witness to our kinship with the Father and our fraternity with the Son.

Similarly, our reading from John's Gospel combines the Spirit who births us into the kingdom of God, with the Son of Man who descended from heaven, with the God who loved the world so much that he gave his only Son.

Granted, the connections between Father, Son and Spirit are not very clear or very close in these passages. In fact, all three Persons never even manage to fit into the same sentence. The lessons appointed for other years in our lectionary are much tidier in this respect. For example, the Epistle for year A closes with the splendid conclusion of Second Corinthians: **"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you."** Here we have Jesus Christ, God and Holy Spirit all together in one breath.

The Gospel for year A is the Great Commission from St. Matthew and this reading is as "Trinitarian" as the Bible ever gets. The risen Christ directs the Eleven to **"go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** However, the theologians would say that even this last passage is not, strictly speaking, Trinitarian but merely "triadic." In other words, the three names – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are mentioned, but nothing is said about their *relationship*. Nothing about "three in one" or "one in three." Nothing about God in three Persons.

The word "Trinity," of course, never appears in the Bible. All of that language came a couple of centuries later. Nevertheless, I think that the doctrine of the Trinity is going to stay with us because it has a mystery of great importance to reveal to us, something more than just the inner workings of the divinity.

First of all, the doctrine states that we believe in a *personal God*. You won't find the phrase "personal God" in the Bible either, but that concept has emerged from the experience of believers over the centuries. Yes, we do believe in a personal God, for we believe in God in three **persons**. The word is carefully chosen. It means, above all, that God is cognizant of us and loves us. And it means that we are able to love God, intensely and wholeheartedly.

Second, the doctrine of the Trinity affirms that God does not exist in isolation. God is, if we can call God that, a *social God*. Even prior to the creation, God existed in relationship – **the** relationship. The relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit one to another. Since we are created in God's image, that means that *we are created for*

relationship as well. We become whole persons only in relationship to one another and to God.

Finally, we need to observe the traditional *language* about the Trinity (and this comes to us from the Athanasian Creed): The three Persons are **co-equal** and **co-eternal**. They exist in communion, in a mutual sharing of life. The Persons of the Trinity do not allow for inequality or domination or hierarchy. Our baptism into the Church in the name of the Trinity means that all of us, though irreducibly unique, exist together as equal partners in Christ in a relationship of mutual love.

So, do we still need the doctrine of the Trinity? We might just as well ask:

- Do we still need mutuality?
- Do we still need to be in relationship?
- Do we still need a personal God?
- Do we still need love?

If your answer to these questions is anything like mine, the answer is a resounding “yes.”