

THE TRINITY: AN IMAGE OF HOW LIFE COULD BE

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The Holy Trinity is one of the most perplexing ideas of the Christian faith. It is generally thought to be confusing to such an extent that many people who would say that they believe in God have given up this way of thinking about and experiencing God. In reality, many Christians have too. It is often thought to be 'pie-in-the-sky' drivel, something that only academics talk about that has no real impact on our lives. But it is a reality worth wrestling with.

When Western people think about God, whether we believe in one or not, the Trinity is generally seen as an optional extra. We talk about the Trinity after we have decided whether we believe in God or not. This is unfortunate because the Trinity is a uniquely Christian contribution to humanity's wrestling with the nature of God.

Part of the problem we have with the Trinity is that many people try and talk about God as if God is some sort of objective reality that we can sum up. Very often in this type of thinking there are a series of consequences for our thinking about God. God ends up being imaged as separate, isolated and distant from the universe, a self-contained entity. It is arguable that many of these concepts have their basis in ancient Greek philosophy rather than the Judeo-Christian tradition. In many ways these ideas about God are the ways we like to think about ourselves, in much of Western society. For example, we almost deify the 'self-made man'. We pride ourselves on self-sufficiency and individuality and objectivity. These are not good or bad things in themselves but when they are over-emphasised we can lose the capacity of looking at the world with a different perspective.

In no small way we find the Trinity hard to think about today because we rarely see a person as being made up from a series of relationships with people, animals, the earth, and the Divine. We do not exist in a vacuum. We exist because two people had sex. Generally humans come alive in mutually empowering relationships. Christians believe we are created in the image of God whose very being is a process of loving relationships. That is what we are called to live out. The Trinity is an expression of the experience in which even the Divine is an unfolding process of relationship. The Trinity is a different way to experience life and the Divine.

The Trinity shows that we are created for community, to live compassionately, seek inclusion, embrace ambiguity and struggle for mutuality. This is in contrast to individualistic self-absorption, of participating in ways of relating that lead to dominating patterns of existence in all areas of our lives or the desire to exclude those who 'do not think in the correct manner'.

I look forward to the possibility of writing about the all-embracing nature of the Trinity that encourages us to move beyond constrictive boundaries, particularly in relation to theologies that are rigid and self-congratulatory in their understandings of salvation and God.