

The Most Holy Trinity

First reading:

The Wisdom of God
(Proverbs 8.22-31)

How did we Christians come to see God as a Trinity of Persons? With a noble sense of reverence, the Israelites saw God as so infinitely other than the world that it became difficult to understand how God could mix with the world, even how God could 'dirty his fingers' by creating the world. The solution was that God must have created the universe by his Wisdom, the 'master craftsman by his side' in the work of creation. God's Wisdom is in a way the same as God, but yet not exactly the same. But is God's Wisdom itself created? It is not clear whether God 'created' or 'possessed' Wisdom, for the Hebrew word, different from the word used for 'creating' the universe, is given both senses by different ancient translators. So there is in God something that both is God and is not the same as the Creator. The Wisdom of God is also similar to the Word of God by which God created, 'He spoke and it came into being' (in the Creation Story in Genesis 1). In the New Testament, Jesus is known both as the Wisdom of God and as the Word of God. The first thing we know about God is that we cannot know about God. Nevertheless, the Bible is groping towards the idea that there is diversity within God. This is the beginning of the understanding of the Trinity.

Question:

'God is love.' But if God is totally other, what can this mean?

Second reading:

The Three Persons at Work
(Romans 5.1-5)

When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, the theology of the Trinity was still waiting to be worked out. The interrelationship between the three Persons did not begin to be elaborated by theologians for a couple of centuries yet, or what is meant by calling them three 'Persons'.

Paul calls the Risen Christ 'Lord', using the sacred name that may be used only of God. However, already Paul shows an awareness that three different modes are involved in human salvation, the divine action that brings human beings back to God. He often has a triple formula like the one in this reading, using different language of God, Christ and the Spirit. Through our Lord Jesus Christ we are brought into peace with God, and the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Human language is so totally inadequate to express truths about God that it will be long before any satisfying formula is found.

Question:

Can we distinguish the function of the three Persons of the Trinity in the work of our salvation?

We can learn a little about the Trinity from this passage. Think of a perfect relationship between a father and a son: complete understanding between them, loving care from the father, loving obedience from the son, complete support from both sides. As soon as one has an idea, the other expresses it, to the perfect satisfaction of the first. As soon as one starts an action, the other has completed it, to the delight of the first. Then the son sends his own spirit, which is not himself, but represents himself fully, makes him present when he is not there and does his work exactly as he would do it.

One other image, perhaps rather cheeky: three people on a bench outside a pub, all three chatting in perfect harmony and understanding and complete exchange of ideas, plenty of humour, laughter and warmth. They are so attractive that you would love to join them but don't dare. They are so welcoming that they invite you to join them. They are so loving that you feel you have found happiness as never before. This is a wretched image to express unity in diversity, but one must at least try to understand. Read the gospel again!

Question:

Can you think of an image for three Persons in one Nature?
