

The Holy Trinity: Proclaiming the Truth about God

By Fr. Dean McFalls, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Lathrop, CA. May 17, 2008

Thirty years ago, hiking alone at 7,000 feet in New Mexico, I witnessed something that I'll treasure forever. Into a meadow wandered a fawn of maybe three or four months. As I sat there, silent, a second fawn broke through the surrounding brush. Leaping at the first, this unleashed bundle of youth and pure energy kindled a wrestling match that seemed to last an eternity. But hardly had these siblings begun their play, than their mother jumped into the fray. Small and sleek, she held her own with the energizer kids, until, as the surrounding darkness closed in, they collapsed in a heap.

A year or so afterwards, I had a similar experience. At a monastery near Portland, Oregon I'd climbed a small mountain to pray. Sitting beside a shrine on the edge of another meadow, I felt a tremendous sense of peace.

Suddenly, three separate seedpods appeared overhead. Tiny white feathery spheres, destined to soar until the seeds find a place to root and germinate, the three little globes began a mysterious dance. Never touching each other, but always close together, spinning individually yet also spinning as one, they rose and fell in the gentle breeze, remaining in the meadow until, after a long, long time, an updraft raised them up and beyond the trees.

In both these wilderness experiences, I was absolutely certain that the Lord wanted to communicate something beyond my mind's ability to grasp. As a person exploring religions, I had become disillusioned with several of the Eastern traditions I'd studied and, in some cases, even begun to practice.

At the heart of my frustration was the way these religions understood God.

No matter where I'd been seeking, I knew in my gut that God is One, that God is indivisible, that God is transcendent, and yet at the same time here.

I didn't appreciate being told that God is so distant that no one has access to Him without having to escape the body; or that I should meditate until I entered a total void in which no personal God would be present to meet me or dialogue; or that Jesus Christ was one of many God-realized souls who have replaced one another in a long succession of spiritual masters; or that God is so much in each one of us that we can become our own little gods.

I wanted to know the Truth about God, and only the Truth. Yet in fact I had known the Truth all along. It wasn't just that I'd heard it in Sunday

School, which I did. It wasn't even that I'd read it in many, many books of philosophy and theology, and in every book of the Bible. I had an instinct for the Truth about God because I, like you, have been created in His Image.

Tomorrow is Trinity Sunday. That is, in the Catholic Church we celebrate the Truth about our God who is Truth itself. And the Truth we have found and proclaim to the world is that God is One, yet the One God is also a community of love and mutual inter-relationship, because God is also Three.

We know that God is a dynamic union of three Persons, not because some dogma of ancient Christianity obliges us, but because our God has revealed Himself to us as Three-in-One since the very beginning. And in order to reach and teach our limited minds, the Lord has used figures of speech, symbols, and dreamlike images, just as I experienced on the mountaintops.

Since most of us have access to authentic, unadulterated Bibles, I usually base my arguments on scripture, rather than referring to documents of the Catholic Church, which not all of my readers would accept as authoritative.

However, to those who ask, "Where is the word 'Trinity' found in the Bible?" I will reply, "The word is not found anywhere in the Bible. But the presence of the Trinity, and God's revelation of Himself as Triune, is found from the beginning to the end, from Genesis 1 to Revelation chapter 22."

But to appreciate this, as with all the major truths of the Sacred Scriptures, you have to obtain a reliable translation of the Hebrew and Greek in which the Bible was originally written. Some groups who reject the Trinity have replaced the Bible with other books they claim are from God, and one sect has deliberately distorted the Bible to reduce Jesus Christ to a mere caricature of His true self. Rather than being God the Word Incarnate, as John declares in his gospel (1:1-14), the Word-made flesh is now "a god".

The first group cries out day and night "God is One"; to them Jesus is just a great prophet. The second proclaims two gods: a big one and a little one.

The two religious groups I'm referring to are among the fastest growing in the world, because they have mastered marketing techniques (one resorts to conquest and coercion; the other has perfected the science of confusion).

A third rapidly-growing religious sect talks about the "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit", but what they mean by these words is beyond me. They too have replaced the Bible with another book they claim is from God. But the teachings of this book contradict those of Scripture, so I can't honor it.

By denying or misrepresenting the truth about God, these three groups lead innocent people astray. I wouldn't publicize my disagreements with these sects if they weren't knocking on the doors of innocent people. In a cultural climate where everything has to be tolerated, and truth is taught to be whatever people wish to believe, some truths remain "self-evident".

"In the beginning," opens the Bible, "God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen. 1:1-2).

In this translation (New International Version), the Hebrew word "Ruah" is translated "spirit". It could also be translated "breath" or "wind", since the ancients experienced the forces of nature as a direct activity of God. (I use the NIV to demonstrate that a variety of Bibles manifest the Trinity.)

The next line continues: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness." These first lines of the Bible introduce us to the Three Persons of the Trinity in a symbolic way, since God the Creator is accompanied in the beginning by His Spirit, and the first word God speaks brings light into being. What this "word" and this "light" mean will be explained by John:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood (or 'overcome') it" (1:1-5).

"There came a man who was sent from God" continues John's Gospel; "his name was John (the Baptist). He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." Clearly, Jesus is the Light.

"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the only-begotten son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14-15). Clearly, Jesus is the Word made flesh for our salvation. John's interpretation-in-scripture of the first verses of the book of Genesis is so obvious in proclaiming the Trinity that those who deny this beautiful doctrine resort to re-writing this passage.

It is John, too, who wrote the final book of the Bible, Revelation. The last verses of this prophetic book state: “ ‘Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End...I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.’ The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:12-13, 16-17).

We see that the presence together and loving collaboration of the three Persons of the Trinity, united in one Divine Nature, has one desire above all others: our salvation. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This echoes John’s earlier words: “He was in the world, and the world came to be through Him, but the world did not know Him...But to those who did accept Him, He gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in His name...” (John 1:10-12).

If we see references to the Trinity at the beginning and end of the Bible, we see this mystery revealed most clearly at the center of salvation history.

With the conception of Jesus in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, God no longer speaks in figures and images. In her presence God, for the first time, shows Himself without any doubt as a Trinity of Divine Persons.

“Do not be afraid, Mary,” says the Archangel Gabriel, “for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of David His father, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end.” And when Mary asks how, Gabriel replies:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1:30-35). As John points out in his gospel, being called “Son of God” means being made equal with God. In the words of Isaiah:

“...Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulders; and His name shall be called: Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:14-15).

Yes, the Holy Trinity is a doctrine worth fighting for. Understanding God correctly is the foundation of all Christianity and Christian theology; it also makes all the difference in how we live our lives. For we have been created in the image of the Triune God. As the author of Genesis relates:

“...God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27). In the face of California’s Supreme Court impotence to defend marriage as God intended it to be, we must remind each other that we bear the image the Holy Trinity.

We are called to be temples of God’s presence. Jesus promised that, if we believe in Him and live in His love, He and the Father would live in us through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14-17). With the Triune God living in us, we should become more godly. The Spirit would “guide us to all truth” (John 16:13). And, as I mentioned above, our acceptance of the Word-Made-Flesh would empower us to become children of God (Jn 1:12).

“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God,” Paul wrote to the Romans (8:14-17). “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but received a Spirit of adoption, through whom we cry, ‘Abba, Father’! The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.” And nothing, Paul declares, will separate us from God’s love.

There are many, many other references in Sacred Scripture, in the teaching of the saints and great theologians of the Church, and in the doctrines of the Christian churches which have remained faithful to the Word of God. The “Trinity” is the Truth about God, so one can find evidence everywhere.

But by far the greatest evidence is the peace, the love, and the joy radiating in the hearts and lives of those who have come to know the One True God.

May this peace, love and joy be yours, as you receive the Lord Jesus Christ again into your heart. (If you’ve never welcomed Him, now is the time!)

And may the blessing of Almighty God - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - descend upon you, and remain with you forever. *–Fr. Dean McFalls*