
Our God is One and Our God is Three

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

On Trinity Sunday, the Christian Church proclaims that God is One and God is Three. That mysterious truth has confounded many a preacher and many a congregation if we try to grasp only its logic. (The most successful logical definition of the Trinity remains my old Neapolitan Ice Cream theory! God is one ice cream: chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry, and every taste "every taste" is delightfully delicious!) The Bible never explains this logic (though 2 Corinthians 13:13 is my favorite mention of the Trinity). In fact, the Bible rarely spells out the logic of any doctrine. The Bible tells stories of truth. I hope we all know that!

We leave it to preachers to provide the connection between the stories of truth and the logic of doctrine. I believe that Trinity Sunday represents the clue "the secret, the answer, the mystery" of what Christian practice is all about. This doctrine represents the mystery of how to behave as Christians.

"In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Our God is One. Our God is Three. This formula is not meant to be simply a proposition of faith, something to believe in cerebrally so that we will pass the orthodox test. No, this formula is meant to describe the very image of God. Our God is a triune God, a God who is actually three persons living in relationship.

Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity models how to live together in mutual and loving relationship. After all, we are created in the image of God. That is how Genesis, chapter one, tells the story. If we are made in the image of God, and if God is a relationship of persons in community, then we are meant to live in the relationship of community.

This lesson was never easy: Early Christian history is replete with communities who lived according to only one person of the Trinity instead of all three. The Montanists were obsessed with the Holy Spirit to the exclusion of Father and Son; they were declared heretics. The Arians were obsessed with the Father to the exclusion of the divinity of the Son; they were declared heretics. In short, obsession with one person of the Trinity, taken to an absolute extreme, became heresy in the Christian Church. Homogeneity became heresy.

People become absolutists when we focus on only one person of the Godhead, or on only one way that God reveals himself to humanity. The triune God is revealed in a multiplicity of ways: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "in diversity and in relationship.

It follows that the Christian Church is where we are supposed to live in Trinity! The Church is supposed to be where we learn to live in relationship with people who are different from us, and who are different from one another!

If we are healthy, this Trinity model of relationship should affect all that we do in the Christian Church. In our Christian education classes, in our mission and outreach efforts, in our music programs, in our prayer groups, we learn that God is present "the Triune God is present" in different idioms and languages and styles. No one of them has any automatic

advantage to communicating the grace of God.

It may be that our own Anglican comprehensive tradition recognizes Trinitarian dogma more accurately than other theologies. In our public lives and in our friendships, refusing to hold ourselves hostage to any particular culture, or language, or idiom” as Democrats or Republicans, as Americans or Nigerians, studying Paul or Pixar, we witness that God can use any medium to bring grace and love to humanity.

"In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Our God is One and our God is Three. The Holy Trinity is not just a stiff piece of doctrine un-attached to any particular practice of Christianity. This wonderful and mysterious doctrine is at the heart of all our Christian behavior. It is how we live in relationships of diversity, acknowledging together the One God of Love.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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