



...God desires us, as if we were God, as if we were that unconditional response to God's giving that God's self makes in the life of the Trinity. We are created so that we may be caught up in this, so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God. *Archbishop Rowan Williams*

The Pentecost shofar

The Trinity is a complicated but truly amazing gift

Holy, Holy, Holy. If anyone was to utter those words, most Christian churchgoers would be able to continue the doxology. It has been a part of the Christian tradition from the earliest days of the Church. It comes from the Nicene Creed (325 AD) with the popular hymn ending *God in three persons, blessed Trinity!* Beautiful and much loved but what about the theology? Many a novice preacher has stumbled attempting to explain complicated theology to a congregation of lay people. Seminarians could also share stories of scratching their heads as uninspiring lecturers tried to put two thousand years of theological reflections on a mystery into a series of lectures.

Both students and congregations probably come away with the same confused reflections: What do we mean when we say God is one God in three “persons”? Does that mean three different personalities? How do these persons relate to each other? And how do we square this with the biblical affirmation from **Deuteronomy 6:4** that “*the Lord our God, the Lord is one*”? In all that complicated theology, is there any way in which the theology of Trinity can be personal? Can the Trinity be a central part of our daily spiritual living?

The Bible says some strange things about the life of the Trinity. For instance, the Father dwells in the Son, while the Son dwells in the Father. The Father is home to the Son, while the Son is home of the Father. As fourth-century theologian Hilary of Poitiers put it, Father and Son envelop one another and are simultaneously enveloped by one another. Simple.

A word worth learning – *perichoresis* - “mutual indwelling”

Since the early centuries of the church, Christian theologians have used complicated in talking about the Trinity - the word *perichoresis* for example. The term—means “mutual indwelling”—and has been used almost exclusively to describe the relationship between the divine persons in the Trinity and as well, the intertwining of the two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ.

In preparation for the feast of the Trinity, I have come to appreciate that word even though it is not used in the New Testament. The idea though is found in the Gospel of John. When Jesus talks about mutual indwelling, he is highlighting the similarities—rather than the dissimilarities—between the relationship of the Father and the Son, the church’s relationship with him and the Father, and Christians’ relations with one another. All of that is caught up in that word. Surprisingly, this term *perichoresis* can help us understand not only the God we worship, but also who we are and what we experience as Christians on a day-to-day basis.

Our In/In and In Relationships

In a most beautiful prayer from the Last Supper, Jesus asks the Father that all his disciples “*may be one . . . just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us*” (**John 17:21**). The Son is “*in*” the Father. At the same time, the Father is “*in*” the Son. And Jesus prays that the unity of the disciples would be *just the same as* the unity of the Father and Son. Christians form

an earthly mirror image of the fellowship existing in the Trinity. Jesus prays that the disciples will be brought into the “*being-in-one another*” fellowship of the Father and Son. Our unity, with the Father and Son, and sharers in the Apostolic Tradition, is also an “in/in” relationship.

On one hand,

- the disciples are *in* the Father and Son.
- On the other, Jesus is *in* the disciples,
- and the Father is *in* Jesus.
- Disciples of Jesus are brought *into* the fellowship of the Father and Son *in* the Spirit, and
- by being brought into that divine communion they are brought into mutual indwelling with one another.

This is all great news! While Christ is home for believers, believers are equally a dwelling place for Christ. “*I have been crucified with Christ,*” Paul says, and “*Christ lives in me*” (Gal. 2:20). The mystery that Paul preaches is “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col. 1:27). Elsewhere, Paul says that the Spirit, not Christ, dwells in us (2 Cor. 1:22; Rom. 5:5). This forms the background for Paul’s claims that believers are “*temples,*” dwellings places, of God in the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). There is an interconnectedness across the whole of creation.

Believers are *in* Christ. Christ is *in* them. The Spirit is *in* them, and they are *in* the Spirit. Believers *dwelt in* and are *in-dwelt*. They are caught up in the Spirit who dwells in them even while they are enveloped by the Spirit in whom they have all blessing. Of course, humans do not become God. The relation of the disciples to the Father and the Son is not identical to the relation of the Father and the Son. But, again, Jesus stresses similarities, which I think give us reason to use indwelling (*perichoretic*) to describe these relations. It is just the way God works.

The traditional doctrine of the Trinity used by the Church for over 1,800 years, with its use of the language of “indwelling,” illuminates and so transforms the world we live in, helping us to discover clues to the Trinitarian life within creation. Within human history and activities. Not only that, an indwelling imagination of the world and human existence works itself out in Christian ethics. In the way we live with others around us. This is a powerful way to reimagine the way we live with others and understand ourselves as a part of the ongoing activities of the Trinity in our lives. How does that work?

Don’t give up on thinking about the Trinity

Others “indwell” in our lives in a whole range of ways. Some close and others incidental. Once we are aware of this we ought to open our lives hospitably to them. But we also “indwell” the lives of others. We should then see others not as obstacles to what we strive to do in the world but as potential homes in which we can dwell together. A world of mutual indwelling implies an ethic of hospitality, welcome, invitation, companionship, centred on a common table. It is a world alive with the fruits of the Spirit... *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things...* (**Galatians 6**). This wonderful world created by our Triune God is a world organized by and for love.