

## Gingins, Holy Communion

Sun 31<sup>st</sup> May 2026, 16h

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Isaiah 40.12-17,27-end

Matthew 28:16-20

### The Holy Trinity, Occam's Razor and Real Life

- A bit of nostalgia - not far from where I was born – (it takes me back nearly 65 years) in England, West Byfleet, Surrey (over and old branch of Sainsburys as it happens, but that's another story) ... and Pyrford (which is where I grew up - therefore it's the centre of universe) ... is the little village of Ockham ...
- Not many claims to fame – 410 people in last census – church, pub (Black Swan) – two cricket teams, one football team ...
- There is a link with Ada Lovelace, daughter of poet Byron – a mathematician and one of the pioneers of computers and computer programming
- But the most famous person (you may never have heard of him) was William of Ockham - William of Ockham was a 14th Century friar, philosopher and

theologian - widely known for Occam's razor: the principle (in logic) that the simplest explanation, requiring the fewest assumptions, is usually the correct one - - don't make things unnecessarily complicated - the 'razor' refers to the need to pare things away to the most simple

- If I were to say the work KISS, what would you think ? – ... Not a glam rock band from 1970s ... KISS stands for 'keep it simple, stupid' - Occam's Razor is a kind of scholarly and ancient version of the KISS principle
- KISS - Good for engineering, systems - technology can be confusing, you forget how it works - don't go constantly increasing complexity because you can, as if that were an improvement – same for organisations, society
- There is another principle – I remember it from a poster in school classroom of my history teacher – in Guildford (again just a few km from Ockham – you can see it really is centre of universe round there ☺) - « to every question there is a simple answer ... and it's wrong » - I found later it's a slight misquote of American journalist and thinker H. L. Mencken – well done H. L. Mencken
- So keep it simple ? Or not ?

- What about the Trinity then ? – it does not, on the face of it, feel simple - God, who is One, is multiplied it seems into Three, or One but also Three, or Three in One ... or something. Is that not an unnecessary complexity, according to Ockham's principle ?
- I admit to a bit of a craving for simplicity – a craving for this in terms of how to conceive of God, universe and everything – looking for a single, unifying entity, behind the universe – hence craving for the idea that 'God is one' ... However, the Trinity says 'God is one ... but three .. in fact 3 in 1' ..
- However, I have come to love the idea of the Trinity – I was happy to be chaplain of 'Holy Trinity' in Geneva (and here at Gingins and LaC until it grew into independence)
- Why ? - because it works ... it resonates with what I observe of life, the way people **work** ... it fits with what I feel is the one starting point which for me makes sense, which is that 'God is Love' – that, if you like, is the one unifying principle ...
- There are all sorts of attempts to explain the model of the Trinity – how three can be one – three-legged stool, three different phases of water (ice, water, vapour) – even heard explanation based on a triceratops (one head, three horns) – even have a favourite tree ... this side of Aubonne as you pass on the autoroute ... do you

know it ? It looks like one ... but as you approach you see it is three ... a good metaphor for the Trinity ? Don't know ...

- ... none of them really help me – I'm left with the question 'why?'
- Idea of the Trinity - its origins are, of course, in the early church's attempts to make sense of who was this Jesus who had turned their lives and the world upside down – the doctrine of the Trinity didn't just declare itself overnight (Bible readings bear witness to that: today's OT reading talks just about God Creator and the NT reading is the only place where we see the formula 'Father, Son and HS' – Jesus's earliest followers spent decades, centuries trying to articulate something which was incontestable – this man, Jesus, there was something truly God-like, divine about him – they were passionate about how He had changed everything – 'who was he, who is he ? We're going to follow him !' – well, you can do that in many ways – Jesus could simply be a great man, or a prophet (Islam reveres him as a prophet) – but the more they reflected, the more they came to feel that 'here, in this Jesus, we have somehow seen God'
- That resonates: if God (at his / her /its most simple) is Love and, and love is what I understand it to be, then God does not simply sit on a cloud in some sort of detached divine purity, but comes to that which he

loves, his creation, humanity, in all its messiness and complexity – God identifies with humanity to such an extent that he enters into the human condition, as a human being – *ergo*, as Jesus ... ‘in this Jesus, we have somehow seen God’

- ... so we have God the creator, God the unseen Spirit who moves over the face of the waters, shaping and guiding ... and then God in Jesus – in asking the question ‘how does he fit in?’ you have the beginnings of starting to articulate the idea of the Trinity.
- But ! The doctrine of the Trinity is - like much of our philosophising and theologising - an attempt to explain something which is beyond our comprehension. The Trinity is best understood not as a complicated conceptual formula but as a **working** model – in some ways, it’s OK to think that it might be wrong, to question it, to doubt ‘ ... that’s entirely possible ... that is what Faith is about
- The thing to do, in order to learn to love the Trinity, is to test if and how the model resonates with our lived experience. That is probably how we decide on the ‘truth’ of a lot of what we believe in: not in terms of pure conceptual logic, but does it align with what we observe, feel and live. Tested in that way, we can see that somehow the Trinity ‘**works**’.

- One could start with the nature of, and our experience of, love. What is the nature of Love ? If God is ‘Love’, can a single entity ‘be’ Love ? Surely Love requires interaction with an ‘other’ – can an austere, remote, conceptual unitary ‘Force’ behind the universe *be* Love ? – I don’t think so. That implies at least some kind of relational dynamic within ‘God’ – at least two – but then what about love between two ? – authentic yes, but perhaps we know from our own experience that it can also be exclusive, possessive, jealous – love that we experience with an other can be true, beautiful, powerful – but we know from our own lives that it must also take into account other loves : love for a child, parent, family member, friend, whoever, maybe even an enemy (‘love your enemies’ Jesus told us) – love takes many forms and so a true, God-like Love must have more than a binary exclusivity – it is a love in Community – the Trinity, three, is such a model of community, capable in itself of ‘being’ Love ...
- ... a truly generous and overflowing love is experienced in the idea of a divine relational community – Trinity, Three in One, is an attempt to capture that.
- So don’t get lost in the mathematical complexity and impossibility of the Trinity – learn to enjoy the relational beauty of it – the living in the presence of a God who *is* Love, and who is in himself/herself the pattern for how we can understand and live in Love ... with our nearest, with our family and friends, with our communities,

even (maybe) with our enemies ... the Trinity, God in relational community: see how it **works** ...

- Explaining the nature of God in terms of relational community is also a way to say that the ultimate nature of our universe is relational, and the ways of living in it and finding ways forward - those which are truly life-giving, life-affirming and therefore (for me) authentic - are also relational. That resonates with our lived reality. The Trinity, God in community : it **works** ...
- Hierarchies of control and obligation are not life-affirming, life-giving ... relational communities are – that is why the church, or any institution, must watch out – when we revert to institutional hierarchical thinking, or seek solutions based only on power, we lose the plot; when we find ways forward based on relationships, there is hope ...
- This applies to AI – Pope Leo has recently spoken about this in his encyclical – AI is not relational, it may be dehumanising
- This applies to the world around us, to world affairs –
  - when raw power and *realpolitik* ignore any attempt to see the moral imperative of multilateral dialogue based on relational respect and on shared human values, OR
  - when our model of God is egocentric and we lose sight of the relational community at the heart of

God and descend into the blasphemy of so-called ‘Christian Nationalism’, OR

- when we forget that the model of God as relational community should be a model for how we see the world and all the other nations and cultures which share our planet, and we scapegoat the foreigner and blame the outsider as the source of all our woes - and allow populist politicians to tweak that lever and feed people’s fears
- ... then we are well on the way to turning God into our puppet and selling our souls ...
- So let’s not go down that road ... instead : God is Love – God as Trinity is a model for how to BE – how to BE in the Real World ...
- Let’s keep in mind that trinitarian emphasis on relational community ... let’s take it as a pattern for addressing the challenges of our world, including the affairs of nations, our response to others, real Life.
- Beyond the philosophical concepts, there is a way to live the Trinity in our daily lives, with family, friends, communities ... let us explore that.