

God of Domination or Cooperation?  
Psalm 8

This is Trinity Sunday. We Christians traditionally have declared that we believe in the Trinity. What does that mean? It means that we believe that God is three separate and distinct persons, who are eternally united in purpose and in love, working together in perfect harmony.

Why do we believe that God is three persons? Because in many stories from the gospels Jesus is either talking about or talking to his Father or the Holy Spirit. These stories make no sense, nor does what Jesus says about the Father and the Holy Spirit, if they are not separate and distinct persons from Jesus, the Son of God.

Now, we need to be honest. Even though most Christians believe in the Trinity, we struggle with the idea of God being three persons. Why? For one thing, Christianity came out of a strictly unitarian understanding of God. The belief that there is only one God is the central message of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the story of people coming to understand that there are not a multitude of gods. If we read the Old Testament carefully, we can see that when Abraham chose to follow God, he was deciding to give his allegiance to this one god among the many gods. Over time his descendants came to believe that their God was the greatest of the gods, the ruler over the gods. Only gradually did they come to believe that the God of Israel is the one true God. All others are false gods. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might." (Deut. 6:4-5) That is called the "Shema," and it is recited by observant Jews on a daily basis. It is the closest thing the Jews have to an Affirmation of Faith.

Christianity comes from a religion which strongly emphasized that there is only one God and that one God is one person. We have a hard time letting go of that understanding of God. We keep trying to hold on to God as the Trinity and to God as one person. Some of the ways people have come up with to hang on to both have been creative. There is the explanation that God is like water, which can be a liquid, a gas or a solid. The idea being that God is one person who moves between being the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit. Another explanation with basically the same point is that just as a man can be a husband, a son and a father at the same time, so can God have three different roles. Then, of course, there is the explanation that God used to be the Father in the Old Testament. Then God became the Son as Jesus. Then when Jesus returned to heaven, he became the Holy Spirit. These are all forms of what theologians call "modalism." Modalism is a heresy. All of these explanations of the Trinity make the same mistake: They are holding on to the idea that God is one person. That's not the Trinity.

We believe that God is a relationship of three separate and distinct persons in a relationship of harmony and love.

So, you're saying, what difference does it make? Isn't this just a mental exercise which appeals to eggheads who are drawn to ephemeral ideas and has no real impact on our everyday lives? Absolutely not. Your understanding of God has a powerful impact on every area of your lives.

There are basically two approaches to life: One is that the key to the good life is to dominate everyone and everything around you. "It's every man for himself." The assumption underlying this approach is that life is about the survival of the fittest. We are in competition

with everyone else. Those who are able to gain power and wealth for themselves deserve what they have. Those who get pushed down are weak and their only value is to serve the strong.

The other approach believes that cooperation is the way to the best life. This approach says, "We are in all this together." The assumption is that if we work together in cooperation, creating a system in which everyone can use their unique skills and gifts for the good of the whole, we will all enjoy a better quality of life.

So, is life all about domination or cooperation? When I know which of these philosophies guide your life, I can tell you which understanding of God you will prefer. The belief that God is a single person, exercising exclusive and complete power over all that is, goes hand in hand with the domineering approach to life. The cooperative understanding of life goes hand in hand with the belief that God is the Trinity, three persons eternally united in love and purpose, working together to create a realm of peace and harmony.

Those who see life as a competition see God as the strongest of the strong. God is the one sitting at the top of the chain of command. God is the ruler of rulers. We all exist for the purpose of serving God.

Those who see life as a cooperative effort see God as three persons working together in peace and in harmony to create a world in which all things are moving toward a system of relationships which produces a high quality of life for all involved. This God gains no satisfaction in being served and did not create us in order to have servants, but joyfully serves us, willingly sacrificing even life itself for us, in order that we might share in the goodness of life. We willingly serve this God, not out of fear or because God demands it, but out of gratitude and love for the one who was loved us so much that he was willing to die for us.

To know God as the Trinity shapes our understanding of how life is meant to be lived. It affects our understanding of the nature of the world we live in. When we understand our Creator to be the Trinity we realize that this universe was created by a loving relationship.

The universe is not being swallowed up by increasingly powerful black holes, each struggling to be the final black hole that swallows up everything else. No, the universe is made up of black holes, stars, planets, moons gradually finding a wonderful balance which allows them to dance gracefully around each other. It is made up of chaotic subatomic particles coming together to create atoms and molecules, which then form elements, which then form a wonderfully diverse forms of matter, which come together to form continents and oceans, rocks and trees, fish and birds, and human beings with souls which reach out to eternity.

All of these elements of creation are being taught by God to exist together in peace, just as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have been united in peace from eternity to eternity.

And God is teaching human beings how to live together in peace. The Kingdom of God will come on earth as it is in heaven when we truly become like God, and learn how to live in harmony and peace with one another, with creation, with ourselves and with God.

We take a giant step in that direction when we let go of the domineering God is one person sitting on the throne imposing his will on us and choose to embrace the Trinity, three persons who honor each other and serve one another creation in an eternal, loving fellowship.

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