*Faith, Science & Understanding*: that’s the book I finished reading just minutes before I started writing this. Well, to be honest, to call it “reading” gives me way too much credit. It’s more like I plowed through the dense, dense language of physics and theology, the theology being just about as difficult to understand as the physics. Again, not quite true; some of the physics terminology might as well have been written in hieroglyphics. I had read another book by John Polkinghorne, the author, when I was on sabbatical in 2005.

We were in the guesthouse at a seminary, and I read *Science and Theology* over several late nights in the library. Enough time had passed that when I pulled this one off my shelf at home I had forgotten how difficult it had been for me to get through that one. I mean the subject really interests me, and Polkinghorne is an impressive figure—Fellow of Queen’s College, Cambridge, and Canon Theologian of Liverpool, England. But . . . no.

Oh, sure, there were brief shining moments of clarity, but mainly I was left feeling grateful that someone is doing the heavy lifting of bridging these two areas of human knowledge and inquiry.

Just hold that in mind for a bit, if you will.

This is Trinity Sunday, one of the very few feast days that celebrate a doctrine rather than a person or event in our calendar. Today’s readings are among the few scriptural references that put together the formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The words “Holy Trinity” do not appear at all in the Bible. We Christians have extrapolated the concept and coined the term based on disparate passages in Scripture and the overall sweep of our record of faith in a God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies.

Trinitarian formulas appear as early as the turn of the first century, but the first use of the term Trinity was about a hundred years later. It was finally formalized by the early Ecumenical Councils in the fourth century.

So, even though the evidence and support are present in the Bible, creating an official and universally accepted formulation took some time. It’s understandable, since we still have difficulty describing or explaining it.

I mean, the short form’s a piece of cake: one God in three Persons. Boom. But when someone asks, “What does that mean?” it starts to get sticky.

As with many things theological it’s easier to say what’s not than what is. This is not about three gods. We’re monotheists from way back, centuries before Jesus appeared on the scene.

So: one God. Check.

Three persons? Ah . . . and there’s the rub. There are all kinds of heresies in that linguistic and philosophical minefield.

A smattering of those: Modalism (only different modes of the godhead, not distinct personalities), Tritheism (plain enough—three gods), Arianism (Christ is not fully divine), Docetism (opposite of that—not really human), Ebionitism (human only), Macedonianism (Spirit is created), Adoptionism (Jesus was totally human and adopted by God), Partialism (each Person not God, only God when all Three act together).

Any questions? Sorry, no time for that.

Now’s a good time for me to return to the Polkinghorne book—remember, I said I would.

He restates a standard theological construction, *kenosis*, meaning that God has emptied the divine self of enough qualities to create a universe in which creatures have free will. That is particularly present in the person of Jesus, who was fully human and fully God.

A leading theory in the book and tentative meeting ground of science and faith posits that God’s creatures, by God’s grace, collaborate in the unfolding of creation. I subscribe to that notion and was aware of it before reading the book, but I found his survey of various takes on that topic fascinating.

So, all that is my tap-dancing before getting to my real point here:

The book is almost impenetrable by my meager intellect.

Kinda like the doctrine of the Trinity.

It’s not, I believe, that God wants to confuse us. It’s rather like the Old Testament reading for today—that long account of the Creation. It is meant to impress upon us that if we could understand and explain all of this—how things came to be, the nature of God, the presence of evil—all of it would be nothing more than the reach of our intellect and imagination.

And whatever else God is, God is greater than that.

By the way, in theology, as in science, our not understanding something fully does not mean that we should give up trying to understand. We should always be exploring both areas, and our knowledge does increase, by God’s grace, but God will always be greater than that.

That’s one important thing for us to ponder on this day. The other—perhaps I should say *an* other ponderable is what this one God in Three Persons points toward—that our faith and our God are about relationship, specifically loving relationship, because even God (so far as we understand) lives in relationship within the godhead.

God is love. And love depends upon and flourishes in relationship. For us that means relationship with God and with everyone, including those we would call other when we forget that there is no other, because all of us are children of God.

I’ll stop there, hoping I’ve navigated the spaces between those theological landmines.

God is love—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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