

Jo's truly excellent article on baptism preparation in the parish magazine reminded me of a parish review I did 25 years back. They were very proud of their baptism ministry, led by their Reader. I pushed for more detail. 'When you visit the family, what do you say?'

'I always say the same thing,' the Reader declared. 'Your so-and-so is to be baptised in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity. You won't understand what that means, but I am here to explain it to you. The Trinity was defined at the First Council of Nicea in AD 325 which resulted in the Nicene Creed. This was ratified at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 425 which stressed the dual nature of Christ...'

Goodness, he'd got his lecture off pat. After a considerable time he petered out. 'What do you tell them?' he asked.

'Well, I usually ask the mum how the birth went and give her and her husband space to tell me how they really felt. I ask them how the nights are going and how they are coping with all the demands and expectations. I then ask them what they want me to do for them, what they are looking for with a baptism.' 'But you've never even mentioned God, let alone explained the Trinity,' the Reader objected.

'Oh, I stress that God loves their little one so much he wants to put his name to him right at the start, and will never let him go.'

The Reader clearly was not impressed by my approach. Elizabeth Jennings wrote a poem about a Chinese Sage who had spent days writing the perfect poem. He then read the poem out to a peasant woman and crossed out every word she couldn't understand. Very discreetly but decisively and with no arguments, this Sage crossed out every word that was foreign to a woman of simplicity who knew labours of the soil and the house, who had no Dealings other than this with poetry, art of any kind, yet by his Magnanimity, more his humility, became his mentor, guided him Out of all obscurity, not

with wearying argument or even quiet coaxing, but by the fact That she was a world he could only enter through her. Hay beds, crude meals, lust Subdued his wit, bodied out his verse, cancelled cleverness.

She was a world he could only enter through her. Those parents were a world I could only enter through them. There is a poignant passage in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* where Jude discovers all his children have taken their lives so not to be a burden to them. In utter grief, he overhears two clergymen passing by discussing the eastward position at the altar for celebrating communion, a big controversy in Victorian times. 'Good God, the eastward position and all creation groaning!' Jude cries in despair. 'Good God, the Trinity, and all creation groaning,' those shattered parents could have cried out when that Reader gave them his standard lecture.

Had they done that, they'd have got the Trinity in one sentence. Good God. The Lord saw all he had made and it was very good. Good like him. God is good. Not bad, not twisted, not out to trip you up, not out to wreck things, not out to ruin you, not out to send you to Hell, not consumed by wrath. God is good. My tutor used to say, the Justice of God demands the existence of Hell, the goodness of God demands it is empty.

The Trinity and all creation groaning. The Trinity is all creation groaning. The theologian Austin Farrer claimed that we are so obsessed by God's omnipotence that we miss the heart of love. The decrees of the Council of Nicea and Chalcedon were sadly as much a victory for Plato and Aristotle as they were for Jesus. By that I mean they spent a lot of energy defending the God of Greek Philosophy, the God who was impassive and transcendent and aloof from the field of play which had nothing whatsoever to do with the Lord and Father of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

When Christ assumed the role of humble servant it was not a divine disguise but God's very essence. The Trinity really is all creation

groaning. God loved the world so much he was impaled on it. Love means giving ultimate significance to the other, with human transcendence, like God's transcendence consisting in being given away.

He left his Father's throne above, so free, so infinite his grace,
emptied himself of all but love and bled for Adam's fallen race. Tis
mercy all, immense and free, for O my God it found out me.

The Trinity, in all creation groaning. I recently re-read a book I first read thirty years ago, the *Christlike God*, by John V Taylor, Bishop of Winchester which put faith in a very different and refreshing way. Let me quote a bit by him:

'Some months ago I was asked by a friend to visit a young couple whose two year old daughter had been found dead in her cot. They were still stunned, haunted by the old question *Why?* and sometimes *Why her?* I simply could not offer them the conventional reassurance about it all being in God's providence, a mystery now but one day to be seen as part of a loving plan. I said to them instead that their child's death was a tragic accident, an unforeseeable failure in the functioning of the little body. That far from being willed or planned by God, it was for him a disaster and a frustration of his will for life and fulfilment, just as it was for them. God shared their pain and loss and was with them in it. I went on to say that God is not a potentate ordering this or that to happen, but that the world is full of chance and accident. God has let it be so because that is the only sort of world in which freedom, development, responsibility and love could come into being. God was committed to this kind of world in love and to each person in it, and was with them in this tragedy, giving himself to them in fortitude and healing and faith to help them through. And their child was held in that same caring, suffering love.'

When he became Bishop of Winchester Taylor cleared his diary, refused to attend any diocesan committee and instead spent three

months writing and producing and directing a Passion Play performed in the Cathedral Precincts in Holy Week. I preached at Winchester Cathedral in 2007 about three bishops of Winchester who were stars in my night sky. One was Lancelot Andrewes For calling, recalling and recalling manifold thanks be to God. Another was Cyril Garbett who in the middle of the Second World War flew to Moscow to express solidarity with our Russian Allies and came back with icons galore. The third was John V Taylor who produced a passion play. At coffee I had a queue of people who had acted in that play and it had changed them for ever. Thirty years on what bishop would command a queue of people telling you he had changed their lives? Good God, the Trinity, and all creation groaning. Trinity Sunday is an invitation to clear your diary of all the meetings, clear all the obsession with theory and definition and post-mortems and explanations, and simply put on Christ and his story of sacrificial service, a story of power emptying itself. touching lepers, riding a donkey, washing feet, being crucified, rising again.

I will leave you with Taylor's killer question. When you pray, do you pray to the Wizard of Oz, or do you pray to Christ crucified on the cross? That's a real deal-breaker. Imagine yourself strolling up to Calvary and looking at Christ, bloodied, naked, mangled and having the audacity to say, 'Sorry to bother you, Lord, but could you find me a parking space near Marks and Spencers?' Good God, the Trinity and all creation groaning!

Trinity Sunday by George Herbert:
Lord, who hast form'd me out of mud,
And hast redeem'd me through thy bloud,
And sanctifi'd me to do good;

Purge all my sinnes done heretofore:
For I confesse my heavie score,
And I will strive to sinne no more.

Enrich my heart, mouth, hands in me,
With faith, with hope, with charitie;
That I may runne, rise, rest with thee.