

# YOUTH UPDATE

LUKE GOLDBERG

Elisabeth Graham (15), Jennifer Graham (17), Brian Leapley (18), Matti Lewis (17) and Brad Whitten (16) of Sacred Heart Parish in New Carlisle, Ohio, met to discuss this issue and suggest changes and improvements. Dave Leapley, parish youth minister, also assisted.

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# Trinity

## Model for Our Relationships

**W**hen you make the sign of the cross, what are you doing? You are expressing a faith in three Persons. You have proclaimed that any action that follows is being done in the name of these three Persons. You have attached yourself more deeply to a mystery that is at the heart of your life as a Christian.

*by Karen Berry, O.S.B.*

A Muslim friend asked me one day, "If you say you believe in one God, how can you say there are three Persons who are all God?" When you are asked

such a question, what do you say? What do Catholics really believe and why?

### Trinity in Time

**C**atholics share a belief in one God (monotheism) with Jews and Muslims. All three faiths honor Abraham, a Middle Eastern shepherd,

whom we call our Father in faith.

Unlike Jews and Muslims, we believe there are three Persons in one God. Where did such a unique idea come from? When Christians, in the early days of the Church, expressed a belief that Jesus was God, they were doing some pretty radical preaching.

Jews were living with a long history of commitment to one single God while neighbors all

around them were worshipping many gods. The messiah the Jews were expecting was supposed to be a great leader, like King David had been, but not a divine leader. The messiah was expected to save the Jews from oppressive foreign rulers and restore a kingdom for the descendants of David.

Recognizing Jesus as messiah was difficult enough. He didn't fit the part. He was nonviolent, uninterested in worldly kingdoms and made no move against the Roman authorities. But recognizing Jesus as God was even more difficult to understand and to believe.

### Three in One

**W**hen you repeat the Nicene Creed at Sunday Mass, you are saying that you believe in a Father and Son and Holy Spirit. The creed begins with the words: "We believe in one God!"

This official teaching about a trinity of Persons in one Divine Being didn't happen overnight among Christians. It was several hundred years before that doctrine was spelled out in the

Creed. (The word *creed* comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means "I believe.")

This belief was there from the earliest beginnings of the Church. For instance, St. Paul wrote in his Second Letter to the Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship



of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (13:13). That greeting recognizes three Persons in God.

The notion of three-in-one as something unexplainable but real has been presented in interesting ways by other teachers of the faith for centuries. Legend tells us that St. Patrick used a shamrock, with its three leaves on one stem, to teach the people of Ireland about the

Trinity. Artists have created other images that have helped to shape the way you picture the three Persons.

What does your picture look like? Because one of the Persons is called *Father*, you might think of an older man. One Person is the Son, who took a human form but only

the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son."

This language is "loaded." At least, it was when it was written. "Eternally begotten" is an argument against people who were teaching that the Son came *after* the Father. It means *always was*.

Both Father and Son were always existing and always in the closest of relationships. Then, the Holy Spirit issues from them both—together and eternally, not *after* in time or in order.

**Focus on *begotten* and *proceeds*:** Both words were chosen to convey energy, movement and power, all in the context of unity, equality and love. So there's a dynamic working relationship among equals here: That's key to understanding the Trinity.

### Mystery Links

**R**elationships are important. Think about your own: family, friends, teachers, employers. When your family is relating at its best, it can be a safe haven, an experience of home. You may have a friend with whom you feel "at one."

You are linked to God even more closely than you are connected to your family or even your closest friend. You may experience this oneness sometimes—but it's true all the time.

Dr. Michael Downey, a theologian who writes and speaks on Christian spirituality, says that for him the mystery of the Trinity is more about the awesome idea of God relating to us than about how three can be one. He does not dismiss the importance of the Trinity, but shows us how it may connect most to our life.

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**Q.** Why is the creed in which we use words about the Trinity called Nicene? **A.** *This creed expresses beliefs that were emphasized at a Church council held in Nicaea (Nice SEE ah) in the year 325. The Church holds a worldwide council whenever there are special needs to be addressed. Councils are named for the place where they are held. Nicaea was located in Bithynia in Asia Minor (today's Turkey). At that time in the Church, some false teachings about Jesus were circulating, and Church leaders wanted to stand united on the basic beliefs of Christianity.*

He says the Church's doctrine on the Trinity is about a communion of Persons in loving relationship. Consider you belong to a family. That's usually counted as one "unit" with more than one person in it.

Lots of people speak of "starting a family" when a third person—a baby—is expected. When you see God as a family—as divine persons in relationship to one another—it can help you to understand yourself as a human person, and how God is an example of what that means.

Any attempt to visualize the Trinity is going to be limited and imperfect, because God is more than we humans can fully understand. A while back, Paulist Productions produced a film called *Jesus B.C.* It was meant to help viewers imagine the Trinity as Persons in a loving relationship.

The setting was a "room" where three people represent God had a window view of the world from the time of creation. Their conversation, gestures, care and concern led the viewers of the film to see how deeply committed these persons were to each other and to the human race.

In the film, as human activity progressed toward chaos and self-destruction, this loving "trinity" devised a solution involving sending one of them (the Son) to live among the people and show them how to relate to each other. In this film, a woman played the role of the Holy Spirit. This stretched the viewers' awareness of how all humans, male and female, are in the image of God.

Dr. Downey says the Church's teaching about the Trinity shows us that God is a communion with, or communion of, persons. To be a person is to be in relation to others. You learn who you are as you interact with other people. You are

always practicing and learning how to be human.

The Persons of the Trinity *know* how to be in relationship. They don't need practice. They have great, total and eternal joy in one another. This joy is such a powerhouse that it leads to our existence. God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is deeply committed to loving us. The Persons of the Trinity love one another—and this love is so strong that it creates, redeems, inspires and strengthens us.

### Jesus Drops Clues

**J**esus taught people God's mercy. When he healed, he showed people what God was like.

When one of his disciples asked Jesus to show him the Father, Jesus said,

"Whoever has seen me has seen the father" (John 14:9).

When he spoke of a future in which his disciples would see and understand more clearly, he added, "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). That astounding statement draws us all into the unity and love of the divine relationship. We are actually taken into God's existence.

Let's look at the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught his followers. Jesus was using a word that teaches people to approach

God trustingly, as a child would go to a loving parent for protection, nurturing, sustenance and lessons about life.

Jesus taught many lessons using parables: stories taken from everyday life. Some of his stories were meant to teach people what God was like. He spoke of a shepherd who wouldn't stop searching for a lost sheep, a generous employer who paid a full day's wage even to part-time workers, a party-giver who invited everyone—not just the "in" crowd.

Other stories taught people how they should treat each other. Jesus also spoke of the traveler who stopped to help a stranger in need and the person who canceled another's debt.

Amazingly, he was calling people into the same loving relationship with each other that they also experience with God. And that was the relation-

### Relating to Trinity

**W**hen Jesus left his death was near, he promised to send the Spirit to be with his disciples. After his resurrection he said, "I am with you always until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Just as Jesus had said he was one with the Father (in an earlier section), so now he said he was one with the Spirit.

This third Person in the Trinity, "proceeding from the Father and the Son," is the ongoing inspiration providing gifts of wisdom, understanding and holiness to those who seek closeness with God.

Even though we name the Father first in the Trinity, Jesus tells us that the Person we name last will probably be the

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**q.** When I pray to Jesus, am I somehow excluding the Trinity? What about prayers to the Holy Spirit? Do they leave out Jesus? **a.** *Jesus said whoever sees him sees the Father and that he and the Father are one. Also, from Jesus, we learn about the Spirit whom Jesus sends to be with believers always. So through this unity of Persons, as one God, it seems to be impossible to exclude anyone! When you pray, address the aspect of God you feel most inclined to relate to at any given moment. Trust that God, in all aspects, will be fully present to you.*

ship Jesus had known with the one we call Father, his father from all eternity.

That Jesus would give up his life in an act of love shows us the heart of God, the qualities of the Son of God. We have a compassionate God who does not reject us when we are weak or when we fail. God knows that the real self we were created to be is quite beautiful and attainable.

basis of our first connection with God. As we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "Everyone who glorifies the Father does so through the Son in the Holy Spirit; everyone who follows Christ does so because the Father draws him and the Spirit moves him" (#259).

So how will you find your true self? Discover the God who lives in you. Think about your strengths and weakness your gifts and fears. Examine your thoughts, feelings and actions. You will find God the

healer working within you, inspiring and supporting you, whenever you allow God to be your partner in growth.

Think of yourself as a type of "trinity." All of us are capable of thinking, feeling and doing. But each of us is more at home in one realm than in the other two. One person may think all day but be slow to act. Another might be involved in lots of activities but not be very sensitive to how others feel. Someone else might have great sensitivity to another's need but be less inclined to think what

action would be helpful.

Are you more comfortable as a thinker, a feeler or a doer? Do you suspect there are some untapped resources in yourself that, if developed, would enrich the way you approach life?

Prayer can touch and open up the parts of you that need to be brought into the whole picture of your self. You can allow the mystery of the Trinity to play an important role in your spiritual growth.

If you are a "thinker"—

someone who likes to ponder and understand—you probably can easily find God in Jesus. Imitating Jesus appeals to you.

If you are a "feeling" type—one who is at home with your emotions—you probably relate well to God as Spirit, whose love is always flowing and filling all things.

If you are a "doer"—someone who is readily active and involved—you probably enjoy just "being" or resting when you come to prayer. Praying to God as Father, the Source and ground of your being, can be very satisfying.



## Touch the Trinity Acting in Your Life

### Reflect With Jesus

- ▲ Use scripture to imagine scenes and people. In stories about Jesus, observe what Jesus is saying and doing. Participate at Mass to nourish your inner self. Pay attention to the symbols used: words, gestures, objects and music.
- ▲ Practice healing past memories by letting feelings rise to the surface. Ask Jesus, the healer, to take away the pain and help you let go.
- ▲ Find a way to live out what you have prayed about.

### Relate to the Spirit

- ▲ If you like to feel deeply when you pray, choose beautiful surroundings: a sacred place, outdoors in nature, space alone and quiet, or a lovely setting for celebrating the liturgy with a group.
- ▲ Imagine the Spirit of God flowing in and through you. Breathe deeply. Inhale to receive the Spirit and exhale to send the Spirit out to the world.
- ▲ Use gestures, dance, poetry, symbols—anything that brings feelings into focus.
- ▲ Trust your positive feelings and don't get trapped by negative ones. The Holy Spirit is personally available to you and you don't ever have to pretend to be someone you're not.

### Renew With the Creator

- ▲ God as Father/Mother/Birther is the source of your personal creativity. Practice simply being in God's presence. Set aside all thinking, feeling and moving—and simply be. Experience union and oneness with God.
- ▲ Let God be God for you. Accept and surrender. Center yourself in God's being and experience the freedom that brings. Give up the need to control whatever happens and let stillness nourish you.

### Tap Trinity Energy

One high school student wrote a prayer which includes these words: "It's easy to live with a God you've been taught, but it's easier to love a God you've found in yourself."

You can see it happen—in the story of Jesus, the story of the Church, the story of your life. In your own experience, you've discovered that love is both giving and receiving. You have seen in the Easter story that when love is shared, it brings to life something new. Jesus gave his life; now we are strong enough to give ours.

Think of the Trinity this way: the Father extending love (Creator), the Son embodying or giving visible shape to that love and offering it back (Redeemer) and the Holy Spirit being the shared love of Father

- 9. The Trinity isn't
- pretty complicated. It's
- thinking about it that
- necessarily is so hard.
- a. The Trinity is a
- profound mystery of
- our faith so, in that
- sense, thinking about it
- will always be
- complicated. But think
- in terms of privilege
- rather than necessity.
- You are able to relate
- to God in a variety of
- personal ways: to the
- One who made us with
- loving care, to the One
- who walked with us in
- our humanity, to the
- One who lives within
- us to inspire and guide.
- Then realize all of that
- is one and the same
- God—and rejoice!

and Son (Sustainer).

The Trinity lives within and embraces you. As the Trinity is One, so you are one unified whole. You are receiving love from God and returning love to God. In the process, you are always becoming someone new. **YU**

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