

When I was discerning a call to the priesthood, the rector of my parish suggested that I attend an ordination service at the church. A young woman was being ordained a deacon, and he thought that it would be wise for me to see just what I was getting myself into. So I showed up by myself that Saturday morning and found an open seat beside my mentor, the retired director of Christian Education, who during the point in the service when the candidate submits herself fully to God leaned over and said, “are you sure that you want to do this?” When I turned to look at her and respond, I saw the tears welling up in her eyes. I knew that she had felt the calling for most of her life, but because of her age and her gender, it had never happened, and in her mind, it was too late. She squeezed my hand, and I felt the Holy Spirit holding us together in that sacred moment.

It was a joyful and powerful service, and on the way out the door, we all hugged and congratulated the newly ordained deacon. As I approached her she said to me, “That Holy Spirit, She is a powerful force!” That was the first time that I had heard the Holy Spirit referred to as “She,” and it made me pause. “She,” I thought. “That’s cool . . . I think.” But I wasn’t entirely sure

that I understood. So Father and Son are the masculine parts of the Trinity, and the Holy Spirit is the feminine? How exactly does that work? I felt lost trying to conceptualize the Trinity, and it was a relief to find out in seminary that pretty much everyone feels at a loss when trying to conceptualize the Trinity. In fact, today, Trinity Sunday, is widely known among clergy as the day to dread preaching. Until today I had never been scheduled to preach on Trinity Sunday. But my number is up.

About a month before I started seminary, my primary teacher, the Episcopal priest, writer and mystic, Cynthia Bourgeault, published her first book on the Trinity: *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three: Discovering the Radical Truth at the Heart of Christianity*. She begins the book by expressing her own frustration with feminizing the Trinity. She acknowledges that from a practical standpoint, “this gender corrective yields tremendous gains . . . if the church’s exclusively male representation of the inner life of God laid the theological groundwork for an exclusively male political hierarchy that has systematically devalued the place of both the feminine and women in Christianity, then an authentic female representation among the persons of

the Trinity would seem a graceful way to redress the grievance and correct the imbalances that have distorted so many areas of the church's life." But the problem, she claims, is that we have been programmed to think of the Trinity as "persons." And the heart of the matter, the radical truth at the heart of Christianity, as she calls it, is that the Holy Trinity is not about persons so much as it is about process. The Trinity is an active paradigm of change and transformation, not an external, static emblem of individuals. No doubt, each of us has fallen into the trap of anthropomorphizing God, and I cannot blame us for this mistake, as we so desire to be in relationship with the Creator, and so often our human relationships are all that we know.

I recently discovered a Rabbi, David Cooper, who teaches that God is a verb. He reminds us that Isaiah cried out that God's understanding cannot be fully grasped, and that as long as we relate to God as Father and we as children, we remain alienated and relinquish our own sense of responsibility. This may be true for many people, yet certainly not all, but the important thing to consider as we explore this reframing of God is that **theology matters**. How

we understand God determines how we live and make meaning, how we relate to the world.

A dear friend of mine grew up in the Catholic Church and spent her formative years learning about God as Father while simultaneously living out a heart-wrenching experience with her own abusive father, causing her to flee religion as soon as she was able. After years of struggling with addiction, she found a community that invited her to contemplate God in the feminine, and her healing process began. She is now an Episcopal priest who has dedicated her ministry to the work of multi-generational healing and reconciliation. Theology matters.

In my 20s and 30s, I spent years working as a volunteer teacher of yoga and mindfulness in various schools. The students loved it, but there were occasions when I heard from parents of a more fundamentalist background who, knowing that the origins of these practices were in Eastern religious traditions, were concerned and even angry that I was leading their children down a path of “false religion” or polytheistic worship. I was hurt by their

language and accusations, but over time I came to realize that it was not so much that they disrespected or hated other religions; rather, they were terrified of God. Theirs was a theology that deemed God as jealous and perhaps even vengeful. Theology matters.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says to the disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." Jesus understood that the theology of his generation mattered, but he also knew that to fully grasp God was not possible for them in that moment in time, and that there would be much work to be done in the generations that followed. And it remains true in our day; we cannot yet bear the whole truth. Our insights about God are ever-evolving as we draw closer in each age to what Jesus calls the "age to come." The slow and deliberate work of the Holy Spirit requires patience, and it is not the work of easy answers or quick correctives. I always find it helpful to revisit the words of the Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who wrote:

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything  
to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something  
unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress  
that it is made by passing through  
some stages of instability—  
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;  
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,  
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on,  
as though you could be today what time  
(that is to say, grace and circumstances  
acting on your own good will)  
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit  
gradually forming within you will be.  
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing  
that his hand is leading you,  
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself  
in suspense and incomplete.

On this Trinity Sunday, as we recognize that yes, indeed, theology matters,  
we may also allow ourselves to relax a little, to loosen the grip on  
understanding, and to trust that in God's time, we will finally know and  
understand, we will at last bear the truth of God, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*.

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