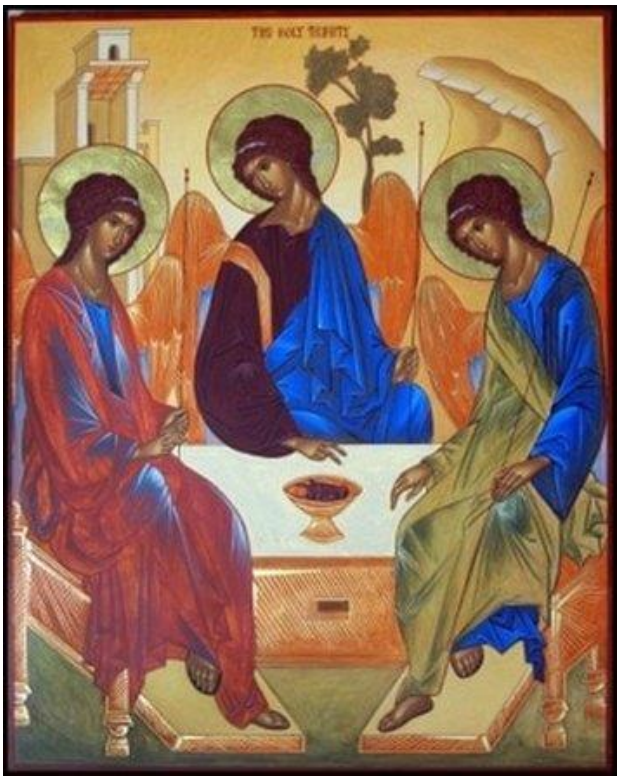
Weekly Reflection on the Trinity - the House of Love

Catholic theologian Karl Rahner once wrote that Christians behave as "mere monotheists." That is we probably don't live into the Triune God and yet, many theologians and contemplatives would argue that a fuller understanding of the Trinity helps us to live well in times like this especially. Well, this Sunday is Trinity Sunday and so I wanted to explore the Trinity principally through leading Christian contemplatives who have written on the Trinity.



I served my curacy in Holy Trinity Church, Fareham on the south coast of England and it is there I first encountered this picture of Andrei Rublev's icon of the Trinity, originally written in 1410. Henri Nouwen wrote about the icon[1] which was written at a time of upheaval and uncertainty and so is particularly relevant.

Long ago in Russia, there were many attacks made on a small town, and in a monastery the monks got very nervous and could no longer concentrate on their prayers because of all the violent conflicts throughout the town. The abbot called his icon painter, Rublev, to paint an icon to help the monks remain prayerful in the midst of restlessness, trouble, and anxiety. Rublev painted an icon based on the visit of the three angels to Abraham in Genesis 18, seated around a table of hospitality.

In the icon, the figure in the centre points with two fingers to the chalice and inclines toward the figure on the left, who offers a blessing. A third figure on the right points to a rectangular opening on the front of the table through which the viewer is invited to enter and participate in the spiritual actions. Together, the three figures form a mysterious circle of movement in perfect proportion. So when the monks prayed with the icon and focused on that circle of hospitality, love, and intimacy, they realized that they did not have to be afraid. When they allowed themselves to be part of the community formed by the three figures and let themselves be drawn into that circle of safety and love, they were able to pray and not lose heart."

Thomas Merton describes the Trinity relationship as follows:

> ***"The One God Who exists only in Three Persons is a circle of relations in which His infinite reality, Love, is ever identical and ever renewed, always perfect and always total, always beginning and never ending, absolute, everlasting and full.*** *(New Seeds of Contemplation)*
>
> Prophetically, Nouwen's continues:
> ***"Hardly a day passes in our lives without our experience of inner or outer fears, anxieties,***

[1] Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons by Henri J. M. Nouwen (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1987)

> ***apprehensions and preoccupations. These dark powers have pervaded every part of our world to such a degree that we can never fully escape them. A network of anxious questions, which begins to guide many, if not most, of our daily decisions.***
>
> ***Still it is possible not to belong to these powers, not to build our dwelling place among them, but to choose the house of love as our home. This choice is made not just once and for all but by living a spiritual life, praying at all times and thus breathing God's breath. Through the spiritual life we gradually move from the house of fear to the house of love."***

So, here I return to my reflections a few weeks ago – it is in the spiritual practices that we are grounded in the spiritual life that leads to the house of love. Nouwen beautifully describes the house of love as:

> ***"the place where we can think, speak, and act in the way of God – not in the way of a fear-filled world….***
> ***The house of the Lord is the house of love for all people. There is a circle of safety, intimacy, and hospitality in the house of love. In that house we can slowly let go of our fear and learn to trust. In that house we can find freedom, community, and joy. Peacemaking is possible when we live in the house of love. Justice can be practiced where we live in the house of love. Ministry is effective when we live in the house of love. There we can be, and move, and trust, and love in freedom and without fear."***

So now, we need to use the horror of recent racist events not to despair but to commit to entering the House of Love and as we let go of our fears which feed our prejudices so we truly can love those who are not like us but who are equally created and equally loved by the Triune God.

A fellow pilgrim on the way of love, Philip