

Brentwood School 6th Form - January 1999

John 14 v6-11: "Show us the Father"

In the reading today Philip is asking Jesus to shine some light on this question of the nature of God. So that's what I want to do today.

I was talking to a sub-atomic physicist the other day and she explained to me that as soon as you get into science at that level, you are into mystery. Because although we know that the mathematics of quantum mechanics works, nobody can come up with a theory to explain why it works. We simply don't know. It's a mystery as awkward as the Holy Trinity. But the mystery of the Trinity and the mystery of quantum mechanics are related.

For the first thing that quantum mechanics has proved to us is that everything is in relation and at the sub-atomic level nothing is inert. A stone may look dead to you and me - but at a deeper level the whole thing is in flux - moving and dynamic. And why? We don't know the answer to that mystery.

The Christian can suggest however that it is because the creator has made creation in God's own image. So creation has to be relational and dynamic like this because the creator God is such - three persons dynamically inter-related. If God were simply a set, unchanging, Oneness, as some primitive religions assert, then the relational nature of the universe to which quantum mechanics attests could not make sense.

However, if God is a dynamic Trinity, as Christians have always maintained, then quantum mechanics makes sense of the relational, Trinitarian nature of the God of Christianity and Christianity's creator God makes sense of quantum mechanics. Everything has to be relational.

Second. Quantum mechanics relates to chaos theory. Chaos theory essentially says that creation occurs through random chance. God does "play dice" with the universe. But, when you multiply up the outcome of those random chances (and computers allow us to do the mathematics as never before) then we see that that randomness issues, at a higher level, in order. The laws of science can operate at our level because the chaos at the basic level always works out that way. Or as Einstein said, "the most irrational thing about the universe is that it is rational." It is that random chance working in dynamic with order at the higher level, that allows for creativity.

But it is also that same dynamic which allows for disappointment and suffering to exist. "Sorry, but chance has ordained that Sonya will contract meningitis." So we are saying that the same facts that allow suffering to exist, also offer the transformation that allows creativity to exist. And that is what crucifixion and resurrection is saying. Precisely that.

Now if we know from this sub-atomic physics that all is relational, then there never is aloneness. You can't be relational by yourself. That's why God must be relational - a three in one - a trinity. And what's more, God must be a God who relates to the creation - and at every level. A non-interrelating, non-trinitarian God cannot logically exist. In other words, God knows. God relates. And because this is *a/ways* the nature of God, then creation is always in relation to God the creator.

The second person of the Trinity, the Logos, has always been the Logos - the expression, and so creativity has always existed and God has always been in relation to it. So relation has to continue. That is how we know scientifically, if you like, that God relates to the world even now. That is why prayer and worship make sense now. Because God is interested.

And it is precisely because God is as intimately involved and concerned with creation as this that Paul can talk in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans of the fact that God is to be discerned by anyone in the universe. Revelation is that "matter-of-fact". That's why ecology can turn you on. That's why 'natural law' makes sense. That's why we must take very great interest in implicit religion, or folk religion. Because God is present here, relating to all. God actually is Emmanuel -it's not a myth.

If you're not a physicist then these arguments may not strike you as convincing. If you're more interested in the arts or sociology, try this approach.

A note about culture. There are two major factors in culture today which are horrendously apparent. The first is Globalisation.

I was in Brazil a month ago, in Budapest last year. In both places MacDonalds was everywhere. Globalisation or the MacDonaldisation of the world is an example of big business and modern technology combining to make everything around the world look and taste the same. Globalisation.

At the other extreme, we hear every day of yet another local tribal battle - be it the Afghan Taliban, or the Basque separatists. Local culture fighting for its place in the sun. Call it the "localisation" of world cultures. So it's the local against the global.

Now this is a new dynamic for us. But it's in no way new for God. God has been conscious of the complexity and diversity of the world since it was made. But God is also conscious of the struggle of local and global because it is a tension within the very nature of the Holy Trinity. We speak of God being One (global) and yet we also speak of

God being Three (local). But in God there is not the horrendous battle of exclusion - as if one person of the trinity is trying to exclude the other - trying to find its identity at the expense of the other, as we tend to do; but in the Godhead there is a ready acceptance of difference - indeed a loving affirmation of differences, *and* unity. The Holy Trinity is the model for a just and peaceful planet.

I hope that my whizz-bang tour of modern physics and sociology shows that you can rely on Christianity to address the basic issues of the next millennium. It speaks of a God who is relational - relating to the universe (hence the importance of history and ecology), who relates to us (hence the importance of psychology, prayer and worship) and who works through the suffering of chance to the glory of justice and order.

I'd love the chance to come back and discuss all this with you in detail, but I trust I have given you a flavour of why it is that Christianity appeals so much both to our human reason and to the artistic, feeling nature of a full and alert human being. For at the heart of the universe, there is not a solitary aloneness. There is a three in One.

May God bless you in your search for truth.

AMEN.