

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Trinity

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity tells what we have tried to formulate about the nature of God. God is so much greater than us that our minds are *formally* incapable of understanding this nature; they simply do not reach far enough to contain a complete concept of “God”. Without being trivial, we could say that “a human definition of God” would be like a spaniel’s definition of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. The dog is *formally* underequipped to define the Prince. That doesn’t mean the spaniel can’t *know* him, in a doggy way: recognise his voice, form, smell. A dog can be very hard to mislead about the meaning of such signals. But the doggy mind isn’t equipped to understand a man, and a human is similarly certain to fall short in speaking of God.

Look At The Son

On the other hand, what are we to say about the very real flesh-and-blood figure of Jesus of Nazareth? Everything we read about him in the Scripture speaks of a man no-one felt able to fathom, but who seemed to read the hearts of others with great ease. He comes in the role of a religious leader, and in that role he scandalises his hearers by insistently and urgently proclaiming *himself*. Yet in proclaiming himself, he evinces a humility and obedience which almost approaches self-effacement. At the same time he is surrounded by persistent stories, from various different sources, of his stunning mastery over the forces of evil, and even over natural conditions (walking on water, and so on) which seem to preclude any ordinary evaluation of him. He is frighteningly aware, penetratingly truthful; at the same time his claims about himself dumbfound us. Any number of charlatans have tried to hoodwink the world by odd behaviour and frowning faces. But the suggestion that Jesus of Nazareth is a Rasputin, a Svengali, or any other sort of mass illusionist has never served to dispose of him. He is truly a foundation-stone which you can either build on or stumble over; but you can’t rubbish him or ignore him. It is in the Church’s facing the question of who he is, that the doctrine of the Trinity has evolved.

Think Of The Father

The question soon arises, as we look at the extraordinary personality of this man who calls himself “the Son”: *what manner of Father can he be speaking of?* What is the nature of the one

obeyed, prayed-to by such a Son? You can see that the theology of the Trinity begins to build itself up at once; Jesus spoke of himself as “glorifying” his Father, and indeed, if we see the effect of the Father on the human life of Jesus, we sense the majesty and pre-eminence of the divine Father he religiously serves. The more we learn about the Son, the more we sense the greatness of the Father.

Wait For The Spirit

Looking at Jesus is something everyone has to do. He dominates human experience as no-one else does. And all who do so must think about the Father. But there is a third dimension, moved into by those who listen to Jesus in the most personal way. Those who come to trust him and believe in him are increasingly drawn into a sense of communion with him, which leads them into a journey with Jesus to the Father. Every step of the way is a closer approach to the understanding of all things in the light of Christ; and little by little the God who was a theory, or a way of understanding Jesus, becomes a place for us to live in, a home for the heart, a living presence, a total relationship which embraces all the world we know. This Welcomer into the heart of God, Father and Son, we call the Holy Spirit, and it is his presence in us that makes us alive to God. The Trinity is not a numerical puzzle but transcendent experience. To know God, you must call him “Father”. *Fr Philip*