

May the dance of infinite love and community shape our lives

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 15 June 2025

A Reflection by Rev Vladimir Korotkov

Trinity Sunday C

Genesis 1: 26; Proverbs 8: 1-4; 22-31; John 16: 12-15

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

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I feel a real urgency to elaborate alternative accounts, to learn to think differently about the subject, to invent new frameworks, new images, new modes of thought

Rosi Braidotti

Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory
1994, p1.

1. Limiting Jesus, limiting divinity and community

In his book *Jesus Means Freedom*, Ernst Kasemann shares an anecdotal story about a congregation in Amsterdam in 1952 which faced a life-challenging incident. One Sunday there were severe storms and floods, so if they were to survive the congregation needed to go out and strengthen the canal walls. But they believed they should honour the Sabbath and never work on a Sunday. The church council told the pastor that they must obey God's will, even if it meant death. God, being all-powerful, would save them. Their duty was obedience.

When the pastor suggested that Jesus himself broke the Sabbath on occasions, one venerable older man said that he had always suspected "*that our Lord Jesus was just a bit of a liberal*". (16) Kasemann concluded that the "*liberal Jesus*" was a cause of offence" to orthodox Jews, his first disciples and the whole church down to our time, due to his peculiar freedom. (17) A limiting view of Jesus limits our views of the divine and how we live our lives in community.

So can we imagine what the response would be if the pastor shared Jurgen Moltmann's interpretation of the first person of the Trinity in relation to the second person. And now I am using Moltmann's terminology and metaphors, not mine.

He writes that when the Father generated his only begotten Son in eternity, the Son was not "created" as the world was, but "*proceeded from the substance of the Father and is hence of the same substance as the Father.*" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 164)

Moltmann thus suggests, God as Father “*is a motherly father too. He is no longer defined in unisexual, patriarchal terms but – if we allow for the metaphor of language – in terms of bisexuality or transsexuality.*” (164)

Moltmann noted that the Council of Toledo in 675 stated:

“It must be held that the Son was created, neither out of nothingness nor yet out of any substance, but the He was begotten or born out of the Father’s womb (de utero Patris), that is, out of his very essence.” (165)

Now I think the Amsterdam Church Council would not only dismiss their pastor if he shared this new thinking, but they would question his Christian faith.

But while I see that Moltmann is attempting to “*elaborate alternative accounts, to learn to think differently*” about the divine and trinity, to use Rosi Braidotti’s words: *why does he still use gender exclusive language, and just focus on biology?*

2. Shall we look for another: women held in patriarchal bonds

Elizabeth Wainwright in her book *Shall we look for another? A feminist rereading of the Matthean Jesus*, wrote in 1998 that there was:

“an urgency among many women “to think differently” ...

Recent feminist critical theology and praxis – the experience and the critical reflections of feminist Christian women in both the academy, and in communities of faith and resistance – have brought to light this crisis. Images and modes of thought that gave meaning to Jesus in the context of Christian community in the past – Lord, Son of God, Son of Man – are no longer functioning in the same way for women who are moving toward new female/feminist subjectivities. Jesus, as refracted through the lens of centuries of androcentric and patriarchal theology and ideology, is proving a stumbling block.”
(Elizabeth Wainwright, p1)

Following Braidotti, Wainwright calls for a critique and invention to move forward together. The goal is both a movement out of patriarchy and its power dynamics toward a transformation of society. She writes that “*we need foundational stories and symbols that yield life-giving meaning. Which means representation of divinity beyond merely male symbolisation.*” (p2)

With Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Wainwright reminds us that patriarchy is a multidimensional system of oppressive structures; and patriarchy (the rule of the fathers) is combined with kyriarchy, the rule of male elites. Kurios, means Lord in Greek. Which today we see growing in power around the world.

And we need to be aware of the multidimensional nature and power of patri/kyriarchal oppression: that is, forms of domination experienced by race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, condition, and age. We are living in times of neo-colonisation which includes the ecological crisis, and the power of neoliberalism and neo-capitalism and post-democracy.

Added to this, Wainwright calls each of us, regardless of our identity or subject position to recognise, to wake up to, to identify the truth of our particular embeddedness and power and powerlessness in our own contexts of our neo-colonial culture.

3. The Spirit of Truth: beyond the domestication of unmindfulness

In our text today we heard the words of John's Jesus: "*When the Spirit of truth comes, she will guide you into all truth*". The Ancient Greek word for truth is *aletheia*.

The core word is *Lethe*, the Classical Greek word meaning, forgetting. In Ancient Greek mythology, the river Lethe was one of five rivers in the underworld, Hades, which was the river of forgetfulness. The river was also known as *Amelēs Potamos*, or the "river of unmindfulness." The dead drank the water to forget their past.

So, *A-lethe-ia*, then, has the sense of waking up, remembering, overcoming oblivion and stupor; being alive and vital; of being mindful of our embeddedness in our culture and its ideology which can unconsciously shape our existence and power dynamics.

John O'Donoghue wrote:

When our lives, minds and hearts are domesticated by the symbolic and cultural order around us, our lives are reduced. Our lives as free and equal children of the universe are disinherited. Almost without knowing, we slip inside ready-made familial, socio-cultural, national roles, routines, values ... We acquire sets of convictions in relation to politics, religion, and work. (Eternal Echoes, 142)

The Spirit of Truth provokes us to journey into and beyond the domestication of unmindfulness. To think and live differently! To critique current theology and social power, and invent "*foundational stories and symbols that yield life-giving meaning to all equally. Which means representation of divinity beyond merely male symbolisation.*" On our faith journey, we are invited to continue to expose all our individual and community expressions of divinity to the Spirit of Truth: to the Jesus story, the Divine Source of life, the Trinity, Mystery.

Conclusion

To conclude, Trinity is one expression of divinity. And there are only hints of trinity in the Scriptures. Throughout church history trinitarian doctrines were shaped, each from within their cultural frameworks. And some creations were disempowering due to patriarchal inventions. For some of us trinity has little meaning or relevance. And that's okay in this place.

So, I just want to leave two examples of a contemporary expression for those for whom trinity is important.

1 To summarise a new way of experiencing the Trinity, Debie Thomas:

Then, there is an inner energy of the one God who exists in three persons, an intrinsic plurality to goodness. A goodness, with contrast and tension, not perfect uniformity.

Their difference is at the heart of the divine which invites us to love, accept and live difference.

The Divine is community. God is relationship, intimacy, connection, and communion.

The one who is divine three is a radical hospitality. The 15th century, Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev created the Trinity icon (on our liturgy sheet today). The three persons around the shared table share an intimacy and appreciation of each other.

2 David Lose:

“The Trinity then is about the profound love of God that draws us into relationship with God, with each other, and with the whole of creation and the cosmos.”