

## **The Holy Trinity** **Proverbs 8**

The reason the doctrine of the Holy Trinity matters is that it has something to say about events currently in the news. Let's take, for example, the Conservative Party leadership contest; or the debate about climate change. The doctrine of the Trinity has something quite definite to say about both of these.

So let's begin the Conservative Party leadership. And let's begin with the most obvious fact about the Holy Trinity: there are three of them! The Christian understanding of God is that he, or she is not a self reliant individual but a community of people. This Holy Trinity is represented in a famous icon, a copy of which is in front of us. Commentators on this icon tend to notice two things. First of all the three figures are looking in each other's direction. They are a community, interdependent, linked, joined in love. But the other feature of this Holy Trinity is that they are not equally spaced round the table: there is a gap. The three members of the Trinity are all looking outwards. They are looking outwards at you. They are drawing you into the community. They are inviting you into their community of love.

But although the explicit understanding of the Holy Trinity belongs to the Christian church, the understanding of community goes well back into the Old Testament. At the heart of the Law of Moses is a concern for those who are at the edge of the community, widows, orphans and foreigners. For example, farmers were encouraged not to be too efficient when they harvested the grain. They were encouraged not to harvest all the way to the edge of the field but to leave a strip of corn to be harvested by the those who were poor or immigrants:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:9)

Jesus conveys similar sentiments in the parable of the sheep and goats, Matthew 25, where the vulnerable are characterised as the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, strangers, and those in prison.

So, in the context of this Jewish and Christian tradition what are we to make of the phrase 'tax burden'? This is a phrase which has bandied about rather carelessly in the Conservative party leadership campaign by both the candidates and by journalists. There is a casual assumption that tax is a 'burden'. Let me put to you an alternative view. A couple of years ago I was holding a conversation with the young man who was doing rather well in his career. He was of no particular religious persuasion nor I think any particular political conviction. But he commented on how proud he was when at the age of eighteen he started earning a wage and started paying income tax. Tax was seen by him not as a burden but as a privilege. I think that is thoroughly Christian way of understanding taxation: a privilege not a burden.

And when you look at the way the government uses their tax income you can see why. £24 out of every £100 was spent on welfare: supporting those who are ill, unemployed, disabled. £20 out of every £100 went on health care, used by everyone, but a disproportionately by those who are ill! £13 about every £100 went on state pensions, most valued by those who have no private pension. £12 as of every hundred went on education which is traditionally a route out of poverty. I hope you will forgive me if I add that out of every £100 of tax we pay a mere 70 pence or fourteen shillings went to the European Union budget.

I also suggested that the adoption of the Trinity has something to say about the debate on climate change. You will have heard in the news that the government has committed to Britain to reducing net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by the year 2050.

Prime Minister Theresa May said there was a "moral duty to leave this world in a better condition than what we inherited". The doctrine of the Trinity suggests that she may be right. We heard in our first reading, from the book of Proverbs, how God and Wisdom, the forerunners of the Trinity, were responsible for the creation of the world and everything in it.

Everything we see and touch and smell is part of God's creation, in which he delighted and rejoiced. It seems self evidence but we should care for that creation. We're here to steward it not destroy it.

It's pretty obvious there's going to be a cost to safeguarding the creation. Let's take a homely example. If I want my kitchen to be clean, tidy, safe, hygienic, I will have to invest my time in making it that way. A clean and tidy kitchen does not come without effort. If we extend that to the global economy, if we want our world to be clean, tidy, safe and hygienic we will have to invest and it's quite likely that we will have to invest a little more time than we have been doing. We will need, for example, to invest in electric cars, wind turbines, the insulation of domestic and commercial buildings, the planting of trees. So how does that happen? I think there are two choices. One possibility is that as human race we might have to work a little more. Since it is quite likely that taking the world as a whole here are significant numbers of people who are unemployed, creating more work might not be a problem. It may well be that unemployment is not a problem in our own country in which case we can encourage immigration in order to find the necessary labour.

But what if we were all fully employed? What if there were no unemployment in the world at all? What if we were all working as many hours as we wanted to and no one wanted to work any more? How would we implement measures to prevent climate change in such circumstances? The answer quite obviously is that if we contributed more of our time as a human race to mitigate the effects of climate change we would have to do less in other areas. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has realised this but he has made a very strange suggestion: he has suggested that the cuts would have to come out of the health and education. The poorest people would have to pay for measures to reduce climate change. I'm not sure this fits in with the law of Moses about caring for the widows, the poor, the orphans and the foreigners. I'm not sure this fits in with a parable of the sheep and goats about caring for those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers and in prison. My reading, my understanding of the scriptures, my understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, my understanding of the sense of community found in the bible is that if we have to do less in

order to protect God's creation then perhaps we should produce less gin, fewer BMW's, and fewer luxury hotels.

That is the practical outworking of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. What is so often regarded as a rather complicated, obscure, academic doctrine turns out to be a very simple and very radical political philosophy. The doctrine of the holy Trinity turns out to be an economic lesson.

Jesus said, 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.'  
(John 16:13)



