

“Trinitarian Bodies” by Anna Gilcher

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Deuteronomy 4:32-40

Psalms 33:1-12

2 Corinthians 13:5-14

Matthew 28:16-20

Trinitarian Bodies

“The Trinity,” writes N. T. Wright, “does not begin with abstract thought, though it will stretch the minds of anyone who reflects on it. It begins with passion: the passion of Jesus, the passion of the apostles, the passion for reconciliation, God’s passion for the world. It is not, to begin with, a thinking person’s doctrine. It is a passionate person’s doctrine.”[1]

It is not a thinking person’s doctrine. It is a passionate

person's doctrine. Another way to put this might be that the Trinity has a lot more to do with what has been called "right-brain function" than with the culturally dominant "left-brain" way of thinking-which is to say that it's more about holistic, symbolic, empathetic ways of understanding rather than logical, linear, rational ways. The trinity is all about love and interconnectedness and relationship... which makes me wonder if it has more to do with the deep wisdom of the body rather than with the careful analysis of the thinking mind.

Most of us in our culture are not really in close relationship with our own bodies. Referring to this fact, a friend recently quoted James Joyce describing a character in his story *A Painful Case*: "Mr. Duffy lived a short distance from his body." We read and think and wrestle with ideas and concepts; we worry, we call for action, we write political manifestos; we reach out to the oppressed; we feed and clothe the poor; yet so often we don't reach out to our own distanced bodies with love and listen to what our bodies have to say.

Did you know that within our bodies our very bones reach out to each other, making relationship, communicating with one other? When that communication gets blocked, we get out of whack-and I imagine most of us are pretty out of whack on this front, in our culture, most of the time. My husband has been going to something called "zero balancing" for the past several months-a type of bodywork that concentrates on these bone relationships-and as crazy as all this sounds, we have seen that it is clearly true. As his body has reconnected with itself, his energy has improved, his terrible migraine-type headaches have lessened in frequency, and he feels more available for intimacy and relationship outside himself.

Our bodies have great wisdom. One thing the body knows is that things that appear contradictory can coexist. For example, emotion may come to our thoughts as being “anger” or “sadness,” or “fear,” but in our body we may feel all three at once-anger in the jaw or back of the neck, sadness in the throat, fear in the stomach.

Like the body, the Trinity shows us how to be in apparent contradiction, and how to be in relationship.

In our gospel passage today, from Matthew, the eleven disciples return to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had sent word for them to go. When the disciples see Jesus, we read in most translations: “they worshiped him; but some doubted.” However, in the Greek, the word “some” is not there, and the word that’s translated as “but,” can also be translated as “and.” So, another rendering of this passage reads: “when they saw him, they worshiped him and doubted” (or hesitated, as one hesitates between strong, powerful choices). What appears contradictory, worshipping and doubting (or hesitating)-so contradictory that translators have consistently chosen to interpret these two actions as belonging to separate people-may well be what is happening in each of these disciples’ hearts. But we have very little room in our usual way of thinking for apparent contradiction, for making relationship with it.

Are you with us or against us, we ask-and we are asked. Are you: a Democrat or a Republican? a man or a woman? are you gay or are you straight? And when we meet people who don’t fit our categories, we are so unpracticed at holding contradiction in relationship, that we run away, or we turn violent. Someone born with ambiguous genitalia, our culture says, must be

operated on to fit into the norm of being one of two possible genders-though we might well ask why we only name two to describe a whole range of gender experience and expression. A bisexual person is asked, but what are you *really*? if you had to choose, which would you?

Are you worshipping Jesus, or are you doubting? Tell us. Which are you doing?

Jesus gives the Great Commission to eleven disciples rather than twelve (which would represent the twelve tribes of Israel). Frederick Dale Bruner says the number eleven “limps”[2] and I love that rendering because, really, it’s not just the number that limps, but the disciples themselves, who deserted Jesus, who fled, who denied him. Yet-but the word really shouldn’t be “yet,” but rather “and”-**and** these are the disciples Jesus sends into the world to do this great work... of relationship. Relationship again. Because the Great Commission is, it seems to me, all about relationship, about knowing that we are all one, that we are all connected in the great wide world.

In his article “The Trinity: A model of belonging in contemporary society,” Thomas J. Scirghi says that to exist is to be in relationship. “Human relationships,” he writes, “are meant to mirror the divine communion. A person is a being-in-relationship... The more we belong to one another-the more we are able to make ourselves a gift-the more fully we exist.”[3] The more fully we exist. Self-gift is what the Trinity teaches us about being human and about being divine. Scirghi points out that the trend of our current corporate/advertising culture is “towards a disembodied community with a tenuous sense of belonging, [with] individuals existing within a state

of virtual connection. This culture," he says, "symbolized by the corporate brand, actually promotes uniformity while seeming to preserve an attitude of individualism. Consequently the notion of a person allowing God to make his or her life a self-gift is diminished or negated."

A **disembodied** community, he says. The body again.

We are so stingy with our bodily self-giving, aren't we-even in our most intimate relationships? Most of us have signs all over our bodies saying: keep off the grass; don't touch here; this is ugly; not here either. The corporate/advertising culture we live in promotes this idea. Don't touch each other. Buy this product instead. Here's how you're going to find belonging.

Have you been with a small child recently? Have you noticed how fully they give the gift of their bodies, of themselves? And what a joy it is to receive that gift? And how much intimacy grows when that happens? ...how much love grows? And how you are both drawn into existing more fully?

We are not just "souls" in relationship with God and with each other; we are bodies-in-relationship-with God, with each other, and with ourselves.

The physical reality of our spiritual connection to the universe is becoming ever clearer as the discoveries of quantum physics grow. Constance Fitzgerald explores some of this in her talk "Into the Thicket: The Hidden God and the Dispossession of Selfhood." [4] "It's intriguing to realize," she says, drawing on Danah Zohar's *The Quantum Self*, "that the

most fundamental building blocks of consciousness... called... photons, are essentially particles of relationship, not particles in isolation..." So, right from the quantum level, we-and all of the universe-are always already beings-in-relationship. In addition: "According to quantum physics, all being at the subatomic level can be described equally well as solid particles, like billiard balls, or as waves, like undulations on the surface of the sea. **In other words, all quantum stuff of the universe is essentially both wave life and particle life simultaneously.**" Both wave life and particle life simultaneously. *They worshipped and doubted.* She goes on to say that in intimate relationship our wave functions get superimposed upon one another, more or less harmoniously. They get entangled with each other. And sometimes, what happens is a "quantum resonance phenomenon, in which two coupled quantum systems, or even two totally non-locally related systems, one at one side of the earth or one at the other side of the universe... can suddenly swap oscillations. In this case, I would become you and you me."

If apparent contradiction goes so far that I can become you and you can become me; if my wave front can meet that of someone or something on the other side of the world or even the universe; how can we ever define who is with us and who is against us? How can we think that our linear, logical, rational way of conceiving ourselves, of conceiving the world, of conceiving God, can possibly account for the richness of relationship that really exists?

And how dare we-how dare we-discount our physical selves in the quest for God, in our desire for relationship, in our conception of the Trinity-for which, indeed, incarnation is so central? How can we be the body of Christ if we are not in relationship with our own bodies?

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Amen.

[1] From a sermon at the Eucharist on Trinity Sunday, 2002, Westminster Abbey.

[2] Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: Volume 2, The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28*, Dallas: Word, 1990, p. 1090.

[3] In *The Ecumenical Review*, July 2002.

[4] In *A Carmelite Commentary, The Experience of God Today*. Recorded Summer 1997;

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