

HOW MANY IDEA-SUNDAYS IN THE CHURCH YEAR? ONLY ONE!

1 In theological seminary 61 years ago this summer, I learned to use my hand for remembering the five realities one should keep in mind to be a good reader of the Bible or any other literature. Authors reveal their point of view by how they deal with **persons** (that's your little finger), **times**, **ideas**, **events**, & (here is your thumb) **places**. Notice that the three middle fingers spell "t-i-e": they tie together the little finger & the thumb. Now notice that the tall finger represents "ideas," which may or may not be what's most important in something you're reading. In the Church Year, last Sunday we celebrated an event, Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. Christmas & Easter are events in the semester (the half-year) of our Lord Jesus. Today is the swing Sunday into the Church Year's second semester, the half-year of the Church; & its theme is God, whose Name (into which we are baptized) is Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. So God--the person & work & will of God--is what's most important in the Church Year, as in the Bible. God come among us in & as Jesus is the first half-year: God in his trinitarian being & action in the world is the perspective of the second half-year.

2 "Trinitarian"? In the Church Year, today, Trinity Sunday, is the only idea-Sunday. On this day, we Christians are to sing about & pray about & think about & worship the One God who has come to us for our illumination & salvation as the Trinity, a shortened form of the word Tri-unity, meaning Three-in-One. This God-idea, our Christian God-idea, is as *simple* as it can be! Make it any simpler, & what you have is a deity less than, & other than, the Christian God. So the Trinity Sunday task of the Christian preacher is to make this simple idea **clear** without reducing God's revelation of himself in history & the Christian heart & hope.

3 The creeds make clear what God did, is doing, & will do--& who he is. To use a few expressions from our UCC Statement of Faith, God is "the **Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father," who "calls the worlds into being...." "In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord," God "has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to himself" in his **Son**. He bestows upon us his **Holy Spirit**, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ." God "calls us into his church, to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be his servants..., to proclaim the gospel...and resist the powers of evil." God "promises to all who trust him forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, his presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in his kingdom which has no end...." There is the Christian Story, the world-story as we Christians see it. You can tell it faster by just saying "Father, Son, Holy Spirit." You can tell it fastest by just saying "Trinity."

Also, thousands of hymns are clarifications & celebrations of the Trinity, including the one I wrote (& which we just sang) for the dedication of the Trinity window 45 Trinity Sundays ago (window & hymn, pp3-4 of #2877) high over the altar in the church we had just built: I had designed into the window the themes appearing in the hymn. All who raise their eyes above the altar every Sunday, any day, are invited to contemplate & adore the Holy Trinity, God as he is and has come to us, to the world, & will come.

4 Of course the divine personality is a mystery: even *human* personality is! As our love of God & people deepens, so does the mystery. But also the clarity, the sense. As a visual (which I suggested for the Easter '98 edition of NEWSWEEK), "The Shield of the Trinity" makes sense a dozen times--as three reversible affirmations with "God" at the center ("God is the Father, the Father is God," etc.); then as three reversible denials ("The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father," etc.). Each of the dozen statements shields, defends, the Christian Faith against specific attacks (& thus "the shield of faith" as defensive armor [Eph.6.16; next vs., offensive armor, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"]). The Trinity is an idea to be thought & fought for, as well as the God Reality to be adored & sung & obeyed. Each Trinity Sunday is to be a reminder & reinforcer of all this.

