

Trinity sermon

One of the massive cultural changes of the last 50 years or so has been a growing awareness of different faiths and I guess most of us will have had some contact with some wonderful people from other faiths.

I've prayed with both Moslems and Buddhists, and I look forward very much to meeting those people again in heaven, Judith and I took a Jewish funeral in a Christian church last week, and I was once politely ejected from a mosque. There is a spiritual awareness that cuts right across cultures: as the French writer Pascal wrote, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person"

That vacuum needs many different things to fill it: it needs a sense of something far greater than us. A person who can no longer experience AWE or REVERENCE or WONDER, has all but died.

- Islam is very strong on that. It has much in common with Christianity: it started when Mohammed saw a corrupt society with about 80 different gods who people tried to bribe and he said there is only one God, the Creator, the Almighty, the Merciful. Islam has a great sense of the otherness of God, the majesty of God, a God who asks for obedience, goodness and compassion.

Muslim faith has a deep belief in one who is far greater, and in the goodness of the one who is far greater.

Now, a very different group would be those who say they are 'spiritual but not religious'. This became a term used in the early days of dating websites: people were asked to identify their 'belief' and about 20% of folk in the UK ticked the 'spiritual but not religious box'. Those people are wary of institutions, which is understandable. I can only speak in very general terms, partly because of time constraint, but also because this group are a very diffuse and broad group. But on the whole, they are people who have an innate sense that 'there must be something else', and it often focusses on private, inward experience, with a belief in a divine spark within each person. It's often associated with feelings, an appreciation of beauty, of things being 'meant', and a search for inner calm.

We might say they have an awareness of the role of the Holy Spirit. That too is part of the vacuum.

The Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit seems to combine the truths of both of these: the otherness and majesty of God (as in God the Father) and the God that we can experience within us (the Holy Spirit).

And Christian faith adds to this the wonderful person of Jesus: Jesus, among other things, the one that makes God approachable without fear or sense that we're not good enough.

When I was young, I sat next to someone at my primary school who told me his name was Cowdrey and that his dad was the captain of England's cricket team. As a five year old, this meant little to me. But I became friends with this boy, and it turned out he lived just up the road. So, while journalists had to make appointments for interviews with Colin Cowdrey, I just turned up and had tea with them, and I might ask the captain of English cricket to pass me the jam. I didn't understand the adult world, but because his son was like me, a five year old who understood the real world of children, I had uncomplicated access to this great man. I knew the son. I didn't have to prove I was good enough to sit down to tea with them. Jesus, God the Son. Our friend, our brother.

So, Christians came to develop this understanding that God was supreme and majestic (God the Father), was to be experienced within (God the Holy Spirit) and that God was accessible and understandable to us through the Jesus (God the Son). That seems to me to fill every part of the vacuum.

As somebody once wrote, God beyond us, we call you Father, God beside us, we call you Jesus, God within us, we call you the Holy Spirit.

So, never lose confidence in your Christian faith. There's a vacuum, and the Trinity fits and fills every part of that vacuum.