TRINITY: UNITY IN DIVERSITY

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Category: Theology

For those who follow the Church Calendar, yesterday was Trinity Sunday, a day when traditionally minded preachers are forced to deal with a complex subject.

So, while all over the country, preachers have been trying to avoid Ariansm, partialism, tritheism and lots of other isms, I'd like to revisit one of my favourite subjects; the Trinity and mission(ism).

Thanks to @frsimon on Twitter for the pic.

There are important historical reasons why we look at the doctrine of the Trinity in the way we do and things like Arianism and modalism are actually important; but they also tend to divert our attention from the day to day relevance of the Trinity for our lives.

It is important to remember that Trinity is who God is. It's not some sort of strange add on that makes a simple God more complex and keeps theologians in business. The God of the Bible is Trinity; three in one. - Father, Son and Spirit.

Which leads us to the heart of mission. There is one God who exists in three persons; there is unity and diversity. This is our God and the church of God is a reflection of him. The Church is united; there is one Holy catholic Church, but it is diverse. Christianity in Africa often looks rather different to a congregation in the North of England and both are different to Christian meetings in India - but they are all Christian.

It is impossible to imagine Hinduism apart from its Indian roots and Islam, despite spreading worldwide, is still essentially rooted in Arabia. Christianity, on the other hand is geographically, culturally and linguistically diverse.Â Even the founding documents of the faith, the Gospels, where not written in the language Jesus spoke, so that no one language or culture could claim primacy.

Of course, the church is not God; we are called to reflect his unity in diversity, but it doesn't always come easy. I reckon there are three things that we need to do as we seek to reflect the Triune God.

We have to extend the diversity of the church: there are still places in the world - languages and cultures - where people don't know Jesus. If the church is to be truly diverse, we have to pay attention to taking the message of Christ to them, we can't be content with the current level of diversity (amazing though it is).

We have to build the diversity of our congregations: the world is increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse - especially in the large cities. Churches should reflect the world in which we live, with diverse congregations and leadership. A truly diverse church would probably be slightly uncomfortable for everyone with mixed worship styles and so on - but the benefits in terms of discipleship and mission are huge.

We have to avoid imposing our culture on others: church history is littered with attempts to force

Christians to fit into a particular model - be it mediaeval Latin, or Jacobean English. Globalisation, with standardised soft-rock worship songs and youtube preachers brings a whole new set of temptations and we have to avoid them.

Some contemporary approaches to mission would take a different tack to the one I've taken here; but I think they are wrong for all sorts of reasons - see more here.