

trinity (lc)

Some years ago I flew into Heathrow from Dublin, where I had attended a conference at Trinity *(up)* College. No-one was available to meet me, so I took the coach. At Oxford, there still being no-one to meet me, I took the bus. At Witney, there *still* being no-one to meet me, I took a taxi home. That was my one and only experience of travelling by bus as an adult. I now understand the somewhat spurious adage regarding having waited so long, and then ‘three came together’. Or you arrive at the bus stop, only to see the bus disappearing around the corner; you eventually arrive at your appointment, only to discover that you have the wrong day; in your confused state, you trip over a loose paving slab, and end the day in A&E. Troubles, like buses, we are told, ‘often come in threes’; or triads, as the dictionary tells us, ‘... the state of being threefold or triple or a trinity *(lc)*’.

Early man, as discovered in the disparate jungles of Amazon and Borneo, could count to three, at least they had only words for one, two and three, everything after that was ‘many’. The Pythagorean school regarded the number three as, ‘...the most noble of digits’, it being a prime number, the first *odd* prime number, and the sum of the previous two prime numbers ($1 + 2 = 3$). The triangle is the smallest polygon having three sides. The generally recognised symbol of modern Judaism, the hexagram, is made up of two equilateral triangles, called The Star of David or the Shield of David.



The Rule of Three in literature, suggests that things that come in threes are funnier, more satisfying, or more effective than other combinations; ‘Stop, Look and Listen’, ‘Work, Rest and Play’, ‘Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité’, ‘Faster, Higher, Stronger’, ‘Past, Present and Future’. ‘The Three Bears’, ‘Three Blind Mice’, ‘Three Men in a Boat’, Macbeth’s three witches...

(Homework: add your own, there are plenty out there, believe me!)

Hindus talk of the Trimurti, (5th Cent BCE) the Great Trinity of, Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver or destroyer, and Shiva the transformer; and the Tridevi, their consort goddesses, the three manifestations of Shakti the Divine Mother, Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati.

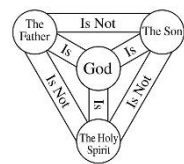
The Three Jewels or The Three Pure Ones of Taoism (3rd Cent BCE) and Buddhism (6th to 4th Cent BCE), refer to ‘compassion’, ‘frugality’ and ‘humility’. The Triple Goddesses of Wicca, are Maiden, Mother and Crone, whose attributes and manifestations being fairly obvious, are represented by a symbol made up of the waxing, full and waning moon.

In the Bible, three is used 467 times, and represents completeness or perfection. The Old Testament carries a myriad examples of the use of three. For example, Adam had three sons, Shem Ham and Japheth (Gen 4:2-25); there were three Patriarchs, Adam, Isaac and Jacob (Gen 9:18/19); three men were in the fiery furnace (Dan 3:23-25); Jonah spent three days in the belly of the ‘great fish’ (Jon 1:17); Paul was blinded for three days (Acts 9:9), prayed three times for his ‘thorn in the flesh’ to be removed (2 Cor 12:7-9); and was stranded for three months on Malta (Acts 28:11)

And look how important *three* is in Jesus’ life; He was tempted three times (Mat 4:1-11); aged 12 He went missing from his parents (Lk 2:41-50); there were Three Wise Men, (Mat 2:1&11); Peter, James and John were his *inner circle* (Mat 17:1); Peter denied Him three times (Mat 26:34); He prayed three

times in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mat 26:36-46); He was crucified at the third hour (Mk 15:25); He was resurrected on the third day (Mat 16:21); Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6); ‘When two or where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I, in the midst of them’ (Mat 18:20)

So what of the Trinity (uc)? Well the debate has raged, and continues to rumble. While early church Fathers even saw elements in the old testament, as looking forward to the Trinity, as in God appearing to Abraham as three persons (Gen ch 18), it was the *new* testament that they saw as a basis for developing the concept of the Trinity. Probably the most influential indicator is that found in (Mat 28:19) "Go therefore and teach all people, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". In *many* places there are references to God as the Father (John 6:27; Romans 1:7; 1 Peter 1:2), God as the Son (John 1:1, 14; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:8; 1 John 5:20), and God as Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 3:16), but nowhere is the word Trinity used or indeed, is even a simple doctrine suggested. The simplest outline of the doctrine, that there is one eternal God, shared by three co-equal and co-eternal ‘persons’, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, is depicted in The Shield of the Trinity, after The Shield of Faith (Eph 6:16), and derived from the Athanasian Creed – not by Anthansius! - and dates back to C12.



The doctrine of the Trinity, grew out of the teachings of the early bishops such as, Ignatius, Irenaeus, Clement and Tertullian, but there were those like Origen and Arius, who disagreed. So the first statement on the Trinity, came out of the 4th Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, and attended by around 320 bishops. It had been called, *not* by the bishops, but by the quasi-Christian Emperor Constantine 1, (he who had been responsible for the deaths of his Christian mother and his son, and only baptised on his deathbed), so that he could tame these bishops and bring them into an orthodox line, thus at the same time creating heresies. So we now have and say the Nicene Creed; later were developed the Athanasian Creed and the Apostles’ Creed.

The date of the celebration of the Trinity, is set as the Sunday following Pentecost; which follows 50 days after Easter; the date of Easter having been established by the Council of Nicaea as, ‘... the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the spring equinox.,’ of course it depends whether you use the Gregorian calendar of the Julian calendar. So there you are, homework time.

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