

God-as-Gospel: The Doctrine of the Trinity as Science and Theology Converge

Colleagues,

Two pieces this time. One's about a book from the growing literature on the convergence of science and theology in today's post-modern, post-secular, world. The second is from my sermon last Sunday in Rochester NY where Bob Wennerstrom was installed as pastoral associate in the Lutheran Church of the Incarnate Word (ELCA). Bob and I were classmates at Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) in the 50s. After 40 years in LCMS pastorates, he retired a few years ago, only to be called now to this new post. Since he was crossing the Rubicon from the Missouri Synod to the ELCA, he asked for someone to preach the Gospel who had done that crossing before. You'll see what he and the congregation got below.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

BOOK REVIEW

Patrick Glynn. GOD: THE EVIDENCE.

The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason in a Postsecular World.

Rocklin CA: Prima Publ. 1997,1999. viii, 216pp.

[5.8.99]

"Is science uncovering the face of God in our post-secular world?" That is the question Glynn's going after. His answer is

a feisty “Yes!”—and he’s not a crazy, a TV evangelist, or a monkey-trial madman. His gig is science, the heavy egg-head stuff that’s been the prize fruit of the Enlightenment. And from that science for us moderns came the message, gleeful for some, doleful for others: “Sorry, folks, there is no evidence for God out there.”

But here at the end of the millennium “it ain’t necessarily so.” That song from Porgy and Bess is now being refocused. In the opera those words were predicated to “the things that you’re liable to read in the Bible.” But nowadays, Glynn says, those words now apply to “science.” You know, when Christian kids went to college it was “the things that vexed when we opened our texts” – in biology, psychology, geology, and of course philosophy and lit crit. T’ain’t necessarily so.

So what’s happened to the “atheist scientists” we all know about, many of whom are still around? [There’s pluralism in their midst too.] Glynn tell us. He’s been there; done that. And now he’s “back” to Christian faith, but he’s not jettisoned his scientific and intellectual smarts to do so. ‘Fact is they’ve pushed him to see the evidence for God in today’s postsecular world. And that evidence is IN the stuff the scientists, using their hard-headed research tools, are telling us they are finding.

But it’s not just Glynn. Quote the dust jacket:

“A startling transformation is taking place in Western scientific and intellectual circles. Recent discoveries in physics, medicine, psychology, and other fields paint a radically new picture of the universe and humanity’s place within it. Central is the dawning realization that the cosmos, far from being a sea of chaos, appears instead to be an intricately tuned mechanism whose every molecule and every physical law seems to have been designed from the very first nanosecond of the big bang toward a single end—the creation of

life."In this provocative book, Patrick Glynn lays out the astonishing new evidence that led him away from the atheism he acquired [after a boyhood of Jesuit education] as a student at Harvard and Cambridge. The facts are fascinating: Physicists are discovering an unexplainable order to the universe; medical researchers are reporting extraordinary healing powers of prayer and documenting credible accounts of near-death experiences; and psychologists are finding that religious faith is a powerful elixir "for" [not "against," Dr. Freud!] mental health.

"God: The Evidence demonstrates that faith today is not grounded in ignorance. It is where reason has been leading us all along."

Folks with a Reformation twist to their heritage will see evidence in this book that Glynn is indeed a Roman Catholic who wandered into atheism and is now returning from that far country. Any signal of the supernatural that scientists are finding (e.g., the healing value of faith, "any kind of faith," the documented healthy consequences of practicing the "ethics of Jesus") has him turning cartwheels. Well, almost. Granted, what he shows us is not to be pooh-poohed. But it's still a stretch to get from scientists "finding room for God" all the way over to faith in a crucified and risen Messiah.

In Lutheran lingo the stuff Glynn gleans from postsecular scientists is data about "deus absconditus," the hidden God. Not hidden so that there are no signals from this deity. Yes, signals aplenty. But signals that this deity is merciful to sinners? No. Even if the world out there is not "all red in tooth and claw," the evidence for messages of mercy and rumors of redemption are either non-existent, or at best very ambiguous. If "science is uncovering the Face of God," there is

still a veil over the face that's been detected.

But you can build Christian (=Christ-specific) bridges to those data. Someone two millennia ago put it this way: "The veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away" [2 Corinthians 3]. That's our next agenda.

TRINITY SUNDAY SERMON – May 30, 1999.

Texts: 2Cor 13:11-13

11Finally brothers & sisters, farewell (or: rejoice). Put things in order, listen to my appeal (encourage one another), live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. 13The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of (sharing in, being participants in) the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Matthew 28:11-13

16Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17When they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. 18And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Introduction:

It's Trinity Sunday. And we've got three things to get connected this morning: Pastor Bob Wennerstrom, ourselves the congregation, and these texts, both of them the very last words

in 2 books of the NT (Matthew's Gospel and Paul's 2nd letter to the Christians at Corinth).

The Gospel text itself has its own trio: Galilee, authority, and the Trinity—the “boonies,” Christ's clout, the One-in-Three God. Trinity is not mysterious arithmetic about God, but Good News about God. Trinity is Gospel. The only way the disciples of Jesus could eventually do “God-talk” after their Christ-encounter—culminating in Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost—was as the Corinthians text does it. GRACE of our LJC = in Jesus we encountered God being for us, not against us. LOVE of God = God as agape, the give-away God finally giving away God's own self to sinners. The KOINONIA of [the Greek term, when followed by the genitive = partnering with, participating in, having a share of] the Holy Spirit. HS is not something spooky, but as at Pentecost [wind, fire, new language] Spirit is power, and the holying adjective is the healing action wherein we are shareholders.

I. Diagnosis of their malady, theirs and ours too.

D-1 Dismay, Dismal. Galilee—our life in the Boonies. Ho-hum record as Christ's disciples.

D-2 Disbelief. Sometimes worshipping, sometimes doubting, not remembering our authority.

D-3 Disconnected from the Trinity (from the Grace of LJC, love of God, koinonia of the HS) and its grim consequences: forced to live “coram deo” [face-to-face with God], but not with God as Gospel, “coram Trinitate” [face-to-face with the One-in-Three God].

II. A New Prognosis for the Afflicted

NP-1 Jesus' authority (clout, pull, connexions), & how he achieved it. What it means for our Triune connexions—grace,

love, partnering. What it does for you Bob, for the rest of us.

NP-2 Re-remembering = getting in on Christ's clout—for you Bob, for us.

NP-3 Galilee in Rochester. The “therefore” in “Go therefore”—for Bob and for us. Glee and Glow in the Galilee called Rochester.

Conclusion:

[Visual aid for the letter “W” in Wennerstrom]. We're not doing the Athanasian creed this a.m. (It takes about the same amount of time as this sermon did.) But we can picture it—with its words about the two dogmas of the ancient church: the Trinitarian nature of God and the Divine-Human natures of Christ—with what I have here in my hand, a carpenter's measuring rule folded into the letter “W.” Three points here—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: (“Remember” that means Love, Grace, Partnering with and from God). And two points here—Jesus Christ, true God and truly one of us. It works either way, whether you hold it up this way or turn it upside down this way—the three points support the two and vice versa.

We could brand you, Bob, with this Trinitarian “W,” but it's not a hot iron, and branding is gross anyway. So since you're already marked with the sign of the cross, that will surely suffice. Suffice for you and for the rest of us here: for coping with our dismay, disbelief and disconnection as it repeats to plague us in our Galilees. Suffice for getting us re-connected to Christ's clout and “going therefore” with glee and glow into our Galilee as Christ's disciples. Our goal: to clone more disciples, and in the same way—getting them connected to Christ and his clout. Getting them the Trinitarian fix: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and our partnering with the Holy Spirit. You could use “W” for that too. Like “Wow! ” Like “Whoop-de-doo!” E.H.S.