

R C I A

Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults

The Inner Life of God

God's inner life is a mystery to us; but it is not an enigma. A mystery is something you can get into and learn; an enigma remains baffling and impossible the longer you battle with it.

Few married people would claim that they could write the definitive "guide" to their spouse, so that there would never be any surprises. That's because, in a successful marriage, husband and wife never finish making room for new discoveries, and being interested in the way the other will respond to new situations as they grow together.

But that doesn't mean to say that they know nothing of each other, or even that they couldn't write a large book about the person they married. They are the world experts on each other; no-one alive knows them better. But learning about one another teaches them that even another human being remains a mystery.

The wife who, just in time, comes upon her husband about to fry an egg in a dry skillet should not classify him with all other males, but should give him the accolade of a special distinction. She might say, for instance, "George, no other man in the world would try to do a thing like that." Similarly, a husband watching his wife trying to start the car without turning on the ignition should not say to a passer-by, "Oh, well, you know how women are!" He should remark to his wife: "I've seen a lot of women in my life, Nellie, but I've never seen one that could touch you."

James Thurber, Ten Rules for a Happy Marriage

God, as we've already noted, isn't human, and this means that we are no more likely to know the Being he is than we are to know the inner life of a bacillus or a shark. If we mindlessly assume that because God is personal, he is a kind of human being, we shall make grave mistakes. If you are God the Father, for instance, you have no body, no face, no voice and no tone of voice, no bearing, no appearance, no colour. You have no obsessions, distortions, likes or dislikes, blind spots, weaknesses, desires. You have no past and no future. Having all things and all possible things within your self, you have no needs. As Scripture grimly asks, in God's voice,

*If I were hungry, would I come to you?
Do you think I need your endless sacrifices and processions?
I have no time for your solemn assemblies!*

- which puts us, and our careful observance of Biblical instructions, firmly in our place. If we think we've got God sorted in our minds, we should think again.

A Few Questions

1 People have sometimes never realised how different God is from a human being. At first the discovery is very off-putting, because we like to know those we must relate to, and the idea that God is fundamentally beyond our understanding makes us not want to try.

But is it not wonderful that God is so much beyond our knowledge?

Could we really *worship* someone we utterly knew, like an elder relative or a human leader or wise man?

2 There is a real question these days about whether it does human beings good to worship at all. Is it *undignified* for a human being to worship God?

Would it not be more honourable for us to take responsibility for our own lives and mistakes, and to stand on our own two feet?

3 Do we understand the link between the Holy Trinity - that God is *relationship*, not lonely majesty - and our own lives, which are designed to be laid down in love for others?

Does it make us think that *how we are with one another* is more significant than *what we are in ourselves*?

4 Do we have special personal problems in relating to the Holy Trinity - to Father? to Son? to Holy Spirit?