

R C I A

Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults

The Inner Life Of God

It falls to us eventually that we have to speak of the life of God in himself. We watch the endless kaleidoscope of nature, and especially our own nature, to understand its Maker. We try, if we are Christians, to penetrate this mystery by listening to the Word we believe he has spoken through the prophets, and through the history with human beings that he himself initiates, most of all in the story of Israel.

But the transformation of all human prospects in coming to know God is in the recognition of the unique presence of God in one supremely human life, the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The Church has spent two millennia slowly coming to understand all that he said and did, treasuring every detail that has come down to us. If we can begin to understand Jesus, we believe, we can start to understand God.

In trying to understand Jesus, we neglect *nothing* that he has revealed to us. Our faith in him is such that we ascribe to his eternal nature all his human attitudes. But, far more than that, we look to his relationships to illuminate us. His own heart was in the single aim that he called *doing the will of my Father in heaven*. His readiness to lose all things and all others in the pursuit of that aim is what shines from his death. His summons to his followers to abandon their possessions and their families and their homes symbolises the same unifying obedience; it was his answer to the question, *What must I do to inherit eternal life?* The absolute necessity for his followers is that they take up their own Cross to follow him. We saw him turn aside to pray to his Father, we felt the constant trust of the Father which sustained him in the most demanding places; we saw the priority of the will of God over his every natural tie and desire; we keep most sacred the story of his agony before the Passion. It was not only with the challenged faculty of speech that he taught us, but with his heart, his life, his deeds. These sometimes speak to us with a depth which no mere language could have reached. It is in the experience of these depths that we know a mystery beyond the merely human.

There never was a time, since the Passion of Jesus, when the Church could have been content to call him *a good man who deserved to be revered*. With irresistible force the community he left behind has followed through the consequences of his life, as one by one the lesser ways of expressing his significance have fallen away: this is how the theology of the Trinity has been forced into being. Far from being a clever construct by arcane human thinkers, it appears as a revelation from the heart of Jesus himself. It is the only way we can talk about him. He reveals the Father to us in the words that have come down to us, and a faithful Church bonds her understanding of him to his words; but the Church's life also reveals the heart of Christ; it is the privilege of his followers to reproduce in their own obedience the Christian mystery; we revere the saints because they too have entered depths beyond those of earthly understanding, because in them the mystery of God has come to dwell. Jesus said:

*If one of you loves me, you will keep my word
and my Father will love you
and we shall come to you
and make a home in you.*

This indwelling of the eternal God - Father, Son, and Spirit - has been experienced in countless lives by people who have advanced in faithfulness to Christ, and left behind all other reasons for living. This sanctification which is verified in the Christian life is a true revelation of the inner life of God, and explains the attention the Church gives to the saints, whose lives mirror the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

A Legacy Of Misunderstanding The words “Trinity Sunday” can strike fear into the heart of the average preacher, and people in general widely believe that nothing can be done to help us understand it. At the back of their minds is the memory of catechism classes, where some good soul told them “It’s a mystery, and you just have to accept it!” All they are left with is the uneasy feeling that, in order to be Christians, they have to accept that “One” and “Three” are somehow the same thing for the purposes of theology...which is of course pious nonsense. God isn’t a mathematical contradiction!

If, instead, we go by way of the question: *What do you think about Jesus of Nazareth?* we can build up a positive approach to the doctrine, understanding who Jesus is by stages, exploring as we grow in understanding the realities which came to pass in his life *because he is the Son of God*. These are divine truths, but Jesus was standing on the same earth as we are when they came to light. His life can only make sense if we take the things he said about it seriously. One of the great surprises about Jesus is that, despite all his humility, he still proclaims *himself* as the key to the meaning of the universe, and of every individual life. *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*, he assures us: *no-one can come to the Father except through me*. This knowledge of his own central necessity for the lives of all others is the sort of key factor that forces us to the kind of language we use about him.

Relating To The Trinity Our Christian way of thinking about God, then, is utterly transformed from (say) the Jewish way of belief. In Christ we are invited to a deep and intimate relationship with the Father in the Holy Spirit. *I no longer call you servants*, Jesus says, *but friends: because I have made known to you everything I have learned from my Father*. We have indeed come a long way from the story of God descending onto Mount Sinai, in dark cloud, with thunder, fire, smoke, and apocalyptic trumpet; we have come a long way from Isaiah’s vision of the massive enthroned figure surrounded by the seraphim, whose very vision is death to the seer. What has entered into the religious awareness is *relationship*, almighty and eternal, in the very heart of the Godhead.

The consequences for us are immense. We can never consider the business of *our* relationships as some kind of human speciality, limited in their meaning to the human community. Instead, we see them as our vital participation in the mystery of the Trinity. The first of all the Commandments is that we must love God with all our heart, mind, and strength: the second, that we must love our neighbour as ourself.