

Gregory's² idea was of God as Being, itself mysterious and unknowable, and yet understandable. What mortal humans could understand of this mystery was captured in three Persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of these three reaches out to humanity in a loving relationship. In one sense, they are artificial: God's own Being remains unknowable except in mysticism, but the Persons are his way of giving humanity a glimpse of Himself.

Band of angels: the forgotten world of early Christian women / Kate Cooper. 2013

Related topics

For further study:

Trinity; God as Father, Son, and Spirit; economy of salvation; soteriology; sacrament; conversion; evangelisation; Christology; faith; creed; images of God

Closing Prayer

Merciful and gracious Father,
you showed the fullness of your love
when you gave your only Son for our salvation
and sent down upon us the power of your Spirit.

Complete within us the work of your love,
that we who have communion in Christ
may come to share fully
the undying life he lives with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Trinity Sunday, Year A³

CPL • LBC Year B Trinity Sunday.odt • 2021-05-13

² Gregory of Nazianzus, 329-390.

³ *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

Trinity Sunday

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 6.1-8	Isaiah's vision in the temple: 'holy, holy, holy'
Psalms 29	Give God his due; adore him
Romans 8.12-17	The Spirit bears witness with our spirit
John 3.1-17	The need to be born again of water and the Spirit

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Conversation with Nicodemus

¹There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' ³Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' ⁴Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' ⁵Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' ⁹Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' ¹⁰Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him

may have eternal life. ¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.'

John 3.1-17 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Chapter 3 shows an encounter between Jesus and a character from the world of Israel. It follows a reflection on the faith of the many who came to believe in Jesus because of the signs he did (2.23-25). Initially Jesus addresses Nicodemus personally, using the singular (e.g. 3.11a: 'I say to you ...'), but later in the same sentence he addresses a plural audience (3.11b: 'you [plural] do not receive ...'). This is a bridge verse, and from 3.12 the direct addressing of Nicodemus disappears. Nicodemus now remains in the background. What Jesus says is addressing the reader, and comments authoritatively on the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus.

The dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus indicates a movement towards Jesus by Nicodemus, like that of the many who came to Jesus and believed in him because of the signs he did (2.23-25). The faith of Nicodemus parallels that of the first disciples, calling him 'Rabbi' (1.38), and asserting 'we have found ...' (1.41,45), Nathanael believed in him as Son of God and King of Israel because of his miraculous knowledge (1.49). Nicodemus joins these first believers, but still has a limited understanding. Jesus tries to build on this, and talks about being 'born from above' (3.3).

Nicodemus approached Jesus as a rabbi, a miracle worker, and a teacher (3.2), but Jesus makes an affirmation that is more than he can understand. However, his 'misunderstanding' allows Jesus to explain further (3.5). A human experience (of water) and a spiritual experience (of the Spirit) are necessary in order to see and enter the kingdom of God (3.5). In John, the kingdom of God refers to a group of believers who profess and try to live the Johannine understanding of Jesus. This commitment to the kingdom, which is a gift from above, is

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accompanied by the physical ritual of water baptism. Jesus comments on Nicodemus' failure to grasp his teaching: 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (3.6). Living in the 'flesh' means making judgements based on what one senses, but living by the Spirit gives a different way of seeing and understanding.

Quotations

1

All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that "God is love." But they seem not to notice that the words 'God is love' have no real meaning unless God contains at least two persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love.

C. S. Lewis, 1898–1963

2

In Christ, for the first time, we see that in God himself there exists--within his inseparable unity--the distinction between the Father who gives and the Gift which is given (the Son), but only in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Unless you become like this child / Hans Urs von Balthasar. 1988

3

The Trinity is the answer to the questions of Plato.

If there is only one God, what does He think about? He thinks an eternal thought: His eternal Word, or Son.

If there is only one God, whom does he love? He loves His Son, and that mutual love is the Holy Spirit.

The great philosopher was fumbling about for the mystery of the Trinity, for his noble mind seemed in some small way to suspect that an infinite being must have relations of thought and love. But it was not until the Word became Incarnate that man knew the secret of those relations and the inner life of God, for it was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who revealed to us the inmost life of God.

Three to get married / Fulton J. Sheen. 1951