

“Knowing” God: A Reflection on the Holy Trinity

Did you know that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is based in part on the first chapter of Genesis? In English the word God seems to be a singular noun. But the Hebrew word for God is “elohim.” The “im” ending in Hebrew is a plural ending. So, Elohim, or God, is really a plural noun. Yet, interestingly, although “elohim” is a plural noun it is almost always associated with a singular adjective or verb in the Old Testament.¹ The grammar of Genesis is our first indication that our God is a mystery. A mystery of one God in three persons. From the second word of Genesis, in the original Hebrew text, we are introduced to the Triune mystery.

As we read through Chapter one, we fall into a sort of stupor due to the repetitiveness of the story. God is the subject of almost every sentence and phrase: God created, God swept, God said, God saw, God separated, God called, God made... And then verse 26 catches us English readers off guard...“Then God said, let *us* make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness...”. Again, we are simultaneously confronted with the unity of God in purpose and the plurality of God in God’s nature.

Note that we never see God in the Genesis account. No image of God is given except the image of God reflected in humankind. We hear God, but we never see God face to face. In some wondrous way, both males and females are equally good and accurate reflections of God’s image.

We understand that God the Creator is at work, but where is the Son and the Holy Spirit in this story? The Holy Spirit actually appears first, in Chapter 1, verse 2 as the wind that “swept over the face of the waters.” The Hebrew word “ruach” has a multiplicity of meanings. One understanding of “ruach” is wind.² Wind is the agent of God that initiates creation. Wind often functions as a divine agent in the Old Testament.³ In this sense, the “wind” is instrumental in the initiation of creation. A second understanding of “ruach” is God’s creative, life-giving, sustaining energy or dynamic power.⁴ A third understanding of “ruach” is the expression of God’s nearness, God’s arrival, God’s presence.⁵ Taken together, the wind that moves over

¹ Sarna, Nahum M., Jerusalem Publication Society Torah Commentary: Genesis, JPS: Jerusalem, 1989, p. 5.

² Ibid., p. 6.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

the water at the dawn of creation, is the dynamic, powerful presence of God that initiates, creates, and perpetually sustains life: that is the wind is the Holy Spirit.

It is in retrospect, after incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that we come to understand that the voice of God, is the second person of the Trinity. The gospel of John relates the mystery this way:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

The Word of God, the person who speaks for God and is God is Jesus. It is the divinely human Jesus who is the living water, the water from which all creation springs forth. This human reflected image that we have of God is the basis and ground for the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. If we know that humankind reflects the image of God. Then, if God were to reveal himself to us in a way that could be physically perceived and biblically accurate, and not fatal to the observer, he must reveal himself in human form. This is why Jesus says in the gospel of John: “No one has seen the Father.” [1:18] while at the same time declaring that “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” [14:9] Jesus is the dynamically powerful, immanent, life-giving presence of God begotten by the Spirit and the human son of Mary. In his humanity Jesus reflects the image of God. In his divinity, Jesus is God.

At this point, I imagine the doctrine of the Trinity is about as clear as mud. This is okay. My seminary theology professor described the study of the Trinity in this way: it is the attempt of comprehending the incomprehensible. God’s purpose is not that we comprehend him, God’s purpose is that we know him. If we could comprehend the mystery of God, God would not be God. As the Lord revealed to the prophet Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways.” [Isaiah 55:8] If we can never fully comprehend our parents, spouses, children...people we live with and observe on a regular basis...it makes sense that we cannot fully comprehend God.

God’s purpose is for us to know him and to be in relationship with him. And God reveals that desire in the ordering of Creation. God creates a world, day by day, that will allow humankind, male and female, to not only exist but thrive. God not only

gives humankind dominion, that is Godlike power and authority, over creation. God declares all other created things good, but God declares humankind “very good.” It is after the creation of humankind that God rests having completed all he set out to do. God has had no purpose other than to create a world in which human beings would exist and thrive: physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Our Triune God wants to bless us and provide for us. Our Triune God wants to know us and wants us to know him. Our Triune God does not want us to relate to him as a puzzle to be figured out. Our Triune God wants to relate to us person to person. Our Triune God wants us to know him not so much in the academic sense but in the emotional sense of knowing someone. God wants us to know his heart. And so our Triune God has created us, saved us, and at the end of time, we will know him fully, but for now, he only desires that we know him personally as God, Our Father, Jesus Our Savior, and the Holy Spirit, our Advocate.