

## 'We relate to One God - Father, Son and Spirit

My best subject at school was history, I loved history, but I always say that at school nobody taught me how to study. I didn't know how to read books and really study. It was only when I went to seminary that the professors were interested enough to teach us how to study and learn and examine things and test things. I did some history in my degree, and I still love history because history puts things in a setting. I notice on telly nowadays a lot, that things are judged in the past by today's standards, which is not always a very good thing to do. You have to enter the mindset or the understanding of a race of people, a nation, to really get to feel what was going on. This is true also with theology, because all doctrines have an historical setting and the Trinity is an ancient one. I know that the Anglican Church for example, measures everything by Trinity.

Next Sunday in the Anglican Church, it'll be the first Sunday after Trinity and so on, whereas we used to have the Sundays after Pentecost. Nowadays we refer to the Sundays in Ordinary time. The feast of the Trinity is interesting. It's always been a feast, but as an actual feast it's puzzled me, because what are we celebrating today, a celebration of a doctrine or a celebration of God? I don't know. But when you look at the Trinity, historically you see that the doctrine evolved in controversial circumstances. It was most profoundly defined at the Council of Nicaea and we'll use the Nicene creed today, but the events which lead up to the solemn definition were controversial to say the least.

Apparently, at the Council of Nicaea, the bishops, who all had beards in those days, like the Orthodox today, fell out so much, that they started pulling one another's beards, because others weren't listening to them, and were trying to get their own views across. Amazing to us today - as if you could get so excited, but the bishops were so concerned that we would understand the nature of God. The most profound thing they decided was to confirm the Jewish belief that God is one. There were many controversial ideologies floating around in the early church, conflicting ideologies, that the Council of Nicaea in particular sat down to settle disputes.

And unfortunately I think, it used the philosophy of the day - the idea of substance and nature - to try and explain in human understanding, the relationship between God, Christ and the Spirit. In a sense, I think they ossified that understanding. For the Orthodox Christians, it's more important that you understand the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit, than the nature of God. We can never fully understand the nature of God. So the doctrine of the Trinity is really a stake in the ground like a goal post. Beyond this, you cannot go or else you're denying an essence of faith.

God relates to us, comes to us from outside space and time. He cannot be seen by us, because He is so immense and glory-filled that we would die, our frames could not take it. We believe that God is shown to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus preferred to call God, Father, or Abba. That was a controversial title then, and perhaps now, because God is neither male nor female, but in the context of the time it was an acceptable term. The Jews, and the early Church had been doing their best to stamp out pagan goddess worship. The Jews had been surrounded by goddess worship, and Mother Earth and fertility cults, so any feminine expression of God, in the Jewish religion and in the Early Church got crushed because of fear of these erroneous and superstitious beliefs.

And so the male emphasis got emphasized about God. But it's there, the feminine side. If you look in the Bible, you'll see in the wisdom literature and so on, the spirit of God is referred to as feminine to balance that sense of God who is neither male nor female. But we don't have any other pronoun. We can't use the word "it" because that would be offensive to God. We only have "He" and "She". So God, whom Jesus preferred to call "Abba" in the intimate, sent the Son into the world that the gap between God and humankind might be bridged. The Word - God - became flesh, the gap between us and God was bridged. After Jesus's ascension into heaven, the Spirit was sent to us - the spirit of Christ of course - so that we can all still relate to God.

The Trinity - three Persons One God - is all about our RELATIONSHIP to God and our means of sanctification.