

CHRISTIANITY

Excerpt from *The Heart of Christianity*

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REVELATION OF THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY

Jesus Christ

Because of the suffering common in the world, I see that as another reason to project it against the backdrop of a greater reality functioning in our universe. It is enlightening to see how a great mystic, the Evangelist John, saw the torment of Jesus, and how he presents that as life-giving to the Christian. Moreover, through John's Gospel we have the same opportunity to encounter Jesus as did the Evangelist's first hearers/readers, for that work was written precisely to make Jesus present to people of all times (20:31). In fully hearing and "seeing" Jesus, we are hearing and "seeing" God, so that whoever believes in His Son receives God's own life. What God gives is His Being, and His Being is Love. In the following lengthy treatment of John's writings, I will try to substantiate the claim made earlier about his Gospel that Raymond E. Brown so concisely summarized: "the most splendid treasury of Christian spirituality ever written." I will attempt to bring to light the underlying subtle gems hidden in John's personal examples that can surface only with repeated readings and reflections.

The Beginning

In taking Jesus and his words as our primary source, there is an essential nature of Jesus that we must accommodate as best we can. In this our world, Jesus will always be a stranger from above, from another world. His vision, his thoughts, his words, will always be different. They will even be different from ours, who choose to follow him. It is in this very difference that Jesus challenges us to look beyond ourselves and our world, to see another and higher level of values, those of his Father.

To start with, John is the only writing we have that has Jesus himself speak about his previous life with God. John prepares us for Jesus' announcements by paraphrasing Genesis. The Old Testament had begun, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). As at the beginning God directed his attention toward earth, so in the new beginning God directs His attention toward man: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love" (John 1:1-14).

"Beginning" here is not, as in Genesis, the beginning of creation, for creation comes in verse three: "Through him all things came into being, and apart from him not a thing came to be." Rather the

"beginning" refers to the period before creation and is a designation of the sphere of God, revealing the very essence of God as love, and a love going outward to man. It means, as saints have subsequently said, "We have been loved from before the beginning." God is love directing His attention toward man because Word implies an audience and seeks an encounter, and that is what God is before the foundation of the universe. Word comes out of a speaker, and it implies a listener. The question then becomes, "Does the one who hears respond and how?" In three short phrases, "Word" is mentioned three times. No pun intended, but God is "grounded" in and for man. I will take up "encountering" later, but first I want to draw out fuller implications of being God's Son.