

The Holy Trinity

STARTING NEW

John 3:1-17

The Holy Trinity

Analysis by Michael Hoy

1Now there 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?" 10 Jesus 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.”

DIAGNOSIS: Growing Old

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *(Poor) Night Vision*

When things have gone awry, and they most certainly seem to have in this day and age, it's not “starting over” that will finally save. Nor is it augmenting what one has been doing all along with only some minor course corrections (as Nicodemus seems to think). Only starting new will help, truly new. But Nicodemus has trouble seeing that, as also do you and I, in all our oldness. “How can anyone be born after having grown old?” “How can these things be?” These questions would almost be comical if they were not so serious. They imply that answers must fit into our box, our parameters, of vision. They do not consider that our vision is already damaged beyond repair, that any lens of ours is already broken. Our false assumption is that any mistake we make can be fixed. Not so. Even appeals to Jesus as a great man, a “teacher [who] comes from God” will not avail us of all that we need or, for that matter, what Jesus comes to give. But to be that true to and about ourselves would be mortifying. So we do not go there, and so we do not see that we are already people with poor night vision.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Not Seeing the Evil Within*

Besides the fact that our specks do not work, we too often look at what is outside us as broken. But the problem runs deep; it

is what is within us that is broken. As Jesus would go on to expose (beyond this text), “people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed” (vv. 19-20). Evil! That is what resides within us, and describes our inner being. But that is also hard to see, even and maybe especially when the Light of Jesus is standing right in front of us. It only makes us want to cower away further into our darkness of unbelief, making it our own, not abandoning what we have been and done through honest repentance.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Perishing, Condemned*

Having avoided the vision of seeing things for what they really are, both outside and within, we end up seeing only what we want to see. So we are blindsided by what we deserve: condemnation. Even now, much to our sightlessness, we are already perishing. Jesus does not water down our accountability, even though we think we can-even though we often do. And neither Jesus, nor his Father, desires this perishing. But that does not change what it is in fact the case, especially as we keep Jesus at arm's length, without his real saving presence.

PROGNOSIS: Born Anew

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Lifted Up*

Aware that this is what we have coming, the way to newness, real newness that will lift us out of the mess of our oldness, does not come from any means within ourselves. No meditations or introspective glances will finally bring the desired results, no matter how resolute or devout. Newness comes from something, Someone, outside ourselves: Jesus, the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross. Here is where God takes our perishing, our condemnation, our blind death and our deadly blindness, into God's self. But here, also, is where God is bringing something

new into being for you and me: eternal life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Seeing the Newness Within*

When our glance is focused toward this One, as it is in faith, newness begins to grow as life within. We look upon the Son of Man, in all his brilliance for us and for our salvation on the cross, and live. She who is the Spirit imparts to us a wisp of a fresh breath, a new start, blowing away all the guilt and sorrow and despairing wrong (evil) of our old lives, and planting in its place a new fresh leaf on life that is pleasant to behold. She who is the Spirit takes us deep into the depths of baptismal death with Christ, drowning all that is old within us, and raising us again to new life within and without: 100% brand-spanking new. Birth happens here. Now we get to see the love of God for us, for we who were old have been born anew.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Re-visioning the World*

Yet how much is this new birth of love not only for us, but for "the world," which God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) so dearly loves? It happens that we who have passed with Christ from death into life get to keep on passing on that newness for the world. "You don't need to stay old, dear world!" we say out loud, with a chuckle of the Spirit's breeze. The newness that God brings about in Jesus the Christ takes us outside the box that has boxed us in. The stifling air of all our old ways are overcome in the gentle wind of forgiveness and new life in the Spirit. He who has ascended into heaven is He Who had descended from heaven to bear our flesh; but that flesh, even our flesh, now sits at the right hand of God, redeemed. And so the promise shines in all its brilliant splendor for all flesh. There is new vision starting for us and for the world ... a vision of new life. And the world may already begin to see there is something new, truly new, truly loving and life-giving, in what is already happening

in us.