

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Children's Understanding of God in Three Persons

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Research Questions

Do children differentiate the three persons of the Trinity?

- Do children think that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit do different things?
- Do children think that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have different qualities?

Do children anthropomorphize God?

- Do children believe God can engage in different physical acts than a human?
- Do children believe God can engage in different biological acts than a human?
- Do children believe God can engage in different psychological acts than a human?

Methods and Questions

To conduct our study, we recruited children from Northwestern's faculty and from local churches. We then interviewed children ages 3- 12 years old over zoom about what they thought about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Our questions included:

Tell me about Jesus.

What is Jesus like?

What can Jesus do?

What do you pray to Jesus about?

(repeated for God the Father and Holy Spirit)

To understand children's physical, biological, and psychological understandings of God, we asked questions such as:

Physical:

Do you think that God can change this rock into a living dog? Do you think your dad could? Why or why not?

Biological:

See this picture of a worm? Do you think God can change a worm into a tiger? Could your dad? Why or why not?

Psychological:

Do you think God can make you suddenly feel happy when you have been sad? Could your dad? Why or why not?

Next Steps

We hope to continue our interviews with children to collect more data. After interviewing, we will transcribe the interviews and begin the process of coding and analyzing the data.

Implications

The goal of this research is to better understand how children view God. The results of this study might help parents and those involved in children's ministry modify the way they teach children about God.

Thanks to Northwestern alumni Jordanna Kruse and Matthew Aguilar for their contributions.

