

The Triune God: the meaning and implications of the Trinity to our shared faith

As Christians, we worship One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We sing about that *Holy One, Merciful and Mighty, God in three persons, the blessed Trinity*

The word Trinity is not in the Bible but the concept of the three-ness of God is there.

There is no one passage to turn to read about the Trinity. We have to draw from many parts of the Scripture.

This is the most complex doctrines of Christianity and in fact sets Christianity apart from other religions. Its complexity reminds us of "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding". So if you have not understood anything at the end of this teaching, it does not mean you have difficulty in understanding. It only means we are all limited human beings trying to discuss an unlimited God.

This hilarious conversation captures the confusion which assails many on this subject. I got it from one of the theology textbooks we used in seminary and took the liberty to name the characters:

Sarah: Explain the Trininty

Mary: Well, it is a bit of bugger

Sarah: Well, it cant be that difficult. You have been a Catholic all your life

Mary: Yeah, well here is a pinch (he then lights up a cigarette)

You got the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. The three are one like shamrock - my old priest used to say. Three leaves but one leaf. Now the Father sent down the Son who was love. And then he went away he sent down the Holy Spirit who came down in form of a

Sarah: You told me already a Ghost

Mary: No, a dove

Sarah: The dove was a Ghost?

Mary: No the Ghost was a dove

Let me try to summarize this: God is his Son and His son is God. But His son moonlights as a Holy Ghost a Holy Spirit and a dove. And then all send each other even though they are all one and the same thing. Got it?

Sarah: What? You really could be a Nun

Mary: Thanks .. Wait a minute. What I said does that make any sense to you?

Sarah: Well, no, but it makes no sense to anybody. That is why you have to believe it. That is why you have to have faith. I mean if it made sense it wouldn't have to be a religion. Would it?¹

So now you must pray as I continue to teach.

1.0 What does the Trinity mean?

I will use the words of Stanley J Grenz in breaking down this Trinitarian concept:

- i. **God is one** - There is one God and not three gods. Christians worship only one God who has revealed Himself to humanity. He is the one who revealed Himself to the Old Testament Community as Yahweh.
- ii. **God is three** - One God is three - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each of the three is God, sharing together in, and together constituting the divine essence. The One God is not an undifferentiated solitary oneness but consists of a plurality - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

¹ Nuns on the Run, directed by Jonathan Lynn, 1990

reveals himself in three persons - Father. Son and Holy Spirit.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20. Please note that 'name' is singular.

There is plurality in God. "Let us", who will go for us?

- iii. **God is a diversity** - There is a diversity within the unity of God. The three persons of God as they are normally referred to are differentiated and they are eternal and internal to the nature of God. The Father is not the Son, the Father is not the Holy Spirit. The Son is is not the Holy Spirit.
- iv. **God is a unity** - all the three persons are involved in God's workings in His creation - there is cooperation among the persons of God and there is interdependence of the persons in their working.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to

himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

The limitedness of illustrations -

- a. The egg - One egg with a shell, the white and the yolk - neither of each of the three is the egg
- b. Water - Ice, liquid, and vapour - modes - where there is one there is no other.
- c. A music triad or chord - when sounded it can be perceived as an entity, yet the constituent notes are distinguishable
- d. The triangle - each vertex has its specific locating coordinates but it is part of the same triangle.

2.0 What are the implications of the Trinity?

1. Faith must come before understanding

The topic of Trinity reminds us of the complexity of God. This is who God has revealed Himself to be. This is how God wants us to know Him.

Having faith in God does not mean that we have worked out all the answers. In fact sometimes human beings lose their way in trying to understand who God is.

Consider the answer God gave Moses:

13 *Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"* **14** *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* *Exodus 3: 13-14.*

We here this, and inwardly say, God please say more. He says that is enough.

2. Christianity has a unique view of God

There are certain things which must be true for a deity to be God from a Christian point of view.

Nabeel Qureshi is a former Muslim who works with RZIM

He wrote an article² on December 27th 2015 following the exchange about a Prof at Wheaton who claimed that Allah was the God of the Bible and she was suspended. Nabeel argues convincingly and I will quote very briefly:

² <http://rzim.org/global-blog/do-muslims-and-christians-worship-the-same-god>

"I should start by saying this: for years after leaving Islam and accepting Jesus as Lord, I believed that Muslims worshiped the same God as Christians but that they were simply wrong about what He is like and what He has done. After all, I had been taught as a young Muslim to worship the God who created Adam and Eve, who rescued Noah from the flood, who promised Abraham a vast progeny, who helped Moses escape Egypt, who made the Virgin Mary great with child, who sent Jesus into the world, who helped the disciples overcome, and who is still sovereign today. Is that not the God of the Bible?"

After a lengthy discussion he makes a strong conclusion:

"There is much more to be said about the differences between the Christian God and the Muslim God, but this much can already be said with confidence: the Christian God, both in terms of what he is (Triune) and who he is (Father, Son, and Spirit) is not just different from the Muslim God; He is fundamentally incompatible. According to Islam, worshiping the Christian God is not just wrong; it sends you to Hell. They are not the same God".

"Christians worship a Triune God: a Father who loves unconditionally, an incarnate Son who is willing to die for us so that we may be forgiven, and an immanent Holy Spirit who lives in us. This is not what the Muslim God is; it is not who the Muslim God is; and it is not what the Muslim God does. Truly, the Trinity is antithetical to Tawhid, fundamentally incompatible and only similar superficially and semantically. Muslims and Christians do not worship the same God"

To worship the Triune God makes Christianity exclusive. If we are to cooperate with other religions including Islam it is not because our God is the same, but may be because we face the same global challenges. We live together with people of all religions not because we believe in the same God but because the Triune God calls us to love all people.

3. The mystery of God draws us to Him in worship

"In the complexity of the very Being of God there is an I-You relationship within the Godhead."

"University = Unity + Diversity"

"The only way to explain unity and diversity in the effect (i.e. the creation) is if you got unity and diversity in the First Cause (i.e. God)."

"Only in the Trinity is there Unity and Diversity in the Community of the Trinity!"

"If God ever says He loves, who was He loving before the creation?! If God ever says He speaks, who was He speaking to before the creation?!"

"Communication and affection (love) are contained in the Godhead right from the beginning!"

"The mystery of the Trinity is a revelation of how God is complete in Himself in One Being; the Three Persons as They relate in love and in language." Ravi Zacharias

As we ponder this, we marvel. We wonder. We worship God who has none like Him

4. Our relationship with and experience of God is God in three persons.

Sometimes among Christians there seems a preference of persons in the Godhead

- ✚ In some revival Fellowships all you hear about is Jesus

- ✚ In the more charismatic fellowships all you hear about is the Holy Spirit

The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that the persons of the Godhead work among us in cooperation and interdependence

Jesus taught us that the father knows what we need and he will take care of us

The Son as our Saviour lives forever to make intercession for us

The Holy Spirit helps us and glorifies Jesus in our midst

Conclusion

God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures as One God in three persons. Let us worship Him with understanding. Let us seek to know Him better.

Prayer: I believe that Lord God you are who you claim to be. I worship you for there is no God like you. I pray that you continue to reveal yourself to me in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.