

## **The Doctrine of God: The Trinity**

**(Enrichment materials for EIIT/SMP students)**

**The First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods besides Me.”**

**Catechism: “We should believe and trust in God above all things.”**

**Kolb, pp. 30-47**

**Kinnaman, pp. 26-30**

### The Trinity

When we work with people of other religions, one Christian teaching that is difficult for us to explain is the Trinity. We understand from the Bible that God is one but also is three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**Have you had difficulty explaining this doctrine to others?**

**How have you tried to explain it?**

Explaining the Trinity is especially difficult when speaking to people of other major religions such as Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. Below I suggest that we can try to explain the Trinity by talking about Him in four ways:

- God is beyond our understanding.
- God is simple.
- God is complex.
- God is love.

I will use these four ways to explain the teaching to Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists.

Muslims:

#### A. God is Beyond Understanding

We agree with Muslims that God is a totally different nature from us. We were created. God never was created. God has always been.

We agree with Muslims that we can only know about God from what He has told us. We learn this in the Bible. We learn this by God’s actions in history.

We agree with Muslims that God is spirit. God cannot be seen. We see only what God has created.

We agree with Muslims that the only way we can relate to God is to worship Him. We are to bow to no other in worship or prayer.

We agree with Muslims that God is beyond what we can understand or describe. He is God. We are just humans. We are His creations.

#### B. God is Simple

We agree with Muslims that God is one. From the very beginning of Christianity when Christians expressed their faith (in the Creeds), they have said: "I believe in one God..."

#### C. God is Complex

We agree with Muslims that often we stand in silence before God. His actions are beyond our understanding. We can only submit to God. We can only submit to His will.

We agree with Muslims that God has given us intelligence. We should try to use it to understand God and His ways.

When Christians read about God and His ways in the Bible, they see this one God referred to as three Persons: "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit." This is how God talked about Himself in the Bible.

We cannot understand how one God can be three Persons. Yet, we try to understand it. We try to talk about it.

We know that God is beyond our understanding. He is complex. He is not to be explained. He is to be believed and accepted.

#### D. God is Love

When Christians read about God and His ways, they see that God is love. God is beyond our understanding. But we do experience Him as loving in all He does.

Love is always a relationship. Even among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit there is only a relationship of love. God is love. The "Son" is not the result of a marriage union. It is a way of saying that this Second Person of the Trinity is equal to the Father.

In His relationship with all of His creation and all of us, God acts in love. He wants only good for us.

Christians see God's greatest act of love in Jesus. The Bible talks about Jesus having been the Son in the Trinity. The Son became human in order to bring God's love to earth. We could see and experience God's love in Him.

Jesus' great act of love was to die on the cross to pay the price for our sins. Christians are not ashamed to say this. It was a bloody, painful death. But Jesus submitted to the will of the Father.

As God Himself, Jesus could take all people's sins upon Himself. God could now forgive everyone's sins because of Jesus. This was His great love for His creation.

The Bible then records how three days later Jesus rose from the dead. He showed the world that He was God and that the price for sins had been paid.

Now Christians are not afraid of death. They are not afraid of Judgment Day. They know the price for all sins has been paid because of God's love in Jesus.

This is what the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) have done for everyone to get to heaven. We don't understand it because it is the work of God. We receive it as His loving gift.

**Do you think these thoughts would help to explain the Trinity to Muslims?**

Hindus:

A. God is Beyond Understanding

We agree with Hindus that the truth of God is beyond our understanding. Hindus call it "Brahman." Brahman is the source of all things. Brahman is not a Person. Brahman lives in all things. Hindus believe that Brahman cannot be understood. It can only be experienced.

We agree with Hindus that really all we can say about God is what God is not:

- God is not visible.
- God is not like us.
- God is not explainable.

However, From the Bible, Christians understand God as a Person. They see what He has done in history. They can only understand God from these actions.

B. God is Simple and Complex

We agree with Hindus that God is finally only One. However, Hindus believe that God can be experienced in many different ways. He can have many different names.

Hindus accept that some people may need to experience God through worshipping idols made of stone. The best way to experience God is by finding Him within oneself. The goal in Hinduism is for people to experience God. People should find whatever way works best for them.

The Christian understanding of God also comes from experience. They look to the experiences of God written about in the Bible. The people in the Bible found that God is only one. They found that God is spirit. Therefore, they did not worship many different gods. They did not use idols.

We agree with Hindus that God is beyond our understanding. One of the experiences of God in the Bible is that He is One but also three Persons. God is simple but also complex.

We cannot explain it. We can only accept it because of what was experienced in the Bible.

### C. God is Love

In the Bible history, Christians experience God as fundamentally a God of love. He wills only good for His creation.

The ultimate expression of that love is God's Incarnation. This event was more than an "avatar." He not only seemed to be a human, but God actually became a human, named Jesus.

As God, He was able to receive all the karma of all people upon Himself and free them from any effects of their sins.

While on earth, Jesus spoke of the Father and the Holy Spirit as divine. From this, Christians developed the teaching that God is One but has three Persons. We can have a personal relationship, then, with all three Persons of the Trinity.

Jesus is understood to be an incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son. He is "son" not by union with a female god. The use of Son means that He is God just as much as the Father is.

After Jesus died on the cross to take all our karma upon Himself, He rose from the dead. Now He is returned to be with the Father and the Holy Spirit in heaven. He now has Godly power once again to answer the prayers of those who come to Him.

Because Jesus rose from the dead to be in heaven, Christians understand that we will not be reincarnated after death. Instead, we can pray to Jesus and be with God in heaven forever.

**Do you think these thoughts will help explain the Trinity to Hindus?**

## Buddhists:

### A. God is Beyond Understanding

Christians agree with Gautama the Buddha that matters about God are beyond our understanding. The Buddha said we should only speak about what we can experience.

What Christians say about God is based only upon experience. The experiences they refer to are those recorded in the Bible.

Christians realize that they must be very careful when trying to describe God from the experiences. They teach the best they can from what the Bible describes.

### B. God is Simple

When the Buddha talked about "nirvana," he said that it was beyond words. Yet, he said, it is real. Christians speak that way about God. They say He is real.

Christians say that God is One. They do not worship many different gods. They do not try to imagine different gods.

All truth is simple, including the truth about God.

### C. God is Complex

The Christian teaching about the Trinity also comes from the experiences of God recorded in the Bible history. When people saw Jesus doing miracles of healing and raising the dead, they knew that He must be God to do these things.

Jesus also talked about the Father and the Holy Spirit as God. From these experiences, Christians came to understand that God is One, but God is also complex. The One God has three Persons.

Christians realize that such teaching is beyond our understanding. Speaking of God as One yet with three Persons is the best explanation that we can give.

### D. God is Love

When people experienced Jesus as God, they came to understand the true nature of God. Everything that Jesus did was loving, so God Himself must be love.

Gautama the Buddha decided not to enter nirvana. Instead, he returned to give his life teaching others. Christians see that God acted just like this in Jesus. He went to the cross in perfect love.

Because Jesus was God, His good karma covered all the bad karma of all people for all time. Jesus took all that bad karma upon Himself and died for it.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He showed all the world that their karma was over. They could join Him in heaven, where all is love forever.

**Do you think these thoughts would help to explain the Trinity to Buddhists?**