

THE  
UNIQUENESS  
OF THE TRIUNE  
GOD

# **Trinitarian Theism**

**Christianity holds that  
God is an All-Personal,  
All-relational Being  
existent in three equally  
Divine Persons: Father,  
Son and Holy Spirit**

# *Trinitarian Theism*

**How did this  
'complex' doctrine  
come about?**

# *Trinitarian Theism*

*1. By theological reflection?*

*2. By philosophical speculation?*

*3. By historic encounters?*

# *Theological Reflection*

*Reflection alone on passages such as Ps.110:1 and Ps.45:6,7 could not have led to the conclusion that God was Triune*

# *Philosophical Speculation*

*Philosophers – Eastern  
and Western – could not  
resolve how unity and  
diversity could be  
reconciled*

# 3 Historic Encounters

*1. AT THE FOOT OF MOUNT SINAI!  
(SEVERAL OTHER ENCOUNTERS ARE  
RECORDED IN THE OT)*

*2. ON THE DUSTY STREETS OF  
PALESTINE AND JERUSALEM WITH THIS  
AMAZING MAN WHO TURNS OUT TO BE*

*3. IN THE UPPER ROOM **GOD!** WHERE THE FIRST  
INTRA-PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH  
GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT TAKES PLACE!*

# THE ENCOUNTER AT THE FOOT OF MOUNT SINAI

- ✓ In the OT, there are a number of instances of individuals meeting with  
God
- ✓ But at the foot of Mount Sinai, at least 2 million men, women and children heard God speaking in an  
audible voice



# ENCOUNTER ON THE STREETS OF PALESTINE

V JESUS was definitely human:

- ✓ He was tired
- ✓ He was hungry
- ✓ He was thirsty
- ✓ He was in need of sleep
- ✓ He was tempted
- ✓ He dies!

# ENCOUNTER ON THE STREETS OF PALESTINE

- ✓ But He was more than a man:
- ✓ He claimed that the ancient Hebrew Scriptures spoke of His coming
- ✓ As a Boy, He insisted in the temple that He should be about 'His Father's business'

# ENCOUNTER ON THE STREETS OF PALESTINE

V But He was more than a man:

✓ He forgave sins - to the Jewish mind that was unthinkable and blasphemous

✓ But He excluded Himself from praying the prayer that He taught His disciples

# ENCOUNTER ON THE STREETS OF PALESTINE

V But He was more than a man:

✓ He calls God His Father making

Himself equal with God

✓ He made it clear that His

relationship to the Father was

different from ours!

# ENCOUNTER ON THE STREETS OF PALESTINE

- ✓ V But He was more than a man:
- ✓ He spoke to the raging waves on the Sea of Galilee as if He had created them
- ✓ At His trial, the High Priest realises what Jesus is claiming to be <sup>1313</sup>

# ENCOUNTER ON THE STREETS OF PALESTINE

✓ But He was more than a man:

✓ Was ignominiously crucified... yet rises from the dead, on the third day, very differently from the way He had raised Lazarus from the dead

...some days earlier!

# ENCOUNTER ON THE STREETS OF PALESTINE

**V**But He was more than a man:

His resurrected body had physical properties. He could be touched, He could eat... but He also could go through walls...His body went through grave-clothes and the stone at mouth of His  
grave

# ENCOUNTER ON THE STREETS OF PALESTINE

V He was more than a man:

E the stone was rolled away not to let

Him out but to let us in!!

E He ascends into heaven to a new

dimension of existence



# ENCOUNTER IN AN UPPER ROOM IN JERUSALEM

√ Ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit came down upon the 120 disciples...

√ For the first time, through the Spirit, these men and women experienced an intra-personal encounter (John 7:37-39; 14:16, 17) with Another Person

1717

√ He faithfully represents the Father and the

## *TWO QUESTIONS ARISE!*

*1. ARE THESE THREE SEPARATE GODS?*

*2. ARE THEY ONE PERSON IN THREE DIFFERENT ROLES?*

**WHY NOT THE FIRST OPTION?**

***EACH OF THESE GODS WILL BE  
FINITE IN THEIR POWER AND  
AUTHORITY – THEIR FAITH WOULD  
DEGENERATE INTO A POLYTHEISM  
SO CLEARLY CONDEMNED IN THE  
OT SCRIPTURES***

## *WHY NOT THE SECOND OPTION?*

- *THE DISCIPLES HEAR JESUS PRAYING TO THE FATHER AS TO ANOTHER PERSON – THEY HEAR THE FATHER SPEAKING TO JESUS – THEY HEAR JESUS REFERRING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AS ‘ANOTHER’ COMFORTER*

# *THE QUESTIONS?*

- 1. ARE THESE THREE SEPARATE GODS?*
- 2. ARE THEY ONE PERSON IN THREE DIFFERENT ROLES?*

*THE ANSWER?*

*NEITHER!!!*

*THEY ARE THREE PERSONS WHO IN  
SOME MYSTERIOUS WAY  
CONSTITUTE ONE GOD*

**Wrong answers to the  
two questions result in  
the two early heresies of  
TRITHEISM and  
MODALISM.**

# TWO HERESIES

1. **TRITHEISM** – The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three separate Gods
2. **MODALISM** – One Person was playing three roles

**The Church recognises God as One Being existent in 3 Divine Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity does not mean that God is one in one sense and 3 in the same sense.**



**That would have been a direct logical contradiction, thus necessarily false. What the Church said was that in the Trinity, God is one in one sense and three in another sense.**

**Specifically, God was one in substance and three in persons - colloquially, one **what** (Neut. in Gk.) (John 10:30; 17:22) and three **who's** (Masc. in Gk.) (e.g., John 16:13).**

**(Again one must be careful not to give univocal meanings to the terms “substance,” “person,” “what,” and “who.”) The substance or essence unites the three; person is that which distinguishes them.**

# *Three ways of using words*

1. ***Univocal*** – in exactly the same sense
2. ***Equivocal*** – in a totally different sense
3. ***Analogical*** - in a metaphoric,  
anthropomorphic sense

**Thus the unity of the Trinity does not mean "aloneness," nor does the distinction within the Trinity mean "dividedness." God can be love within His Own Being only because of the Subject-Object relationship...**

**...between the Father and the Son  
through the Holy Spirit (John  
17:24). The same would apply to  
Divine knowledge and Divine  
freedom as relational qualities.**

# *Christian Theism*

It is only within this understanding of God that there is adequate basis for:

1. *True freedom* - ONTOLOGY
2. *True morality* - AXIOLOGY
3. *True knowledge* - EPISTEMEOLOGY

# Ontological criteria:

1. Creation has  
tremendously  
diverse  
components  
acting in perfect  
harmony - the  
Creator must  
exhibit the same  
unity in diversity

2. A Trinitarian  
understanding of  
God explains both  
transcendence and  
immanence

3. Gender  
distinctions are  
anchored in the  
Trinity  
Our freedom to be  
ourselves  
(identity) is  
anchored in  
relationships



Christ's Divine-Humanity reveals...

...the transcendence of God

...as well as God's immanence in  
human creation

# Christ's Divine-Humanity is...

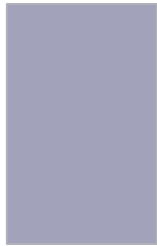
...not a logical absurdity but an epistemological mystery...

...not a mixture (as that of salt and sugar) but a combination similar to that of a set - a cube – and a subset – a square (John 14:9)

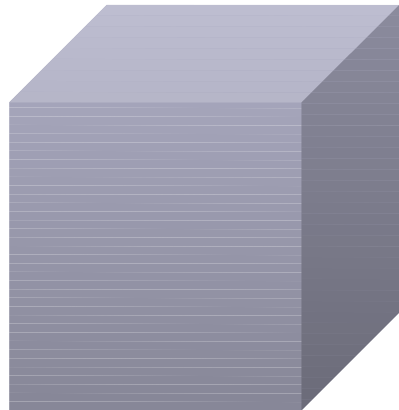
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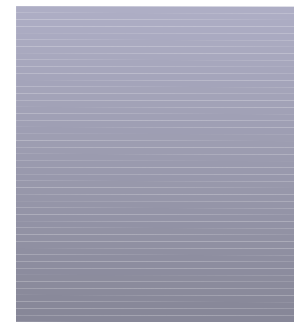
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# *OUR RESPONSE?*

*1. PURSUIT OF GOD IN WORSHIP*

*2. OUR GOD IS TRANSCENDENT AND  
IMMANENT – ‘OUR FATHER’ – ‘IN  
HEAVEN*

# Axiological criteria:

1. Morality is relational – the quality that sums up all virtues – LOVE - God is holy only because He is love (John 17:24)

2. Beauty is relational because it requires unity (of theme) and diversity (of components) – a painting, a symphony

3. All commandments in the OT and NT are relational  
The beauty of the New Creation is its harmony and diversity

# *OUR RESPONSE?*

*1. PURSUIT OF HOLINESS*

*2. JESUS GIVES A RELATIONAL  
CRITERION FOR HIS DISCIPLES – NO  
RELIGIOUS CRITERIA*

# Epistemological criteria:

1. How can God  
be all-knowing and  
still unchanging?  
Only Matt. 11:27  
explains this  
dynamic of  
relational  
knowledge!

2. Knowledge is  
more than  
informational – it is  
relational! The  
known has to  
reveal itself to the  
knower!

3. Knowledge, thus,  
turns on a  
subjective-objective  
axis!!

# *OUR RESPONSE?*

*1. PURSUIT OF TRUTH*

*2. GOD'S REVELATION IN HIS WORD  
AND HIS WORLD (PSALM 19)*

*3. WE ARE TRUE IN OUR ATTITUDES  
AND BEHAVIOUR (I JOHN 3:18)*