TRINITY OVERVIEW

THE QUESTION

Wow! The Trinity...how do we explain this one? This is the "biggy" of all questions. It won't be easy. In fact, we know we can't do it, but we've got to try. How do you discuss the unexplainable (or do we say inexplicable)? Still, here comes the question (and it comes quite often). So, where do we begin?

OTHER QUESTIONS

Everyone uses electricity, but few can really explain it, and no one fully understands it. We haven't even gotten to the ultimate bottom of "matter" or material things. Is it atoms, or electrons, something smaller, or something more energy than matter...and what does that mean?

Love is harder to understand fully. They say we can all recognize love when it really hits, but there are so many different kinds of love and so many ideas about it. Now, there are definitions of matter and electricity and love, but exceptions can be taken to each definition, and no one completely understands. You know what I mean? Like there are some people on earth who don't have a clue about electricity or the nature of matter. But most of us do have at least some ideas and are able to have a good discussion about these common topics. We talk about things all the time that we don't fully understand. So, our goal may not be to fully understand, but to be able to talk intelligently about the most important person in the universe...and beyond.

THE CHRISTIAN IDEA OF GOD

Don't get me wrong; I'm not trying to sneak away for your question about the Trinity. It is a difficult idea, and it is important to understand it as well as we can. Last summer I heard African Christian leaders trying to explain a challenge they faced to American friends: "The Muslims come into our town and say: "These Christians give you three gods and only one wife, but we give you only one God and three wives" " Muslims and Jews often think Christian believe in three gods.

Christians believe one thing for sure: that God is One, and that God is revealed as Unseen Source of All, as Incarnate Son of God, and as the Holy Spirit. Christians believe in the unity of God as much as do the believers in Jewish or Islamic faith. Christians accept three persons and manifestations of One Ultimate Being. Why shouldn't the Creator, Redeemer, and Healer/Enabler be something
more than we, the created? God needed to be in heaven, in the manger or on the Cross, and in people's hearts at the same time. God is so much bigger and so much more than we are.

HUMAN COMPLEXITY AND TRI-UNITY

Even we human beings are not so simple: we have a body but are clearly so much more than a body-as death demonstrates. When you see a friend in a coffin, you know there is more to him or her than lies there as material substance. The something that left the body we call spirit or soul. Isn't that so? Even as we live, we have, besides our bodily functions, all that's going on within our minds-consciously and subconsciously. So, you could say we are sort of three in one: a body, a soul, and something to be remembered and felt. For if our bodies die and are put in a grave, and our souls go to heaven, there are still memories left with our friends, and they feel our presence. Doesn't it make sense that God is so much more triune than we?

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF TIME AND SPACE

There is another very important difference between us and God. We live in time and space where God created us to be. That means we are limited to live and to think in space and time...or spatially and temporally as some say. No brain on earth can get out of these limitations.

As a little boy, I used to think of getting into my own spaceship and traveling forever. Did you ever imagine things like that as a kid? And I would travel faster than the speed of light. Of course I didn't know how big the universe was back then (and still don't!). But I used to think of getting to the end or edge of it all...and wondering what was on the other side. If you get to the end of space, to the very end of it all, whether it is curved and circular or square or whatever...what is on the other side? Einstein may have thought in terms of equations and relativity. But common sense asks, What's on the other side...out there beyond the curve or whatever? Human minds can avoid that question as irrelevant, but they can't answer it or solve the mystery of space. Do you follow me?

It's the same way with time. When did time begin? And what was before that? And before that? And what does it mean to live forever? When you get to the end, what's next? What do you mean no end? It's not as hard as no beginning! But still...and after that?

The human mind is sort of trapped in something like a picture frame. Call the sides of this frame, time; the top and bottom, space. We just can't get out of this frame, this thinking in terms of time and space, no matter how hard we try.
They are our two dimensions. The philosophers call us finite beings. God is not
two-dimensional but multi-dimensional. God is infinite and different from us in so
many ways. If God weren't so different, we wouldn't be talking about God. You
know what I mean?

So, someone says, "If I can't understand it, I won't believe it." That doesn't
make sense. They can't understand the Trinity—and a whole lot of other things
like love that must be believed. And if they could understand God and the Trinity
completely, it wouldn't really be God—but just a human idea in time and space.
Isn't that so?

SIMPLE PICTURES AND ANALOGIES

Some have tried to explain the Trinity in terms of the three forms of H2O:
there's solid ice (that's one form); there's liquid water; and there's gaseous
steam...but all water. It may be better to picture the sun. What we see of the
sun is not the sun itself, but rays coming from the sun. Then there is the way the
sun warms us or even burns our skin. That sunburn is neither the sun itself nor
its rays but something the sun did to us. But in a way, it's all the sun. These are
pictures that may or may not be helpful. Because we're talking about something
that goes beyond human experience and comprehension.

CONCLUSION

It's important to know that our idea and the word Trinity came from the Church
and its Councils. You can find evidences of God as triune in the Bible (like at the
baptism of Jesus where God speaks from heaven, Jesus is baptized, and the
Spirit descends like a dove). And Paul teaches about the Father, the Son, and the
Holy Spirit in the Epistles of the New Testament. But the Bible in no place
teaches the Trinity as a doctrine. It is the church that has formulated the
doctrine of the Trinity and placed this belief in our basic creeds. What God does
say very clearly in the Bible is that no one sees God face to face and that no one
fully comprehends God and all God's ways. Is that OK with you? Would you
really want it any other way? Isn't God saying:

I am the God of heaven and earth, the beginning and the end. I fully
comprehend you, but you cannot fully comprehend me. I am at the center, I am
the only Hub of all that is. From my position I know and judge you; I came to be
like you and to die for your wrongs and to rise again for your healing; and I want
a personal relationship with you, I want to come into your heart and life. I do all
this as your Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Finally, God says one more thing it is important to hear (through Moses in Deut.
29:29)
The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law (God's will).

I guess our big question of the Trinity boils down to this: Are we OK with the idea that God has shown us a whole lot about the person and work of God, but there's still a lot we'll only know when we get to be with our Lord. And the Trinity is one of those mysteries.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you remember when you first thought about God and the Trinity? What questions did you have? What kind of answers satisfied you at that time?
2. What do you want to know about who God is and the Trinity at this point in your life?
3. Was this article helpful? What particular idea or point was most useful for you? How could this article have been more helpful?
4. What is your approach to the idea of God as a Triune Being? How would you explain it to a friend?
5. Do you think most kids can follow this discussion? Do kids turn off on this kind of talk or get lost?

IMPLICATIONS

1. We are talking about one of the most basic ideas about the most important person there is. We can't be wasting our time.
2. If presented well, I don't think young people will either be lost or disinterested in this theological discussion. As with all discussions with young people, we must begin where they are...with their own human personality and relationships with others. The Trinity is, after all, the oldest and greatest love affair, and we must make it that exciting.
3. Of course, you will be talking together differently in different cultures and churches-and at different ages. Be flexible in your discussion. Maybe your first attempt at this discussion ends up in a great conversation about science fiction, or some video or fantasy game, or even rock and roll. So be it. Maybe the Trinity shouldn't be discussed until next month or later. If they trust you, they will help you with the timing of the teaching they need.
4. Young people themselves can come up with the best ways to explain the Blessed Trinity; we've got to give them the chance. They are the experts on their lives and generation.

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