

Isn't Christianity's concept of the Trinity illogical?

Christianity teaches that there is one God who exists in three persons. For many, this is an inherent contradiction. How can God be both one and three at the same time? That's a reasonable question. But let's clear up some confusion right up front. Christians are not saying there is one God and three gods, or one divine person and three divine persons. In that case, there would most definitely be a logical contradiction. What Christians are saying is that there is one God who exists in three persons.

But while the Trinity may not be inherently illogical, that does not mean it is easy to comprehend. You and I think of individual humans consisting of only one person. Because we are not aware of any human who has more than one person (excluding the mental malady of schizophrenia), the idea of a God consisting of three persons is difficult for us to understand. If I were to say to you that there is a creature with four wings, three heads, eighteen legs, three fins, and two furry pinchers, you would probably give me a quizzical look. You would not give me that look because what I said is inherently illogical, but because you have no mental category for such a being. I think this is the case for God as well. We have never known of a living entity with three persons, so even if it is not illogical for God to exist in three persons it remains difficult for us to comprehend.

Since we are on the topic of the Trinity, I would like to clarify a few things about the Trinity as it is best understood by Christians. First, Christians consider the three persons of the Trinity to be Father, Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit. Many Muslims are taught that the Christian Trinity consists of God, Mary (who had sex with God), and Jesus (to whom Mary gave birth). I am completely unaware of any Christians who hold this view, and I am sorry that Muslims have been given errant information.

Second, in describing the Trinity some people use an object like an egg. They say an egg has a shell, a yolk, and whites. It is one egg, but has three parts. This illustration, however, is not in line with the Christian view of the Trinity and represents what is known as *partialism* in which each member of the Trinity is just a part of God. Historical Christian thinking, however, has always been that each member of the Trinity is equally and fully God, and not just a fraction.

Third, it is not uncommon to hear people use the illustration of ice, water, and steam to describe the Trinity. The idea is that just as water comes in three forms, so God exists as Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. This illustration also falls short of the historical teaching on the Trinity and has been labeled *modalism*. Modalism says there is one God who just shows up in different *modes*. Accurate Christian instruction on the Trinity, however, does not teach modalism. When Jesus prays to the Father, he is not praying to a different mode of himself; he is praying to a distinctly different person of the Trinity.

A fourth misrepresentation of the Trinity says that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are like the sun, its light, and its heat. But this illustration also falls short of historical Christian understanding. The Son and the Holy Spirit are not creations or emanations of the Father, but are one in nature with the Father.

Once again, you and I are simply not accustomed to living entities having three persons. In an attempt to bring some understanding, we may try to use illustrations like the ones above, but often they create more confusion than clarity.

One final word on the Trinity. Because God exists in three persons and has for eternity past, we know that God has always existed as a relational being. He did not need us for relationship as he already had

that within himself. Christianity says that God is a God of love. This is not something that was only realized when humanity was created. It is something that has always been the case, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always loved one another. Personally, I like knowing that. It means that when we were made in the image of God, we were made to reflect him by being in loving relationships with others.

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