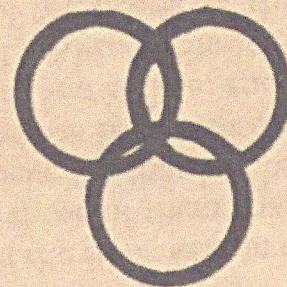# TRINITY & UNITY

*A Lecture by Pope Shenuda III delivered
at the Cathedral of Mark in Cairo*

The problem with those who attack the Trinity is that they set it in opposition to the concept of unity. Thus, they imagine that the Christian Trinity is a form of polytheism or plurality of gods. However, we Christians say that we believe in one God without an equal and certainly not in three. Furthermore, all the attacks aimed at the belief in three gods have no connection whatsoever with Christianity which believes in one God only. Indeed they consider that belief in more than one god is something not even the devil would be guilty of:

"*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.*" (James 2:19). Inwardly, the devils believe in one god. If they spread polytheism among men they are making fun of their minds, while in themselves they believe in one god and no other.

Among the texts in the New Testament which demonstrate the Christian belief in one God are the words of Christ to His disciples when He sent them to preach: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19). He said "in the name" not "in the names." This point is brought out in John's first letter where he says: "For there are three that testify, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one." (I John 5:7) and, the universal Christian Creed which begins: "I believe in one God."

Therefore, we believe in one God and no more. We regard polytheists as infidels and whoever believes in more than one god or in three is also an infidel. The whole problem is: In what sense is God, in whom we all believe "one in three"? What does the word "Son" mean, and what does "Holy Spirit" mean and does this deny the unity of God?

Let us then begin our discussion of the subject "Trinity and Unity" in a quiet manner which is preferable to one of anger and defamation. For our Muslim brethren are urged by the Koran (in Surat Al Ankabout #46): "Dispute not with the people of the Book save in the fairer manner, except for those of them that do wrong; and say, "We believe in what has been sent down to us, and what has been sent down to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we have surrendered." Also, in Surat Al-Imran #113 it says: "Some of the people of the Book are a nation upstanding, that recite God's signs in the watches of the night, bowing themselves, believing in God and the Last Day…" And in Surat Al-Maidah #82: "Thou wilt surely find the most hostile of men to the believers are Jews and the idolators; and thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say "We are Christians": that, because some of them are priests and monks…" Here are presented three groups: Jews, Idolators and Christians.

Also, in Surat Al-Bagara #62: "Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, who believe in God

and the Last Day, and works righteousness their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow."

Furthermore, in Surat Al-Hajj #17: "Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, the Sabaeans, the Christians, the Majians and the idolators—God shall distinguish between them on the Day of Resurrection; assuredly God is witness over everything."

It is clear from the foregoing verses that a distinction is made between Christians and the idolators. Likewise, Islam itself distinguishes between these two groups for it forbids the Muslim to marry an idolatoress whereas, it does not forbid him to marry a Christian. Also, it permitted the slaying of idolators, but not of Christians who had to pay tribute. Christians are people who know God and do not join other gods to Him and we believe in the logic of this position. For if He had a co-partner then it follows He is not all-powerful because He has no power over His partner. In the same way God is creator of all; if there was another god, did God create him? If so, the created is no longer God because he cannot create.

Indeed we believe in one God who is omnipotent (over all and all powerful). Everything is subject to His authority. There is nothing in existence which is not subject to this one God.

Three in One and One in Three

Question: In Surat Al Maidah there is a text which brands those who believe in the Holy Trinity with infidelity. What does your Holiness say to that?

Reply: In Al Maidah number 73 we read: "They are unbelievers who say "God is the Third of Three," no God is there, but, One God. We do not believe that God is the "Third of Three" as the Surat Al Maidah puts it. What we say is that God is One and we take issue with anyone who says that God is the "Third of Three." One of the best analogies for the truth of the Trinity is man himself who was created "in the image of God." He is of one humanity possessing mind and spirit. Personality and mind and spirit comprise just *one* human being. In the same way, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one self. No one can say that God has no mind or spirit. God, in His mind and spirit is One God and not the "Third of Three." Exactly as we say that fire generates heat and light. Thus fire, with its light and heat is one (entity) thing, and what can be said of fire can, also, be said of the sun.

God is a living, divine person, intelligent, consisting of mind and life and self. Mind and life are one being. Thus, one cannot separate between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We call this divine, living, intelligent person The Holy Trinity. The object is explanation rather than separation.

The Mind of God—The "Logos"

It is clear that the Holy Spirit is God's Spirit and there is no problem with that...As for the word "Logos," in what sense is it the mind of God?

The mind, also called the word, both derive their meaning from the Greek original "Logos." In the original Greek text of John's gospel we read: "In the beginning was the Logos (Word) and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God" John 1:1. The word "Logos" in the dictionary has many meanings. One form "Logo" gives us the English *logic*, which means not just ordinary speech (words), but, mind expressed or intelligent expression.

God created the world by His intelligent mind, or by His Son, or by His logic or wisdom—all of which mean the same. For God and His mind are the same being. An example of this is when we say, "I solved the problem with my mind." Is it you who solved it or your mind? Both are the same thing. This distinction between you and your mind is merely intellectual and does not mean separation. Likewise, when we say Father and Son, we are not separating them, but, only for the sake of clarification. If God was without mind He would not be God, or if God was without a Spirit He would not be God. Therefore God, of necessity had to be with His mind and Spirit a Trinity of Unity.

The Father and Son:

We believe in one God, God the Father. What then is this talk of the Son? The fact is that the Son's humanity is not physical nor reproductive nor a son born of a consort. It is of another kind, the personal, intellectual, spiritual sonship which has no connection with the body or propagation. An example of this is when we say that the mind gives birth to ideas. It is true that mind begets thought, but, is the begetting reproductive? Of course not! As thought is born of mind so was the birth of the Son of the Father. In physical birth there is a separation. However, birth from the Holy Triune God does not involve separation. As Christ said in the Gospel of John, "I and the Father are One." (John 10:30) The Son comes from the Father without leaving Him. He comes out of Him and yet remains in Him, which leads to the enquiry, how? I shall explain to you with the help of an example: When you think, then voice (speak) that thought it reaches the ears of the people, although that thought is still in your mind. It is also possible for the thought to leave your mind and enter a book which is distributed in America where everyone reads it. In that sense the thought came out from you and yet remains with you.

We understand the word "Son" in a number of ways. A word referring to time and space as when we say for example: So and so joined the army when he was twenty in its Arabic form

"Ibn Ishreen" (a son) of twenty years (time). We also speak of "Sons of the Nile"—our countrymen—of intellectual situations when we say: So and so did not utter a "lips daughter" ("Bint shafa", literally daughter of a lip, i.e. *word*). Also there is a spiritual sonship between a teacher and his pupils, as when he calls them: "My sons, oh pupils!" In the language of science we speak of friction giving birth to heat...And so in the Gospel, Saint John The Beloved says; "Oh my children, I write this to you so that you will not sin."

The Son was also called "Wisdom" in the Proverbs of Solomon in the Old Testament (before Christ's incarnation). This has the sense of wisdom and knowledge...The Book says: "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge..." Thus when we say that the Father created the world through the Son it means He created the world through His mind, His wisdom, His thought and His knowledge. Thus the Father created and the Son created and the two of them are One.

The Heathen Trinity

The Trinity which Islam fights is not the Christian one. It is clear that the target of Islam's attack in the Koranic text "The Creator of the heavens and the earth—how should He have a son, seeing that He has no consort, and He created all things, and He has knowledge of everything?" (Anaam Sura 100); this is something which Islam fights and which we Christians fight also. One who says that God had a son through a consort is an infidel in both the Islamic and Christian creeds...The Trinity which both Islam and Christianity fight is the heathen trinity. An example of this is found in the pharaonic religion which has Isis, Osiris, and their son Horus, the very trinity which Christianity combated before the rise of Islam. However, Islam accused the Christians, well versed in their Trinity that they believed it consisted of God, Christ and the Virgin since it says in the Surat Al Maidah: "and when God said, "O Jesus, Son of Mary dids't thou say unto men, "Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God"? He said, "To Thee be glory! It is not mine to say what I have no right to." We, too, deny this saying and reject a trinity consisting of God, Christ and the Virgin...Indeed we fight it with the Muslims. We do not teach that the Virgin was a goddess. On the contrary, we consider one who deifies the Virgin to be an infidel.

The three persons in the Christian Trinity are fully equal: the Father equals the Son, equals the Holy Spirit; there is no difference or separation. They are also co-eternal which differentiates the Christian Trinity from the heathen trinity.

In the heathen trinity, the three—Isis, Osiris, and Horus—are not one, unlike the Christian Trinity which holds that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are One.

The heathen trinity has the element of propagation which is absent from the Christian. It is different as to time: In the heathen story at one time there was Osiris and Isis alone before marriage. After their marriage Horus came into existence and his age, naturally, was less than theirs...However, in Christianity, there is no time difference between the Three Persons because God has existed eternally, in this mind (Son) and Spirit (Holy Spirit).

The idea of the Christian Trinity was not evolved today or yesterday and is not particularly Christian for it has existed since eternity.

Christian Trinity and the Heresies:

In the Arian heresy, Arius said that the Son was created, thus showing his ignorance of the essence of the Holy Trinity. For if he understood that the Son is the mind of God, it was not possible for God to create His own mind for this creation would mean that it did not exist before. Far be it that God was without His mind at any time! Therefore, it is not possible that the Son was created. God and His mind were there since eternity. While it is true that the Incarnation occurred in time, the Son existed before the Incarnation.

As for the Holy Spirit, those who said that He was created misunderstood the Holy Trinity. How could God exist before His Holy Spirit? It follows then that God in His mind and Spirit has existed eternally. And the word "God" can be applied to any of the Three Persons. Thus we say: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

, The founders of the neo-Platonist philosophies held that it was not possible for God to have a direct connection with matter. Therefore, He created an intermediary who had a connection with matter. This intermediary mediates between the divine self (God) and matter (man). The Christian response to these philosophies is that we do not see any problem with the creation of matter by God. If a created god (a mediator) existed he could not rightly be named "God" because there was a time when this god did not exist. From this we can see that such a god is dispensable since the universe existed and was operated without him...Therefore, the Father and the Son (the incarnated God) are one and the same thing.

God is the Spirit and the Wisdom (or mind) and He is the divine Person. Thus, we can speak of the divinity of the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Father, and all of them are One. There is no difference between one Person of the Trinity and the other.