

Acts 2:33 (Epistle text)

*Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he (Christ) has poured out **this** that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*

THE TRINITY TEST

Religious ideas are everywhere!

If each of you were given a piece of drawing paper and a pencil/ art pen, chances are there would be as many different images of God as there are people in this room. The point is, we all have our own private imaginations of what he looks like ... and, here is the real challenge – we all have our own ways of talking about him!

You are to be commended for the responsive reading of the *Athanasian Creed*. Is there anyone who can recite it by heart? (*pause*) I didn't think so. By now most of you are breathing a sigh of relief that we won't have to do that again until next year. It is very long, repetitious, and uses the "c" word (catholic) some of us learned very early in life to associate with Roman ... but in this credal statement it means "universal, global," and includes everyone in the church, the Holy Christian Church. It is attributed to the 20th bishop of Alexandria, the fourth century church father named Athanasius (296-373). He served for 45 years, seventeen of which included 5 exiles imposed by 4 different Roman emperors. Since he seemed to be in trouble most of the time for defending the faith, his contemporaries nicknamed him (Latin: *Athanasius contra mundum*) *Athanasius against the world*. He is best known for his stand against heretical ideas circulating about Christ, particularly those that make him inferior and subordinate to the Father. Such notions are still embraced to this day and would never pass --

THE TRINITY TEST.

- HINDUISM among the oldest and most venerated religious traditions in the world has three gods: *Brahma*, the creator; *Shiva*, the destroyer; and *Vishnu*, the preserver. Through endless cycles of birth, death, and reincarnation Hindus must work until reaching final release called: *moksha*.

To illustrate how pervasive Hindu thought has been, here is one possible credal statement from a very familiar cartoon character ...

I am what I am and that's all that I am.

Popeye, the Sailorman

He was strong to the finish and a vegetarian ... very Hindu, indeed. But his life style, even though he traveled the seven seas, would hardly pass --

THE TRINITY TEST.

- ISLAM is still a headliner today, claiming one billion believers, of whom six million are here in the U.S. Since around 610 AD when Muhammad said the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him to start a new religion, muslims have strongly disagreed with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity; they cannot

accept the Biblical truth that Jesus and the Father are one, that they have the same substance and are co-eternal. They insist on their *Shahadah*, which is their creedal statement ...

There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.

Formidable foes ... to be sure, but even without *jihad* they will refuse --
THE TRINITY TEST.

We could spend the rest of today talking about all the religious traditions in our world today. We could identify the heretics and the false teachers, too. But that will be the subject for another time and place. Right now let's see how this text stacks up to --
THE TRINITY TEST.

St. Peter is preaching the best sermon of his life! He is talking about Christ!

*Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he (Christ) has poured out **this** that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*

The key word: (Gk: *touto*) **this**, a tiny pronoun. What is it referring to in the context of the event of Pentecost? What person, place, or thing (an idea?) does **this** tiny pronoun designate? As we look and listen we discover that it is *not* the Holy Spirit himself, but the effect of his divine presence and power. This means that He is the source of our energy, the motor that makes our church run, the power that regenerates our life in Christ. Does this passage mention the three persons in one divine essence? Yes, it does! The main focus is Christ pouring out what the Father gives him, namely the Holy Spirit whom he gives to us. This is the pattern repeated throughout Scripture that passes --
THE TRINITY TEST.

Let's see if we can pass the test.

Here are (12) twelve experiments ...

- There were two words for GOD'S NAME in ancient Hebrew. One is plural and the other is singular; the first could be spoken, but not the second. We translate both as divine names for God. **Elohim**, almighty God (them) ... **YHWH**, Lord (him), which was avoided; instead the substitute became **Adonai**, Lord. Note that in Scripture (Gen. 1:26): *Let us make man in our image.*
- GOD ... spelled with three letters to form one word.
- TREE ... we can see roots, trunk, branches, but only one tree.
- SHAMROCK ... three equal petals, but one green leaf.
- TRIANGLE ... three equal sides, but one symbol.
- MATH (Trinity Math) ... $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$

- TIME ... past, present, and future for all time.
- PENCIL ... lead, wood, and an eraser to make one pencil.
- EGG ... hardboiled or fried instead of raw, which is messy.
Demo: *Fry one egg in small skillet.*
- WATER ... solid, liquid, gas are three properties of one basic element of life on this planet.
Demo: *Melt Ice Cube on skillet.*
- ELECTRICITY ... energy, light, and heat from invisible power to visible effects of its presence in our modern appliances.
Demo: *Turn on electric Light Bulb.*
(similar to Spirit of God, Jesus, and Nature)
- SYNERGY ... synchronized motion of diversity into unity.
Demo: *Switch on Tinkertoy Trinity* (battery-powered)

These (which is the plural of the pronoun, *this*) are only limited experiments to help us think correctly about our unlimited God ... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are very simple things to show us how complex the doctrine of God can be in --
THE TRINITY TEST.

One last thought.

In their efforts to understand the Holy Trinity, the heretics and false teachers to this day keep making the same mistake ... they think they can understand it.

Like most religious ideas, only one passes --
THE TRINITY TEST.

The Christian faith is *this* ...

*That we worship one God in Trinity and
Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons
nor dividing the substance.*

Athanasian Creed 4, LSB 319

We see it and hear it.

In Jesus' Name,
A M E N