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The Family Of God

There's a diversity of views about the nature of God in the various world faiths. How can He best be understood?

by James McBride

Christianity proposes that 'God' is a 'trinity'. That is, God is composed of the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This idea has been established since the fourth century and any other concept is viewed as unorthodox. Indeed, Christians down the centuries have been murdered for opposing it.

Others within Christianity have proposed a variety of alternative views. Potentially the simplest—and perhaps the most accurate and satisfying - is that *God is a Family*, an idea richly supported in the Scriptures. In other words, 'God' is an inclusive term that embraces an increasing number of family members.

Family Origins

The human family is a divine concept modeled on the God Family. We are created by Him ('Elohim') *'in the likeness and image of God'* (Genesis 1:26). Alone in nature we humans have in embryo form the very nature of our Creator. We are not fish, not amphibians, not birds or animals. Never have been.

A man, according to the divine model for human relationships, is nourished by his parents. In maturity he leaves that family, becomes joined to his wife and together they have their own new family including a varying number of their offspring. This 'nuclear' family remains in close association with their wider extended family of parents and grandparents.

Occasionally in human history societies have followed this mode—as from time to time in ancient Israel. And outside the Western world, as in the Hindu faith, life-long marriage remains the option of choice. Other areas are a basket case, notably Africa. Not far behind, however, are the 'Christian' nations. The duration of marriage in the UK, for example, averages eleven years, fifteen in the United States. Millions of children are fatherless, brought up by struggling single mothers.

And the consequences are clear for all to see—except perhaps for Government and the so-called liberal Establishment. For many, too many, the choice—even among

Christians—is 'co-habitation'; but such relationships manage only on average two or three years. Increasingly, too, promiscuous young men and women—children, often—procreate like alley cats and leave the consequences to the tax-payer.

That's not the divine pattern. Society will benefit from the diligent application of the Torah, the divine instruction on this, as in other aspects of life.

Let's explore the 'God Family'.

The Family of God

The notion accepted by Christian orthodoxy confines God to a closed Trinity, 'one in three and three in one'. The very terms used in Scripture—and by theologians—however, should indicate the *family* relationship of God: Father and Son. And then there are 'children of God', and we use the term 'mother church'. All are terms agreed as authentic throughout the varied sects of Christianity. It's the heart and core of the faith. *And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.*

The family concept runs as a golden thread through Scripture. Humans are potentially children of the Creator God, the Father: *'For it became him [Jesus], for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory...'* (Hebrews 2:10).

Jesus is 'the Son of God' - and all true Christians are his brothers: *'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers'* (Romans 8:29). Jesus, says Paul, is the firstborn, to be followed by multitudes (through resurrection) of transformed men and women.

So there are indeed three aspects of the God Family: Father, Son—and the brethren of Jesus. How, then, did the erroneous idea of a 'Holy Ghost' slip into theology?

The Family of God

Holy Spirit

Clearly, the Scriptures ascribe a huge importance to the role of the holy Spirit ('Holy Ghost'). That Spirit is the extension throughout the universe of the divine persona, the divine mind. The Spirit is all-powerful, everywhere present, active in world affairs and in certain individuals. It is how God created and sustains and works throughout His creation: *'...the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters'* (Genesis 1:2).

By means of the Spirit the LORD has communicated with His prophets. And through the Spirit Jesus builds, guides and corrects the church. Through the apostle John Jesus says: *'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches'* (Revelation 2:7, 11 etc).

The point is, the holy Spirit is God—just as we can each lay claim to our own human spirit or personality, while understanding that it is not a being separate from us.

The Vital Link

There's a further aspect of the work of the Spirit, one that links it to the Family of God. For it is only if we humans have the Spirit dwelling in us that we can be called 'Christian'.

Wrote Paul: *'Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his'* (Romans 8:9). So, with the indwelling Spirit we are—right now—God's sons: *'...now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is'* (1 John 3:2). That is, by virtue of the holy Spirit in us *we are* God's sons and daughters. We are a part, the third part, of the divine Family. Since the first Christian Pentecost that part has been growing—growing as the Father calls and as men and women respond to that call.

But notice: *'... we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him'*. When Jesus Christ returns to Planet Earth, all individuals with the Spirit will burst the chains of mortality and enter into *'the glorious liberty of the Sons of God'*. No longer will we be bound by the constraints imposed by the physical. For we will have become fully a part of the divine Family with all that entails.

The Spirit has co-existed in the Father and in the Son since eternity. By virtue of the Spirit in us we participate in that eternity. In this life we, in co-operation with the Spirit, are building the divine character: *'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord'* (II Corinthians 3:18). By the action of the Spirit in us, in other words, we are transformed during our

converted lifetime to reflect the very image of God as exemplified to us by Jesus.

The Way

The first step to become a Family member, then, is to receive the holy Spirit. The apostle Peter explains how: *'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'* (Acts 2:38). That is, change your mind and turn around your life. Jesus the Son is 'the way, the truth and the life' and nobody can enter the Father's Family except through a saving faith in him, God's appointed Saviour. And no-one can come to Jesus Christ unless drawn to him by the Father (John 6:44).

Again we see the family analogy. Humanly, the father implants his 'seed' and a child is conceived. The heavenly Father implants His Spirit seed in selected human minds. A 'spiritual son' is begotten. Just as our first parents were instructed to *'...be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth'* (Genesis 1:28), so, too, God is 'reproducing after his kind'.

When we come to a knowledge that we are, through our thoughts and actions, an enemy of God and we desire to be reconciled with Him—then we must be 'born anew'. Through the new birth we inherit unending life. Wrote Paul: *'But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you'* (Romans 8:11).

Purpose of Life

And God's prescription? *'Repent and be baptized'*. That's how, following the laying on of hands, we receive the eternal Spirit that imparts eternal life, and gives us entrance to the Family of God.

We were created by a loving God who desires to share His glory with those He has created in His image and likeness. That's the whole purpose of human life.

Many thousands in the various churches of God are sharing in this vision. Contact us at any of our addresses if you would like to discuss your part.

God is calling individuals to share in the family relationship he has with His Son Jesus. For an insight into how you can be part of the divine Family you are invited to request the free articles:

What Do You Mean - 'Repent'? Coming To Baptism

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