

The Concept of Trinity

by Sayyid Qutb

People of earlier revelations! Do not indulge in excesses concerning your faith, and do not say about Allah anything, but the truth.

The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was no more than a messenger from Allah and His word which He gave to Mary and a spirit from Him. (Women: "An-Nisaa": 4:171)

The Christians and Jews, both had received revelations from Allah through their prophets in earlier times. They are, therefore, addressed in the Qur'an as "people of the Book", or "people of earlier revelations" in our preferred rendering of the relevant Arabic terms. In the passage, the surah has done justice to Jesus, son of Mary, and his pure mother against the fabrications of Jews. It also stated the view of the true faith concerning the alleged crucifixion, and has done justice to the truth itself against Jews, their schemes and stubborn opposition. In this passage, the surah also states the view of the true faith and does justice to Jesus, son of Mary against the excesses of Christians themselves and shows the fallacy of pagan legends that have crept into Christianity from all nations and creeds with whom Christianity came into close contacts, Greek and Roman legends as well as Egyptian and Indian mythology.

Having found the faith of the people of earlier revelations full of distortions and rife with alien mythology, the Qur'an has taken it upon itself to put this faith back into its original true form. It also states the truth concerning the faith of the polytheists which combined some remaining traces of the original faith of Abraham (peace be on him), covered by a great heap of legends and ignorant absurdities.

Indeed, Islam aims to state the true concept of godhead to all mankind. It eliminates every distortion, excess and complacency in human thinking. It sets right, among other philosophies, the mistaken notions in the concept of the Oneness of Allah in the philosophy of Aristotle in Athens before the Christian era and that of Plotinus in Alexandria after Christianity and all intervening and subsequent philosophies and concepts which grope in the dark, guided only by the flickering rays of the human mind which cannot be properly guided without a message from Allah.

The main issue discussed in this passage is that of the Trinity, including the legend of whose son Jesus was. It goes on to state the true concept of the Oneness of Allah.

At the time when Islam was revealed, the Christian faith, including all denominations, was based on the concept of one god in three elements or manifestations: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is considered the son.

Beyond that, there are great differences among Christian sects with regard to Jesus Christ and whether he has a dual nature: divine and human, or a single divine nature and whether he has a single will despite his dual nature, and whether time does not apply to him in the same way as it does not apply to the Father. There are numerous concepts which vary a great deal and which have led to persecution by one sect or another.

If we closely follow the history of the Christian faith, we are bound to come to the conclusion that the concept of the Trinity and that of Jesus being the son of Allah, and also the concept of the divine nature of Mary and her being included in the various concepts of the Trinity, were all unknown to the early Christians.

These concepts were introduced into Christianity much later, at different times, when pagans embraced Christianity without abandoning their pagan and polytheistic concepts altogether. It is perhaps more likely that the concept of the Trinity was imported from ancient Egyptian religions, such as the concept of the Trinity of Osiris, Isis and Horus as well as many other Trinities in the ancient Egyptian religions.

The Unitarian Christians continued to resist every type of persecution which they suffered at the hands of Roman emperors and the various synods which followed the line dictated by the state until the sixth century, suffering in the process untold torture.

The concept of the Trinity continues to represent an intellectual shock to Christian intelligentsia. The church tries to make it acceptable to them by all possible means including references to something unknown, the secrets of which will not be given to man until the day when everything in the heavens and on the earth is laid bare. Potter, the author of a treatise entitled *Fundamentals and Details* who is considered one of the main commentators on the Christian faith states on his comments on the concept of the Trinity: "We have understood this as best as our minds can do. We, however, hope to understand it more clearly in the future, when everything in the heavens and on earth is laid bare."

It is not our intention to give a historical account of the method and the stages by which this concept has crept into Christianity, one of the main monotheistic religions. We will confine ourselves to the study of the Qur'anic verses in this surah which aim at correcting this concept which is alien to monotheism.

