Three persons in One God

Question from Makerita on 19-Jun-97 at 08:08 PM:

Just recently I got into a debate with a few Jehovah's Witnesses. The witnesses questioned our belief in the Holy Trinity, stating that nowhere in the Bible is it stated that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are in fact God Himself, that Jesus is the Son of God and not in fact God.

Fortunately, I remembered a little about scripture and mentioned that in the New Testament Jesus identified Himself as "I Am" which coincides with God's statement to Moses in the Old Testament that "I Am who I AM." Unfortunately, I could not actually direct them to the textx. Howeever, they reacted a bit stunned at my references. Then they questioned the validity of the Holy Spirit as being God, that it was not at all Scripture based. Because I was a bit shaky on that, I quickly stated that that was their interpretation of the Bible and their interpretation will differ from the next person. Fortunately with our Church, we have the Pope, the Magisterium, the councils of Bishops who interprets the Bible according to what the Holy Spirit leads them to believe and what they say is infallible based on what Jesus stated to the apostles and the power He gave to the apostles.

So, help me out here, please. What would have been a better, and correct way to answer the above arguments posed by the Jehovah's Witnesses recruiters? How else can I better prepare myself for the next round of debate.

Answer by Colin B. Donovan, STL on 20-Jun-97 at 01:48 PM:

As a general rule, unless one is versed in the faith and it is strong, it is not a good idea to do what you did. However, you may be one of those exceptions, since in fact I think you did quite well. The JWs have pat answers and the key is to get them off-script, as it were, which you did.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we saw His glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14; see also 1 Jn 1:1-3). This text alone is sufficient to refute the Jehovah Witnesses.

However, the I AM references (Yahweh in Ex 3:13-14; Jesus in John 8) are also very strong arguments. The abhorrence of the Jews to pronounce THE NAME, as evidenced by the reaction of the Pharisees (Jn 8:58-59) who recognized it as blasphemy for a mere man to attribute to himself, is well known. Jesus was, of course, not a mere man. In John 14:8-10 Jesus directly identifies Himself with the Heavenly Father.

From St. Elizabeth at the beginning of Jesus' earthly life (Lk 1:43) to St. Thomas after the Resurrection (Jn 20:28), the first believers called Jesus "Lord" (Kyrios) and in Thomas' case, God (Theos). Kyrios is the same word used of Yahweh in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Septuagint) in those places where the Jews did not want to write The Name. This usage was already current in the first century since the Septuagint translation was completed about 100 BC. While we don't know what Aramaic word Elizabeth and Thomas used, the sacred authors were inspired in their choice of Kyrios to translate it (2 Tim 3:16).

It can also be said that contrary to JW interpretation of "Son of God," the Sanhedrin understood it to mean that Christ claimed the Divine Nature (Lk. 23:70-71). Even under the title of "Son of Man" Jesus claimed Divine prerogatives (Mt. 12:8), manifesting what the Church would later define as the unity of His natures in His Person. These natures can also be seen in Phil. 2:6-12, in which Christ lays done the glory of the Divine Nature to take up the mortality of our human nature. On the other hand, there is not a single text in Scripture to suggest that Christ was an incarnation of St. Michael! Nor, did any Christian suggests so until the Witnesses came along.

Since the New Testament was a revelation of the Father in the Word-made-flesh, the evidence for the Divinity of the Holy Spirit is less explicit. The first revelation of the Trinity is, not surprisingly, to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The archangel Gabriel tells her, "The 'Holy Spirit' will come upon you, and the power of the 'Most High' will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the 'Son of God'" (Lk 1:35). The Trinity is first publicly revealed at the Baptism of Jesus in which all three Persons are manifested separately (Mt 3:16-17; Mk 1:10-12, Lk 3:21-22).

Christ clearly distinguishes between the Father, Himself and the Spirit. In John 8, after having identified Himself with the Father, He immediately speaks of the Spirit as an Advocate like Himself. Who was Jesus? A Divine Person sent by the Father to testify to the Truth (Jn 18:37) and as an Advocate for man. Who is the Spirit? A Divine Person sent by the Father and the Son to continue to testify to the Truth and as an Advocate for man (Jn. 14:15-17, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7). Thus, when Jesus at His Ascension gives the great evangelical commission to His Apostles He commands them to Baptize in THE NAME - whose name? - the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

There are many other citations that attest to the Divinity of Christ. For example, wherever Jesus' eternity is attested to, or our participation in God or in eternity is said to be due to Christ, we know that He is not a creature since no creature can be the cause of eternal life (Jn 3:36, 6:54, 10:28, 17:3, Eph 1:4, Col. 1:17, 1 Jn 1:2, 5:11-13, 20).

These texts will give you a good start. The best preparation for any apologetics is to know the faith. So develop a practice of reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church along with your Bible.

-Colin

Back to topics list.