

“Who Invented the Trinity?”

Defending the Triune Nature of God as Revealed in His Word

Introduction

In this paper I respond to an article found on the Institute of Islamic Information & Education (III&E) website,¹ entitled “Who Invented the Trinity?” (by Aisha Brown).² I include the article in full (shaded sections) in this paper, with my personal response interspersed throughout ([blue lettering]).³ I have seen this article by Brown on many other Islamic websites, so she seems to be well-received by the Islamic community, and the view-points and arguments expressed in the article appear to be that which is held by many Muslims.

This discussion before us is of vital importance for at least three reasons. First, the Trinity is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. The very gospel that we believe and proclaim is a Trinitarian gospel (e.g. Ephesians 1:3-14). Second, this is one of those great dividing lines between Muslims and Christians. After all, Muslims deny the Trinity, and believe it is contrary to the belief in one God (i.e. monotheism). Third, the doctrine of the Trinity is a favorite for Muslims to criticize. However, Muslims frequently misunderstand, and therefore misrepresent, this fundamental doctrine, both with regard to the doctrine itself and its historical development. This article epitomizes the typical misrepresentations found among Muslims. I can only hope that my response will provide some clarification for them, and, God willing, lead them to embrace this glorious truth and revelation of God’s nature.⁴

Article: “Who Invented the Trinity?”

The three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – all purport to share one fundamental concept: belief in God as the Supreme Being, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. Known as "tawhid" in Islam, this concept of the Oneness of God was stressed by Moses in a Biblical passage known as the "Shema", or the Jewish creed of faith: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

¹ <http://www.iiie.net/>. Accessed on November 10, 2013.

² You can find the article here: <http://www.iiie.net/index.php?q=node/36>. Accessed on November 10, 2013.

³ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

⁴ I highly recommend the following books on the Trinity: *The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief*, by James R. White (1998); *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, by Robert Letham (2004); and *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, & Relevance*, by Bruce A. Ware (2005).

[I just want to quickly point out here that “Lord” is actually in all capitals (i.e. LORD) in English translations, as it refers to God’s covenant name, *Yahweh*. The NASB reads, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!”]

It was repeated word-for-word approximately 1500 years later by Jesus when he said "...The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord." (Mark 12:29)

Muhammad came along approximately 600 years later, bringing the same message again: "And your God is One God: there is no God but He..." (The Qur'an 2:163).

Christianity has digressed from the concept of the Oneness of God, however, into a vague and mysterious doctrine that was formulated during the fourth century. This doctrine, which continues to be a source of controversy both within and outside the Christian religion, is known as the Doctrine of the Trinity. Simply put, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity states that God is the union of three divine persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – in one divine being.

[First, the claim that the doctrine of the Trinity “was formulated during the fourth century” (i.e. supposedly at the Council of Nicaea [A.D. 325] and Council of Constantinople [A.D. 381]) must be understood in the context of this entire article. While no Christian would deny that the doctrine of the Trinity was further clarified and explained in a doctrinal formula – something that is done with the whole corpus of theology (e.g. a confession of faith; a Systematic Theology) – this isn’t the same thing as is implied by the author. The author clearly uses the term “formulated” to imply invention (hence, the title of the article, and the assertion elsewhere in the article that the Trinity is a man-made doctrine). However, we can speak of the formulation of a doctrine, not in the sense of invention, but in the sense of clarification, elaboration, and systematic arrangement, *based on the teachings of the Scriptures*. This is especially the case when an important and historically held teaching is brought into question and attacked by false teachers. Such is the case with the Trinity.

Second, the author implies here, and elsewhere, that the mere existence of controversy over this doctrine necessitates its falsehood. The argumentation seems to be the following: Doctrine + Controversy = False Doctrine. This, however, is unrealistic, and it seems to assume that Islam is without controversy among its adherents.

Third, the author defines the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as follows: “God is the union of three divine persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – in one divine being.” This actually isn’t a bad summation. After all, Trinity means Tri-unity, or three in oneness; and this definition captures that thought pretty well. However, as we’ll see, the author seems to fail to properly understand the definition itself (a failure of the distinction between “persons” and “being”), as she

will later contradict it, thus misrepresenting what we as Christians actually believe. That being said, I would like to briefly state the doctrine of the Trinity as it is traditionally stated: “There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.”^{5]}

If that concept, put in basic terms, sounds confusing, the flowery language in the actual text of the doctrine lends even more mystery to the matter:

"...we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity... for there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Ghost is all one... they are not three gods, but one God... the whole three persons are co-eternal and co-equal... he therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity..." (excerpts from the Athanasian Creed).

[You can read the Athanasian Creed in full online.⁶ Let me say here that there is certainly a degree of mystery to the Trinity. Who wouldn't say that God is in some sense mysterious to us? After all, He is eternal, we are time-bound; He is infinite, we are finite; He is Creator, we are the created. In fact, God is so wholly different and above His creatures that He refers to Himself as "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). Dr. James White expresses well the challenge of expressing and defining the unique God:

This shouldn't be surprising, however. We must always remember that we are trying to define and describe something that is absolutely, universally *unique*. It is far easier to say, 'I don't mean this,' than it is to say, 'Well, it's like this,' since there is nothing in the created universe that really, fully is *like* an absolutely unique thing. That's what makes it unique in the first place! Consequently, theologians have had much more success at saying, 'The Trinity is *not this*,' than positively saying, 'The Trinity is *this*.'⁷

Of course, that doesn't mean the Bible doesn't give us positive teachings on this matter, nor does it mean that Christians haven't expressed the Trinity in positive terms. Indeed, we have. It just means that there's always going to be the need for qualifications (i.e. "We don't mean this..."). The Athanasian Creed is simply a confession that seeks to synthesize the biblical data (teachings); it seeks to explain, in a summary fashion, and especially in opposition to the heretical views of Arius and his followers, the Trinitarian nature of God as taught in the Scriptures.]

⁵ *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. Q. 6.

⁶ <http://www.ccel.org/creeds/athanasian.creed.html>. Accessed on November 12, 2013.

⁷ White, James. *The Forgotten Trinity* (MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 29. Emphasis is his.

Let's put this together in a different form: one person, God the Father, plus one person, God the Son, plus one person, God the Holy Ghost, equals one person, God the [sic] What? Is this English or is this gibberish?

[Here we have the first of many misrepresentations of the doctrine of the Trinity; and it actually comes as somewhat of a surprise, because she actually provided a fairly accurate definition of the Trinity above, yet here she demonstrates that she still does not understand the doctrine. I hope to provide some clarification here.

Here's how the author's mathematical formula looks: 1 (person) + 1 (person) + 1 (person) = 1 (person). Obviously, this is indeed illogical. A first-grader would likely be able to see the error of this mathematical equation (it's a false equation). Now, even though God's nature can't be dumbed down to a mathematical equation, let's look at what this equation would look like if it were to properly represent what Christians actually assert about the Trinity: 1 (person) + 1 (person) + 1 (person) = 1 (*being*). The distinction between these two terms – *person* and *being* – seems to be overlooked by the majority of Muslims. Person and being are not the same thing, and therefore it's paramount to take notice of their use in the doctrinal "formulation" of the Trinity. It is not three persons in one person; but it is three *Persons* in one *Being*. *Being* pertains to substance or nature, whereas *person* refers to personhood or self-consciousness.]

It is said that Athanasius, the bishop who formulated this doctrine, confessed that the more he wrote on the matter, the less capable he was of clearly expressing his thoughts regarding it.

[The statement by Athanasius that is referred to by Brown is found in his "First Letter to Monks" (A.D. 358-360).⁸ The following are Athanasius' words:

For the more I desired to write, and endeavoured to force myself to understand the Divinity of the Word, so much the more did the knowledge thereof withdraw itself from me; and in proportion as I thought that I apprehended it, in so much I perceived myself to fail of doing so. Moreover also I was unable to express in writing even what I seemed to myself to understand; and that which I wrote was unequal to the imperfect shadow of the truth which existed in my conception.

He goes on to quote from Psalm 139:6, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it." By the way in which Brown referenced this statement by Athanasius, she seems to suggest that he was unsure of the doctrine of the Trinity, or at least couldn't express the doctrine in a coherent and meaningful manner. Such is furthest from the truth. Athanasius was

⁸ You can read it here: <http://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/npnf204/npnf2115.htm>. Accessed on November 13, 2013.

simply affirming the glorious nature of God, and the difficulty that comes with expounding upon it, as the finite mind and language of man can only go so far. This statement by Athanasius actually points to the glorious reality of the Trinity. It is quite clear from the bulk of Athanasius' writings that he had a pressing concern for grounding Trinitarian language (i.e. the various words used to define the Trinity) in the revelation of God – the Scriptures. This is the same conviction of Christians today.]

How did such a confusing doctrine get its start?

Trinity in the Bible

References in the Bible to a Trinity of divine beings are vague, at best.

In Matthew 28:19, we find Jesus telling his disciples to go out and preach to all nations. While this "Great Commission" does make mention of the three persons who later become components of the Trinity, the phrase "...baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" is quite clearly an addition to Biblical text – that is, not the actual words of Jesus – as can be seen by two factors:

- 1) baptism in the early Church, as discussed by Paul in his letters, was done only in the name of Jesus; and
- 2) the "Great Commission" was found in the first gospel written, that of Mark, bears no mention of Father, Son and/or Holy Ghost – see Mark 16:15.

[First, "components of the Trinity" is not accurate terminology. *Component* refers to a constituent *part* of something. However, the biblical doctrine of the Trinity is not that the three Persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) each make up a "part" of the Godhead, in which case each would take up 1/3 of the Godhead; but it teaches that each Person is fully God (all that makes God God). This is what is meant by the Shorter Catechism's statement, "the same in substance". James White sums it up well: "Each [Person] fully shares the one *Being* that is God. The Father is not 1/3 of God, the Son 1/3 of God, the Spirit 1/3 of God. Each is fully God, coequal with the others, and that eternally."⁹

Second, the assertion that the Trinitarian formula of baptism is a later addition to the original text of Scripture, and not actually the words of Jesus, cannot really be substantiated. There is no

⁹ *The Forgotten Trinity*. 27.

manuscript evidence that suggests such a thing. And while some may wish to deny its authenticity based on other means, such only amounts to speculation, and is typically grounded in the denial of the inspiration of the Bible. Now, let's look more closely at Brown's assertions (or "two factors").

1. I find it very interesting that Brown would look to the apostle Paul for support. Why? Because Muslims typically piggyback the liberal and skeptic scholars that claim that Paul corrupted or changed early Christianity from what Jesus actually taught. Yet here, Brown is asserting that Paul's teaching on baptism was what Jesus really taught. More than likely, if it were Paul that had the Trinitarian formula of baptism, and not Jesus, she would be saying that Paul's teaching was a later corruption. I do hope the arbitrariness of this argument is evident to the reader. Still, even if Matthew 28:19 did not contain the Trinitarian formula of baptism, the evidence of the Trinity in the Scriptures would not be lost; for it is found in a plethora of passages. Below I write out a few Scriptures by Paul, and others, that clearly evidence the belief of the Trinity in the early Church. Further, just because someone says that we are baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, doesn't mean they are denying the Father and Holy Spirit in the matter. In fact, water baptism points to our being baptized in/by the Spirit (e.g. Acts 10:44-48). Rather, it is simply short-hand, and Jesus is representative.
2. The verse in Mark's Gospel is actually 16:16, which reads, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." Now, besides the fact that there exists strong manuscript evidence against vv. 9-20 being original to Mark's Gospel account, even if it were, it proves nothing. Brown seems to be operating on the assumption that the Gospel accounts have to match up perfectly, or say the exact same thing. This, however, is nonsense, and would completely negate the concept of having multiple witnesses speaking from their particular vantage point; not to mention that each author has a specific audience in mind, as well as a central/particular message to communicate to that audience. Brown is trying to deny the Trinitarian formula as found in Matthew 28:19, which has no manuscript evidence against its originality (or authenticity), by referencing a verse found in a passage that has strong manuscript evidence against its originality. Now, that being said, I don't think Mark 16:16 and Matthew 28:19 present different views of baptism. Just because the Trinitarian formula isn't found in Mark's Gospel doesn't mean it wasn't believed by Mark. Mark 16:16 isn't even concerned with the name in which Christians are baptized into; rather, it focuses on baptism as the sign of the New Covenant, and therefore as a necessary Christian rite by which believers testify to their obedience to Christ's gospel, and enter into the visible manifestation of the church (though I readily acknowledge that baptism is more than that).]

The only other reference in the Bible to a Trinity can be found in the Epistle of 1 John 5:7. Biblical scholars of today, however, have admitted that the phrase "... there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" is definitely a "later addition" to Biblical text, and it is not found in any of today's versions of the Bible.

[Brown is correct in pointing out that First John 5:7 is undoubtedly a much later addition to the Bible. The 10th Century is the earliest evidence of it; but it is written as a marginal note, not in the text itself.¹⁰ The rich manuscript evidence that we possess for the Scriptures allows us to discern these things. However, Brown is incorrect to state that this verse is not found in any of today's versions (or translations) of the Bible. It is still found in the KJV and NKJV (with a footnote noting its lack of early manuscript attestation). It seems that KJV-Only advocates are the only ones who believe it's part of the original Scriptures, but this is clearly due to the fact that they believe the KJV to be God's uniquely preserved, if not inspired, English translation of the Bible. However, honest Christians and scholars are well aware that this verse is not original, and we have no problem making that known.

That being said, Brown is grossly mistaken when she states that there are no other references to the Trinity in the Bible. I can only assume that Brown has not read the Bible in full, or if she has, her Islamic prejudices keep her from seeing the numerous Trinitarian passages. The following is a small sampling:¹¹

Matthew 3:16-17 "After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'" (cf. Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:33-34)

Romans 14:17-18 "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men."

2 Corinthians 13:14 "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all."

¹⁰ For a fuller discussion of this, see the text-critical note of this text in *NET/NTG New Testament*, p. 881.

¹¹ See my article, "The Trinitarian Nature of Christianity: A Doctrinal Overview & Scriptural Compilation," for a fuller list, a brief overview of the progressive revelation of the Trinity in the Scriptures, and the importance of the Trinity in the Christian faith and life. <http://reformedbaptistdaily.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/the-trinitarian-nature-of-christianity2.pdf>. Accessed on November 11, 2013.

Philippians 3:3 “for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

Hebrews 9:14 “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

1 Peter 1:2 “[chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.”

This is but a very small sampling of Trinitarian passages. However, in light of this small sampling alone, it’s a wonder as to how anyone can think that Matthew 28:19 and First John 5:7 (which those Christians who are aware of textual-criticism readily acknowledge not to be original) are the only Trinitarian passages in the Bible. And don’t forget the passage I referenced in my introduction (Ephesians 1:3-14). Notice in these passages, too, the central place of Jesus: He is to be served; He is the giver of grace; He is to be gloried in; He is to be obeyed; He is the accomplisher of salvation (i.e. the Savior). This is no mere prophet; this is the Divine Logos incarnate. Clearly, the early Church held the belief that we Christians hold today: there is only one, true God, who eternally exists in three distinct, yet coequal Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).]

It can, therefore, be seen that the concept of a Trinity of divine beings was not an idea put forth by Jesus or any other prophet of God. This doctrine, now subscribed to by Christians all over the world, is entirely man-made in origin.

[I believe I have clearly shown that the Trinity is not “man-made in origin,” but is according to the God-breathed Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16). Not only has Brown misrepresented the doctrine of the Trinity, but she has also failed to take notice of the plethora of Trinitarian passages in Scripture. What is more, Brown again misrepresents the doctrine of the Trinity in this section. She says, “It can, therefore, be seen that the concept of a Trinity of divine beings...” Again, she fails to distinguish between *being* and *persons*. These words do not mean the same thing, and Christians readily distinguish between the two when defining the biblical revelation of the Trinity. There’s no reason to be confused about these terms, as Christians have clearly explained their differences, and are quick to point them out as they relate to the Trinity. If what she said here were the Christian perspective, then Christians would be tri-theists (i.e. the belief in three gods). No doubt, this is what Muslims often accuse us of; but it is often based on this very misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Trinity.]

The Doctrine Takes Shape

While Paul of Tarsus, the man who could rightfully be considered the true founder of Christianity, did formulate many of its doctrines, that of the Trinity was not among them. He did, however, lay the groundwork for such when he put forth the idea of Jesus being a "divine Son". After all, a Son does need a Father, and what about a vehicle for God's revelations to man? In essence, Paul named the principal players, but it was the later Church people who put the matter together.

Tertullian, a lawyer and presbyter of the third-century Church in Carthage, was the first to use the word "Trinity" when he put forth the theory that the Son and the Spirit participate in the being of God, but all are of one being of substance with the Father.

[The assertion that the apostle Paul is the "true founder of Christianity" is simply not true (e.g. Acts 9:1-31; 15:1-35; Galatians 1-2:10; 2 Peter 3:15-16).¹² Such an assertion is based on liberal scholarship, which operates on the presupposition that the Bible is not the inspired word of God (or at least not in the fullest sense of the word).¹³ The use of liberal and skeptic scholarship by Muslims is very commonplace when it comes to arguing against Christianity, even though these same scholars would question many of the fundamental beliefs and historical assertions of Islam. Muslims who do this often show no familiarization with the works by conservative scholars that respond to and rebut such assertions.

Now, I wish to focus more on Brown's assertion that Paul did not teach the Trinity, but only laid "the groundwork" for it by teaching that Jesus was "a 'divine son'." However, I will attempt brevity at this point, as to keep this article from being too long. I am not exactly certain what Brown intends to imply by asking, "and what about a vehicle for God's revelations to man?" I do not think she is denying that God uses means for communicating His revelation; for even Muslims believe that God has used prophets, and that Muhammad received the Qur'an, not directly from Allah, but by the archangel Gabriel,¹⁴ known as the "Angel of Revelation," reciting it to him.¹⁵ Perhaps

¹² These passages show Paul being commissioned by Jesus Christ, recognized by the apostles as an apostle, and working alongside the rest of the apostles. One must assume the Scriptures to be a mere product of man, and communicate misinformation, to believe that Paul is the "true founder of Christianity." Such attempts to show that Paul is the founder of Christianity, as we know it today, are typically circular in nature, affirming at the outset what has yet to be proven. All subsequent analysis is then performed with the conclusion in mind; and those Scriptures that prove the contrary of the conclusion are brushed aside as later emendations.

¹³ There's no doubt that Brown is relying on liberal and skeptic scholarship at this point. Still, it would be nice if she at least tried to provide some kind of argumentation, or at least some documentation, for her assertion. To make such a rash assertion, and then fail to justify it, is irresponsible.

¹⁴ Muslims believe the angel Gabriel to be the Holy Spirit, though obviously they don't think of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity.

¹⁵ See "Introduction" in *The Qur'an*, A new translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford World's Classics, 2005), ix, xiv, xv. See also Sura 4:166; 11:17.

she is here suggesting that Paul's teaching of Jesus as "a 'divine son'" implies a demi-god (a lesser god for communicating with the material world). It's difficult to tell exactly what she has in mind; but anyone who has read the New Testament, with a willingness to understand its teachings on its own terms, cannot possibly conclude that Paul viewed Jesus as a demi-god of sorts. Let me turn now to the biblical evidence that Paul did indeed believe in the Trinity. Again, this will be a small sampling.

Let us look again at the definition of the Trinity according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." Now, no Christian would assert that Paul expressed these exact words; however, does His teaching of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit agree with it? We need not worry about whether or not Paul taught the Deity of the Father (this is not questioned). Rather, we are here concerned with whether or not Paul taught the Deity of the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit. Further, we are also concerned about whether or not Paul expressed monotheism. After all, if Paul believed in one, true God, and also believed the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to be God (i.e. of the same essence/substance), then He believed in and taught the Trinity: *One God eternally existing in three distinct, yet coequal Persons (Father, Son, Spirit)*.

Monotheism:

1 Corinthians 8:6 "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." (cf. v. 4)

- It is believed by many scholars that this text is an early Christian creed, and that Paul is essentially utilizing a central prayer and creed within Judaism, the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- Notice the Creator-language given to Christ: "by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." This is no mere prophet. This is language used of God. (Compare to Colossians 1:15-17 and John 1:1-4.)
- If "God" can only apply to the Father, then we must also conclude that "Lord" can only apply to Jesus Christ, yet we know that the Father is also Lord (e.g. Luke 2:22-24; Acts 4:24). Further, the Greek word for Lord (Κύριος; *Kyrios*) is used in the Septuagint to translate God's covenant name, Yahweh.
- The only way we can properly understand this text is from the Trinitarian perspective.¹⁶

¹⁶ For a video discussion of this text, visit here: <http://youtu.be/-E22l9bn1HQ>. Accessed on November 17, 2013.

Ephesians 4:4-6 “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

- Note the Trinitarian context in which the “one God” affirmation is found. (Compare to previous verse.)

1 Timothy 1:17 “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

John Frame has remarked, “It is interesting that when the New Testament most strongly emphasizes the unity of God, it cannot seem to resist naming more than one of the Trinitarian persons.”¹⁷ This is exactly what we have seen in the first two Scripture passages above.

Deity of the Son (Jesus):

Philippians 2:5-11 “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

- First, this is no mere prophet. Second, in order to properly understand the “emptying” aspect of Jesus’ humiliation, we must understand Him to be greater than a mere man. While some may wish to think of Him as an angel, nowhere in Scripture can this be substantiated; and the author of Hebrews (who may very well be Paul) specifically teaches the Deity of Jesus in contrast to the angels in Hebrews 1. Finally, the very passage itself identifies Jesus as Yahweh. “EVERY KNEE WILL BOW” (and I would also say, “every tongue will confess”) is a quotation from Isaiah 45:23, which reads, “I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, and every tongue will swear allegiance” (see also vv. 22, 24).

¹⁷ Frame, John. *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 48.

Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.... For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”

- If the “fullness of Deity” dwelt in Jesus, then Jesus was/is God. This sounds a lot like the Shorter Catechism’s definition: “the same in substance”.
- Compare with John 1:1-14

Titus 2:13 “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”

- Some have asserted that “God” refers to the Father, whereas “Savior” refers to Jesus Christ in this text. This distinction comes out in the KJV, which reads, “the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” However, the context suggests to us that only one person is in view, not two. Further, the Greek construction of this text (προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) falls under what is known as the *Granville Sharp’s Rule*, named after Granville Sharp (1735-1813). James White summarizes this rule for us: “...Sharp’s study of the text of the New Testament led him to recognize that when the writer used a particular construction of ‘article (the word ‘the’)—substantive (noun)—*kai*—substantive,’ and when the personal nouns involved were singular and not proper names, they *always* referred to the same person.¹⁸ In other words, both “God” and “Savior” refer to Jesus.
- See also 2 Peter 1:1 where this same construction is found.

Deity of the Holy Spirit:

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 “For to us God revealed them [the hidden wisdom of God in the gospel] through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.”

- The Spirit is “the Spirit of God,” and the Spirit searches “the depths of God.” The Spirit is also said to know the thoughts of God. Clearly, the Spirit is personal and distinct from God, yet also of the fullness of God.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”

¹⁸ White, James. *The Forgotten Trinity*. 77-78. Emphasis is his. For a fuller discussion, see pages 75-80.

- In First Corinthians 6:19 Paul says that we are the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (cf. Ephesians 2:22).
- This is reminiscent of the glory of the LORD dwelling in the temple under the Old Covenant (e.g. Exodus 25:8; 1 Kings 8:10-11).

1 Corinthians 12:3 “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus is accursed’; and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

- This text gets to the heart of the saving work of the Spirit (i.e. regeneration).
- Compare with Titus 3:5.

Clearly, anyone who asserts that Paul did not believe and teach the Trinity, apparently has not read Paul’s letters.]

A Formal Doctrine Is Drawn Up

When controversy over the matter of the Trinity blew up in 318 between two church men from Alexandria – Arius, the deacon, and Alexander, his bishop – Emperor Constantine stepped into the fray.

Although Christian dogma was a complete mystery to him, he did realize that a unified church was necessary for a strong kingdom. When negotiation failed to settle the dispute, Constantine called for the first ecumenical council in Church history in order to settle the matter once and for all.

Six weeks after the 300 bishops first gathered at Nicea in 325, the doctrine of the Trinity was hammered out. The God of the Christians was now seen as having three essences, or natures, in the form of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[Since it has already been shown that the doctrine of the Trinity is indeed taught in Scripture, and since the biblical testimony is most important, I will be brief in this historical section.¹⁹

First, for Brown to assert that the Trinity was “hammered out” at Nicea is somewhat misleading. It seems to imply that what the council concluded on, in regards to the nature of Jesus Christ (as that was the primary focus), was not really held prior to the council, or at least it was always in question. This, however, is not the case. For example, Ignatius, writing in the early 2nd Century,

¹⁹ If one wishes to engage in more in-depth study of the doctrine of the Trinity in history, especially with regard to the Council of Nicea, I recommend Philip Schaff’s, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. III; and E. Calvin Beisner’s, *God in Three Persons*.

repeatedly refers to Jesus as “our God” and “my God.”²⁰ Again, Irenaeus, writing in the second half of the 2nd Century, refers to Jesus as “God.”²¹ These writers speak of Jesus Christ, not as a separate god, or a lesser god, but equal with the Father. What is more, this testimony comes well before the Council of Nicea. Nicea was necessary, not to hammer out some beliefs that weren’t already held and taught by the Church, but in order to respond to the heretical teachings put forth by Arius, who denied the Deity of Jesus, and held that He was a created being. While the history is certainly more complex than I have here stated it, this is the central factor. Again, for a more in-depth look at the history of Nicea, see *footnote 19*.

Second, yet again there is a misrepresentation of the Trinity. The council did not conclude that God has “three essences, or natures, in the form of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” It is not three essences, but *three persons in one essence that is God*. The Nicene Creed itself says that Jesus Christ is “of **one substance** [essence] with the Father” (ὁμοούσιον [*homoousion*] τῷ Πατρὶ.)]

The Church Puts Its Foot Down

The matter was far from settled, however, despite high hopes for such on the part of Constantine. Arius and the new bishop of Alexandria, a man named Athanasius, began arguing over the matter even as the Nicene Creed was being signed; "Arianism" became a catch-word from that time onward for anyone who didn't hold to the doctrine of the Trinity.

It wasn't until 451, at the Council of Chalcedon that, with the approval of the Pope, the Nicene/Constantinople Creed was set as authoritative. Debate on the matter was no longer tolerated; to speak out against the Trinity was now considered blasphemy, and such earned stiff sentences that ranged from mutilation to death. Christians now turned on Christians, maiming and slaughtering thousands because of a difference of opinion.

[First, disagreement and debate is not a proof of falsity. I say this, because Brown seems to suggest that the existence of continual disagreement over the doctrine of the Trinity somehow evidences erroneous teaching. Naturally, however, truth divides, and disagreements on important and fundamental doctrines abound in all religions. Paul himself warned of false teachers creeping in to lead people astray (e.g. Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 4:1-5).

²⁰ See his “Epistle to the Ephesians;” and “Epistle to the Romans.” You can access these writings online here: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/ignatius/>. Accessed on November 19, 2013.

²¹²¹ See, for example, “Against Heresies,” Book I. Ch. X. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/irenaeus/book-i.html>. Accessed on November 19, 2013.

Second, it is indeed true that the Council of Chalcedon did affirm, yet again, the Nicene/Constantinopolitan Creeds. However, the way in which Brown presents this makes it appear that these creeds were in doubt until Chalcedon. Rather, Chalcedon's affirmation of the previous creeds was a reaffirmation of the orthodox teaching against the heretical views that still existed (and continue to exist today in certain circles).²² That being said, Chalcedon was not concerned so much with the doctrine of the Trinity *per se*, but with the related doctrine of the two natures of Jesus (Divine and human; fully God and fully man). This doctrine deserves fuller discussion, so I will likely address it in another article.

Third, while I do not know what the degree of persecution was over this theological debate, I do know that persecution existed, though it seems to have been strongest from the Arian side against the Athanasius side (though both parties are responsible for some degree of persecution). This can partly be explained by the union of Church and state that existed at this time. Such is a sobering illustration of what may take place when ecclesiastical authority is joined with political-state authority. However, we must not think of this theological debate as a mere matter of a "difference of opinion." Granted, no Christian should engage in persecution. We are the ones who are to be persecuted for righteousness sake (e.g. Matthew 5:10-12). Indeed, we are to bless those who persecute us (Romans 12:14; cf. Matthew 5:44; 1 Peter; 2:21-25). That being said, this theological debate was no trivial matter. The doctrine of the Trinity gets to the very heart of the Christian faith – the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian gospel is a Trinitarian gospel (Ephesians 1:3-14). The nature of Jesus directly relates to the nature of redemption (e.g. Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-21; Hebrews 1-2).]

Debate Continues

Brutal punishments and even death did not stop the controversy over the doctrine of the Trinity, however, and the said controversy continues even today.

The majority of Christians, when asked to explain this fundamental doctrine of their faith, can offer nothing more than "I believe it because I was told to do so." It is explained away as "mystery" – yet the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14:33 that "... God is not the author of confusion ..."

The Unitarian denomination of Christianity has kept alive the teachings of Arius in saying that God is one; they do not believe in the Trinity. As a result, mainstream Christians abhor them, and the National Council of Churches has refused their admittance. In Unitarianism, the hope is kept alive

²² For example, Jehovah's Witnesses hold to a form of Arianism.

that Christians will someday return to the preachings of Jesus: "... Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." (Luke 4:8)

[While I do not doubt that there are many Christians who cannot supply a biblically and theologically sound articulation of the Trinity, and why they believe it, as (sadly) many professing Christians today are very ignorant of the Bible and Church history, I do doubt that the majority of Christians would respond as Brown has stated: "I believe it because I was told to do so." Even Christians who have a difficult time articulating the doctrine of the Trinity certainly know what some key Scriptures are that support and teach the Trinity. Again, this seems like nothing more than a poor attempt at making the doctrine of the Trinity appear highly suspect. Further, there is indeed some mystery to the Trinity; yet Brown is woefully mistaken to equate mystery with "confusion." After all, we are finite human beings; God is the infinite and eternal Creator. Yes, we may know a great deal about God because He has revealed Himself to us in various ways (e.g. creation; Scripture); but this does not mean that we have exhausted the knowledge of God (we have not!); and therefore to a degree God is still a mystery to us. We can have certainty on the doctrine of the Trinity because it is clearly taught in God's word, as has already been demonstrated; however, that does not mean that we have exhausted the Trinitarian nature of God. So while there is a mysterious element to the doctrine of the Trinity, we must not speak of it as merely a mystery, as if God has not revealed any certain truths about His Trinitarian nature in His word.

With regard to Brown's comments about the Unitarian Church, she is again assuming what she has yet to prove. First of all, Trinitarians believe in one, true God. It is wrong to think that monotheism necessitates Unitarianism. Further, orthodox churches (those holding to the doctrine of the Trinity) do not reject Unitarians because they believe in one God. This is what Brown's comment implies. It also implies that Trinitarians believe in three gods. Again, Brown shows her woeful misunderstanding of the Trinitarian position. Trinitarians deny Unitarians into their fellowship, not because they believe in one God – we believe in one God – but because they believe in a false god (a Unitarian god). The true God, as revealed in the Scriptures, is not a Unitarian god, but is Trinitarian (as has been demonstrated). Further, by denying the Trinity, they likewise deny the biblical gospel. Many Unitarians are also universalists (i.e. everybody will be saved; there is no judgment), and that is another reason for refusing to fellowship with them. Lastly, it's interesting that Brown, a Muslim, would hold up Unitarians as maintaining the truth that Jesus taught. Obviously, Unitarians and Muslims are far from being in agreement on fundamental doctrines and issues. This is another demonstration of how many Muslims will attempt to utilize whatever argument seems to make their case, no matter the inconsistencies and double-standards that exist by such utilization.]

Islam and the Matter of the Trinity

While Christianity may have a problem defining the essence of God, such is not the case in Islam:

"They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity, for there is no god except One God" (Qur'an 5:73).

It is worth noting that the Arabic language Bible uses the name "Allah" as the name of God.

Suzanne Haneef, in her book *What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims* (Library of Islam, 1985), puts the matter quite succinctly when she says,

"But God is not like a pie or an apple which can be divided into three thirds which form one whole; if God is three persons or possesses three parts, He is assuredly not the Single, Unique, Indivisible Being which God is and which Christianity professes to believe in." (pp. 183-184)

Looking at it from another angle, the Trinity designates God as being three separate entities – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. If God is the Father and also the Son, He would then be the Father of Himself because He is His own Son. This is not exactly logical.

[I will address Qur'an 5:73, and other passages, in the next section.]

There are two very important problems that need to be addressed in this section. Here again Brown shows that she, and other Muslims, do not have the slightest understanding of the Trinity. Even though many sound books have been written on the Trinity, Muslims just can't seem to understand what Christians mean by the Trinity. I hope that this article will assist Muslims in this matter, and God willing it will. First of all, in the quote by Haneef, the critique is not a critique of the Trinity, but of tri-theism (the belief in three gods). This is a common misunderstanding among Muslims. Even though historical Christian creeds on the Trinity have been clear in explaining the oneness and equality of the persons of the Trinity, and of explaining the distinction between *being* and *person*, this quote by Haneef clearly demonstrates that Muslims simply do not understand what we are saying. I will reiterate here a quote from James White that I quoted above: "Each [Person] fully shares the one *Being* that is God. The Father is not 1/3 of God, the Son 1/3 of God, the Spirit 1/3 of God. Each is fully God, coequal with the others, and that eternally." In other words, the three Persons of the Trinity don't make up component parts of the fullness of God; each Person is fully God: one God in three distinct, yet coequal and coeternal Persons. This is what we have been saying for a long time now, yet Haneef's statement clearly demonstrates that

Muslims do not get this. Either they don't get it, or they are willfully misrepresenting what we actually believe (or both).

What is more, Brown's comments, after the Haneef quotation, demonstrate a contradiction in her own thinking. In her first sentence she portrays the Trinity as tri-theism ("three separate entities"). However, her second sentence portrays the Trinity as modalism²³ ("If God is the Father and also the Son, He would then be the Father of Himself because He is His own Son"). I can only conclude at this point that Brown's repeated misrepresentation of the Trinity discredits the entirety of her article.]

Christianity claims to be a monotheistic religion. Monotheism, however, has as its fundamental belief that God is One; the Christian doctrine of the Trinity – God being Three-in-One – is seen by Islam as a form of polytheism. Christians don't revere just One God, they revere three.

This is a charge not taken lightly by Christians, however. They, in turn, accuse the Muslims of not even knowing what the Trinity is, pointing out that the Qur'an sets it up as Allah the Father, Jesus the Son, and Mary his mother. While veneration of Mary has been a figment of the Catholic Church since 431 when she was given the title "Mother of God" by the Council of Ephesus, a closer examination of the verses in the Qur'an most often cited by Christians in support of their accusation, shows that the designation of Mary by the Qur'an as a "member" of the Trinity, is simply not true.

While the Qur'an does condemn both trinitarianism (the Qur'an 4:171; 5:73) and the worship of Jesus and his mother Mary (the Qur'an 5:116), nowhere does it identify the actual three components of the Christian Trinity. The position of the Qur'an is that WHO or WHAT comprises this doctrine is not important; what is important is that the very notion of a Trinity is an affront against the concept of One God.

[First, Muslims may view the Trinity as "a form of polytheism," but it is only because, as I have pointed out numerous times already, they do not properly understand the doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed, they often misrepresent it as tri-theism, as I have already pointed out, which is a form of polytheism; but this is not what we believe.

Second, the Qur'an does misrepresent the Trinity. Of course, Muslims must insist and attempt to prove that it does not. After all, if the Qur'an misrepresents the Trinity, then it is shown to be the

²³ Again, modalism teaches that there is one god who manifests or reveals himself in different *modes*. At one time he manifests himself as the father, and at another time as the son, and at another time as the holy spirit. In other words, the distinction of the persons is done away with.

work of a confused man (Muhammad), and not of Allah (or God). Here are the relevant texts from the Qur'an on the Trinity:²⁴

Sura 4:171 “People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a ‘Trinity’—stop [this], that is better for you—God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust.”

Sura 5:73, 75 “Those people who say that God is the third of three are defying [the truth]: there is only One God. If they persist in what they are saying, a painful punishment will afflict those of them who persist.... The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger; other messengers had come and gone before him; his mother was a virtuous woman; both ate food [like other mortals]. See how clear We²⁵ make these signs for them; see how deluded they are.”

Sura 5:116 “When God says, ‘Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, ‘Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God’?’ he will say, ‘May You be exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say—if I had said such a thing You would have known it: You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You, You alone have full knowledge of things unseen.’”

It is painfully obvious that the Qur'an presents a false understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. First, nowhere does it demonstrate that Christians believed (and continue to believe) that the three Persons of the Trinity are the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. Rather, whenever it talks about the Trinity, the only three persons mentioned are the Father, Jesus, and Mary. While some Muslims have attempted to insist that Sura 4:171 does mention the Holy Spirit, as “spirit” is in the text, there is a problem with this. The Saheeh (or Sahih) International translation of the Qur'an translates it as “soul” rather than “spirit.” However, no matter how it is best translated, it is clearly *a description of Jesus*, not a separate person. Second, Brown's attempt at pointing to the devotion of Mary does not help her case. While devotion to Mary was certainly increasing during this time, even to the point of being considered worship (though Roman Catholics deny this), Mary has never been viewed as being a god, or being a member of the Trinity. Yet, this is exactly how the Qur'an presents it. Further, the Qur'an assumes that Christians believed the Trinity to be the belief in three gods. This is especially obvious in the following quote: “Those people who say that

²⁴ From the translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (2005). All brackets in the quotes are supplied by Abdel Haleem.

²⁵ Used as a plural of majesty of Allah.

God is the third of three are defying [the truth]: there is only One God.” Again, the Qur’an presents Mary as one of these three gods (“both [i.e. Jesus and Mary] ate food” and ““When God says, ‘Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, ‘Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God?’”). Yet, this is not what Christians believe! The Qur’an misrepresents the Trinity just as much as Muslims misrepresent it today (as is obvious from Brown’s article). Brown, and Muslims in general, must affirm that the Qur’an does not identify the members of the Trinity, but only addresses the notion of the Trinity. Why? Because the Qur’an painstakingly misrepresents what Christians believe about the Trinity, and therefore it is shown to be a product of man, not of God. However, any honest person will see that the Qur’an does indeed identify the members of the Trinity as the Father, Jesus (the Son), and Mary.]

In conclusion, we see that the doctrine of the Trinity is a concept conceived entirely by man; there is no sanction whatsoever from God to be found regarding the matter simply because the whole idea of a Trinity of divine beings has no place in monotheism. In the Qur'an, God's Final Revelation to mankind, we find His stand quite clearly stated in a number of eloquent passages,

"... your God is One God: whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness, and, in the worship of his Lord, admit no one as partner." (the Qur'an 18:110)

"... take not, with God, another object of worship, lest you should be thrown into Hell, blameworthy and rejected." (the Qur'an 17:39)

– because, as God tells us over and over again in a Message that is echoed throughout ALL His Revealed Scriptures,

"... I am your Lord and Cherisher: therefore, serve Me (and no other) ..." (the Qur'an 21:92)

[I will only note here that Brown again misrepresents the Trinity: “a Trinity of divine beings”. Again, she fails to differentiate between *being* and *person*.]

Conclusion

Well, we have looked at many things in this article. Over and over and over again Brown demonstrated a complete misunderstanding of what the doctrine of the Trinity actually is. This misunderstanding and misrepresentation is not confined to Brown alone; I have noticed it to be a common thing among Muslims, even among Muslim apologists. What is more, we have seen that the Qur’an very clearly misrepresents the Trinity, and therefore cannot be the word of God (or Allah), but is the word of a confused man (Muhammad). I mean no disrespect by stating that, only to state what the evidence points to.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a critical doctrine for Christians to be soundly grounded in. Not only is the Trinity essential and central to our faith and life, but it is one of our most attacked doctrines. For at least these reasons Christians need to be thoroughly grounded in the biblical basis of the Trinity. And, of course, having at least a basic knowledge of the councils pertaining to the Trinity is a good thing too.

I pray that this response to Brown's article will serve to strengthen Christians against the objections from Islam, as well as to solidify their belief in the Trinity as a doctrine from God's word, not a doctrine of man. And for the Muslims who may read this, I pray that it will serve to clarify the doctrine of the Trinity against the many misunderstandings and misrepresentations from Muslims. More than that, I pray it will lead you to believe, love, and worship the one, true God of the Christian Scriptures.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." – *2 Corinthians 13:14*