

THREE IN ONE

Harry Foster

“UNCLE JOE” asked Fred one day, “can you explain the Trinity to me? I know that there can only be one God and yet we also know that He is three persons. How can that be?”

“Shall I tell you what happened to me once in Amazonia?” was the only reply he received to this question. To Fred this seemed as though for once his uncle had no answer to his question and was trying to change the subject, but he was too polite to say so, and in any case he liked to hear missionary stories from Uncle Joe, so he just said: “Yes, please”, and waited for the story.

His uncle explained that in his early days among a Red Indian tribe he had many difficulties in learning their language because there were no books and no teachers to help him. The only thing to do was to have a notebook ready and to write down the words as he was able to learn them. But this was not as easy as it may sound.

There was a time, for instance, when he pointed to one of the men of the village and asked a boy who was standing by what the man was called. “*He Ru*”, answered the Indian lad, so Uncle Joe wrote that down. But he wanted to make sure that he was right, so he asked an older man if the other man’s name was really *He Ru*. The old chap shook his head to deny this, and then went on to tell Uncle that the man was called *He Ra-ira*.

Had Uncle Joe been able to speak their language fluently he would have asked for an explanation, but he could not do this, so the only check he could make was to appeal to yet another man -- a young one this time -- and ask him what the man in question was called. To his surprise and dismay he received yet another different reply. “That is *He Muripari*” the third man explained.

“Now Fred”, said Uncle Joe, “What do you think I felt like with three different names for the same man?” Fred was sharp enough to know that this story was somehow

connected with his own question about the Trinity, but he could not see how, nor could he understand the three different names for one and the same man. "Did you ever find out?" he asked his uncle, and was told that later the facts became plain and Uncle Joe realized what had been happening.

"*He Ru,*" he explained to Fred, "simply meant 'my father,' while *He Ra-ira* meant 'my son.' In the first case I had asked the man's son and in the second I had spoken to his father. So quite truthfully one said that the man was his father and the other than he was his son."

"And what about that third word?" asked Fred.

"*Muripari?*" enquired his uncle, "well that just means 'friend.' The other man was his friend. As a matter of fact one of our first hymns used this word, when we made an Indian version of '*There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus.*'"

How could one man be three? Well, that man was father, son and friend. "It is a poor illustration of a wonderful truth, Fred" said his uncle, "but at least it does suggest how one and the same person can, in a sense, be three people. And certainly we can know God as Father, we can know the Son as our Saviour, and we can know the Holy Spirit as our Companion and Friend."

The next thing to do was to find a verse in the Bible which speaks of God in this threefold way, so Fred's uncle showed him the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 -- "baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Then it was Uncle Joe's turn to ask a question.

"Although Father, Son and Holy Spirit are mentioned," he enquired, "what do you notice about their name?"

"Why" said Fred, who had never noticed this before, "it does not say 'names' but just name." That is, of course, true. You can verify it in your own New Testament. So we have the marvel and the mystery of what men call the Trinity -- the one name of Saviour and Friend. We cannot expect to understand this with our minds, but if we

are true Christians we know the Father, and the Son of God and the friendship and presence of the Holy Spirit.

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