

# “When Does a Fetus Receive a Soul?”

I had a question about the beginning of life. My wife and I have endured two miscarriages so far. The doctor says that there isn't enough genetic info to create personhood for at least eight days and both of our miscarriages happened before a visible fetus had formed. (One when there was just a gestational sac, another when there was just an endometrium lining). We've always believed life begins at conception, of course, and I've read a couple articles on this site to that end. But when does a fetus receive a soul? Do we, CAN we know from scripture? It seems obvious that the life cycle is under way when sperm and egg meet, but at what point does the soul become infused in the cells?

Thank you for writing, and I am sorry to hear that you and your wife have had to endure two miscarriages. One of my siblings had to deal with this recently, so I know it is a difficult loss. I pray that God will provide comfort and healing for you and that he would bring compassionate friends into your life who know what you have gone through. I will provide an academic answer to your question, but know that I am sensitive to the circumstance behind your question.

I have received questions about when exactly the soul enters the body before, and I know there are several theories posited by theologians to this end. With that in mind, understand that my training is as a scientist and a bioethicist. I will tell you that the soul is not something that we can detect scientifically because science deals in the realm of the physical, and the soul is in the realm of the spiritual. We can see the physical effects of the spiritual realm, but we cannot actually detect the spiritual. Many have tried to this end with experiments that teeter on verge of ridiculous (the God Helmet comes to mind).

From scripture, especially, looking at Psalm 139 (I recommend reading the whole thing): "O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether."

God has a very intimate knowledge of us, and as we see in the next few verses in this Psalm, that knowledge extends to everywhere, including the womb.

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?... For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

This is a reference to being made in the womb. Even there God has this intimate knowledge of man. I think this is an important verse for your situation because it is a reminder that God was sovereign over both of these pregnancies, and for whatever reason, they were not to come to fruition. The next verse is even more to this point.

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.

I was particularly struck by the "unformed substance" in this verse because you said your babies died when one was a gestational sac and the other when there was just an endometrial lining. And according to this verse, God seems to treat this unformed substance as though it has a soul.

I cannot conclude when a fetus receives a soul, but from scripture, it seems that God's actual mechanism on this is not our concern. The point is that this unformed substance will

have/does have/has always had a soul, and we treat it as such. I also think it is reasonable to conclude from general and special revelation (that would be from what we know from observation and from the Bible) that from the time of conception the new clump of cells is a new individual. Your doctor is defining personhood as something that has the full genetic make-up of a person. Before 8 days, the cells have not formed its entire genetic structure, it's still in the process of doing that, however, those cells are also not composed of only your genetics or only your wife's genetics. In fact, there is no other genetic match to those cells, so it is a new genetic entity, and in that sense is a unique, new being.

I think it is tempting in our culture to think of the soul as a physical object that gets infused or sewn into our bodies. According to scripture, it seems to be much more complex than that; kind of in the sense that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. We are both physical beings and spiritual beings and because of the fall we have a very difficult time understanding or even interacting with the spiritual aspect. Thankfully, Christ provided a way that we could interact with God (who is spirit) again.

I usually try to stick to the question at hand, but I do want to address that if your babies had souls, then where are they now? According to Psalm 139, God is sovereign, which is comforting because you can rest in his sovereign and loving grace knowing that he has taken care of your babies.

Thank you for writing,

Heather Zeiger

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# “Could God Have Ordained the Holocaust?”

I have read an article titled “God, Evil and the Holocaust,” and I have also read an article called “Did God Ordain the Holocaust?” at <http://deoxy.org/godholoc.htm>. Both talk about the Holocaust, but in different terms.

From what I have read on articles on evil and suffering, it really seems to me that there are two views or ways of looking at evil and suffering. 1) Those who think of suffering or evil as part of the Fall and a way Christians are tested in their faith in God. 2) God intended evil for good (punishment or a necessity) or He is not powerful to intervene or “Why can’t he intervene if He loves us so much when the suffering or evil in the world today is too unbearable?”

Honestly, I really trust and agree with the article on the Probe website. I have always and still believe in a God who is loving and merciful and just. Yet, the article in the other website which I have pasted (the link above) does provoke me to think differently about the Holocaust. Is the author of that article’s reasoning flawed? Is he correct in saying that God ordained the Holocaust? He does form a good argument out of the bible.

Thanks for your letter. You ask an interesting and important question. The question not only touches on the problem of evil, but also on the nature of Divine sovereignty and human freedom. Concerning the latter issue, please see my previous response to the question, [“Does Calvinism Make People into Choiceless Puppets?”](#) I think this response will be helpful in rounding out the discussion.

For more on the problem of evil, please see Rick Rood’s article [The Problem of Evil](#) and my brief e-mail response at

["Is God the Creator of Evil?"](http://www.bible.org). Finally, please visit bible.org for a large array of articles and e-mail responses dealing with the problems of suffering and persecution at [www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic\\_id=77](http://www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=77).

Now for my own brief response. First, I'm personally hesitant to say that we should apply (without any qualification) the OT references cited in the article you mentioned to the suffering of Jewish people in the Holocaust. God did say these things, of course. And He did bring such suffering on His people in the Assyrian invasion of Israel (722 B.C.) and the Babylonian invasion of Judah (605-586 B.C), as well as at other times. However, in my opinion, God is no longer relating to the world on the basis of the Old Covenant and Mosaic Law. Rather, a New Covenant is now in effect (see Hebrews 8, etc.).

Second, the author of the article you cite seems to deny any human responsibility in the Holocaust. But the Bible clearly affirms a measure of human freedom and moral responsibility (see my e-mail response mentioned earlier). Of course, the Bible is also very clear about God's sovereignty. Ephesians 1:11 describes God as "Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will." A good example of God's sovereignty and human freedom and responsibility can be seen in the crucifixion of Jesus (see Acts 4:27-28).

I think we're forced to conclude that God did at least permit the Holocaust. And some Christian theologians would indeed say that He ordained it (in the same sense in which He has ordained whatever comes to pass). How one understands the details of this is rather controversial among evangelicals and I'll leave you to think through this on your own. Everything which happens in history, some argue, is simply the outworking in time of God's eternal decree. Nevertheless, the Bible also seems to affirm that man has some genuine freedom and is therefore morally responsible for what he does. Thus, the Nazis acted freely in the Holocaust and are morally responsible before God for their sins.

Much more could be written on this subject. For more information, please visit the links above. Also Rick Rood, at the end of his article, lists the following resources for further study:

#### Resources for Further Study:

- Blocker, Henri. *Evil and the Cross*. Tr. by David G. Preston. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Briggs, Lauren. *What You Can Say...When You Don't Know What to Say: Reaching Out to Those Who Hurt*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1985.
- Carson, D.A. *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.
- Craig, William Lane. *No Easy Answers: Finding Hope in Doubt, Failure, and Unanswered Prayer*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1990.
- Dobson, James. *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993.
- Dunn, Ronald. *When Heaven is Silent: Live by Faith, Not by Sight*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994.
- Feinberg, John S. *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B. *Deserted by God?* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993.
- Geisler, Norman L. *The Roots of Evil*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.
- Kreeft, Peter. *Making Sense Out of Suffering*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1986.
- Lockyer, Herbert. *Dark Threads the Weaver Needs*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1979.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Suffering & God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.
- Plantinga, Alvin C. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974.

Hope this helps.

Michael Gleghorn

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# **“Were Those Who Fell Away Ever Saved or Did They Lose Salvation?”**

In referencing II Thess. 2:3, II Timothy 3:1-8 regarding the apostasy of professing church (Body of Christ?) and falling away at the end time by seducing spirits, how does that correlate with Hebrews 6: 4-6? Are these people believers or not? Are they saved and God's elect or not? ...Are they eternally lost because they cannot crucify Christ again and put Him to an open shame? I was taught (once saved, always saved). Please enlighten, as I am puzzled. Thank you for your time and information.

Thanks for your letter. These are complicated questions and good Christian people (including scholars) often disagree about the details. I personally lean toward the view that the true believer is eternally secure in her relationship with Christ. But not all Christians (indeed, not all evangelical Christians) hold this view. Some believe that a genuine Christian can indeed fall away and be lost. Hebrews 6:4-6 is a passage often cited in this regard. But notice that, strictly speaking, this passage does not say that a true believer can lose her salvation. What it says is that if such a person falls away (i.e., commits willful apostasy) it is impossible to renew that person again to repentance. This may mean that the person has sinned so grievously, and their heart has been so hardened in the process, that they simply will not repent.

But their failure to repent does not necessarily mean that they are therefore eternally lost. Thus, I personally do not see this passage as decisive in this debate.

Ultimately, one must weigh all of the biblical evidence pertaining to this issue. It is my view that the evidence, considered in its entirety, is more consistent with the eternal security of the believer, than with the notion that one of God's elect might ultimately fall away and be eternally lost. Here, it seems to me, that Romans 8:28-39 and John 6:35-40 are particularly strong promises regarding the security of the believer.

Hope this helps. Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“Isn't It Egotistical of God to Command Our Worship and Praise?”**

Hi there! Someone once raised this objection that really bugs me... They asked whether it isn't vain or egotistical of God to command our worship and praise and be so passionate about His own glory. While I certainly don't agree that God could be vain or egotistical, I'm at a loss for how to respond to this objection. I can understand why some people read verses like these and conclude that God is tooting His own horn:

*For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you. Isaiah 48:9*



*I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." Isaiah 43:6-7*

*For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another. Isaiah 48:11*

**How would you respond to this objection to the Christian faith?**

What a great question! I meditated on it for a couple of weeks.

God wants us to relate rightly to Him. Because He is so immense, so powerful, so sovereign, so righteous, so holy, so pure, so right, so good, so loving, so kind, so just, and most importantly, so *glorious*, relating rightly to Him means responding in awe, in fear, in love, in attraction, in worship, and in praise.

His commands are His loving gifts to us because He created and designed life to work the way it does, and His commands align with His design. The Ten Commandments are powerful because that's the way He created life to function, and we are blessed when we obey. We have trouble when we disobey. His command to praise and worship him is no different because He knows that He is the only source of life. Being rightly related to God is the only way to enter into life, to get our empty souls filled up. Being rightly related to Him means humbly accepting our position as creatures, and affirming that He is God and we are not. It means praising, worshipping and glorifying Him and, as the Westminster Catechism starts out, "enjoying Him forever."

God is not a limited, finite creature for whom it would indeed be prideful and arrogant to say, "Worship and praise me."

There is no sinful pride in His invitation to be rightly related to Him, to invite us to enjoy and partake in His glory.

We don't look at the sun and say, "How arrogant of it to shine so brightly, to relentlessly give off heat and light that makes life possible on the earth." It's the nature of gargantuan balls of burning gas to do these things. Our response to the sun is one of respect, gratitude and fear: we can't even look directly at it for more than a glance or it damages our eyes.

It's not arrogant or prideful for God to shine with a radiance beyond a million suns. That's what glory does: it radiates. It shines. That's how He is, that's who He is.

The God who created the billions of galaxies can pinch the entire universe between two fingers like a toddler picking up a Cheerio. This same God, who keeps the galaxies in motion just as He holds the atoms of physical matter together, not only revealed Himself through His prophets, He actually became one of us, then died in our place and came back to life just as He said He would.

The only response to that kind of God that makes any sense is to fall down at His feet and worship Him.

Thanks for writing!

Sue Bohlin

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After reading this article from my Facebook, a friend sent me a link to a short essay on this subject he thought I'd enjoy. I did, and I'm posting it here because I bet you'll enjoy like it too! [C.S. Lewis' Most Important Discovery](#)

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# **“It’s Not Fair for God to Judge People For Sins They Didn’t Know Were Wrong”**

**How is it fair for God to judge an unsaved person’s sin on Judgment Day if that person did not know “specifically” that their action was a sin? If an unbeliever is taught sex outside marriage is morally OK and no one ever shows him in the Bible that it is against God’s laws, how can he be judged guilty? Don’t you have to be taught the law in order to be punished for it?**

Thanks for your letter. This is a very good question. Briefly, here are some important points to bear in mind.

First, carefully read Romans 1:18-32 and 2:1-16.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,*

*because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.*

*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

*For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

*Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed*

*animals and crawling creatures.*

*Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.*

*For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

*For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,*

*and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.*

*And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,*

*being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,*

*slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,*

*without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;*

*and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.*

*Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.*

*And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.*

*But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that*

*you will escape the judgment of God?*

*Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?*

*But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,*

*who will render to each person according to his deeds:*

*to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;*

*but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.*

*There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,*

*but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

*For there is no partiality with God.*

*For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;*

*for it is not the hearers of the Law {who} are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.*

*For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,*

*in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,*

*on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.*

These passages strongly suggest that all men (with the exception of [infants](#) and the severely mentally retarded) have an inherent knowledge of God (through the things that He has made) and of basic morality (for God has "written" the law on their hearts in some sense). This knowledge of basic morality,

though not perfect because of the darkening of our intellects due to sin, comes through our conscience. Thus, in this sense, all men have some knowledge of God and of their morally guilty status before Him—all men are therefore without excuse.

Second, God has graciously provided the Holy Spirit to convict unbelievers of their sin and (hence) their need for a Savior. Please see John 16:7-11 in this regard:

*“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.*

*“And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;*

*concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;*

*and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;*

*and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.*

Thus, not only has God made His existence and basic morality clear to man through creation and conscience, but His Holy Spirit also convicts the world of their sin and need for salvation in Christ.

Finally, we must remember that God is perfectly holy, just, and fair (Deuteronomy 32:4, etc.). For this reason, we can be absolutely confident that on Judgment Day no one will be able to look God in the face and honestly complain of being treated unfairly or unjustly. God will be perfectly just and completely fair in His judgment of each individual. We can therefore safely rule out any sort of unfair or unjust judgment of any particular individual. Everyone will be treated fairly; no one will be treated unfairly. God is all-knowing and completely good. We can trust that He knows perfectly well just what an individual did—or did not—know about His moral standards. And we can trust that He will judge

that individual fairly and with perfect justice.

I hope this helps.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“Is ‘I am Second’ OK?”**

**I am looking into a ministry called I am Second. I believe it is based in Dallas, Texas? From the little bit I can find on it, it seems to have links with the Emergent Church and Brian McLaren? Curious if you guys know anything. Thanks.**

I am Second ([iamsecond.com](http://iamsecond.com)) is indeed based here in Dallas and is not part of the emergent church except that all wise pastors and churches, including [emergent](#) ones, will recognize it as a powerful tool for the gospel. [It features great video stories of life change in people who are second because Jesus Christ is first.] In fact, Ray's and my pastor and church (Watermark Community Church) is featured on the website.

When Probe moves to the new [Hope Center](#) in a couple of months, we are looking forward to welcoming I am Second as one of our office neighbors. This is a building with 30+ ministries as tenants, and the Hope Center Foundation is very picky about the theology and integrity of the ministries they allow to office there. We're delighted to be so close to an excellent ministry like theirs!

So glad you asked!

Sue Bohlin

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# “If Jealousy Is a Sin, Why Is God a Jealous God?”

**If jealousy is a sin, then why does God say He is a jealous God?**

Great question. Not understanding this distinction was Oprah's point of departure from orthodox Christianity, when she heard that God is a jealous God, and her reaction was, “What? God is jealous of *me*?”

There is a difference between holy jealousy and sinful jealousy.

Holy jealousy means that one is appropriately possessive of something that belongs to him or her. For example, I am not willing to share my husband's heart or body with any other woman because he is mine. I'm happy to share his gifts and energies with the body of Christ and the larger world, and I even love to see that happen, but I want his heart and soul to be exclusively mine. That is a kind of holy and entirely appropriate jealousy.

Sinful jealousy is the desire to have something that *doesn't* belong to us; another word is envy. When we want something God has not given to us, such as other people's fame, or material goods, or a job, or favor, or a spouse, that is a sin. Sometimes we see this in a jealous person who wants *all* the attentions of their loved one to be directed to themselves. I



have seen people who fly into a rage when they learn that their spouse or significant other has talked on the phone with anyone, or had any kind of conversation with a third person. Such a jealous person desires to have a level of exclusivity that doesn't belong to them.

God exhibits holy jealousy because our love and adoration rightfully belong to Him; He is jealous with a holy jealousy when we love and worship false gods in idolatry. His kind of jealousy is not sinful because we belong to Him and He created our hearts to belong to Him as well.

For a fuller description of these ideas, check out these articles at GotQuestions.org and Bible.org:

**Why Is God a Jealous God?**

[[www.gotquestions.org/jealous-God.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/jealous-God.html)]

**A Jealous God** [[bible.org/seriespage/jealous-god](http://bible.org/seriespage/jealous-god)]

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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## **“Does God Love Us All Differently?”**

Does God love us all differently? I always thought He loves us all equally, but what about Scriptures like “Jacob I have loved, Esau I hated” and how John was the beloved disciple? Does God love some of us more or less than others?

Great question! It would seem that certain verses would indeed support the idea that while God does love everyone (John

3:16—"God so loved the world. . ."), there are also degrees of love and favor. In Deuteronomy 7:6 Moses tells the children of Israel, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, His treasured possession." Drawing on several Old Testament passages, Peter makes a similar proclamation to the Church in 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession."

And then there are individuals, as you have pointed out. In Malachi 1:2-3, God does say, "Jacob I have loved, Esau I hated." It's important to understand what God means here, because God talks about hating individuals in the Old Testament, and the Lord Jesus calls us to hate our families in the New (Luke 14:26). These biblical uses of hate means "to love less." [For a compelling argument and explanation, see this article on Bible.org, "How To Hate Your Wife" at <https://bible.org/seriespage/49-how-hate-your-wife-luke-1425-35>.]

John does describe himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," but do note that Jesus never calls him that. Jesus loved *all* His disciples. John reveled in being loved by Jesus, and gave himself that anointed description, a description we can all ascribe to ourselves. It is a stunning light bulb moment when a believer realizes, "Wow! I too am a disciple whom Jesus loves!"

In Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17, He tells the Father that He has "loved them [the disciples], even as You have loved Me" (23). The idea that the Father loves the Church as much as, and in the same way as He loves the Son is amazing. I can find no such statement about unbelievers. I think that God's love for all people is outrageously powerful and huge, but there seems to be a special component to the relationship between God and His people. Maybe that's because there IS an actual relationship. . .?!

One more thing. Acts 10:34 says that “God is no respecter of persons,” but this does not mean he loves everyone equally. It means (and this is made clearer by checking the origin of the Greek word for “respecter”) that God is not impressed by anyone’s position, wealth, power or beauty. These things do not affect the way He judges with fairness and justice, the way a human judge can be “a respecter of persons.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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## **“How Can I Teach Pluralism Wisely?”**

I am teaching *Life of Pi*, by Yann Martel, in my Advanced Placement English class.

As an evangelical Christian working in a public school, I want to evoke discussion about pluralism as we read. The book does discuss Christianity (through the Catholic tradition), Hinduism, and Islam. The main character in the book explores all three and converts to Islam and Christianity while still a Hindu.

I think this is the “ultimate pluralist” created by Martel. □

Keep in mind that my students are freshmen, and my definition of religious pluralism would need to be somewhat simple.

Whatever I teach focuses on whomever I teach. How can I, as a Christian teacher, probe their minds and hearts to think about

## deeper issues?

Thanks for writing. It's great that you want to help your students think about pluralism. It's probably safe to say that many teachers are quite happy with pluralism and wouldn't think to challenge the notion.

Since you can't promote Christianity, I can think of two ways to approach the subject: making clear the differences between the major religions, and talking about the nature of truth.

First, a lot of people say all religions are the same without knowing what they teach. It would be instructive to put up a chart or make a list of the beliefs of the different religions. For example, regarding God or ultimate reality:

- *Hindus are pantheists or polytheists.*
- *Buddhists are atheists or pantheists.*
- *Muslims are theists and unitarian.*
- *Christians are theists but trinitarian.*

There's a pamphlet called ["The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error"](#) which you might find at a Christian bookstore that lists a lot of differences.

The point is that they teach contradictory ideas. How can they all be true?

If the students respond with the "it's true for them" line, ask why they think so? The only ways that could be so would be if 1) there really is no god; religion is just something people make up, or 2) there is a god, but no one can really know anything about him. Whichever of these they might believe, you can ask why they think so.

You may even want to back up a little and talk about truth itself. Talk about its exclusive nature. If it's true that I'm typing on a keyboard, for example, it has to be false that I'm typing on a tree or an elephant. Logic reflects the way the

world is. A thing (like a keyboard) can't be another thing (at the same time and in the same sense). And, a thing can't both exist in reality and not exist. You can extend this to moral issues as well. Ask if it's okay for one set of parents to beat their child blue with rods when they don't get their homework done (or use another example they'll find horrendous). If they say it's wrong, say something like, "But it's true for them, then it's good."

You can also talk about whether it's important to make distinctions between true and false. This and the above are more preparatory kinds of things that make it possible for people to believe one religion can be true and others false. You have to relate these questions to real life. Talk about other things in their lives that have to be either true or false (including moral issues, if not religious ones). The main point is to get the students thinking about the nature of truth, using things in their world where they know true and false in the classical sense apply. That can raise in their minds a conflict. They're used to the "true for me" thinking, but in their lives they don't and can't live that way. You can then relate this to the matter of religion.

Finally, they may talk more about social matters, about the need to respect all people. To this you can pose this problem. Ask what, say, a Muslim might think if you tell him you respect his religious beliefs even though no one can really know what God (or Allah) is like, or if you say that there really is no God, but that religion is something that people make up to meet their needs. Would a Muslim feel gratified and respected by this "inclusive" attitude? I know as a Christian it doesn't make me feel more respected when someone claims that Jesus really isn't the only way to God, because that is central to my beliefs. Students need to know that people can disagree about ideas without hating each other. Unfortunately, that idea (that disagreement equals hatred) is so often fostered today. To think someone is wrong means you hate them

and will do harm to them. That's all part of the tolerance nonsense being taught today.

If all this is clear as mud, write back and we'll talk some more.

Rick Wade

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## **“Christianity Teaches Four Gods, Right?”**

The Bible clearly states that there is only one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 states, “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.” The Father is obviously called God as seen throughout the Bible. No one will argue that point. So there is one member of the Trinity, the Father.

Jesus the Son, is a separate person but He is also called God. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The Holy Spirit is also a separate person, and He is also called God.

Let me see if I got this right. Please correct me if I'm wrong.

God is a trinity, composed of three divine persons, namely, the Father, Son, and holy spirit. God is also the Father, the first person of the first God who is a trinity. God is also the Son, the second person of the first God who is a trinity. God is also the holy spirit, the third person of the first God

**who is a trinity.**

**All of this means that there are four Gods. One three-person God and three single-person Gods. But to avoid the stigma of polytheism, all four Gods are really one God.**

**Did I get that right?**

I don't know if you really wanted a response or not, since it seems like you may have just been trying to have some fun. But obviously no orthodox trinitarian Christian would subscribe to the doctrine as you have characterized it.

Actually, you basically got it right when you wrote: "God is a trinity, composed of three divine persons, namely, the Father, Son, and holy spirit." In other words, God just "is" the unity of the three divine persons. Traditionally, this has been expressed by saying that God is one in essence, three in subsistence. Trinitarian Christians do not propose the absurd (and logically contradictory) notion that there is only one God, and yet (somehow) there are three Gods. That would clearly be incoherent. Rather, we maintain that there is only one God (monotheism) who mysteriously subsists as three distinct persons (Trinitarianism).

Consider an analogy (which I take from the Christian philosopher William Lane Craig). Cerberus was a three-headed dog that guarded the entrance to Hades in Greek mythology. Cerberus, therefore, was one dog with three heads. Now we could imagine that each head constituted a distinct center of consciousness. We could even give them names, say, Spike, Bowser, and Rover. Spike would be conscious of being Spike, but also of being Cerberus. He would also be conscious of not being either Bowser or Rover. The same could be said, in an appropriate way, regarding the conscious experience of both Bowser and Rover. Now consider Cerberus as a spiritual, disembodied entity. You have one being, Cerberus, who has three distinct centers of consciousness (i.e. Spike, Bowser,

and Rover). This is something akin, I think, to what the Trinitarian maintains about the nature of God, recognizing, of course, that God is an infinitely higher being than any merely finite being. I could write more, but you get the idea. Hopefully this analogy will help you better understand what Christians maintain about the nature of God. Of course, it's only an analogy—and to ridicule it for that reason would really be rather petty. I offer it solely as a way of making this doctrine a bit more comprehensible, while nonetheless acknowledging that there is genuine mystery here as well.

Best wishes as you continue to explore and examine Christian doctrine!

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