

**Psalm 31:1-24** <sup>NIV</sup> For the director of music. A psalm of David. In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. <sup>2</sup> Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. <sup>3</sup> Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. <sup>4</sup> Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. <sup>5</sup> Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth. <sup>6</sup> I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the LORD. <sup>7</sup> I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. <sup>8</sup> You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place. <sup>9</sup> Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief. <sup>10</sup> My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, {10 Or guilt} and my bones grow weak. <sup>11</sup> Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbours; I am a dread to my friends-- those who see me on the street flee from me. <sup>12</sup> I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. <sup>13</sup> For I hear the slander of many; there is terror on every side; they conspire against me and plot to take my life. <sup>14</sup> But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." <sup>15</sup> My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me. <sup>16</sup> Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love. <sup>17</sup> Let me not be put to shame, O LORD, for I have cried out to you; but let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave. {17 Hebrew Sheol} <sup>18</sup> Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous. <sup>19</sup> How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you. <sup>20</sup> In the shelter of your presence you hide them from the intrigues of men; in your dwelling you keep them safe from accusing tongues. <sup>21</sup> Praise be to the LORD, for he showed his wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city. <sup>22</sup> In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help. <sup>23</sup> Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. <sup>24</sup> Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

## “Who Is Your God?”

I have now on at least two occasions received an e-mail claiming to be the views of Australia’s Prime Minister Kevin Rudd about Muslims who immigrate to Australia. First, I checked Snopes.com, the site you check to see if the stuff you’re forwarding is true. Prime Minister Rudd never said any of the things included in the e-mail. It turns out that the e-mail is a compilation of misquotes and quotes taken out of context from interviews with two cabinet members who served under the former Prime Minister John Howard. Concerning the e-mail, the gist of it is that if Muslims want to live in Australia, adapt to Australia and the culture of Australians. Don’t expect Australia to adapt to Islam. If that’s what you want, then go somewhere else. Quoting the e-mail, it says: "Most Australians believe in God. This is not some Christian, right wing, political push, but a fact, because Christian men and women, on Christian principles, founded this nation, and this is clearly documented. It is certainly appropriate to display it on the walls of our schools. If God offends you, then I suggest you consider another part of the world as your new home, because God is part of our culture."

When I hear stuff like that I just want to ask “Well, what do you mean by God?” In the Christian faith we define God as Trinity – the loving communion of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit who has revealed himself to us in, through, and as Jesus Christ and who personally relates to us and to all peoples in such a way as to reveal his steadfast love and faithfulness to us and create faith in us. There are other ways that those who call themselves Christian think of God. The men who put “In God we Trust” on the currency of the United States were Deists, rationalists who believed God was the Great Watchmaker who set the universe in motion and stepped back to have nothing more to do with it until Judgement Day. Thomas Jefferson was famous for having clipped out of his Bible all those things he thought were reasonably impossible. There are others who believe in Pantheism - that God is simply the underlying essence of all things. There’s also Panentheism – that God is a spiritual power at work in the universe. I could go on. Nevertheless, what do we mean by God?

Our word for God, God, comes from the Proto-Germanic word *gudan* which is rooted in a Proto-Indo-European word *ghu-tu-m* which meant to call or to invoke. The capitalized English word God was first used for the Christian God in the 300’s AD when a bishop and missionary named Ulfila translated the New Testament into the language of the Goth’s, one of the Barbarian tribes that sacked Rome. In Greek the word for God is *theos*. They didn’t capitalize it because they believed in many gods. Gods were eternal beings who lived in eternity and meddled in human affairs. The gods were also embodiments of things like an eternal force, power, value, or virtue. All of life was an expression of the life of the

gods. Greek translators of the Old Testament used theos to translate the Hebrew names of God. The oldest name for God in the Old Testament is Elohim which is the plural form of the word for "a god", which is el, and it means the God of the gods, the one true God. Elohim of our fathers who worked to create faith in Abraham and his descendents was the God who cleverly revealed his name to Moses as Yahweh, which is the Hebrew verb "to be". Elohim said, "I am who I am and I will be who I will be." Interestingly, Jesus refers to himself at important moments as "I am".

Let's talk about another name for God. Allah is the Arabic word for God. Al means "the" and lah means "deity" – the deity. In pre-Islamic times Allah was the name the Arab peoples used for the creator god and giver of rain. In the desert you only need one God. According to Islamic belief, Allah is the proper name of God, and humble submission to His Will, Divine Ordinances and Commandments is the pivot of the Muslim faith. "He is the only God, creator of the universe, and the judge of humankind." "He is unique and inherently one, all-merciful and omnipotent." In Islam Jesus was just a prophet.

Now, to turn a few heads and maybe even lose a few friends, both Islam and Judaism are what we would call unitarian monotheist in their understanding of God meaning God is a single entity and the only God. Yet, the fullness of God's self-revelation that we find in the Bible is that God is Trinity and therefore as Christians we are Trinitarian monotheists. There is only one God and this God is One in Three and Three in One. The "founding father's" who formed the great democracies that emerged in the 1700's and 1800's were Deists who held to unitarian monotheism. I find it ironic that the Deists who formed the world's great democracies would essentially agree with Islam's definition of God. Moreover, many of them, though claiming to be Christian, would be very close to believing the same thing about Jesus that Islam does. Most of them, due to their Rationalism, would not have accepted Jesus to be both divine and human.

I'm treading dangerous ground here I know and I mean not to offend anyone. We need to be real careful to know who we are talking about when we throw the word God around thinking everybody knows what we mean. This is true especially because it has been the three unitarian monotheist religions that have been slaughtering each other for the last 2,000 years. This is just so wrong especially considering that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem he came as its king and Messiah. Yet, he did not come to slaughter his enemies wholesale. He came to be given over to death. As God the Son who knew no sin he was made to be sin so that we might become the righteousness of God. He came to free us from sin and death and emptying himself unto death on a cross was the only way he could destroy both sin and death in his very self and bring forth resurrection and new creation. That's love – self-giving love.

Gregory of Nazianzus was a priest who was instrumental in crafting the thought and language of the Nicene Creed. He said, "When I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The nature of God is these three giving themselves to each other in love so completely that they are each other. Where God is involved in his creation wholesale slaughter is not the result. Exclusion of people and peoples is not the result. Rather, the birth and nurturing of community in his image is. The Psalmist said in Psalm 31:14, "But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." The God we put our trust in is a communion of persons giving themselves to each other in self-giving love. Jesus gave himself to us that we might have life and live eternally. He calls us to do the same. He calls us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. He calls us to love our enemies. He calls us to be extremely gracious in our hospitality to others. He calls us to be the ones who even suffer for others. That's living in the image of the Trinity in whose image we were created. Who is your God? Amen.