Understanding The Trinity

'the doctrine of the Trinity reconciles the paradoxical affirmations that God is self-sufficient and that he is love.' – H.P. Owen[1]

As Michael J. Murray and Michael Rea observe: 'Christians believe that, though there is but one God, God nevertheless exists somehow as three distinct divine persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'[2] Atheist Michael Martin rejects the doctrine of the Trinity as incoherent:

> There are three divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Yet these three divine persons are supposed to be distinct from one another: the Father is not the Son, the Father is not the Holy Spirit, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. However, there is exactly one God. According to this doctrine, Christ must be his own father and his own son.[3]

Atheist Richard Dawkins rejects the doctrine as 'sophistry,'[4] asking: 'Do we have one God in three parts, or three Gods in one?'[5] It's a badly formed question. In the Christian God we have *one personal divine being* (the 'Trinity' or 'Godhead' – this being one sense of the term 'God') *essentially composed of three divine persons* (each distinguished from the others by different senses of the term 'God'). Christians don't believe in 'one God who isn't one God', or 'three persons who are one person'! Thus Christ is *not* 'his own father and his own son' as Martin alleges! Rather, Christians believe in *three divine persons* who are jointly *one divine personal being*. The doctrine of the Trinity *can* be coherently stated with precise philosophical terminology; and this precise use of language is good philosophy, not 'sophistry'.

A Discursion on Dawkins

Dawkins quotes the *Catholic Encylopedia*, which he says (with sarcasm) 'clears up the matter for us, in a masterpiece of theological close reasoning'[6]:

> In the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, these Three Persons being truly distinct one from another. Thus, in the words of the Athanasian Creed: 'the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three God's but one God.'[7]

Dawkins ridicule stems from his ignorance of the fact that the term 'God' is being used here *in different senses*. Dawkins likewise has no patience with third century theologian St. Gregory the Miracle Worker who wrote:

> There is therefore nothing created… in the Trinity; nor is there anything that has been added as though it once had not existed, but had entered afterwards: therefore the Father has never been without the Son, not the Son without the Spirit: and this same Trinity is immutable and unalterable forever.[8]

According to Gregory it is false to say that any member of the Trinity 1) is a creature; 2) has come into existence having previously not existed; 3) has existed without the others also existing, or 4) that the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead is a contingent fact (rather than a necessary fact). All four statements are perfectly coherent, but all Dawkins can say is:

> Whatever miracles may have earned St. Gregory his nickname, they were not miracles of honest lucidity. His words convey the characteristically obscurantist flavour of theology…[9]

Philosophical theology is bound to appear obscurantist to those who can't be bothered to learn something of its history, structure, methods and terminology. But then, the same thing could be said of science. As Peter van Inwagen writes:

> creedal descriptions of the Trinity… are good, practical descriptions of real things... I am confident that they are at least as good as descriptions of curved space or the wave-particle duality in works of popular science.[10]

Dawkins is the sort of critic whom Peter Kreeft describes as finding the Trinity:

> unintelligible because they are impatient with mystery and have… an arrogant assumption that what is not intelligible to them at first reading must be in itself unintelligible and unworthy of attention…[11]

Ridiculing what you don't understand on the basis that if *you* don't understand it then there's clearly nothing to understand is a rhetorical technique that serves Dawkins' critique of religion, but it's no way to conduct scholarly debate. Dawkins' scepticism also brings to mind C.S. Lewis' retort that:

> It is the simple religions that are the made-up ones… If Christianity was something we were making up, of course we could make it easier. But it is not. We cannot compete, in simplicity, with people who are inventing religions. How could we? We are dealing with Fact. Of course anyone can be simple if he has no facts to bother about.[12]

Nevertheless, Dawkins' frustration reflects a widespread popular impression that the concept of God as Trinity is incoherent (an impression that isn't helped by the fact that Christians often don't use clear and precise terminology when talking about God).

Data to be Acommodated

Consider the following set of propositions taken from the Athanasian Creed:

1) The Father is God
2) The Son is God
3) The Holy Spirit is God
4) There are not three God's but one God

These propositions are often pictorially represented in church windows and theology texts by this diagram:[13]
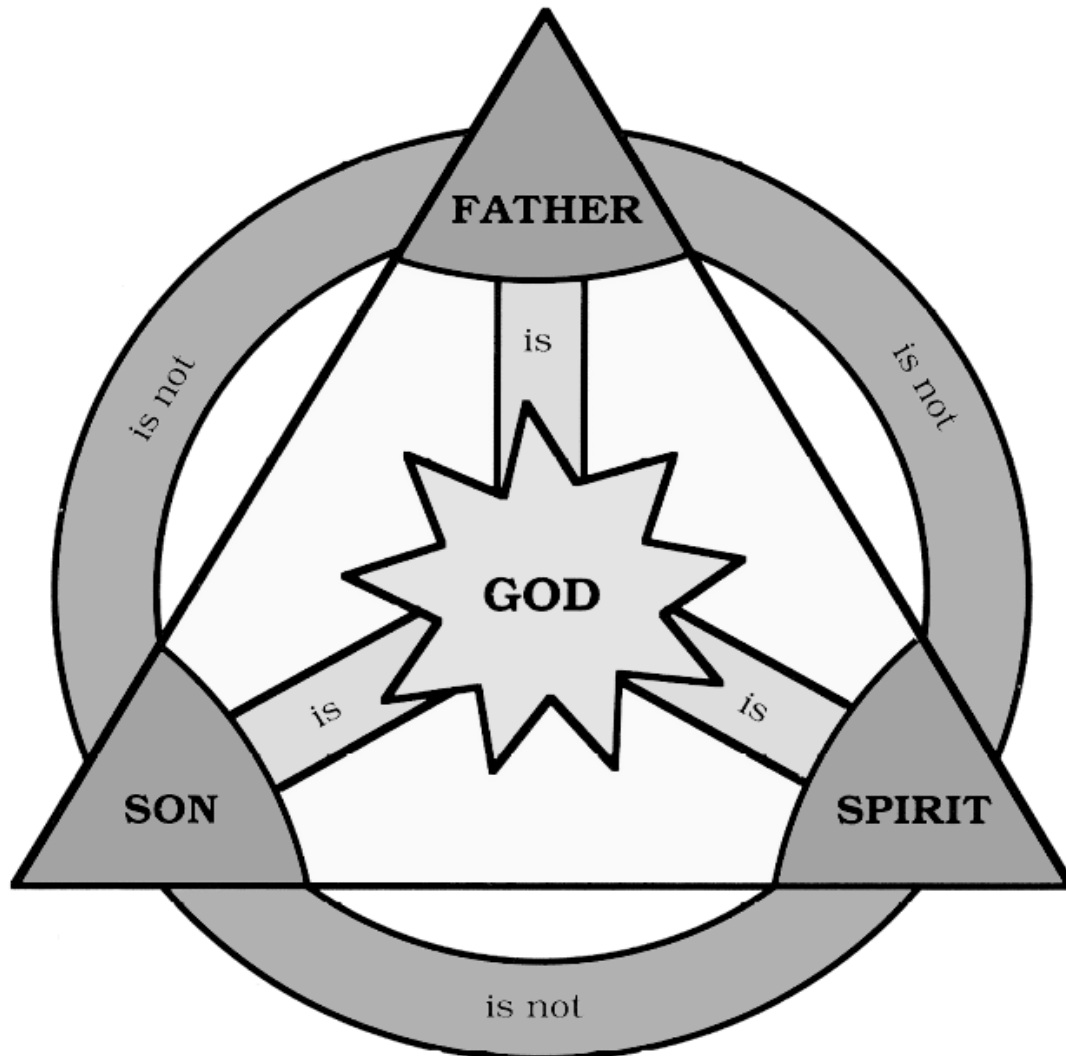
One can't be an orthodox Christian if one rejects any of these propositions. However, at first glance these propositions *appear* to form an inconsistent set. For if 'The Father' is God, and there is only one God, then surely 'The Holy Spirit' *can't* be God *as well*! Indeed, in the above diagram the outer 'is not' ring affirms that 'The Father' *is not* 'The Holy Spirit'. *Prima facie*, trinitarianism *looks like* the claim that one plus one plus one equals one. This is what philosophers call 'the logical problem of the Trinity'.

Coherently Solving the Logical Poblem of the Trinity

One simple way to render our four propositions self-consistent would be to claim that 'God the Father' *is* 'God the Son' *and* 'the Holy Spirit', just as Clark Kent *is* Superman *and* a journalist. One individual can merit three different descriptions as they play different roles in life. However, the claim that 'the Father', 'the Son' and 'the Holy Spirit' are simply one person with three different roles or modes of revelation is the heresy of *modalism*. One cannot be orthodox whilst solving our

apparent contradiction this way, hence the includison of the 'is not' ring on the above diagram.

Orthodox Christianity requires us to affirm all four propositions listed above *in some legitimate sense* whilst avoiding *two* opposite heresies. These heresies form the bookends of orthodoxy, the Scylla and Charybdis between which a Christian understanding of God must pass:

- The first heresy is *modalism* (failing to recognize the existence of more than one divine person).
- The second heresy is *tritheism* or *polytheism* (affirming the existence of a plurality of independent finite 'gods').

Hence Christians believe in what theologian Gerald O'Collins calls 'the differentiated unity of God or the divine unity in distinction.'[14] The Christian God is a *tri-une* God. As H.P. Owen writes, the classic formula 'one substance in three persons' is:

> meant simply to affirm the fact of God's triunity in a way that excludes on the one hand tritheism (the view that there are three gods) and on the other hand modalism (the view that the Three are no more than temporary manifestations of a divine monad). The formula does not state how the one is Three or how the Three are One.[15]

Christians thus believe that there is one, and only one God *and* that this one God *is* a Trinity of divine persons. The Trinity (or 'Godhead') is *one personal divine being* (this is one sense of the term 'God') *essentially composed of three divine persons* (distinguished by different senses of the term 'God').

The crucial point here is that in our list of four propositions the term 'God' is *ambiguous*. *If* 'God' is understood *in the very same sense* in all four propositions, and we reject modalism, *then* they form an inconsistent set. However, the term 'God' has a range of meanings. Most obviously, 'God' can mean *either* 'the Trinity' *or* 'a single divine person'. Hence while the proposition 'There is only one God the Father' means that 'God' as qualified by being 'the Father' is a single divine person, the proposition 'There is only one God' needn't be read as meaning that there is only one divine person, but rather as meaning that there is only one Trinity of divine persons (only one of whom is 'God the Father').

Four additional points are worth bearing in mind:

- 'Trinity' means three *not* four! God in these sense of 'the Trinity' is *not* a fourth divine *person*. However, because God the Trinity is composed of three divine persons it is appropriate to call God the Trinity/the Godhead 'a personal being' (note the distinction between 'a personal being' and 'being a person').
- Some Christians affirm belief in one God who is three distinct persons *each of whom is the whole of God*; but this is incoherent. As C.S. Lewis said, nonsense doesn't become sense simply because you talk it about God. God the Father, Son and Spirit are each *an essential component* or *part of* God the Trinity. The inner connecting 'is' in the above Trinitarian diagram means 'is part of' and not 'is the whole of'. Those who deny that the persons of the

Trinity are 'parts' of God mean to deny that they are parts in the same sense that, for example, a telescopic leg is part of a camera tripod. A leg is 'part of' a tripod in the sense that it is a discreet object that can exist and function apart from the tripod of which it is a part. God the Father isn't a discreet object that can exist and/or function apart from the Trinity. However, 'part' can simply mean 'not the whole of', and *in this sense of the term* God the Father is only 'part of' God the Trinity.

- Since the Trinity is *essentially* composed of three divine persons, 'Trinitarianism' *doesn't* amount to tri-theism or polytheism. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are *not* analogous to the separate, finite 'gods' of Egyptian, Greek, Roman or Norse religion (finite 'gods' who can exist quite apart from the other 'gods' and who can act in opposition to those other 'gods').

- Nor is the Son (or the Spirit) *a creature* created by God the Father (the heresy of Arianism).

Trinitarian Analogies

The proposal of analogies for God as Trinity has a long and distinguished history marred by the fact that every analogy is necessarily flawed:

> Two main types of analogy have been offered: the psychological and the social type. According to the first (associated especially with Augustine) the Three are compared to various faculties of the human mind or soul. Thus, to take Augustine's culminating example, the memory, the understanding, and the will, though distinct activities, form one, indivisible *psyche*. The social analogy can be traced back at least as far as Tertullian. According to it the Three are comparable to three human persons. It may best be illustrated by a father, mother and child who, while being three individuals, form one family. Although both types of analogy have their uses both can be misleading, even heretical, if over-pressed. The first type can suggest modalism… the second type suggests tritheism… No theistic analogy adequately represents God. Each is… a 'model' that needs to be 'qualified' in various ways if it is to mediate a 'disclosure' of divine reality.[16]

I like the musical analogy proposed by theologian Jeremy S. Begbie: A musical chord is essentially composed of three different notes (to be a chord all three notes must be present), namely the first, third and fifth notes of a given musical scale. For example, the chord of C major is composed of the notes C (the root of the chord), E (the third from the root) and G (the fifth from the root). Each individual note is 'a sound', and all three notes played together are likewise 'a sound'. Hence a chord is essentially three sounds in one sound, or one sound essentially composed of three different sounds (each of which has an individual identity as well as a corporate identity). By analogy, God is three divine persons in one divine personal being, or one divine personal being essentially composed of three divine persons. Moreover, when middle C (the root of the chord) is played it 'fills' the entire 'heard space'. When the E above middle C is played at the same time, that second note simultaneously 'fills' the whole of the 'heard space'; yet one can still hear both notes distinctly. When the G above middle C is added as well, a complete chord exists; one sound composed of three distinct sounds:

> What could be more apt than to speak of the Trinity as a three-note-resonance of life, mutually indwelling, without mutual exclusion and yet without merger, each occupying the same 'space,' yet recognizably and irreducibly distinct, mutually enhancing and establishing each other?[17]

So the doctrine of the Trinity isn't self-contradictory, and there are some analogies that help us to conceptualise the Trinity. *But why would anyone adopt such a mysterious concept of deity*? We can provide two converging answers to this question. The first traces the historical development of Trinitarian belief from its biblical roots through the thinking of the 'early church fathers' and successive early Christian Creeds. The second answer involves a purely philosophical argument for understanding God as Trinity.

Why Believe in God as Trinity? The Weight of Historical Experience

The use of the term 'Trinity' to summarise the Christian understanding of God can be traced back to the second century church father Theophilus (A.D. 115-181). Belief in the Trinity arose not from philosophical reasoning, but from the weight of historical experience. As John Polkinghorne writes:

> Whatever might be the speculative elaboration of aspects of Trinitarian discourse, it had its origins in the Church's struggle to come to terms with its threefold *experience* of divine encounter… The proclamation of the One in Three and Three in One is not a piece of mystical arithmetic, but a summary of data.[18]

Peter Kreeft says: 'We believe the Trinity because God has told us; it is as simple as that.'[19] God didn't tell us *directly* about the Trinity, be he told us *indirectly*. The disciples believed in the God to whom Jesus prayed as 'Father' (cf. Matthew 26:39). They also came to believe Jesus' claim to be divine as well as human (to see why, see my book *Understanding Jesus: Five Ways to Spiritual Enlightenment*, Paternoster, 2011). And they recognised that Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit (cf. John 15:26; Acts 1:8 & 5:3-5):

> The experience of new life... came to the Christians from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. That experience began with the acceptance of Jesus as Lord, of his testimony that God was his Father, and of the Spirit as the inner power which he sent in a sort of spiritual baptism upon their community.[20]

As Owen says, Christians 'know the eternal Father as the one to whom Jesus prayed as *Abba*; and we know the eternal Spirit as the one who communicates the life of Jesus and who thereby makes us "adopted" sons of God.'[21] Thus C.S. Lewis held that the Trinity is something *experienced* in the life of the Christian:

> An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get into touch with God. But if he is a Christian he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who

was God – that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying – the goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on – the motive power. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. So that whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers.[4]

God the Father can say 'I' (John 12:28), the Son can say 'I' (John 17:4) and the Spirit can say 'I' (Acts 13:2). The Father says 'Thou' to the Son (Mark 1:11), the Son says 'Thou' to the Father (John 17:2) and the Father and the Son use the words 'He' and 'Him' in reference to the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26). Furthermore, the Father loves the Son (John 3:35), the Son loves the Father (John 14:31) and the Spirit testifies to the Son (John 15:26). These statements indicate the reality of *three different persons*: 'God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These names indicate three genuine distinctions within the one personal God, and these three distinctions themselves are fully personal.'[22] Theologian David Brown agrees that God contains 'three distinct centres of consciousness, each with its own distinctive mental content,'[30] acting in co-operation with each other.

Paul prayed for the Corinthians that: 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.' (2 Corinthians 13:14) He may have been echoing God's blessing in Numbers 6:24-26. Paul told the Ephesians 'I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better' (Ephesians 1:17), reminding them that 'It is through Christ that all of us... are able to come in the one Spirit into the presence of the Father.' (Ephesians 2:18)

Although there are three divine persons, these three are, *in some sense*, jointly 'God' (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6; John 1:14 & Acts 5:3-4). Jesus commanded the disciples to Baptise: 'in *the name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...' (Matthew 28:19, my italics) Here Jesus teaches that there are three divine persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) who are one God. In ancient times a name wasn't just an identifying label, but was meant to represent someone's *inner character*.

Jesus' disciples didn't abandon monotheism when they came to view God in Trinitarian terms – they began to develop a more nuanced monotheism: 'The idea of the Trinity does not supersede monotheism; it interprets it, in the light of a specific set of revelatory events and experiences.'[23]

Jewish Monotheism and Trinity

The Christian concept of God is grounded in the Old Testament, which insists:

- There is one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; cf. Mark 12:29, Romans 3:30)
- There is no God besides God (Deuteronomy 4:35, Isaiah 44:6)
- No God is formed before or after God (Isaiah 44:6)

On the other hand, the Old Testament contains clues that God might not be the deity of a 'strictly monotheistic' or 'Unitarian' theology (e.g. Islam). Genesis opens with i) God creating by ii) the act of speech (which can be interpreted as the divine 'word' or *logos*) and iii) God's Spirit being broody over the waters of chaos:

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering [brooding] over the waters. And God said, 'let there be light.' (Genesis 1:1-3)

The word used for God in this passage, *Elohim*, is a plural noun. *El* means one. *Eloah* means two. *Elohim* means three and 'cannot be explained as a "plural of majesty"; this was entirely unknown to the Hebrews.'[24]

According to W.A. Pratney, the Old Testament word for absolute mathematical or numerical unity and/or singularity is '*Yachead*', which is *never used to describe the unity of God*. On the other hand:

> '*Echad*' describes a compound or collective unity: 'In marriage "the two shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24); a crowd can gather together "as one" (Ezek. 3:1); or be of one mind or heart: "All the rest of Israel were of one heart to make David king" (1 Chron. 12:38). This is the compound plural always used of God when He is called "one" Lord.[25]

God's unity is the unity of a being with an inner complexity. A helium atom is a society of entities: proton, neutron and electron all held together by atomic force. God might be thought of as an analogous society of entities in unity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, held together by love. God *is* a set of loving, interpersonal relationships. It is surely significant that when the 'one [*Echad*] Lord' God creates humanity 'in our image' (Genesis 1:26) he creates *a complementary plurality* of two distinct people designed to become 'one [*Echad*] flesh' in marriage, an institution naturally issuing in children, and hence the family:

> The Trinity infinitely expresses an ideal of personal being that we reflect in finite modes. Our existence as persons revolves around two poles: individuality and relationship. Each of us is an individual who as such is distinct from other persons. Yet each of us exists in relation to other persons. Our humanity depends upon our success in maintaining a balance between these poles… God is the perfect… prototype of that which all love between persons tends to achieve – absolute unity and yet distinction – to be one with the other, not by losing ones identity but by perfecting it, even at the very source of one's being. That is why divine existence is the ideal of all personal existence – to be fully oneself, but only in dependence upon, and in adherence to, another in the communion of unity. The Trinity, then, is (to use Platonic terms) the archetype of personality that human persons 'copy' or 'imitate'. This is an inevitable consequence of the fact that man is made in God's image.[26]

Indeed, God speaks using the first person plural when He creates humanity: 'Then God said, "Let *us* make man in *our* image..."' (Genesis 1:26; cf. Genesis 11:7 &

Isaiah 6:8). According to Gleason Archer: 'The first person plural can hardly be a mere editorial or royal plural that refers to the speaker alone, for no such usage is demonstrable anywhere else in biblical Hebrew.'[27]

Immanuel Kant was wrong to say that 'Absolutely nothing worthwhile for the practical life can be made out of the doctrine of the Trinity taken literally.'[28] For 'The relationship that exists within the Godhead is the basis for unity in every human relationship, be it marriage, family, or church.'[29] Kreeft argues:

> Nothing could be more relevant to your life than the doctrine of the Trinity. For life is meaningless to you unless you know life's meaning. And the meaning of life, the ultimate purpose of life, the greatest good, the supreme value, is love. And the doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation for that, because it means that love 'goes all the way up' into ultimate reality, into the very essence of God. The doctrine of the Trinity means that God *is* love.[30]

Finally, in the Old Testament a distinction is drawn between 'the Lord' and 'the angel of the Lord' to whom divine titles and worship are appropriately given (cf. Genesis 16:10-13; Exodus 3:2; Joshua 5:13-15; Judges 6:11 ff.; 13:3 ff.; Micah 5:2; Isaiah 9:6). In short, while the Old Testament is monotheistic *it isn't strictly Unitarian*; it is monotheistic *in a way that leaves the door open to understanding God as Trinity*.

Creeds and the Early Church Fathers

The proper function of creeds is to set the boarders of orthodox belief without being unnecessarily dogmatic about the specific content of orthodox belief: 'Creeds do not add to Scripture but summarize it and resist subtractions from it, i.e. heresies.'[31] In thinking about the nature of God a Christian should take serious (but not uncritical) account of the creedal assertions of Church councils, and of the writings of the early church fathers whose thinking informed those creeds. According to Carl F. H. Henry:

> Non-evangelical scholars often scorn the early ecumenical creeds as a translation of Christianity into Greek metaphysics. But the decisive question is whether the creeds afirm what is true. The fact is that early Christianity opposed much of Greek metaphysics... What decided the formulation of the ecumenical creeds was not Greek philosophy or Christian consciousness, but only the biblical data. The creeds resist reducing NT statements about the persons of the Trinity to merely functional significance.

The earliest creeds were most concerned with the status of Jesus as both divine and human, but they nevertheless include three persons within the one God. Hence the Apostle's Creed (which may trace back to very early rites of baptismal confession) affirms:

> I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.
> I believe in Jesus Christ his only son, our Lord [which translates a Hebrew term for God]. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit…

The only explanation of the distinction between the divine persons given here is the analogical use of familial language.

The 4th century Nicene Creed begins the task of conceptualising the distinctions between the divine persons of the Trinity:

> We believe in one God,
> the Father, the Almighty,
> maker of heaven and earth,
> of all that is, seen and unseen.
> We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
> the only Son of God,
> eternally *begotten* of the Father,
> God from God, light from light,
> true God from true God,
> begotten, not made,
> of one Being with the Father;
> through him all things were made.
> For us and for our salvation
> he came down from heaven,
> was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
> and became truly human.
> For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
> he suffered death and was buried.
> On the third day he rose again
> in accordance with the Scriptures;
> he ascended into heaven
> and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
> He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
> and his kingdom will have no end.
> We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
> who *proceeds* from the Father [and the Son],
> who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
> who has spoken through the prophets.
> We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
> We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
> We look for the resurrection of the dead,
> and the life of the world to come. Amen.

For 'the only Son of God' to be *begotten* surely means that a causal relationship exists between the Son and the Father such that while the Father has logical priority the Son is not thereby reduced to the status of a creature (i.e. a non-divine being created by God). That which is 'begotten' by divinity is itself divine (we'll come to 'proceeds' later). In the context of Trinitarian philosophical theology 'cause' does *not* mean 'a temporally prior pre-condition of something that comes into being'. To say that the Son is begotten by the Father is *not* to say that the Father existed in time *before* the Son existed, or that the Son *came into being*. Rather, the Father is a 'sustaining' or simultaneous cause of the Son.

The creedal terminology of the 'only Son' being 'begotten' has scriptural roots. Whether John 1:18 talks about the 'only begotten *God*' or the 'only begotten *Son*' (and 'only begotten God' is in the earliest available manuscript), this passage talks

about the Son of God being 'begotten… in the bosom of the Father'. The *New American Standard Bible* reads: 'No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten [*monogenes*] God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.'

There's also scriptural precedence for the affirmation of a causal relationship between Father and Son understood in terms of logical priority. In John 5:26-27 Jesus says: 'For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.' (*TNIV*). Here Jesus combines a claim to his own divinity ('he is the Son of Man', cf. Daniel 7) with the recognition that his life is somehow *grounded in* the life of God the Father (the 'Ancient of day's' in Daniel 7). Likewise, in John 6:57 Jesus sates: 'Just as the living Father sent me and *I live because of the Father*, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.'

It was probably reflection upon such passages that led the early church fathers to develop the Trinitarian model affirmed by the early creeds:

> The Nicene Creed stops just short of the full articulation of Trinitarian doctrine. The three divine persons are presented to us, but the mysterious subtlety of their interrelationship is not spelled out. Later formulations, such as the *Quicunque Vult* (the so-called Athanasian Creed) attempted to make up the deficit…[32]

According to the 5th Century Athanasian Creed:

> The Father is from none, not made nor created nor begotten.
> The Son is from the father alone, not made nor created but begotten.
> The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding…

This creed: 'asserts that all three Persons of the Trinity are unmade and uncreated [i.e. not creatures], but differentiates them in that the Father is sourceless, the Son begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.'[33]

With H.P. Owen: 'I cannot see how we can preserve belief in God's unity… if we postulate a ground of differentiation between the Three that is other than their interrelation.'[34] While each member of the Trinity is divine, each *must* differ in at least one essential respect from the others. If there were no essential difference between any given person of the Trinity and the others, then (by the law of the indiscernability of identicals) they would necessarily be one and the same person, and the heresy of *modalism* would be true. Hence each member of the Trinity must be divine *in a slightly different manner*. Hence William P. Alston affirms: 'What makes the persons of the Trinity distinct is the causal relations in which they stand to each other.'[35] Richard Swinburne likewise acknowledges that the individual members of Trinity 'would be the same individual but for the relational properties… which distinguish them',[36] and notes 'that we need to interpret "of the same substance"… as a relation "which links the persons closely while allowing them to be discernable with respect to a certain range of properties"'[37] Thus Owen is careful to say that each member of the Trinity: 'must possess the whole of the nature of the Godhead *in respect of every personal property*…'[38] Without the qualification made by the second

half of this sentence, the first half would be incoherent and/or heretical, *because it would leave no internal basis for differentiation between the members of the Trinity*.

The main point here is that different causal terms (e.g. 'begotten', 'proceed') are used by the creeds to distinguish between the divine persons of the Trinity, who are related in terms of logical but not temporal causal priority:

- The Spirit 'proceeds' from the Father & Son
- The Son is 'begotten' by the Father alone
- The Father doesn't 'proceed' from, and isn't 'begotten' by, anyone

Three Causal Distinctions

What do the causal terms used by the creeds mean? Richard Swinburne argues that:

> The Father is the Father because he has the essential property of not being caused to exist by anything else… The Son is the Son because he has the essential property of being caused to exist by an uncaused divine person acting alone [this is what being 'begotten' means]. The Spirit is the Spirit because he is caused to exist by an uncaused divine person in cooperation with a divine person who is caused to exist by the uncaused divine person acting alone [this is what it means for the Spirit to 'proceed' from the Father and the Son].[39]

Consider two standard causal distinctions made by philosophers: Dependent/Independent and Necessary/Contingent. Something is 'dependent' if it *depends* for its existence upon some external cause. Something is 'independent' if it doesn't depend upon any external cause for its existence. Something is necessary if it cannot fail to exist, if its non-existence is logically impossible. Something is contingent if its non-existence is logically possible. Nothing can be 'dependent and independent', or 'necessary and contingent', nor can anything be 'independent and contingent'. Hence, if some *x* exists, it must be 'dependent and contingent' or 'dependent and necessary' (if *x* depends for its existence upon an external cause *y* that is itself a necessary being and which necessarily causes *x*) or 'independent and necessary'. Using these causal categories we can interpret the creedal language of 'begotten' and 'proceeding' as follows:

- God the Father and God the Son *necessarily* co-operate in causing the existence of God the Holy Spirit, whose existence is therefore *necessary but dependent* upon *both* Father and Son.
- God the Father *necessarily* causes the existence of God the Son – whose existence is therefore *necessary but dependent* upon the Father
- God the Father (and therefore 'God the Trinity' *as a whole*) has Independent and Necessary Existence. Thus Swinburne argues: 'the three divine individuals taken together... form a collective source of the being of all other things… This collective… is such that each of its members is necessarily everlasting… This collective would be causeless… not dependent for its existence on anything outside itself… The claim that "there is only one God" is to be read as the claim that the source of being of all other things has to it this kind of indivisible unity.'[40]

Independent & Necessary	Dependent & Necessary	Dependent & Contingent
God the Father, and thus God as a whole (the Trinity)	God the Son & God the Holy Spirit	Creation (the cosmos, angels, humans, etc.)

As the above chart indicates, God is a necessary and independent being. The Trinity doesn't depend upon anything temporally or logically prior to themselves. Nothing is temporally or logically prior to 'God the Father' or, therefore, to 'God the Trinity'. However, if we 'cash out' the traditional Trinitarian language of God the Father 'begetting' God the Son and the Holy Spirit 'proceeding' from God the Father and God the Son using our terminology, we find:

- God the Father (the 'root' of the Trinitarian 'chord') exists independently and necessarily with no temporally or logically prior conditions for His existence.
- The Father necessarily begets the Son, which means that the Son exists necessarily and without temporally prior cause, but he exists in dependence upon the begetting of the Father, who is a logically prior cause of the Son.
    - o As Justin Martyr wrote: 'We are sure that he [Jesus] is the [incarnate] Son of the true God, and hold him the second in order, with the Spirit of prophecy in the third place.'[41]
    - o Likewise, According to Ireneus (c. 115-202 A.D): 'The Father supports Creation and his Word; the Word, supported by the Father, bestows the Spirit on all, as the Father wishes... Above all is the Father, and he is the head [i.e. source] of Christ...'[42] The metaphor of the Son being 'supported' by the Father suggests a logically rather than temporally prior causation.
    - o Origen (c. 185-254 A.D) thus held that: 'The existence of the Son is generated by the Father... The existence of the Son derives from the Father, but not in time, nor does it have any beginning, except in the sense that it starts from God himself...'[43]
    - o As C.S. Lewis wrote: 'The Son exists because the Father exists: but there never was a time before the Father produced the Son.'[44]
- The Father and the Son necessarily jointly cause the existence of the Holy Spirit, who 'proceeds' from the Father and the Son (hence 'proceeding' is here distinguished from being 'begotten', in that to be 'begotten' is to be dependent upon the logically prior necessary causation of the Father, while to 'proceed' is to be dependent upon the logically prior necessary causation of the Father *and* the Son).
    - o As Origen wrote: 'the Holy Spirit depends upon him [the *Word*] to minister to his person not only existence but wisdom and rationality and righteousness, and all other qualities which we must suppose him to possess...'[45]

This description of the Trinity holds that God is composed of three divine individuals (this isn't modalism); but these individuals are not three separate and independent 'gods' along the lines of Zeus, Apollo and Athena (neither is this tri-theism or polytheism). Rather, 'God' is *essentially* a Trinity of *three divine persons in one divine personal being*. The Son is, as it were, a 'part' of the Father's nature while yet being a distinct person. The Spirit is likewise, as it were, a 'part' of the nature of the Father-in-conjunction-with-the-Son, while also being a distinct person. It is an

intrinsic part of the Father's nature to 'beget' the Son, and an intrinsic part of the nature of both Father and Son that the Spirit 'proceed' from them.

The dependency of the Son and the Spirit doesn't mean that the Son and the Spirit are *creatures* rather than divine (this is not 'Arianism' or 'Adoptionism'). No created beings (including angels) exist necessarily, and both the Son and the Spirit exist necessarily. The church council of Constantinople condemned the view that the Father *freely* creates the Son and the Spirit (whereas God is traditionally held to be free in his act of creating the angels and the cosmos), hence 'The most plausible view of the Christian tradition on this issue is that Son and Spirit are generated necessarily...'[46]

The Father could not exist without the Son, or without the Holy Spirit. This isn't because *he* depends upon *them* (for *they* depend upon him), but because it is essential to his nature to 'beget' the Son and in union with the Son to cause the Spirit to 'proceed'. In other words, every 'possible world' in which any member of the Trinity exists is a world in which the other members of the Trinity exist (in the same causal relationships), and there is no 'possible world' in which they do not all exist (in the same causal relationships). Furthermore, there was never a time when the Son or the Spirit didn't exist, because the Father is not a temporally prior cause of their being (only a logically prior cause).

Taking 'God' to refer to 'the Trinity', it remains true to say with the Old Testament that there is one living and true God; that there was no God formed before God, nor shall there be any formed after God; and that there is no God besides God. Nevertheless, in line with the New Testament, we can coherently affirm that the one and only God *is* three necessary divine persons. Hence it is possible to understand *how it might be* that the three persons of the Trinity are distinct individuals who are related without being three separate gods on the one hand or being identical with one another on the other hand. Contra Dawkins, this is all perfectly coherent.

Non-Heretical Ontological Subordination

H.P. Owen writes: 'Of course the Son is subordinate to the Father in the sense that he is derived from the Father, but if (as the Nicene creed and Athanasius make plain) he receives the Father's whole nature, he and the Father are co-equal.'[47] Owen is correct when he states that the Son 'is subordinate to the Father in the sense that he is derived from the Father'. However, Owen's larger assertion, about the Son being 'derived from the Father' but nevertheless having 'the Father's whole nature' is self-contradictory. After all, it is part of the Father's whole nature that he is *not* derived from anyone (unlike the Son, who *is* derived from the Father)! As Keith Ward observes, according to the creeds: 'The Father is the only one whose creative acts are wholly underived from another.'[48] To avoid modalism we *must* ascribe *one* essential 'great-making property' to God the Father that we can't ascribe to other members of the Trinity (who *together* form the 'greatest-possible being' who is God 'the Trinity'):

> the Father cannot create another being with exactly the same divine properties as he has. Suppose the Father tries to create another essentially divine being with the same divine properties, namely, the Son. At least one divine property cannot be thus created, the property of being the unoriginated cause of

everything other than itself. The Son will owe being wholly to the Father, and will thus be dependent for existence in a way the Father is not.[49]

Swinburne argues that: 'since the Father had no option but to cause the Son, and Father and Son had no option but to cause the Spirit, and all exist eternally, the dependence of Son on Father, and of Spirit on Father and Son, does not diminish greatness.'[50] That is, 'Their equal inevitable existence makes the members of the Trinity equally worthy of worship.'[51] However, it's a non-orthodox peculiarity of Swinburne's philosophical theology that God doesn't have the great-making property of necessary existence; hence Swinburne can claim that although the Father eternally causes the existence of the Son, the Son must eternally permit the existence of the Father, etc., thereby making the Trinity an inter-dependent whole. Whereas, on the model I have presented, whilst every divine member of the Trinity (and hence the Trinity as a whole) exists necessarily, God the Father has one 'great-making property' (i.e. ontological independence) that the other members of the Trinity cannot and so do not have. As Cornelius Plantinga writes: 'there is only one font of divinity, only one Father, only one God in *that* sense of God.'[52] Hence, although God the Son *is divine*, he isn't divine *in exactly the same sense in which God the Father is divine*. Several early church fathers endorsed this conclusion:

- **Tertullian** (A.D. 165-225): 'the Father is distinct from the Son, being greater than the Son, in as much as he who begets is one, and he who is begotten is another; he, too, who sends is one, and he who is sent is another; and he, again, who makes is one, and he through whom the thing is made is another.'[53]
- **Origen** (c. 185-254 A.D): 'The existence of the Son is generated by the Father. This must be accepted by those who profess that nothing is ungenerate, that is with underived existence, except only God the Father… Therefore I think that we should be right in saying of the Saviour that… as he is the image of the invisible God he is by that token God, but not the God of whom Christ himself says "That they may know you, the only true God".'[54]
- **Hilary of Poitiers** (c. 291-371 A.D): 'Who indeed would deny that the Father is the greater; the Unbegotten greater than the Begotten, the Father than the Son, the Sender than the Sent, He that wills than He that obeys? He Himself shall be His own witness: "The Father is greater than I." It is a fact which we must recognize, but we must take heed lest with unskilled thinkers the majesty of the Father should obscure the glory of the Son.'[55]

Theologian David Brown explains that, like modern-day Jehovah's Witnesses:

Arians used texts such as John 14:28 ('My father is greater than I') to argue that the Son was a creature, not co-eternal with the Father. Nicea used the non-biblical phrase *homoousis* (literally 'of the same being') to refute this claim, but it was only by the time of the Council of Constantinople… that a precise terminology was worked out: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three *hypostases* in one *ousia*. In Latin this came to be expressed as three *personae* in one *substantia*: hence the normal English pattern of 'three persons in one substance.' The meaning of these terms is a potential minefield of misunderstandings, as they were given a more precise signification as discussion continued.[56]

For God the Son to be 'of the same being' or 'of one substance' as God the Father doesn't necessarily mean that the Father and the Son have all and only identical properties. Indeed, if this were what it meant, then (by the law of the indiscernability of identicals) *we would be landed with the heresy of modalism*! Rather, for God the Son to be *homoousis* as God the Father means that *he is not a creature* (not a contingent being) but an intrinsic, co-eternal 'part' (in the sense discussed before) of the Godhead's 'maximally beautiful' Trinitarian essence. This is compatible with saying that Father and Son have different *individual* natures because 'the Son is subordinate to the Father in the sense that he is derived from the Father...'[57]

The affirmation that Father and Son are *homoousis* has sometimes been interpreted to mean that they have *identical individual natures*, being literally 'co-equal'. This claim of 'co-equality' contradicts the claim that the Son is 'ontologically subordinate' to the Father, and because Arianism (the denial of Jesus' divinity) is a heresy, some have therefore taken the claim that the Son is 'ontologically subordinate' to the Father be a heresy in itself (called 'subordinationalism'). However, this state of play is based upon an interpretation of creedal terminology that leads to the heresy of modalism! What theologians *intend* to affirm by the 'co-equality' of the Trinity is that all three members are divine, co-eternal and essential 'parts' of the Godhead. Thus, while I *am* defending an 'ontologically subordinationalist' form of Social Trinitarianism, I am *not* defending the heresy of subordinational*ism* understood as 'any christological position which subordinates the Son to the Father *in such a way as potentially to endanger his essential divinity.*'[58]

Christians often tell Arians (e.g. Jehovah's Witness) that verses like John 14:28 can be interpreted as indicating a subordination of *function* rather than *being*. True. However, to argue this way is already to buy into the *false dilemma* assumed by Arians: 'Either God the Son is co-equal with God the Father, or he is a creature rather than divine.' Rightly refusing to deny the divinity of the Son, some Christians affirm 'functional subordination' whilst denying 'ontological subordination'; but in so doing they unwittingly embrace the heresy of modalism! A better course is to reject the Arian's false dilemma, embracing 'ontological subordination' whilst nevertheless avoiding both Arianism and modalism. And the only way to do this is to affirm that the Father and the Son are both divine *in different senses of the term*. Such 'ontological subordination' doesn't render the Son (or the Spirit) unworthy of worship or praise.[59] As Jesus said: 'Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him…. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.' (John 5:23 & 30; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:28.)

While there is no direct inference to 'ontological subordination' (let alone Arianism) from the fact that the Son and the Spirit assume different subserviently functions in salvation history (c.f. John 5:19-30, 14:26 & 15:26), explaining these 'economic' functions (as theologians call them) in terms of 'imminent' ontological distinctions within the Trinity makes for a less *ad hoc* understanding of God. Thus my conclusion fits with theologian Karl Rahner's famous dictum that: 'the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.'[60]

Finally, the 'ontological subordination' of the Son to the Father isn't *ad hoc* in light of Jesus' affirmations that 'as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to

have life in himself' (John 5:26); that 'Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me' (John 6:57); that 'the Father is greater [*meizon* – a term that can mean greater in position *or* nature] than I' (John 14:28) and that 'this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.' (John 17:3)

Why Believe in God as Trinity? Philosophical Deduction

As the maximally beautiful, greatest possible being, it is essential to the nature of God that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). The highest form of love (which is therefore to be attributed to God) clearly isn't the love of a person for something non-personal, or for themselves, but the love of one person *for another person*. In order that the nature of God be *independent* of the existence of any creature (which is itself one aspect of God's greatness), it is therefore necessary to hold that God contains *more than one person*. Hence, our doctrine of God should be *Monotheistic without being Unitarian*.

Contra Unitarianism

Peter Kreeft argues that: 'Only the Trinity allows God to be unselfish love in his own essential, independent being.'[61] Stephen T. Davies proposes a deductive 'Proof of the Social Trinity'; that is, of the theory that the Trinity of Christian doctrine is to be understood as stating that God 'in some way like a community or society.'[62] He argues:

1) 'God is love (1 John 4:8).
   > It is hard to imagine a situation in which God, in God's blessedness, experiences only forms of love lower than do other sentient creatures… Thus:
2) God experiences the highest form of love…
   > it seems obvious (at least to me) that love of another is a higher form of love than love of oneself. Thus:
3) The highest form of love is love of another.
   > God could (in some strong sense of the word "could") have decided not to create at all. Thus:
4) God was free not to create the world.
   > Had God chosen not to create, and were the Social Theory of the Trinity false, then God would have had no "other" to love and thus would not have experienced the highest form of love… Thus:
5) Therefore, the Social Theory is true.
   > This is because the Social Theory, however it is unpacked, entails that there are eternally different individuals (objects of love) within the godhead. QED.'[63]

J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig advance a similar argument:

> God is by definition the greatest conceivable being. As the greatest conceivable being, God must be perfect. Now a perfect being must be a loving being. For love is a moral perfection; it is better for a person to be loving rather than unloving. God therefore must be a perfectly loving being. Now it is of the very nature of love to give oneself away. Love reaches out to another

person rather than centering wholly in oneself. So if God is perfectly loving by his very nature, he must be giving himself in love to another. But who is that other? It cannot be any created person, since creation is the result of God's free will, not the result of his nature. It belongs to God's very essence to love, but it does not belong to it to create. So we can imagine a possible world in which God is perfectly loving and yet no created persons exist. So created persons cannot sufficiently explain whom God loves… It therefore follows that the other to whom God's love is necessarily directed must be internal to God himself. In other words, God is not a single, isolated person, as Unitarian forms of theism like Islam hold; rather, God is a plurality of persons, as the Christian doctrine of the Trinity affirms. On the Unitarian view God is a person who does not give himself away essentially in love for another; he is focused essentially only on himself. Hence, he cannot be the most perfect being. But on the Christian view, god is a triad of persons in eternal, self-giving love relationships. Thus, since God is essentially loving, the doctrine of the Trinity is more plausible than any Unitarian doctrine of God.[64]

Pro Trinitarianism

The above scholars all argue *against* a Unitarian doctrine of God, rather than *for* a specifically Trinitarian doctrine. Arguing against a Unitarian doctrine supports a Trinitarian doctrine over against a Unitarian doctrine; but it doesn't prove a Trinitarian doctrine (for what prevents one from advancing a dualistic doctrine of God as two persons in one being, or a quadratic doctrine of God as four persons in one being, etc?).

It would be nice to have an argument that moves us beyond Tertullian's statement that 'before the creation of the universe God was not alone'[65]; an argument that justifies the hypothesis that God consists of three, and only three, divine persons in one being. I think that such an argument can be given on the basis that the highest form of love (love between persons) can be divided into two basic categories, both of which only a Trinitarian God can encompass. Those two basic, qualitatively distinct categories of love are: a) the love of one person for another, and b) *the love shared by two persons who love each other for someone beyond their love for each other*. That is, love can be divided into *loving* another and *loving with* a loved other, an activity which obviously requires *a third personal party*.

Does this argument imply the existence of an actual infinite number of additional persons, so that God encompasses the love of three persons who love each other for a fourth party, the love of four people for a fifth party, and so on, *ad infinitum*? Because this *quantitative* requirement necessitates an actual infinite regress, a regress that is to be rejected as logically impossible (and therefore as no part of the essence of the greatest *possible* being), it does not. There is no intrinsic maximum number of persons, and so being composed of the maximal number of persons can't be a 'great making property'.

Moreover, there is nothing *qualitatively* distinct about the love of three people for a fourth party and four people for a fifth, etc., as there is something qualitatively distinct about the love of one person for another and of two people for a third (the first

example is an example of *loving* another, the second example is an example of *loving with* another). By encompassing both loving another and loving with another God encompasses both qualitatively distinct types of love. The inclusion of further parties wouldn't add any qualitatively distinct great-making property to the Godhead. Indeed, it would add nothing except the incoherent implication of an actual infinitude of persons.

Brian Hebblethwaite defends this extended Trinitarian version of what we might call 'the argument from love':

> if we are unable to posit the fullness of love given and love received *in* God, God's love has no object unless and until God creates a world of persons to know and love him... This makes creation necessary to God and prevents us from articulating a theology of God as perfect and sufficient in himself. Strict monotheism, modelled on a single individual person [i.e. Unitarianism], thus contains a very basic difficulty. For one can only predicate the excellences of interpersonal relation, and especially those of love, on God in relation to us, not on God as God is internally, prior to creation and for all eternity. This point has no bearing on the number of personal centres in God. It simply suggests a general need to posit internal relatedness in the divine, if love is really of God's essence… On the other hand, it has been suggested that there is good *reason* to posit not two, but three – and no more – personal subjectivities in God. Love certainly requires mutuality of giving and receiving. Necessarily, we move from the model of an isolated individual to that of at least two persons in relation. But the fullness of love is not captured by this two-term relation. Love's excellence requires not only love given and love received, but also love shared with another. This element in what it is to love unselfishly would be lacking in a binitarian view. Hence there is reason to posit at least three centres in God if God *is* love. There is no need to go further than this. No further excellencies in love are missing from a Trinitarian conception of God…[66]

Conclusion

Critics accuse the Christian idea of God as Trinity of incoherence, but as Kreeft argues:

> The doctrine of the Trinity does not say there is one God and three Gods, or that God is one Person and three Persons, or that God has one nature and three natures. Those would indeed be self-contradictory ideas. But the doctrine of the Trinity says that there is only one God and only one divine nature but that this one God exists in three Persons. That is a great mystery, but it is not a logical self-contradiction.[67]

To believe in the Trinity is to believe in three co-eternal divine persons who together essentially constitute one divine personal being, and this is not logically incoherent.

Far from being the liability to Christianity that critics assume, the doctrine of God as Trinity is supported by *a posteriori* and *a priori* arguments that demonstrate the shortcomings of Unitarian theologies and which lend weight to the conclusion that Christian theism is the best worldview available to us. Perfect-person theology in the tradition of Anselm's ontological argument 'leads directly to one of the central and distinctive doctrines of the Christian faith, and constitutes an outright refutation of Jewish and Muslim conceptions of deity.'[68] As Pinnock and Brow state: 'Loving is what characterizes God essentially... God is not a solitary monarch but a tripersonal mystery of love.'[69]

Recommended Resources

Video

Lee Strobel, 'The Mystery of The Trinity',
www.leestrobel.com/videoserver/video.php?clip=strobelT1055

William Lane Craig, 'Can Three Be One?',
www.leestrobel.com/videoserver/video.php?clip=strobelT1053

John Ortberg, 'The Trinity is a Paradigm for Community',
www.leestrobel.com/videoserver/video.php?clip=CCNT2505

Audio

Andy Bannister and Keith Small, 'Allah vs. Yahweh / Tawhid vs. Trinity',
www.bethinking.org/islam/allah-vs-yahweh-/-tawhid-vs-trinity.htm

Graham Tomlin, 'What is the Trinity, and Why Does it Matter?', http://sptc.htb.org.uk/news/what-trinity-and-why-does-it-matter

Papers

Francis J. Beckwith, 'The Trinity: A Short Introduction', www.answering-islam.org.uk/Trinity/beckwith.html

Jeffery E. Browder & Michael C. Rea, 'Understanding the Trinity',
www.nd.edu/~mrea/Online%20Papers/Understanding%20the%20Trinity.pdf

Norman L. Geisler, 'The Trinity – Part Two',
www.johnankerberg.org/Articles/_PDFArchives/theological-dictionary/TD2W0100.pdf

Stephen D. Kovach & Peter Schemm Jr, 'A defense of the doctrine of the eternal subordination of the son', www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/42/42-3/42-3-pp461-476_JETS.pdf

Ian Kyle, 'Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity', www.isca-apologetics.org/Kyle-Oneness-Pentacostals.pdf

Robert Morey, 'The Trinity in the Old Testament', http://answering-islam.org.uk/Trinity/morey7.html

Peter R. Schemm Jr., 'Kevin Gile's *The Trinity and Subordinationism*: A Review Article', www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-7-No-2/Review-of-The-Trinity-and-Subordinationism

Sam Shamoun, 'The Quran and the Holy Trinity', http://answering-islam.org.uk/Shamoun/quran_trinity.htm

Patrick Zukeran, 'Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity', www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/jw-trin.html

Books

Henry Bettenson, *The Early Church Fathers* (Oxford, 1969)

David Brown, 'Trinity' in Philip L. Quinn &Charles Taliaferro (ed.'s), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell, 1999)

Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Essence of Christianity*: *A Fresh Look At The Nicene Creed* (SPCK, 1996)

Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge & Mystery* (Cornell University Press, 1995)

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Fount, 1997)

J.P. Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations For A Christian Worldview* (IVP, 2003)

H.P. Owen, *Christian Theism* (T & T Clark, 1984)

John Polkinghorne, *Science & Christian Belief*: *Theological Reflections of a Bottom-Up Thinker* (SPCK, 1994)

Ron Rhodes, 'Oneness Pentecostals and the Doctrine of God' in Norman L. Geisler & Chad V. Meister (ed.'s), *Reasons for Faith*: *Making a Case for the Christian Faith* (Crossway, 2007)

Richard Swinburne, *Was Jesus God*? (Oxford University Press, 2008)

Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994)

James E. Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics*: *Cultivating Christian Commitment* (Baker, 2006)

Keith Ward, *Religion & Creation* (Oxford University Press, 1996)

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[1] H.P. Owen, *Christian Theism*, (T & T Clark, 1984), p. 65.

[2] Michael J. Murrary & Michael Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, (Cambridge, 2008), p. 64.

[3] Michael Martin, 'Hugo Meynell's *Is Christianity True*?', www.infidels.org/library/modern/michael_martin/meynell.html

[4] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, (Bantam, 2006), p. 33.

[5] *ibid*.

[6] *ibid*.

[7] *ibid*.

[8] *ibid*, p. 34.

[9] *ibid*.

[10] Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge & Mystery*, (Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 220.

[11] Peter Kreeft, p. 114.

[12] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Fount, 1997), p. 137.

[13] Diagram taken from www.answeringlds.org/images/AncientTrinity.gif

[14] Gerald O'Collins, 'The State of the Question', in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ & Gerald O'Collins SJ (ed.'s), *The Trinity*, (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 8.

[15] Owen, *op cit*, p. 61.

[16] *ibid*.

17 Jeremy Begbie (ed.), *Beholding the Glory*: *Incarnation Through the Arts*, (Baker, 2000), quoted by 'Hearing God in C Major', *Stillpoint*, www.gordon.edu/download/galleries/Summer2005Stillpoint1.pdf

[18] John Polkinghorne, *Science & Christian Belief: Theological Reflections of a Bottom-Up Thinker*, (SPCK, 1994), p. 154.

[19] *ibid*, p. 121.

[20] Keith Ward, *Religion & Creation*, (1996)

[21] Owen, *op cit*, p. 59-60.

[22] Klaas Runia, 'The Trinity', *The Lion Handbook of Christian Belief*, (Lion, 1982), p. 166.

[23] Clark Pinnock & Robert C. Brow, *Unbounded Love*, (), p. 49.

[24] Klaas Runia, *Eerdmans Handbook to Christian Belief*, (Eerdmans, 1982), quoted by W.A. Pratney, *The Nature And Character of God*, (Bethany House, 1988), p. 262.

[25] W.A. Pratney, *The Nature And Character of God*, (Bethany House, 1988), p. 259.

[26] Owen, *op cit*, p. 65-66.

[27] Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties*, (Zondervan, 1982), p. 359.

[28] Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*

[29] Patrick Henry Reardon, www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/trinity_3.shtml

[30] Peter Kreeft, *Because God Is Real*, (Ignatius Press, 2008), p. 87.

[31] Kreeft, p. 121.

[32] Polkinghorne, *op cit*, p. 154.

[33] Kreeft, *op cit*, p. 115.

[34] Owen, *op cit*, p. 62.

[35] William P. Alston, 'Substance and Trinity' in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ & Gerald O'Collins SJ (ed.'s), *The Trinity*, (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 184.

[36] Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God*, *op cit*, p. 189.

[37] Chistopher Hughes, quoted by Swinburne, *The Christian God*, p. 189, footnote 25. On the account provided here, the 'range of properties' of relevance are: 'being independent', 'being dependent upon an independent being' and 'being dependent upon an independent being and a dependent being'.

[38] Owen, *op cit*, p. 67, my italics.

[39] Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?*, (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 32.

[40] Swinburne, *The Christian God*, (Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 180-181.

[41] Justin Martyr, *The Early Christian Fathers*, (Oxford, 1969), p. 59.

[42] *ibid*, p. 231-232.

[43] *ibid*.

[44] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Fount, 1997), p. 147

[45] Origen, *The Early Christian Fathers*, (Oxford, 1969), p. 228.

[46] Pinnock & Brow, *op cit*, p. 49.

[47] Owen, *op cit*, p. 28.

[48] Keith Ward, *Religion and Creation*, *op cit*, p. 334.

[49] Keith Ward, *Religion & Creation*, (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 324.

[50] Swinburne, *The Christian God*, p. 185.

[51] Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?*, p. 31.

[52] Cornelius Plantinga, 'Social Trinity and Tritheism' in Cornelius Plantinga & Ronald Feenstra (ed.'s), *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement*, (Notre Dame University Press, 1989). p. 31.

[53] 'Subordinationism', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subordinationist#cite_note-22

[54] Origen, *De Principiis* & as quoted in Justin's 'Epistle to Menas' in Bettenson, *The Early Church Fathers*, p. 231-232.

[55] Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, Book III, Chapter 12, quoted by Stephen D. Kovach & Peter Schemm Jr, 'A defense of the doctrine of the eternal subordination of the son', http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3817/is_199909/ai_n8858703

[56] David Brown, 'The Trinity' in Philip L. Quinn &Charles Taliaferro (ed.'s), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, (Blackwell, 1999), p. 525.

[57] Owen, p. 28.

[58] Stephen D. Kovach & Peter Schemm Jr, 'A defense of the doctrine of the eternal subordination of the son', *op cit*, my italics.

[59] On the theory I am advancing, Philippians 2:6 concerns the Son's equality of rights rather than

ontological properties, cf. *New Bible Commentary*: *21ˢᵗ Century Edition* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), p. 1253.

[60] Karl Rahner, 'The Trinity', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Rahner

[61] Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, (Ignatius, 1988), p. 122.

[62] Stephen T. Davies, 'A Somewhat Playful Proof of the Social Trinity in five Easy Steps', *Philosophia Christi*, Series 2, Vol. 1, No.2, p. 103.

[63] *ibid*.

[64] J.P. Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations For A Christian Worldview*, (IVP, 2003), p. 594-595.

[65] Tertullian, quoted by W.A. Pratney, *The Nature And Character of God*, (Bethany House, 1988), p. 284.

[66] Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Essence of Christianity*: *A Fresh Look At The Nicene Creed*, (SPCK, 1996), p. 58-59.

[67] Peter Kreeft, *Because God Is Real*, (Ignatius, 2008), p. 42.

[68] Murray & Rea, *op cit*, p. 64.

[69] Pinnock & Brow, *op cit*, p. 45.