

# Trinitarian Theology

## Baptism as the beginning lesson



Baptism of Christ, by Piero della Francesca, 15th century

Baptism itself is generally conferred with the Trinitarian formula, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19); and Basil the Great (330–379) declared: "We are bound to be baptized in the terms we have received, and to profess faith in the terms in which we have been baptized." "This is the Faith of our baptism," the First Council of Constantinople declared (382), "that teaches us to believe in the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. According to this Faith there is one Godhead, Power, and Being of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 28:19 may be taken to indicate that baptism was associated with this Trinitarian formula from the earliest decades of the Church's existence.<sup>1</sup> The formula is found in the Didache,<sup>2</sup> Ignatius,<sup>3</sup> Tertullian,<sup>4</sup> Hippolytus,<sup>5</sup> Cyprian,<sup>6</sup> and Gregory Thaumaturgus.<sup>7</sup> Though the formula has early attestation, the Acts of the Apostles only mentions believers being baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38, 10:48) and "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16, Acts 19:5). There are no Biblical references to baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit outside of Matthew 28:19, nor references to baptism in the name of (the Lord) Jesus (Christ) outside the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>8</sup>

Commenting on Matthew 28:19, Gerhard Kittel states:

This threefold relation [of Father, Son and Spirit] soon found fixed expression in the triadic formulae in 2 C. 13:13, and in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6. The form is first found in the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19; Did., 7. 1 and 3...[I]t is self-evident that Father, Son and Spirit are here linked in an indissoluble threefold relationship.<sup>9</sup>

In the synoptic Gospels the baptism of Jesus himself is often interpreted as a manifestation of all three Persons of the Trinity: "And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 3:16–17)

## One God

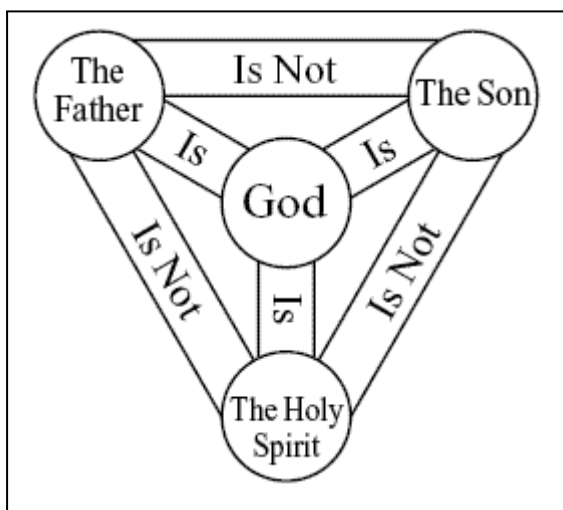
God is one, and the Godhead a single being: The Hebrew Scriptures lift this one article of faith above others, and surround it with stern warnings against departure from this central issue of faith, and of faithfulness to the covenant God had made with them. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4) (the Shema), "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Deuteronomy 5:7) and, "Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel and his redeemer the LORD of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." (Isaiah 44:6). Any formulation of an article of faith which does not insist that God is solitary, that divides

worship between God and any other, or that imagines God coming into existence rather than being God eternally, is not capable of directing people toward the knowledge of God, according to the Trinitarian understanding of the Old Testament. The same insistence is found in the New Testament: "...there is none other God but one..." (1 Corinthians 8:4). The "other gods" warned against are therefore not understood as gods at all, but as substitutes for God, and so are, according to St. Paul, simply mythological (1 Corinthians 8:5).

Which brings the question, what is meant by "one?" In the Hebrew, the word for God is *Elohim* [אֱלֹהִים]. In every other instance where *elohim* is with a small e (indicating non-gods), it indicates a plurality because the word *elohim* is in fact plural. In the abovementioned passages, the Hebrew word for "one" is *echad* [אֶחָד] which may signify a compound unity, unified in perfect harmony and purpose, unlike the Hebrew word *yachid* which unequivocally means an absolute (not compound) singularity. The concept of *echad* would be similar to a perfectly functioning family or the cleaving of husband and wife as one flesh (cf. Genesis 2:24).

So, in the Trinitarian view, the common conception which thinks of the Father and Christ as two separate beings is viewed as incorrect by many but not all groups in Christianity and Messianicism. The central and crucial affirmation of Christian faith is that there is one savior, God, and one salvation, manifest in Jesus Christ, to which there is access only because of the Holy Spirit. The God of the Old is still the same as the God of the New. In Christianity, it is understood that statements about a solitary god are intended to distinguish the Hebraic understanding from the polytheistic view, which see divine power as shared by several beings, beings which can, and do, disagree and have conflicts with each other. The Gospel of John depicts the Father as united with Jesus as Jesus is united with his followers (John 17:20–23).

## God exists in three persons



The "Shield of the Trinity" or "Scutum Fidei" diagram of traditional Western Christian symbolism.

This one God however exists in three *persons*, or in the Greek *hypostases*. God has but a single divine nature. Chalcedonians—Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Anglicans and Protestants—hold that, in addition, the Second Persona of the Trinity—God the Son, Jesus—assumed human nature, so that he has two natures (and hence two

wills), and is really and fully both true God and true human. In the Oriental Orthodox theology, the Chalcedonian formulation is rejected in favor of the position that the union of the two natures, though unconfused, births a third nature: redeemed humanity, the new creation.

In the Trinity, the Three are said to be co-equal and co-eternal, one in essence, nature, power, action, and will. However, as laid out in the Athanasian Creed, only the Father is unbegotten and non-proceeding. The Son is begotten from (or "generated by") the Father. The Spirit proceeds from the Father (or from the Father and through the Son—see filioque clause for the distinction). The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

It has been stated that because God exists in three persons, God has always loved, and there has always existed perfectly harmonious communion between the three persons of the Trinity. One consequence of this teaching is that God could not have created Man in order to have *someone to talk to or to love*. God "already" enjoyed personal communion; being perfect, He did not create Man because of any lack or inadequacy He had. Another consequence, according to Rev. Fr. Thomas Hopko, an Eastern Orthodox theologian, is that if God were not a Trinity, He could not have loved prior to creating other beings on whom to bestow his love. Thus we find God saying in Genesis 1:26-27, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." For Trinitarians, emphasis in Genesis 1:26 is on the plurality in the Deity, and in 1:27 on the unity of the divine Essence. A possible interpretation of Genesis 1:26 is that God's relationships in the Trinity are mirrored in man by the ideal relationship between husband and wife, two persons becoming one flesh, as described in Eve's creation later in the next chapter. Genesis 2:22 Some Trinitarian Christians support their position with the *Comma Johanneum* described above, even though it is widely regarded as inauthentic and was not used patristically.

### **Mutually indwelling**

A useful explanation of the relationship of the distinct divine persons is called "perichoresis," from Greek *going around, envelopment* (written with a long O, omega—some mistakenly associate it with the Greek word for dance, which however is spelled with a short O, omicron). This concept refers for its basis to John 14–17, where Jesus is instructing the disciples concerning the meaning of his departure. His going to the Father, he says, is for their sake; so that he might come to them when the "other comforter" is given to them. At that time, he says, his disciples will dwell in him, as he dwells in the Father, and the Father dwells in him, and the Father will dwell in them. This is so, according to the theory of perichoresis, because the persons of the Trinity "reciprocally contain one another, so that one permanently envelopes and is permanently enveloped by, the other whom he yet envelopes." (Hilary of Poitiers, *Concerning the Trinity* 3:1). [4]

This co-indwelling may also be helpful in illustrating the Trinitarian conception of salvation. The first doctrinal benefit is that it effectively excludes the idea that God has parts. Trinitarians affirm that God is a simple, not an aggregate, being. The second doctrinal benefit is that it harmonizes well with the doctrine that the Christian's union with the Son in his humanity brings him into union with one who contains in himself, in St. Paul's words, "all the fullness of deity" and not a part. (*See also: Theosis*). Perichoresis provides an intuitive figure of what this might mean. The Son, the eternal Word, is from all eternity the dwelling place of God; he is, himself, the "Father's house," just as the Son dwells in the Father and the Spirit; so that, when the Spirit is "given," then it happens as Jesus said, "I will not leave you as orphans; for I will come to you" (John 14:18)

Some forms of human union are considered to be not identical but analogous to the Trinitarian concept, as found for example in Jesus' words about marriage: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh" (Mark 10:7–8). According to the words of Jesus, married persons are in some sense no longer two, but joined into one. Therefore, Orthodox theologians also see the marriage relationship as an image, or "ikon" of the Trinity, relationships of communion in which, in the words of St. Paul, participants are "members one of another." As with marriage, the unity of the church with Christ is similarly considered in some sense analogous to the unity of the Trinity, following the prayer of Jesus to the Father, for the church, that "they may be one, even as we are one." John 17:22

## **Eternal generation and procession**

Trinitarianism affirms that the Son is "begotten" (or "generated") of the Father and that the Spirit "proceeds" from the Father, but the Father is "neither begotten nor proceeds." The argument over whether the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, or from the Father and the Son, was one of the catalysts of the Great Schism, in this case concerning the Western addition of the Filioque clause to the Nicene Creed.

This language is often considered difficult because, if used regarding humans or other created things, it would necessarily imply time and change; when used here, no beginning, change in being, or process within time is intended and is in fact excluded. The Son is generated ("born" or "begotten"), and the Spirit proceeds, eternally. Augustine of Hippo explains, "Thy years are one day, and Thy day is not daily, but today; because Thy today yields not to tomorrow, for neither does it follow yesterday. Thy today is eternity; therefore Thou begat the Co-eternal, to whom Thou saidst, 'This day have I begotten Thee.'" {Psalm 2:7}

## **Son begotten, not created**

Because the Son is begotten, not made, the substance of his persona is that of Yahweh, of deity. The creation is brought into being through the Son, but the Son Himself is not part of it except through His incarnation.

The church fathers used a number of analogies to express this thought. St. Irenaeus of Lyons was the final major theologian of the second century. He writes "the Father is God, and the Son is God, for whatever is begotten of God is God."

Extending the analogy, it might be said, similarly, that whatever is generated (procreated) of humans is human. Thus, given that humanity is, in the words of the Bible, "created in the image and likeness of God," an analogy can be drawn between the Divine Essence and human nature, between the Divine Persons and human persons. However, given the fall, this analogy is far from perfect, even though, like the Divine Persons, human persons are characterized by being "loci of relationship." For Trinitarian Christians, this analogy is particularly important with regard to the Church, which St. Paul calls "the body of Christ" and whose members are, because they are "members of Christ," also "members one of another."

However, any attempt to explain the mystery to some extent must break down, and has limited usefulness, being designed, not so much to fully explain the Trinity, but to point to the

experience of communion with the Triune God within the Church as the Body of Christ. The difference between those who believe in the Trinity and those who do not, is not an issue of understanding the mystery. Rather, the difference is primarily one of belief concerning the personal identity of Christ. It is a difference in conception of the salvation connected with Christ that drives all reactions, either favorable or unfavorable, to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. As it is, the doctrine of the Trinity is directly tied up with Christology.

### **Economic and Ontological Trinity**

- **Economic Trinity:** This refers to the acts of the triune God with respect to the creation, history, salvation, the formation of the Church, the daily lives of believers, etc. and describes how the Trinity operates within history in terms of the roles or functions performed by each of the Persons of the Trinity—God's relationship with creation.
- **Ontological (or essential or immanent) Trinity:** This speaks of the interior life of the Trinity "within itself" (John 1:1–2, note John 1:1)—the reciprocal relationships of Father, Son and Spirit to each other.

Or more simply—the ontological Trinity (who God is) and the economic Trinity (what God does). Most Christians believe the economic reflects and reveals the ontological. Catholic theologian Karl Rahner went so far as to say "The 'economic' Trinity *is* the 'immanent' Trinity, and vice versa."<sup>10</sup>

The ancient Nicene theologians argued that everything the Trinity does is done by Father, Son, and Spirit working together with one will. The three persons of the Trinity always work inseparable, for their work is always the work of the one god. Because of this unity of will, the Trinity cannot involve the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. Eternal subordination can only exist if the Son's will is at least conceivably different from the Father's. But Nicene orthodoxy says it is not. The Son's will cannot be different from the Father's because it is the Father's. They have but one will as they have but one being. Otherwise they would not be one God. If there were relations of command and obedience between the Father and the Son, there would be no Trinity at all but rather three Gods.<sup>11</sup>

In explaining why the Bible speaks of the Son as being subordinate to the Father, the great theologian Athanasius argued that Scripture gives a "double account" of the son of God – one of his temporal and voluntary subordination in the incarnation, and the other of his eternal divine status. <sup>12</sup>For Athanasius, the Son is eternally one in being with the Father, temporally and voluntarily subordinate in his incarnate ministry. Such human traits, he argued, were not to be read back into the eternal Trinity.

Like Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers also insisted there was no economic inequality present within the Trinity. As Basil wrote: "We perceive the operation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be one and the same, in no respect showing differences or variation; from this identity of operation we necessarily infer the unity of nature."<sup>13</sup>

Augustine also rejected the idea of an economic hierarchy within the Trinity. He claimed that the three persons of the Trinity "share the inseparable equality one substance present in divine

unity.”<sup>14</sup> Because the three persons are one in their inner life, this means that for Augustine their works in the world are one. For this reason, it is an impossibility for Augustine to speak of the Father commanding and the Son obeying as if there could be a conflict of wills within the eternal Trinity.

John Calvin also spoke at length about the doctrine of the Trinity. Like Athanasius and Augustine before him, he concluded that Philippians 2:4-11 prescribed how scripture was to be read correctly. For him the Son’s obedience is limited to the incarnation. It is indicative of his true humanity assumed for our salvation.<sup>15</sup>

Much of this work is summed up in the Athanasian Creed. This creed stresses the unity of the Trinity and the equality of the persons. It ascribes equal divinity, majesty, and authority to all three persons. All three are said to be “almighty” and “Lord” (no subordination in authority; “none is before or after another” (no hierarchical ordering); and “none is greater, or less than another” (no subordination in being or nature). Thus, since the divine persons of the Trinity act with one will, there is no possibility of hierarchy-inequality in the Trinity.

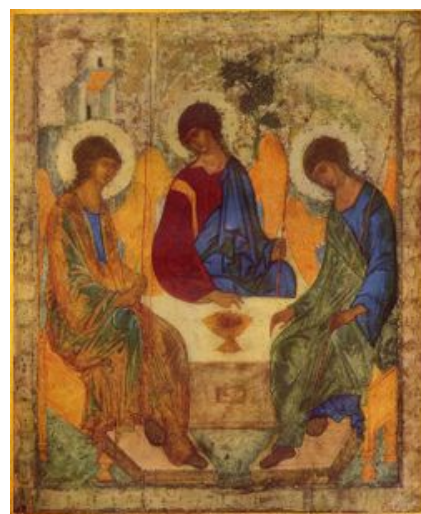
Since the 1980’s, many evangelical theologians have come to the conclusion that the members of the Trinity may be economically unequal while remaining ontologically equal. This theory was put forward by George W. Knight III in his 1977 book *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*, states that the Son of God is eternally subordinated in authority to God the Father.<sup>16</sup> This conclusion was used as a means of supporting the main thesis of his book: that women are permanently subordinated in authority to their husbands in the home and to male leaders in the church, despite being ontologically equal. Subscribers to this theory insist that the Father has the role of giving commands and the Son has the role of obeying them.

## **Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant distinctions**

*The Holy Trinity* by Andrei Rublev, using the theme of the "Hospitality of Abraham."

The three angels symbolize the Trinity.

The Western (Roman Catholic) tradition is more prone to make positive statements concerning the relationship of persons in the Trinity. It should be noted that explanations of the Trinity are not the same thing as the doctrine itself; nevertheless the Augustinian West is inclined to think in philosophical terms concerning the rationality of God's being, and is prone on this basis to be more open than the East to seek philosophical formulations which make the doctrine more intelligible.



The Christian East, for its part, correlates ecclesiology and Trinitarian doctrine, and seeks to understand the doctrine of the Trinity via the experience of the Church, which it understands to

be "an ikon of the Trinity" and therefore, when St. Paul writes concerning Christians that all are "members one of another," Eastern Christians in turn understand this as also applying to the Divine Persons.

The principal disagreement between Western and Eastern Christianity on the Trinity has been the relationship of the Holy Spirit with the other two hypostases. The original credal formulation of the Council of Constantinople was that the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father." While this phrase is still used unaltered in the Eastern Churches, it became customary in parts of the Western Church, beginning with the provincial Third Council of Toledo in 589, to add the clause "and the Son" (Latin *filioque*) into the Creed. Although this was explicitly rejected by Pope Leo III, it was finally used in a Papal Mass by Pope Benedict VIII in 1014, thus becoming official throughout the Roman Catholic Church. The Eastern Churches object to it on both ecclesiological and theological grounds.

Anglicans have made a commitment in the Lambeth Conference, to provide for the use of the creed without the filioque clause in future revisions of their liturgies, in deference to the issues of Conciliar authority raised by the Orthodox.

Most Protestant groups that use the creed also include the filioque clause. However, the issue is usually not controversial among them because their conception is often less exact than is discussed above (exceptions being the Presbyterian Westminster Confession 2:3, the London Baptist Confession 2:3, and the Lutheran Augsburg Confession 1:1–6, which specifically address those issues). The clause is often understood by Protestants to mean that the Spirit is sent from the Father, by the Son, a conception which is not controversial in either Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. A representative view of Protestant Trinitarian theology is more difficult to provide, given the diverse and decentralized nature of the various Protestant churches.

## **Naming the Persons**

Some feminist theologians refer to the persons of the Holy Trinity with gender-neutral language, such as "Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer (or Sanctifier)." This is a recent formulation, which seeks to redefine the Trinity in terms of three roles in salvation or relationships with us, not eternal identities or relationships with each other. Since, however, each of the three divine persons participates in the acts of creation, redemption, and sustaining, traditionalist Christians reject this formulation as suggesting a new variety of Modalism. Some theologians prefer the alternate terminology of "Source, and Word, and Holy Spirit."

Responding to feminist concerns, orthodox theology has noted the following: a) the names "Father" and "Son" are clearly analogical, since all Trinitarians would agree that God is *beyond* all gender; b) that, in translating the Creed, for example, "born" and "begotten" are equally valid translations of the Greek word "gennaō," which refers to the eternal generation of the Son by the Father: hence, one may refer to God "the Father who gives birth"; this is further supported by patristic writings which compare the "birth" of the Divine Word "before all ages" (i.e., eternally) from the Father with his birth in time from the Virgin Mary; c) Using "Son" to refer to the Second Divine Person is most proper only when referring to the Incarnate Word, Jesus, who is clearly male; d) in Semitic languages, such as Hebrew and Aramaic, the noun translated "spirit" is

grammatically feminine. Images of God's Spirit in Scripture are also often feminine, as with the Spirit "brooding" over the primordial chaos in Genesis 1, or grammatically feminine, such as a dove.

## **Logical Coherency**

On the face of it, the doctrine of the Trinity seems to be logically incoherent as it appears to imply that identity is not transitive—"for the Father is identical with God, the Son is identical with God, and the Father is not identical with the Son." Recently, there have been two philosophical attempts to defend the logical coherency of Trinity, one by Richard Swinburne and the other by Peter Geach et al. The formulation suggested by the former philosopher is free from logical incoherency, but it is debatable whether this formulation is consistent with historical orthodoxy. Regarding the formulation suggested by the latter philosopher, not all philosophers would agree with its logical coherency. Richard Swinburne has suggested that "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be thought of as numerically distinct Gods." Peter Geach suggested that "a coherent statement of the doctrine is possible on the assumption that identity is 'always relative to a sortal term.'<sup>[44]</sup> Christians admit that the Trinity is beyond our finite understanding to understand completely, as God is beyond our finite understanding.

On the other hand, some Messianic groups, the Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventists, and even some scholars within (but not necessarily representing) denominations such as Southern Baptist Convention view the Trinity as being comparable to the concept of a family, hence the familial terms of Father, Son, and the implied role of Mother for the Holy Spirit. The Hebrew word for "God," Elohim, which has an inherent plurality, has the function as a surname as in "Yahweh Elohim." The seeming contradiction of Elohim being "one" is solved by the fact that the Hebrew word for "one" is "*echad*" meaning compound unity, harmonious in direction and purpose; not "yachid" which means singularity.

## **Ambivalence to Trinitarian doctrine**

Some Protestant Christians, particularly some members of the restoration movement, are ambivalent about the doctrine of the Trinity. While not specifically rejecting Trinitarianism or presenting an alternative doctrine of the Godhead and God's relationship with humanity, they are neither dogmatic about the Trinity nor hold it as a test of true Christian faith. Some, like the Society of Friends (Quakers) and Christian Unitarians, may reject all doctrinal or creedal tests of true faith. Others, like some members of the restorationist Churches of Christ, in keeping with a distinctive understanding of "Scripture alone," say that since the doctrine of the Trinity is not clearly articulated in the Bible, it cannot be required for salvation. Still others may look to church tradition and say that there has always been a Christian tradition that faithfully followed Jesus without such a doctrine.

## Unorthodox Trinitarianism

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) identify the Trinity (or Godhead) as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, but they regard these three as one in purpose and unity, but not in identity.

The Trinity in Christian Science is found in the unity of God, the Christ, and the Holy Ghost or—"God the Father-Mother; Christ the spiritual idea of sonship; divine Science or the Holy Comforter." The same in essence, the Trinity indicates "the intelligent relation of God to man and the universe."<sup>17</sup>

## Non-trinitarianism

Some Christian traditions either reject the doctrine of the Trinity, or consider it unimportant. Persons and groups espousing this position generally do not refer to themselves as "Non-trinitarians." They can vary in both their reasons for rejecting traditional teaching on the Trinity, and in the way they describe God.

## Criticism and defense

Following is an outline of basic objections raised by critics of the Trinity and a theologian's defense of each:<sup>18</sup>

1. **The word Trinity is not found in the Bible.** Response: This has no bearing on whether or not the Bible teaches the doctrine. The word "monotheism" is not in the Bible yet the concept is clearly taught in scripture.
2. **There is no verse in the Bible that teaches the Trinity.** Response: Various verses teach that the Father is called God Phil. 1:2, the Son is called God (John 1:1,14, and the Holy Spirit is called God (Acts 5:3-4). There are verses that suggest the Trinity since they mention all three together: Matt. 3:16-17. Matt. 28:19, 2 Cor.13:14
3. **The Trinity is three separate Gods.** Response: The Trinity doctrine, by definition, is monotheistic. The **Shema** of the Old Testament (Deut. 6:4) is seen in the New Testament ("The Lord our God is one." Mark 12:29). The New Testament knows God *as* Father, *as* Son, and *as* Holy Spirit.
4. **Three gods cannot be one God.** Response: The Trinity is not three gods. The Trinity is one God in three persons.
5. **Three persons cannot be one person.** Response: The Doctrine of the Trinity does not state that God is one person. The Trinity is one God in three persons.
6. **The Trinity is illogical.** Response: There is no logical reason why the Trinity cannot be a possibility. An analogy would be time which is past, present, and future. Another example is a woman can be **wife** to her husband, **daughter** to her parents, **mother** to her children, **sister** to her siblings.

7. **The Trinity is a pagan idea.** Response: Other religions have included triads (three separate gods) in their theology. The Trinity is one God. There are many verses in the OT that contain plural references to the one God: 1) Gen 1:1-26; NIV Job 33:4; 2) Gen. 17:1; Gen. 18:1; Ex. 6:2-3; 24:9-11; 33:20; Num. 12:6-8; Psalm 104:30; 3) Gen. 19:24 with Amos 4:10-11; Is.48:16 Furthermore, mere similarity in appearance between two beliefs does not dictate that one belief came from the other.
8. **Jesus cannot be God because He did not know all things, slept, grew in wisdom, said the Father is greater than I, etc.** Response: This objection fails to take into consideration the Hypostatic Union which states that Jesus had two natures: divine and human. As a man, Jesus cooperated with the limitations of His humanity. Jesus would sleep, grow in wisdom, and say the Father was greater than He. These do not negate that Jesus was divine since they reference His humanity and not His divinity.
9. **Jesus cannot be God because this would mean that God died and God can't die.** Response: Jesus' sacrifice was divine, as well as human, in nature. Jesus died. But, we know that God cannot die. So, if the divine nature did not die, how can it be said that Jesus' sacrifice was divine in nature? The answer is that the attributes of divinity, as well as humanity, were ascribed to the person Jesus. Therefore, since the person of Jesus died, His death was of infinite value because the properties of divinity were ascribed to the person in His death. This is called the *Communicatio Idiomatum*.

## Non-trinitarian groups

Since Trinitarianism is central to so much of church doctrine, nontrinitarians have mostly been groups that existed before the Nicene Creed was codified in 325 or are groups that developed after the Reformation, when many church doctrines came into question <sup>19</sup>

In the early centuries of Christian history adoptionists, Arians, Ebionites, Gnostics, Marcionites, and others held non-trinitarian beliefs. The Nicene Creed raised the issue of the relationship between Jesus' divine and human natures. Monophysitism ("one nature") and monothelism ("one will") were heretical attempts to explain this relationship. During more than a thousand years of Trinitarian orthodoxy, formal nontrinitarianism, i.e., a doctrine held by a church, group, or movement, was rare, but it did appear. For example, among the Cathars of the 13th century. The Protestant Reformation of the 1500s also brought tradition into question. At first, nontrinitarians were executed (such as Servetus), or forced to keep their beliefs secret (such as Isaac Newton). The eventual establishment of religious freedom, however, allowed nontrinitarians to more easily preach their beliefs, and the 19th century saw the establishment of several nontrinitarian groups in North America and elsewhere. These include Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Unitarians. Twentieth-century non-trinitarian movements include *Iglesia ni Cristo* and the Unification Church. Non-trinitarian groups differ from one another in their views of Jesus Christ, depicting him variously as a divine being second only to God the Father (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses), Yahweh of the Old Testament in human form, God (but not eternally God), Son of God but inferior to the Father (versus co-equal), prophet, or simply a holy man.

Of notable exception are Oneness Pentecostals, who affirm that God came to Earth as man (i.e., manifested Himself) in the man Jesus Christ. Oneness Pentecostals fully affirm, like Trinitarians, that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. One can understand Oneness Pentecostals by replacing the Trinitarian term 'person' with the term 'mode' or 'manifestation' when discussing the Christian Godhead. Many Oneness Pentecostals can recite the first Nicene Creed, as it rejects Arianism, yet preserves the oneness of God and divinity of Jesus Christ.

Largely taken from the Wikipedia article **The Trinity**, with modifications and additions.  
accessed 8 Oct 2007

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<sup>1</sup> Some groups, such as Oneness Pentecostals, demur from the Trinitarian view on baptism. For them, the fact that Acts does not use the formula outweighs all other considerations, and is a liturgical guide for their own practice. For this reason, they often focus on the baptisms in Acts, citing many authoritative theological works. For example, Kittel is cited where he is speaking of the phrase "in the name" (Greek: εἰς τὸ ὄνομα) as used in the baptisms recorded in Acts:

The distinctive feature of Christian baptism is that it is administered in Christ (εἰς Χριστόν), or in the name of Christ (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Χριστοῦ). (Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 1:539.)

The formula (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα) seems rather to have been a tech. term in Hellenistic commerce ("to the account"). In both cases the use of the phrase is understandable, since the account bears the name of the one who owns it, and in baptism the name of Christ is pronounced, invoked and confessed by the one who baptises or the one baptised (Acts 22:16) or both. (Kittel, 1:540.)

Those who place great emphasis on the baptisms in Acts often likewise question the authenticity of Matthew 28:19 in its present form. A. Ploughman, apparently following F. C. Conybeare, has questioned the authenticity of Matthew 28:19, however, the majority of scholars of New Testament textual criticism accept the authenticity of the passage. There are no variant manuscripts regarding the formula, and the extant form of the passage is attested in the Didache and other patristic works of the first and second centuries, for many textual critical scholars this is sufficient evidence to prove authenticity. However, the fact that this version may be what was recorded in the original text of the gospel still begs the theological question as to whether these are the *ipsissima verba* (*very words*) of Jesus – or even the *ipsissima vox* (*very voice*)! It does seem to many theologians, some of whom would in other spheres be quite conservative, that this formula is a reading back of the early practice of the church – and incidentally, evidence for a later rather than an earlier dating to the gospel.

<sup>2</sup> 7:1, 3

<sup>3</sup> *Epistle to the Philippians*, 2:13

<sup>4</sup> *On Baptism* 8:6, *Against Praxeas*, 26:2

<sup>5</sup> *Against Noetus*, 1:14

<sup>6</sup> *Seventh Council of Carthage*

<sup>7</sup> *A Sectional Confession of Faith*, 13:2

<sup>8</sup> Baptism "in the name of" need not necessarily be taken as referring to a formula used in the ceremony in either Matthew or Acts; it may merely indicate the establishment of a relationship, corresponding to the phrases "baptized into Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:3) and "baptized into Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Compare "baptized ... into John's baptism" (Acts 19:3), "baptized in the name of Paul" (1 Corinthians 1:13), "baptized into Moses" (1 Corinthians 10:2).

<sup>9</sup> Kittel, 3:108

<sup>10</sup> K Rahner, *The Trinity* (Herder & Herder:1970) p22

<sup>11</sup> Phillip Cary, *Priscilla Papers* Vol. 20, No. 4, Autumn 2006

<sup>12</sup> Athanasius, 3.29 (p. 409)

<sup>13</sup> Basil "Letters", NPNF, Vol 8, 189.7 (p. 32)

<sup>14</sup> Hill, *De Trinitate*, 2.15

<sup>15</sup> P. van Buren, *Christ in Our Place* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 38

<sup>16</sup> George Knight III, *New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1977)

<sup>17</sup> Eddy, Mary Baker; *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*

<sup>18</sup> Slick, Matt. "The Trinity, the Hypostatic Union, and the Communicatio Idiomatum," *Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry*, 2007. <http://www.carm.org/doctrine/3.htm> Accessed 09-15-2007

<sup>19</sup> See indulgences, particular judgment, primacy of the Pope, purgatory, transubstantiation, etc.