

## The Trinity

*"Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD..." (Dt 6:4; Mk 12:29).*

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:19.*

- I. Does God Exist or is There a God?**
- A. The Argument from Change
- B. The Argument from Efficient Causality
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- D. The Argument from Degrees of Perfection
- E. The Design Argument
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U. Pascal's Wager

## II. Nature of God As Defined by Different Religions.

A. Are Adonai, El Shaddai, Shekinah, Lord, Yahweh and Allah just human names for the same God?

### DIVINE IMMANENCE

the omnipresence of God permeating all creation. It is the interpenetration of the divine essence and activity within all created beings. In the Christian faith this immanence does not deny but complements the divine transcendence.

### Islam

#### Vatican Council II (Lumen Gentium):

1. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church tells us that the “plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Mohammedans, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind.” (Lumen Gentium 16)
2. Second Vatican Council is not actually making a definitive statement on that issue. It is saying that both Catholics and Muslims adore the one and merciful God, and while that clearly does indicate a certain commonality, there can be no doubt about one thing it certainly doesn't mean: that Muslims and Catholics adore the same God in every particular, for Catholics do not believe that Muhammad was a prophet or the Qur'an is God's Word, and Muslims do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God or the Savior of the world, or that God is Triune. The same may be said of Jews, of course: they, along with Muslims, reject the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the divinity of Christ, and yet clearly Catholics and Jews worship the same God. This, however, is because Christianity began as a form of Judaism and is in a certain sense an extension of it, affirming faith in the same Old Testament Scriptures, the same prophets, and many points of belief.
3. Vatican II was a large-scale attempt to restore relationships that had been broken for centuries and build new bridges of trust where groups had been divided from the Church by centuries of mistrust, suspicion and outright conflict. Consequently it emphasized common ground rather than differences, unlike every ecumenical council that preceded it.
4. That is all that Vatican II is really saying about Muslims: they're monotheists, they say they belong to the religion of Abraham, and they revere Jesus, but not as the Son of God, and His Blessed Mother.

5. The messages are not simply inspired human words, but an actual copy of the divinely preserved “Mother of the Book” found in heaven.
6. Islamic Conception of God is a being who acts capriciously, autocratically and evilly:
  - i. “I visit My punishment on whomever I wish.” Q 7:156.
  - ii. “Surely God leads astray whomever He pleases and guides to Himself whoever turns (to Him).” Q 13:27.
  - iii. “Those who deny Our signs are deaf and dumb, in a manifold darkness. Allah leads into error whomever He wishes, and whomever He wishes He puts him on a straight path” (Q 6:39).
  - iv. In Qur’an 27:4 it is God who declares: “As for those who do not believe in the Hereafter, We have made their deeds seem decorous (zayyanna) to them, and so they are bewildered.” He purposefully deceives them, for He does not love them: “God does not love any sinful unbeliever” (Q 2:276) and “God does not love the faithless” (Q 3:32). One passage (Q 40:10) even suggests that God hates the unbelievers (depending on how one interprets the Arabic word maqt).
  - v. Islam believes Allah is a monad, that’s a single entity, existing entirely on their own. The Bible teaches that God is Trinitarian, one God, three persons, beautifully existing in a perfect, intimate relationship with each other. In contrast, Allah is singular, not dependent on anyone, or anything else. But that creates a problem:

The God of Islam is undivided and singular. He is the completely other creator and judge to whom humanity owes worship and submission. The result of such otherness is that God himself is unknowable in any intimate, relational sense. (Matthew Bennett - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/do-christians-muslims-worship-same-god/>)

So, he can choose to love but he might not. It’s not part of his essence, and this produces real problems and insecurity. For example, you can’t trust Allah, he is described in the Qur’an as the Father of lies:

But they (the Jews) were deceptive, and Allah was deceptive, for Allah is the best of deceivers S. 3:54; cf. 8:30

In contrast, because the God of the Bible is trinitarian, one God three persons, that means he eternally exists in a beautiful, intense, loving, communicating perfect relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit.

And when God created us in his image, he made us like him, able to love, communicate, and have relationships. The God of the Bible is love, he doesn't choose to love, it's part of his essence. The same can be said of all his character traits, compassion, just, merciful. The God of the Bible IS all his attributes all of the time. Whereas Allah isn't – he chooses what he'll be like at any given moment – there is no consistency or reliability inherently within Allah.

Those differences are not just about formal doctrinal structure either. Once you lose the Trinity and once you lose the atonement, you lose some very important things about God. In 1 John 4, John tells us that God IS love. This is not just about something he does but a perspective on who he is. This is an eternal attribute. Yet, this poses the questions:

- a. Who did God love before Creation? If himself, is he a narcissist?
- b. If he needed to create us in order to have someone to love does that mean he is dependent/contingent upon us for his being?
- c. If he started to love when he made the world, doesn't that mean that he must have changed.

So for God to be sovereign, unchanging, eternal and at the same time to be love, then we need the Trinity. Without the atonement, we lose something else concerning his love. We lose the basis for mercy and compassion that is also just. Without the Trinity and the atonement, we cannot call God "father" and we cannot have a God who is just and merciful. Whilst all of those things were not fully known in the Old Testament, the hints and clues were in place so that faith in the promise meant that people were engaging with the one true and living God.

So, we can't say that we worship the same God. I think that the dilemma we have here is that we are trying to picture the one true God and then alongside him an actual other being, real or imaginary that we can choose to believe in and worship instead of Yahweh. However, that is not what the danger is because God never has had nor could have true rivals, even imaginary ones. Therefore, when humans turn away from the worship of the true and living God, they turn either to images of creatures (most idols) or they turn away by accepting a distorted and diminished likeness of the true and living God. It is helpful at this point to remember that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve did both. They accepted a distorted image of the true God by listening to Satan's lies and by trusting Satan's words,

they followed the words of a creature giving it the honour, worship and obedience that belonged to God alone.

### Mormonism

1. Mormons believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three different entities who are “one in mission”. Their doctrine about Trinity is that the teaching of the New Testament holds that there is a Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit; three dissimilar beings.
2. The second difference pertains to the religions’ perception of God; for Mormons, God has a physical body, and He is the Heavenly Father. This belief is based on many biblical passages such as when Stephen saw Jesus standing at the hand of God or when Moses spoke to God “face to face”. He is referred to as the “Heavenly Father” for “he is the Father of our spirit.”
3. Another difference is in how they define hell. According to Mormons, hell is an unpleasant spirit prison that is to be entered only by the most obstinately wicked. Do wicked things, be like Satan, and you’ll end up in hell. Conversely, Catholics believe hell to be a place or a state of being of eternal torment and distance from God. It is the non-believers and absence of God in oneself that defines hell.
4. The two religions’ beliefs in afterlife are also dissimilar. Mormons believe that when they die, everyone goes to the spirit world and undergoes preparation; good souls in the spirit paradise, and the wicked in the spirit prison, and upon resurrection, reunite with the body. They believe in a second chance after death. Catholics believe that we don’t have an afterlife; souls either go to Hell or the Kingdom of God. Many devotees’ souls, as they believe, will undergo purification in Purgatory before entering Heaven.
5. Here again, is a fundamental difference between Christianity and Islam. Central to Muslim theology is a rejection of anything that can lead to idolatry, since nothing is like God, not even human reason or the order of creation. According to the Qur’an, humans are created to serve God and submit to God’s will. In its account of the creation of human beings, the Qur’an relates that God has a special relationship with humanity. He has communicated with them through revelations in every generation, and even commanded the angels to bow down to the man he created from clay. Yet, Muslims deny the notion that humans were created in the image of God and instead emphasize their creatureliness. Islam is the religion of “submission” to God. The name “muslim” means “one who submits.”

### Catholicism

1. The Catholic Church teaches that God is a substance or essence different from any other being.

2. God does not just have being; He is being itself. He gives being to everything else.
3. God is uncreated subsisting being. This means that God is the eternally subsisting being. God, then, is not only pure spirit, He is being itself subsisting immaterial at the summit of all things and transcending any limits imposed by either space or matter or a finite spiritual essence. Now, because God is the self-subsisting being, the infinite ocean of spiritual being, unlimited, unmaterialized, He is distinguished from every material or spiritual creature. The divine essence is existence itself, it alone of necessity exists. No creature is self-existent; none can say: I am being, truth, life, etc. Jesus alone among men said: "I am the truth and the life," which was the equivalent to saying, "I am God."
4. As uncreated, subsisting being God is beyond our categories or distinctions of being. [Beyond the Aristotelian categories such as
  - i. Substance
  - ii. Quantity
  - iii. Quality
  - iv. Relative
  - v. Place
  - vi. Time
  - vii. Position
  - viii. Having
  - ix. Acting Upon
  - x. Being affected
4.
  - i. Old Testament – "I AM that I AM" (Exodus 3:14).
  - ii. New Testament - "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

Apophatic Theology: Via negative God cannot be said to exist in the way that creation exists, i.e. that God is uncreated.

God is not absolutely unknowable, and yet it is true that we cannot define Him adequately. But we can conceive and name Him in an "analogical way". The perfections manifested by creatures are in God, not merely nominally (equivocal) but really and positively, since He is their source. Yet, they are not in Him as they are in the creature, with a mere difference of degree, nor even with a mere specific or generic difference (univocal), for there is no common concept including the finite and the Infinite. They are really in Him in a supereminent manner (eminenter) which is wholly incommensurable with their mode of being in creatures. We can conceive and express these perfections only by an analogy; not by an analogy of proportion, for this analogy rests on a participation in a common

concept, and, as already said, there is no element common to the finite and the Infinite; but by an analogy of proportionality.

Attributes of God:

1. Infinite
2. One
3. Simple
4. Eternal
5. Omnipresence.
6. Unchanging or Immutable.
7. Omniscient.
8. Persons (not a force or thing)
9. Impassible.
10. God is Love.
11. God is Truth.
12. God
11. Providential Will. Providence may be defined as the scheme in the Divine mind by which all things treated are ordered and guided efficiently to a common end or purpose (ratio perductionis rerum in finem in mente divina existens). It includes an act of intellect and an act of will, in other words knowledge and power. And that there is such a thing as Divine Providence by which the entire universe is ruled clearly follows from the fact that God is the author of all things and that order and purpose must characterize the action of an intelligent creator. Nor is any truth more insistently proclaimed in revelation. What the author of Wisdom (xiv, 3) says of a particular thing is applicable to the universe as a whole: "But your providence, O Father, governs it", and no more beautiful illustration of the same truth has ever been given than that given by Christ Himself when He instances God's care for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:25 sq.). But to rational creatures God's providential care is extended in a very special way, yet not so as to do away with the utility and efficacy of prayer, whether for temporal or spiritual favours (Matthew 7:8), nor to disturb or override the efficiency of secondary causes. It is in and through secondary causes that

providence ordinarily works, and no miracle, as a rule, is to be expected in answer to prayer.

Predestination and reprobation are those special parts of Divine Providence which deal specially with man's salvation or damnation in the present supernatural order.

Predestination is the foreknowledge on the part of God of those who will de facto be saved and the preparation and bestowal of the means by which salvation is obtained, while reprobation is the foreknowledge of those who will de facto be damned and the permission of this eventuality by God.

In both cases an act of the intellect (infallible foreknowledge), and an act of the will are supposed; but whereas in predestination the antecedent and consequent will is the same, in reprobation God wills consequently what He does not antecedently will at all but only permits, namely, the eternal punishment of the sinner.

### **III. Biblical Evidence for the Trinity.**

The dogma of the Trinity was defined in two states. At the First Council of Nicea in 325 declaring the divinity of the Son and the First Council of Constantinople in 381 which defined the divinity of Holy Spirit

#### Old Testament

- A. Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.”
- B. Genesis 1:26 – “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’”
- C. Genesis 11:6-7 – “And the Lord said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’”
- D. 1 Samuel 16:13 – “Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.”
- E. Daniel 7:13-14 – “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and



was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

- F. In Genesis 18, for example, Abraham and Sarah are visited by three men, one of whom seems to be YHWH himself (Genesis 18:1, 9–22).

### New Testament

- A. Matthew 28:19 (RSV) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. “Name” and not “Names.”
- B. Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, . . . (cf. 61:2; Jesus applies this to Himself in Lk 4:16-30)
- C. Luke 3:21-22 . . . when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, [22] and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.” (cf. Mt 3:13-17)
- D. John 15:26 But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; (cf. 14:26)
- E. Acts 2:33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. (cf. 7:55)
- F. Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son.
- G. Romans 15:30 I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, (cf. Eph 2:18)
- H. 1 Corinthians 6:11 . . . justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (cf. 1 Pet 1:2)
- I. 2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- J. Is the Holy Spirit directly referred to as God? Yes; here is the best single passage along those lines:

Acts 5:3-4 But Peter said, “Anani’as, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? [4] . . . You have not lied to men but to God.” . . .

#### Resurrection, Covenant, Sanctification, Creator, Indwelling

1. Who raised Jesus from the dead? Well, it was **God the Father** (Gal 1:1; 1 Thess 1:10); it was also **Jesus** Himself (Jn 2:19; 10:17-18); and it was the **Holy Spirit** (Rom 8:11).
2. Who gave the new covenant? The **Father** (Jer 31:33-34); **Jesus** (Heb 8:1-13; 10:29; 12:24; 13:20); the **Holy Spirit** (Heb 10:15-17).
3. Who sanctifies believers? The **Father** (1 Thess 5:23); **Jesus** (Heb 13:12); the **Holy Spirit** (1 Pet 1:2).
4. Who is the creator? The **Father** (Gen 1:1; Is 44:24; Acts 17:24; Eph 3:9); **Jesus** (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:8, 10); the **Holy Spirit** (Job 33:4). Job 33:4.
5. Who indwells believers? The **Father** (1 Cor 3:16a; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Jn 3:24); **Jesus** (Jn 6:56; Rom 8:10; Eph 3:17); the **Holy Spirit** (Jn 14:16-17; Rom 8:9, 11; 1 Cor 3:16b). The Bible even describes this in terms of different combinations: Father and Son (Jn 14:23); Father and Holy Spirit (Eph 2:21-22; 1 Jn 3:24); Son and Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6).

What one Person does, the others also do in complete agreement and unity, and the Persons “interpenetrate” each other. Christian theology has 50 cent words for this: circumincession (Latin) or perichoresis (Greek).

This view of revelation is very different from that of Christians, who hold that the definitive self-disclosure of God is found in the Person of Jesus Christ. The Holy Scripture is believed to be inspired and free from all error in regard to matters necessary for salvation. Nonetheless, it is recognized by the Catholic Church that God uses human beings (with all of their limitations) and events of history to communicate His divine will. Revelation is a dynamic relationship established between God and humanity in the Incarnation, not a fixed written moral code simply to be applied in a given situation.

#### **IV. Trinitarian Heresies.**

- A. Monarchianism. Only one person in God. If there is only one person in God, then the Son of God did not become man except as the embodiment of an adopted son of God. According to the Adoptionists, Christ was a mere man, though miraculously conceived of the Virgin Mary. At Christ's baptism, He was endowed

by the Father with extraordinary power and was then specially adopted by God as son. Among others, the best known Adoptionist was Paul of Samosata.

Another group of Monarchians took the view that Christ was divine. But then it was the Father who became incarnate, who suffered and died for the salvation of the world. Those favoring this idea were called Patripassionists, which literally means "Father-sufferers," meaning that Christ was only symbolically the son of God, since it was the Father Himself who became man. On this hypothesis, of course, the Father, too, is only symbolically Father, since He does not have a natural Son.

- B. Modalism. God's being or essence is one in one person who expresses himself in different modes. God manifests Himself, in the sense of reveals Himself, as the Father in creation, as the Son in redemption, and as the Holy Spirit in sanctification. There are not really three distinct persons in God but only three ways of considering God from the effects He has produced in the world.
- C. Subordinationism. This heresy admits there are three persons in God but denies that the second and third persons are consubstantial with the Father. Therefore it denies their true divinity. There have been different forms of Subordinationism, and they are still very much alive, though not all easily recognizable as Trinitarian errors in which the mind tries to comprehend how one single infinitely perfect divine nature can be three distinct persons, each equally and completely God.

The Arians, named after the Alexandrian priest Arius, held that the Logos or Word of God does not exist from eternity. Consequently there could not have been a generation of the Son from the Father but only by the Father. The Son is a creature of the Father and to that extent a "son of God." He came into existence from nothing, having been willed by the Father, although as "the first born of all creation," the Son came into the world before anything else was created.

- C. Tritheism. At the other extreme to saying there was only one person in God was the heresy that held (and holds) there are really three gods.
  - i. According to John Philoponus (565 AD), nature and person are to be identified, or, in his language *ousia* = *hypostasis*. There are then three persons in God who are three individuals of the Godhead, just as we would speak of three human beings and say there are three individuals of the species man. Thus instead of admitting a numerical unity of the divine nature among the three persons in God, this theory postulates only a specific unity, i.e., one species but not one numerical existence.
  - ii. In the theory of Roscelin (1120 AD), a Nominalist, only the individual is real. So the three persons in God are actually three separate realities. St. Anselm wrote extensively against this error.

iii. Gilbert of Poitiers (1154 AD) said there is a real difference between God and the Divinity. As a result there would be a quaternity, i.e., three persons and the Godhead.

iv. Abbot Joachim of Fiore (1202 AD) claimed that there is only a collective unity of the three persons in God, to form the kind of community we have among human beings, i.e., a gathering of like-minded persons joined together by their freedom to work together on a common enterprise.

## V. Conclusion.

Why is it so important to get the theology right? What difference does it make? Aren't these all equally valid ways of viewing God? What is the Trinity the central and ultimate mystery of our faith?

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. What is that blessed life? It matters because we are created in the image and likeness of God. At the end of the ages, we will have a life in God. Jesus in His High Priestly Prayer in John's Gospel, teaches us: And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth. "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. (John 17:20-21).

What is God? The Trinity is relational. This means, as the Apostle John tells us: "God is love." (1 John 4:8). Saint Augustine explains the Trinity in this way: if you see love, you see the three - the one who loves (the Father), the one who is loved (the Son) and the love itself (the Holy Spirit).

Love cannot exist in the abstract; you cannot say "I love" without saying what or whom you love; so likewise, God's love is of and for something, except that God is entirely self-sufficient. What he loves is himself, and in that love, there is both perfect unity and perfect relationship. Now we can begin to see why the Catechism speaks of this mystery as central not only to our faith but also to our life. When you love aright, you do so by means of God, who is love; just what kind of love is revealed by Jesus Christ, and we can read about it in the gospels. Jesus also invites us to share in this same love, to be his friends (Jn 15:15) and to join his fellowship (1 Jn 1 :3). God, therefore, is the **end** goal of our love, the **means** by which we love, and has provided an example of **how** to love. God, in himself, is the only true version of what is so often referred to as "unconditional love," because only the Trinity loves wholly, perfectly, without reservation and without ulterior motives. It is precisely this love which God offers to us in Christ, because Christ is not simply a messenger or an angel, but he himself is God, the **very incarnation of love**. To put it succinctly, the Trinity is the central mystery

of Christian life because love - or charity - is both the goal and the means of the entire Christian life.

After all, what we want most, even on a purely human level, is to love and be loved, to know and be known. We want to have perfect harmony within ourselves and with everyone else - be they friends, family, coworkers or strangers - without losing who we are uniquely. We want to love our spouse with all that we have, and we want them to love us for who we are too. Virtually every love song gives voice to this desire in one form or another. And so, as it turns out, what we want (perfect unity and perfect relationship) is who God is, even as we recognize that human friendships are an incomplete reflection of the Triune life of God.

## **VI. Catechism.**

- A. 261 The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life. God alone can make it known to us by revealing himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- B. 262 The Incarnation of God's Son reveals that God is the eternal Father and that the Son is consubstantial with the Father, which means that, in the Father and with the Father the Son is one and the same God.
- C. 263 The mission of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in the name of the Son (Jn 14:26) and by the Son "from the Father" (Jn 15:26), reveals that, with them, the Spirit is one and the same God. "With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified" (Nicene Creed).
- D. 264 "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father as the first principle and, by the eternal gift of this to the Son, from the communion of both the Father and the Son" (St. Augustine, De Trin. 15, 26, 47: PL 42, 1095).
- E. 265 By the grace of Baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", we are called to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity, here on earth in the obscurity of faith, and after death in eternal light (cf. Paul VI, CPG # 9).
- F. 266 "Now this is the Catholic faith: We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance; for the person of the Father is one, the Son's is another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal" (Athanasian Creed: DS 75; ND 16).
- G. 267 Inseparable in what they are, the divine persons are also inseparable in what they do. But within the single divine operation each shows forth what is proper to him in the Trinity, especially in the divine missions of the Son's Incarnation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.