

Many of the attributes ascribed to God within the Christian understanding of Theology Proper would be shared with other monotheistic religions. Judaism and Islam would attest to the holiness of God. They would agree that God is transcendent and benevolent. However, there is one important distinction between Christian Theology Proper and other monotheistic religions: namely, the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is a uniquely Christian teaching.

Often times Christians seem to be embarrassed by the doctrine of the Trinity. The simplicity of a single God found in the Judaic and Islamic views of God, along with the philosophical clarity of a non-Trinitarian God that makes it easy to believe and understand in such a God. However, because it seems to be biblical, we have to believe in it. But we won't emphasize it or consider it foundational.

However, Trinitarianism is not a doctrine to be tolerated. The Trinity should not be taught alongside other doctrines of the Christian faith. It should be the center point of our Christian faith. It is the doctrine which most readily defines orthodoxy and which gives us an insight into the beauty, mystery and depths of God which non-Trinitarians will never understand.

## I. Biblical Teaching on the Trinity

### A. Jesus' Teaching Regarding the Trinity

#### 1. Jesus On the Oneness of God

Jesus affirmed that God is one. When asked what is the most important commandment in the Old Testament, He affirms Deuteronomy 6:4.

*(Mark 12:29) Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord.'"*

#### 2. Jesus' relationship with the Father

##### a. *John 8:51-59*

i. *The context* – Jesus is in a heated discussion with the Pharisees and other Jews. Jesus has been trying to show them their sinfulness and their own need for salvation. Furthermore that by believing in Him, they “will never taste of death” (v. 52). The Jews respond by stating that Abraham and the prophets died, and question Jesus as to who exactly he thinks he is. Does he really regard himself as more than Abraham (vs. 52-53)? Jesus' response astounds these people. In verse 56 He states, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” This was a preposterous claim. Jesus was a relatively young man who was claiming to have seen Abraham. The Jews believe Jesus is insane for making this statement.

ii. *The claim* – Jesus' response is an even more preposterous (or shall we say blasphemous) statement: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” Note, he does not say that before Abraham was born, he was. He said I AM. He is specifically using this to assert his claim that He is Yahweh, the Great I AM. He is claiming to be God himself, in the flesh, having existed from eternity past, self-existent, independent, and here willing to reach down and redeem His people.

iii. *The response* – The Jews understand this claim and immediately seek to execute this blasphemer. But what should our response to this be? What is the relationship that Jesus has to the

God of Israel, Yahweh? Jesus is clearly claiming to be Yahweh. Yet He has also distinguished himself in this passage from the Father, “whom you say, ‘He is our God.’” (vs. 54). He states that He and the Father are both God, but are distinct persons with different roles.

*b. John 10:22-39*

*i. The context* – The Jews directly ask Jesus again, who He is. Is He the Christ?

*ii. The claim* – Jesus responds by telling them in verse 30, “I and the Father are One.” They pick up stones, ready to kill Him. But He asks why? He cites his works as evidence of this oneness with the Father, and then reasserts the claim in verse 38, “the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”

*iii. The response* – The Jews do not misunderstand His claim. Again they seek to kill Him.

Jesus is claiming a special relationship with the Father. In verse 30 He claims unity with the Father. They are One. But He also shows a distinction between the two, stating that the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father.

The grammatical gender of the word “one” is neuter, meaning that Jesus was not claiming to be the same person as the Father, but was united with the Father and was as divine as the Father<sup>1</sup>.

### **3. The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son (John 14:23-26)**

Jesus does not just claim a special relationship with the Father, but with another person: The Spirit. In John 14:23, Christ promises that the Father and He will together abide in those who love Him. But how will this abiding take place? In verse 26 we see that the Father will send, in the name of Christ, a Helper, the Holy Spirit. This Helper will teach, bear witness of Jesus (15:26), convict (16:8-9), and guide into truth (16:13)

This third person, the Holy Spirit, is distinguished from the Father and the Son, and yet is closely tied into the work of the Father and the Son. The work of the Spirit involves things that only God can do (i.e. convict of sin and righteousness), thus demonstrating Jesus belief that the Spirit was divine.

### **4. Conclusion**

Jesus taught that there is only one God. Yet Jesus regards himself in a united relationship with the Father. The Jews rightly interpreted that in claiming to be united to the Father, Jesus was declaring himself to be equal in divinity to the Father. Jesus also taught that another like himself, the Holy Spirit, was divine, yet distinct in His role.

## **B. The Old Testament Teaching Regarding the Trinity**

### **1. The Unity of God (Deut. 6:4)**

The clarity of Deuteronomy 6:4 demands that we regard this passage as definitive in the nature of God. “Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is One!” There is only one God, and that One God is unified, in perfect balance. But while the concept is simple, that does not necessitate that God himself is simple, or of only one personality. Merely that whatever His nature is, it will be unified and completely consistent with the rest of His character.

The word “One” used in this passage is also used in Genesis 2:24, where the institution of marriage is founded. Here, God declares that a husband and wife “shall become ONE flesh.” Certainly there are still two distinct persons within the marriage, but in some mystical sense, a husband and wife are of one substance, or flesh. They are united. So it is with God. He is one substance, united.

### **2. The Angel of Yahweh**

The Old Testament frequently discusses an entity known as "The Angel of Yahweh," The entity is usually bringing a message to a person, and while distinct from God himself, speaks with the

<sup>1</sup> Charles C. Ryrie. *Basic Theology*. (Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1987), 54

authority of God. This again shows that there are personal distinctions within the unified God. (Gen. 22:11-18, Ez. 3:2)

### **3. The Spirit of God**

The Spirit of God is mentioned frequently in the Old Testament, and is shown as an entity from God, possessing attributes of God, who indwells certain people at certain times. Most commonly, the prophets were indwelled by the Spirit of God (Ez. 2:2, 3:24). But also, the early monarchs of the unified nation Israel received the Spirit. Saul, in 1 Samuel 10:10 received the Spirit of God upon His anointing. And in 1 Samuel 16:13ff, the Spirit of God leaves Saul and descends upon David.

As such, the concept of the Holy Spirit was not new with the teachings of Jesus. While the Old Testament does not overtly declare the Holy Spirit to be God, the work of the Spirit in the lives of those in whom it dwelled is work that can only be accomplished by God himself.

### **4. The relationship of the Spirit to Yahweh (Isaiah 48:12-16)**

God speaks in this prophecy to Judah through the prophet Isaiah, to comfort them with His coming deliverance from Babylon. God first identifies himself in verse 12 as three "I am's." "I am He, I am the first, I am the last." This is clearly Yahweh, the self-existent one who exists from eternity past to eternity future. He then assures them that He is in control of what is happening with the Babylonians and that He is "against" Him. (Contrast this with how the name of Yahweh assures Israel that He is for them)

In verse 16 we seem to still have Yahweh speaking, discussing how He is going to deliver Israel. Yet the speaker says, "The Lord Yahweh has sent Me and His Spirit." If Yahweh is sending the speaker, then who is this speaker, this I am first and last, spoken of in verse 12? Here it seems there is a unity of Yahweh who has distinct persons with different roles to play sent by the Father.

The comparison does not end there, for we see in verse 17 that Yahweh, our God is the one who teaches and guides us. Yet this is specifically a role set forth for the Holy Spirit in John 17. Furthermore, verse 16 describes the going forth of the Spirit. This would lend proof to the unity of the Spirit of God with God himself.

## **C. The New Testament Teaching Regarding the Trinity**

### **1. The Unity of God in the New Testament**

The New Testament does not contradict the Unity of God, and in fact, reaffirms the Oneness of God. This fundamental belief is taken for granted in James 2:19, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 and 1 Timothy 2:5.

However, the coming of Christ and the Holy Spirit raised questions as to how exactly these persons fit with the unity of God.

### **2. The Distinction of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the New Testament**

While the unity of God is assumed in much of the New Testament, these books also emphasize the distinctness and uniqueness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:4-6, in a passage reminiscent of Deut. 6:4, declares that there is not just one God and Father, but also one Spirit, and one Lord (i.e. Christ). 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 exhibits this same distinctness and unity.

The distinction is not just in form, but also in role. Ephesians 2:18 is one example of how access to the Father is shown as coming through Jesus in the Spirit. I John 4:12-15 and 1 Peter 1:2 also show similar roles.

Finally, Matthew 28:19, Jesus tells his disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Clearly the New Testament teaches these three entities are distinct.

### 3. Other Important Passages

#### a. *Colossians 1:15*

Jesus is declared to be the image of God, the firstborn of all creation. This has caused some to believe that Christ is a created being, not equal to God. In this view, Jesus is still “semi-divine,” being the “first born.” This is the Greek word “proto-to’kos,” meaning the first born. However, if the accent symbol is moved back one syllable, the word is now “pro-tot’-okos,” it changes the verb to the passive voice. This would change the meaning to ‘the first bearer of all creation.’ Accents were not included in the Greek text until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the changing of such an accent can have a profound difference in meaning<sup>2</sup>.

#### b. *John 1:14*

Jesus is said here to also be the “only begotten” of the Father. Again, this is used to state that Jesus was created by the Father, thereby making him not fully divine. However, the term only-begotten can also be translated, “one-of-a-kind,” or “unique.” This is confirmed by the usage of the same word in Hebrews 11:17, where Isaac is considered Abraham’s “only-begotten” son, when Isaac was neither the only son nor even the first born son of Abraham (that distinction belonging to Ishmael)<sup>3</sup>.

In both the Colossians and the John passage, the term begotten or first born speaks not to Christ being created, but being of first priority. John 1:1 makes that clear, showing that Christ was with God already in the beginning, and that Christ was indeed God from eternity past.

#### c. *1 John 5:6-8*

Certain later manuscripts found in the West include the words:

*...in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one And there are three that testify on earth, the Spirit.*

This, however, is not found in most of the earliest manuscripts, and in none of the manuscripts found in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the West there was a prevalent heresy called Arianism (see below) which denied the Trinity. Therefore most scholars today believe this passage was not part of the original manuscript, but was added here to combat the Arian heresy<sup>4</sup>.

## D. Conclusions

Based on these scriptures, here are some truths about God:

- There is only one God.
- God is united within himself. All things are consistent and balanced in his character.
- There are three entities, Father, Son and Spirit, who exhibit the characteristics of God and are considered God.
- The Father is not the Son, the Son not the Spirit, and the Spirit not the Father. Each is distinct, having relationships with each other. Therefore, they can not merely different names of the same thing.
- The Father sends forth the Son and with the Son sends the Spirit.
- The Son provides access to the Spirit.
- The Spirit teaches, guides, and convicts.

<sup>2</sup> Donald J. Brake. Unpublished class notes: TH 507, Christian Theology I. (Multnomah Biblical Seminary, fall 2003).

<sup>3</sup> The Theology Notebook – Trinitarianism. [book on-line]. (Dallas TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2005, accessed April 24, 2006; available from [http://www.bible.org/assets/ttp/TRIN\\_Notebook\\_Nov2005.pdf](http://www.bible.org/assets/ttp/TRIN_Notebook_Nov2005.pdf); Internet), 114.

<sup>4</sup> Brake.

- The Spirit seeks to glorify the Son. The Son seeks to glorify the Father. The Father glorifies the Son.

## II. The Historical Development of Trinity

### A. Heretical Understandings of the Trinity

The scriptures teach that there is only one God. Yet they also teach that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are unique and divine. This dichotomy was accepted by the church without much development for the first three centuries. This doctrine, along with many others, was not fully developed in the mind of the church because the church faced rampant persecution, and survival was more important than a thorough development of theological ideas.

However, by the late third century AD, persecution began to wane, and by AD 318 the Roman emperor Constantine issued an edict of toleration towards Christianity. By AD 325 Christianity was made the state religion, and by AD 338, Christianity was the only legal religion and paganism was persecuted just as the Christians had been.

After Christianity became tolerated by the government, the church now began to explore many of the important doctrines, not the least of which was this dichotomy between God's oneness and His three-ness. There were several viewpoints that arose at this time to try to reconcile this dichotomy<sup>5</sup>.

#### 1. Ebionism

In last first century there were many Jews who denied the deity of Christ all together. Christ was accepted as a prophet in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15, but they saw Christ only as human, not as divine.

#### 2. Docetism

In the second century, there arose a Greek religion known as Gnosticism. This religion extended early Platonic ideas of spirituality which believed that the physical world was evil, while the spiritual world was good. This idea called on people to transcend the physical and seek instead the diving spirituality within. Ultimate hope then was found in transcending the physical body and living as pure spirit.

Gnosticism was blended with Christianity by Marcion in the second century to create Docetism. This taught that Christ was indeed truly God, but that He was not truly human. Christ only appeared to have a body. But because the physical is evil, God could not have actually had a real physical body.

#### 3. Adoptionism

In the third century idea, it was suggested that Jesus was "adopted" as God's son. In this viewpoint, the *logos* indwelt the person Jesus at His baptism, and then departed while He was on the cross ("into your hands I commit my Spirit."). Jesus was indwelt by this "spirit of Christ," but was not equal to God.

#### 4. Modalism (aka Sabellianism)

In the third century, Sabellius proposed that the Father, the Son and the Spirit were all different roles or manifestations of the one God. There was only one entity, God, but three different names assigned to God. For example, one individual person takes on many different roles. I can be a husband to my wife, a father to my children and a son to my parents. But I remain only one person. There is no distinction in my essence, only in my role.

This viewpoint was condemned by the synod of Antioch in AD 286.

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<sup>5</sup> Theology Notebook, 84-88.

## **5. Arianism**

Arius was an elder in Alexandria in the early fourth century. In contrast to Sabellius, Arius proposed that that Christ was not just another name for God, but that He was a distinct creation of God. Using Colossians 1:15, Arius taught that before the creation of the world, God created Christ as His firstborn, and was therefore subordinate to God. Christ was still very important and had a unique relationship with the Father, but He did not have the fullness of deity that the Father did.

## **B. The Nicene Creed**

### **1. The Council of Nicaea**

In opposition to Arius was Alexander, the Patriarch of Alexandria. Alexander held firmly to an eternally existent Christ and condemned Arius as a heretic in 318. However, Arius continued to teach his viewpoint, creating great dissent within the church in Alexandria. To address the disagreement, Emperor Constantine called a conference of bishops in AD 325 in the city of Nicaea. This was the first ecumenical council of the church and established a precedent for how the church would decide theological issues.

The Council agreed with Alexander and issued a statement of faith known as the Nicene Creed, in which it declared Arianism to be anathema.

### **2. The Council of Constantinople**

The Nicene Council did not end the Arian controversy. After the death of Alexander, Athanasius, who had accompanied Alexander to Nicaea, became the patriarch of Alexandria, and he began actively persecuting the heretic, Arius. However, soon the Emperor intervened in this persecution and reinstated Arius and exiled Athanasius. With that, it appeared for a time that the Arian theology would become the orthodox teaching of the church. However, Athanasius continued to defend the Nicene Creed from exile and along with three Greek philosopher-theologians known as the Cappadocian Fathers, they slowly regained the theological upper hand within the church.

In AD 381, the Emperor Theodosius I called the second ecumenical council of the church in Constantinople to settle the matter once and for all. The council sided with Athanasius, reaffirming and clarifying the original Nicene Creed.

### **3. The Nicene Creed (AD 325, 381)**

The following is the Nicene Creed, as amended in Constantinople:

*We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, creator 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 the same essence with the Father.*

*Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. 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. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He 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.*

#### 4. The Orthodox Definition of the Trinity

##### a. *Heretical Understandings of the Trinity*

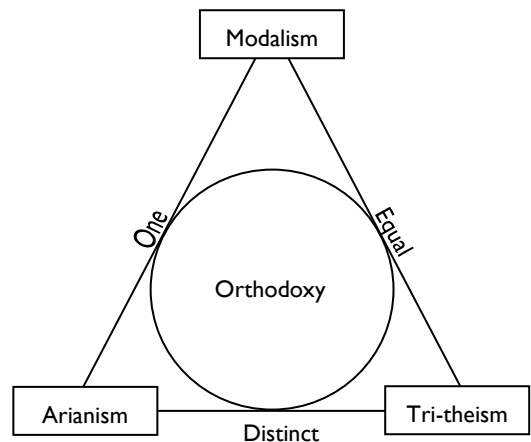
This creed defines the orthodox view of the Trinity. It brings a delicate balance between the scriptural teaching that God is one and that God is three. If God's oneness is ignored, it becomes Tri-theism (i.e. three gods). If the three persons of the Trinity are not considered distinct, it becomes Modalism. If the three persons are not considered equal, it becomes Arianism. It is only when these three characteristics are held together can the orthodox view of the Trinity be affirmed.

Nearly all the major Christian heresies are based on a corruption of the orthodox understanding of the Trinity. Mormonism, for example, teaches an extreme form of Arianism, where Christ was born to the Father. The Jehovah's Witnesses also believe Jesus to be a creation of God. The "Oneness Pentecostals" are modalists, believing Father, Son and Spirit to be one person revealed in three separate ways. Liberal Christians deny Christ's divinity all together.

##### b. *Failure of Analogies*

There are numerous illustrations of the Trinity which Christians have developed through the years to try to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. All of the most popular analogies fail to capture the unique relationship of Oneness and Three-ness.

- *Egg* – There is only one egg, but there are three parts to it: the shell, the white and the yoke. However the analogy does not show the equal nature of the three parts. In the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit are of the same substance (i.e. divinity).
- *Water* – Water can exist in one of three states: ice, liquid or steam. This is a Modalist view of the Trinity; for it shows God as being revealed in three separate forms, but denies the distinction between them. God exists simultaneously and distinctly as Father, Son and Spirit and the three are not merely different states or manifestations of the one God.
- *Person* – A person has body, soul and spirit, but there is only one person. However, there is no distinction to these three. Within my consciousness I can not distinguish between my soul and my spirit. My body does not have awareness apart from my non-corporal forms. My spirit does not commune and have relationship with my soul. Father, Son and Spirit are distinct and have awareness of and relationship with each other.
- *Crowd* – There are many people within the crowd, but a crowd is considered a singular word. However, this is a Tri-theistic analogy as it denies the oneness of God.



##### c. *The Trinity Defined*

With the failure of analogies, it is best to just state the doctrine for what it is and acknowledge that it is impossible for us to fully fathom the doctrine. The doctrine of the Trinity can be summarized as follows:

*There is One God who eternally exists in three distinct persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit- all of whom are fully God, all of whom are equal<sup>6</sup>.*

<sup>6</sup> Theology Notebook, 82.

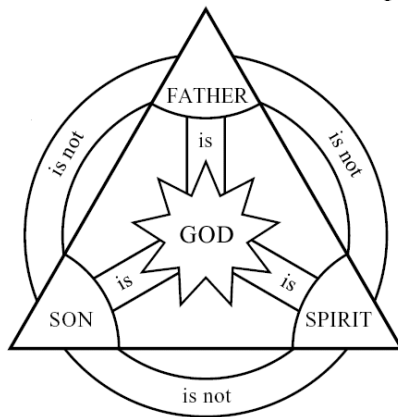
## C. Eastern and Western Views<sup>7</sup>

This creed defines the orthodox view of the Trinity accepted by all branches of Christianity today, including Protestant, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. However, there has been great misunderstanding between the Western and Eastern viewpoints of Christianity. Both sides have accused the other of departing from the orthodox Nicene understanding. However, these two viewpoints are not contradictory but complementary.

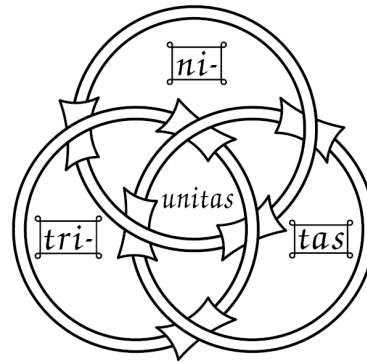
In western Christianity (which consists of both Catholic and Protestant viewpoints), the emphasis has been on defining the terms of the essence of each person and entity within the Trinity. Western theologians have attempted to define the Trinity in almost psychological and ontological terms in an attempt to understand the nature and essence of the Godhead.

In eastern Christianity (which consists of the Eastern Orthodox and Coptic traditions), the emphasis has been on the social and communal aspects of the Trinity. Rather than define the nature of the essence of God, Eastern theologians have concentrated on the nature of the relations between Father, Son and Spirit. The trinity is left a mystery with the exception of the understanding of the mutual indwelling of the Trinity (i.e. the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, etc.).

This difference can be seen in the predominant illustrations of the Trinity developed by the two viewpoints. In the west, the Shield of the Trinity Trinitarian shield was developed in thirteenth century. It defines the essence of the Godhead, showing all three to be one God with three distinct persons. In the east, the Borromean rings were the dominant illustration (developed also as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century and named after an Italian family in whose coat of arms the symbol is found). This symbol illustrates more of the inter-relationship between the members of the Trinity.



The Shield of the Trinity



The Borromean Rings

Because the west has emphasized that each member of the Trinity is of the same substance, the east has accused the west of modalism. Because the east has emphasized the distinction between the members of the Trinity, the west has accused the east of Arianism and Tri-theism. However, both viewpoints are valid orthodox understandings which help us to see a fuller glimpse of the Trinity.

## III. The Practical Ramifications of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is a beautiful mystery which, if we let it inform and influence our world view, we will find new meaning and depth of understanding. An understanding of the Trinity

<sup>7</sup> Scott J. Horrell. *In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Constructing a Trinitarian Worldview*. ([article on-line]. Dallas TX: Biblical Studies Foundation, 2003, accessed April 24, 2006; available from [http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page\\_id=246](http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=246); Internet).

answers many of the philosophical problems of monotheism. It should be the foundation of our Christian worldview. The influential Trinitarian theologian Colin Gunton said it this way:

*It is part of the pathos of Western theology that it has often believed that while trinitarian theology might well be of edificatory value to those who already believe, for the outsider it is an unfortunate barrier to belief, which must therefore be facilitated by some non-trinitarian apologetic, some essentially monotheistic 'natural theology.' My belief is the reverse: that because the theology of the Trinity has so much to teach about the nature of our world and life within it, it is or could be the centre of Christianity's appeal to the unbeliever, as the good news of a God who enters into free relations of creation and redemption with his world. In the light of the theology of the Trinity, everything looks different<sup>8</sup>.*

## A. The Purpose of Creation<sup>9</sup>

Why did God create the universe, and specifically why did God create humanity. A non-Trinitarian monotheist would answer that God created for his own good pleasure and for his own glory. However, this understanding of creation makes God a narcissistic egotist. He created just so he would have someone to tell him how great He is.

However Trinitarianism teaches us that God did not create the world so he could have someone to glorify him. Instead God created out of the outpouring the love between the members of the Trinity.

There seems to be a truism that when people come together in love and unity, the creative act comes out of that. For example, why do we have children? Ideally it comes from two distinct individuals have come together in one flesh and in the midst of that unity and out of the outpouring of that love comes a desire to share that love with another—a child. Having children is not something we do to find our own glory. We do not have children so they can worship us. We have children out of the expression of our love for each other and as a means to extend our oneness and our love to a greater level. Children become then the fulfillment of the love found within the unity of a husband and a wife.

So it is true with the trinity. God created humanity out of the outpouring of the love and unity of the Trinity. As Father, Son and Spirit have been sharing in the communion since eternity past, out of that comes the creative act not to be worshipped by the creation, but so that God could extend the love and union found within His triune self with others. This Trinitarian view of creation shows that God is not an ego-maniac, but a God of love and humility.

## B. The Self-Sufficiency of God

When studying the aspects of God's character, certain characteristics are transitive, meaning they only find meaning when they operate on objects outside of themselves. For example, the love of God has no meaning if there is no person for God to love. In a non-Trinitarian monotheism, for God's love to find its fulfillment, God needed to have an object on which to pour out his love. Therefore, God needed us (or some other creation of His) in order to be found perfect. Yet we know that God does not need creation. This creates a quandary in the non-Trinitarian worldview.

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<sup>8</sup> Colin Gunton. *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. As quoted by Horrell.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Metzger. *What In the World Is God Doing?* (Unpublished class notes: TH 508, Christian Theology II. Multnomah Biblical Seminary, Summer 2003).

However, within Trinitarian theology, God's love has an object. The love of the members of the Trinity were expressed on the other members of the Trinity during eternity past, such that God did not need creation to find the full expression of His attributes. God's transitive attributes are perfect and complete within the relationships of the Trinity.

Only Trinitarianism can conclude that before creation God existed in a self-sufficient state and that He does not need creation. As Horrell states it:

*All creation exists and is sustained, not by necessity nor by divine selfishness, but by the abundance of Trinitarian grace<sup>10</sup>.*

### C. The Unity of Marriage

In 1:26, God says, "let Us make man in Our image." Why didn't God say, "I will now make man in my image?" Why does He use the plural here?

In the Hebrew, just as in English, there is the "royal plural," where a sovereign refers to himself or herself in the plural. However, this also leaves open the possibility that God is speaking within the Trinity to himself. While not a definitive proof, it does leave open the possibility of the trinity.

This is significant beyond just a proof text for Trinitarian theology. God's image is most fully realized when a man and a woman are joined together in marriage; for marriage serves a living example of the Holy Trinity. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons joined to become one, so also, a husband and wife are two persons joined to become one. When the world sees a properly function marriage, they should have a greater glimpse of the Trinitarian God. This is bearing the image of God, and is the primary purpose of marriage.

### D. Eternal Glory

Non-Trinitarian monotheism leads to the belief that God is a narcissistic ego manic desiring to receive worship and glory from His creation. But Trinitarianism teaches that God is not arrogant, but is humble and selfless. Within the Trinity, no member of the Trinity seeks to glorify himself, but to share that glory, both with the other members of the Trinity and with His creation.

Jesus entire ministry was to bring glory to the Father (17:4). Furthermore, when Christ obeyed the Father by dying on the cross, the Father glorified the Son, declaring His name to be above every name (Philippians 2:9). The Holy Spirit glorifies the Son, not taking credit for His teaching as if it were His own, but only passes on what the Father gives Him (16:13-14).

This dynamic gives us remarkable insight to the inner workings of the Trinity. This passing of glory from Father to Son and Son back to Father is like a cosmic game of hot potato, with none grasping onto the glory, but always passing back to the one from whom it came.

But this mutual glorification is not limited to the Trinity. For in Jesus request for the disciples' unity, Christ seeks to share His glory with His disciples:

*The glory which You have given Me, I have given to them that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me. (John 17:22-23a)*

Jesus is requesting that the Father allow Him to include His disciples in the unity of the Trinity, and to share in the mutual sharing of glory within the Trinity. He is asking the Father to include the church in the Trinitarian game of glory hot potato! The ultimate hope of the Christian is to enter into fellowship with the Trinitarian community.

### E. Indwelling of Spirit

Each member of the Trinity dwells within the other:

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<sup>10</sup> Horrell.

*(John 17:20) ...even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You.*

Because we bear the image of God we have the capacity to be indwelled by another, just as the members of the Trinity indwell one another<sup>11</sup>. When we become believers in Christ, we are indwelled by the Holy Spirit. Paul describes this indwelling in Ephesians 1:14 as a down payment of future glory. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit gives us a glimpse of the mutual indwelling of the Trinity and serves as a foretaste of the fellowship we will possess with the Trinitarian community.

## **F. Church Unity**

In John 17:21, Jesus prays that His disciples would be one. Jesus request for unity is not merely a request that the church get along. There is a much deeper, much more glorious significance than just a call to quit squabbling in the church. It is a call to be included in the unity of the Trinity. It is a call to share in the glory of God. It is a call to not selfishly hold onto glory, but to pass that glory off to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

It is also a call for us as Jesus disciples to humble ourselves before each other, and thus emulate the Trinity. When Jesus commands us to “love one another” and to put the interests of others ahead of ourselves, He is calling us to establish a community which exhibits the dynamics of the Trinitarian community. It is a lesson to learn here and now so that when we are glorified and are allowed to commune with the Trinity in our future glory, we already understand the dynamics of such a union.

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<sup>11</sup> In so far as we have already described marriage as an illustration of the Trinitarian union, so also it seems the sexual act (the two becoming one flesh) reflects this “indwelling” aspect of the trinity.

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