

The Trinity Defined and Refuted¹

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A Brief History

Once the idea of literal pre-existence was articulated by Justin Martyr in his Logos Christology² in the mid-second century a chain reaction of philosophic speculation began.³ Justin, himself trained in Greek Philosophy, sought with noble intent, to explain Christianity to his fellow philosophers, but alas, some things are better left in their original cultural context, lest the concepts themselves are mutated in the translation process. Already prior to the mid-second century Marcion had combined the Gnosticism battled by the apostles in the late first century with Christianity in order to explain the pre-existence of Christ.⁴ He said that Christ only appeared human, that he was in fact, purely divine. Marcion was rejected and vigorously opposed by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others, though the basic Gnostic idea of a heavenly demiurge/spirit coming down to save mankind persisted.

In the late second century a leather-seller named Theodotus taught that that Jesus was a genuine human being virginally begotten by the Father who, at his baptism, received Christ and thus became the Son of God, empowered to do miracles. Under this scheme Christ left Jesus at his death and went back to the right hand of the Father. Theodotus was excommunicated by the African Bishop of Rome, Victor I, just prior to the third century. His views, however, continued and were modified by Bishop Paul of Samosata who said that the Logos (pre-existent Word) was impersonal and that the descent of the Spirit is what made Jesus into the Son of God at his baptism.⁵ Paul was examined and removed from his position at the council of Antioch in AD 269 by seventy bishops, priests, and deacons.

Tertullian (AD 150–225) was the first to use the term Trinity in the early third century. He taught that there were three persons in one substance, though in his writings many times he spoke of them as separate beings. He also taught that there was an inequality of rank between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (subordinationism). Parallel to this Origen (AD 185–254) theorized that when the Scripture said “today I have begotten you,” that “today” is really eternity for God. Thus, the concept of “eternal generation” or that Jesus was “eternally begotten” came into the church. He contradicted Tertullian by teaching that nothing in the Trinity can be called greater or less but at the same time thought that since the Spirit was the first creation of the Father through the Son, the Spirit is “God” but not “the God.” In both of these



A medieval portrayal of the Trinity

¹ For more resources on this subject, log on to www.kingdomready.org/topics/god.php

² Justin saw in the Logos (the “word” from John 1.1) a bridge from the thought world of Judaism to that of the Greek philosophers. Since the logos was already understood as the divine rationality it was not a large step to personalize it.

³ Justin is not the only one who sees Christ as pre-existent at this early date, the Gnostics had been teaching in apostolic times that Christ only appeared human (that he did not actually come in the flesh). Also 2 Clement 9.5 (depending on which Clement wrote it) represents an early or simultaneous expression of pre-existence.

⁴ A byproduct of combining Gnosticism with Christianity was disregarding the Hebrew Scriptures along with any other overtly Jewish documents/concepts.

⁵ This is called adoptionism—that Jesus became the Son of God through his godliness and commitment.

proto-orthodox men we lack complete equality between the Father, Son, and Spirit and both of them appear to fall closer to the side of tri-theism than Trinitarianism.

In the early third century a priest named Sabellius worked out a theology in an effort to express the “threeness” of God that some were postulating while taking seriously the oneness demonstrated by the Scriptures. His “solution” was to say that God was one person who manifested himself in three modes⁶. Thus, the Father is the Son is the Holy Spirit, three revelations of the one God. It could even be said that the Father actually suffered on the cross (Patripassionism). He was officially excommunicated as a heretic in AD 220 by Calixtus I.

In the early fourth century a priest in Alexandria named Arius confronted his Bishop, Alexander, because the Bishop was teaching that the Son of God had always existed. Arius asserted that the Son came into existence via special creation by the Father just before the Universe was made. His views ignited what came to be called the Arian Controversy which was the primary impetus for the Council at Nicaea in AD 325 which excommunicated all who say that the Son had a beginning. The church had by now strayed so far in its theological speculations that when it came time to work out the creed only the most erudite philosophy of the day could handle the paper thin distinctions and paradoxes.

If we take the New Testament as a criterion, we cannot deny that the Council of Nicaea certainly maintained the New Testament message and did not Hellenize it totally. But it is equally beyond dispute that the council remained utterly imprisoned in Hellenistic concepts, notions and thought-models which would have been completely alien to the Jew Jesus of Nazareth and the earliest community. Here in particular the shift from the Jewish Christians apocalyptic paradigm to the early church Hellenistic paradigm had a massive effect.⁷

Nevertheless, Nicaea was just one step towards orthodox Christology. Once the Father and Son were declared to share the same essence a host of other questions needed to be asked and answered. Apollinarius, the Bishop of Laodicea, tried to work out the implications of Nicaea by stating that in Christ’s human body dwelt a divine soul (or ego). In this way Christ was fully human (in body) and fully divine (in mind). However, this perspective was condemned as heresy and the council of Constantinople (AD 381) which specifically affirmed that Christ had a human soul though he was fully divine. In this same council, Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa worked into the Nicene Creed the addition of the Holy Spirit (which later resulted in the great split between Eastern and Western churches⁸). Only after AD 381 can one speak of the Trinity in the modern sense as it was not until this council that it was fully worked out by these Cappadocian philosophers.

Even so, the description of three-in-one in the Trinitarian sense did not solve many of the Christological problems. In order to work out what it meant that Jesus was both divine and human

⁶ The view of Sabellius is adhered to today by the Universal Pentecostal Church and T.D. Jakes.

⁷ Hans Kung, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, Continuum International Publishing Group In, NY, NY, ©1994, page 182.

⁸ The split occurred because in the creed of 381 the Holy Spirit was said to proceed from both the Father and the Son. The Eastern Church did not (and still has not) accepted the clause, “and the Son.”

several schools of thought developed. Nestorius took another stab at working out post Nicene Christology by saying that in Christ were united two natures in such a way that his opponents accused him of saying that Christ consisted of two persons (both a divine and a human ego). As a reaction against the dual personality theory, the leader of a large monastery, Eutyches, said that after the Incarnation, the two natures fused together in such a way that the divinity absorbed the humanity. In an effort to declare both the teaching of Nestorius and Eutyches as heresy, the Creed of Chalcedon (AD 451) was formed which asserted that both natures are not “confused” nor are there two persons.⁹ But as one might expect the tornado of orthodox theological development and excommunication did not dissipate in the fifth century either, but for now this brief history should suffice.

The Trinity is not some simple creed handed down by the apostles orally and written down only when heretics began causing problems. Rather, the Trinity is a Hellenistic set of postulations which was one direction of many that resulted from assuming the literal pre-existence and divinity of the Son of God. The only reason, historically speaking, that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan-Chalcedonian Trinity won is that those who defended it throughout its development were more successful in politicking and excommunicating their opponents than the “heretics.” David Christie-Murray begins his survey of heresy by remarking, “Heresy, a cynic might say, is an opinion held by a minority of men which the majority declares unacceptable and is powerful enough to punish.”¹⁰ I will leave it up to the reader who has interest in the historical development of Trinitarian orthodoxy to probe the subject more. For the rest of this paper, it is not our task to pinpoint when, how, and why the doctrine developed, rather our task is to determine what the doctrine is, evaluate it logically, and compare it to Scripture in an effort to make a theological confession or denial. The five sections to be discussed in turn are (1) the three persons in one God (2) the co-equal Godhead (3) the co-eternal Godhead (4) the co-essential Godhead and (5) the hypostatic union.

Three Persons in One God

The Trinity is probably the most misunderstood doctrine in Christianity. Non-Trinitarians often do not take the time to understand the Trinity and so craft great arguments against modalism¹¹ all the while thinking they have debunked the Trinity. For this reason, I have endeavored to define each of the aspects under consideration before trying to refute them. The first point that needs to be explained is the essential understanding of three persons in one God. The entry below is informative:

In Christianity, the doctrine of the Trinity states that God is one being who exists, simultaneously and eternally, as a mutual indwelling of three persons: the Father, the Son (incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth), and the Holy Spirit. Since the 4th century, in both Eastern and Western Christianity, this doctrine has been stated as "one God in three persons," all three of whom, as distinct and co-eternal persons, are of one indivisible Divine

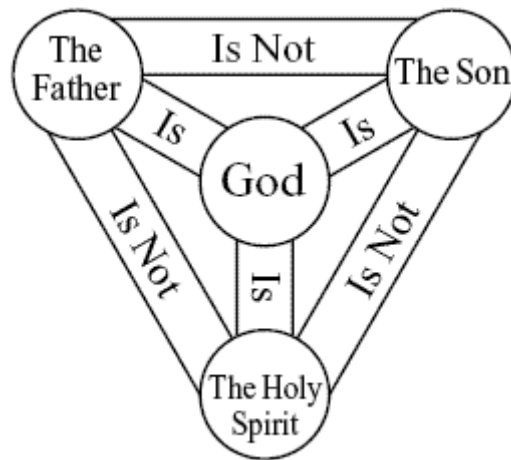
⁹ “We also teach that we apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten—in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other...The properties of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one person and in one reality. They are not divided or cut into two persons...” Chalcedonian Creed of AD 451

¹⁰ David Christie-Murray, *A History of Heresy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, ©1976, page 1

¹¹ Modalism is the doctrine espoused by Sabellius—that there is one God who manifests himself in three modes.

essence, a simple being...The doctrine of the Trinity is the result of continuous exploration by the church of the biblical data, thrashed out in debate and treatises, eventually formulated at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD in a way they believe is consistent with the biblical witness, and further refined in later councils and writings.¹²

According to the Trinity, there are three separate “persons” in one divine “substance.” These separate persons are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The belief of the Trinity is a paradox – the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God; yet, there are not three Gods, but one. In fact, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. This concept is illustrated below.



Thus, God is not believed to be a person; rather, God is an essence that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share in common. Imagine for a moment a three-headed man. Each head has its own mind (thoughts, intentions, memory, feelings, preferences, etc.). Although there are three minds (persons), there is only one body. At first this seems like a good analogy to represent what is being said by the definition of the Trinity. However, this analogy breaks down at the next step because, according to the Trinity, each person not only shares the same substance (God), but each is fully God. Our three headed person analogy falls short here because each head is not fully the man; rather, each is a part of him. In fact, every analogy to anything in the known universe breaks down at this point. The shamrock analogy, the egg analogy, the three phases of water analogy, etc., all fail to represent what has been defined in the above diagram.¹³

I believe that difficulties arise because we are dealing with something that is impossible—a contradiction (not merely a paradox). It is true that the Father could be fully God, and the Son fully God, and at the same time the Son is not the same as the Father. For example, I am fully human, and you are fully human, and yet, I am not you. The complications develop when we say that there is only

¹² Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity>

¹³ The shamrock and egg have been used to demonstrate plurality in unity. Yet, a problem arises when one realizes that both of these analogies are really examples of one object made up of three parts, which the Trinity is not. Then, there is the three phases of water analogy. Here the same water can be solid, liquid, or vapor. Yet, the same water molecule is not in all three phases at once, so this is a better illustration of modalism than trinitarianism. Another attempt to find a physical type of the Trinity is the illustration of time (past, present, and future). Still, the time analogy falls more into modalism than anything because past, present, and future can not all exist at once.

one human. If I am human and you are human, then clearly there are two humans. The only way around this is if we say that we are parts of the same human. But again, this solution is explicitly denied by the Trinity. All members of the Godhead (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) must be fully (not part of) God.

It [the Trinity] signifies that within the one essence of the Godhead we have to distinguish three "persons" who are neither three gods on the one side, not three parts or modes of God on the other, but co-equally and co-eternally God.¹⁴

There is no logical problem with accepting that Jesus is a member of divinity (if that were what the Bible taught). Similarly, we can accept the proposition, "Sean is a member of humanity." However, we cannot say that there are multiple members of divinity and then say that there is only one divinity, unless each of the members is a part of that one divinity. So, it would not be contradictory to say that Jesus is fully God, but then to say that the Father is fully God and yet that there are not two Gods is impossible.

Typically at this point, the Trinitarian brings forth the language of mystery in order to retreat from the imposing threat of logic. Often, it is said, "How can we possibly expect to know the deep mysteries of the triune Godhead, being that we are mere mortals?" To this question, we respond that we do not expect to know even one percent of everything that God is. Our inquiry is not into the deep mysteries of who God is and how He works; rather, we are simply trying to determine if the model of the Trinity is contradictory in and of itself. It is not God who insists we think of Him in the terms used in this Trinitarian creed. The Bible contains no such distillation of propositional boundaries. Besides, is it even possible to genuinely believe in a contradiction? For example, if I honestly believe that I am both fat and thin at the same time and in the same sense, then would I go on a diet or not? The result of believing a contradiction is paralyzing. If I truly believed both that I should diet and that I should not go on a diet, then what is the result? Confusion! Thus, to facilitate faith in God, we would be wise to avoid defining God as a contradiction.

However, if somehow we could accept a theory that is contradictory in the terms of its definition, we would only need to find one text that asserts that God is only one person in order to refute this model. Jesus gave us just such a verse when he said, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17.3). Jesus is in prayer to his Father (John 17.1) and declares that his Father is "the only true God." Can there be any clearer way to define God as one person? With regards to the category "true God," the Father is the only one who qualifies. The point is further amplified because Jesus went on to say "and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Jesus could have included himself in the definition of "only true God," but he did not. He clearly distinguished himself from the only true God.¹⁵ Thus, on the basis of this text, it is clear that in Jesus' mind the Father is the only person that is God. Since the Trinity claims that there are multiple persons in the true God and Jesus claims that there is only one person in the true God, the reader is presented with a clear decision: believe Jesus or believe the theologians of the third and fourth centuries.

¹⁴ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology, The Trinity*, ed. Harrison, Bromiley, and Henry, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, ©1960, page 531.

¹⁵ Other texts include: Deuteronomy 4.39; 1 Corinthians 8.6; Ephesians 4.6; 1 Timothy 2.5; etc.

A second difficulty that arises from the idea that God is a substance or essence and not a person is that there are no Scriptures to support this. If “God” were interchangeable with “divine stuff,” then John 3.16 would read, “For divine stuff so loved the world that it gave its only begotten Son that whoever believes....” The simple fact is that God is a “He” in Scripture, not a “what.” “For God so loved the world that He....” If God is a “He,” then God is a person, not a substance. (In fact, God is one person, not two or three; because if He were three, then the pronoun “We” would have been used.) Still there is a shared moral nature between Father and Son but this has nothing to do with their substance.¹⁶

At its foundational level, this system is evidencing major cracks. We are dealing with terminology that is completely unbiblical and concepts that are without question philosophical (metaphysics) and reek of Plato (cp. forms). There is nothing Hebraic in this entire discussion, and so we should immediately become suspicious. It is preposterous to think that Jesus or his apostles redefined the concept of God from a unipersonal, monotheistic belief of “Yahweh alone is God” to some tripartite or triune God of three persons when we see not one New Testament book, not one chapter, not one paragraph describing the change. There is no explanation of how the clear statements of radical monotheism found in the Old Testament could be reread in light of this new understanding of plurality. If the Trinity were part of what the apostles taught, then we should find at least one community in either Palestine or the Diaspora that struggled to accept this new doctrine of God. To think that the early Church debated over accepting the Gentiles, keeping the Law, how to keep communion, the role of women in the Church, yet never once had any trouble at all accepting that God is now three instead of one is absurd.¹⁷

I hope that I have sufficiently expressed in an understandable way what exactly the concept of the Trinity is (three persons, one God etc.). I contend that although it is logically possible to have three persons in one essence, it is not also possible to say that they are not parts of that one essence. Furthermore, the definition of “God” as an essence rather than a person is not possible due to the personal pronouns that thousands of times refer to God. Finally, we conclude that the Father is the only person who is truly God. This flatly contradicts the primary understanding of there being three. Now we turn to another necessary supporting structure of the Trinity, the equality of the persons in the Godhead.

Co-equal

¹⁶ “Any attempt to establish an ontological [relating to substance] as distinct from a moral basis for the unique sonship of Jesus in this Gospel [John] is I believe wrong-headed and purely on linguistic grounds doomed to failure. Jesus’ sonship for John is one of its kind (μονογενής) because of his total moral unity, and the moral unity is for John that which is most really real. The later (Greek) distinction and debate about whether he is one with the Father by ‘nature’ or by ‘will’ is not only anachronistic but distortive for the interpretation of John.” John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, SCM Press, London, page 375-6.

¹⁷ The Trinity is the work of Christians who were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy living in Alexandria, Egypt (a hotbed of philosophical speculation). Anyone interested in the history of this should obtain *When Jesus Became God* by Richard Rubenstein. This is a very readable book that describes in detail without partiality the controversy that kicked off the decades of debate over whom God is and why the Trinity ended up winning the day.

According to the definition of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal, co-eternal, and co-essential. In this section, co-equality will be discussed and compared to the Scriptures to see if this concept is biblical. First, it is necessary to mention how the Trinity speaks to the issue of equality within the Godhead:

The Christian idea of the Trinity may be summed up in the familiar words: 'The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. The Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. And in this Trinity none is afore or after other: none is greater or less than another, but the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.'¹⁸

The equality of the three persons of the Godhead is a necessary element of the concept of the Trinity. However, the discussion of equality between divine persons is far from straightforward. The following are biblical reasons some use to argue that the Son should be considered as co-equal with the Father.

John 5.17-18¹⁹ 17 But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." 18 For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

Jesus had just cured the lame man on the Sabbath, and the Jews (presumably the religious leaders) were irritated by Jesus to the point of confronting him. His response was that he and his Father work on the Sabbath (i.e. healing). The Jews understood the implication to mean that Jesus was claiming equality with God. Often times (especially on radio programs), the speaker stops here without reading the next verse.

John 5.19-21 19 Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. 20 "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. 21 "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

Jesus' response is firstly a denial of ultimate equality with God. In other words, the Son can do nothing on his own; he is able to do only what his Father empowers him to do. Secondly, Jesus clarifies the equality he does have with God in regards to resurrection. Since the Father has conferred upon Jesus the right to resurrect and judge, they are functionally equal with regard to this. Nevertheless, this equality falls far short of the required "co-equality" of the Trinity.

¹⁸ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings, Trinity, pg 949).

¹⁹ All quotations from the NASB 1995 Updated Version unless otherwise noted.

John 10.30-31 30 "I and the Father are one." 31 ¶ The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.

It is said that since Jesus and his Father are one, they share the same substance and are equal. However, again looking at the preceding verse clears up much of this misinterpretation.

John 10.27-29 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

The context focuses on how Jesus is the good shepherd (in contrast to the bad shepherds of Ezekiel 34). Jesus had just said that, as the shepherd, he keeps the sheep so that no wolf or thief can snatch them. The next verse says that also the Father (who is greater than all) keeps the sheep so that no one can snatch them out of His hand. Thus, the Son and the Father are one in that they are both working to keep the sheep. This has nothing to do with substance or equality. Furthermore, it is clear that the Father is greater than all because he gave the flock to the Son. In addition, we are to have the same sort of oneness that the Father shares with the Son:

John 17.20-22 20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

The oneness that the Father and Son share is to be shared by the disciples as well. If the oneness spoken of is a oneness of substance, then this statement is either impossible or meaningless. It is impossible for you and me actually to share the same substance (i.e. the same human body). It is meaningless to say we should be one in substance if what is meant is sharing humanity because that is shared no matter what. The oneness in the context is unity (love of the brethren).

Now that we have taken a look at a couple of the Scriptures used to show that the Father and the Son are co-equal, we will turn to consider a few Scriptures that indicate an inequality: the Father is greater than the Son.

John 14.28 28 "You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

In this text, Jesus clearly states that he is not equal with the Father. There is nothing in the context that would modify or change this basic statement.

1 Corinthians 11.3 3 But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

Here, an ordering is made clear: God is the head of Christ. To be the head implies an inequality in responsibility. Jesus demonstrated this subordination many times by his words and actions, always putting his will in subjection to the Father's (John 5.19, 30; 8.28; 12.49-50; 14.10, 31).

1 Corinthians 15.23-28 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

At the end of Jesus' rule (the millennium), he will hand the Kingdom over to his Father. Therefore, for all eternity, the Son will remain in subjection to the Father. If the two are co-equal, then why should one be over the other for all eternity? This is an important point because even in Jesus' exalted Kingdom glory, he is subservient to his Father.

So, why does anyone continue to believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal? There are two solutions that advocates of the Trinity have adhered to over the centuries. The first solution, which is more popular today, is known as the doctrine of the kenosis. The word, "kenosis," is taken from the Greek word used in Philippians 2.7 translated "emptied." The theory states that when the Son of God became human, he emptied himself of various divine prerogatives. Perhaps he did this so that his divinity would not overwhelm his humanity. Thus, when we see Jesus doing or saying things that contradict the understanding that he is fully God, the Trinitarian is free to say that for a time Jesus had limited his divinity (i.e. while on earth he was not all powerful, everywhere present, or all knowing). This doctrine is not really orthodox (the official teaching of the historic Church) because it implies that Jesus was not really God for 30+ years. In fact, many Trinitarians have gone to great lengths to show how this kenosis doctrine is wrong. The official understanding is not that Jesus lost any of his divine attributes during his human life but that his humanity veiled those attributes. In other words, Jesus was still fully God in all ways, but his humanity made that divinity invisible to the naked eye.²⁰

Another solution for the apparent inequalities mentioned in John 14.28; 1 Corinthians 11.3; 15.28 is the doctrine of the dual natures of Christ. In this scheme, anytime Jesus does something miraculous (like knowing someone's thoughts, walking on the water, or raising the dead), it is a deed of his divine nature. Anytime Jesus manifests distinctly human characteristics (like not knowing who touched him, sleeping, dying on the cross), it is a deed of his human nature. However, the issue with this strategy is that Jesus is only one person (he has only one mind), and the natures cannot be separated from him. Otherwise said, there was not a human mind and a divine mind; there was just one mind. So, when it comes to saying that Jesus did not know something (Matthew 24.36), it cannot be argued that only in his humanity he did not know, but in his divinity he did know. This splits the ego of Jesus into two

²⁰ For more information on why the kenosis doctrine is wrong (from a Trinitarian perspective) go to <http://kenosis.info>

(this is explicitly denied by later Trinitarian creeds). We are left with a conundrum: did Jesus know when he was coming back or not? The Scripture states that he did not know therefore, Jesus is not equal to the Father at least with respect to knowledge.²¹

We conclude that the doctrine of the Trinity requires equality between all members. If one is able to show from the Bible that any of the three is not equal (i.e. greater or less than) the others, then the Trinity would be defined as unscriptural. This is precisely what occurs when Jesus explicitly states, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14.28). The Trinity and John 14.28 cannot coexist as truth in the same world. One of the two must be in error. The Trinity requires equality between Father and Son, whereas the Bible plainly states an inequality (Father > Son). The two methods of coping with this (1) that Christ emptied himself when he became man, and (2) that this is only talking about Jesus' humanity, not his divinity have been considered and refuted. Next, we will examine the claim that the Father and Son are the same age.

Co-eternal

It was an overcast day in Geneva, Switzerland on October 31, 1553. A dingy character followed by a mob of city dwellers staggered his way up the road. One could imagine the discomfort as this man walked awkwardly, weighed down by the chain about his neck. His clothes were filthy rags, his hair unkempt, his stench a giveaway to his lack of bathing over the past few weeks. He was tied to a post surrounded by green wood ready to be burned, his last remaining heretical book attached to his arm. His accuser turned his furious eyes on the pitiful figure (once a wealthy medical doctor, translator, and theologian), and demanded that he say, "Jesus Christ is the **eternal Son** of God." In fact, if he would simply repeat that phrase, he would be released. Michael Servetus stiffened up a bit, took in a deep breath, and said "Jesus Christ is the Son of the **eternal God**" (a clear denial of the requested statement). At this last statement, the fire was lit, and one more "heretic" was extinguished by the Church.

I would like to focus on this last statement that was foisted upon Michael: "Jesus is the eternal Son of God." What does he mean by "eternal Son?" According to the Trinity, God is believed to exist eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Before testing the "eternal Son" concept logically or biblically, we first turn to the creeds to allow the notion to be defined by its advocates.

...And those that say 'There was when he was not,' and, 'Before he was begotten he was not,' and that, 'He came into being from what-is-not,' or those that allege, that the son of God is 'Of another substance or essence' or 'created,' or 'changeable' or 'alterable,' these the universal and apostolic church anathematizes.²²

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of

²¹ The doctrine of the dual natures (hypostatic union) will be analyzed in greater detail in a later section of this paper.

²² Nicene Creed AD 325

the Father...²³

...Before time began he was begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these "last days," for us and behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect of his humanness...²⁴

...For such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, the Holy Ghost uncreate; the Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible; the Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet, there are not three eternals, but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated, nor three incomprehensibles; but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible... For the right faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ is God and man. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the world; and Man of the substance of His Mother, born into the world...²⁵

The concept expressed by these creeds is that the Son of God did not have a beginning. This is an essential element of the Trinity. If it could be shown that the idea of an “eternally begotten Son” is logically impossible or that it contradicts Scriptures, then the Trinity itself would be disproved. So, first we need to consider the idea of the eternal Son in and of itself. There are two concepts present that I find contradictory: (1) the usage of the word “Son” by definition implies that the Father is older and existed before the Son did; (2) the usage of the word “begotten” implies a definite point in time when someone came into existence.

~Logical problems with using “Son” of two co-eternal persons~

Three times now, common words have needed to be redefined so that the Trinity can exist. The word “person” had to be defined as just the mind of a person rather than a being. Then, the concept of equality could not be applied directly, so a doctrine of dual natures had to be created in order to show how Jesus was both equal and less than the Father at the same time. Now, we are on to the word “Son,” and here again the Trinitarian is forced to redefine a simple word in order to keep believing in the Trinity.

In everyday language, the word “son” means a human being who has been produced as the result of sexual relations between his parents. Of course, the Bible teaches that Jesus was not the product of sexual relations, but the result of the holy spirit overshadowing the virgin Mary. Even so, there is a causal connection between father and son: the father is always the progenitor of the son. In addition, a father is always older than his son. In patriarchal societies such as first century Judaism, the father is always considered to be greater than the son. Yet, all of these obvious connotations are stripped from the word, “son,” in order for it to be crammed into the definition of the Trinity.

~Logical problems with “begotten”~

²³ Constantinopolitan Creed AD 381

²⁴ Chalcedonian Creed AD 451

²⁵ Athanasian Creed circa AD 500

According to the creeds cited above, the Son is “eternally begotten” or “before time he was begotten.” Again, there is a fundamental definitional problem with these two statements irrespective of the biblical data. To be eternal is to have no beginning. To be begotten is to have a beginning (the date of begetting). To be begotten is to be procreated by a father (to be made). To have no making is to have no father or mother. In order to skirt these issues, the primary strategy that has been traditionally put forward since Origen is to say that the Son was begotten outside of time (i.e. in eternity). The problem with this “solution” is that the word “begotten” contains within it temporal restrictions. For example, one begets at a certain point in time. (There is a time before and after.) The word “begotten” is the past participle, which means that the action has already occurred in the past. (Note the necessity of time to speak meaningfully here.) It seems to me that flitting off into “eternity land” where one can beget someone and yet that someone has already always existed is cheating. Yet again, we see the necessity to redefine plain language in order to preserve the concept of the Trinity.

~The Scriptures Speak~

There are a number of key verses that we need to look at to verify or contradict the notion of the Son having no beginning. The question that needs to be answered is, “When was the Son begotten?”

Psalm 2.7 7 "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten you.'"

There was a day when the Son was begotten. To be begotten means to become the child of someone else. The NIV brings this out nicely by translating it this way, “today I have become your Father.” Yet, the simple implication of this text is that yesterday, the day before the “today” mentioned, the Son did not exist, or he was not the Son of the Father. It is unthinkable to imagine someone existing before he was begotten (which is why the standard Trinitarian response is that the Son was begotten in eternity past). However, for me, the idea of an “eternal beginning” is impossible to grasp because the word “eternal” implies not having a beginning.

Matthew 1.20 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, " Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

For some reason, the translators of the NASB wrote “the child who has been **conceived** in her” rather than “the child who has been **begotten** in her” and then put in the footnote, “Lit *begotten*.” I am at a loss to see why they would conceal the begetting of the Son of God by replacing it with the word “conceived.” Conceiving is what the mother does; whereas, begetting is what the father does. The two words are not the same, though they refer to the same event. If one were to read through the Scripture in an attempt to find “the day” when the Son was begotten, he or she would naturally see the miracle begetting of Jesus in his mother as that day.

Luke 1.35 35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy child shall be called the Son of God.

God caused Mary to conceive a child miraculously via the Holy Spirit. This one moment of divine creativity is the time when the Son was begotten. It was a begetting definitely inside of time (approximately 2,000 years ago). This is the only begetting of the Son that the Bible ever describes. In fact, the text explicitly states that it is precisely because of the miracle in the womb of Mary that this child is called the Son of God. The miraculous begetting is what makes Jesus the Son of God. There is no description of Jesus or anyone else being begotten “outside of time.” This concept was invented by the philosophers in order to fit the Bible into the mold of the Trinity. Several other Scriptures speak on this issue, but we will not be able to cover them here.²⁶

In conclusion, the Trinity teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all co-eternal (they have always existed and always will exist). Logically, it is problematic to say the Jesus is the “eternal Son” or that he was “eternally begotten” because both of those phrases imply a beginning point. Furthermore, the Scripture itself explicitly teaches that there was a day on which the Son of God was begotten (Psalm 2.7; Hebrews 1.5). Therefore, we reject the notion that the Son of God is the same age as God, and we reject the crafty language that admits that the Son was begotten but this action occurred in eternity. Jesus is the Son of God because God caused his birth (fathered him). Hence, there was a time before the Son existed. Now we must turn to the central issue of the council of Nicaea—the shared substance of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Co-essential

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there are three who are considered to be God. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. It is easy to see the distinction, therefore, between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each “person” has an independent mind and can interact with the other two. This is starting to sound like three Gods, but of course the Trinity is shrewder than that. In order to make the three-in-one idea work, the Trinity asserts that although each of the three persons is completely distinct with regard to his mind, each shares the same divine substance. Historically, this one point, the idea of shared substance, more than any other, was the source of controversy, especially in AD 325 at the Council of Nicaea.

One word was singled out as the central focus of the various divergent views: same substance *homoousios*. The Arians believed that to be begotten was to be created by the Father which would imply that the Son was made of a different substance (i.e. he is a creature). Since the Father is uncreated and the Son is created, there is a fundamental distinction in substance between the two.

So, what exactly does the doctrine of the Trinity mean when it asserts that the Father is of the same substance as the Son? Below is a quotation from Adolph Harnack’s *History of Dogma*, in which he tells us how Athanasius, one of the primary enforcers of the Trinity in its earliest days after Nicaea, would answer this question:

He [the Son] has one and the same substance in common with the Father and together with Him constitutes a unity, but “substance” in reference to God means nothing else than “Being.” It is not

²⁶ Matthew 1.18; Acts 1.1; 13.33; Galatians 4.4; Hebrews 1.1-2, 5; 5.5

the case that the Father is one substance by itself and the Son another substance by itself and that these two are similarly constituted. This would do away with the unity of the Godhead...Thus the Son is true God, inseparable from the Father and reposing in the unity of the Godhead, not a second alongside of God...for He actually possesses the *ousia* [substance] of the Father; he is *homoousios*, of the same substance. Only He is not actually the Father, for the latter is also His source and root, the Almighty Father, the only unbegotten principle.”

This paragraph is a mere sampling of the complicated language and overbearing hairline distinctions that are necessary in order to define the Trinity without contradiction. The Bible never focuses on the shared essence between the Father and the Son. The language and methods required to speak about the Trinity are non-Hebraic as well as heavily influenced by classical Greek philosophy. This, of course, does not automatically make discussion about the “shared substance” between the Father and Son taboo, but it should alert us that we perhaps have steered off the road of forming our interpretation based on Scripture and onto the road of philosophical speculation.

In either case, the closest the Scripture does come to talking about the shared substance of Father and Son is found in the introduction of Hebrews.

Hebrews 1.1–3 1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

The key phrase to focus on is “the exact representation of his [God’s] nature.” The Trinitarian asserts that since the word translated as “nature” means “essence” or “being,” this text is proof that the Son shares the exact same essence as the Father. It is certainly understandable, presupposing the doctrine of the Trinity, that one could see this verse as supportive. But, did the writer of Hebrews have the *homoousios* concept in mind when this was originally written? I think that it is more likely that the writer of Hebrews was expressing in different words what had been said several times in the Scriptures—that Jesus was God’s representative. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus is the word (the mind/plan/utterance of God) made flesh and the very explanation of the Father (John 1.14, 18). To see Jesus is to see the Father (John 14.6). In other words, Jesus always did what the Father would do and say if He were a human (John 5.19, 30; 8.28; 12.49–50; 14.10, 31). Paul’s way of expressing this same truth is to say that Jesus is the image of the invisible God (2 Corinthians 4.4; Colossians 1.15). This may be a calculated way of bringing the reader’s mind back to Adam as the first son of God (Luke 3.38) who was also made in His image (Genesis 1.26). William Wachtell sees to the root of this concept when he says,

Verse 15 [of Colossians 1] tells us that God’s “beloved Son” (v. 13, NASB) is the “image” of the unseen God. An image, of course, is a visual representation, the copy of an original. The very

fact of using a word such as "image" suggests necessarily that there is a difference in identity between the copy and the original. When one looks in the mirror, he sees an "image" of himself. He does not consider himself to be the person who is "behind the glass" but the person who is "in front of the glass." The only reason to labor this point is that many foolish things have been said about the word "image" in this and other verses, seeking to prove that Christ, "the image of God" (2 Cor. 4.4), is God himself! The word "image" establishes, by its very meaning, that Christ is not God. The image is not the same as the original, and in this case the original is God.

When Jesus told his disciples, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14.9), he was not claiming to be the Father (a claim that would prove too much, if Trinitarianism were correct), but rather that he is like the Father. The writer of Hebrews (1.3) says that he is the "express image" (KJV) – "exact representation" (NIV, NASB) – of God's being, or God's nature. Again, our two words "exact representation" and the single Greek word *carakter*, from which those two words are translated, imply that a copy is being set forth, based on an original. The writer of Hebrews is telling us that God has spoken to us by a Son who is just like God. But to say this Son is "just like" God is to recognize that he is not, in fact, himself God, i.e., the One to whom he is now being "likened." The writer goes on to say that this person who is like God, after purging our sins by his death, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, a further differentiation between the Man who is "just like" God, and the Being who is God, himself!²⁷

So, one could easily see this text in Hebrews 1.3 as evidence against the notion that the Father and Son share the same substance since the Son is the **representation** of the Father's substance. Though it is not clear from the Scriptures that the Father and Son are co-essential, it certainly is clear that the Son was a human being. Perhaps this is why it took more than three hundred years and the help of trained philosophers before this concept could be proposed. Even in his glorified state, Jesus is referred to as a human.

1 Timothy 2.5-6 [New American Bible] 5 For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, 6 who gave himself as ransom for all. This was the testimony at the proper time.

Though Jesus has been elevated to a position "far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion" and even over the angels, he remains a human being. He is the quintessential human, the firstborn of the new creation, the future of humanity. Even so, he is not God in the sense that he shares the substance of deity. Jesus is God in that he represents God to the world as the mediating agent (remember Moses on Mt. Sinai?). John A. T. Robinson aptly sums up the relationship between Father and Son when he says, "Christ is the very 'exegesis' [or explanation] of the Father, and indeed

²⁷ William M. Wachtel, *Colossians 1.15-20 – Preexistence or Preeminence?*, from www.restorationfellowship.org

himself *theos* [God], because *as a man* he is utterly transparent to *another*, who is greater than himself and indeed than all."²⁸ Now we turn to the dual natures as our last category of inquiry for this paper.

Hypostatic Union

Another of the major supporting structures of the doctrine of the Trinity is the notion that Jesus is both God and man. This is technically called the hypostatic union:

A theological term used with reference to the Incarnation [when God became Man] to express the revealed truth that in Christ one person subsists in two natures, the Divine and the human. *Hypostasis* means, literally, that which lies beneath as basis or foundation. Hence it came to be used by the Greek philosophers to denote reality as distinguished from appearances (Aristotle, "Mund.", IV, 21). It occurs also in St. Paul's Epistles (2 Corinthians 9.4; 11.17; Hebrews 1.3-3.14), but not in the sense of person. Previous to the Council of Nicæa (325) *hypostasis* was synonymous with *ousia*, and even St. Augustine (De Trin., V, 8) avers that he sees no difference between them. The distinction in fact was brought about gradually in the course of the controversies to which the Christological heresies gave rise, and was definitively established by the Council of Chalcedon (451), which declared that in Christ the two natures, each retaining its own properties, are united in one subsistence and one person (*eis en prosopon kai mian hpostasin*) (Denzinger, ed. Bannwart, 148). They are not joined in a moral or accidental union (Nestorius), nor commingled (Eutyches), and nevertheless they are substantially united.²⁹

According to the creed formulated at Chalcedon in AD 451, the union of the divine and the human occurred as follows:

Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This selfsame one is perfect both in deity and in humanness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man, with a rational soul [human soul] and a body. He is of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as we ourselves as far as his humanness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted. Before time began he was begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these "last days," for us and behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect of his humanness.

We also teach that we apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten-in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into

²⁸ John A.T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, ©1973, pages 189-190).

²⁹ Catholic Encyclopedia (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07610b.htm>)

the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the "properties" of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one "person" and in one reality [*hypostasis*]. They are not divided or cut into two persons, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Word [Logos] of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of Fathers [the Nicene Creed] has handed down to us.

So, the Trinity teaches that Jesus is fully divine and fully human and that these natures coexist within him without becoming mixed together. There are a number of logical problems that arise from this dual nature hypothesis, but before investigating them, we shall turn to the biblical evidence traditionally given to support this doctrine.

Why would anyone conclude that Jesus is both God and man? The reason is that Jesus is called God in Scripture (John 1.1, 18; 20.28; Romans 9.5; Philippians 2.6; Titus 2.13; Hebrews 1.8; 2 Peter 1.1), and he is called man (Acts 17.31; Romans 5.15; 1 Timothy 2.5; 1 John 4.2; 2 John 7). The doctrine of the dual natures (hypostatic union) is an effort to take both of these sets of Scripture seriously. It is argued that the most biblically accurate statement that can be made in light of these verses is that Jesus is not just a man, nor did he merely appear as a man, but was, in fact, both man and God (the God-Man). Since it is uncontested that Jesus is a human being, I will focus on the texts that imply he is God and give brief responses to each.

John 1.1

The word was God, not the Son. The truth expressed in John 1.14 is that Jesus is what the word became when it was made flesh. In other words, since the Son is not one to one equivalent with the word, this text does not teach that Jesus is God. J. A. T. Robinson aptly expresses the sense of the incarnation of verse 14 when he says:

What I believe John is saying is that the Word which was θεός (1.1), God in his self-revelation and expression, σαρκί ἐγένετο (1.14), was embodied totally in and as a human being, became a person, was personalized not just personified. But that the Logos came into existence or expression as a person does not mean that it was a person before. In terms of the later distinction, it was not that the Logos was hypostatic (a person or *hypostasis*³⁰) and then assumed an impersonal human nature, but that the Logos was anhypostatic until the Word of God finally came to self-expression not merely in nature and in a people but in an individual historic person, and thus became hypostatic.³¹

John 1.18

³⁰ *Hypostasis* is here used to refer to personhood. Prior to Chalcedon the word meant the substance and was synonymous with *ousia*.

³¹ John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, SCM Press, London, page 380-1.

There are two manuscript traditions here. One says “only begotten Son” and the other “only begotten God.” Scholars debate which is correct, with many of the textual critics agreeing that since the earliest manuscripts contain “only begotten God,” and it is more likely that a scribe would change this difficult phrase to the more natural “only begotten Son” than the other way around, the original was “only begotten God.” Meanwhile others, like Bart Ehrman³², are unconvinced that this local tradition is correct because the manuscripts containing “only begotten God” are only found in the Alexandrian (Egypt) area, while the others reading “only begotten Son” are found in the Western, Caesarean, and Byzantine traditions. Furthermore, the phrase “only begotten God” is foreign to the language of the Gospel of John and directly contradicts John 17.3 which indicates that the only true God is the Father. It is perhaps more likely that the “only begotten God” reading, though primitive, is not actually what John wrote, but instead an early corruption used to bolster the prologue to say something explicitly that it only at best implied.

John 20.28

Here we have a clear confession of faith by Thomas who had previously doubted the resurrection of Jesus. There can be no question that he calls Jesus, “my Lord and my God.” However, is this to be understood in an ontological [of or relating to substance] or representative [Jesus represents God to us] sense? To say that the resurrection proves that Jesus is God is counterintuitive, because God cannot die (1 Timothy 1.17); since only dead people are resurrected, the resurrected one cannot be God. Furthermore, the phrase “my lord” is never applied to God and is represented in Hebrew as *adoni* (a title exclusively used of those who are not God). In effect, calling Jesus “my lord” is equivalent to saying that he is not God Almighty. Either Thomas was confessing that he in fact was now seeing God in Christ (cf. John 14.7–11), or he was calling Jesus God in a representative sense like Moses, the Judges of Israel, and the King of Israel were called God (Exodus 7.1; 21.7; 22.8–9; Psalm 45.6; 82.6; John 10.33–36).

Romans 9.5; Titus 2.13; 2 Peter 1.1

Each of these comes down to a translator’s decision. The Greek may with good reason be rendered in either way: to confess Jesus to be God or to be a statement of two—God (the Father) and Jesus. The New American Bible renders the first two in the non-Trinitarian manner and inserts a footnote for 2 Peter 1.1 stating that it may be rendered “our God and the savior Jesus Christ.” Thus, all three of these are ambiguous in the Greek and so cannot form a substantial support for doctrine.

It is sometimes said that he [Jesus] is called God in Romans 9.5; 2 Thessalonians 1.12; and Titus 2.13; but it is more likely that the first is pious ejaculation unconnected with the syntax of the sentence; that in the second and third, the Greek is rather loose and in fact refers (in the former) to the grace of God plus the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and (in the latter) to the glory of our great God and of our Savior Jesus Christ.³³

Philippians 2.6

³² Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Oxford University Press, New York, © 1993, pages 78-82.

³³ Frances Young, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. by John Hick, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, ©1977, page 44 (fn 21).

Although the NIV translates the phrase in question as, “who, being in very nature God,” this is a gross exaggeration of the Greek text which is correctly rendered by many other translations as, “who, being in the form of God.” If Jesus was/is in the form of God, then he is certainly not God. If Paul (or the hymn writer) had wanted to say that Jesus was God, he could easily have said, “who, being God,” but he did not. Furthermore, it is clear that the contrasting parallel of this passage is between Christ, “the form of God,” and “the form of a servant.” In other words, we are talking about rank or status, not substance.

Hebrews 1.8

Since this verse quotes Psalm 45.6 to call the Son God, we ought to understand the application in light of that Messianic context. The Psalm speaks of the Davidic king who is called God but not in an ultimate sense because, as God, he has a God which is called “your God,” the one who anointed him. Thus, if one concludes that Hebrews 1.8 makes Jesus into God, then the Davidic King of Psalm 45.6 is also God, which would make a “Quadity” rather than a Trinity.

In addition to these Scriptures, the Trinitarian argument that Jesus is fully God is also founded on certain things that Jesus did—places where he is not called “God,” but he in fact does things, they would say, that only God can do. He raised the dead, walked on water, exorcised demons, forgave sins, and lived perfectly. Each of these will be taken in turn:

1. Jesus raised the dead.

Jesus raised Lazarus, Jairus’ daughter, and the widow’s son. If raising the dead makes Jesus God, then Elijah, Elisha, and Peter are also God because they also raised the dead.

2. Jesus walked on water.

Jesus confessed the source of his miracles when he said, “the Father abiding in me does His works” (John 10.25, 32, 37; 14.10) and “the Son can do nothing of himself” (John 5.19). Jesus walked on the water because God empowered him to do so.

3. Jesus exorcised demons.

Often Jesus came face to face with the spiritual forces of wickedness. He never struggled but cast them out with a few words. However, he is not unique here either, the 12 also cast out demons as well as the 70. Besides, Jesus clearly stated, “I cast out demons by the spirit of God” (Matthew 12.28). God empowered His Messiah to do these things.

4. Jesus forgave sins.

When the paralyzed man was brought to Jesus, he said, “Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven” (Matthew 9.2). It is alleged that since all sins are ultimately an affront to God (Ps 51.4), that only God can forgive sins. This reasoning is logical, but what if God conferred His right to forgive sins onto his earthly agent—the Messiah? “But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men” (Matthew 9.8). Similarly, Christ’s disciples are authorized to forgive or retain sins (cf. John 20.23).

5. Jesus lived perfectly.

Adam was made in God's image—perfect. God's plan was for him to stay sinless, live forever, cultivate the Garden of Eden, rule over the earth, and produce many children. Jesus also was made in the image of God (Col 3.10). He was divinely created (begotten) (Luke 1.35; Matthew 1.20) in the womb of his mother, Mary. (Adam was also divinely made (Gen 2.7).) Thus, Jesus falls in the category of one who began perfect who needed to maintain his perfection (i.e. the second Adam). Because of what Christ has done, we can now mortify the deeds of our old man and live as he lived (Romans 8.10, 13). Christ is the example of what God can do with a wholly submitted human. To say that one has to be God to be made perfect means that Adam never had a chance and that all Christians will be made "Gods" in the resurrection.

One other argument that often surfaces is related to salvation, "if Jesus was not God, then his sacrifice would not have been sufficient to redeem all of humanity." This assertion seems logical on its surface, but there are four problems with it.

1. Nowhere is this stated in the Bible.
2. God cannot die (1 Tim 1.17 says he is immortal).
3. A sacrifice is effective because God accepts it, not because it is exactly equivalent to the transgression(s).
4. According to their view, only the body (the humanity) of Jesus died; his spirit (the deity) continued to live. Thus, the God portion of Jesus did not die, only impersonal human nature, which is even less valuable than a real human being!

Beyond these biblical considerations, there are also several serious logical problems associated with the doctrine of the hypostatic union. One such problem is well articulated by Hans Schwarz,

If Jesus had not really assumed human nature, so common thought went, he could not actually redeem humanity, since he seemed to be aloof from it. Yet if he had taken on human nature, did this not threaten his divinity from which salvation would necessarily come forth? But even if both 'natures' were maintained, how could they ever be joined to form one being? Would not a savior composed of two 'natures' almost resemble a monster, totally unlike a truly divine or truly human being? One can easily imagine that questions like these defied easy answers or simple solutions.³⁴

Maurice Wiles agrees with this sentiment when he writes:

In entering such a demurrer I am not claiming that one ought to be able to be able perfectly to fathom the mystery of Christ's being before one is prepared to believe. We do not after all fully understand the mystery of our own or one another's beings. But when one is asked to believe something which one cannot even spell out at all in intelligible terms, it is right to stop and push the questioning one stage further back. Are we sure that

³⁴ Hans Schwarz, *Christology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 138.

the concept of an incarnate being, one who is both fully God and fully man, is after all an intelligible concept?³⁵

Yet, whenever someone points out the obvious logical difficulty with combining these two substances (divinity and humanity) without co-mingling, the orthodox defender replies, “Jesus is 100% God and 100% Man.” But is that not 200%? In order to determine whether or not it is possible to have coexisting natures, the characteristics of both deity and humanity need to be explored. It is possible to be both fully God and fully man if and only if both natures are entirely compatible. To illustrate this, one can consider a man who has children. It can be said that he is both a father and a son at the same time. He is a father to his children, and he is the son of his father. Thus, he is 100% a father and 100% a son at the same time! Even so, this is only possible because there is no contradiction of attributes between these two relationships. However, another analogy may be the case: imagine trying to fill one glass with milk up to the brim and then filling that same glass with an equal amount of water. This is impossible because both substances require the same full volume of the glass. The best one can do is to fill the glass with 50% of each milk and water, but that is not what the doctrine of the hypostatic union requires. It is important to determine which of these two analogies is applicable. Below is a chart containing a few of the attributes of deity and the corresponding attributes of humanity. If any one of the two rows conflicts with the other, then the latter of the two analogies applies, and we have a logical contradiction of substance. However, if there is no conflict, then the two natures may be said to coexist, and the former of the analogies applies.

<u><i>Attributes of God</i></u>	<u><i>Attributes of man</i></u>
Thinking (Jeremiah 29.11)	Thinking (Philippians 2.6)
Compassion (Exodus 33.19)	Compassion (Matthew 14.14)
Omniscience (Psalm 147.5)	Limited Knowledge (Mark 13.32)
Omnipotence (Job 42.2)	Limited Power (John 5.19)
Immortality (1 Timothy 6.16)	Mortal (1 Thessalonians 4.14)
Invisible (1 Timothy 1.17)	Visible (Luke 23.8)
Cannot be tempted (James 1.13)	Can be tempted (Hebrews 4.15)

This short list makes the point that although there are some areas where compatibility exists, there are also several characteristics that contradict. It would appear that either the deity of Christ must be diminished by his humanity or his humanity must be elevated by his deity. Still, if he is diminished or elevated, he is no longer fully either, much like the milk and water analogy. Yet, both of these ideas have been historically repudiated by Trinitarians. A portion of God and Man can fit in the same person, but not all of both at the same time—it is simply impossible. Maurice Wiles recognized this when he reflected upon the past struggle over this issue,

It seems to me that throughout the long history of attempts to present a reasoned account of Christ as both fully human and fully divine, the church has never succeeded in offering a

³⁵ Maurice Wiles, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. by John Hick, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, ©1977, page 5.

consistent or convincing picture. Most commonly it has been the humanity of Christ that has suffered; the picture presented has been of a figure who cannot by our standards of judgment (and what others can we apply?) be regarded as recognizably human.³⁶

Besides, is it fair to split Jesus in any way? If Jesus is fully God and fully Man, then everything Jesus experienced both his divine and human natures also experienced. It is not fair to say when something contradicts the notion of his divinity (like not knowing when he will return), that he did know in his divinity but he did not know in his humanity. This is impossible; one cannot both know everything and not know everything at the same time! If Jesus had claimed ignorance about his second coming when he was really omniscient, is this not deceptive? To illustrate this consider the analogy below:

Fred asked Laura for five dollars, and she responded, "I don't have five dollars." But then, ten minutes later, Fred noticed that she was holding a five dollar bill in her hand and questioned her why she had lied. Laura replied, "When I said I didn't have five dollars, I meant in my right hand I did not have it; although it is true that in my left hand I do have five dollars." Would this not be immediately exposed as deception? Either the person has the five dollars or not. One cannot both have and not have five dollars at the same time.

Jesus always spoke the truth. If he said he did not know something, then all of Jesus did not know it. If he died, then he cannot be immortal. If he slept on the boat, then he cannot claim to be the God who never sleeps, etc. Imagine for a moment what the Trinitarian is saying. God was born. God fell asleep in the boat. God died. God was resurrected. All of this confusion can be avoided if we understand Jesus as a human—a sinless man, who, like Adam, was directly made by God but, unlike Adam, did not grasp at equality with God. There is nothing complicated about that. **Jesus is a real human** who really died for our sins. Our entire faith depends on this truth. It is a simple fact: if the whole Jesus did not *really* die, then the whole of our sins are not *really* paid for. Thanks be to God who would not leave us in such a predicament.

Conclusion

It is time for the church to rework her Christology, to reach back beyond Luther, before Augustine, prior to imperial Christianity, and even ante the ante-Nicene Hellenistic fathers, straight back to the first century when the New Testament was written. The words of Hans Küng are instructive:

Had people kept to the New Testament, they would have spared themselves the notorious difficulties which now arose over the

³⁶ Maurice Wiles, *The Myth of God Incarnate: Christianity without Incarnation?* ed. John Hick (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press), 4.

relationship of the three persons 'in' God, all the speculations over the numbers one and three.³⁷

Speculation is the enterprise that one embarks upon when he does not have all of the facts to prove his case. If the Trinity is the result of speculation then it has gone beyond the creeds and concepts of the New Testament. Though the Trinity (at least for Augustine) is supposed to be the supreme example of love in stead a long reign of tyranny has materialized in the wake of this dogmatized speculation.

If the pagans of the first century were amazed by the love which Christians bore one another, those of later centuries could have been equally astonished at the loathing and intolerance the upholders of loving God and their fellow-men displayed towards their associates whose formulae for defining the indefinable differed from their own."³⁸

We can now look back over the last seventeen centuries of Nicene Christianity and observe the fruit of this Trinitarian dogma: philosophic speculation, exclusion, oppression, and brutality. Let us listen to our master who said, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 7.19). The Trinity is well seasoned fuel dried out and ready to catch if even the smallest spark of reason flies onto the heap. The church has had to choose between two children, the Trinity and Reason, but it has been Reason that has been sent out of the house as an orphaned child made to live in the fringes of exile while the Trinity consumes all of the resources and in the end destroys the peace of the home. Why cling to this theological conundrum? Why hold so tight to something that is so hard to comprehend? Why not let go, return to the Jewish documents of the New Testament and consider afresh the ultimate question and the aim of all religion: who is God?

³⁷ Hans Kung, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, Continuum International Publishing Group In, NY, NY, ©1994, pages 173-4.

³⁸ David Christie-Murray, *A History of Heresy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, ©1976, page 62.