

# **“If the Trinity Doctrine is Correct, Then Why Isn’t It in the Bible?”**

Okay, smart guy. . .if the Trinity doctrine is correct, then why do Catholic encyclopedias themselves admit that it was never taught in the bible? Why does Jesus say that God is greater than he is? Why did Jesus pray to God if God is Jesus? If Jesus died on the stake, how could he bring himself back to life in three days?

Thank you for your recent inquiry. Let me see if I can shed some light on the things you have questions about. You ask:

*If the Trinity doctrine is correct, then why do Catholic encyclopedias themselves admit that it was never taught in the Bible?*

You have misinterpreted what they said. What is *not in the Bible* is the use of the term “trinity.” It, like many other terms, is a theological designation descriptive of what is *taught* in the Bible. And this concept of a tri-partite Being comes from many places in Scripture, from both Old and New Testaments.

Perhaps the most important is found in Matthew 28:18-20. From the very beginning, the early church baptized in the name of the “Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost” because it was one of the last things Jesus told his disciples to do: “And Jesus said, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’”

This practice of baptizing converts in the three names of the

Godhead was faithfully followed by the Apostles as they spread out to proclaim the Gospel in the first century, and the practice was still in effect at the time of the first major church council at Nicea (A.D. 325). In fact, this was the major topic under consideration. It was here that what we know as the "Doctrine of the Trinity" was hammered out by these church leaders who searched the scriptures and shaped what they believed to be the truth about the Godhead.. I point this out simply to emphasize that the practice of the Church reflected a universal acceptance of the concept of the Trinity for almost 300 years before the Church got around (because of persecution under the various Roman Emperors) to clarifying and resolving this issue at Nicea.

I think it is also important, in light of your question, for you to know something about this historic Council. Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, called this council, paid the expenses to bring 318 bishops (out of 1,800) from all over the Roman Empire to the little town of Nicea (which is near Constantinople), and served as both host and moderator during the deliberations, which lasted about six weeks.

Most of the bishops present were from the Eastern Mediterranean (Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Damascus, Ephesus) and they spoke Greek. In fact, only seven bishops represented the Western church, those who spoke Latin. Each major city throughout the Roman Empire had a bishop, and the bishops from the prominent cities I just named, by sheer representation, dominated the Council. So if anyone was responsible for coming up with the Trinity it was the Eastern church, not the "Catholic" church.

The elderly Bishop of Rome (who at that time was not considered a pope, but one bishop among equals), chose not to come himself due to illness. He did, however, send two of his associates.

All branches of orthodox Christianity—Eastern Orthodox,

Protestant, and Roman Catholic, have universally accepted the conclusions of the Council of Nicea concerning the Trinity, namely, that the scriptures clearly teach God is One in Essence, but three in personality: unified, but also distinct. Incidentally, the term "catholic," for the first three or four centuries, was used to describe the *entire* church, the *universal* body of Christians sprinkled throughout the Greco-Roman world. At that time "Catholic" had nothing to do with the city of Rome. (\_\_\_\_\_, if you want more specific examples from scripture which teach a trinitarian God, let me know).

*Why does Jesus say that God is greater than he is? Why did Jesus pray to God if God is Jesus?*

Consider John 1:1-4: "In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of Men."

This passage also addresses part of your first question as well. Note that there are two terms used in verse one: "the Word," and "God." What does it say about the Word?

"The Word **was**" – the Word existed in the beginning (Eternity Past)

"The Word was **with** God" – (Greek, *pros*, "face-to-face with")

"The Word **was** God." – (Full Deity. . .or God Himself).

Whoever the Word was, the Word possessed (1) eternal existence like God, (2) had face-to-face fellowship with God, and (3) is designated AS God.

Who was the Word? John 1:14 tells us: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." That's Jesus. The second person of the Trinity came and dwelt among us. He became the God-Man. Jesus was just as

much man as if He had never been God, and just as much God as if He had never been man. . .two natures distinct, but linked together in one Person.

As a true human, Jesus had feelings, grew to manhood (cf. Luke 2:52), could become weary, thirsty, depressed, and die a human death. When Jesus said, "I thirst" on the cross, He was speaking from His humanity. When He said things like, "Your sins are forgiven you," or "Rise, take up your bed and walk," He was speaking from His deity.

In Christ's humanity, while here on earth, the Father WAS greater, because now Christ was relating to God the Father, not only out of the equality He possessed with His Father in eternal existence, eternal fellowship, and full deity, but now also relating to Him as a man. This also answers your question about why Jesus prayed to the Father. The answer is simple: Jesus was praying from His humanity. He was a man with normal human emotions. He felt the need to pray as all men do.

\_\_\_\_\_, your questions have focused entirely on the divine nature of Christ, but His humanity is equally important for us. Consider this passage from Philippians 2:6-11: "Who, although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (competed for), but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the Name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father..."

The total uniqueness of Christ as the God-Man is absolutely necessary for human salvation. He is the Mediator Who, through His death, provides for us a bridge, or access, to God if we

will accept it. And His humanity is necessary to accomplish this, because *Deity doesn't die*: "Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, 'Sacrifice and offering (animals) Thou hast not desired, But a body (His humanity) Thou hast prepared for me. . .Behold, I have come to do thy will, O God.'" (Hebrews 10:5-7)

Further, the scripture makes it clear that the entire plan of redemption to bring about the salvation of human beings involved the entire Trinity. In fact, all the great acts of God throughout the scriptures involved the active participation of the Godhead:

- Creation of the Universe (Ps. 102:25; Col. 1:16; Job 26:31)
- Creation of Man (Gen. 1:1-3, 2:7; Colossian 1:16; Job 33:4)
- The Incarnation (Luke 1:30-37)
- Baptism of Christ (Mark 1:9-11)
- Christ's Death on the Cross (Psalm 22; Romans 8:32; John 3:16, 10:18; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 9:14)
- Christ's Resurrection (Acts 2:24; John 10:18; I Peter 3:10)
- Inspiration of Scripture (II Timothy 3:16; 1:10,11; II Peter 1:21)

To each of the above events, the scriptures ascribe an active participation by each member of the Trinity.

*If Jesus died on the stake, how could he bring himself back to life in three days?*

If Jesus is God as well as man, He would have no trouble rising from the dead. The verses cited above (See Resurrection) indicate that Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit were all actively involved in the process of bringing Him back to life.

I might also add that historically, it is undisputed that during the early centuries there was rapid growth and a dramatic impact by Christianity across the Roman Empire. It is very difficult to explain this, if you just leave a dead Jew hanging on a cross. Nothing short of His actual resurrection can explain the boldness and unfailing commitment of the first disciples to proclaim it so, and, who were, with few exceptions, called upon to seal their affirmation to the truth of this event with their own, violent martyrdoms.

\_\_\_\_\_, I have taken some time to try to answer your questions. They are all good and important questions. And I hope you can see that there are good answers to these questions. But what is most important is if you really want them and believe them. Your note sounded angry, or hurt. Perhaps you have been “burnt” in the past by some who claim to be Christians but who have deeply disappointed you. I hope not to do that.

And I hope this information is helpful to you, \_\_\_\_\_. I am a busy man, but if you sincerely want answers to your questions, I definitely have time for that. The ball is in your court.

Jimmy Williams, Founder  
Probe Ministries

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## **“Does One Have to Believe in the Trinity to be Saved?”**

Do you have to believe in the Trinity to be saved? I have a friend who is a Oneness Pentecostal who does believe Jesus is

**God who died for sins and rose from the grave. However, he does not believe in a Triune God. They believe God showed Himself as the Father, then the Son, and now the Holy Spirit.**

You ask a very good question. Although the doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, I do not personally think that a person needs to have an orthodox understanding of this doctrine in order to be saved. Indeed, when you think about it, many of the people in Christian churches today have an inadequate and unorthodox understanding of this doctrine (but this doesn't necessarily mean that they aren't saved).

The Bible is very clear that we are saved by the grace of God through faith in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly, in order to trust Jesus properly, one must have some genuine knowledge of who He is and why He is capable of saving those who trust Him. But the Bible never teaches that it is necessary to have a correct understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity in order to be saved. All that is required is trusting in Jesus, the One who is truly God and truly man, and who died for our sins and rose from the dead in order to reconcile us to God.

So the bottom line is this: although your friend has an unorthodox view of the Trinity, I personally believe that he or she can still be saved through genuine faith in Christ. Of course, if one were to deny the deity of Christ, that would be another issue! But in the case of your friend, what he or she essentially holds is a modalistic doctrine of the Trinity. And this doctrine, while unorthodox, does not deny the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; it rather denies that there are three coequal and coeternal persons who are God. This is significant, to be sure. But I don't think it's the kind of false belief that will prevent someone who genuinely trusts in Jesus from being saved.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“Where Do I Find Biblical Support for the Trinity?”**

I'm having a hard time with the issue of the Trinity in terms of finding support for this concept in the Bible. I am searching your website and other sites to get a handle on this doctrine. I need to be well versed on this issue as I am in a discussion with two Jehovah's Witnesses where we will be addressing the explanation of the Triune nature of God. All of the other issues I can address and I'm doing okay, but the Trinity has got me a little stumped right now. Can you help me?

I'm so glad you wrote!! I can imagine why you would be having a hard time with the concept of the Trinity if Jehovah's Witnesses are talking to you. And that's why I'm doubly glad you have access to the Probe website to help you be grounded in the truth, as well as equipping yourself to answer their faulty arguments.

The scriptural support FOR the Trinity is so strong that you have to work hard at finding proof texts AGAINST the Trinity! We have several excellent articles on the Trinity, written by a staff member (Pat Zukeran) who has extensive experience in dialoging with Witnesses. Start here:

[Why We Should Believe in the Trinity](#)

then go here:

[Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity](#)



If you have further questions, we are available to answer them through e-mail (info@probe.org) or telephone.

I am sending this along with a prayer that the Lord will show you clearly and with the peace that accompanies His truth, His triune nature. (Consider, for example, the baptism of the Lord Jesus, where all three persons of the Godhead are present: the Father speaking His approval of the Son from heaven, the Son standing in the water in human flesh, and the Holy Spirit appearing as a dove Who came upon Jesus.)

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## **“The Doctrine of the Trinity is Stupid”**

I want to make it clear that I am not a Jehovah's Witness, yet when considering this Nicean doctrine, it way amazes me how people can define the form of a God that Jesus confirmed that no one had seen at any time, neither have we seen his shape, what makes it rather annoying is that people seem to patronize you and in the process try and undermine one's faith in a loving God. I have a question for you.

**Is God subject to Jesus as Jesus is subject to God?**

I believe that there is God and he reveals himself in these last days by his Word (Jesus), Hebrews 1:1-2. Where do you see Jesus sending God to do something or the Holy Spirit telling God to do something? Jesus said he could do nothing of self, Jesus confirmed that the Holy Spirit can do nothing of self,

but all power belongs to God.

In the book of Corinthians 14:11-24, you would see that there is a time when the power that was given and I stress that word given to Jesus will be submitted on to God. I wish for once you Trinitarians will allow the Holy Spirit to reveal who God is by his Son and not through pulpits.

Frankly speaking if you have to have the Holy Spirit reveal all things you would find the doctrine is stupid, and hey if the Jehovah Witness is right in this instance so be it, even in the time of Christ our Lord he acknowledged the Pharisees to be right in at least one instance, it didn't do anything to his pride, and I believe that that is the example we must follow.

Thank you for your response. I believe you have misunderstood the doctrine of the Trinity. Simply stated it is, There exists one God who has revealed Himself in three distinct persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We see throughout scripture the Father is called God. However, the Son is called God as well, John 20:28, Matthew 1:23, Titus 2:13 and many other passages. The Son is worshipped, has authority over areas only God has authority over. The Son shares in the attributes only God can have. The Holy Spirit is also called God, Acts 5:3-4, Romans 8, Genesis 1:2, Matthew 28:19. All three are equal in nature yet there is an economy among the persons of the Trinity. The Son submits to the Father and the the Holy Spirit submits to the Son. 1 Corinthians 11:3 states, "...the head of every woman is man..." Does that mean that women are inferior to men? By no means, men and women are equal in nature, yet there is an economy of headship and submission in marriage, where the man is head over his wife. In the same way God the Father is head over God the Son. They are equal in nature, but different in position as illustrated in marriage.

Regarding the fact that no one has seen God, you are quoting John 1:18. "No one has seen God, only the begotten God who is

in the bosom of the Father.” This verse means, no one has seen God as He really is in all His glory and splendor. There are several passages in the Bible where men have seen God. Exodus 24:9-11, Deuteronomy 34:10. However, they did not see Him in His full glory but in a veiled form that could be withstood. Same with Jesus, He is God the Son revealed in veiled form. Regarding this verse, the JW’s have been dishonest in their translational work. The Greek reads, “*Theon oudies eoraken popote monogeneies theos...*” they translate it “No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten god...” Why do they use a little “g”? They do this to make it match their theology, but this is dishonest translation. They feel they can justify using a little “g” because *theos* has no article or is anartharous. However, in the beginning of the verse “God” or the Greek *Theon* is also anartharous, it has no article. So the JW’s should translate it “No one has seen god” but they do not. They use a capital “G.” Once again, dishonest translation by the Watchtower. When you honestly look at this verse, it supports the deity of Christ, He is God the Son incarnate as stated in John 1:1. The translation properly reads, “No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten God (capital G) who is in the bosom of the Father has made him known”.

Thanks for your inquiry.

Patrick Zukeran

Probe Ministries

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# The Council of Nicea and the

# Doctrine of the Trinity

*Don Closson argues that Constantine did not impose the doctrine of the Trinity on the church, demonstrating the actual role of church leaders and Constantine.*

*This article is also available in [Spanish](#). *

The doctrine of the Trinity is central to the uniqueness of Christianity. It holds that the Bible teaches that “God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.”[{1}](#) So central is this belief that it is woven into the words Jesus gave the church in His Great Commission, telling believers to “. . . go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .” (Matthew 28:19).

It is not surprising, then, that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most denigrated and attacked beliefs by those outside the Christian faith. Both Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses reject this central tenet and expend considerable energy teaching against it. Much of the instruction of the Jehovah’s Witness movement tries to convince others that Jesus Christ is a created being, not having existed in eternity past with the Father, and not fully God. Mormons have no problem with Jesus being God; in fact, they make godhood available to all who follow the teachings of the Church of Latter-day Saints. One Mormon scholar argues that there are *three* separate Gods—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are one in purpose and in some way still one God.[{2}](#) Another writes, “The concept that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God is totally incomprehensible.”[{3}](#)

Among the world religions, Islam specifically teaches against the Trinity. Chapter four of the Koran argues, “Say not ‘Trinity’: desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One

God: glory be to Him: (far Exalted is He) above having a son” (4:171). Although Muhammad seems to have wrongly believed that Christians taught that the Trinity consisted of God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus the Son, they reject as sinful anything being made equivalent with Allah, especially Jesus.

A common criticism by those who reject the doctrine of the Trinity is that the doctrine was not part of the early church, nor a conscious teaching of Jesus Himself, but was imposed on the church by the Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century at the Council of Nicea. Mormons argue that components of Constantine’s pagan thought and Greek philosophy were forced on the bishops who assembled in Nicea (located in present day Turkey). Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the Emperor weighed in against their view, which was the position argued by Arius at the council, and, again, forced the church to follow.

In the remaining portions of this article, we will discuss the impact the three key individuals—Arius, Constantine, and Athanasius—had on the Council of Nicea. We will also respond to the charge that the doctrine of the Trinity was the result of political pressure rather than of thoughtful deliberation on Scripture by a group of committed Christian leaders.

## **Arius**

Let’s look first at the instigator of the conflict that resulted in the council, a man named Arius.

Arius was a popular preacher and presbyter from Libya who was given pastoral duties at Baucalis, in Alexandria, Egypt. The controversy began as a disagreement between Arius and his bishop, Alexander, in 318 A.D. Their differences centered on how to express the Christian understanding of God using current philosophical language. This issue had become

important because of various heretical views of Jesus that had crept into the church in the late second and early third centuries. The use of philosophical language to describe theological realities has been common throughout the church age in an attempt to precisely describe what had been revealed in Scripture.

Alexander argued that Scripture presented God the Father and Jesus as having an equally eternal nature. Arius felt that Alexander's comments supported a heretical view of God called Sabellianism which taught that the Son was merely a different mode of the Father rather than a different person. Jehovah's Witnesses argue today that the position held by Arius was superior to that of Alexander's.

Although some historians believe that the true nature of the original argument has been clouded by time and bias, the dispute became so divisive that it caught the attention of Emperor Constantine. Constantine brought the leaders of the church together for the first ecumenical council in an attempt to end the controversy.

It should be said that both sides of this debate held to a high view of Jesus and both used the Bible as their authority on the issue. Some have even argued that the controversy would never have caused such dissension were it not inflamed by political infighting within the church and different understandings of terms used in the debate.

Arius was charged with holding the view that Jesus was not just subordinate to the Father in function, but that He was of an inferior substance in a metaphysical sense as well. This went too far for Athanasius and others who were fearful that any language that degraded the full deity of Christ might place in question His role as savior and Lord.

Some believe that the position of Arius was less radical than is often perceived today. Stuart Hall writes, "Arius felt that

the only way to secure the deity of Christ was to set him on the step immediately below the Father, who remained beyond all comprehension.”{4} He adds that whatever the differences were between the two sides, “Both parties understood the face of God as graciously revealed in Jesus Christ.”{5}

## Emperor Constantine

Many who oppose the doctrine of the Trinity insist that the emperor, Constantine, imposed it on the early church in 325 A.D. Because of his important role in assembling church leaders at Nicea, it might be helpful to take a closer look at Constantine and his relationship with the church.

Constantine rose to supreme power in the Roman Empire in 306 A.D. through alliance-making and assassination when necessary. It was under Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. that persecution of the church ended and confiscated church properties were returned.

However, the nature of Constantine’s relationship to the Christian faith is a complex one. He believed that God should be appeased with correct worship, and he encouraged the idea among Christians that he “served their God.”{6} It seems that Constantine’s involvement with the church centered on his hope that it could become a source of unity for the troubled empire. He was not so much interested in the finer details of doctrine as in ending the strife that was caused by religious disagreements. He wrote in a letter, “My design then was, first, to bring the diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity; and, second to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world . . .”{7} This resulted in him supporting various sides of theological issues depending on which side might help peace to prevail. Constantine was eventually baptized shortly before his death, but his commitment to the Christian faith is a matter of debate.

Constantine participated in and enhanced a recently established tradition of Roman emperors meddling in church affairs. In the early church, persecution was the general policy. In 272, Aurelian removed Paul of Samosata from his church in Antioch because of a theological controversy. Before the conflict over Arius, Constantine had called a small church synod to resolve the conflict caused by the Donatists who argued for the removal of priests who gave up sacred writings during times of persecution. The Donatists were rebuked by the church synod. Constantine spent five years trying to suppress their movement by force, but eventually gave up in frustration.

Then, the Arian controversy over the nature of Jesus was brought to his attention. It would be a complex debate because both sides held Jesus in high regard and both sides appealed to Scripture to defend their position. To settle the issue, Constantine called the council at Nicea in 325 A.D. with church leaders mainly from the East participating. Consistent with his desire for unity, in years to come Constantine would vacillate from supporting one theological side to the other if he thought it might end the debate.

What is clear is that Constantine's active role in attempting to resolve church disputes would be the beginning of a new relationship between the empire and the church.

## **Athanasius**

The Council of Nicea convened on May 20, 325 A.D. The 230 church leaders were there to consider a question vital to the church: Was Jesus Christ equal to God the Father or was he something else? Athanasius, only in his twenties, came to the council to fight for the idea that, "If Christ were not truly God, then he could not bestow life upon the repentant and free them from sin and death."[8](#) He led those who opposed the teachings of Arius who argued that Jesus was not of the same



substance as the Father.

The Nicene Creed, in its entirety, affirmed belief “. . . in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost.” [\[9\]](#)

The council acknowledged that Christ was God of very God. Although the Father and Son differed in role, they, and the Holy Spirit are truly God. More specifically, Christ is of one substance with the Father. The Greek word *homoousios* was used to describe this sameness. The term was controversial because it is not used in the Bible. Some preferred a different word that conveyed *similarity* rather than *sameness*. But Athanasius and the near unanimous majority of bishops felt that this might eventually result in a lowering of Christ's oneness with the Father. They also argued that Christ was begotten, not made. He is not a created thing in the same class as the rest of the cosmos. They concluded by positing that Christ became human for mankind and its salvation. The council was unanimous in its condemnation of Arius and his teachings. It also removed two Libyan bishops who refused to accept the creed formulated by the Council.

The growing entanglement of the Roman emperors with the church during the fourth century was often less than beneficial. But rather than Athanasius and his supporters seeking the backing of imperial power, it was the Arians who actually were in favor of the Emperor having the last word.

## Summary

Did Constantine impose the doctrine of the Trinity on the church? Let's respond to a few of the arguments used in support of that belief.

First, the doctrine of the Trinity was a widely held belief prior to the Council of Nicea. Since baptism is a universal act of obedience for new believers, it is significant that Jesus uses Trinitarian language in Matthew 28:19 when He gives the Great Commission to make disciples and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The *Didache*, an early manual of church life, also included the Trinitarian language for baptism. It was written in either the late first or early second century after Christ. We find Trinitarian language again being used by Hippolytus around 200 A.D. in a formula used to question those about to be baptized. New believers were to be asked to affirm belief in God the Father, Christ Jesus the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit.

Second, the Roman government didn't consistently support Trinitarian theology or its ardent apologist, Athanasius. Constantine flip-flopped in his support for Athanasius because he was more concerned about keeping the peace than in theology itself. He exiled Athanasius in 335 and was about to reinstate Arius just prior to his death. During the forty-five years that Athanasius was Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, he was banished into exile five times by various Roman Emperors.

In fact, later emperors forced an Arian view on the church in a much more direct way than Constantine supported the Trinitarian view. Emperors Constantius II and Julian banished Athanasius and imposed Arianism on the empire. The emperor Constantius is reported to have said, "Let whatsoever I will, be that esteemed a canon," equating his words with the authority of the church councils.[{10}](#) Arians in general "tended to favor direct imperial control of the church."[{11}](#)

Finally, the bishops who attended the Council of Nicea were far too independent and toughened by persecution and martyrdom to give in so easily to a doctrine they didn't agree with. As we have already mentioned, many of these bishops were banished by emperors supporting the Arian view and yet held on to their convictions. Also, the Council at Constantinople in 381 reaffirmed the Trinitarian position after Constantine died. If the church had temporarily succumbed to Constantine's influence, it could have rejected the doctrine at this later council.

Possessing the freedom to call an ecumenical council after the Edict of Milan in 313, significant numbers of bishops and church leaders met to consider the different views about the person of Christ and the nature of God. The result was the doctrine of the Trinity that Christians have held and taught for over sixteen centuries.

#### Notes

1. Grudem, Wayne, *Bible Doctrine* (Zondervan, 1999), p. 104.
2. Blomberg, Craig L., & Robinson, Stephen E., *How Wide the Divide*, (InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 128.
3. Bruce McConkie in *Mormonism 101* by Bill McKeever & Eric Johnson (Baker Books, 2000), p. 52.
4. Hall, Stuart G., *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 135.
5. Ibid.
6. Hall, Stuart G., *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p. 118.
7. Noll, Mark, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, (InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 51.
8. Ibid., 55.
9. Ibid., 57.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 60.

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# **“I Have Questions About the Trinity”**

I still have questions about the Trinity from your article [The Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity](#)—here are some of them:

John 17:1-3 The Emphatic Diaglott reads this this way: “Jesus spoke these things, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the HOUR is come: glorify THY son, that the son may glorify thee as thou didst give him Authority over all flesh, so everything which thou hast given to him, he may give to them even aionian life. And this is the AIONIAN life, that they may know thee, the ONLY TRUE God, and him whom thou didst send, Jesus Christ.”

If Jesus Christ is God Almighty, then who was he praying to?

When you quoted Rev. 1:16 and 17, you were taking them out of context, surely, because the first few verses show that God sent his angel (Jesus Christ) to John to give him the Revelation. I am assuming you are going to say that it was Jesus Christ who gave the Rev. to John. If so, then Jesus was quoting the words of God, his Father.

Are you saying that Jesus is God—equal in every way to God—or that he a powerful spirit being as God is? In the page dealing with the Trinity you mentioned that Jesus is the same nature as God, that is why I ask?

I have never believed the Trinity, but if I am wrong in not doing so, I want to find out.

Hello and thank you for your question.

Who is Jesus praying to? He is praying to God the Father. Many

people misunderstand the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible shows that there is one God who has revealed himself in three distinct and separate persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. What JW's and others misunderstand is that Jesus, the Father and Holy Spirit are all the same person. The Trinity does not teach Jesus is the Father or that the Father is the Holy Spirit or the Son is the Holy Spirit. The Trinity means there exists one God revealed in three distinct persons. As seen at the Baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3, the Father spoke from heaven, the Son arose from the water, and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove.

So who was Jesus praying to in John 17:1-3? It was God the Son praying to God the Father. I hope you go on to read the rest of the verse. 17:5 states, "And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." Jesus shared in the glory of the Father. What a significant statement in light of Isaiah 42:8, where God the Father states, "I am the Lord, that is my name. I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." The glory of God is His alone. It is evident that this is the glory that belongs to God alone. Why does Jesus have it? Because He is God.

Let us look at Revelation 1:16-17. We are sure this is Jesus speaking because of the context. Verse 1:13 states, "And among the lampstands was someone like the son of Man." Is God the Father ever called the son of man? No, this is the title of Jesus (Daniel 7:13, Matthew 12:8, 32, and 20:18.) Jesus is not quoting the Father in 1:17-18, He is stating what is true of Himself. Look at the context. Verses 1:17-18 go together. The quote begins at 1:17b, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last." Then it connects to verse 18, "I am the living one; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!" Is this statement true of the Father or the son? Was the Father once dead and resurrected to life? No, that is clearly true only of God the Son, Jesus who died on the cross and rose from the

dead. Jesus would not be quoting a statement from the Father that was not true of the Father. The Father was never dead and resurrected to life. Context shows verses 1:17-18 are one quote and it is Jesus speaking about what is true of Himself.

Thanks for your question. Keep studying the Bible and the Bible only.

Patrick Zukeran  
Probe Ministries

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## What Difference Does the Trinity Make?

*Greg Crosthwait examines the Christian teaching of the Trinity—one God in three Persons—with a view toward how it impacts one's daily life.'*

How much do you love the Trinity? Strange question, isn't it? Well, it certainly struck me as strange the first time I read it. But James R. White, in his article *Loving the Trinity*,[{1}](#) both asks the question and then addresses why it's so important.

On the issue of the Trinity in the contemporary church, he writes, "For many Christians, the Trinity is an abstract principle, a confusing and difficult doctrine that they believe, although they are not really sure why in their honest moments. They know it is important, and they hear people saying it is 'definitional' of the Christian faith. Yet the fact of the matter is . . . little is taught about the relationship of the divine Persons and the Triune nature of God. It is the great forgotten doctrine."[{2}](#)

When I hear that, it prompts me to ask two questions. First of all, to what extent as Christians are we consciously Trinitarian? Well, that softens the question. Perhaps I should ask more accurately, To what extent as Christians are we relentlessly, doggedly, and fervently Trinitarian? Secondly, why should we be?

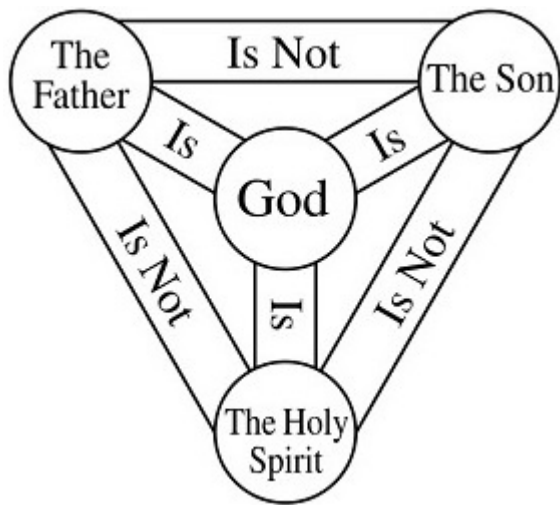
In this article I'll examine why the Trinity is important. And hopefully we'll lay some groundwork so that we may happily realize that to be truly Christian is to be consciously Trinitarian.

## **Why the Trinity is Important: An Overview**

Perhaps some find it easier to think that the Trinity is the "secret handshake" of Christian theologians. Or maybe some may consider the Trinity of value only so we can sing the hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy*. At the root of these notions is the idea that the Trinity serves no place in the real life of one who holds a Christian worldview. But that's a mistake. A. W. Tozer begins his book *The Knowledge of the Holy* saying, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."[\[3\]](#) This statement follows his comment in the preface that reads, "It is impossible to keep our moral practices sound and our inward attitudes right while our idea of God is erroneous or inadequate. If we would bring back spiritual power to our lives, we must begin to think of God more nearly as He is."[\[4\]](#)

Before moving on in our discussion, though, it may be helpful to give a brief explanation of what I mean when I refer to the Trinity. Of course, we could borrow a short phrase from *Holy, Holy, Holy*, "God in three persons, Blessed Trinity." Another handy definition is this, "Although not itself a biblical term, 'the Trinity' has been found a convenient designation for the one God self-revealed in Scripture as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It signifies that within the one essence of the Godhead we have to distinguish three 'persons' who are neither

three gods on the one side, nor three parts or modes of God on the other, but coequally and coeternally God.”[\[5\]](#)



Even though it's short, this definition is both a mouthful and a mind full. But let's settle on four basic concepts before we move on to the implications. At the heart of the definition of the Blessed Trinity we have: one God, three Persons, who are coequal and coeternal. With this sketch in place, then, we are ready to move

out and survey the importance of the Trinity with respect to the Christian worldview and its practical aspects for the Christian life. At the end of our discussion I truly hope that we can affirm together our love for the Trinity.

## The Trinity and the Christian Worldview

Having established a short, working definition of the Trinity—one God, three Persons, who are coequal and coeternal—let's look at the implications of the Trinity on your worldview.

When it comes to discussing worldviews the starting point is the question, Why is there something rather than nothing?[\[6\]](#) As you may already know, there are three basic answers to this question. The pantheist would generally answer that all is one, all is god, and this “god with a small g” has always existed. Second, the naturalist would say that something, namely matter, has always existed. Third, the theist holds that a personal, Creator-God is eternal and out of nothing He created all that there is.

When we look around at what exists, we see an amazing collection of seemingly disparate elements such as gasses, liquids, and solids, planets and stars, horses, flowers,



rocks, and trees. And seeing all of these things we notice that they all exist in some sort of equilibrium or unity. How is it that such diversity exists in such apparent unity? And are we as human beings any more important than gasses or ants?

Because the pantheist believes that everything melds into a gigantic oneness, he ultimately has no place for individual things or people. As Scott Horrell argues, "When a worldview begins with an all-inclusive, apersonal deity, there is no final place for the human being or for ethics on either an individual or a social level." {7}

The pantheist's commitment to an all-inclusive oneness leaves no room for the real world in which people live, where I am not you and neither of us is one with a tree or a mountain. The naturalist has no problem accepting the reality of the physical world and the diversity present in it. However, there is no solid ground for understanding why it is all held together. In short, there is no infinite reference point so we are left with the circular argument: everything holds together because everything holds together; if it didn't, we wouldn't be here to see it. What a coincidence! In fact, coincidence, or chance, is the only basis for anything. As a result human beings are left with an absurd existence. "Without a unifying absolute, everything exists by chance and chance alone. . . . The human being is reduced to either a cog in a cosmic machine or an astronaut adrift in space. . . . If there is no infinite, absolute reference in the universe, then all of the particulars . . . have absolutely no meaning." {8}

Trinitarian theism is the only option that contains within itself an explanation of both the one and the many while saying that people are important. In the Trinity, God has revealed Himself as the eternal, infinite reference point for His creation. Moreover, the Trinity provides the only adequate basis for understanding the problem of unity and diversity since God has revealed Himself to be one God who exists in a plural unity. Ultimately then, as Horrell concludes, "Every

thing and every person has real significance because each is created by and finally exists in relationship to the Triune God.”[{9}](#)

## The Trinity and Salvation

In reference to the Christian worldview I used the term *Trinitarian theism*. I used that term because the doctrine of the Trinity separates Christianity from any other type of theism. And, most importantly, it’s the only view that adequately describes God’s work in salvation.

There are other religions beside Trinitarian theism that believe in one God. Judaism, Islam, and so-called Unitarian Christianity (an oxymoron to be sure) all hold to a mono-personal God. This understanding of “God in one person” suffers in two important respects.

First of all, if we understand God to be self-existent, eternal, and personal, characterized by such an action as love, then a mono-personal God cannot be adequate, for love demands an object. Consider Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” The first part of this passage is one of the great texts affirming the essential unity of God. And love is the proper human response to Him. This love is not some squishy feeling, but rather an expression of devotion from someone to someone. Love has a source and love has an object. Since human beings are created in the image of God, then He must be capable of love in His very self. So, when we hear, “God is love,” (1 John 4:16) we must realize that in Himself God must be at least two. Scott Horrell writes, “In short, it seems from every vantage that for God to be infinitely personal and to be love, he must exist as at least two persons. A mono-personal God is not ‘big enough’ to be God.”[{10}](#)

The other area in which a strictly mono-personal God is inadequate is in the relationship between God's mercy and His justice. In Romans 3:25-26 we read of Jesus Christ, "a sacrifice of atonement" (NIV) and God the Father who is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Simply stated, a mono-personal God cannot be both just and the justifier. Horrell argues, "[I]f God, as Moral Absolute of the universe, shows mercy and forgives the sinner, then he has violated his righteous justice. And if God exercises justice against the sinner, then he has denied his mercy. For a mono-personal God, compassion contradicts holiness, forgiveness is finally contrary to justice. God's judgment and mercy are arbitrary, if not capricious."[{11}](#)

So far we have seen the work of God the Father, the righteous judge, and God the Son, the only One who can satisfy the judgment of God the Father, and therefore the only worthy object of saving faith. The Trinity is complete as we understand that the Holy Spirit is the One who, in Jesus' words, "when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit is the active agent in the hearts of men and women, and He "works in the fallen world convicting and leading sinners to salvation. With God's absolute holiness satisfied at the cross, true forgiveness can be freely offered to all who believe."[{12}](#)

So we see that the gospel, the story of the God who saves His people, is Trinitarian at its very core. Otherwise God would not be truly just, in which case grace would be far less than amazing.

## **The Trinity and the "Everydayness" of Everyday**

What greater reality can be contained within the Christian confession of the Trinity than that of a God who is able to

exercise perfect justice and perfect mercy perfectly? Such a self-revelation from God regarding His activity in salvation should encourage confessing Christians to focus on and revel in the Trinity rather than ignoring or dismissing it as though it were some eccentric, old uncle at a family reunion. And according to James R. White, this is what is happening in parts of the church.

*Entire sections of the modern church are functionally “non-Trinitarian.” I did not say “anti-Trinitarian,” for that would involve a positive denial of the doctrine. Instead, while maintaining the confession that the Trinity is true, many today function as if the Trinity did not exist. It has no impact on their theology, their proclamation, prayer, or worship. {13}*

This observation leads us into the final section of our discussion. Since we covered the importance of the Trinity with regard to the Christian worldview and the gospel, let's not leave it on the shelf or in the text book. Let's dress the doctrine of the Trinity in some work clothes and allow this blessed truth to change our lives where we live them, in the everydayness of everyday.

Trinitarianism impacts three important areas: worship, prayer, and the local church.

## **Worship**

Worship is a debated topic these days. But in the midst of the opinions and preferences about drums, organs, guitars, hymns, praise choruses, and seeker sensitivity, how often does someone declare that our worship is not Trinitarian enough?

Though it seems like a dry, academic issue this is an important question in two ways. First of all, if our worship is not Trinitarian enough, then we fail to worship the God of the Bible. And in biblical terms worshipping anything other

than the Most High God is idolatry. As Isaiah records, "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me" (Isa. 46:9).

Would a visitor to a typical worship service realize that a Christian church confesses and worships the Triune God? Most certainly someone would realize that we worship Jesus. That person might even hear Him called God's Son. But would this person hear prayers addressed to the Father, in the name of the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit? Would this visitor hear songs to the different Persons of the Trinity, about the different Persons of the Trinity?

Good examples of this type of song are the classic hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy* and the chorus *There is a Redeemer*, with the refrain, "Thank you, O my Father, for giving us Your Son; And leaving Your Spirit 'til the work on earth is done." That last example is not foggy theology, but an expression of gratitude to the Living God for who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.

I am not arguing that all Christian worshipers must hold doctorates in theology, but simply that we exercise care in the content of our worship so that we truly worship the one true God in three Persons. We can focus on Jesus, and indeed we ought to for He is our Savior. But we must not exclude confession and adoration of the Father and the Holy Spirit, much less the blessed Trinity.

## Prayer

In his book, *God: Who He Is, What He Does, How to Know Him Better*, J. Carl Laney includes a helpful section on prayer. He writes, "Although God is one divine essence, He is also three persons. Which of these should we address in our prayers?"<sup>{14}</sup> Though this question may seem like an unnecessary trifle, we must be informed by Scripture. We are taught by Jesus to

address God the Father, “Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your Name” (Matt. 6:9). In another statement on prayer Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you” (John 16:23). We see that, in Laney’s words, “Christian prayer involves requesting the Father on the basis of the Son’s merits, influence, and reputation”[{15}](#)—that is to say, ask of the Father in the name of the Son. We can also address our prayers to Jesus, who says, “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:14).[{16}](#)

The Spirit is also active when we pray. Paul writes, “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). So then we pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, by the power of the Spirit who assists us in our weakness. What a wonderful provision from the Triune God who not only desires us to ask of Him, but also enables us to do it.

## **The Local Church**

As we seek to apply the Trinity in the everydayness of everyday, let’s consider life in the local church. And here we encounter an important application of Trinitarian theology.

The Trinity serves as a model for the local church. For as there are three Persons united in the Godhead, all of whom are equally God, so also those who are children of God, united in Christ, and members of the church universal are all equally sons and daughters of God and coheirs of His promises. As Scott Horrell writes, “Believers are to be given real value and dignity by the local church, not left as anonymous spectators amidst professional performances.”[{17}](#) The foundation of the value and dignity of believers, regardless of gender or training, rests in the Trinity.

However, this does not negate the need for order in the

church. For, though each member of the Trinity is equally God, we see that there is a functional order within the Trinity. The Father sends the Son, the Son glorifies the Father, the Father and the Son together send the Spirit, and the Spirit bears witness of the Son. So also we have a functional order in the local church. There are those who are responsible to exercise authority, elders and deacons, and those who are responsible to submit to authority. But it's important that we realize that submission does not imply inferiority. The Trinity models this truth. "Whether in the church, family, or society, submission to another does not admit inferiority any more than the Son, by his obedience, is inferior to the Father."[\[18\]](#)

Though brief in some respects, I hope this discussion has been profitable for you. It's only a beginning point, and I encourage you to press on, for the deep well of the greatness of our Triune God can never run dry. May we then remove the concept of the Trinity from our dusty shelves and proudly display it as the jewel of God's revelation that it is.

## Notes

1. James R. White, "Loving the Trinity," *Christian Research Journal*, Volume 21, Number 4.
2. *Ibid.*, 22.
3. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1961), 1.
4. *Ibid.*, viii.
5. G. W. Bromily, "Trinity" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 1112.
6. For a fuller discussion on worldviews see [Worldviews](#) by Jerry Solomon at [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org).
7. J. Scott Horrell, *In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Constructing a Trinitarian Worldview* (1998), 1.
8. *Ibid.*, 8.
9. *Ibid.*, 8.
10. *Ibid.*, 11.

11. Ibid., 11.
12. Ibid., 12.
13. White, 22.
14. J. Carl Laney, *God: Who He Is, What He Does, How to Know Him Better* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1999), 122.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. J. Scott Horrell, *The Self-Giving Triune God, The Imago Dei and the Nature of the Local Church: An Ontology of Mission*, 13.
18. Ibid.

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# Why We Should Believe in the Trinity

## How the Doctrine of the Trinity Developed

The doctrine of the Trinity separates orthodox Christian teaching from heresy. This essential teaching of Christianity states that we believe in one God who exists in three separate and distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each member is equal in nature and substance. (For a biblical defense of the Trinity, see [Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity](#).)

A common question raised by heretical groups is, When and how did this doctrine develop? According to the Watchtower tract *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* this doctrine was not held by the church fathers. Rather, it was imposed on the church by the pagan emperors who had “converted” to Christianity at the



Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. and the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. The bishops in attendance were overawed by the emperor and signed the creed against their inclination. Let's take a careful look at what really happened at these two key church councils.

The Council of Nicea was the first church council ever called. Until this time, the church was under severe persecution from the Roman Empire. Early in the fourth century, the emperor Constantine showed an interest in Christianity and was tutored by Hosius of Cordova who held to the doctrine of the Trinity. With peace in the empire, Christianity spread all across the world. However, in Alexandria a presbyter named Arius gathered a significant following around his teaching that Jesus was a created being and not God. As his teachings spread, the controversy grew and Constantine realized it needed to be addressed. He thus called for the first universal church council at Nicea to debate the matter.

Although the doctrine of the Trinity itself was not discussed, the doctrine of the deity of Christ was confirmed. In attendance were approximately 300 bishops, many of whom were divided over the issue. Arius with his supporters, Theonas, Secundus, and Eusebius of Nicomedia, held the view that Jesus was an inferior creature to God the Father. The orthodox camp was led by Bishops Hosius, Alexander of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Athanasius who argued that Jesus is God.

After hours of debate, the council concluded the following in their creed:

*"We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance (homoousios) with the Father. . . ."*

While the deity of Christ—a crucial aspect of the doctrine of

the Trinity—was affirmed, Arius nevertheless continued to teach his doctrine of Christ's inferiority, and Arianism came back into favor for a short time. Fifty years later, in 381 A.D., the Council of Constantinople was called by Emperor Theodosius. Here the Nicene Creed was reaffirmed and further clarified. It is at this council that the Holy Spirit was declared equal in divinity with the Father and the Son.

The councils of Nicea and Constantinople did not establish a new creed. The councils clarified and formalized the belief in the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, views already held by the apostles and church fathers. However, Jehovah's Witnesses contest this point. Let's see if the church fathers who lived before the Council of Nicea, the ante-Nicene fathers, held to the deity of Christ.

## **What Did the Church Fathers Say About the Trinity?**

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity were never a part of the theology of the church fathers. In the article *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* several church fathers are cited as denying the orthodox view of Jesus. They include Justin Martyr who died in 165 A.D., Irenaeus 200 A.D., Clement of Alexandria 215 A.D., Tertullian 230 A.D., Hippolytus 235 A.D., and Origen who died in 250 A.D. The Watchtower list quotes from each theologian, claiming that they believed the inferiority of the Son to the Father. But the article contains no footnotes citing the source of these quotations.

Did these significant figures in church history really deny the divine nature of Christ? Let us take a careful (and referenced) look at what the ante-Nicene fathers stated in their original writings.

*Justin Martyr:* "...the Father of the universe has a Son; who being the logos and First-begotten is also God" (*First Apology* 63:15).

*Irenaeus:* (referencing Jesus) "...in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, . . ." (*Against Heresies* I, x, 1).

*Clement of Alexandria:* "Both as God and as man, the Lord renders us every kind of help and service. As God He forgives sin, as man He educates us to avoid sin completely" (*Christ the Educator*, chapter 3.1). In addition, "Our educator, O children, resembles His Father, God, whose son He is. He is without sin, without blame, without passion of soul, God immaculate in form of man accomplishing His Father's will" (*Christ the Educator* Chapter 2:4).

*Tertullian:* "...the only God has also a Son, his Word who has proceeded from himself, by whom all things were made and without whom nothing has been made: that this was sent by the Father into the virgin and was born of her both man and God. Son of Man, Son of God, ..." (*Against Praxeas*, 2).

*Hippolytus:* "And the blessed John in the testimony of his gospel, gives us an account of this economy and acknowledges this word as God, when he says, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' If then the Word was with God and was also God, what follows? Would one say that he speaks of two Gods? I shall not indeed speak of two Gods, but of one; of two persons however, and of a third economy, the grace of the Holy Ghost" (*Against the*

*Heresy of One Noetus.* 14).

*Origen:* (with regard to John 1:1) "...the arrangement of the sentences might be thought to indicate an order; we have first, 'in the beginning was the Word,' then 'And the Word was with God,' and thirdly, 'and the Word was God,' so that it might be seen that the Word being with God makes Him God" (*Commentary on John*, Book 2, Chapter 1).

Not only in these instances, but also throughout their writings the ante-Nicene fathers strongly defend the deity of Christ.

## **What Did the Apostle John Say?**

To summarize our argument thus far, we discovered that the doctrine of the Trinity was formally adopted as the official teaching of Christianity after the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. I argued against opponents who state that the doctrine was imposed on the church by Constantine in a political move. Rather, the Nicene Creed was a formal statement of a doctrine already articulated by the church fathers even before Nicea. Now, let us take a look and see what the apostle John teaches.

John opens his Gospel with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." *In the beginning was the Word* shows that the Word was eternally with the Father and not a created being. The second phrase, *and the Word was with God*, shows that the Word is a distinct person from the Father. Thirdly, *and the Word was God* reveals that although separate and distinct, the Word in nature and substance is fully God.

Throughout his Gospel, John demonstrates that Jesus possesses the attributes which qualify Him to be God. Jesus displays power over nature, over disease, and even death. He has a grasp of the Law of God which He, though not formally trained,

teaches with such authority as had never been seen before (7:14-16). Testimony from John the Baptist (1:29; 3:26-36) shows His authority to be God. Jesus also accepted the worship of men (9:38).

Jesus also makes several statements revealing His divinity. In John 5:22-23 Jesus says, "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." Here, Jesus commands followers to honor Him as they honor the Father. To do this, one must acknowledge Jesus as being equal in nature to God.

John 8:58 states, "'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am.'" The term *I am* is the term God used when He spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Here is a clear statement of Christ declaring His divinity.

In John 10:30 Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." Jesus did not mean "I am one in purpose with God." He was claiming to *be* God. The verses that follow His declaration make that clear: "Again the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God'" (vv. 31-33). The Jews clearly understood His statement and Jesus does not deny their accusation.

The culmination of John's testimony of Jesus' deity is in 20:28, which is the conclusion he desires all his readers to come to. "Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'" John argues throughout his entire Gospel for the purpose that all who read it might come to believe that Jesus is God incarnate.

## John 1:1

In spite of the overwhelming testimony throughout the entire Gospel of John, there are some who argue about the translation of John 1:1. *The New World Translation* of the Jehovah's Witnesses reads, "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was a god," which makes Jesus to be an inferior being to God. In refutation of this translation, I will explain the Greek rules behind the proper translation and argue that the Greek word *God* (*theos*) in John 1:1c must be translated in the definite or qualitative sense—written *God* with a capital G—rather than indefinitely—a *god*—as the NWT has done. This discussion will get a little technical, but the importance of the subject deserves careful attention.

Let me first define some key terms of Greek grammar. An *anarthrous noun* is a noun without the definite article, the English equivalent of the word *the*. A noun in the nominative case in Greek often signifies that this is the subject of the sentence. A predicate nominative noun is a noun in the same case and is equivalent to the subject. The Greek construction of John 1:1c looks like this, *theos e<sup>n</sup> ho logos*, and is literally translated "God was the Word."

The subject of this phrase is *the Word* (*ho logos*). We know this because it is in the Greek nominative case and it possesses the definite article *ho*. *God* (*theos*) is in the nominative case and does not have an article. It precedes the equative verb "was" (*e<sup>n</sup>*), and therefore is the predicate nominative.

The Jehovah's Witnesses argue that since *God* (*theos*) does not have the article before it, it must be translated indefinitely. So we get their translation, "a god." However, there are other possibilities available for translation.

According to a Greek grammar rule called Colwell's rule, the construction in John 1:1c—anarthrous predicate nominative

(*theos*)equative verb (*e<sup>n</sup>*)articular noun (*ho logos*)does not automatically mean that the predicate nominative must be indefinite. Colwell's rule, in summary, states that an anarthrous predicate nominative preceding an equative verb can be translated as either (1) definite, (2) qualitative, or (3) indefinite. Thus, (1) as a definite noun *the Word* equals *God*, (2) as a qualitative *the Word* has the attributes and qualities of *God*, or (3) as an indefinite noun *the Word* is a *god*. Context determines which one it will be.

In the vast majority of cases in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John, this construction is translated as a qualitative or definite noun. Greek Scholar Dan Wallace writes, "an anarthrous pre verbal PN [predicate nominative] is normally qualitative, sometimes definite and only rarely indefinite. . . . We believe there may be some in the NT, but this is nevertheless the most poorly attested semantic force for such a construction."[\[1\]](#)

Furthermore, the translators of the *New World Translation* are not even consistent with their own rule of translation. Throughout John we find instances of an anarthrous *God* (*theos*) not translated as "a god," but as "God." John 1:6 and 1:18 are clear examples of this. Therefore, to argue that *God* (*theos*) in John 1:1c *must* be translated as indefinite solely because it has no article is clearly incorrect.

In an effort to insure that our decision agrees with the overall context of John's Gospel, we must see if the Gospel of John argues that Christ is inferior to God. As I showed previously, this is certainly not the case.

We must conclude that grammar and context argue against an indefinite translation that makes the Word an inferior being to God. The noun *God* (*theos*) should be translated "God," as a definite or qualitative, thus upholding the fact that Jesus is 100 percent God and 100 percent man.

# Alleged Objections from the Gospel of John

To close this discussion, I will address several problem verses in the Gospel of John that are used in attempts to deny the deity of Christ.

In some translations like the *King James Version* and *New American Standard*, John 1:14 reads that Jesus is “the only begotten from the Father.” Some cults understand the Greek word translated *only begotten* to mean “to procreate as the Father.”<sup>{2}</sup> In other words, God created Jesus. However, this definition would be inconsistent with John 1:1a, 17:5, and 17:24 which declare the eternal nature of the Word.

The term, translated in some versions as “only begotten,” may sound to English ears like a metaphysical relationship. However, in Greek it means no more than *unique* or *only*. Elsewhere in the New Testament it is used of the Widow of Nain’s “only” son and Jairus’ “only” daughter (Luke 7:12, 9:38 and 8:42). Its use in Hebrews 11:17 with reference to Isaac is particularly insightful. Isaac, we know, was not Abraham’s only son. According to Genesis 16 and 25:1, Abraham fathered several other sons. Isaac is the “only begotten” in that he was unique; he was the only son given to Abraham by God’s promise. Therefore, when *only begotten* is used of Jesus, He is the only begotten in the sense that He is unique. No other is or can be the Son of God. The unique relationship the Son has with His Father is one of the great themes in the Gospel of John.

The next controversial verse is John 14:28. Jesus states, “...I am going to the Father for the Father is greater than I.” Here the Jehovah’s Witnesses understand the term *greater* to mean “superior in nature.” Thus they assert that Jesus is stating His inferiority to God. Once again, however, this would argue against John’s consistent theme of the deity of Christ.



*Greater* here refers to position, not to nature. For example, we would agree with the statement that the President of the United States is greater than you or I. As the chief executive of the country he is greater due to his position. However, we would disagree with a statement that says the President is by nature better than you or I. In other words, is he a superior being to the rest of the citizens of the United States? No, we are all human and equal in nature. *Greater* refers to position, not to nature.

There is an established economy in the Trinity. The Father is the head who sends the Son. The Son sends the Spirit. All three are equal in nature, but different in position. This is called "functional subordination." We see the same principle in 1 Corinthians 11:3, "...and the head of every woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." The husband is greater than his wife, her head by position. However, he is not a superior being to his wife. The same applies to Jesus. The Father is greater by position, not by nature.

It is essential that we defend the doctrine of the Trinity, the foundation of Christian theology. Many of the great church fathers courageously defended this truth. Let us follow in their footsteps.

## **Notes**

1. Dan Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 262.
2. Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), 15.

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# Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity: A Christian Perspective

*Dr. Pat Zukeran provides Christians with a biblical perspective on countering the false teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses regarding the nature of God and the Trinity. Countering these non-Christian views will enable you to get to the heart of the matter in sharing Christ with members of this cult.*

## The Trinity

In another essay ([Jehovah's Witnesses: Witnessing to the Witnesses](#)) I discussed effective evangelistic strategies when sharing the faith with Jehovah's Witnesses. We covered some effective techniques such as the Witnesses' record of false prophecy, the name "Jehovah", the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the personality of the Holy Spirit. In this essay I would like to teach you how to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, a truth clearly denied by Jehovah's Witnesses. Before we can defend this doctrine, however, we must have a clear understanding of the Trinity. Too many Christians lack a solid understanding of the Triune nature of God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the belief that there is one God who has revealed Himself in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons make up the one true God. These three persons are of the same substance, equal in power and glory. It is important we understand this doctrine because the wrong Jesus or the wrong God cannot save us from eternal death. Paul makes a clear warning of this in 2

Corinthians 11:4.

The Bible clearly states that there is only one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 states, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." Isaiah 44:6 states, "I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides me." Clearly, these verses reveal that there is only one God. Yet, there are three separate persons in the Bible who are called God and have the characteristics only God can have. The Trinity is a difficult concept to grasp, because we are finite beings trying to explain an infinite God who is beyond our understanding.

Let's take a look at some verses that back up our doctrine of the Trinity. The Father is obviously called God as seen throughout the Bible. No one will argue that point. So there is one member of the Trinity, the Father. Jesus the Son, is a separate person but He is also called God. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Titus 2:13 says, "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." So here we see clearly, the Son is also called God.

The Holy Spirit is also a separate person, and He is also called God. First, let us understand, the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. He is a person and has the characteristics of a person. He can be grieved (Eph. 4:30), He speaks (Acts 13:2), and He can be lied to (Act 5:3-4). In Acts 5:3-4 the Holy Spirit is called God, "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?...You have not lied to men, but to God.'"

So we see clearly that there are three persons in the Bible, and all three are called God. Yet, we must remember, there is only one God according to the verses we looked at Deuteronomy 6:4 and Isaiah 44:6. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that the Trinity is made up of three separate persons who are the one true God. At this point we need to look at verses

Jehovah's Witnesses use to attempt to disprove the Trinity and learn how to refute these arguments. Then we will look at the best verses to use in demonstrating the truth of the Trinity to Jehovah's Witnesses.

## **Jehovah's Witnesses and the Bible**

I run in to many Christians who tell me, "The Jehovah's Witnesses know their Bible so well, and they've got so many verses memorized." The truth is, they don't know their Bible well, it's just that we Christians are lacking in our Bible knowledge. When it comes to the Trinity, Witnesses only know about 8 verses to defend their view. We'll be studying the main verses they use to try to disprove the Trinity.

In one approach they attempt to show that Jesus cannot be God because He was created. The verse they use here is Colossians 1:15, "And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation." Here the Witnesses say Christ is the *first-born* which they say means, "first created being of God." Therefore, they conclude Jesus cannot be God since He was created.

The key to understanding this verse is understanding the term *first-born*, what does it mean? The Greek word for "first created" is the word *Protoktioti*. If Paul wanted to say Christ was the first created being, he would have used this word but he does not. He uses another term, *Prototokos*. Paul is referring to the Jewish use of the word *first-born* which not only means first one born but also is used as a title of sovereignty and pre-eminence.

Here's an example of the meaning of the word. In Psalm 89:27 God says of David, "I also shall make him My first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth." Let's take a good look and see how first-born is used here. Is David the first-born son of Jesse? No, he is the eighth and youngest son of Jesse. Then how is it that David is the first-born? In the Old Testament

use of the word, he is first-born in that he is pre-eminent or sovereign of all the kings of the earth.

Now stick that usage of *first-born* into the context of Colossians 1:15, and it fits perfectly. Not only that, have the Witnesses read on with you to verse 18. Verse 18 shows that Paul is clearly talking about the pre-eminence of Christ for he says, "He is also the head of the body" and "the first-born" for the purpose, "that in everything he might be pre-eminent." If we were to replace *first-born* in verse 18 with the term *pre-eminent*, it would fit perfectly in the context. However, if we replaced it with *first created*, it would not fit in that context.

Another verse the Witnesses use to show Jesus was created is Revelation 3:14, "And to the angel of Laodicea write: 'The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Beginning of the creation of God...'" Here the faithful witness is Jesus and He is called, "The Beginning of the creation."

The Greek word for beginning is *arche*, which is used in many ways. It is used to mean "origin or source of, or ruler," but not first creation. Turn with the Witness to Revelation 21:6. In these two verses, Jehovah calls Himself the beginning. Does that mean Jehovah was created? No. Therefore, the Witnesses use of the term *beginning*, is incorrect.

Jesus was never created. John 1:1 states, "In the beginning was the Word" Jesus was with God from eternity past; Jesus has no beginning because He is the eternal God.

## **Is Jesus Inferior to God?**

Is Jesus inferior to God? Another way the Witnesses try to disprove the deity of Christ is to show that Christ is inferior in nature to God. The verses they use here are John 14:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:3.

John 14:28 reads, "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." They will ask you, "How can Jesus be equal to God if here He states 'the Father is greater than I'?"

The term *greater* refers to position, not nature. The term *better* refers to nature. Here is a good example I use in illustrating this passage. The President is greater than you or I, correct? Yes, as Chief Executive Officer of the United States he is greater than you or I. The Jehovah's Witness will agree. But, is the President *better* than you or I? What I mean is, is there anything about the President that makes him a superior being to you or me? No.

You see, *greater* refers to position, not nature. We see in Philippians 2:6-8, that Christ though He was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself and submitted Himself to the Father and took on the form of a servant. Though Jesus emptied Himself, He was always in nature God and equal to the Father in nature. If Jesus wanted to say He was inferior to God in nature, He would have said, "The Father is better than I."

Here is an example of the use of the term *better* in Hebrews 1:4 (NAS); it says speaking of Jesus, "having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they." The NI V reads, "So he became as much superior to the angels..." Here we see that Jesus is a being superior to the angels, so the term *better*, is used. Remember, in explaining this verse, the term *greater* refers to position, not nature.

Another verse the Witnesses will use is 1 Corinthians 11:3, "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." Here they say since the head of Christ is God, Jesus must be inferior to God.

Once again you use the same concept of equal in nature, but Christ submitted Himself to the Father. Here the principle of headship and submission established by God is displayed both in marriage and in the Trinity. Now show the Jehovah's Witnesses that in this passage, the head of the woman is man. "Does this mean that the husband is a superior being to his wife?" The answer is obviously, "No." The husband is greater than his wife by way of position but not by nature. The same applies to the Father and the Son. The Father is greater by position, but not better by nature.

Remember when you're Witnessing, you are not there to win an argument, but to show them the error of their ways in a loving and Christ-like manner, but also you are not to be afraid to boldly defend the faith.

## **Proving the Deity of Christ**

One of the best defenses is a good offense. When defending the Trinity to Witnesses, take charge of the conversation. Don't let the Witnesses run you in circles. You pick the topic and keep them on the topic you choose, instead of having them ask you all the questions, you have some questions ready for them to answer.

The best way to do this, when they appear at your doorstep, is ask them, "What organization are you with?" They will reply, "We are Jehovah's Witnesses." Then ask them, "Whom do you say is the God of the Apostles?" They will reply, "Jehovah." You then reply, "How do you explain the fact that Jesus is the God of the Apostles?" They will be surprised and say, "No, that's not true, where do you find that?" Here you have taken over the conversation. Now, stay in charge of the conversation and don't let them break off on another tangent.

Next, you turn to the first text John 20:28, where Thomas, after seeing the resurrected Lord, proclaims to Jesus, "My Lord and My God." Here, Thomas calls Jesus *God*. The Witnesses

have two responses to this. One, they may say, "Well, Thomas was so surprised at seeing Jesus that he shouted, 'My Lord and My God,' in surprise just as we shout, 'Oh, my God,' when we're surprised." There's a problem with that. Thomas was a devout Jew and never would have shouted "my God" in surprise for that would be blasphemy for a Jew. A second response they have is, Thomas looked at Jesus and said, "My Lord," then looked to heaven and said, "My God." There's a problem with that too because the context does not say that. If you look at the passage, Thomas says, "My Lord and My God" to Jesus. So Thomas saw clearly that Jesus was God.

The next verse to turn them to is John 1:1. Now here the Witnesses will think you're falling into their trap for they have a different translation. Their translation says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was **a** god."

Well, the first thing to do is to show them that *both* translations can't be right. Someone is wrong. Ask them, "If we were to go to the local library here, we would find over thirty translations of the Bible. How many would translate it your way?" The truth is only one would, theirs. Then ask them, "Are you willing to say all the translators for the past centuries have been wrong and only yours is correct?" If they're honest, they'll think about it. Others will say, "Yes, ours is the only true translation."

It is then you say, "Let's say your translation is correct and mine is wrong, you still have a problem. How many gods do you have in that verse?" Then you take their Bible and count the number of gods with them. Say, "Well, here is one God with a capital **G**, what kind of god is He?" They'll say, "A true god." Then you go on and say, "Here's another god with a small **g**, what kind of god is He?" They must say, "a true god." Then you ask them, "How many gods do you have?" This is where they get stuck for they must either say two gods and be polytheists or deny their translation. These are two great verses to use when



witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses.

## **The Alpha and the Omega**

As I have witnessed to many Jehovah's Witnesses, I have found some verses that work most effectively in proving the deity of Christ. Here are two of my favorite combination of verses.

The first verse is Revelation 1:8. I am reading from the Jehovah's Witness Bible, and it reads, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says Jehovah God. Ask the Witness, "What does Alpha and Omega mean?" They'll reply, "The beginning and the end." Then ask them, "How many Alphas and Omegas can you have?" They'll answer, "Only one." Make sure you get this point across, there is only one Alpha and Omega.

Then turn to Revelation 22:12-13 which says, "Look I am coming quickly, and the reward I give is with me...I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Ask the Witnesses, "Who do you say the Alpha and Omega is?" They will say, "Jehovah." Now take a careful look. The Alpha and Omega in verse twelve is coming quickly. Let's see who is speaking in verse twelve.

Look at verse sixteen, "I Jesus, sent my angel to bear witness to you people of these things for the congregations. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star." It is Jesus speaking in verse twelve. If there is any doubt go to verse 20 which says, "He that bears witness of these things says, 'Yes; I am coming quickly' Amen come Lord Jesus." So it is clear that the Alpha and the Omega in verse twelve is Jesus. Here is a strong proof text that Jesus is God because both Jehovah and Jesus are called the Alpha and the Omega.

Another pair of verses that are effective when used together are Isaiah 44:6 and Revelation 1:17-18. Isaiah 44:6 says, "This is what Jehovah has said, 'The king of Israel and the Repurchaser of him, Jehovah of armies, I am the first and I am

the last.'” Ask the Witnesses how many firsts and lasts can you have? It’s obvious to anyone you can only have one first and one last. Ask them, “Who is the first and the last?” They will say, “Jehovah.” Now turn to Revelation 1:17-18 which says, “Do not be fearful; I am the First and the Last, and the living one; and I became dead but look! I am living forever.” Who is speaking here? Obviously, it is Jesus for He died but is now alive, and guess what? He is called the First and the Last. Here again we see Jesus is God.

These are my favorite verses, and I have never had Witnesses refute these arguments. Remember, the Witnesses at your door won’t convert right then and there. The key is to get them to start thinking and questioning the organization, and down the road, maybe in several years, they will seek answers and that will lead them out of the organization. Don’t give up or be discouraged when sharing with Witnesses. Though they may be rude and show no signs that they are thinking, the Word of God is powerful and is working in their hearts even if we can’t see it.

Remember Dr. Walter Martin (author of *Kingdom of the Cults*) went fifteen years without a convert, but he never gave up. Today we know of hundreds he pulled out of the organization. Continue to study the Word, and God bless you as you defend the faith.

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