

A 3-In-1 GOD – Sense or Nonsense?

Article for Authors.den

Introduction

This article addresses a long time debate in Christian theology and apologetics as to whether One GOD can be 3 Persons and yet be only One GOD. This is something that is not only significant in scholarly theological debate but also of substantial importance to every Christian who takes our faith seriously. This article seeks to make this theological issue relevant and meaningful to all Christians, including pastors and ministers. It identifies the positions of those who object to this doctrine as nonsensical within the history of Christian theology and the Church, and from non-Christian religions. But it strongly affirms why it is a unique and most significant understanding of the GOD who chose to reveal Himself through the Bible as Scripture to the believing Church.

Arguments that this is Nonsense

The main reason for arguing that the One GOD is 3 Persons but yet is One GOD is nonsensical is that it contradicts simple mathematics and logic - how can 3 be 1 or 1 be 3?

This position is taken by

- some within the Church in church history and theology
- other monotheistic religions like Judaism and Islam

Historical Arguments Against the Trinity In Christian History & Theology

The arguments against the validity of a triune GOD from within church history and theology can be identified and summarised as follows:

- Economic & Immanent Trinity –

This position affirms that GOD is ONE in his Being. But how He has chosen to reveal Him through His action is to sequentially show Himself in 3 different way:

Firstly, He showed Himself to be the Creator. In this role, He is the Father.

He then took the form of being human by incarnating Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. In so doing, He came to teach the Truth, die for the sins of humankind, and rose from the dead to eternal life, which He gives to all who repent and turn to Him in faith to worship and obey Him as God and Lord. He becomes their Saviour.

After He returned to heaven in His bodily form, He came as the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost after His ascension, and poured Himself out on all flesh, especially to indwell those who believe in Him.

Therefore, in reality, there is Only ONE GOD. The Persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are sequential roles by which He acted and revealed Himself in human history. There is, therefore, no mathematical or logical conflict to make the idea of One GOD who is, simultaneously, 3 Persons nonsensical. But GOD cannot be One GOD and Three Persons at once. That would be nonsensical.

- Ebionite Christology –

This position believes that Jesus Christ is human not divine. Therefore there is no eternal Son of GOD. Nor is the Holy Spirit a Person. Reference to the Holy Spirit is simply a reference to GOD's power at work. Therefore there is Only One GOD, no three Persons.

- Pneumatomachianism –

Similar to Ebionite Christology, but this time arguing first on the basis that the Holy Spirit is not GOD, nor is Jesus GOD, this position also denied the Holy Trinity.

- Unitarianism –

This is the term used for those who believe that there is Only ONE GOD. Therefore both Ebionite Christology and Pneumatomachianism are versions of this position. So would any belief that GOD can only be One.

- **Dynamic Monarchianism** –
This view can be considered a version of the economic and immanent Trinity. It believes that there is only One GOD and that Jesus Christ was a human being who was adopted by GOD through whom He acted. The Holy Spirit is only a reference to GOD's action.
- **Modalistic Monarchianism** –
This may be considered another form of the economic and immanent Trinity. There is only One God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are forms which the One GOD took to reveal Himself to humankind.

Arguments of Other Monotheistic Religions

The two major monotheistic religions of today are Judaism and Islam. Both of them, in slightly different ways reject the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and firmly insist that there is only One GOD.

- **Judaism** holds to the OT revelation in a historically evolved form that followed the position of the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Jewish Council in Jesus' time, the Sanhedrin, who rejected Jesus Christ as their God or Messiah, and decided that he was a heretical Rabbi.
- **Islam** linked the OT revelation to the claims of Mohammed that Jesus was a prophet but not divine and, hence, cannot be the son of GOD. He was a prophet who has a lower standing than Mohammed, who was the Final Prophet of GOD.

Both would uphold the Mathematical Contradiction that 3 and 1 cannot be equal. Thus, a 3-in-1 GOD is nonsensical.

Arguments that the ONE GOD is Three Persons is GOOD Sense

Let us now consider the positions of Christian history and theology on why a triune GOD not make good sense, it is the unique revelation of the One True GOD who chose to reveal Himself through the Bible as Scripture to the believing Church.

1. The Bible as SCRIPTURE says so

The most important and critical reason why the faithful accepts that the One True GOD is the Holy Trinity is centred on the Person of Jesus Christ, who is revealed as the Lord, God, Messiah, and Saviour, of all creation and humankind as stated in the Bible as Scripture.

- (1) The Father sent His angels to announce the birth of Jesus Christ and to reveal to Mary and Joseph, His human parents, the His birth is by the act of the Holy Spirit.
[Luke 1:16-38; Matthew 1:18-25]
- (2) The Father and the Holy Spirit revealed their relationship with Jesus Christ at His baptism by John the Baptist, when the Holy Spirit came down upon Him in fullness, like a dove, and the Father spoke in an audible voice from heaven to declare that He is His beloved Son with whom He was very pleased. Jesus is the One who baptises with the Holy Spirit.
[Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34]
- (3) Jesus Himself showed this to be so by His actions when He repeatedly prayed to His Father in heaven as GOD and acted frequently with miracles by the Power of the Holy Spirit who resided in Him.
[Mark 1:32-34, 35; John 17]
- (4) Jesus repeatedly taught His disciples to worship the Father as their Father in heaven, as He did, and to receive the Holy Spirit who would come on them to live in them forever after He physically ascended from this earth into heaven to be at the right hand of the Father.
[Matthew 6:7-15; John 16:4-15]
- (5) The teaching of the apostle John through his Gospel and his epistles reveal and identify for us the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with each their own identity and each their own role as ONE GOD. The Father sent the Son, and they sent the Holy Spirit, who reveals and confirms to all the One Truth of the Father, that is fully revealed in the Son, which is the Truth that the Holy Spirit comes to reveal to all who believe, that they may receive All Truth, as Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father.

[John ch 14 to 17; 1 John 1:1-4; 4:1-6]

- (6) The teaching of the apostle Paul through his epistles affirm much the same as the apostle John. GOD the Father is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is GOD. Christ Jesus is made known to all by the Holy Spirit, who is GOD.

[Romans 1:1-7; Ephesians 1:3-14; Colossians 1:3-8]

- (7) The teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that in the last days the Father sent the Son to reveal in full what the prophets He sent had previously revealed only in part. Christ is the High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek who offered Himself as the Perfect Sacrifice for our sins, who replaced the OT covenant that cannot take away sin. This Covenant is established by the Holy Spirit.

[Hebrews 1:1-3; 9:11-14; 10:5-18]

2. The Historical Creeds of the Christian Church

Each of the following historical creeds of the Christian Church firmly express the historical Christian faith that GOD is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Apostles' Creed and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, often shortened to be called, The Nicene Creed, are still widely confessed as part of Sunday services through the historical churches of the Roman Catholic, the Protestant Churches that began in and after the Reformation, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and many independent churches. The Athanasius Creed is a historical creed that, although rarely used in the services of churches, remains a creed that explicitly affirmed that the belief of the Trinity of GOD is necessary for salvation. While most churches would no longer take the view that belief in the Holy Trinity is necessary for salvation, its explicit credal elaboration of the Holy Trinity still stands.

(1) The Apostles' Creed

Quoted here from the Anglican Morning Prayer with highlights in **BOLD** on the Trinity:

I believe in **God, the Father** almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in **Jesus Christ, his only Son**, our Lord, who was **conceived by the Holy Spirit**,
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in **the Holy Spirit**,
the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

(2) The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed [often simply called, The Nicene Creed]

Quoted here from the Anglican Holy Communion Service with highlights in **BOLD** on the Trinity:

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 the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven;
by the power of **the Holy Spirit** he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures; he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in **the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son**.
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen

(3) The Athanasius Creed [*Quicunque Vult*]

This is Schaff's modernised English version from the Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican Communion:

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold **the Catholic Faith**. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.
For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.
The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreates, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.
So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be both God and Lord, So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. 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. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved is must think thus of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.

Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood; Who, although he be God and Man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

3. Why is this NOT Illogical or Contradictory?

There are some very valid and serious reasons why the Holy Trinity as the One GOD in Three Persons cannot and must not be dismissed as illogical, contradictory, or nonsensical:

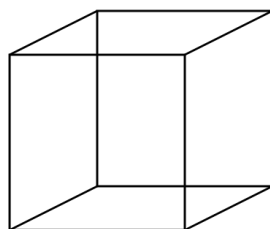
(1) This is the **REVELATION** of **GOD as GOD** which He has given us through Jesus and the Bible as Scripture.

It should NOT surprise us that its divine source does not conform to our **human** knowledge, logic, mathematics, or reasoning, because GOD is a Being who is BEYOND any created being – this is Why His revelation may Not conform to **human** thinking.

We, as human beings, are finite creatures. So, thus, is the extent of our logic, mathematics, or reasoning. But this revelation is from GOD of His own being. HE is an infinite uncreated Being.

(2) Mathematics or Logic is the **WRONG** Way to understand this Revelation of GOD's Being:

- **Biology** is a better, albeit, still limited, analogous perspective – every living thing, other than single cell animal or plant, has many parts, each part of you is you, not another creature.
- The closest **philosophical analogy** comes from the view, that many hold, that a human being is spirit, soul, and body. Hence, your spirit is you, your soul is you, your body is you, but there are NOT 3 of you, Only ONE of you.
- The **Transcendent Being** of the Infinite GOD is **revealed in a restricted model** so that it is brought to the level that we as human beings can make sense of it. For example, by drawing a 2-dimensional diagram of a 3-dimensional cube, we can understand the diagram identifies a cube. But the diagram is NOT a cube.



- To argue that the doctrine of the Trinity is wrong because there is nothing on earth that is like it, is a criticism that actually supports the Transcendent Being of GOD as GOD – there is nothing in creation that is like Him because He alone is Uncreated.

4. The doctrine of the Trinity is A TRUE & ACCURATE Revelation of GOD

This revelation of GOD's own being is given by the One True GOD by Scripture and the Holy Spirit to help us know Him in His Transcendence and Infinity:

- BUT it is ***Necessarily INCOMPLETE*** because we are finite beings who cannot possibly fully comprehend an Infinite and Transcendant GOD
- Yet, because it is TRUE & ACCURATE, we are NOT free to play with it, twist it around, reconstruct it to our taste, for this will Only lead to Distorting and Corruption of how we NEED to know Him
- we NEED to know Him this way because it is His Own REVELATION to us of HIMSELF – there is absolutely NO alternative to knowing Him Except by HIS Revelation to us
- He is the TRUE GOD and the GOD who is TRUTH – to deviate from His revelation is to go into lies, falsehoods, and distortions

The fact that it seems so illogical to human thinking is itself evidence that it is divinely revealed and not humanly fashioned. Human reason cannot think or construct what is contrary to its own sense of reason or logic. Divine revelation has no such problem. Its divine origin makes it hardly surprising that it comes across as a major stumbling block to all who do not believe.

Even for believers, it calls for genuine faith in the One True GOD to, first, believe and accept what is revealed and taught by GOD by His own actual historical action, such as how the Father and the Holy Spirit revealed themselves at the baptism of Jesus, and what He said to those He appeared to in Person, such as Abraham, Moses, and the New Testament apostles. Only after receiving Christ by faith in repentance of sin, can believers continue to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit to learn how God's revelation is superior to any human logic, and workout, by His leading WHY this revelation is true and totally sensible.