

The Triune God: A Study on the Trinity

I. Introduction

A. *Claim: God exists as three distinct persons with one nature.*

1. The Word Trinity is not found anywhere in scripture
2. “Trinity” was first used in its Greek form *trias* by Theophilus of Antioch in 180 A.D.
3. Concept/idea is used to describe the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and their relationship to one another

B. *Idea: The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all one and they operate with one purpose.*

1. The Trinity does not suggest polytheism
2. God does not suffer from multiple personality disorder

II. Ideas that Aren't Sustainable

A. The Trinity ***is like water, steam and ice.***

1. Merits: All three states of water are H₂O *i.e.* same essence
2. Problems:
 - a. A single sample of H₂O cannot be all three states simultaneously
 - b. Must be self-differentiated AND same essence.

B. God as a ***heavenly board of directors*** of a corporation made up of three equal partners, each of whom has a particular responsibility¹

1. Merits: Distinction between partners
2. Problems:
 - a. Partners d/n work concomitantly
 - b. Differentiated tasks/goals
 - c. Three different partners → three different tasks → Polytheism?

¹ Guthrie, S., Christian Doctrine, Revised Edition, Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

C. God is like a man or woman who “**wears three hats**” or fulfills several functions at the same time— spouse, wage earner or member of a profession, church officer or civic leader.

1. Problems:

a. Modalism- Shifting modes, but same person.

D. God is like **players on a football** team waiting their turn to enter into a game.

1. Problems:

a. Denies the eternality of the Godhead

b. Implies that the Son and the Holy Spirit are created later

E. God is **committee** with one big boss and two underbosses.

1. Problems:

a. Denies the co-equality of the Godhead

b. Subordinates the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father

c. Creates tension if subordinates were to rebel against God; act on their own accord.

III. Essential Concepts of Trinitarian Thought

a. God is eternal and so are the Son and the Holy Spirit

b. Each person of the Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) exists simultaneously and perpetually

c. Each person within the Godhead acts in concert with the other two

d. The co-equality of all three persons is essential; they are ONE in nature

e. God is eternal and so are the Son and the Holy Spirit

f. Each person of the Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) exists simultaneously and perpetually

g. Each person within the Godhead acts in concert with the other two

h. The co-equality of all three persons is essential; they are ONE in nature

IV. Evidence for the Trinity in the Old Testament

1. Genesis 1:26 (Let us make man in our own image)

2. Judges 3:10 (The LORD anoints, the Spirit of the LORD empowers)

3. 1 Samuel 10:1,6 (The LORD anoints, the Spirit of the LORD empowers)

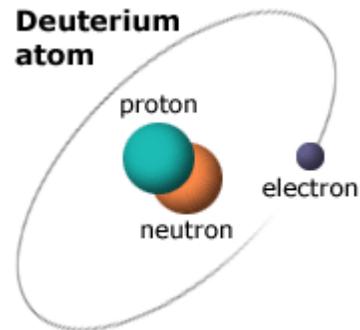
4. Typologies/Pre-figurings of Christ [Numbers 22:31; Joshua 5:14,15; Judges 6:22; 13:21; 2 Samuel 24:16; Zechariah 1:12]

V. Evidence for the Trinity in the New Testament

1. Mark 1:11
2. John 1:1,14
3. Philippians 2:6
4. Colossians 2:9
5. Romans 8:26

VI. Practical Example: The Atom

- a. Three separate pieces- Protons, neutrons and electrons
- b. All perpetually working together
- c. Equally important
- d. Different but same nature
- e. One purpose: Cause matter to exist
- f. All working simultaneously in some way to achieve that purpose.



VII. Conclusion

“One God in three persons” → One personal God who *works in three ways at the same time.*²

Three inseparable/concurrent works, One God: Creation (Genesis 1:2; John 1:3), **Salvation** (John 3:16; John 6:44) and **Renewal** (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 5:26).

The works are inseparable. The Father, Son and Spirit are equally involved in all of the works of Creation, Redemption and Renewal.

² Guthrie, S., Christian Doctrine, Revised Edition, Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

VIII. Questions for Consideration (Selected from Guthrie's "Christian Doctrine")

1. Look at the following passages in which Father, Son (Lord) and Spirit are mentioned: Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12:4,5. **What is the significance** of the fact that there is no fixed order in which the names appear? **What is the significance** of the fact that the three names appear together in context of worship or in the context of a discussion of the Christian life?

2. Creation is usually associated with the Father, reconciliation and redemption with the Son, and Sanctification or newness of life with the Spirit. With whom is creation associated with in John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:16? With whom is reconciliation/salvation associated with 2 Corinthians 5:18,19; Titus 3:4? With whom is sanctification associated with 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Ephesians 5:25,26; Hebrews 10:10? **What is the significance** of this inconsistency?