

CONCERNING THE TRINITY

Affirmations and Denials (Topic #8)

Preamble:

The historic doctrine of the Trinity and the attributes of God form the essential foundation stones of Christianity on which rest many other doctrines and basic truths of Christian theology. They also provide answers to basic philosophic questions such as “the one and the many” and “the connection between the visible and the invisible worlds.” It took the careful scholars of the Church several hundred years to clarify the accurate picture of God from the Bible and we are indebted to them for working it out for posterity. For nearly 2000 years this doctrine of the Trinity and of God’s attributes has been believed by the Body of Christ in every country and is still considered to be necessary if one is to be truly saved and to be worshipping the one true God.

Religious liberals who have rejected the Bible as their source for truth have long since given up on believing in the Trinity or the deity of Christ. But within the last century, many Bible-believing people and some conservative denominations have adopted a modern version of the “modalism” heresy from the 3rd century AD and now believe wrongly that God is not a trinity of three distinct Persons, but rather is only one divine Person who manifests Himself in three different modes at different times, like one actor playing three different roles. This heresy has permeated many evangelical circles and is a deadly, unbiblical cancer which needs to be addressed, exposed and clarified. Because of this confusion among evangelicals, we have included the Trinity as one of the issues which must be addressed by this Church Council movement. We commend to the Church at large this statement on The Trinity to help her stay true to the historical and biblical position held by the Church for 2000 years and to offer her theological clarification which may help her correct her wayward children.

Such confusion and lack of theological clarity abounds in evangelical circles these days that a number of pastors and Christian leaders believe in the heresy of “modalism” while thinking all along they truly believe in the Trinity. And many others simply do not have enough theological interest or knowledge to even care what anyone believes about the Trinity. Thus we offer this one question as a simple test to let pastors and church members be able to tell if a pastor or layman friend of theirs is indeed a heretic who needs to be exhorted and re-trained. The correct answer is “yes,” so a “no” answer or an “I don’t know” answer is a signal that that person is a “modalist” heretic.

“Does the one true God, the God of the Bible exist as a Trinity of three Persons wherein all three Persons are fully God and possess all the attributes of God, but the Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son?” A true biblical and historical Trinitarian will answer “yes” enthusiastically.

Affirmations and Denials

1. Historic Statement On God And Christ's Deity.

We affirm there is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts...of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three Persons, of one substance, power and eternity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (From 39 Articles 1571AD)

We further affirm that there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made. (From Nicene Creed 325AD)

Gen.1:1; 17:1, 18:14; Ex. 3:14; 34:6-7; Deut. 6:4; Psa. 65:6-8; Psa.145:3; Isa. 40:12-18, 21-26; Jer. 10:10; 32:27; Mat. 19:26; John 4:4; Rom. 11:33; Eph. 3:20; Rev. 4:8-11

We deny that there is any god in existence other than the one, true God of the Bible.

Mat. 8:26-27; 13:27; 14:19; John 1:1, 18; 2:1-11; 4:11; 8:58; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1; Rev. 1:8; 22:13

2. The Trinity Defined And Modalism And Arianism Denounced.

We affirm that this one, true God exists in a Trinity of three persons and not as three separate Gods, and that we worship this one God in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Substance. (Last two lines from Athanasian Creed, 4th Cent.) We further affirm that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons within the Godhead so that the Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Spirit and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but all three are fully God and possess all of God's attributes being equal in every divine perfection, and executing distinct and harmonious offices in the work of redemption. (Last line from New Hampshire Baptist Confession 1833)

Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Exo. Psa. 110:1; Isa. 6:8; 48:16; 61:1; 63:10; Mat. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; Heb. 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:2; Jude 20-21

We deny that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are merely three different manifestations, personages, appearances, or modes of action of one single Person in the Godhead as was claimed by the heresy called Modalism (or Modal Monarchianism) of the third century AD and by certain cults today. We further deny that anyone may properly call himself a Christian who denies this historic doctrine of the Trinity or who denies the full deity of the Son or of the Holy Spirit as did the Arians who were condemned as heretics in 325AD and as is done by religious liberals of this century.

3. Distinction Of The Three Persons Clarified And Mystery Acknowledged.

We affirm that within the Trinity in Unity the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding: the Son is eternally begotten of the Father: the Holy Spirit is eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. (From Westminster Confession 1646)

Mat. 3:16-17; Mat. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13-14; John 1:1; 5:18; Acts 5:3

(Note: All the verses under #2 above apply here also.)

We deny - While we deny that God's self-revelation in Scripture is ever logically inconsistent, we also deny that finite minds will ever plumb the depths of all truths about God, and therefore deny that it is ever right or reverent for creatures to demand that their Creator satisfy all their questions about Him before they submit their wills to Him.

4. Attributes of God: Old Testament God and New Testament God the Same God.

We affirm that God, in all three Persons, existed from all eternity and is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, self-existent, indivisible, unchangeable, personal, and that He is perfect in his holiness, justice, love, mercy and fatherliness in His Being and in all His activities, words, motives, and decisions.

Gen.1:1; 17:1, 18:14; Ex. 3:14; 34:6-7; Deut. 6:4; Psa. 65:6-8; Psa.145:3; Isa. 40:12-18, 21-26; Jer. 10:10; 32:27; Mat. 19:26; John 4:4; Rom. 11:33; Eph. 3:20; Rev. 4:8-11. (Note: All the verses under #1 above apply here also.)

We deny that God's infinity detracts from His Personhood or that His Personhood limits His infinity or that His holiness and justice are ever in conflict with His love and mercy. We further deny that there is any difference between the Jehovah of the Old Testament and the Triune God of the New Testament regarding justice and mercy or any other attribute since they are indeed the very same unchangeable God.

John 5:21-23; 8:58; 14:8-11

5. The Bible Our Source Of Knowledge Of God: Heresies Denounced.

We affirm that this one, true God is indeed the God of the Bible Who is adequately and accurately, but not exhaustively, revealed in the Old and New Testaments by divine inspiration of inerrantly revealed language through God's prophets and apostles.

Exek. 3:1-4; John 5:32-39; Rom. 1:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:16

We deny any and all views of God that negate or deviate from the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of God, including Atheism, Deism, Finite-godism, Pantheism, Polytheism or the process god of Panentheism. (From 42 Articles on Historic Doctrine)

6. God's Transcendence And Immanence.

We affirm that God is both transcendent¹ over and immanent² in His creation concurrently.

1. Gen.1:1; 18:14; Ex. 3:14; Psa. 65:6-8; Psa.145:3; Isa. 40:12-18, 21-26; Jer. 10:10; 32:27; Mat. 19:26; Rom. 11:33; Eph. 3:20; Rev. 4:8-11
2. Gen. 2:21-22; Job 12:10; Jer. 10:12; Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3

We deny the Neo-Orthodox and liberal claim that, in His transcendence, God is totally Other so that human language and logic cannot serve as an adequate and accurate connection between God's mind and our human minds. We further deny that, in His immanence, God is ever identified with His creation as is claimed by the pantheists and by many religious liberals.

7. Supernatural Intervention By God.

We affirm that from time to time God supernaturally intervenes in the course of natural or human events to accomplish His sovereign and redemptive purposes.

Exo. 7:31; Deu. 6:22; Psa. 135:9; Acts 4:30; 5:12; Rom. 15:19; Mat. 11-4-5; Luke 4:36-41; John 2:23; 4:54; 20:30-31

We deny any naturalistic view which either rejects a supernatural God or His miraculous intervention in nature and history. (Both A.& D. from 42 Articles on Historic Doctrine)

8. The Two Natures Of Christ

We affirm with the Chalcedonian Creed of 451AD that when God the Son was incarnated into a human being through the virgin Mary, He was "perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God¹ and truly man², of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin;to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ..."

1. John 1:1, 18; 5:27; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1
2. Mat. 1:18-20; Gal. 4:4-5; Isa.9:6; John 1:14; 5:27

We deny that Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior was any less than 100% God or any less than 100% man or that his two distinct natures, divine and human, ever resulted in Him ever being anymore than one single Person, the incarnate Son of God. We further deny that, having taken on a human body for His work as Prophet, Priest and King, He will ever, throughout all eternity, exist in any form other than in a glorified human body and reigning as King at the right hand of the Father.

(End of Affirmations & Denials, Appendix follows)

Appendix A Excerpts From Historic Creeds

The Nicene Creed (A.D. 325: Revised in Constantinople A.D. 381)

I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made;.....

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the father and the son together is worshiped and glorified;....

The Athanasian Creed (fourth-fifth centuries A.D.)

3. And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity;

4. Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Substance.

5. For there is one Person of the Father: another of the Son: and another of the Holy Spirit.

6. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.

7. Such as the Father is: such is the Son: and such is the Holy Spirit.

8. The Father uncreated: the Son uncreated: and the Holy Spirit uncreated.,

9. The Father incomprehensible: the Son incomprehensible: and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.

10. The Father eternal: the Son eternal: and the Holy Spirit eternal.

11. And yet they are not three eternals: but one eternal.

12. And also there are not three uncreated: nor three incomprehensibles, but one uncreated: and one incomprehensible.\13. So likewise the father is Almighty: the son Almighty: and the Holy Spirit Almighty.

14. And yet they are not three Almighties: but one Almighty.

15. So the Father is God: the Son is God: and the Holy Spirit is God.

16. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God.

17. So likewise the Father is Lord: the son Lord: and the Holy Spirit Lord.

18. And yet not three Lords: but one Lord.

19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord:

20. So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion: to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.

21. The Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten.

11. The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created: but begotten.

23. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten: but proceeding.

24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

25. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after another: none is greater, or less than another.

26. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal.
27. So that in all things, as aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshiped.
28. He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity.

Thirty Nine Articles Of Religion (A.D. 1571: Church of England)

I. Of Faith in the Holy Trinity

“There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Westminster Confession Of Faith (A.D. 1643-46)

Chapter 2: Of God, and of the Holy Trinity

3. In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding: the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

New Hampshire Baptist Confession (A.D. 1833)

II. Of the True God

We believe that there is one, and only one, living and true God, an infinite, intelligent Spirit, whose name is JEHOVAH, the Maker and Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth: inexpressibly glorious in holiness, and worthy of all possible honor, confidence, and love; that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; equal in every divine perfection, and executing distinct and harmonious offices.