

Trinitarianism

This study of theism examines the question of whether God, as to His mode of existence, is absolute unity or whether He subsists as a plurality of Persons. If there is evidence for a plurality of Persons, the questions are, "What manner of persons are these and what are their number?"

In orthodox Christianity it is generally agreed that God subsists as a Trinity of three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Though the word "Trinity" does not appear in Scripture, the detailed revelation concerning the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit make clear that God is three Persons while at the same time remaining one God. The doctrine of the Trinity is the only way of explaining the person of Jesus Christ, His incarnation, and His work, as well as the person, nature, and work of the Holy Spirit.

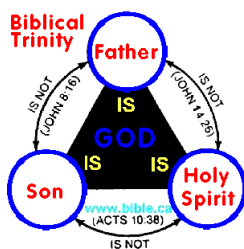
The doctrine of the Trinity is beyond human comprehension. There is actually no parallel in human experience where three persons such as the three Persons of the Godhead can exist and at the same time be one essence. The Bible reveals that each Person of the Trinity has divine attributes as well as the properties of personality. On the other hand in the Bible are disclosures equally plain and numerous that God is essentially one.

Two errors must be avoided:

- (1) that the Godhead is composed of three distinct Persons such as Peter, James and John, a concept that would lead to what is known as tritheism
- (2) that the Godhead is one Person only and the triune aspect of His being is no more than three fields of interest, activities and manifestations, which is referred to as Sabellianism.

The Bible does not teach polytheism, that is, that there are many gods; nor on the other hand does it teach tritheism, that is, that there are three gods. The Bible also does not teach Unitarianism, which teaches that God is one and exercises His interests and powers in various ways but not as three Persons. The Bible supports the concept of monotheism – that God is one – and yet it also affirms that God subsists in a plurality of three Persons.

The following from bible.ca/trinity provides some evidence for the orthodox belief.



Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let *US* make man in *OUR* image, according to *Our* likeness"

I. Plural pronouns used of God proving the trinity:

A. Three plural pronouns, (We, Us, Our) used 6 different times in four different passages. Remember the word God (elohim) is also plural every time it is used in the Old Testament. Gen 11:7 also includes a plural verb (confuse) which even further, through grammar reinforces the plural "elohim" and the plural pronoun US.

1. "Our" Gen 1:26
2. "Us" Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8
3. "We" Isa 6:8

B. These are the four passages where God speaks for Himself and uses plural pronouns:

1. "Then God [plural elohim] said, "Let Us [plural pronoun] make man in Our [plural pronoun] image, according to Our [plural pronoun] likeness" Genesis 1:26
2. "Then Yahweh God [plural elohim] said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us [plural pronoun], knowing good and evil" Genesis 3:22
3. "Come, let Us [plural pronoun] go down and there confuse [plural form of balal] their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech." Genesis 11:7
4. "Then I heard the voice of the Lord [plural elohim], saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us [plural pronoun]?" " Isaiah 6:8

II. Christ is the identical image of God, angels are not

A. Jesus Christ is our co-creator who is the exact image of God.

1. *"see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. "* 2 Corinthians 4:4
2. *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. "* Colossians 1:15
3. *"And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, "* Hebrews 1:3

III. Angels are not included in "we" and "us":

A. Anti-Trinitarians claim that when God said, *"Let US make man in OUR image"*. (Gen 1:26) he was speaking to angels.

1. Angels are not created in the image of God, only man.
2. If angels are included in *"Let US make"*, then angels AND God are equally our creator.
3. Jehovah's Witnesses actually get this one right: The US includes (at least) the Father and Jesus in this creation. Jesus, being God, is the creator of all things: *"All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. "* John 1:3

V. The apostolic Fathers unanimously taught that the "we" in Gen 1:26, refers to the trinity:

1. **74 AD Epistle of Barnabas:** "For the Scripture says concerning us, while He speaks to the Son, "Let Us make man after Our image, and after Our likeness" (Epistle of Barnabas, Chapter VI.—The Sufferings of Christ, and the New Covenant, Were Announced by the Prophets.)
2. **150 AD Justin Martyr:** Speaking of Jewish theologians Justin calls the Jewish teaching that God spoke to angels a heresy: "In saying, therefore, 'as one of us,' [Moses] has declared that [there is a certain] number of persons associated with one another, and that they are at least two. For I would not say that the dogma of that heresy which is said to be among you (The Jews had their own heresies which supplied many things to the Christian heresies) is true, or that the teachers of it can prove that [God] spoke to angels, or that the human frame was the workmanship of angels. But this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures." (Dialogue of Justin Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew: Chapter LXII.—The Words "Let Us Make Man")
3. **180 AD Irenaeus** "It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor any one else, except the Word of the Lord, nor any Power remotely distant from the Father of all things. For God did not stand in need of these [beings], in order to the accomplishing of what He had Himself determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things, to whom also He speaks, saying, "Let Us make man after Our image and likeness; " [Gen. 1:26]" (Against Heresies 4:20:1).

4. **200 AD Tertullian:** "If the number of the Trinity also offends you, as if it were not connected in the simple Unity, I ask you how it is possible for a Being who is merely and absolutely One and Singular, to speak in plural phrase, saying, "Let us make man in our own image, and after our own likeness;" whereas He ought to have said, "Let me make man in my own image, and after my own likeness," as being a unique and singular Being? In the following passage, however, "Behold the man is become as one of us," He is either deceiving or amusing us in speaking plurally, if He is One only and singular. Or was it to the angels that He spoke, as the Jews interpret the passage, because these also acknowledge not the Son? Or was it because He was at once the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, that He spoke to Himself in plural terms, making Himself plural on that very account? Nay, it was because He had already His Son close at His side, as a second Person, His own Word, and a third Person also, the Spirit in the Word, that He purposely adopted the plural phrase, "Let *us* make;" and, "in *our* image;" and, "become as one *of us*." (Tertullian, Against Praxeas, Chapter XII. Other Quotations from Holy Scripture Adduced in Proof of the Plurality of Persons in the Godhead.)
5. **200 AD Tertullian:** Tertullian rejects the idea that God was speaking to Angels because our head is the creator, not a creature: "Since then he is the image of the Creator (for *He*, when looking on Christ His Word, who was to become man, said, "Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness"), how can I possibly have another head but Him whose image I am? For if I am the image of the Creator there is no room in me for another head" (Tertullian, Book V, Elucidations, Chapter VIII.—Man the Image of the Creator, and Christ the Head of the Man.)
6. **200 AD Tertullian:** "In the first place, because all things were made by the Word of God, and without Him was nothing made. Now the flesh, too, had its existence from the Word of God, because of the principle, that here should be nothing without that Word. "Let us make man," said He, before He created him, and added, "with our hand," for the sake of his pre-eminence, that so he might not be compared with the rest of creation." (Tertullian: On the Resurrection of the Flesh, Elucidations, Chapter V.—Some Considerations in Reply Eulogistic of the Flesh. It Was Created by God.)
7. **250 AD Ignatius** "For Moses, the faithful servant of God, when he said, "The Lord thy God is one Lord," and thus proclaimed that there was only one God, did yet forthwith confess also our Lord [Jesus] when he said, "The Lord [Jesus] rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and brimstone from the Lord." And again [he confessed a second time our Lord Jesus by saying], "And God said, Let Us make man after our image: and so God made man, after the image of God made He him."" (The Epistle of Ignatius to the Antiochians, Chapter II.—The True Doctrine Respecting God and Christ.)
8. **Origen:** "it was to Him that God said regarding the creation of man, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." (Origen Against Celsus, Book V, Chapter XXXVII)
9. **Novatian:** "For who does not acknowledge that the person of the Son is second after the Father, when he reads that it was said by the Father, consequently to the Son, "Let us make man in our image and our likeness;" and that after this it was related, "And God made man, in the image of God made He him?" "Or when he holds in his hands: "The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and brimstone from the Lord from heaven?" (A Treatise of Novatian Concerning the Trinity, Chapter XXVI. Argument.—Moreover, Against the Sabellians He Proves that the Father is One, the Son Another.)
10. **Constitutions of the Holy Apostles:** "the divine Scripture testifies that God said to Christ, His only-begotten, "Let us make man after our image, and after our likeness. And God made man: after the image of God made He him; male and female made He them."(Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Book V., VII)

An example of the Trinity – Who was the creator?

God the Father Created

Isaiah 64:8 – *“But now, O LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand”*

1 Cor. 8:6 – *“yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live^[2]”*

There are also many other verses that do not explicitly state the Father, but in their context point to the Father as Creator. For example, Is. 44:24; 45:12; Ps. 33:6.

God the Son Created

John 1:1-3 – *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”* This first verse of John’s gospel starts out as the exact parallel to the first verse of the Old Testament. It is a direct reference to Jesus as God and Creator of all things. John 1:10 continues *“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.”*

Col. 1:15-17 states *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”* These verses show Jesus as the creator of the invisible, such as angels, as well as the visible creation. Jesus is the only physical representation of God we will ever see. Yet He is all we need to see since He is the visible image of the fullness of the Godhead (*Colossians 2:9 “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.”*).

In view of the many cults (like Jehovah’s Witnesses) who deny the deity of Christ, it is worth discussing the phrase *“the firstborn over all creation”* since this is sometimes used to state that Christ was created. However, [the Gr. word for “firstborn” can refer to one who was born first chronologically, but most often refers to pre-eminence in position, or rank (*see note on Heb. 1:6; cf. Rom. 8:29*). In both Greek and Jewish culture, the firstborn was the ranking son who had received the right of inheritance from his father, whether he was born first or not. It is used of Israel who, not being the first nation, was however the preeminent nation (*cf. Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9*). Firstborn in this context clearly means highest in rank, not first created (*cf. Ps. 89:27; Rev. 1:5*).....Thus Jesus is the firstborn in the sense that He has the preeminence (v. 18) and possesses the right of inheritance “over all creation” (*cf. Heb. 1:2; Rev. 5:1–7, 13*). He existed before the creation and is exalted in rank above it.]

Heb. 1:1-3 *“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person;”*

God the Spirit Created

In Gen. 1:2 we see the Spirit of God involved in the work of *creation “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”*.

Job 26:13 *“By His Spirit He adorned the heavens”*

Psalms 104:30 *“You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;”*