

Doctrine of Trinity

Three Persons in One

1. The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery, it is paradoxical, but not a contradiction.
2. The church has always taught that God is one in essence, and three in person.
3. The Law of Non Contradiction is different from a paradox.
4. God is one in one thing, and three in something else. To break the Law of Contradiction, the church would have to say that God is one in essence, and God is three in essence. Or, say that God is one in person, and three in person.
5. The Law of Non Contradiction states that something cannot be what it is, and not be what it is at the same time, and in the same way, or relationship.

Example.

A man can be a father, and a son, at the same time. But a man cannot be a father, and a son, in the same relationship. A father cannot be his own son, nor can a son be his own father.

6. In the formal category of rational thought, the Trinitarian formula is not contradictory.
7. The Bible teaches God is One, and yet, the Father is divine, Christ is divine, and the Holy Spirit is divine.
8. Here is an apparent contradiction, but non exists, because the Christian faith seems to be teaching faith in three Gods. That would violate the principle of monotheism.
9. The word paradox is based upon a Greek root, and a Greek prefix. Para means, alongside of (paralegal, paramedic, parable). The word dox comes from the Greek word meaning, to seem, to appear. A paradox may seem to be contradictory, but it is not.
10. How can one being contain three persons and still be One person? It is a mystery.
11. Understanding begins with the realization that essence, and person, are not synonymous terms.
12. An individual person has essence. A person has substance. A person has will, emotion, and intellect.
13. The concept of essence comes from the Greek verb, to be, "ousia." Ousia can be translated, "being", "essence", or "stuff". The "stuff" is that which allows a distinction between a man and antelope, or an antelope from a grape, or a grape from God. There is the "stuff" of deity, the essence, the substance of God making Him what He is in Himself.

14. God is of one “stuff”, one “being”, “one essence”.
15. God is one in being, but three in person.
16. The word person is from the Latin, persona. This was used primarily as a legal word, and in the dramatic arts for a mask. The mask was called, persona..

Special Note.

The arts are personified in the twin masks of comedy, and tragedy. There is a smiling face for comedy, and a sad face for tragedy. Basil Rothbone once played in a stage drama about Job, called J. B., by wearing two masks throughout the play, and interfacing with them. One person, speaking two ways.

Special Note.

The original J. B. was a play in two acts by Archibald MacLeish. Opened at the ANTA Theatre, New York City, December 11, 1958, and ran until October 24, 1959 (364 performances). Produced by Alfred de Liagre, Jr., and directed by Elia Kazan. The 1959 production won MacLeish the 1959 Pulitzer for drama

J.B. was Archibald MacLeish's re-enactment, in a contemporary setting, of the Book of Job. It was also, in a double sense, a theatre piece: the action took place inside a night-lit circus tent where a sideshow Job had been performing. Two out-of-work actors, Zuss and Nickels, toying with the Biblical masks of God and Satan they found lying around, are suddenly aware of a Voice from outside them, and are caught up in a story near at hand.

In the story, J.B. is a rich, admired, American industrialist, with a devoted wife, and five children. Then disaster looms and mounts: his children are senselessly killed, or brutally murdered; his possessions are lost, his house is destroyed, his wife goes away, his body festers. All this happens against a crossfire, Biblical and profane, between Zuss and Nickels; then J.B. wrestles with his soul, with his comforters, with his God, till at the end his health is restored, and his wife returns.

17. Tertullian incorporated the Greek and Latin terms in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity, and talked about One Being in three persona. He was saying that there are three roles that God was playing, manifested as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
18. There are limitations in this analogy, because God is not “playing” three roles. The Father is distinct from the Son, the Son is distinct from the Father, and both are distinct from the Holy Spirit.
19. Perhaps a better concept to be used in trying to understand the Trinity is what is found in the term subsistence.
20. God is One in essence, but He subsists in three persona.

21. This is not a familiar word in the church, though it is well known when used in life. We understand the meaning of a person eking out a living. An extreme poverty level is viewed as a subsistence state of living.
22. The prefix sub, means under. Existence refers to being.

Special Note.

The word exist (existere) literally means out of (ex), to stand (istere). For somebody to exist is outstanding. What was meant by this word that, according to Plato, and Greek philosophy, there was being, pure and simple. Pure being depends on nothing for its ability to be. It is eternal. It has the power of being in itself. It is by no means creaturely. The thing that characterizes creatureliness is not being, but, becoming. The chief character traits of all creatures is change. Whatever a person is today, he is not the same tomorrow.

The idea of existence means to stand out. If God stands out of being, then He is a creature after all. He is a stand out being. He has one foot in being, and the other in becoming. He has one foot in non-being, and the other foot in becoming. Unless something is connected to being, it cannot not be.

We would not be human beings if we were not connected to the essential being of all things, we would only be becomings.

The conclusion is that God is not standing outside of being, He is being, He is the source of all that is becoming: the universe, creation, and man. Let the church say, God is. God said, "I AM." God did not say "I AM becoming." God did not say, "I exist." Man can say, "I exist." God said, "I AM." God is being, not becoming, not changing. He is eternal.

23. Within the being of God there are not three existences, for to exist means "to stand out of."
24. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit stand in the essence of being, not out of it, so that each is becoming the Father, or becoming the Son, or becoming the Holy Spirit. Each is eternal in essence.
25. The word to use for the Trinity is not three existences, but three subsistences, which the Bible calls Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each subsistence within that One eternal Being.
26. This is a necessary distinction, because the Bible makes this distinction. It is a real distinction, but not an essential distinction.
27. As a general term, essential means supremely important. In theological terms it means that the differences between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are real, but not essential, meaning there are no differences within the essence of deity of each. One Being, three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.