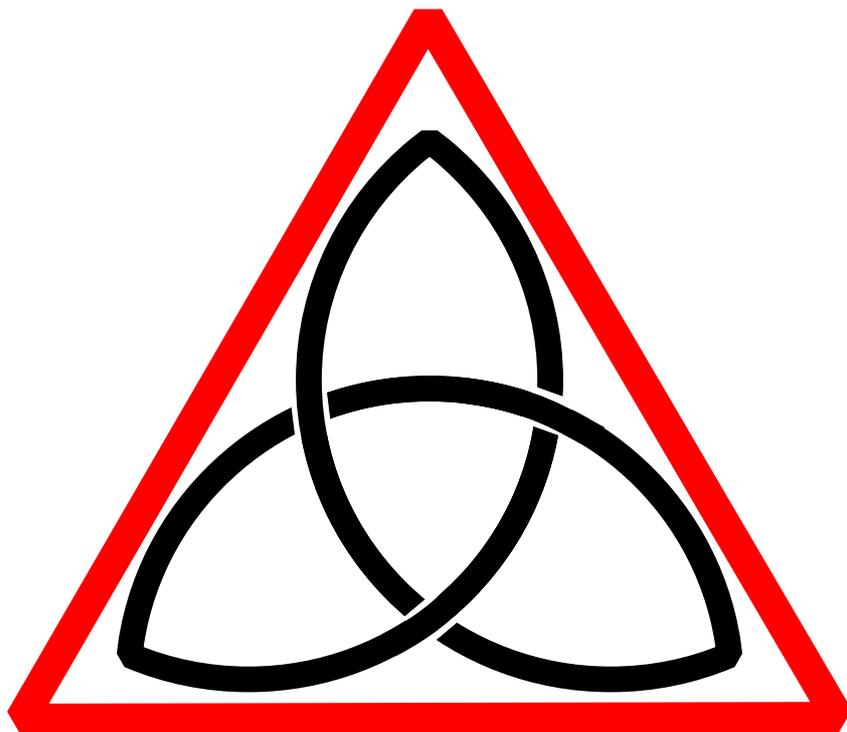


***The Doctrine of the Trinity
True or False?
a Biblical Examination***



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Summary

The Doctrine of the Trinity is considered to be the fundamental doctrine of many mainstream churches. The picture of God that it proposes suggests that the One God is composed of three persons. The Bible, however, gives a picture in which God is one person, who is the Father of Jesus Christ. This picture is called Unitary Monotheism.

The Old Testament describes God strictly in terms of Unitary Monotheism. The basic statement of this is in Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one”. This statement is confirmed by a wide range of other passages in the Old Testament. The consequence of this is that Judaism involves the worship of a single, unitary God. At the same time God often acts on earth through agents that are not God. The Old Testament contains examples of angels acting as such agents, as do men who are chosen to be prophets, priests and judges. Such agents are often described as though God is present when they are acting for God.

The Gospels show that Jesus endorsed the Jewish view of God. He repeats the statement that: “The Lord our God is one” (Mark 12:29) and he states that the Jews, who have never been Trinitarians, understand God (John 4:22). In many places, for example John 5:19-30, Jesus describes himself as an agent for God.

The statements of the Apostles in Acts and the Epistles also endorse Unitary Monotheism. Paul emphasises that there is one God, but doesn't include Jesus in the godhead.

One can summarise the scriptural reasons for believing that Jesus is not God under about ten headings; these notes put some of these together to produce five distinct clusters of reasons which show that Jesus is not God. This is the content of chapter 5 of these notes.

Finally, the history of the Church shows that the Apostles were not Trinitarians. The earliest followers of Jesus were Jews, and would have been brought up with a Jewish point of view, which is not Trinitarian. If the Apostles had taught the doctrine of the Trinity, one would have expected there to have been some controversy over the change in teaching about God's nature. There was certainly controversy over the adoption of Gentiles into the church. However, the New Testament contains no sign of such a controversy. The controversy did arise, in the third, fourth and fifth centuries AD.

As a consequence one must conclude that the Bible does not support the Doctrine of the Trinity, but that on the contrary it provides good reasons that this Doctrine provides an incorrect picture of the nature of God and of Jesus Christ.

1. Introduction

The Doctrine of the Trinity is considered by many in mainstream churches to be the most important part of Christianity. Many of these people would be very surprised to find that the Doctrine of the Trinity is not a part of Real, Apostolic Christianity at all and that the Bible teaches a different picture of God entirely.

However, this is the case. Not only does the Bible not contain any account of the Doctrine of the Trinity, it presents a radically different picture of the nature of God and of Jesus Christ. The Bible presents Jesus as the Son of God, and as the best possible representative of God. To know God well it is necessary to come into contact with Jesus. But it never presents Jesus as God. Trinitarians tend to raise passages which, with the right assumptions, might suggest that Jesus is God, but when one looks at those passages carefully the idea of the Trinity disappears.

The Doctrine of the Trinity was not present in the first century Church. It did not appear in a proper form until the fourth century. There is a chain of development between the original picture of Jesus and the modern Doctrine of the Trinity which shows how ideas gradually changed. The Council of Nicea in 325 AD took a major step in the development of this idea but the full Trinitarian doctrine did not really appear until the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

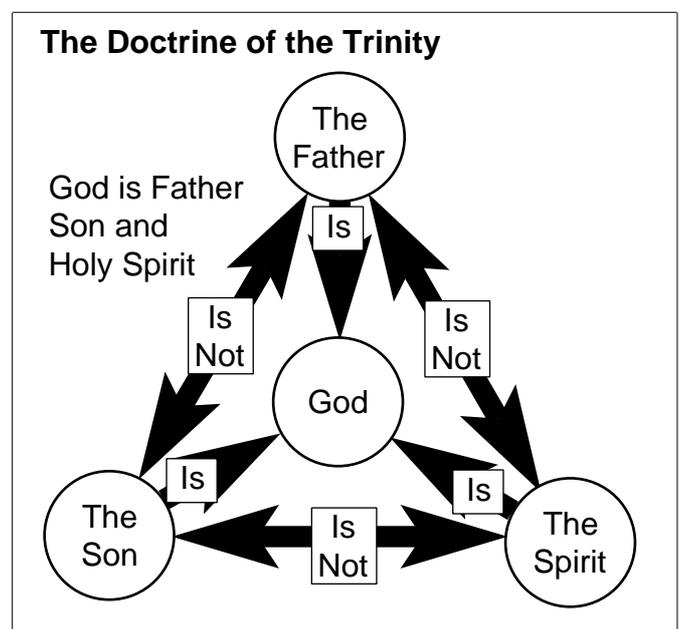
1.1 The Doctrine of the Trinity

The Doctrine of the Trinity is not easy to understand. It involves the idea that God is one being but that there are three beings who are God. This is generally acknowledged to be paradoxical; we are assured that it is a great mystery which we cannot hope to understand.

A second paradox involved in the Doctrine of the Trinity is that of the nature of Jesus. The official definition of the nature of Jesus appears in the statement of Chalcedon which asserts that Jesus was one person who had two natures. This insists that Jesus has the complete nature of an ordinary man and also the complete nature of God. This is also impossible to understand as one of the fundamental aspects of the nature of an ordinary man is that the ordinary man is not God and is completely different from God.

These overall pictures of the Doctrine of the Trinity are more than confusing. The statements contain internal contradictions which make it difficult to produce any kind of hard evidence either to confirm or deny them. The best way to proceed is to reduce the Doctrine of the Trinity to a set of simple statements and compare each of these against the Bible. There are two sources for these statements; these are the revised Nicene Creed (from the Council of Chalcedon) and the Athanasian Creed (from somewhat later but with unclear origins).

Analysis of these creeds tells us that the Doctrine of the Trinity refers to three persons. These are the Father, the Son (who is Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. Each of these is seen as being a personality in its own right, distinct from the others, but the whole forms one God. As such they all share one will. Analysis further suggests that the following statements are the core of the Doctrine of the Trinity:-



- The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father
- The Son is not the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is not the Son.
- The Father is not the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is not the Father.
- The Father is God
- The Son is God
- The Holy Spirit is God
- The one God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but not one of these alone.
- All three persons are equal with one another
- All three persons are co-eternal: none of them existed before any of the others.

These statements do not cover every aspect of the Doctrine of the Trinity, but they are close enough to allow for the doctrine to be tested against scripture.

1.2 Brief History of the Teaching

The Doctrine of the Trinity is not found in the New Testament or in any other Christian writing in the first century AD. In the second century one group of Christians with a background in Greek philosophy became fixated on the idea of the “Word” in the first chapter of John’s Gospel. This they understood in terms defined by Middle Platonism rather than in terms of the Old Testament, and they began to think of Jesus as being identical with this Platonist “Word”.

In Middle Platonism the “Word” was an entity which formed the basis of the process by which the One God caused the creation. The Word Theorists considered that this was Jesus but were then faced with the problem of how this fitted into the very clear biblical teaching that there is only one God. Various attempts were made to reconcile the two in the third century, without much success; one group, however, was convinced that there were two Gods: The Father and The Word, who was Jesus. They condemned those who maintained that there was only one God as “Monarchians”.

However, in about 300 AD this group had its philosophical problems solved by pagan Neoplatonist philosophers. The ancient Egyptians had a religious system in which gods were grouped in triads and a triad was declared to be one god. This system finally made its way into Greek philosophy in Alexandria during the second century and was developed strongly by Plotinus who declared that God was one being in three persons, the three persons being the One, the Word and the Spirit. The Word-Theorists adopted this idea and applied it to their problems in describing the relationship between Jesus and God.

The Metropolitan (senior bishop) of Alexandria was Athanasius. He started to teach the new doctrine to congregations in his city and was opposed by a presbyter by the name of Arius. This started a controversy which was taken up by the Emperor Constantine. At that time the emperor had decided to attempt to unite the empire behind Christianity and was determined that any division within the church would cease. He called a council at Nicea and a creed was produced which was intended to settle the problem. The majority of Christians supported the Arian side of the argument, but the council produced a creed which, while it could accommodate some Arians left the door open for Trinitarians. Over the next century the Trinitarian party made more and more gains, and by the council of Chalcedon in 451 AD a fully Trinitarian position was official doctrine throughout the mainstream church.

Non Trinitarian teaching has continued to the present day, but outside the official blessing of the mainstream churches.

1.3 Missing Believed Non-Existent

Mainstream churches usually believe that the Doctrine of the Trinity is the fundamental teaching of Christianity. This means that they consider it to be more important than any other teaching. One cannot become a member of most mainstream churches unless one is prepared to state a belief in the Doctrine of the Trinity, and no church can become a member of the World Council of Churches unless that church includes the Trinity in its doctrinal basis.

If the Doctrine of the Trinity is so important, one would expect it to have been explained in the New Testament. Doctrines which were important to the early church appear in the Epistles. These discuss the resurrection of the body, life after death, justification by faith, the relationship between Christians from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds and meat offered to idols. Each of these teachings is covered in depth in more than one passage. However, there is no discussion of the Doctrine of the Trinity.

There are certainly opportunities for the Doctrine of the Trinity to be explained if it was true. For example, when Peter makes his confession of faith in Matthew 16:16 /Mark 8:29/Luke 9:20 there is a perfect opportunity for Jesus to explain the relationship between himself and God. In the long discourse about the comforter in John 14-17 there is also plenty of opportunity. And of course the famous prologue to John's Gospel (John 1:1-18) and the first chapter of Hebrews both contain passages which are easily understood in terms of Jesus acting as the ultimate revelation of God, but which, when read against the background of the Old Testament (as the original readers would have read them) are problematic for Trinitarians and certainly contain no in-depth presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Of course, we know from the history of the early post-Apostolic Church that there was no clear teaching of the Trinity in the New Testament. If such a passage had existed then there would have been no need for the infighting of the Monarchian Controversy in the third century or the Arian Controversy in the fourth century. The fact that these controversies took place shows that there is no clear teaching of the Trinity in the Bible.

Trinitarians may point to passages which they assert have a hint of the Doctrine. They may, for example, refer to the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 or the blessing of 2 Corinthians 13:14. Both of these are easily understood in non-Trinitarian terms; even if they were considered to be Trinitarian in nature they are not explanations of the Doctrine of the Trinity. The same is true of the remaining verses which are occasionally quoted as examples of the Doctrine of the Trinity in scripture.

If the mainstream churches are correct about the Doctrine of the Trinity, we would have to believe that the most important teaching in Christianity is never explained in the Bible. This is not credible. If the Bible is to be taken as the foundation document of Christianity and Jesus and the Apostles are to be considered as its founders, then the most important teachings of Christianity must be the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, recorded in the Bible. These teachings would include the resurrection of Jesus, salvation by faith, the resurrection of the body and baptism as a first step in faith. However, the Doctrine of the Trinity is not among them.

1.4 Also Missing

The earliest followers of Jesus came from a Jewish background. As such they would have been brought up in a strict monotheism and would have continued to believe that there was a God who was one person. For such people to change their belief to a Trinitarian God would have been a major shift. One would not expect this to happen without controversy.

The same people were brought up with an outlook where circumcision was everything and adherence to the Law of Moses was the determining factor of their spiritual life. The new faith in Christ Jesus proclaimed by the Apostles did not require Gentiles to be circumcised or to obey the dietary rules of the Law of Moses. Some Christians from a Jewish background objected to this and the epistles of Paul reflect the debate on this subject in tremendous detail. The relationship between Law and Grace is the main theme of Galatians and Romans and appears in most of the other epistles as well as being a common theme through the book of Acts. But there is no controversy over the nature of God or the nature of Jesus.

There was, of course, a controversy later on. During the third century AD there was a considerable controversy between the Dynamic Monarchians, who believed that there was one God, the Father, and that Jesus the Son revealed God, and the Logos Theorists who asserted that Jesus was a God in his own right in some way. This controversy intensified in the fourth century when the Athanasian party asserted that a Trinitarian doctrine similar to that of the Neoplatonists could describe the Godhead.

It is thus very surprising that there is no hint of a controversy about the switch from a unitary idea of God to a Trinitarian one in the New Testament, unless the idea of the Trinity was completely unknown during the New Testament period. In other words, the evidence is that the Doctrine of the Trinity was not known during the time of Jesus and the Apostles.

1.5 Summary

The Doctrine of the Trinity is complex and difficult to understand. It can be looked at as a set of separate propositions, each of which the Doctrine of the Trinity asserts to be true, but some of which are contrary to scripture (see chapter 3 of these notes). However, there are problems with reconciling these statements with one another; they give every sign of being mutually contradictory.

The history of the Doctrine of the Trinity shows that it emerged in the third and fourth centuries, amid much controversy. This in turn shows that the Doctrine doesn't appear clearly in the New Testament, or there would have been no reason for a later controversy. Indeed, if the Doctrine of the Trinity had been taught by the Apostles one would have expected a controversy in New Testament times but there is no evidence of any such controversy.

In the following chapters it is hoped to show conclusive evidence that the Doctrine of the Trinity was not supported by Jesus or the Apostles, and that it is incompatible with the Bible.

2. God in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is especially clear in its teaching that there is one God. It clearly states this in several passages and it assumes it in many more. The Old Testament, however, is clear that God cannot be seen, but that he reveals himself to human beings in a number of different, but necessarily indirect, ways. This teaching lays the foundation for New Testament teaching about the nature of God and the nature of Jesus Christ.

2.1 Statements of the Unity of God

The most succinct statement of the unity of God comes in the book of Deuteronomy:-

Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD (AV Deuteronomy 6:4)

This is a clear statement that God is a unity. There are alternative translations to the Hebrew here; the passage could be read as:

Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, The LORD is one (Deuteronomy 6:4)

This statement of the unity of God is clear and unmistakable. This passage could have been a good place to explain the nature of a triune God, if God was a Trinity. However, there is no place in the Old Testament where this is done. The statements of the nature of God are very much statements of the unity of the Godhead.

- 2 *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*
- 3 *“You shall have no other gods before Me.*

(Exodus 20:2–3)

This is the beginning of the Ten Commandments. It would have been quite feasible to put a Trinitarian formula here, but no such formula exists anywhere in the Old Testament.

The nature of God is presented in Isaiah’s prophecy, and particularly in the servant cycle (Isaiah 40-55). The picture given is of an uncompromising monotheism. Here are some extracts from this part of the prophecy:-

- 4 *For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.*
- 5 *I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me,*
- 6 *that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.*
- 7 *I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.*

(Isaiah 45:4-7)

This passage is an exposition of the unity of God. It presents God as absolutely a single entity. There is only one God, and that God has the name here translated as LORD. No other entity can claim to be God. Everything in creation, whether prosperity or disaster, comes from this one God.

- 18 *For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): “I am the LORD, and there is no other.*

(Isaiah 45:18)

- 22 *“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.*

(Isaiah 45:22)

These passages, along with many others, emphasise the unity of God.

In Malachi, this God is identified as the Father.

10 *Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?* (Malachi 2:10)

To a Trinitarian, the Father is one part of the Triune godhead. Here God is identified as the sole creator of all mankind. This is consistent with the statements in Isaiah, but it adds the point that the God who made us all is also known as Father.

Trinitarians tend to consider that the idea of Jesus as God, and hence the Doctrine of the Trinity, is the most significant element of Christian teaching. Even those who do not believe that this doctrine is the core statement of the Gospel would assert that it is very important in the understanding of God. However, there is no passage in the Old Testament which provides a clear and detailed picture of what would be a core teaching. Instead there are numerous passages which insist on the absolute unity of God.

2.2 Misunderstood Passages

Some Trinitarians assert that there are, indeed, passages in the Old Testament which hint at a triune God. There are essentially three arguments in use. The first is that God is sometimes referred to in the plural, the second is that sometimes a threefold descriptor is used for God, and the third is the appearance of three angels to Abraham.

Plural References involving God

There are several of these references, but the only one that is quoted with any frequency is in Genesis 1:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." (Genesis 1:26)

The argument here is that God speaks in the first person plural. Some Trinitarians would claim that he does this because more than one person is involved and deduce from this that God is made of more than one person.

This is not the only place where God is referred to using a plural pronoun. There are three other places; however, these places tend to indicate rather more clearly why the plural pronoun is used. The passages are:-

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:22)

5 *the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.*

6 *the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them."*

7 *come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech."* (Genesis 11:5-7)

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8)

The first clue here is in Genesis 3. Here God says that the man (Adam) is become like one of "us". It is difficult to imagine that this is telling us that Adam had become like a person of the Trinity. What has happened is that Adam has come to know good and evil, and in this has become like an angel. This way of looking at the passage suggests that the word "us" does not simply refer to God, but to God acting with angels.

This is certainly the case in the third of the references (Isaiah 6:8). Here we know that God appears in a vision with seraphim (Isaiah 6:1-3). The question that is asked is “who will go for us”; the us is God and the seraphim who are with him. The word translated as “God” in Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 3:22 is “*elohim*”, a title which sometimes implies God working with others, even with a whole multitude of others. For example, the word appears in Psalm 8:5 and in Psalm 97:7; in both cases we have a translation in the New Testament (Hebrews 2:6,7 and Hebrews 1:6 respectively) which indicate that the word should be translated as “Angels” in these passages.

This indicates the likelihood that these passages, where God speaks in the plural, are really referring to God acting with angels. In Isaiah God is with the seraphim. In Genesis 11 God is sending angels to confound the languages of mankind and bring an end to the building of the tower of Babel, and in Genesis 1 God is speaking of using the angels in creation, particularly to create mankind.

There is no suggestion that any of these passages refers to a triune God; this is merely an assumption on the part of Trinitarians. However, there is another viable interpretation available which is that the passages refer to God working with angels. In one of the passages the entity to whom the pronoun “us” refers can certainly not be persons of the Trinity and in another the pronoun certainly refers to seraphim. There is no reason to suppose that the Trinity is implied.

Threefold Formulae

In Isaiah 6 God is described by a seraph using a threefold repetition.

And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3)

Some Trinitarians assert that the fact that the word “Holy” is repeated three times is an allusion to the doctrine of the Trinity.

In fact there are very few places where God is described by a threefold phrase like this. There are passages where God is described using twofold formulae, but one would not take this as evidence of a twofold godhead.

Three Angels

Shortly before Sodom was destroyed, God sent three angels to Abraham. Genesis 18:1 says that The LORD appeared to Abraham as a kind of heading for the episode, and the detailed description of v2 begins with three angels (described as three men). Some Trinitarians assert that this is an example of God appearing as three persons.

However, the passage shows that this is not the case. In Genesis 18:22 two of the angels go off to Sodom to arrange for its destruction and the safety of Lot’s family, while one remains.

So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. (Gen 18:22)

This tells us that only one of the angels was called by the name of the LORD. However, none of the angels was actually God in person. We know this because the Bible tells us that God has never been seen directly (Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 John 4:12). What we have is a single angel who acts as God’s spokesman, and while he does he uses God’s name. Such an angel is called the angel of God’s presence (Isaiah 63:9) or the angel of God’s name (Exodus 23:20-21)

The passage doesn't describe a threefold representation of God, but an angel who represents God and while doing so bears his name. This sort of thing is a frequent occurrence in the Old Testament. See Genesis 16:7-13, Genesis 32:24-30 cf Hosea 12:2,4, Exodus 3:2-15 cf Acts 7:30-35, Exodus 20:1ff cf Acts 7:38 and Judges 6:11-14 for further examples.

2.3 How God Reveals Himself

Having seen that God is spoken of as a unity throughout the Old Testament, one can then go on to look at the way that God has revealed himself to human beings. The principle can be expressed as follows:-

God reveals himself through other beings who are not themselves God.

The clearest example of this principle in the Old Testament is through angels, although God also revealed himself through human beings, prophets and judges.

God Revealed in Angels

The classical example of an angel acting as a manifestation of God is the example of the angel in the burning bush, Exodus 3.

And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. (Exodus 3:2)

The first point to note in this passage is that the being in the burning bush was, indeed, an angel. We are told this explicitly in Exodus 3:2, and the fact is confirmed by New Testament commentary in Acts 7:30-35

The angel, however, represents God, and because of this speaks as God and uses the name of God.

5 *Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."*

6 *And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.* (Exodus 3:5,6)

The action of the angel in demanding that Moses removes his sandals is one that one would expect in the presence of God. Similarly the words of the angel identifies him as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The angel not only speaks for God, he speaks as God.

Indeed the angel uses the memorial name of God.

13 *Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"*

14 *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

15 *God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.* (Exodus 3:13-15)

This is the name by which God is known throughout the Bible, the name which is translated as LORD in most English versions. It is the personal name of God. It is completely unexpected that an angel could be allowed to use this name. However, at this point the angel is speaking as God. As such the angel says exactly what God would say, exactly as though God were present. The voice belongs to the angel but the words are God's.

- 20 *“Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.*
- 21 *Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.*
- 22 *“But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.* (Exodus 23:20-22)

This is an explanation of how the angel represents God. This angel is called by the name of God. Verse 22 provides a very clear account. It refers to the voice of the angel: *“If you obey his voice”*, but the message spoken by the angel is the word of God *“and do all that I say”*. God speaks with the voice of the angel.

The angel is also described as *“The angel of God’s presence”* in Isaiah 63:9. In some way the angel conveys not only the words and acts of God, but also God’s presence. When the angel appears, it is as though God was present in him. This is why the ground around the angel in the burning bush was considered holy. The angel is not considered especially holy in itself; it is the fact that the angel carries the presence and word of God which makes it a special being.

In summary, angels sometimes act as representations of God. When they do this they speak God’s words, carry out actions thought of as God’s prerogative and may be described as God acting. They not only speak *for* God, they speak *as* God. Essentially they convey God’s presence.

God Revealed in Judges

Israel was governed by the Law of God, given in the wilderness at Mount Sinai. The task of the judges was to interpret this Law, and in doing so they acted for God. This means that the Old Testament sometimes refers to the judges in the same way that they might to other manifestations of God.

The process of obtaining a judgement is explained in the book of Deuteronomy.

- 8 *“If any case arises requiring decision between one kind of homicide and another, one kind of legal right and another, or one kind of assault and another, any case within your towns that is too difficult for you, then you shall arise and go up to the place that the LORD your God will choose.*
- 9 *And you shall come to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall consult them, and they shall declare to you the decision.*
- 10 *Then you shall do according to what they declare to you from that place that the LORD will choose. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they direct you.*
- 11 *According to the instructions that they give you, and according to the decision which they pronounce to you, you shall do. You shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left.*
- 12 *The man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.* (Deuteronomy 17:8-12)

This process had several important stages:-

- It was to happen at the place chosen by God.
- It was to involve a designated officer, a priest or a judge.
- The person involved has the force of law behind them - their judgement had to be obeyed.
- The priest (who was presumably the default holder of the office of judge) stood before God.

The process of obtaining a legal opinion on a difficult matter of this kind is also described in the book of Exodus. The first example is that of a servant who chooses to remain a perpetual slave rather than being released from temporary bondage in a sabbatical year.

then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.

(Exodus 21:6)

The process here involved a judge, and many English versions translate the word rendered “God” in the ESV above as “Judge”.

The other passage:-

8 *If the thief is not found, the owner of the house shall come near to God to show whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbour's property.*

9 *For every breach of trust, whether it is for an ox, for a donkey, for a sheep, for a cloak, or for any kind of lost thing, of which one says, 'This is it,' the case of both parties shall come before God. The one whom God condemns shall pay double to his neighbour.* (Exodus 22:8,9)

This is exactly one of the situations covered by the passage from Deuteronomy above. The thief is to come before a judge, who stands in for God by interpreting the Law of God.

2.4 Summary

The Old Testament provides a very clear and consistent view of a single unitary God in heaven who acts on earth in various ways. One of these ways is through other beings who are not themselves God.

The statements that God is one are written throughout the Old Testament. They begin in the Law of Moses, are distributed through the historical books and are repeated in the Prophets. They are explicit. There is no equivalent statement anywhere in the Old Testament which might suggest that there is a Triune God.

The Old Testament also provides a picture of the way that God reveals himself. He sometimes acts invisibly, and possibly directly. This kind of action is attributed to the Spirit of God, which is essentially God's unseen influence and is not to be thought of as a person in any way. God also acts through other beings, angels, prophets and judges. When this happens the being who is revealing God speaks as though that being is standing in God's place. The being speaks for God and speaks as God. Sometimes the narrative will speak of that being as though God were present in person.

Almost any revelation of God can be described as “The Word of God/The LORD”. For example:-

Psalm 33:6 *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.* The Word is God's command in creation.

Psalm 119:16 *I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word..* The Word of God is a written document.

Jeremiah 2:1,2 *The word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD...”* The Word is revealed to a Prophet.

Zechariah 1:7,9 *the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying,... Then I said, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who talked with me said to me, ‘I will show you what they are.’* Here the Word of the LORD is clearly an angel.

The Old Testament describes a single, unitary, God who acts on earth through other beings who are not themselves God.

3 Jesus and the Unity of God

Not only is the Unity of God is taught in the Old Testament; it is also endorsed by Jesus and the Apostles in the New Testament. Several occasions are recorded in the Gospels where Jesus specifically endorses a unitary view of God.

3.1 The Greatest Commandment

This is an episode where Jesus is debating in the Temple with members of the Jerusalem Authorities. During a lull in the debate, a scribe asked him the question “*Which commandment is the most important of all?*” (Mark 12:28). This gives Jesus the opportunity to describe what the foundation truths of the Gospel are. He takes this opportunity:-

Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ (Mark 12:29,30)

Here Jesus repeats the *Shema*. This is the fundamental statement of Jewish unitary monotheism, and one which would be understood by any Jewish scholar as such. Had Jesus believed that the correct picture of God was as a Trinity then he would have laid the foundation for his teaching with a statement on the Trinity. The fact that he chooses to endorse unitary monotheism instead is a strong point in favour of unitary monotheism. One can say that the way Jesus handled this question makes the following points:-

- Jesus represents the words of Moses as divine truth. These are not merely an opinion of Moses, they are the teaching of God.
- Jesus restates the foundation statement of unitary monotheism
- The scribe’s agreement with Jesus is even more emphatic than Jesus’ own statement: “*You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*” (Mark 12:32,33) This says more than simply that God is one. It adds the idea that there is no-one besides God. The scribe agrees that unitary monotheism is fundamental to understanding God.
- Jesus tells the scribe that he is “*not far from the Kingdom of God*”. (Mark 12:34) Here Jesus endorses the scribe’s statement, and by doing this confirms that unitary monotheism is at the core of a proper understanding of God. He is also implying that someone who doesn’t agree with the scribe on this is much further from the Kingdom of God!

3.2 The Only True God

On the walk from the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to his Father. The prayer is very definitely addressed to the Father of Jesus:-

Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, (John 17:1)

A short way into the prayer, Jesus refers to the only God:-

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

The point here is that the person whom Jesus is addressing is described as “The only true God”. This, of course, is the Father. Jesus has here told us that the Father is the only true God. The Greek word for “only” is the word *μονος* which can have no other meaning than sole, unique, only.

There is a similar statement in John 5:-

How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (John 5:44)

The Greek of this verse may be even more emphatic - it could be translated as “*The one who alone is God*”.

In these and similar passages Jesus is making two important points. He tells us that there is not only one God, but that there is a God who is one. In addition, he is clear that this God is not Jesus himself. Jesus’ prayer is addressed to the Father; this Father is the only true God.

3.3 The Woman at the Well of Samaria

Another statement by Jesus on the unity of God is in the account of the Samaritan woman who Jesus met at Sychar and whose story appears in John 4. The woman engages Jesus in conversation and the differences between Samaritan and Jewish systems of worship appears in this conversation. At this point Jesus makes the following statement:-

- 21 *Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.*
 22 *You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.* (John 4:21,22)

The important points here come from verse 22. Here Jesus points out that the Jews know who they worship, while the Samaritans do not know who they worship. Not only this, but he includes himself with the Jews: “*We worship what we know*”.

- The point about the Jews knowing the God that they worship is very significant. Judaism has never involved any idea of a Trinity or of a God who is more than one person. Judaism, based on the Old Testament, sees God as a single person. Jesus endorses this view: “*Salvation is from the Jews*”.
- The second point is that Jesus worships God. Jesus includes himself with the Jews in worshipping a God who he knows. Of course, if Jesus worships God he cannot see himself as the supreme being. He acknowledges some other being as greater than himself.

Jesus clearly endorses the Old Testament idea of God, a God who consists of a single person. This is the Jewish view of God, a unitary monotheistic view and not the Trinity.

3.4 God Revealed Through Jesus

The picture Jesus shows is that God lives in heaven. He is thus unseen. But he acts on earth through a number of different channels. Sometimes he works invisibly and possibly directly, in which case the Bible describes God as acting through his Spirit. Sometimes he works through agents. The Old Testament gives a clear description of God acting through angels, and through men appointed for the purpose (prophets, priests and judges). The New Testament describes Jesus as the greatest representative of God on earth.

Jesus as God’s Representative

Jesus describes himself as a representative through whom God works on earth:-

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. (John 5:19)

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38)

So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me." (John 8:28)

These three passages speak quite plainly of Jesus acting and speaking for God. John 5:19 tells us that the actions of Jesus come from God, and John 8:28 tells us that the words of Jesus also come from God. Jesus is acting after the manner of the angel who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, or the angel who appeared at Mount Sinai and delivered the Law of God. On both of these occasions the angel spoke God's words, spoke as God, and is described as though God was present in person.

Jesus does not make such extreme claims. However, Jesus does describe himself as a very true representative of God in John 14:-

- 9 *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*
 10 *Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.*
 (John 14:9,10)

The words "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*" are often quoted out of context in favour of the idea that Jesus is God, but this is not what Jesus says. Jesus does not simply use the words "*He who has seen me has seen **God***" but "*He who has seen me has seen **the Father***". Even to a Trinitarian, Jesus is not the Father. What Jesus is saying is that as the representative of God on earth, to see Jesus acting is to see God acting, and to hear the words of Jesus is to hear the words of God, because God gave Jesus the actions to perform and the words to speak. The point, made very clearly in verse 10, is that the words that Jesus spoke while teaching are not words that originated with him, but words that originated with God, the Father. The Epistles describe Jesus as "*The image of God*" (2 Corinthians 4:4)

The Gospel of John contains more than 40 passages in which Jesus refers to God as "*he who sent me*". These include:-

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me." (John 8:42)

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." (John 20:21)

This declares Jesus to be an agent of God, who represents him, declares the truth given him by God and performs the works determined by God. As Jesus himself points out, the fact that God has sent Jesus shows that there is no equality between them.

Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. (NASB'95 John 13:16)

The word "slave" is a correct rendering of the Greek. Jesus is telling us that the relationship between him and God, who sent him, is not one of equality, or even approaching equality. Jesus is the Son of God who represents his Father among human beings.

3.5 Jesus Rejects Claims to Deity

There are several places in the Gospels where Jesus rejects any claims to deity. Here are two of them.

Jesus Rejects the Equality with God

After the healing of the paralysed man at the Pool of Bethesda, Jesus was accused of claiming equality with God by the religious authorities in Jerusalem:

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

(John 5:18)

The important point here is that Jesus explicitly rejects this accusation. He tells the Jews, and everyone else, that he is not equal to his Father.

- *So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.* (John 5:19,20)
- *I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.* (John 5:30)
- *For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.* (John 5:36)

It is very clear here that Jesus is telling the authorities that he does not claim any kind of equality with his Father. On the contrary, he always acts on his Father’s initiative. The Father is in command.

This is important because if Jesus was God, co-equal with his Father, then he would not explicitly reject the idea that he claims equality with God. By rejecting a claim to equality with God, Jesus is rejecting a claim to deity.

Jesus Rejects the Claim to Goodness

In the middle of his ministry Jesus encountered a young nobleman who came to Jesus and asked what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus’ answer is instructive:

And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

(Mark 10:18)

It is clear in the words of Jesus that he is correcting the words of the man who is addressing him; Jesus is rejecting the claim to be good. One can connect the idea of being good with temptation; if one is really good, one would not be tempted to commit sin. God is not tempted to sin (although people may make futile attempts to tempt him), but Jesus was tempted, as we know from the account of the temptations in the wilderness and from comments in the Epistles.

However, Jesus goes further than a rejection of the claim to be good. He goes on to tell us that only God is good. Effectively this is an assertion that Jesus is not God.

3.6 Summary

Jesus shows that he is not God in several different ways.

- Jesus endorses the unitary picture of God found in the Old Testament and followed in Judaism.
- Jesus worshipped God.
- Jesus claimed to reveal the will, actions and words of God. By an encounter with Jesus one could find what God is like. This, however, is like the actions of angels in the Old Testament (but more complete). God reveals himself on earth through other beings who are not themselves God, and Jesus revealed God completely.
- Jesus explicitly rejected assertions that he was making himself equal to God.

On their own these would be sufficient to show that Jesus is not God. But there is more. They are endorsed by the followers of Jesus in the Epistles.

4. Unitary Monotheism in Acts and the Epistles

After Jesus ascended to heaven his disciples became Apostles and spread the message of the Gospel throughout the ancient world. Part of their message was a picture of the nature of God and the nature of Jesus Christ. The details of this message are found in the Acts of the Apostles and in the letters (Epistles) written by the Apostles, under the inspiration of God, to address the problems of early Christianity. These writings show a very firm commitment to the unitary monotheism of the Old Testament and of Jesus.

4.1 The Missing Explanation

For a large number of Trinitarians, the Doctrine of the Trinity is the most important aspect of their theology. Some would state that it is the core doctrine of Christianity, the teaching which divides between Christians and non-Christians. This would elevate the Doctrine of the Trinity to the point where it should be explained in great detail in the New Testament, probably several times. However, it is completely absent.

This is a comment from a standard work by theologians on the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is characteristic of many such comments.

Because the Trinity is such an important part of later Christian doctrine it is striking that the term does not appear in the New Testament. Likewise, the developed concept of three co-equal partners in the Godhead found in later credal formulations cannot be detected within the confines of the canon. (ie. within the pages of the known New Testament).

(Oxford Companion to the Bible (1993) "Trinity")

There are a few passages that are claimed by Trinitarians to be hints in the general direction of the Trinity (although these generally point to other possible ideas), but Trinitarian scholars admit that there is no comprehensive description or explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity within the Bible.

This is very significant, because it means that Trinitarians expect one to believe that the main teaching of Christianity is not explained in any detail in the Bible, but was only worked out by theologians three centuries after the resurrection, when the Apostles had died and been long buried.

There are many places where it would have been appropriate to include such a description. The speeches in Acts introduce the most important elements of the Gospel to the people who heard the Apostles and there are passages in Romans, Ephesians and Philippians where such an exposition would not be out of place.

The general approach of theologians from the Church Fathers onwards is to presume that the Apostles were writing hints about the Doctrine of the Trinity, interpret these hints in Trinitarian terms and then put them together in a framework which emerges as the Doctrine of the Trinity. The trouble is that these details don't fit very well into the Old Testament picture of a single unitary God who has representatives that operate for him on earth.

4.2 Passages which Distinguish Jesus from God

One feature of the Epistles which is not often noticed by Trinitarians is the way that they consistently distinguish between Jesus and God. There are nearly 150 passages in the Epistles which do this. The following are typical examples of the kind of passage where this occurs:-

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:2)

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (Colossians 3:1)

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (1 Timothy 2:5)

how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:14)

Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, ... (1 Peter 3:21,22)

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. (Revelation 1:1)

These passages are often not noticed; Trinitarians tend to substitute the word “Father” for “God” in their minds when reading them. However, the distinction is very clear. Jesus has gone to be at the right hand of God; this means that he is distinct from God. The Revelation was given to Jesus by God. And so it goes on, for passage after passage after passage.

Besides the passages which distinguish Jesus from God, there are ones which indicate that the Father is God, whereas Jesus is not described as God. Examples include:-

yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Corinthians 8:6)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Romans 1:7 - A similar wording appears in 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Philippians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon :3; 2 Peter 1:2 and 2 John :3)

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, (1 Thessalonians 3:11)

These verses are very non-Trinitarian. They identify God and the Father and leave Jesus outside the godhead. Indeed they are actually anathematised at the end of the Athanasian Creed (which anathematises any statement which suggests either that God is the Father - this would be “dividing the substance” or that Jesus is not God).

Finally, in this set of passages there are some which emphasise the difference between Jesus and his Father and emphasise that only the Father is God.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, (Galatians 4:4)

⁴ *And no one takes this honour for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.*

⁵ *So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”;* (Hebrews 5:4,5)

The Hebrews passage here tells us that Jesus was appointed to be a high priest by God, just as Aaron was. It also emphasises the fact that Jesus is the Son of God.

4.3 Passages which tell us that Jesus has a God

One of the most significant points about the relationship between Jesus and his Father is that Jesus worships our God, the God of heaven, as his own God. Jesus pointed this out himself in John 4:22 (see above) and the Apostles continue to repeat the important fact that Jesus has a God. Here are some passages which repeat this:-

that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
(Romans 15:6)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
(2 Corinthians 1:3; Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3)

The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.
(2 Corinthians 11:31)

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,
(Ephesians 1:17)

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.
(Hebrews 1:9)

- 5 *and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood*
6 *and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen*
(Revelation 1:5,6)

The implication of these is startling; God is the supreme being on whom everything else depends. God has no God. The fact that Jesus has a God shows that he is not the supreme being, but depends on God.

4.4 God raised Jesus from the Dead

The letters of the Apostles contain seven statements to the effect that Jesus was raised from the grave by God. In two of these (Romans 4:24; 8:11) one is left to work out who raised Jesus, but it is clear that Jesus did not raise himself. Galatians 1:1, Colossians 2:12 and Hebrews 13:20 clearly state that it was God who raised Jesus from the dead. There are two passages which say more than this.

- 9 *...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,*
10 *and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead,..* (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10)

This passage not only points out that God raised Jesus from the dead but also makes the distinction between God and the Son of God.

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
(Romans 10:9)

The final passage of this set tells us that the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead is an essential part of salvation. If you cannot believe that Jesus was really dead, or believe that Jesus was not raised to life by God, then you do not match the condition set here for salvation. This is a very emphatic statement by the Apostle, inspired by God.

4.5 The Unity of God

The Old Testament Doctrine of the unity of the godhead is endorsed by Jesus in the Gospels, so it is unsurprising to find that it is also endorsed by the Apostles. There are several passages in the Epistles which teach Old Testament unitary monotheism.

yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1Corinthians 8:6)

- 5 *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,*
6 *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*
(Ephesians 4:5,6)

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever.
(1 Timothy 1:17)

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
(1 Timothy 2:5)

In all these passages there is a picture of one God and it is clear that Jesus is not part of this Godhead. In three of the passages (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:5,6; 1 Timothy 2:5) Jesus is described separately from the one God; in the remaining passage we are reminded that no-one has seen the only God, while many people had seen Jesus.

4.6 Jesus is God's Representative

The final element of the picture of the relationship between Jesus and God as presented by the Apostles is that Jesus acts as a representative who carries the presence of God in the same way that Angels, prophets and judges did in the Old Testament. The difference is that Jesus gives a more exact representation of God than does any other representative.

The Image of God

Three of the passages about the relationship between Jesus and God simply state that Jesus is the image of God.

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (Colossians 1:15)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, (Philippians 2:5,6)

The first two of these used the word "eikon" to describe Jesus as an image of God. This is a two-dimensional representation, as in a picture, but nonetheless one which could have provided a very good likeness of the person being represented by the picture. The Philippians reference uses the word "morphē" to describe the form of God. This is the outward shape, a three-dimensional representation, but nonetheless a representation of God.

Direct Statement of how God is Manifest in Jesus - Hebrews 1

The fourth passage which declares Jesus to be an image or representation of God is in the letter to the Hebrews:

- 1 *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,*
- 2 *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*
- 3 *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*
- 4 *having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.* (Hebrews 1:1-4)

This passage provides a concise summary of the way that God reveals himself, as explained in the Bible. It begins with the fact that God has revealed himself in many different ways. The prophets received messages from God by visions, from angels who visited them, and as statements from God. Any of these could be described as "The word of God", although Hebrews does not use this term.

The passage then goes on, in verse 2, to show that God has also represented himself to us in Jesus Christ, the son of God. Here we read that this process continues in Jesus. Notice that there is a distinction between Jesus and God here. The verse tells us that God has spoken to us by his Son. Only one of the referents in this verse is described as God; the Son is the intermediary who has represented God to us humans. The Son has been appointed by God as the heir of the world - he will receive the world and rule it. This task, and honour, is delegated to him by God; this can only happen because God is in authority over Jesus.

The world created is the “world to come”, as is explained to us in the next chapter:

For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.
(Hebrews 2:5)

The world to come, of course, is the kingdom of God, which is to be set up on earth at the return of Jesus.

Verse 3 describes Jesus very clearly as an exact image of God. Jesus is described as the “radiance” of God’s glory (AV has “brightness”). The point about this word, and the Greek word which underlies the translation, is that it does not refer to the source of light, but to the light which travels from the source to the observer. This is a picture of Jesus as an intermediary between God and mankind. The sentence goes on to explain this in a different way - it describes Jesus as “the exact imprint” of God’s nature. Again, this is language that describes an image. The word translated as “exact imprint” refers to the ancient process of making identical objects. One particular example was making coins, where a stamp was hammered into the blank coin to produce an image was exactly the same on every coin. The coin was an exact image of the original used to make the stamp, and in the same way Jesus is described as the exact image of God. However, there is a difference between an image and the original.

Verse three continues by showing Jesus as sitting at God’s right hand; again, this is quite different from indicating that he became part of a triune godhead in heaven.

Verse four describes the status of Jesus. Jesus has *become* greater than the angels, which means that he was not always so. He has done this because he has inherited a great name, which comes from God (this is also spoken of in Philippians 2:9).

Direct Statement of how God is Manifest in Jesus - John 1

Another passage which contains some detail about the relationship between Jesus and God is in the first chapter of John. The passage begins with the word of God:-

1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

This is a verse which is often read only through the lens of Greek philosophy. To a Platonist philosopher the word of God was an intermediate being who took the world of perfect forms produced by the ultimate God and made it possible for various other intermediaries to turn the forms into physical objects in the material world. The logos theorists of the second and third centuries read the first chapter of John against this background, decided that Jesus was identical with the Word in John 1 and that this Word was the same as the Word of Platonic philosophy. At the end of the third century the pagan philosopher Plotinus produced an idea of the godhead in which three persons made one God and this finally allowed the Logos theory to develop into the full-blown doctrine of the Trinity.

However, it is much better to read the chapter in terms of the Old Testament idea of the word of God.

In the Old Testament the Word of God is whatever method God uses to express himself:-

- In creation: Psalm 33:6 (see also Psalm 147:15,18; Jeremiah 10:12,13; 2 Peter 3:5,7)
- To the prophets: Jeremiah 2:1,2a (This phraseology appears very many times in the Old Testament.)
- The written word of God in the scriptures: Psalm 119:9
- Conveyed by an Angel: Zechariah 1:7,9

There are further uses of the Word in this sense in the New Testament

- The word spoken by Jesus: John 8:31
- The word spoken by the Apostles: Hebrews 13:7

With this idea in mind the chapter becomes much easier to understand.

The first verse indicates the word of God, the means by which God has revealed himself in the past. This was the word by which God created the world, “The breath of his mouth” as Psalm 33:6 puts it. This first verse tells us that the word is a complete representation of God - “The word was God” in some versions “What God was the word was” in others.

Verses 2 and 3 talk about the word’s involvement in creation. Everything was made by God’s word, and there are no exceptions. Verses 4 and 5 tell us that the same word that was present in creation is the word which teaches men of God. In the darkness of human ignorance the word of God enlightens us, and the darkness has not overcome it.

From verses 6 to 8 the passage speaks of John the Baptist, the prophet immediately before Jesus who bore witness to him. There is then another general section in verses 9 - 13. The point about this is that the light was continually coming into the world, but men refused to see it or to hear God’s word.

Then in verse 14 we have Jesus entering the account. The word of God which was previously expressed in creation and through the prophets, of whom John was an example, which gave the opportunity for unity with God, was now expressed as a human being; Jesus was born.

The whole process is summarised in verse 18:

No one has ever seen God; God’s only Son, who nearest to the Father’s heart, he has made him known. (REB John 1:18)

There are some textual issues here, but the most likely text, backed by all but a handful of manuscripts, has “son” rather than “God”.

The verse points out that no-one has ever seen God; this is why God needs a representative to make him known. Jesus is the representative described in John’s Gospel; Hebrews explains that Jesus is the best possible representation of what God is like.

5. Problems with the Doctrine of the Trinity

The previous sections of this document show that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a scriptural concept. There is no explanation of it anywhere in the Bible, something which is agreed by almost all academic theologians. Instead the Bible produces a picture of a God who is a single person (unitary monotheism), but who acts through other beings who are not themselves God, but can use the name of God and are sometimes described as God being at work.

This picture is developed in the Old Testament, where the intermediaries are angels, prophets, priests and judges. Jesus endorsed this picture in his recorded statements in the Gospels and the Apostles, inspired by God, provide exactly the same picture.

This section goes on to look at scriptural reasons which show, directly and clearly, that the Doctrine of the Trinity is incompatible with the Bible as a whole. There is no possibility that the issues raised in the Bible can be resolved by the Doctrine of the Trinity; there are facts about God, and especially about Jesus, written in the Bible, which are in complete contradiction to the Doctrine of the Trinity.

The important question that will be considered here is "Is Jesus God?". There are 12 propositions, each supported by passages throughout the Bible, which show that Jesus cannot be God.

5.1 No-One has ever Seen God

The Bible is especially clear that no-one has ever seen God at any time. Passages which state that no-one has ever seen God include the following:-

No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.
(John 1:18)

...he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.
(1 Timothy 6:15,16)

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.
(1 John 4:12)

This is a problem for anyone who wishes to believe that Jesus is God. Thousands of people saw Jesus. He was seen at the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand. When a paralysed man was let down through the roof it was because the house in which Jesus was teaching was full of people, all of whom could see Jesus. Even the risen Jesus was seen by over 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:6). However, no-one saw God, not the Disciples, not the crowd, not even the prophet John the Baptist.

Indeed, God cannot be seen, ever.

But, he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." (Exodus 33:20)

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17)

To this one can add 1 Timothy 6:16 (quoted above), Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 11:27.

God cannot be seen, but Jesus was seen. This means that Jesus cannot be God.

5.2 God is Omniscient, but Jesus Didn't Know Everything

There are many passages in the Bible which tell us that God knows everything. Omniscience is one of the known attributes of God, but it is useful to have this confirmed by scripture.

Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge, (Job 37:16)

Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' (Isaiah 46:9,10)

for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. (1 John 3:20)

These passages are unequivocal and one can add to them others such as Psalm 147:5; 1 Samuel 2:3; Job 28:24 and Psalm 33:13-15. In particular, the Isaiah passage tells us that God knows the future completely. No plan is hid from him, and especially not his own plans.

The following passage is therefore an insurmountable problem for a Trinitarian:-

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Mark 13:32)

God knew from the beginning of the creation the day on which Jesus would return, but Jesus did not know it when he was on earth. This means that Jesus was not God.

5.3 God Never Changes

There are many passages which attest to the unchangeable nature of God's purposes and hence the reliability of his covenants. However there are also passages which refer to the unchangeableness of God's nature.

*Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, **but you are the same**, and your years have no end.* (Psalm 102:25-27)

*"For **I the LORD do not change**; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.* (Malachi 3:6)

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights **with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*** (James 1:17)

God is the same for all time, and even outside of time if such a domain exists. The Bible is, however, even more clear that Jesus has changed in the past.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man. (Luke 2:52)

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. (Hebrews 2:10)

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, (Hebrews 5:8,9)

As God does not change, but Jesus has changed, it must be the case that Jesus is not God.

Occasionally Trinitarians attempt to evade some of the force of the differences between Jesus and God by asserting that he laid aside his divine nature at birth and was not God for his time on earth, but then resumed divinity on ascension. This, of course, would be a change of his nature. As God does not change, this argument is self-defeating.

Interestingly, the idea that Jesus surrendered his divinity to be born on earth is ruled out in the orthodox statement of the Doctrine of the Trinity. This is the position that was taken up by the Nestorians of the fifth century; it was outlawed at the council of Chalcedon in 451 AD (this is the council which produced what is now known as the Nicene Creed - the council of Nicea produced a creed which was similar in many ways but didn't provide a rigorous definition of the Trinity). This council declared Mary to be the "Mother of God" - in other words Jesus was divine when he was born. Trinitarians are required to believe this, although many Protestant and Evangelical Trinitarians find it hard to accept.

5.4 God is Greater than Jesus

One of the clear statements of the Bible is that God is greater than Jesus. This appears in direct statements, but is also seen in the way that God delegates to Jesus and in the way that Jesus worshipped.

Direct Statements

These statements are simple statements that God is greater than Jesus.

You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. (John 14:28)

This records a statement to the disciples shortly after the Last Supper. It is extremely explicit. It is impossible to take these words seriously and believe that Jesus was equal to his Father. However, some Trinitarians attempt to escape from the teaching of this verse by the claim that Jesus was not equal to his Father at the time of the Last Supper - before the ascension - but has become equal more recently. This, of course, would show that Jesus has changed, which would be contrary to the standard version of the Doctrine of the Trinity.

However, there are other statements:

When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1Corinthians 15:28)

1 Corinthians 15 was written about 25 years after the ascension; this verse refers to the end of the Millennium, an event a thousand years after the return of Jesus and so clearly well in the future. Even at this time Jesus is subordinate to his Father.

Authority is Delegated to Jesus by God

A further point about the relationship between Jesus and God is that Jesus derives his authority from his Father. This is an important point. Jesus cannot claim authority because of his own merit, brought about by his nature. He is given authority by someone else.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Matthew 28:18)

- 1 *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,*
- 2 *since **you have given him authority over all flesh**, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.*
- 3 *And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:1-3)*

The passage from John places several statements together which are profoundly at variance with the doctrine of the Trinity. First of all, Jesus prays to God in heaven. As a second point he prays to be glorified, the idea being that when he has received glory from God he will be able to praise God more effectively.

In verse 2 Jesus notes that the Father has given him authority over all flesh. This is a statement of the difference in authority of the Father and the Son. The Son does not have authority as an inherent feature of his being; he is given authority over all flesh by his Father.

In verse three Jesus goes on to describe his Father as “The only true God” and to differentiate him from Jesus himself, who is sent by God. This is a microcosm of the Old Testament picture of unitary monotheism - there is One God, the Creator, the God of Heaven, who acts through intermediaries. Jesus is the greatest of these intermediaries, sent by God to speak God’s word, do God’s works and act as a complete representation of God.

A third passage in this vein is from Hebrews.

but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:2)

This verse refers to God, not simply to the Father; the pronoun refers back to verse one. Jesus has been *appointed* heir of all things.

The point is fairly clear. Authority is always delegated by the greater to the lesser. The fact that God has made Jesus Messiah/Christ and made him Lord over the whole world means that God has more authority than Jesus. The two are not equal in any sense.

Our God is the God of Jesus

The final, and most important, element of this statement of inequality between Jesus and God is that Jesus acknowledges our God as his own God.

You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. (John 4:22)

These words of Jesus tell us that he worshipped the God of the Jews. Jesus worships the God of heaven. The God of the Jews is the God of Jesus.

There are more passages along these lines:-

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (John 20:17)

Again, it can be argued that this refers to a time before the ascension when Jesus had in some way laid aside his nature as God and again this would be evidence that Jesus has changed and cannot therefore be God. However, one can go on to show that Jesus still had a God after the resurrection.

*that together you may with one voice glorify **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** (Romans 15:6)

Blessed be ***the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...***

(2 Corinthians 1:3 also Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3)

The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

(2 Corinthians 11:31)

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,

(Ephesians 1:17)

*You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore **God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.***

(Hebrews 1:9)

Seven Refs

Rom 15:6

2Cor 1:3 This list contains seven passages in the epistles, in which the Apostles refer to our God as the God of Jesus Christ. Jesus still acknowledged his Father as his God after the ascension.

2Cor 11:31

Eph 1:3

Eph 1:17 This fact is also acknowledged in the Revelation.

Heb 1:9

1Pet 1:3 *and made us a kingdom, **priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.***

(Revelation 1:6)

Again, the Revelation describes our God, the Father of Jesus, as the God of Jesus.

Finally we have the words of Jesus himself in the Revelation. These words are spoken by Jesus to John more than 30 years after the resurrection. Clearly Jesus had ascended to heaven long before. The words are about the Day of Judgement, further in the future.

*The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of **my God**. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of **my God**, and the name of the city of **my God**, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from **my God** out of heaven, and my own new name.*

(Revelation 3:12)

This is final confirmation that Jesus has a God. Jesus himself describes our God as his God four times in a single verse. There is no possible doubt. Jesus has a God.

What it Means

The point here is that Jesus has a God. This means that he is not the supreme being.

God is the supreme being who causes the existence of every other entity in the universe. This means that God does not rely on any other entity. No other entity can be greater than God, can cause God, can restrict God or can set God's goals and objectives. This is the meaning of monotheism.

However, Jesus has a God. Jesus acts for God and represents him to those in the world. Thus Jesus is not the ultimate being.

5.5 The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

The basic fact of Christianity is that Jesus died for our sins on the cross and was raised to life again. This is vitally important in the process of atonement; our sins are forgiven because Jesus died and was raised. The importance of this is that God does not die.

God does not die: Jesus died

The fact that Jesus died is recounted over and over again in the New Testament and is emphasised as the basis of our salvation. There are many verses about this in the Epistles, in the Gospels and even in the Old Testament, where the death of God's servant is predicted. Here are some examples:-

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

(Isaiah 53:7,8)

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

(Matthew 16:21)

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

(Romans 5:8-10)

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

(Philippians 2:8)

No Christian can deny that Jesus died and was raised to life. This is the clear teaching of the Bible. However, the Bible also tells us that God cannot die.

God is described 28 times in the Bible as “The Living God” (13 times in the New Testament and 15 times in the Old Testament). The problem is that God is the source of life for every other living thing; if God’s spirit were to cease, all living things would die (Job 34:14,15). The New Testament contains other statements that God does not die:-

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever.

(1Timothy1:17)

he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion.

(1Timothy6:15,16)

As God cannot die (or rather we cannot exist in a universe where God dies), but Jesus has died, he cannot be God. Even though Jesus was raised again from the dead, there would have been a period when he was dead, and this would have required a dead God.

Some Trinitarians attempt to avoid the implications of this by saying that Jesus was not really dead, that he had merely gone elsewhere. This, of course, removes the point of his sacrifice; if he was not really dead then he was not really a sacrifice.

God Raised Jesus from the Dead

There are 16 passages in the New Testament which tell us that Jesus was raised from death by God. For many of these this is a simple statement: “*This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.*” (Acts 2:32). There are places where the resurrection is used as an identifier for God: “*It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,*” (Romans 4:24) Some statements are more elaborate still.

by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead...

(Acts 4:10)

and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

(1Thessalonians 1:10)

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, (Hebrews 13:20)

These leave us in no doubt. Jesus was dead, and he was raised to life by God. There is a distinction here between Jesus, who was dead, and God who raised him from the dead. Jesus did not raise himself. He was raised by God.

Summary

The understanding that Jesus really died, and was really raised from the dead by God, is an essential part of the Gospel. According to the Bible it is a matter of salvation:-

but for ours also. because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

This certainly leaves a problem for Trinitarians, who now have to explain how Jesus can be the Living God, die, and raise himself from the dead. It also refers to God as a separate referent from Jesus.

5.6 The Bible and Unitary Monotheism

The Bible always describes God as a unity. The repeated statement is that there is one God and it is often stated that God is one. Here are some examples:

Deuteronomy 6

4 *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.* (Deuteronomy 6:4)

This is the ESV translation of the passage. An alternative might be “The LORD our God is one LORD” as in the AV/KJV. The point, however, is that the passage is very much about a God who is unitary. He is the only God, but he is also one. A Trinitarian God might be the only God, but he is three.

Isaiah 45

5 *I am the LORD, and **there is no other**, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me,*
 6 *that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and **there is no other**.*
 18 *For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): “I am the LORD, and **there is no other**.*
 22 *“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and **there is no other**.* (Isaiah 45:5,6,18,22)

This set of passages emphasises one fact about God, which is that he is alone. There is one God, and there are no other gods. This is a very clear statement of monotheism and a very good place to introduce the idea of a Trinity, if the Trinity was a correct understanding of God.

John 17

3 *And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.* (John 17:3)

This is part of a prayer to the Father in heaven. In verse 1 he addresses his Father directly, and here in verse 3 he tells us that this person is *the only true God*. If the Father is the only true God then there is no other person in the godhead.

John 5

44 *How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?* (John 5:44)

The important wording here is “the only God”. The wording used by Jesus, and the context, imply that he does not include himself in the statement. Jesus is describing his Father as “the only God”.

1 Corinthians 8

6 *yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.* (1 Corinthians 8:6)

In this passage the one God is identified as the Father.

Galatians 3 and 1 Timothy 2: The Mediator

19 *Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.*
20 *Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.* (Galatians 3:19,20)

Here there is the issue of a mediator between God and man. In the Old Testament the mediator was an angel, or a group of angels; here the angels appear to appoint a mediator. The existence of a mediator implies that more than one party is involved. Here one of the parties is God. The New Testament mediator, the mediator of the new covenant, is Jesus Christ.

5 *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,* (1 Timothy 2:5)

This second passage on the mediator identifies exactly whom the mediator is. It also tells us that the one God is the party who uses a mediator; Jesus is the mediator between God and mankind. This is a clear statement of unitary monotheism.

Ephesians 4

4 *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—*
5 *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,*
6 *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* (Ephesians 4:4-6)

This passage speaks of various unitary entities within the Gospel. Among these is the One God, who is clearly identified as the Father.

Summary

The Bible consistently speaks of one God. The one God that is spoken of within its pages is the Father. There is no picture of a God who is three persons within the one godhead.

6. Historical Development

The final chapter in the consideration of the Doctrine of the Trinity is to see how the idea developed in the centuries following the completion of the New Testament. This is a significant study in two ways: first, because it is important to see when the Church developed from a community with a very Jewish idea of God to one which was essentially Trinitarian and second, because it is important to see what influences affected the transition.

The point here is that immediately after the Resurrection of Jesus the Christian Community was made entirely of people from a Jewish background. These people would have a view of Jesus which was entirely formulated in terms of Unitary Monotheism, in accordance both with the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. The same people would have had a background in Jewish Law and a consequent distrust of Gentiles. At some point the majority of those in the Church became Trinitarians and issues of Jewish law ceased to be controversial in any way.

6.1 Jewish Law

The first Christians were all Jews. The first congregation was set up in Jerusalem and there would be others in Galilee. The first Gentiles join the church in Acts 10; this causes a stir which is reported on in Acts 11. Further Gentiles join as a result of Paul's first missionary journey, and these are also discussed in a council of important Apostles in Jerusalem in Acts 15. The problem was that many Jewish Christians found the transition from Law to grace difficult to negotiate. They wished to retain the Jewish Law themselves and to avoid contact with Gentiles, and they thought of salvation as being granted by keeping the Law of Moses rather than by faith in Christ Jesus.

This caused a controversy which had to be dealt with by the Apostles. The letters to the Galatians, to the Romans and to the Hebrews are particularly concerned with dealing with the problems raised by this, but issues in the area crop up throughout the epistles.

The point is that the earliest Christians could have had no idea of the Trinity, regardless of whether one believes that this was taught by the Apostles or not. The transition to a belief in the Trinity would have caused a controversy similar to the one caused by the transition away from the Law for Jewish believers. The point is that there is no evidence of any such controversy.

6.2 A Brief History of the Trinity

The Doctrine of the Trinity is absent in the Old Testament and there is no statement of it in the New Testament. The word "Trinity" is absent from the Bible and from any other writing before 200 AD. A study of the Apostolic Fathers shows that Trinitarian teaching was not a factor in the second half of the first century or the first half of the second century.

The first elements of the Doctrine of the Trinity begin to appear towards the end of the second century among a small number of theologians who all shared a background in Platonic philosophy. These theologians began to think in terms of the Word of John 1 in platonist terms; platonists had proposed an entity called the *Logos* (Greek for Word) which was considered to be the ultimate principle from which the physical world was made; the Stoics saw the Word as not only the basis of creation, standing between an entirely transcendent God and the physical universe of matter, but also sustaining the world and directing its development. The Logos theorists began to identify this principle with the Word of John 1:1-18 towards the end of the second century.

A survey of Christian writings shows that no idea of Jesus as God was used to define the difference between mainstream Christianity and, on the one hand, strictly Jewish Christians or, on the other, those who saw Jesus as simply a moral teacher (the new Socrates). The teaching of the virgin birth

was used to bolster the mainstream position on controversy with those who simply said that Jesus was an ordinary man with exceptional wisdom, and arguments with those of a Jewish persuasion were handled via quotations from the Apostle Paul and the fact that Jesus did not seem to have kept the Sabbath day very scrupulously. Either of these controversies could have been solved by an appeal to the Doctrine of the Trinity if the Trinity had been known and had been mainstream doctrine at the time. The fact that no appeal to the Trinity was made suggests that it was not, at that time, a feature of mainstream teaching.

At the end of the second century a variety of different views of the nature of Jesus seems to have co-existed within the Christian community. However, these could be grouped into two types:-

- Theologies where Jesus was separate from God but had the spirit of God within him
- Theologies where Christ was the supreme being who had assumed flesh and appeared in the world. This was the view put forward by the Logos theorists, among others.

At this point the second set were very much a minority viewpoint, but had the advantage that they fitted in with Platonic philosophy. At this point, however, the Logos theorists had not thought of a way of reconciling the idea that Jesus was God with the idea that there is one God.

A clash of doctrine soon followed. In the early third century the controversy began between two different groups. One of these was the Logos Theorists who demanded the excommunication of another group of theologians who also believed that Jesus was God. This second group, the Modalists, taught that Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirits were three different aspects of the same person who was the one God. They were condemned as Monarchians (believers in the rule of one God). The Logos theorists also used the same term to describe those who believed that Jesus was not God, but was able to represent God because of the action of the Holy Spirit; these were described as “Dynamic Monarchians”.

Towards the end of the third century the Logos Theorists were able to develop their theology in line with developments with Platonism. The new development was produced by the pagan Plotinus and consisted of an idea that God could be three persons but still be one God. This idea was adopted by the Metropolitan of Alexandria, one Bishop Athanasius. Various members of the Christian community in Alexandria were appalled by this and opposed it vigorously, led by a presbyter by the name of Arius. The controversy was temporarily settled by the new emperor Constantine, who convened a council at Nicea. A compromise was reached and embodied in a creed, but the controversy continued for more than a hundred years. In 481 all views apart from the Trinitarian one were outlawed and a new creed (known now as the Nicene Creed) was written, coupled with a statement on the nature of Christ.

The controversy continued for some time after this, but the non-Trinitarians were by now defeated and gradually faded into the background. There continued to be non-Trinitarians, but they were a persecuted minority who lived in hiding and had little influence on history until the reformation.

6.3 The Issue

The important point in the history of the Trinity is that there was no controversy about the adoption of this doctrine in the first century AD. The arguments began with the Monarchian controversy in the third century and continued with the Arian and Nestorian controversies in the fourth and fifth centuries. This shows the time at which the teaching of the Church changed. The transition from the unitary monotheism of the first century to the Doctrine of the Trinity did not begin until the third century and was not completed until the fifth century. This is strong evidence that the doctrine of the Trinity was not taught by the Apostles. If it had been, the controversies around it would have started in the first century and not in the third, fourth and fifth centuries.

7. Conclusion

These notes examine the Doctrine of the Trinity from the point of view of the Bible. It attempts to find a consistent definition of the doctrine, but is only partially successful in this. This is a fairly common problem with the Doctrine of the Trinity; Trinitarians who attempt to explain it usually end with the comment that the Trinity is a mystery and that it cannot be fully understood.

However, there are several propositions which are part of the official definition of the Doctrine of the Trinity, among them the statements that God is one, but in three persons, that the Father is God and that Jesus is God, that Jesus is equal to the Father, but that Jesus is not the Father. Some of these statements (for example, the Son is not the Father) are consistent with scripture, but others (for example the statement that Jesus is equal with the Father) are not consistent with scripture.

Trinitarians tend to insist that the Doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation teaching of Christianity and the basis of any true idea of God. If this is the case then one would expect a clear presentation of the doctrine. One would expect several explanations of it, some of which would be detailed and others concise summaries. However, no such explanation is found anywhere in scripture. The most that can be said is that the Bible puts forward some questions which the Traditional Church has attempted to answer with the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Chapter two shows that the clear teaching of the Old Testament was that of unitary monotheism, which means that the Old Testament teaches that there is one God who is a single person. The Old Testament presents a picture of a single God who sometimes acts on earth through other beings who are not themselves God, but who act as God's agents and represent God. This is the reason that Judaism has always proclaimed unitary monotheism.

In chapter three we saw that Jesus endorsed the Jewish view of God. He describes God as his Father, and himself as the Son of God, sent by God to proclaim God's word, to act for God and to die for the sins of mankind. He refers to God as his God, and declares that he worships God. The same picture carries on through the words of the Apostles in Acts and the various epistles, and this was the point of chapter four.

Chapter 5 looked at problems with the central points of the Doctrine of the Trinity. In particular the Bible shows that Jesus is not God, and presents a picture of a unitary godhead. The reasons given for believing that Jesus is not God are:-

1. No-one has ever seen God, but thousands saw Jesus
2. God is omniscient but Jesus didn't know everything
3. God never changes, but Jesus has changed.
4. God is greater than Jesus
5. God does not die, but Jesus died
6. God raised Jesus from the dead
7. The Bible presents Jesus as the mediator between God and men.

These facts about Jesus cannot be explained in a Trinitarian context, but are completely consistent with Unitary Monotheism in which God is a single person who acts on earth through other beings.

Chapter 6 was a brief survey of the historical development of the Doctrine of the Trinity. The earliest Christians would have been Unitary Monotheists as they came from a Jewish background, and at some point the church made a transition to Trinitarianism. If the Doctrine of the Trinity had been

taught by the Apostles one would have expected to find this transition marked by controversy which would leave a written record in the Epistles like the record of the controversy over circumcision and Jewish dietary restrictions. The reality is that no controversy occurred until the end of the second century. This is further evidence that the Apostles did not teach the Doctrine of the Trinity.

The Bible contains two kinds of evidence about the Doctrine of the Trinity. There is the hard evidence of passages like Revelation 3:12 which contain statements that are completely incompatible with the Doctrine of the Trinity. There is also more circumstantial evidence like the absence of controversy on the subject in the Apostolic Church and the large number of passages in which Jesus insisted that he has been sent by God or the even larger number passages which distinguish Jesus from God in the Epistles (not all the passages in either list here are circumstantial; some are direct evidence). However, all the evidence points in the same direction; the Prophets and Apostles in the Bible did not teach the Doctrine of the Trinity.