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STUDIES AND STUDY AIDS

Arguments against the Trinity

Catalogue of objections and guide to orientation



JESUS AND THE TRINITY

Thinking biblically and entering into conversation

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Central point and use

This collection organizes 205 objections to the doctrine of the Trinity and provides an overview of 25 central problem areas. It is a catalogue of objections, not a collection of answers that have already been worked out.

A literally complete inventory of every objection ever formulated cannot be brought to a conclusion. New variants arise continually. Moreover, many objections target a particular explanatory model rather than every form of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The classical basic structure of antitrinitarian alternatives can be distinguished as follows:

- Modalism: preserving unity by denying real distinctions between persons.
- Arianism and subordinationism: preserving unity by denying consubstantiality.
- Tritheism: preserving real distinctions between persons by multiplying the divine essence.

The modern debate also examines identity, counting, predication, personal self-knowledge, indexicality, mereology, constitution, group agents, relative identity, contradictory logics and mysterianism.

For each objection, examine precisely which assertion is being attacked, how strong the argument is, and whether it affects the doctrine itself or only an individual model. Literature and online sources appear at the end of the document.

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I. Distinguishing four types of objection

This distinction is crucial for a fair examination.

Dogma objection: aims to show that every orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is false or contradictory.

Model objection: at most refutes a particular explanation, such as social trinitarianism, relative identity or a Thomistic relational model.

Justification objection: the doctrine might be coherent, but allegedly lacks sufficient biblical or historical grounding.

Intelligibility objection: the formulas might be free of contradiction, yet lack any intelligible or credible content.

A frequent mistake by critics and defenders alike is:

> **A particular model is refuted - and the dogma is then simply assumed to have been refuted.**

The opposite mistake is:

> **A model is presented as formally consistent - and it is then concluded that the biblical doctrine of the Trinity has been proved.**

II. The comprehensive catalogue of objections

A. Semantic and conceptual objections

1. The argument from the word “Trinity”

The term Trinity does not occur in the Bible. Therefore, the doctrine is said to be a postbiblical construction.

The argument is weak in this simple form, but leads to the stronger problem of whether not only the word but also the state of affairs it denotes is absent.

2. The no-single-doctrinal-statement argument

No single Bible verse says:

> **One God exists eternally in three coequal, consubstantial persons.**

Antitrinitarians therefore argue that the doctrine arises only by combining texts that originally made different assertions. Jehovah's Witnesses explicitly formulate this objection as the claim that no text teaches the three's shared equality of essence, power and eternity. (JW.ORG)

3. The problem of definition

What do the following mean?

- Essence?
- Nature?
- Substance?
- Hypostasis?
- Person?
- Subsistence?
- Relation?
- “Is God”?

Until these words have been defined unambiguously, no consistency test can be conducted either.

4. The modern concept of a person

In modern usage, “person” usually means a distinct:

- self;
- center of consciousness;
- subject of cognition;
- center of willing;
- center of action.

Three such persons seem to be three personal beings. If, conversely, “person” is weakened so far that no distinct center of consciousness is meant, modalism threatens.

5. The equivocation argument concerning “is”

In the assertions:

- The Father is God.

- The Son is God.

“Is” can mean:

- 1. Identity: “is numerically identical with”;
- 2. Predication: “is divine”;
- 3. Consubstantiality: “possesses the same nature”;
- 4. Constitution: “is constituted by the same reality”;
- 5. Part-whole membership;
- 6. Relative identity.

The critic claims that trinitarians shift between these meanings to avoid modalism or tritheism as required.

6. God as a proper name or a kind term

Is “God”:

- a proper name for an individual being;
- a title;
- a predicate;
- a nature;
- a generic designation;
- a functional designation such as “ruler of the world”?

If “God” is treated like “human,” three bearers of the divine nature seem to be three gods. If “God” is treated as a proper name, every statement about a person seems to become an identity statement.

7. The semantic placeholder argument

If “person” and “essence” merely indicate that God is one and three in different ways without making it intelligible how, they are mere placeholders.

The current mysterianism debate formulates precisely this objection: what is not sufficiently understood cannot really be believed, nor can it guide thought, prayer or worship. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

8. The argument from poverty of meaning

A minimal formula such as:

> **“One in one respect, three in another”**

is easily consistent. But it might possess too little content still to express the Christian Trinity.

9. The underdetermination argument

Very different models could be developed from the same biblical data:

- Latin;
- social;
- Thomistic;
- Augustinian;
- Cappadocian;
- relative-identity;

- constitutionalist;
- mereological;
- monarchical;
- mysterian.

The critic concludes that the sources do not determine an unambiguous ontology.

10. The model pluralism argument

If orthodox theologians accept mutually contradictory explanations, the question arises of what the allegedly binding doctrine consists in beyond a mere collection of formulas.

11. The failure of analogy

Every popular analogy is known to end in a classical error:

- Water: modalism;
- Egg: partialism;
- Three-leaf clover: partialism;
- Three human beings: tritheism;
- Sun, light and heat: subordinationism;
- Mind, knowledge and will: possibly mere faculties of a single subject.

The stronger objection is that an assertion lacking any intelligible field of analogy may be meaningless rather than mysterious.

12. The unfalsifiability argument

Every difficulty is deflected with one of these answers:

- divine mystery;
- analogical language;
- human finitude;
- an incomparable divine mode of existence.

It then becomes unclear which conceivable observation or inference could count against the doctrine.

B. Formal logical problems of identity and counting

13. The classical logical problem of the Trinity

Richard Cartwright's and Beau Branson's standard formulation consists of seven statements:

- 1. The Father is God.
- 2. The Son is God.
- 3. The Holy Spirit is God.
- 4. The Father is not the Son.
- 5. The Father is not the Holy Spirit.
- 6. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
- 7. There is exactly one God.

The question is how all seven can be true simultaneously. Branson explicitly distinguishes mere formal consistency from the stronger metaphysical possibility of the doctrine. (PhilArchive)

14. The argument from the transitivity of identity

If:

- Father = God;
- Son = God;

then transitivity entails:

- Father = Son.

Since Father ≠ Son, at least one of the identity statements cannot be correct.

Garrigou-Lagrange treats this classical formulation as the objection:

> **Things identical with a third thing are also identical with each other.**

His Thomistic answer appeals to real identity with the essence together with relational opposition between the persons.

15. The Leibniz's law argument

Identical things have the same properties.

But:

- The Father begets.
- The Son is begotten.
- The Father is not begotten.
- The Son does not beget the Son.

Therefore Father and Son cannot each be numerically identical with the same God.

16. The substitution argument

If “the Son” and “God” are identical, in principle one expression ought to be substitutable for the other in true statements:

- The Son became human.
- Therefore God became human.
- The Father is God.

- Therefore the Father became human.

Orthodox doctrine denies the final inference. The critic demands a non-ad-hoc explanation of the blocked substitution.

17. The counting argument

Concrete individuals are normally counted on the basis of numerical nonidentity:

- Father ≠ Son;
- Son ≠ Spirit;
- Father ≠ Spirit.

There are therefore three individuals. If each is divine, they seem to be three gods.

18. The three-instances argument

Three distinct bearers of the same nature normally amount to three beings of the same kind:

- Peter, Paul and John are three human beings;
- Father, Son and Spirit would correspondingly be three gods.

The trinitarian must explain why the divine nature is not instantiated three times.

19. The modalism-or-tritheism dilemma

Either the persons are genuine personal subjects; then tritheism threatens.

Or they are not independent subjects; then modalism threatens.

This dilemma appears in very different historical forms. Bosserman describes how opponents sought to force Calvin into precisely this alternative.

20. The real-or-nominal-Trinity dilemma

English Unitarians historically distinguished:

- “Real trinitarians”: three real personal spirits and therefore tritheism;
- “Nominal trinitarians”: mere modes or names and therefore disguised unitarianism.

Richard Muller documents this strategy in the controversies surrounding William Sherlock and Robert South.

21. The quaternity problem

Besides Father, Son and Spirit, there seems to be a fourth subject:

- the triune God as a whole.

We would then have:

- 1. Father;
- 2. Son;
- 3. Spirit;
- 4. The Trinity.

Classical Western doctrine therefore denies that the divine essence is a fourth thing. Garrigou correspondingly emphasizes that each person is the one divine essence; there is no quaternity.

22. The whole-parts problem

Are the persons parts of the Trinity?

- If so, no person is fully God.
- If not, how do three complete persons form exactly one God?

23. The difference-in-kind problem of whole and parts

A football team is not itself a football player. A community of three divine persons would therefore not automatically be another God of the same kind.

24. The group-agent problem

A corporation or state can metaphorically “act” but does not necessarily possess consciousness of its own. If God is the community of three persons, the question arises whether the one God himself knows, loves and acts, or only his members do.

25. The substitute-monotheism argument

Some social trinitarians define monotheism not as the existence of exactly one divine self, but, for example, as:

- one divine community;
- one inseparable dominion;
- one source;
- one shared activity.

Critics call this “substitute monotheism”: three gods would not become one by cooperating perfectly. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

26. The objection to relative identity

According to Peter Geach, Father and Son can be “the same God” but “different persons.”

Critics reply:

- Absolute identity is fundamental, not relative to sortal concepts.
- “The same F, but not the same G” does not explain how two things can be numerically one.
- The theory revises ordinary logic precisely where the Trinity needs it.

The literature on relative identity constitutes one of the main branches of the modern discussion. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

27. The too-cheap-monotheism argument

If several mutually distinct subjects can be “the same God” simply by being grouped under a sortal, many other pantheons could also be declared “one God.”

28. The constitution problem

Brower and Rea partly compare the persons with different things constituted by the same material.

Objections:

- God is treated like a quantity of matter.
- Additional entities arise.
- Constitution is not identity.
- The model threatens divine simplicity.
- It is unclear why three constitutions do not yield three gods.

29. The composition-as-identity problem

If the Trinity is supposed to be identical with the three persons together, the question arises whether a whole can really be identical with several parts even though those parts are not identical with one another.

30. The problem of “improper parts”

Some mereological models say that Father, Son, Spirit and God are improper parts of the same reality.

Objections:

- The persons are then not simply God.
- Mereological relations seem to introduce composition.
- The traditional assertion that each person is wholly God becomes difficult to understand.

31. The problem of triunity

Justin Mooney's new problem is:

- 1. God is triune.
- 2. The Son is God.
- 3. The Son is not triune.

With unrestricted transfer of properties, 1 and 2 seem to entail that the Son is triune. Mooney calls this the Problem of Triunity. (PhilArchive)

32. The property-inheritance problem

If each person is identical with God, each would have to possess all God's properties:

- being tripersonal;
- being the Father;
- being the Son;
- being the Spirit.

Yet precisely these properties are not attributed to every person.

33. The exactly-three problem

Why exactly three?

Natural reason seems unable to rule out:

- two persons;
- four persons;
- infinitely many persons.

Even classical theologians concede that the Trinity cannot be demonstrated from creation.

34. The three-omnipotent-beings problem

If three different subjects are each omnipotent, can one will something that another does not will?

- If so, not every one can realize its will.
- If not, what grounds the impossibility of disagreement?

35. The one-action-does-not-prove-one-being argument

Perfectly coordinated action does not show numerical identity. Three musicians can play exactly the same piece and remain three beings.

36. The inseparability-does-not-prove-identity argument

Even metaphysically inseparable things need not be numerically one thing. The inseparability of the persons therefore does not prove monotheism.

37. The dialetheist way out

J. C. Beall accepts certain trinitarian identity statements as both true and false and uses a paraconsistent logic.

Objections:

- Historical orthodoxy did not intend to teach real contradictions.
- In the theory, even “The Father is God” would have to be partly false.
- The method could immunize any contradictory doctrine. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

38. Branson's no-new-solutions argument

Beau Branson claims that every possible solution can be classified within a finite taxonomy. Every solution contains features that are either:

- disputed;
- heretical;
- metaphysically costly;
- or inconsistent.

One should therefore not simply hope for a still unknown future model. (PhilPapers)

C. Indexicality, consciousness and personal self-knowledge

39. The indexical argument proper

The Father knows in the first person:

> **I am the Father.**

The Son knows:

> **I am the Son and not the Father.**

The Spirit knows:

> **I am the Spirit and neither Father nor Son.**

Such de-se or first-person contents seem perspectivally different. If the persons therefore possess different mental acts or centers of consciousness, tritheism threatens. If they possess only a single undifferentiated mental act, genuine personal self-knowledge seems impossible.

40. An important terminological clarification

“Indexical Argument” is not a universally standardized name for a single antitrinitarian proof. In the specialist literature, Scott Williams's article Indexicals and the Trinity is primarily an attempted solution: the same mental sentence-token is supposed to be usable by different persons with different first-person contents. The SEP explains the example of a single sign reading “I am happy,” used by Peter and Paul and designating a different speaker in each case. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

This should be distinguished from the argument about God's knowledge of “now” in the debate concerning divine temporality, also called the “indexical argument.”

41. The objection to shared Mentalese

Why should divine thought consist of language-like mental sentence-tokens?

Human beings may be able to think nonlinguistically. Introducing a shared divine Mentalese then looks like an auxiliary hypothesis specially constructed to solve the problem of the Trinity. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

42. One mind or three minds?

- One mind with one self seems to be only one person.
- Three minds with three first-person perspectives seem to be three divine beings.

43. The consciousness argument

Self-consciousness is usually regarded as constitutive of personhood. Three distinct self-consciousnesses would therefore suggest three personal substances.

Garrigou discusses a corresponding modern theory that posits three consciousnesses, and thus three intelligences, in God as a danger of tritheism.

44. The one-will problem

Classical doctrine attributes one numerically single will to God.

The critic asks:

- How can three persons with only one will be genuine personal agents?
- What then distinguishes a person from a mere relational mode?

45. The three-wills problem

If each person is assigned a will of his own, there seem to be three complete personal agents.

46. The conflict problem

If different wills are essentially incapable of ever willing differently, it is questionable whether they really are different wills.

47. The mutual-love argument against one-self models

The Father loves the Son; the Son loves the Father.

If both are the same self, this may be merely self-love described in a complex way. If they are different subjects of love, multiple divine selves threaten.

48. The sending argument

The Father sends the Son. A subject can indeed send itself, but biblical usage seems to presuppose a sender and someone sent.

49. The prayer argument

Jesus prays to the Father.

- Does God pray to himself?
- Does a human nature speak to a divine person?
- Does the person of the Son as a human pray to another divine person?

The objection connects the doctrine of the Trinity with Christology.

50. The two-witnesses argument

Jesus appeals to his own testimony and the Father's testimony, for example in John 8:17-18. Two testimonies seem to presuppose two subjects of cognition.

51. The knowledge-asymmetry argument

The Father knows the day and the hour; according to Mark 13:32 the Son does not know them.

If both possess the same numerically single divine intellect, one and the same cognitive act seems to contain both knowledge and ignorance of the same state of affairs.

52. The will-asymmetry argument

“Not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36) sounds like different acts of will.

The doctrine of two natures answers by appealing to Christ's human and divine wills. The critic then asks whether the text really distinguishes between natures rather than between Father and Son.

53. The Spirit's-intercession argument

According to Romans 8:26-27, the Spirit intercedes with God for the saints. This seems to require either:

- two subjects of cognition and action;
- or a dramatized self-relation of God.

54. The incarnation-transfer problem

If Son and Father possess the same intellect, will and reality, why are the Son's human experiences not attributed to the Father?

D. Metaphysical objections

55. The simplicity problem

Classical theism teaches that God is not composed of parts, properties or metaphysical constituents.

How, then, can three real personal distinctions exist in God?

Dolezal's work shows how central simplicity is to the classical concept of God.

56. The identity-collapse argument

If every divine relation is completely identical with the one essence:

- Fatherhood = divine essence;
- Sonship = divine essence;

then Fatherhood = Sonship seems to follow by transitivity.

57. The composition argument

If, conversely, fatherhood and sonship are not identical with the essence, God seems to be composed of essence plus relations.

58. The problem of a subsistent relation

The Thomistic definition is roughly:

> **A divine person is a subsistent relation.**

The critic asks:

- How can a relation subsist?
- How can a relation know, love and act?
- Is “subsistent relation” an explanation or merely a technical paraphrase?

Garrigou develops precisely this Thomistic doctrine of persons and concedes that the answer may initially seem less clear than the objection.

59. The relational-opposition argument

The persons are distinguished by opposed relations of origin.

But a real relation normally already presupposes two distinct bearers. The relation then seems to presuppose the distinction of persons rather than ground it.

60. The problem of communicating the essence

The Father “communicates” the whole divine nature to the Son.

- Is it multiplied?
- Is it transferred?
- Does the Father possess it before the communication?
- Is the Son dependent on this communication?

61. Aseity versus eternal generation

Aseity means self-existence or independence.

If the Son receives his personal being from the Father, he seems not to be a se. If only his personal distinction but not his existence is explained, the critic asks whether this separation is intelligible.

62. The origin-dependence argument

“Begotten of the Father” and “proceeding from the Father” sound like ontological dependence. Dependence seems incompatible with coequality and full deity.

63. The before-and-after argument

Generation normally means:

- cause and effect;
- earlier and later;
- begetter and begotten.

The doctrine of eternal, timeless and uncaused generation seems to alter the ordinary concept so drastically that its positive content becomes questionable.

64. The timeless-process problem

A process seems to involve a succession. How can a “procession” be completely timeless?

65. The necessity problem

The intradivine processions are supposed to be necessary. God could then not have existed otherwise.

The critic asks:

- Is personal love still free?
- Are the persons necessary products?
- Is divine freedom restricted?

66. Monarchy versus coequality

In Eastern and some monarchical models, the Father is the source or origin of deity.

The objection is:

- Either the Father has ontological priority;
- or “source” means nothing real.

67. Autotheos versus fons divinitatis

Is the Son “God of himself,” or does he receive his deity from the Father?

Both formulas seek to safeguard different truths, but seem to be in tension.

68. One intellect, one will, three persons

In classical metaphysics, intellect and will belong to nature. There is therefore only one divine intellect and will.

In the ordinary concept of a person, however, intellect and will belong to the personal subject. The critic sees different anthropologies of personhood here.

69. Undivided works versus different missions

Opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt: the Trinity's external works are undivided.

But Scripture says:

- The Father sends.
- The Son is sent and becomes human.
- The Spirit is poured out.

How can the works be numerically one and yet specific to persons?

70. The appropriation problem

Properties and works are “appropriated” to individual persons:

- power to the Father;
- wisdom to the Son;
- love to the Spirit.

If these properties are fully shared, such assignments seem theologically constructed or arbitrary.

71. The problem of revelation through undivided works

If every external work is done by all three persons through the same single act, how can any created effect reveal a particular person?

The classical answer itself is that the Trinity cannot be demonstrated from natural effects because creative power is common to all the persons.

72. The wholly-God problem

Each person is supposed to be fully God, rather than one third of God.

At the same time, no individual person is supposed to be the Trinity. The critic asks in what sense each person possesses the whole Godhead without possessing all personal properties.

73. The problem of universals

Is the divine nature a universal instantiated by three persons?

Then three instances threaten. If it is not a universal, it must be explained how the same concrete nature can be three nonidentical persons.

74. The individuation problem

What makes Father, Son and Spirit precisely these three persons?

- Relations of origin?
- Personal properties?
- Primitive haecceities?
- Different consciousnesses?

Each option generates its own costs.

75. The problem of the modality of incarnation

Could the Father have become human?

- If not, the Son possesses a possibility the Father does not possess; they then differ in more than relations.
- If so, the link between sonship and incarnation seems contingent or interchangeable.

76. The classical-theism-versus-social-Trinity argument

Three interacting centers of consciousness seem to introduce change, mutual dependence and a need for relational supplementation.

77. The simplicity-and-plurality dilemma

The more strongly simplicity is emphasized, the harder real personal difference becomes.

The more strongly personal difference is emphasized, the harder simplicity becomes.

The Reformed orthodox tradition was aware of this problem and understood simplicity precisely as a safeguard against tritheistic formulations without excluding every kind of distinction.

E. Biblical and exegetical objections

1. Fundamental canonical objections

78. The singular God of the Old Testament

God regularly speaks as one “I,” not as “we”:

- Deuteronomy 6:4;
- Isaiah 43:10-11;
- Isaiah 44:6;
- Isaiah 45:5-6;
- Isaiah 46:9.

The objection is not merely “God is one,” but:

> **The one God presents himself as a single personal self.**

79. “One God, the Father”

Several New Testament texts explicitly identify the one God with the Father:

- John 17:1-3;
- 1 Corinthians 8:4-6;
- Ephesians 4:4-6;
- 1 Timothy 2:5;
- 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10.

The Unitarian argues that Jesus and the Spirit are not identified together with the Father as the one God.

80. Jesus as Messiah and Son of God

New Testament confessions frequently call Jesus:

- Messiah;
- Son of God;
- Lord;
- servant of God;
- someone authorized by God.

The objection is that trinitarians illegitimately read “Son of God” as “God the Son.”

81. The kerygma argument

In Acts the apostles preach:

- Jesus's messianic mission;
- crucifixion;
- resurrection;
- exaltation;
- return;
- forgiveness.

A developed three-person ontology does not appear as an explicit subject of their gospel proclamation.

82. No explicit condition of salvation

Nowhere does the New Testament call to salvation say:

> **Believe that God is one essence in three persons.**

This is cited against the later strong clauses in the Athanasian Creed concerning necessity for salvation.

83. Triadic texts do not prove a Trinity

Father, Son and Spirit can be mentioned together without thereby entailing:

- consubstantiality;
- coeternity;
- equal omnipotence;
- one numerical essence;
- three subsistent relations.

84. Matthew 28:19

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” establishes:

- a triadic baptismal formula;
- not necessarily a trinitarian ontology.

The singular “name” is used trinitarianly; the objection is that a shared religious reference does not prove identity of essence.

85. Second Corinthians 13:13

Christ's grace, God's love and the fellowship of the Spirit are mentioned together.

Antitrinitarians object:

- “God” here evidently designates the Father;
- appearing together does not prove coequality.

86. The Elohim argument against proof of plurality

The plural Elohim is used with singular verbs and designates a single referent even then. Its grammatical form therefore does not prove multiple personhood.

87. Genesis 1:26 as a divine council

“Let us make humankind” could be understood as God speaking to his heavenly council or his angels.

The objection to the trinitarian reading is:

- The text mentions neither Son nor Spirit.
- The subsequent execution is in the singular.
- Even a plurality of heavenly speakers would not yet be a Trinity.

88. The angel of YHWH as an agent

The angel of the Lord speaks with divine authority because, under the ancient Near Eastern messenger principle, the agent represents the sender.

It does not follow that the angel is a second divine person.

89. Word and Wisdom as personification

Proverbs 8 and similar wisdom texts could be poetic personifications.

They then prove neither:

- Christ's personal preexistence;
- eternal generation;
- nor a second divine person.

90. Economic versus immanent Trinity

The Bible could teach a threefold order of salvation:

- God acts through his Messiah;
- by means of his Spirit;

without asserting anything about three eternal intradivine persons.

2. Objections to the deity of Christ

91. John 1:1

Antitrinitarian readings claim:

- theos without the article is qualitative or indefinite;
- the Logos is “divine,” not “the God”;
- “with God” distinguishes him from God;
- Logos need not already be an independent person.

92. John 1:18

The textual variants “only-begotten God” and “only-begotten Son” are discussed.

The objection is that a disputed text must not bear a foundational burden of proof.

93. John 8:58

“Before Abraham came to be, I am” need not quote Exodus 3:14.

Alternative explanations:

- a statement about preexistence;
- messianic preeminence;
- idiomatic use of ego eimi;
- the presence of a predestined identity.

94. John 10:30

“I and the Father are one” could mean unity in:

- intention;

- work;
- protection;
- testimony;

comparable to the disciples' unity in John 17:20-23. Jehovah's Witnesses use precisely this comparison. (JW.ORG)

95. John 20:28

Thomas says: “My Lord and my God.”

Counterreadings:

- an exclamation addressed to God;
- Jesus as a fully authorized representative;
- functional rather than ontological address as God.

These alternatives vary in strength, but belong in a complete series.

96. Romans 9:5

The punctuation of the Greek text could determine whether “God over all” refers to Christ or the Father.

97. Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1

The Granville Sharp construction is read trinitarianly as designating Jesus “God and Savior.”

Objections concern:

- syntax;
- exceptions;
- stylistic parallelism;
- different referents.

98. Hebrews 1:8

“Your throne, O God” could be a royal address to the messianic king. Immediately afterward it says: “Therefore, O God, your God has anointed you.”

The critic sees here a distinguished king who is nonetheless subordinate to God.

99. Philippians 2:6

The expression harpagmos is interpreted differently:

- Christ possessed equality;
- Christ did not grasp at equality;
- Christ did not exploit his status selfishly.

Antitrinitarians emphasize the possible reading that Jesus precisely did not try to be equal to God.

100. Colossians 1:15

“Firstborn of all creation” is said to be most simply understood as the first creature.

The trinitarian answer points to rank, inheritance rights and the following statements about creation. The objection remains a principal argument of Arian groups. (JW.ORG)

101. Revelation 3:14

Archē tēs ktiseōs could mean the “beginning” or first member of creation, rather than its origin or ruler.

102. Proverbs 8:22

If personified Wisdom is identified with the preexistent Christ, “The Lord created me” seems to support creaturehood.

The trinitarian defender must decide how strongly to maintain the christological identification at all.

103. Isaiah 9:5

“Mighty God” could be a royal throne name or a representative designation. Not every bearer of a divine title is identical with YHWH.

104. Micah 5:1

“Origins from days of old” need not mean metaphysical eternity, but could refer to Davidic or ancient descent.

105. The proskynesis argument

The Greek proskyneō can designate both divine worship and homage to human authorities.

Every act of bowing before Jesus therefore does not automatically prove his deity.

106. The delegated-authority argument

Jesus:

- forgives sins;
- judges;
- performs miracles;
- gives life;
- receives honor;

because God has granted him this authority. Delegated divine functions would not make the agent God himself.

3. Subordination and humanity arguments

107. “The Father is greater than I”

John 14:28 seems to assert direct inequality.

The orthodox answer distinguishes economic or human lowliness from equality of essence. The critic asks whether this distinction comes from the text or the dogma.

108. “The Son can do nothing of himself”

John 5:19,30 is read as dependence.

109. “The head of Christ is God”

1 Corinthians 11:3 suggests an enduring hierarchy.

110. “Christ belongs to God”

1 Corinthians 3:23:

> **You belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.**

111. The Son's final subjection

According to 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected all things to him.

The objection is that this describes more than a temporary earthly subordination.

112. Jesus has a God

- John 20:17;
- Ephesians 1:17;
- Revelation 3:12.

A being that has a God above it seems not itself to be that same supreme God.

113. Jesus receives life

John 5:26:

> **The Father has granted the Son to have life in himself.**

Received self-life appears paradoxical.

114. Jesus receives authority

- Matthew 28:18;
- John 5:22-27;
- Daniel 7:13-14.

Someone who receives all authority apparently does not possess it originally of himself.

115. God makes Jesus Lord and Christ

Acts 2:36 is cited against an eternal, unchangeable lordship of Christ.

116. God exalts Jesus

Philippians 2:9:

> **Therefore God also highly exalted him.**

God is the one exalting; Jesus is the one exalted.

117. God raises Jesus

Numerous apostolic texts distinguish God as the agent and Jesus as the one raised.

118. Jesus grows and learns

- Luke 2:40,52;
- Hebrews 5:8.

An omniscient divine subject could not increase in wisdom or learn obedience.

119. Jesus does not know everything

Mark 13:32 is both a christological and a trinitarian problem.

120. Jesus is tempted

According to James 1:13, God cannot be tempted; Jesus was tempted.

121. Jesus dies

God is immortal; Jesus died.

The doctrine of two natures says that the person of the Son died according to his human nature. The critic asks whether this is an intelligible solution or merely a formal one.

122. Jesus prays to God

Regular prayer, obedience and dependence are understood as indications of a human Messiah.

123. “My God, my God”

The cry of abandonment by God seems to show a genuine I-Thou relationship between Jesus and God.

4. Objections to the Spirit's personhood and deity

124. The Spirit as God's power

The Spirit is described as:

- poured out;
- received;
- given;
- distributed;
- filling;
- anointing.

This seems to fit God's effective power or presence better than a person.

125. The baptism-in-a-person argument

People are baptized or filled “with Holy Spirit.” Critics claim that one is not “filled with a person.”

126. The personification argument

The Spirit:

- speaks;
- teaches;
- guides;
- testifies.

But wisdom, sin, death and blood are also personified. Personal verbs alone therefore do not prove personhood. Jehovah's Witnesses explicitly advance this argument. (JW.ORG)

127. The grammatical-gender argument

Pneuma is grammatically neuter. Masculine pronouns in the farewell discourses could refer to the masculine paraklētos and do not prove metaphysical personhood.

128. The no-proper-name argument

Father and Son have personal designations; the Spirit is given no unambiguous personal proper name.

129. The no-throne argument

Visions show Father and Son, or God and the Lamb, but do not always show a third enthroned person.

130. The possession argument

Expressions such as:

- Spirit of God;
- my Spirit;
- Spirit of Christ;

could designate possession or effective power rather than a third person.

131. Acts 5

Ananias lies to the Holy Spirit and thus to God.

The objection is that disregarding God's effective presence or agent could count as lying to God without proving identity or personhood.

132. The Spirit as a gift

A person can give gifts; but the Spirit himself is also called a gift.

133. The omission argument

Many Pauline greetings mention Father and Son without naming the Spirit as a third coequal sender.

134. The late-pneumatology argument

Even in parts of early church history, the Spirit's status remained disputed longer than the Son's. This is taken as an indication that his full deity and personhood emerge less clearly from Scripture.

F. Text-critical and hermeneutical objections

135. The Comma Johanneum

The trinitarian-sounding addition in 1 John 5:7-8 about Father, Word and Spirit, “and these three are one,” is absent from the earliest and best Greek manuscripts.

This does not entail that the Trinity is false. But it refutes the use of this addition as an original proof text.

Particularly important: Garrigou's older account still quotes this text in a form that, according to textual criticism today, cannot be regarded as original.

136. The interpolation charge against Matthew 28:19

Some antitrinitarians claim that the trinitarian baptismal formula was added later.

This objection must be addressed even though its manuscript basis is substantially weaker than in the case of the Comma Johanneum.

137. First Timothy 3:16

The variants “God was manifested in the flesh” and “he/who was manifested” alter the immediate christological evidential value.

138. Acts 20:28

Variants and translations affect the wording “the church of God, which he acquired through his own blood.”

139. Jude 5

The variants “Jesus,” “Lord” and “God” affect whether Jesus is explicitly identified as the one who saved Israel from Egypt.

140. John 1:18

“Only-begotten God” versus “only-begotten Son” is another text-critical focal point.

141. The punctuation argument

The oldest manuscripts do not contain the same modern punctuation. In texts such as Romans 9:5, sentence division can acquire theological significance.

142. The translation-bias argument

Capitalization of:

- Spirit;
- Word;
- Son;

as well as the use of articles and the choice of pronouns, could already import trinitarian interpretation into the translation.

143. The analogia fidei circularity argument

Trinitarian texts are read in the light of the Trinity; those readings are then cited as proof of the Trinity.

144. The proof-text underdetermination argument

For almost every trinitarian proof text, differing interpretations exist even among trinitarian exegetes.

The Unitarian argues:

> **If even trinitarian specialists do not uniformly read a text as proof of the Trinity, that text cannot unambiguously ground the doctrine.**

145. The Synoptic-Johannine development argument

The Synoptics present Jesus predominantly as a messianic human being; John is said to contain a later, higher Christology.

146. The canonical-diversity argument

Different New Testament authors could hold different Christologies and pneumatologies. A harmonized doctrine of the Trinity smooths over those differences.

147. The economic-versus-ontological-language argument

Statements about what Father, Son and Spirit do in salvation history do not automatically permit statements about how God exists eternally in himself.

G. Historical and doctrinal-historical objections

148. The development argument

The doctrine in its fully developed terminology does not appear immediately, but grows over several centuries.

The objection is:

> **Apostolic revelation was not merely made more linguistically precise, but ontologically expanded.**

149. The Nicaea-and-Constantinople argument

Nicaea in 325 concentrated primarily on the relation between Father and Son. The more detailed definition of the Spirit came later in the fourth century.

This is taken to imply a stepwise construction of doctrine.

150. The Constantine-invented-the-Trinity argument

The popular form claims that Emperor Constantine had Jesus “declared God” at the Council of Nicaea.

This formulation is historically crude. A more serious variant, however, asks about:

- imperial convocation;
- a political interest in unity;
- the exile of opponents;
- state enforcement of dogmatic decisions.

151. The imperial-enforcement argument

Even if Constantine did not invent the doctrine, imperial power and church institutions allegedly contributed substantially to which position subsequently counted as orthodoxy.

152. The pre-Nicene subordination argument

Many pre-Nicene authors speak of the Son in ways that would later have seemed at least misleading or inadequate.

Remonstrants, Semi-Arians and Socinians used precisely this historical argument against the claim of a fully Nicene doctrine from the beginning.

153. The homoousios argument

Homoousios is not a biblical expression. The critic asks:

- Why must an extrabiblical metaphysical category be binding?
- Does it exclude alternative biblical ways of speaking?
- Does it import meanings from ancient philosophy?

154. The Hellenization thesis

According to the thesis particularly associated with Adolf von Harnack, Jesus's simple gospel was transformed into a dogmatic system through Greek metaphysical concepts.

Research today regards “Hellenization” as a complex and disputed historiographical concept; its indeterminacy in particular is criticized. (Cambridge University Press & Assessment)

155. The pagan-triads argument

Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek or Roman divine triads are alleged to have influenced the Christian Trinity.

Jehovah's Witnesses explicitly advocate this genealogy. (JW.ORG)

The stronger critical response must distinguish between:

- mere groups of three gods;
- triadic symbols;
- emanationist triads;
- and the specific formula of one numerically single essence in three consubstantial persons.

Similarity in the number three alone does not prove historical dependence.

156. The development-or-change-of-dogma problem

When is later precision legitimate development, and when is it invention?

This is one of the central historical questions of the entire series.

157. The conciliar-authority argument

Protestant defenders must explain why they accept Nicaea and Constantinople if Scripture alone is the infallible norm.

Roman Catholic and Orthodox defenders must explain how the authority of the council itself is recognized.

158. The Filioque argument

West and East disagree about whether the Spirit proceeds:

- from the Father;
- or from the Father and the Son.

The critic concludes:

- An essential intradivine relation is not unambiguously defined even within the historic trinitarian churches.

159. The Athanasian-Creed argument

The so-called Athanasian Creed is not simply a personal work of Athanasius. The objection targets its use as direct testimony from the Nicene generation.

160. The Socinian decline scheme

Socinians read the history of dogma as decline:

- early evangelical purity;
- pre-Nicene subordinationism;
- post-Nicene tritheism;
- scholastic metaphysical overcomplexity.

Muller shows that this polemic forced Reformed orthodoxy to relate Scripture, the Fathers and philosophical concepts to each other anew and more critically.

161. The victor-writes-history argument

The categories “orthodox” and “heretical” transmitted to us today largely come from the victorious tradition. Opposing writings were copied less often, sometimes destroyed, or quoted only in refutations.

162. The persecution argument

State or church punishment of Arians, Socinians and other antitrinitarians is cited as an indication that social power intervened where proofs did not persuade.

Historical persecution obviously does not prove a doctrine false, but it is a legitimate topic in the history of its reception.

H. Objections to particular modern models

163. Social trinitarianism

Three fully personal centers of consciousness and action look like three gods.

The SEP summarizes the basic problem as follows: three numerically different selves seem to be three things; if each possesses the divine nature, they seem to be three gods. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

164. Swinburne's model

Richard Swinburne describes three divine persons with causal relations of origin and perfectly coordinated love.

Objections:

- tritheism;
- dependence on the Father as source;
- possibly unequal aseity;
- unity only through necessary cooperation.

165. The divine community as God

If “God” is the community, the persons may not each be God in the same sense as the community.

166. Craig's tripersonal mind

William Lane Craig proposes one divine mind or soul with three personal centers of consciousness or complexes of rational faculties.

Objection:

- Either the one soul is the actual self;
- or the three centers are distinct selves;
- mere complexes of faculties seem not to be complete persons.

167. Classical Latin one-self trinitarianism

One single divine self with three modes of personal subsistence threatens to reduce the biblical I-Thou relations to modalities of one subject.

168. Leftow's three-life-strands model

Brian Leftow compares the Trinity with one self possessing three parallel life courses.

Objections:

- explaining the obscure through time-travel or multiple-life scenarios;
- one person three times instead of three persons;
- unclear individuation of the life strands. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

169. Barth and Rahner

“Modes of being” or “modes of subsistence” are intended to avoid modalism, but strike critics as particularly sophisticated modes of a single self.

170. Relative-identity trinitarianism

The model can make the seven standard statements formally consistent, but may pay for this with a revisionary theory of identity.

171. Constitution trinitarianism

The same constituting reality with different persons may not solve identity, but replace it with an equally difficult metaphysical relation.

172. Mereological trinitarianism

Part-whole structures endanger:

- simplicity;
- the full deity of each person;
- and God's noncompositeness.

173. Monarchical trinitarianism

The Father alone is identified as the one God; Son and Spirit are fully divine and inseparably united with him.

Objection:

- “God” is predicated of the Father and of Son/Spirit in different senses;
- Nicene coequality could be weakened.

174. The Thomistic relational model

The strongest classical version asserts:

- one numerical essence;
- three subsistent relations of origin;
- real distinction solely through relational opposition.

Objections:

- high conceptual complexity;
- an unclear positive concept of subsistent relation;
- tension between the relations' identity with the essence and their real distinction.

Thomas treats the concept, unity and number of the Trinity in the objection-and-answer framework of the Summa theologiae.

175. The Scotist model

Formal distinctions can differentiate personal and essential characteristics more clearly, but seem to introduce additional formal realities into God.

176. Mysterianism

Negative form:

> **We know that God is triune, but not how.**

Positive form:

The doctrine appears contradictory, but is rationally believable on the basis of divine revelation.

Objections:

- special pleading;
- insufficient meaningful content;
- confusion of mystery and contradiction;
- no criterion for distinguishing other religious paradoxes. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

177. The Van Tillian paradox approach

The objection is that logic is used strictly against opponents, while paradox and mystery are invoked when one's own difficulties arise.

Bosserman states this possible criticism very sharply: the procedure could look like “logic when convenient; suspension of logic when inconvenient.”

178. Dialetheist trinitarianism

A paraconsistent theory can avoid explosion, but only at the price of accepting genuine contradictions in the doctrine of God.

I. Jewish, Islamic and other confessional objections

179. The Jewish Shema objection

The Shema Yisrael confesses YHWH as Israel's one God. Jewish criticism frequently regards the Christian Trinity as a violation of undivided divine unity.

180. The Jewish incarnation problem

God is:

- incomparable;
- invisible;
- not human;
- not corporeal.

The incarnation of a divine person therefore appears to cross the boundary between Creator and creature.

181. The medieval Jewish simplicity argument

Absolute divine unity is said to exclude real personal plurality in God.

182. The Islamic tawḥīd objection

God is absolutely one, without partners or personal co-deities. The Trinity appears as shirk, that is, associating partners with God.

183. The Quranic “Do not say three” objection

Central passages are:

- Surah 4:171;
- 5:72-75;
- 5:116;
- 112.

Jesus is Messiah and messenger, but not a divine person within a triune God.

184. The Islamic generation objection

God neither begets nor is begotten. Christian “eternal generation” is criticized as an illegitimate or unintelligible special meaning of the concept of generation.

185. The three-attributes problem

If Father, Word and Spirit as eternal divine realities ground personal distinctions, why not also:

- knowledge;
- power;
- will;
- life;
- wisdom?

Why do exactly three persons arise rather than many?

The philosophical account of Jewish and Islamic objections emphasizes both the danger of tritheism and the problem of the seemingly arbitrary restriction to three. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

186. Jehovah's Witnesses

Their model is:

- the Father alone is the almighty God;
- the Son is the first and highest creature;
- the Spirit is God's active force.

Their main arguments focus on Colossians 1:15, Revelation 3:14, John 14:28 and the seemingly impersonal language about the Spirit. (JW.ORG)

187. Biblical unitarianism

The Father alone is the one God; Jesus is the human Messiah, possibly with differing understandings of his preexistence.

188. Socinianism

Classically:

- no personal preexistence of Jesus;
- no divine nature of Christ;
- the Trinity and the doctrine of two natures contradict Scripture and reason.

The Racovian Catechism is one of the most important historical primary sources. The SEP describes it as a comprehensive engagement with the principal trinitarian texts. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

189. Christadelphian objections

Typically:

- God is one person, the Father;
- Jesus begins as the human Son of God;
- the Spirit is God's power;
- preexistence lies in God's plan, not in an earlier personal existence.

190. Oneness Pentecostalism

Father, Son and Spirit are not three eternal persons but modes of revelation or salvation of the one God, whose name is Jesus.

The objection to the orthodox Trinity is that it turns biblical manifestations into three centers.

191. The Latter-day Saint conception

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three separate beings, united in purpose.

This also shows why the mere formula “three persons, united in love and purpose” does not yet constitute a Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. Official LDS teaching explicitly distinguishes the members of the Godhead as separate beings. (churchofjesuschrist.org)

192. Liberal and symbolic criticism

The Trinity is not an assertion about God's metaphysical structure but a symbolic summary of Christian experience of God:

- God above us;
- God with us;
- God in us.

The objection is that classical ontology reifies religious symbols.

J. Epistemic, pastoral and moral objections

193. The not-necessary-for-salvation argument

If the apostles recognized people as saved on the basis of simpler confessions of Christ, a later metaphysical confession cannot be a necessary condition of salvation.

194. The accessibility argument

A doctrine central to salvation would have to be sufficiently intelligible for:

- children;
- ordinary believers;
- people without philosophical training.

The historical technical language seems to contradict this principle.

195. The Athanasian-threat-to-salvation objection

It seems morally problematic to make eternal salvation depend on accepting a highly complex formula disputed even among specialist theologians.

196. The explanatory-power argument

What observation does the Trinity explain better than a unitarian concept of God?

The critic demands a positive gain in knowledge, rather than merely a way of holding various texts together.

197. The Ockham argument

One divine self plus a human Messiah and divine power is ontologically simpler than:

- one essence;
- three persons;
- two processions;
- four relations;
- five notions;
- undivided external works.

Simplicity does not prove truth, but affects the burden of proof.

198. The devotional-practical argument

In practice, many Christians pray:

- to the Father;
- through the Son;
- in the Spirit.

Others pray directly to Jesus or the Spirit. Critics see the varying practice as a sign of conceptual uncertainty.

199. The relevance argument

The doctrine of the Trinity is often defended at length, but seems to make little discernible difference to ethics, pastoral care and everyday piety.

200. Feminist criticism

Exclusively male personal designations could stabilize patriarchal images of God.

The stronger variant does not necessarily deny every doctrine of the Trinity, but certain models of language and domination.

201. The projection argument against the social Trinity

Theologians allegedly project their respective preferred form of society onto God:

- monarchy;
- community;
- equality;
- hierarchy;
- reciprocity.

The Trinity becomes a theological legitimation of political ideals.

202. The “God is love” counterargument

Trinitarians sometimes argue:

- 1. God is eternally love.
- 2. Love requires another.
- 3. Therefore there must be several eternal persons.

Objections:

- Self-love might suffice.
- God could know and love possible creatures.
- Two persons would suffice.
- A third lover does not follow.
- The argument proves neither Son nor Spirit nor their specific relations.

203. The objection to the transcendental argument for the Trinity

Some Van Tillians claim that only the Trinity can ground unity and plurality, logic and personal knowledge.

The critic asks:

- Why would a unitarian God not suffice?
- How does exactly three-personhood follow from the one and the many?
- Does the proof already presuppose Christian revelation?
- Has the impossibility of all alternatives really been demonstrated?

Bosserman develops a particularly ambitious form of this argument, but also recognizes the dangers of an inconsistent appeal to paradox.

204. The consensus argument

If even orthodox trinitarians substantially disagree on:

- the concept of person;
- the number of centers of consciousness;
- will;

- the Son's aseity;
- Filioque;
- the Father's monarchy;
- simplicity;
- the logic of identity;

then it is unclear which precise doctrine is supposed to count as biblically proved.

205. The thin-or-heretical dilemma

The more thinly the doctrine is formulated, the easier it is to make consistent, but the less it says.

The more substantially it is modeled, the greater the threats of:

- modalism;
- tritheism;
- subordinationism;
- partialism;
- composition.

III. 25 central problem areas

The following core problems deserve particularly careful examination:

- 1. The classical logical seven-statements problem.
- 2. Transitivity of identity.
- 3. Leibniz's law and personal properties.
- 4. Counting: why not three gods?
- 5. The modalism-or-tritheism dilemma.
- 6. The quaternity problem.
- 7. The problem of triunity.
- 8. The indexical/de-se argument.
- 9. One intellect and will versus three persons.
- 10. Three centers of consciousness versus monotheism.
- 11. Divine simplicity and real relations.
- 12. Aseity versus eternal generation.
- 13. Undivided works versus different missions.
- 14. “The one God is the Father.”
- 15. The subordination texts about Jesus.
- 16. Mark 13:32 and the Son's ignorance.
- 17. The Spirit as power rather than person.
- 18. Economic triads do not prove an immanent Trinity.
- 19. Pre-Nicene subordinationism.
- 20. Hellenization and extrabiblical metaphysics.
- 21. The development from Nicaea to Constantinople.
- 22. Relative identity as revisionary logic.
- 23. Social trinitarianism as tritheism.
- 24. Mysterianism as special pleading.
- 25. Biblical underdetermination and competing orthodox models.

IV. Research literature

Primary sources and historical polemics

- Racovian Catechism - classical Socinian argumentation.
- John Biddle - especially against the Spirit's personhood and deity.
- Samuel Clarke, The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity - a subordinationist reconstruction.
- Joseph Priestley - historical and rational criticism.
- Fausto and Lelio Sozzini - Socinian Christology.
- Arius, insofar as reconstructable from fragments and hostile transmission.
- Eunomius - a radical Anomoean objection to consubstantiality.
- Official literature of Jehovah's Witnesses as a contemporary Arian form of argumentation. (JW.ORG)

Logic and analytical philosophy

- Richard Cartwright, On the Logical Problem of the Trinity
- Peter Geach, Reference and Generality
- James Cain, The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Logic of Relative Identity
- Peter van Inwagen, And Yet They Are Not Three Gods But One God
- Keith Yandell, The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error in Counting?
- C. Stephen Layman, Tritheism and the Trinity
- Edward Feser, Swinburne's Tritheism
- Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea, Material Constitution and the Trinity
- Trenton Merricks, Split Brains and the Godhead
- Scott Williams, Indexicals and the Trinity
- Beau Branson, The Logical Problem of the Trinity
- Beau Branson, No New Solutions to the Logical Problem of the Trinity
- Justin Mooney, A New Logical Problem for the Doctrine of the Trinity
- J. C. Beall, works on contradictory trinitarian logic
- William Hasker, works on the social Trinity and consciousness
- E. Yang, Monotheism and the Trinity, as a current overall account of the philosophical debate. (PhilPapers)

Feinberg's bibliography provides access to an older core of this debate, including works by Porter, King-Farlow, Howe, Layman, Cain, Bartel, Yandell, Kelly, Feser, van Inwagen, Martinich, Geach, Power, Cartwright, Wiggins and Zeis.

Historical research

- Lewis Ayres, Nicaea and Its Legacy
- Khaled Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea
- Michel René Barnes
- Christopher Beeley and Mark Weedman, The Bible and Early Trinitarian Theology
- Richard A. Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, volume 4
- Adolf von Harnack as the chief representative of the Hellenization thesis
- More recent research on the Council of Nicaea and its varied theological contexts. (Cambridge University Press & Assessment)

Further theological literature

Particularly valuable are:

- Garrigou-Lagrange for the classical objections concerning identity, relation, generation and simplicity.
- Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae I, q. 27-43, for the systematic objection-and-answer framework.
- Feinberg, No One Like Him, for evangelical synthesis and analytical literature.
- Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, especially for Socinians, Remonstrants and Reformed orthodox responses.
- Dolezal, God without Parts, for the connection between simplicity and the doctrine of the Trinity.
- Bosserman, for paradox, Van Til, transcendental argumentation and its internal criticism.
- Geisler, whose systematic theology explicitly treats the claim that mysteries of faith contradict logic as an apologetic problem.

V. Questions for examining objections

Six questions help in examining an objection:

- 1. Exact doctrinal statement: which proposition of the doctrine of the Trinity does the objection attack?
- 2. Steelman: the argument in its strongest possible form, preferably syllogistic.
- 3. Proponents: who actually held this version?
- 4. Scope: does the argument affect the dogma or only a model?
- 5. Response options: Thomistic, Reformed, social trinitarian, relative-identity, etc.
- 6. Costs of the response: what new problems does the solution generate?

Two apologetic errors must be avoided:

- refuting weak popular arguments while ignoring stronger academic versions;
- presenting one possible answer as the only orthodox solution.

The decisive guiding principle should be:

> **Not every difficulty is a contradiction; not every formal consistency is an explanation; not every refutation of a model is a refutation of the Trinity - and not every biblical triad already proves the Nicene dogma.**

Appendix: Online sources

[1] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Trinity

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trinity/

[2] JW.ORG: What About Trinity “Proof Texts”?

https://www.jw.org/en/library/brochures/Should-You-Believe-in-the-Trinity/What-About-Trinity-Proof-Texts/

[3] Beau Branson: The Logical Problem of the Trinity

https://philarchive.org/archive/BRATLP-3

[4] Justin Mooney: A New Logical Problem for the Doctrine of the Trinity

https://philarchive.org/rec/MOOANL-3

[5] PhilPapers: No New Solutions to the Logical Problem of the Trinity

https://philpapers.org/rec/BRANNS

[6] JW.ORG: What Does the Bible Say About God and Jesus?

https://www.jw.org/en/library/brochures/Should-You-Believe-in-the-Trinity/What-Does-the-Bible-Say-About-God-and-Jesus/

[7] JW.ORG: Reasoning From the Scriptures - Trinity

https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Reasoning-From-the-Scriptures/Trinity/

[8] Cambridge: Embodiment, Heresy, and the Hellenization of Christianity

https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/harvard-theological-review/article/embodiment-heresy-and-the-hellenization-of-christianity-the-descent-of-the-soul-in-plato-and-origen/7F49E8654F8C5445A17A09AB258F2EEB

[9] JW.ORG: How Did the Trinity Doctrine Develop?

https://www.jw.org/en/library/brochures/Should-You-Believe-in-the-Trinity/How-Did-the-Trinity-Doctrine-Develop/

[10] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Judaic and Islamic Objections to the Trinity

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trinity/judaic-islamic-trinity.html

[11] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Unitarianism

https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2025/entries/trinity/unitarianism.html

[12] The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Godhead

https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/godhead?lang=eng

[13] Cambridge Companion to the Council of Nicaea: Bibliography

https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-the-council-of-nicaea/bibliography/92AEE5E19AA63614E1E0214F61AD89FA