

The Trinity

A Position Paper of Legacy Church

Introduction

The doctrine of the Trinity stands at the very heart of historic Christian faith. To confess the God of Scripture is to confess one God who eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This doctrine is not a philosophical abstraction nor a later theological invention, but the necessary conclusion drawn from the whole witness of Scripture. While the word *Trinity* does not appear in the Bible, the reality it describes permeates the biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation.

From the earliest days of the Church, Christians worshiped the Father, confessed Jesus as Lord, and experienced the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The Church did not invent the Trinity, it articulated it. Faced with false teachings that either denied Christ's divinity, collapsed the persons into one, or divided the Godhead into lesser beings, the Church was compelled to give precise language to what it had always believed, prayed, and proclaimed.

Legacy Church stands firmly within this historic, orthodox confession. We affirm one God in three persons, co-equal, co-eternal, and of one essence, worthy of equal worship, glory, and obedience.

The Trinity in the Early Church

Apostolic Foundations

The earliest Christians were Jewish monotheists who nevertheless confessed Jesus as divine and spoke of the Holy Spirit as fully personal and divine. This forced an expansion, not a rejection, of their understanding of God.

The New Testament repeatedly places Father, Son, and Spirit side by side **in ways that would be blasphemous if any were less than God.**

- Jesus commands baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).
- Paul blesses the Church with "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Corinthians 13:14).
- Jesus speaks of the Father sending the Spirit in His name (John 14:26).

These are not three gods, nor three modes, but three distinct persons sharing the one divine name.

The Rule of Faith

Early Christians summarized apostolic teaching through what became known as the *Rule of Faith*. This rule functioned as a theological guardrail, ensuring Scripture was read consistently with the apostolic witness.

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202 AD) wrote that the Church believes in "one God, the Father Almighty... and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God... and in the Holy Spirit" (*Against Heresies* 1.10.1). For Irenaeus, the Trinity was not speculative theology but the basic grammar of Christian belief.

Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD) spoke openly of Christians worshiping the Father, the Son, and the prophetic Spirit, insisting that such worship did not violate monotheism but revealed its fullness.

Tertullian (c. 155-220 AD) was the first to use the Latin term *Trinitas*. He wrote of "one substance in three persons," articulating a conceptual framework that would later be refined but never abandoned.

Councils and Creeds

The Arian Controversy

In the early fourth century, Arius taught that the Son was a created being, exalted above all others but not truly God. This teaching threatened the gospel itself. If Christ were not fully God, He could not fully save.

The Church responded at the Council of Nicea (AD 325), affirming that the Son is *homoousios*, of the same essence as the Father. Jesus is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God."

Athanasius of Alexandria became the chief defender of Nicene orthodoxy, famously insisting that only if Christ is truly God can humanity be truly redeemed. His unwavering stand preserved the Church's confession during decades of controversy.

The Holy Spirit Affirmed

The Council of Constantinople (AD 381) clarified the divinity of the Holy Spirit, confessing Him as "the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified."

The Nicene Creed remains the most universally affirmed doctrinal statement in Christian history, uniting Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant churches across centuries and cultures.

The Reformers and the Trinity

The Protestant Reformers did not revise the doctrine of the Trinity, instead they assumed it. For Luther and Calvin, Trinitarian theology was not up for debate but foundational to the gospel itself.

Martin Luther affirmed the creeds wholeheartedly and taught that salvation flows from the triune work of God: the Father's will, the Son's atonement, and the Spirit's application.

John Calvin wrote extensively on the Trinity in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, emphasizing both the unity of God and the real distinction of persons. Calvin rejected all forms of subordinationism, insisting that the Son and Spirit share the same divine essence as the Father.

For the Reformers, to deny the Trinity was to abandon Christianity altogether.

Mainstream Christianity Today

Across historic Christianity, the doctrine of the Trinity remains non-negotiable.

- Roman Catholicism affirms Nicene Trinitarianism as dogma.
- Eastern Orthodoxy confesses the Trinity as the very mystery of God's being.
- Protestant traditions universally affirm the Trinity in their confessions and statements of faith.

Groups that deny the Trinity, such as Oneness Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and certain liberal theological movements, stand outside the bounds of historic Christian orthodoxy.

While Christians may disagree on many secondary doctrines, the Trinity is not one of them.

Biblical Foundation of the Trinity

One God

Scripture is unequivocal that there is only one God.

- "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- "I am the Lord, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:5).

Christian Trinitarianism is fiercely monotheistic.

The Father is God

The Father is universally acknowledged as God (John 6:27, Ephesians 4:6).

The Son is God

Jesus is explicitly called God.

- "The Word was God" (John 1:1).
- Thomas confesses, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).
- Jesus shares divine attributes, receives worship, forgives sins, and exercises authority over creation.

The Spirit is God

The Holy Spirit is personal, not an impersonal force.

- He speaks, teaches, grieves, and intercedes.
- Lying to the Spirit is equated with lying to God (Acts 5:3-4).
- He possesses divine attributes such as omnipresence and omniscience.

Distinction Without Division

At Jesus' baptism, the Father speaks, the Son is baptized, and the Spirit descends (Matthew 3:16-17). The persons are distinct, yet inseparable in essence and purpose.

The Position of Legacy Church

Legacy Church affirms the historic, orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

We Believe

- There is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Each person is fully God, sharing the same divine essence.
- The persons are distinct, not modes or manifestations.
- The Trinity is eternal, not functional or temporary.
- The Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in glory, power, and authority.

The work of salvation is Trinitarian from beginning to end. The Father sends the Son, the Son accomplishes redemption, and the Spirit applies salvation to the believer.

What We Reject

Legacy Church explicitly rejects:

Modalism – the belief that God is one person who appears in different modes.

Arianism – the belief that the Son is a created being.

Subordinationism – the belief that the Son or Spirit are lesser in essence.

Oneness Theology – the denial of personal distinctions within the Godhead.

Any view that denies the full deity of Father, Son, or Holy Spirit.

These views undermine the gospel, distort Scripture, and depart from historic Christianity.

Conclusion

The Trinity is not a theological puzzle to be solved but a divine reality to be worshiped. It shapes how we pray, how we worship, how we understand salvation, and how we know God.

To know the Father is to be sent by the Son. To know the Son is to be revealed by the Spirit. To walk with God is to live within the life of the Triune God.

Legacy Church joyfully confesses the faith once delivered to the saints:

One God. Three Persons. Eternal glory.