Research Paper

A Critical Analysis of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology through the Lens of Sadraean Monotheism

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Abstract

This study undertakes a comprehensive comparative analysis of the Trinitarian doctrine in Christian theology from the perspective of Ṣadrāean transcendental theosophy (al-ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya). It aims to explore the fundamental epistemological and ontological divergences between these two intellectual systems of Christianity and Islam. The central research question involves examining how these theological frameworks conflict at the metaphysical level and the implications of this conflict for comparative theology and interfaith dialogue. Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology grounded in extensive library research of primary and secondary sources from both traditions, this investigation is structured into three integrated sections: first, a comprehensive analysis of the biblical and theological foundations of the Trinity through examination of key scriptural passages and interpretations by Christian theologians; second, a detailed exposition of the philosophical structure of monotheism in Ṣadrā's thought, focusing on the core concepts of principality of existence (aṣālat al-wujūd), personal unity of existence (waḥdat al-shakhṣiyya lil-wujūd), and gradation of existence (tashkīk al-wujūd); and third, a profound examination of the points of contention between these two paradigms and the feasibility of constructive dialogue between them. The findings reveal that this conflict stems from fundamental structural differences in ontological foundations. From the perspective of transcendental theosophy, any acceptance of plurality in the divine essence (even in the form of three hypostases) leads to essential ontological polytheism (shirk al-wujūdī), while Christian theology explains the Trinity through the concept of mystery and the distinction between essence and hypostasis.

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The present study offers a critical and comparative philosophical investigation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in light of the monotheistic principles of Mullā Ṣadrā's Transcendent Theosophy (*al-ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya*). The central objective is to analyze the epistemological and ontological tensions between these two major theological systems and to determine whether a theoretical reconciliation between them is possible at the level of metaphysical foundations. While Christian theology upholds a tri-personal conception of the divine essence—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Ṣadrāean philosophy affirms an uncompromising monism grounded in the *principality of existence* (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) and the *personal unity of being* (*waḥdat al-shakhṣiyya lil-wujūd*). The importance of this research lies in extending comparative theology beyond textual or doctrinal analysis toward a metaphysical engagement that probes the structure of divine reality itself. By reassessing both the biblical basis of Trinitarian belief and the philosophical coherence of Ṣadrā's unity of existence, the study aims to contribute to interreligious dialogue on rational and philosophical grounds rather than mere dogmatic assertions.

2. Methods

This research adopts a descriptive–analytical approach, relying on extensive library research of primary and secondary sources from both Christian and Islamic traditions. The study is divided into three major analytical parts:

1. A textual and theological examination of key biblical passages that form the foundation of the Trinitarian doctrine, such as John 1:1, John 10:30, Philippians 2:6–7, and Matthew 28:19, as well as their interpretations by theologians including Augustine, Aquinas, and modern thinkers like Moltmann and Rahner.

2. A systematic exposition of Ṣadrāean metaphysics, highlighting the principles of *aṣālat al-wujūd* (principiality of existence), *tashkīk al-wujūd* (gradation of existence), and *waḥdat al-shakhṣiyya lil-wujūd* (personal unity of existence).

3. A comparative analysis of the metaphysical implications of both systems, focusing on their divergent conceptions of divine simplicity, unity, and multiplicity. All references were critically assessed for their philosophical coherence and relevance to the metaphysical dimensions of the Godhead in both traditions.

3. Results

The findings indicate that the Trinitarian conception of God—comprising three distinct hypostases in one divine essence—creates an unavoidable ontological plurality within the divine nature. From the Ṣadrāean viewpoint, this plurality violates the principle of absolute simplicity (basāṭa) of existence and introduces an implicit form of ontological polytheism (*shirk wujūdī*). Ṣadrā's metaphysics interprets reality as a single continuum of existence with varying degrees of intensity. Within this framework, all beings are mere manifestations or modes of the One True Being, and no real distinction can exist within the divine essence itself. Consequently, the Christian attempt to reconcile unity and plurality through the distinction between

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ousia (essence) and *hypostasis* (person) is philosophically inconsistent from a Ṣadrāean perspective. Christian theologians have traditionally resolved this paradox by appealing to divine mystery or relational models of unity, as seen in Augustine's psychological analogy, Aquinas's metaphysical distinctions, or Moltmann's social Trinity. However, according to the principles of *al-ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya*, any such relational multiplicity still implies composition within the Absolute Being, which is metaphysically impossible. The research also finds that Ṣadrā's notion of *tashkīk al-wujūd* provides a more coherent explanation of multiplicity without compromising divine unity: multiplicity belongs to the level of manifestation (*tajallī*), not to the level of essence. Therefore, the Trinitarian problem of "three in one" finds no conceptual space within Ṣadrāean monism.

Table 1. Comparative Framework: The Trinity and Ṣadrāean Monotheism

Theological Dimension	Trinitarian Theology	Ṣadrāean Monotheism (Transcendent Theosophy)
Ontological Basis	Three coequal and coeternal persons in one essence	One absolute existence with graded manifestations
Divine Simplicity	Differentiation between essence and persons	Complete simplicity of being—no internal multiplicity
Source of Multiplicity	Inherent within divine relations	Emanation and gradation of the single existence
Role in Creation	Joint participation of Father, Son, and Spirit	Single effusion (fayḍ) of divine existence
Philosophical Outcome	Tension between unity and plurality	Resolution of unity and plurality via tashkīk al-wujūd

4. Conclusion

This comparative philosophical study demonstrates that the Trinity and Ṣadrāean monotheism rest on mutually exclusive ontological assumptions. The Christian model affirms "plurality within unity," while the Ṣadrāean system asserts "unity beyond plurality." The contradiction arises from their differing understandings of existence itself: for Christian theology, relational distinctions can coexist within the divine essence; for Ṣadrā, the divine essence is pure existence, and any internal distinction contradicts its absolute simplicity. Therefore, no genuine theoretical reconciliation between the two systems is metaphysically possible. Nevertheless, recognizing and understanding these foundational differences may promote constructive interfaith dialogue based on philosophical clarity rather than dogmatic opposition. The study underscores the need for future comparative theology to engage more deeply with metaphysical categories rather than merely doctrinal formulations.

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Authors' Contribution

The author (Mohamad Heydarifard) contributed to the conception, analysis, writing, and revision of the study in all stages.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declared no conflict of interest.

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