

GOD TRIUNE

I. Introduction.

- A. The term, Trinity, is not found in Scripture.
- B. Why is the doctrine of the Trinity necessary?
 - 1. It is not primarily concerned with philosophy, but with Life.
 - 2. It deals with and accounts for the basic facts of Christian experience.
 - 3. In our fellowship with God, we know the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - 4. *Although this doctrine is primarily relational, it does have secondary philosophical implications.*
 - a). In the history of philosophy, there has never been an adequate resolution of the problem of the “one and the many,” the “universals and the particulars,” or “unity in diversity.”
 - b). What *justifies* the fact that you can draw general conclusions (*unity*) from a *diversity* of particulars?
 - c). Why do the mathematical cogitations of the human mind have an uncanny *fit* to the workings of the physical creation? In other words, why do these two *diverse* operations (what goes on inside your head and what goes on outside your head) have a *connection* or a *unity*?
 - d). The answer of naturalistic philosophers is an answer of “I do not know” or “it is a mystery.”
 - e). The mystery of this proximate unity in diversity is ultimately reconciled in the person of ultimate unity in diversity: the Triune God of Scripture: it is because of Who He is (the infinite, eternal One and the Many) that the world has meaning and connection.

Some persons who reject all they cannot explain have denied that God is a Trinity. Subjecting the Most High to their cold, level-eyed scrutiny, they conclude that it is impossible that He could be both One and Three. These forget that their whole life is enshrouded in mystery. They fail to consider that any real explanation of even the simplest phenomenon in nature lies hidden in obscurity and can no more be explained than can the mystery of the Godhead.

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 25.

II. Definition.

- A. There is only one God but, in the unity of the Godhead, there are three co-eternal and co-equal persons, the same in substance (essence; i.e., all three fully God) but distinct in subsistence (existence; i.e., persons).
 - 1. This is a correct theological definition, but without understanding the nature of relationship in the Trinity, it can easily become an academic one.
 - 2. God is Trinity, in three persons distinct yet one.
 - a). God's nature is consequently relational, familial.
 - b). God is love.
 - c). Holiness is constituted in the relationships within the Trinity.

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- d). The love of God shared in the Trinity is the basis of creation.
- e). God is creative and passionate, not austere and distant.
- f). God has joined himself to his creation in Jesus through incarnation, life, baptism, death, resurrection, ascension and giving of the Holy Spirit.
- g). Participation in God's community is only through Jesus Christ.
- B. Creation gives hints about the Triune God, the One and the Many (proximate "unity in diversity"), but only in Scripture do we find the full expression of the Godhead as revealed by the being and acts of Jesus Christ.
 - 1. "The Holy Trinity is a primordial ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather which follows it, as in the case of the dogmatic manuals of the West."¹
 - 2. "... despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists.' We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature would well remain virtually unchanged."²
 - 3. The God revealed by Jesus Christ is Triune; He is the ground and grammar of theology, indeed, of all of life.
- III. The Trinity in the Old Testament.
 - A. The Trinity of God is in the Old Testament but is not fully revealed.
 - 1. Left with the Old Testament alone we would never have discovered it.
 - 2. When we look at the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, we find the doctrine alluded to everywhere.
 - B. A look at the diversity of the Godhead.
 - 1. Deuteronomy 6:4.
 - a). The word "one" (*echad*) does *not* carry with it the meaning of a mathematical unit.
 - b). Carries the meaning of one cluster of grapes.
 - c). It means "unity," i.e., within the Godhead there exists a unity.
 - 2. In the Hebrew, the word for God (*Elohim*) is a plural noun, yet is always joined with verbs and adjectives in the singular.
 - a). Genesis 1:1 From the first verse in the Bible we are prepared for a God within whom is a plurality of persons.
 - (1) This plurality is exemplified in the phrase "Let Us make" (Genesis 1:26).
 - (2) In the next verse, we see the Spirit³ of God hovering over the face of the waters (cf. Genesis 1:2).

¹ John Zizioulas, *Being in Communion*, p. 17.

² Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, pp. 10-11.

³ Spirit, in the Hebrew, is transliterated into the English as *ruach*. It is a feminine noun that means spirit, wind, or breath. In the Greek, spirit is the neuter πνεῦμα (*pneuma*). In John 16:13, πνεῦμα is linked to the neuter ἑαυτοῦ (that one), but used in connection with masculine personal "he will guide" (ὁδηγήσει), "he will speak" (λαλήσει), "himself" (ἑαυτοῦ), "he may hear" (ἀκούσει), and "he will declare" (ἀναγγελεῖ). Irrespective of grammatical gender, she, it or he, by the Spirit being deeply relational, beautifully ordering, and fellowship-oriented, a communion that runs side to side with power, we know what it means to be an authentic person.

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- (3) Then, *Elohim* created all things by the speaking forth of His Word, by the breath of His mouth (Genesis 1:3ff.; Psalm 33:6).⁴
- b). Ecclesiastes 12:1 (creators), “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth ...”
 - c). Job 35:10 (makers), “Where is God (*elohab* – singular) my Maker, who gives songs in the night ...”
 - d). Psalm 149:2 (in his makers, kinds), “Let Israel be glad in his Maker (plural); Let the sons of Zion rejoice in their King (plural).”
 - e). Proverbs 9:10 (holy ones), “The fear of the LORD (YHWH) is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One (plural, literally “Holies”) is understanding.”
 - f). Isaiah 54:5 (makers, husbands), “For your husband (plural) is your Maker (plural), Whose name is the LORD (YHWH) of hosts; And your Redeemer (singular) is the Holy One plural, literally “Holies”) of Israel, Who is called the God (*Elohim* – plural) of all the earth.”
- 3. God is heard speaking of Himself in the plural (Genesis 1:25; 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8).
 - 4. The Scriptures speak of God speaking with Himself, yet Himself being a distinct, separate person (Psalm 45:6, 7; 110:1).
 - 5. An angel is mentioned called the “angel of the Lord.”
 - a). This angel is understood as God (Genesis 16:7-14; 31:11-16; Exodus 3:2-6; Judges 13:21-22).
 - b). Although sometimes called God, the angel is seen as distinct from God (Exodus 13:21; 14:19, 24; 23:20, 21; 33:2, 3; Numbers 20:16).
 - c). The angel is obviously a manifestation of God, yet distinct from Him.
 - d). The Hebrews certainly understood diversity of persons within one Godhead.
 - 6. Word (*logos*) of God (John 1:1-18).
 - a). Seen as an independent, personal entity.
 - b). The Word is an active extension of the One who speaks it.
 - c). The Word is God Himself in action in His world.
 - d). Jesus is God in the flesh, the Word of the Father, who, in union with the Spirit, reveals the Father to us.
 - 7. The Spirit of God.
 - a). A personal agent sent forth by God who acts decisively for God (Genesis 1:2).
 - b). Seen as God Himself in action (Psalm 33:6; Haggai 2:5; Isaiah 61:1; 63:7-14).
 - 8. Other manifestations of God; each seen with an independent existence.
 - a). Wisdom of God (Proverbs 8).
 - b). Name of God (Deuteronomy 28:58; Isaiah 30:27; 59:19; Leviticus 24:11; Jeremiah 14:9)
 - c). Glory of God.
 - d). Face (presence) of God.

⁴ Thus, the Spirit and the Word, albeit distinct, are tied together since they are both linked to the voice of *Elohim*. The image given is that the Word is the articulate sound of Elohim, the Spirit is the wind, the breath of that voice.

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9. The coming Messiah was seen to be a man, descending from David and Abraham, yet divine (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6).
 - a). A child is born (a real man bearing our human nature).
 - b). A son is given (in this real man is the gift of the Son of God revealing the true nature of the Father).

A popular belief among Christians divides the work of God between the three Persons, giving a specific part to each, as, for instance, creation to the Father, redemption to the Son, and regeneration to the Holy Spirit. This is partly true but not wholly so, for God cannot so divide Himself that one Person works while another is inactive. In the Scriptures the three Persons are shown to act in harmonious unity in all the mighty works that are wrought throughout the universe.

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 31.

IV. The Trinity in the New Testament.

- A. In a sense, the New Testament does not expand one God into three persons, but rather narrows down the rich diversity within the Old Testament to a *mere* Trinity!
- B. The first Christians saw no distinction between the God they worshiped in three persons and the God of Israel.
- C. Three distinctions at the baptism of Jesus.
 1. Matthew 3:16-17 (YLT), “And having been baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water, and lo, opened to him were the heavens, and he saw the *Spirit* of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him, and lo, a *voice* out of the heavens, saying, “This is My Son—the Beloved, in whom I did delight.””
 2. Beloved (*agapetos*): This Son of mine is the object of my peculiar (one of a kind) love.
 3. Delight: to take pleasure in.
- D. Jesus formally announced the Trinity in the baptismal formula (Matthew 28:19).
 1. He did *not* say “in the names” or “in the name of the Father and in the name of the Son and in the name of the Spirit” for either of these would have given us three separate gods.
 2. He did *not* say “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” for that would be three designations of one person.
 3. What He did say is *three persons in common unity of name*.
 4. What Jesus did here was to *substitute the name of the God of Israel for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*.
 - a). The God the Israelites had worshiped was now to be worshiped as Father and Son and Spirit.
 - b). In this sense, the Trinity is the distinctive mark of the New Covenant.
- E. The writers of the New Testament saw the church as the continuation of God’s people, the Israel of God.

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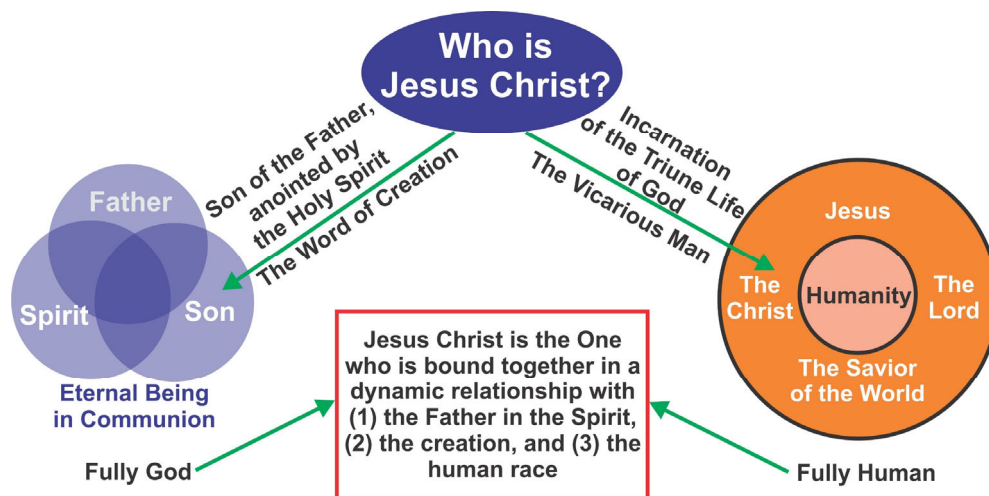
1. These early Christians worshiped the same God but now in this Triune revelation.
 2. The Triune God is the revelation of who Israel's Lord God really is.
 3. By the time the New Testament came to be written the Trinity was an accepted idea.
 - a). So, the epistles do not seek to prove it; they only allude to it.
 - b). The Old Testament was written before the revelation of the Trinity and so could only suggest and hint at it.
 - c). The New Testament was written after the revelation and so alludes to it frequently but without explanation.
 - d). The Trinity as a full grown, accepted doctrine was articulated much later (in the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian formula).
- V. Revelation of the Trinity.
- A. The revelation of the New Testament is Jesus and what Jesus primarily reveals to us is His relationship to the Father in the Spirit.
 - B. The Being of the Trinity is revealed in the *action*, not words, of God.
 1. God's being is in His actions and His actions are in His being.
 2. The Trinity is revealed in what God *did* after the Old Testament was written and before the

It is thus that we understand why Christians believe the God and Father of Jesus Christ to be the one and only God and Saviour of the world. He is not different in himself from what he is in the activity of his saving and redeeming love in the singularity of the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the God who is loving and saving us has once for all given his very Self to us in his Son and in his Spirit, and who in giving himself freely and unreservedly to us gives us with him all things. It is in the Cross of Christ that the utterly astonishing nature of the Love that God is has been fully disclosed, for in refusing to spare his own Son whom he delivered up for us all, God has revealed that he loves us more than he loves himself. And so it is in the Cross of Jesus Christ above all that God has both exhibited the very Nature of his Being as Love and has irrevocably committed his Being to relationship with us in unconditional Love. In Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit we know no other God, and believe that there is no other God for us than this God, who freely seeks and creates fellowship with us, utterly undeserving sinners though we are.

Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 4-5.

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- New Testament was written.
3. God redeemed man in the incarnate Son and outpoured Spirit.
 4. The revelation of the Trinity was the *result of God's saving act*.
 - a). To have revealed it before would have given abstract truth that would have meant nothing.
 - b). *Revealed in redemption, it becomes meaningful and significant.*
- C. Redemption cannot be understood without the revelation of the Trinity.
1. The Father who loved the world sent His Son for the purpose of reconciling the world to Himself.
 2. The Son who came, died, and rose again secures this reconciliation as objective truth.
 3. The Spirit who was sent by the Son applies this reconciliation, in concert with the Gospel preached, to the world.
- D. You understand the Trinity *only* by *encountering* the Triune God.
1. If you do not reciprocate God's initiative to make Himself known to you in the depths of your being, all your knowledge of God will be surface level only.
 2. Even if you are right on the surface, your understanding of God will be wrong because His reconciling power is not known in your life.



VI. The Deity of the Son and Spirit.

A. The Son.

1. The Hebrews understood "son of" as meaning, "having the same nature as" (John 5:18; 10:33; cf. Hebrews 1:1-3).
2. The Word of God in the Old Testament has become visible in the person of the Son (John 1:1-14).
 - a). In the beginning the Word already was (speaks to the eternity of the Word).
 - b). Word was with (Greek: *pros*) God (speaks to intimate union and communion, face-to-face fellowship).
 - c). Word was God (speaks to shared divine nature).

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- d). v. 14 The Word was made flesh (the Incarnation) and dwelt (tabernacled) *in* (Greek: *en*) us, not among us.
- 3. John 14:6, "I am the way, both the truth and the life, no comes before the Father but through Me."
 - a). The Greek construction means that the way (*hodos*) is both the truth (*aletheia*) and the life (*zoe* – the quality of communion; cf. John 17:3).
 - b). Jesus is the way we come before (*pros*), face-to-face, to the Father.
- B. The Spirit.
 - 1. The Spirit comes from the Son (John 14:18-20).
 - 2. The Spirit comes from the Father (John 14:23).

The Triune God and the Reason for Creation

A = The communion *of* the persons of the Triune God is the reason for creation with the *goal* to include humanity in that fellowship.

B = The Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit to the world.

C = The Son reveals the Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit to humanity.

D = The Holy Spirit reveals the Son of the Father to humanity.

D' = The Holy Spirit lifts humanity in union with Jesus Christ to the Father.

C' = The Son unites humanity to the Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

B' = The Father receives humanity as brothers of His incarnate Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

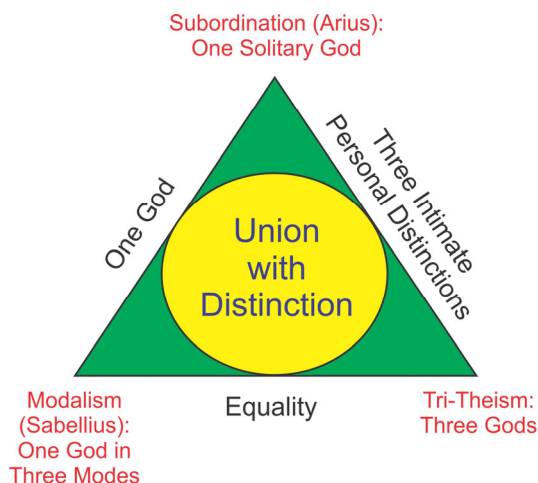
A' = Communion *with* the persons of the Triune God, to be included in their fellowship, is the *goal* of creation.

VII. The Trinity in the Epistles.

- A. Greeting and benediction blessings (2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Titus 3:4-6; Jude 20, 21; Revelation 1:4-5).
 - 1. 2 Corinthians 13:14, (YLT), "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, [is] with you all! Amen."
 - 2. Fellowship: *koinonía*. With (*meta*): in the midst, with, among, implying accompaniment.
- B. Ephesians 1.
 - 1. v. 3-6: The Father purposes redemption in His election of His Son and, by consequence, since all things are created in, through, and by the Son (Colossians 1:14f), all humanity is elect in the Son.
 - a). Election is grounded in the person of the Son.
 - b). Predestination is the goal of election; as adopted sons, to be brought before, face-to-face, with the Father; the Son carries us to that place of unblemished fellowship.

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2. v. 7-12: The Son accomplishes an objective redemption for the world.
 - a). The Cross serves the purposes of adoption.
 - b). Justification is not primary in Paul's mind.
 - c). Justification gets us to adoption, the eternal purpose.
3. v. 13-14: The Holy Spirit, the bear-hug of the Father in the Son (Luke 15; Acts 8:16) seals this accomplished redemption as a subjective reality to those who believe.
- C. Paul believed in one God (Romans 3:30; 1 Corinthians 8:4; 1 Timothy 2:5).
 1. He sees the Spirit as God (1 Corinthians 2:11; Romans 8:9).
 2. He calls Jesus God (Titus 2:13; Romans 9:5; 1 Corinthians 8:6).
- D. Ephesians 2:18 (YLT) "... because through him [Jesus] we have the access [to be brought near]—we both [Jew and Gentile]—in one Spirit unto the Father."
- E. True Christian experience is nothing less than being lovingly embraced by each of the three persons of the Godhead (Ephesians 3:14-19).



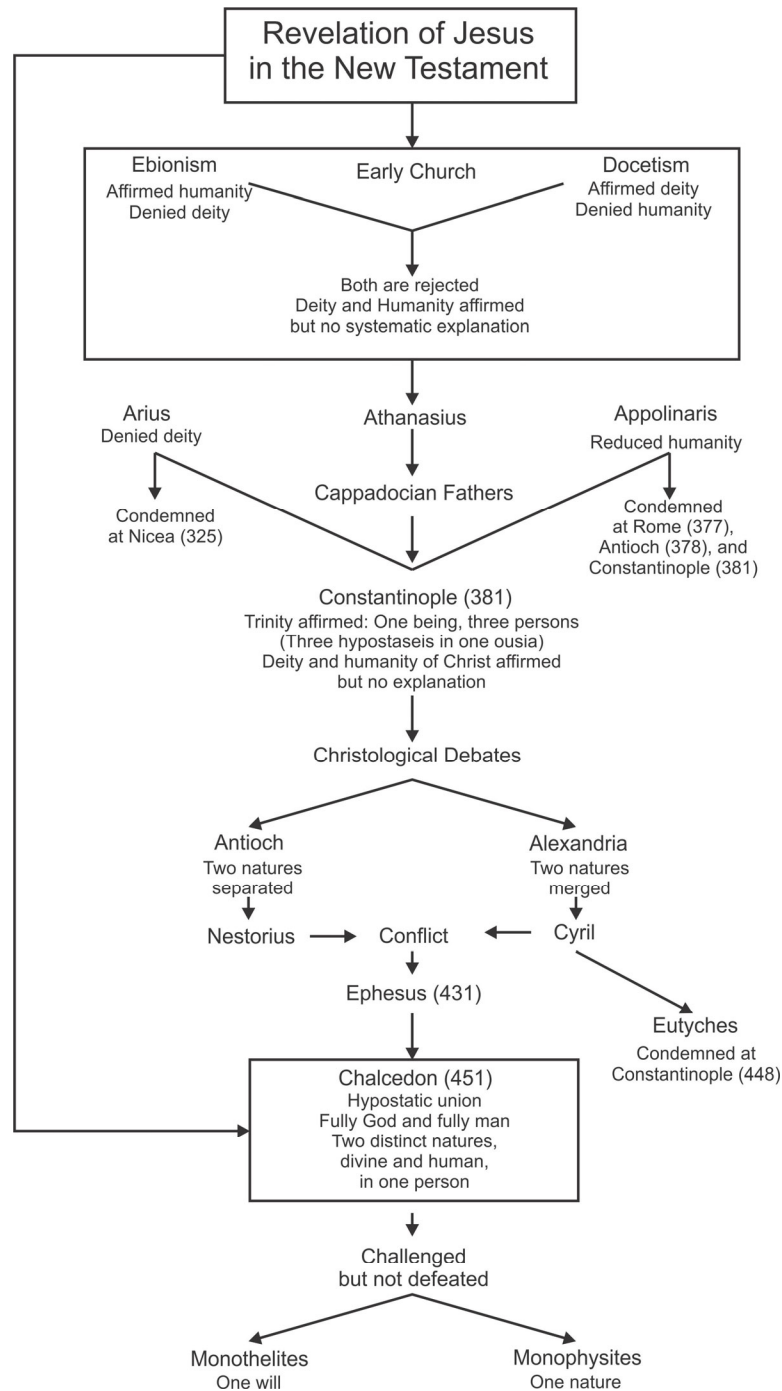
The God revealed by Jesus is
onto-relational, Being in Communion

VIII. The Trinity in the Creeds.

- A. The unity of confession of the leading theologians of the early church (post first century): The Trinity is more to be adored than expressed.
 1. God remains utterly inscrutable to us in the essence of his divine Being.
 2. But we are summoned to respond to him in committed rational worship and praise through godly ways of thought and speech that are worthy of God.
- B. We would not know God in any way unless God reveals Himself to us and He has revealed to us Who He is in Jesus Christ.
 1. Matthew 11:25-30; Luke 10:21-22; 1 Corinthians 2.
 - a). Only God knows God.

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- b). God reveals Himself to anyone who comes to Him.
- c). Condition: weary and heavy-laden.



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- d). You must know the unrest of your soul to find rest in the arms of the Father, Son, and Spirit.
- C. Why and how did the early church bring these relationships revealed by Jesus together in a way that honored the apostolic deposit?⁵
 - 1. Why?
 - a). Multiple ideas challenged the Faith and, as a consequence, the nature of salvation.
 - b). Three challenges:
 - (1) God is a solitary One (Aristotelianism): Belief of Arius (250-336) [One solitary God with no equality; Son and Spirit “junior” gods.]
 - (2) God is One and reveals Himself in modes: Belief of Sabellius (ca. 215) [Three modes with no relationship.]
 - (3) God is three (tri-theism): accusation from the Jews/pagans. [Three divine beings with no union.]
 - c). Equality-Union-Distinction must be addressed.
 - 2. How?
 - a). By taking several Greek words and re-framing them in the context of the revelation of Jesus.
 - b). They choose words not in Scripture to protect the theology that was in Scripture.
 - c). Some of the men:
 - (1) Athanasius (298-373) of Alexandria.
 - (2) The Cappadocian (central Turkey) Fathers.
 - (a) Basil the Great or Basil of Caesarea (330-379).
 - (b) Gregory of Nazianzus, The Theologian (329-389).
 - (c) Gregory of Nyssa (332-395), Basil’s younger brother.
- D. How did they understand the nature of salvation?
 - 1. It was their view of atonement, their view of salvation, grounded in who Jesus is, that shaped their formulation of the Trinity. What does it mean to be saved?
 - 2. 2 Peter 1:4, “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”
 - a). Partakers: *koinonia*.
 - b). Divine nature: the divine life, the way God is, who He is in Himself.
 - 3. 1 John 1:3, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”
 - a). 1 John 5:11, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life (*ζωε*), and this life (*ζωε*) is in his Son.”
 - b). John 17:3, “And this is life (*ζωε*) eternal, that they might know (*ginosko*) thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”
 - (1) This is intimate knowledge, not knowledge about.

⁵ I am indebted to Martin Davis (<http://martindavis.blogspot.com/>) for the analysis that follows. He is an able expositor of the thinking of Thomas F. Torrance and the Cappadocian fathers.

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- (2) Ephesians 3:19, "... to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."

E. Three words.

1. *Hypostasis* (*hupo*: under, *stasis*: standing).
 - a). This word is in Scripture: Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the *substance* (*hypostasis*) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."
 - b). Two distinct meanings:
 - (1) Objective or substantial reality.
 - (2) The unique, one of a kind, reality or personal subsistence (i.e., that makes God God) of the three persons in the one being of God (*mia ousia, tres hypostaseis*).
 - c). The three persons are *not* to be understood as equivalent to three psychological persons (as in Peter, James, and John being three human persons).
 - d). Hypostasis and the Trinity
 - (1) Three *hypostaseis* means three intimate distinctions in the one God.
 - (2) The one God is a God in relationship.
 - (3) The three hypostases are the one being of God.
 - (4) With God, Being and Communion are one and the same.
 - (5) The relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the substance of God.
 - (6) God is onto-relational, God is *Being in Communion*.
 - (7) The one eternal God of Christian revelation is the three divine *hypostases*, who in their differentiation from one another and in their communion with one another are Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 - (a) The one God is the Father who eternally begets the Son, the Son who is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit, who eternally christens Son, and eternally proceeds from the Father.
 - (b) The words begotten and procession are not just relations, but reveal the deep relationships that exist between the *hypostases* of the Trinity.
 - e). Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*.
 - (1) "There is for us no activity of God behind the back of Jesus Christ or apart from the mission of the Spirit, for there is only one movement of God's Love, one movement of his Grace, and one movement of divine Sanctification, which freely flows to us from the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, which took concrete form in our human existence in space and time in the incarnate economy of redemption." (p. 108)
 - (2) "To speak ... of God's inner Being, we cannot but feel to be a sacrilegious intrusion into the inner holy of holies of God's incomprehensible Mystery, before which we ought rather to cover our faces and clap our hands upon our mouths, for God is utterly ineffable in the transcendence and majesty of his eternal Being. The God whom we have come to know through his infinite condescension in Jesus Christ, we know to be infinitely greater than we can ever conceive, so that it would be sheer presumption and theological sin on our part to identify the

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trinitarian structure in our thinking and speaking of God with the real constitutive relations in the triune Being-in-Communion of the Godhead.” (p. 110)

2. *Homoousion* (*homo*: same, *ousia*: being).
 - a). Coined and scrupulously reinterpreted by the patristic fathers, *homoousion* was:
 - (1) First applied to the Son (325-Nicea ... the Son is *homoousios to patri*): the Son is of the same being as the Father.
 - (2) Then to the Spirit (381-Constantinople ... the Spirit is *homoousios to patri*): the Spirit is of the same being as the Father.
 - b). Both creedal affirmations explicated the ground of ontological oneness between what God is toward us as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in his revealing and saving acts in history, and what he is antecedently, inherently, and eternally in himself as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: One Being, Three Persons.
 - c). What *homoousios* did was to give decisive expression to the truth that God’s revelation of himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the incarnate economy of salvation was grounded in and derived from God as he is in [his] own eternal Being and Nature.
 - d). These three hypostases coinhere in each other, they act together in unison, unlike any three psychological persons (e.g., Peter, James, and John) can.
 - (1) The three *hypostases* interpenetrate each other.
 - (2) The three *hypostases* mutually indwell each other [mystery!], in loving embrace, in the eternal dance of infinite love.
 - (3) We now come to the third word.
3. *Perichoresis* (*peri*: around [perimeter] *choreo*: rotate).
 - a). Meaning:
 - (1) Interchange, reciprocity.
 - (2) Interpenetration.
 - (3) To encompass ... to make room for, mutual indwelling, the mutual containing or enveloping of realities, coinherence, coindwelling.
 - b). The importance of Greek prepositions.
 - (1) From the New Testament use of *en* (in).
 - (2) The reality of what it means to be “in Christ” is the main point of the Apostle Paul’s theology.
 - (3) John 17:20-21, “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”
 - (4) John 14:20, “that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”
 - c). Applied to speak of the way in which the three divine Persons mutually dwell in one another and coinhere or inexist in one another while nevertheless remaining other than one another and distinct from one another.
 - (1) The complete mutual containing or interpenetration of the three divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in one God.

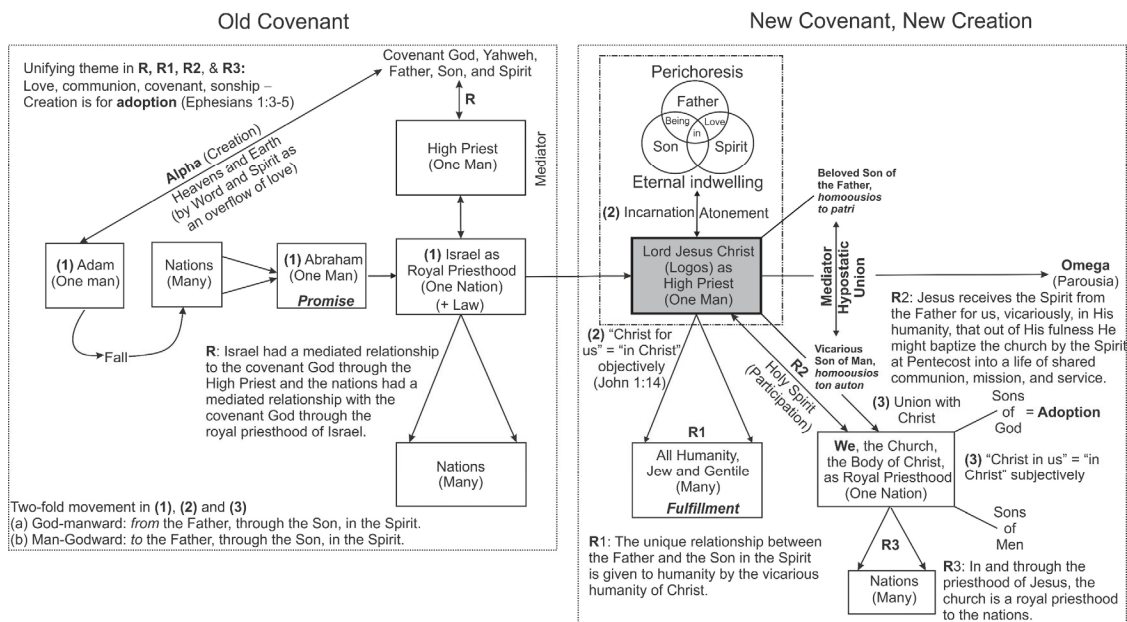
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- (2) The concept of perichoresis serves to hold powerfully together in the doctrine of the Trinity the identity of the divine Being and the intrinsic unity of the three divine Persons.
- (3) Alister McGrath, Anglican theologian, “The meaning allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two. An image often used to express this idea is that of a ‘community of being,’ in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them.” (*Christian Theology: An Introduction*, p. 325)
- (4) Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Godhead is undivided in being divided; and there is one mingling of Light, as it were of three suns joined to each other ... No sooner do I consider the One than I am enlightened by the radiance of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One. When I bring any One of the Three before my mind I think of him as a Whole, and my vision is filled, and the most of the Whole escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One in such a way as to attribute more greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one Torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided Light.”

d). *The Gospel in a nutshell*: We have access to the divine life of the Father, Son, and Spirit (Ephesians 2:18)!

F. Summary:

1. Thomas F. Torrance, “The effect of this careful thinking (reverent formulation) makes us concentrate our personal faith all the more squarely upon the vicarious humanity of Christ



Amplification of a diagram from the lecture notes of James B. Torrance (1923-2003), University of Aberdeen, Scotland.

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who identified himself with us in our lost and corrupt existence in order to heal and redeem us, and restore us to participation through the Communion of the Spirit in the eternal Life and Love of God.” (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 111)

2. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, “The Christian understanding of beauty emerges not only naturally, but necessarily, from the Christian understanding of God as a perichoresis of love, a dynamic coinherence of the three divine persons, whose life is eternally one of shared regard, delight, fellowship, feasting, and joy.” (p. 155)
3. The being (*ousia*) of one God is shaped by the eternal communion (*perichoresis*) of the three persons (*hypostaseis*) as revealed in Jesus Christ.

G. So what?

1. The thoughts developed by Christian theologians related to perichoresis and hypostasis were new to the world.
 - a). These words were new forms of relational thought and speech developed and refined under the impact of the revelation of Christ on the mind of the church.
 - b). Other words, such as ‘spirit’ and ‘being’ (*pneuma* and *ousia*), were also radically changed from having an impersonal to having an intensely personal meaning.
 - c). Thus, what was developed was a new concept of person, unknown in human thought until then, according to which the relations between persons belong to who persons are.
 - d). Thomas F. Torrance, “The onto-relational concept of ‘person’, generated through the doctrines of Christ and the Holy Trinity, is one that is also applicable to inter-human relations, but in a created way reflecting the uncreated way in which it applies to the Trinitarian relations in God.” (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 103)
2. Contra “Consolation of Philosophy,” where Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480-524) introduced into the Western World the definition of person as an “individual substance of a rational nature” (*individua substantia rationalis naturae*).
 - a). Boethius began a trend, reinforced later by Enlightenment thought, that reduced human personhood to the primary substance of autonomous rationalism.
 - b). Lost in the angst of the cosmos created by the Boethian-Enlightenment definition of person is any concept of being in relationship, in relationship to others and to creation, multi-faceted relationships that can only flourish when grounded in the intratrinitarian relations of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

H. An important extra.

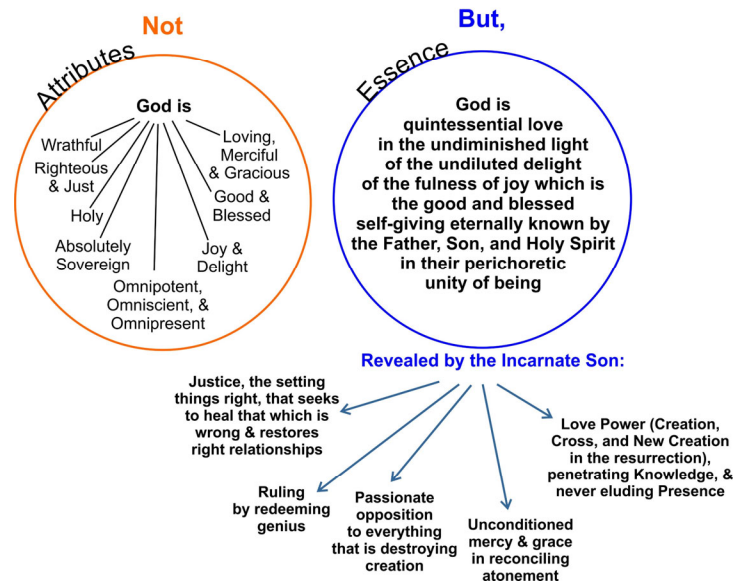
1. There is no *ousia* (being) apart from the *hypostaseis* (persons).
 - a). There is no unknown, mysterious, abstract essence of God (*ousia*) that exists apart from the Father, Son and Spirit as revealed by Jesus.
 - b). If the *ousia* of God existed apart from the Triune Persons, then the *ousia* of God would be something else, a “fourth something,” as theologian Colin Gunton puts it, that exists in addition to the Triune *hypostaseis*.
 - c). This would mean that the “deepest truth” about God is something other than what has been revealed by Jesus.
 - d). If there is something deeper behind Jesus, a fourth entity or another idea (e.g., the

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inscrutable decrees of scholastic Calvinism⁶), then Jesus is merely a revelation of the Father, not the revelation of the Father; we have a denial of the deity of Christ.

- e). The Triune *hypostaseis* in their perichoretic interrelations are the *ousia* of God.
2. The scholastic Calvinist will often speak of a secret will of God, a secret will that called the shots of election and reprobation, a secret will that exists behind the back, so to speak, of the revealed will of the Father in Jesus.
 - a). The proponents of Scholastic Calvinism defend their theology by using certain passages of Scripture, but unless one's view of Scripture is grounded in the reality that the Triune *hypostaseis* in their perichoretic interrelations are the *ousia* of God, you will misinterpret them.
 - b). Jesus is the revelation of God.
 - (1) The Son of God manifested in the flesh is the will, the decree, the election of God.
 - (2) On the Cross, He carries the fallen, reprobate man, into death to resurrect him to new life.

How Do We Perceive God?



3. Is Augustine (354-430) the origin of this secret will idea?
 - a). Augustine's native tongue was Latin, and he did not know Greek.
 - b). Therefore, he did not understand what the Cappadocian fathers were saying and how they were recasting these Greek words.
 - c). He misrepresented the Cappadocian fathers by the Latin words he chose to interpret

⁶ Scholastic Calvinism is the thought of Calvin systematized by his followers, starting with Theodore Beza's (1519-1605) work in Geneva, Switzerland.

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their Greek words.

- (1) For example, instead of translating hypostasis as “person,” Augustine translated it as *substantia* (substance).
- (2) It is possible that he could not grasp the full-orbed Cappadocian dynamics of Trinitarian relationships; i.e., perichoresis (mutual indwelling of persons).
- (3) For him, the common divine *substantia* of God was considered the foundation of the trinitarian persons and was, therefore, logically primary.
- (4) In other words, essence trumps relationship.
 - (a) There is an essence of God that is logically primary to relationship.
 - (b) Augustine’s view leads to an attributable understanding of God, leading ultimately to a non-Trinitarian understanding of God.
 - (c) Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 7.
 - (i) What is God?
 - (ii) God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, every where present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. [with attendant Scriptural proofs]
 - (iii) T.F. Torrance, “the God of Westminster theology is not distinctively or essentially Christian.” (*The Mediation of Christ*, pp. 100-101).
 - (d) In the 19th century, Charles Hodge (1797-1878), a well-known Protestant (Calvinist) theologian wrote a three-volume, 2,300 page systematic theology wherein only four pages are dedicated to the doctrine of the Trinity.
- (5) For the Cappadocian fathers, essence is relationship, God is being in communion.

IX. Conclusion.

- A. The Bible reveals the purposes of the Triune God.
 1. Creation.
 2. Redemption.
- B. To understand Trinity is to understand redemption and to grasp our faith.
- C. Until we have understood Trinity we shall be in constant confusion in understanding the unfolding of God’s purposes.

○ Blessed Trinity!
○ simplest Majesty!
○ Three in One!
Thou art for ever God alone.
Holy Trinity!
Blessed equal Three.
One God, we praise Thee.
Frederick W. Faber

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With the Nicene Creed and orthodox Christianity, Trinitarian theology affirms the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ and thus confesses that Jesus Christ is the one, true revelation of God to the human race. The revelation of God in Christ addresses us on two fronts. First, Jesus Christ reveals to us the eternal being of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. For it is not only God that we meet in Jesus Christ, it is the Son of God, the eternal Son who has an eternal Father and who shares all things with Him in the communion of the eternal Spirit. And this Trinitarian relationship is not a mere form that God assumed for a moment of time. It is the way God is, and always has been, and always will be. Second, Jesus Christ to us the eternal will of the Triune God for the human race. For it is not only the Son of God that we meet in Jesus Christ, but the Son in, through, and by Whom all things were created and the Son in Whom all things consist and are held together. The very person of Jesus Christ reveals to us that the Holy Trinity and the human race now exist in union. For He is the Father's beloved Son who shares all things with Him in the fellowship of the Spirit and He is the one in whom the whole human race lives, and moves, and has its very being. The very identity of Jesus Christ proclaims that the Holy Trinity and humanity are together. Over against the Calvinists, who deny the deity of Jesus Christ by reduced Him to a revelation of a will of God for humanity (i.e., the elect only), Trinitarian theology affirms that to see Jesus Christ is to see the Father and thus to see the Father's heart, and passion, and will. Standing firm upon the full deity of Jesus Christ, Trinitarian theology does not regard Jesus Christ and the union between the Holy Trinity and humanity in Him as an accident or a second plan or simply a will of God, but as they living expression of the eternal purpose of the Triune God for the human race. There is no other God and no other will of God for humanity. The divine activity of creation finds its context and true meaning in the union between the Holy Trinity and the human race accomplished in Jesus. For this union in Jesus Christ is not an afterthought. It is the eternal plan of the Triune God. Jesus Christ is therefore the light of the world, the true hermeneutic of creation, and the one truth which reveals the mystery of human history. First, there is the plan of the Triune God for our adoption in Christ. Second, there is the creative action of the Triune God which establishes the womb of the incarnation of the Son and thus the womb of the accomplishment of the eternal purpose of human adoption in Him. The eternal Son of the Father is on the road to His incarnation and to the fulfillment of the Father's eternal purpose for the human race before the first particle of creation is called into being. Creation serves the cause of the Triune God in Jesus Christ.

C. Baxter Kruger, *The Big Picture* (audio transcription).

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Please answer the following question:

1. Explain how you understand the Trinity as seen in the Old Testament.
2. The revelation of the Trinity is revealed in what God did after the Old Testament was written and before the New Testament was written. Explain what you understand by this statement.
3. How do we guard ourselves against a mere academic understanding of the Trinity?