



Survey of Christian Theology.4

Doctrine of the Trinity / Trinitarianism





Logistics & Learning Objectives:

1. Learning Objectives. Participants will gain an understanding of:
 - a. The biblical doctrine of the Trinity
 - b. The doctrine of the Trinity throughout Church history
 - c. Philosophical thoughts to ponder
2. For more information please visit studioscriptura.com



Key Sources:

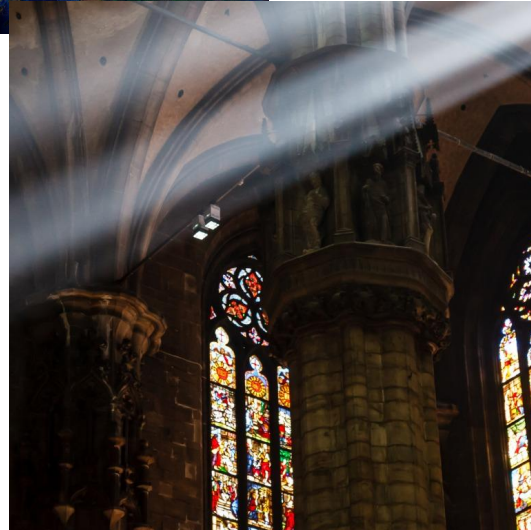


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The Trinity



Walter Smiechewicz



- One of the more perplexing yet immensely important doctrines of the Christian Church.
- One of the challenges is our limitation in using human language in presenting the Trinity. We enter challenges as we attempt to explain (with the limitation of human thoughts and words) the theology of the transcendent nature of the Triune God as HE reveals Himself to us as 3 in 1.
- God is one - He is one *substance*. He reveals Himself to us through three distinct *persons*: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Together they are to be worshipped and glorified.

The Trinity

"The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity affirms that God is one in essence and three in person. If God were to be one and not one (that is, three) at the same time and in the same relationship, then we would have a logical contradiction. But we believe that God is one and God is three at the same time, but the way in which He is one (in essence) is different than the way in which He is three (in person). To be sure, this doctrine is mysterious and we cannot understand it fully."

("The Trinity", Ligonier Ministries)

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/trinity/>





The Trinity

Early Church theologians began to grapple with the teaching of the Trinity due to John 1 and how Jesus is so clearly presented as Divinity, as God.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." John 1:1-5

"That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world." John 1:9

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14



The beauty and transcendent truth of the Trinity provides to the Christian believer: (1) the majesty of God in the Father, (2) the personification of God in Jesus, and (3) the ongoing presence of God through the Holy Spirit.



Some will interpret the Trinity as Christians worshipping three distinct gods which is inconsistent with Christian theology - and inconsistent with our beliefs.

Our beliefs hold firmly to the undivided authority of one God as Creator - Redeemer - Comforter.

Biblical Foundations for the Trinity



"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**," Matthew 28:19

"The grace of the Lord Jesus **Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the communion of the **Holy Spirit** be with you all. Amen." 2 Corinthians 13:14

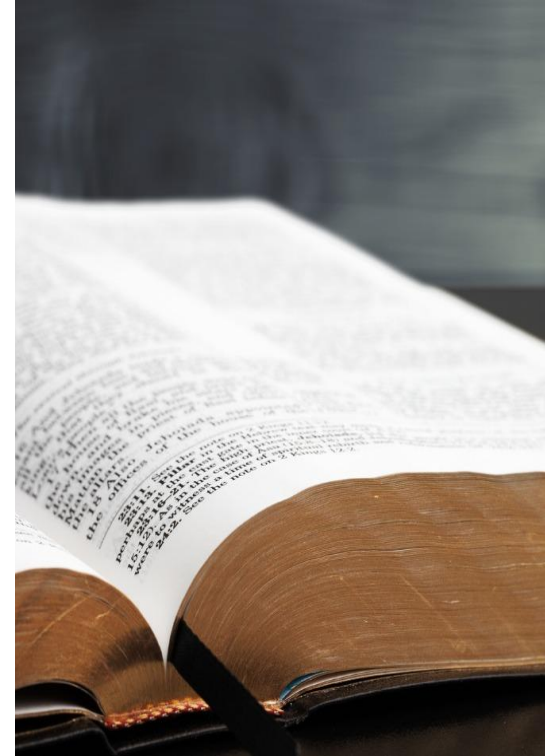
"When He had been baptized, **Jesus** came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the **Spirit of God** descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a **voice came from heaven**, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" Matthew 3:16-17

Biblical Foundations for the Trinity *(continued)*

“Now He who establishes us with you in **Christ** and has anointed us *is* **God**, who also has sealed us and given us the **Spirit** in our hearts as a guarantee.” 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

“...elect according to the foreknowledge of **God** the Father, in sanctification of the **Spirit**, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus **Christ**.” 1 Peter 1:2

“For there are **three** that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are **one**.”
1 John 5:7



Theology of the Trinity Throughout Church History

- Δ Irenaeus (c.130 - c.202) posits that the whole process (i.e., the way affairs are ordered) of salvation bears witness to the actions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- Δ Tertullian (c.160 - c.220) coined many terms that became normative in the Church:
 - ◆ *Trinitas* - Three in One
 - ◆ *Persona* - One God with differing responsibilities for salvation
 - ◆ *Substantia* - The fundamental unity of the Godhead, even with an outward appearance of different responsibilities
- Δ The Cappadocian Fathers defended the divinity of the Holy Spirit. They presented the now oft-used phrase: one substance (ousia), three persons (hypostasis).

Two brothers, and a close friend, from today's eastern Turkey (just north of Syria) in the 4th century. Influential Theologians whose grandfather was martyred for his faith. Believed Christians can, and should, hold their own with their Greek-speaking contemporary intellectuals when it comes to presenting and defending our Christian faith.

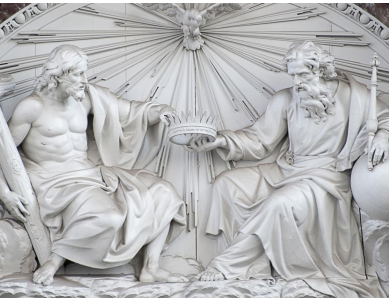


Theology of the Trinity Throughout Church History *(continued)*



Church Creeds

- Δ First Council of Nicaea (325 AD): Framed a statement of the doctrine of the Trinity that would include all its scriptural elements.
- Δ Council of Constantinople (381 AD): A more definitive statement on the Holy Spirit was added to the Creed.
- Δ Council of Chalcedon (451 AD): Issued the *Chalcedonian Definition*, which repudiated the notion of a single nature in Christ, and declared that He has two complete natures in one person.

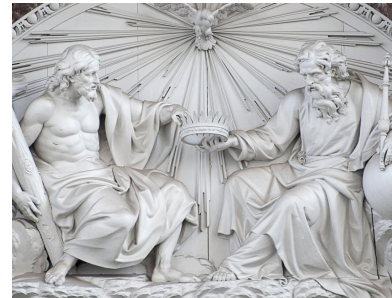
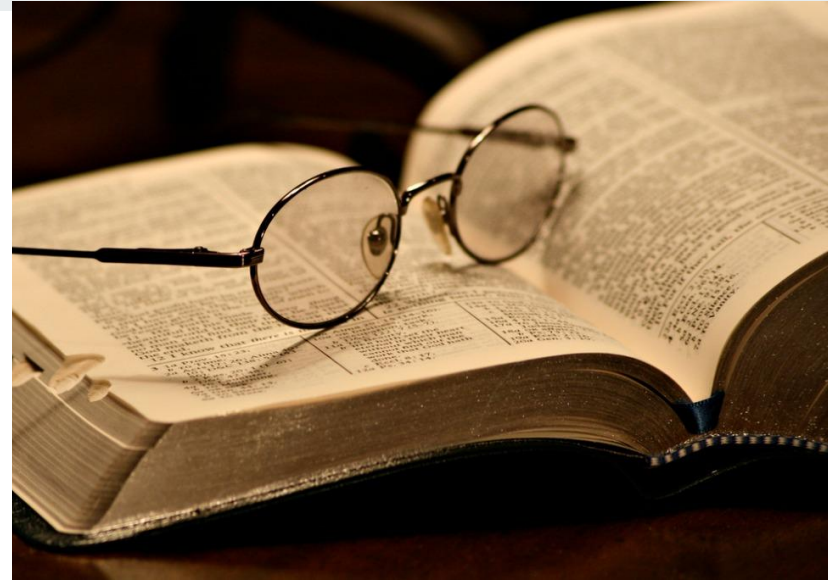


Theology of the Trinity Throughout Church History *(continued)*

Church Creeds *(continued)*

"The creeds are nothing more than a well-ordered arrangement of the facts of Scripture which concern the doctrine of the Trinity. They assert the distinct personality of the Father, Son, and Spirit; their mutual relation as expressed by those terms; their absolute unity as to substance or essence, and their consequent perfect equality. These are Scriptural facts, to which the creeds in question add nothing; and it is in this sense they have been accepted by the Church universal."

Charles Hodge

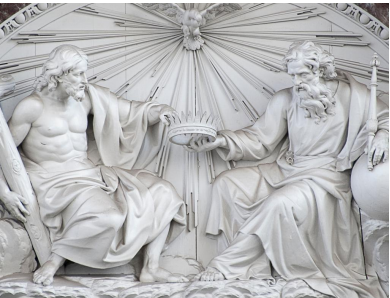


Theology of the Trinity Throughout Church History *(continued)*



- △ Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430): Vigorous defense against subordinationism. The Son and Spirit are not in any way lesser than the Father.
- △ Karl Barth (1886 - 1968): The Trinity is not a puzzle for us humans to try and solve or explain. The Trinity is how God reveals Himself to us, and this should move us to wonderment and awe of who He is.
- △ A survey conducted by Asbury Seminary found that of the 72 most oft-used songs in churches between 1989 and 2004, none referred to the triune nature of God.

This is in stark contrast to the traditional hymns of our faith.



Theology of the Trinity Throughout Church History *(continued)*

- △ Post the Enlightenment, certain critics (especially Deists) were doubtful of the theology of the Trinity as it was not *reasonable*. Christians, however, believe that God exists outside, or above, reason.
- △ Two Heresies:
 - ◆ **Modalism:** It has been around since the 2nd century. There is one God who reveals Himself in three different ways/modes through history - sometimes as the Father, at other times the Son, and still other times as yet a different mode, as the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ **Tri-theism:** God is three independent and autonomous beings, each of whom is divine.



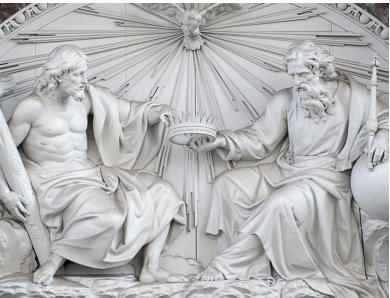
Theology of the Trinity Throughout Church History *(continued)*



Δ Thomas À Kempis on the Limits of Trinitarian Speculation

"What good does it do you if you dispute loftily about the Trinity, but lack humility and therefore displease the Trinity? It is not lofty words that make you righteous or holy or dear to God, but a virtuous life. ... Naturally, everyone wants knowledge. But what use is that knowledge without the fear of God? A humble peasant who serves God is much more pleasing to Him than an arrogant academic who neglects his own soul to consider the course of the stars. ... **So restrain an extravagant longing for knowledge, which leads to considerable anxiety and deception.** Learned people always want their wisdom to be noticed and recognized. But there are many things, knowledge of which leads to little or no benefit to the soul."

Alister E. McGrath. "The Christian Theology Reader." Apple Books.



Theology of the Trinity Throughout Church History *(continued)*

- △ Walter Kasper on the Rationality of the Trinity (McGrath's summary):

"Kasper's quote begins by asking whether the doctrine of the Trinity can be proved by reason, and offers a negative answer. Kasper then notes that certain medieval writers appear to have given a more positive answer, but points out that their arguments are not strictly proofs of the doctrine. **Rather, they assume the doctrine, and then demonstrate its consistency or "suitability."** Kasper affirms the ultimate mystery of God, not in the sense that God is "irrational" *but in the deeper sense that the human mind cannot completely grasp and represent the divine reality.* ... What is said in the scriptures applies here: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11.27). ...The thesis regarding the Trinity as a strict mystery is directed primarily against rationalism which seeks to prove the doctrine of the Trinity by reason," Alister E. McGrath, "The Christian Theology Reader." Apple Books.

- △ YouTube - *Professor Alister McGrath - On The Trinity.* Winchester Cathedral. Streamed live on Jun 26, 2018.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhBPg8Mgfy0&ab_channel=WinchesterCathedral





Some Philosophical Thoughts to Ponder

"The guiding principle has been the creedal declaration that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the New Testament are consubstantial (i.e. the same in *substance* or *essence*). Because this shared substance or essence is a divine one, this is understood to imply that all three named {persons} are divine, and equally so. Yet the three ... "are" the one God of the Bible."



The triquetra is an ancient symbol that consists of three interconnected arc shapes which form what is known as a trinity knot. The symbol has also been emblematic of the Holy Trinity in Church history.

The colors are indicative of Genesis 9:13-15a "I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you ..."



Some Philosophical Thoughts to Ponder *(continued)*

- Our rational mind desires what we might call “analytic philosophy or analytic theology, in which religious doctrines are given formulations that are precise, and it is hoped self-consistent and otherwise defensible.”
 - But are our human words and philosophies able to fully define God in a “defensible manner? Or is He truly *transcendent*?
- The philosophical (and to a certain degree, mathematical) presentation of the Trinity:
 - The Father is God.
 - The Son is God.
 - The Holy Spirit is God.
 - The Father is not the Son.
 - The Father is not the Holy Spirit.
 - The Son is not the Holy Spirit.



Some Philosophical Thoughts to Ponder *(continued)*

- "The principle of the *identity of indiscernibles*, states that any two objects sharing all properties are in fact the same, identical object."
- "When many things are said of a subject, yet it is said of nothing else, this subject is rightly called an individual substance." This speaks to the truth that the things said of God can only be said of God and of nothing/no one else - therefore God is one.
- "Principle of sufficient reason"
 - "By virtue of which we consider that we can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise, although most of these reasons cannot be known to us"
 - "The classical statement of the principle of sufficient reason is, there is nothing without reason or cause - every state of affairs has an explanation, even if we must admit that we often do not have sufficient information to provide an explanation."
 - When we ponder the Trinity we acknowledge that we may not have sufficient information to provide an explanation to others to their satisfaction.



Some Philosophical Thoughts to Ponder *(continued)*

- “Metaphysicians call the things that exist in their own right, *substances*. Aristotle called them *protai ousiai* or *primary beings*.
 - “Metaphysics was the *science* that studied *being* as such or *the first causes of thing*” or *things that do not change*”
 - “At least one hundred years after Aristotle's death, an editor of his works (in all probability, Andronicus of Rhodes) titled those fourteen books *Ta meta ta phusika*—*the ones after the physical ones*—the *physical ones* being the books contained in what we now call Aristotle's *Physics*.”
 - Metaphysics is a study that somehow *goes beyond* physics, a study devoted to matters that transcend the mundane concerns of daily life.
- We do well to remember that God, as Trinity, cannot be fully grasped the same way we desire to grasp observable reality.



Some Philosophical Thoughts to Ponder *(continued)*

- “Essence (Latin: *essentia*) is a term used in philosophy and theology as a designation for the property or set of properties that make an entity or substance what it fundamentally is”
- “Substances are particulars that are ontologically independent: they are able to exist all by themselves.”
 - “The Christian writers of antiquity adhered to the Aristotelian conception of substance.”
- “The ecclesiastics of the Cappadocian group (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa) taught that the Trinity had a single substance in three hypostases individualized by the relations among them.

Sources:

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

<https://iep.utm.edu/leib-ove/> Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy - A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essence>

It is incumbent upon Christians to have a firm grasp of how God has revealed Himself to us as Father - Son - Holy Spirit i.e. The Trinity

A solid understanding of the theology of the Trinity is foundational to a comprehensive understanding of other areas of Christian theology, i.e., the doctrine of salvation.

We acknowledge when we study the doctrine of the Trinity that God is transcendent and our words are insufficient to fully define God.



So What

Find some time alone to *ponder* the mystery and grandeur of the Trinity and to lift us above the mundane challenges of daily life.



The unity within the Trinity is an example of how we as Christians should live in unity within the Church and with all other believers.

The theological truths of the Trinity should motivate us to the evangelization of the world. "And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the **Father** has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the **Holy Spirit** has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to **Me** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'" Acts 1:7-8

Enhance your prayer and worship to include the fullness of God as revealed in the theology of the Trinity..



Now What

