

Week 6: The Trinity

Emptying the Ocean one handful at a time

The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery. It exposes the inadequacy of human language to describe the infinite and uncontainable God. That said, it didn't stop theologians inventing lots of long and confusing words! To help us navigate this important article of faith, it will be useful to be familiar with some of the terms commonly used to discuss the Trinity.

What proper theologians say	The vicar's questionable translation
<i>Triune</i>	God's "three-in-oneness"
<i>Person</i>	A distinct consciousness, it's about being able to relate "personally"
<i>Essence</i>	God's being, his essence
<i>Monotheism</i>	Belief in one God.
<i>Tritheism</i>	Ahh, you've divided the persons into three gods!
<i>Modalism</i>	Ahh, you've squashed the three Persons into one!

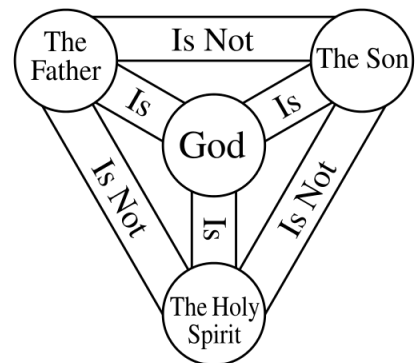
Peeling the Onion one layer at a time So what is the Trinity?

Layer 1: The Cappadocian Fathers

One God, three persons. One ousia, three hypostases.

Layer 2: A Summary of the doctrine in seven statements

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



The *Scutum Fidei*, or Shield of Faith.
A helpful diagram

Going Deeper: So why have the Trinity?

If the Trinity is just questionable mathematics can't we just get rid of it? **NO!!!**

Layer 3: The Economy of God

The Trinity is not a later invention, imposed on the Christian faith from the 3rd and 4th Centuries. The Bible tells us **1)** It's who God is, it's how he *exists*. **2)** It's how God works, it's how he *expresses* himself.

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A Clear, if not repetitive, Statement

Layer 4: The Athanasian Creed

As the early church wrestled with the Scriptures, and saw that it affirmed the divinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it was obvious a statement of faith was needed to help clarify this important article of faith. The *Quicumque Vult* or *Athanasian Creed* was the result. This Creed outlines the doctrine of the Trinity, and reaffirms the two natures of Christ. It remains the Church's clearest teaching on the divine mystery.

So, what difference does the Trinity make?

Layer 5: The Trinity and Human Society

"Ok, so the Trinity is a biblical doctrine, and the church fathers thought it was important, but what does it mean for me?" Good question, theologian Kevin DeYoung makes these helpful comments.

1) Diversity and Unity of God

The Trinity shows us how diversity and unity hold together. Unity is enriched by diversity, and diversity is expressed through unity.

2) God is community

The Trinity shows us that God is community, its archetype and origin.

3) God is Love

The Trinity shows us that God is love. Love is not external to God, nor created by him, rather, it is who God is and has been through all eternity. The persons of the Trinity mutually indwell and delight in each other, such that to love is to identify with God's very being and nature.

Pick of the bunch, some helpful quotes from McGrath's *Theology: The Basics*

On the Trinity and the Bible

The doctrine of the Trinity can be regarded as the result of reflection on the pattern of divine activity revealed in the bible, and continued in Christian experience. This is not to say that the Bible contains or sets out an explicit doctrine of the Trinity; rather, it bears witness to a God who demands to be known in a Trinitarian manner.

P.129 (4th ed.)

And another

The doctrine of the Trinity this identifies and names the Christian God – but identifies and names this God in a manner consistent with the biblical witness. It is not a name we have chosen; it is a name which has been chosen for us, and which we are authorized to use.

P. 141 (4th ed.)

The Trinity and Human Language

In the end, the doctrine can be seen as an admission that human words are simply inadequate to express the glory and wonder of God.

P. 131 (4th ed.)