

The Trinity

Three Whos and One What

The doctrine of the Trinity is encapsulated in Matthew 28:19, where Jesus instructs the apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

In this passage the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are said to share one name (notice that the term "name" is singular, not plural), and that name is almost certainly Yahweh, the personal name of God in the Bible.

The parallelism of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is not unique to Matthew's Gospel, but appears elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., 2 Cor. 13:14, Heb. 9:14), as well as in the writings of the earliest Christians, who clearly understood them in the sense that we do today—that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three divine persons who are one divine being (God).

Tertullian [A.D. 216]

"Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent persons, who are yet distinct one from another. These three are, one essence, not one person, as it is said, 'I and my Father are one' [John 10:30], in respect of unity of being not singularity of number"

In Catholic theology, we understand the persons of the Blessed Trinity subsisting within the inner life of God to be truly distinct relationally, but not as a matter of essence, or nature. Each of the three persons in the godhead possesses the same eternal and infinite divine nature; thus, they are the one, true God in essence or nature, not "three Gods." Yet, they are truly distinct in their relations to each other.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life.

Trinity:

In the Nicene Creed we say:

I believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

It is significant to note that the doctrine of the Trinity did not come to us either by philosophical or theological speculation. A good place to see a clear presentation of the Trinity is in the Baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:10-11:

The Baptism of Jesus

On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

In many of the exchanges in the Bible we hear one person speaking to another. We hear the Son speaking to the Father, the Father speaking to the Son. We heard the Son referring to the Holy Spirit as another person. But we don't hear three gods, and we don't hear one person playing three roles.

Stay with me on this: There is an inherent complexity within the Trinity that points to an I/You relationship within the Godhead. From the beginning, if God ever loved, who was he loving before the creation, if he spoke, who did he speak to.

There is community within the Trinity, and diversity in that community.

To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, in life if you have one dimension all you get is a straight line, but with three dimensions you have a great capacity for what can be actualized. Each component, in combination, is necessary in order to fulfill the full potential and completeness of possibility.

In terms of the Trinity, if any one of the three were missing the Church would not have the capacity to fulfill His great commission.

In John 14 Jesus spoke of the interrelation of his role with that of the Spirit. “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you”

Analogies of the Trinity:

No matter how we try we can't fully describe what the trinity is through physical examples, or analogies. That's like trying to smell a radio wave, or taste a sound. God is beyond physical description and analogy, because he transcends the physical world, we can say that he is beyond this natural world, he is in fact supernatural.

Water example:

Water can be liquid, solid or gas – liquid water, ice, or steam. Steam is not ice, ice is not liquid, liquid is not steam, but they are the same thing.

Apple example

The skin is like God the Father, because he protects it all.

The flesh is like God the Son, because Jesus is God-made-flesh.

The seeds are like the Holy Spirit because He is the source for new growth.

Three in One

The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is not the father. Three who's and one what.

The Writers of the New Testament

The writers of the New Testament came to express that creation, and all we see within it, is the work of God in community. Each person of the Trinity in relationship with one another brings forth out of nothing a creation reflecting the goodness and love of this divine community.

To be a part of the body of Christ is about constructing communities based on Godly love. That's exactly what Jesus is saying in John 13 "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Another way to say this is, the only way people will know that we are His disciples, is to demonstrate it, not individually, but by our relationships—for there can be no real evangelization without a community of Christian love in relationship.