

Lesson on the Trinity

Resources:

Christian Theology, Alister McGrath

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology Vol. 3, Thomas Oden

The Living God: Systematic Theology Vol. 1, Thomas Oden

Scripture to Consider:

(plurals in quotations of God's thought)

Genesis 1:26 - "Then God said, 'Let us make man **in our image**, after our likeness.'"

Genesis 3:22 - "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like **one of us** in knowing good and evil.'"

Isaiah 6:8 - "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go **for us?**'"

(trinitarian structure in the Old Testament)

1. Wisdom - This personification of God is especially evident in the Wisdom literature. The attribute of divine wisdom is frequently treated as if it were a person, with an existence apart from, yet dependent upon, God.
2. Word of God - The idea of God's speech or discourse is treated as an entity with an existence independent of God, yet originating with God. The Word of God is portrayed as going forth into the world to confront men and women with the will and purpose of God.
3. Spirit of God - The OT uses this phrase to refer to God's presence and power within creation. The spirit is portrayed as being present in the expected Messiah, and as being the agent of a new creation which will arise when the old order has passed away.

Alister McGrath - "The doctrine of the Trinity can be regarded as the outcome of a process of sustained and critical reflection on the pattern of divine activity revealed in Scripture, and continued in Christian experience. This is not to say that Scripture

contains a doctrine of the Trinity; rather, Scripture bears witness to a God who demands to be understood in a Trinitarian manner."

(triadic formulas)

Matthew 28:19 "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,"

Galatians 4:6 "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

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

(preexistence and divinity of the Son)

John 1:1-3 "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 was not any thing made that was made."

John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 1:18 "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

(further ref. Hebrews 1; Colossians 1:15-20;

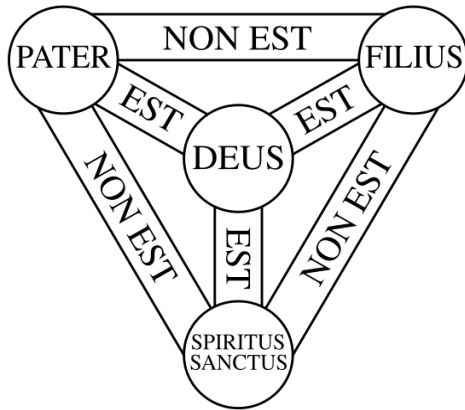
(status, personhood and divinity of the Spirit)

Romans 8:26-27 "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Christ also as intercessor, v. 34. intercession is a personal function)

John 14:16-17 "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

Mark 3:29 "but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"

History of the Doctrine of the Trinity:



Tertullian (late 2nd - early 3rd century theologian from Carthage) could arguably be the theologian responsible for distinctive Trinitarian terminology.

"Trinitas" - Trinity

"Persona" - literally "a mask" (Greek *hypostasis*)

"Substantia" - substance (Greek *homoousios*)

(McGrath) "Tertullian helped shape the distinctive form of Trinitarian theology. God is one; nevertheless, God cannot be regarded as something or someone totally isolated from the created order. The economy of salvation demonstrates that God is active in creation. This activity is complex; on analysis, this divine action reveals both a *unity* and a *distinctiveness*. Tertian argues that *substance* is what unites the three aspects of the economy of salvation; *person* is what distinguishes them. The three persons of the Trinity are distinct, yet not divided, different yet not separate or independent of each other. The complexity of the human experience of redemption is thus the result of the three persons of the Godhead acting in distinct yet coordinated manners in human history, without any loss of the total unity of the Godhead."

In responding to an opposing point of view, Tertullian said it is wrong to conclude "that if there is only one monarchy there must only be one monarch, and thus one divine person." This position "puts the Paraclete to flight and crucifies the Father." His opinion is that it is error to conclude that "Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the very selfsame person. On the contrary, the one trinity consists of three *persons* of one *substance*."

{person = distinct agent, substance = essential makeup}

(from Athanasian Creed) "So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God."

Share Nicene Creed, begins "We believe in one God," and affirms lordship of the Son and the Spirit (note that it is Western in theology, stating that the Spirit proceeds both from Father and Son).

(of modern trinitarianism) Reformation had no quarrel. John Calvin, bemoaning the many technical trinitarian terms of previous centuries, said he "could wish they were buried" if people would only agree "that Father and Son and Spirit are one God, yet the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but that they are differentiated by a peculiar quality."

Key Historical Errors:

Simony - using the Spirit instrumentally to make money, after the pattern of Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:18-19).

Modalism - naming God according to particular modes (roles). These can be seen chronologically: creation (Father), redemption (Son), sanctification (Spirit).
{water, ice, steam analogy}

Arianism (also Macedonianism) - teaching that the Son and the Spirit are creations of the Father, and not one in nature with Him {sun, light, heat analogy}

Tritheism - understanding the Father, Son, and Spirit as if they are separate and distinct Gods, denying the unity of substance

Partialism - an assertion that the Father, Son, and Spirit are all distinct parts of the Godhead, not fully God of themselves {clover analogy}

(again from the Athanasian Creed) "neither confusing the persons or dividing the substance"

Trinitarian Denominations:

Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian,