

Survey of Theology 2

The Trinity

Outline

The Problem of the Trinity

Approaching the Mystery of “One in Three”
in “Three in One”

Two Trinitarian Heresies

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Eastern Models

The Problem of the Trinity

The Trinity in the Nicene Creed (from St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*):

1. The Father is God
2. The Son is God
3. The Holy Spirit is God

4. The Father is not the Son
5. The Son is not the Holy Spirit
6. The Holy Spirit is not the Father

7. There is only one God

The Problem of the Trinity

The numbers do not add up: three individual beings are named as God but they do not add up to three Gods, but rather to One God:

$$3 = 1, 1 = 3$$

The Problem of the Trinity

“No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One. . . . When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.”

- St. Gregory Nazianzen

The Problem of the Trinity

“When I speak of God you must be illumined at once by one flash of light and by three. Three in Properties, or Hypostases, or Persons, if any prefer so to call them, for we will not quarrel about names so long as the syllables amount to the same meaning; but One in respect of ... the Godhead. For they are divided indivisibly. . . and they are conjoined dividedly. For the Godhead is one in three, and the three are one. . .”

- St. Gregory Nazianzen

The Problem of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is:

- ultimately irrational: “beyond rational understanding,” a “mystery”
- something revealed to us by God, not demonstrated to us by our own reason
- something in which, in the end, our “argumentation and analysis must give place to wordless prayer, ‘Let all mortal flesh keep silent, and stand with fear and trembling.’” (Bishop Kallistos Ware)

Approaching the Mystery of “One in Three” and “Three in One”

Two concepts:

1. **Perichoresis**
2. **Appropriation**

Approaching the Mystery of “One in Three” and “Three in One” Perichoresis

Perichoresis (Greek) = *circumincessio*
(Latin) = “mutual interpenetration:” the
way the persons of the Trinity relate to
each other

Describes “a community of being:” each
person, maintaining a distinctive identity,
“penetrates” the others and is penetrated
by them, to the point that they have one
will.

Approaching the Mystery of “One in Three” and “Three in One” Perichoresis

“I-You” Relation:

- The “You” can never be objectified, or “boxed” into our understanding. The “You” has no borders, cannot be measured or “turned into content.” The “You” “fills the sky” of our mind's eye. The “You” is a *Presence*, is *Presence* as power.
- An encounter, a transitory event (the “event of relation”) which is mutual and reciprocal
- Can be called love
- Comes to us by grace

Approaching the Mystery of “One in Three” and “Three in One” Perichoresis

The “mutual interpenetration” of the three persons of the Trinity should be thought of as involving a continuous (rather than a transitory) “I – You” relationship of each person of the Trinity with the other persons

Approaching the Mystery of “One in Three” and “Three in One” Appropriation

All three persons of the Trinity are involved
in *every* action of God

Nonetheless, it is *appropriate* to think of
some actions as distinctive actions of one
person of the Trinity. For example:

- creation as the work of the Father
- redemption as the work of the Son

Two Trinitarian Heresies

Heresy = an *inadequate* or *deficient* understanding of some aspect of Christianity

Two understandings of the Trinity considered to be *inadequate*:

1. **Modalism** (a danger in going too far to affirm the unity of God)
2. **Tritheism** (a danger in going too far to affirm the distinctiveness of the three persons of the Trinity)

Two Trinitarian Heresies

Modalism

Chronological Modalism (Sabellianism):

the one supreme God acts in different ways at different points in history

- God acting as creator and lawgiver = “The Father”
- God acting as savior = “The Son”
- God acting as sanctifier = “The Holy Spirit”

Two Trinitarian Heresies

Modalism

- Functional Modalism:** the one supreme God acts in different ways (has different “functions”) at the same time in history:
- God acting (functioning) as creator is the Father
 - God acting (functioning) as redeemer is the Son
 - God acting (functioning) as sanctifier is the Holy Spirit

Two Trinitarian Heresies

Tritheism

Tritheism: Trinity consists of three equal, independent, autonomous beings, each of whom is divine

- the analogy: The Trinity is like three human persons sharing a “common humanity”

Models of the Trinity

Some terms:

1. **“Immanent Trinity”** (or **“Essential Trinity”**) versus **“Economic Trinity”**
2. **The Filioque Clause**

Models of the Trinity

The “Immanent Trinity” versus “Economic Trinity”

Immanent Trinity or Essential Trinity

- **“God in Godself”**
- God as God is outside of creation. God as God is in eternity

Economic Trinity

- **“God for Us”**
- God as we experience God in creation: in history, in the “economy” of salvation, and in our personal lives

Models of the Trinity

The “Immanent Trinity” versus “Economic Trinity”

Western Christianity:

- **Economic Trinity = Immanent Trinity**
- the God we experience in creation is fully God as God is outside of creation. **“God for Us” = “God in Godself”**

Eastern Christianity:

- **Economic Trinity ≠ Immanent Trinity**
- the God we experience in creation is *not* fully God as God is outside of Creation. There is more to God than what we experience in creation. **“God in Godself”** is more than **“God for Us”**

Models of the Trinity

The “Immanent Trinity” versus “Economic Trinity”

Western Christianity:

- **“God in Godself” = “God for Us”**
- Someday we will be able to *see* fully **“God in Godself,”** = the essence of God, in the “beatific vision”

Eastern Christianity:

- **“God in Godself”** more than **“God for Us”**
- **“God for Us” = “Energy of God”**
- We will never fully know the essence of God, never fully know **“God in Godself,”** but someday we will be able to *participate* fully in the **“Energy of God”** and so become “deified”

Models of the Trinity

The Filioque Clause

Nicene Creed (p. 359 Book of Common Prayer):

“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.”

However, Nicene Creed, as written by Eastern and Western bishops at the Ecumenical Council in 381 read:

“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father.”

Models of the Trinity

The Filioque Clause

- The additional phrase **“and from the Son”** is the “filioque” clause (*filioque* = Latin for “and from the Son”)
- phrase was *added* by the Western Church to the Creed
 - this addition was never agreed to by the Eastern Church

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

St Augustine's Model of the Trinity

St. Augustine:

1. there are “triadic” traces of the Trinity in the human soul: For example:
 - *triad of self-knowledge* (memory, understanding, will)
 - *triad of self-love* (Lover, Beloved, Love)
2. the Spirit is the basis of the union between God and believers, and believer to believer. That is, the Spirit is the *giver of community*
3. “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16)

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

St Augustine's Model of the Trinity

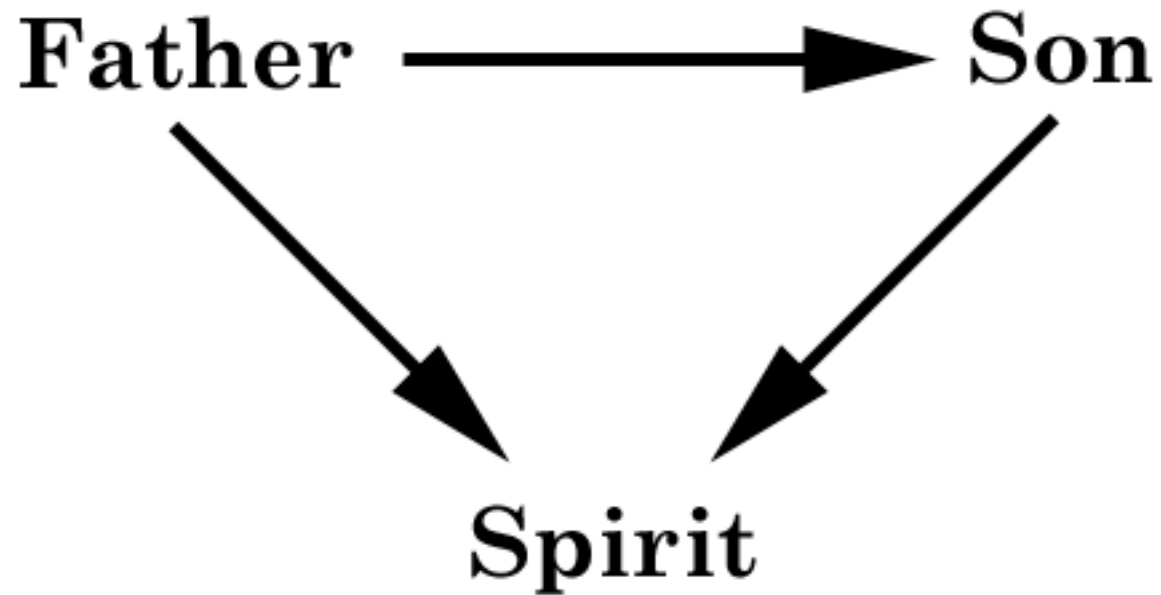
Augustine proposed:

- the Holy Spirit is Love personified
- just as we experience the Holy Spirit as the “bond of love” between believers, the “giver of community,” so too within the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is the **Bond of Love** between Father and Son
- hence that triadic trace of the Trinity in each of us -- the “triad of self-love”
- “Economic Trinity” = “Immanent Trinity” is being assumed

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

St Augustine's Model of the Trinity



Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Barth's Model of the Trinity

God's self-revelation to us is the root of the
Doctrine of the Trinity (Immanent
Trinity = Economic Trinity)

God moves out of God's hiddenness
(*veiling*) in two movements:

- In the Word / the Son (movement of
"objective" Word or *unveiling*)
- In the Spirit (movement of "subjective
reception" or *imparting*)

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Barth's Model of the Trinity

The movement of the Holy Spirit (*imparting*) is necessary because human beings are incapable of hearing the Word of God. God must *effect a personal (subjective) response* to the Word in each individual.

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Barth's Model of the Trinity

Consider two individuals walking outside Jerusalem in 30 A.D. They see three men on a cross.

- First man points to the crucified figure in the center and says: "There is a common criminal being executed"
- Second man says: "There is the Son of God dying for me"

Jesus as the objective revelation of God is not enough (first man); the Spirit as the imparting of a subjective recognition of that objective revelation, is also necessary (second man)

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Barth's Model of the Trinity

The movement of “imparting” = the Spirit =
movement of “subjective reception,”
logically follows (proceeds) from both:

- God's hiddenness = “veiling” = the
Father
- God's “unveiling” = movement of
“objective Word = the Word or Son

(Thus Barth affirms the *filioque* clause
that the Spirit proceeds from the
Father and the Son)

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Barth's Model of the Trinity

These movements are not merely “modes” of God’s “economic” activity, but reflect true “modes of being and existence” within the eternal Godhead (Economic Trinity = Immanent Trinity; “God for Us” = “God in Godself”)

(Nonetheless, Barth’s model has been criticized as a form of Modalism)

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Barth's Model of the Trinity

Grace in Barth's model:

- grace is God's "good favor," God's "good-pleasure"
- grace is the "Holy Spirit received"

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Rahner's Model of the Trinity

Immanent Trinity = Economic Trinity. “The way God is revealed and experienced in history is the way God is.”

As in Barth, God's self-revelation or self-communication is the root of the Doctrine of the Trinity

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Rahner's Model of the Trinity

God's self-communication occurs by way of four "double-aspects:"

- **past** *future*
- **history** *transcendence*
- **offer** *acceptance*
- **knowledge** *love*

these four "double aspects" reduce to *two fundamental modalities* of God's self-communication:

- "**knowledge**" (encompassing past, history, offer)
- "*love*" (encompassing future, transcendence, acceptance)

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Rahner's Model of the Trinity

The Father is “God as Such”

The Son/Word/Logos, and the Spirit, are distinct “modes / manners of subsisting,” or “modes of God’s givenness:”

- Son/Word/Logos = God’s self-communication as “**knowledge**”
- Spirit = God’s self-communication as “*love*”

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Rahner's Model of the Trinity

God's self-communication presupposes a personal recipient. God *made* human beings capable of receiving God's self-communication

The four "double aspects" of God's self-communication are also present in human beings ("traces of the Trinity"):

- elements of our personality that move us to step beyond ourselves (**past, history, offer, knowledge**)
- elements of our personality reflecting our openness and receptivity (*future, transcendence, acceptance, love*)

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Rahner's Model of the Trinity

The presence of these “double aspects” of God's self-communication in ourselves “allow a duality:

- of word and response
- of going out and return”

between ourselves and God

Models of the Trinity

Western Models

Karl Rahner's Model of the Trinity

Grace in Karl Rahner's Model:

- “uncreated grace” – the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us
- “created grace” – the result of God's indwelling within us

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

The nature or essence or inner being of God
is absolutely:

- transcendent
- incomprehensible
- unknowable

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

“The super-essential nature of God is not a subject for speech or thought or even contemplation, for it is far removed from all that exists and more than unknowable . . . incomprehensible and ineffable to all for ever. There is no name whereby it can be named, neither in this age nor in the age to come, nor word found in the soul and uttered by the tongue, nor contact whether sensible or intellectual, nor yet any image which may afford any knowledge of its subject. . . None can properly name its essence or nature if he be truly seeking the truth that is above all truth.”

- St. Gregory Palamas

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

“God, then, is infinite and incomprehensible, and all that is comprehensible about Him is His infinity and incomprehensibility.”

- St. John Damascene

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

How then can we know God? What of those who say they have visions of God?

At the time of St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), hesychasts were claiming to have an unmediated vision of God:

- **hesychasm**: the repetition verbally, then in the depth of being, of the **Jesus Prayer** “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner”

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

Palamas proposed two forms of God's existence:

- the **essence, nature, or inner being** of God (for ever beyond all comprehension and knowing)
- the **energy or energies** of God. The actions, operations, power of God in creation. The “side of God through which God is revealed in and to the creation” (Doctrine of the Energies of God sometimes called “Palamism”)

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

The **energies** are eternal and cannot be separated from the Trinity. They cannot be “appropriated” to individual persons of the Trinity

The **energies** are independent of creation

It is possible to have an unmediated experience of God by *participating* in the **energies** of God

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity cannot be based on how we experience God in creation, for this would:

- imply God's essence / nature / inner being is contingent or dependent in some way on creation
- confuse the unknowable, incomprehensible **essence** of God with the **energies** of God (all of Western theology is only about the energies of God)

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

Immanent Trinity ≠ Economic Trinity

The **Immanent Trinity** (“God in Godself”) refers to the **essence/nature/inner being** of God, and is unknowable

The **Economic Trinity** (“God for Us”) is an imprecise way of referring to that form of God’s existence more properly called the **energies** of God

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

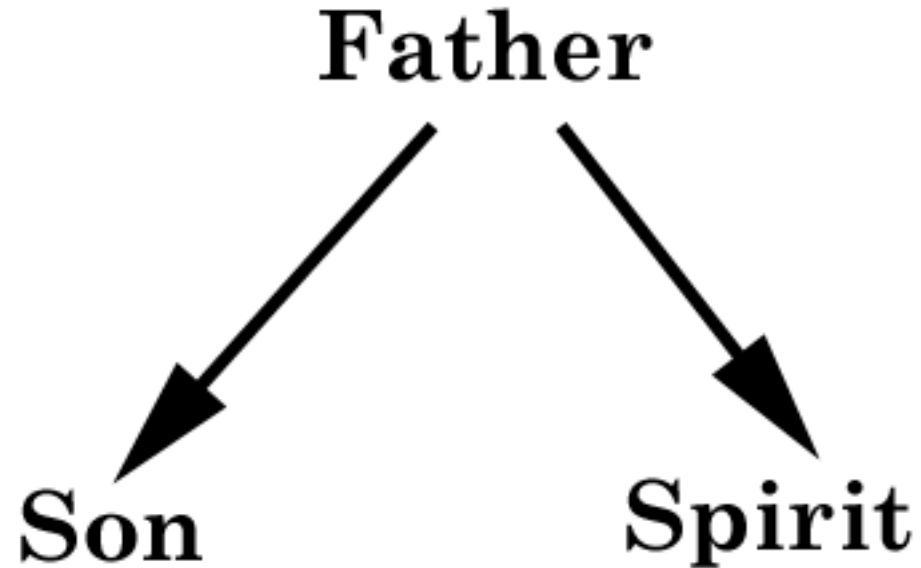
The **nature / essence / inner being** of God is a Trinity of three equal Persons. Only the following has been revealed to us of this inner being of God:

- The Father is the *source* of divinity
- There is a movement from the Father to the Son (Son is “*begotten*” of the Father)
- There is a different movement from the Father to the Spirit (The Spirit “*proceeds*” from the Father)

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir
Lossky's Models of the Trinity



Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

Grace = another name for the **energies** of God.

- a “penumbra of glory” surrounding the trinitarian Godhead
- “shines through” all of creation
- through ascetic preparation, we can choose to *cooperate* with the energies (grace) of God and ultimately *participate* in the energies

Models of the Trinity

Eastern Models

Georges Florovsky's and Vladimir Lossky's Models of the Trinity

- participation in the energies leads to “deification” of the full person (body and soul)
- rather than a “passive” “beatific vision” of God in the world to come, Eastern Christianity envisions an ever deepening and growing “deification”/ participation in the energies of God

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