

The Trinity – One God, Three Persons

Preliminary thoughts to this section:

God the father is, in many ways, has been covered so far in section 1.

- Old Testament understanding before the progressive revelation in the NT
- This is not exclusively true:
 1. The understanding of “Father” in the Jewish world of the OT was limited.
 - Israel was seen more as the bride of Yahweh
 - Some Davidic psalms begin to shape the understanding of Father-child relationship, but this really developed more in the NT with Christ (and then to us as children).
 2. Christ is foreshadowed in the Old Testament
 - Messianic promises (Gen 3 – crush the serpent)
 - Angel of the Lord (prefigurations)
 - Furthermore, the NT reinterprets many references to God in the OT through Christocentric eyes

The person and work of the Holy Spirit will be covered somewhat in this section, but really developed more in the next section as the work of the Spirit relates to the immanent presence of God in creation and specifically in the believer and life of the Church community.

So much of this section will evaluate the personhood and work of God through the lens of Christ.

- The sharer and bearer of the Spirit
- The bridge between God and man
 - “As you’ve seen me you’ve seen the Father” – John 14:9

What is the doctrine of the Trinity really saying? (3 in 1)

- A. God exists in three distinct persons
- B. God exists in one unified essence (nature, character, holiness of being)

The tension of saying that God is 3 persons in one essence:

Deut 6:4-6 – The Shema (recited 3 times daily in Israel)

- John 10:30-33, 14:9 - Does the Trinity violate this foundational OT revelation?
- Depends what we mean by “one”.

Mal 2:10

- Col 1:15-17, John 1:1-5 – Does this violate the OT verse in Mal?
- Depends what we mean by one creator.

Progressive revelation of God

- Nothing is contradicted in OT, but expanded on in NT
 - ONE is a divine essence, nature – not personhood, being
 - Divine is a family bound in the same essence, never contradicting each other, but bound perfectly in love (which is the essence of God)

- Furthermore, we should see a “foreshadow” of this expanded revelation in the original revelation (Christ in the OT)
 - See Gen 1:26-27 (“Us make...Our image...male and female...created THEM)
 - Angel of the Lord (not all angelic references are pre-incarnate Son, but angel simply means messenger, bearer of the Word of God – and so can apply to Christ, and is compelling in the following cases) – Gen 16:7-12; 21:17-18; 22:11-18; 32:24-30, Ex. 3:1-6 Dan 3:24-25

Arguments against the Trinity (with responses)

- The word Trinity is found nowhere in Scripture
 - Word-Thing fallacy – just because the word isn’t in Scripture doesn’t mean the concept isn’t (see Matt 28:18-20 & Scriptural basis below for support). The following words are all absent from Scripture, yet are certainly implied in Scripture – Atheism (but see Psalm 14:1), Incarnation (yet see John 1:14), Rapture (see 1Thess 4:16-18), omniscience, omnipotence
- Jehovah can only be one person (The God). In John 1, Jesus is mentioned as a lower heavenly being (a god) – similar to use of god for Satan in 2 Cor 4:4 (Jehovah Witness argument)
 - Greek grammar and the use of the definite article (see also Scripture proofs below)
- The idea that God had intercourse with Mary to produce a god/man is an ancient pagan concept Christians stole from surrounding culture (Islamic argument)
 - Mohammed met some heretical offshoots of the Christian diaspora who understood Christ this way. In reality, we say Christ is 100% God, and 100% man, not 50-50. And we never claim God had intercourse with Mary. Rather the Holy Spirit planted the incorruptible seed/Word (creative & infinite self-expression of God) into the WOMB of Mary
 - Misunderstandings in the Quran – surah 4:171 - O people of the scripture, do not transgress the limits of your religion, and do not say about **GOD** except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was a messenger of **GOD**, and His word that He had sent to Mary, and a revelation from Him. Therefore, you shall believe in **GOD** and His messengers. You shall not say, "Trinity." You shall refrain from this for your own good. **GOD** is only one god. Be He glorified; He is much too glorious to have a son. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything on earth. **GOD** suffices as Lord and Master.
 - Surah 5:73,75 - They have certainly disbelieved who say, " Allah is the third of three." And there is no god except one God. And if they do not desist from what they are saying, there will surely afflict the disbelievers among them a painful punishment (75) The Messiah, son of Mary, was not but a messenger; [other] messengers have passed on before him. And his

mother was a supporter of truth. They both used to eat food. Look how We make clear to them the signs; then look how they are deluded

- Surah 5:116 - And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?'" He will say, "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen
- Why stop at 3? (Hindu argument)
 - The Son as a representative of the fullness of that creative, loving expression of God. That fullness is always unified in the concept of the Son (the living seed of God), and anything short of that fullness is not divine (i.e. – not God)
 - It doesn't mean that the Son cannot become incarnate (more later)
 - But in terms of ultimate reality and infinite existence, the Son captures all that a divine existence can be as (fullness) as an offshoot of God. That fullness is the Son/Seed.
 - God can never contradict himself in nature, essence of being. How can a religion of monism (ultimate reality is one) have the revelation of that reality be many and contradicting? If duality is an illusion, than incarnations are delusions
- 3 cannot be 1, 1 cannot be 3 (rational argument)
 - God is 1 in essence, nature; God is 3 in personhood. Three persons are completely unified in a single divine essence & expression.
 - Unity in plurality can ONLY be the result of divine essence & expression

Rational arguments for the Trinity (as it pertains to a plurality in the one essence of God)

- If we acknowledge that God is creative by nature, then His creative expression (Son/Seed/Word) has always been too
- If we acknowledge that God is love as the essence of His being (not just as a response to another person, but as divine nature of being), then the conditions for Him to be love (an object of His love) must also be infinite and pre-existent
- THUS: God as transcendent & set apart (Father), God as immanent while set apart (Spirit), God as divine expression in full incarnation (Son/Seed)
 - God to be removed, among and within. Otherwise, could we really know God if He is never present? In what way is He present?
 - The Sufi problem

Assignment:

Find an example of Jesus that shows His divinity by relating it to an act/work of God in the OT.

Write about the parallel and how it speaks to Christ's nature as divine.