**The Triune Nature of God: Part 1**

Due to the complex nature of understanding Trinity we are going take the next 3 (get it wink wink) weeks to study this.

1. Intro to Trinitarian thought
2. The OT argument
3. The NT argument

Q: What common practice(s) do we engage in that express our belief in the Trinity?

* Baptism most specifically – Matt 28:19
* Doesn’t it seem as though that is a really big deal? This isn’t some fly by the night theology that we’ve come up with to confuse others and ourselves. This is a theology that stands at the heart of our faith. It find expression at the most pivotal moment in a Christian’s life – their conversion.
* Do we understand it though? Do we believe it? Can we explain it? Is it necessary to our faith? These are the questions we’ll try to answer over the next few weeks.

Set in a context of apologetics our task is to try and show that it makes sense to think of the creator we’ve been arguing for, God, as being triune in nature.

We’re getting the cart slightly before the horse since we’ll be relying heavily on scripture before having shown its reliability, historicity or even why we should put our faith in it.

First of all, as we will see, understanding God to be triune is not a trithesim, our belief in God is monotheistic, ONE GOD. We do not assert that we have three Gods, but one God who is triune in nature…we’ll come back to this in a minute.

Understanding God as trinity gives us a way of viewing and making sense of our past and future, a way of giving meaning to the whole of history. As Cliff pointed out last week, it is essential to understanding why God would have created to begin with, HE being in his nature a personal relationship, desired to have relationship. Understanding God in tri-unity is important to understanding the concept of Love. God in his nature exists in loving relationship.

Beyond this the whole history of mankind can be seen in a threefold movement: It begins with a primordially good creation and unfallen human condition that is plunged into radical alienation of human freedom, into sin, guilt and death. Separated from God in the Garden. The pivot of history comes in the incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ, God’s own personal engagement in the human condition, where the Son speaks the words of the Father’s word of forgiving love. God’s Spirit is sent after in order to enable faith, hope and love in those who are willing to hear and to engender a response to the divine Word, enabling faith and revealing the mystery of God.

This view of history is intimately interwoven with the triune understanding of God: God the Father is understood as the giver and ground of all things: God the Son is God Himself entering into this sphere to declare the love of God and make known God’s word to us; God the Spirit empowers the fulfillment of the divine purpose in redemption.

Church scholars and philosophers have been working this out and arguing over its exact expression since Christ ascended into heaven. And have come up with lots of different ways of dealing with this question. One thing they most all agreed upon and I think rightly so, is that we are not talking about three chronologically separable modes in God (as in modalism), as if God meets us in disjunctive, successive modes in a progressive sequence, each one outdating the one before. That has been rejected and continues to be rejected because it looses sight of God’s eternal unity. The purpose of triune teaching has been to affirm the equality and unity, and yet the distinguishability of Father, Son and Spirit.

Ok…so back to avoiding tritheism. One of the most difficult sticking points in our theology of the Trinity is avoiding merely saying we have three Gods. How do we wrap our heads around the concept that God is ONE yet three?

The answer is we do it all the time, its one of the reasons why a triune God makes more sense than not.

* In many areas of experience we note an implicit 3-n-1ness. Can you think of examples?
  + Objects have 3 dimensions – length, breadth, and height. They are distinguishable, but inseparable, unified in a single object yet three-dimensional.
  + Our experience of the physical world always has three dimensions – space, time and matter – unified in the being of any physical object, yet distinguishable.
  + Augustine argued that God has left triune footprints everywhere in the created order.
    - Consider perception – External object, a mind capable of perceiving, the actual event of perceiving the object. Yet we do not normally think of experiences in this way. We see it as a unified whole experience completed instantaneously. Yet there are distinguishable aspects of perception that make the whole.
    - Consider, more meaningfully, the unity of selfhood – what makes you a person? What separates you from the animal? Your understanding of yourself, your ability to think about yourself thinking. A threefold process – memory, understanding and will. “Whatever else can be predicated of each singly in itself, is predicated of them all together in the singular and not in the plural…I remember that I posses memory and understanding and will: I understand that I understand and will and remember: I will my own willing and remembering and understanding. And I remember at the same time the whole of my memory and understanding and will.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
    - Finally Consider Love – a lover, one who is loved, and the love that unites them in a three in oneness, for in speaking of three we are speaking of only one thing—love. Man and woman shall leave their parents and be united as one flesh, yet distinguishable from one another.
* Tri-Unity
  + Many dismiss Trinity because it isn’t a term expressly found in scripture and that is true.
  + Neither is eschatology (final destination of the soul), anthropology (study of man), pneumatology (study of spirit), hamartiology (doctrine of sin), or cosmology (study of the origin of universe). They are not found expressly in scripture, but are terms derived explicitly from scriptural teaching.
  + What we will see over the next two weeks is that the early Christian writers had the concept of God as one and yet three firmly in their minds and were working out how to express it.
  + In AD 325 The first ecumenical council at Nicea put it this way God as one *ousia* (essence or substance) and three *hypostases* (persons)
  + What we are getting at here is an idea of Tri-Unity.
  + God in nature is one, but three in persons.
  + This is unity and distinction.
  + At the conclusion of this study it will come down to a simple question: Once we have seen proof of the early churches belief in the triune nature of God, have seen it revealed through Jesus Christ, will we be willing or able to submit our own understanding to God? Will we be able to give up what “makes sense,” even though I believe this does make sense, to us in order to affirm what is taught and revealed to us in scripture?

1. Augustine, *On Trinity*. X:17-19, LCC VII, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)