

Session 2: How (not) to Think About the Trinity

How is the Trinity revealed to us? What does the interaction between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the gospels tell us about God's eternal nature? And what are some helpful (and unhelpful) ways in which we can begin to think and talk about the Trinity?

The Revelation of the Trinity

How is the eternal Trinity revealed to us?

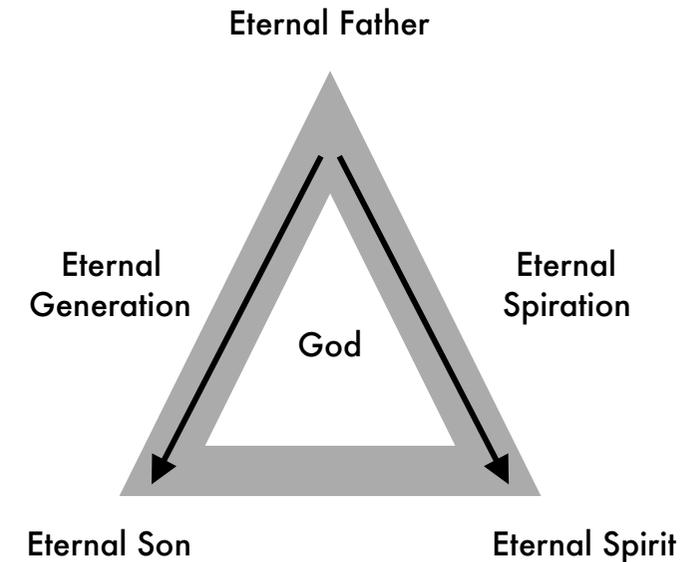
The Immanent Trinity	The Economic Trinity
<p>Immanent = 'internal to itself'</p> <p>Also known as the ontological trinity or essential trinity.</p>	<p><i>oikonomos</i> = The orderly management of a household.</p> <p>The Trinity as revealed in creation and salvation, acting in our world.</p>
<p>'The "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity.' (Karl Rahner)</p> <p>The economic revelation of the triune God corresponds truthfully with His existence in eternity. Nothing revealed in the economy will contradict the truth of the immanent Trinity. The faithfulness of God requires that He reveal Himself in a manner that truthfully reflects who He is. But whilst <i>wholly truthful</i>, the <i>oikonomia</i> is by no means <i>the whole truth</i> and cannot be said to exhaustively describe the triune God as He is eternally.</p>	
<p>'The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.' (1 John 1:2)</p> <p>'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.' (John 1:1-4, 6, 14)</p>	

Relations in the Imminent Trinity

How has the Trinity interacted in eternity?

The revealed relationship of Father and Son relates not just to the economy. It is an eternal relationship (John 17:24; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:1-4 etc.)

'There are certain elements of sonship, as we know it among humans, that could not apply to a son who is eternal and essential. For one thing, he could not be younger than his father. For another thing, he could not be one of many possible sons, because he exhausts the totality of sonship in himself. For similar reasons, he could not have a mother. When all these aspects of sonship as we know it are subtracted, what is left? Two things. First, the Son cannot be a different kind of being than his Father. A Father may create a statue or a house out of something besides himself, but a Son comes from his very being. He is not a lower order of being but is on the same level as the Father. Second, the Son stands in that relationship of originating from the Father - he comes from the Father. The classic word for that relation of origin is begetting, so we say that the Father begets the Son.' (Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, p91)



The Fountain

'Many theologians have liked to compare the Father to a fountain, ever bursting out with life and love (indeed the Lord calls himself 'the spring of living water' in Jeremiah 2:13...) And just as a fountain, to be a fountain, must pour forth water, so the Father, to be a Father, must give out life. That is who he is. That is his most fundamental identity.' (Reeves, *The Good God*, p8)

The Lamp

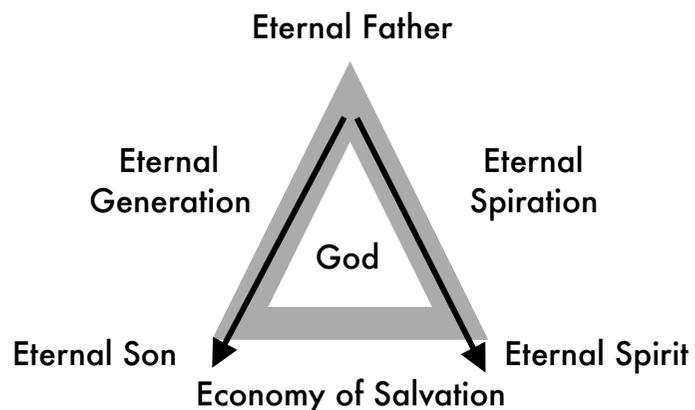
'The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being' (Heb 1:3)

'The Father is never without the Son but, like a lamp, it is the very nature of the Father to shine out his Son. And likewise, it is the very nature of the Son to be the one who shines out from his Father. The Son has his very being from the Father. In fact, he is the going out - the radiance - of the Father's own being' (Reeves, p9)

Eternal Generation and Temporal Mission

How do the eternal processions extend into the economy of salvation?

The Father and the Son	The Spirit and the Son
<p>'Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.</p> <p>This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.</p> <p>This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.' (1 John 4:7-14)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jesus was begotten of the Spirit. (Luke 1:35) 2. Jesus led a holy and spotless life and offered Himself without spot to God through the working of the Spirit. (Heb. 9:14) 3. Jesus was anointed and fitted for service by the Spirit. (Acts 10:38; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:14, 18) 4. Jesus was led by the Spirit in his movements here upon the earth. (Luke 1:4) 5. Jesus was taught by the Spirit who rested upon Him. (Isaiah 11:2; compare Matthew 12:17-19) 6. The Spirit abode upon Jesus in all His fullness and the words He spoke in consequence were the words of God. (John 3:34) 7. After His resurrection, Jesus gave commandment unto His Apostles whom He had chosen through the Spirit. (Acts 1:2) 8. Jesus wrought His miracles here on earth in the power of the Spirit. (Matthew 12:28; compare 1 Corinthians 12:9-10) 9. It was by the power of the Spirit that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. (Romans 8:11) <p>(From R.A. Torrey, <i>What the Bible Teaches</i>)</p>

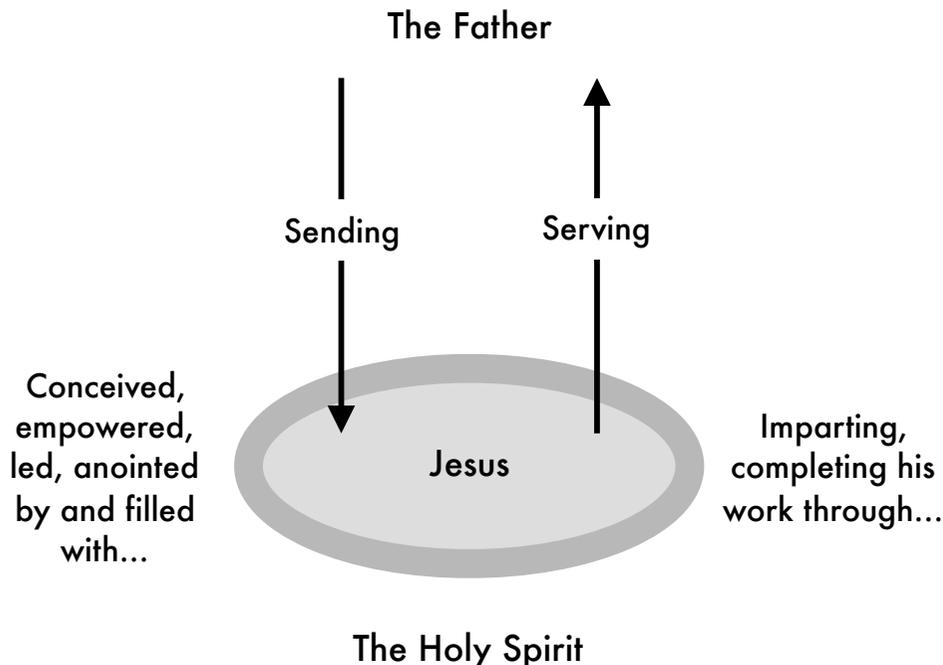


Eternal Generation and Temporal Mission

Two models for understanding the work of the Trinity in the economy

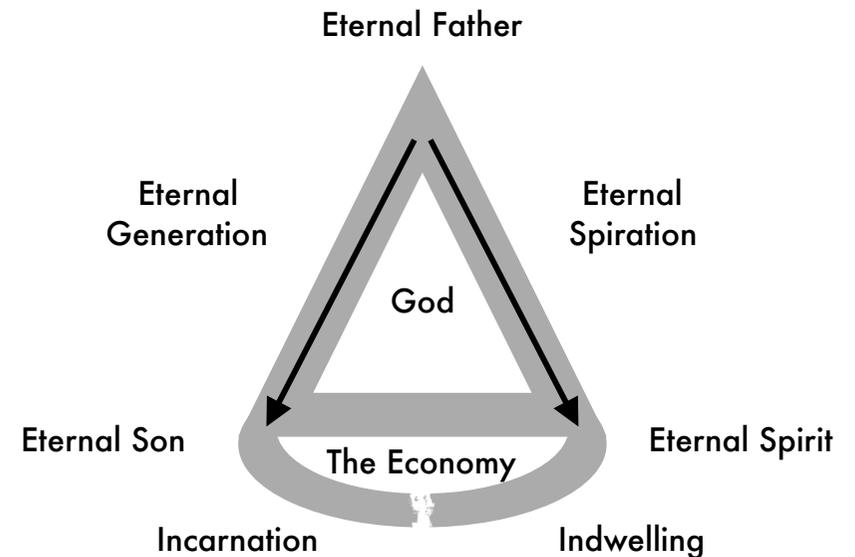
Centred on the Son

'As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."' (Matthew 3:16-17)



Centred on the Father

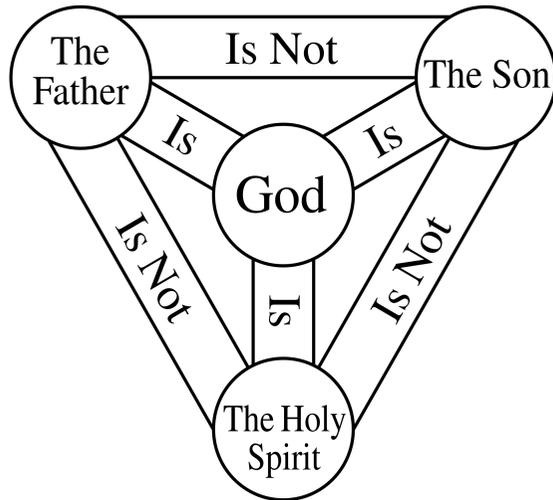
'It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor any one else, except the Word of the Lord... for God did not stand in need of these... as if He did not possess His own hands. For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things, to whom also He speaks, saying "Let Us make man after Our image and likeness.'" (Irenaeus on Gen 2:7)



Adapted from Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, p136 and 138

How (not) to Think About the Trinity

Biblical guidelines for correctly understanding the Trinity



'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made... And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets....'

(The Nicene Creed)

Attribute	Denial leads to...
DISTINCTION: God is three persons (Matt 3:13-17)	MODALISM: The Trinity is not distinct persons, but God acting in different 'modes' at different times. e.g. Father in the OT, Jesus in the gospels, Spirit in Acts onwards.
DEITY: Each person is fully God (Phil 2; Acts 5:3-4)	ARIANISM: Jesus was created and is therefore less than fully God. Teaching of Arius, condemned in 325 AD at the Nicene Council
UNITY: There is one God (Mark 12:29)	TRITHEISM: The Trinity consists of three different gods.

How (not) to Think About the Trinity

Are these metaphors helpful? If not, why not?

DISTINCTION:
God is three persons

DEITY:
Each person is fully God

UNITY:
There is one God

Egg	Water	Man
<p><i>"The Trinity is like an egg: three in one. Yolk, white and shell, yet still one egg."</i></p>	<p><i>"The Trinity is like water: it can be solid (ice), gas (steam), or liquid, but it remains H2O."</i></p>	<p><i>"The Trinity is like an man who is a Father, a Son, and a Husband, yet remains one person."</i></p>

'We worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence.' (Athanasian Creed)