

THE HOLY TRINITY

“In the doctrine of the Trinity beats the heart of the whole revelation of God for the redemption of humanity.”

Herman Bavinck

- God as one in essence and three in persons
- The doctrine of the Trinity shapes and structures Christian faith and practice in every way
- This doctrine distinguishes Christianity from every other world religion
- The Trinity is a dogma that gives shape to our worship and discipleship

REVELATION OF THE TRINITY IN SCRIPTURE

- The NT sheds new light on OT passages
- Theophanies (the Angel of the Lord)
- John identifies the Son as God, though distinguishing him from the Father (Jn 1:1-3)
- Paul describes Jesus Christ as the creator of all things (Col 1:15-17)
- Jesus accepted human worship and appropriated the attributes and actions reserved for Yahweh

REVELATION OF THE TRINITY IN SCRIPTURE

- The Bible also describes the Spirit as God
- Paul revealed that the Spirit was the one who, with the Father, “raised Christ Jesus from the dead” (Ro 7:11)
- Both the OT and NT describe the Spirit as possessing the name of Yahweh
- As the drama of redemptive history unfolds there is a progressive revelation of the triune God

POSTAPOSTOLIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

Early Trinitarian Debates

- Problem of the one and the many
- Origen – Son is subordinate to the Father in his essence
- Arius – the Son was the first created being
- Semi-Arians – the Son is of a *similar* essence to the Father, but not exactly the same essence

POSTAPOSTOLIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

- *homoousios* – “of the same essence”
- *homoiousios* – “of a similar essence”
- Sabellius (modalism) – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are merely “masks” worn by the one divine person
- Cappadocian theologians – *hypostasis*- *new term*- *underlying substance that is fundamental reality*
- *perichoresis* – the mutual indwelling of the persons in each other

POSTAPOSTOLIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

The Ecumenical Consensus and East-West Tensions

- The Eastern and Western theologians developed different conceptions of the Trinity
- Combating different opponents
 - East worried about modalism
 - West concerned about ontological subordination
- East-West consensus: “one in essence and three in persons”
- Council of Nicaea (325)
- *filioque* – Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son-and the Son* added in the 6th century
- Schism in 1054

POSTAPOSTOLIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

Modern Developments

- Enlightenment marked triumph of a Socinian, or neo-Arian, theology
- Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* revived interest in the Trinity
- Some say Barth emphasized the one God over the three persons
- The problem of the “one” and the “many” persists

POSTAPOSTOLIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

Views of the Trinity

- **Modalism/Subordinationism** – God is one person (the Father), manifested to us sometimes also as “Son” and “Spirit.” Subordinationists (and Arians) taught that the Son and the Spirit are inferior ontologically to the Father
- **Orthodox Trinitarianism** – God is one in essence, three in persons
- **Tritheism** – God is three persons, with no unity of essence

PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

- Trinity gives shape to Christian faith and practice
- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together throughout redemptive history
- Trinity central in our worship and baptism

“Christians throughout the ages didn’t just talk *about* the Trinity (which still, more often than not, happens today), but *to* the Father, *in* the Son, *by* the Spirit.” – Pilgrim Theology, p. 103

CREATION AND HUMAN PERSONHOOD

“Creation has within it the sovereign seriousness of God, who will not tolerate the violation of the terms of creation, which are terms of gift, dependence, and extravagance. For those who refuse the doxology-evoking sovereignty of Yahweh, creation ends on an ominous warning.”

Walter Brueggemann

- Anthropology is the doctrine of humanity
- In order to understand ourselves, we first must understand creation and providence

CREATION BY GOD'S WORD

- Biblical account of creation differs from pantheism and panentheism
 - Pantheism: nature = divinity
 - Panentheism: the divine (god or gods) is in everything but is still ontologically distinct
 - Bible- God does not need creation to exist
- Author is the triune God
 - Economically in creation, Father is source, Son is mediator, Spirit bring appropriate effects
 - Father speaks creation into being in the Son and by the Spirit

CREATION BY GOD'S WORD

- The source of God's creative act is loving freedom, not necessity
 - All of creation is contingent and temporal
 - Only God is necessary and eternal
 - God does not need creation to exist
- God's speech is the medium of his creative work
 - Creation is product of God's word, not an extension of his being
 - Creation neither a self-sustaining mechanism (deism) nor generates itself (naturalistic materialism)

PROVIDENCE

- Providence – God’s act of sustaining creation in his Son and by his Spirit
 - *ex nihilo* - ‘Let there be’- brought the world into being out of no preexisting matter
 - providence – God’s purposes are realized gradually without subverting the freewill of his creatures.
- KEY DISTINCTION
- Creation and providence are distinct
 - Collapsing them results in hypersupernaturalism (where every rustling leaf is seen as an act of God)
 - Concursus – the interplay between divine and human agency

PROVIDENCE

- Common grace – God’s general goodness to all creation- Experienced by all people
- Saving grace – God’s goodness on his people in justification and sanctification- Only experienced by God’s elect

- Christ is lord of all creation
- He rules the civil kingdom through providence and common grace
- He rules the church through his miraculous saving grace

TO BE HUMAN

Mapping Philosophical Options

- Platonist/Neoplatonist dualism
 - Dualism sees soul as real, pure, eternal self
 - Soul seeks liberation from bodily imprisonment
- Plotinus trichotomy – 3 rankings of cosmos and man:
 - *pneumatikoi* (“spirituals”)
 - *psychikoi* (“soulish”)
 - *sarkikoi* (“fleshly”)
- Monism – no distinction between body and soul

TO BE HUMAN

Contrasting Anthropologies

- **Trichotomy** – Humans are composed of spirit/mind, soul, and body (in descending rank)
- **Dichotomy** – Humans are composed of soul (synonymous with spirit or mind) and body
- **Monism** – Humans are strictly physical organisms
- **Mediating Views** – modified monism and duality-in-unity (distinguishes soul and body without ranking them)

TO BE HUMAN

Mapping Philosophical Options

- The great ontological distinction is between God and everything else (not spirit/mind and body/matter)
- Soul is neither divine nor evil
- Our souls will be integrated with our resurrected bodies

TO BE HUMAN

The Image of God: A Biblical-Theological Account

- Understanding ourselves as created to serve God
- Adam's ultimate goal – win for himself and his descendants God's everlasting Sabbath rest
- The *imago dei* constitutes a covenant relationship between us and God
- Image-bearers is not just something we *are*; it is a *public vocation*
- We are created as communal creatures (similar to the trinity)

TO BE HUMAN

“The uniqueness of humanity is a gift, not a given. Our true uniqueness can be discovered only in relation to God, as we understand ourselves to be covenantal servants and ambassadors, created to lead the vast choir of creation in its ‘Hallelujah Chorus.’”

Pilgrim Theology, p. 128

THE COVENANT OF CREATION

“The universe, as created, was only a beginning, the meaning of which was *not perpetuation, but attainment.*”

Geerhardus Vos

- Adamic Covenant- Gen 1-3 is much bigger than just about Adam and Eve
- *verbum internum* – natural law part of *imago dei*
- Makes all people accountable
- Depravity seeks to suppress this divine awareness

THE COVENANT OF CREATION

Ge 1-3 and Ancient Near Eastern Treaties

- preamble (Ge 1:1a)
 - historical narrative (vv. 1b-27)
 - stipulations (vv. 28-29)
 - sanctions (Ge 2:16-17)
 - covenant curses (Ge 3:14-19)
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- Structure is clear evidence of covenantal context

THE COVENANT OF CREATION

- Jesus as Second/Last Adam
- Christ completed the work that the first Adam failed to fulfill
- But we are not returned to Adam's state in the garden
- Christ achieved the eschatological goal that Adam failed to achieve
- After the fall, Adam and his posterity become corrupt office holders
- We still bear God's image, but are born corrupt

SOLIDARITY IN ADAM

Original Sin

- Adam the federal head/representative for all humanity in covenant of creation
- All creation was judged in Adam
- Imputation of Adam's guilt → imputation of Christ's righteousness (Ro 5)
- Pelagianism denies original sin (we are born in same state as Adam before the fall)
- Effects of sin are both legal (we are guilty) and transformative (we are corrupt)
- Original sin is a condition that affects us

SOLIDARITY IN ADAM

How Total Is Total Depravity?

- Need a distinction between natural and moral ability to avoid two extremes:
 - Manichaeian identification of sin with God's creation itself
 - Pelagian denial of total depravity
- Total depravity does not mean we are incapable of any civic justice or civic righteousness
- Total depravity – we are fallen *in all our parts*
- We still possess the image of God and the *natural* ability to relate to God and others as we should

STAY OF EXECUTION

- Our story of the fall concludes with a stay of execution
- Immediately after the fall God surprised them with grace (clothing their nakedness)

“The stay of execution opened up space within the history now defined by transgression and curse for the arrival of the promised redeemer and the gathering of a people who call on his name.”

Pilgrim Theology, p. 156

- The promise of entering his rest still stands (Heb 4:1)