

The Journey of Faith: Trinity, Faith, & the God Who is Love

Symbolon Course: The God Who Is Love

This course explores the fundamental Christian belief in God as a loving, relational, and Trinitarian being, and how this reality shapes human existence and the nature of faith.

Part 1: God's Loving Plan for Creation

Core Truths:

- **God's Perfection and Motivation:** God is **infinitely perfect and blessed in himself**. He didn't create humanity to increase His own happiness. Instead, He **freely chose to create us out of his own love and goodness** so that we could share in His blessed life (CCC 1, 293).
 - **Created for Love:** We were created by the God who is **love** and are made for His love. As **St. Augustine** famously stated, "**Our hearts are restless until they rest in him**" (CCC 27–30).
 - **God's Constant Invitation:** At every moment of our lives, **God draws near to us**, calling us to seek Him, to know Him, and to love Him (CCC 1).
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Part 2: The Mystery of the Holy Trinity

The One God, Three Persons:

- **Monotheism:** There is only **one God** (CCC 200–202).
- **The Trinity Revealed:** This one God has revealed Himself as a **communion of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit** (CCC 221).
- **God's "Inmost Secret":** By sending the Son and the Holy Spirit, God has revealed His "inmost secret"—that His very being is a **communion of love**. "God himself is an **eternal exchange of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit**, and he has destined us to share in that exchange" (CCC 221).
- **The Trinitarian Dogma:** The **Holy Trinity is Three Persons in One God**. We "worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance." The Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal (CCC 266).

Part 3: Faith: Our Response to God's Invitation

The Nature of Faith:

- **Response to Revelation: Faith** is our response to God who has made Himself known to us.
- **Two Key Aspects of Faith (CCC 150):**
 1. **Assent of the Mind:** An agreement of our intellect to all that God has revealed.
 2. **Personal Adherence:** A personal commitment to God in which we **entrust our lives** to Him.

Trinity In Scripture

Reference	Context	Observation
Matthew 28:19	The Great Commission	"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. " (This is the clearest New Testament command that affirms the three distinct Persons.)
Matthew 3:16–17	The Baptism of Jesus	The Son (Jesus) is baptized, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father speaks from heaven ("This is my beloved Son"). All three Persons are present and manifest at the same event.
2 Corinthians 13:14	A Final Benediction	"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (A common Trinitarian formula in Paul's epistles.)
John 14:16, 26	The Promise of the Helper	Jesus says, "I will ask the Father , and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth... But the

Reference	Context	Observation
		Helper, the Holy Spirit , whom the Father will send in my [Jesus] name..." (Shows the cooperative sending and relationship among the three.)
1 Peter 1:1–2	A Greeting to the Elect	"...chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father , in the sanctification of the Spirit , for obedience to Jesus Christ ..." (Demonstrates the distinct roles of the three in the process of salvation.)
Reference	Context	Observation
Genesis 1:26	Creation of Man	"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...'" (The plural pronouns "us" and "our" suggest a plurality of persons within the one God.)
Genesis 1:1–2	The Beginning	"In the beginning God created... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." (God and the Spirit are introduced immediately at Creation. The Hebrew word for God, Elohim, is a plural noun used with a singular verb, hinting at unity and plurality.)
Isaiah 48:16	Prophecy of the Messiah	"And now the Lord God has sent me [the speaker, understood as the Messiah/Son], and his Spirit." (A passage that clearly points to three distinct agents: the Lord God (Father), the one sent (Son), and His Spirit.)
Isaiah 6:8	Isaiah's Call	"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'" (Again, the Lord speaks using the plural pronoun "us.")
Psalms 110:1	Prophecy of Christ	"The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand...'" (A distinction between two "Lords" or divine figures, which Jesus later uses to refer to Himself and the Father in Matthew 22:44.)
Person	Reference	Affirmation

Reference	Context	Observation
The Father	John 6:27	"...God the Father has set his seal."
The Son (Jesus)	John 1:1	"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
	John 20:28	Thomas confesses to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"
	Colossians 2:9	"For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily."
The Holy Spirit	Acts 5:3-4	Peter tells Ananias, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to men but to God." (Equates lying to the Holy Spirit with lying to God.)
	1 Corinthians 3:16	"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (The dwelling of the Spirit is equated with God's dwelling.)

The theological background and formation of the doctrine of the Trinity is a story of three centuries of intense doctrinal debate, philosophical engagement, and systematic clarification, driven by the need to reconcile strict biblical monotheism with the divine identity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as revealed in the New Testament.

1. Biblical Foundation (First Century)

The doctrine's roots lie in the biblical revelation, not philosophical speculation, though the latter was later used to articulate it. The New Testament provides the raw data for the doctrine:

- **Monotheism:** Christianity inherited the strict monotheism of Judaism: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- **The Divinity of Christ:** New Testament writers clearly attribute divine qualities, titles, and roles (like Creator and Judge) to Jesus (e.g., John 1:1, Colossians 1:15-17).
- **The Personhood of the Spirit:** The Holy Spirit is depicted as a distinct divine agent, possessing intellect, will, and the power of God (e.g., John 14:26, Acts 5:3-4).

- **Triadic Formulas:** These reveal the distinctness of the three Persons in salvation and worship, most notably in the baptismal formula: "baptizing them in the name of **the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**" (Matthew 28:19).
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2. Early Church Articulation (2nd–3rd Centuries)

The early Church Fathers began developing technical language to explain these biblical truths, often using existing Greek philosophical concepts.

- **The Term "Trinity":** The word was first used by **Theophilus of Antioch** (late 2nd century, Greek: *Trias*). It was later articulated in Latin by **Tertullian** (early 3rd century) as *Trinitas* to explain God as "one substance [substantia] in three persons [personae]," which was a critical step in providing a coherent, non-heretical framework.
 - **Controversy and Defense:** The earliest theological defenses focused on refuting two main errors:
 - **Modalism (or Sabellianism):** The view that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are merely **three different modes or roles** played by the single God (like an actor wearing three masks). The Fathers insisted the Persons were truly distinct, not just names.
 - **Subordinationism:** The belief that the Son and the Spirit were divine, but **subordinate or lesser** than the Father, a view seen in thinkers like Origen, which paved the way for the Arian crisis.
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3. The Nicene Crisis and Creedal Definition (4th Century)

The doctrine was formally defined and established in response to the massive **Arian controversy**.¹³

The Arian Controversy

Arius, a priest from Alexandria, taught that the Son, Jesus Christ, was not eternally God, but was a **created being**—the first and greatest creation of the Father.¹⁴ His famous phrase was, "**There was a time when he was not.**" This position threatened the core of the Christian faith, as it meant a created being, not God Himself, was the Savior.

The Council of Nicaea (AD 325)

Emperor Constantine called the first ecumenical council to settle this dispute. The resulting **Nicene Creed** affirmed the full divinity of the Son, using the non-biblical but necessary term:

- ***Homoousios***: A Greek term meaning "**of one substance**" or "consubstantial" with the Father. This was the critical anti-Arian line, declaring that the Son shares the same divine essence as the Father, making Him co-eternal and co-equal.

The Council of Constantinople (AD 381)

The debate did not end in 325. It took further work by theologians known as the **Cappadocian Fathers** (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa) to clarify the relationship between the Persons. They refined the terminology to:

- **One *Ousia*** (Substance/Essence): Referring to the shared divinity—what God is.
- **Three *Hypostases*** (Persons/Distinctions): Referring to the distinct existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who God is.

The Council of Constantinople reaffirmed the Nicene Creed and explicitly **affirmed the full divinity of the Holy Spirit**, completing the Trinitarian formula that is recited in the Creed today.

The established doctrine of the Trinity is thus the theological understanding that God is **One *Ousia* in Three *Hypostases***—one divine essence shared equally by three distinct, co-eternal Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

