

The Trinity in the Gospel of John

LECTURE 3. INTRODUCTION TO THE TRINITY

ALEC & BELLE WATERHOUSE LECTURES

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Outline

- A. The Ontological and the Economic
- B. God the Father
- C. God the Son
- D. God the Holy Spirit
- E. The Unity and Order of God

A. The Ontological Trinity and the Economic Trinity

- We must consider God in his eternal relation to Himself as Triune and God in his temporal relation to world.
 1. *The Ontological Trinity* is a term which indicates God in Himself. Cf. “Immanent Trinity,” “Eternal Trinity,” “Essential Trinity,” “Triune Godhead.”
 2. *The Economic Trinity* is a term which indicates God in the way he works upon and relates to his creatures through Creation, Redemption, and Consummation.

The Ontological and the Economic

- Karl Rahner, in *The Trinity*, made a statement that became deservedly famous, but it has been interpreted variously: “The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa.”
 1. On the one hand, the statement is true. God acts out of who God is. Knowing how God acts help us understand who God is.
 2. Problems occur when someone makes God's actions toward creation necessary for his being.

B. God the Father

1. Ontologically, He is the One from whom the Son is begotten and from whom the Spirit proceeds.
2. Economically, He is the One from whom the Son comes and to whom the Son returns. He also sends the Holy Spirit into the world.

C. God the Son

1. Ontologically, He is eternally begotten of the Father.
2. Economically, the Father sent the Son into the world in order to save the world. He reaches his height of glory through his work on the cross and is raised from the dead. He ascends to the Father. He also gives the Spirit without measure.

D. God the Holy Spirit

1. Ontologically, He is eternally proceeding from the Father (and the Son).
2. Economically, He is sent to the church by the Son. The disciples will be baptized in the Spirit. He convicts the world of sin and judgment and righteousness. He will guide the disciples into all truth.

E. The Unity and the Order of God

1. The Equality of the Son with the Father
2. The Order of the Son with the Father
3. The Equality of the Spirit with Father and Son
4. The Order of the Spirit with Father and Son
5. Perichoresis

1. The Equality of the Son with the Father

“My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

John 10:27-30

- Note the Unity of Economy (“No one will snatch”) and the Unity of Being (“I and the Father are one”)

The Equality of the Son with the Father

“No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”

John 1:18 (NASB)

- Note the origin of relation. He is “the only begotten.”
- Notice the equality. He is “God.”
- Notice the eternal intimacy. He is “in the bosom of the Father.”

2. The Order of the Son with the Father

“You have heard me tell you, ‘I am going away and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.”

John 14:28

- Among the orthodox church fathers, the statement, “the Father is greater than I,” was taken in one of two ways. It can either refer to the Son’s relation of origin in his deity, or it can refer to the Son in his humanity. If one chooses the first option, one cannot say that the Son is any less God than the Father.

The Order of the Son with the Father and the Spirit

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

John 20:21-22

- Note that Jesus indicates that He has been sent by the Father.
- Note also that Jesus indicates that He has authority to give the Holy Spirit.

3. The Equality of the Spirit with the Father and the Son

“He [the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth] will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. Everything the Father has is mine. This is why I told you that he takes from what is mine and will declare it to you.”

John 16:14-15

- Notice the Father and Son own everything together. There is no qualifying the divine perfections, such as power, glory, eternity, immutability, etc. Cf. 17:10.
- Notice the Spirit has sovereign access to the same.

4. The Order of the Spirit with the Father and the Son

“When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me.”

John 15:26

- The Spirit is described ontologically as “proceeding” from the Father. This is the only clear text teaching the eternal origin of the Spirit. It grants origin to the Father.
- The Spirit is also described economically as being “sent” into the world by the Son. In 14:26, the Spirit is also “sent” by the Father.

5. Perichoresis

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.”

John 14:10-11a

- The preposition ἐν, “in,” is highly significant regarding the relation of Father and Son. “I am in” and “in me.”
- *Perichoresis* means “circumincession” or “mutual indwelling.” Some speak of the “divine dance.”

Perichoresis

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

John 14:16-18

- The Spirit will come to the disciples.
- The Son will thereby also come to the disciples.

Perichoresis

“After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”

John 14:19-20

- As the previous verses indicate, the Spirit will maintain the personal relationship of Jesus to his disciples.
- The Son has a personal relationship also to the Father.
- Through the mediation of the Son's humanity, the disciples have a relationship with the Father.

Perichoresis

“Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

John 17:5

- The relationship of the Father with the Son is one that has pre-existed creation itself.
- The relationship of the Father with the Son is one of being *παρά*, “with,” one another. This indicates their relationship is comprised of facing one another as persons in eternity.

Perichoresis

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”

John 17:20-23

Perichoresis

- Note three forms of unity in this text:
 - a. The unity between Father and Son is an eternal unity of being described as circumincession or *perichoresis*.
 - b. The unity between the Son and his disciples is a created unity of being. This unity occurs through his taking upon himself a common humanity with them and their union through the Spirit's regeneration with Christ in his saving work upon the Cross
 - c. The unity between believers is based on their common humanity in Christ Jesus and their common reception of divine grace in the Holy Spirit.