****

**The Trinity in the New Testament**

*by Fr. Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D., Loyola Marymount University*

Although the ***word***"Trinity" does not occur in the Bible, the theological ***concept***of the One God consisting of Three Divine Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is founded upon various New Testament texts. Christians have traditionally also seen the Trinity foreshadowed or alluded to in certain Old Testament texts.

**Terminology:**

* **God**
	+ In its generic meaning, "god" refers to any "divine being," at the highest levels of "spiritual" existence, beyond the ordinary physical (earthly, material) world.
		- Related words: deity, godly, divine, divinity, divinization
	+ Generic words for "God" in ancient biblical languages:
		- Hebrew *El* or *Elohim*; Greek *Theos*; Latin *Deus*
	+ Particular names and titles given to God in the Bible:
		- Old Testament: YHWH (the sacred name or *tetragrammaton*), El-Shaddai, El-Elyon, Adonai (Lord), etc.
		- New Testament: Father, Lord, Master, Creator, the Holy One, the Blessed One, etc.
* **Theology:**
	+ "Theology" (literally the "Study of God") is an academic field that attempts to understand and explain who and what God is, what God does, how God is related to the world and the human race, and other aspects of the divine or spiritual realms.
	+ ***Theism:***any system of theology that believes in God as a force or being in or related to the universe.
	+ ***Deism:***a system of theology that believes that God created the universe, but is no longer actively involved in the world; the creator set things in motion, but the universe is like a top, now continuing to spin on its own.
	+ ***Pantheism:***a system of theology that believes that divinity is everywhere, that the absolute or spiritual reality exists within all of creation, but not in a "divine being" somehow above or separate from the created universe.
	+ ***Polytheism:***a system of theology that believes in multiple gods, several divine beings, possibly inter-related (such as the families of gods on Mount Olympus in Greco-Roman mythology).
		- ***Tri-theism:***believing in the existence of three (separate) gods.
	+ ***Henotheism:***a system of theology that believes that multiple gods exist, but that one's allegiance and worship is due only to one God; thus it is polytheistic in belief, but monotheistic in practice.
	+ ***Monotheism:*** a system of theology that believes that only One God truly exists, and what other people may call "gods" are really no more than spirits (angels or demons) or idols (human creations or wood, stone, or other materials).
		- ***Trinitarian Monotheism:*** the Christian belief that there is only one God, yet this God consists of three distinct but inseparable "persons"
* **Trinity:**
	+ "Trinity" expresses the Christian belief that God is "***Three-in-One***"; that the *One God* (with one divine nature/being/substance) consists of three divine "*Persons*" (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)
	+ ***Constituent concepts:***Nature; Being; Substance; Person (for definitions, see a good theological dictionary)
	+ ***Related words:***Triune, Trinitarian, Trinitarianism, Trinitarian Monotheism
	+ ***Analogies:***
		- **St. Augustine**: Lover, Beloved, Love
		- **St. Patrick**: Three-leaf Clover
		- **Mathematics**: *three* points connected by *three* sides make ***one***triangle (not three triangles)
		- **Science**: H2O can be either *solid* (ice) or *liquid* (water) or *gas* (steam)
		- **Government**: Executive, Legislative, Judicial branches
		- **Theater**: One actor can play three roles (Gk. *prosopon*) in the same stage play
		- NOTE: No analogy is perfect, but some can help us to understand how something can be three-in-one

**Biblical Background: Basis in New Testament Texts:**

* **Connections between Father, Son, and Spirit:**
	+ **Matthew 28:19** (*conclusion of the Gospel*) - "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***..."
	+ **Luke 3:21-22**(*at the baptism of Jesus*) - "Now when all the people were baptized, and when **Jesus**also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, / and the **Holy Spirit**descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "**You are my Son**, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (parallels in Mark 1:10-11; Matt 3:16-17; John 1:32)
	+ **JOHN 14—16** (*Last Supper Discourse*) - The Holy Spirit, as the "**Spirit of Truth**" and the "**Paraclete**," is intimately related to the Father and the Son (see esp. 14:16-17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7, 13).
	+ **Galatians 4:4-7** - "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, **God has sent the Spirit of his Son**into our hearts, crying, "**Abba! Father!**" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God."
	+ Romans 1:3-4 - "the gospel about **his Son**, descended from David according to the flesh, / but established as **Son of God**in power according to the **spirit of holiness**through resurrection from the dead, **Jesus Christ our Lord.**"
	+ **Romans 8:14-17** - "For all who are led by **the Spirit of God**are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "**Abba! Father!**" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him."
	+ **2 Cor 13:14** (*concluding prayer of the letter*) - "The grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the communion of the **Holy Spirit**be with all of you."
	+ **1 John 4:2, 9, 13-15** - "By this you know the **Spirit of God**: every spirit that confesses that **Jesus Christ** has come in the flesh is from God... God's love was revealed among us in this way: **God** sent **his only Son** into the world so that we might live through him... By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of **his Spirit.** / And we have seen and do testify that **the Father** has sent **his Son** as the Savior of the world. / God abides in those who confess that **Jesus is the Son of God**, and they abide in God."
	+ **1 Peter 1:2-3a** - Peter writes to "who have been chosen and destined by **God the Father** and sanctified by **the Spirit** to be obedient to **Jesus Christ**and to be sprinkled with his blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!"
	+ **1 John 5:5-6**- "Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that **Jesus is the Son of God**? This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And**the Spirit** is the one that testifies, for **the Spirit** is the truth."
* **Connections between Father and Son, showing the divinity of Jesus:**
	+ **Matt 11:27** - "All things have been handed over to me by **my Father**; and no one knows **the Son** except **the Father**, and no one knows **the Father**except **the Son** and anyone to whom **the Son** chooses to reveal him." (parallel Luke 10:22)
	+ **John 1:1-18** - Jesus Christ as the divine word/logos, the light and life of the world, the "**only** [unique - Gk. *monogenes*] **Son**" of the Father
	+ **John 5:17-19** - "But Jesus answered them, '**My Father** is still working, and I also am working.' / For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also **calling God his own Father**, thereby **making himself equal to God**. / Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, **the Son** can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees **the Father** doing; for whatever **the Father** does, **the Son** does likewise.' "
	+ **John 10:30, 38** - "The Father and I are one." / "...the Father is in me and I am in the Father."
	+ **John 14:8-11a**- "Philip said to him, '*Lord, show us the Father*, and we will be satisfied.' / Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? / 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; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. / Believe me that **I am in the Father and the Father is in me**...' "
	+ **John 17:1b-5** - "**Father**, the hour has come; **glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you**, / since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. / And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. / I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. / *So now,****Father****, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed*."
	+ **Philippians 2:5-11** - "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in **Christ Jesus**, / Who, *though he was in the form of God*, did not regard *equality with God* something to be grasped. / Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, / he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. / Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, / that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, / and every tongue confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father**."
	+ **Colossians 1:15-20**- "**He is the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn of all creation. / For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. / He is before all things, and in him all things hold together./ He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent./ For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,/ and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven."
	+ **Hebrews 1:1-5** - Jesus is "**the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being**" (v. 3); "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are **my Son**; today **I have begotten you**'? (citing Psalm 2:7; repeated in Heb 5:5) Or again, 'I will be **his Father**, and he will be **my Son**'?" (citing 2 Sam 7:14)
	+ **1 John 1:3b** - "...truly our fellowship is with the Father and with **his Son Jesus Christ.**"
	+ **1 John 2:22-24**- "the Son and the Father" are mentioned together four times in these short verses.
* **Connections between the Father and the Holy Spirit:**
	+ **Luke 11:13** - "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the **heavenly Father**give the **Holy Spirit**to those who ask him!"
	+ **John 4:23-24** - "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the **Father**in spirit and truth, for the **Father**seeks such as these to worship him. **God is spirit**, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."
	+ **Acts 2:1-36** - The **Holy Spirit of God** is poured out on the disciples at the feast of Pentecost (see esp. 2:33).

**Allusions to the Trinity in Old Testament Texts (as interpreted by Christians):**

* **Genesis 1:1-3** - This first creation account not only mentions "**God**" at the beginning and the "**mighty wind**" (some translations read: “Spirit of God”) hovering over the waters, but God creates by *speaking words*, such as "Let there be light!"); Christians later identify the personified "**Word of God**" with Jesus Christ.
* **Genesis 1:26-27** - When creating humans, God speaks in the plural: "Let **us** make humankind in **our** image, according to **our** likeness."
* **Genesis 3:22a** - When expelling Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, God also speaks in the plural: "Then the LORD God said, 'See, the man has become like one of **us**, knowing good and evil...' "
* **Genesis 11:7** - Seeing the tower of Babel, God again speaks in the plural: "Come, let **us**go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech."
* **Genesis 18:1-22** - God appears to Abraham as three separate beings: "**The LORD**appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. / He looked up and saw **three men**standing near him..."
* **Isaiah 6:8** - When the prophet sees God on a throne, God speaks both in the singular and in the plural: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall **I**send, and who will go for **us**?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!' "
* The Old Testament often also speaks of **Father, Son, and Spirit**separately:
	+ ***God as Father:*** Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 89:26; Isaiah 9:6; 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4; 3:19
	+ ***God's Son:*** Psalm 2:7; 2:12; Proverbs 30:4; Wisdom 2:18; Daniel 3:92; cf. 7:13-14
	+ ***God's Spirit:*** Genesis 1:2; 6:3; Exodus 31:3; 35:31; Numbers 11:17-29; 24:2; 27:18; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Samuel 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:13, 14; 19:20.23; 2 Samuel 23:2; 1 Kings 18:12; 22:24; 2 Kings 2:16; 1 Chronicles 12:18; 15:1; 18:23; 20:14; 24:20; Nehemiah 9:20, 30; Job 33:4; Psalm 51:11; 104:30; 106:33; 139:7; 143:10; Isaiah 11:2; 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:21; 61:1; 63:10-14; Ezekiel 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 5, 24; 36:27; 37:1, 14; 39:29; 43:5; Joel 2:28-29; Micah 2:7; 3:8; Haggai 2:5; Zechariah 4:6; 7:12; 12:10; Malachi 2:15 (esp. in reference to the Prophets)
	+ ***God's Wisdom***(personified divine Wisdom is traditionally also connected with the Son and/or the Spirit): Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-12; Sirach 24:1-29; Wisdom 6:12-25.

**Unity and Plurality:**

How can God be both ***one***being and ***three***persons?
How can Christians both claim to be ***monotheists*** (believing in only **one**God) and also understand God as a ***triune deity***(a unity of three "persons": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)?
This only makes sense if one understands that there are different types of "unity" or "oneness"!
One must distinguish between "oneness as uniqueness, separateness, aloneness" in contrast to "oneness as unity within diversity."

* **Examples from common life:**
	+ ***One as absolute uniqueness:*** every human being has only one biological mother; every person has only one true birthday (one date on which we were born).
	+ ***One as unity of diversity:*** one human body is a unit consisting of many parts; one man can have multiple relationships (son, brother, husband, father, grandfather); one human family consists of several members;
	one nation includes many towns and cities; one universe is made up of many galaxies; etc.
* **Examples from the Bible:**
	+ Hebrew ***yachid*** means "*one and only*" in the sense of "unique" or "alone" or "lonely" (translated by Gk. μονογενής; *monogenēs*, lit. "only, unique"; or sometimes by ἀγαπητός, *agapētos*, lit. "beloved")
		- A person’s “one and only son” (Genesis 22:2, 12, 16; Proverbs 4:3; Jeremiah 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zechariah 12:10)
		- A person’s “one and only child/daughter” (Judges 11:34)
		- People have “one and only life” (Psalm 22:21; 35:17)
		- People who are “alone/lonely” (Psalm 25:16; 68:7)
	+ Hebrew ***echad*** means "*one in unity*" in the sense of "oneness with plurality" (usually translated by Gk. *heis/mia/hen*, the number "one"):
		- A man and woman become *one* flesh (Genesis 2:24)
		- All people spoke *one* language with *one* set of words (Genesis 11:1)
		- All humans are *one* people, having *one* language (Genesis 11:6)
		- Two ethnic groups intermarry and become *one* people (Genesis 34:16)
		- All the people answer Moses with *one* voice (Exodus 24:3)
		- A branch has *one* cluster of grapes (Numbers 13:23)
		- *One* assembly numbers 42,360 people (Ezra 2:64)
		- God gives all his people *oneness* of heart and action (Jeremiah 32:38-39)
	+ Most importantly, the great "***Shema***" prayer of the Hebrew Bible (Deut 6:4) uses the word ***echad***, not *yachid*:
		- "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is ***one***LORD" (KJV & RSV - more accurate translation)
		- "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD ***alone***" (NRSV & NAB - less accurate translation)