

Trinity: God is a Community of Love

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Date: 21 September 2014

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[0 : 00] As you know, last week we looked at Scripture. That's the best way to start in looking at any topic pertaining to our faith, looking at Holy Scripture.

Today, I want to not by any means leave Scripture behind, but to move on and, in a sense, see what the early Church did with Scripture.

And I'm going to give you sort of a question before the question time to deal with. You see up here, this is a very old picture of God the Trinity.

It's usually in Latin, God, Deus, is in the middle. Don't worry if you can't see it. It's just, again, it's just a little picture. I've seen this on altar cloths in Anglican churches.

And then there's a circle around the word God. And at the top is Father, Pater, Son, Filia, and then Spirit, or Spiritus Sanctus, often in Latin.

[1 : 13] And then you're told, strangely, around the circle that the Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Father. The Son is not the Spirit. The Father is not the Spirit.

The Spirit is not the Father. There's all these is not, non-est in Latin. But all of them point into the middle, into that mystery of God in the middle. And the diagram tells you the Father is God, est.

The Son is God, yes. The Spirit, Spiritus Sanctus, is God. God is Father. God is Son. God is Spirit. Now the question that you'll be able to ponder and answer for me, is the talk from last week and the talk from this week, do they really end up with that diagram?

Is that diagram really, does it accurately tell us how to think, if you will, about the word God? We spoke last week about thinking about what the word God means.

[2 : 22] What does the word God mean? The Bible answers that question in a very deep sense. Not for all, my friends, writes Gregory of Nazianzus.

He was a fourth century church father. Gregory of Nazianzus. The church fathers often have names that we're not familiar with. But he writes again, not for all, my friends.

No, not for all, my friends. Not for all is it to philosophize about God. Since the subject is neither simple nor lowly.

He writes, and then he continues, not for all, nor before all, or not at all times, he says, nor on all themes, but rather before some at some times.

Then he says, thankfully, and with some bounds. He's aware that thinking about the Trinity is difficult. Is philosophizing about God, as he says, is difficult.

[3 : 34] And it should be done with reverence and with care. And with an appropriate approach that's good in the life of the church. So here we are, some of us in the church at this time.

And we're just going to talk about a few today, a few Trinity themes. I hope that Gregory, our brother in Christ, would approve.

He seems to have been a wonderful Christian man, Gregory. Gregory, with some bounds, as he said, might, as the saint said, might mean a lot, in fact.

With some bounds. He's, Gregory thinks it's important to think about the Trinity with some bounds.

Another Christian philosopher, a fellow named James Smith, James K.A. Smith, would tell us that, properly understood, if he was with us this morning, he would want to emphasize this.

In thinking about the Trinity and thinking about any aspect of church doctrine, we are doing a socially based knowledge, is the fancy language amongst philosophers and sociologists and others.

[4 : 59] We're doing a socially based knowledge. We are, Scripture tells us, we are contingent. We are created knowers.

And knowing, or knowing as Christians certainly, is a kind of permissioned, that's not the philosopher's words, that's mine, it's a kind of permissioned gift knowledge.

God has given us the gift of knowing him this much in Holy Scripture. Here's who I am, says God. Your thoughts about me are futile.

Well, here's who I really am. Know me this way. It's a gift. We are contingent knowers. We receive knowledge.

Trinity knowledge is certainly a gift knowledge. It's a high honor for us as creatures to know this about God. It's a gift.

[6 : 01] Given from the Father. In his Son it is given to us. It's informed in the church, in the Christian, by the Spirit. So here, if anywhere, we learn, we come to know together.

The church came to know the people of God, what the word God means together. And it's an ongoing project that the church lives with.

So before we begin, the church fathers, all of them would agree, always start, always start with prayer when you approach this holy ground called God the Trinity.

So let me just lead us in a word of prayer. Lord, we thank you for the privilege of gathering together again as the people of God. And we thank you that you have spoken to us in your Son, Jesus.

And that in him, by the power of your Spirit, you are leading us into knowing you more and more.

Help us again, Lord, as we do this happy task, to do it reverently and seeking always to be instructed by you, your word, in your Spirit.

[7 : 19] And this we pray in the name of our Savior, Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Early Christianity, as you know, it's kind of a common sense thing to realize, but it's good to be reminded perhaps.

Early Christianity was very urban. It happened in cities, which is kind of where else would it happen. That's where the folks were, most of them.

Early Christianity, urban. Early, as in, say, 100 to 700 A.D. That's a lot of early.

But early is a relative term. Just in passing, it's interesting to note, didn't know this until the other day, pagan has come to mean someone outside the bounds of the church, not Christian.

Pagan, etymologically, at its root, it means a person from the country. A rural person. That's what a pagan was in Roman discourse.

[8 : 24] As church numbers grew, again, this is a story that we all know so well. Church grew and some usual things happened.

Ignorance was probably quite rife in the church. It always has been. It's always a need to push back against that. There was a second generation inherited faith that was just passed on to people.

That was very much present in the church and all the difficulties that that brings. Sometimes it brings blessings. There were cold hearts, undoubtedly, in the church. Positions of church leadership were often fought over.

There was a kind of opportunism. The usual kind of sinful things started to swirl in the life of the church. And, of course, the faith grew ever so much when Constantine, the first Christian emperor, made our faith the official religion of the empire.

So, as we all know, again, as we all know, if you know the basic outline of early church history, in places like Egypt, in Syria, I believe very much so in Palestine, some Christians fled the city, fled the urban environment, and became solitary contemplatives.

[9 : 40] You know this story. The first church protest movement, really. A desire to rekindle, as they sought, the real thing.

Let's get away from this compromised, mushy, big city religion. Go out to the desert, rediscover again the real thing. And soon, these solitaries formed communities.

Inevitably, you find it very difficult to be a Christian alone in a desert. It's hard to be a Christian alone anywhere. So, these solitaries formed communities, the very first monastic foundations.

And then, church authorities in the cities usually asserted, at the very least, the kind of patronage over these communities. Probably a good thing in the long run.

Keep the church at least together in some sense. Make sure that authority is recognized. Keep the unity of the church going. And someone, I think, very beautifully has called these first gatherings, solitudes in community.

[10 : 50] They were solitaries, really. He uses the word solitudes. I like that. It has a nice touch to it, feel to it. Solitudes in community. Again, I find that kind of lovely.

Is not the church really composed of solitudes, each of us as an individual, with others? Solitudes with others. We, each of us, we are in God's image.

And we have names. It's important that we have names. We are persons. We are persons in communion.

That's how it's meant to be with people, according to the gospel, one would think. This is how we're meant to be. Or so we have come to believe in the church, certainly.

People are persons in communion. We are all this mystery, one way or the other. Persons. How did persons come about?

[11 : 51] Here's a brief, a very brief overview of it. Because there is one high, all-powerful sovereign from which we have all come.

Equally, if you will, we are from this high, powerful sovereign. Even lesser authorities over us, and goodness knows, you run into them all the time, for good or for ill.

There are political authorities over us. Parents are authorities given us when we're children, guardians. All sorts of powers or authorities over us.

They possess an authority, you see, relativized by this supreme, most high authority. They have their authority because it has been granted to them.

And crucially, the understood nature, the character, the ways, the desires of the high supremacy will determine over time, the entire stance, the ethos, the character of everything else, including those lesser authorities.

[13 : 15] It's the kind of cosmos that we live in. It just works this way. So we have become persons, or we can give up our personhood if we want.

There's nothing necessary in the cosmos that says you have to be understood to be a person. We are all persons. We are all, we have all become dignities in the world by being persons.

And again, we became persons because a high supreme authority has a certain character that grants to us the status of person, the dignity of person.

Ideas become incarnate sooner or later in the world. They become social realities more or less. Ideas, beliefs carry with them intuitions.

Ideas and beliefs carry hidden presuppositions which unfold in time. And the carriers of these ideas may not know all that they mean.

[14 : 30] I've never thought how delightful that is. We all probably hold beliefs, but we don't yet know all what they thoroughly mean. That undoubtedly happens. The ideas contain powers that turn sometimes even against the carriers of the power and then challenge them hopefully into deeper realities about what you already believe.

Again, this is the way ideas unfold in history apparently. It appears as if that's what happens. How strange this drama may be. A Christian would see it, perhaps I would see it, as the strange ways of providence with humans in history.

It's the way God is unfolding the mystery of history. Early Christianity, those first early centuries referred to earlier, it was undoubtedly a carrier of ideas into the world.

It was a drama of ideas, the early church. It was many things other than that, but it was never less than a drama of ideas.

A drama that worked out, again with many other things in its life, but a drama that worked out in terms of very simple things.

[16 : 00] How are we going to say our faith? The church had to work out how it was going to say the faith. How are we going to say it?

How are we going to talk about scripture? How are we going to talk about Jesus? How shall we speak about his nature?

How shall we speak about his work? How shall we speak of this one in scripture called the spirit? What is spirit?

What is the nature and the work of spirit? And jumping right along here, in a sense, summarizing all of this, summarizing all of this work, how shall we speak about our faith to the world, to ourselves? Summarizing it all, the church worked out what the church has come to understand as her Trinity confession.

[17 : 07] I was at communion this morning at 7.30, and this liturgy is just saturated with Trinity confession.

Over and over and over again, this work has been woven into the way the church speaks, the way we sing, the way we pray, the way we do liturgy, the way we talk about God, what's hammered out in Trinity confession.

God is Father. God is Son. God is Spirit. Spirit. One God in... Oh, what a story there is hidden in that metaphor.

In. In? Nevertheless, one God in... Three Persons. Blessed Trinity. Have you sung that recently? God in three Persons. Blessed Trinity. The church has learned to speak this. This is how it prays. How it confesses. It took time to work out how to say the faith.

[18 : 21] Trinity discussion, Trinity analysis, does appear, for sure, for many, and it is very understandable.

It appears remote at times. It does appear a bit unreal. Our creator reduced to a circle surrounded by some painfully obvious Latin that we all learned in about grade nine.

Non est. Est. Deus. Imagine God reduced to a picture. There it is. The fathers of the church, or the leading thinkers in the church, is how we would call them today.

There was the odd mother in this drama. It's good to remember. But they've come to be called the fathers of the church. The leading thinkers were well aware of this abstractness, this remoteness of a lot of the language that they found themselves resorting to.

Athanasius. Are you familiar with that name? I bet you are if you've heard it here and there. There's a creed named after him in the prayer book. It's one of my favorite church fathers. Very interesting man.

[19 : 40] An Egyptian fellow. Athanasius simply loved the chief biblical pictures of Jesus. Jesus, the light of the world, he delights to speak of.

Jesus, the manna from heaven. I am the bread that came down from heaven. More, Jesus, the stream of living waters.

And supremely, Jesus, the temple. Jesus, the temple of God. The temple contained manna, bread.

The temple was lit by symbolic numbered candles of light.

The temple had a cleansing water in it for baptisms. The temple where persons meet with the reconciling God.

He loved the temple picture of Jesus because it contained, if you will, these other, what he considered the chief words about Jesus. Light, bread, water.

[20 : 50] He obviously read John's gospel a lot, Athanasius. This is Jesus. This is Jesus. Yes, this is the way the church loves to speak of him. This is Jesus, the God-man.

Destroy this temple, said the Lord. And in three days, I will raise it up. I am the bread of the temple. The light of the temple. The living water in the temple.

Athanasius loved this living, breathing, earthy, if we dare use that word, a language about our Lord. Jesus, the temple, filled with the Spirit of God.

The Spirit. The Spirit is the condition for knowing these things. You know you're in the temple because the Spirit of God is there, seeking out the deep things of God.

And as we talked about last week, teaching us to say, Abba, Father. So, in the light of that, if Athanasius, when he preached, when he visited other preachers and taught them how to preach, Athanasius was a great teacher in the early church.

[21 : 57] Why the refinement? Why the complexity? At times, the rather painful intellectual subtleties of Trinity talk.

And the answer is, we're going to race through this in very speedy terms this morning. Lots of time for discussion. The answer is, and again, you know this. It's often said, but should be said.

The answer is, in large part at least, because of the threat of deep distortion or heresy in the church. Yes, indeed, the church and those big urban centers drew a lot of people in.

A lot of dubious people probably found themselves in teaching positions. Distortions would creep in. Sloppy theological talk would creep into the life of the church.

And it would become, at times, dangerous what Christians were saying. So, the church had to figure out certain ways of saying things and decide that there were other ways of saying things that we're definitely going to say no to.

[23 : 07] As painful as that might be for some. That's why it gets a bit complex. It might even come down again to funny pictures. Here's the way we're going to talk about God around here.

Got it? The church had to get down to business about some things sooner or later. The rest of this little talk, remembering Gregory's very good advice about sticking to, keep it bounded.

Don't try to say too much. We're just going to focus on two things, two themes. And then, again, we'll have a lot of time for discussion. I hope.

What time is it now? I don't know. I think. Formally, I want to talk about this. What is the difference between is, since we have mentioned it getting a bit complex and refined, I want to do that a bit. It's great fun. What is the difference between, I bet you were thinking about this before breakfast. What is the difference between is and like? Ah, yeah, okay.

[24 : 15] I know, you know the answer, but keep it to yourself for now. That's the first issue. What's the difference between saying that something is and something's like something? What's the difference? And second, is it helpful to distinguish between being and identity?

Ah, got that? Another thing you probably talk about frequently. Two issues, two themes. Just want to race through these, which will give us a picture of the early church and how it thinks through Trinity issues.

About 150 A.D., a pagan writer, a pagan now in the usual sense. He wasn't from the country. I'm sure he was very much an urban fellow, a very sophisticated urban fellow, and a pagan, as I say. About 150 A.D. His name was Celsus. He's, again, a real philosophically minded fellow. Says that the main idea that these Christians live by and what they teach, he says, is this idea of Trinity. That's at 150 A.D. That's 150 years and more before Nicaea gathers. A pagan says, I've listened to these. He knew Christians. He knew sophisticated Christians who were philosophically minded people.

[25 : 31] And he said, yeah, their big idea is Trinity. Trinitas. That's their big idea, the Christians. The reflective Christians, who if you ask them a bunch of questions about what they're believing and teaching throughout the empire now, well, he heard them talk, and he said, yeah, their big idea is Trinity.

Trinitas. Very early, you see, this summarizing word, Trinity, was in circulation. May we guess why? Well, here's a guess. This refers back to the church getting its language distorted and somebody saying, we've got to straighten this out. What if a preacher or a teacher or a writer of hymns, very early on, the church had poets, hymn writers, very smart people who came into the church, very gifted people.

Our faith started to abound in its expression. What if one of these preachers or teachers or writers of a hymn or a poet or someone publicly praying says directly or indirectly implies that the Jesus, that the center of our Christian attention is precisely, let me tell you, brothers and sisters, he is just like God.

Jesus is like God. I'm going to tell you the first thing. What's the difference between is and like? Jesus is like God. Jesus, you see, therefore, if we think that through and thoughtful pagans would think it through, very serious-minded Christians would think this through, you see, Jesus is not simply and without remainder God.

[27 : 13] No, no, no. He's like God. Jesus is not simply and without remainder God. would be the claim.

The precise way of saying this, if you like precise ways of saying things, is the precise question would be, is there an ontological equivalence between Jesus and God?

Is Jesus just exactly God? Period. Period. An ontological equivalence. Ontological means being, how you understand what's really there.

Words about being. Is there an ontological equivalence between Jesus and God? That would be, as we talked about last week, God with a capital G, the real God, the infinite, unfathomable, unthinkable mystery behind all things.

Yes. Scripture calls God Father. Well, Athanasius weighs in. We're really going to race through this too quickly. But, you'll get again a picture, a taste of this kind of unfolding in Trinitarian talk in the early church, broadly understood.

[28 : 36] Was the Father, Athanasius asks rhetorically, what a gift some of the ancients have with rhetoric. Was the Father ever without a son?

Asked Athanasius. You call God Father, there must have been a time when he didn't have a son, eh? You people who say that he's like God, but he's not just God.

There must have been a time when, was he without a son? Asked Athanasius. Was the Father without his word, and therefore was forever silent?

Without wisdom, and therefore, oh, Athanasius could be daring. If he was without his wise son, was he an idiot? What does it mean to say that Jesus is like God?

Was there ever a time when he wasn't? Oh, then when you pose and press that question, the people who said that Jesus is like God said openly and clearly, yes, there once was a time when he wasn't.

[29 : 44] Ah, so Jesus is not God. The church had a decision to make. Does, does the spirit of this son, is he able to search out the deep things of God if he's not God?

Exhaustively? You know, that takes us back to Paul. Paul, when he speaks of the spirit in 1 Corinthians, speaks of the spirit seeking out the deep things of God.

Was he the spirit of a son who isn't God? Think of the implications here. Ideas, as was noted earlier, may have hidden implications.

They have hidden presuppositions that will, over time, work themselves out. They will. There are institutions on Oak Street that worked out the implications of saying that Jesus is like God. They were sincere people who said that. He was the highest and most blessed and most beautiful of all God's creatures. And the church said, no.

[30 : 59] He is God. An idea will unfold and it will reveal previously unthinkable things.

Trinity thought begins to say this, there may be in God, think of the hidden presuppositions that lurk inside of Trinity thought.

It becomes beautiful and magnificent. There may be in God, in the final unthinkable mystery of God, the uncreated one, the unfathomable one.

The early church was quite agreed that God was unfathomable. He was unthinkable. In God, there may be, there is, in fact, both identity, he is God, and difference.

And this difference difference is not less than God. That is almost unthinkable, but that's what our faith confesses.

[32 : 03] God is identity and difference at the same time. Arius, a great Christian leader and teacher, a contemporary of Athanasius, taught that Jesus was the creature most like God.

He was like God. He could not, Arius, he just would not believe that divinity could contain difference and remain simply, without remainder, divinity.

If something came from God, it must be less than God. So thought Arius. Arius. Oh.

Athanasius just kept thinking God is love because he has eternally been a relationship of love.

He didn't start to love when he decided to create another. He had always been love because the other had always been there.

[33 : 09] the other is eternal. A deep thought is hidden away in Trinitarian thought. Gnostics, another group that the early church had to deal with, they were a group of religious folk just abounding in a love of religious language and mystical ideas.

You can meet them in coffee shops in Vancouver every day. And I thought it is funny but it's also true. you meet them everywhere. People who just love mystical spiritualities.

They're always going to be attractive. They'll never be a shortage in a marketplace for religion. We don't have to worry about it. They thought quite movingly of deity as the fullness.

They called God fullness. Not a bad thing to call God at all. The word is pleroma. That's not a bad way to refer to God. The fullness. Why would anybody object to calling God the fullness?

Well here is why the early church very much objected to the Gnostics. The Gnostics thought they had to think that whatever comes from the fullness comes from the fullness was necessarily less than the fullness.

[34 : 35] fullness. It had to be just something less than what it came from. The Gnostics thought of Jesus as a very high but a lesser God than the fullness.

They loved Jesus. They were high on him. They really liked him. He's great. But he's not God. He comes from God.

Therefore he can't be God. He's less than God. That's what the Gnostics in a very hyper religious way got to the same conclusion as Arius did in a much more intellectual way.

The Gnostics thought of Jesus as just less than God. Just as did again did Arius. Jesus was again like God but he was not God.

This is all quite well known of course. This was the drama that the early church and all sorts of different contexts different players involved in these disputes.

[35 : 39] That's essentially one of the big things they were dealing with. How do you speak about God and how do you speak about Jesus and if you speak about Jesus this way that means you're going to talk about God this way.

And Trinitarian talk summarized all these disputes. So when these issues were in the minds of the people who gathered at Nicaea in 325 AD the church gets around to saying of Jesus that he is this was very much an Athanasius inspired language he is Jesus is light from light.

Jesus is God from God. Jesus is begotten not made.

We say that all the time at St. John's and it's a good thing we do. Some people say oh how unreal that is it doesn't warm my heart. That's okay.

Let it speak to your mind. It has hidden powers in it and those are gospel powers. The spirit the church has been witnessed to by the spirit and wants us to say things like begotten not made.

[37 : 00] If he was made there once was a time when he wasn't. Athanasius said if Jesus isn't God when he tells us that our sins are forgiven he might be wrong because he doesn't exhaustively know the mind of God because he's not God.

If he's God he can say your sins are forgiven on the day of judgment there is no God that will hold you in debt to him any longer. If Jesus is not God he cannot make that promise.

Athanasius says he is God and the church got it right at Nicaea. He is God from God.

God this is a wonderful mystery of divinity. Jonathan Edwards I love it calls God a fugue.

Not just a music that's obvious and commonsensical he's a fugue. He has his identity and difference at the same time. And that is a mystery that the mind should adore not turn its back on.

[38 : 18] Sorry I can't handle that. I must move on to this being identity thing. Just one more Trinity confession word that's very important there.

The Holy Catholic Church as we call ourselves in the Creed believes that Athanasius for an example speaking of Jesus as temple Jesus as light Jesus as the bread that came down from heaven Jesus as the one who brings us the spirit that resides in the temple this is exactly the same as speaking of Jesus as one substance with the father.

Nicaea baptizes Greek thought and Greek vocabulary and makes it a servant of Jesus Christ. It is faithful to Holy Scripture.

There it is. That's what the church believed. Every thought made captive to Jesus. So what about this being? I have a being.

I'm a being. And I also have an identity. I have a name. I can tell you who I am. That's my identity. I have a being, a nature, and I also have an identity.

[39 : 39] Is there anything in these ideas to help us understand what is happening when the church thinks trinity thoughts. I think very much so.

It's very helpful. I think to focus on the difference between nature and identity is illuminating, is very illuminating. The difference, of course, is really quite simple.

As I say, I have a nature. You have a nature. You have a human nature. But you also have an identity. Your nature, in a certain sense, can step out of itself and say, my name is, what is your name?

You have an identity. Where do you live? Who are your parents? What do you do? What is your story? That is your identity. You have a being, you also have an identity.

Does God have a nature? Well, of course, the early church thought about this so much. Does God have a nature? Is God necessarily something, in other words?

[40 : 46] Well, it seems we must answer yes. God, with a capital G, has a nature. The church just kept looking at scripture and saw that, yes, God has a nature.

For instance, God is infinite. God is everlasting. One of scripture's favorite words for God. The Bible insists that God is everlasting.

God is immortal. Most high. You notice, are you a reader of the Old Testament? I'm sure you are, is frequent in the Bible.

Scores of uses of the word most high. Israel's writers understood this most high. For scholarly details, see me after.

I can show this. Richard Bauckham and others have shown this. Israel's writers, both biblical and outside of scripture, understood this term most high not as a comparative term, but as a confession of infinite uniqueness.

[41 : 58] And the scriptures say most high God. They mean incomparable, utterly, utterly beyond all comparison.

The cultures surrounding Israel thought of God, thought of divinity as a static perfection.

Perfection, they thought, is changeless. Well, that's very interesting, and it's very interesting to note that the faith of Israel would see changelessness as a moral attribute.

Isn't that interesting? Isn't that difference between, there is a cultural difference between Greek thought, ancient Greek pagan thought, and biblical Hebrew thought. God's changelessness is that he's utterly reliable.

If he makes a promise, he'll keep it. He's changeless. changeless in his faithfulness. And that, again, would highlight the difference between nature and identity.

[43 : 07] The God of the Bible, racing right along here, I want you conversation. The God of the Bible, the God of Israel, the God being pondered in Trinity talk, is a God who has revealed first and foremost his identity.

Isn't that a I find that so helpful. God didn't come to Israel and say, I'm infinite. No, he comes to Israel and says, here's who I am.

To Moses, I am. Let me tell you who I am, Moses. I have an identity. Nature is revealed.

But identity is the very first thing that you get to know about anything. Identity, now you begin to realize why the Bible is the way it is.

Identity is revealed through action. Identity is revealed in a narrative. Think of the Bible. It's not like a philosophy book, is it?

[44 : 17] It's a story book. God is the God who acted in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He revealed himself to Moses, gave Moses the law.

He spoke through prophets. And in this faithful action over time, his nature began to be revealed. Just the way it is with a friend.

You get to know someone, you get to know who they are. And you get to know, are they reliable? Are they this way? Are they that way? And as they reveal their identity, their nature begins to be revealed.

That's the way our God did it. He is so good. He is so gracious that he reveals his identity, and then he says, are you getting to know my very nature?

Are you getting to know me? So when Irenaeus and Augustine and Athanasius and a good many others looked deeply at scripture as we race towards the end, they saw this God revealing more, more about himself, in a way astonishing to contemplate.

[45 : 38] This Trinity stuff didn't happen by accident. More of his identity is now on display in Jesus. the early church concluded.

He's not like God, he is God, and God is saying, here's who I am, just get to know me. Trinity talk is gospel talk, really.

What an astonishing revelation this is of God's complexity. identity. This identity displays word, son, spirit, as integral to what the word God means.

That's the heart of Trinity revelation. The divine as changeless, it seems, the divine as changeless was the difficulty in the way of seeing God as one God in threefold relation.

That was the difficulty that the church was confronted with. Again, Trinity confession is Bible thought, is Hebrew thought, as Augustine said, looting the Egyptians.

[47 : 00] Christians. You know, you know that story of how Augustine loved the Bible. When Israel left Egypt, she took some of Israel's loot along with it.

The philosophers had been thinking, Augustine was convinced, under the providence of God. The church can use some of their ideas to highlight what the Bible is saying and meaning.

Hebrew thought, Bible thought, healing, baptizing, Greek thought, making it a servant of the gospel. That's what the early church wanted to do and successfully accomplished.

The God of Israel was inherently open to a further work of identifying himself. That's what the gospels presuppose.

God became a man in Bethlehem. In Jesus crucified and risen in, as we looked at last week from Galatians, in the gift of the spirit of the son, the God of Israel has done just that.

[48 : 12] What? He has identified himself as this God. I am one God and I come, I am three. I'm not apparently three or I take on a different identity for certain purposes.

He is three, a perfect community of love. One community of love. He is this complexity, he's also this great simplicity.

One God, three ontologically distinct mysteries, and yet one. That is God, the most high God, is this God, known by his people, known by the church uniquely as such.

God is Trinity. That's how the church knows God. There's no other God of the gospel. That's why these battles have pretty well defined who's who throughout all of history on the church scene. The ones who are willing to say Nicaea, walk, in the gospel. When you turn your back on these great confessions, the gospel begins to dwindle away.

[49 : 32] It dissolves into mere individualism, mere spiritualism. It has no center. It has no identity. There it is. What is the time now?

I should find two. I wanted to, I don't know if this helps to, just as we close, to, I always find this helpful.

I don't know if other people do or not, but this is just to get your mind into some questions. I've done this before at Learners Exchange. There are two views of the world. I had Harvey announce today there's two views of the world.

This is the first view of the world. You can ignore those two lines. They mean nothing. They just mean that the view of the world that was dominant in pagan antiquity, dominant, I think, everywhere, in all cultures, at all times, is that reality works like that.

There is something, quote, at the top, and then everything unfolds down to the nothing, the almost nothing. It's a continuum, would be the fancy, precise, philosophical work of understanding.

[50 : 45] That's the way all of reality works. For the Gnostics, it was the fullness up here, then the fullness, started to drip out down to the very bottom of almost nothing.

The Bible uniquely, as I understand it, says that is not the way it is. No, and the church fathers were very much aware of this elemental issue.

Elemental issue was at stake here. The biblical view of the world is like this. Got it? There you go, in case you needed a picture.

This is even simpler than that picture. Above the line is God. Above the line is God, and below the line is everything else.

That's reality. That's what the Bible tells us reality is, and to miss that is to go through your life in a cloud of at least biblical unreality. it is.

[51 : 48] Everything above the line is God. Everything below it is not. Archangels, cherubim, seraphim, if we heard from Jim this morning at 730, if that was a creature by which God revealed himself, that creature is below the line.

God is utterly, infinitely, unthinkably unique. He is utterly other than anything. He's different than space, time, anything.

And what the church was deciding in all these battles that were so confusing and filled with politics is a very simple question. Is Jesus above the line or below the line?

The Aryans and the Gnostics all put Jesus somewhere, see, in a continuum. But therefore, Jesus is not above the line, therefore, the Jews would be right if Jesus is not above the line.

You Christians are idolaters. You worship a creature. When you worship Jesus, you only worship God. You don't worship archangels.

[53 : 02] You may honor and venerate and hold in high regard many things below the line, but you do not worship them. If you worship them, you're an idolater.

the early church decided that he is God from God, light from light, very God of very God, begotten, not made.

That means he's above the line. And you can worship Jesus. You can fall down and confess him, my Lord and my God.

And you are not an idolater, you are worshipping God. God. When you worship the carpenter from Nazareth, you are worshipping God. If he's on a continuum here, everything changes, everything is wrong.

Religion becomes mythologine, Athanasius called it, human speech about God. Mythologine, mythology, we get that we got.

[54 : 05] It's not theologine, which is God's speech about God. Everything just turns on these simple confessional differences. The Bible is God telling us about God.

It's this one view. The Gnostics and the Aryans would have turned Christianity somewhere on this continuum picture of the world. And we'd be just, as many liberal Christians want us to be, just one more religion of the world, with our guesses about what God might be like.

We're not in touch with God from God, light from light, very God of very God. Everything just turns on what these guys decided.

Were they the true readers of Scripture? The Holy Catholic Church, that would be us. We say they read Scripture truly. That's why we say these creeds when we stop, we'll probably filter over into the continuum model of religion.

And we'll become something other than the church. What a mouthful. Wow. That's 700 years of battle and thinking, all in 45 minutes or whatever.

[55 : 24] It's ridiculous really. But I should say a word of prayer. After all this God talk, we need to compose ourselves again. And then please, conversation.

Our God, we thank you that you are God. And that we, as your creatures have been called into the high honor of beginning to get to know you, and we will do this forever.

We will peer down into vistas of mystery and glory. And you have revealed what that vista and mystery is. God, the blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, thank you, Lord, for the honor of knowing these things about you.

Help us to live in them faithfully. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.