

4. Concerning God

A. PBCC Statement

There is but one true God, who eternally exists as three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who share in the work of creation, maintenance of the universe, sovereign control of history, redemption of believers and judgment of angels and mankind.

[Gen 1:1; Isa 40:15-17, 22-24; Matt 3:16-17; John 1:1-3; 1 Cor 12:4-6; Eph 4:4-6; Col 1:15-20]

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1)

- ¹⁵ Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as the dust on the scales;
behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.
- ¹⁶ Lebanon would not suffice for fuel,
nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.
- ¹⁷ All the nations are as nothing before him,
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness...
- ²² It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;
- ²³ who brings princes to nothing,
and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.
- ²⁴ Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows on them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble. (Isa 40:15-17, 22-24)

¹⁶And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matt 3:16-17)

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1-3)

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. (1 Cor 12:4-6)

⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:4-6)

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15-20)

I. The Trinity

Distinguish between ontological and economic Trinity:

- **ontological** (Gk *ōn* being): who God is eternally.
There is but one true God, who eternally exists as three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit...
- **economic**: how the triune God works.
who share in the work of creation, maintenance of the universe, sovereign control of history, redemption of believers and judgment of angels and mankind.

A. Biblical Statements

1. OT: monotheism

The Shema: Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (Deut 6:4).

2. NT: foundation for Trinitarian theology

- Jesus' baptism: Spirit's descent and Father's voice from heaven (Matt 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:21-22).
- Baptismal formula: 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. (Matt 28:19)
- Benediction: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor 13:14)
- Greeting: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. (Rev 1:4b-5a)

NT church called Jesus Lord (*kurios*, OT used for God *Yahweh*); worshiped the risen Lord Jesus without compromising monotheism.

B. Development of the doctrine of the Trinity

1. Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty... And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord... I believe in the Holy Spirit.

Not yet a need to develop an ontological Trinity.

2. Nicene Creed

The Trinity was defined at the first two ecumenical councils in response to Arianism ("there was a time when the Son was not"), which was condemned.

- First Council (Nicea, 325) affirmed the full deity of Christ. Nicene Creed, v.1.
- Second Council (Constantinople, 381) affirmed the full deity of the Holy Spirit. Nicene Creed, v.2.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

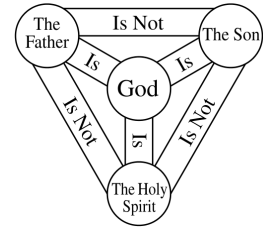
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father, by whom all things were made...

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]*; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified...

4. Concerning God

3. The Athanasian Creed

The Trinity was more fully defined in the Athanasian Creed (Latin c. 400); later represented by the Shield of the Trinity (*scutum fidei*, shield of faith).



Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinities, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.

C. Ontological Trinity

God is Three in One: one being (Gk *ousia*, Lat. *substantia*) but three persons (Gk *hypostaseis*, Lat. *personae*). The Son is of one substance (*homoousios*), not of like substance (*homoiousios*), with the Father. The Son is eternally *begotten*; the Father has always had a Son, his only-begotten, his beloved. The Spirit eternally *proceeds*: from the Father to the Son and back to the Father.

1. God is Love

The love between the Father and the Son through the Spirit is the engine which drives everything.⁵

Metaphors:

Augustine: **Love**

“There are three things—the lover, the loved, and the mutual love” (*Tres sunt, amans, amatus, et mutuus amor*). (*De Trinitate* 9.2)

Bernard of Clairvaux: **Kiss**

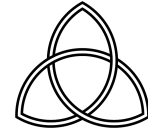
“If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.” (*Sermons on the Song of Songs*; sermon 8)

5. See Bernard Bell, “In the Beginning God,” sermon on Genesis 1:1a; #1563, PBCC, Jan 6, 2008.

2. God is relational

Perichoresis (Gk), coinherence; the interpenetration of the three members of the Trinity. The Divine Dance.

Participation: they fully participate in each other, while remaining distinct.



Triquetra:
symbol for the Trinity

3. God is self-satisfied, self-fulfilled; has no need of anything.

Aseity (Lat. *a se*, of himself).

D. Economic Trinity

God always acts as a triune God: the Father acts through the Son by the agency of the Spirit.

The Son and the Spirit are God's Two Hands (Irenaeus).

- Creation: God had no need to create a universe (aseity), but did so freely as an expression of love. Created through the Son (the eternal Word) and the Spirit.
- Incarnation: the Father through the Spirit sends the Son into the world he has made.
- Consummation: God has made the world and humanity to participate in the divine happiness.

How God thinks of us is not only more important [than how we think of God], but infinitely more important... It is written that we shall "stand before" Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can scarcely sustain. But so it is.⁶

6. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*.