

The Origin and Mission of the Son (John 3:16; Philippians 2:5-11)

The name “Trinity” is not mentioned in Scripture. Writers of the New Testament first provide the language of the Trinity, then the creeds and confessions give the grammar of the Trinity. While the Trinity is not mentioned, the Trinity has eternally existed.

John of Damascus (8th century theologian): the Trinity is “one essence, one divinity, one power, one being, one authority, one dominion, one sovereignty, made known in three different *subsistences* and adored in one adoration, united without confusion, and divided without separation.”

The Trinity exists in three modes of subsistence (hypostasis): paternity (Father), filiation (Son), and spiration (Holy Spirit). The one essence of God eternally wholly subsists in three undivided, yet distinct persons, as each person is a subsistence of the one, undivided essence.

Heresies that emerged by the fifth century:

- A. Arianism: the Son was created (begotten) before creation. Consequently, He cannot be consubstantial, infinite, eternal, immutable, and impassable.
- B. Triplicity/Tritheism: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons (as God) who share the same nature as three separate persons would (Peter, Paul, and Patrick).
- C. Sabellianism: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are merely three ways in which the one God revealed himself.

The Trinity as Who He is and how He relates to His creation:

A. Immanent (relations) Trinity:

- Refers to Whom the Triune God is in eternity, apart from the created order. This is also called the ontological Trinity. It refers to God’s being, His essence. This is Who God is. It cannot be exhausted by the economic, nor is it governed by the economic. This is the hidden depths of God’s fulness that He alone knows, partially (though naturally) revealed through (though not constituted by) the economic trinity.
- B. Economic (external missions) Trinity:
- Refers to how this triune God acts towards creation and the created order. This is His external operations or missions (ad extra). It is the triune God concerning the created order. While it follows the immanent, it does not constitute it.

*Both the immanent (relations) and economic (missions) Trinity are the same Trinity. These two terms merely explain Who God is and how He relates to His creation in time and space.

1. The Eternal Generation of the Son (John 3:16)

What makes a Father a Father, and what makes a Son a Son?

Creaturely Generation:

- Son: by definition, a son is the proper offspring of conjugal relations between a man and woman, or from adoption. A son’s “origin” is from his biological father and mother. All generation communicates the begetter’s nature to the begotten. The begotten becomes like the begetter and partakes in the same nature.
- Father: by definition, a father begets, or adopts a son. Only in the begetting does the biological father pass on his nature and essence.
 - A human father, by definition, becomes a father when he begets. There was a time when that father was not a father. He became a father in time.
 - A Father loses part of his substance in the process of begetting and gains a son through that same process of begetting.

- While the nature of the begetter is passed to the begotten, they are not the same essence or substance. Both the begetter and the begotten have two separate wills and two natures.
- The Father’s eternal begetting of the Son:
 - The Son, as consubstantial with the Father, is coequal, coeternal, one in substance, essence, and nature, yet distinct in subsistence (personhood).
 - There was never a time when the Son did not exist, as He is eternally the Son.
 - The Son is begotten (not made) from the substance of the Father, yet not after the same manner as mankind. The Father, by begetting (one of a kind) His Son in and from eternity, passed His whole nature and substance upon the Son, with the only distinction based on origin from that procession: eternal from eternal.
 - Eternal generation does not undermine the Son as coequal and coeternal. In begetting the Son, the Father begets the Son immutably (without changing) and impassibly (He is not subject to emotional fluctuations/suffering). In the Father’s begetting, He neither loses nor gains, for it is an eternal generation.
- The Father was the Father, and the Son was the Son before the incarnation. The Son is the Son eternally, and the Father is the Father eternally. The Father is not the Son’s creator, but the Son’s Father. The one essence is communicated through eternal generation from the Father to the Son. The Father can do this because, as the Father, He has not received the essence from anyone else. He has the divine nature from Himself.

2. The “Emptying” of the Son (Philippians 2:5-11)

This incarnation is known as the *hypostatic union*: the union formed in the incarnation by the hypostasis of the Son in assuming human nature.

A. Christ Jesus was in the form of God (v.6):

- Christ Jesus (Son) is one with the Father (John 10:30) and the very form of God as God (v.6). Paul describes the Son’s unity and equality of substance with God (as God).

B. Christ Jesus emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (v.6-8):

- While the Son is one with the Father (John 10:30), the Father is greater than the Son (John 5:27) only in the Son’s economic activity.
- As God, the Son remained truly God in the incarnation. The human nature (flesh) that He added to His nature was the self-emptying (*kenosis*). The Son, in assuming upon Himself human flesh, added a human nature, unexperienced before. This “self-emptying” was also the Son’s refusal to exploit His deity as God in the flesh.
- The Son, as a man, learned obedience through what He suffered (Heb. 5:8). The mission of the Son was obedience toward the Father which He never experienced before.
- Servanthood (v.7) entails humility and obedience. The Son did not experience obedience prior to the incarnation because the Son has always possessed the same will, nature, and essence (*ousia*) as the Father. Obedience, servanthood, suffering, and death are what God incarnate (the Son) experienced through the union of the divine and the human will (*hypostatic union*).
- Obedience does not constitute the Son’s eternal relation: it is only through the incarnation. The Son is not an obedient servant eternally: He is the obedient, suffering servant only in redemptive history. God’s sending and giving of His Son (John 3:16), and the Son’s subsequent humble obedience (Phil. 2:8) is experienced through the created (economic) order.

The Son’s economic relations do not constitute His immanent relations. The suffering and submission of the Son are not to be projected back to the immanent. How God acts in history is not to be projected back to Who God is in His essence.