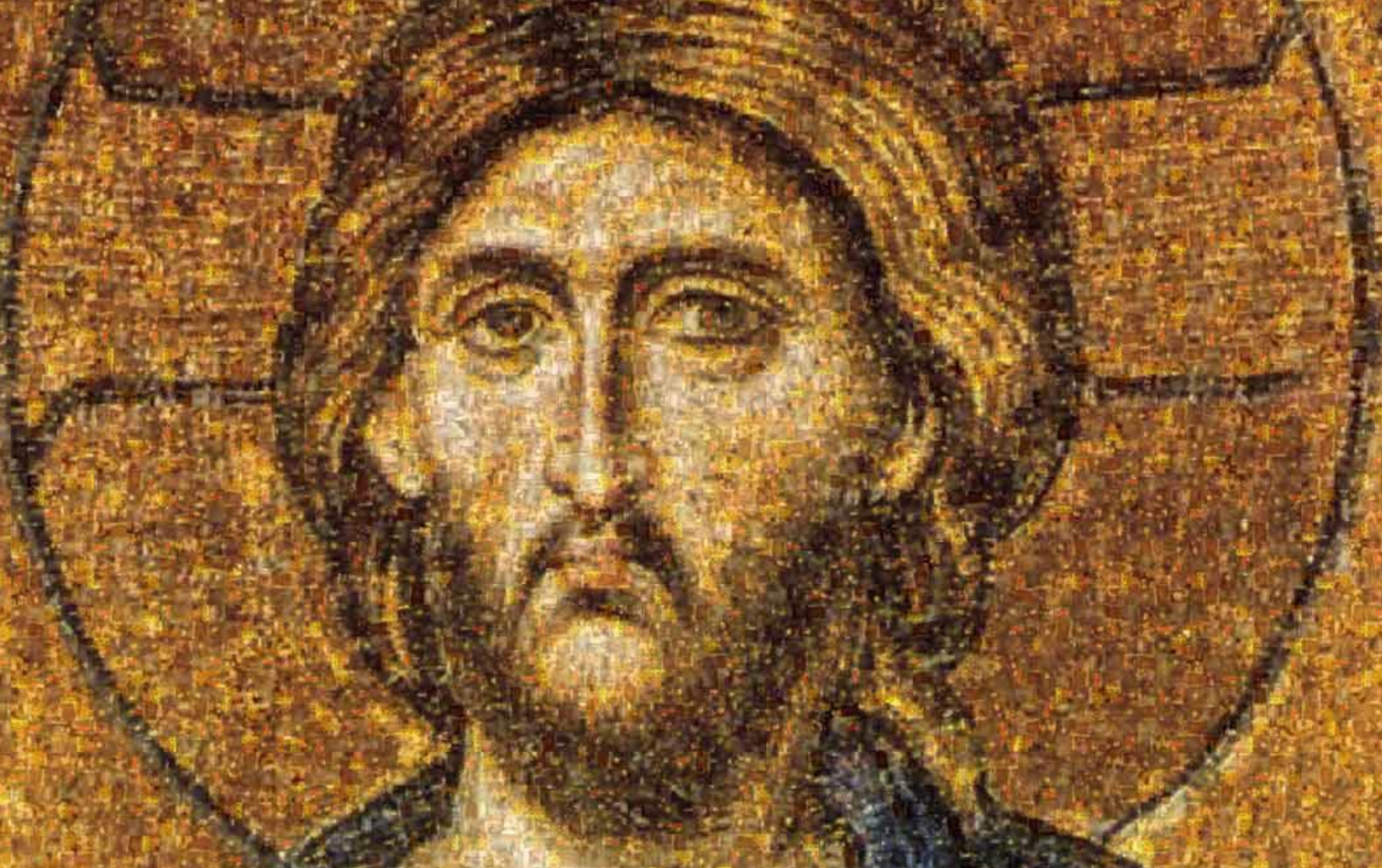


CHRIST'S MISSION AND PERSON IN ITS TRINITARIAN ASPECTS



Who is Jesus in the Trinity?

- Preliminary notes about the Doctrine of the Trinity
- Part 1: Jesus' Mission
- Part 2: Jesus at the Council of Nicaea

Presuppositions

1. To understand the mission and identity of Jesus, we must follow him in faith and discipleship. Only then is blindness overcome.
2. Jesus' mission has to do with his solidarity with us as sinners.

Goals for today

1. Why is Jesus unique or important for us?
2. How do we understand Jesus' relationship to the Father?
3. The Church has two main confessions about the person and identity of Jesus, particularly as he relates to the Father: the Nicene Creed and the Formula of the Council of Chalcedon. How do these professions of faith relate to the New Testament? How do we get from Jesus of Nazareth to the Triune God of our Faith? *[Today, we will only cover the first part of this]*

Preliminary Notes about the Doctrine of the Trinity

If I were God ... *Red Carpets, please!*



The Trinity is the fullest expression of the Church's understanding of who God is and what God has done for us in Christ.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is “the substance of the New Testament,” it is “the greatest of all mysteries, since it is the fountain and origin of them all” (Pope Leo XIII, *Divinum illud munus*, no. 3).

“The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the ‘hierarchy of truths of faith.’ The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men ‘and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., no. 234).

Quotes continued ...

“The fullness of our happiness, beyond which there is nothing else, is this: to enjoy God the Trinity in whose image we were made” (Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 1.8.18).

“The whole of our life bears fruit and comes to achievement in the knowledge of the Trinity” (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk I, dist. 2, exposition).

“The Kingdom of God is the knowledge of the Holy Trinity” (Evagrius of Pontus, *The Praktikos*, ch. 3).

Part 1: Jesus' Mission

- a. Jesus' Mission as connecting *who Jesus is* with *who God is*.
 - i. Because Jesus *is* his mission, his mission started before his earthly existence.
 - ii. This means that Jesus tells us something about *who* God is. For Christians, *who* God is is tied to *who* Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us.
- b. This understanding of Jesus' Mission explains the different starting points of the New Testament.
 - i. Virgin Birth Starting Points (God as Jesus' Father)
 - ii. Incarnational Starting Points (The eternal Word of the Father/ Son of God becoming flesh)
- c. Expressed in the baptismal mystery of the faith
- d. Important aspects of Jesus' Mission:
 - i. Jesus is the embodiment of the Father's love.
 - ii. The Father entrusted the Son with the task of saving the world.
 - iii. The *key* to Christian interpretation: "*He is what he expresses—namely, God—but he is not whom he expresses—namely, the Father.*"

a. Jesus' Mission connects *who Jesus is* with *who God is*.

1. Jesus is his mission. His existence in the world is the unfolding of his mission.
2. If Jesus is his mission, then Jesus' entire life is a divine self-gift. His mission entails that he comes into the world. This mean that he was sent *into* the world, and must have existed outside and before it.

Jesus describes his whole life as coming “from above” (Jn 4:31), “from heaven” (Jn 4:32), “from the Father” (Jn 16:28), and he enters into the depths of the earth and of human experience, by becoming the Son of Man (Jn 8:28; Mark 10:33); and this is done in order to return from these depths to the place of the Father, when his mission of proclaiming and sharing the Father’s love for the world is accomplished (Jn 3:13; 6:32; 16:27ff.; Cf. 1:51). Jesus says, “I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father” (John 16:28).

After his resurrection, Jesus ascended to the Father “from which he came.” It was on the basis of Jesus’ mission which entailed that he *came* from the Father and *returned* to the Father that the incarnation was understood.



This means that Jesus tells us something about who God is. For Christians, *who God is* is tied to *who Jesus is* and *what Jesus has done for us*.

The early Christians, in depicting the life of Jesus on the basis of the experience of his mission, which entailed coming into the world and returning to the Father who sent him, attempted to give expression to his unique origin from the Father in different ways.

The Virgin Birth

In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, for example, his unique origin was given expression through the virgin birth. Jesus' biological father was not Joseph, but was the One who sent him, whom he would later call "Father."

Incarnation

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.



Incarnation Continued

And the Word became flesh

and made his dwelling among us,

and we saw his glory,

the glory as of the Father's only Son,

full of grace and truth. ...

From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. *The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.*

(Jn 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18; italics mine).

Incarnation (Philippians 2)

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.



Summary of Part 1. a-c.

In Jesus' life, we see both sides of his one story: his human side and his divine side. On the one hand, Jesus was hungry, was tempted to sin, grew in stature and wisdom. Jesus even wept. But he was also entrusted with the whole task of saving the world, and was sent into the world by the Father in order to save it. And only God can bear the weight of the world. Only God can save us.

And so he is not only called "Son of Man" "Son of David" and so on, but also "Son of God" and "My Lord and my God" and "Savior" and so on. The eternal Son of God truly became flesh in Jesus Christ, without ever ceasing to be the Son of God. His body is truly God's body. Jesus' beating heart is truly the beating heart of the eternal Son of God. In Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God suffered for us. It is into this mystery that we are baptized when we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Important aspects of Jesus' Mission

1. Jesus is the embodiment of the Father's love.

What does this mean?

- Jesus is not God's henchman.
- The Father is not far from us.

John 14:8-11

At the last supper, before Jesus was handed over to death, Philip asked him,

“Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? 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 speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves.” (John 14:8-11).

What kind of logic is this??

The Logic of Self-Giving Love

The Father loves his Son. And the Son's existence derives from the Father, and the Father's love. And so when the Father sends the Son into the world to share his love, the Son is mirroring the Father's own gift of his life for his Son. The logic becomes clearer when Jesus says: "As the Father loves me, so I also love you." How does Jesus love us? By giving his life for us. The Father loves the Son and gives his life to him. The Son mirrors the Father's love and makes the Father's love present to us by giving his life to us. It is only by seeing Jesus as embodying the Father's self-pouring love that we can understand how Jesus can say that the Father is "in" him and that he is "in" the Father, and that anyone who sees him has seen the Father. Jesus' presence in the world is like a stained glass window. The Father's love shines through Jesus into the world. And the *same* love with which the Father loves his son is the *very* love with which he loves us.

It is as if the Son, looking into his eternal Father's eyes, says:

Father, you have loved me for all of eternity. You have given your life to me. You have poured yourself to me. And I give myself back to you, Father. And our creation, which we have made out of this very love which we share, has turned away from us, Father. As we have known from all of eternity, I shall go to them, and the love with which you love me shall be poured upon them. I shall become one with them, so that the very love that you give me shall be in them. Your very life, Father, which you have given to me, I shall now give to them. By giving them my life, I am giving them the life that you have given me. You send me, Father, because you have given me all that you are and all that you have. You have loved me with all of you. For this reason, you have "handed all things over to me" (John 11:25-7), because you have given me all of you. And so I shall go to them. And when they see me, they shall see you.

Jesus' final prayer before he is handed over to death:

I pray not only for [my disciples], but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them” (John 17:20-6).

Summary of Jesus' Mission as Embodiment of the Father's Love

It is precisely this logic of love that the author of the letter to the Hebrews intends to describe when he writes of Jesus that he is the *refulgence* of the Father's glory and the exact *imprint* of the Father's very being" (Heb 1:3).



SANCTA TRINITAS VNVS DEVS

Important aspects of Jesus' Mission

2. Jesus's Mission is to Save the World.

Thus far we have seen how Jesus' mission shows us that he was sent by the Father into the world and is the embodiment of the Father's love. But why was he sent into the world? What is the purpose of this sending?

The task of his mission is to save the world.

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk 19:10; cf. Lk 12:49). Jesus says that it is *necessary* that he suffer (Mk 8:31). In fact, it is the reason why he came into the world: “For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). The Father, as we have already seen, pours himself into his Son, and the Son, in turn, pours himself into the world. The Son is therefore entrusted with the entire responsibility for the world’s salvation (Cf. John 5:22-30). The task of the Son is to reveal and share the love of the Father. The Son’s task is to embody the Father’s love.

Christian *key* for interpretation

Jesus *is* what he expresses---namely, God---but he is not whom he expresses---namely, the Father.

This not only applies to understanding Jesus' relationship to the Father, but our relationship to Jesus. This is why discipleship is about bearing *witness* to Christ. Since *we* are what we express---namely, the body of Christ---but we are not whom we express---namely, Jesus.

Part 2: Jesus at the Council of Nicaea

- a. The Role of Dogma as Preserving the Scriptural Mystery
- b. The Problem: Jesus' relation to the Father
 - i. The Position of Arius (Preserving God's Transcendence; the Father was before the Son)
 - ii. The Position of Athanasius (Christ as God's self-gift)
- c. The Council of Nicaea
- d. What difference does this make ultimately?



Part 2. a. The Relationship of Dogma to Scripture

- Does dogma evacuate the mystery of Scripture?
- Can the Christian mysteries be expressed in language that is non-biblical? Such as the philosophical language of “being,” “essence,” “substance,” and so forth?

Arius

- Word of God was not truly God but had the title only as an honorific. The Word is, rather, a creation of God, the very first and greatest creation, but still a creature created from nothing and not Creator, not truly divine.
- Why? ---- Because God would not be God, since:
 - God would either be divided, one part “Father” and one part “Son”
 - Or else, there would be two Gods.



“We know one God – alone unbegotten, alone everlasting, alone without beginning.”

“God is thus before all as a monad and a cause. Therefore he is also before the Son”

(Arius, *Letter to Alexander of Alexandria* in William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*)



Arius Argued:

In view of his future obedience even to the point of death, the Word of God is given the *honorific title* “Son of God” at his baptism, and honored with the title of God himself after his resurrection.

Arius's View

Father = God, as Monad (One)

FIRE WALL BETWEEN GOD AND THE WORLD.

Word of God = greatest
Creature, received title of “Son
of God” honorifically.

Can he ever say that the Son of God is God's self-gift to us?

Controversy erupted between Arius and his Bishop, Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria



We believe in one God, Father, all-sovereign, maker of all things seen and unseen; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father as only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, *homoousios* with the Father, through whom all things came into existence, the things in heaven and the things on earth, who because of us men and our salvation came down and was incarnated, made man, suffered, and arose on the third day, ascended into heaven, comes to judge the living and the dead; and in one Holy Spirit.

(“The Creed of the Synod of Nicaea” in William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*)

“consubstantial with the Father”

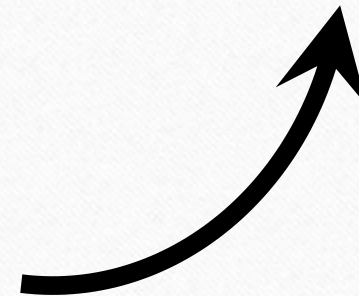
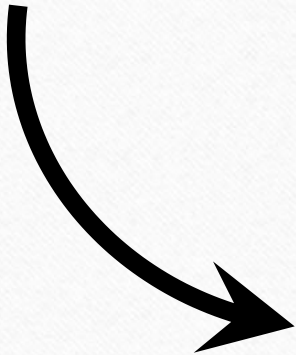
“*homoousion to patri*,” that is, “of one and the same essence with the Father.”

The Son was
sent by the
Father into
the world...

Consubstantial / Homooousios
claims that Jesus' Mission begins
with the Father himself. It
reaches all the way to the level of
God's own life and existence.

... and then
the Son
returned to
the Father
from which
he came.

In this space is where we understand
his incarnation, birth, life, death, and
resurrection.



The Question: Can a non-scriptural word such as *homoousion* or *consubstantial* be used to clarify the meaning of Scripture?



Athanasius, a protégé of Alexander who was present with him at the Council, and who succeeded him as bishop of Alexandria in 328

Scripture's deepest and most consistent teaching, according to Athanasius, is that the mystery of the Person of Jesus is a mystery of divine self-gift.

Summary of Scripture for Athanasius

The phrase: “*for us and for our salvation.*”

What does this mean? KEY: If Jesus is *one with God*, then his entire life is a self-gift. His whole life is his *mission for us and for our salvation*. By saying “homooousion” or “consubstantial,” we are saying that Jesus himself gets nothing out of salvation, but that salvation is for us. His entire life, from birth to death to resurrection, is a divine gift for us and for our salvation. If he gained the title “Son of God” as a *reward*, as Arius thought, then his life is not a complete self-gift, since he gains something out of it too.

“Obviously he himself in no way improved the flesh – rather, he himself (the Arian Christ) through it was improved” if “he did not have from the beginning the name Son,” if “he had it as a prize for works and progress – a progress not other than that which he made when he became man and took the form of a slave [Phil. 2.7]. If he has [truly] descended to effect the improvement of that which needed improvement,” that is, if he has descended to save us, *for us humans and for our salvation*, then “he did not have the title of Son and God as a reward” (Athanasius, *Orations Against the Arians*, in William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*)

“The invisible one, a lover of humankind, shines forth through his kindness” and, through “love of humankind,” (*philantropea*) himself comes to deliver us.

(Athanasius, *Orations Against the Arians* in William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*)

God as Trinity

- What mattered most to Arius: not to compromise God's transcendence by dividing him into three parts. And we agree --- which means *no Shamrocks!*
- On the one hand, there was the need to develop a way of speaking of the three persons in God in order to do justice to the Scriptural account of the Father sending the Son, and the Son sending the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts. On the other hand, if salvation is truly God's self-gift, then we must also develop the language to understand these three persons as one God. It is only in this delicate language of the Trinity that we truly understand Christ as the self-gift of God.
- The word "person" was chosen to indicate that there was more than one "someone in God," namely three. But "persons" were not defined as we would define them today; they were defined *solely in relation to each other*.

“the Father is the name of the relation in which the Father is to the Son or the Son to the Father”

(Gregory of Nazianzus, *3rd Oration* sec. 16)

The Significance of the Council of Nicaea and these Trinitarian Debates

The doctrine of the Trinity is the doctrine of a God who can enter into true and loving solidarity with his creatures and has done so in the fullest and most complete way in Christ. Thus Gregory of Nazianzus's claim that anything less than the doctrine of the Trinity not only does not help us understand "Who is Jesus?" according to the Bible, but it **"makes void the Gospel,"** and, by reducing the transcendence of God to what can be discovered by human logic and reasoning alone, **"declares the nullification of the cross"** (3rd Oration, sec. 21, allusion to 1 Cor. 1.17). The true teaching of Scripture is of one so loving that **"He is sold, and at a very low price – thirty pieces of silver – but redeems the world, and at a great cost: his own blood"** (ibid., 20).