



# Theology Corner

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*Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation*

## “Is the Holy Trinity Just a Mystery?”

I have heard many people over the years say that there is not much we can discuss about the Trinity outside of the fact that it is a great mystery of the faith. I have even heard homilies on Trinity Sunday start out jokingly that the sermon will be a short one since we cannot explain a whole lot about the Trinity other than the work of the Son in the Person of Jesus Christ, or the Person of the Holy Spirit. I think that this mentality is a bad one because once we know that some essential truths about the Trinity can be known, we are able to: 1) Avoid falling into heretical beliefs, 2) Become better defenders of the faith to those who deny the existence of the Trinity, and 3) We can develop an understanding of God that changes our whole outlook on how God operates in the world.

The vast majority of us know that by the word “Trinity” we are referring to the three persons of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But what exactly does this mean? We profess a belief in “One God”, but also three distinct persons in the one Godhead. Isn’t this irrational? Some may think this, but we have to be careful to understand that there is a difference between something being above reason and something being *against* reason. For example, we can know by reason that God exists because we can reason from known *effects* in the world (i.e., things that we know exist in the real world) to the *cause* of these things. In other words, we can come to know the existence of God from his acts of creation in the world. However, we cannot, by reason alone, come to know the internal life of God that we cannot experience directly. This is why we might say that the Trinity is *supra-rational* (above reason). But it is not *irrational* because there is nothing contradictory about it. It is only *seemingly* contradictory if we have an improper understanding of what we mean by saying that there are three persons in one God.

First off, it is helpful to realize that this is not a new problem. The early Church dealt with many heresies, Sabellianism and Arianism to name a couple. Sabellianism (i.e., modalism) is the heresy that claims God is not *really* three but is only *conceptually* three based on how he works in creation: (Father as the Creator, Son as Redeemer, Holy Spirit as Sanctifier). The problem with this position is that it would necessarily follow that *before* creation, God was not three. But this is contrary to scripture and thus contrary to Church teaching. As an aside, I gave a Trinity seminar to about 50 people here at Sacred Heart, and I asked them whether the Trinity is properly understood by the various ways that God acts in creation and 100% of the attendees nodded yes. Everyone was unknowingly in agreement with an early church heretic! This was, of course, just a fun experiment to be carried out for rhetorical purposes, but I think it shows that a little bit of education on the Trinity is needed.

Next week, I will explain what the Church teaches about the inner life of God and just how it is that he is three in one. But for this week, I wanted to just get the point across that we should not avoid seeking to understand the Trinity and simply disregard an explanation by choosing to say it is just a mystery no one will understand. If the Church took this route, we would have heretical beliefs all over the place. Additionally, this does not do justice to the great amount that we *can* know about our God. We spend our whole prayer lives praying in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and we are all baptized according to this trinitarian formula. We do this because that is the identity of the God that we all worship. As the medieval axiom goes, “One cannot love what one does not know.” Therefore, the more that we come to know about God, the more deeply we fall in love with who he is. We already know *what* he is, but our relationship grows when we know more about *who* he is. Fortunately, we come to know *who* he in the person of the Son in Jesus Christ, who shows us the Father. But it becomes even more beautiful as we consider each of the persons in themselves, both as they are within the life of God and as they send or are sent into the world making themselves present to us in a way unique to each person. Join me in next week’s bulletin as we begin this task of knowing and loving more deeply the God whom we serve and adore.