

Video Transcripts for *A Short, Animated Introduction to the Social Trinity*

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Video One Transcript: What is the Trinity and Why Does It Matter?

The word Trinity isn't in the Bible, but the idea comes from a problem we get when we read the Bible. It works like this: On the one hand the Bible says that there is only one God. On the other hand that Bible talks about God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So, is it one God, or three Gods? The answer is yes and no.

Yes, there is only one God. No there are not three gods.

Yes, there are three persons. No, the three are not the same person.

See. One God, three persons. That's the Trinity. Makes perfect sense, right?

Don't worry, it hasn't made perfect sense to anybody and theologians have been talking about it for 2,000 years.

Here's how the conversation has gone in the Western World (By the way, when we say the Western World, that means the European church that descended from the Latin Church in Rome)

Jesus came to Earth in the Roman Empire. The world at that time was dominated by Greek philosophy. The Greeks thought the universe looked like this: It was divided into two parts. Up here was the realm of the divine. It was pure spirit, it was eternal, unchanging. It was the perfect substance. Down here, under the line, was everything that was created. This is the realm of the physical, changeable, world. It is a shadowy reflection of the perfect realm. This two-part universe is called dualism.

The human being had two substances. There was the soul, which was a lot like the perfect, divine substance. The soul was trapped and encased in the shadowy, filthy substance of the flesh and the material world.

Everybody's goal was to figure out how to move up the staircase of ever-increasing perfection until we can finally shed the sinful, physical body and the soul can become united with the perfect substance of the divine.

Remember, this is the way most people thought about the world when Jesus showed up. The first Christians had to figure out who Jesus was, and they tried to explain him, and his talk about the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, in terms of this model of the universe. The problem was this: if God is one, unchangeable substance, then how could you have three persons that are equally God, and how could one of them become flesh? That's just foolishness.

Eventually Christian theology ended up looking like this. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were three co-equal, co-eternal persons that were up here, above the line. Jesus descended momentarily into the shadowy realm in order to die and to establish the church. The church then became the staircase upon which people had to climb in order to reach Heaven. The Pope was up here, and everybody else fell in line under his authority according to their rank in society. The church, the king, the wealthy men, women, peasants, slaves, animals.

A lot of people in the late twentieth century have looked at this picture and said, "Wait a minute. That doesn't seem right. That system has led to Western Imperialism, colonization, and a great amount of pain and suffering under the hands of greedy tyrants. Isn't that the opposite of what Jesus taught in the Gospels?"

For the past 50 years people have been asking some questions.

What if things went wrong because this is not at all how the universe looks. What if it actually looked like this?

What if the universe isn't divided into two-parts, but is actually continually being created by the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? What if we acknowledged the fact God is not male or female and that this masculine imagery has led the church to oppressive practices. What if we referred to God as the relationship between Parent, Child and Spirit, or we could borrow from Augustine and refer to God as the relationship between the Lover, the Beloved, and Love.

Think about how your life works. You exist because of the relationships that you have. Your parents conceived you and sustained you in your early life. You constantly interact with other human beings, animals, plants, water, and air in order to live. Our lives are a dynamic interplay of multiple relationships.

The Bible says that we were created in the image of God. What if God is the dynamic interaction of Parent, Child, and Spirit. What if it is this relationship itself that creates and sustains all things? The purpose of creation is the unity and harmony of all living things to work for peace. When we move against that rhythm of life, we cause stress and disruption, pain and suffering.

God the parent is the source and author of life. Jesus is the Word of life. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, who became flesh and dwelt among us, to show us what God's peaceful rhythm looks like in action and to show us God's promise of life. God entered into our pain and suffering and freely gave himself over to death to demonstrate true love. He rose from the dead to demonstrate the promise of new life and rebirth. The Spirit of God moves in and through us like the wind, or like a song, to coax us into God's rhythm of life. God is continually

bringing about new life and new growth toward the promise of a peaceful relationship with all things.

This way of thinking about God is called the social Trinity, as it understands God to be the social relationship of the Parent, the Child, and the Holy Spirit—the Lover, the Beloved, and Love—eternally co-creating all things.

The question for us today is this. Which picture of the Trinity seems to be more in line with the life and teaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom of Heaven and what it means to go into all the world and make disciples?

Video Two Transcript: Theology Changes

At the end of the introduction video, we saw two models of the Trinity and asked the question, "Which model seems to best reflect Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God?" That's a fair and important question.

However, you may have had a deeper question. Perhaps you look at models like this and think, "How can there be different models of God?" "Why can't it be clear and simple?" "All that theology talk is too confusing."

Maybe you've heard people say something like this. "I don't need theology, I just read the Bible, or follow the confessions of our founders."

Here's an important thing to keep in mind. All of these statements are actually a theology.

You can't not do theology, because theology is simply the process of human beings talking about God.

You see, theology does not equal God. Theology is the human attempt to use language, metaphors, and images to describe God and how God works.

God is infinite, and we are finite. No human words could ever accurately describe God. The best and most complex theologies are little more than childish sketches in relation to the infinite mystery of God.

So, what's the point? Why even talk about God at all?

Just because we can't wrap words around God or define God and how God works with 100% accuracy doesn't mean that God doesn't exist or that God isn't knowable. That's like saying that just because a child can't completely understand her parents she shouldn't communicate with them or strive to learn more about them and grow in the relationship.

Theology is the process of God's children trying to figure things out. The more connected we are to people and their theologies that have been evolving throughout human history, and the more our ability to observe the universe through telescopes and microscopes, the more necessary it is for our theology to change.

Let's take an example from physics.

What is an atom?

Democritus was a Greek philosopher in 400 B.C.E. He speculated that the universe was built of tiny building blocks that cannot be cut into any smaller pieces. That's what atom means: uncuttable.

Being a good Greek, he imagined that the atom was a perfect sphere.

In 1803, John Dalton started thinking about the atom again and, due to advancing technology, was able to run experiments. He began with Democritus' model of the perfect, solid sphere. The atom was like an 8-ball.

In 1897 J.J. Thomson discovered that there was a smaller part within the atom. He called it an electron. Thomson's atomic model was like a blob of pudding with raisins suspended throughout it.

Ernest Rutherford tested Thomson's theory in 1909 and discovered that there was a solid core at the center of an atom. Scientists began thinking of the atom much like the structure of the solar system. The nucleus was at the center, like the Sun, and the electrons orbited it, like the planets orbit the sun.

Neils Bohr discovered that the electrons are on different levels and can jump levels.

Since the 1930s physicists have discovered that there are subatomic particles called quarks that behave in unpredictable patterns. They also believe that the electrons are not particles

at all, but are force fields of energy. Many Quantum Physicists now believe that most of what we consider solid matter is actually the illusion of matter that is constructed by the bonds of high energy force fields.

So, which is it. Is the universe a collection of tiny 8-balls, is it a system of interlocking solar systems, or is it more like a hologram projection of force fields.

The answer...all and none.

Each of these pictures is a model of the atom and none of them equal the atom. The atom is the atom and our models are the human attempt to discuss and frame the atom within our limited language.

Models are necessary and we need to construct them and use them to help us understand the universe and make practical decisions about how to live in the universe. At the same time, we need to be willing to re-imagine our models when new information comes along.

God is God and we will never be able to fully or accurately describe God. Yet, we must construct models of God. This is called theology. Our theology is based on the witness of scripture, the dialogue of cultures, and the human ability to reason and imagine how the universe functions based on our most current experiences and observations.

Theology matters, and theology changes...because we change.

Video Three Transcript: The Modern I

So far, we have established two things. 1. There has been a huge shift in our understanding of the Trinity from the Medieval Times to our current times. 2. Theology shifts, and that is not a bad thing.

Now we must ask another question. What happened? How did we get from this picture in the early sixteenth century to where we are in the twenty-first century?

Things started to shift in the fifteenth and sixteenth century in Europe.

The Italian Renaissance brought shifts in the arts, economics, and philosophy.

The Protestant Reformation began to question the authority of the Pope.

The invention of better modes of transportation and the discovery of the New World challenged the notion that the Earth is flat.

The discoveries of Copernicus through mathematical observations, and Galileo through physical observations challenged the idea that the earth was the center of the universe.

The 30 Years' War between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics ravaged the European countryside.

By the early seventeenth century the authority of the Medieval church was being challenged from every side and the fabric of the universe was being torn apart.

A growing group of intellectuals observed the theological and political debates raging between the Christians and declared that the Bible and theology obviously didn't provide any answers. The only thing that could provide real truth for the world was the use of human reason and the employment of empirical science.

This era is called the Enlightenment because it believed it was helping Western society to crawl out of the Dark Ages of the Medieval World and into the light of Reason and the Modern

Era. Further advancements in astronomy eventually led the Western Modern World to think of the universe like this: The earth revolves around the Sun, which is just one of trillions of stars that comprise our galaxy, which is just one of trillions of galaxies spinning in a seemingly infinite sea of space with no apparent center, and no apparent purpose or meaning.

Where is God in this universe? What is the truth? Who has the authority to decide? How do we make sense out of this life? What's the point?

The modern world likes to make sense out of things by breaking everything down to its most basic parts. This is a simple picture of how the modern world is broken down.

First, it is divided into two basic sectors. On one hand there is the *public sector* and the other is the *private sector*. The *public sector* is ruled by human reason, and science is the only source of truth. The modern motto is, "Just the facts, ma'am." The only thing that is real in this world is economics and politics.

The *private sector*, on the other hand, is that place where individuals are free to believe and do whatever fantasies they desire, as long as it does not encroach on the public sector. The church was exiled to the private sector and faith was branded as a personal choice that had no place in the public sector. For the first time in human history, having no faith was a valid option, and actually the only option that made sense in the "real" world.

The modern world has also broken something else down to its basic parts: humanity. The most basic part of humanity is the individual person. Each person is a self-contained individual, completely separate from everything and everyone else. The human is a highly evolved biochemical machine that has the ability to think and reason. The mind is simply a projection of the body. This self-contained individual is free to travel wherever it wants, and can be plugged into any place in the world like an interchangeable part of a machine. Truth is found through the

objective observation of the universe through reason and scientific method. The highest goal for the individual is to become self-reliant and to climb the socio-economic ladder to success, power, and personal fulfillment.

Meet the modern I. The I is the subject of the sentence. It is the actor, the one in control. I see you. I love you. I hate you. I am the center of the universe.

As the modern "I" developed there arose a debate among modern thinkers. They asked, "How does the I really know things?" On one side, the rationalists said that the I observes nature and uses reason to figure out the objective truth. On the other side, a thinker—named Immanuel Kant—said that the I can't really know anything objectively, but can only know what the "I" experiences. This is where we get the terms objective and subjective truth. Rationalists think the I can be objective and truth exists out there and is discovered through observation. Subjectivists think that the I can only know something as the I experiences it, and therefore creates truth and meaning.

This created another version of Plato's dualism. Up here is the realm of the mind, or the thing that is beyond physical senses, thus can never be known by the I. Down here is the experience of the physical world that can only be known through the perspective of each individual "I."

Confused yet?

Hey, aren't we supposed to be talking about the Trinity? Well, you've probably guessed it already. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hardly anybody was talking about the Trinity. Christian theologians were faced with the task of proving to the rationalist world that God exists, when the rationalist world didn't believe that anything beyond the physical exists.

This led to two major types of theology: On the one hand there is objective theology that spent most of its energy trying to rationally and scientifically demonstrate that a) the Bible was the objective revelation of God to humanity, b) the Bible was the literal truth, c) the Bible was the absolute authority for all of life, and d) that correct belief in Jesus was the way to bridge the gap from the fallen world of sin to the eternal realm of God in Heaven.

The other type of theology was subjective and believed that God could only be known through personal experience of faith and that there was no objective revelation of God. God and the universe are essentially the same thing and the purpose of the Gospel was to bring about social change to promote peace on earth, thus ending violence and poverty.

The turn of the twentieth century saw Western, Modern Christianity divided into these two camps. The conservatives on the objectivist, foundationalist side, and the liberals on the subjectivist, experientialist side.

So where is the Trinity during this time? Hardly anywhere to be found. Theologians were scrambling to prove that God existed in any form. They didn't have time to quibble over the ancient debate of three or one. The Trinity became little more than a footnote in the Modern Theology books.

Video Four Transcript: The Fusion of Horizons

Now we come to the early twenty-first century and we are left with this picture in the West. There are three basic views. Some people call these worldviews, some call them closed world systems, others call them plausibility structures, others horizons.

The majority of people live their lives operating in the public sector and are forced to function under the *public system*, whether they believe it or not. The *public sector* has no room for the spiritual. There is nothing beyond what human reason can understand and explain with science. The only reality and meaning comes from the interplay of the economic and political power structures.

All faith has been relegated to the private sector, where the individual "I" is free to believe and do whatever she desires, so long as it does not impede on the public sector.

Here there are two basic systems in regard to the spiritual, or supra-rational, or faith. There are those who think of the spiritual as being separate from the physical. It is completely other than the physical. It transcends, or is transcendent. This is dualism, once again. God is up here, and the hope of humanity is to jump the gap of sin and separation and be united with God, up here. This is Transcendence.

The other system believes that there is no actual separation between the spiritual and the physical. They are one. The spiritual is within, it is the life force of the universe, and the hope of humanity is to find unity and harmony with the spiritual so that the world may live in peace and not destroy itself. God is within, God is immanent—meaning within itself. This is *immanence*.

We have three distinct systems, coexisting: The material atheistic public sphere; the transcendent, dualist sphere; and the immanent, spiritualist sphere.

Which one is right? How can these different spheres co-exist in a productive way?

What typically happens is that each sphere considers itself to be the only correct view and bangs up against the other ones, fighting for dominance. This usually leads to violence.

What if the reason these spheres exist is because people within them experience a unique part of the reality of God that shapes their perspective and behavior, thus making each of them true, but incomplete. Further, what if the path to peace was found in the Trinity and the spiritual practices of relating to the Trinity?

Before we talk about that, it will be helpful to discuss a concept called the fusion of horizons, made famous by a man named Gadamer.

A horizon is the limit of a person's perspective in relation to the fact that the earth is a sphere. It isn't a real boundary, but is created by the person's position on the planet. If you want to expand your horizon, you must change your position. When you go higher, you see more. Let's say you wanted to get the maximum horizon possible. If you went out into space, and got far enough away, you could see your maximum horizon.

The problem is that, even though you have reached your maximum horizon, you can still only see half of the picture at one time. If you want to see the whole picture, then you have to get other people involved.

Let's launch two more satellites. Now we have three overlapping horizons. The only way one person can get a picture of the whole is if she talks to the person in each of the other satellites and they fuse their pictures into one combined picture. This fusion of horizons is not reality itself, but is a socially constructed representation of reality that will help each individual gain a better, but not perfect understanding of what lies beyond their own horizon. The only way this can work is if each individual trusts the other and allows herself to receive the other horizon and share her own.

This constructed understanding will constantly shift and change as each individual orbits the earth and understands their own perspective in new ways.

It is the relationship between each individual which creates the larger, shared reality. Which comes first, the relationship or the individual? Exactly.

This brings us back to the social Trinity. The fact that humanity has multiple systems from which it perceives reality is a reflection of the essence of God. God is the relationship between the Lover, the Beloved, and Love. There is an aspect of God which is transcendent—that is not created, or physical. There is an aspect of God which is pure spiritual energy and is that which gives life. This is Love, this is the Spirit. There is also that aspect of God which is enfleshed—that enters into and shares—the physical, bodily reality of the created thing. This is the Beloved.

It is the relationship of these three that creates and sustains life.

The spiritual disciplines that will bring growth, healing, and peace on earth, the Good News for all nations, are those that allow us to humbly enter into the conversations that allow us to fuse our horizons in humility.

What might that look like for people within each of these systems to realize that the relationships we have with each other actually form who we are?