

TRINITY THOUGHTS

Letter to a friend

I took the opportunity presented by your question Sunday to assemble some thoughts that can also be part of the internet ministry effort I am working on. There is probably enough here to found a good-sized horse, but that is the risk you take when you raise a good question that is at the same time complex and controversial. The first attachment I wrote up new as a second-level treatment of the trinity issue as I have come to see it. The other two attachments are more elaborate because they are lifted from my notes on Christian Doctrine, a course I taught at Manhattan Christian College for many years.

A couple comments on the essay you gave me. I wonder if Ho Soo Kam converted from an eastern religion with its distinctive philosophical base. In some of this thinking, something can be and not be at the same time and in the same sense. Such mystical thought is beyond comprehension or evaluation—either verification or falsification—because there is no active or experiential correlate to which it can be compared in human experience. At any rate, his concept is a kind of unitarianism, or monarchianism as it is also called (Patripassianism, economic trinity, modalism, and Sabellianism are other terms as well; see attachment 3.) Another label for it is *manifestative trinity* since it pictures the three-ness as being in the manifestation of deity rather than in deity itself. So Father, Son, and Spirit are three roles. One criticism of this idea has been that during the incarnation heaven would have been empty of deity if, as Soo Kam says, each member of the Godhead is all the deity there is.

The comment that caught my eye especially was the idea that somehow it makes sense to say that $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ describes the trinity. 1 and 3 are numbers of things, not things themselves. It communicates no idea to say an orange times an orange, or perhaps more exactly an orange times itself. What would it mean to say the Son times the Father? One times the Son equals the Son, not the Father. In other words, we are dealing with real persons in the trinity, not abstract numbers (metaphysics). The “orthodox” view is expressed in “Holy, Holy, Holy” when it ends a verse by saying, “God in three persons, blessed trinity.” The traditional formulation has been summed up in the expression “one God in three persons.”

Hopefully, these notations make sense and seem to fit the passages of scriptures that obviously relate to this issue. There is no hurry in getting this matter “solved”; people have been thinking about it for hundreds of years!

See you Sunday.

P.S. In Christianity, God is able to be incarnate in human flesh without defilement or deficiency, which corresponds to the interpersonal capacity in

humankind. He was “incarnatable” because we humans are created in God’s image—the “us-ness” of God in Genesis 3:22. In the incarnation, Christ could “empty” himself (Colossians 2:5-11) of the free exercise of his rights and prerogatives as deity without ceasing to have his identity or nature/deity. The exact nature of his experience in the incarnate condition is, of course, not capable of being reflected in ourselves because we are not Jesus and our experience as persons is not his type of personhood.

christir.org