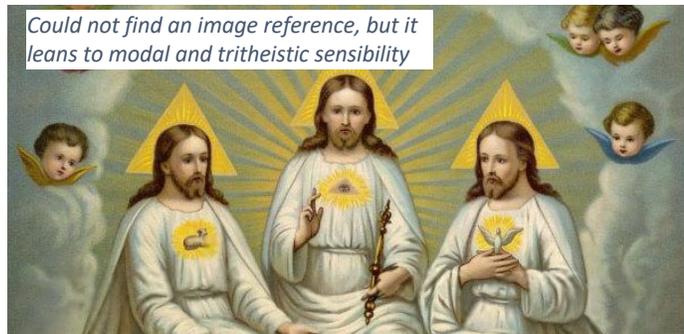


Trinitarian images are everywhere in our liturgy. At the same time, there are many Christian groups who reject the Trinity. Pentecostal churches (Church of God, independent Pentecostals); Jehovah's Witness; Mormons and denominations that you've never heard of don't believe "In the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." If you forget most of this sermon, just remember that Trinity is a relationship. I want to get into some theology; but my primary goal is to give you a reason to care about the Trinity or to know why you don't care.

There are lots of small pieces that one could use to cobble together a scriptural understanding of the Trinity. This is found especially in the beginning of Genesis and when people get baptized. The most explicit verse is at the end of Matthew. *Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* There is also a reference in 1st John - *For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.* It's a stretch to build the Trinity upon these and other oblique references, but that is exactly what the church in history has tried to do.

Here are some historical "heresies" around the Trinity. I am willing to bet that one of them is your favorite.

Sabellianism, Noetianism and Patripassianism Trinity is expressed in different "modes." Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distinct, but rather different faces God. For example -- I am priest to the church, a husband to my wife, and father to my kids. Stemming from Modalism, Patripassianism believed that the Father suffered as the Son.



Tritheism Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three distinct Gods.

Arianism The preexistent Christ was the best of God's creation but not fully divine. The Arian controversy was huge in the 4th Century both politically and theologically. It precipitated the Nicene Creed. Some Arian leaning Christians converted to Islam later in history.



Don't think Hitler and Aryan nation. Hitler was a prolific cultural thief who built a Third Reich mythology on many disparate histories (The first Reich was the Roman Empire). For example, he co-opted the swastika from the Indian subcontinent. He blended and mixed things to the point of unintelligibility.

Ebionitism Purely human Jesus, but a really great preacher and miracle worker.

Macedonianism The Holy Spirit is something God made for us to enjoy.

Adoptionism Jesus was born human and “adopted” as divine. This happened at baptism or at his resurrection.



Salvador Dalí, 1951

Docetism Jesus only appeared human. He was an all-powerful God wearing a skin suit. Some versions taught that Jesus’ divinity left him, with only a shell of skin and bones on the cross.

Partialism Puzzle pieces. Father, Son and Holy Spirit together are components of the one God. It’s a variation on modalism like I mentioned earlier.

Trinity conversations revolved a lot around the character of Jesus. Who is he? How is he related to God? These “heresies,” give you a picture of a very old attempt to nail Jell-O to a tree.

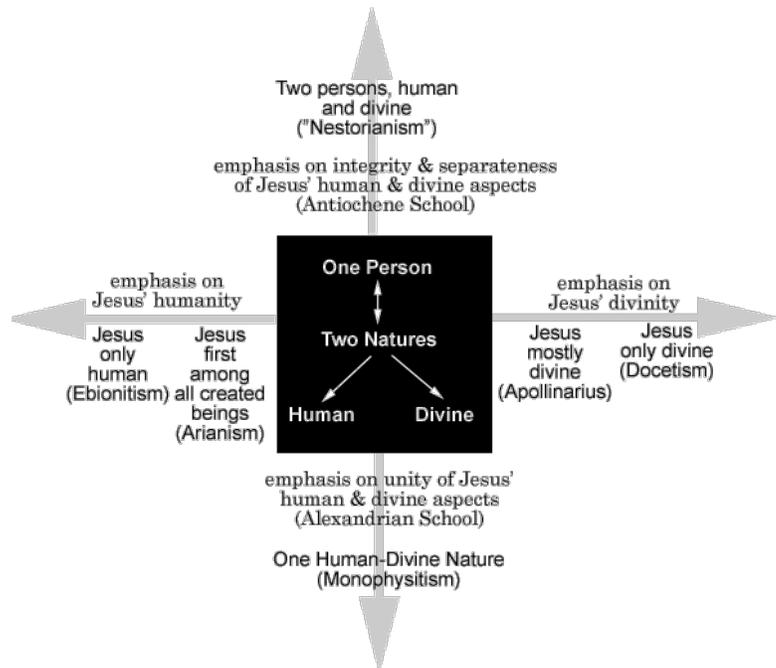


St. Lawrence Parish Salzburg

St. John of the Wilderness, an Episcopal Church in Minnesota put a lot of theological education and history on their website that gives you a taste of this [complicated history](#) around Trinity. This graphic covers many other heresies than I listed above. If you want to know more of a particular title, google the name and fall into a rabbit hole.

Most of the conversation in church history was how Godly vs. how human Jesus was. The mystery of God’s relatedness doesn’t settle onto easy solutions. The real mystery is how **we** live in relationship with others and God. The Bible asks, “how can you say that you love God when you hate your brother and sister?”

The Trinity is a living mystery that defines this goal. My understanding of the Trinity is simplistic. “God loves God.” Jesus loves the Father, the Father loves Jesus, The Spirit loves Jesus, etc. So in good Episcopalian style when you ask me to define the Trinity, I will clutch my crucifix and intone that, “it’s a mystery.”



It’s a mystery to be discovered in day-to-day life, loving our people. Let’s keep dancing with and loving the “Body of Christ”, the Church and the world while we take our cue from the great dancers -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who are deeply in love with each other.

Todd