

The Trinity (Catechism 232-267)

The Christian dogma of the Blessed Trinity is:
'the most fundamental and essential teaching in
the hierarchy of the truths of faith' (Catechism n. 234).

It was Jesus' experience of God that was the source of everything he said and did. It was the source of his love. The Catechism is saying that it must be the same for us. Living Jesus' life, loving with his love, has its ultimate source in our experience of God, and this means our experience of the one Jesus called 'Abba', our experience of Jesus and our experience of the Spirit of love that fills our hearts and our universe.

The first thing to note is that if we understand the dogma of the Trinity in a way that contradicts monotheism, we are misunderstanding it. There is only one God. It is this God who creates and energizes the universe, what Paul calls 'God's work of art'(Ephesians 2:10).

We need to explore the dogma of the Blessed Trinity in two steps. In the first we are speaking of how the one God (our 'Father') communicates with us, and how we experience this one God. The transcendent God is revealed in the outer world of nature, events, prophetic oracles and sacred writings, all of which are referred to as God's 'Word' (the numinous).

The transcendent God is also revealed in the inner world where we experience what is referred to as God's 'Spirit'(the mystical). This is Older Testament language. We find it also in the Newer Testament.

Transcendent ('holy') God

God's Word

Revelation

God's Spirit

Mystical

- Nature
- Events
- Prophetic oracle
- Sacred Writings



Reflecting on how God has chosen to communicate with us through Word and Spirit, Christians look to Jesus as the purest expression of both. Again and again the Newer Testament highlights the special, intimate relationship between Jesus and God, and the special way in which Jesus reveals God. In the language of the Newer Testament Jesus of Nazareth is described as God's perfect human 'Word' to us, God's 'Word-made-flesh' (Catechism n.241). He is also portrayed as the one who receives and gives God's 'Spirit' without reserve (Catechism n.243).

- ‘The Messiah Jesus, God’s beloved Son, is the image of the invisible God ... God was pleased for all the fullness to dwell in him.’(Colossians 1:15,19)
- ‘In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself’ (2Cor 5:19).
- ‘He [God’s Son] is the brilliance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being’ (Hebrews 1:3).

- We accept that **God is love**, because we have experienced the **Lover (Jesus)** and the **Loving** (the **Spirit**) that inspires the Christian community in its relationship with God and with one another. We find this truth expressed throughout the New Testament.
- When we act ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’, ‘**Father**’ refers to **God**, ‘**Son**’ refers to **Jesus**, and ‘**Spirit**’ refers to **the intimate love-communion between God and Jesus**.

‘God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,
crying, “Abba! Father!”’ (Galatians 4:6)

‘God chose you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth’ (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

‘You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.’ (1 Corinthians 6:11)

‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you’(2Corinthians 13:13).

‘You are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him’(Romans 8:9).

‘You have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.’(Romans 8:15-17)

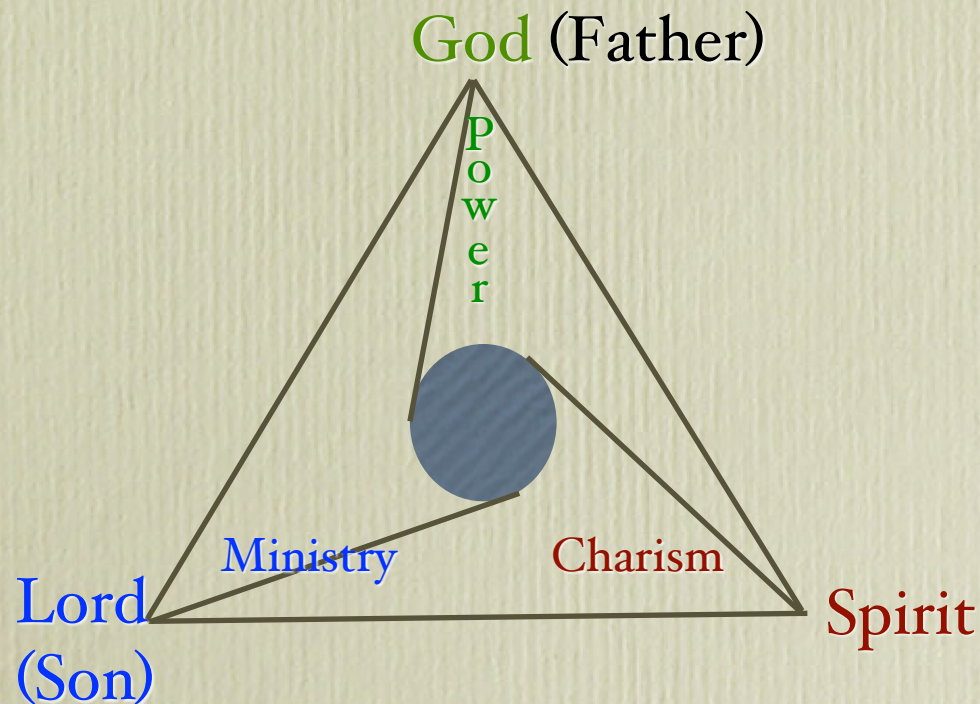
1 Corinthians 12:4-7

‘There are varieties of gifts but the same **Spirit**.

There are varieties of ministries but the same Lord.

There are varieties of ways of exercising power
but the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

To each is given the manifestation of the **Spirit** for a good purpose.



So, when we speak of the Blessed Trinity, 'Father', 'Son', and 'Holy Spirit', we are repeating the language of the Newer Testament, the language of Jesus, to speak of how the one God communicates with us, and how we experience this one God.

The dogma of the Blessed Trinity, however, says more than this. It says that God, the one God whom with Jesus we address as 'Father', must be such as to be revealed in Word and Spirit. Thanks to Jesus, we have come to acknowledge that God is one, not as individual, but in a communion in love. Here we must accept the absolute poverty of human understanding and language to speak of the Triune God, the 'Eternal Source', the 'Eternal Word' and the 'Eternal Spirit'.

The Newer Testament recognises that Jesus is the Incarnation, not of the 'Eternal Source', or of the 'Eternal Spirit', but of the 'Eternal Word'. In the Prologue to John's Gospel we read:

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was towards God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of the gift of truth' (John 1:1,14).

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was
towards God, and the Word was God.

The Word was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.’

The true light, which enlightens everyone,
was coming into the world.

God's Word was in the world,
and the world came into being through him;
yet the world did not know him.

God's Word came to what was his own,
and his own people did not accept him.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God,
who were born, not of blood
or of the will of the flesh
or of the will of man, but of God.

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of the gift of truth.

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

The law indeed was given through Moses;

the gift truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God.

It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

It is the eternal Spirit that fills Jesus' heart and that he gives without reserve (John 3:34). We are invited to thank God for the revelation of the mystery of the Triune God that continues to open us up to the wonder of the love-communion that is the very being of God, the love-communion which we are called to share.

Catherine LaCugna God for us: the Trinity in Christian Life (Harper 1991)

‘The doctrine of the Trinity is a theory about the essence of God revealed and bestowed in the person of Christ and in the permanent presence of the Spirit’(page 334).

‘The purpose of the doctrine of the Trinity is to affirm that God who comes to us and saves us in Christ and remains with us as Spirit is the true living God’(page 380).

‘The perfection of God is the perfection of love, of communion, or personhood. Divine perfection is the antithesis of self-sufficiency. Rather it is the absolute capacity to be who and what one is by being for and from another. The living God is the God who is alive in relationship, alive in communion with the creature, alive with desire for union with every creature. God is so thoroughly involved in every last detail of creation that if we could truly grasp this it would altogether change how we would approach each moment of our lives. Everything that exists manifests the mystery of the living God’(LaCugna page 304).

‘Whoever has seen me
has seen the Father ...
I am in the Father
and the Father is in
me’(John 14:9-10).

‘I will ask the Father
and he will give you the
Spirit to be with you for
forever’(John 14:16).

‘I am coming to you’(John 14:18).

‘My Father will love you
and we will come to you
and make our home with
you’(John 14:23).

- To contemplate the wonder of the Triune God, and to learn to call God ‘Father’ as Jesus did, we must listen to Jesus, and pray that his Spirit will help us to enter into his experience.

- Knowing that God is **Spirit** reminds us to be attentive to the divinely inspired movements of our own heart: movements of longing as we yearn for closer communion with God whose Spirit inspires us; movements of wonder and praise as we rejoice in God being with us. It reminds us to be sensitive to these movements in every man and every woman.

- Knowing that God is **Word** reminds us to be attentive to the words and actions through which God speaks to us, and the words and actions through which we respond to God. We learn, too, to reverence the sacred ground of each person's Spirit, and be attentive to each person's Word, as together we journey towards God who is the Source ('Father', 'Mother') of all.
- Knowing that God is **Father** reminds us to open our hearts to God's love and to treat every other person as our brother or sister.



Ground of all Being

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Ground of all being

Breath of all life

Spirit within all things



Open our eyes

Open our ears

Stir in our hearts

Awaken our minds



And then

we will bend low

And then

we will know



That all is holy

All is One

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Holy One



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