

Dr. James S. Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 16, Divine Incarnation and the Trinity Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 16, Divine Incarnation and the Trinity, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Jim Spiegel's Philosophy of Religion session explores two central tenets of Christian theology: **the Divine Incarnation and the Trinity**. The lecture examines philosophical challenges arising from these doctrines, particularly the seemingly contradictory nature of **Jesus Christ being both fully human and fully God**, and **how God can be simultaneously one and three**. Spiegel introduces distinctions like individual versus kind essence, common versus essential properties, and the is of identity versus predication to address these complexities. He also touches on historical heresies like modalism and tritheism, aiming to provide a philosophically informed understanding of these foundational Christian beliefs.

**2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 16 – Double click
icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Theology → Apologetics → Philosophy of Religion).**



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3. Briefing Document: Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 16, Divine Incarnation and the Trinity

Briefing Document: Divine Incarnation and the Trinity

Executive Summary:

This briefing document summarizes the key philosophical questions and attempts at resolution concerning the Christian doctrines of the Divine Incarnation (Jesus Christ being both fully human and fully God) and the Trinity (God being one being in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) as presented by Dr. Jim Spiegel. The discussion highlights the inherent logical challenges these doctrines pose and introduces philosophical distinctions and historical context to clarify and defend their coherence against charges of contradiction. While acknowledging remaining mysteries, Dr. Spiegel draws upon the work of philosopher Thomas Morris and traditional theological distinctions to navigate these complex concepts.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

I. Divine Incarnation:

- **The Central Paradox:** The core issue is the apparent logical incoherence of Jesus Christ being simultaneously fully human and fully God: "How can someone be a God-man and truly remain divine while also being truly human?" This was a major challenge for the early church, leading to various heresies.
- **Distinction between Contradiction, Paradox, and Mystery:**
 - Contradiction:** Affirming and denying the same proposition.
 - Paradox:** An apparent but not real contradiction.
 - Mystery:** A truth that cannot be fully grasped by human reason.
- Dr. Spiegel suggests the Divine Incarnation is at least a mystery, possibly a paradox, but not a contradiction.
- **Thomas Morris's Contribution:** Dr. Spiegel highlights the significant work of philosopher Thomas Morris, particularly his book "The Logic of God Incarnate," in addressing the philosophical problems related to the Incarnation.
- **Individual Essence vs. Kind Essence:**
 - Individual Essence:** All properties possessed by a particular thing, making it unique. "Your individual essence is made up of all the qualities that you possess. That's what makes you, you."

- **Kind Essence:** All properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for membership in a class or kind. "You possess all of the qualities and properties that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for you to be a member of humankind."
- The Incarnation can be understood as Jesus's individual essence encompassing both a fully human kind essence and a fully divine kind essence. "To say that Jesus Christ was one person with two natures is just to say that his individual essence, his unique essence as a particular person, was made up of all of the properties of a fully human-kind essence and a fully divine kind essence."
- **Common Properties vs. Essential Properties:**
Common Properties: Characteristics possessed by many or most members of a class but not strictly necessary for membership (e.g., having two hands, a navel, or being conceived by a human father).
Essential Properties: Characteristics that must be possessed for membership in a class (e.g., having a mind to be human).
- The objection that Jesus lacked the property of being conceived by a human father is addressed by arguing that this is a common but non-essential property. "Just because all or nearly all human beings happen to have a certain trait, it doesn't mean it's an essential trait." The examples of Adam and Eve are used to support this.
- **Merely Human vs. Fully Human:**
Fully Human: Possessing all characteristics essential to humankind's essence. "To be fully human, one need not be merely human. One need only possess all the characteristics that are essential to humankind's essence."
- Jesus was fully human because he possessed all essential human properties, but he was "human plus divine" and therefore not merely human. "As long as there are no contradictions between essential human properties and divine properties, you don't have a problem here."
- **The Problem of Jesus's Limited Knowledge (Matthew 24):** Jesus's statement about not knowing the hour of his return raises a challenge to his omniscience.
- **Kenoticist Approach:** Suggests Jesus gave up some divine attributes, including omniscience, during the incarnation (based on Philippians 2). Dr. Spiegel notes this implies a denial of his full divinity.

- **Two-Minds View:** Proposes Jesus had two minds, one human and limited, the other divine and omniscient, with an asymmetrical relationship of access. This is Morris's preferred view. "It says that Jesus had two minds that bear an asymmetrical relation to each other, where one mind can omnisciently access the other, but not vice versa." The challenge here is maintaining Jesus's singular personhood.
- Other possibilities include Jesus choosing not to access the information. The issue remains a "philosophical conundrum" and contributes to the mystery of the Incarnation.

II. The Trinity:

- **The Central Paradox:** The orthodox Christian doctrine asserts that God is both three and one, which appears to be a "blatant contradiction."
- **One Being in Three Persons:** The doctrine clarifies that God is not three and one in the same sense. "God is one being or substance or essence in three persons." This distinction refutes the claim that Christians are polytheists.
- **The Begotten Son:** The objection that if Jesus is the Son of God, he must have been created and therefore cannot be one with God, is addressed by the concept of being "begotten" rather than created. This is analogized to human procreation: "As human beings beget children through procreation, I have four children. I didn't create any of them. I was involved in the procreation. They were begotten, not made..." This emphasizes the shared essence within the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is also described as "proceeding from the union of the Father and Son."
- **Heretical Extremes to Avoid: Modalism:** The view that the Trinity are different modes or manifestations of the same divine being. This is problematic because it does not account for the distinct personhood indicated in Scripture.
- **Tritheism:** The idea that each person of the Trinity is a distinct being, which is simply polytheism and unbiblical.
- The orthodox view seeks a balance between the oneness and the plurality of God.
- **The Distinction Between the "Is" of Identity and the "Is" of Predication:**
 - Identity:** Used to indicate that two things are one and the same (e.g., "Jocasta is Oedipus's mother").
 - Is of Predication:** Used to indicate that something has a certain characteristic (e.g., "Jocasta is blonde").

- In the context of the Trinity, the statements "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God" should be understood using the "is" of predication. "That is, to use the word in the sense of predication rather than identity." This means each person possesses the characteristic of being divine, without being identical to one another. "There is more to God than just the Father. There is more to God than just the Son, than just the Spirit. He is Father, Son, and Spirit. Each of these persons of the Trinity has this characteristic of being divine." This helps avoid the problematic implication that "the Father is the Son or the Son is the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit is the Father."

Conclusion:

Dr. Spiegel concludes that while the doctrines of the Divine Incarnation and the Trinity present significant philosophical challenges and contain elements of mystery, they are not necessarily contradictory. By employing careful philosophical distinctions and drawing upon theological tradition, Christians can offer coherent explanations that address many objections. However, certain aspects, like the implications of Jesus's limited knowledge, remain complex and open to further theological and philosophical reflection.

4. Study Guide: Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 16, Divine Incarnation and the Trinity

Study Guide: Divine Incarnation and the Trinity

Key Concepts:

- **Divine Incarnation:** The Christian doctrine that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human in one person.
- **Trinity:** The Christian doctrine that God is one being who exists simultaneously as three distinct persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.
- **Contradiction:** A statement that affirms and denies the same proposition at the same time, making it logically impossible.
- **Paradox:** A statement that appears contradictory but may contain a deeper truth or a resolution that removes the apparent contradiction.
- **Mystery:** A truth that is beyond the full comprehension of human reason, though it may not necessarily be contradictory.
- **Individual Essence:** All the properties that a particular thing possesses, making it unique.
- **Kind Essence:** All the properties that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for something to be a member of a specific class or kind.
- **Common Property:** A characteristic possessed by many or most members of a class or kind.
- **Essential Property:** A characteristic that must be possessed by a thing in order to be a member of a class or kind.
- **Merely Human:** Possessing only the essential properties of humankind.
- **Fully Human:** Possessing all the essential properties of humankind, without necessarily being limited to only those properties.
- **Kenoticism:** The theological idea, based on Philippians 2, that Christ emptied himself of some divine attributes during the Incarnation.

- **Two-Minds View:** The theory that Jesus possessed two distinct minds, one divine and omniscient, and one human with limited knowledge, bearing an asymmetrical relationship.
- **Elohim:** A Hebrew term for God that has a plural grammatical form.
- **Being/Substance/Essence (in the context of the Trinity):** The fundamental nature of God, which is one.
- **Person (in the context of the Trinity):** A distinct center of consciousness and relationality within the one divine being (Father, Son, Holy Spirit).
- **Begetting:** The process by which the Son proceeds from the Father, distinct from creation.
- **Proceeding:** The way in which the Holy Spirit originates from the Father and/or the Son.
- **Modalism:** A heretical view of the Trinity that posits the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are merely different modes or manifestations of the single divine being.
- **Tritheism:** A heretical view of the Trinity that considers the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be three separate gods.
- **Is of Identity:** The use of the word "is" to indicate that two terms refer to the same thing or person.
- **Is of Predication:** The use of the word "is" to indicate that a subject possesses a certain characteristic or attribute.

Short-Answer Quiz:

1. Explain the central tension in the doctrine of the Divine Incarnation. What question does it immediately raise?
2. Describe the difference between a contradiction, a paradox, and a mystery, providing a brief example for each (though not necessarily related to the doctrines discussed).
3. According to the text, what is the distinction between an individual essence and a kind essence? How does this distinction help in understanding the Incarnation?
4. Explain the difference between a common property and an essential property. How does this distinction address the objection that Jesus lacked a human father?

5. What is the difference between being merely human and being fully human, according to the source material? How does this distinction apply to Jesus?
6. Briefly describe the Kenoticist approach and the two-minds view as potential explanations for Jesus' statement about not knowing the hour of his return. What is a potential problem with the Kenoticist view?
7. What is the orthodox Christian understanding of the Trinity? How does it address the concern that Christians believe in three gods?
8. Explain the analogy used in the text to describe how Jesus can be the Son of God without being created by God. What is the key difference highlighted in this analogy?
9. What are the two heretical extremes related to the Trinity mentioned in the text? Briefly describe each and the primary problem associated with them.
10. Explain the difference between the "is of identity" and the "is of predication." How is the "is of predication" helpful in understanding the Trinity?

Answer Key:

1. The central tension in the Divine Incarnation is how Jesus Christ can be both fully God and fully human simultaneously within one person. This immediately raises the question of logical coherence: how can someone possess both divine and human natures without contradiction?
2. A contradiction affirms and denies the same proposition (e.g., "The door is open and the door is not open"). A paradox is an apparently contradictory statement that may be true or resolvable (e.g., "This statement is false"). A mystery is a truth beyond human reason's full grasp (e.g., the ultimate nature of reality).
3. An individual essence includes all unique properties of a particular thing, while a kind essence includes the necessary and sufficient properties for membership in a class. In the Incarnation, Jesus' individual essence uniquely encompasses both a complete human kind essence and a complete divine kind essence.
4. A common property is a characteristic shared by many in a class (e.g., having two hands), while an essential property is necessary for being part of that class (e.g., having a mind for being human). Jesus lacking a human father is presented as an uncommon but non-essential property, thus not disqualifying his humanity.

5. Being merely human means possessing only the essential characteristics of humankind. Being fully human means possessing all essential human characteristics without excluding the possibility of possessing additional, non-human characteristics. Jesus was fully human because he possessed all essential human properties, but he was not merely human because he also possessed divine properties.
6. The Kenoticist approach suggests Jesus gave up some divine attributes, like omniscience, during the Incarnation. A potential problem is that relinquishing omniscience might imply a denial of his full divinity. The two-minds view posits Jesus had two minds with asymmetrical access to information.
7. The orthodox Christian understanding of the Trinity is that God is one being (essence, substance) who exists as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This addresses the concern of polytheism by emphasizing God's singular being while acknowledging the distinct personhood within that being.
8. The analogy compares the begetting of the Son by the Father to human procreation, where parents beget children who share the same human essence but are distinct individuals. This highlights that Jesus, as the begotten Son, shares the divine essence with the Father without being created as something separate and lesser.
9. Modalism is the heresy that the Trinity's persons are merely different modes or appearances of one God, failing to account for the genuine plurality of personhood. Tritheism is the heresy that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct gods, contradicting the oneness of God.
10. The "is of identity" means one thing is the same as another (e.g., "Jocasta is Oedipus's mother" means they are the same person). The "is of predication" means a subject has a certain attribute (e.g., "Jocasta is blonde" means she has blonde hair). In the Trinity, "the Father is God" uses the "is of predication," indicating the Father possesses the attribute of divinity, without being identical to the entirety of God to the exclusion of the Son and Spirit.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the philosophical distinctions presented in the text (contradiction/paradox/mystery, individual/kind essence, common/essential property, merely/fully human) and evaluate their effectiveness in addressing philosophical challenges to the doctrine of the Divine Incarnation.
2. Discuss the implications of the Kenoticist and two-minds views for understanding the nature and consciousness of Jesus Christ during the Incarnation. What philosophical difficulties does each view present?
3. Explain the doctrine of the Trinity and analyze how the distinction between God's being/essence and the three persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) attempts to resolve the apparent contradiction of one God existing as three.
4. Evaluate the arguments against modalism and tritheism presented in the text. Why are these views considered heretical, and what key aspects of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity do they fail to uphold?
5. Explore the role of philosophical distinctions, such as the "is of identity" and the "is of predication," in clarifying complex theological doctrines like the Trinity and the Incarnation. What are the strengths and limitations of using such distinctions?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Divine Incarnation:** The theological doctrine that the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, became fully human in the person of Jesus Christ while remaining fully God.
- **Trinity:** The central Christian doctrine that God is one being, eternally existing in three co-equal and distinct persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.
- **Contradiction:** A logical incompatibility between two or more propositions where one proposition asserts the opposite of another.
- **Paradox:** A statement or situation that appears self-contradictory but may contain a deeper truth or be resolved through further understanding.
- **Mystery:** A truth that is inherently beyond the full grasp and comprehension of human intellect, often due to its nature or limitations of human reasoning.
- **Individual Essence:** The unique set of properties that constitute a specific individual and distinguish it from all others.
- **Kind Essence:** The set of properties that are both necessary for and sufficient to define membership in a particular category or kind of thing.
- **Common Property:** A characteristic or attribute that is typically found among members of a particular group or category.
- **Essential Property:** A characteristic or attribute that a thing must possess in order to be a member of a specific kind or to be what it fundamentally is.
- **Merely Human:** Possessing only the fundamental attributes and limitations characteristic of human beings.
- **Fully Human:** Possessing all the essential characteristics of humanity, implying a complete human nature.
- **Kenoticism:** A theological theory that Christ voluntarily relinquished some of his divine attributes during his earthly life and incarnation.
- **Two-Minds View:** The theological concept suggesting that Jesus Christ possessed both a divine mind with complete knowledge and a human mind with limited knowledge.

- **Elohim:** A Hebrew word meaning "God," often used in the Hebrew Bible in a plural form, which some interpret as hinting at the Trinity.
- **Being/Substance/Essence:** The fundamental nature, reality, or core of something; in theology, referring to the indivisible nature of God.
- **Person (in Trinitarian Theology):** A distinct center of consciousness, will, and relationality within the one divine being; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each distinct persons.
- **Begetting:** The relationship of the Son to the Father in the Trinity, understood as an eternal and necessary procession, not an act of creation.
- **Proceeding:** The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and/or the Son in the Trinity, describing the Spirit's origin and eternal relationship within the Godhead.
- **Modalism:** A heretical theological view that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distinct persons but rather different modes or forms of a single divine being.
- **Tritheism:** A heretical theological view that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate and distinct gods.
- **Is of Identity:** The use of the verb "to be" to assert that two terms refer to the same entity.
- **Is of Predication:** The use of the verb "to be" to ascribe a property or characteristic to a subject.

5. FAQs on Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 16, Divine Incarnation and the Trinity, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Divine Incarnation and the Trinity

1. What is the orthodox Christian understanding of the Divine Incarnation, and what primary philosophical challenge does it present? The orthodox Christian view of the Divine Incarnation asserts that Jesus Christ is one person possessing two natures: fully human and fully divine. The primary philosophical challenge this doctrine poses is the apparent logical incoherence of how one being can simultaneously possess the complete and distinct attributes of both humanity and divinity. This raises the fundamental question of how Jesus could be both God and man without contradiction.

2. How does the distinction between "individual essence" and "kind essence" help in understanding the Divine Incarnation? The distinction between individual essence (all properties of a particular thing) and kind essence (properties necessary and sufficient for membership in a class) clarifies the Incarnation by suggesting that Jesus's unique individual essence encompasses both a complete human kind essence and a complete divine kind essence. This means he possessed all the necessary properties to be fully human (human body, soul, mind, etc.) and all the necessary properties to be fully God (omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, etc.). His being one person with two natures signifies that his particular existence embodied both these sets of essential characteristics.

3. An objection is raised that Jesus lacked a human father, a seemingly common human property. How is this addressed in relation to his humanity? The objection that Jesus lacked a human father is addressed by distinguishing between "common properties" and "essential properties." While being conceived by a human father is a common property among humans, it is not considered an essential property. Essential properties are those characteristics that are absolutely necessary for being human (e.g., having a mind). Since Jesus possessed all essential human properties, his lack of a human father, while uncommon, does not disqualify him from being fully human. The examples of Adam and Eve, who would not have had human parents, further illustrate that this mode of origin is not a prerequisite for humanity.

4. How can Jesus possess divine properties (like walking on water or healing) and still be considered truly human? What is the difference between "merely human" and "fully human" in this context? Jesus's possession of divine properties does not negate his full humanity because "fully human" does not equate to "merely human." To be fully human, one only needs to possess all the characteristics essential to humankind's essence. Jesus possessed these essential human properties, making him fully human. However, his additional possession of divine qualities meant he was not merely human; he was human "plus divine." As long as there are no logical contradictions between these essential human and divine properties, his dual nature is philosophically tenable.

5. The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus saying he doesn't know the hour of his return (Matthew 24). How is this reconciled with his presumed omniscience as God? What are some proposed solutions, and what challenges do they face? The statement in Matthew 24 presents a challenge to the idea of Jesus's full divinity, particularly his omniscience. One proposed solution is the Kenoticist view, suggesting Jesus gave up some divine attributes, including omniscience, during the Incarnation. However, this raises concerns about whether he truly remained fully God. Another approach is the "two-minds" view, positing that Jesus had both a human mind with limited knowledge and a divine mind with complete knowledge, although the relationship between these minds and Jesus's singular personhood is debated. A further possibility is that Jesus, in his human capacity, chose not to access this information known by the Father. Each of these solutions faces philosophical difficulties in fully explaining this passage without compromising core tenets of Christology.

6. What is the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity? How does it avoid the charge of contradiction and polytheism? The orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity asserts that God is one being, substance, or essence existing in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. This doctrine avoids the charge of contradiction by stating that God is three and one in different senses. He is not three and one in the same way or at the same time. The claim of polytheism is countered by emphasizing that there is only one divine being or essence; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not separate gods but distinct persons within the singular Godhead.

7. If Jesus is the Son of God, how can he be eternally one with God and not created by God? What analogy is used to explain this relationship? The relationship between the Father and the Son is understood through the concept of being "begotten" rather than "created." Just as human parents beget children who share the same human essence without being created by them, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, sharing the divine essence without being a creation of the Father. The Holy Spirit is described as proceeding from the Father and the Son. This analogy of human procreation, where offspring share the same kind essence as their parents, helps illustrate how the Son and the Holy Spirit are fully divine while originating from the Father in a unique and eternal way.

8. What are the heretical extremes of modalism and tritheism, and how does the orthodox view of the Trinity navigate between them? What philosophical distinction helps clarify the Trinity? Modalism is the heretical view that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are merely different modes or manifestations of one singular divine person, failing to account for the distinct personhood of each. Tritheism, on the other hand, is the heretical belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct beings or gods, which is essentially polytheism. The orthodox view of the Trinity navigates between these extremes by affirming both the unity of God's being and the distinctness of the three persons. The philosophical distinction between the "is of identity" and the "is of predication" is helpful here. When we say "the Father is God," "the Son is God," and "the Spirit is God," the "is" is one of predication, meaning each person possesses the divine characteristic. It does not mean the Father is identical to the Son, or vice versa. They are distinct persons who all share the same divine essence.