

Dr. Papanikolaou - Lesson 2

Big Question: What can we understand about the Trinity and why is this important?

Key points

Teachers should understand these few, key points before the lesson, and students should take these points away from the class.

- A. “We believe that God is Trinity because we believe that humans were created to be God-like.”
- B. The Trinitarian formula is on ousia (essence) and three persons.
- C. What do we mean by God-like? We mean that we were created to love.
- D. God wants us to have relationship and communion with him.
- E. This concept of God is radically different than the conceptions that prevailed in other popular ancient religions.

Review

Ask students:

1. What did we learn last class? Review your notes and rewrite a key point or takeaway that you found significant. If you were absent, your job is to review the student guide from last class and then ask your fellow students questions about the points they’re about to share.

Give them 3 or so minutes to review and write, then ask them:

- Share what you’ve written (go around the room systematically to get feedback)
- Then ask students who were absent last class: do you have any questions they have about their points? Students may not be able to answer their questions, and that’s okay. You can affirm the question, and if it’s easy to answer yourself, do so. And if not, say “We’ll hold on to that question to see if it’s answered in any of the future classes.”

Finally, review any key points from last class that were missed, especially if they are really important for this upcoming lesson.

Opening Reflection

2. Why does it even matter (or, *does* it matter) for us that we try to understand the Trinity?

Take student responses after giving them time to write. Be comfortable with students guessing and being incorrect. Let them wonder out loud. Get them asking great questions with each other. If they do, they’ll listen more attentively to the lecture. This is not the time to come up with any “answers” but rather highlight what “we” don’t know and what’s confusing.

Preparing for Video Clip

Next, you may need to do some basic theological teaching with the students. Dr. Aristotle Papanikolaou assumes that the audience of his lectures has some basic knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity, so it’s important that you make sure that your students have this knowledge before listening.

3. From your understanding or memory, what does the Orthodox Church teach about the Trinity?

You may or may not want to allow some responses. Then you'll want to cover the basics before viewing the video clip.

The Basics: These three points are requisite knowledge when listening to this lecture:

- * God is one in essence (ousia)
- * He is in three persons (hypostases)
- * This is a mystery that doesn't make mathematical sense, though it makes sense in other ways.

How and why is this important? Dr. Papanikolaou will help us explore this question.

Encourage students to take notes in their student guide as they watch and listen to the video clip. Tell them that you will discuss the lecture afterwards.

In their student guides it says:

4. As you watch and listen to Dr. Papanikolaou, take notes here:

Reflection on Video

- Now we are going to do an activity that will help us examine Dr. Papanikolaou's claim that the fact that the Christian God was loving and wanted a relationship with the world made him radically different from gods worshipped in other ancient religions.
- Directions: Read an ancient Chinese creation myth, Pan Gu. Compare and contrast this account with Genesis. Students should be directed to the chart in the student guide.
- Then, discuss what you see. (Discussion questions are below.)

Pan Gu

Long, long ago, when heaven and earth were still one, the entire universe was contained in an egg-shaped cloud. All the matter of the universe swirled chaotically in that egg. Deep within the swirling matter was Pan Gu, a huge giant who grew in the chaos. For 18,000 years he developed and slept in the egg. Finally one day he awoke and stretched, and the egg broke to release the matter of the universe. The lighter purer elements drifted upwards to make the sky and heavens, and the heavier impure elements settled downwards to make the earth.

In the midst of this new world, Pan Gu worried that heaven and earth might mix again; so he resolved to hold them apart, with the heavens on his head and the earth under his feet. As the two continued to separate, Pan Gu grew to hold them apart. For 18,000 years he continued to grow, until the heavens were 30,000 miles above the earth. For much longer he continued to hold the two apart, fearing the return of the chaos of his youth. Finally he realized they were stable, and soon after that he died.

With the immense giant's death, the earth took on new character. His arms and legs became the four directions and the mountains. His blood became the rivers, and his sweat became the rain and dew. His voice became the thunder, and his breath became the winds. His hair became the grass, and his veins became the roads and paths. His teeth and bones became the minerals and rocks, and his flesh became the soil of the fields. Up above, his left eye became the sun, and his right eye became the moon. When he was happy the sun shone, but when he was angry black clouds gathered in the sky. One version of the legend has it that the fleas and lice on his body became the ancestors of mankind. Thus in death, as in life, Pan Gu made the world as it is today.

Story excerpted from: Jan Walls and Yvonne Walls (translators and editors), 1984, *Classical Chinese Myths*: Hong Kong, Joint Publishing Company, 135 p. (BL1825.C48 1984)

Genesis 1-2:7

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was*^[a] on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. **4** And God saw the light, that *it was good*; and God divided the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

6 Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." **7** Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which *were* above the firmament; and it was so. **8** And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.

9 Then God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry *land* appear"; and it was so. **10** And God called the dry *land* Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that *it was good*.

11 Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed, *and* the fruit tree *that* yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed *is* in itself, on the earth"; and it was so. **12** And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its kind. And God saw that *it was good*. **13** So the evening and the morning were the third day.

14 Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; **15** and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. **16** Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. *He made* the stars also. **17** God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, **18** and to rule

over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that *it was good*.¹⁹ So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

²⁰ Then God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.”²¹ So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that *it was good*.²² And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”²³ So the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

²⁴ Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, *each* according to its kind”; and it was so.²⁵ And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it was good*.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all^[b] the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”²⁷ So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.²⁸ Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

²⁹ And God said, “See, I have given you every herb *that* yields seed which *is* on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.”³⁰ Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which *there is* life, *I have given* every green herb for food”; and it was so.³¹ Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was* very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.² And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.³ Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

⁴ This *is* the history^[a] of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,⁵ before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and *there was* no man to till the ground;⁶ but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

⁷ And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Pan Gu distinctives	Similarities	Christian distinctives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the matter of the universe existed alongside Pan Gu -when Pan Gu died, he <i>became</i> different elements of Creation (pantheism) -the heavens and the earth create chaos when they come together -God was afraid -God's emotions determine whether the weather is good or bad - man is from lice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - God has an effect upon the world - God is much more powerful than man 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - only God existed and then he created all matter - God is directly involved with creation both at the moment of genesis and after, but he is also distinct from creation - there was no chaos at creation; God calmly spoke and his commands were realized - God unified heaven earth since Christ took a human body - Bad weather is a result of the Fall and Sin, in other words: human disobedience to God - man is from mud (but then, later, God becomes man)

Unpacking the comparison:

At first, take quick notes on the literal similarities and differences between the stories. What is different about what *happens* in the stories? Then, ask students an abstract question:

6. How is the Christian God different, in character, than Pan Gu?
7. Does this comparison help clarify any concepts from Dr. Papanikolaou's lecture?
8. Has this activity changed the way that you think about God? If so, in what way?

Close with any of the key points that they might not have addressed in their own sharing/discussion.

At this point, you may choose to hand out the "Key Points" summary page for this lesson.