

God and Creation

- The Trinity
- The nature of God
- Creation
- Sovereignty and providence

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The Trinity

- Three affirmations (Grenz):
 - God is triune.
 - God is relational.
 - God is creator.
- “Trinity” coined by Tertullian (3rd c.).
- Church had to deal with 3 factors:
 - Monotheism
 - Divinity and Lordship of Christ
 - Experience of the Holy Spirit

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The Trinity

- See handout on Trinity.
- Oneness of God
- Deity of Christ and the Spirit
- Distinction between the three persons
- Trinitarian formulas suggest equality.
- Functional subordination of the persons

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The Trinity

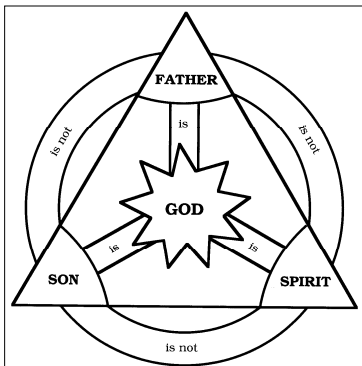
- Doctrine worked out in stages.
 - Tertullian: one substance in 3 persons (3rd c.)
 - Nicea (AD 325) - Son is divine.
 - Constantinople (381) - Spirit is divine.
 - Details worked out by Cappadocian fathers.
- There is no God but the Triune God.
 - Single substance in 3 persons (Father, Son, Spirit).
 - Perichoresis (mutual indwelling of persons).

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The Trinity

- Internal relations:
 - Father generates.
 - Son is generated (not created).
 - Spirit proceeds (not created).
- External relations (activity in the world):
 - Father originates.
 - Son mediates or reveals.
 - Spirit completes.
 - *From Father, through Son, by Spirit.*

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Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine, H. Wayne House

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The Trinity

- Theological significance of the Trinity:
 - We are monotheists, not polytheists.
 - There is diversity in the godhead itself.
 - There is relationship and *agape* love in God.
 - Father, Son, and Spirit may be prayed to and worshiped.

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The Trinity

- Practical or ethical implications of Trinity:
 - Paradigm for how we understand human identity (persons in relationship to others).
 - Basis of our relationship with God and others.
 - Appreciate diversity within unity of our faith.
 - Paradigm for mutuality and equality in church and ultimately in society.

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The Nature of God

- God is the social Trinity.
- God is spirit (John 4:24).
 - God doesn't have a physical (material) nature.
 - God is the living one and the source and sustainer of all life (Grenz).
- God is person.
 - Grenz: incomprehensible, willful, free.
 - God has a personal name: Yahweh.
 - Personhood is a non-negotiable value.

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The Nature of God

- God's relationship to creation:
 - Transcendent = self-sufficient, above and beyond creation.
 - Immanent = present to creation, active in it.

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The Nature of God

Transcendence

Immanence

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The Nature of God

- Immanent: God sustains all things.
 - Not pantheism (God is identified with creation or is “in everything”).
 - In pantheism, God is no longer personal.
- Practical implications:
 - God can act within natural processes.
 - God can indwell human beings.
 - God understands our situation from the inside.

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The Nature of God

- Transcendent: God is Other; self-sufficient.
 - Not deism (God made the world and left it alone to run by natural laws).
 - We often act like deists.
- Practical implications:
 - God is higher than us and worthy of worship.
 - God can't be captured in human concepts.
 - God can work in miraculous ways.
 - God can save us from our situation.

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The Nature of God

Deism

Pantheism

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The Nature of God

- One model of God's relationship to creation:

Based on *Flatland*, by Edwin Abbott

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The Nature of God

- We must keep God's immanence and transcendence in balance.
 - Too much transcendence = deism.
 - Too much immanence = pantheism.
 - In either case, no personal relationship.
 - See Isaiah 57:15; John 1:14.

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The Nature of God

- Eternality - God is not limited with respect to time.
 - Timelessness, eternal now (Augustine).
 - All times present simultaneously (Grenz).
 - Experiences successive time, but also outside it (open theism).
- God's life is eternal.
- God has the perspective we need.

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The Nature of God

- Omnipresence: not limited by space.
 - Accessible from anywhere.
 - Can't hide from God.
 - We can trust God to be there for us.
- Omnipotence: God can do anything that is possible and consistent with his character.
 - Not logical impossibilities (square circle).
 - Not arbitrary or tyrannical.
 - Not coerced but free.
 - We can trust God to keep his promises.

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The Nature of God

- Omniscience: knows all that can be known.
 - Makes predictive prophecy possible.
 - We can trust God’s wisdom to guide us.
- Debates over *what is possible to foreknow*.
 - Predestination (he knows it because he wills it)
 - Foreknowledge (he simply knows in advance)
 - Middle knowledge (knows all possible futures)
 - Simultaneous knowledge (all times at once)
 - Presentism (some as definite, some as maybe)

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The Nature of God

- Open theism = variety of Arminianism.
 - Dissatisfaction with simple foreknowledge.
 - Conclusion that the future is fixed.
 - Biblical passages on God changing his mind.
 - Effectiveness of prayer.
 - Future is partly determined, partly open.
 - God knows some of it as settled, some of it as possibilities.
 - Actual future partly depends on human choice.

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The Nature of God

- Views on immutability have two extremes:
 - God the Unmoved Mover (Greek philosophy)
 - God evolving with the world (process thought)
- Biblical emphasis: constancy of character.
- God’s “repentance” works against complete immutability.
- God is faithful, but he changes his actions in response to human actions.
- The Incarnation and the Cross.

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The Nature of God

- God traditionally described as impassible.
 - God doesn't change; emotions mean change.
 - Therefore God has no emotions.
- Still defended by some evangelicals (Thomists and some Reformed).
- Rejected by most today.
 - Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*.
 - God chose active suffering for our sakes.
- God the social Trinity can't be impassible.

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The Nature of God

- Relevance of immutability and impassibility to counseling?

- No good biblical support for impassibility.
- But we can't define God's emotions solely by ours.

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The Nature of God

- Love is God's preeminent attribute.
 - God is love (1 John 4:8, 16).
 - *Hesed* (covenant love)
 - *Agape* (self-sacrificial love)
 - *Abba* (intimate parental love)
- Wrath is the "dark side" of God's love.

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The Nature of God

- God is completely good.
 - Holiness and compassion.
 - Upright, just, righteous in his dealings.
 - Standard of morality.
 - Gracious, benevolent, long-suffering.
- No division between holiness and love or between justice and love.
 - God’s justice is covenant faithfulness.
 - Guided by love.

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The Nature of God

- God’s character should draw us closer to him in loving relationship and worship.
- It provides a standard for personal ethics.
- It provides a standard for social ethics.

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Creation

- God’s relationship to the world = creator to creation.
- Creation shows that God is relational.
- Creation is a free act of God.
- God created the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).
 - By his Word.
 - God is the only eternal reality.

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Creation

- Creation is an act of God's love.
- Creation is the work of the Trinity.
- Creation is for God's glory.
- Includes original creation and new creation.

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Creation

- Theological significance of creation:
 - Universe is different from God and dependent on God.
 - Creation is purposeful and meaningful, not random.
 - Creation is good as originally created.
 - Establishes God's sovereignty.
 - Includes a future orientation (new creation).
 - Affirms community.

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Sovereignty and Providence

- Providence = God's governance of creation.
 - God directs creation toward his purposes.
 - How God chooses to exercise sovereignty.
 - Idea that God is in control.
- Understanding of God's sovereignty and providence differs between Calvinists and Arminians.
 - Calvinists: God decides all that happens.
 - Arminians: God gives humans limited freedom.

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Sovereignty and Providence

- “He is accounted omnipotent, not because he is able to act, yet sits down in idleness, or continues by a general instinct the order of nature originally appointed by him; but because he regulates all things in such a manner that nothing happens but according to his counsel.” (John Calvin)
- If God does not cause everything, God is not sovereign.
- God chooses which individuals will be saved.
- Prayer does not affect God’s actions.

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Sovereignty and Providence

- Divine Providence is “that solicitous, continued, and universally present inspection and oversight of God, according to which he exercises a general care over the whole world, but evinces a particular concern for all his [intelligent] creatures without any exception, with the design of preserving and governing them in their own essence, qualities, actions and passions, in a manner that is at once worthy of Himself and suitable to them, to the praise of his name and the salvation of believers.” (James Arminius)

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Sovereignty and Providence

- God respects the natures and actions of his creatures.
- God allows for their responses.
- God controls what he chooses to control.
- God wants people to choose to love him, so he allows them to freedom to choose.
- God responds to prayer.
- Grenz: God’s *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty.

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Sovereignty and Providence

- What do you think of these positions?

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Sovereignty and Providence

- Theological significance of providence:
 - Life is not random but meaningful.
 - God directs creation towards his purposes.
 - Rejects deism. God didn't abandon the world.
 - Evil will not be victorious.
 - God is near to help us.
 - Our efforts are not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

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Sovereignty and Providence

- Providence raises the problem of evil.
 - God is good. God is all-powerful. Evil exists.
 - If God were not creator, there would be no problem.
 - Especially important problem in counseling.
- Different causes of suffering:
 - Result of wrong choices.
 - "Natural evils" such as disease, hurricanes.
 - Either God causes these or permits them.

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Sovereignty and Providence

- Problem is critical for Calvinism.
 - If God causes everything, is God responsible for evil?
 - How can God's sovereignty be reconciled with human responsibility?
 - A mystery or a self-contradiction?

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Sovereignty and Providence

- Calvinism: God decrees evil to achieve a greater good.
 - Sometimes to the person experiencing it.
 - Evil brings glory to God by letting him demonstrate his justice.
 - It demonstrates God's mercy toward the elect.
 - Does the intention make an act good or evil?

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Sovereignty and Providence

- Arminianism: God grants freedom and responsibility to make moral choices.
 - Without freedom, they can't be responsible.
 - God's will can be thwarted by human decisions, within limits.
 - God wants all people to be saved, but he lets people reject his offer.
 - God does not decree evil, but he brings good out of evil.

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Sovereignty and Providence

- What do you think?

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Bob and Linda recently lost their twelve year old son to cancer. Their marriage is in crisis, and they come to you for help. They are both Christians. They attend a church that has a strong emphasis on healing. Although they fervently prayed for their son's healing, he was not healed. Their friends at church were very supportive during their son's illness, but they seem uncomfortable around them now. Linda torments herself with thoughts that their son might have died because their faith was too weak. Or perhaps God did not heal their son because he was angry at them. Bob, on the other hand, is angry at God. He doesn't understand why God would do this—or at least let it happen. If God is truly in control, what kind of God is he? He has certainly let them down. Linda says that he shouldn't talk like that. What theological framework will you need in order to address their situation?

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God and Creation

- Theological issues in case study?
 - How would Calvinists and Arminians understand the situation differently?
 - How might classical and open theists understand the situation differently?
 - What would God's providence mean in this situation?
 - What do they need to know about God?
 - What do they need to know about healing?

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