

## The Nature of God

- The Trinity
- The names of God
- The nature of God

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## The Trinity

- “Trinity” not a biblical term - inference from the biblical data.
- Church had to deal with 3 factors:
  - Monotheism (Deut. 6:4ff)
  - Divinity and Lordship of Christ (Rom. 10:9-10)
  - Experience of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18)
- Account for Christ and the Holy Spirit in a way that would preserve monotheism.

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## The Trinity: Biblical Data

- Oneness of God - Deut. 6:4ff; 1 Cor. 8:4-6.
- Deity of Christ and the Spirit.
- Distinction between the three persons.
- Trinitarian formulas suggest equality.
- Functional subordination of the persons.
- Problem: how to reconcile oneness and threeness; equality and distinctions.
- Heresies over-emphasize one or the other.

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### The Trinity: Inadequate Models

- What is dynamic monarchianism?
  - From *mono* + *arche* = one ruler or source.
  - Wanted to safeguard monotheism.
  - Theodotus, Paul of Samosata (2nd-3rd century)
  - From *dunamis* = power.
  - God’s power was present in the man Jesus.
  - Jesus was an ordinary human being; at his baptism, the Spirit or Christ descended upon him and empowered him to do miracles.
  - An adoptionistic solution.

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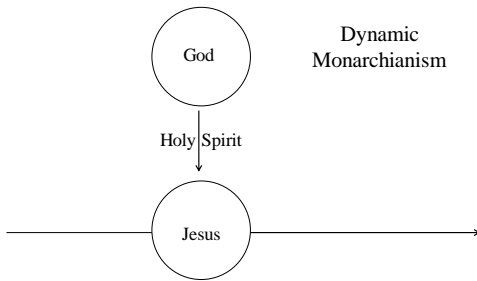
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### The Trinity: Inadequate Models



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### The Trinity: Inadequate Models

- What is modalistic monarchianism?
  - Modalism; again emphasizes oneness of God.
  - Divinity of Father, Son, Spirit.
  - God is one person with three different names, appeared to us in three different “modes.”
  - Sabellius: age of Father (creation until Christ), Son (life of Jesus), Spirit (church age).
  - Patripassionism - father suffered on the cross.
  - Doesn’t deal adequately with Trinitarian texts or passages where all 3 persons appear.

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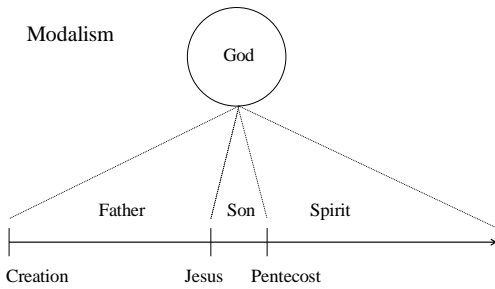
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### The Trinity: Inadequate Models

Modalism



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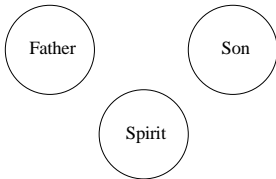
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### The Trinity: Inadequate Models

- What is tritheism?
  - Opposite error to modalism.
  - Three separate gods, as in polytheism.



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### The Trinity: Inadequate Models

- What was Arianism?
  - Arius, deacon in Alexandria
  - Son was a creature.
  - “There was [a time] when he was not.”
  - Not human; a superior creation
  - Rejected at Nicea in 325.



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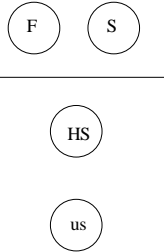
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## The Trinity: Inadequate Models

- Macedonianism
  - Macedonius, bishop of Constantinople.
  - Orthodox view of the Son.
  - Arian view of the Spirit.
  - Rejected at Council of Constantinople in 381.



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## Trinity: Doctrinal Development

- Settled in West by early 3rd century.
  - Tertullian: one substance in 3 persons.
  - Not exactly the later orthodox view: 3 parties could share the same property.
- Not settled in East until 4th century.
  - One *ousia* in three *hypostaseis*.
  - One essence but different properties: paternity, sonship, sanctifying power.

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## Trinity: Doctrinal Development

- Origen's contributions
  - Eternal generation of the Son.
  - Subordinationist tendencies.
- Athanasius - defender of orthodoxy
  - Deity of Son and Spirit necessary for salvation.
  - Only God saves, so Son must be divine.
  - Spirit must be divine, or we aren't united with God.

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### Trinity: Doctrinal Development

- Ecumenical councils affirmed divinity of Son and Spirit.
  - Nicea (325) - Son is divine.
  - Constantinople (381) - Spirit is divine.
  - So elements of doctrine of Trinity were in place by 381 - but not worked out in detail.
- Further details worked out by Cappadocian fathers.

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### Trinity: Doctrinal Development

- Immanent Trinity vs. economic Trinity.
  - Immanent (eternal, essential) = Trinity in its eternal relations, independent of creation.
  - Economic (historical) = Trinity in its interaction with creation.
- Why does it matter that these are the same?

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### Trinity: Doctrinal Development

- Eastern and western Trinitarian doctrine
- Latin - emphasize oneness; modalistic tendency.
  - Focus on relationships in Trinity (Augustine).
  - *Persona* could mean an actor's mask.
- Greek - emphasize threeness; tritheistic tendency.
  - Father as sole source of deity.
  - Tend toward subordination of Son and Spirit.

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### Trinity: Doctrinal Development

- Augustine's contribution
  - Based on idea that God is love.
  - Father, Son, Spirit relate to one another as lover, beloved, and the love they share.
- What was the *filioque* controversy?
  - East: Spirit proceeds from Father *through* Son.
  - West: Spirit proceeds from Father *and* Son.
  - Council of Toledo (589) changed Nicene Creed.
  - Became creed of Holy Roman Empire in 809.
  - Cited in East/West split in 1054.

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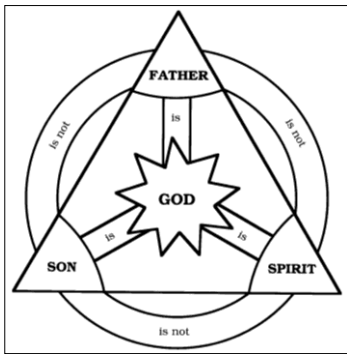
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Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine, H. Wayne House

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### Trinity: Theological Significance

- Theological significance of God's oneness?

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### Trinity: Theological Significance

- Theological significance of God's threeness?

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### Trinity: Theological Significance

- Problems with analogies for the Trinity.
- Dynamism in God, unlike static view of Greek philosophy.
- Father, Son, and Spirit may be prayed to and worshiped.
- God is the relational God, the social Trinity.
  - God is a community of mutual love.
  - Trinity explains how "God is love."

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### Trinity: Theological Significance

- What status do we give this doctrine?

<u>Theological Norms</u>	<u>Status of Trinity doctrine</u>
Creeds	Dogma; unquestionable.
Scripture, tradition	Trust that God has guided the church to the right development of doctrine.
Scripture	Open to review by standard of biblical data.

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### Trinity: Practical Implications

- Practical or ethical implications of Trinity?
  
- Remember that the Trinity is a mystery!

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### The Trinity: Case Study

- You are on staff at a congregation that has an effective ministry which uses a popular weight-loss program. A controversy has arisen because the founder of the program has been making statements rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity. Some churches have dropped the program because of this. Some of the participants in your ministry have expressed concern about her statements. The ministry leaders come to you and ask if they should discontinue the program. What do you do?

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### The Names of God

**OT (Hebrew)**  
*El, Eloah/Elohim*     g/God, mighty one  
*El Shaddai*             God Almighty  
*Adonai*                    Lord/lord  
*Yahweh*     יהוה     I am who I am (will be)  
 Often thought to mean self-existent.  
 May refer to covenant faithfulness.  
 May mean I will be revealed in my acts.  
 Tetragrammaton (four letters).

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<i>El Shaddai</i>	God Almighty
<i>Adonai</i>	Lord/lord
<i>Yahweh</i> יהוה	I am who I am (will be)
<i>Yahweh Sabaoth</i>	Yahweh of hosts

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### The Names of God

<b>OT (Hebrew)</b>	<b>NT (Greek)</b>
<i>El, Eloah/Elohim</i>	<i>Theos</i>
<i>El Shaddai</i>	
<i>Adonai</i>	
<i>Yahweh</i> יהוה	
<i>Yahweh Sabaoth</i>	

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<b>OT (Hebrew)</b>	<b>NT (Greek)</b>
<i>El, Eloah/Elohim</i>	<i>Theos</i>
<i>El Shaddai</i>	<i>Theos pantocrator</i>
<i>Adonai</i>	
<i>Yahweh</i> יהוה	
<i>Yahweh Sabaoth</i>	

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<i>Adonai</i>	<i>Kurios</i>
<i>Yahweh</i> יהוה	
<i>Yahweh Sabaoth</i>	<i>Abba (Aramaic, "papa")</i>

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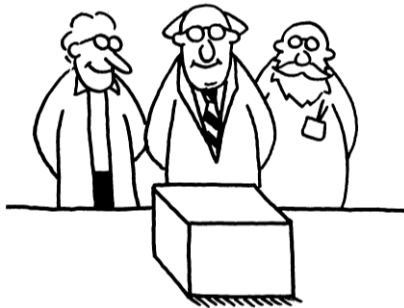
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ALLEN

After months of intensive effort, Prof. Mortzman and his fellow theologians finally succeed in putting God in a box.

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### The Nature of God

Then Yahweh passed before him and called out, "Yahweh, Yahweh, God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in faithful love and constancy, maintaining his faithful love to thousands, forgiving fault, crime and sin, yet letting nothing go unchecked, and punishing the parent's fault in the children and in the grandchildren to the third and fourth generation!"

(Ex. 34:6-7; NJB)

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### The Nature of God

[We] acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, who is apprehended by the understanding only and the reason, who is encompassed by light, and beauty, and spirit, and power ineffable, by whom the universe has been created through His Logos, and set in order, and is kept in being... (Athenagoras, c. 177)

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### The Nature of God

- What does it mean that God is spirit?
  - God doesn't have a physical (material) nature.
  - Hebrew *ruach* and Greek *pneuma* (spirit) can mean breath, wind, air.
- Some passages suggesting that God has a physical body are anthropomorphisms.
- Others are theophanies.

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### The Nature of God

- What does it mean that God is person?
  - M. Erickson: “an individual being, with self-consciousness and will, is capable of feeling, choosing, and having a reciprocal relationship with other personal and social beings.”
  - God has a name; is not an object or a force; forms relationships with other beings.
  - Grenz: God is “incomprehensible, willful, and free” (complex, self-determining, uncontrolled).

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### The Nature of God

- Grenz: God’s nature as person means that personhood is a non-negotiable value.
  - Our individual personhood is affirmed.
  - The distinction of our personhood from God’s is affirmed.
  - God has a person-to-person relationship with us.
  - In the consummation, our personhood will be confirmed for eternity.
  - This differs from some other religions.

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### The Nature of God

- What does it mean that God is transcendent and immanent?

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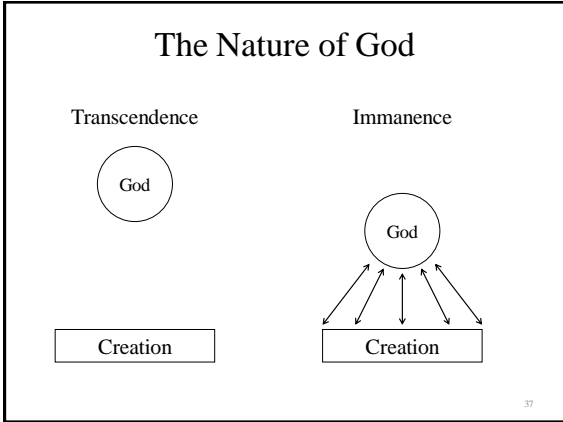
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### The Nature of God

- Recent theologies tend to emphasize God’s immanence.
  - God sustains all things in being.
  - Extreme view of immanence: pantheism (God is identified with creation).
  - In pantheism, God is no longer personal.

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### The Nature of God

- Earlier theologies tended to emphasize God’s transcendence.
  - God is Other; God is self-sufficient and needs nothing.
  - Extreme view of transcendence: deism (God made the world and left it alone to run by natural laws).

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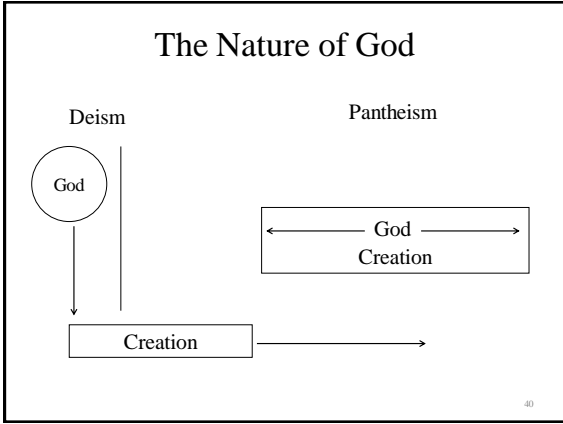
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### The Nature of God

- Models: spatial (“up there”); dimensional (another dimension).

Based on *Flatland*, by Edwin Abbott

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### The Nature of God

- Why is it important to affirm both God’s immanence and God’s transcendence?

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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 55:6-9; 57:15; John 1:14.

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### The Nature of God: Eternality

- Eternality - God is not limited with respect to time.
- “God is present in all time, and therefore all time is present to God” (Grenz).
- Not static timelessness, but presence and activity.

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### The Nature of God: Eternality

- What does it mean that God is omnipresent?
  
- What is the difference between omnipresence and pantheism?
  - See Psalm 139; 145:18.
- We can trust God to be there for us.

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### The Nature of God: Eternality

- What does it mean that God is omnipotent?
  
  
  
  
- We can trust God to keep his promises.

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### The Nature of God: Eternality

- What does it mean that God is omniscient?
  
  
- Many debates over *how* God knows.
  - 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)
  - Open theism (all that is possible)
- We can trust God's wisdom to guide us.

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### The Nature of God: Eternality

- 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 undercuts immutability.

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### The Nature of God: Eternality

- Immutability is sometimes linked with impassibility.
  - Greek idea of perfection as static.
  - Any change would mean imperfection.
  - Therefore God could have no emotions.
- This impacts our doctrine in many ways:
  - Affects transcendence and immanence.
  - Also God’s responsiveness and relationality.
  - Affects the incarnation and atonement.

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### The Nature of God: Eternality

- What do you think? Is God impassible?

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### The Nature of God: Goodness

- Complete this: “God is \_\_\_\_\_.”
  - God’s moral attributes.
  - We’ll focus on categories of holiness and love.
- Holiness - moral uprightness, uniqueness, transcendence.
  - Righteousness - covenant faithfulness
  - Integrity - genuineness, truthfulness
  - Justice - requiring right action, human faithfulness to covenant

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### The Nature of God: Goodness

- Love is God’s preeminent attribute.
  - *Hesed* (covenant love)
  - *Agape* (self-sacrificial love)
  - *Abba* (intimate parental love)
- God is the compassionate one (Ex. 34:6).
- God is persistent in his mercy.
- God is holy love.

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### The Nature of God

- How does this study of God’s character affect you?
- It should draw us close to God.
- It should lead us to worship.
- It provides a standard for personal ethics.
- It provides a standard for social ethics.
- It should prompt us to worship, prayer, and bold action in the world (Grenz).

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