

**THE DOCTRINE OF GOD**  
**Part V: The German and American Rationalist**

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**I. INTRODUCTION.**

In the last few lectures our focus has been upon the development of Theology Proper, particularly trinitarianism. The fertile period for the delineation of that doctrine was in the fourth century through Athanasius and the Cappadocians that led to the final triumph over Arianism at Constantinople in A.D. 381. Attack upon this fundamental plank of Christianity (the plural unity of God) was not seriously questioned until the Post-Reformation era in the emergence of Socinianism, Deism, and Unitarianism. These theological re-evaluations, themselves the product and harbinger of Enlightened Rationalism, were a precursor of the theological restructuring that would follow in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries.

The purpose of this lesson is to trace the highlights of the development of the doctrine of God in the Modern Era. The stress is not so much upon trinitarianism as the more fundamental issue of theism. The reality of God was verified through inward experience within the context of a Kantian world.

**II. THE ANTHRO-THEISM OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN THEOLOGIANS.**

As indicated previously, the Post-Reformation era experienced a shift from a theistic worldview to an anthropocentrism which was the result of the reinterpretation of life and its meaning through the humanism of the “Scientific Method.”

**N.B.** This is said in no degree to demean the “Scientific Method” as such. The error was not in the method, but to the sphere in which the method was applied. Hard,

concrete data, which is the vital ingredient of Baconian empiricism, is unavailable in the sphere of the supernatural. Rationalism is excellent when applied to nature, critically short in the sphere of the supernatural. It simply restricts access to a sphere of available knowledge.

In the realm of Bible study, the scientific method can apply in the sense that the Bible provides the data and man uses his reason to understand, classify, and categorize the data, but not to validate the existence of God or the data. When Western man attempts to justify and validate the existence of God or the data in the Bible apart from either, then it inevitably results in the destruction of both.

Mention has already been made of the following key figures:

1. **Rene Descartes** began his search for knowledge in universal doubt, not skepticism, and sustained religion from the “idea” of religion (reason, not logic!).
2. **John Locke** and **Thomas Hobbes** rejected Cartesianism with its philosophic innate ideas for a form of empiricism (here revelation is not denied; it is limited to experience!).
3. **Immanuel Kant** rejected both Cartesian innateness and Lockean empiricism for a mediating position. Knowledge comes to us from an interplay between ideas within and sense perceptions of the external.

**N.N.B.B.** The point of all this is that a philosophic shift brought about a major reorientation of theology. The mind was set free from revelation upon which it had been dependent for truth (i.e., the Christian Era [A.D. 323–1650]). The steps in the process were four:

1. The prelude to the Enlightenment was not a conscientious effort to change Orthodoxy, but came from an attempt to show “the faith” consistent with the Scriptures. Reason was not elevated but used. In apologetics, a dualism was introduced between reason and revelation (i.e., Aquinas). This led to a “two book of knowledge” theory: revelation and nature.
2. Reason or religious consciousness was put on par with revelation: All truth is God’s truth. Reason and creation are no longer under the authority of Scripture but are now equal with the authority of Scripture.
3. Reason usurped revelation (i.e., revelation defined the meaning of our ideas concerning God and liberty, immortality, and morality). This left the nineteenth century with these remarkable features: inward authority, moralism, optimism, and Pelagianism.
4. The extreme of the approach is to reduce Christianity to virtues. Twentieth

century religions of experientialism are a reaction to the nineteenth century elevation of reason!

A. **Frederick Schleiermacher (1768–1834).**

1. **Schleiermacher and Religion.** Schleiermacher's presentation of religion is clearly within the framework of the prevailing philosophy of his day (i.e., Kantianism). Religion begins in man, not in God, which to him was the traditional approach. Barth commented (*From Rousseau to Ritschl*, 340): "Schleiermacher reversed the order of this thought. What interests him is the question of man's action in regard to God. We must not condemn him for this out of hand. If we call to mind the entire situation of theology in the modern world then we shall find it understandable that it fastened upon the point which had come to the centre of the entire thought of modern man. This point was simply man himself. This shifting of interest did not necessarily have to mean man without God, man in his own world. It could also mean man in the presence of God, his action over against God's action. A genuine, proper theology could be built up from such a starting-point. We may ask the question whether it was a good thing that Schleiermacher adapted himself to the trend of the time in this way and took up his position at the spot where he was invited to do so by the prevalence of the Copernican world-picture, by its execution during the Enlightenment, by Kant, by Goethe, by Romanticism, and by Hegel."

Pfleiderer stated the same points, but clarifies Schleiermacher's somewhat facile meditating position between supernatural and natural religion (*The Development of Theology*, 103–104): "He took up, therefore, a position opposed to the standpoint of the Supernaturalists, on the one hand, by conceiving the Christian faith not as a doctrinal authority given us from without, but as an inward condition of our own self-consciousness, which must be connected with the remaining contents of our consciousness and the laws of our mind. On this point Schleiermacher occupies completely the position of modern idealism, for which there can be no truth that does not rise out of and answer to the human mind. On the other hand, he maintained, in opposition to the Rationalists, the view that the Christian faith is not a product of rational thinking, but a condition of the heart, a feeling preceding thought and supplied independently of it; moreover, a feeling not of the devout individual only, but of the Christian, or specifically of the Protestant Church; accordingly a fact not merely of individual experience, but of the common experience of a historical community; an experience, therefore, which, like all positive experiences in history, must be received and intelligently described, while it cannot and may not be reasoned away."

**N.B.** Because of this approach to religion, which Barth correctly said was not necessarily in error, but proved to be because of other, far

more questionable presuppositions, little is given by the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the nature and purpose of God. He was out of focus for that era.

This is why Schleiermacher defines religion as “the feeling of absolute dependence” on God. The stress is not God, but human consciousness of God (something “*sui generis*”), a God-consciousness most perfectly displayed by the man Christ.

2. **Schleiermacher and Theology Proper.** His proportional stress on the doctrine of God is evident in his systematic theology by placing it as the last subject that he takes up. In short, Schleiermacher explains the Trinity modalistically, and justifies it by appealing to Sabellius. The Trinity is a tirade of God-consciousness. He wrote (*The Christian Faith*. II, 751) evidencing classic modalism: “The designation of the First Person as Father, as well as the relations of the First Person to the other two Persons, seems rather to set forth the relation of the Persons to the unity of the Essence than to be consistent with the equality of the three Persons. Here the question really comes to be, whether it was right at the outset to give the name ‘Son of God’ solely to the divine in Christ, and to relate the term ‘Father’ to one of the distinctions in the Divine Essence and not rather to the unity of the Divine Essence as such. If it transpires that by ‘Son of God’ Scripture always and exclusively means the whole Christ Himself, and recognizes no difference between ‘God,’ as denoting the Supreme Being, and ‘the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ but uses the latter name in exactly the same sense as the former, we should then have to try whether a similar question might not be raised with regard to the Holy Spirit, with a similar answer, leading to such forms of statement as would solve our second difficulty. If the results of both problems combined in one, a new construction could easily be arrived at; if otherwise, we should have to seek new solutions, as we could, of the remaining differences. This is of itself a sufficient explanation why we are here unable to go beyond these indications in such a way as to complete the whole task.”

He argued for Modalism from Scripture, systematics, and the ancient theologians as follows (*The Christian Faith*. II, 746-47): “If we now consider the manner in which this doctrine is handled almost everywhere in dogmatic expositions, it becomes still clearer to how slight an extent what is insisted on in general formulae may be given effect to in the developed statement. In the first place, the doctrine of the Essence and attributes of God is treated apart from the trinity, God being considered in His unity. Here, however, the particular attribute under consideration is not shown within the unity, as truly divided or separated in a definite way. Instead, the doctrine of the Persons is later treated of by itself, apart from any such connexion and without being prepared for by the consciousness of the being of God in Christ and in the Christian Church. It is so treated

of, however, that when it is shown that this or that attribute also belongs to the three Persons, the proof is specially led only for the Son and the Spirit, while that it belongs to the Father is usually held to be self-evident. But if the equality of the Persons is asserted not merely as a formula but as an operative rule, such self-evidence must hold either of all three Persons or of none. The pre-eminence given to the Father in this respect proves that He is after all conceived as standing in a different relation to the unity of the Essence; so that those who feel it to be superfluous to prove that divine attributes and activities belong to the Father, while they insist on proof for the Son and the Spirit, are all of them far from being strict Trinitarians; for they identify the Father with the unity of the Divine Essence, but not the Son or the Spirit. This can be traced right back to the idea of Origen, that the Father is God absolutely, while Son and Spirit are God only by participation in the Divine Essence—an idea which is positively rejected by orthodox Church teachers, but secretly underlies their whole procedure.”

Again, he wrote (*The Christian Faith*. II, 750): “The first unsolved difficulty lies in the relation of the unity of the Essence to the trinity of the Persons; and here everything depends on the original and eternal existence of distinctions within the Divine Essence. Hence it would first be necessary to inquire whether this idea is so clearly and definitely present in passages of the New Testament that we are bound to regard it as a self-descriptive utterance of Christ and of the divine Spirit that guided the thinking of the Apostles. Of this there can scarcely be a better test than to ask whether these passages could not also be explained by the Sabellian view set up in opposition to our ecclesiastical interpretation. If this question must be answered in the negative, nothing is left but to try whether the ecclesiastical doctrine would not, without injury to the essential presuppositions mentioned above, be stated in formulae which should not contradict the Biblical passages and yet should avoid the rocks on which the ecclesiastical presentation comes to grief. If, on the other hand, the question can be answered affirmatively, so that it is no longer possible to hold that the ecclesiastical doctrine, even if not purely exegetical in origin, can at least be sustained by purely exegetical proof, then the Athanasian hypothesis is simply on a par with the Sabellian.”

Perhaps the best summary of Schleiermacher’s position is given by Pfleiderer when he wrote (*The Development of Theology*, 122): “At the end of the work is added a section on the Trinity. It follows of itself from what has already been said on Schleiermacher’s doctrine as to the divine attributes, that he could not acknowledge hypostatic distinctions in the Divine Being. His dialectical critique of the ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity is as admirable as the historical estimate of the various motives which led to the construction of this doctrine is unsatisfactory. It is undoubtedly correct that the doctrine is not a direct utterance as to the

Christian self-consciousness, but only a combination of several of such, namely, of our union with God by the revelation of Christ, and by the common spirit of the Christian Church. Schleiermacher explains, therefore, the Trinity modalistically of the various forms of the revelation of God, and justifies his procedure by an appeal to the early example of the Sabellians.”

**N.B.** The Theology Proper of the entire nineteenth century falls back to a blurring of either of the Monarchian errors of the second and third centuries.

**B. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72).**

A progression, perhaps it would be better to say a retrogression, from Schleiermacher’s thought is that of Feuerbach who holds that religion is an idealistic fiction without any actual truth (i.e., he is the precursor of the Modern Positivists and Agnostics). He held that only what is knowable through the senses, what is material, is real; even in man, the spiritual is only an effect of the sensible (i.e., religion is a foolish aberration, a mental disorder!).

**N.B.** As noted at the outset of this study, trinitarianism was only an afterthought to the nineteenth century. The major issue was the credibility of theism.

1. **Feuerbach and Religion.** In short, Feuerbach was a disciple of Strauss’ approach to the Bible (mythology). Barth states (*Essay*, xii): “Feuerbach views the Kantian and Hegelian philosophies as sharing damnation with theology: only they dissolved the divine being who was separated from man in thought or reason [categorical imperative or Geist]: at the same time they separated essence all the more sharply from material, sensuous existence from the world, from man.” He, like Freud, begins his religion with this sentence: “I am a real, a sensuous, a material being: yes, the body in its totality is my Ego, myself itself.” Truth is only the sum of life and being. He reasoned that in community (that is, as he knows others) he can know God (“Man with man—the unity of I and thou—is God”).
2. **Feuerbach and Theology Proper.** As you may surmise Feuerbach denies all shades of theism (“the fantastic projection of theology”) for anthrotheism (“The ego attains consciousness of the world through the consciousness of the Thou. Thus man is the God of man. That he exists at all he has to thank nature, that he is man, he has to thank man”).

In the first section of the *Essence of Christianity* he shows that the true meaning of theology is in its stating the identity of all predicates of the divine subject and the human subject (i.e., I am a man; I have love. Therefore, God is love and whatever else I predicate of myself is God).

That is, he reverses the subjects of theology to predicate the being of God (e.g., when I say God is righteous, Feuerbach would reverse it and say, “righteousness is what I think God is”). Thus, to Feuerbach God is merely an extension of himself. “While I do reduce theology to anthropology,” he wrote, “I exalt anthropology to theology; very much as Christianity while lowering God into man, made man into God.” Pfleiderer wrote (*The Development of Theology*, 135): “The final consequences of Strauss’s position were inferred by Feuerbach. Strauss did not go beyond an idealistic pantheism, which, while it gave up the God of religion, at least assumed a universal spiritual principle, an ‘idea’ which realises itself in the finite, evolves nature from itself, and becomes conscious of itself in man; and in this Feuerbach recognised a remnant of mysticism which must be got rid of; the Absolute above man he declared to be an empty abstraction, the really Absolute or Divine is man himself. All and every system of theology, not excepting speculative theology, must therefore be superseded by anthropology. But if man alone is divine, how can he come to believe in and worship a God? Feuerbach answers that the conception of God is an illusion, formed of the wishes of the heart and of the poetic imagination. The gods are Wunschwesen, i.e., the wishes and ideals of the human heart objectified by the imagination. In them man contemplates his own nature, not as it really is, held in by the limitation of the world, but as he wishes it to be, as the unlimited omnipotence of feeling. Religious faith is the self-assurance of the heart demanding the satisfaction of its desires. A miracle is the realisation (of course the imagined realisation) of a supernatural wish. Christ is the omnipotence of subjectivity, the reality of all the wishes of the heart; the conception of an incarnate God is the disclosure of the truth, that the nature of God is simply man. So also the Christian heaven means, just like the Christian God, the fulfillment of all wishes. Immortality is the testament of religion, in which it makes its last will; as heaven is the unfolded nature of the Deity, it is also the frankest declaration of the inmost thoughts of religion.”

**N.B.** Needless to say, trinitarianism is not a subject to broach with Feuerbach!!

**C. Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89).**

1. **Ritschl and Religion.** Ritschl is heavily influenced by Kantianism (God is knowable by my reason), but also evidences shades of the existentialism of Schleiermacher and Feuerbach. Religion in essence is the “common recognition of the dependence of man on God.” He rejected Schleiermacher’s “innateness” (givenness) and supernaturalism. Using Bauer’s Bible and the life of Christ, religious truth is knowable through “value judgments (i.e., existential decisions through the community)” (that is with conceptions of our relation to the world which are of moment solely according to their value in awakening feelings of pleasure or pain as our dominion over the world is furthered or checked). He wrote: “In all

religion, by the help of the sublime spiritual Power which man adores, the solution is attempted of the contradiction in which man finds himself placed as a part of nature, in subjection to it, dependent upon and checked by other things, but as spirit he is moved by the impulse to maintain his independence against external things. In these circumstances arises religion as a belief in superior spiritual powers by whose help the deficiencies in man's own power are supplied."

2. **Ritschl and Theology Proper.** All religion seeks to supplement, by means of the idea of God, man's sense of personal dignity in the face of the hindrances of the world. Hence, to Ritschl, the thought of God is simply a value judgment, or is a conception valuable for the attainment of goods (Feuerbachian—God was invented by man out of his practical need of a supplement to his own powerlessness over nature; but he reacts against Feuerbach to say that God has objective existence.)

Pfleiderer wrote (*The Development of Theology*, 186-87): "In accordance with his principle that the Christian thought of God must be put forward only in judgments of value, Ritschl teaches that God should be thought of only as love. All metaphysical statements regarding God's absoluteness, his existence through himself, in himself, and for himself, must be rejected as 'heathenish metaphysics,' connected with the false theory of knowledge which maintains the existence of things irrespective of our conception of them. The idealistic subjectification of the idea of God on the lines of Feuerbach seems a necessary consequence of this. Such is not, however, Ritschl's intention; on the contrary, he seeks to conceive of the personality of God as objectively real. That this involves the assertion of an absolute existence of God in himself, as distinguished from his existence in relation to us, or his love, is plain, but is not admitted by Ritschl. He says that the attribute of personality is only the form for God's love. If this proposition were taken strictly, it would finally come to mean that our conception of the personality of God is the form under which we personify love as 'God,' which is the view of Feuerbach and the Positivists. But Ritschl does not mean this; indeed, he speaks also of an 'intrinsic purpose of God,' into which God takes up the purpose of the world, or which he realises in the education of the human race for the kingdom of God. But such a purpose is a relation of the will to itself, and therefore presupposes a being which is not solely love, that is, existing for other, but exists also as a subject in and for itself. This inner self-subsistence of God, with his loving communication of himself, is not merely a necessary metaphysical conception, but also of great religious importance, since it is the foundation, as Dorner has well remarked, of the Biblical conception of God's holiness and righteousness, which in the teaching of the Bible and the Church is inseparable from that of his love. But this side of the idea of God is altogether neglected by Ritschl. He said: 'In comparison with the conception of love there is no other of equal value. In particular this holds



of the conception of holiness, which in its Old Testament sense is, for several reasons, not valid in Christianity, and the use of which in the New Testament is obscure.' And with regard to God's righteousness, in which, according to Biblical doctrine, his holiness is actively shown, Ritschl (like Hofmann) considers that it is 'his action for the salvation of the members of his religious community, and is identical in fact with grace.' "

**N.B.** Karl Barth has accurately summarized nineteenth century theology as a "monologue of the soul with its own divinity."  
Anthropocentrism was the hermeneutic of that century; God was humanized; and Theology Proper became (Trinitarianism) an unnecessary, irrelevant subject.

### III. THE THEISM OF KARL BARTH.

The tremendous influence of Karl Barth has already been alluded to as his teachings often provided a helpful corrective to nineteenth century anthrotheism. Barth reversed the century's trend toward the humanization of God as a personification of man's needs. To him, God was transcendent (Wholly Other!). Barth reversed the thought-framework of German theology by stressing the deity of God!

**N.B.** In reality, however, God was made so transcendent that he became lost to mankind in a historical-objective sense. He developed a biblical concept of God, but not a balanced one. God was lost in outer space apart from a subjective, existential encounter. His concept of God was far better than the nineteenth century's, but the basis of knowledge, like the nineteenth century, is still divorced from history and became subjective (i.e., facts are not important to anyone but me, I determine validity within the context of the encounter).

With Barth's interest in theism, it is not surprising that he discussed at length the doctrine of God (two volumes in *Church Dogmatics*).

**A. Barth speaks of the unity and equality of Essence.** At this point Barth speaks about the "oneness in threeness" and therefore argues that God's oneness is not only not abolished by the threeness of the persons, but that his unity consists much more precisely in the threeness of the persons. He wrote (*Church Dogmatics*. I, 1.402): "Of this essence of God it must now be said that the unity of it is not only not removed by the threeness of the 'Persons,' but that it is rather in the threeness of the 'Persons' that its unity consists. Whatever is to be said about this threeness, it can by no means signify the threeness of the essence. Three-in-oneness in God does not mean a threefold deity, either in the sense of a plurality of deities or in the sense of the existence of a plurality of individuals or parts within the one deity. The name of Father, Son, and Spirit means that God is the one God in a threefold repetition; and that in such a way, that this repetition itself is grounded in His Godhead; hence in such a way that it signifies no alteration in

His Godhead; but also in such a way that only in this repetition is He the one God; in such a way that His Godhead stands or falls with the fact that in this repetition He is God; but also precisely for the reason that in each repetition He is the one God.”

**B. Barth prefers to speak of three “modes of existence” rather than “Persons.”**

In fairness to Barth, he is not evidencing Modalism at this point because he does not speak of three modes of singular manifestation! Barth likewise clearly rejected Sabellianism! He wrote (*Church Dogmatics*. I, 1, 407-08, 413): “The concept of the revealed unity of the revealed God thus does not exclude but includes a distinction (*distinctio* or *discretio*), an arrangement (*dispositio* or *oeconomia*), in the essence of God. This distinction or arrangement is the distinction or arrangement of the three “persons”—we prefer to say, the three “modes of being” in God. In the opening sentence of our section we avoided the concept “Person.” Neither was it on its introduction into ecclesiastical language made sufficiently clear, nor has the subsequent interpretation, imparted to it and enforced as a whole in medieval and post-Reformation scholasticism, really issued in such a clearing up, nor has the introduction of the modern concept of personality into this debate produced anything else but fresh confusion. The situation would be hopeless if our task here were to state the proper meaning of “Person” in the doctrine of the Trinity. Fortunately, that is not our task. But, of course, the difficulties in which we see ourselves involved regarding a concept once for all become classical, are but a symptom of the difficulty of the question generally, which has to be answered here one way or the other . . . The statement “God is one in three modes of being, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” thus means that the one God, i.e., the one Lord, the one personal God is what He is not in one mode only, but—we appeal in support simply to the result of our analysis of the biblical concept of revelation—in the mode of the Father, in the mode of the Son, in the mode of the Holy Spirit.

**N.B.** This distinction must be held in balance because the self-distinctions in the divine being pertaining particularly to personality do imply an “I” (thou, He) so that there is communication between the persons of the Godhead.

Barth is quite Orthodox when he defines the Trinity as follows (*Church Dogmatics*. I, 1.353): “We mean by the doctrine of the Trinity, in a general and preliminary way, the proposition that He whom the Christian Church calls God and proclaims as God, therefore the God who has revealed Himself according to the witness of Scripture, is the same in unimpaired unity, yet also the same in unimpaired variety thrice in a different way. Or, in the phraseology of the dogma of the Trinity in the Church, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the Bible’s witness to revelation are the one God in the unity of their essence, and the one God in the Bible’s witness to revelation is in the variety of His Persons the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

- C. **Barth acknowledges that his doctrine of the Trinity goes beyond the Bible.** Barth's analysis of the Trinity is two-fold (*Church Dogmatics*. I, 1.437): "The problem pointing to the Church doctrine of the Trinity, which we imagine we see set up in the Bible, consists of the fact that there the being, language, and action, and therefore the self-revelation of God is described throughout by the moments of His self-veiling or His self-unveiling or His self-impartation to man, that His characteristic attributes are holiness, mercy, and love, that His characteristic proofs in the NT are indicated by Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost, and accordingly His name indicated as that of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are of equal essence and therefore in an equal sense God Himself. And the other express declaration is also lacking, that God is God thus and only thus, i.e., as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These two express declarations, which go beyond the witness of the Bible, are the twofold content of the Church doctrine of the Trinity."

He is clear in what he knows the Trinity is not (*Church Dogmatics*. I, 1.437-39): "The doctrine of the Trinity means on the one hand, as the denial of subordinationism, the express statement that the three moments do not mean a more and a less in the Godness of God. The Father is not to be regarded as the proper God as distinguished from the Son and from the Spirit, and Son and Spirit are not, as distinguished from the Father, favoured and glorified creatures, powers of life aroused and set in motion by God, and as such and in this sense revealers. But it is God who reveals Himself in a like manner as the Father in His self-veiling and holiness, as He does as the Son in His self-unveiling and mercy, and as the Spirit in His self-impartation and love. Father, Son, and Spirit are the one, single, and equal God. The Subject of revelation attested by the Bible, of whatever nature His being, language, and action may be, is the one Lord, not a half-god, either descended or ascended. But on the other hand, the doctrine of the Trinity means, as the denial of modalism, the expressed declaration that those three elements are not foreign to the Godness of God ... Modalism in the last resort means the denial of God."

**N.B.** Thus Barth has a clear, Orthodox understanding of Theology Proper! The only weakness of import is his identification of the Spirit as Redeemer—this appears to be a confusion of the application of redemption with the procurement of the same!

#### IV. THE ANTHRO-THEISM OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN THEOLOGIANS.

The theology of the nineteenth century has reproduced itself in the United States in both Classic Liberalism (1890–1930) and Neo-Liberalism (1930–60) forms, so that to repeat the same views in the Americans is unnecessary. This section will therefore focus on the concept of God in three manifestations of "radical theology."

### A. Tillich and the Trinity

Paul Tillich (1886–1965) was the fountainhead of what has been labeled the “Theology of Being” which is actually quite reminiscent of Feuerbach. God to Tillich is essentially “our ultimate concern.” Tillich rejects the concept of a personal God understanding that the term is “symbolic” (*Systematic Theology*. I, 244). He wrote (*Systematic Theology*. I, 245): “ ‘Personal God’ does not mean that God is a person. It means that God is the ground of everything personal and that he carries within himself the ontological power of personality. He is not a person, but he is no less than personal . . . classical theology employed the term *persona* for the trinitarian hypostases but not for God himself. God became ‘a person’ only in the nineteenth century, in connection with the Kantian separation of nature ruled by physical law from personality ruled by moral law.”

The original function of the doctrine of the Trinity was “to express in three central symbols the self-manifestation of God to man, opening up the depth of the divine abyss and giving answer to the question of the meaning of existence” (*Systematic Theology*. III, 291). “The mystery ceased to be the eternal mystery of the ground of being; it became instead the riddle of an unsolved theological problem and in many cases, as shown before, the glorification of an absurdity in numbers. In this form it became a powerful weapon for ecclesiastical authoritarianism and the suppression of the searching mind.”

In short, Tillich then states that the Trinity was produced by man to meet his needs (*Systematic Theology*. III, 285-86): “Man’s predicament, out of which the existential question arises, must be characterized by three concepts: finitude with respect to man’s essential being as a creature, estrangement with respect to man’s existential being in time and space, ambiguity with respect to man’s participation in life universal. The questions arising out of man’s finitude are answered by the doctrine of the Christ and the symbols applied to it. The questions arising out of the ambiguities of life are answered by the doctrine of the Spirit and its symbols. Each of these answers expresses that which is a matter of ultimate concern in symbols derived from particular revelatory experiences.”

Therefore, to Tillich the term “Father” is a symbol of concern and care in an alienated world, the term “son” is the symbol of “the self-sacrifice of his finite particularity” (*Systematic Theology*. III, 293-94) and the “Spirit” is a synthesis of the other two. God and Christ (the window to God) is my mental projection of my sense of need for stability in the life existence! In summary, Killen wrote of Tillich’s concept of God (*Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich*, 132): “The purpose of Tillich’s argument against the personality of God is not simply to express that there are three persons in the Godhead, and to correct the way that the Godhead itself can be rather carelessly spoken of as a person, but rather to prove that there is not any ‘person’ in the Godhead let alone ‘three persons.’ ”

## B. Altizer and the Trinity

Thomas J. J. Altizer became quite popular in the 1960s as a leader in the “Secularization of God Movement” by writing a much-read text entitled, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*. Altizer adopts Hegel’s idea of the historical evolvment of God (a forward movement). Such a movement includes three stages which correspond to the three persons of the Trinity; in reality Altizer has no concept of God (Secularized Theology). First, there was what he calls a “universal being” but (second) in the dialectical process He ceased to be himself and became Christ (“God who emptied himself into Christ,” 90). This Christ is an intermediary being, the “universal humanity.” Third, the Spirit is a synthesis of the sacred God and profane humanity. The spirit is total “self-consciousness.”

**N.B.** God ceased to be a person (i.e., his view is worse than Feuerbach’s, at least God was man!); the trinity did not hold Altizer’s interest at all. The dialectical triad consists chronologically of the primordial God who serves as the thesis, the second triad is the incarnate Word which serves as the antithesis; then the third in the triad, the spirit is the completion of the synthesis (God is imaginary!). Realizing this, man can usher in “The Great Humanity Divine” or “the Kingdom of God.”

## C. Whitehead and Process Theism

1. The Historic Background: a paradigmatic shift
  - a) The reaction to mechanistic scientism (i.e., Romantic Literature, Philosophical Idealism, Religious Pietism).
  - b) The refinement of evolutionary philosophies (i.e., Pragmatism, Bergsonianism).
  - c) The emergence of new theories in mathematics and physics (i.e., Einstein and relativity, Quantum physics).
2. The critique by process theologians of humanism and classic theism: Charles Hartshorne
  - a) The total inadequacy of classic theism. Alan Gragg noted (*Charles Hartshorne*, 75): “As far as he is concerned, all atheistic humanisms fail to perceive that humanity cannot support itself alone in an indifferent or hostile universe. Nevertheless, Hartshorne is also a powerful critic of humanism. He repeatedly insists that no form of atheistic humanism could possibly be a satisfactory philosophy for the masses of mankind in the long run.”
  - b) The total inadequacy of classic theism.

- (1) The perfection of God: If God is absolute (removed, untouched, perfect, total, complete) how can He be related to the world and man?
- (2) The power of God: If God is all-powerful, how can creatures possess any power?
- (3) The immutability of God: If he is already totally perfect, how could He change at all?
- (4) The omniscience of God: If God knows all things as they now are then God is all-knowing. If it means that God knows the future, this is impossible since all non-realities are unknowable.
- (5) The love of God: If God loves man, then he has desires or passions and therefore cannot be absolutely independent and immutable.
- (6) The abode of God: If God's love is real, then his bliss cannot be absolute or perfect? If God mourns over man's state, how can we seriously affirm that he dwells in perfect bliss?

3. The theological formulation of process thought.

a) The person and nature of God: A dipolar model.

- (1) Primordial nature: abstract and transcendent.  
“The unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality” (Whitehead, *God and the World*, 88). By this pole, God gives determination, definiteness and orderliness to an indeterminate, indefinite and unordered world (this is God's subjective goal).
- (2) Consequent nature: Concrete and relative.  
Since all things are relative God must have a consequent nature. Mellert (*What is Process Theology*, 45) says:  
  
“... the primordial nature and the consequent nature of God are not two individual elements, which, as joined together, form the deity. We cannot, at this point, make any meaningful analogies either to the union of the three persons in God or the two natures in Christ. We are speaking here simply of one God, who is represented as an

actual entity and who manifests at least two ways in which his divinity is related to the world.”

b) The attributes of God: a redefinition.

Perfections = God is perfectly related to everything (a functional, not ontological term).

Eternity = everlasting duration.

Omnipotence = Cosmological Casual Adequacy (luring, creating the potential for actualization by love).

Immutability = God's capacity for being changed cannot change

Omniscience = God knows all things actual, not future.

Infinity = there is nothing outside God (i.e., panentheism).

c) The nature of the Scriptures.

Process theology essentially adopts the methodology of liberal theology in understanding the nature of Scriptures as myth and symbol.

4. The formulators of process theism today.

Henry Nelson Wieman - Introduced Whitehead to the University of Chicago

Charles Hartshorne - Ashbel Professor of Theology, University of Texas

Daniel Day Williams - Paul Tillich Chair of Theology, Union, New York

Bernard Loomer

Bernard Meland

Shubert Ogden, *The Reality of God*.

*Christ Without Myth*.

John Cobb, Jr., *Process Theology as Political Theology*.

Norman L. Pittenger, *God in Process*.

Delwin Brown

David Griffin

Don S. Browning

Lewis S. Ford, *The Lure of God*.

## V. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the doctrine of God in nineteenth and twentieth century theology. Two strains become evident in the nineteenth century, both of which are denials of trinitarianism: moderate liberals such as Schleiermacher and Ritschl adopted a monarchian view of the Trinity (mostly Dynamic although Schleiermacher was modalistic) and radical liberals, such as Feuerbach, denied of God's objective reality for

an extremist emphasis on immanentism (anthro-theism). In the twentieth century Karl Barth rescued the doctrine of Theology Proper by stressing God's objective reality and transcendence. In America, Classic Liberalism and New Liberalism followed the lead of the moderate German Liberals while the Radical Theologies of the radical 1960s evidenced the anthropocentric-pantheistic extremes of Feuerbach



## **THE PERSON OF CHRIST**

### **Part I: The Ancient Church**

Summary:

- I. INTRODUCTION.**
- II. THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH FATHERS.**
- III. THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN THE APOLOGISTS.**
  - A. The Person of Christ and Western Apologists.
  - B. The Person of Christ and Eastern Apologists.
- IV. THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN THE THEOLOGIANS.**
  - A. The Person of Christ and the Apollinarian Controversy.

#### **I. INTRODUCTION.**

The focus of our class takes another turn as our topic changes from the Doctrine of God to Christology, particularly the Person of Christ in His incarnation. The explanation of the “*Logos-sarx*” (Word or deity — flesh or incarnation) in Christ came on the heels of the Arian controversy. Harnack wrote (*History*. IV, 138): “It accordingly had already necessarily emerged in the Arian controversy, for it was in reference to the thought of the union of Godhead and humanity that the whole controversy was carried on by Athanasius.” Up to the time of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) the same writer asserts that “no single outstanding church teacher really accepted the humanity in a perfectly unequaled way. Further than that, it was necessary to believe in an actual ‘incarnation of the Logos’ all else was uncertain (*History*. IV, 139).” The purpose of this initial lesson shall be to trace the opinion of the early Church from Clement of Rome (ca. 95) to Apollinarius (d. 390) in an attempt to understand their doctrine of the incarnate Christ.

#### **II. THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH FATHERS.**

As has been noted previously, the Fathers were not given to theological speculation, but were pastoral in character and tone. As one turns to the Person of Christ, however, they are far from silent.

##### **A. Clement of Rome**

According to the testimony of Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*. III, 3.3), Clement of Rome handed on the apostolic teaching intact in his letter to the Christian community at Corinth.

1. Clement clearly understands the ordering of salvation from God in Christ and the Spirit (*To the Corinthians*, 42).

“The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order. Having therefore received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the Word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come.”

2. Clement speaks of the incarnation of Christ in these terms (*To the Corinthians*, 16, 2), “The sceptre of the majesty of God, even our Lord Jesus Christ, came not in the pomp of arrogance or of pride, though He might have done so but in lowliness of mind according as the Holy Spirit spake concerning Him.” Clement then quotes Isaiah 52–53.
3. Clement also speaks of Christ as the preexistent Son of God. Chapter 36 is a particularly beautiful rehearsal of Hebrews 1.
4. After His exaltation, He was united with the Father in glory and receives divine honor (32:4; 38:4; 43:6; 58:2; 63:3; 65:2).

#### **B. Ignatius of Antioch**

1. Ignatius speaks of the incarnation as material to exclude all hint of “semblance” (to dokein). “For if these things were done by our Lord in semblance, then am I also a prisoner in semblance (Deut. 4:3)”. He denies any attempt to have a docetic Christ.
2. Ignatius has a text about Christ’s natures that was often quoted in later history (*To the Ephesians*, 7, 2). “There is only one physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Grillmeier stated of Ignatius (*Christ and Christian Tradition*. I, 89), “Though the static character of a ‘two nature’ Christology may become visible as early as Ignatius, a full, living dynamic is evident throughout his writings.”

**N.B.** The Christology of the Fathers is much clearer than their understanding of other areas of theology. With the possible exception of Ignatius, the Fathers did not venture into speculation (i.e., Christ was simply Logos and sarx). Grillmeier wrote (*Christ and Christian Tradition*. I, 105), “Despite this emphatic delineation of the God-manhood of Jesus Christ, there is still no doctrine of two natures in a technical sense.”

### III. THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN THE APOLOGISTS.

The church was brought to a definition of its understanding of Christ by external pressure applied by heathen philosophers who attacked the faith. Celsus (ca. 178) confronted the theology of the church with a dilemma, either docetism or a change in the Godhead. Origen quoted Celsus (*Against Celsus*. IV, 18), the early accuser: "Either God really changes himself, as they say, into a moral body . . . or he himself is not changed, but makes those who see him think that he is changed. But in that case he is a deceiver and a liar." The church was forced to reckon with true humanity and true deity.

#### A. The Person of Christ and Western Apologists.

1. **Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 140–202 A.D.)**, wrote Cullman (*Christ and Time*, 56-57), "recognized so clearly that the Christian proclamation stands or falls with the redemptive history." He battled the Gnostics, particularly Basilides and Valentinus (also Marcion), who denied His true humanity (taught that He was an emanation) and full deity. Of the God-man, so fundamentally integral for redemption, he writes (*Against Heresies*. III, 16): "There is therefore . . . one God the Father, and one Christ Jesus our Lord, who came by means of the whole dispensational arrangements and gathered together all things in himself. But in every respect, too, he is man, the formation of God: and thus he took up man into himself, the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impassible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man, thus summing up all things in himself: so that as in super-celestial, spiritual and invisible things, the Word of God is supreme, so also in things visible and corporeal he might possess the supremacy and, taking to himself the preeminence, as well as constituting himself head of the church, he might draw all things to himself at the proper time."

Irenaeus so stressed the unity of Christ (pre- and post-incarnation) that his oft-repeated phrase ("Christ, one and the same") will appear seven times in the Chalcedon Creed.

**N.B.** Irenaeus' thoughts will be deepened and delineated by the theologians. Irenaeus, with his stress on flesh to oppose the Gnostics, does not delineate the nature of Christ's soul and so has been called an Apollinarian (not so!).

2. **Tertullian of Carthage (ca. A.D. 155–240/60)**, as in the Trinitarian issue, laid the foundation for the resolution of the Christological debate in the West. Tertullian began his confrontation of Praxeas with firm Trinitarian

presuppositions. Tertullian argued for substances in Christ (*Against Praxeas*. XXVII, 14).

“Learn therefore with Nicodemus that what is born in the flesh is flesh and what is born in the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6). Flesh does not become spirit nor spirit flesh. Evidently they can (both) be in one (person). Of these Jesus is composed, of flesh as man and of spirit as God: and on that occasion the angel, reserving for the flesh the designation Son of Man, pronounced him the Son of God in respect of that part in which he was spirit.”

The conjunction between the two and permanent realities, the Godhead and the man Jesus, occurs in one person (his logic is that of his Trinitarianism—God is different in persons, one in substance). He wrote (*Against Praxeas*. XII, 6): “You have two (Father and Son) one commanding a thing to be made, another making it. But how you must understand ‘another’ I have already preferred, in the sense of person, not of substance.” Hence, he argues for two natures in the one Christ.

**N.B.** Tertullian’s thought still needs refinement, but his striking contribution was his stress on “one person” in Christ.

3. **Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170–225 A.D.)**, a mentor of Irenaeus, speaks of Christ in two stages of existence (preexistent and incarnate). He assigns sonship to the incarnation. He wrote (*Refutation of All Heresies*, 15): “And he has taken for humanity the new name of love by calling himself Son; for neither was the Logos before the incarnation and when by himself yet perfect Son, although he was perfect Logos, only begotten, nor could the flesh exist by itself apart from the Logos, as it had its existence in the Logos. Thus, then, was manifested one (single) perfect Son of God.”

**N.B.** Hippolytus, however, makes no explicit mention of the problem of the conjunction of the two natures.

## **B. The Person of Christ and the Eastern Apologists.**

1. **Melito of Sardis (ca. 170)**, appears to have been the first in the church to speak of Christ’s two natures. Eusebius quoted Polycrates (*Church History*. V, 24) that this man, a eunuch, was a defender of the church in Asia Minor and in V, 28 that he announced Christ as “God and Man.” In resisting the Gnostics, he presses the true humanity of Christ within the matrix of biblical redemption.

2. **Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–211/16)**, comes to the issue of the incarnation through the veil of Platonic thought. His framework did not prove to be an advantage. While he maintains the reality of the human nature of Christ, his penchant for spiritualization makes the incarnation relative. Grillmeier wrote (*Christ and Christian Tradition*. I, 136), “We find in Clement precisely the element of the non-Christian Logos doctrine which leads to the total obscuring of the distinction between Logos and soul in his Christology.”
3. **Origen of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 185–253/54)**, apart from his stress on philosophic forms, seeks to postulate a twofold rule in Christ, the one Christ. He wrote (Commentary on John I.28): “Whereas some are led by Christ as the ‘shepherd’ because they are capable of being guided and the part of their soul which is outside reason is tranquil, others come to him as the ‘king,’ who rules over the rational spirit and raises it up to worship God. But there are also differences among those who are under his sovereignty, depending on whether a man is ruled over mystically and with inexpressible mystery, according to God’s fashion, or in a lesser way. I would say that those who attain to the sight of incorporeal things . . . are removed outside all matters of the senses by the ‘Word.’ They are ruled royally by the guidance of the Only-Begotten. However, those who only penetrate as far as the word of sensual things and reverence the Creator through these, are also ruled by the Word and to the same degree stand under the Lordship of Christ. But let no one take offence if we distinguish aspects of the Redeemer in this way, and think that as a result we are transferring a division into his very being.”

The incarnation to Origen means the real arrival of the Logos, but the human Jesus appears to be subordinated. At any rate, the conjunction of the Logos and humanity is real and permanent. Origen errs in a serious way in saying that the human soul of Christ becomes full divinized and is aglow as iron in a fire (*Trinity*. II, 6).

**N.B.** The point that this writer is attempting to demonstrate is that by the late third century the church had made no significant strides in speculative theology. The West, without a Greek philosophic framework, was able to see in Christ, the one Christ, two persons. Beyond that they did not go. Grillmeier stated (*Christ and Christian Tradition*. I, 148-49): “It is clear from this survey that the rise of Christological reflection was a very slow process. The main emphasis was laid on the theological interpretation of the relationship of Father and Son, though this was seen to be closely connected with the incarnation. Over against the Gnostics and the docetists, the theologians of the church had above all to stress the duality of the two natures of Christ and their reality. True, the first

reflections on the problem of the unity of Godhead and manhood are made. The Fathers know that the incarnate Logos is 'one and the same.' But this unity is more intuitively seen than speculatively interpreted. It can—with the sublimity of the *Mysterium Christi* in the Christian faith—also be no more than a matter of the first repulse of the attacks which, for example, Celsus had made against the Christian doctrine of the incarnation.”

#### IV. THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN THE THEOLOGIANS.

As one enters the period of the theologians, Seeburg's summary is perhaps important to have in the mind (*The History of Doctrine*, 243):

“Two things had been transmitted by tradition as fixed: the reality of the humanity of Christ, with his human activity and sufferings (recognized in conflict with Docetism in the second century), and the reality and *Homousia* of his divinity. Divinity and humanity are now combined in one person; there is a synthesis (*autheton*, Origen), but as to the question how this union was conceivable, especially how two personal natures can constitute one person, there was no further investigation, despite the propositions put forth by the Dynamistic Monarchians. Only the West possessed, in Tertullian's view of one person in two substances, a formula which appeared to adequately meet the situation, and which had been confirmed fuller development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Western theologians, with this theory in hand, felt themselves from the necessity of further investigation, and in the conflicts of the succeeding era they presented it as an adequate solution of all the questions raised in the Orient.

##### A. The Person of Christ and the Apollinarian Controversy.

The development of the Apollinarian-Christological debate must not be divorced from the Arian Controversy which in reality occasioned the unfolding in vivid relief of the discussion on Christ's person. Heick wrote (*History*. I, 171): “The third stage of the development came when men, satisfied as to the divinity and humanity of Christ, were compelled to ask the next question: What is the relationship between the divine and the human in Christ?” Tertullian anticipated Chalcedon when he wrote (*Against Praxeas*, 27), “We see His double state, not intermixed but conjoined in one person, Jesus, God and man.”

1. **The formulation of Apollinarius (ca. A.D. 310–90)**, bishop of Laodecia, attempted to answer the question of the Logos-sarx relationship by a synthesis of body and soul within substantial unity (one nature). His thought evidences the echoes of Origen with the concept of an emerging soul that combines the two natures into one. In brief, Apollinarius evidences two interests in developing Christology: the integrity of the

person Christ (to combat the Arians) and the immutability of Christ. Gregory of Nazianzen writes (*Oration*. IV. 19, 308): “For He Whom you now treat with contempt was once above you. He Who is now Man was once the Uncompounded. What He was He continued to be; what He was not He took to Himself. In the beginning He was uncaused; for what is the Cause of God? But afterwards for a cause He was born. And that cause was that you might be saved, who insult Him and despise His Godhead, because of this, that He took upon Him your denser nature, having converse with Flesh by means of Mind. While His inferior Nature, the Humanity, became God, because it was united to God, and became One Person because the Higher Nature prevailed . . . in order that I too might be made God so far as He is made Man. He was born—but He had been begotten: He was born of a woman—but she was a Virgin. The first is human the second Divine. In His Human nature He had no Father, but also in His Divine Nature no Mother. Both these belong to Godhead. He dwelt in the womb—but He was recognized by the Prophet, himself still in the womb, leaping before the Word, for Whose sake He came into being. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes—but He took off the swathing bands of the grave by His rising again. He was laid in a manger—but He was glorified by Angels, and proclaimed by a star, and worshipped by the Magi. Why are you offended by that which is presented to your sight, because you will not look at that which is presented to your mind? He was driven into exile into Egypt—but He drove away the Egyptian idols. He had not form nor comeliness in the eyes of the Jews—but to David He is fairer than the children of men. And on the Mountain He was bright as the lightning, and became more luminous than the sun, initiating us into the mystery of the future.”

Again (*Letter to Nectarius*, 438): “For he asserts that the Flesh which the Only begotten Son assumed in the Incarnation for the remodeling of our nature was no new acquisition, but that carnal nature was in the Son from the beginning. And he puts forward as a witness to this monstrous assertion a gargled quotation from the Gospels, namely, No man hath Ascended up into Heaven save He which came down from Heaven, even the son of Man which is in Heaven. As though even before He came down He was the Son of Man, and when He came down He brought with him that Flesh, which it appears He had in Heaven, as though it had existed before the ages, and been joined with His Essence. For he alleges another saying of an Apostle, which he cuts off from the whole body of its context, that The Second Man is the Lord from heaven. Then he assumes that that Man who came down from above is without a mind, but that the Godhead of the Only-begotten fulfills the function of mind, and is the third part of this human composite, inasmuch as soul and body are in it on its human side, but not mind, the place of which is taken by God the Word. This is not yet the most serious part of it; that which is most terrible of all is that

he declares that the Only-begotten God, the Judge of all, the Prince of Life, the Destroyer of Death, is mortal, and underwent the Passion in His proper Godhead; and that in the three days' death of His body, his Godhead also was put to death with His body, and thus was raised again from the dead by the Father."

The Christology of Apollinarius arises from a trichotomist presupposition: the deity occupied (supplanted) the human spirit so that in the one person a human body and soul was joined to divine reason. Gonzalez wrote (*History*. I, 358): "In this way Apollinarius saved the immutability of the Word, which is always the active agent and never passive, in the life of Christ. At the same time, he solved the problem of how two natures—the divine and the human—can unite without forming a new nature. Christ is human because his body and his soul—or vital principle—are human; but he is divine because his reason is the very Word of God. If in Christ there were united a complete man, with his own personality and his own reason, to the Son of God, two persons would result, and this would destroy the reality of the incarnation, which states that in Christ God was united with man. Apollinarius, then, found no other solution than to mutilate the human nature of Christ, taking away its rational faculties, and putting the Word in the place these should occupy."

Kelly summarized Apollinarius' position thusly (*Early Christian Doctrine*, 191-92): "In order to eliminate the dualism which he considered so disastrous, Apollinarius put forward an extreme version of the Word-flesh Christology. He delighted to speak of Christ as God incarnate (*theos ensarkos*) 'flesh-bearing God' (*theos sarkothoros*), or 'God born of a woman.' By such descriptions he did not mean that the flesh was, as it were, simply an outward covering which the Word had donned, but rather that it was joined in absolute oneness of being with the Godhead (*pros enoteta theou sunertai*) from the moment of its conception. 'The flesh,' he stated, 'is not something super-added to the Godhead for well-doing, but constitutes one reality or nature (*sueouthiomene kai sumphutos*) with It.' The Incarnate is, in effect, 'a compound unity in human form' (*synthesis anthropoeidys*), and there is 'one nature (*moan . . . fusin*) composed of impassible divinity and passible flesh.' Apollinarius interprets the text I sanctify myself (John 17:19) as implying precisely this: it 'reveals the indivisibility of a single living entity,' i.e., the substantial oneness of the Word with His flesh (= 'myself'). The reason for this was that, as he viewed the matter, the body of Christ could not by itself exist as an independent 'nature;' to exist as such it needed to be conjoined with, and animated by, the spirit. He brings out the full significance of his teaching in the statement, 'The flesh, being dependent for its motions on some other principle of movement and action (whatever that principle may be), is not of itself a complete living entity, but in order to become one enters into



fusion with something else. So it united itself with the heavenly governing principle (i.e., the Logos) and was fused with it . . . Thus out of the moved and the mover was compounded a single living entity—not two, nor one composed of two complete, self-moving principles.’ ”

Apollinarius’ logic flows out of his strong defense of “*homoousia*” (i.e., the anti-Arian motion of equality between God the Father and Christ the Son) in these steps:

- a) It is impossible to make the divinity and the humanity combine in their entirety into one person. Two persons would be the necessary result, that two complete things should become one is impossible (This, he argues, would lead to a quaternity instead of a Trinity.).
- b) Thus, he argues from redemption truth that immutable divinity can be preserved only by yielding the integrity of his human nature. Christ is one person, not two. He wrote: “For God, having become incarnate, has in the human flesh simply his own energy, his mind being unsubject to sensual and carnal passions, and divinely and sinlessly guided the flesh and controlling the fleshly emotions, and not alone unconquerable by death, but also destroying death. And he is true God, the unfleshly appearing in the flesh, the perfect one in genuine and divine perfection, not two persons (*prosopa*), nor two natures (*phuseis*). There is one Son; both before the incarnation and after the incarnation the same, man and God, each as one. And the divine Logos is not one person and the man Jesus another.”
- c) This allowed Apollinarius to speak of one harmonious being (one nature, one substance) and yet see or distinguish two natures. “For as man is one, but has in himself two different natures . . . so the Son, being one, has also two natures.”

Seeburg simply adds at this point (*Text-book of the History of Doctrines*. I, 246-47): “He could find no way to escape their solution of it (Antiochene Sabellianism) except at the terrible price of the surrender of the human (nature) of Christ. He substituted the human ‘flesh’ for the complete human being controlled by the Logos because he was little able to understand the divine-human nature.”

**N.B.** A note is in order here concerning the relationship of Athanasius to Apollinarius. Athanasius saw clearly the soteriological consequences of a denial of the true divinity of the son but was unable to perceive that a Christology that denied the human

integrity also endangered the doctrine of salvation. Athanasius, like Origen and Apollinarius, stressed the unity of Christ, interpreting the phrase “becoming flesh” to mean “dwelling in the flesh.” Grillmeier attests to Athanasius’ Apollinarianism with caution (*Christ and Christian Tradition*. I, 308): “In discovering the particular views which Athanasius held on the being of Christ we start from a number of plain facts. It is probably undeniable that in his picture of Christ the soul of Christ retreats well into the background, even if it does not disappear completely. Does this retreat imply that the human psyche is really missing from the Athanasian picture of Christ? We must distinguish two points of view here. It can probably be demonstrated quite easily that the soul of Christ plays no part in Athanasius’ explanation of the economy of salvation, and that it is not even a factor in the human life of Christ. These assertions may be made with reasonable assurance. But over and above them there is a further question to be asked. Did Athanasius, in fact, know nothing of a human soul in Christ? Did he exclude it altogether? We can summarize briefly what is to follow by putting the last question in this way: did Athanasius advocate a merely verbal Logos-sarx framework or a real one? While the former framework would indeed ignore the soul of Christ it would in fact tacitly assume its presence. The latter, on the other hand, would regard the soul as non-existent. We shall now show quite simply and clearly that in the Athanasian picture of Christ the ‘soul’ of the Lord is no ‘theological factor.’ ”

Grillmeier stated that the soul of Christ was “no theological factor” for Athanasius, but at the same time he may not have denied its physical reality.

2. The refutation of Apollinarius. The Cappadocians were the first to recognize the hidden danger within his Christology, which, for all practical purposes, denied the reality of Christ’s human nature and the Christian doctrine of salvation. To Cledonius Gregory of Nazianus (A.D. 329–89) wrote (*Epistle*, 101): “If anyone has put his trust in Him as a Man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. Let them not, then begrudge us our complete salvation, or clothe the Savior only with bones and nerves and the portraiture of humanity. For if His Manhood is without soul, even the Arians admit this, that they may attribute His Passion to the Godhead, as that which gives motion to the body is also that which suffers. But if He

has a soul, and yet is without a mind, how is He man, for man is not a mindless animal? And this would necessarily involve that while His form and tabernacle was human, His soul should be that of a horse or an ox, or some other of the brute creation. This, then, would be what He saves; and I have been deceived by the Truth, and led to boast of an honour which had been bestowed upon another. But if His Manhood is intellectual and not without mind, let them cease to be thus really mindless. But, says such an one, the Godhead took the place of the human intellect, which is the most essential part of man. Keep then the whole man, and mingle Godhead therewith, that you may benefit me in my completeness. But, he asserts, He could not contain Two perfect Natures. Not if you only look at Him in a bodily fashion. For a bushel measure will not hold two bushels, nor will the space of one body hold two or more bodies. But if you will look at what is mental and incorporeal, remember that I in my one personality can contain soul and reason and mind and the Holy Spirit; and before me this world, by which I mean the system of things visible and invisible, contained Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”

Gregory writing to Cledonius stated (*Epistle*, 102) that “they accuse us of introducing two natures, separate or conflicting, and of dividing the supernatural and wondrous Union.” Apollinarius, principally Vitalis, the schematical bishop of Antioch, taught one nature in Christ; Gregory two natures. Such to Apollinarius destroyed Christ’s oneness. Gregory stated (*Epistle*, 102): “And since a question has also been mooted concerning the Divine Assumption of humanity, or Incarnation, state this also clearly to all concerning me, that I join in One the Son, who was begotten of the Father, and afterward of the Virgin Mary, and that I do not call Him two Sons, but worship Him as One and the same in undivided Godhead and honour. But if anyone does not assent to this statement, either now or hereafter, he shall give account to God at the day of judgment.”

Again he wrote (*Epistle*, 102): “Thus, then, they interpret wrongly the words, but we have the Mind of Christ, and very absurdly, when they say that His Godhead is the mind of Christ, and not understanding the passage as we do, namely, that they who have purified their mind by the imitation of the mind which the Saviour took of us, and, as far as may be, have attained conformity with it, are said to have the mind of Christ; just as they might be testified to have the flesh of Christ who have trained their flesh, and in this respect have become of the same body and partakers of Christ; and so he says, ‘As we have borne the image of the earth we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.’ And so they declare that the Perfect Man is not He who was in all points tempted like as we are yet without sin; but the mixture of God and Flesh. For what, say they, can be more perfect than this?

“They play the same trick with the word that describes the Incarnations, vs.: He was made Man, explain it to mean, not, He was in the human nature with which He surrounded Himself, according to the Scripture, He knew what was in man; but teaching that it means, He consorted and conversed with men, and taking refuge in the expression which says that He was seen on Earth and conversed with Men. And what can anyone contend further? They who take away the Humanity and the Interior Image cleanse by their newly invented mask only our outside, and that which is seen; so far in conflict with themselves that at one time, for the sake of the flesh, they explain all the rest in a gross and carnal manner (for it is from hence that they have derived their second Judaism and their silly thousand years delight in paradise, and almost the idea that we shall resume again the same conditions after these same thousand years); and at another time they bring in His flesh as a phantom rather than a reality, as not having been subjected to any of our experiences, not even such as are free from sin; and use for this purpose the apostolic expression, understood and spoken in a sense which is not apostolic, that our Saviour was made in the likeness of Men and found in fashion as a Man, as though by these words was expressed, not the human form, but some delusive phantom and appearance.”

**Gregory of Nyssa (A.D. 395 d.)** has a remarkable work that touches on this subject, *Against Eunomius* which clearly suggests a rejection of Apollinarius (5.5). He postulates two distinct natures in one person (a “commixture”).

“And the Word was in the beginning with God, the man was subject to the trial of death; and neither was the Human Nature from everlasting, nor the Divine Nature mortal: and all the rest of the attributes are contemplated in the same way. It is not the Human Nature that raised Lazarus, nor is it the power that cannot suffer that weeps for him when he lies in the grave: the tear proceeds from the Man, the life from the true Life. It is not the Human Nature that feeds the thousands, nor is it omnipotent might that hastens to the fig tree. Who is it that is weary with the journey, and Who is it that by His word made all the world subsist? What is the brightness of the glory, and what is that that was pierced with the nails? What form is it that is buffeted in the Passion, and what form is it that is glorified from everlasting? So much as this is clear, (even if one does not follow the argument into detail) that the blows belong to the servant in whom the Lord was, the honours to the Lord Whom the servant compassed about, so that by reason of contact and the union of Natures the proper attributes of each belong to both, as the Lord receives the stripes of the servant, while the servant is glorified with the honour of the Lord; for this

is why the Cross is said to be the Cross of the Lord of glory, and why every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, the glory of God the Father.”

“But if we are to discuss the other points in the same way, let us consider what it is that dies, and what it is that destroys death; what it is that is renewed, and what it is that empties itself. The Godhead ‘empties’ Itself that It may come within the capacity of the Human Nature, and the Human Nature is renewed by the Divine. This is our doctrine, which does not, as Eunomius charges against it, preach a plurality of Christs, but the union of the Man with the Divinity, and which calls by the name of ‘making’ the transmutation of the Mortal to the Immortal, of the Servant to the Lord, of Sin to Righteousness, of the Curse to the Blessing, of the Man to Christ. What further have our slanderers left to say, to show that we preach ‘two Christs’ in our doctrine, if we refuse to say that He Who was in the beginning from the Father uncreatedly Lord, and Christ, and the Word, and God, was ‘made,’ and declare that the blessed Peter was pointing briefly and incidentally to the mystery of the Incarnation, according to the meaning now explained, that the Nature which was crucified through weakness has Itself also, as we have said, become, by the overwhelming power of Him Who dwells in It, that which the Indweller Himself is, in fact and in name, even Christ our Lord?”

**N.B.** Gregory of Nyssa is clear in his rejection of a one-nature Christ, but unclear as to the cohabitation of the two natures in Christ. He uses terms like “intermingle” or “commixture,” but does not stress the “without confusion” of the Chalcedonian Creed.

3. **The condemnation of Apollinarius.** From the decade of the 370s onward the Cappadocians assailed Apollinarius and Vitalis with the result that Bishop Damascus of Rome condemned them in local councils in A.D. 374 and A.D. 376. The final condemnation of Apollinarius’ views came at the second Ecumenical Council, Constantinople, A.D. 381 (Technically, this was not ecumenical because only Eastern bishops attended). The creed stated:

“And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time (*pro panton ton aionon*), Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created (*poiethenta*), of the same essence (reality) as the Father (*homousion to patri*), through Whom all things came into being, Who for us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary

and became human (*enanthropesanta*). He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His Kingdom shall have no end (*telos*).”

Leith commented (*Creeds of the Churches*, 32): “ ‘From the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary’ has been traditionally regarded as a refutation of Apollinarianism. The Council did condemn Apollinarianism, and the clause does contain the material for the refutation of Apollinarianism.”

### Summary

The purpose of this lesson has been to initiate the discussion of the person of our Lord. As in the discussion of theology proper, the Age of the Theologians was most fertile. The Fathers evidence little interpretative insights; the apologists began to grapple with the issue of His humanity/deity in the matrix of the threat of both Gnosticism and Docetism. In the era of the theologians, the incarnation of Christ was finally focused upon with intense study. Interestingly, truth emerges in conflict with error and is often expressed initially in what truth is not as opposed to what it is. Apollinarius’ single nature of Christ, in which the humanity was degraded, was repulsed by the Cappadocians, but the truth by 381 was not formulated. This awaits Chalcedon (451) after two other errant attempts are exposed and rejected (i.e., Nestorianism, Eutychianism). These are subjects of the next lesson.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE PERSON  
AND THE NATURES OF CHRIST

Party	Time	Reference	Human Nature	Divine Nature
Docetists	Late 1 <sup>st</sup> Century	1 John 4:1–3	Denied	Affirmed
Ebionites	2 <sup>nd</sup> Century	Irenaeus	Affirmed	Denied
Arians	4 <sup>th</sup> Century	Condemned: Nicaea, 325	Affirmed	Reduced
Apollinarians	4 <sup>th</sup> Century	Condemned: Cont., 381	Reduced	Affirmed
Nestorians	5 <sup>th</sup> Century	Condemned: Ephesus, 431	Affirmed <sup>1</sup>	Affirmed
Eutychians	5 <sup>th</sup> Century	Condemned: Chalcedon, 451 & III Const. 680	Reduced <sup>2</sup>	Reduced
Orthodox	From beginning	Defined: Chalcedon, 451	Affirmed <sup>3</sup>	Affirmed

<sup>1</sup>Nestorians held that Christ was two persons.

<sup>2</sup>Eutychians held that Christ had one mixed nature, neither fully human nor fully divine.

<sup>3</sup>Orthodox view: Christ is one person with a fully divine nature and a fully human nature.

Christ is one person, *prosopon*, *hypostasis*

His natures are

without mixture, *asynchutos*

without change, *atreptos*

without division, *adiaretos*

without separation, *achoristos*

Taken from: Buswell, J. O. *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, II, pp. 46-47