

21. Doctrine of the Trinity (continued)

The Council of Nicea: A.D. 325

Because of the spread of the Arian heresy, which denied the deity of Christ, the unity and even the future of the Roman Empire seemed uncertain. The newly converted Constantine convened an ecumenical council in Nicea to settle the issue.

The Issue: Was Christ fully God, or was he a created and subordinate being?

Arius

Only God the Father is eternal.
The Son had a beginning as the first and highest created being.
The Son is not one in essence with the Father.
Christ is subordinate to the Father.
He is called God as an honorific title.

Athanasius

Christ is co-eternal with the Father.
Christ had no beginning.
The Son and Father are of the same essence.
Christ is not subordinate to the Father.

Crucial Statements of the Council's Creed

[We believe] "in one Lord Jesus Christ . . . true God of true God, not made, of one substance with the Father."
"But those who say there was when He was not, and before being begotten He was not . . . these the Catholic Church anathematizes."
"And we believe in the Holy Spirit."

Results From the Council

Arianism was formally condemned.
The *homoousia* (same substance) statement created conflicts.
Arians reinterpreted *homoousia* and accused the council of modalistic monarchianism.
Doctrine of the Holy Spirit was left undeveloped.

The Council of Constantinople: A.D. 381

Arianism was not extinguished at Nicea; it actually grew in prominence. Additionally, Macedonianism emerged, which subordinated the Holy Spirit in much the same manner as Arianism had subordinated Christ.

The Issue: Is the Holy Spirit fully God?

Crucial Statement of the Council's Creed

" . . . and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, who proceeds from the Father, who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son."

Results From the Council

Arianism was rebuffed and the Nicene Creed reaffirmed.
Macedonianism was condemned and Holy Spirit's deity affirmed.
Major conflicts over Trinitarianism were resolved (though Christological debates continued until Chalcedon, A.D. 451).

24. A Biblical Presentation of the Trinity

<p>Introduction</p>	<p>The word "Trinity" is never used, nor is the doctrine of Trinitarianism ever explicitly taught in the Scriptures, but Trinitarianism is the best explication of the biblical evidence. The theological exposition of the doctrine arose from clear, but not comprehensive, scriptural teaching. It is a crucial doctrine for Christianity because it focuses on who God is, and particularly on the deity of Jesus Christ. Because Trinitarianism is not taught explicitly in the Scriptures, the study of the doctrine is an exercise in putting together biblical themes and data through a systematic theological study and through looking at the historical development of the present orthodox view of what the biblical presentation of the Trinity is.</p>	
<p>Essential Elements of the Trinity</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God is One. 2. Each of the persons within the Godhead is Deity. 3. The oneness of God and the threeness of God are not contradictory. 4. The Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is eternal. 5. Each of the persons of God is of the same essence and is not inferior or superior to the others in essence. 6. The Trinity is a mystery which we will never be able to understand fully. 	
<p>Biblical Teaching</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Old Testament</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">New Testament</p>
<p>God is One</p>	<p>Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (Deut 6:4; cf. 20:2-3; 3:13-15).</p>	<p>Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17; cf. 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; James 2:19).</p>
<p>Three Distinct Persons as Deity</p>	<p>The Father: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Ps. 2:7).</p>	<p>... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father... (1 Peter 1:2; cf. John 1:17; 1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:11).</p>
	<p>The Son: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Ps. 2:7; cf. Heb. 1:1-13; Ps. 68:18; Isa. 6:1-3; 9:6).</p>	<p>As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:16-17).</p>
	<p>The Holy Spirit: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Gen. 1:1-2; cf. Exod. 31:3; Judg. 15:14; Isa. 11:2).</p>	<p>Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...? You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3-4; cf. 2 Cor. 3:17).</p>

24. A Biblical Presentation of the Trinity (continued)

Plurality of Persons in the Godhead

The use of plural pronouns points to, or at least suggests, the plurality of persons within the Godhead in the Old Testament.

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness. . . .'"

The use of the singular word "name" when referring to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit indicates a unity within the threeness of God.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

	Attribute	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Persons of the Same Essence: Attributes Applied to Each Person	Eternality	Ps. 90:2	John 1:2; Rev. 1:8, 17	Heb. 9:14
	Power	1 Peter 1:5	2 Cor. 12:9	Rom. 15:19
	Omniscience	Jer. 17:10	Rev. 2:23	1 Cor. 2:11
	Omnipresence	Jer. 23:24	Matt. 18:20	Ps. 139:7
	Holiness	Rev. 15:4	Acts 3:14	Acts 1:8
	Truth	John 7:28	Rev. 3:7	1 John 5:6
	Benevolence	Rom. 2:4	Eph. 5:25	Neh. 9:20
Equality with Different Roles: Activities Involving All Three Persons	Creation of the World	Ps. 102:25	Col. 1:16	Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13
	Creation of Man	Gen. 2:7	Col. 1:16	Job 33:4
	Baptism of Christ	Matt. 3:17	Matt. 3:16	Matt. 3:16
	Death of Christ	Heb. 9:14	Heb. 9:14	Heb. 9:14

23. Major Views of the Trinity

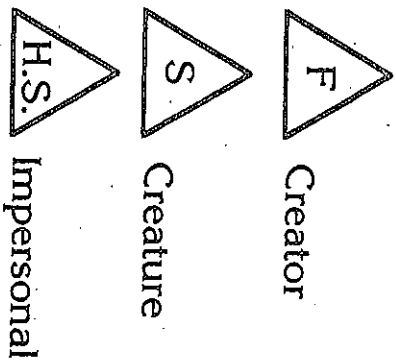
View	Source	Adherents	Perception of God's Essence (Oneness-Unity)	Perception of God's Subsistence (Threeness-Diversity)
Dynamic Monarchianism	Theodotus	Paul of Samosata Artemon Socinius Modern Unitarians	The unity of God denotes both oneness of nature and oneness of person. The Son and the Holy Spirit therefore are consubstantial with the Father's divine essence only as impersonal attributes. The divine <i>durantia</i> came upon the man Jesus, but he was not God in the strict sense of the word.	The notion of a subsistent God is a palpable impossibility, since his perfect unity is perfectly indivisible. The 'diversity' of God is apparent and not real, since the Christ event and the work of the Holy Spirit attest only to a dynamic operation within God, not to a hypostatic union.
Modalistic Monarchianism	Praxeas	Noetus Sabellus Swedenborg Schleiermacher United Pentecostals (Jesus Only)	The unity of God is ultra-simplex. He is qualitatively characterized in his essence by one nature and one person. This essence may be designated interchangeably as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are different names for but identical with the unified, simplex God. The three names are the three modes by which God reveals himself.	The concept of a subsistent God is erroneous and confounds the real issue of the phenomenon of God's modalistic manifestation of himself. The paradox of a subsisting "three in oneness" is refuted by recognizing that God is not three persons but one person with three different names and corresponding roles following one another like parts of a drama.
Subordinationism	Anus	Modern Jehovah's Witnesses and several other lesser known cults	The inherent oneness of God's nature is properly identifiable with the Father only. The Son and the Holy Spirit are discrete entities who do not share the divine essence.	The unipersonal essence of God precludes the concept of divine subsistence with a Godhead. "Threeness in oneness" is self-contradictory and violates the biblical principles of a monotheistic God.
"Economic" Trinitarianism	Hippolytus Terullian	Various "neo-economic" Trinitarians	The Godhead is characterized by trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three manifestations of one identical, indivisible substance. The perfect unity and consubstantiality are especially comprehended in such manifest Trinitic deeds as creation and redemption.	Subsistence within the Godhead is articulated by means of such terms as "distinction" and "distribution," dispelling effectively the notion of separateness or division.
Orthodox Trinitarianism	Athanasius	Basil Gregory of Nyssa Gregory of Nazianzus Augustine Thomas Aquinas Luther Calvin Contemporary orthodox Christianity	God's being is perfectly unified and simplex of one essence (<i>homoousia</i>). This essence of deity is held in common by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three persons are consubstantial, coherent (<i>perichoresis</i>), co-equal, and co-eternal.	The divine subsistence is said to occur simultaneously in three modes of being or hypostases. As such, the Godhead exists "undivided in divided persons." This view contemplates an identity in nature and cooperation in function without the denial of the distinctions of persons in the Godhead.

23. Major Views of the Trinity (continued)

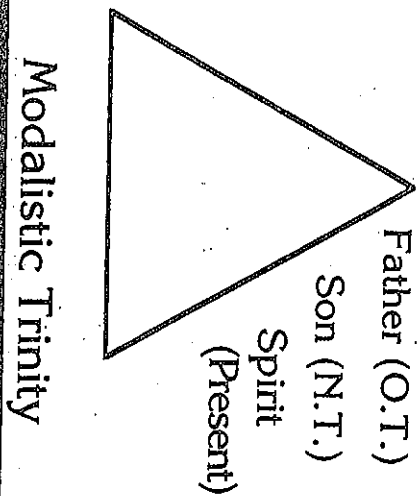
View	Asignation of Deity/Eternality			Analogical Referent(s)	Criticism(s)
	Father	Son	Holy Spirit		
Dynamic Monarchianism	Unique Originator of the universe. He is eternal, self-existent, and without beginning or end.	A virtuous (but finite) man in whose life God was dynamically present in a unique way; Christ definitely was not deity though his humanity was deified..	An impersonal attribute of the Godhead. No deity/or eternity is ascribed to the Holy Spirit.		Elevates reason above the witness of biblical revelation concerning the Trinity. Categorically denies the deity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, thereby undermining the theological undergirding for the biblical doctrine of salvation.
Modalistic Monarchianism	Fully God and fully eternal as the primal mode or manifestation of the only unique and unitary God.	Full deity/eternality ascribed only in the sense of his being another mode of the one God, and identical with his essence. He is the same God manifested in temporal sequence specific to a role (Incarnation).	Eternal God only as the title designates the phase in which the one God, in temporal sequence, manifested himself pursuant to the role of regeneration and sanctification.	One person acting three different roles in the same drama. Water-ice-vapor	Depersonalizes the Godhead. To compensate for its Trinitarian deficiencies, this view propounds ideas that are clearly heretical (e.g. patripassianism). Its concept of successive manifestations of the Godhead cannot account for such simultaneous appearances of the three persons as at Christ's baptism.
Subordinationism	The only one, unbegotten God who is eternal and without beginning	A created being and therefore not eternal. Though he is to be venerated, he is not of the divine essence.	A nonpersonal, noneternal emanation of the Father. He is viewed as an influence, an expression of God. Deity is not ascribed to him.	Mind-idea-action	It is at variance with abundant scriptural testimony respecting the deity of both Christ and the Holy Spirit. Its hierarchical concept likewise asserts three essentially separate persons with regard to the Father, Christ, and Holy Spirit. This results in a totally confused soteriology.
Economic Trinitarianism	The equal deity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is clearly elucidated in observation of the simultaneous relational/operational features of the Godhead. Co-eternality, at times, does not intelligibly surface in this ambiguous view, but it seems to be a logical implication.			A source and its river. Unity between a root and its shoot. The sun and its light.	Is more tentative and ambiguous in its treatment of the relational aspect of the Trinity.
Orthodox Trinitarianism	In its final distillation, this view unhesitatingly sets forth Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as co-equal and co-eternal in the Godhead with regard to both the divine essence and function.			All analogies fail to express orthodox Trinitarianism adequately.	The only shortcoming has to do with the limitations inherent in human language and thought itself: the impossibility of totally describing the ineffable mystery of "three in oneness."

25. False Views of the Trinity

Unitarianism



Sabellianism



Tritheism

