The Trinity

by
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Preface

There is a fundamental question underlying the entire New Testament: "Who is Jesus?" On the one hand, each of the four gospels addresses this question through the lens of the actions and teachings of Jesus in his earthly ministry. The letters, on the other hand, address this question in more abstract theology. Thus, it comes as no surprise to find that in the history of the Christian church, this question has loomed large again and again. From the Gnostic controversies of the 2nd century to the Arian controversies of the 4th century to the modern cults of the present century, one of the most important watersheds for distinguishing genuine Christianity from the various heterodoxies is the answer to this question, "Who is Jesus?"

The cults have alternative answers to that of orthodox Christianity. The Jehovah's Witnesses deny the uniqueness and full deity of Jesus, and the Way International does the same. Christian Scientists do not view Jesus Christ as God, and in fact, they separate Jesus from Christ into a sort of schizophrenic figure. Mormons hold that Jesus, whom they identify with Jehovah, was a lesser god than Elohim, who in their view was Jehovah's father. Unitarianism makes Jesus a pointer toward God rather than the incarnation of God, thus defining Jesus as an exalted human but certainly not divine. Oneness Pentecostals, while less extreme, go the other way by teaching Christomonism, that is, that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are ontologically indistinguishable.

Unfortunately, the average Christian confessionally accepts the doctrine of the Trinity but knows little about it. Many lay persons articulate the doctrine of God in ways that at the one extreme verge on tritheism (a belief in three gods), and at the other, lapse into modalism (the defining of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as only temporary states of action rather than qualities of essential being). Sometimes differences in the discussions about the godhead turn out to be semantic differences only, but at other times, what may seem to be even similar vocabularies can end up being quite different ideologies. When a Mormon says that Jesus is God, it does not at all mean the same thing as when a Baptist or a Presbyterian or a Lutheran or a Catholic says that Jesus is God.

As such, an exploration of the biblical doctrine of the Divine Nature is a worthwhile project. Dave Breese is doubtless correct when he says, "The cults will have a field day in exploiting experience-oriented saints who have no time for the

study of Christian doctrine."[1] Here, we shall approach the subject from the standpoint of biblical theology rather than systematic theology, that is, we will look first at the Old Testament theology of God, next at the incarnation theology of the New Testament, and finally at the triadic conception of God in the New Testament and the primitive church. To Him be glory in the church, now and forever. Amen!

[1]D. Breese, *Know the Marks of Cults* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1975) 84.

The Divine Nature

Theology is by definition the study of God. However, used loosely, the term theology often implies the study of the Christian religion, while in the stricter sense, it means the study of the nature of God *per se*, and especially, the nature of God in Christ Jesus. A study of this sort could be interminably long. Therefore, certain potential areas of exploration, such as, God's activity and character, will be limited here. The approach will begin in the Old Testament with the faith of Israel. From there, it will progress to the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the New Testament witness to God's Being. Finally, it will explore the formulation of the early creedal statements in Christendom which define Christian orthodoxy with respect to the godhead.

The Old Testament Names for God

The essence of personhood for primitive peoples was concentrated in a person's name, and this holds true for the divine names as well as for human ones.[2]

Elohim

El is the most general and probably the oldest designation for God in Semitic languages.[3] In the Old Testament, it appears over 2500 times, both in reference to the one true God as well as to the gods of Israel's neighbors. *Elohim*, a plural form, is used to describe pagan gods, one god among many gods, but especially within the faith of Israel, the sole legitimate God. In this latter usage, it corresponds to our word "godhead" and is to be understood as a plural of intensity. As such, it sums up the whole divine power in a personal unity.[4]

Compound names, using the name *El* as their base, are not uncommon in the Old Testament, and they each especially describe a personal characteristic of God, such as:

El Elyon = God Most High (Ge. 14:18)
El Olam = God Everlasting (Ge. 21:33)
El Roeh = God Who Sees (Ge. 16:13)
El Shaddai = God Almighty (Ge. 17:1)[5]

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[2]E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. A. Heathcote and P. Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 43.

[3]W. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979) 45.

[4]W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament [OTL],* trans. J. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) I.185.

[5]The precise meaning of the appellation *Shaddai* is problematic. The antiquity of the title seems likely to defeat all

Yahweh

Unlike *Elohim*, Yahweh is always a proper name and carries definite meaning. Called the tetragrammaton (due to the four letters in the Hebrew text, i.e., YHWH), it is consistently translated LORD in the English versions. (Note that all four letters are upper case when the underlying Hebrew word is Yahweh; this differentiates Yahweh from *Adonay* in English, the latter appearing in both upper and lower cases, see below). The name Yahweh is connected to the verb *haya* (= to be). The phrases "I AM" (Ex. 3:14) and "I am not" (Ho. 1:9) are word plays upon the name Yahweh.[6] The name Yahweh is especially the covenant name of God (Ex. 3:15; 6:2-8). As in the name *El*, various compounds are to be noted in the Old Testament that describe Yahweh's character, such as:

Yahweh-Nissi	= the LORD my banner (Ex. 17:15)
Yahweh-Yireh	= the LORD will see or will provide (Ge. 22:14)
Yahweh-Rapha	= the LORD who heals (Ex. 15:26)
Yahweh-Shalom	= the LORD is peace (Jg. 6:24)
Yahweh-Raah	= the LORD my shepherd (Ps. 23:1)
Yahweh-Tsidkenu	= the LORD our righteousness (Je. 23:6)
Yahweh-Shammah	= the LORD is present (Eze. 48:35)

***Yahweh Tsabaoth* (= LORD of Hosts)**

Occurring some 279 times in the Old Testament, this name, also a compound, means LORD of Armies or LORD of Hosts. Yahweh is himself depicted as a warrior (Ex. 15:3; cf. 1 Sa. 17:45; Ps. 68:1). Originally, the name *Tsabaoth* may have been a reference to the armies of Israel inasmuch as in the historical books it is often found in connection with the ark, a symbol of war (cf. Nu. 10:35-36; 2 Sa. 6:2, 18; 7:2, 8, 26-27, etc.). It may equally have referred to the celestial bodies, such as, the stars and the planets, for they also were called the hosts (Ge. 2:1; Ps. 33:6). Finally, it may have referred to the angelic armies of spirit-beings who formed the divine forces of God from heaven (Ps. 148:2; 1 Kg. 22:19).

Later in Israel, the name Yahweh Tsabaoth seems to have outgrown the association with armies, and it became a designation for God's exaltedness and omnipotence (cf. Is. 23:9; 24:23).[7] Thus, the NIV consistently translates this name as LORD Almighty.

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attempts to uncover its etymology. The idea that it means "almighty" or "all-powerful," while a scholarly guess, is still just that -- a guess, cf. R. Wyatt, *ISBE* (1982) II.506. However, this is the traditional English rendering, and it has as much credence as any other.

[6]Dyrness, 46 (see the NIV footnotes).

[7]Dyrness, 46.

Melek (= King)

God's kingship is implicit in the covenant. He is the divine suzerain who enters into covenant with Israel, his vassal (Ex. 15:18; Nu. 23:21; Dt. 33:5). When Israel wished for a king, her desire stood in direct confrontation with Yahweh's kingship (1 Sa. 8:7). Even though God allowed the nation to have a monarch, that monarch's kingship stood squarely under Yahweh's higher kingship (Ps. 2:4-7). Yahweh was the highest king of all -- he was truly the King of kings (Ps. 24:7-10; Is. 6:1ff.).

Adon (= Lord)

This name, also translated "Lord" in the English Versions (but in both upper and lower case letters), means master or lord and can refer to either humans or a deity. Most frequently, it appears in a plurality of intensity, like Elohim, as *Adonay* (= lit., my lords).[8] When *Adonay* and Yahweh appear as a compound, the NIV renders them Sovereign LORD (cf. Ge. 15:2, 8).

The Nature of God

If the Old Testament names for God indicate that God is personal, the Old Testament descriptions of God distinguish him from humankind and the world as well as from the pagan notions of deity.

God's Existence[9]

A remarkable fact is that the Old Testament never attempts to prove God's existence, unlike the attempts in modern philosophical apologetics. Only fools deny God, according to the ancients, and even here it is not a denial of God's existence *per se* as much as a denial of his interference in human affairs (cf. Ps. 14:1; 9:17; 53:1; Je. 5:12).

What God is Not

It may seem strange, but in the Old Testament there are no formal definitions of God such as are found in the New Testament (cf. Jn. 4:24; 1 Jn. 1:5; 4:8). The Old Testament writers are content to distinguish God from other entities like humans (Nu. 23:19; Is. 31:3).

In the Hebrew hymns, God is distinguished from nature because he transcends it. To the pagans, the gods and nature were fused so that for the Egyptians and Babylonians, the heavens, the weather, and the cosmic order and balance in nature

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[8]J. Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 146-147.

[9]A. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1910) 30-36.

were all that a person might know of deity.[10] For the faith of Israel, however, God transcended both nature and history, and nature merely witnessed to the transcendent God who was sovereign over all (Ps. 19:1-6). No abstract definition was needed to describe God's Being; a historical statement was sufficient. He was the One who brought Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 20:2).

God was clearly distinguished from the pagan deities in several ways, two of the most important being:

As Elohim Hayyim (= the Living God)

The pagan deities were frequently dying-rising gods, like Ba'al of Canaan, who died in the dry season and came to life in the rainy season. Yahweh, on the other hand, was always the living God (cf. Je. 10:1-16). This is why the basic form of oath-taking, used by both the Israelites and God himself, was, "As Yahweh lives" (Eze. 17:19; 33:11).[11]

As the Conqueror of Pagan Mythical Deities

In the Canaanite and Babylonian myths of creation, the universe originated from a heavenly battle between Marduk (the god of order) and Tiamat (the dragon-monster of chaos). Marduk split the monster's body, thus making the upper and lower parts of the universe.[12] In the Old Testament, on the other hand, God is not a mythical deity, but rather, he is the conqueror of all these mythical deities (Ps. 74:12-14; Is. 51:9), and this imagery anticipates his ultimate triumph over the forces of evil in the close of history (Is. 27:1; cf. Rv. 20:1-3).

What God Is

The formal definition of God as spirit is for the most part absent from the Old Testament. The Old Testament emphasis is on God's personhood and immanence rather than his spirituality and transcendence.[13] However, God as spirit is to some degree implicit within the language of the Old Testament, for the Hebrew *ruah* (= spirit) also doubles for air, wind and breath.[14]

Primarily, God is described in terms of his character and attributes, such as, his holiness (Lv. 11:44), his power (Ps. 115:3; Ge. 18:14; Ex. 15:2, 6), his righteousness (Jg. 5:11; Ps. 119:137), his faithfulness (Ps. 136), his love (Je. 31:3), his wrath (La. 4:11) and his wisdom (Is. 31:2).

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[10]G. Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (London: SCM Press, 1950) 16-23.

[11]T. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Scribners, 1971) 172.

[12]F. McCurley, *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 9.

[13]Eichrodt, I.211.

[14]Jacob, 121.

God is One

The *Shema* of the Old Testament (Dt. 6:4), which by the time of Jesus was recited by all male Jews each morning and evening, is the classic affirmation of Israel's monotheistic faith. However, a full understanding of the implications of this affirmation was progressive in Israel's history. For instance, in Psalm 82:1 there is an assembly of *elohim* (= gods, mighty beings) surrounding God in his court. This reference is perhaps to the angelic intermediaries who do God's bidding (or who rebel against him, as this psalm seems to indicate). They are called by various names, such as, "messengers," "holy ones," "sons of God," "servants," and "ministers" (cf. Ex. 15:11; Dt. 33:3; Ps. 29:1; 89:5; 148:2). However they are to be understood, it is clear that Yahweh alone was truly God. This is made emphatic in the challenge of Elijah to the Baal cult (1 Kg. 18:21-24, 39) and in the oracles of Isaiah (42:8, 17; 43:8-12; 44:6-8, 24; 45:5-6); 48:12-14a). At the same time, there is clearly a multi-dimensional character to the one, true God as is evident in:

Plural Names and Pronouns

The names Elohim and Adonay are both plural forms. When used of God, they do not indicate a plurality of divine beings, but as intensive plurals they indicate that God is multi-dimensional. Furthermore, the use of plural pronouns do the same (cf. Ge. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Is. 6:8).

Special Self-Distinctions

In a number of places in the Old Testament, there seem to be special self-distinctions within the single Divine Nature, such as:

- Yahweh and Yahweh (Ge. 19:24; Ho. 1:6-7; Zec 3:2)
- Yahweh and Adonay (Ps. 110:1)
- Elohim and Elohim (Ps. 45:6-7)
- Yahweh and His Anointed One (Ps. 2:2, 6-7, 11-12)
- Yahweh and Elohim (Ex. 3:4)

This sort of language is probably not to be understood as different parts which when added up together complete the divine nature. At the same time, such expressions suggest that God is a complex one rather than a simple one.

The Mal'ak Yahweh (= the Angel of the LORD)

The designation "Angel of Yahweh" on certain occasions is seen to belong to the Divine Nature (Ge. 16:7, 13; 32:24, 30; Ex. 3:2, 6; Jg. 6:11-12; Is. 63:9). However, he not only speaks *as* Yahweh, he also speaks *for* Yahweh (Zec. 1:12-

13). The Old Testament does not enter into speculation about the essence of the Angel of Yahweh or his relationship to Yahweh. Nevertheless, the multi-dimensional character of the Divine Nature is to be clearly seen.

The Wisdom of God

In one sense, of course, wisdom is an attribute of God (cf. Job 12:13). However, in a larger sense, wisdom is personified as possessed with the Divine Nature before creation (Pr. 8:22-31; cf. 1 Co. 1:24).

Son of Man (Da. 7:13)

In Daniel's prophetic vision, he saw a divine figure descending with the clouds of heaven to receive a universal kingdom. While the heavenly origin of the Son of Man is apparent, he is also to be distinguished from the Ancient of Days. It is not an accident that Jesus' favorite self-designation in the gospels is drawn from this passage!

The Paradoxical Character of New Testament Theology

One of the challenges for the modern interpreter of the biblical documents is to shift his/her mindset from the West to the East and from the modern period to the ancient world. This shift involves a movement from the tendency in the West to work with abstractions and contemplative modes of thought and the tendency in the ancient Near East to deal in the concrete and the dynamic.[15] The ancient, eastern person had a much greater tolerance for paradox than the modern, western person. This tolerance for paradox must be taken into account, particularly when describing the doctrine of God.

Progressive Revelation

Any kind of study, such as the study of God, which attempts to move freely from the Old Testament to the New Testament must recognize the principle called progressive revelation. One need not look far to discover distinctive emphases, the growth and development of ideas, and a certain amount of discontinuity between the old and new covenants.[16] By progressive revelation we mean simply that God made himself known to the human race gradually through the process of time, and as God continued to interact with human history in his mighty acts, and as the documents increased that eventually made up the Bible, God's people were able to understand God more fully.[17] Notice the kinds of statements which are made in the Bible along these lines:

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[15]See the helpful discussion in J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: SCM Press, 1983) 10ff.

[16]A. Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 352.

[17]B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 101-102.

Mt. 5:17-18

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared that he would fill the law full, that is, he would bring out the wider, larger and higher significance of Torah.[18] Jesus called his followers to a higher ethic than can be found in the traditional interpretations of Torah within Jewry.

Ga. 3:23-25; 4:1-7

The period prior to Christ is described by the analogy of a child who is under a slave-custodian. The child is immature. Only when the time had fully come was he given a fuller understanding in Jesus Christ.

He. 1:1-3

God's self-revelation was partial and incomplete in the time of the Old Testament prophets. It was sporadic and uneven. However, God has revealed himself fully and decisively in Jesus Christ, who is God's exact representation.

To speak of progressive revelation, then, is not to defect from the inspiration of the Old Testament. It is simply to affirm that the fullest revelation is in the New Testament. This factor is especially helpful when one addresses the Divine Nature. To attempt to build a view of the Godhead using the Old Testament model for the primary data would be a severe truncation of the available information. Certainly the kind of benedictions familiar in Paul's letters, with references to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are not to be found in the Old Testament. Rather, they reflect the progress of revelation which is found in the New Testament.

The Early Church and the Doctrine of God

In the New Testament one encounters three terms which significantly broadened the Old Testzment conception of the Divine Nature, and these terms are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To be sure, the designation *ruah Elohim* (= Spirit of God) is common enough in the Old Testament; however, there are new nuances in the usage of the term Holy Spirit in the New Testament, nuances which are nowhere to be seen in the Old Testament. Even more important, the idea of the Father and the Son in the Divine Nature is distinctively New Testament in its orientation.

The Functional Nature of Early Christology

Once more, it is important to remember that Christianity was born in the East, not in the West. The eastern mind did not rebel at paradox. It was not an intellectual offense to the Hebrew mind to read that "Yahweh said to Adonay...."

[18]Ramm, 102.

and at the same time affirm that God was one (Mt. 22:41-45; Mk. 12:29). When the question, "Who is Christ?" is addressed in the New Testament, it has to do primarily with Christ's function, not his nature.[19]

The Rise of Controversy

It is only later, when Christianity moved into the Greek world, that reflection on the problem of natures became prominent.[20] The two biggest questions were:

a) What is the relationship of Jesus Christ to God the Father, and
b) What is the relationship between the human nature and the divine nature of Jesus Christ. In Christian history, various answers were explored and will be considered later.

The Present Method

Since the theological-philosophical question of natures was not the primary concern of the earliest Christians, we shall seek to avoid terminology that reflects later Christian thought, at least at this stage of the study. Our purpose shall be to explore first what the New Testament says about God, how it uses the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and what it makes of other terms and concepts without immediately attempting to harmonize or rationalize the implications. In this way, we shall attempt to see the data of the New Testament without forcing it into a preconceived theological framework. Only then shall we be ready to survey and evaluate the later Christian answers to the question of natures. This method may well result in some temporary paradoxical conclusions, but it will be well to bear with them for the time being.

The Virgin Birth

For one who picks up the New Testament to read for the first time, the first intimation he/she will receive about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ will be in the account of the virginal conception.[21] Both the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke clearly indicate that Jesus' birth was miraculous. Jesus was the son of Mary, but not of Joseph (Mt. 1:18, 25; Lk. 1:30-35). The circumstances of his birth indicated that he was the Son of God. Most probably, the enemies of Jesus did not accept this testimony (cf. Jn. 8:41), but Paul's statement that Jesus was "born of a woman" may well reflect on his belief in the virgin birth (Ga. 4:4). Even in this early stage of the gospel, the terms Holy Spirit and Son of God become significant.

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[19]O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 3-4.

[20]H. Boer, *A Short History of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 108-109.

[21]The term virginal conception is perhaps more accurate though less popular than the term virgin birth, but it has the advantage of being distinct from the Roman Catholic theology of the perpetual virginity of Mary which has its roots in the late 2nd century, J. Wright, *NBD* (1982) 1238.

The Incarnation

The word incarnation is derived from a Latin expression *in carne* and means "in flesh." For Christians, it refers to the becoming flesh of the divine *Logos* (= Word) in Jesus Christ.[22] Although the word incarnation is not found in the English Versions, the concept of incarnation is to be seen in a number of important passages.

It is important to distinguish between incarnation and indwelling. Incarnation is the divine Logos *becoming* flesh so that there is a fundamental union between them. It is deity acquiring manhood. Indwelling, on the other hand, is the divine Spirit being resident in a human. The two ideas are not synonymous.[23]

The essence of incarnation, the becoming flesh of the Logos, means that the physiological and psychological aspects of human life were acquired by the Logos, including its frailness and creaturely weakness. At the same time, the divine Logos was not reduced, nor did he become incapable of exercising his divine functions. The incarnation, while affirmed in the New Testament, is the strongest of paradoxes. What is impossible by very definition, that is, that the human could be divine and the divine could be human, became possible and happened!

John's Prologue (Jn. 1:1-3, 9b-10, 14-15, 18)

One of the most significant passages describing the incarnation is the introduction prefacing the Fourth Gospel.

The Preexistence of the Logos (1:1-2)

The term Logos was a rich word with many nuances in the first century. In Stoic philosophy, the logos was the principle of cosmic reason in the universe which gave order and structure to the whole. It was the mind at the center of the universe. In Hebrew thought, the logos was the Word of God which brought all things into existence. It addressed the prophets and became the bridge between the divine and the human. In later Jewish thought, the logos was the divine wisdom which resided with God as a personification of his Word (cf. Pro. 8:22-31).[24]

The Personality of the Logos

Though this cannot be proved, John may well have intentionally used this rich word Logos to give the broadest possible meaning. However, beyond this is John's purpose to show that the Logos was *personal*, not merely a philosophical construct or an impersonal force or idea. He does this by insisting on the actual preexistence

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[22]V. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964) 130.

[23]J. Packer, "Incarnation," *NBD* (1982) 512.

[24]R. Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976) 24-25.

of the Logos. The parallelism between Jn. 1:1 and Ge. 1:1 can hardly be incidental. The point is that when creation began, the Logos was already in existence. He did not come into existence as another created being or substance; he was existing before time began.

Furthermore, John says that the Logos was *pros ton Theon* (= with God). The expression "with God" personalizes and distinguishes the Logos. Grammatically, the phrase may be translated as "in accompaniment with" or "in relationship with," but in either case, it demands personality. This sort of expression would fit very awkwardly if it had been used to describe an abstract philosophical concept or an impersonal force.

Finally, John says that *Theos en ho logos* (= the Word was God). Grammatically, because there is no definite article with the word "God," this phrase indicates that there is more to God than the Word. However, the Logos itself fully partook of the Divine Nature.

The first verse of John may be paraphrased: "The Logos existed before time began. The Logos is distinct from God. The Logos is nothing less than God." Such a description is paradoxical. In our normal understanding, we could not easily set side by side these latter two statements. Such a paradox, however, is anticipated in the Old Testament descriptions of monotheism and God's multi-dimensional character.

The Logos as the Agent of Creation (1:3)

When John uses the expression *di' autou* (= through him), as opposed to simply "by him," he indicates that God stood behind the creative activity of the Logos. God is the ultimate source of all that exists, but he brings all things into existence "though" or "by the agency of" the Logos.

The Logos was Coming into the World (1:9b-10, 14-15)

The last phrase in 1:9 speaks of the Logos (which was the true Light) as "coming into the world" (cf. Jn. 11:27).[25] The Logos, the agent of creation, was in the world he had made (1:10). Notice that the personal pronouns "he" and "him" imply personality, not just an abstract force. The ultimate manner in which the Logos came into the world is later to be describe in 1:14, where it says *ho logos sarx egeneto* (= the Word became flesh). This is an unmistakable statement of incarnation. It is at this point that John clearly identifies the preexistent Logos with Jesus who lived "among us."

In the expression "lived among us," the verb is unusual and quite literally

[25]The Greek here is somewhat ambiguous. The problem is whether it was "every man" or the "true light" which came into the world (see NIV footnote). The latter seems best, cf. L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 93-94.

means to pitch a tent. This may well be an allusion to the idea that the presence of God, which was in the ancient Tent of Meeting in the desert and in Solomon's temple, now was "tented" in Jesus Christ. If so, then the word *kavod* (= glory) takes on added significance. The glory of God which dwelt over the Ark of the Testimony now resided in Jesus.

The term *monogenous* (= one and only) has been translated in two ways. One rendering, "only begotten" (KJV), is based on the Latin Vulgate, but there is little justification in the Greek for such a translation. A better translation is "of a single kind."[26] The point is that Jesus was uniquely the Son who came from the Father, not that he had a point of beginning as though he was a created being. From this point on in the Fourth Gospel, John does not use the term Logos again to refer to Jesus. Hereafter, John consistently describes Jesus as the Son of God. It is clear, therefore, that when John uses the term Logos in the beginning of his gospel, he means the one who is the Son of God. He uses the term Logos to capture a special significance and to build up to the incarnation of Jesus, God's Son.

The phrase *para patros* (= from [the] Father) parallels the frequent mention in John's Gospel of the fact that the Father "sent" the Son (3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21). This expression consistently implies what John has expressed in the first verse, that is, that the Logos (now called the Son) was with God (now called the Father) before the beginning of creation. The Father sent his unique Son into the world, that is, the Son "came from the Father." Thus, the Baptist can say that Jesus "comes after me" yet he "was before me." Jesus was born after John and began his public ministry after John, yet in a divine sense he existed before John as the Son of God.

The Son--the Revelation of the Father (1:18)

God, in his purest essence, cannot be seen (cf. 1 Ti. 6:15-16). The ways in which he has disclosed himself in visions and theophanies have all been partial and incomplete. However, God the only Son has revealed the Father in the fullest possible way.[27] The Son is the one who is ever at the Father's side (lit., "at [or into] the chest of the Father"), and because he maintains this relationship, he is able to fully make the Father known (cf. Jn. 5:19-21; 6:46; 8:38).

A Hymn of the Incarnation (Phil. 2:6-11)

Students of biblical languages have long recognized that this passage is poetic in the style of antiphonal Hebrew parallelism. Many scholars agree that it may have been pre-Pauline and that Paul quotes it by way of illustration, because it was

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[26]R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) I.13.

[27]The manuscripts vary here between "God the only [Son]," the "only Son," the "only Son of God" and "the only [Son]." However, the oldest and best manuscripts give the first rendering, which is followed by the NIV.

familiar to his readers.[28]

He, although He was in the divine Form,
Did not think equality with God a thing to be grasped

But surrendered His rank
And took the role of a servant;

Becoming like the rest of mankind,
And appearing in a human role;

He humbled Himself,
In an obedience that went so far as to die.

For this, God raised Him to the highest honor,
And conferred upon Him the highest rank of all;

That at Jesus' name every knee should bow,
And every tongue should own that 'Jesus Christ
is Lord."[29]

2:6

The expression "being in very nature God" (NIV) refers to Jesus before his incarnation. This verse retains the paradoxical character of John's prologue, for it shows both unity and distinction within God's Being. Jesus was divine in his very essence, and he continually existed that way prior to the birth in Bethlehem. He did not become divine, but he by very nature *was* divine! He was "equal with God," not because he sought to make himself so, but because by his very nature he already existed as such. At the same time, the expression "equality with God" requires distinction. To be "equal with" is not the same as being "indistinguishable from."

2:7-8

This is the famous passage which describes Christ's *kenosis* (= self-emptying). The NIV reading "but made himself nothing" can be more literally rendered "but emptied himself." This should not be read as though Christ emptied himself of his

[28]R. Martin, *Philippians [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 91-94.

[29]R. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 49-50. The first couplet in the hymn is an antithetic parallelism; the other couplets are synonymous parallelisms.

deity, but rather, that he surrendered his majestic advantages (cf. 2 Co. 8:9). From his position as "equal with God" he condescended to the role of a slave. There is an intentional contrast between the expressions "form of God" and "form of a slave," or as the NIV renders it, "in very nature God" as opposed to "the very nature of a servant."

The ultimate character of Christ's condescension is described as *en homoiomati anthropon genomenos* (= becoming in the likeness of humans). The expressions "taking" the form of a slave and "being made" in human likeness do not imply an exchange so much as an addition. Jesus did not relinquish his divine nature, but he added to himself a human nature. This humanness made it possible for him to die the most disreputable death--public criminal execution (cf. He. 2:9-15).

2:9-11

Here the hymn depicts the upward movement that contrasts with the previous condescension. God has exalted the incarnate Christ, who during his earthly life had temporarily surrendered his prior advantages. He exalted him to the highest status (*hyperupsosen* = super-exalted). God gave to Jesus the most exalted name, the name "Lord." It may be noted that the exalted name is apparently given subsequent to the cross, and therefore, the exalted name is not "Jesus," the name given at Christ's birth. Rather, in light of 2:11, the exalted name is "Lord," the Greek counterpart to the Old Testament name Yahweh.[30] The affirmation "Jesus Christ is Lord" is the central confession of the Christian faith (cf. Ro. 10:9; 1 Co. 12:3). It is to the Father's glory that the Son is recognized as Lord.

In summary, it is well to observe the three stages of the Philippian hymn. It describes: 1) the preexistent glory of the Son as divinely equal with God, 2) the incarnation of the Son when he accepted a human form, and 3) God's exaltation of the Son to the place of cosmic sovereignty after his obedient death.

Another Hymn of Incarnation (1 Ti. 3:16)

1 Ti. 3:16, like the preceding Philippian hymn, is in poetic form and is probably also an early Christian hymn.[31] The mystery of godliness is Christ himself who appeared in a body.[32] The Pauline concept of mystery is that of a secret that was hidden in divine wisdom during previous centuries and only

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[30]H. Kent, Jr. "Philippians," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) XI.125.

[31]D. Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 89.

[32]The manuscripts vary as to the first word in the hymn, whether *Theos* (= God) or *hos* (= who or he). The evidence strongly favors the latter reading, and it is followed by almost all English Versions, the KJV being the one notable exception, cf. B. Metzger, A *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London/New York: United Bible Societies, 1971) 641.

revealed in messianic times.[33] The expression "in a body" (*en sarki* = in flesh) is the exact counterpart of the Latin *in carne*, from which we derive the word incarnation. Thus, the nature of Christ, which was hidden during the Old Testament era, was revealed when he appeared in flesh. The short hymn is probably to be read in three couplets, each with a contrast between earth and heaven.[34]

He was manifested in the flesh,	(earth)
vindicated in the Spirit,	(heaven)
Seen by angels,	(heaven)
preached among the nations,	(earth)
Believed on in the world,	(heaven)
taken up in glory.	(earth)

Christ was vindicated by the Spirit, that is, he was shown to be the sinless Son of God (cf. Ro. 1:4). He was watched over by angels (cf. Mt. 4:11; Lk. 22:43). He was proclaimed abroad by his apostles and believed by many who heard the good news. The climax of his earthly ministry was his ascension. Once again, the three stages are evident: 1) *Preexistence* (here implicit in the fact that he was revealed in flesh), 2) *Incarnation*, and 3) *Exaltation*.

The Incarnational Christology of Hebrews (1:1-3; 2:9-18)

These three stages of preexistence, incarnation and exaltation are also clearly described in the Book of Hebrews. The favorite designation for Christ in Hebrews is Son of God.

Preexistence

The preexistence of the Son is shown in that he was God's Agent of Creation (1:2, 10). As the preexistent Son of God, Jesus bears the very stamp of God's nature (1:3). He maintains a relationship with the Father which is in a category by itself (1:4-6). The Son is worshiped as divine (1:6). He is eternal and unchangeable (1:7-8, 11-12; 13:8).

Incarnation

The incarnation of the Son is described as his being made lower than angels so that he might suffer and die (2:9). He took upon himself a human body when he came into the world (10:5). In his acquired humanness, the Son of God suffered so

[33]G. Denzer, "The Pastoral Letters," *JBC* (1968) II.354.

[34]A. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 85.

as to establish his empathetic relationship with all other humans (2:10-18).

Exaltation

The exaltation of the Son of God is given in the metaphor: "....he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (1:3). The expression "sat down" is intended to point to the completion of his atoning work (cf. 10:11-13).

The Prologue of 1 John (1 Jn. 1:1-3)

There is an obviously close connection between this prologue and that of the Gospel of John. Notice the parallelisms:

'That which was from the beginning' (1 Jn. 1:1)
'In the beginning was the Word` (Jn. 1:1)

'The Word was Life' (1 Jn. 1:1)
'In him [the Word] was life' (Jn. 1:4)

'We have seen....we have looked at...our hands have touched...the life appeared...we have seen it' (1 Jn. 1:1-2)
'The Word became flesh....we have seen his glory' (Jn. 1:14)

'Which was with the Father' (1 Jn. 1:2)
'The Word was with God...he was with God in the beginning' (Jn. 1:1-2)

As in the Gospel of John, the Son's preexistence with the Father and his incarnation in humanity are the central ideas in the prologue of 1 John. Now that the Son has been exalted, all believers share in the *koinonia* (= fellowship) of the divine life of the Father and the Son (1:3). The distinction yet equality between the Father and the Son is especially emphatic.

This theme of incarnation was central to the early Christians' faith, as can be seen in the above five passages. It should come as no surprise that even outside observers understood Christians to believe that the Jesus of Nazareth who walked in Galilee and Judea was also God. In fact, an outside observer, the Roman Pliny, wrote in a letter a description of early Christian worship (about AD 112). He said: "They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed, but to abstain from all fraud, theft and adultery, never

to break their word, or deny a trust when called upon to honor it; after which it was their custom to separate...."[35]

The Names of Jesus of Nazareth

An understanding of how the early church conceived of Jesus of Nazareth is especially augmented by looking at the various names which Jesus used of himself and which his disciples in turn used of him. It is worth mentioning that the New Testament writers did not make the subtle distinction between names and titles in the same way we do in modern English. To be sure, there is a Greek word *titlos* (= title), but it is never used of a title for Christ. The Greek word *onoma* (= name) is used for both given names and titles of distinction. The name of Jesus of Nazareth is not only Jesus, but it is also Lord, Son, Christ and so forth.

The earliest Christians were more concerned with the function of Jesus than explaining the paradox of his incarnation. Thus, as one looks at the data of the New Testament, the reader must bear in mind that Jesus' function and the question of natures must not be treated independently.

Names Relating to Jesus' Earthly Work

There are primarily three names which describe Jesus' earthly ministry which he accomplished through the incarnation. He was the *Prophet* like Moses, the suffering *Servant* of Yahweh, and the great *High Priest*.

The Prophet Like Moses

The important prediction of the rise of a prophet like Moses became a significant part of the Old Testament hope of Israel (Dt. 18:18-19). While the Jews did not know the specific identity of the coming prophet who would speak for God (Elijah, Enoch, Jeremiah and Baruch are all suggested in Jewish literature),[36] they did expect someone (cf. Mt. 16:13-14; 21:10-11; Mk. 6:14-16; Jn. 6:14; 7:40). John the Baptist was questioned as to whether or not he was himself this prophet, but he refused the title (Jn. 1:19-28). However, the faith of the early Christians was that Jesus was indeed the Prophet who was coming (Ac. 3:22-26; 7:37, 52). He was the final great spokesman for God. He was not another in the line of prophets, but he was *the* Prophet!

The Suffering Servant of Yahweh[37]

In the consolation section of the Book of Isaiah, there is introduced a

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[35]T. Dowley, ed., *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 124.

[36]Cullmann, 14-33.

[37]F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 83-99.

compelling figure, the figure of Yahweh's Servant, in four poetic structures (sometimes called "songs") and their related passages.

In the first Servant song (42:1-4), the Servant is chosen and anointed with Yahweh's Spirit so that he might bring justice to the earth. In contrast to all others who seek to establish justice, the Servant will not accomplish his mission by force (42:2). He shall not overpower those who are weak (42:3). Rather, he shall be a model of uncomplaining endurance (42:4). His mission shall stretch beyond the bloodlines of Israel to the nations of the world (42:6-7). The gospels clearly describe Jesus in just these terms. He was anointed by the Spirit (Lk. 3:21-22; 4:1a). His ministry of patient endurance and mercy to the poor was evident on every hand.

In the second Servant song (49:1-6), the universal mission of the Servant is once more elaborated. The Servant is in some sense the embodiment of Israel (49:3), that is, he is everything Israel was supposed to be, but he is also distinguished from the nation Israel (49:5-6). The phrase "light for the Gentiles" is quoted in the New Testament to refer to Jesus (Lk. 2:30-32).

The third Servant song (50:4-9) describes the character of the Servant in that he would completely obey and submit to Yahweh's will (50:4-5). This included humiliation and suffering (50:6), and the Servant of Yahweh accepted such a role with firm resolution (50:7). However, in the end the Servant would be vindicated by Yahweh (50:8-9). Jesus' own testimony about himself was clear regarding his obedience and submission to the Father's will (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; Lk. 22:42). The evangelists describe the humiliation of Jesus in terms parallel to those of the Servant song (Mt. 26:67-68; 27:26). Jesus' resolution to face death in Jerusalem was noted in Luke's Gospel (9:51), and his vindication by the resurrection is the heart of the good news (Ac. 2:32; 3:15).

The fourth Servant song (52:13--53:12), the longest and best known of the four, predicts the vicarious suffering and exaltation of the Servant. His oppression and unjust death were at first interpreted by those who saw it as a sign of God's displeasure (53:4), but later, they recognized that his suffering was in behalf of others' sins (52:15a; 53:4a, 5-6, 8b, 10-12). He bore his suffering without retaliation (53:7) or violence (53:9). Because of his wise obedience, God exalted him to the pinnacle (52:13).

The parallels between this fourth Servant Song and the passion of Jesus are profound. When the apostles said that the death of Jesus happened "by God's set purpose and foreknowledge" (Ac. 2:23), they were on solid ground. Yahweh's Servant is Jesus of Nazareth (Ac. 3:26; 4:27; 8:26-35). The vicarious sin-bearing of Yahweh's Servant is mentioned frequently by the early Christians (cf. Jn. 1:29; Ro. 4:25; 8:3; 2 Co. 5:21; Ga. 1:3; He. 9:28; 1 Pe. 2:24; Rv. 5:9).

The High Priest

The concept of a High Priest, a supreme individual who stood between humans and God, is also part of the Jewish hope. Patterned after the mysterious figure of Melchizedek (Ge. 14:18-20), David, the greatest Israelite king, pays homage to the Priest-King who is higher than himself (Ps. 110:1-4).[38] In the Jewish literature of the intertestamental period, a new priest was anticipated who would fulfill all the proper duties and characteristics that the present priests did not.[39] Without question Jesus considered himself to be greater than the Jewish temple system (Mt. 12:6). The Book of Hebrews, especially, treats Jesus as the true High Priest. The priestly institution of Israel was only a shadow of reality, but Jesus was the full reality (8:3-6; 10:1-9). The inadequacy of the old system stands in sharp relief against the finality and sufficiency of Christ's "once-for-all" priestly work (1:3; 2:17; 7:18, 23-28; 9:9-14; 10:11-14).

The high priestly work of Jesus is also to be seen in his prayer on behalf of his followers (Jn. 17:9, 20), a prayer for their sanctification (17:17), protection (17:11) and unity (17:11, 21-23). A continuing high priestly ministry is still being exercised by Jesus for his people (1 Jn. 2:1; He. 7:25; 1 Ti. 2:5).

Names Relating to Jesus' Eschatological Work

The word eschatology is an important term which refers to the final events that conclude this age and begin the age to come.[40] The ministry of Jesus was the inauguration of an eschatological reality, even though it would not come to final fulfillment until his second coming. Thus, to Jesus are applied names which are eschatological in character--names that in the faith of Israel heralded the end of the old age and the beginning of the new.

The Davidic King

This title was so significant that Paul could summarize his entire approach to the gospel by saying, "Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel..." (2 Ti. 2:8).

Israel's hope for an eschatological descendent of David who would arise to rule God's people has its roots in God's covenant with David (2 Sa. 7:8-16; Ps. 89:3-4, 19-29, 34-37). Yahweh had chosen the line of David as the kingly dynasty (Ps. 78: 67-72). However, as the history of the monarchy progressed toward the exile, it became increasingly clear that these promises must have an eschatological meaning if they were to be fulfilled at all. The memory of God's covenant with

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[38]D. Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1975) 391-392.

[39]Cullmann, 85-87.

[40]It comes from the New Testament word *eschatos* (= last).

David inspired hope for the continuity of a Davidic line (Ps. 132:10-18), but the harsh realities of history produced an almost unbearable tension (Ps. 89:38-46, 49-51). Instead of a glorious covenantal fulfillment, there was David's "fallen tent," a victim of the Mesopotamian empire-builders (2 Kg. 25:1-11). A fulfillment of the Davidic promises was postponed until the future (Am 9:11-12; Jer. 23:1-6; 33:14-26; Eze. 34:22-31). During the intertestamental period, the Davidic hope was revived and the eschatological Davidic king was identified with the figure of messiah.[41]

When Jesus was hailed as the son of David, such a title sprang from the Jewish hope (Mt. 9:27; 12:22-23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42; Mk. 11:9-10; Jn. 7:40-43; etc.). The early Christians considered the fact that Jesus was descended from David to have great significance (Mt. 1:1; Ro. 1:3; 2 Ti. 2:8; Rv. 22:16). Matthew's genealogy asserts that Jesus was the rightful heir to the Davidic throne (Mt. 1:6-11, 16). At the annunciation, Mary was informed that her son would receive the Davidic promises (Lk. 1:32-33). Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the Davidic son (Ac. 2:29-32) as did Paul (Ac. 13:32-38) and James the Just (Ac. 15:15-18). Jesus, not Solomon, was David's greater son, and the church, not the Solomonic temple, was the greater dwelling place for the Holy Spirit (Ep. 2:22). Jesus is the Lion of Judah, David's tribe, and the Root of David's family (Rv. 5:5).

The Messiah

The term messiah is broad in the Old Testament and narrows in usage as one moves into the New Testament.

Closely related to the Davidic promise is the name *messiah* (Old Testament) or *Christ* (New Testament). In spite of the fact that this name has become the most widely used within the Christian church, it was not as widely used in the Old Testament as is often supposed, and where it is used, it carries a broader meaning than is sometimes attached to it. Related to the verb *mashah* (= anointing), the name messiah referred to a person who was anointed for a special mission or special service. As such, it was used of priests (Lv. 4:3, the messiah-priest), kings (1 Sa. 16:6; 24:6; Ps. 2:2), patriarchs (Ps. 105:15), and even a heathen king whom God wished to use to achieve his purposes in history (Is. 45:1). The messianic expectations which one meets in the gospels primarily arose in the intertestamental period, when the Jews began to look for an anointed instrument *par excellence*.[42] It is worth noting that the Jewish expectations of messiah were not uniformly conceived. Some expected him to be a Jewish human leader, some to be a Davidic

[41]Bruce, 75-78.

[42]D. Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981) 237.

king, some to be a divine being who would descend from heaven, and others to be a figure cloaked in mystery.[43] The Qumran community seems to have expected two messiahs, one a priestly figure from Aaron's line and the other a political figure from David's line.[44] In any case, it was generally agreed that when messiah came, God's victory over the powers of evil would begin. This messianic expectation gave rise to frequent speculation. John the Baptist was suspected of being the messiah (Lk. 3:15), but he emphatically denied it (Jn. 1:20). Jesus' earliest disciples believed him to be the messiah, but their depth of understanding was initially probably not greatly different from the popular ideas of the day (Jn. 1:41). Even the Samaritans expected a messiah (Jn. 4:29). Various notions about messiah are to be gleaned from the New Testament. Some thought that he would be born in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:3-5), although others thought his origin would be unknown (Jn. 7:26-27). Many believed that messiah would be a wonder-worker (Jn. 7:31) and that he would stay forever (12:34).

It is almost certainly due to the multiplicity of messianic notions as well as the rise of alternate messiah-like figures (cf. Ac. 5:35-37)[45] that Jesus avoided the use of the title messiah in his public ministry, a feature that sometimes is described as "the messianic secret". This is most clearly to be seen in Mark's Gospel (Mk. 1:25, 34, 44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). Jesus' reluctance would seem to have been based on his unwillingness to identify with all the popular political messianic notions. On one occasion, the Jews even tried to force him into kingship (Jn. 6:14-15). Nevertheless, Jesus was not unwilling to be recognized as the messiah by individuals (Mt. 16:13-20; Jn. 4:25-26; 11:27). Thus, one may conclude that Jesus knew himself to be the messiah, but he also knew that he was not the sort of messiah that was popularly expected. Only after the crucifixion would it be safe to speak openly of his messiahship (Lk. 9:20-21).[46]

The messiahship of Jesus was defined by his death and resurrection. It is at his trial that Jesus openly acknowledged his messiahship (Mt. 26:62-64; Lk. 23:2-3). Once his death was known to be inevitable, all political notions of his messiahship would have to be discarded, and indeed, most of the Jews would not have been able to accept the idea of a crucified messiah (Lk. 23:35, 39). After his resurrection, Jesus began to explain fully his self-concept of messiah (Lk. 24:17-27). Yes, his messianic mission was the redemption of God's people, though in a spiritual sense, not in a nationalistic sense. Jesus' messianic mission included Jews

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[43]H. Kee et al., Understanding the New Testament, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973) 52.

[44]Some scholars debate this reading of the Qumran evidence, cf. W. LaSor, The Dead Sea Scrolls, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Moody, 1962) 151-163; Kee, 65.

[45]Josephus mentions "ten thousand disorders in Judea" which were like those of Judas and Theudas, Antiquities, XVII.x.4-5.

[46]G. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 170-171.

but went far beyond them (cf. Ep. 2:11-20). His messiahship was spiritual in character and universal in scope!

That Jesus was the messiah became a central declaration of early Christian preaching (Ac. 2:36; 3:18; 5:42; 8:5; 9:22; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 26:22-23; 28:31). Paul even began to use the title Christ as a proper name for Jesus (Ro. 9:5), and throughout the New Testament, the coupling of the names "Jesus" and "Christ" show how central was the messiahship of Jesus to the Christian faith.

The Son of Man

Except for one occasion (Ac. 7:56), the only one to ever use the title Son of Man was Jesus himself, and he does so over 65 times in the gospels. Some have thought that the title refers primarily to Christ's humanity (as opposed to the title Son of God which refers to Christ's deity),[47] but while this may be so in some cases, it does not do justice to either the New Testament usage or to the historical evidence.

The primary Old Testament background for this title is in Daniel's prophetic vision (Da. 7:13-14, 25-27). The picture is of a heavenly being who descends to establish God's rule in the world on behalf of God's afflicted people. The way in which Jesus understood the coming of God's rule is to be found by examining the way in which Jesus used the Son of Man designation to refer to himself. The following emphases are important:

First, there is the Son of Man on earth. Here, the use of the title points toward Jesus' authority to forgive sins (Lk. 5:24), his lordship over the sabbath (Lk. 6:5), and his mission of seeking and saving the lost (Lk. 19:10).

Then, there is the Son of Man who suffers. Here, suffering is described as unavoidable for the Son of Man (Lk. 9:22). His life is to be given as a ransom for the many (Mt. 20:18; Jn. 12:34), and he will go to the grave (Mt. 12:40).

Next, there is the Son of Man in glory. The passion of the Son of Man is also his glorification (Jn. 13:31). Because he has been glorified, he will come again in glory (Lk. 9:26; 21:27; 22:69). He holds authority over the angels (Mt. 13:41), and he sits as the heavenly judge of all (Lk. 12:8-9; 21:36; Jn. 5:27).

Finally, there is the Son of Man as preexistent. Jesus as the Son of Man existed prior to his incarnation at Bethlehem. He was the ladder from heaven, seen by Jacob (Jn. 1:51; cf. Ge. 28:12), he came from heaven (Jn. 3:13) and he returned to heaven (Jn. 6:62). He was the one who was taught by the Father (Jn. 8:28), and he is the giver of eternal life (Jn. 6:27, 54).

From these indications, it is clear that the name Son of Man, far from being only a description of Jesus' humanity, is more fundamentally a description of his

[47]This reading is based upon Ezekiel's repeated use of the title son of man to refer to himself as a human being.

heavenly origin, his authority, his atoning work, and his glorification. He is the Son of Man from heaven who establishes God's rule in the earth!

Names Relating to Jesus' Present and Ongoing Work

The categorization of Jesus' names as they relate to his earthly, eschatological and present work are to some degree overlapping. Christ's present work as Savior and Lord are eschatological as well as present. His eschatological work, in like manner, has already begun, because the future age has broken into the present.

Soter (= Savior)

The concept of salvation is one of the broadest in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *yeshu'ah* (= salvation) can be used to refer to welfare (cf. Job 30:15), deliverance (cf. 1 Chr. 19:12), salvation from either external or spiritual evils (cf. Is. 33:2; 52:7), and military victory (cf. 1 Sa. 14:45).[48] In the New Testament, the corresponding Greek *soteria* (= salvation) can be used to refer to preservation in danger (cf. Ac. 7:25; 27:34) as well as salvation through the Christian faith (Ro. 1:16; 10:10).

The single greatest salvation event in the Old Testament was the exodus of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 14:13, 29-31; 15:2), where the use of salvation vocabulary properly begins.[49] The exodus becomes the pattern for all God's saving work, and especially, for the return of the Jews from the exile which was understood to be a second exodus (Is. 43:1-3, 16-19; 48:20-21; 52:12).

Certain aspects of the exodus are recapitulated in the life and death of Jesus. What Yahweh says about Israel to Pharaoh, "Israel is my son," he says about Jesus also (cf. Ex. 4:22; Mk. 9:7). As Israel descended into Egypt and was brought back, so Jesus did the same (cf. Ge. 46:1-4; Ho. 11:1; Mt. 2:13-15). Jesus' forty days of temptation in the desert is probably more than a coincidental parallel to the forty year desert sojourn of Israel, and all of Jesus' scriptural refutations of Satan are drawn from this period (cf. Mt. 4:1-11; Dt. 2:7; 8:3; 6:13, 16). It is remarkable that Jesus himself used the word *exodos* (= exodus, departure) to describe his death (Lk. 9:31). Jude says that it was Jesus (or the Lord) who saved his people from Egypt (Jude 5),[50] and Paul says that it was Christ who sustained Israel with water

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[48]*BDB*, 447.

[49]Only once prior to the exodus is the word salvation used (cf. Ge. 49:18), and there it anticipates the future.

[50]Textual critics frankly admit that however unusual the reading, the name Jesus in Jude 5 seems required on general textual critical principles, cf. B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London/New York: United Bible Societies, 1975) 724. Nevertheless, the reading is so difficult that no major English Version retains it, though it appears as a marginal reading in the RSV, NEB, NIV and NASB. Still, this identification of Jesus with Yahweh in the Old Testament, while unusual in the circumstances, is certainly not out of harmony with the rest of the New Testament. Even if the reading *kyrios* (= Lord) is adopted, there are still excellent reasons for taking Jude's meaning to be the Lord Jesus, cf. R. Bauckham, Jude, *2 Peter [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 49.

from the rock (Ps. 78:35; 1 Co. 10:4). Christ became the great Passover lamb (Ex. 12:3-5; 1 Pe. 1:19; 1 Co. 5:7). Christians are baptized into Christ just as Israel was baptized into the sea and the cloud (1 Co. 10:1-2; Ga. 3:27).

While Jesus never used the term "savior" of himself, it became an important name to early Christians as a designation of Jesus' completed redemptive work. The fact that God was always the savior in the Old Testament indicates the Christian belief in the deity of Jesus. Jesus is the Savior, because he saves his people from their sins (Mt. 1:21; Lk. 2:11; Jn. 4:42; Ac. 5:3; 1 Jn. 4:4) and from the curse of death (2 Ti. 1:9-10).

Kyrios (= Lord)

The formula "Jesus is Lord" is one of the most important confessions of faith in early Christianity (cf. Ro. 10:9; 1 Co. 12:3; 2 Co. 4:5; Phil. 2:11). Christians designated themselves as "those who call on the name of the Lord" (cf. 1 Co. 1:2; Ac. 2:21; 9:13-14; 22:16).

The Greek word *kyrios* has at least three significant nuances in the New Testament. In common usage, it is a title of respect. Especially in the synoptic gospels, the name *kyrios*, when it appears in the vocative case, is a word similar to our English word "sir."[51] In the Greco-Roman world, the name *kyrios* was used as a title for a salvation deity. The title "the Lord" was a standard designation for a personal lord-protector to whom the devotee prayed for guidance and help. This title is used of Isis and Serapis (Egyptian deities) and Artemis (an Ephesian deity).[52] Most important, however, is the usage of *kyrios* as the Greek translation of Yahweh in the Old Testament. Most of the designations of Jesus as *kyrios* carry overtones of deity. Notice, for instance, the parallelism between the Old Testament background of "calling on the name of Yahweh" and the New Testament "calling upon the name of the Lord [Jesus Christ]" (cf. Jl. 2:32//Ac. 2:21, 36; Ro. 10:13). Old Testament ascriptions to Yahweh are made to apply to Jesus (Ps. 102:21, 25//He. 1:10). Similarly, the familiar Old Testament construction of "the Day of Yahweh" becomes in the New Testament "the Day of the Lord Jesus" (2 Co. 1:14; 1 Co. 1:8) and “the Day of Christ” (Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16). Clearly, the lordship of Jesus involves recognizing him as having a fundamental identity with Yahweh, the one true God. As the Lord, Jesus is sovereign over all realms (Ro. 14:9).

The confession that "Jesus is Lord" has a twofold meaning. On the one hand, it expresses the personal experience of the one confessing it, that is, the personal

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[51]Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 292.

[52]For instance, acclamations to Serapis and Isis read: "We have one Zeus, namely Serapis, and great for us is Isis, the Lord." Compare this with Paul's counterstatement: "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father....and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ...." (1 Co. 8:6), cf. L. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. J. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) II.82-83.

acknowledgment of Jesus as sovereign over all the affairs of one's life (Col. 2:16). Though there are many other authorities in the world, the Christian recognizes only one (1 Co. 8:5-6). On the other hand, the confession "Jesus is Lord" describes a relationship enjoyed by the whole church. He is *our* Lord Jesus Christ (28 times in Paul), *our* Lord Jesus (9 times) and Jesus Christ *our* Lord (3 times). The one who confesses Jesus as the Lord belongs to the community of faith (1 Co. 1:2).

Names Relating to Jesus' Divine Nature

While the emphasis in the previously cited names is primarily functional, the names *Logos* (= Word), *Theos* (= God), and *Huios tou Theou* (= Son of God) have to do with essence and being. Just as the names Son of Man and Lord both have strong overtones of deity, the names *Logos*, *Theos*, and *Huios tou Theou* do also, but in an even stronger way. The name *Logos*, of course, has already been explored earlier. The name *Huios tou_Theou* is so significant that it will require a special section of treatment all its own.

Though not frequent, there are a number of New Testament passages in which Jesus is directly called God. While these are not nearly so numerous as the other names given to him, they nevertheless point toward the ultimate confession of Christological faith. It will be important to remember, however, that while Jesus can be called God, it is not in the sense of a simple equation but in the sense of a complex unity. Though Jesus is God, there are still essential distinctions within God's multi-faceted nature.

John

It is surely more than incidental that the opening statement, "....the *Logos* was God...." (Jn. 1:1), and the closing confession by Thomas, "....my Lord and my God...." (Jn. 20:28), frame the Fourth Gospel in its beginning and its closing. John's witness about Jesus is to bring his readers to this central confession of faith, that is, that Jesus is God.

There are, however, some ontological distinctions within God's nature. The *Logos* is not only said to *be* God but is also said to be *with* God (Jn. 1:2). Likewise, in 1:18 Jesus is designated as "God the only Son" who is "at the Father's side."[53] This, obviously, does not mean that Jesus as God the Son is indistinguishable from God the Father. But neither is there any indication that one should understand two distinct Gods, for *the Logos was God*, not another God. The paradox is complete.

In 1 John 5:20, there appears the same paradox. The "one who is true" (God the Father) is clearly distinguished from "his Son Jesus Christ." Yet the Son is

[53]Though there are textual variants here, the evidence is very strong in favor of the NIV reading. It includes the Bodmer Papyri (p66) and both the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus manuscripts.

called "the true God."

Paul

While Paul is not in the habit of referring to Jesus as God in simple equations, there are occasions when he makes a clear identification between Jesus and God (Ro. 9:5; 14:10; 2 Co. 5:10; Tit. 2:13). Acts 20:28, while not a simple equation, nevertheless implies that Jesus is God. In Colossians 1:19 and 2:9, Jesus Christ is the one through whom God gives full and complete expression of himself.

However, one would do Paul an injustice to omit that while the apostle sees a fundamental identity between God and Christ, so that Christ can be called God, he also distinguishes between God and Christ, so that when taken together his statements retain a paradoxical character. He sees God the Father as the *source* of all things and the Lord Jesus Christ as the *agent* of all things (1 Co. 8:6). He sees Christ Jesus as being *in very nature God*, as *equal with God* and as *exalted by God* (Phil 2:6, 9). As the image of God, Christ is the Lord and agent of creation (Col. 1:15-20).[54]

Other Passages

Two other passages are worthy of notation. In Hebrews 1:8-9 the writer takes an Old Testament quotation (Ps. 45:6-7) and applies it directly to Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ is God's exact representation (He. 1:3), and because he is God the Father's Son (He. 1:5), he can be called God directly (He. 1:8). Again, however, this is not a simple equation because of the relationship between the phrases "God the Son" (1:8) and "your God" (1:9). The author's application of this quotation is intended to show that "God (the Father)" has anointed "you (God the Son)."

The other passage, 2 Peter 1:1, calls Jesus both "God and Savior." Yet again, the following verses make a distinction between "God" and "Jesus our Lord."[55]

Jesus, the Son of God

More than any other name, the designation of Jesus as the Son of God

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[54]The term *prototokos* (= firstborn) cannot here refer to Bethlehem, as Oneness Pentecostals sometimes assert, because it would result in an anachronism due to the connection with the creation. Neither can it mean that Christ was a created being, as the Arians and Jehovah's Witnesses assert, because Paul's very argument is that Christ is the agent of creation (cf. 1:16). The idiomatic word *prototokos* here indicates Christ's priority as the Sovereign Heir (cf. Ex. 4:22; Ps. 89:26-27), and the objective genitive construction may be rendered "existing before all creation."

[55]When two nouns of the same case are joined by the conjunction *kai* (= and), they may either refer to the same thing (if one definite article governs both words) or to two distinguishable entitites (if each word has its own article). In 2 Pe. 1:1, a single article governs both the words "God" and "Savior, Jesus Christ", thus indicating that they are the same. On the other hand, passages such as 1 Jn. 2:24, in which there are two articles, one for "the Son" and one for "the Father" would normally indicate a clear distinction, cf. H. Dana and J. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1957) 146-149.

describes the special relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. This name is especially a relational name, and it has parallels in Hellenistic culture as well as in Hebrew thought. Thus, there are several nuances to be found in its use.

Background for the Name Son of God

In the Hebrew thought of the Old Testament, the term Son of God is used in several ways. It may refer to spirit-beings (cf. Jb. 1:6; 2:1), to humans as created in the divine image (Ge. 5:1-3; cf. Lk. 3:38), to the Israelites as God's distinctive people (Dt. 14:1-2; Ho. 1:10; 11:1), or to the kings of David's line (2 Sa. 7:14; Ps. 2:7; 89:26-27). In Hellenistic culture, on the other hand, the notion was popular in the Greek world that their kings were begotten by the gods. Also, certain wonder workers, *theioi andres* (= divine men), were alleged to possess miraculous powers, claiming to be sons of a god.[56]

Jesus Self-Understanding

This Hebrew and Hellenistic background raises the important question, "In what way did Jesus understand himself to be the Son of God?" At the outset, it should be pointed out that Jesus' self-understanding cannot be completely subsumed under any earlier usage mentioned above, though they may have a bearing on the name. He certainly was not an angel, and he certainly was more than just a human, more than just an Israelite and more than just a descendent of David. Far from being a wonder worker who specialized in exhibitionism, he refused to listen to Satan's suggestions that he should prove himself as the Son of God in this way (Lk. 4:1-3). To be sure, Jesus performed miracles; however, he was not simply another of the so-called divine men who wandered about the ancient world performing magic and sleights of hand. There is a uniqueness to Jesus' self-conception as the Son of God which sets him apart from all others, and this uniqueness is affirmed over and over in the gospels.

The Baptism and Transfiguration (Mt. 3:17; Lk. 9:34-36)

The uniqueness of Jesus as the Son of God is emphasized in the two events in which the audible voice of God declared Jesus to be his beloved Son. The very nature of these pronouncements point toward uniqueness.

Self-Admissions (Mt. 11:25-27)

The uniqueness of Jesus' Sonship is emphatic in that the entire content of divine revelation is given to him by the Father, and there is an intuitive, mutual and

[56]R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1951) I.130.

exclusive understanding between the Father and the Son which can only be known to others as the Son chooses to reveal it to them. Humans may have a mediated knowledge of the Father. Jesus as the Son of God possesses a direct and unmediated knowledge of the Father.[57]

Peter's Great Confession (Mt. 16:13-17)

Peter, acting as the spokesman for the other apostles, at last comprehended the Sonship of Jesus in a unique way, and this understanding, far from merely being borrowed out of popular thought, was given by direct insight from God.

Caiaphas' Interrogation (Mt. 26:62-64; Lk. 22:70-71)

Jesus' affirmative answer to the Sanhedrin's question bears all the marks of a unique understanding of Sonship. If either Jesus or Caiaphas had meant no more than that Jesus was an Israelite or a created human being, there could hardly have been cause for a verdict of blasphemy.

The Fourth Gospel

The uniqueness of Jesus as the Son of God is probably most clearly to be seen in the Gospel of John. Four times in the Fourth Gospel Jesus is described as the "only Son" (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18), an expression that means "alone of its kind."[58] Jesus clearly distinguishes between his relationship to God the Father and the relationship of believers to the Father (20:7). If Jesus regarded his Sonship to be only on the same level with other humans, he would have said, "Our Father," instead of "My Father." Others may be given the power to become sons of God (1:12), but Jesus is the Son of God by his very nature. This unique relationship is defined by several important concepts.

First, the origin of the Son of God is heaven (3:13). Jesus' stay on earth was temporary (1:14a), and after Jesus' earthly life was completed, he ascended up to heaven where he was before (6:62; 8:21; 16:28). Closely related to the Son of God's heavenly origin is the fact that he was sent by the Father into the world (3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:36, 38; 7:29; 8:26; 9:4; 11:42; 17:3).

Second, there exists a unique relationship of love between the Father and the Son which was in existence from all eternity (17:24). Because of the Father's love for the Son, he has given him full authority (3:35) and intimate knowledge (5:20). Jesus' obedience in death contributes to this love (10:17), and such love between the Father and the Son becomes the pattern for the love between the Son and his disciples (15:9; 13:34).

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[57]Ladd, *Theology*, 166.

[58]The term monogenes (= unique or one and only) is a better rendering than the traditional "only begotten," cf. Guthrie, Theology, 312-313.

Next, Jesus claimed to possess a unique and complete knowledge of the Father (1:18; 6:46; 10:15; 17:25). Furthermore, the Son and the Father do not work independently, but the Son works in accord with the Father's purposes (5:19, 30; 14:31; 15:10).

On several occasions it is clearly stated that there is an absolute unity and interpenetration between the Father and the Son (10:30; 14:8-11; 17:11, 21-23). This unity does not render the Father as indistinguishable from the Son, as though Jesus had simply said, "I am the Father," but it does insist that the Father and the Son cannot be separated as independent beings. The idea of interpenetration is significant in 14:10-11. It cannot be relegated to a mere indwelling of deity in a human body, that is, a dwelling Christology, since each indwells the other. Instead, it is an interpenetration of the Father and the Son which is true beyond just the incarnation.[59] This unity between the Father and the Son is described in the Fourth Gospel in various ways. It consists of:

- Mutual Love (10:17; 14:31; 15:9; 17:24)
- Cooperative Work (5:19-21; 10:25, 37-38)
- Undivided Honor (5:23; 7:18; 8:49-50, 54; 13:31-32; 14:12-13; 17:1, 5)
- Desire to Please (5:30; 8:29)
- Singularity of Purpose (6:38-39; 10:29-30)
- Intimate Fellowship (6:46; 8:38, 55; 10:15; 17:24)
- Common Teaching (7:16-17; 8:25-28; 12:49-50; 14:24b)
- Solidarity in Decisions (8:16-18)
- Unity of Essence (12:44-45; 14:7-13, 20)
- Joint Ownership (17:10)

The *Ego Eimi* sayings in John's Gospel are unique. This literary device is highly significant and emphatic. The various sayings portray Jesus as the epitome of that upon which men and women depend for their continued existence, that is, bread, light, water, truth, life and so forth (6:35, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5). In many instances, Jesus simply says "I am" without a predicate (4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8).[60] These are especially important in that this construction is what the Greek Old Testament uses for the words "I, Yahweh" as well as the more obvious similarity with Exodus 3:14.[61] As such, Jesus as the Son of God claims to be one with God, as is especially evident in 8:54-59.

In conclusion, one must concede that there is paradox in Jesus' self-

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[59]L. Morris, The Gospel According to John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 643-644.

[60]English translations generally supply a predicate to make English sense (i.e., "I am he" or "It is I").

[61]Kysar, 40-44.

understanding of his Sonship. He was one with the Father, but not identical. He was fully divine, yet fully obedient. He is the Father's divine agent who at the same time participates in the Being of the Father, yet without sacrificing his own distinct individuality. He is both the Son of God and God the Son (Jn. 1:18).

The "Son of God" Sayings in the New Testament Letters

Many of the themes regarding Jesus as the Son of God in the gospels are also to be found in the various epistles.

Paul

Paul understands Jesus the Son of God to be uniquely God's Son. The expression *ton heautou huion* (= his own Son, Ro. 8:3, 32) indicates this uniqueness and corresponds to the Johannine phrase "one and only."[62] Furthermore, Paul also says that the Son is the one whom the Father loves (Col. 1:13). The Son existed before all creation (Col. 1:15),[63] and he is the Father's agent of creation (1 Co. 8:6; Col. 1:16-17). Finally, the Son is the one whom God sent into the world (Ro. 8:3; Gal. 4:4).

In a number of places, Paul distinguishes between God the Father and Jesus the Son (Ro. 1:9; 1 Co. 1:9; 15:24-28; Gal. 1:15-16; 4:6; Col. 1:13; 1 Th. 1:10). In Romans 1:3, he describes the Sonship of Jesus to be in two spheres, the sphere of earthly weakness (by the incarnation) and the sphere of heavenly power (by the resurrection).

Hebrews

In Hebrews, Jesus the Son of God is depicted as the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of God's being, and God's final and supreme revelation of himself (1:3). The expression *charakter tes hypostaseos autou* (= the representation of his reality) comes from the language of engraving, especially as the impression or stamp made on coins and seals.[64] Here, also, the Son is the agent of creation (1:2). He is uniquely the Son of God (1:5; 5:5). While there is a distinction between God the Father and Jesus the Son (3:6), it is entirely appropriate to address the Son as God (1:8).

Johannine Letters

John's letters clearly distinguish between the Father and the Son (1:3, 7; 2:24;

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[62]J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 279.

[63]The term *prototokos* (= firstborn) here means strictly priority, not the first to come from the womb. As such, it says nothing about the Son of God having a point of beginning, but rather, it declares God's Son to be sovereign over creation, cf. J. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (rpt. Lynn, MA: Hendrickson, 1981) 146-150.

[64]F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 6.

5:9, 11; 2 Jn. 3), while at the same time holding them together in a unity (2:22-23; 4:15; 5:1b; 2 Jn. 9). Here, as before, the Father is described as the one who sent the Son into the world to accomplish a redeeming work (4:9-10, 14). Here, also, Jesus is portrayed as the unique Son of God (4:9). To fail to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God is to transgress an essential facet of true Christian faith (2:23; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12).

The Triadic Conception of God in the New Testament Documents

For the serious reader of the New Testament, it quickly becomes clear that the faith of the earliest Christians revolved around their conception of God as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This pattern of faith is what is sometimes called the triadic conception of God (not to be confused with a triple conception of God). There seems to be no perfect analogy in the physical world to illustrate the Divine Nature as such. Various models, such as, 1) water, ice, and vapor, or 2) the musical triadic chord with a root, a third and a fifth, or 3) the sun, sunlight, and solar heat. All fall short of a true analogy, though they may assist some Christians in conceptualizing the divine paradox in at least a partial way. Augustine's analogy of the human mind which is capable of self-dialogue can also be helpful.[65] Thus, it is important to realize that the evidence in the New Testament is not so much an explanation of God as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as it is a definition of God as such. The New Testament primarily tells us "what," not "how."

The Synoptic Gospels

The first three gospels depict the triadic pattern of the Divine Nature in several ways. In the birth narratives, God speaks of the Holy Spirit as the active agent in the birth of Jesus, his Son (Mt. 1:20-23; cf. Lk. 1:30-35). At Jesus' baptism, the triadic pattern is clear in the voice of the Father from heaven, "This is my beloved Son," in the Son over whom the divine statement was invoked, and in the Holy Spirit which descended in the form of a dove (Mt. 3:16-17; Mk. 1:10-11; Lk. 3:21-22). In the great commission in Matthew's Gospel, Mt. 28:19 maintains both the distinction and the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The use of the singular form of the word *onoma* (= name) along with the use of separate definite articles for *the* Father, *the* Son, and *the* Holy Spirit form a paradoxical triadic pattern.[66] Closely connected with the great commission is the promise of the

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[65]J. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) I.124-125.

[66]Though some scholars have questioned the textual authenticity of this verse by implying that it is in the same category as 1 Jn. 5:7 (KJV), the fact is that every Greek manuscript which contains the latter part of Matthew's Gospel contains Mt. 28:19 as it stands. Furthermore, the attestation to such a formulation in early Christian writings, such as *The Didache* and *The First Apology of Justin*, show that the expression was not only very early but very popular, cf. *Didache* 7; *Apology* 61. It may also be mentioned that the Oneness Pentecostal notion that the singular form of the word "name" means that the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit are indistinguishable is grammatically untenable in view of the

Holy Spirit (Lk. 24:49). Jesus declared that he would send what the Father promised, and without question, he was referring to the Holy Spirit.

The Fourth Gospel

John's Gospel is, if anything, even more specific in its statement of the triadic pattern. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit underlie the reference to Jesus' baptism in which the Spirit, the Son of God and John's reference to "the one who sent me" are distinguished (1:32-34). Jesus, while in unity with the Father, clearly distinguishes himself from the Father, and this distinction cannot be merely a conventional way of speaking about flesh and spirit (8:16-19; cf. 5:37-38). In the farewell discourse of the upper room, the triadic pattern becomes marked as Jesus speaks of himself as "I" and distinguishes himself from the Father and the Holy Spirit (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:15). There is clearly an "I" and "Thou" relationship between Jesus and the Father which preceded the incarnation (3:13; 6:62; 16:28; 17:5, 24).

The Salutations and Benedictions in the New Testament Letters

The opening section of a letter in the ancient Hellenistic culture often began with an intercessory remark concerning a god or the gods, a formula that became more or less fixed during Roman times. The writer would make mention of the addressee before the gods or give thanks to the gods for the addressee.[67] The New Testament letters are similar except that instead of referring to the pagan deities, the New Testament writers referred to the Christian understanding of God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is especially typical of Paul, who most often refers to the Father and the Son (Ro. 1:1-4, 7; 1 Co. 1:1-3; 2 Co. 1:1-3; Ga. 1:1-3; Ep. 1:1-3; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:1-3; 1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:1-2; 1 Ti. 1:1-2; 2 Ti. 1:1-2; Tit. 1:4; Phlm 3). However, the same sort of salutation is to be found in other New Testament letters as well (cf. Ja. 1:1; 1 Pe. 1:2; 2 Pe. 1:1; 2 Jn. 3; Jude 1).

Benedictions at the close of the letters point to the early Christian confession of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Ro. 16:27; 2 Co. 13:14; Ep. 6:23; Phil. 4:19-21; He. 13:20-21; 1 Pe. 5:10-11; 1 Jn. 5:20; Jude 24-25). These latter mention that all glory is to be given to the Father through the Son.

Internal References to the Triadic Pattern

In addition to the salutations and benedictions that are so prominent in the New Testament letters, there are many internal passages within the treatment of larger topics which reflect the same triadic pattern. Some of these almost seem to

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three definite articles in the Greek text. A case could possibly be made if the tripartite formula was prefaced by only one definite article, but since each element has its own article, the threeness of the Father, Son and Spirit is emphatic.

[67]W. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 30-31.

be unconscious references, such as, those found in the narratives, sermons and prayers in the Book of Acts (1:1-5; 2:33; 4:24-26; 5:30-32; 7:54-56). Others appear to be very deliberate formulations, such as, the description of the Father who planned (Ep. 1:3-6), the Son who performed the atoning work (Ep. 1:7-12), and the Holy Spirit who seals (Ep. 1:13-14). Notice how this triadic pattern is reflected in the following passages:

Lord Jesus Christ	The Spirit	God	Ro.15:30
Same Lord	Same Spirit	Same God	1Co.12:4-6
Son	The Spirit	God	Gal.4:4-6
Him (Jesus Christ)	One Spirit	The Father	Ep.2:18
One Lord	One Spirit	One God and Father	Ep.4:4-6
Jesus Christ	Holy Spirit	God our Savior	Tit.3:4-6
Word of Life from the beginning	the Son	The Father	1Jn.1:1-3
Lord Jesus Christ	Holy Spirit	God	Jude20-21
Jesus Christ	Sevenfold Spirit	God the Father	Rv.1:4-5

In the New Testament usage of this triadic pattern, it becomes significant that while Jesus can be called God, the Son is never addressed as the Father nor the Father as the Son.

Prayer and Worship

Sometimes Christians ask who should be addressed in prayers, whether the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, or whether equal time should be given to all. This was apparently a problem that the primitive Christian community did not address. In the first place, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three separated Beings but one God. Each interpenetrates the other so that prayer to one is sufficient (cf. 1 Jn. 2:23; 2 Jn. 9). However, one should not forget that by far the most common form of praying in the New Testament is to the Father rather than to the Son or the Holy Spirit. It was the teaching of Jesus that his followers pray to the Father (Mt. 6:9; Jn. 4:23), and further, that they do so in the name of the Son (Jn. 16:23-24). It is significant that the nature of Christ's mediatorship is not so much that he goes to the Father instead of us (as though he went where we cannot go), but that he goes to the Father *with* us (Jn. 16:26-28).[68] He has made the way open to us. To be sure, on rare occasion prayers were addressed directly to Jesus (cf. Ac. 7:59; 9:13-17), but while this is true, one must also concede that it is the exception and not the norm. Far more are the prayers directly addressed to the Father in the name of the Son (Ro. 8:15; 15:6; 2 Co. 11:31; Gal. 4:6; Ep. 1:17; 2:18; 3:14; 5:20; Col. 1:3, 12; 3:17; 1 Th. 3:11; Ja. 3:9).

[68]T. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 170ff.

Therefore, one cannot say it is improper to address Jesus directly in prayer, but from the evidence of the New Testament one can say that it is the norm to address the Father in prayer through the Son or in the name of the Son.

The Biblical Revelation of the Divine Nature

At this point it will be appropriate to make some summary statements about the biblical data and what it tells us. It is well to bear in mind that God's self-revelation is progressive. One should not attempt to read the triadic pattern of the New Testament back into the Old Testament, nor should one address the Old Testament without remembering that the New Testament gives the fullness of God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Monotheism

The uniform witness of the Old Testament is monotheism, that is, the belief that there is only one God. However, the Being of God must be seen as complex rather than simple. Pluralities of majesty, special self-distinctions between bearers of divine names (i.e., Yahweh and Adonay), the personification of Wisdom, the Angel of Yahweh, and the Son of Man passages in the Book of Daniel all point to the complexity of God's Being.

Incarnation

The uniform witness of the New Testament is that the one true and living God disclosed himself most fully on the historical, human level in the incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God. He who was born of the virgin Mary eternally existed with God the Father even before the creation of the universe. Yet his existence was not independent of the Father, as though there were two deities. He was both with God, and he was God. The glory of the Father and the Son was one. The love between the Father and the Son was mutual. There was a mutual interpenetration between the Father and the Son which, although distinguishable, was at the same time indivisible.

The One and Only Son

Jesus, the Son of God, was and is uniquely the Son of God. His sonship stands qualitatively apart from all others who can be called "sons of God." It is in this sense that he is truly God's *only* Son. This sonship is eternal and unchanging. He is truly Jesus the Son of God--yesterday, today and forever.

Humility and Exaltation

In the incarnation, the Son of God did not cling to his divine prerogatives, but he surrendered himself to a human nature. Yet he did so without relinquishing his

Divine Nature. In his death and resurrection, God exalted Jesus to the highest position in the universe--to the position of glory which he shared with the Father before the universe began.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is also illuminated in the New Testament as is the Father and the Son. He is shown to be personal, he is shown to proceed from the Father, and he is shown to be sent by the Father and the Son. At the same time, it is entirely appropriate to understand the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus our Lord and/or as the Spirit of the Father. Yet there are not three Spirits, but one Spirit.

The Three-in-One Paradox

Thus, the paradoxical character of the Divine Nature can be summed up by saying that there is one God who simultaneously exists as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The names "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" are not synonyms nor merely descriptions of action, for they describe what God is in himself. The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father. At the same time, the Father and the Son interpenetrate each other, and so also does the Holy Spirit, so that the Being of God is undivided. It is entirely proper to refer to the Father as God, to the Son as God, and to the Holy Spirit as God. There are not, however, three Gods--there is but one God!

Triadic Pattern

The triadic pattern of the Divine Nature, that is, the belief that there is only one God who is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is central to the faith of the New Testament. Worship and prayer is to be directed to God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son.

The Triadic Conception of God in the Post-Apostolic Church

The triadic pattern of describing God, which was so evident in the New Testament, carried through into the writings of those who came after the 1st century church. The distinction between God, Christ and the Holy Spirit, or alternately between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is to be found frequently.

Clement of Rome (circa AD 96): Clement was an early Presbyter of Rome who died in about AD 100. 1 Clement became widely known and popular in early Christianity, because it was believed that Clement knew Peter and Paul personally.

> "....as God lives, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit...."[69]

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[69] *1 Clement* 58:2.

"....being filled with confidence because of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and confirmed in the Word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Spirit..."[70]

"Do we not have one God and one Christ, and one Spirit of grace poured out upon us...."[71]

Ignatius of Antioch (circa 110-115 A.D.): Ignatius was the Bishop of Antioch, Syria, and was martyred in the early 2nd century.

"[God] manifested himself in Jesus Christ His Son, who is His Word proceeding from silence...."[72]

"Our God, Jesus the Christ, was born of Mary....of the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit...."[73]

"[Jesus] was truly crucified and died....and was truly raised from the dead when His Father raised Him...."[74]

"[Jesus Christ] from eternity was with the Father and at last appeared to us...."[75]

"Like the stone of a temple, cut for a building of God the Father, you have been lifted up to the top by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, and the rope of the Holy Spirit...."[76]

"[believers should prosper] in the flesh and spirit; in faith and love; in the Son and in the Father and in the Spirit...."[77]

The Didache (circa AD 120): This work, representing what the 12 apostles taught to the Gentiles, is a compendium of practical teaching on subjects such as baptism, traveling evangelists, Christian worship, and instruction on the Two Ways, the Way of Life and the Way of Death.

"Baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...."[78]

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[70] *1 Clement* 42:3.

[71] *1 Clement* 46:6.

[72] *Magnesians* 8:2.

[73] *Ephesians* 18:2.

[74] *Trallians* 9.

[75] *Magnesians* 6:1.

[76] *Ephesians* 9:1.

[77] *Magnesians* 13.

[78] *Didache* 7:1.3.

Polycarp (circa AD 155): Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, was a disciple of the Apostle John.

> "I praise thee....through Jesus Christ, thy Beloved Son, through whom be to thee with him and the Holy Spirit glory...."[79]
>
> "While you walk according to the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ; with whom be glory to God the Father and the Holy Spirit...."[80]
>
> "....may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ himself, who is the Son of God....build you up in faith and truth...."[81]

Epistle of Barnabas (circa AD 110-130): An anonymous work (though attributed to Barnabas by some), this ancient work was nearly canonized and enjoyed great esteem in many early Christian congregations.

> "[Christ] is the Lord of the whole world, to whom God said at the foundation of the world: 'Let us make man in our image and likeness...."[82]
>
> "For the Scripture says concerning us, how He [the Father] said to the Son, 'Let us make man...."'[83]

2 Clement (circa AD 150): This anonymous sermon, which was generally circulated with 1 Clement in the primitive church, describes the salvation which God has granted to the Gentiles.

> "....to the only invisible God, the Father of truth, who sent to us the Savior and Prince of immortality, through him also He disclosed to us the truth and heavenly life--to Him be glory...."[84]

Justin Martyr (circa AD 140): Justin, the most notable apologist defending Christianity in the 2nd century, aimed at clearing away prejudice and

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[79] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14:3.

[80] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 22.

[81] *Philippians* 12.

[82] *Barnabas* 5.

[83] *Barnabas* 6.

[84] *2 Clement* 20.

misunderstanding about Christianity to the Roman Emperor.

> "....for in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water...."[85]
>
> "For he gives the second place to the Word who is with God....and the third to the Spirit...."[86]
>
> "[at the communion, the one in charge takes the bread and cup and] gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...."[87]

Athenagoras (circa AD 177): Like Justin, Athenagoras was a 2nd century apologist for the Christian faith.

> "Who....would not be astonished to hear men who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who declare their power in union and their distinction in order, called atheists?"[88]
>
> "We acknowledge a God, and a Son His Logos, and a Holy Spirit united in power...."[89]
>
> "[Christians] know God and His Logos, what is the unity of the Son with the Father, what [is] the communion of the Father with the Son, what is the Spirit, what is the unity of these three, the Spirit, the Son, the Father, and their distinction in unity."[90]

Aristides (early 2nd century): Aristides, like Justin and Athenagoas, was a 2nd century apologist.

> "[Christians] know God the Creator and Fashioner of all things by the only begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, and besides Him they worship no other God."[91]

Theophilus of Antioch (circa AD 180): Theophilus was also a 2nd century apologist.

> "....the Logos always exists, residing within the heart of God, for before anything came

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[85] *First Apology* 61.

[86] *First Apology* 60.

[87] *First Apology* 65.

[88] *Plea for the Christians* 10.

[89] *Plea for the Christians* 24.

[90] *Plea for the Christians* 12.

[91] *Aristides* 15.

into being He had Him as a counselor...."[92]

"....in like manner also the three days which were before the luminaries are types of the Trinity, of God, and His Word, and His Wisdom...."[93]

Irenaeus (circa AD 200): Irenaeus, who studied under Polycarp and became the Bishop of Lyons in Gaul, wrote to defend orthodox Christianity against gnosticism.

"[the church] believes in one God, the Father Almighty....and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God....and in the Holy Spirit...."[94]

"His Word and His Wisdom, His Son and His Spirit, are always by Him, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things, to whom also He speaks, saying, 'Let us make man...."[95]

Tertullian (circa AD 150-225): Tertullian of Carthage in North Africa, like other apologists, argued that Christianity should be tolerated as a legal religion by Rome.

"We....believe that there is only one God, but under the following dispensation....that this one God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself, by whom all things were made.... We believe him to have been sent by the Father.... We believe Him to have suffered and died.... We believe he....sent also from heaven from the Father....the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit."[96]

The Development of Traditional Terminology with Regard to the Divine Nature

There are several terms regarding the Divine Nature that have become traditional and that stand for orthodoxy in the Christian faith. Of these, the two most significant are the terms "Trinity" and "Person." While neither of these are to be found in the New Testament itself, at least with respect to the nature of God, such a fact should not be taken as a strong argument against them, for they were never claimed as biblical words but rather as words that conceptually explained the

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[92] *Autolycus* 2.22.

[93] *Autolycus* 2.15.

[94] *Against Heresies* I.10.1.

[95] *Against Heresies* IV.20.1.

[96] *Against Praxeas* 2.

New Testament data regarding the Divine Nature. In a similar way, Christians use terms such as "substitution" in reference to the atonement, "unmerited favor" in reference to God's grace, and "worldliness" in reference to materialism, none of which, strictly speaking, appear in the New Testament. The question, then, is not whether the words Trinity and Person are in the Bible but whether they are adequate as descriptions of God's nature.[97]

The Origin and Meaning of the Word Trinity

The first written mention of the word *Triados* (= Trinity) appears to be from Theophilus of Antioch (about AD 180) when he says, "....in like manner also the three days which were before the luminaries are types of the Trinity, of God, and His Word, and His Wisdom...."[98] The unassuming way in which he uses the term, however, may infer that it was known earlier, possibly even as far back as the early part of the 2nd century.[99] In any case, the term gradually came to the fore as a word that described the triadic nature of God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity is that in the Being of the one eternal God there are three essential self-distinctions called the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[100] This is not meant to indicate that God is conceptualized as three separate and distinct individuals, but rather, that within the Being of the one God there are three personal self-distinctions so that God is a threefold center of life.[101] Such a way of understanding God seems necessary in view of the biblical data, which includes, 1) the uniform assertion in both Testaments that there is only one God, 2) the uniform testimony in both Testaments that God is complex rather than simple in his oneness, 3) the New Testament triadic concept of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and 4) the fact that there is an eternal relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To be sure, this data is paradoxical, but it seems to accurately reflect the paradox of the Divine Nature as revealed in Holy Scripture.

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[97]Some groups who deny the doctrine of the Trinity, such as Oneness Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses, argue against these terms because they are not in the New Testament, but ironically, some of their own favorite expressions are not there either. Oneness Pentecostal vocabulary, such as, "oneness," "three manifestations," and "three offices" are not in the New Testament, and the name Jehovah as used by the Jehovah's Witnesses is at best a mistransliteration.

[98]E. Fortman, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972) 50; cf. *Theophilus to Autolycus* 15.

[99] The use of this word Trinity seems to have been used by Theophilus in his lost works as well, for the use he makes of it is familiar. He does not "lug it in as something novel: 'types of the Trinity,' he says, illustrating an accepted word, not introducing a new one," cf. A. Coxe, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) II.101 [note #2]. At the same time, how far one may push back the use of the term is a moot question, and some writers, such a Beisner, may be overly ambitious, cf. E. Beisner, *God in Three Persons* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1984) 53-54. Still, no less a historian than Seeburg sees the Trinity as "an article of the common faith" by the time of Theophilus, cf. R. Seeburg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, trans. C. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954) I.214.

[100] V. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964) 244.

[101] J. Douglas, ed., "Trinity," *NBD*, 2nd. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1982) 1223.

The Origin and Meaning of the Word Person

The word *persona* (= person) as a technical term for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit probably originated with Tertullian (AD 150-225) who coined the formula "three persons in one substance." However, it should be noted that the Latin term *persona* was not understood to reflect a Godhead of three individuals (like a triumvirate), for a *persona* described either a mask worn by an actor (who might wear several masks in order to play several roles) or it was a legal entity in a contract. Tertullian argued that God was *one* with respect to his Being (substance or nature) but *three* with respect to the exercise of his sovereignty (persons).[102] He drew analogies from nature, such as, the comparison of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with the root, shrub and tree or with a fountain, stream and river.[103] This early terminology of "persons" became normal in Christian history, and today the concept of "persons" is well captured in the following selection:

> *God is one in His essential being, but in this one being there are three persons called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These persons are not, however, like so many persons among men three entirely separate and distinct individuals. They are rather three modes or forms in which the divine essence exists. At the same time it should be born in mind that these self-distinctions in the divine being are of such a nature that they can enter into personal relations. The Father can speak to the Son and can send forth the Holy Spirit. The real mystery of the Trinity consists in this that the three persons are one in their essential being. And this does not mean that the divine essence is divided among the three persons. It is wholly, with all its perfections, in each one of the persons, and has no existence outside of and apart from the persons.*[104]

The Trinitarian Controversy

During the 3rd and 4th centuries, two conceptions of God arose which rivaled the triadic concept.

Modalistic Monarchianism[105]

The aim of Monarchianism was to preserve the unity of God and to avoid tritheism. Modalists taught that God manifested himself in three successive forms, as the Father in creation, as the Son in redemption, and as the Holy Spirit in sanctification. However, these forms were not part of God's essential nature. They were only temporary phases through which God acted. For a modalist, the Father,

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[102] J. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) I.182-185; V. Harvey, 181-182.

[103] O. Heick, *A History of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965) I.146.

[104] L. Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1933) 75.

[105] Two other terms associated with Modalistic Monarchianism are patripassianism (the belief that the Father was born, suffered and died) and sabellianism (after Sabellius; the belief that the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit refer only to different actions of God and not to his essential nature).

Son and Holy Spirit were essentially identical. God's Being had no essential self-distinctions.[106]

Arianism

Arianism, after Arius of Alexandria, held that Jesus was not eternal but was, in effect, created by the Father in the beginning, and so of necessity must have been inferior to the Father. Only God the Father was eternal and absolute. Thus, the Logos was a sort of intermediate being, neither fully divine nor fully a creature.[107]

The Council of Nicaea (AD 325)

Because of the serious political ramifications of the debate over the Divine Nature, Constantine convened the first council at Nicaea to settle the dispute. Though this council did not end the controversy, it made important strides in affirming that Jesus Christ was "of one substance with the Father" (over against Arianism) so that the essence of the Son was identical with that of the Father. Jesus was not less than God![108]

Unitarianism

More recently in western history is the deviation from Christian orthodoxy called unitarianism, that is, the denial of the deity of Jesus Christ. With roots in Polish Socinianism (early 1600s), the unitarian movement has infiltrated much of modern liberal Christianity.[109]

Summary of Four Major Conceptions of the Divine Nature

In a brief way, it will be helpful to collect and compare the contesting views of the Divine Nature, of which there are four primary ones.

MODALISM	**ARIANISM**	**UNITARIANISM**	**TRINITARIANISM**
God is a simple "one."	God is a simple "one."	God is a simple "one."	God is a complex "one."
Jesus is God in a shell	Jesus is less than God.	Jesus is not God.	Jesus is God's Son incarnate.

[106]Heick, 149-151.

[107]L. Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1937) 84; V. Harvey, 27-29.

[108]Berkhof, *History*, 86-92; Heick, 156-163; Gonzales, I.268ff. Oneness Pentecostals sometimes assert that the Council of Nicaea was an attempt to throw down the unity of God and to lessen the position of Jesus Christ. This is a gross historical misconception; the council's primary goal was to affirm the full deity of Jesus Christ in view of an Arianism which denied it.

[109]W. Hordern, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 36-37.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are identical	The Son is inferior to the Father	The Son is not God incarnate; he is one who points to God	God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; he is Three-in-One
Holy Spirit is impersonal.	Holy Spirit is impersonal.	Holy Spirit is impersonal.	Holy Spirit is personal.

The Use of Traditional Terminology

The traditional terms Trinity and Person are not in themselves indispensable to the Christian faith. The word Trinity is a combination of the prefix "tri" and the word "unity" (tri-unity), and it expresses the concept of Three-in-One.[110] One can affirm everything the Bible says about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit without using the traditional vocabulary. At the same time, one should recognize that the traditional vocabulary is a careful attempt to capture the New Testament teaching about the Being of God, and since it has served the church well for most of its history, it should not be discarded lightly.

Limitations

Great theologians have long recognized the limitations of this traditional vocabulary. Augustine, for instance, was not satisfied with the term Person, but he used it, as he said, "...not in order to express it [the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit], but in order not to be silent."[111] He strenuously avoided speaking of God as "triple."[112] A modern theologian frankly remarks, "Many think it [the word Trinity] is a poor word to use to try to describe this particular teaching of the Bible. Actually, it describes only half the teaching...the 'threeness' part and not the 'unity.' Perhaps the word tri-unity is better, since it contains both ideas, the 'tri' [the threeness] and the 'unity' [the oneness]."[113]

To this admitted limitation in the traditional vocabulary should be added the fact that many Christians who confessionally espouse trinitarian vocabulary, usually lay people without theological background, articulate their understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity poorly. That they sometimes verge on tritheism

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[110] I. and K. Cully, *An Introductory Theological Wordbook* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943) 196. It is ironic that one of the founding fathers of Oneness Pentecostalism, Andrew Urshan, suggested that the best word to use for the godhead is this term tri-unity. He also states, "I personally cannot refrain from believing that there is a plurality in God's mysterious Being, and that this plurality is shown as a three-ness, not three separate, distinct Beings or Persons of God, but a mysterious, inexplicable, incomprehensible three-ness," cf. D. Reed, 244, 246. Urshan obviously misunderstood the traditional term Person, and one wonders that if he would have taken more care to research his material, perhaps he would have realized that his difference with trinitarians was more semantical than substantial. In any case, he falls into the same mistake that Oneness Pentecostals usually do, that is, refusing to listen to how trinitarianism defines its terms.

[111] Berkhof, *History*, 92.

[112] Gonzales, I.339.

[113] C. Ryrie, *Understanding Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody, 1983) 38, 40.

would horrify the great theologians of Christian history.

Advantages

In spite of the admitted limitations of the traditional vocabulary for the Divine Nature, there are some strengths that should not be overlooked. Alternative suggestions are no better, and in many cases they are worse:

Oneness Pentecostals speak of three manifestations of God rather than three persons, but this vocabulary lapses into modalism and conveys the notion that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are temporary states. The only truly adequate usage of the term manifestation is with regard to the incarnation of the Son. The term manifestation is totally inadequate as a way of describing the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The vocabulary of “three offices”, similar to the vocabulary of three manifestations, conveys a lack of real distinction between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and worse, makes personal relationships impossible. An office cannot love another office in the way that the Father loved the Son before the world began. An office can never be a "he," it can only be an "it."

The vocabulary of “three modes of Being”, suggested by Karl Barth, is better than the previous alternatives, but it lacks familiarity and precision for most Christians. Also, it runs the risk of being mistaken for modalism, a risk with which Barth himself was forced to contend, for he was criticized by some for lapsing into modalism.

In the end, the traditional terms were not chosen and employed without thorough deliberation and, in fact, much debate. Since they are generally recognized and so long as they are carefully defined, they are probably the best terms available and should continue to be used by the church to express its understanding of the Divine Nature.