

THE CHRISTIAN
UNDERSTANDING
OF GOD

THEO 331 – week 5

CLASSICAL THEISM SUMMARIZED

- **There is only one God**
- **There are three hypostatic persons in God**
 - Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- **The Father is the Source (mono-archè) of the Trinity**
- **Son = Word = Wisdom of God**
 - The term “Son of God” applies even prior to the Incarnation

CLASSICAL THEISM SUMMARIZED

- **The Son is “eternally begotten” of the Father, equal to the Father in terms of divinity**
 - The term “begotten” applies to his divine nature, not just to the human nature
- **The Son received a human name at his Incarnation: that name is Jesus**
 - Jesus is not a separate person from the eternal Son of God

CLASSICAL THEISM SUMMARIZED

- **Jesus is fully divine but also fully human, like us in all things but sin**
 - Jesus had: a body of flesh; a human soul; a human intelligence and free will
- **Because of the Incarnation material things can be truly holy and should be venerated as such.**
- **The Holy Spirit proceeds “from the heart” of the Father (ekporesis), and so is also equal to the Father in terms of divinity**

CHRISTIANITY MEETS THE PAGANS

- **Gnosticism: a very diverse set of beliefs that generally denied the Biblical view of God and salvation in favour of a view that matter was evil, and that salvation comes through knowledge and occult practices**
 - Christian-flavoured gnosticism arose from the contact of Christianity with the pagan (generally Greek-speaking) peoples
 - An early example: Docetism
 - Modern gnostics: theosophists, New Age

TRINITARIAN HERESIES

- **Tritheism: The Father, Son and Spirit are actually 3 gods united in one “godhead”**
 - **Difference from classical theism: In this view, the Father is not the source of the Son and Spirit, but himself has a higher source in the Godhead.**
 - **The Mormons are Tritheists.**

TRINITARIAN HERESIES

- **Modalism (aka Sabellianism):** There is only one Person in God; the terms “Father”, “Son” and “Spirit” refer to modes of God’s action.
 - **Patricassionism:** A form of modalism where the title “Father” truly applies to God, but the titles “Son” and “Spirit” are modes of action. Therefore, it was actually the Father, acting as the Son, who was crucified, hence the name of this heresy.

TRINITARIAN HERESIES

- **Subordinationism: A middle view between Tritheism (3 gods in 3 persons) and Modalism (1 god in 1 person), which held that there was truly one Person who was wholly God (the Father) while the other two persons (Son and Spirit) were subordinated in some way to the Father and therefore do not share fully in the divine nature.**
 - **Example: Pneumatomachianism, which held that the Holy Spirit was created, not eternal, and therefore not wholly divine.**

THE GREATEST TRINITARIAN HERESY OF THEM ALL

- **ARIANISM:** Developed by the Egyptian priest Arius, it taught that the Son was not co-eternal with the Father, and therefore was (at best) a lesser divine being.
 - “The Father is greater than I” (John 14: 28)
- **Arianism** swept across the Roman Empire and beyond. The Emperor himself called a council to deal with the question. The Council of Nicea was held in 325 A.D.

THE CREED OF NICEA

- **We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.**
- **And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten;**
- **that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (homousios) with the Father;**
- **by whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth;**

THE CREED OF NICEA

- **who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.**
- **And in the Holy Ghost.**
- **But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable' — they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.**

CONSEQUENCES OF ARIANISM

- **The Arian view spread rapidly. It seemed theologically sound to many, and resolved the difficulties within Trinitarianism.**
- **As they were outside the Roman empire, certain Germanic tribes in the north and Arab tribes in the south retained Arianism for centuries.**
- **Even within the empire, a second council needed to be held in Constantinople (381 A.D.) to conclude the doctrinal controversy.**

THE CREED OF NICEA-CONSTANTINOPLE

- **We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.**
- **And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;**
- **by whom all things were made;**

THE CREED OF NICEA-CONSTANTINOPLE

- **who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;**
- **he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;**
- **from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.**

THE CREED OF NICEA-CONSTANTINOPLE

- And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

INCARNATION HERESIES

- **The Son has been affirmed as co-eternal. But what is the relationship between the eternal Son of God and the human being known as Jesus?**
- **Early theory: ADOPTIONISM**
 - **Jesus was a human being upon whom “Christ” descended at his baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit, thus making him divine.**

INCARNATION HERESIES

- **APOLLINARISM:** The theory that Jesus had a human body but did not have a rational human soul, the Divine Logos taking this role.
 - The theory was that salvation could only come to humans if Jesus' divinity and humanity were united, but that this union would be impossible if Jesus had a rational human soul.
 - Response: Having a rational soul is part of the image of God in human nature, and therefore is compatible with divinity.

INCARNATION HERESIES

- **NESTORIANISM:** The belief that the two natures in Christ (human and divine) imply that there are two persons.
 - Key proposal: Mary should be called “Christotokos” (mother of Christ) not “theotokos” (mother of God)
- Yet another council was called to deal with this, held at Ephesus in 431 A.D. Mary was declared Theotokos.

INCARNATION HERESIES

- **MONOPHYSITISM:** The belief that the two natures in Christ were united but mixed, with the human overwhelmed by the divine “like a drop of honey in the ocean”.
 - A fourth council was held in 451 A.D. at Chalcedon to deal with this question.
- **The basic problem with both Nestorianism and Monophysitism: they continue the belief that the divine and human natures are incompatible.**

THE CONFSSION OF CHALCEDON

- **Following the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, composed of rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial with us as to his humanity; "like us in all things but sin." He was begotten from the Father before all ages as to his divinity and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, was born as to his humanity of the virgin Mary, the Mother of God.**

THE CONFSSION OF CHALCEDON

- **We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only-begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation. The distinction between natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (prosopon) and one hypostasis.**
- **SUMMARY: One divine person with two natures; fully divine, and fully human.**

MORE INCARNATION HERESIES

- **MONOTHELITISM: A compromise position with monophysitism, this theory acknowledges that Christ had a human nature but only a divine free will.**
 - **ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR:** If Christ had two free wills, they theoretically could operate contrary to each other. If they always worked together in favour of the divine will, what is the difference between that and having only one will in the first place?
 - **ARGUMENT AGAINST:** Free will is the capacity to choose, but that choice is always meant to be directed towards an object (the good). Otherwise, free will is some sort of disease.
- **Rejected at the third council of Constantinople (A.D. 680-681).**

ICONOCLASM

- **ICONOCLASM (lit: “icon-smashing):**
Opposition to the creation of images of God, or their use in worship. Extends to images of the saints or of holy events as well, or the creation/use of other “blessed” objects.
 - The iconoclastic movement began after the contact between Islam (which is highly iconoclast) and Eastern Christianity, and sought to be faithful to the Old Testament ban on the creation of images so as to respect the “otherness” of God

RESPONSES TO ICONOCLASM

- **God himself has overcome the “otherness” through the Incarnation of his Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit. The idea of localised areas or objects of holiness is therefore an extension of the principle of the Incarnation, and makes possible the veneration of icons, relics, holy objects and places, etc.**
- **The second council of Nicea (A.D. 787) taught that “the honour accorded to the image passes over to its prototype, and whoever adores the image adores in it the reality of what is there represented”. In other words, thanks to the Incarnation, an icon is not necessarily an idol!**