

SOME FUNDAMENTALS OF TRINITARIANISM

Note: Articles in this PDF do not cover every detail, discussion, or debate on the subject in question.

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A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON "PERSONS" AND FUNDAMENTAL GROUNDWORK

It is common for us to take what we see in life and import it onto the life of God, and this is often the case when we hear the term "person" in relation to the Trinity. "Person" is adequate enough, but modern conceptions of persons (self-conscious, separate, autonomous, individualism) can create problems when applied to God. For us, we each are individual persons subsisting (existing) within our own individual (and concrete) human nature. There are many humans, yet, each human person has their own human nature. You will have a difficult time finding two persons who share the same concrete human nature!

What is crucial here is recognizing that natures do not act, but rather, a person acts through their nature. **A nature** (being, essence, substance) refers to *what something is*, the fundamental makeup of something. **A person** refers to *the who is existing and acting through a nature and its capacities*.

Unlike human beings, God is three persons existing or subsisting in the *single divine nature*. There is one ontological God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are identical in their being, each whole God, none greater or lesser, indivisible with inseparable operations, with one will and one mind. God is one indivisible being, and in God's works, all three persons operate

inseparably, yet each work is specifically attributed or appropriated to one of them. Additionally, the three persons occupy the same infinite divine space, mutually indwelling one another, dynamically, with living relations in love (called *perichoresis*). Each person is in their own right, God in himself, and each person is identical with the others in all things **except** their *personal properties* of Paternity, Filiation, and Spiration. In other words, these **properties** are the eternal distinctions between the three persons:

Father to Son (Paternity)

Son to Father (Filiation)

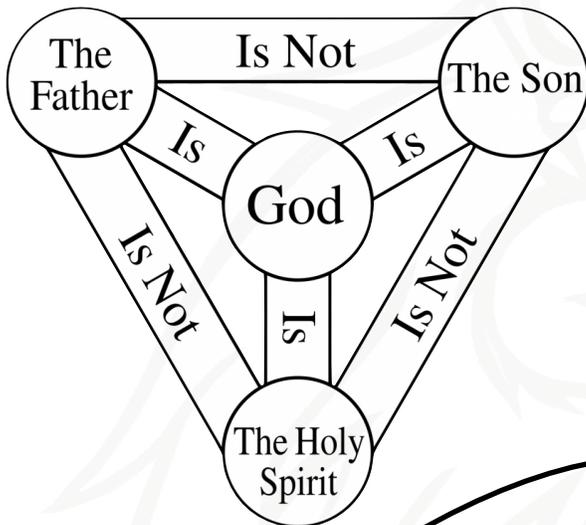
Father to Holy Spirit (Spiration)

Holy Spirit to Father (Procession)

Son to Holy Spirit (Western Church - Spiration)

This all appropriately lays the groundwork for understanding other discussions such as why *the Son* became enfleshed (incarnate) and why the Spirit is sent by the Father through the Son. The work of the trinity in redemption reflects the nature of the trinity in eternity (but not all things can be imported back onto the trinity!). The Son is the person who acts through his divine nature, but becomes incarnate, and thus acts through two natures in his ministry.

GOD IS ONE BEING SUBSISTING IN THREE PERSONS



Remember!

Modern conceptions of "person" creates an idea of self-conscious, separate, and autonomous individualism. Each human is a person subsisting within their own individual human nature. There are many humans and each has their own person, two persons do not share the same human nature. Natures do not act, rather a person acts through their nature.

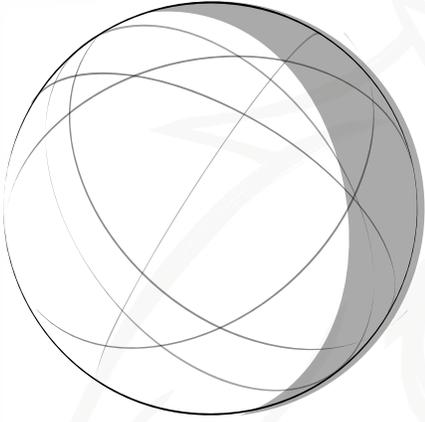
Key points:

- God is a **personal being par excellence**.
- God is an **indivisible union** of three persons.
- **Both** the distinctness of persons and oneness of God's being **must** be maintained.
- "Person" is adequate enough when stripped of modern connotations, but still not fully comprehensible.
- The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are **identical in being** (Homoousious, of the same being).
- The persons are Eternal differentiated by their personal properties.
- Each person is **whole God** - none is more God than another.
- No person is of higher or lesser status than any other, nor are there gradations of deity.

Indivisible Essence and Inseparable operations:

God is one indivisible being - in all his works all three persons operate inseparably. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit determine all decrees and purposes together without division. Yet, each work is specifically attributed or appropriated to one of them (ex. Creation; Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 33:6-9; John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3). In accordance with this, we recognize that will is a property of nature, not persons, thus God has one will opposed to three separate centers of volition.

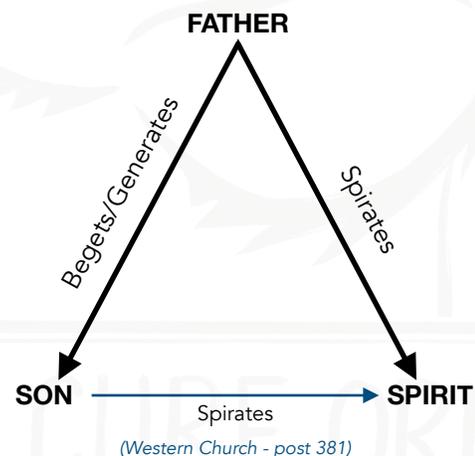
PERICHORESIS, PROPERTIES, & TAXIS



Perichorēsis is the term used to designate the reality that the three persons occupy the same infinite divine space, mutually indwelling one another, dynamically with living relations in love.

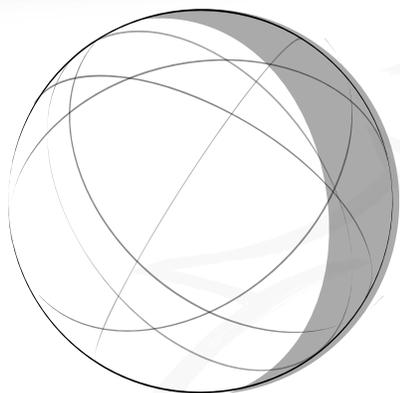
Properties are those relations of origin possessed by the persons that are the eternal and real distinctions between the persons.

- Father to Son (Paternity)
- Son to Father (Filiation)
- Father to Holy Spirit (Spiration)
- Holy Spirit to Father (Procession)
- Son to Holy Spirit (Western Church - Spiration)



Taxis is the term used to describe the clear order of the persons in terms of their relations. i.e. the Son does not beget the Father and the Spirit does not send the Father. The relations between the three persons are and inseparable from their identity. The Father is always the Father and the Son is always the Son.

AD INTRA & AD EXTRA



Ad intra: Relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit **in eternity.**

Theologia: Concerns the nature of God (the being of God).



Ad extra: Relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the execution of God's plan **in redemptive-history.**

Oikonomia: Concerns God's work in history. His providence and ordering of his creation, and the manner in which God reveals himself.

Through the oikonomia, the theologia is revealed and the theologia reveals the whole okonomia. God's works reveal who God is. God is one eternal being who enters into history

Rather than this classical language (theologia and oikonomia), it is common since the 19th century to say the Immanent Trinity and the Economic Trinity. While the language is acceptable, we need to remember there are not two trinities but one trinity that is revealed according to God's plan and work in history.

COMMON OBJECTIONS ANSWERED:

Objection: "The word trinity does not appear in the Bible therefore it is made up and/or unbiblical"

Answer: While the word trinity doesn't appear in scripture, it doesn't negate the truths the term seeks to summarize. Words like 'incarnation,' 'divinity,' and 'monotheism,' do not appear in the Bible either, yet clearly summarize biblical truths.

Objection: "Christians believe in three gods"

Answer: Early Christians (and the writers of the New Testament) affirm one God (See "Paul's Shema in 1 Corinthians 8:6"). The notion of a plurality in God finds its roots even within Second Temple Judaism and can be seen within the Old Testament. Most errors regarding the Godhead in modern Christian circles are formed by attempting to explain God according to our finite human frameworks, yet, Christians (trinitarians) ultimately must become comfortable lettings God be God, i.e. not fully comprehensible to our finite understanding.

Objection: "Jesus is not God"

Answer: There is no way to miss the reality that Jesus is God according to the New Testament. That which is applied exclusively to God is applied to Jesus, and even Jesus' contemporaries sought to kill Jesus because they recognized his claims of having equality with God. Some examples (out of many) are here:

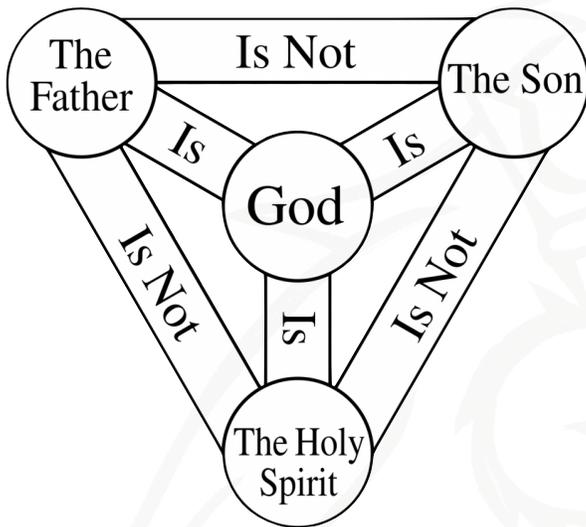
God	Jesus
CREATOR (GENESIS 1:1; ISAIAH 44:24)	CREATOR (JOHN 1:3; COLOSSIANS 1:16)
THE FIRST AND THE LAST (ISAIAH 44:6)	THE FIRST AND THE LAST (REVELATION 1:17)
ONLY SAVIOR (ISAIAH 43:11; 45:21-22)	ONLY SAVIOR (JOHN 3:16-18; 4:42; TITUS 2:13)
DIVINE GLORY (ISAIAH 42:8; 48:11)	DIVINE GLORY (JOHN 17:5)
WORSHIPED BY ANGELS (PSALM 97:7)	WORSHIPED BY ANGELS (HEBREWS 1:6)

Objection: "Jesus is God, simply manifesting himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Answer: This is an ancient and unanimously condemned heresy known as modalism (or oneness theology today). This heresy makes God's characterization of love dependent upon creation and makes divine revelation incoherent. The bible continuously shows the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be distinct persons (1 John 4:4; Matthew 3:13-17; John 3:35; 5:31-37; 16:14; 17:4-5; Colossians 3:1-4; etc).

**PLURALITY
WITHIN THE
GODHEAD**

GOD IS ONE



Divine Simplicity Means:

- God is not made up of parts
- God is not divided
- God is not mutable
- God is not temporal
- God is not dependent
- God is simple: All that is in God is God: ex. God's essence and attributes are not separate

Remember!

There is one God subsisting in three persons. God is one essence eternally and wholly subsisting in three undivided yet distinct persons, each person being a subsistence of the one, undivided essence. All three persons are identical in every respect except in their personal properties.

Monotheism = unipersonal?

Contrary to modern notions, Monotheism does not necessitate that God is one being subsisting as one person, but rather that there is one being that is God in essence (single divine nature, will, and operation).

Trinitarianism holds to *one divine* essence subsisting wholly, indivisibly, simultaneously, and eternally in three persons.

PLURALITY WITHIN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- Elohim is a **plural Hebrew noun** that is used to describe God (translated as God) in various texts such as Genesis 1:1; Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 13:2.
- Elohim is used for the one true God as well as many false gods. **At minimum** the term allows for plurality within the Godhead.
- Some argue that Elohim could have been the only form that was available for "God," yet there is also singular form that is found in scripture (see: Deuteronomy 32:15-17 as one example). The singular form is used 250 times while the plural is used 2,500 times.

Plural Pronouns:

- When God speaks of himself, he often uses plural pronouns. The most famous example being in Genesis 1:26, "God [Elohim] said, let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness."

- Genesis 3:22, "The Lord God [Elohim] said, "Behold man has become like one of **us**"
- Genesis 11:7, "Come, let **us** go down."
- Isaiah 6:8, "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I **send**, and who will go **for us**?"

- Some will say this is God speaking to angels or "the divine council," but we know that man was **created in God's image, not the image of angels.**
- In regard to Genesis 1:26 the Midrash Rabbah on this passage notes the plurality saying it gives excuse "to the sectarians (who believe in the trinity of God)."

jewsforjesus.org points out, "God not only speaks of himself in the plural, but many authors of scripture also refer to God's plurality" citing, Ecclesiastes 12:1 [lit. creators], Psalm 149:2 [lit. Makers], Isaiah 54:5 [lit. Makers and husbands]. (see the sites articles on the trinity).

WHAT ABOUT DEUTERONOMY 6:4?

- "Hear O' Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (echad)!" (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- The Confession, called the Shema, is often cited to affirm the oneness of God in terms of God being unipersonal.
- It has been pointed out by many, however, that the Hebrew term "echad" (translated as "one") can indicate a compound unity and is used that way in numerous other texts of the Bible.
- There is a Hebrew term that means absolute unity (yachid) and it is used in various passages, yet it was Echad that was used in the Shema.
- Ultimately: The Shema in regards to echad does not tell us about God's nature, but emphasizes the profession of faith in the one divine being, God.

- Genesis 2:4, A man is united to a woman making them "one" flesh.
- Exodus 36:13, the joining of all the pieces into one Tabernacle is described as "one."
- 2 Samuel 7:23, Israel is "one" though made up of thousands.
- Ezra 2:64, the whole assembly is noted to be "one."
- Ezekiel 37:17, two sticks are combine and become "one."

Remember Divine Simplicity!

- God is not made up of parts
- God is not divided
- God is not mutable
- God is not temporal
- God is not dependent
- God is simple: All that is in God is God: ex. God's essence and attributes are not separate

While there are analogies and metaphors in our world that can tell us something about God, they will always break down

**THE DEITY OF
THE SON**

THE UNMISTAKABLE DEITY OF THE SON

The Bible is loaded with texts indicating that Jesus is God. However, this examination will be limited with some select points that can be highlighted with minimal explanation. That is, these examples are selected based on how condensed they are given the limitation of space.

Jesus as Lord

The most common title for Jesus in the New Testament is "Lord." The term can be used in a formal sense (like yes sir), but it is also used in the Greek Old Testament for the divine name, Yahweh. Put another way, Yahweh (All Caps. LORD in English Old Testaments) is translated as Lord (κυριος) within the New Testament.

Because of this, in the New Testament, the term "Lord" is used in reference to Jesus in a way that clearly equates him as "Yahweh."

To illustrate this - these citations include Yahweh alongside the traditional all caps "LORD."

Example:

Matthew 3: Matthew introduces John the Baptist and says that Isaiah spoke of John. Mathew shows [John preparing the way for Jesus](#) with a citation of Isaiah. Isaiah's text says

that one will prepare the way for [Yahweh and "our God."](#) Isaiah 40 paints the picture of [Yahweh returning to Israel as the King](#) whenever God's people are in need of a savior. The Gospel writers speak of John the Baptist [preparing the way for Jesus](#).

Matthew 3:3	Isaiah 40:3
"The voice of the one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight."	"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD (Yahweh); make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

Points and Stress:

- John is preparing the way for Jesus
- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, says Isaiah spoke of John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord.
- Isaiah 40:3 points to the preparation for Yahweh and "our God."
- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John link Isaiah 40:3 with Jesus as "the Lord" and speaks of his (our God) path being made straight.

JESUS AS LORD EXAMPLES CONTINUED:

Isaiah 8:12-13	1 Peter 3:14-15
<p>“Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread, but the Lord (Yahweh) of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear and let him be your dread.”</p>	<p>“Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”</p>

Isaiah 45:21b-23	Philippians 2:10-11
<p>“Was it not I, the LORD (Yahweh)? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none beside me.</p> <p>Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.’</p>	<p>“Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”</p>

Joel 2:32	Romans 10:11-14
<p>“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD (Yahweh) shall be saved.”</p>	<p>“For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him [Jesus] will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?”</p>

Jesus as God Explicitly:

[John 1:1](#), "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

[John 1:18](#), "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

[John 20:28](#), Thomas addresses Jesus as, "My Lord and my God."

[Romans 9:5](#), "To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen."

[Hebrews 1:8](#), "But of the Son, he (the Father) says, Your throne, O' God, is forever and ever"

[1 John 5:20](#), "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."

[Titus 2:13](#); [2 Peter 1:1](#) call Jesus, our "God and Savior."

Jesus as the Son of God & Son of Man

The title "Son of God" goes beyond this particular discussion, but nonetheless demonstrates the deity of Christ.

Jesus is presented as the Eternal Son of God and this is even known by Satan (Matthew 4:3). Paul notes that Jesus is God's Son from Heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10) as does John (1:1-18). Jesus is not a Son because he was incarnate, but he was incarnate because he was the only begotten Son of God. The pre-existent relationship between the Father and Son can be seen notably in texts like John 17:5, "And now, Father, glorify me in your own

presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." Jesus points out that he came from the Father and returns properly to the Father (John 16:28).

John 5:16-30 is a brief case study as Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath. Jesus' contemporaries critique him for this work and Jesus points out that, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." (v. 17). Jews understood God to be working on the Sabbath because he upheld the entire universe, and Jesus claimed to be equal to God in his right to work on the Sabbath. This is evident in the reaction of the Jews, "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." The rest of the text through verse 30 continues to demonstrate Jesus' position as the Son of God.

The title "Son of Man" also goes beyond this particular discussion, but nonetheless demonstrates the deity of Christ.

Son of Man is Jesus' favorite title for himself - it is mentioned 86 times. Jesus links this title to his authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6) and his authority over the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8).

The key text in regards to this title is Daniel 7 which pictures God's deliverance. In the text one enters "like a son of man," who rises on clouds, and receives ruling authority (v. 13-14). Within the Old Testament, it is deity that comes riding on clouds (see Exodus 14:20 as one example). Daniel describes a divine human being who receives authority in response to the suffering of God's people. In the vision, the God-Man King comes from the clouds of heaven (v. 13) and his reign will last forever (v. 14).

**THE DEITY
OF
THE HOLY
SPIRIT**

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Some of the Holy Spirit's divine attributes and Work:

Everywhere present (Psalm 139:7-10)
Knows all things (Isaiah 40:13-14)
Knows the mystery of the Triune God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11)
Eternal (Hebrews 9:14)
Works alongside the Father and Son (ex. Luke 1:34-37; Genesis 2:7, Job 33:4)
Regenerates (John 3:5-6; Titus 3:5)
Unites to Christ (Romans 8:9-10)
Works in justification and sanctification (1 Corinthians 6:11)
Can be blasphemed (Matthew 12:22-32)

The Personhood of the Spirit:

Intelligent, knows all things (Isaiah 40:13-14; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11)

Can be grieved (Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30)

Can be insulted (Hebrews 10:29)

Volition is expressed (1 Corinthians 12:11)

Appoints (Acts 13:1-4; 16:6-8)

Testifies (John 15:26; Romans 8:16)

Teaches (John 14:26)

Leads (Psalm 143:10; Romans 8:14)

Intercedes (Romans 8:26-27).

A classic case study: In Acts 5:3-4, Ananias and Sapphira "lie to the Holy Spirit" which Peter parallels with "lied to God."

In 5:9, Peter asks Sapphira, "Why did you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?"

In the Old Testament, "Testing the Spirit of the Lord" is an expression for sinning against Yahweh (see examples in Exodus 17:2 and Deuteronomy 6:16).

THE FILIOQUE CONTROVERSY - BRIEFLY EXPLAINED

The Filioque Controversy is significantly larger and more complex than space will allow for, but we will summarize it in brief. *This explanation will not seek to take a position, but only explain the East's reaction/perspective.*

This is referred to the largest single cause of division in the undivided church. The result of the Filioque controversy was a strong break between the Eastern and Western church in AD 1054 (though, the issue moves beyond theological discussion to ecclesiastical discussions).

Explaining the issue:

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 stated originally that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father."

This relates to the Holy Spirit's personal property (or eternal distinction) within the Trinity (see: Key Aspects of Trinitarianism).

In Spain, local congregations added to this creed: "a patre filioque" that is "from the Father and the Son"

This addition would spread throughout the West in local congregations to combat Arianism. In 1014 the bishop of Rome inserted it officially into the creed.

The Objections to this insertion were on both Ecclesiastical Grounds and Theological Grounds.

To the former: For the East, the insertion of the Filioque into an ecumenical creed, required an ecumenical council. It was a breach of authority to insert the Western Tradition into a Universal Creed.

To the latter: Eastern writers were concerned that the Filioque compromised the monarchy of the Father by including the Son as a source of the Holy Spirit. For the East, the Son receives and manifests the Spirit, but is not the source, only the Father is the source of both the Son and Holy Spirit. For the East, the clause confuses the Father and the Son by giving them the same property of spirating (sending) the Spirit.

In the West we tend to assume the Filioque (see: the Athanasian Creed on the Holy Spirit) while there are Western Christians who hold to both positions.

To read more on the Filioque see:

The Holy Trinity Robert Letham - (<https://amzn.to/3LgMvaZ>)

Through Western Eyes Robert Letham - (<https://amzn.to/3qpDrYG>)

The Holy Spirit (Allison & Kostenberger) - (<https://amzn.to/3B3ymJG>)

Nick Needham, The Filioque Clause: East or West? Scottish bulletin of Evangelical Theology (accessible online for free)

THE TRINITY IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

God's work is Trinitarian:

The Father has revealed his Word by his Spirit.

Jesus is sent by the Father (John 6:38) and within the Gospel of John, the relationship between the Father and Son is highlighted. It is through the Son's work that we can come to the Father (John 14:6).

The Holy Spirit brings about the conception - the incarnation - of Christ (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35). Jesus lives in perfect obedience as a man, offering himself to the Father, by the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 9:14). The Holy Spirit rests upon Jesus in fullness and the words he spoke were God's (John 3:34).

All three persons were involved in the resurrection (Galatians 1:1; 1 Peter 3:18; John 2:19). The trinity, inseparably, works in creation (1 Corinthians 8:6; Genesis 1:1-2; John 1:1-3) and Salvation (John 3:6-16).

The Gospel is Trinitarian:

To gain access to the throne of grace is to come to the Father by believing in his only begotten Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Regenerated to new life, we are united to the Son, and have access to the Father's throne of Grace: "For through him [Christ] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18)

"In him [Christ] you are also being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22)

Christian life is Trinitarian:

Sanctification: Born of the Spirit, United to Christ, Adopted as children.

By the Spirit and the Word we live as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:17). In abiding union with Christ, we produce fruit by the Spirit unto the Glory of God (2 Peter 1:3-11; John 15:11).

Prayer: To the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit as Children of God in adoption by the Spirit, through the Son, as to a Father (Ephesians 2:18; Matthew 6:9; Romans 8:14-17; 8:29).

Worship: "[We] worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:3; Romans 12:1-2; Romans 6; Colossians 3:1-17)

**THE HERESY
OF
MODALISM**

THE MONARCHIANS

The Monarchians would appear early on in church history, with the term being first used by the church writer Tertullian against an individual named Praxeas, and the “patripassians” (lit. the father suffering). The latter would be primarily known as the Sabellians or Modalists. Monarchianism, had two primary branches or approaches - *Adoptionism and Modalism*.

Monarchians, theologically, began with an attempt to preserve monotheism, that is, the affirmation of a single God to the exclusion of every other, but they did so at the expense of the full and coequal deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. For *Adoptionism*, which is also called dynamic monarchianism, Jesus was considered to be a mere man who was adopted as the Son of God because of his merits. Theodotus of Byzantium, or “The Tanner,” is often credited with this doctrine in the 2nd century. Theodotus claimed that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary and lived among other men as a typical man yet with pious rigor. Due to his merits, Jesus would receive the Logos, the higher Christ, or the divine spirit, at his baptism signified by the descending dove. From here Jesus was able to perform miracles as he was “adopted” to be God’s son and empowered because of his virtue. Some adoptionists would hold that Jesus was deified at his baptism and others held that he was deified at his resurrection. Adoptionism would live on with more developed forms through the 4th century, most notably with Paul of Samosata and Photinus of Sirmium. Adoptionism continues to be alive today although it is less popular than Arianism and Modalism.

The second approach of Monarchianism was *Modalism*. Modalism is also known as Sabellianism, named after Sabellius. This teaching maintained the deity of Christ, however, it rejected that the Father and the Son were distinct persons and thus it

rejected that they shared the same substance. The Son was a mere mode of being, and manifestation, of the Father. Stephen Wellum states, “So they conceived of the Father, Son, and Spirit as ‘modes’ in which God manifested himself. It was suggested that God manifested himself differently in each of the three phases of world history - as Father in the Old Testament, as Son in the Gospel period, and as Spirit since the time of Pentecost. In this way they denied the personal distinctions between the Father, Son, and Spirit within the Godhead.” For Modalism, then, the one person, God becomes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is no real or eternal distinction between the persons.

Today, Modalism appears in what is called “Oneness Theology” with the largest group adhering to this theology being the UPCI. Oneness theology is the largest anti-trinitarian group in the world exceeding both Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons. While many adherents of this movement will move away from the designation of “Modalism,” the emphasis is upon the one person of God manifesting in three modes. Attempts to move away from the designation of modalism is often rooted in the misconception that ancient modalism was *limited to successive or developmental modes over and against Oneness’ simultaneous model*. However, not only were both of these forms of modalism in existence in the ancient world, but oneness theology is still confined to sequential models when the Father (Jesus or YHWH) creates the Son (the human nature) and inhabits the Son.

MODALISM

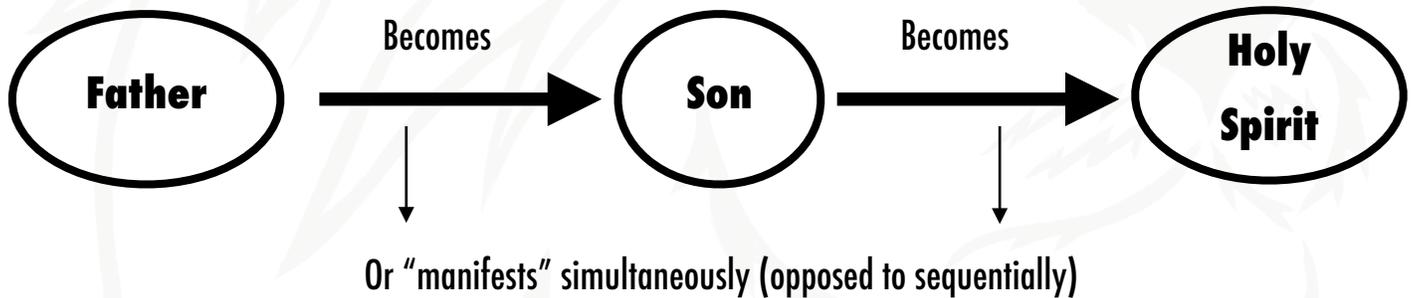
Modalism (Or: Sabellianism, Modalistic Monarchianism, Partipassianism, Oneness Theology, Jesus Onlyism) is an ancient unanimously condemned heresy that views God as one person with three modes or manifestations in the history of redemption.

The stress lands on the unity of God without proper regard for the distinctions within the Godhead.

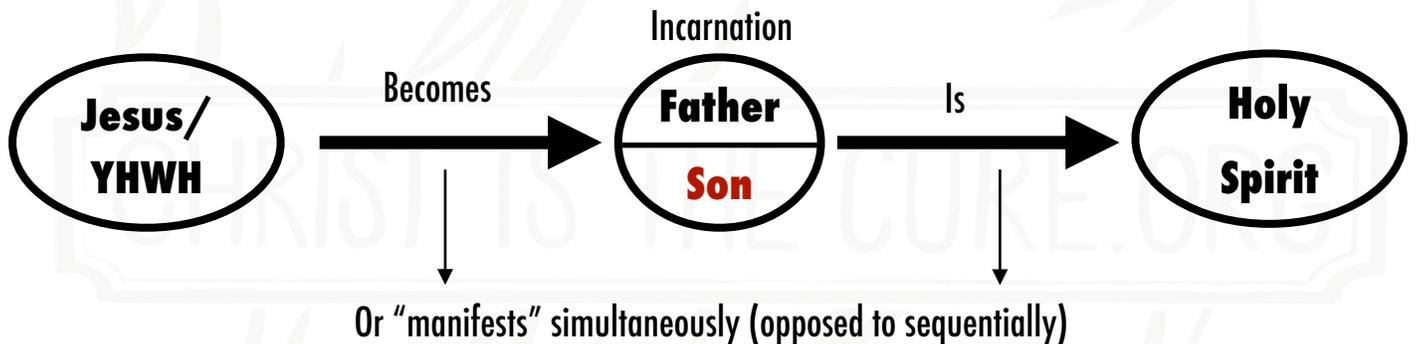
Note: Modalism is not uniform in regards to its more subtle details.

Proof Texts and Defense:

- **Key Proof texts:** John 10:30; 14:9; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 28:19 + Acts 2:38
- **Defense:** Texts that emphasize the Oneness of God or interchangeably speaks of the Holy Spirit and the "Spirit of Christ"
 - Jesus' prayers are a mere model or example for people to follow
 - Where multiple persons of the Godhead are mentioned - the omnipresence of God that accounts for this (particularly in oneness theology)



Oneness Pentecostal Model:



Son = The human nature

Father = the divine nature within the Son

WHY IS MODALISM PROBLEMATIC?

- It changes the fundamental nature of God; it creates a false god, and religion centered around that god. (1 John 2:22).
- It damages the mediatorial work of Christ between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5)
- It makes divine revelation unreliable and incoherent:
 - In modalism "God is love" makes God dependent upon his creation in order to be love.
 - It downplays the love of God towards creation in the love of the Father sending the Son.
 - Revelation of God's nature and character, especially in terms of the relations between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are ultimately a fictions facade (in blunt terms: it makes God a liar).
 - Jesus' prayers understood as mere examples become nonsensical in many contexts.
 - It confuses clear distinctions made between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- It was unanimously recognized as a heresy by the church universal in the 3rd century.

CLEAR DISTINCTIONS SEEN IN SCRIPTURE:

"No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side — he has revealed him."
(John 1:18)

"That the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me."
(John 8:17b-18)

"Jesus was baptized...he saw the Spirit of God descending..and behold a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son..."
(Matthew 3:13-17)

"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands"
(John 3:35)

"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."
(John 17:4-5)

"He [the Spirit] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."
(John 16:14)

ADDRESSING SOME MODALISM PROOF TEXTS:

Modalism Proof Text: "I and the Father are one"
(John 10:30)

Answer: While modalists will say that this text supports that the Son is the Father, the context doesn't allow for a blurring of distinctions, nor do trinitarians disagree with the text.

v. 25 speaks of Jesus's work in the "Father's name." Jesus is acting in his Father's name (a clear distinction is made).

V. 29 - "My Father, who has given them to me," the distinction is made again, and Jesus claims the Father as his Father - who has actively given sheep to Jesus.

V. 30 - After emphasizing a unity in mission (v. 25-30), Jesus claims he and the Father are one. The distinction is inherent in the phrase itself: Jesus and the Father (two) are one. Classically this echoes the Shema (Deut. 6:4; modified by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:6). Jesus is claiming deity in being of one nature with the Father (recognized by his contemporaries, v. 33).

V. 32 makes distinction again, the Son in the incarnation shows good works "from the Father" as they are united in mission.

Modalism Proof Text: "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:9)

Answer: This text, like the last, demonstrates the unity within the Godhead. Modalists will argue that

Jesus is the Father and this proves it as Philip has seen the Father by seeing Jesus.

Jesus, as the Son reveals the Father and the nature of God (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:2-3). His statement solidifies that, and still, the immediate context moves directly to a distinction between the Father and the Son in conjunction to the mutual indwelling of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This distinction is clearly seen in beginning in v. 12, "I am going to the Father." If Jesus was stressing that he is the Father incarnate, then this departure back to the Father is nonsensical.

Modalism Proof Text: "Everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6)

Answer: Isaiah 9:6 is the strongest proof text for modalism. They reason, if Jesus is called "everlasting Father," in the sense that they mean it, then the case is closed. This text is easily dealt with, however.

Isaiah's emphasis is on the Messiah, the King. In the context of Isaiah, fathers of a nation were not unheard of (even in modern days we have 'founding fathers'). The image is of a benevolent protector of the nation (ex. "And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Isaiah 22:21; also Job 29:16; Ps. 103:13). The emphasis is on the coming King who is the Everlasting Protector of the Kingdom.

See: <https://vimeo.com/693222057> for more discussion

FINAL THOUGHTS:

- The trinity is beyond our full comprehension as all things of God ultimately are, but God has clearly revealed himself as being one in essence and three in person. This is a tension we must uphold in humility.
- Note clear distinctions between the persons within the Bible - observe that claims such as "Jesus is praying as a mere example" falls apart when expressing intimacy between himself and the Father.
- While modalism seeks to be rational and refute that which they see as irrational, they make God's revelation incoherent. You can test the alleged rationality of modalism by replacing every distinctive name with references to Jesus. Example:

"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."

(John 17:4-5)

"I glorified myself on earth, having accomplished the work that I gave me to do. And now, Myself, glorify me in my own presence with the glory that I had with myself before the world existed."

(John 17:4-5, New Modalism Translation)

RESOURCES:

Through Nicaea Series - (<https://christisthecure.org/category/through-nicaea/>)

Simply Trinity Matthew Barrett - <https://amzn.to/3KXKZJW>

The Holy Trinity Robert Letham - (<https://amzn.to/3LgMvaZ>)

The Deep Things of God Fred Sanders - (<https://amzn.to/3GA9Wsg>)

God the Son Incarnate Stephen Wellum - (<https://amzn.to/3rx06b>)

The Holy Spirit (Allison & Kostenberger) - (<https://amzn.to/3B3ymJG>)

2000 Years of Christ's Power Vol. 1 – Nick Needham (<https://amzn.to/3HAjDZ2>)

From Nicaea to Chalcedon Frances Young - (<https://amzn.to/3gucaiv>)

jewsforjesus.org - articles pertaining to the trinity

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