

## Doctrine of God (SYTH 412; Bierma in Fall 2000)

I.

II. Note: following Prof. Bierma's class outline

### I. INTRODUCTION TO THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

#### A. Definitions

- 1) "Theology Proper" = "theos (God) logos (Word)", so word about God  
\*\*\*\* Key: it is especially as God has revealed Self in Bible
- 2) "*Proprie*" (Latin) = "in strictest, narrowest sense"; so focuses on God Himself rather than on more general or broad theological doctrines

#### B. Importance of the Doctrine of God

- 1) D of G is foundation and framework for rest of Systematic Theology (all doctrines must necessarily begin with God)
- 2) D of G been under constant attack in West since time of Enlightenment, so we must know the D of G in order to meet the challenges posed
  - Deism (18<sup>th</sup> C, 1700's: mixed rationalism into D of G)
  - Atheism (19<sup>th</sup> C, 1800's: Feuerbach mixed in anthropology by saying God = projection of idealized human self; Nietzsche: "God is dead")
  - Philosophy/Logical Positivism (20<sup>th</sup> C, 1900's: Ayer said science cannot verify God; Huxley's naturalism = science tells us all we know)
  - Process Theology (1960's: Cobb & Ogden "God in process of becoming")
  - Openness Theology (1990's: Pinnock 'God learns as goes along')
  - Non-Christian religions
- 3) D of G held shapes how we live and minister each and every day

#### C. Knowledge of God

- 1) Special Revelation = Bible (Book of Scripture)
- 2) General Revelation = creation (Book of Nature)
- 3) Because of effects of The Fall (people became blind to -- per Romans 1:18, refuse to see -- Special Rev. and Gen. Rev. got all smudged/blurry), Holy Spirit needed to see what God has revealed
- 4) All 5 rational arguments for existence of God (Ontological, Ethnological, Teleological, Cosmological, & Moral) appeal to General Revelation

### II. THE BEING OF GOD

#### A. Names of God

- 1) In general and in OT & NT (Prof. Bierma referred us to Berkhof, pgs. 47-51)
- 2) Feminine Names for God (recent/current struggle; see 1997 Synodical Report on *Inclusive Language For God*)
  - a) God indeed does use feminine imagery in describing Himself
  - b) However, God ALWAYS refers to Himself with masculine names and pronouns
  - c) Therefore, since God has chosen to reveal Himself to us in Scripture as male, we must address Him as male (the normativity of Scripture is key here)

## B. Attributes of God

- 1) Defined: the essential characteristics of God that He reveals in His Word & works
- 2) Classified:
  - a) Incommunicable (**Not** shared by God with mankind)  
“*via negationis*” (by negation) = what God is not (**in**finite = not finite)
  - b) Communicable (shared by God with mankind) “*via eminentiae*” (lit: elevated to highest degree) = God is to the n<sup>th</sup> degree of love, but humans do love
  - c) Immanent: those attributes that are WITHIN the Godhead
  - d) Operative (from “*opera*” = works): attributes manifested in the works God does
- 3) Immutability & Impassability
  - a) Immut. = God does not change in His being, attributes, purposes, and promises  
(see Mal. 3:6, James 1:17 [being/character] and Is. 46:9-11, Num. 23:19 [purposes])
  - b) Impass. = God not affected emotionally by what’s in creation (not covered in class)

## C. The Trinity

1. Definition: God is one in three Persons
2. Biblical Basis (yes, but a systematic exercise not a single text)  
(see **attached diagram/chart** of Scriptural evidence)
3. Incorrect Attempts to Reconcile/Understand the Trinity
  - a) Monarchianism = no distinctions between the Three Persons
    - i) Modalistic Monarchianism (different, successive modes of revealing Self in redemptive history [F in OT, S in Gospels, and HS after Pentecost])
    - ii) Dynamic Monarchianism (Christ, a human, was adopted by God and endowed with extra-special dose of God’s power and Spirit)
  - b) Arianism = distinctions exaggerated; S created, but special; HS is 1<sup>st</sup> creation of the S; HS below the S and S is below the F
  - c) Council of Nicea in 325 AD rejected Arianism by holding that F & S are of same level, same substance (*homoousios*), and co-eternal (**NOT that Nicea was wrong**, but, Modalism was still left lurking about)
  - d) Cappadocian Fathers (Basil and 2x Gregory) developed 3 Hypostases (which got translated into Latin as “persons”)(**WARNING**: not our modern idea of “person” as an individual or unique center of consciousness, but a **traditional Western theological idea**; Bierma hammered this)
4. What “Person” means theologically (classical, traditional Western understanding)
  - a) existence characterized or defined by RELATIONSHIP in which F, S, & HS stand to each other; each person IS God
  - b) “opera ad intra” (“opera” = work; “ad intra” = within the Trinity)

F	paternity	(the Unbegotten One who begets)
S	filiation	(is the Begotten One)
HS	procession	(proceeds from the F & S)
  - c) “opera ad extra” (“ad extra” = work outside the Trinity)  
e.g., all 3 involved in work of creation (C) and work of redemption (R)

F	originator of C and R
S	mediator/implementor of C & R
HS	completor/applier of C & R

- d) Greek prepositions in 1 Cor. 8:6 (per Berkhof, help us understand)
- |    |            |                        |   |
|----|------------|------------------------|---|
| F  | paternity  | origination            | <i>ek</i> (from, out of)  |
| S  | filiation  | mediation/implement.   | <i>dia</i> (through, on acct. of)                                     |
| HS | procession | completion/application | <i>en</i> (in) (Note: <i>en</i> not used in 1 Cor., but is elsewhere) |

So, “Filioque” clause (HS proceeds from the F & S) is correct;  
John 15:26 = “from the Father”; rest of Scripture = “and the Son”)

- e) Athanasian Creed contains the correct understanding of the Trinity
5. Unitarian challenges to the Trinity (see Broek’s summary since I was absent)
6. Analogies
- a) Bierma concerned about C. Plantinga’s “social theory” (1 Person can simultaneously be all 3 -- like a man can be a father, son, and husband); B fears this is modalistic, focuses on external relats., & bit tri-theistic; B does admit that P’s “social trinitarian theory” is helpful somewhat
- b) Bierma hammered: Trinity is an **internal relationship**; this is consistent with Reformed theology that has long held that each Person of the Trinity is the whole of the essence of God
7. Application (proper doctrine of the Trinity helps . . .)
- a) to keep balance in worship, ministry, theology, and world-view
- b) to model for humans how to relate in family, church, & society (John 17:21)

### III. THE WORKS OF GOD (will consider the “3 Great Works of God”)

#### A. The Divine Decrees (to God [from His perspective], just 1; to us, many)

- 1) defined (Berkhof 102, citing Shorter Westminster): “His eternal purpose [or plan] according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass”
- 2) “Foreordained” broader than “predestination” (predest. is a subset of foreordained)
- 3) decretive will (aka “secret will”) vs. revealed will (both derived from Deut. 29:29) decretive is within God (so secret), while we see revealed will
- 5) does petitionary prayer matter if God’s mind made up ? Yes, prayer is commanded

#### B. Creation

1. defined: act by which God brought forth the universe out of nothing (*ex nihilo*)
2. Why created ? for His own glory (Is. 60:21; Rev. 4:11); so that Christ will be supreme and preeminent in redemption (Romans 8:29)

#### C. Providence (from Latin: “pro” = before; “videre” = to see; so, foreknowledge)

1. HC at LD 10, Q & A 27 is fantastic definition; God preserves what He created
2. Suffering (God allows, but God NOT the author of evil)
 

Suffering used by God to accomplish His redemptive plan:

  - 1) brings good ultimately (Romans 8:28, Gen. 50:20, Acts 2:23)
  - 2) punishes sin (David & Bathsheba’s baby died in 2 Sam. 12)
  - 3) prevents sin (Paul’s thorn in the flesh, 2 Cor. 12:7-8);
  - 4) produces perseverance(deeper faith/trust) and hope (Romans 5:1-5)
  - 5) tests our faith (see Book of Job)
  - 6) prepares us to comfort others who are suffering (2 Cor. 1:3-5)
  - 7) God’s power & glory displayed (man born blind in John 9:1-3)
  - 8) advances the Gospel (Paul in chains, Phil. 1:12-14)