

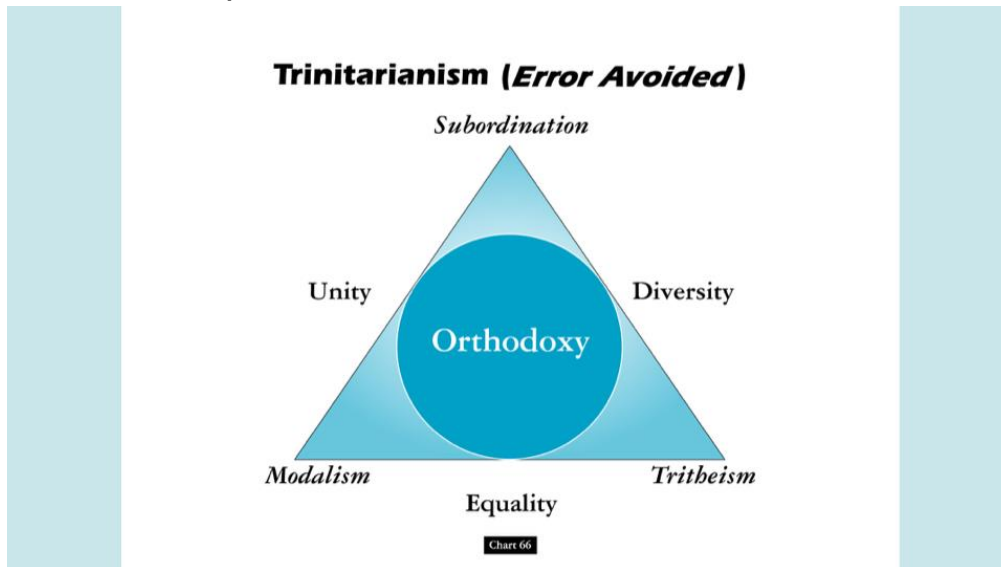
The History and Explanation of the Formulation of the Trinity or Tri-Unity of God.

Preliminary Assumptions

1. The Bible did not come to us in an assembled form nor with a glossary of terms.
2. The great doctrines of our Faith were not created by our scholars and communicators but derived from the witness of the Scriptures to them in the context of explaining the Faith to believers as well as their replies to spurious teachings from well-meaning teachers and enemies of the church.
3. It must also be remembered that God has revealed Himself truly to us in the Incarnate One but not completely because there is an infinite gap between the wisdom of God and the capacity of human comprehension. We learn through analogies, word-pictures, but what are they? They are earthly words employed to declare an incomprehensible message. God has not will for us to possess infinite wisdom, yet the Spirit's work to give us wonderful glimpses of heaven. We do not have all the answers (e.g. the age of rocks, but we can still know the Rock of Ages!).
4. If the earliest believers did not have all the answers that we have come to possess through the collective of witness of those who came before us, is there a clue even in that realization? If all believers across the ages will join us in the realization of God's promises in heaven, what does it tells us is the essence of the gospel? What is in common to all of us is the Spirit's revelation individually that Jesus brought to us, through His death, life (the Spirit being that life). What is common for all of us is that Jesus came from heaven to reveal God's love for us and exemplified it in the only way it could be ours, by the substitute of one who is God (finitude cannot not meet the criteria of infinitude, to forgive us required one who is God Himself since only God can meet God's standard of righteousness with surrendering His justice). Doctrine should increase our faith, error never does, yet we must remember what Jesus accomplished is the

revelation of a love story, the love of the infinite God! Kent Hughes, former pastor of the Wheaton Bible Church, wrote, “Our salvation does not depend on the formulation of... [a] doctrine but in our experience of it.” “The heart has ways of knowing the mind knows not of (Blaise Pascal).”

5. Finally, the church sought understanding not by posing: “How can this be?” but “Who must Jesus have been to bring us the salvation that He brought us?” The lens of doing theology was conformity to the person and accomplishments of Jesus!

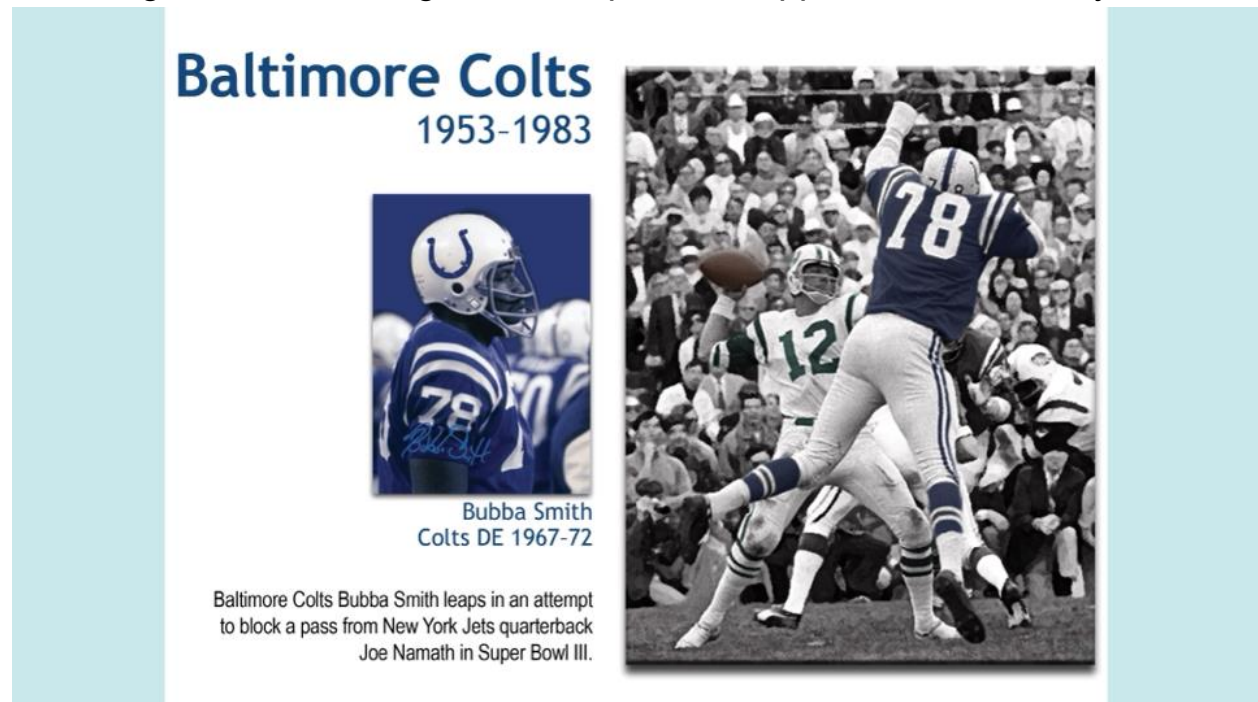


The Earliest Centuries

1. The triadic formula appears only twice in Holy Scripture (Matt. 28:19, II Cor. 13:14) and the earliest churchmen did not speculate on the implications of it.
2. They embraced the preexistence of Christ recognizing that He spoke through the Spirit in the Psalms.
3. Ignatius declares that He is “our God” describing Christ as “God incarnate” and “God manifest as man” (*To the Ephesians* 7:2; 19:3). II Clement opened his letter by advising readers (1:1) to “think of Jesus as of God, as of the judge of the living and dead.”

The Catalyst for Explaining the Relationship of Father to Son.

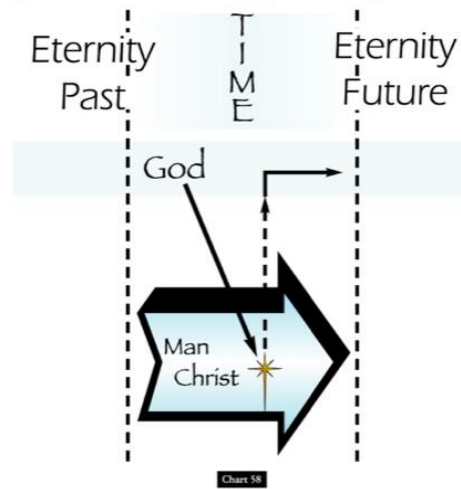
1. It seems that often the pathway to clarity comes from knowing what is errant. Seeking to explain the person of Christ by false explanations made the churchmen think more clearly. We often know that a view is wrong without knowing how to express its opposite more clearly.



2. Two major errors, inaccurate explanations, emerged in the church that brought some clarity. The question that the false teachers had an answer was this: “How can you defend Monotheism (“our God is one God”), avoid the charge of polytheism, and accord specialness to Jesus?”
 - a. Adoptionism argued Jesus was a human being but at His baptism the power of God came upon Him and elevated him to a unique status. This was condemned at the Synod of Antioch in 269.

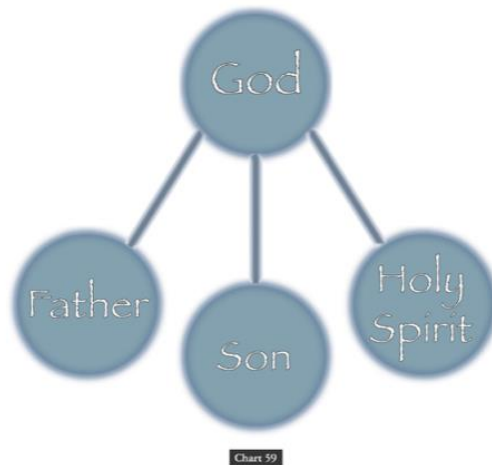
Denial of co-equality of Father and Son destroys salvation because God would have to suspend His justice and accept a lesser penalty for our forgiveness.

Adoptionism: An Attempt to Explain Christ



- b. Modalism or Patripassionism, argued that God metamorphized Himself into the appearance of the son coming down “into the virgin, was Himself born of her, Himself suffered, indeed, was Himself Jesus Christ (Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 1. 2).”

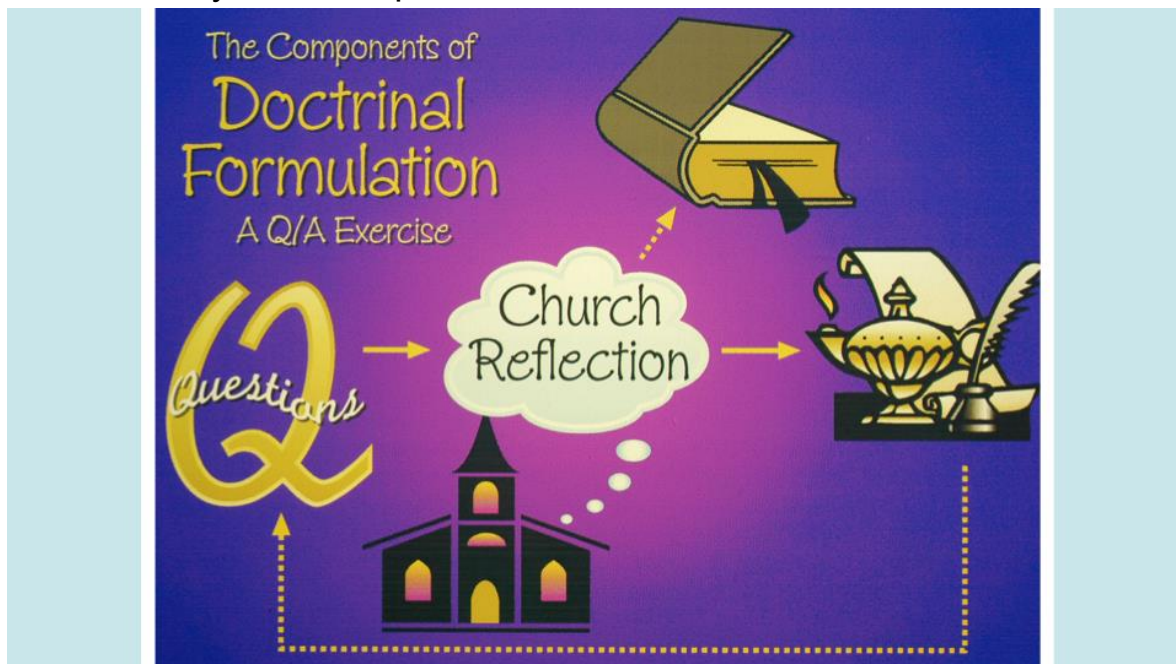
Modalism: An Attempt to Explain Christ



Denial of distinctions of person makes the offended become the adjudicator. Jesus should have said on the cross, “Myself, Myself, why have I forsaken Myself.” The Father did not pay the debt that had to be paid, an equal in character (one perfect) is required. “God is just and the justifier... (Rom. 3:26),” not the procurer of our forgiveness. The cause was that justice was requited by another who is equal.

3. The Resolution

- a. While some churchmen did respond to criticize the above views, the lack of status in the empire did not allow the church to speak publicly. Irenaeus stated, “The Father is God, and the Son is God, for whatever is begotten of God is God (*To Autolycus*, 2. 25).” Tertullian, who coined the term “Trinity,” wrote, “Everywhere I hold one substance in three cohering.... All are of one, by unity of substance... (*Against Praxeas*, 12).”
- b. The coming of the church’s change of status in the empire (tolerated, then the state religion (310, 381) brought with it the opportunity to gather all the bishops to resolve issues the impaired unity in the empire.



- 1) The Council of Nicaea (325) gathered under the direction of Constantine I with 318 bishops attending in the emperor’s summer palace near the yet-unfinished new capital, Constantinople.
 - a) The immediate issue was the teaching of Arius, a presbyter from Alexandria, who argued that the distinction between the Father and Son could be defended by embracing the view that Jesus was a created being, but created in eternity. Arius stated, ““God was not always Father; but there was when

God was alone and was not yet Father; afterward He became a Father... (Quoted by Athanasius in *Orations Against Arius*, 1. 2).

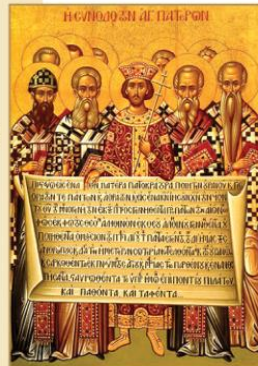
- b) The bishops responded with the affirmation that Jesus was very God, coequal with the Father.
- c) Without co-equity our salvation would be impossible unless God ceased to be God surrendering His righteousness and justness. What salvation would that be?

The Nicene Creed (325)

We believe in one God, the Father All Governing, creator of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence [reality] of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence [reality] as the Father, through Whom all things came into being, both in heaven and in earth; Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, becoming human. He suffered and the third day He rose, and ascended in the heavens. And He will come to judge both the living and the dead.

And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit...



2) The Council of Constantinople (381)

- a) Because Arianism proved difficult to extinguish, 150 bishops gathered at the new capital of the empire to speak to the issue again.

The Creed of Constantinople (381)

We believe in one God, the Father All Governing [*pantokrator*], creator [*poieter*] of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;

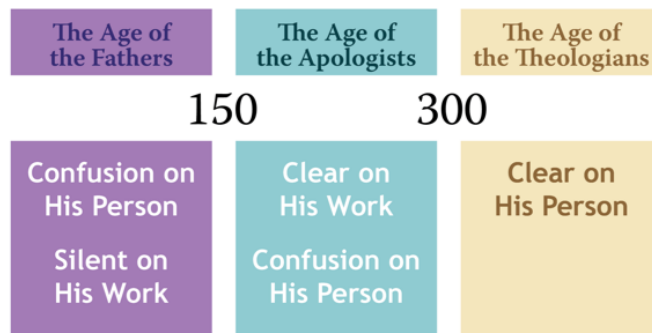
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time [*pro panton ton aionon*], Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created [*poiethenta*], of the same essence [reality] as the Father [*homoousion to patri*], through Whom all things came into being, Who for us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human [*enanthropesanta*]. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His Kingdom shall have no end [*telos*].

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and Son, Who spoke through the prophets;

And in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. *Amen.*

The Recognition of the Co-equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The History of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit



Reflection of the person of the Holy Spirit was not a focal topic in the early church. Some writers saw Him in a hierarchy below the angelic host and others as the mere expression of God's power.

1. The Context

The catalysts that brought the issue to the forefront were: the elevated status as the empire's religion under Theodosius I (381), the Council of Nicaea (325), and the teachings of a prominent bishop.

2. Macedonius, the Semi-Arian Bishop of Constantinople, taught that there were three gradated persons in the Godhead (the Father, the Son, and [then] the Spirit).

3. The Clarification

The understanding that the Son was co-equal with God (Nicaea, 325) raised the question that clarified the issue (again it is an understanding brought about by contemplating the doctrine of salvation). If the acceptance by God in the atoning work of Christ had to be consistent with God's character, Jesus had to be God. If the Spirit is the gift that Christ purchased for us, meaning the very life of God, the Spirit must be co-equal with the Father and Son. Macedonius was condemned in 362 and 381.

The Creed of Constantinople (381)

We believe in one God, the Father All Governing [*pantokratora*], creator [*poietai*] of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time [*pro panton ton aionon*], Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created [*poiethenta*], of the same essence [reality] as the Father [*homoousion to patri*], through Whom all things came into being, Who for us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human [*enanthropesanta*]. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His Kingdom shall have no end [*telos*].

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and Son, Who spoke through the prophets;

And in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. *Amen*.

Trinitarianism (*Error Avoided*)

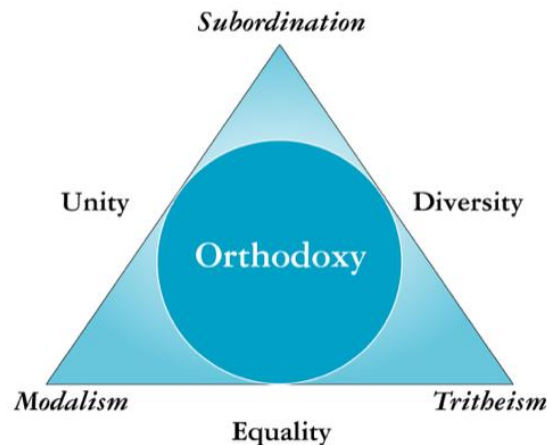


Chart 66