

**THE DOCTRINE OF GOD**  
**Part V: The German and American Rationalist**

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**I. INTRODUCTION.**

In the last few lectures our focus has been upon the development of Theology Proper, particularly trinitarianism. The fertile period for the delineation of that doctrine was in the fourth century through Athanasius and the Cappadocians that led to the final triumph over Arianism at Constantinople in 381 A.D. Attack upon this fundamental plank of Christianity (the plural unity of God) was not seriously questioned until the Post-Reformation era in the emergence of Socinianism, Deism, and Unitarianism. These theological re-evaluations, themselves the product and harbinger of Enlightened Rationalism, were a precursor of the theological restructuring that would follow in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries.

The purpose of this lesson is to trace the highlights of the development of the doctrine of God in the Modern Era. The stress is not so much upon trinitarianism as the more fundamental issue of theism. The reality of God was verified through inward experience within the context of a Kantian world.

## II. THE ANTHRO-THEISM OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY GERMAN THEOLOGIANS.

As indicated previously, the Post-Reformation era experienced a shift from a theistic world view to an anthropocentrism which was the result of the reinterpretation of life and its meaning through the humanism of the “Scientific Method.”

**N.B.** This is said in no degree to demean the “Scientific Method” as such. The error was not in the method, but to the sphere in which the method was applied. Hard, concrete data, which is the vital ingredient of Baconian empiricism, is unavailable in the sphere of the supernatural. Rationalism is excellent when applied to nature, critically short in the sphere of the supernatural. It simply restricts access to a sphere of available knowledge.

In the realm of Bible study, the scientific method can apply in the sense that the Bible provides the data and man uses his reason to understand, classify, and categorize the data, but not to validate the existence of God or the data. When Western man attempts to justify and validate the existence of God or the data in the Bible apart from either, then it inevitably results in the destruction of both.

Mention has already been made of the following key figures:

1. **Rene Descartes** began his search for knowledge in universal doubt, not skepticism, and sustained religion from the “idea” of religion (reason, not logic!).
2. **John Locke** and **Thomas Hobbes** rejected Cartesianism with its philosophic innate ideas for a form of empiricism (here revelation is not denied; it is limited to experience!).
3. **Immanuel Kant** rejected both Cartesian innateness and Lockean empiricism for a mediating position. Knowledge comes to us from an interplay between ideas within and sense perceptions of the external.

**N.N.B.B.** The point of all this is that a philosophic shift brought about a major reorientation of theology. The mind was set free from revelation upon which it had been dependent for truth (i.e., the Christian Era [323–1650 A.D.]). The steps in the process were four:

1. The prelude to the Enlightenment was not a conscientious effort to change Orthodoxy, but came from an attempt to show “the faith” consistent with the Scriptures. Reason was not elevated, but used. In apologetics, a

dualism was introduced between reason and revelation (i.e., Aquinas). This led to a “two book of knowledge” theory: revelation and nature.

2. Reason or religious consciousness was put on par with revelation: All truth is God’s truth. Reason and creation is no longer under the authority of Scripture but are know equal with the authority of Scripture.
3. Reason usurped revelation (i.e., revelation defined the meaning of our ideas concerning God and liberty, immortality and morality). This left the nineteenth century with these remarkable features: inward authority, moralism, optimism, and pelagianism.
4. The extreme of the approach is to reduce Christianity to virtues. Twentieth century religions of experientialism are a reaction to the nineteenth century elevation of reason!

A. **Frederick Schleiermacher (1768–1834).**

1. **Schleiermacher and Religion.** Schleiermacher’s presentation of religion is clearly within the framework of the prevailing philosophy of his day (i.e., Kantianism). Religion begins in man, not in God, which to him was the traditional approach. Barth commented (*From Rousseau to Ritschl*, 340): “Schleiermacher reversed the order of this thought. What interests him is the question of man’s action in regard to God. We must not condemn him for this out of hand. If we call to mind the entire situation of theology in the modern world then we shall find it understandable that it fastened upon the point which had come to the centre of the entire thought of modern man. This point was simply man himself. This shifting of interest did not necessarily have to mean man without God, man in his own world. It could also mean man in the presence of God, his action over against God’s action. A genuine, proper theology could be built up from such a starting-point. We may ask the question whether it was a good thing that Schleiermacher adapted himself to the trend of the time in this way and took up his position at the spot where he was invited to do so by the prevalence of the Copernican world-picture, by its execution during the Enlightenment, by Kant, by Goethe, by Romanticism, and by Hegel.”

Pfleiderer stated the same points, but clarifies Schleiermacher’s somewhat facile meditating position between supernatural and natural religion (*The Development of Theology*, 103-104): “He

took up, therefore, a position opposed to the standpoint of the Supernaturalists, on the one hand, by conceiving the Christian faith not as a doctrinal authority given us from without, but as an inward condition of our own self-consciousness, which must be connected with the remaining contents of our consciousness and the laws of our mind. On this point Schleiermacher occupies completely the position of modern idealism, for which there can be no truth that does not rise out of and answer to the human mind. On the other hand, he maintained, in opposition to the Rationalists, the view that the Christian faith is not a product of rational thinking, but a condition of the heart, a feeling preceding thought and supplied independently of it; moreover, a feeling not of the devout individual only, but of the Christian, or specifically of the Protestant Church; accordingly a fact not merely of individual experience, but of the common experience of a historical community; an experience, therefore, which, like all positive experiences in history, must be received and intelligently described, while it cannot and may not be reasoned away.”

**N.B.** Because of this approach to religion, which Barth correctly said was not necessarily in error, but proved to be because of other, far more questionable presuppositions, little is given by the 19th century on the nature and purpose of God. He was out of focus for that era.

This is why Schleiermacher defines religion as “the feeling of absolute dependence” on God. The stress is not God, but human consciousness of God (something “*sui generis*”), a God-consciousness most perfectly displayed by the man Christ.

2. **Schleiermacher and Theology Proper.** His proportional stress on the doctrine of God is evident in his systematic theology by placing it as the last subject that he takes up. In short, Schleiermacher explains the trinity modalistically, and justifies it by appealing to Sabellius. The trinity is a tirade of God-consciousness. He wrote (*The Christian Faith*, II, 751) evidencing classic modalism: “The designation of the First Person as Father, as well as the relations of the First Person to the other two Persons, seems rather to set forth the relation of the Persons to the unity of the Essence than to be consistent with the equality of the three Persons. Here the question really comes to be, whether it was right at the outset to give the name

‘Son of God’ solely to the divine in Christ, and to relate the term ‘Father’ to one of the distinctions in the Divine Essence and not rather to the unity of the Divine Essence as such. If it transpires that by ‘Son of God’ Scripture always and exclusively means the whole Christ Himself, and recognizes no difference between ‘God,’ as denoting the Supreme Being, and ‘the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ but uses the latter name in exactly the same sense as the former, we should then have to try whether a similar question might not be raised with regard to the Holy Spirit, with a similar answer, leading to such forms of statement as would solve our second difficulty. If the results of both problems combined in one, a new construction could easily be arrived at; if otherwise, we should have to seek new solutions, as we could, of the remaining differences. This is of itself a sufficient explanation why we are here unable to go beyond these indications in such a way as to complete the whole task.”

He argued for Modalism from Scripture, systematics, and the ancient theologians as follows (*The Christian Faith*. II, 746-47): “If we now consider the manner in which this doctrine is handled almost everywhere in dogmatic expositions, it becomes still clearer to how slight an extent what is insisted on in general formulae may be given effect to in the developed statement. In the first place, the doctrine of the Essence and attributes of God is treated apart from the trinity, God being considered in His unity. Here, however, the particular attribute under consideration is not shown within the unity, as truly divided or separated in a definite way. Instead, the doctrine of the Persons is later treated of by itself, apart from any such connexion and without being prepared for by the consciousness of the being of God in Christ and in the Christian Church. It is so treated of, however, that when it is shown that this or that attribute also belongs to the three Persons, the proof is specially led only for the Son and the Spirit, while that it belongs to the Father is usually held to be self-evident. But if the equality of the Persons is asserted not merely as a formula but as an operative rule, such self-evidence must hold either of all three Persons or of none. The pre-eminence given to the Father in this respect proves that He is after all conceived as standing in a different relation to the unity of the Essence; so that those who feel it to be superfluous to prove that divine attributes and activities belong to the Father, while they insist on proof for the Son and the Spirit, are all of them far from being strict Trinitarians; for they identify the Father with the unity of the

Divine Essence, but not the Son or the Spirit. This can be traced right back to the idea of Origen, that the Father is God absolutely, while Son and Spirit are God only by participation in the Divine Essence—an idea which is positively rejected by orthodox Church teachers, but secretly underlies their whole procedure.”

Again, he wrote (*The Christian Faith*, II, 750): “The first unsolved difficulty lies in the relation of the unity of the Essence to the trinity of the Persons; and here everything depends on the original and eternal existence of distinctions within the Divine Essence. Hence it would first be necessary to inquire whether this idea is so clearly and definitely present in passages of the New Testament that we are bound to regard it as a self-descriptive utterance of Christ and of the divine Spirit that guided the thinking of the Apostles. Of this there can scarcely be a better test than to ask whether these passages could not also be explained by the Sabellian view set up in opposition to our ecclesiastical interpretation. If this question must be answered in the negative, nothing is left but to try whether the ecclesiastical doctrine would not, without injury to the essential presuppositions mentioned above, be stated in formulae which should not contradict the Biblical passages and yet should avoid the rocks on which the ecclesiastical presentation comes to grief. If, on the other hand, the question can be answered affirmatively, so that it is no longer possible to hold that the ecclesiastical doctrine, even if not purely exegetical in origin, can at least be sustained by purely exegetical proof, then the Athanasian hypothesis simply on a par with the Sabellian.”

Perhaps the best summary of Schleiermacher’s position is given by Pfleiderer when he wrote (*The Development of Theology*, 122): “At the end of the work is added a section on the Trinity. It follows of itself from what has already been said on Schleiermacher’s doctrine as to the divine attributes, that he could not acknowledge hypostatic distinctions in the Divine Being. His dialectical critique of the ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity is as admirable as the historical estimate of the various motives which led to the construction of this doctrine is unsatisfactory. It is undoubtedly correct that the doctrine is not a direct utterance as to the Christian self-consciousness, but only a combination of several of such, namely, of our union with God by the revelation of Christ, and by the common spirit of the Christian Church. Schleiermacher explains, therefore, the

Trinity modalistically of the various forms of the revelation of God, and justifies his procedure by an appeal to the early example of the Sabellians.”

**N.B.** The Theology Proper of the entire nineteenth century falls back to a blurring of either of the Monarchian errors of the second and third centuries.

**B. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72).**

A progression, perhaps it would be better to say a retrogression, from Schleiermacher’s thought is that of Feuerbach who holds that religion is an idealistic fiction without any actual truth (i.e., he is the precursor of the Modern Positivists and Agnostics). He held that only what is knowable through the senses, what is material, is real; even in man, the spiritual is only an effect of the sensible (i.e., religion is a foolish aberration, a mental disorder!).

**N.B.** As noted at the outset of this study, trinitarianism was only an afterthought to the nineteenth century. The major issue was the credibility of theism.

1. **Feuerbach and Religion.** In short, Feuerbach was a disciple of Strauss’ approach to the Bible (mythology). Barth states (*Essay*, xii): “Feuerbach views the Kantian and Hegelian philosophies as sharing damnation with theology: only they dissolved the divine being who was separated from man in thought or reason [categorical imperative or Geist]: at the same time they separated essence all the more sharply from material, sensuous existence from the world, from man.” He, like Freud, begins his religion with this sentence: “I am a real, a sensuous, a material being: yes, the body in its totality is my Ego, myself itself.” Truth is only the sum of life and being. He reasoned that in community (that is, as he knows others) he can know God (“Man with man—the unity of I and thou—is God”).
2. **Feuerbach and Theology Proper.** As you may surmise Feuerbach denies all shades of theism (“the fantastic projection of theology”) for anthrotheism (“The ego attains consciousness of the world through the consciousness of the Thou. Thus man is the God of man. That he exists at all he has to thank nature, that he is man, he has to thank man”).

In the first section of the *Essence of Christianity* he shows that the true meaning of theology is in its stating the identity of all predicates of the divine subject and the human subject (i.e., I am a man; I have love. Therefore, God is love and whatever else I predicate of myself is God). That is, he reverses the subjects of theology to predicate the being of God (e.g., when I say God is righteous, Feuerbach would reverse it and say, "righteousness is what I think God is"). Thus to Feuerbach God is merely an extension of himself. "While I do reduce theology to anthropology," he wrote, "I exalt anthropology to theology; very much as Christianity while lowering God into man, made man into God." Pfleiderer wrote (*The Development of Theology*, 135): "The final consequences of Strauss's position were inferred by Feuerbach. Strauss did not go beyond an idealistic pantheism, which, while it gave up the God of religion, at least assumed a universal spiritual principle, an 'idea' which realises itself in the finite, evolves nature from itself, and becomes conscious of itself in man; and in this Feuerbach recognised a remnant of mysticism which must be got rid of; the Absolute above man he declared to be an empty abstraction, the really Absolute or Divine is man himself. All and every system of theology, not excepting speculative theology, must therefore be superseded by anthropology. But if man alone is divine, how can he come to believe in and worship a God? Feuerbach answers that the conception of God is an illusion, formed of the wishes of the heart and of the poetic imagination. The gods are Wunschwesen, i.e., the wishes and ideals of the human heart objectified by the imagination. In them man contemplates his own nature, not as it really is, held in by the limitation of the world, but as he wishes it to be, as the unlimited omnipotence of feeling. Religious faith is the self-assurance of the heart demanding the satisfaction of its desires. A miracle is the realisation (of course the imagined realisation) of a supernatural wish. Christ is the omnipotence of subjectivity, the reality of all the wishes of the heart; the conception of an incarnate God is the disclosure of the truth, that the nature of God is simply man. So also the Christian heaven means, just like the Christian God, the fulfillment of all wishes. Immortality is the testament of religion, in which it makes its last will; as heaven is the unfolded nature of the Deity, it is also the frankest declaration of the inmost thoughts of religion."

**N.B.** Needless to say, trinitarianism is not a subject to broach with Feuerbach!!



C. **Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89).**

1. **Ritschl and Religion.** Ritschl is heavily influenced by Kantianism (God is knowable by my reason), but also evidences shades of the existentialism of Schleiermacher and Feuerbach. Religion in essence is the “common recognition of the dependence of man on God.” He rejected Schleiermacher’s “innateness” (givenness) and supernaturalism. Using Bauer’s Bible and the life of Christ, religious truth is knowable through “value judgments (i.e., existential decisions through the community)” (that is with conceptions of our relation to the world which are of moment solely according to their value in awakening feelings of pleasure or pain as our dominion over the world is furthered or checked). He wrote: “In all religion, by the help of the sublime spiritual Power which man adores, the solution is attempted of the contradiction in which man finds himself placed as a part of nature, in subjection to it, dependent upon and checked by other things, but as spirit he is moved by the impulse to maintain his independence against external things. In these circumstances arises religion as a belief in superior spiritual powers by whose help the deficiencies in man’s own power are supplied.”
  
2. **Ritschl and Theology Proper.** All religion seeks to supplement, by means of the idea of God, man’s sense of personal dignity in the face of the hindrances of the world. Hence, to Ritschl, the thought of God is simply a value judgment, or is a conception valuable for the attainment of goods (Feuerbachian—God was invented by man out of his practical need of a supplement to his own powerlessness over nature; but, he reacts against Feuerbach to say that God has objective existence.)

Pfleiderer wrote (*The Development of Theology*, 186-87): “In accordance with his principle that the Christian thought of God must be put forward only in judgments of value, Ritschl teaches that God should be thought of only as love. All metaphysical statements regarding God’s absoluteness, his existence through himself, in himself, and for himself, must be rejected as ‘heathenish metaphysics,’ connected with the false theory of knowledge which maintains the existence of things irrespective of our conception of them. The idealistic subjectification of the idea of God on the lines of Feuerbach seems a necessary

consequence of this. Such is not, however, Ritschl's intention; on the contrary, he seeks to conceive of the personality of God as objectively real. That this involves the assertion of an absolute existence of God in himself, as distinguished from his existence in relation to us, or his love, is plain, but is not admitted by Ritschl. He says that the attribute of personality is only the form for God's love. If this proposition were taken strictly, it would finally come to mean that our conception of the personality of God is the form under which we personify love as 'God,' which is the view of Feuerbach and the Positivists. But Ritschl does not mean this; indeed, he speaks also of an 'intrinsic purpose of God,' into which God takes up the purpose of the world, or which he realises in the education of the human race for the kingdom of God. But such a purpose is a relation of the will to itself, and therefore presupposes a being which is not solely love, that is, existing for other, but exists also as a subject in and for itself. This inner self-subsistence of God, with his loving communication of himself, is not merely a necessary metaphysical conception, but also of great religious importance, since it is the foundation, as Dorner has well remarked, of the Biblical conception of God's holiness and righteousness, which in the teaching of the Bible and the Church is inseparable from that of his love. But this side of the idea of God is altogether neglected by Ritschl. He said: 'In comparison with the conception of love there is no other of equal value. In particular this holds of the conception of holiness, which in its Old Testament sense is, for several reasons, not valid in Christianity, and the use of which in the New Testament is obscure.' And with regard to God's righteousness, in which, according to Biblical doctrine, his holiness is actively shown, Ritschl (like Hofmann) considers that it is 'his action for the salvation of the members of his religious community, and is identical in fact with grace.'"

**N.B.** Karl Barth has accurately summarized nineteenth century theology as a "monologue of the soul with its own divinity." Anthropocentrism was the hermeneutic of that century; God was humanized; and Theology Proper became (Trinitarianism) an unnecessary, irrelevant subject.

### III. THE THEISM OF KARL BARTH.

The tremendous influence of Karl Barth has already been alluded to as his teachings often provided a helpful corrective to nineteenth century anthrotheism. Barth reversed the century's trend toward the humanization of God as a personification of man's needs. To him, God was transcendent (Wholly Other!). Barth reversed the thought-framework of German theology by stressing the deity of God!

**N.B.** In reality, however, God was made so transcendent that he became lost to mankind in a historical-objective sense. He developed a biblical concept of God, but not a balanced one. God was lost in outer space apart from a subjective, existential encounter. His concept of God was far better than the nineteenth century's, but the basis of knowledge, like the nineteenth century, is still divorced from history and became subjective (i.e., facts are not important to anyone but me, I determine validity within the context of the encounter).

With Barth's interest in theism, it is not surprising that he discussed at length the doctrine of God (two volumes in *Church Dogmatics*).

- A. **Barth speaks of the unity and equality of Essence.** At this point Barth speaks about the "oneness in threeness" and therefore argues that God's oneness is not only not abolished by the threeness of the persons, but that his unity consists much more precisely in the threeness of the persons. He wrote (*Church Dogmatics*. I, 1.402): "Of this essence of God it must now be said that the unity of it is not only not removed by the threeness of the 'Persons,' but that it is rather in the threeness of the 'Persons' that its unity consists. Whatever is to be said about this threeness, it can by no means signify the threeness of the essence. Three-in-oneness in God does not mean a threefold deity, either in the sense of a plurality of deities or in the sense of the existence of a plurality of individuals or parts within the one deity. The name of Father, Son, and Spirit means that God is the one God in a threefold repetition; and that in such a way, that this repetition itself is grounded in His Godhead; hence in such a way that it signifies no alteration in His Godhead; but also in such a way that only in this repetition is He the one God; in such a way that His Godhead stands or falls with the fact that in this repetition He is God; but also precisely for the reason that in each repetition He is the one God."
- B. **Barth prefers to speak of three "modes of existence" rather than "Persons."** In fairness to Barth, he is not evidencing Modalism at this point because he does not speak of three modes of singular manifestation! Barth likewise clearly rejected Sabellianism! He wrote (*Church Dogmatics*. I, 1, 407-08, 413): "The concept of the revealed

unity of the revealed God thus does not exclude but includes a distinction (*distinctio* or *discretio*), an arrangement (*dispositio* or *oeconomia*), in the essence of God. This distinction or arrangement is the distinction or arrangement of the three “persons”—we prefer to say, the three “modes of being” in God. In the opening sentence of our section we avoided the concept “Person.” Neither was it on its introduction into ecclesiastical language made sufficiently clear, nor has the subsequent interpretation, imparted to it and enforced as a whole in medieval and post-Reformation scholasticism, really issued in such a clearing up, nor has the introduction of the modern concept of personality into this debate produced anything else but fresh confusion. The situation would be hopeless if our task here were to state the proper meaning of “Person” in the doctrine of the Trinity. Fortunately that is not our task. But, of course, the difficulties in which we see ourselves involved regarding a concept once for all become classical, are but a symptom of the difficulty of the question generally, which has to be answered here one way or the other . . . The statement “God is one in three modes of being, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” thus means that the one God, i.e., the one Lord, the one personal God is what He is not in one mode only, but—we appeal in support simply to the result of our analysis of the biblical concept of revelation—in the mode of the Father, in the mode of the Son, in the mode of the Holy Spirit.

**N.B.** This distinction must be held in balance because the self-distinctions in the divine being pertaining particularly to personality do imply an “I” (thou, He) so that there is communication between the persons of the Godhead.

Barth is quite Orthodox when he defines the Trinity as follows (*Church Dogmatics*. I, 1.353): “We mean by the doctrine of the Trinity, in a general and preliminary way, the proposition that He whom the Christian Church calls God and proclaims as God, therefore the God who has revealed Himself according to the witness of Scripture, is the same in unimpaired unity, yet also the same in unimpaired variety thrice in a different way. Or, in the phraseology of the dogma of the Trinity in the Church, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the Bible’s witness to revelation are the one God in the unity of their essence, and the one God in the Bible’s witness to revelation is in the variety of His Persons the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

C. **Barth acknowledges that his doctrine of the Trinity goes beyond the Bible.** Barth’s analysis of the Trinity is two-fold (*Church Dogmatics*. I, 1.437): “The problem pointing to the Church doctrine of

the Trinity, which we imagine we see set up in the Bible, consists of the fact that there the being, language, and action, and therefore the self-revelation of God is described throughout by the moments of His self-veiling or His self-unveiling or His self-impartation to man, that His characteristic attributes are holiness, mercy, and love, that His characteristic proofs in the NT are indicated by Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost, and accordingly His name indicated as that of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are of equal essence and therefore in an equal sense God Himself. And the other express declaration is also lacking, that God is God thus and only thus, i.e., as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These two express declarations, which go beyond the witness of the Bible, are the twofold content of the Church doctrine of the Trinity.”

He is clear in what he knows the Trinity is not (*Church Dogmatics*. I, 1.437-39): “The doctrine of the Trinity means on the one hand, as the denial of subordinationism, the express statement that the three moments do not mean a more and a less in the Godness of God. The Father is not to be regarded as the proper God as distinguished from the Son and from the Spirit, and Son and Spirit are not, as distinguished from the Father, favoured and glorified creatures, powers of life aroused and set in motion by God, and as such and in this sense revealers. But it is God who reveals Himself in a like manner as the Father in His self-veiling and holiness, as He does as the Son in His self-unveiling and mercy, and as the Spirit in His self-impartation and love. Father, Son, and Spirit are the one, single, and equal God. The Subject of revelation attested by the Bible, of whatever nature His being, language, and action may be, is the one Lord, not a half-god, either descended or ascended. But on the other hand, the doctrine of the Trinity means, as the denial of modalism, the expressed declaration that those three elements are not foreign to the Godness of God... Modalism in the last resort means the denial of God.”

**N.B.** Thus Barth has a clear, Orthodox understanding of Theology Proper! The only weakness of import is his identification of the Spirit as Redeemer—this appears to be a confusion of the application of redemption with the procurement of the same!

#### **IV. THE ANTHRO-THEISM OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN THEOLOGIANS.**

The theology of the nineteenth century has reproduced itself in the United

States in both Classic Liberalism (1890–1930) and Neo-Liberalism (1930–60) forms, so that to repeat the same views in the Americans is unnecessary. This section will therefore focus on the concept of God in three manifestations of “radical theology.”

### A. Tillich and the Trinity

Paul Tillich (1886–1965) was the fountainhead of what has been labeled the “Theology of Being” which is actually quite reminiscent of Feuerbach. God to Tillich is essentially “our ultimate concern.” Tillich rejects the concept of a personal God understanding that the term is “symbolic” (*Systematic Theology*. I, 244). He wrote (*Systematic Theology*. I, 245): “Personal God’ does not mean that God is a person. It means that God is the ground of everything personal and that he carries within himself the ontological power of personality. He is not a person, but he is no less than personal . . . classical theology employed the term persona for the trinitarian hypostases but not for God himself. God became ‘a person’ only in the nineteenth century, in connection with the Kantian separation of nature ruled by physical law from personality ruled by moral law.”

The original function of the doctrine of the Trinity was “to express in three central symbols the self-manifestation of God to man, opening up the depth of the divine abyss and giving answer to the question of the meaning of existence” (*Systematic Theology*. III, 291). “The mystery ceased to be the eternal mystery of the ground of being; it became instead the riddle of an unsolved theological problem and in many cases, as shown before, the glorification of an absurdity in numbers. In this form it became a powerful weapon for ecclesiastical authoritarianism and the suppression of the searching mind.”

In short, Tillich then states that the Trinity was produced by man to meet his needs (*Systematic Theology*. III, 285-86): “Man’s predicament, out of which the existential question arises, must be characterized by three concepts: finitude with respect to man’s essential being as a creature, estrangement with respect to man’s existential being in time and space, ambiguity with respect to man’s participation in life universal. The questions arising out of man’s finitude are answered by the doctrine of the Christ and the symbols applied to it. The questions arising out of the ambiguities of life are answered by the doctrine of the Spirit and its symbols. Each of these answers expresses that which is a matter of ultimate concern in symbols derived from particular revelatory experiences.”

Therefore to Tillich the term “Father” is a symbol of concern and care in an alienated world, the term “son” is the symbol of “the self-sacrifice of his finite particularity” (*Systematic Theology*. III, 293-94) and the “Spirit” is a synthesis of the other two. God and Christ (the window to God) is my mental projection of my sense of need for stability in the life existence! In summary, Killen wrote of Tillich's concept of God (*Ontological Theology of Paul Tillich*, 132): “The purpose of Tillich’s argument against the personality of God is not simply to express that there are three persons in the Godhead, and to correct the way that the Godhead itself can be rather carelessly spoken of as a person, but rather to prove that there is not any ‘person’ in the Godhead let alone ‘three persons.’”

## B. Altizer and the Trinity

Thomas J. J. Altizer became quite popular in the 1960s as a leader in the “Secularization of God Movement” by writing a much-read text entitled, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*. Altizer adopts Hegel’s idea of the historical evolvment of God (a forward movement). Such a movement includes three stages which correspond to the three persons of the Trinity; in reality Altizer has no concept of God (Secularized Theology). First, there was what he calls a “universal being” but (second) in the dialectical process He ceased to be himself and became Christ (“God who emptied himself into Christ,” 90). This Christ is an intermediary being, the “universal humanity.” Third, the Spirit is a synthesis of the sacred God and profane humanity. The spirit is total “self-consciousness.”

**N.B.** God ceased to be a person (i.e., his view is worse than Feuerbach’s, at least God was man!); the trinity did not hold Altizer’s interest at all. The dialectical triad consists chronologically of the premordeal God who serves as the thesis, the second triad is the incarnate Word which serves as the antithesis; then the third in the triad, the spirit is the completion of the synthesis (God is imaginary!). Realizing this, man can usher in “The Great Humanity Divine” or “the Kingdom of God.”

## C. Whitehead and Process Theism

1. The Historic Background: a paradigmatic shift
  - a) The reaction to mechanistic scientism (i.e., Romantic Literature, Philosophical Idealism, Religious Pietism).

- b) The refinement of evolutionary philosophies (i.e., Pragmatism, Bergsonianism).
  - c) The emergence of new theories in mathematics and physics (i.e., Einstein and relativity, Quantum physics).
2. The critique by process theologians of humanism and classic theism: Charles Hartshorne
- a) The total inadequacy of classic theism. Alan Gragg noted (*Charles Hartshorne*, 75): “As far as he is concerned, all atheistic humanisms fail to perceive that humanity cannot support itself alone in an indifferent or hostile universe. Nevertheless, Hartshorne is also a powerful critic of humanism. He repeatedly insists that no form of atheistic humanism could possibly be a satisfactory philosophy for the masses of mankind in the long run.”
  - b) The total inadequacy of classic theism.
    - (1) The perfection of God: If God is absolute (removed, untouched, perfect, total, complete) how can He be related to the world and man?
    - (2) The power of God: If God is all-powerful, how can creatures possess any power?
    - (3) The immutability of God: If he is already totally perfect, how could He change at all?
    - (4) The omniscience of God: If God knows all things as they now are then God is all-knowing. If it means that God knows the future, this is impossible since all non-realities are unknowable.
    - (5) The love of God: If God loves man then he has desires or passions and therefore cannot be absolutely independent and immutable.
    - (6) The abode of God: If God’s love is real, then his bliss cannot be absolute or perfect? If God mourns over man’s state how can we seriously affirm that he dwells in perfect bliss?



## 3. The theological formulation of process thought.

## a) The person and nature of God: A dipolar model.

(1) Primordial nature- abstract and transcendent.  
 “The unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality” (Whitehead, *God and the World*, 88). By this pole, God gives determination, definiteness and orderliness to an indeterminate, indefinite and unordered world (this is God’s subjective goal).

(2) Consequent nature: Concrete and relative.  
 Since all things are relative God must have a consequent nature. Mellert (*What is Process Theology*, 45) says :

“ . . . the primordial nature and the consequent nature of God are not two individual elements, which, as joined together, form the deity. We cannot, at this point, make any meaningful analogies either to the union of the three persons in God or the two natures in Christ. We are speaking here simply of one God, who is represented as an actual entity and who manifests at least two ways in which his divinity is related to the world.”

## b) The attributes of God: a redefinition.

Perfections = God is perfectly related to everything (a functional, not ontological term).

Eternity = everlasting duration

Omnipotence = Cosmological Casual Adequacy (luring, creating the potential for actualization by love).

Immutability = God’s capacity for being changed cannot change

Omniscience= God knows all things actual, not future.

Infinity = there is nothing outside God (i.e., panentheism).

## c) The nature of the Scriptures.

Process theology essentially adopts the methodology of liberal theology in understanding the nature of Scriptures as myth and symbol.

## 4. The formulators of process theism today.

Henry Nelson Wieman - Introduced Whitehead to the University  
of Chicago

Charles Hartshorne - Ashbel Professor of Theology, University  
of Texas

Daniel Day Williams - Paul Tillich Chair of Theology, Union,  
New York

Bernard Loomer

Bernard Meland

Shubert Ogden, *The Reality of God.*

*Christ Without Myth.*

John Cobb, Jr., *Process Theology as Political Theology.*

Norman L. Pittenger, *God in Process.*

Delwin Brown

David Griffin

Don S. Browning

Lewis S. Ford, *The Lure of God.*

## V. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the doctrine of God in nineteenth and twentieth century theology. Two strains become evident in the nineteenth century, both of which are denials of trinitarianism: moderate liberals such as Schleiermacher and Ritschl adopted a monarchian view of the Trinity (mostly Dynamic although Schleiermacher was modalistic) and radical liberals, such as Feuerbach, denied of God's objective reality for an extremist emphasis on immanentism (anthro-theism). In the twentieth century Karl Barth rescued the doctrine of Theology Proper by stressing God's objective reality and transcendence. In America, Classic Liberalism and New Liberalism followed the lead of the moderate German Liberals while the Radical Theologies of the radical 1960s evidenced the anthropocentric-pantheistic extremes of Feuerbach