Integrative Theology

GOD’S PERSON AND CHARACTER
What is God like?
“He is not distributed through space by size so that half of Him should be in half of the world and half in the other half of it. He is wholly present in all of it in such wise as to be wholly in heaven alone and wholly in earth alone, and wholly in heaven and earth together; not confined in any place, but wholly in Himself everywhere.”

Quote from Augustine, Integrative Theology, Lewis & Demarest, pg. 183
Aquinas defined God as the “first unmoved mover, first efficient cause, and absolutely necessary being.”

God is immutable (unchanging) and eternal.

God is everywhere in the threefold sense of His presence, His power, and His substance.
Historic Theology

Protestant Liberalism

- View #1 – God is *despotic*: holding that God is sufficient unto Himself, remote, and insulated from human suffering.
- View #2 – God is *democratic*: God is a Father who feels and suffers with humankind. Thus, God is the undergirding force behind social progress.
Historic Theology

Neo-Orthodox

• Contrary to the *immanent* God of liberal theology, Barth emphasized the *irrevocable otherness* of the God of the Bible.
• Since God and humans are metaphysical opposites, the *invisible* and *ineffable* God is known only by His gracious self-revelation in Christ.
Historic Theology

**Neo-liberalism**
- The relation between God and the world is viewed in terms of the panentheistic model: the reality of God includes within itself the world, but is not exhausted by it.

**Process Theology**
- The only absolute in the world is change; therefore, God is constantly changing.
Fathers, Reformers, Evangelicals

- God is *uncreated*, *noncontingent*, *living*, and *active spirit* who, on the basis of propositional revelation has *partially* (yet truthfully) *represented Himself* in human language.
- He is *invisible*, *timeless*, *everywhere present*, and *impassible* in the sense that He is not moved by external forces contrary to His will.
The imperfect tense of the word “to be” or “to exist” denotes that He ever continues to be Yahweh.

The self-designation declares that the God of Israel is the living, awe-inspiring One who is always active in every experience of His people.

“I AM” (Yahweh) implies 1) God is self-existent, in the sense that He possesses His very nature; 2) He is eternal; and 3) He is unchanging in His person and purposes.
“In Oriental cultures a person’s name is richly descriptive of his character and significance. Hence, the biblical names of God, no less than the acts of God, are revelatory instruments that disclose who God is. To know God’s name is to know God Himself.” *

The first explicit mention of omnipresence (the totality of God being present everywhere in the universe) occurs in 1 Kings 8:27.

Psalm 36:9 declares the self-existence of God.

* Integrative Theology, Lewis and Demarest, pg. 185
Biblical Theology

Johannine Literature

- God is light (1 John 1:5)
- God is spirit (John 4:24)
- God is love (1 John 4:8)
God’s Being: An Invisible, Personal, Living Spirit

God is *invisible*: no one has ever seen Him or ever will (1 Tim. 6:16). People in OT history saw *visions of God, theophanies, and mighty acts of God*, but not HIM.

God is *personal*: the divine Spirit exhibits personal capacities of *self-consciousness*, and *self-determination*. “God can hear the sinner’s cry for mercy, be moved by it, decide to act, and save the lost.” *

God is *indivisible*: The ontological oneness as essential is not torn apart even by the Incarnation, nor even by the death of Jesus.

* Integrative Theology, by Lewis and Demarest, Pg. 196
“Attributes are not accidentals but essential characteristics. According to Scripture, God’s attributes are not outside of God but are predicated on Him.”

“God is holy. God is love. These attribute qualities do not simply describe what God does or how God functions. They define who it is who speaks and acts.” *
God’s love will always be *holy love*, and God’s holiness is always *loving holiness*. Every attribute is equally essential in the divine Being.

* Integrative Theology, by Lewis and Demarest, Pg. 197
Cannot speak or act foolishly
Systematic Theology

Faithful and True

Cannot lie
Systematic Theology

Just

Cannot act unfairly
Systematic Theology

Holy

Cannot be pleased with moral evil
Systematic Theology

Love

Cannot act towards people apart from their best interests
Systematic Theology

Eternal

Cannot die
Systematic Theology

Self-existent

Cannot become dependent on anyone or anything
Immutable

Cannot deny Himself
The Apologetic

The Idol of “Mother Nature”

#1 – the world is *not* self-existent; God *is*.

#2 – the cosmos *had* a beginning and will come to an end; God is *eternal*.

#3 – Nature’s resources are *depleting*; God is *tireless* and *limitless*.

#4 – The world constantly *changes*; God is *immutable*.
The Idol of Energy

#1 – Energy loses its usefulness; God doesn’t.

#2 – the energy of the universe had a beginning and will have an end; God doesn’t.

#3 – the energy of the universe is impersonal; God is personal.

#4 – The energy of the universe is amoral; God is moral.

#5 – energy can be manipulated by human engineering; God will not be manipulated.
The Idol of Humanism

Humanists regard the highest manifestation of energy, evolution or process to be found in mankind.

Human nature is thought to be neither essentially bad nor good, but essentially flexible and educable.

Ethics needs no theological or ideological sanction because it is considered ‘autonomous’ and ‘situational.’
Application

Against Relativising the Absolute

• No church will be able to serve the God of truth with an untrue and diminished view of Him.

• “The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him...The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God.” A.W Tozer
Application

Against Absolutizing the Relative

• The transcendent Creator of the universe is not to be confused with it.

• A right concept of God is basic not only to theology, but to practical Christian living as well.
Application

Pro-Communion, not Ontological Union, with God

• While we may enjoy the blessings of fellowship with God, we will never be or become God.

• Our union with God is relational, not ontological; only in pantheism are all persons ontologically one.
Application

Pro-Change Consistent with God’s Revealed Plans

- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever – but He may choose to use different strategies and methods.
- Any transformation achieved by other agencies or “new consciousness powers” within ourselves can never have the permanence of the eternal life from above.