

Trinity Doctrine Error

A Jewish Analysis



Gerald Sigal

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | 7 |
| 2. PREFACE..... | 9 |
| 3. INTRODUCTION TO THE TRINITY DOCTRINE | 13 |
| 4. EARLY CHRISTIAN USAGE OF MARA' AND KYRIOS AS FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRINITARIAN CHRISTIANITY | 22 |
| 5. NEW TESTAMENT REFUTATIONS OF THE TRINITY DOCTRINE | 29 |
| 6. THE ONENESS OF GOD | 79 |
| APPENDIX 1: SAMARITAN INFLUENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INCARNATION DOCTRINE | 131 |
| APPENDIX 2: THE ZOHAR AND THE TRINITY DOCTRINE | 133 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 145 |
| SCRIPTURAL INDEX | 147 |
| SUBJECT INDEX | 159 |



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PREFACE

For the Jews “son of God” referred to one who obeys God, for the Greeks “son of God” meant from the same substance. The two meanings suggest a possibility for misinterpretation when the Jewish phrase was used among Greek hearers.

In the hands of Christianity, the biblical expression “son of God” was influenced by ontological speculations of Hellenistic and Egyptian origins. In the first century of the Common Era, the imperial cult of Caesar was the fastest-growing religion in a Mediterranean world where apotheosis and worship of rulers was standard and emperors adopted the title “Son of God.” Egyptian pharaohs were always regarded as divine offspring of gods. In Egyptian mythology, the god Horus is called the son of Ra, the sun god. In almost every royal inscription from ancient Egypt, the pharaoh is also called “the son of Ra.” Divine sonship was given to the pharaoh at his coronation. The dead pharaoh’s heir was believed to become the incarnation of Horus, the son of Ra, upon the death of his father.

The idea of the divine sonship of pharaoh did undergo change with time. The epithets “Son of Ra” and “Living Horus” continued to be used throughout the pharaonic period. These epithets were even applied to foreign rulers, such as Alexander the Great and his successors and to the Roman Caesars. Divine pharaonic titles continued to be used well into the Christian Era in Egypt. Did this affect Christian understanding of the title “son of God” as applied to Jesus in the New Testament? Did it contribute to the development of the incarnate “God the Son” of trinitarianism?

Christianity came to Egypt shortly after the death of Jesus. By the second and third centuries, it had spread throughout the country. It was because the Egyptians from pharaonic times through the Roman period believed their king was the “son of god” (that is, the incarnation of Horus, the son of Ra) that the concept of Jesus as the incarnate “son of God” found widespread support in Egypt. Under the further influence of Greek

philosophical speculations, the “son of God” became, “God the Son,” one part of a trinitarian godhead.

By the time of the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E., Alexandrian Neoplatonist Christianity was a dominant force. It developed a highly mythologized Jesus, ontologically a supernatural being. In the years between the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon (451 C.E.), the advocates of Alexandrian Christianity grew in power and influence and, with the assistance of the secular authorities, the notion of Jesus having the being of god became the recognized orthodox Christian dogma. What the theologians of the Councils meant by the creedal title “Son of God” was far removed from what it meant to the Jewish proto-Christians who knew Jesus, to Paul, to the authors of the Synoptic Gospels and the author of the Gospel of John. The first followers of Jesus spoke in Jewish terms of the special and perhaps unique role that their fully human teacher had in God’s providence. In Paul’s writings, influenced by Hellenism, Jesus achieved the status of a supernatural being. This transition was also variously expressed in the Gospels, reaching its climax in the Fourth Gospel. But, the creeds spoke in Greek philosophical terms. Thus, under the influence of Greek and Hellenistic speculation, Christianity transformed Hebrew metaphor into Greek ontology.

Some trinitarians explain the Trinity doctrine by reference to the three main colors united in one rainbow. Others explain how the understanding, the conscience, and the will blending together in one man illustrate the Trinity. Still others compare the Trinity to three lit candles in one room blending into one light. None of these illustrations satisfactorily offer an analogy of how three distinct almighty and eternal beings make one almighty and eternal being.

The absolute uni-personality of God is the first principle of the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament. Trinitarian Christians do not deny that there is one God, but differ as to the absolute unity of God. They speak of the Godhead as a Trinity composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that is, the term *God* includes not only *the Father*, but Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Yet, as we shall see, even the New Testament shows that Jesus was a person as distinct from God as the disciples were distinct from him.

The word *Trinity* is never found in the Jewish or Christian Scriptures. Neither is the belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit found in either set of scriptures. The strongest impetus for the development of this doctrine came from Platonic philosophy. Platonic

converts to Christianity introduced the teachings of their old philosophy into the theological structure of their new faith. Eventually, the Nicene Creed promulgated the fundamentals of the Trinity doctrine. Subsequent councils further expanded the notion that the Godhead consists of three coeternal and coequal entities in one essence.

In this volume we will investigate what the Jewish and Christian Scriptures have to say concerning the paradoxes of trinitarian belief. This is illustrated by the following: A trinitarian was once confronted by the self-contradictory character of the Trinity doctrine. "Not at all contradictory," said he, "it is only like a thing that I have just seen in the street—three men riding in one cart." "It would be more to the purpose," the inquirer remarked, "if you had seen one man riding in three carts."



INTRODUCTION TO THE TRINITY DOCTRINE

The predominate Christian doctrine of God is that in the being of the one eternal deity there are three eternal and essential distinctions. These distinctions are traditionally named Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This triune deity, it is claimed, consists of three distinct personalities of God said to be united in essence and being but distinct in function and action. Thus, they are said to share a common essential nature and existence. But, while sharing this common essence of God they are not three separate gods.

This doctrine of the Trinity did not take final shape until the fourth century. Although it was mentioned in early Christian writings, it was not mentioned in the New Testament. Theophilus of Antioch (c. 180 C.E.) first used the term "Trinity" (Greek, *trias*), but he did not provide a definition. The need to give a precise definition to the doctrine resulted from several factors, the two most important being to establish the relation of the so-called "Christ" to God and the necessity of combating what some considered radical views concerning Jesus ("Christ"). For example, Marcion (c. 100-160), taught that the Creator and the Redeemer were not one but two gods and Arius (250-336), taught that the Logos (who he identified with Jesus)¹ was neither fully human nor fully divine. Docetism² and Gnosticism³ viewed the material world as too defiling for a divine being to come in contact with it. Gnostics believed that the creation was the work of a secondary god, the Demiurge, not the Supreme Being. In their view, Jesus was not truly human, but was a phantom that neither was born nor died in the flesh. Monarchians⁴ or modalists⁵ so emphasized the unity of God that all distinctions were rejected and they claimed that the Father suffered and died. Those who emphasized the identity of the Logos with the Father became Monarchians. Subordinationists⁶ insisted that the Logos

was a creature of God, in effect undermining the belief that God was incarnate in Jesus. Those who emphasized the subordinate nature of the Logos gradually drifted into Arianism.⁷ To combat these beliefs some church leaders put great emphasis on the physical reality of Jesus' human nature, as well as on the creation of the physical world by a Supreme God. Hence, the second century Apostles' Creed reads, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord . . . [and] in the Holy Ghost [Spirit]."

The development of the trinitarian doctrine stems from the early Christian belief that Jesus was God's special supernatural agent, the Son of God, and that as the risen, glorified Messiah, or Lord, he was now at the right hand of God. "Our Lord, come" (*Maranatha*, 1 Corinthians 16:22; cf. Revelation 22:20) implies that this prayer was addressed to the supposed risen glorified Jesus. The Aramaic title *Mar* or "Lord" (Greek, *Kyrios*—1 Corinthians 12:3) was a term or title regularly used in Christian religious worship. A different situation existed in the language used of the so-called Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was first viewed as an impersonal figure (cf. Acts 8:15, "that they might receive holy spirit") or as a power as when Mark's Jesus is taken into the sonship of God through the descent upon him of "the spirit" (Mark 1:10-11). But, the holy spirit as an entity remained in the background of speculations concerning the relationship of Jesus to God. In time, the holy spirit evolved in the conceptual language of Christian preaching, teaching, and worship from the status of being an "it" to that of a third divine person.

Despite the claims of later Christian commentators to the contrary, New Testament statements as: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the sharing of the holy spirit" (2 Corinthians 13:14); "Now the Lord is the spirit; and where the spirit of [the] Lord [is], there [is] freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17); and "We all . . . are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as by [the] spirit [of the] Lord [literally "from Lord spirit"]" (2 Corinthians 3:18) have no trinitarian connotation. It is Paul's expressing the alleged power coming from God to the "believer," but not placing the holy spirit into some configuration that is part of or equal to the Godhead. (Christian commentators differ as to whether "Lord" in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 refers to *Y-H-V-H* or to Jesus.) In all passages that mention the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, nothing is said of the three being one God. The only passage in which *Father*, *Word*, and *Holy Spirit* are spoken of as being one (1 John 5:7) is a later interpolation into the text.

The formula of baptism “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19) is a later addition to the Gospel of Matthew and a further stage in the developing of the “Holy Spirit” into a person. Although the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are grouped together, this verse is not proof that Matthew is expounding the existence of a triune deity. Outside of this textual interpolation, Jesus is never recorded as baptizing anyone or advocating baptism among his followers. Moreover, in the Book of Acts, the apostles never baptize in the name of the Father or the Holy Spirit, but solely in the name of Jesus. While this statement is not originally part of Matthew’s text it does point in the direction in which some branches of second century Christian theological speculation were moving.

The first traces of the concept of Jesus as the Logos, the *word* or *principle* that issues from preexistence is found in the Gospel of John. Under the influence of later Neoplatonic philosophy, this tradition became central to speculative theology. This speculative theology centered on the relationship of the “oneness” of God to what Christians saw as a threefold manifestation of the divine, but emphasis was especially placed on the relationship of God to Jesus. Christian theology adopted and adapted Neoplatonic metaphysics as the departure point for interpreting the relationship of the “Father” to the “Son.” Central to the understanding of this relationship are two words, *hypostasis* and *ousia*. The meaning of the ambiguous Greek term *hypostasis* was gradually fixed in Christian theology to mean “individual being” and so roughly equivalent to the Latin *persona*. Similarly, the term *ousia* was rendered as “substance” (*substantia*).

By virtue of the identification of the pre-existent Jesus of Johannine and Pauline thought with the Greek concept of the Logos, Christian theology was led in a speculative direction. Attempts to define the relation of the Logos, or pre-existent Son, to the divine origin, or Father led to an ever-increasing number of theological speculations. The struggle between competing Christian theological notions in time led some to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity. It is usually and rightly said that there were many different Christianities all claiming to teach the true Christianity.

These theological controversies were complicated by political and ecclesiastical rivalries. By the third century it was already apparent that all attempts to systematize the Trinity doctrine with the theories of Neoplatonic hypostases were unsatisfying. This led to a series of new conflicts. Moreover, the Eastern factions of the church were using a Greek vocabulary while the Western factions of the church were using Latin, a situation still further

confused by the fact that there was no fixed terminology in either Greek or Latin. Ecclesiastical authorities first had to agree on what they meant by the terms used and then to explain their application of these terms to the Trinity. As it turned out their terminology and explanations were equivocal. The aim of the orthodox party (so-named because they eventually won out) in the East, led by Athanasius (c. 295-373) and supported politically by the emperor Constantine (c. 280-337),⁸ was to maintain the concept of the unity of God and the coequal status of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, this faction was unable to agree on a precise terminology until the Cappadocian Fathers provided a reconciling formula and interpretation. It was “one *ousia* (substance) in three *hypostases*” (distinctions in being). This formula appealed to the Western theologians because it seemed parallel to Tertullian’s (c. 150-225) earlier Latin formula, three persons in one substance.

Constantine played a leading role in the Council of Nicaea, which was convened because of the Arian dispute that had divided Christians in Egypt. He called this council to deal with the issue of the relation of “the Son” to “the Father,” and after considerable and often unseemly debate the majority agreed upon a creedal statement. The Nicene Creed, which was promulgated at the Council of Nicaea (325), declared that the Son of God was “true God from true God,” of “one essence or being (*homoousion*) with the Father.” Probably on the advice of his counselor, the Spanish bishop Hosius, Constantine himself proposed the formula of *homoousion*, “of the same substance” (consubstantial, in the Latin translation of the Greek term). This term is used in the creed adopted at Nicaea to describe the relation between the eternal Son or Logos and the Father in a triune deity. To say that the Son is consubstantial or *homoousios* with the Father is to say that the Son is truly divine, as the Father is. Denouncements of those who said, “there was a time when he was not” or that “the eternal Son is a creature” were later added to this creed.

The concept that the Father and Son are of “one essence or being” was unacceptable to the Arians, who insisted that the Son was not of one essence with the Father. Arius and two others refused to sign the creed and were excommunicated and banished by the emperor. After a few years, Arian sentiments returned, and in 336 Arius was restored to communion with the church at which time the orthodox leader, Athanasius, was forced into exile. The Arian faction then began to propagate its own creedal statements among which three distinct christological positions are discernible: (1) the

Anomoean (from the Greek word meaning “dissimilar”), which affirmed that the Son is unlike the Father; (2) the *Homoean* (meaning “similar”), which affirmed that the Son is similar to the Father; (3) the *Homoiousian* (meaning “like in essential being”), which affirmed that the Son is like the Father in essential being but is not identical in being (*homoousion*). After the death of the Arian emperor, Constantius, Athanasius was able to reconcile the *Homoiousian* and the (orthodox) *Homoousion* notions, and this culminated finally in 381 with the reaffirmation of the original Nicene Creed by the Council of Constantinople.

Once Constantine adopted Christianity as the state religion, it was the empire that decided what was Orthodox and what was heretical. Directed by its appointed ecclesiastical authorities it sought to suppress the proliferation of different Christian sects. To this end, it used councils, synodic conventions, and pervasive imperial coercion.

Although the Trinity doctrine has always been alleged to be a mystery, trinitarian theologians have not hesitated to try to clarify it. The orthodox view since Augustine (354-430), whose work determined subsequent thought on the matter, has been that there are three significant distinctions within the one divine reality. These distinctions are called persons or hypostases and are coeternal and coequal. He claimed that in each of them the divine nature is fully and undividedly contained. Although the persons are in the closest possible unity with one another and interpenetrate one another, each has a peculiar character when viewed in relation to the others. The Father is not begotten but is said to be ingenerate. The Son is begotten eternally and proceeds by Filiation (being derived from the Father). The Spirit proceeds by spiration from both the Father and the Son in what is called Filioque. The Filioque clause (Latin, *filioque*, “and from the son”), inserted after the words “the Holy Spirit . . . who proceeds from the Father,” was introduced in time as part of the version of the creed used in the Western Church (sixth century). It was probably finally accepted by the papacy in the eleventh century. The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant churches have retained it. The Eastern churches have always rejected it because they consider it a theological error and an unauthorized addition to the Nicene Creed. Sometimes certain qualities and activities are assigned to one of the persons, but this has been qualified by the traditional notion that every one of the persons shares fully in the activities and operations of the others.

The full development of trinitarianism took place in the West, in the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages, when an explanation was undertaken in terms of philosophy, especially of the recovered Aristotelianism of the thirteenth century. The classical exposition is found in the works of Thomas Aquinas, whose views on the Trinity have dominated most of later Christian theology, both Roman Catholic and Protestant.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the central and unique doctrine of the vast majority of those who call themselves Christians. Yet, in essence, this doctrine is nothing more than a speculative theory concerning the internal life and being of God. In truth, it cannot be regarded as a statement about the ontological divine nature itself. It is a Christian theological exercise gone out of control. Its origins lie in Christians trying to comprehend and relate the relationship that they believe exists between God and Jesus.

Notes

- ¹ Logos is the Greek word for discourse or reason. In the second and third centuries C.E., it became the name for the mind or reason of God, which perfectly mirrors or expresses his being and which was completely embodied in the man Jesus of Nazareth. The apologetic theologians of the early church used the Logos terminology for expressing the relationship of Jesus to God as well as for providing a point of contact with the philosophic and religious views to be found outside of the church. This was made all the more convenient by its use in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. The Logos was the mind or reason of the incomprehensible divine source (*Monas*), hence, the perfect expression and mirror of God's being. The Logos is the son, the image of the Father, coeternal yet subordinate in the sense that the Logos is the image of the incomprehensible *Monas* rather than the *Monas* being an image of the Logos. This Logos, moreover, is the source of all truth.

Two somewhat divergent tendencies were discernible among those who employed the Logos idea. The characteristic tendency of the Alexandrian school was to emphasize the utter remoteness and incomprehensibility of the divine source or *Monas* and to subordinate the Logos to it. The other tendency was to identify the Father and the Logos so closely as to border on monarchianism (see note 4), as in Irenaeus (c. 130-200). Origen (c. 185-c. 254) of Alexandria tried to hold these two tendencies together, although there are passages in his writings that may be interpreted in either of the two ways. Those who emphasize the subordinate nature of the Logos gradually drifted

into Arianism. Those who emphasized the identity of the Logos and the Father became monarchians. The struggle between these two emphases gradually led to the formation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

- ² Docetism is a term derived from the Greek word meaning “to seem” and applied to those christological teachings of the early part of the third century in which the humanity and suffering of Jesus were regarded as only apparent (seeming) and not real.
- ³ Gnosticism had a pessimistic denial of the goodness of creation, deprecation of bodily life, and a denial of the real humanity of Jesus.
- ⁴ Monarchianism flourished in both the eastern and western parts of Christendom in the third century. Stressing the undivided unity and sovereignty (*monarchia*) of the Godhead, it generally rejected any view that distinguished sharply among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and especially any view that regarded them as concretely distinguishable individual beings.
- ⁵ Modalism is an interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity in which the persons of the Trinity are viewed as modes of divine action rather than as eternal and essential distinctions within the divine nature itself. Such a view first flourished in the third century C.E. as a form of monarchianism. Its proponents insisted on the complete and undivided sovereignty (*monarchia*) of God and thereby rejected any distinctions in the being of God, such as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Sabellius (early third century) appears to have argued that God is one individual being and that the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are simply names applied to the different forms (modes) of action of that one being and, therefore, do not refer to eternal and intrinsic distinctions within the Godhead.
- ⁶ Subordinationism is that view of the Trinity in which the divine Logos is regarded as subordinate to the Father, or the Holy Spirit is regarded as subordinate to both. Those churches that accept the classical creeds judge any subordination of one of the persons of the Trinity heretical.
- ⁷ Strictly, Arianism refers to the christological teachings of Arius (c. 250-336), a priest at Alexandria, which were condemned as heretical at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. and again at the First Council of Constantinople in 381. These views and the subsequent debate concerning them shook the Roman Empire for over half a century and seriously divided the churches.

Arius' views can only be reconstructed from a few remaining fragments that survived systematic destruction and from the writings of his opponents. He seems to have argued that since only God the Father may be said to be absolute, unbegotten, and an eternal Unity (Monad), the “only begotten Son” is in some sense subordinate and inferior because he is derived from the absolute Unity. This inferior or subordinate

nature of the Son or Logos was expressed in the Arian formula “there was a time when the Son was not.” By this, Arius did not mean that the Son was a mutable creature among the other creatures; on the other hand, he could not say that the Son was essentially divine. Consequently, the Logos was regarded as a sort of intermediate being who was neither fully divine nor fully a creature.

Arius belonged to the Antiochene school of theology, which placed strong emphasis upon the historicity of the man Jesus. In his theological interpretation of the idea of God, Arius was interested in maintaining a formal understanding of the oneness of God. In defense of the oneness of God, he was obliged to dispute the sameness of essence of the Son and the Holy Spirit with God the Father, as stressed by the Neoplatonically influenced Alexandrian school. From the outset, the controversy between both parties took place upon the common basis of the Neoplatonic concept of substance, which was foreign to the New Testament itself. It is no wonder that the continuation of the dispute on the basis of the metaphysics of substance likewise led to the concepts that have no foundation in the New Testament—such as the question of the sameness of essence (*homoousia*) or similarity of essence (*homoiousia*) of the divine persons.

The basic concern of Arius was disputing the oneness of essence of the Son and the Holy Spirit with God the Father, in order to preserve the oneness of God. The Son, thus, became a “second God, under God the Father”—i.e., he is God only in a figurative sense, for he belongs on the side of the creatures, even if at their highest level. Here Arius joined an older tradition of christology, which had already played a role in Rome in the early second century—namely, the angel-christology. The supposed descent of the Son to earth was understood as the descent to Earth of the highest prince of the angels, who became man in Jesus: he is to some extent identified with the angel Michael. In the old angel-christology, the concern is already expressed to preserve the oneness of God, the inviolable distinguishing mark of monotheistic faith over and against all paganism. The Son is not himself God, but as the highest of the created spiritual beings he is as close as possible to God. Arius adopted this tradition with the same aim—i.e., to defend the idea of the oneness of the concept of God against the introduction of a new, subtler form of polytheism by the adherents of trinitarian Christianity.

⁸ Although Constantine was not baptized until on his deathbed his support of Christianity influenced the relations of church and state for centuries to come. He was on occasion cruel, ruthless, and even inhumane. Nevertheless, believing that he was God’s chosen servant, he regarded himself as responsible to God for protecting and

enhancing the church. He sought to bring unity to a Christian church seriously divided by doctrinal dissent and when he took sides, he defined orthodoxy. This meant that henceforth, political considerations would influence definitions of orthodoxy. Formerly a minority sect, Christianity became the official religion of the empire and was stimulated by the imperial patronage of Constantine and his sons. Consequently, the church grew in wealth, numbers, and power.

EARLY CHRISTIAN USAGE OF *MARA'* AND *KYRIOS* AS FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRINITARIAN CHRISTIANITY

How is it that the biblical monotheistic concept of the absolute oneness of God developed among the followers of Jesus into the Christian doctrine of a triune deity? In particular, what role did early church use of the Greek term *Kyrios* (pronounced koo-re-os), "Lord," play in this development?

Aramaic speaking Christians undoubtedly called Jesus *Marana'* ("Our Lord"). The brothers of Jesus were known as "the brothers of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 9:5, Galatians 1:19); the Greek transliteration *Maranatha* (1 Corinthians 16:22) in the Aramaic reads, *Marana' ata'*, "Our Lord, come!" Consequently, it can be assumed that at some point Jesus himself became known as "the Lord" (Aramaic, *Mara'*). The Aramaic *mara'* ("the lord"), *mari* ("my lord") and *marana'* ("our lord") were not as such divine titles. These words could be applied to religious teachers, to secular rulers, as well as to God.

When the first Christians called Jesus, *Mara'*, "the Lord," "the Master," it was with reference to his being their religious teacher (cf., the rabbinic title, *mara' de-'atra'*, "the Master of the Place [i.e., the *Beit Midrash*]"). However, at some point a belief that Jesus was a supernatural agent anointed and exalted by God to be the eschatological ruler and judge of the world led the *mara'* title to shift in meaning and emphasis. The early Aramaic speaking followers of Jesus conflated the title *Mara'* given to God with the *mara'* title given to Jesus as master teacher now installed as supernatural mediator and messenger. In particular, this manifested itself in the interpretation of biblical eschatological texts as the Aramaic speaking Jewish-

Christians related them to the expected imminent *parousia*, "the second coming," of Jesus. The title *marā'*, as a reference to Jesus, was carried over into the Greek speaking church as the Greek *ho Kyrios* ("the Lord"). There it took on significance yet unparalleled in Aramaic speaking Jewish-Christian theology.

Since most surviving ancient manuscripts of the Septuagint have *Kyrios* where the Hebrew text has *Y-H-V-H* (the Tetragrammaton) it has generally been assumed that this is the Jewish usage with which early Christians who read the Bible in Greek were familiar. Indeed, New Testament quotations of and allusions to the Jewish Scriptures regularly use *Kyrios* in place of *Y-H-V-H*. But, the problem with this assumption is that the manuscripts in question are all of Christian origin, whereas the few fragments available of Jewish copies of Greek versions of the Bible (including the Septuagint) do not use *Kyrios* in this way in the written text. Archaeological discoveries in Egypt¹ and the Judean desert² have provided insight into the use of *Y-H-V-H* in Greek biblical texts in the pre-Christian and early Christian periods. A study of pre-Christian Greek Septuagint texts indicates that in all these Greek texts *Y-H-V-H* was always written by Jewish scribes in either paleo-Hebrew, square Aramaic script, or in transliteration (that is, a kind of Greek equivalent of the Hebrew letters based on similarity of shape, or they give an approximate Greek transliteration [IAΩ]). However, even if this shows that *Kyrios* was *not* normally written in place of *Y-H-V-H* in Jewish Greek versions of the Hebrew Scriptures, it still does *not* tell us what Jews *pronounced* when they came to *Y-H-V-H* in reading the Greek text. By the first century, *Y-H-V-H* was already considered too sacred to pronounce and Jews reading the Hebrew text of the Bible were already substituting the intensified honorific title 'Ado-nai ("my Lord," or "Lord of all") for the Sacred Name. It follows that the use of *Kyrios* as a substitution when reading *Y-H-V-H* in the Greek rendering of the Bible was common among Greek-speaking Jews in the first century. Thus, *ho Kyrios*, used as a Greek substitute for *Y-H-V-H* in pronunciation, would be regarded as equivalent to the noun form 'Ado-nai, used as a Hebrew substitute for *Y-H-V-H*.

As mentioned, the extant manuscripts of the Septuagint, all of Christian origin, all render the *Y-H-V-H* as *Kyrios* ("Lord"). However, it might be assumed that the Septuagint copies used by the earliest Greek-speaking Christians were of Jewish origin, and consequently included *Y-H-V-H*. By the end of the first century of the Common Era, Christian copyists replaced

the Hebrew divine name with Greek substitutes in the text of the Septuagint used by Christians and (if not already changed by its respective authors) in all quotations from the Septuagint which are found in the New Testament. These changes in the New Testament text inadvertently helped to create a climate more conducive to the growth of the doctrine of the Trinity. The replacement of *Y-H-V-H* with *Kyrios* in the New Testament, as we shall see below, obscured the distinction between the Lord God and the Lord Christ in many passages. As a result, in a number of New Testament passages uncertainty arose as to whether they refer to God or Jesus. Although it was not the only factor, the confusion caused by the replacement of the Divine Name with *kyrios* played a significant role in the eventual development of the doctrine of the Trinity.³

The Aramaic term *marā'* as used by the early followers of Jesus lent itself to scriptural interpretations which ultimately brought about those theological consequences even they would have found abhorrent. In the Jewish Scriptures it is the eschatological coming of God Himself to judge the nations, which is awaited. The early Christian anticipation of the "second coming" of Jesus centered on the same biblical texts about the coming of God to judge the nations. But, the christological interpretation of God's coming to judge the world is seen as being achieved through God's instrument, "the Lord Jesus," the special supernatural agent of God. At that time, the so-called "Lord Jesus" was expected to pass judgment on the wicked and show mercy to the obedient. Paul writes that "it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to [give] relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thessalonians 1:6-8).

A now supernatural Jesus, supposedly exalted in heaven is said to be in possession of and exercising God's eschatological lordship. With Jesus as *Kyrios*, the dividing line between God and Jesus becomes blurred. For example, Paul writes, "Therefore also God highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. Of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord [*Kyrios*], to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11). Confusion became more pronounced with the New Testament connection between the so-called "Lord Jesus" and "the Lord God." It is no longer

God alone who shows kindness to those who follow Him, but now it is "according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:12). Soon the phraseology would be interpreted so as to meld together "God" and "Lord" with the words "Jesus Christ"—so that "God and Lord" can refer to Jesus alone.

Thus, the eschatological lordship of God was transferred to Jesus whose imminent return to earth the early Christian community expected. Biblical theophany texts were readily applied to the so-called "Lord Jesus." The eschatological passages from the Jewish Scriptures describing the coming of God to judge the nations were used as if they referred to the coming of the so-called "Lord Jesus"—although it is clear that these texts refer to the coming of *Y-H-V-H* (e.g., Deuteronomy 33:2, Isaiah 40:10, Micah 1:3-4). Zechariah 14:5b is the most widely used scriptural verse applied to the *parousia* by New Testament authors writing about the "second coming" of Jesus ("the Son of Man") with angels (Matthew 16:27, 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). Compare Zechariah 14:5b, "and the Lord my God [*Kyrios ho Theos*] shall come and all the holy ones [*agioi*] with him [LXX; MT, "you"]," with 1 Thessalonians 3:13, "so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones." The *Kyrios*, which represents *Y-H-V-H* in the Septuagint, is interpreted by Paul—in spite of its clear reference to God—as referring to Jesus.

The early Christian shift of focus as to whom the title "Lord" refers is also found with reference to the biblical phrase "the day of the Lord." It is used of the *parousia*, with "the Lord" understood as a reference to Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 2 Peter 3:10). Sometimes the referential shift is expressed as "the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6) or "the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:10, 2:16). In addition, although "the Lord" in the conclusion to the explicitly *day of the Lord passage* at Joel 3:1-5 (in some versions 2:28-32), "And it shall come to pass, that whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered," is a reference to God, in Romans 10:13 it is used as the scriptural basis for the Christian confession of Jesus as "Lord." Paul writes: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord [*Kyrios*] of all, [is] rich toward all who call upon him; for 'Whoever will call upon the name of [the] Lord [*Kyriou*] will be saved'" (Romans 10:12-13). As the text stands (although it may be that Paul meant a differentiation between the two *Lords*) it is not only the distinction between Jew and Gentile that disappears, but, essentially, also

the distinction between “the Lord God” and “the Lord Jesus.” Verse 13 is probably also the source of the description of Christians as those who “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:2; cf. Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16; 2 Timothy 2:22). Some other examples of the referential shift of the word “Lord” from God to Jesus in the New Testament quotations from and allusions to the Jewish Scriptures are Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4, John 1:23 (Isaiah 40:3); 1 Corinthians 1:31, 2 Corinthians 10:17 (Jeremiah 9:23 [24 in some versions]); and Philippians 2:10-11 (Isaiah 45:23).

The transition by which the Christian melding of *'Ado-nai/ho Kyrios* with *'adoni/ mari* (Neither the Hebrew, Aramaic, nor Greek contain capital letters.) took place is also illustrated by the use of Psalms 110:1 (LXX, 109:1). When applied to Jesus by Christians this psalm played a pivotal supporting role in the development of *Kyrios* as a christological title. The Hebrew, “*Y-H-V-H* [*'Ado-nai*] said to *'adoni* [“my lord,” “my master”],” is expressed in Greek as “The Lord [*ho Kyrios*] said to my lord (*kyrio mou*).” The verse continues, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” At that future date, as God’s anointed representative, the early Christians believed that Jesus was to carry out the divine functions of eschatological judge and savior. In the interim it seemed appropriate to Christians to attribute to him, as God’s functioning agent, not only the fulfillment of scriptural prophecies of God’s eschatological coming in judgment, but also a title that would express the uniqueness of his exalted position. At this point, Jesus’ Christian title of *Mara’/Kyrios* indicating his alleged authority as God’s anointed one, conflated with the pronounced title *'Ado-nai (ho Kyrios)*. The proximity in Psalms 110:1 (LXX, 109:1) of *'Ado-nai* and *'adoni*, or alternately *ho Kyrios* and *kyrio mou*, appeared to Christians as lending support to their belief. Overall, there is a degree of dual usage of the word *kyrios* in the New Testament that creates the mindset which eventually led to Jesus being considered as of one essence with, and, indeed, part of that which is God. In its earliest phase, however, Jesus’ lordship actually belonged to God.

A study of biblical usage shows that the term “name” stands for “authority.” For example, the Torah speaks of serving in the “name” (authority) of the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:5, 7) and of prophesying in the “name” (authority) of the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:22); David attacked Goliath in the “name” (authority) of the Lord (1 Samuel 17:45), and he blessed the people in the “name” (authority) of the Lord of hosts (2 Samuel 6:18); and Elisha cursed troublemakers in the “name”

(authority) of the Lord (2 Kings 2:24). Paul and other early Christians used the term “name” to express the divine authority that was supposedly transferred to Jesus by God.

In exalting Jesus to be His eschatological plenipotentiary, it is claimed, God has bestowed on him His own name (authority), “the name which is above every name,” and in consequence Jesus receives the homage due from all creation to God. But he does so as the representative of God the Father, in God’s name, and so “to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:6-11). Indeed, it is God who is said to have raised and exalted Jesus and given him a lordly position “as a prince and a savior” (Acts 5:30-31). It is not that Jesus is identical with God the Father, but that the lordship he exercises is the exclusive lordship of the one God (cf. Philippians 2:10-11). The New Testament sources do not claim that Jesus’ supposed lordship was his eternally, but say it was given to him by God as a reward for sacrificing himself. It is alleged that as God’s Messiah, it is God’s authority to save and to judge which Jesus exercises. He is called “the Lord Jesus” because he now exercises the lordship of God, not because he himself is in any way part of God. Jesus is considered the eschatological agent of God’s salvation and judgment. Therefore, as God’s viceroy, even God’s own divine name, represented in Greek by the title *Kyrios*, is bestowed upon him as he now speaks in God’s name. This functionally transforms Jesus to the status of a supernatural power without actually identifying him with God. Pauline thought envisions Jesus as acting as God’s surrogate toward the church and the world. The lordship of God becomes Jesus’ lordship, and God is now known only through the mediation of Jesus. Already God’s divine name, *Y-H-V-H*, represented by *Kyrios*, is bestowed upon Jesus as the one who exercises God’s eschatological lordship. Already Jesus represents in the eyes of the church, the exclusive divine lordship of the one God of Israel. Implicitly, in religious practice, he was already assimilated to God, and the way to his conceptual inclusion in the being of God was open, even though originally there was no connection in Christian belief between the Divine essence and Jesus.

The early church developed the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth, in his earthly ministry, his heavenly lordship, and his impending return to earth within that generation as lord and judge of the world, was the fulfillment of all God’s purposes and promises. But, the crucial *parousia*, the “second coming,” the quick return of the so-called “Lord Jesus” that would vindicate their expectations never came.

Notes

- ¹ The Fouad 266 Greek Septuagint papyri manuscript fragments (dated to the second or first century B.C.E.) reproduce the Divine Name in square Hebrew letters while the rest of the text is in Greek.
- ² Fragments of a Greek rendering of the Bible (dated between 50 B.C.E. and 50 C.E.) have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and contain the Divine Name written in paleo-Hebrew script.
- ³ George Howard, "The Tetragram and the New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977), pp. 63-83.

NEW TESTAMENT REFUTATIONS OF THE TRINITY DOCTRINE

PART 1: INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM

The notion of a triune deity

In trinitarian Christian belief there are three conscious personalities existing in one divine being or substance: the union in one God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three infinite, coequal and coeternal persons; one God in three persons. Many Christian scholars acknowledge that the concept of the Trinity cannot be substantiated from the Jewish Scriptures. Nevertheless, there are misunderstandings of the Jewish Scriptures by some trinitarian Christian commentators attempting to prove otherwise. This is especially true when on occasion angels speak as if they were God Himself, and even use His personal name, *Y-H-V-H*. A few examples of such occurrences involve Manoah and his wife (Judges 2:1; 13:21, 22), Jacob (Genesis 32:24-30; Hosea 12:3-5), Moses (Exodus 3:2 ff.) and Gideon (Judges 6:12-14). What trinitarian commentators sometimes attribute to Jesus or to “the Holy Spirit”¹ in the Jewish Scriptures is better explained as God manifesting Himself by means of an angelic messenger who speaks for Him in the first person (“I the Lord,” etc.) and manifests His glory.

Inability to substantiate the Trinity doctrine from the Jewish Scriptures has led some commentators to say the concept must be derived from the New Testament. However, the allegation of a triune deity cannot be established even from the New Testament (despite some trinitarian interpolations). Careful examination of the evidence presented to prove the existence of a triune deity based on Jewish or Christian Scriptures is found to be without substance.

Compounding the exegetical problem for Christian laypersons reading the New Testament is the fact that the definite article is often added by translators to the term *holy spirit*. This leads readers to think that “*the Holy Spirit*” is referring to a separate person, a third person of “the Holy Trinity” as taught by trinitarian theologians. There is a failure to understand “holy spirit” in the New Testament as a claim to either a manifestation of God’s presence and power or of an angelic manifestation speaking on behalf of God.

PART 2: THE PROBLEM OF THE SON

The Master and the servant

The Trinity doctrine says “the Father” and “the Son” are coequal in power and substance, but what does the New Testament have to say? There are many New Testament passages that refute the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. An examination of statements attributed to Jesus by the Gospels, shows that he never said he was God or a part of God. Jesus spoke of his Father in heaven as his God (John 20:17), to whom he attributed superior authority, knowledge, and greatness (Matthew 20:23, Mark 13:32, John 14:28).

The Gospels’ Jesus did not consider himself equal to God, for it is said there were things that neither he nor the angels knew, but only God knew. Mark’s Jesus says: “But of that day or the hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32). Furthermore, when troubled by the prospect of imminent execution, Luke’s Jesus displayed submission to God and prayed for help saying: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42, cf. John 5:30). Are these verses from the Gospels consistent with the trinitarian claim that Jesus is in fact one in substance and power with God? Do they show agreement or equality of consciousness?

It is alleged that God did miracles and wonders *through* Jesus (Matthew 9:8; Acts 2:22, 10:38). If Jesus were God, the New Testament would simply say that Jesus did the miracles himself without having to make reference to God’s input. The claim that it was God not Jesus who was the actual miracle maker shows that God is greater than Jesus. The claim that Jesus in heaven supposedly prays on behalf of those who follow him (e.g., Hebrews 7:25), yet that God accepts or rejects his petition shows a separation of ideation.

These verses are representative of the Gospels' teachings concerning Jesus' relationship with God. But there are other verses as well which illustrate that the Trinity doctrine is not found in the New Testament. In Matthew 12:31-32 (see also Luke 12:10) it is stated: "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the holy spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in that to come." Matthew's Jesus is here arguing with "the Pharisees who say he performs miracles with the help of "Beelzebul the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 12:24) and not as he claims by "[the] spirit of God" (Matthew 12:28). He sees this as their blasphemous denial of God's power, that is His spirit, as manifested through His agent (Jesus). Jesus is not talking about an actual personage called "the Holy Spirit." Hence, we may reasonably presume that Jesus, if he is to be equated with the "Son of Man" (John 8:28), is not of equal status with an imagined "Holy Spirit" (supposedly the third member of the triune deity of Christianity). If both the Holy Spirit and Jesus were coequal entities in one deity, then there would be no difference between speaking against Jesus and speaking against the Holy Spirit.

According to Matthew, the mother of the sons of Zebedee requests of Jesus that her sons be given prominent positions to the right and left of him in his kingdom. Jesus then explains to her that such decisions are not made by him, but by the Father. He says: "[T]his is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father" (Matthew 20:20-23). Does this statement illustrate equality within the Trinity?

Matthew's Jesus declares: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:35-36; see also Mark 13:32). Do the various parts of the Trinity keep secrets from each other? How can the Father and Son be of one essence if the Father knows things of which the Son is ignorant?

Similarly, when asked if he would "at this time" restore the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6) Jesus replied: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has placed in His own jurisdiction" (Acts 1:7). Are we to conclude that the "equal" partners of the triune godhead have powers and knowledge, which they do not share with each other? Even after his supposed resurrection, Jesus is still not all knowing but is said to receive increments of knowledge from God. Thus, we find: "The revelation of Jesus Christ,

which God gave him to show to his bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1). Even the pre-incarnate Jesus did not have the same degree of knowledge as God, the Father. If this pre-incarnate supernatural being is equated with the angel of the Lord as so many trinitarians allege then the following needs to be considered. The prophet Zechariah records that the angel of the Lord inquired of God: “O Lord of hosts, how long will You not have compassion on Jerusalem and on the cities of Jerusalem” (Zechariah 1:12). Where is the equality of knowledge between the “equal” partners of the triune godhead?

Luke says: “And the child continued to grow and become strong, becoming full of wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40); “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and in physical growth, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52).” Do the members of the Trinity have likes and dislikes about each other? Did Jesus, the perfect god-man, need to increase in favor with God, or shall we say with two-thirds of God?

John’s Jesus does not consider himself equal with the Father as is illustrated in several verses. In the Gospel of John, Jesus acknowledges that “The Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). He adds: “I can do nothing on my own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of Him who sent me” (John 5:30; see also John 6:38, Luke 22:42). Are some members of the allegedly coequal Trinity subservient, and less than equal, to other members? Although they have different wills (“I do not seek my own will”), do they obey without question the others’ commands (“the will of Him who sent me”)? John’s Jesus admits to subordinating his own distinct will, yet according to the trinitarian doctrine they should all have the same will. Should one of the triune partners have to forgo his own will in favor of the will of another member of the Trinity? Should not they all have the exact same will? And, which member of the triune deity initiates the divine will?

John’s Jesus says: “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me; He has not left me alone, because I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” (John 8:28-29). John’s Jesus once more admits that “I did not speak on my own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent me has given me commandment, what to say, and what to speak” (John 12:49). Does the

Son have a mind of his own or is he simply reiterating what he is told? Continuing in this vein Jesus says that what he is teaching is not his own ideas. He exclaims: "My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me" (John 7:16). Jesus could not say this if he were God because the instruction would then have been his to begin with.

John's Jesus says: "As the Father gave me command, even so I do" (John 14:31). Are we to presume that the Son has no authority without the consent of the Father? In the New Testament there are numerous verses alleging that "the Father" gave Jesus power and authority. Yet, if he were an integral part of God he would have always had the power and authority that the New Testament says he was "given." Jesus was allegedly given "all authority" by the Father (Matthew 28:18). He was allegedly given "a name above every name" by the Father (Philippians 2:9). He was allegedly given work to accomplish by the Father (John 5:36). He was allegedly given the power to "raise up" those who believed in him by the Father (John 6:39-40, 10:28-29). He was allegedly given glory by the Father (John 17:22, 24). He was allegedly given his "cup" of suffering and death by the Father (John 18:11). The Father allegedly "seated" Jesus at His own right hand (Ephesians 1:20) and "appointed" him over the Church (Ephesians 1:22). These verses make no sense if Jesus is eternally "coequal" with the Father.

John quotes Jesus as saying: "I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I am" (John 14:28). Is this coequality within the Trinity? According to the New Testament, Jesus referred to God as "my God" both before and after his supposed resurrection (Matthew 27:46, John 20:17, Revelation 3:12). Thus, according to the New Testament, Jesus did not consider himself to be God or God's coequal, but instead recognized his subservience to God to whom he must go. As John's postresurrection Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God" (John 20:17).

John's Jesus says: "Do you say of him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming' because I said 'I am the Son of God'" (John 10:36)? The meaning of sanctify is "to make holy," specifically by setting something apart as holy (consecrate) or to make something free from sin (spiritually purified). This Gospel teaches that Jesus was "sanctified" by God before being sent into the world. It is claimed that Jesus was sanctified by God before entering the world, but God does not need to be sanctified! Does this sound like the alleged pre-incarnate Jesus and God were coequal?

The author of Hebrews writes that it was fitting that God should “make” Jesus “perfect through suffering” (Hebrews 2:10). According to this author, Jesus “learned obedience from the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). God is forever perfect, but Jesus is said to have needed to attain perfection through his suffering. If he was a sinless god-man this makes absolutely no sense. Why did Jesus have to learn to be obedient if he is God? An all-knowing God does not need to learn anything for He knows it already. Whom does Jesus have to obey? Do the equal members of the Trinity exercise authority, one over the other?

Paul states: “Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:3). “You belong to Christ,” Paul claims, but he goes on to say, “Christ belongs to God” (1 Corinthians 3:23). As man is subservient to Christ, and woman to man, so Christ is subservient to God. One who is subservient to another cannot be equal to that individual.

In a prayer to God made by the disciples that is found in the Book of Acts, they refer to King David as God’s “servant” (Acts 4:25). Later in that same prayer they call the alleged postresurrection Jesus “your holy servant” (Acts 4:30). It is obvious that the disciples did not believe Jesus was God, but thought of him, like David, as a servant of God (cf. Matthew 12:18 and Acts 3:26).

The author of Acts reports that Peter said, “God has made this Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). It was God who it is alleged *made* Jesus “both Lord and Christ” and “gave him the name that is above every name” (i.e., Lord of lords and King of kings)—Revelation 17:14, 19:16). If Jesus were part of the one-and-only God, he would not need God to exalt him for he would already be exalted. “Lord” (*kyrios*) is a masculine title of respect and majesty, and it is frequently used in the New Testament of others beside God and Jesus. Property owners are called lord (Matthew 20:8); heads of households are called lord (Mark 13:35); slave owners are called lord (Matthew 10:24); husbands are called lord (1 Peter 3:6); a son called his father lord (Matthew 21:30); the Roman emperor is called lord (Acts 25:26); Roman authorities are called lord (Matthew 27:63). The word, “lord” is not used at Acts 2:36 in the sense of God; rather, it refers to someone who has only attained a high station through the grace of God. The New Testament says Jesus earned positions of authority and as a result earned the names and powers that go along with these positions. How did he earn them? “[He] humbled himself and became obedient to the point

of death—even on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:8-9). Such a one could not be God. Indeed, if Jesus were God, then by definition he was already “Lord,” and it would be incorrect to say Jesus was “made” Lord.

Paul states “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). Some trinitarian Christians allege this shows that Paul taught that Jesus and God are equal. However, their claim is not correct. The complete passage shows Jesus in a subservient position to that of God:

The attitude you should have is the one Christ had: Although he existed in the form of God he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God. Instead, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave and came to be in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient until death, even on a cross. For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name. And so, in the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in heaven and those on earth and of those underground. And every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

According to this passage, Jesus “did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God,” but instead “emptied himself and took the form of a slave, and came to be in the likeness of men.” Having thereby humbled himself he went still further and in obedience to God underwent death on a cross. As a reward for lowering his (supernatural) status rather than trying to elevate himself to the status of God, Jesus was “highly exalted” by God because he did not seek equality with God (verses 6-9). The author of Acts shows that claiming Jesus was exalted does not mean he was God. He declares that “God . . . raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death . . . to His right hand as a leader and a savior . . . [and] exalted [him] to His right hand a leader and a savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:30-31). The recipient of God’s exaltation is not one who was or becomes equal with God, but is given certain powers as a reward for faithful service to God’s will. These statements make no sense if Jesus were God, because then Jesus would have been praised for not seeking equality with himself! And, then, God is said to reward and exalt Himself!

Paul's Jesus is not equal to God but is a supernatural being that is considered to have been raised to an exalted position by God. He who is not equal to God cannot be God. Furthermore, Jesus is proclaimed Lord, but, in verse 11, Paul does not use "Lord" and "God" as synonymous terms. The simple fact is that Paul considers Jesus to be a highly honored supernatural agent, but does not make him equal with God. He is said to be in the "form of God" but not that he was God or even one-third of God.

Paul says that in Jesus the "fullness [*pleroma*] of Deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9). He alleges that God (the Deity) placed a full measure of divine qualities in Jesus. This is not the same as saying that Jesus is deity or that in him dwells the full essence—powers and attributes—of God. Earlier in Colossians, Paul states that God was pleased "for all the fullness to dwell in him [Jesus]" (Colossians 1:19). But, Paul is not claiming that all the divine attributes and nature dwell in Jesus. Paul is speaking about Jesus being filled with spiritual attributes that will enable him to carry out all that God desires. Having "all the fullness" of God would not make one God. Paul also says that Christians should be filled with "all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19), but this does not make Christians God. Furthermore, if Jesus were God, there would be no point in saying that the fullness of God dwelt in him, because, being God, he would already have the fullness of God within him.

Jesus, the man, is said to be the mediator between God and men. Paul writes, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus is called a "man," even after his alleged resurrection. Now, if this supposedly resurrected Jesus were himself God and acted in total accord with the other two-thirds of God, he could not be a mediator, an intermediary or conciliator, "between God and men."

Paul says that there is "*one Lord*, one faith, one baptism, *one God* and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:5-6). The "one Lord" is Jesus. The "one God" is the Father. In this passage there are two separate beings represented, not "one God" composed of Jesus and his Father. The fact is, there is no verse that says that Jesus and the Father are "one God." There is also no mention of the so-called "Holy Spirit" of the triune deity.

Revelation 11:15 states that "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ." Some Christians allege that this verse shows the equality of Jesus and God. This claim is incorrect. Significantly, "our Lord" in this verse is not Jesus but God Himself, and Jesus is clearly distinguished from God as "His Christ." While the term

“Lord” is often used in the New Testament to refer to either God or Jesus, there is a difference between the two.

John’s Jesus says: “I and the Father are one [*hen*]” (John 10:30). Trinitarians allege that this shows that they are one in essence. This claim is incorrect. This statement does not suggest either a dual or triune deity. What John’s Jesus meant by the word *hen* (“one”) becomes clear from his prayer concerning the apostles. He says: “That they may be one [*hen*], just as we are one [*hen*]” (John 17:22). He means that they should be united in agreement with one another as he (Jesus) is always united in agreement with God, as stated: “I [Jesus] always do the things that are pleasing to Him [God]” (John 8:29). There is thus no implication that Jesus and God, or the twelve apostles are to be considered as of one essence. The lesser authority aligns his thoughts with the greater authority.

The author of the Gospel of John claims that on hearing Jesus say: “I and the Father are one,” the Jews accused him of making himself out to be a god: “For good works we do not stone you but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, made yourself a god” (John 10:33). According to John, the Jews understood Jesus’ words as an assertion, on his part, that he was a supernatural power (*’elohim*, i.e., a god). In answering the Jews, John’s Jesus does not explain directly how he and the Father are one but explains rather that the concept of his being “a god” is not a farfetched idea. John has Jesus reply: “Has it not been written in Your Law, ‘I said you are gods?’” (John 10:34). This is taken from Psalms 82:6, which reads: “I said: You are godlike beings [*’elohim*], and all of you sons of the Most High.” By this explanation, John’s Jesus wishes to show that there is nothing wrong in his claiming to be “a son of God” (John 10:36), for God declares this to be true of all the children of Israel. However, John’s Jesus thinks himself to be in a closer relationship with God than any of the other “sons of the Most High.” An important distinction needs to be made here. While Jesus is called the “Son of God” more than fifty times in the New Testament he is *never* called “God the Son.”

John’s Jesus explains that he is a messenger of God sent to do His bidding. He endeavors to convince the Jews that they misunderstand him, “whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world” (John 10:36). It is only because he is God’s consecrated messenger, doing the works of his Father, that he believes himself to be “one” with God, strictly obedient to His every command (John 10:37-38). John’s Jesus is so exact in his obedience to God’s every desire that he claims, “the Father is in me and I am in the

Father” (John 10:38). At no time does he claim to be one in essence with God. Although he presents himself to be as one with God in will and purpose, John’s Jesus never claims a unity of person or equality in substance with the Almighty. In the final analysis, if Jesus were truly part of the Godhead, there would be no need for him to be “sent” by anyone or anything.

John’s Jesus states: “Even in your Law it has been written, that the testimony of two men is true [i.e., valid or admissible; see Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15]. I am he who bears witness of myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness of me” (John 8:17-18). Does this passage show Jesus and God to be ontologically one? Jesus represents himself as distinct from God as one witness in a court is from another. If Jesus and “the Father” were not two distinct entities how could they be considered two witnesses? If Jesus and God are one then there would in reality only be one witness. This statement also goes against the Torah’s precepts. According to the Torah, the two witnesses do not include the testimony of the person being judged.

The author of Hebrews says that Jesus is “not ashamed” to call his followers “brothers,” because they “are all from one [Father]” (Hebrews 2:11). The text says they are “brothers” of Jesus and implicitly sons of God. It does not say they are “brothers of God.” Jesus is no more part of God’s essence than any other individual.

The Book of Revelation says: “I [Jesus] am the first and the last, and the living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (Revelation 1:17-18). By connecting this verse with Isaiah 44:6, “I am the first, and I am the last,” some trinitarian commentators claim to find proof that Jesus is God. However, while the author of Revelation uses the prophet’s language in creating his own phraseology there is no comparison being made with Isaiah’s statement. He is expressing his belief that Jesus is the first and the last, not in terms of everlasting existence, but with regard to the manner of supposed resurrection. For this reason, the author calls Jesus “the firstborn of the dead” (Revelation 1:5). According to him, Jesus was the first one God raised from the dead to be “alive forevermore.” He is also the last one whom God will raise directly in this manner, for now it is alleged that God has given the power to resurrect the dead, the “keys of death and Hades,” exclusively to Jesus (see also John 5:21-22). These verses do not at all provide any ground for proclaiming Jesus as part of a triune deity.

The author of John states: "Jesus said to him: 'Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how do you say, "Show us the Father?"'" (John 14:9). If Jesus is actually God, this statement would contradict the assertion that "no man has seen God at any time" (John 1:18, 1 John 4:12; cf. Exodus 33:20). When John's Jesus says: "He who has seen me has seen the Father," it is not to be understood literally as actually seeing God in a physical sense. The author of the Gospel of John claims Jesus is "the only begotten god ["son" in some manuscripts]" whose function is to explain God (John 1:18). He does not consider Jesus to be part of the Godhead, only a supernatural power who bridges the gulf between God and man.

In sum, the author of John does not consider Jesus to be a mere mortal, but neither does he believe that he is God. He considers Jesus to be God's most intimate messenger, the Logos, who (as Philo states) is made the most exact image of God, but is not God Himself. The New Testament teaches that Jesus died. Yet, even Paul admits at Romans 1:23 that God is "immortal." One who is immortal is not subject to death; such a being could not die for even a moment.

God: undivided and without equal

How did John's Jesus view the possibility of a division in the divine essence? Chapter 17 of the Gospel of John records a prayer, which its author attributes to Jesus. In verse 2 of this prayer, Jesus views himself as being sent by God, his Father, who "gave him authority over all mankind." But of his "Father" he is quoted, in verse 3, as saying that he is "the only true God." Jesus does not say, "We are the only true God," or even, "You Father and the Holy Spirit are the only true God," but refers his remarks solely to the God whom he depicts as "Father." Even assuming Jesus to have been God manifested in a human form, he still would be God, and as such, he could not possibly have made this statement. Thus, by calling his Father not just the "true God" but "the only true God," he avows that he himself cannot be part of God. Jesus may claim to be united in oneness with God in doing only what the Almighty wishes, but he never asserts that he is part of the essence of God. If Jesus is of one substance with the Father, he could not say that the "Father" (verse 1), as differentiated from "Jesus Christ" (verse 3), is "the only true God." By definition, "only" must imply the singularity of God to the exclusion of all, including Jesus and the Holy

Spirit. Thus, it is clear that Jesus himself confirms that the Father, not the Son or the Holy Spirit, is “the only true God.”

According to the author of Acts, Stephen claims to see a vision of God and Jesus just before his own death. While “full of holy spirit” he is said to see “the son of man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). Thus, God and Jesus are portrayed as two separate beings. That which is a separate entity from God cannot be God.

Luke’s Jesus spoke to a “certain ruler” who had called him “good,” asking him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Luke 18:18-19). If Jesus thought he was God, he would have complimented the man on his insight, just as he complimented Peter for saying he was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15-16). Instead, Jesus gives the man a mild admonishment containing no recognition that there is any connection between calling him “good” and God alone being good.

Paul claims that “Christ” is the “image of God” (Colossians 1:15, 2 Corinthians 4:4). If Jesus is the image of God, then he cannot be God, because one cannot be an image of someone and the real person at the same time. If we see a photograph or a painting of a person, we see the individual’s image, but the image is not the real person. If “Christ” is the image of God as Paul alleges, then as God’s *image* he could not be God.

Paul’s Jesus: A savior but not God

The New Testament authors make a definite distinction between the one-and-only God and Jesus, never considering them one and the same. For instance, we find this distinction expressed in the statement: “Kindness and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Peter 1:2). This clarifies the meaning of the preceding verse, which reads, in part, “by the righteousness of our God and of [the] Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). The author of these two verses indicates that he considers God and Jesus to be two distinct beings.

On occasion, the New Testament authors alternate their use of the term “savior,” applying it to both God and Jesus. Thus, Paul, in Titus 1:3, calls God, “our Savior,” and then in verse 4, differentiates between “God [the] Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.” This does not show that God and Jesus are of one essence, but illustrates the function, which the New Testament authors believe Jesus has in God’s relationship with humanity.

This function can be seen from the following discussion of what some of the New Testament authors have to say about Jesus as savior.

Paul writes: "Awaiting the blessed hope and manifestation of the glory of the great God and of our Savior Christ Jesus" (Titus 2:13). He designates Jesus as "our Savior," but not as God Himself. Yet, even Paul could not deny that ultimately God is the true savior (Isaiah 43:11, 45:21; Hosea 13:4), which leads him to argue that God works through Jesus, as He worked, in former times, through others who were raised up as saviors (Judges 2:16; 3:9, 15; Nehemiah 9:27). Thus, God is still considered the ultimate and only source of salvation. However, salvation is now executed through Jesus. Accordingly, in Paul's letters we find the Father and the Son spoken of together in connection with salvation (1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Titus 1:3-4, 2:10-13, 3:4-6). The author of Acts attributes to Peter a statement that indicates Jesus' position as a savior: "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a leader and a savior" (Acts 5:31). This is also expressed in the statement: "the Father has sent the Son to be savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). In point of fact, even though Jesus is described as man's savior, God is described as Jesus' savior. The author of Hebrews writes: "In the days of his flesh, he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the one able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his piety" (Hebrews 5:7). While Jesus is, for Paul and the other New Testament authors, the sole agent through which God deals with mankind, that is, man's Lord and Savior, he is not at all God.

"I am"

John's Jesus states: "Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.' The Jews therefore said to him: 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham came into being, I am'" (John 8:56-58). Is the author of this Gospel claiming that Jesus is part of a triune deity when he has Jesus say, "before Abraham came into being, I am" (verse 8:58)?

Trinitarian commentators argue that the Greek words *ego eimi* ("I am"), allegedly spoken by Jesus, show that Jesus is God (see also John 8:24, 28). They arrive at their contention by connecting the phrase "I am" with the words spoken by God in Exodus 3:14 and often translated: "I AM THAT

I AM . . . Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: I AM has sent me to you.” However, the literal and proper translation of this verse is: I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE . . . Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: I WILL BE has sent me to you.”

Since the author of the Gospel of John utilized the Greek Septuagint translation of the Bible in his writings, it cannot be assumed that John’s Jesus is referring to the words in Exodus 3:14. Although Jesus actually spoke in either Hebrew or Aramaic not Greek, John recorded Jesus’ alleged words in Greek. *Ego eimi* (“I am”), used by John’s Jesus, is not the same as *ho on* (“The Being,” “The One Who Is”), which is used in the Septuagint’s rendering of Exodus 3:14: “And God spoke to Moses, saying, I am THE BEING; and He said, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: THE BEING has sent me to you.” Even though *ho on* appears in the Gospel of John, it is never used as a title or name or exclusively as a reference to Jesus. In the Book of Revelation, also credited to John by Christian commentators, *ho on* appears five times (Revelation 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5). Significantly, in each instance, it is used as a title or designation applied to God, not Jesus. Thus: “John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is [*ho on*] and who was and who is to come; and from the seven spirits who are before His throne” (Revelation 1:4). That this verse refers to God and not Jesus is seen from the following verse, which continues the greeting by now including Jesus as one of those sending greetings. Hence, Revelation says, in verses 4 and 5, that greetings are sent by God, the seven spirits, and Jesus.

The author of Revelation writes: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is [*ho on*] and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). This verse also speaks of God, not Jesus. In Revelation 4:8, *ho on* is applied to “the Lord God, the Almighty,” not Jesus, who, as the “Lamb” referred to in Revelation 5:6-7, comes to God, who is sitting on His throne. That they are two separate entities is seen from Revelation 5:13: “To the one sitting on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.” In addition, *ho on* is applied to the “Lord God, the Almighty,” not Jesus, in Revelation 11:17 and Revelation 16:5. That *ho on* in Revelation 16:5 refers to God and not Jesus can be seen from verse 7, which, referring to the subject of verses 5 and 6, states: “And I heard the altar saying: ‘Yes, Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.’” These are further indications that *ho on* and *ego eimi* are not used as synonymous terms by John.

In John 8:56-58, John is expounding his belief that Jesus had a prehuman existence as God's special supernatural agent in heaven. John's Jesus is proclaiming in this passage that this prehuman existence began before Abraham was born: "Before Abraham came into being, I am." The fact of the matter is that the text does not at all indicate how long John's Jesus supposedly lived before Abraham. In no way is John's statement to be taken as identifying Jesus as part of God.

Jesus as an instrument of the Creator

Even the authors of John, Colossians, and Hebrews, who elevate Jesus to a point where he is viewed as the medium *through* whom things are done, do not claim that he is the Creator or part of a triune deity. They consider him the supernatural instrument through which the Creator works:

All things came into being through him, and apart from him not even one thing came into being. (John 1:3)

For in him all things were created in the heavens and upon earth, visible and invisible, whether lordships or governments or authorities. All things have been created through him and for him. (Colossians 1:16)

In these last days He has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the ages. (Hebrews 1:2)

Do the preceding quotations from the New Testament show oneness of substance and coequality within the christological concept of a triune deity? On the contrary, they show that the various members of the so-called Trinity could not be considered one or coequal. These authors did not view Jesus as equal to God, but rather as the being through which God relates to His creation.

The Jewish Scriptures inform us that only God, who is "from everlasting to everlasting," is eternal, and has no beginning (Psalms 90:2). In contrast, the New Testament refers to Jesus as, "the beginning [*arche*] of the creation of God" (Revelation 3:14). Revelation's author does not imply that Jesus always existed. The word "beginning" expresses the idea of a starting point

in time. This clarifies John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word,” referring to the beginning of creation. John does not state that Jesus was eternally with God, only that he existed for an unspecified time before being used as the means through which God’s creative works were accomplished. It is only after creation began that John’s Jesus became God’s spokesman, the Word. The suggestion that Jesus is the author of the creation, and in that sense the beginning, does not accord with the meaning of the word *arche*. The claim that *arche* means the originating source of creation has no New Testament support. New Testament usage demonstrates that *arche* is not used in Revelation 3:14 in the sense of causing anything to come into being, but rather as a reference to the first thing created by God.

Albert Barnes writes concerning the Greek word *arche*, “beginning” or “origin”:

The word properly refers to the *commencement* of a thing, not its *authorship*, and denotes properly primacy in time, and primacy in rank, but not primacy in the sense of causing anything to exist The word is not, therefore, found in the sense of *authorship*, as denoting that one is the *beginning* of anything in the sense that he caused it to have an existence.²

Nevertheless, Barnes believes that Jesus is himself the uncreated and eternal Creator. However, he does not base his belief on Revelation 3:14. Of this verse he says:

If it *were* demonstrated from other sources that Christ was, in fact, a created being, and the first that God had made, it cannot be denied that this language would appropriately *express* that fact. But it cannot be made out from the mere use of the language here; and as the language is susceptible of other interpretations, it cannot be employed to prove that Christ is a created being.³

It is true that on the basis of language usage alone, this verse does not prove that its author considered Jesus a created being. Nevertheless, it can be shown that the authors of the New Testament considered Jesus a created being, the first so made by God. Paul writes that, “he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation And he is before all things . . .” (Colossians 1:15-17). Barnes disregards this evidence, which

depicts Jesus as a created being. He is of the opinion that Revelation 3:14 teaches solely that Jesus “holds the primacy over all, and is at the head of the universe.”⁴ He maintains that this verse refers to Jesus as ruler of the world, not as the creator of the world or as the first thing created. Accordingly, Jesus “is ‘the beginning of the creation of God,’ in the sense that he is the head or prince of the creation; that is, that he presides over it so far as the purposes of the redemption are to be accomplished, and so far as necessary for those purposes.”⁵ However, the validity of this exclamation is open to question. Barnes’ statement that this verse refers to Jesus as ruler of the world seems more the result of his desire to propose an explanation that will be acceptable to trinitarians than to determine the original intention of its author. There is no question that the authors of the New Testament regarded Jesus as the one through whom God rules the universe. They also attributed to Jesus the attaining of his exalted position only at the behest of God (Philippians 2:9). But what we are mainly concerned with here is that the wording of Revelation 3:14 does not at all establish Jesus as being the eternal Creator of the universe. It does not show Jesus to be the *author* or origin of creation. As we have seen, Barnes agrees with this. Furthermore, when he refers to Jesus as ruler, it should be understood that there is a difference in meaning between saying one is the “head,” “chief,” “prince,” or “ruler” of creation, and saying he is the “beginning” of creation. To be the “beginning” of something does not imply leadership. Primacy in creation, as the first being created by God, and primacy over creation, as the one through whom God rules the creation, are two distinct attributes that the authors of the New Testament applied to Jesus. One does not naturally follow from the other.

In Revelation 3:14 *arche* is properly translated as “beginning” to indicate the author’s belief that Jesus was the first being created. A further example of this usage may be found in Colossians 1:18. There, Jesus is called “the beginning [*arche*], the first born from the dead,” indicating Paul’s belief that Jesus is the first one of those who will be resurrected from the dead, “in order that he might come to have first place in everything.” As we have seen, Jesus, “the beginning of the creation of God,” is thought by the authors of the New Testament to be the first thing created by God, “the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15) through whom everything else was created. The very fact that Jesus’ existence is connected with the beginning of creation nullifies the claim that Jesus is God. What is begotten

cannot be eternal, and what is not eternal cannot be equal to God; moreover, that which is created by God cannot be God.

The author of John expounds the belief that Jesus had a prehuman existence as the Word who was “in the beginning with God” and through whom “all things came into being.” John emphasizes this belief throughout his entire Gospel (John 1:1-3; 17:5, 24). He describes Jesus as “an only begotten from a father” (John 1:14) and “the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18; see also John 3:16, 1 John 4:9). John’s belief in Jesus as “the only begotten Son of God” rests, as does Paul’s belief, on the contention that Jesus is the only being created directly by God. All other creatures were created through Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn, and chief among all creation (Colossians 1:15-17). He is even higher than the ordinary angels (Hebrews 1:3-13). Yet, despite the exalted position to which the author of John raised Jesus, he, like Paul, did not consider him part of the one-and-only God. According to Paul, Jesus became the “Son of God” by his supposed resurrection from the dead: “And who through the spirit of holiness was *declared* with power to be the Son of God *by his resurrection* from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:4).

The New Testament’s Jesus is never recognized as God or part of God, only as the “Son of God,” that is, one who is the first thing created by God and who is in close relationship with God. In fact, even after his alleged resurrection Jesus is still referred to by the term “Son of God” (Revelation 2:18), nothing more. This is not surprising, since in the New Testament Jesus always speaks of himself, and is spoken of by others, as separate and distinct from God. Nowhere in the New Testament, including the Gospel of John, where it specifically mentions the Word becoming flesh, is the claim made that Jesus is God incarnate, a combination of God and man.

Some trinitarian Christian commentators, believing Jesus to be God incarnate, see an important significance in John’s use of the Greek verb *eskenosen*, translated “dwelt,” in John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” This verb is akin to the noun meaning “dwelling,” “tent,” “booth,” or “tabernacle.” These commentators interpret this word to indicate that Jesus was God in spirit while tabernacling, that is, dwelling, in a human body. However, usage of this verb, by the author of John, does not imply that Jesus is God incarnate. The author of the Second Letter of Peter uses the same manner of expression: “And I consider it right, as long as I am in this dwelling [*skenomati*], to stir you up by way of reminder,

knowing that the laying aside of my dwelling [*skenomatos*] is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me" (2 Peter 1:13-14). Does the author of this letter mean, by the use of the Greek noun *skenoma*, "dwelling," or "tabernacle," that Peter also is an incarnation, a god-man? The author most certainly does not intend to express such an opinion. What the author wishes to express is that Peter would remain alive for a short time longer in his human body, and that is all. Therefore, word usage indicates that John 1:14 does not support the incarnation of God doctrine.

Syncretic roots of Paul's Jesus

Much of Christianity is the development of Paul and his theological descendants, who presented the pagans with a diluted form of Judaism in Hellenized garb. It is true that the Hellenistic Jewish philosophy of Philo paved the way to such a syncretism, but Philo certainly would have been shocked at the resulting distortion that followed in Paul's wake. Philo expected the Messiah, but he never identified the Messiah with the Logos, as was done by later Christian theology. For Paul, who is influenced by Philonic philosophy, the Christ is:

. . . the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him all things were created, in the heavens and upon earth, visible and invisible, whether lordships or governments or authorities. All things have been created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together For it was [God's] good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in him, and through him to reconcile all things to Himself He [Jesus] has now reconciled you in his fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him [God] holy and blameless and beyond reproach. (Colossians 1:15-22)

Paul's view is that Jesus is not God. He is God's first creation and the means by which God acts in the universe. He sees Jesus as the temporary incarnation of a preexistent heavenly being. Paul's Jesus is patterned after Philo's Logos.⁶ Jesus, for Paul, is in the image of God. He is the link between God and man and the agent for man's redemption. He intercedes with God on man's behalf and, as heavenly advocate, pleads man's cause before God (Romans 8:34; see also Hebrews 7:25, 9:24; 1 John 2:1). He is the

mediator between man and God: “For there is one God, and also one mediator between God and men, a man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). Paul further states: “But for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist through him” (1 Corinthians 8:6). Trinitarian theology misunderstood Paul’s Father-Son relationship. Paul says that the Father is “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He is the God and Father of Jesus, not his equal (Ephesians 1:3, 17). If there is *one God* and *one Lord*, then there are two separate beings, and they are not of the same nature or substance nor are they equal.

In all of his writings, Paul does not identify Jesus with God or portray him as equal to God. In fact, he says that in the future, the Son’s reign will come to an end and he will be subject to the Father. He says: “And when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the One who subjected all things to him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). In Philippians 2:9, Paul writes of Jesus that it is God who “highly exalted him,” which means that God did not make him His equal. Even after his supposed exaltation, Jesus continues to remain subject to God. It is obvious that if Jesus is “highly exalted” by God, he must have first occupied an inferior position in relation to God. Since his prior position was lower than God’s, and at best, he will attain a level where he will still be “subject to the One who subjected all things to him,” he could not be part of or equal to that “One.”

Subordination and subjection

Wherever the relationship of Jesus to God is treated in the New Testament, Jesus is always represented in a subordinate position. This subordinate role can be seen in the fact that Jesus views himself as a messenger: “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives Him who sent me” (Matthew 10:40; see also John 5:36). Jesus acknowledges his subordination and subjection to God when he declares that God is greater than he is (John 14:28), that he does nothing on his own initiative, speaking and doing only what God has taught him (John 8:28-29), and seeking not his own will, but the will of the God who sent him (John 5:30, 6:38).

Obviously, John’s Jesus is not God, whose will is to be done, but is lower than God, doing God’s will in accordance with Philo’s conception of

the Logos as a heavenly being distinct from God. In accordance with Philo's concept of the Logos as the mediator between God and mankind, John's Jesus said: "You are seeking to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God" (John 8:40). To the apostles he reveals the source of his alleged knowledge: "I have called you friends, because all the things which I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). John's Jesus repeatedly speaks of himself as being sent by God and being taught by God.

But Jesus cried out and said: "He who believes in me does not believe in me, but in Him who sent me. And he who beholds me beholds the One who sent me . . . For I did not speak on my own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent me has given me commandment as to what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting. Therefore the things I speak are just as the Father has spoken to me, thus I speak." (John 12:44-50)

John's Jesus acknowledges that, "A slave is not greater than his master, neither one who is sent greater than the one who sent him" (John 13:16). As God is greater than Jesus in sending him, so Jesus is greater than his disciples in sending them. Jesus tells them: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (John 20:21). The one who has greater authority sends the one who has less authority. John's Jesus himself disavows any triune coequality with God. He says: "This is everlasting life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus [the] Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). The true God is superior to, separate, and distinct from Jesus. That is why Paul writes: "there is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:6).

John's Jesus commands his followers to do "greater works" than his own. He declares, "He who believes in me [Jesus], the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). This statement is absurd if he were God, because then he would be instructing his followers to do greater works than God does.

The New Testament Jesus: A distinct supernatural agent

Despite the distinctiveness with which God and Jesus are regarded in the New Testament, most Christians are under the misconception that

God and Jesus form two-thirds of a triune deity. Partial responsibility for this error goes to the New Testament authors because a number of designations for Jesus in the New Testament are the same as those given to God in the Jewish Scriptures. The resulting confusion as to whether certain New Testament passages refer to God or to Jesus helped to produce the belief in a triune deity. That Jesus, considered by the New Testament authors to be the link between God and His creation, is called by some of the same designations that are applied to God is understandable. After all, the New Testament authors believed that God had conferred a tremendous amount of power upon this supernatural agent. So why not, as well, some of His names, which express certain facets of His being? But it is nevertheless clear that although God in the New Testament interacts with the world He created solely through His “firstborn,” the latter is still subservient to God. Because of the exalted yet subservient position in which they envision Jesus, the New Testament authors do not believe it compromises God’s status to apply some of His names to Jesus (cf. Ephesians 1:21, Philippians 2:9, Hebrews 1:4). The use of common names is not intended to show that Jesus is of one substance with God, but that God is giving Jesus the authority to act in some capacity on His behalf.

The Alpha and the Omega

In the Book of Revelation we find the verse, “I am the Alpha and the Omega,⁷ says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). *Alpha* is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and *Omega* the last letter. This description is ascribed to God who verse 6 says is “his [Jesus’] God and Father.” Verse 8 in the *King James Version*⁸ reads: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending,’ saith the Lord, ‘which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” In this verse, the *King James Version* and its derivative translations leave out the words *ho theos* (“the God”) and use only *kyrios* (“Lord”) giving the impression that the text is referring to Jesus when *Alpha and Omega* are distinctly applied here to the “Lord God” and not to Jesus. The word “God” is found in the best ancient manuscripts and, as a result, many modern versions do include the word “God.”⁹ As is clear from the context, the author of the Book of Revelation applies these words to God and not to Jesus. Thus we find, “Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and

from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:4-5). Confusion became more pronounced as exegetical study of the New Testament intensified the connection between the so-called “Lord Jesus” and “the Lord God.” But, there is a definite separation between God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come,” and Jesus.

Those who rely on the *King James Version* or its derivative translations are further misled by its rendering of Revelation 1:11. The *King James Version* mentions the *Alpha and Omega* in verse 11, which in context implies that it refers to Jesus. This text reads: “Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send *it* unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.” The title, *Alpha and Omega*, is absent in the best ancient manuscripts and, as a result, is not included in most modern translations.¹⁰ This verse should read: “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

Revelation 1:17 and 2:8 do not contain the words *the Alpha and the Omega*. In these verses the author of Revelation uses *protos* (“first”) and *eschatos* (“last”), which imply the same thought as the phrase *the Alpha and the Omega*. Revelation 1:17 reads: “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last.’” Revelation 2:8 reads: “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.’” Jesus is called the *arche* or “beginning” of the creation of God (Revelation 3:14) and considered as the *prototokos* or “first begotten” spiritual son (Hebrews 1:6). Only in Revelation 21:6 is Jesus called *the Alpha and the Omega*. Verse 6 reads, “And he said to me, ‘They have occurred! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment.’” Jesus *becomes the Alpha and the Omega* and the *arche* (“beginning”; see Revelation 3:14, “the beginning of the creation of God”) as well as the *telos* (“end”). This supposedly points to when Jesus is to become *the Alpha and the Omega*. In this phrase, the Greek collective neuter plural *gegonan*, “they have occurred,” promotes the concept that there is a progressive process by which Jesus advances in stature when given increased powers and authority

that in the past were exclusive to Almighty God. Nevertheless, for the Book of Revelation, Jesus is not God's equal at any point in time. What is recorded in Revelation is a vision of an imagined second return of Jesus. In this vision Jesus refers to himself as "the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (21:6). This title was not applied initially to Jesus. It becomes his reward signifying the power and authority invested in him for faithful service to God.

In Revelation 22 we see Jesus portrayed again as *the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end*. Jesus supposedly says:

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood. I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star. (Revelation 22:13-16)

As conceived by the author of Revelation, Jesus is given these titles as part of his delegated power from God. As the *protos* of the creation he is now called the *Alpha*; as the *eschatos* of the creation he is now called the *Omega*.

In Revelation, the title *the Alpha and the Omega* is applied in different verses to refer to either God or Jesus in their own respective ways. Therefore, the title can be applied to either one of them or to both of them. It is unnecessary to make the two of them into "one God" in order to explain this phrase. In the New Testament, the titles "Lord," "Savior," and "King of kings and Lord of lords" apply to both God and Jesus respectively (cf. 1 Timothy 6:14-16 where the title is attributed to God with Revelation 17:14, 19:16 where it is said to apply to Jesus). As with "Lord," "Savior" and "King of kings and Lord of lords," the title *the Alpha and the Omega* is thought by the author of the Book of Revelation to fit both. God is the beginning and the end of all things because he is uncreated and eternal: the first and the last, the beginning and the end. The title *the Alpha and the Omega* is applied to Jesus based on the New Testament belief that the pre-incarnate being that was later called Jesus was the first and last thing created directly by God and that the incarnate Jesus was the first and last

being resurrected directly by God. Once created, Jesus became the intermediary between God and His creation. In this depiction, Jesus is the firstborn from the dead and all others will be raised by him at the end of the ages when God will judge the world through him.

But, the title *the Alpha and the Omega* does not yet belong to Jesus. The author has only seen things transpire in a vision. At his expected second coming Jesus supposedly will attain this title from God who has held it heretofore. Then there will be “a new heaven and a new earth” (21:1), “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (21:2), Jesus dwelling among “his peoples” (21:3), and no more tears, death, mourning, crying, or pain (21:4). However, what is significant concerning the trinitarian claim is that the relationship between God and Jesus is clearly stated throughout the Book of Revelation as being of two completely separate beings (21:22). The “Holy Spirit” is not even mentioned in this book.

The events of this last book of the New Testament which supposedly contain “the revelation of Jesus Christ . . . must shortly take place” (1:1), that is, sometime around the end of the first century C.E.—not *now* in our own time. One New Testament author expressed the expectation succinctly: “The end of all things is at hand [literally “has come near”]” (1 Peter 4:7). Jesus supposedly exclaims: “I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that [hour] which is about to come upon the whole world . . . I am coming shortly, hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown” (Revelation 3:10-11). Indeed, in Revelation 22:7, 12 the subject of verse 13 (*the Alpha and the Omega*) says he is “coming shortly.” The contexts in which the word *tacheos*¹¹ is used in the Book of Revelation show that its author expected the imminent and sudden return of Jesus. The earthly concept of time, that is, the speeds of everyday life are too slow in the divine sense of distance and duration. The psalmist expressed this in saying that to God, a thousand years is like an earthly day that has already passed (Psalms 90:4). The concept, *a fleeting moment for God*, considers time in eternal terms. Man cannot relate to a day of a thousand years; but he can relate to one of twenty-four hours. As a result, “shortly” used as a promised time interval to humans must be understood in its simplest earthly definition as occurring quickly in the near future or it is used deceptively. But, Jesus did not come back “shortly,” within the timeframe designated by this book itself, this visionary experience (1:2, 22:8) is either false prophesy or the text cannot be speaking about Jesus in any form.

A debt to Philo

God, according to Philo, is an incorporeal, indefinable and absolute Being without any knowable attributes and qualities. God, being so removed from the world, cannot have direct relations with it.¹² Therefore, Philo introduces an intermediary existence (“words”) between God and the world.¹³ The “words” are identified with the angels in the Scriptures. These powers are also conceived of as a single independent being called *Logos* (“Word”), a term which Philo borrowed from Greek philosophy. The *Logos* becomes the intermediary between the transcendent, absolute spiritual God, and material creation, the only form in which God reveals Himself to mankind. This Philonic conception has its roots in the Platonic and Stoic speculations concerning the relationship of the First Divinity (God) to the world. Philo’s system follows that of the Greeks in that it is irreconcilably dualistic, with spirit and matter constituting a polarity. God and the world stand at opposite ends. By means of the *Logos*, Philo seeks to solve the problem as to how an absolutely transcendent God may be intimately concerned with the world He created. Philo portrays the *Logos* as the instrument of God’s creation and revelation and of His activity in the universe. This conception of the *Logos* is derived not from the biblical text, but from Hellenistic sources. It is primarily from the latter sources that Philo developed the concept of the *Logos* as mediator between God and the world in the ordering of creation. Philo judaizes his idea by identifying the Reason of the Greek philosophers (*Logos* in Greek means both “word” and “reason”) with the Aramaic term *memra*’ (“word”).

While personifying the *Logos* to a significant extent, Philo does not do so in an absolute sense. For him, the *Logos* is the representative of God and the mediator of man before God. The *Logos* is the “High Priest, His firstborn, the divine Word.”¹⁴ The *Logos* announces God’s intentions to man, acting as prophet and priest. It is through the *Logos* that man knows of God and raises himself toward Him. The *Logos* is definitely inferior to God. It stands midway between an unbegotten God and a begotten mankind. It is neither unbegotten nor begotten, “neither uncreated as God, nor created as you, but midway between the two extremes, a surety to both sides.”¹⁵

Philo describes the *Logos* as a “god” (a “god,” without a definite article, in distinction from “the God”).¹⁶ He states that while some mistakenly “regard the image of God, His angel the Word, as His very self,”¹⁷ it is his opinion that God only “stamped the entire universe with His image and

ideal form, even His own Word.”¹⁸ The Logos is the instrument by which God created the world.

For that man is the eldest son, whom the Father of all raised up, and elsewhere calls him His firstborn, and indeed the Son thus begotten followed the ways of his Father, and shaped the different kinds, looking to the archetypal patterns which that Father supplied.¹⁹

But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a Son of God, let him press to take his place under God’s firstborn, the Word, who holds the eldership among the angels, their ruler as it were. And many names are his, for he is called, “the Beginning” [*arche*], and the Name of God, and His Word, and the Man after His image, and “he that sees,” that is Israel For if we have not yet become fit to be thought sons of God yet we may be sons of His invisible image, the most holy Word. For the Word is the eldest-born image of God.²⁰

It is only through a cumulative study of how the relationship of Jesus to God is treated in the entire New Testament that we can determine the nature and role of the Logos as visualized by the early Christians. As we have seen, there is no doubt that the New Testament is greatly indebted to Philo. It is from him that the New Testament authors borrowed and adapted the concept of the Logos. Parallels to Philo’s teachings on the Logos abound in the New Testament to the extent where they could not be merely coincidental. In essence, Philo’s Logos, the most perfect image of God, is the elder among the angels, and acts as the creative mediator between the all-perfect, all-good God and the inherently evil world of matter. In the New Testament, we find references to such Philonic concepts as the “firstborn Son of God,” the “image of God,” and the “mediating high priest,” but the fullness of Philo’s doctrine of the Logos finds its culmination in the Gospel of John. Its author was deeply influenced by Philonic thought. This influence is most evident from a study of the Logos doctrine as set forth in the first chapter of that Gospel. Modifying Philo’s description of the Logos as a god, John describes the Logos as a separate divine entity who “became flesh,” and identifies it with Jesus. The task John sets for himself is to proclaim to the Greeks that the Messiah, the Christ, the “only begotten

Son of God,” has existed from the beginning of creation as a mediator, and that this divine Logos has become flesh in Jesus.

The metaphorical usage employed by Philo foreshadowed that used by pagan-influenced Christian theologians in their attempts to define the relationship between the nature of the Father and the Son. Much of the terminology characteristic of fourth-century trinitarian polemics is already in use in Philo’s literary works, e.g., the Logos is the firstborn Son of God, His image, His impress, His likeness, a second God. However, while Philo employs these terms in a metaphorical sense, Christian theologians construed them in a literal sense. Despite Philo’s exaggerated personification of the Logos, he believes it to be nothing more than the messenger and minister of God, like the ministering angels.

John 1:1

It is in John 1:1 that the nature of the Logos (the Word) is explicitly stated. The first verse of John, as translated in the *King James Version*, reads: “In the beginning was the Word [*ho logos*], and the Word was with God [*ton theon*, accusative case of *ho theos*], and the Word was God [*theos*]” (John 1:1). In the Greek this is: *En arche en ho logos, kai ho logos en pros ton theon, kai theos en ho logos*. The Greek sentence ends with the crucial words: *kai theos en ho logos* (“and god was the Word”). We are concerned here with the Greek noun *theos* (“god”) written without the definite article. This contrasts with the first mentioning of this noun expressed by *ton theon*, the accusative case of *ho theos* (“the God”), i.e., the noun *theos* preceded by the definite article *ho*.

In this verse, reference is made to God and the Logos, not to three beings. When John 1:1 refers to the Word as “god,” there is really no basis for concluding that he is the second person of a triune deity. This is evident from the Greek text, where, as we have just seen, the definite article *ho* appears before the first mention of God in the sentence, but is omitted before the second. The presence of the definite article before the noun suggests an identity, a personality, whereas its absence merely suggests a quality about someone. In the New Testament, the definite article usually precedes the noun *theos* when it denotes the one-and-only God. Since the Greek definite article is omitted before the second mention of *theos*, no proof for the existence of a triune deity can be accurately adduced from this verse. The omission of the definite article before the second mention of *theos* causes the word *theos* to act merely as an adjective that describes the

nature of the Word. It thus serves as a predicate adjective rather than as a predicate noun.²¹ For this reason, some translators render John 1:1 as “the word was deity” or “was divine.” This is quite different from the trinitarian view that the Word was God and was identical with God. If the Word was toward God, or with God, or for God, it is impossible to say that it was God. If it was God, it could stand in no relationship to God.

The author of John is expressing his belief that Jesus, the Word, was not “the God” but “a god.” It should not be considered unusual that a New Testament author refers to Jesus as a “god” since he is considered to be the supernatural agent that is the decisive link between God and His creation. The term “god” is applied even to the evil angel Satan, “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Indeed, Paul says: “there are many gods and many lords but for us there is but one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 8:5-6). Since referring to Jesus as a god would not make him, in any way, part of the one-and-only God, the proper translation of John 1:1 should be: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with [literally “toward”] God, and the Word was a god.” There is no reason to assume that the need for a definite article is understood from the context in order to be able to translate the end of the verse as, “and the Word was [the] God.” John means that the god mentioned here was not the only god, i.e., a supernatural being.

E. C. Colwell offers a grammatical rule explaining the use of the article with a predicate nominative in the Greek New Testament.²² This rule seems to justify the trinitarian translation of John 1:1. Colwell says:

A definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it precedes the verb. Of course, this can be claimed as a rule only after it has been shown to describe the usage of the Greek New Testament as a whole or in large part The opening verse of John’s Gospel contains one of the many passages where this rule suggests the translation of a predicate as a definite noun. *Kai Theos en ho logos* looks much more like “And the Word was God” than “And the Word was divine” when viewed with reference to this rule. The absence of the article does *not* make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it. The context makes no such demand in the Gospel of John, for this statement cannot be regarded as

strange in the prologue of the gospel, which reaches its climax in the confession of Thomas.²³

On closer examination, one finds that rather than supporting the trinitarian view, Colwell's evidence and conclusions disprove the belief that John teaches the doctrine of a triune deity. Colwell's evidence indicates that this is not an absolute rule but one that has a number of exceptions.²⁴ In addition, citing John 1:1 as an example, he states that context is important in determining whether a predicate nominative before a verb is indefinite. However, in support of his position that context demands that the predicate be definite in this verse, he states that this Gospel "reaches its climax in the confession of Thomas" (John 20:28) in which Thomas refers to Jesus as "my Lord and my God." At the heart of Colwell's statement is a theological bias on his part, not a judicious opinion based on either grammar or context. Colwell says: "The absence of the article does *not* make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when context demands it." According to his explanation, a predicate noun, e.g., "god," in the predicate nominative "and god was the Word," is indefinite before the verb only when the context demands it. He then asserts "the context makes no such demand in the Gospel of John." Actually, the very opposite is true. In John 1:1, context does demand that the second "god" mentioned in this verse be indefinite. In fact, considering the context of the entire New Testament, Colwell's rule is not applicable to John 1:1. John 1:1 is the most obvious exception to his rule; no definite article is to be implied before the second mention of "god" in John 1:1. Translating *theos* as "divine" or "a god" in order to express the nature of the Word, rather than identifying his person, is consistent with John's use of Philo's teachings and terminologies in order to explain his own Logos doctrine. The lack of the definite article before the word "god" most certainly represents John's theological intention.

In a study made by Philip B. Harner, an examination was conducted of clauses in which an anarthrous (used without an article) predicate noun precedes the copulative verb. Harner states that:

. . . E. C. Colwell examined this type of word order and reached the tentative conclusion that "definite predicate nouns which precede the verb usually lack the article." In accordance with this rule he regarded it as probable that the predicate noun in both Mark 15:39 and John 1:1 should be interpreted as definite. Colwell was almost entirely concerned with the question whether

anarthrous predicate nouns were definite or indefinite, and he did not discuss at any length the problem of their qualitative significance. This problem needs to be examined as a distinct issue.²⁵

Harner's findings "suggest that anarthrous predicate nouns preceding the verb may function primarily to express the nature or character of the subject, and this qualitative significance may be more important than the question whether the predicate noun itself should be regarded as definite or indefinite."²⁶

According to Harner, the Gospel of John has fifty-three anarthrous predicates before the verb while the Gospel of Mark has eight. Examining Mark's usage of this grammatical form, he concludes that it "gives little if any support to the idea that an anarthrous predicate noun preceding the verb is necessarily definite."²⁷ In examining John's fifty-three examples of an anarthrous predicate preceding the verb, he finds that there is reason to expect "some qualitative significance in the predicate noun, and we cannot assume that the predicate is necessarily definite."²⁸ Harner cites John 6:51 and 15:1 as two examples of the type of clause in which an arthrous (used with an article) predicate precedes the verb. "The fact that John sometimes uses this type of clause supports the view that he did not necessarily regard an anarthrous predicate as definite simply because it precedes the verb."²⁹ He does not rule out the possibility that "an anarthrous predicate preceding the verb . . . may be definite if there is some specific reason for regarding it as definite."³⁰ But this type of anarthrous predicate, he emphasizes, would be an exceptional case. Harner maintains that the majority of anarthrous predicates in the Fourth Gospel are of the type for which "there is no basis for regarding such predicates as definite, and it would be incorrect to translate them as definite."³¹

In his detailed examination of John 1:1, Harner states that "our study so far suggests that the anarthrous predicate in this verse has primarily a qualitative significance and that it would be definite only if there is some specific indication of the definiteness in the meaning or context."³² However, Harner writes that the clause *ho logos en pros ton theon*, "the Word was with God" "suggests relationship, and thus some form of, 'personal' differentiation, between the two."³³ As such, *theos en ho logos* "means that the logos has the nature of *theos* (rather than something else)" and that "the word *theos* is placed at the beginning for emphasis."³⁴ Therefore, he concludes that:

Perhaps the clause could be translated, “the Word had the same nature as God.” This would be one way of representing John’s thought, which is, as I understand it, that *ho logos*, no less than *ho theos*, had the nature of *theos*.³⁵

Harner, like Colwell, is a trinitarian, yet his study does not enhance the trinitarian contention that John 1:1 speaks of God and the Logos as being of one essence. Furthermore, his analysis makes Colwell’s “definite rule” even less definite than ever. At the end of his study Harner reminds the reader that:

At a number of points in this study we have seen that anarthrous predicate nouns preceding the verb may be primarily qualitative in force yet may also have some connotation of definiteness. The categories of qualitiveness and definiteness, that is, are not mutually exclusive, and frequently it is a delicate exegetical issue for the interpreter to decide which emphasis a Greek writer had in mind. As Colwell called attention to the possibility that such nouns may be definite, the present study has focused on their qualitative force In John 1:1 I think that the qualitative force of the predicate is so prominent that the noun cannot be regarded as definite.³⁶

It follows that it should be quite acceptable to render *theos en ho logos* as “the Word was a god” for here John is expressing his belief about the quality or nature of the Word. He is not identifying the essence of the Word as being one with God. For the author of the Gospel of John *ho theos* and *ho logos* are not interchangeable terms. If they were, he could not say, “the Word was *with* God.” John’s Word is a supernatural being but he is not the Deity.

The trinitarian argument that the second *theos* in John 1:1 does not require the article to be considered definite can only be motivated by theological considerations, whereas to translate the word *theos* as “a god” is consistent not only with John’s use of the Philonic Logos, but with the New Testament’s general explanation of Jesus’ relationship to God. There is no reason to assume that the absence of a definite article is implied or understood. The absence of the article is intentional and essential to express John’s belief. Similarly, in Revelation 19:13, attributed to the author of

the Gospel of John, Jesus is called “the Word of God” (literally “the Word of the God,” *ho Logos tou Theou*), not “God the Word.” Under the influence of Philo’s teachings, John did not promulgate the idea that the Word was “the God,” but that he was, as the firstborn Son of God, a second god. God and Logos are not interchangeable terms. For this reason, in John 1:1, God is referred to as *the* God and the Logos as *a* god to show the difference between the two. John deliberately omitted the definite article in the predicate in order to describe who or what the Word was in relation to God, i.e., a god, a supernatural power, but not *the* God.

It was not difficult for the Hellenistic Gentile mind to picture human salvation as being brought about by the incarnation of the Word in the form of Jesus. The pagans of Asia Minor believed that the Son of God, Hermes, had come down in disguise to dwell among men. The Book of Acts records how in Lystra, Paul and Barnabas were identified with Hermes and Zeus (Acts 14:12). In John’s time (after 81 C.E.), the emperor Domitian insisted that he be regarded as God, son of the supreme God, and be addressed as “our Lord and our God.” It was, therefore, quite understandable for John to have Thomas adore the allegedly risen Jesus as “my Lord and my God” (John 20:28). This could have been employed as a Christian polemic against Domitian’s claim to divinity.

As to the claim that Thomas’ alleged exclamation: “My Lord and my God” is proof of Jesus’ divinity, a grammatical analysis of the original Greek will disprove it. It reads in Greek: *Ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou* (“The Lord of me and the God of me”). Moule states:

In John 20:28 *Ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou*, it is to be noted that a substantive [e.g., God] in the Nominative case used in a vocative sense [indicating the person addressed, e.g., Jesus] and followed by a possessive [e.g., of me] could not be anarthrous [i.e., without the definite article] . . . ; the article before *theos* may, therefore, not be significant.³⁷

Because of this grammatical rule, the definite article before *theos* is, in this instance, of no conclusive value for proving that Thomas referred to Jesus as *the* God. A better understanding of John’s rendition of Thomas’ words may be seen by comparing them with Paul’s usage of the words God and Lord: “But for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all

things, and we [exist] through him” (1 Corinthians 8:6). Paul speaks of two separate and distinct entities. Indeed, Thomas’ words may be taken literally as an exclamation referring to both: “The Lord of me [is Jesus] and the God of me [is *Y-H-V-H*].” Alternately, Thomas’ words may very well mean that Jesus is referred to as a specific supernatural power, who exerts dominion over him (“my lord”) as his guardian angel (“my god”), and not to God Himself. In the light of the evidence presented by the New Testament, it is clear that this alleged statement of Thomas’ in no way refers to Jesus as the Eternal God of Israel.

Satan’s temptation

If Jesus is God as well as man how could Satan expect to tempt him? Mark simply states that Satan tempted Jesus (1:13) but Matthew (4:1-11) and Luke (4:1-13) elaborate the story. It is claimed that during Jesus’ alleged forty days sojourn in the desert following his baptism by John, Satan tempted him with promises of an earthly kingdom if Jesus would only worship him.

If Jesus is part of God, how could he possibly sin, and how could Satan possibly hope to tempt him? Satan’s words would be meaningless. Surely, even the earthly Jesus was incapable of committing as sinful an act as the worshiping of Satan. Indeed, unlike a mere mortal, it was decreed that the Gospels’ Jesus exactly follow the life outlined for his earthly existence by the very deity of whom he was an integral part.

In assuming a human body, the Jesus of Christian theology knew what God’s purpose for the future of mankind was and what was expected of him in order to bring this about. Did Jesus, the perfect god-man, have free will to sin while on earth? Obviously not! Had he failed to carry out God’s plan, the entire timetable set forth by the Almighty would have been eternally disrupted. Lacking free will to do as he pleased, Jesus could not truly have been tempted.

Satan, as one of God’s creations, could not seriously promise the Gospels’ Jesus, who was already divine and in control of the universe, a mere kingdom as a reward for worshiping him. As puffed up with pride as one might envision Satan to be, he is certainly not stupid. In the Gospel narrative Satan knew Jesus was not a mere human given to flattery and subject to the temptations of the flesh. Jesus was not one who would accept worthless promises.

Even if we suppose that Satan did make Jesus the most extravagant of offers, as reported by the Synoptic Gospels, it would not in the least have been a temptation to the divine Jesus of later Christianity. In view of the claim by Christian commentators that Jesus was offered an earthly kingdom by God, as recorded in Psalm 2: "Ask of Me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession" (Psalms 2:8), can anyone believe that a member of the Trinity would have difficulty in choosing between the two opposing offers? Certainly, Satan would not have wasted his time on such a futile endeavor as offering God an earthly kingdom. It is obvious that the account of Satan's attempt to tempt Jesus cannot be reconciled with the overall view of Jesus as held by Christians.

Of Jesus it is said: "For because he himself has suffered and has been tempted, he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). It is also alleged that when Jesus was on earth, he was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Men need to be strengthened at times of anguish (Luke 22:43) or temptation (Matthew 4:11, Mark 1:13); God does not need any such support. If Jesus were God in any manner of speaking it would be meaningless to tempt him. To say that God feels temptation like a human (Matthew 4:11, Mark 1:13) is absurd. If Jesus was God as well as man at the time of his alleged temptation by Satan, how are these verses, and indeed the entire temptation episode, to be reconciled with the belief expressed by the author of James? He states, "Let no one say when he is tempted: 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13). If according to James "God cannot be tempted by evil," then the Jesus who Christians claim is God cannot have been tempted by Satan. The entire Gospel episode of Satan's temptation of Jesus must therefore not have occurred.

In contrast to the Christian claims about Jesus, the God of Israel does not need to be tempted and suffer in order to be able to understand and forgive man's sins because He is the all knowing creator of man. This is poignantly expressed in the verse: "And the Lord said: 'I have surely seen the affliction of My people that are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; for I know their pains'" (Exodus 3:7). Isaiah reiterates this relationship between God and Israel: "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isaiah 63:9).

PART 3: THE PROBLEM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The impersonal nature of holy spirit

The spirit of God is not a being with its own identity and separate consciences. It is divisible and able to be distributed as God sees fit. For example, God took of the spirit that was upon Moses and put it upon the seventy elders of Israel (Numbers 11:17-25). David prayed that God's "holy spirit" not be removed from him (Psalms 51:13). It was also measured out differently to different people; hence Elisha could pray to receive a "double portion" of spirit (2 Kings 2:9). It was not given to all and therefore its presence was noteworthy (Genesis 41:38).

Isaiah declares that when the Messiah comes "the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2). These "spirits" are symbols of the intense God given power of insight and judgment with which the Messiah will judge and reign. They are neither separate beings nor the third member of a triune deity, the "Holy Spirit." The Hebrew usage of "the spirit of God" never refers to an infinite, coequal and coeternal being separate from, but at the same time a part of, God Almighty.

The impersonal nature of holy spirit is also reflected in New Testament belief. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, reportedly quoted from Joel 2:28 where God says: "[I] will pour out of My spirit." The Greek rendering reads literally "from the spirit of Me," that is, "some of My spirit," or "part of My spirit," or "a portion from My spirit" (Acts 2:17). Elsewhere it says: "We know that we live in Him and He in us, because He has given us *of* His spirit" (1 John 4:13). Does this sound like coequality or what is being expressed is that the spirit of God is a separate personage within the framework of a triune deity?

Establishing paternity

In Matthew's version of the alleged conception of Jesus story (Matthew 1:18) it states that Mary "was found to be with child by holy spirit [with no definite article before "holy spirit"]." In Luke's version of this story it says that the angel "said to her [Mary], 'Holy spirit [with no definite article] will come upon you,' and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (1:35). If

holy spirit and *power of the Most High* are synonymous terms used here in a parallel structure then Luke can allege that “for this reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God (verse 35). But, if they are two separate entities, then who is the father of Jesus—the *holy spirit* or *the Most High*?

It may be that the “father-son” phraseology is a convenient way of trying to explain the relationship between God and Jesus. However, if “a holy spirit” (or alternately “the Holy Spirit”) is a separate person within the triune deity, yet part of that triune entity, one might say that God, the Father, is the father of the Son, and that the Holy Spirit is also the father of the Son. But, if the Son is no less part of the triune deity than the Father and the Holy Spirit then, in essence, the Son fathered himself.

The baptism formula

Some Christian commentators allege that the command by Matthew’s Jesus to, “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19) shows the existence of a triune deity. However, it is doubtful that the Gospel of Matthew originally made this claim. Even more uncertain is the notion that this directive was made by Jesus at the onset of the apostolic period (following the death of Jesus) or at any other time. In any case, this text makes no mention of the three being coequal or that they are one in essence. The fact is that belief in a triune deity entered into Christian belief independent of the composition of the Gospel of Matthew. The trinitarian baptismal formula, as it is now found in the Gospel of Matthew, is a post-apostolic period doctrinal expansion of the text.

Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-c. 340) cites Matthew 28:19 at least twenty-one times in his writings,³⁸ but not as it appears today in the New Testament. He finishes the verse with the words “make disciples of all nations in my name” (cf. Luke 24:47—“And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his [Jesus’] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem”). For example, in his *Ecclesiastical History* (c. 324 C.E.), he wrote:

But the rest of the apostles, who had been incessantly plotted against with a view to their destruction, and had been driven out of the land of Judea, went unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of Christ, who had said to them, “Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name.”³⁹

Again, in his *Oration in Praise of Emperor Constantine* (c. 335 C.E.), he wrote:

What king or prince in any age of the world, what philosopher, legislator or prophet, in civilized or barbarous lands, has attained so great a height of excellence, I say not after death, but while living still, and full of mighty power, as to fill the ears and tongues of all mankind with the praises of his name? Surely none save our only Saviour has done this, when, after his victory over death, he spoke the word to his followers, and fulfilled it by the event, saying to them, "Go ye, and make disciples of all nations in my name."⁴⁰

In his *Demonstratio Evangelica* (c. 314 C.E.), he wrote:

For he did not enjoin them "to make disciples of all the nations" simply and without qualification, but with the essential addition "in his name." For so great was the virtue attaching to his appellation that the Apostle says, "God bestowed on him the name above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow of things in heaven and on earth and under the earth." It was right therefore that he should emphasize the virtue of the power residing in his name but hidden from the many, and therefore say to his Apostles, "Go ye, and make disciples of all the nations in my name."⁴¹

Eusebius, who supported the orthodox trinitarian position, was present at the Council of Nicaea and was involved in the debates concerning whether Jesus was part of the essence of God or a creation of God. If the manuscript of the Gospel of Matthew that he used read "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and thus could be used to support the trinitarian position, he would not have quoted it so frequently as "in my name." Thus, it can be assumed that the earliest manuscripts read "in my name,"⁴² and that the phrase was enlarged and officially adopted to reflect the orthodox position as trinitarian influence spread following the Council of Nicaea (325).

Eusebius lived at the great Christian library of Caesarea collected by Origen⁴³ and Pamphilus. He had access to codices of the Gospels containing the disputed verse, which were much older than those now available.⁴⁴

Evidently, the text of Matthew 28:19 with which he was familiar read “Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name.” It is only sometime after he attended the Council of Nicaea that his writings contain any reference to the expanded version of the text. This version is found in two works written in his old age, and entitled respectively, *Against Marcellus of Ancyra*, and *About the Theology of the Church*. The expanded reading is also found in a letter addressed by Eusebius, after the Council of Nicaea, to his church in Caesarea. These citations of the expanded formula either reflect conformity to avoid accusations of heresy in the post-Nicene period or may be the result of interpolation by later copyists.

Can the Eusebian phraseology, “Go ye, and make disciples of all the nations in my name,” be considered as decisive proof that the clause “baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” was lacking in the manuscripts available to Eusebius? Perhaps, in writing “in my name” Eusebius was simply abbreviating the longer clause. What militates against this proposal is that Eusebius cites the shorter version so often that it is difficult to suppose that he is simply paraphrasing the text. Moreover, the shorter form agrees with the baptismal formula used by the apostles as described in the Book of Acts.

If Matthew 28:19 as found in modern versions is accurate, then the apostles ignored Jesus, since there is not a single occurrence of them baptizing anyone according to that formula. All the relevant passages in the New Testament show that in the early years of Christianity people were baptized “into Christ” (Galatians 3:27) or “in the name of Jesus,” just as the Eusebian text said to do and not as directed by the present-day reading of Matthew 28:19. Thus, we find: “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the *name* of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins’” (Acts 2:38). “They had simply been baptized into the *name* of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16). “So he ordered that they be baptized in the *name* of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48; see also Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27). “On hearing this, they were baptized into the *name* of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). From these citations we see that this was the procedure followed, whether or not Jesus actually so ordered. In Acts, the apostles always use the name of “the Lord Jesus” or “Jesus Christ” in baptizing, but never any trinitarian type formula. It is difficult to imagine that the apostles would have disregarded a clear command of Jesus if they knew of it. Interestingly, we never hear in the New Testament that the Jews charge the apostles with teaching that Jesus is God or part of a triune deity.

All the evidence shows that the references to the receiving of “the holy spirit” with baptism which are found in the New Testament do not refer to a third member of the triune deity. They refer to the spiritual gifts believed by Christians to be bestowed by God upon those who receive baptism in the name of Jesus (see Acts 1:8). It should be remembered that the Gospel of Matthew was written in the post-apostolic period. The notion of a triune deity (with great variation) was present among some Christians in the ante-Nicene period, but that does not prove that the New Testament taught the existence of a triune deity.⁴⁵ If the author of Matthew used the longer formula it would still not conform to apostolic usage. Their practice puts in doubt any thoughts that Jesus ever uttered these exact words. There is simply no passage in the New Testament that asserts that God is three in any sense whatsoever.

The problem with 1 John 5:7-8

It would seem that one of the best New Testament proofs for the Christian doctrine of a triune deity is found in 1 John 5:7-8. However, this conclusion depends on which translation of the New Testament you are using. Many modern translations do not include this supposed proof of a trinitarian deity.

As rendered in the King James Version of the Bible, it reads: “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” However, these verses do not occur in any reliable Greek New Testament manuscript. Westcott and Hort observe that “by editorial retouching without manuscript authority, the interpolation assumed the form which it bears in the ‘Received Text’ [The King James Version].”⁴⁶ The words added to the text begin in verse 7 with “in heaven” and include every word through “in earth.”

There is an interesting footnote to the above to be found in the Catholic Jerusalem Bible (1966), which does not have the added words (except for “in heaven”) in the main text. It states:

Vulg[ate] vv.7-8 read as follows: “There are three witnesses in heaven: *the Father the Word and the Spirit, and these three are one; there are three witnesses on earth: the Spirit the water and the blood.*”

The words in italics (not in any of the early Greek MSS, or any of the early translations, or in the best MSS of the Vulg. itself) are probably a gloss that has crept into the text.

Whatever its source, the crucial passage does not appear in any of the early manuscripts and is of much later origin than the original authorship of 1 John.

Pneuma (spirit) and parakletos (helper)

The Greek word for spirit (*pneuma*) has many different meanings, the correct one being determined only from the context of each occurrence. In Greek *pneuma*, is neuter, as are all pronouns referring to the spirit, making them necessarily impersonal. Those New Testament translations, which render the “spirit” as “He” instead of “it,” do so because of trinitarian beliefs (e.g., John 14:17). If the translators had properly rendered the neuter pronouns of “the spirit of the truth” found in John 14 through 16 as “it,” “its,” “itself” and “which” instead of “He,” “His,” “Him,” “who,” and “whom,” (John 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-8, 13-15) there would not be this false sense that there is personality attributed to the holy spirit.

In the Johannine Jesus’ last discourses to his disciples, he speaks of the “helper” who will come to encourage the faithful after he has gone to the Father. Since “helper” (*parakletos*) is a masculine word in Greek, trinitarian translators render the following pronouns as “he” and “him.” The same “helper” is, however, synonymous with “the spirit of the truth” and the texts should be rendered as follows:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father and He will give you another helper to remain with you until the [coming] age, the spirit of the truth, which the world cannot receive, because it does not see it or know it [*auto*, neuter agreeing with spirit]. But you know it [*auto*] because it remains with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you But the helper, the holy spirit, which the Father will send in my name, it [*ekeinos*, masculine in Greek to agree with *parakletos*, but translated as “he” only if it is assumed a person is meant] will teach you all things and remind you of all things that I said to you. (John 14:15-26)

Since the “helper” may be distributed at the request of the “Son” and is subservient to the wishes of the “Father” it is not a person distinct from and equal to the Father or the Son.

So-called pathetic fallacies attributing personal qualities, gender, feelings, and actions to things that have no real personal consciousness are common in the Jewish Scriptures. For example, Wisdom is personified in Proverbs 8 and 9, yet no literal person named “Wisdom” was actually beside God as He created the world (Proverbs 8:30). Similarly, in the Gospel of John the spirit of God is personified as a *parakletos*, “helper,” “advocate” (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The personal pronouns used agree grammatically with the nature of the figurative title. But, the personification does not mean the subject has substance or is a person. The *parakletos*, as with the “spirit of the truth,” and “spirit” requires the neuter “it” to reflect the impersonal nature of what its referent is. A writer or a poet can, however, employ a figurative expression in the use of pronouns. When in the Gospel of John poetic personification is being employed with reference to the “helper” the reader needs to understand such usage to be a mere figure of speech. It is implicit in the text of John 16:13 that this “helper” is “sent.” It is explicit that it “does not speak on its [his] own initiative” and is instructed (“whatever it [or he] hears it [or he] will speak”). Used in this context, it is supposedly the heaven sent insight taking the place of Jesus who is to go to the Father (John 14:12). It is “another helper” in lieu of the departed Jesus who is to lead the disciples to a deeper knowledge of the gospel and enable them to undergo trials and persecution. It is by no means meant by the author of the Fourth Gospel to be considered a personage coequal to the sender. *Parakletos* is also applied to Jesus in the sense of him being a heavenly advocate or intercessor for his followers: “If anyone sins, we have an advocate (*parakletos*) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

Paul writes that “The spirit intercedes for us” (Romans 8:26), but also identifies who this spirit is in the context of this passage: “Christ Jesus . . . intercedes for us” (Romans 8:34). He also writes: “But whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:16-17). The veil is a reference to Exodus 34:34, “But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he took the veil off.” Christian commentators are divided as to whether “the Lord” in verse 17 refers to God or Jesus although Exodus 34:34 refers to *Y-H-V-H*. In any case, Paul’s words can be best understood as leaving no room for a separate entity called the “Holy Spirit.”

The term “spirit” is used in several different ways in the New Testament, but none of them supports the contention that it refers to a coeternal, coequal being within a triune structured deity. It simply expresses a belief held by the author of the Gospel of John that by this “spirit,” this thought implant, Jesus would allegedly still be present: “I will come to you” (14:18); “I am in you” (14:20); and “I will show myself” (14:21). By this spirit his work with them would supposedly continue: “It will teach you” (14:26); “It will remind you of everything I have said” (14:26); “It will testify about me” (15:26); “It will convict the world of guilt” (in preparation for his judgment—16:8); “It will guide you into all truth” (16:13); “It will give glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you” (16:14). But, despite the use of the pronoun *he* when referring to *spirit* in Christian translations *it* is not a person!

The author of 1 John writes that “We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6). If the *parakletos*, the “spirit of the truth” (John 14:17) were a person, then “the spirit of the error” in 1 John 4:6 would also have to be a person, given that the two are directly contrasted. The fact is that what is meant is that each “spirit” represents the mental influence under which a person acts, but neither is a person in itself.

In the New Testament, the Spirit of God is simply God’s *dunamis* (power) in action. The “Holy Spirit” does not have an independent personality. It is merely a way of speaking about God’s personally acting in history. In the New Testament it is also used of the allegedly risen Jesus’ personally acting in the life of the Church. The New Testament nowhere represents the spirit as having an independent personality.

Leaving out reference to the holy spirit

In the opening salutation of Paul’s letters to various churches (Romans through Thessalonians) he sends personal greetings from “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” If “the Holy Spirit” were an integral and personal part of a triune deity, then why does *He* not send *His* personal greetings as well? Obviously, Paul never contemplated that there was such a person. If there were a third person involved, would not the supposedly divinely inspired Paul have known about it and included *Him* in his greetings to the churches? When Paul does include additional entities in his greetings, salutations and adjurations, he names “the elect angels,” not “the Holy

Spirit” (1 Timothy 5:21; cf. Luke 9:26 and Revelation 3:5). It is ludicrous to think that Paul would consistently omit mention of the third person of the Trinity, if he believed him to exist.

In the other New Testament letters, every one of the authors identifies himself with “God the Father” and “the Lord Jesus Christ,” but not one does so with “the Holy Spirit.” But, if they were ignorant of the existence of the doctrine of a triune deity then their apostleship was faulty at best, and at worst they were teaching heresy. No; their failure to clearly teach the existence of a triune deity shows that the doctrine of the Trinity was not a belief of the early church. 1 John 1:3 says that for followers of Jesus fellowship is with “the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.” Why is the Holy Spirit left out?

In the eternal city of Revelation 21 and 22, both God and Jesus are presented as a featured fantasy. Each is pictured as sitting on his throne (Revelation 22:1). If “the Holy Spirit” is a “coeternal” member of a triune deity, why does it have no seat of authority on the final throne? This is consistent with the New Testament belief that there is one God, “the Father,” and one “Lord, Jesus Christ.” There is no such separate person known as “the Holy Spirit.” In point of fact, the notion of the Holy Spirit never appears in the Book of Revelation.

PART 4: IS THE TRINITY DOCTRINE A NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING?

Who has the power?

Paul, speaking of Jesus says, “for in him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). Whether Paul is teaching a form of dualism or that this supposed supernatural power that has indwelled Jesus has become God’s unique representative to mankind is a dispute for Christian commentators to ponder. Suffice it for us to ask, if God was *in* the incarnate Jesus and was *one* with Jesus ontologically why is it that God knew things of which Jesus had no knowledge (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32, Acts 1:7)? Why is it that John’s Jesus says, “I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). The author/authors of the Gospel of John recognized that Jesus was not part of the essence of God. John’s Jesus says, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Yes, this Gospel’s author taught that God the Father was the one and only God, and unlike the later

trinitarians he taught that Jesus was a separate entity *sent* by God. John's Jesus believes himself to be so exact in his obedience to God's every desire that he claims, "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:38). But, at no time does he claim to be one in essence with God. Although he presents himself to be at one with God in will and purpose, John's Jesus never claims a unity of person or equality in substance with the Almighty. In the final analysis, were Jesus truly God Himself, there would be no need for him to be "sent" by anyone or anything.

Some trinitarians maintain that these texts showing subordination of the Son to the Father refer to Jesus' human nature, and not to his supposed divine one. But, this argument falls apart when considering the inferior role of the so-called Holy Spirit who remains solely divine and yet is ordered about by the Father. The Holy Spirit is supposed to be equal to the Father. Yet, in the New Testament the Holy Spirit is said to be sent by the Father, just as the Father sends Jesus. If the three entities of the triune deity are coequal why is it that there are passages that speak of the Son and the Holy Spirit being subordinate to the Father but never is the Father portrayed as subordinate to the Son nor the Holy Spirit?

And last but not least, consider this. According to New Testament theology, Jesus came into the world expressly to offer himself as a willing sacrifice to atone for mankind's sins. Yet, he hesitates and prays for a reversal of the fate preordained for him. The Gospel narrative portrays Jesus' state of mind just a few hours prior to his crucifixion: "And going a little way forward, he fell upon his face praying and saying: 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet, not as I will, but as you will'" (Matthew 26:39; see also Mark 14:35-36, Luke 22:41-44). It is related that Jesus, supposedly one-third of the triune deity, needed an angel to strengthen him: "Then an angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him" (Luke 22:43). With his alleged divine pre-knowledge of why he had to die and of the rewards that would be his for obeying God (Philippians 2:9-11), or himself, what reassurance did he need from a mere angel? Did he have to be reminded of his role and its rewards? Why the feelings of despair and failure? Jesus was in a state of agony (Luke 22:44) in which he tearfully cried out, not for the sins of the world, but to be saved from death (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus' alleged exclamation: "Yet, not as I will but as you will," shows that had it been his choice, he would not have undergone execution. Although he seems to have submitted to God's will, in his final moments of life Jesus is said to

have expressed feelings of frustration and abandonment (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34; cf. Luke 23:46, John 19:30) using the psalmists words: "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalms 22:2). In that last critical moment, Jesus who some say was a supernatural power and others part of a triune deity expressed that he did not wish to die and become a willing sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

As we have seen, the New Testament does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity. However, even if it did, this doctrine would still be false since it does not conform to the teachings of the Jewish Scriptures. God is an absolute one who is neither a duality, a trinity, a quaternity, nor any other composite being. The transformation of Jesus into part of a triune deity is a chimera, an unfortunate distortion of Jewish biblical text, the New Testament, and the Philonic Logos used in conjunction with pagan motifs. Because of misinterpretation, Christians have been misled into worshiping Jesus as the divine God the Son. Joined with this is the notion of the "Holy Spirit" as part of a coeternal, coequal deity. These concepts, in truth, have no place in a discussion of the ontological being of God.

Attempts to explain the doctrine of a triune deity can only be made by the use of extra-biblical terminology. But, this can only mask, not resolve, the many contradictions of Scripture and logic inherent in the Trinity doctrine. Every verse quoted by those attempting to "prove" the existence of a triune deity or that Jesus is God Almighty, can be properly understood otherwise within the context of the original language sources of the New Testament. The absolute indivisible oneness of God stands on a solid foundation.

Trinitarianism or tritheism?

Trinitarians may insist that there is only one God and indeed the vast majority of those who hold to this doctrine truly believe there is one God, but do they worship one God? The point of contention is their further claim that there is one Godhead existing in three persons. The problem is that this is not the God described in the Jewish Scriptures nor the New Testament from which they assume this trinitarian teaching is to be found. The relationship they propose between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is not one of a Godhead existing in three persons, but one of tritheism, three independent gods of unequal status. It should be noted that neither trinitarianism nor tritheism is in concert with the New Testament's teaching on the relationship of God, Jesus, and the holy spirit.

Theoretically, trinitarians profess to believe there is one indivisible God, not three gods. But, they say:

The Father is God.

The Son is God.

The Holy Spirit is God.

The Father is not the Son.

The Father is not the Holy Spirit.

The Son is not the Father.

The Son is not the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not the Father

The Holy Spirit is not the Son

In applying this statement of faith to the actual teachings of the New Testament the result is tritheism.

How is that possible? The New Testament teaches that there is only one Being who is God and that the pre-incarnate Jesus was his first creation. The Gospels' Jesus in his alleged incarnate form is not part of the Godhead and Jesus always physically separates himself from God in describing their relationship. Moreover, the so-called postresurrection Jesus is always portrayed in the New Testament as a physically separate entity from God. That is, not as one of three persons existing as an indivisible God. The *Father* and *Son* are always distinguished with the *Father* superior to the *Son* in position and knowledge. In the New Testament, Jesus is never referred to as *God the Son*, but only as *the son of God*. As for the role of the so-called Holy Spirit it simply has none as a separate coequal and eternal entity.

Notes

¹ Greek Septuagint and New Testament manuscripts are written in two kinds of script: in large capitals (uncial) or small cursive (minuscule). The uncial manuscripts date generally from the fourth to the tenth century C.E., and the cursives mainly from the ninth to the sixteenth. Some New Testament fragments are from the second century and some Septuagint fragments are from still earlier centuries. Since there is no mixture of capital and lower case letters in the manuscripts no accurate distinction can be made by a reference to the Greek biblical manuscripts or to New Testament manuscripts to decide if the upper case "Holy Spirit," a proper noun referring to God or a lower case "holy spirit," referring to an impersonal force, is meant.

- ² Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1966, p. 1569.
- ³ Barnes, p. 1569.
- ⁴ Barnes, p. 1569.
- ⁵ Barnes, p. 1569.
- ⁶ The Christian doctrine of the Logos, "Word," has its origins in the writings of Philo. The Philonic Logos is the result of an attempt to harmonize the Greek Logos and certain Jewish ideas concerning the nature and role of God in the universe. This was to deeply influence early Christian theologians, who paganized and distorted the meaning of the Logos in Philo's writings. The early Christian church, still under pagan influence took the metaphorical phrases employed by Philo to explain his concept of the Logos literally. The misconstruing of Philo's view led early Christian theologians to conceive of God as a triune being, a belief that Philo would have rejected out of hand.
- ⁷ Christian commentators differ as to what the phrase means. More than likely the phrase is a Hebraism to designate the whole of anything from the beginning to the end; e.g., "[T]he faithful who fulfilled the Torah from *alef* to *tav*." (Yehudah Ashlag, trans. and ed., completed by Yehudah Tzvi Brandwein, *Sefer HaZohar . . . im . . . HaSullam*, Jerusalem: *Hevrah Lehotsa'at Hazohar*, (reprint) 1974, *Bereshit, Parashat Bereshit* 23 [1:2b])
- ⁸ The Greek text used for the King James Version was edited by Erasmus (1466-1536). It was a poorly edited volume containing hundreds of typographical errors. Many of its readings supporting Christian doctrines, although sometimes centuries old, are not found in the better manuscripts. An example of Christian scribal interpolation to support trinitarianism is the King James Version of the New Testament reading at 1 Timothy 3:16. It reads, "God [*Theos*] was revealed in the flesh" in conformity with some later manuscripts, but the reading of this verse in the ancient manuscripts is "[he, Jesus,] who [*hos*] was revealed in the flesh." (See B.F. Westcott and F.G.A. Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek*, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988, pp. 133-135.)
- ⁹ The word "God" is found in the oldest Greek manuscripts, including the Alexandrine, Sinaitic, and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus.
- ¹⁰ The title, *the Alpha and the Omega* is not found in the oldest Greek manuscripts of Revelation 1:11, including the Alexandrine, Sinaitic, and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus.
- ¹¹ Concerning the word *tacheos*, Strong says: "briefly i.e. (in time) *speedily*, or (in manner) *rapidly*:—hastily, quickly, shortly, soon, suddenly." (James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1978, 5030.)
- ¹² *Philo*, trans. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Vol. 5, *On Dreams*, 1962, p. 331.
- ¹³ *On Dreams*, pp. 333, 373.

- ¹⁴ *Philo*, p. 413.
- ¹⁵ *Philo*, Vol. 4, *Who Is the Heir*, 1962, p. 385.
- ¹⁶ *Philo*, Vol. 5, *On Dreams*, p. 419.
- ¹⁷ *On Dreams*, p. 423.
- ¹⁸ *On Dreams*, p. 463.
- ¹⁹ *Philo*, Vol. 4, *The Confusion of Tongues*, 1962, p. 45.
- ²⁰ *The Confusion of Tongues*, pp. 89, 91.
- ²¹ Maximillian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963, p. 55, par. 171; p. 57, par. 176.
- ²² E.C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933), pp. 12-21.
- ²³ Colwell, pp. 13, 21.
- ²⁴ Colwell, pp. 16-18.
- ²⁵ Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973), p. 76.
- ²⁶ Harner, p. 75.
- ²⁷ Harner, p. 81.
- ²⁸ Harner, p. 83.
- ²⁹ Harner, p. 83.
- ³⁰ Harner, p. 84.
- ³¹ Harner, p. 84.
- ³² Harner, p. 84.
- ³³ Harner, p. 85.
- ³⁴ Harner, p. 85.
- ³⁵ Harner, p. 87.
- ³⁶ Harner, p. 87.
- ³⁷ C.F. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, Cambridge: University Press, 1977, p. 116.
- ³⁸ Eusebius cites Matthew 28:19 many times in works written between 300-336 (as in his *Commentaries on the Psalms* and *Commentaries on Isaiah*, his *Demonstratio Evangelica*, his *Theophania*, his *Ecclesiastical History*, and his *The Oration in Praise of Emperor Constantine*), and always as "Go ye, and make disciples of all nations in my name."
- ³⁹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3. 5. 2, Trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, in Eds. Schaff and Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Vol. 1, 1986, p. 138.
- ⁴⁰ Eusebius, *The Oration in Praise of Emperor Constantine* 16. 8, in Eds. Schaff and Wace, p. 607.
- ⁴¹ Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica* [*The Proof of the Gospel*], 3. 7, Trans. W.J. Ferrar, New York: the Macmillan Co., Vol. 1, 1920, p. 136.

- ⁴² One scholar, George Howard, has found what may be an early Hebrew version of the Gospel of Matthew embedded in a fourteenth century Hebrew manuscript. The treatise, *Even Boḥan* (“The Touchstone”), was written in Spain, by Shem-Tov Shaprut. Forced by Christian theologians and born-Jewish apostates to Christianity to debate the merits of Judaism versus Christianity, Jews in Europe, during the Middle Ages, wrote polemical works. The *Even Boḥan* is Shem-Tov’s polemical treatise against Christianity. As with many of these works, Shem-Tov’s *Even Boḥan* contains a Hebrew text of a Gospel. Until Howard’s study of this work, it was thought that this Hebrew rendering of Matthew was a fourteenth century Hebrew translation of the Greek, or its Latin version. Although there are notable differences between the Greek and Hebrew texts he believes the similarities in arrangement and wording of the Hebrew and Greek texts of Matthew show that one text served as a model for the other. There is no evidence as to which came first, the Greek or the Hebrew, and Howard maintains that both works are originals, neither a translation. Shem-Tov’s Hebrew Matthew reads at 28:19, “Go and (teach [some manuscripts read “guard”]) them to carry out all the things which I have commanded you forever.” This wording has some affinity to the phraseology *in my name*. (George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995, p. 151.)
- ⁴³ In all of his writings, Origen (c. 185-c. 254) makes no mention of the supposed command to baptize using the triune name formula (although there are a number of obvious interpolations into his works that cite the expanded form of Matthew 28:19).
- ⁴⁴ There are no Greek New Testament manuscripts today earlier than the fourth century containing Matthew 28:19. Of the fourth century there are two post-Council of Nicaea manuscripts: the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus—both have the expanded text. All other known New Testament Greek manuscripts are from the fifth century or later. The oldest Syriac manuscript containing the Gospel of Matthew is missing the folio which contained the end of Matthew. This is also true of the oldest Latin manuscript.
- ⁴⁵ There is indication that a threefold formula was already in use by some Christians during the second century, even if it was not in the New Testament itself. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) wrote: “For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, ‘Except ye be born again ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven’” (Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin* 61, in Eds. Roberts and Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Vol. 1, 1996, p. 183). Although Justin used the triune formula, it does not mean that it was in his text of the Gospel of Matthew. Interestingly, while not formally citing the short form of Matthew 28:19 he echoed it when he wrote “daily some [of you Jews] are becoming disciples in the name of Christ, and quitting the path of error” (*Dialogue With Trypho*, 39).
- ⁴⁶ Westcott and Hort, p. 104 (See their complete observation, pp. 103-104).

THE ONENESS OF GOD

Divine theophanies

Trinitarian commentators claim that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation of God is supported by passages from the Jewish Scriptures. However, there is no indication in the Jewish Scriptures that God ever became flesh. In a number of instances, they have confused the human-like manifestation of angels appearing as God's messengers with God Himself (Genesis 18), in other instances they have confused visionary experiences with physical manifestations by God (Exodus 24:10, Isaiah 6:5, Ezekiel 1:26-28). Trinitarian commentators take these texts as proof of alleged physical theophanies (appearances of God to man) in the Jewish Scriptures. They assume that as God manifested Himself in the Jewish Scriptures so He did in the New Testament in the form of Jesus.

Let us say for argument's sake that these Jewish Scriptures referred to manifestations of God Himself in human form. The fact is that this would prove nothing concerning the trinitarian allegation that God also physically manifested Himself in the form of Jesus. One does not follow from the other. Assuming that these are appearances by God Himself (rather than angels), there is nothing to suggest that in some instances He actually took on a human type functioning fleshly body or that in others what was seen was anything but an apparition in human form. In truth, "God Himself is Invisible, and whatever is seen during prophecy is but a creation, fashioned by God for the eyes of the prophet, presented as desired by God, for reasons known only to Him God's true Essence is not included in any image whatsoever, and . . . He is totally divorced from all possible visualization [T]he prophetic vision is not an actual depiction of the Glory but a vision"¹

The trinitarian Christian incarnation doctrine presents a claim that goes beyond maintaining that God manifested Himself in a visionary human

form. It is alleged that one-third of God took on a totally human existence while remaining totally God. Born of a woman, wholly human and wholly God simultaneously, he grew to manhood in a totally human way. He had normal bodily functions, his cells reproduced and died, he bled, cut his hair and nails, and his umbilical cord and foreskin were removed. This is not the God of Israel, the biblical God. If Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and “the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3) then Jesus could not be God. Neither an *image of something* nor an *exact representation of something* is that thing itself.

Such an alleged god-man manifestation is not the same as a supernatural being manifesting itself for a brief period of time in what appeared to be a human material body. The manifestation of a supernatural being in the Jewish Scriptures, be it God or an angel, was in its origin and nature something quite different than a functioning human body. Indeed, if God or a part of God came to earth in temporary but actual flesh and blood human form for a period of time why would he need to be born of a woman? He did not have to be born of a woman to take on or understand human nature. If He wanted to take on human form, he could have done so in a grown-up mature state of body.

What Christian myth proposes is a great theological leap of faith from the theophanies in the Jewish Scriptures to the New Testament’s so-called “incarnation of Jesus.” Those respective appearances in the Jewish Scriptures were of beings that remained unchangeable during their brief materializations. The New Testament “god” incarnate walked the earth for some thirty years. According to trinitarianism, he also separated himself from two-thirds of himself to enter the womb of a woman. A “god” whose body could age, cell structure could decompose, actually died, and is now said to be sitting at the right hand of God (Hebrews 8:1) detached from the rest of the Godhead, is no god at all but a fantasy. The angelic visitations and theophanies of the Jewish Scriptures do not prefigure the ontological Christian myth of the “incarnate God.”²

One is Y-H-V-H, in the heaven and on the earth

The word *’ehad*, “one,” is used in the Jewish Scriptures in either a compound or absolute sense. In this study, we need to know in what sense *’ehad* is used in the *Shem’a*, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The occurrences of *’ehad* are too numerous to

be listed here in their entirety, but by careful examination of the use of *'ehad* in the Jewish Scriptures, we may get insight into its meaning as it is applied to God in the *Shem'a*.

In some verses, such as Genesis 1:5: "And there was evening and there was morning, one day," and Genesis 2:24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh," the term *'ehad*, "one," refers to a compound united one. That is, day and night constitute one day of twenty-four hours and a man and woman can constitute one couple. However, *'ehad* often also means an absolute one. This is illustrated by such verses as: "Absalom has slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left" (2 Samuel 13:30); "And of all the men that are with him we will not leave so much as one" (2 Samuel 17:12); "There did not die of the cattle of Israel even one" (Exodus 9:7); "There lacked not one of them that was not gone over the Jordan" (2 Samuel 17:22); "There is one [that is alone], and he has not a second; yea, he has neither son nor brother" (Ecclesiastes 4:8). It is context that determines if "one" is compound or absolute. Clearly, the word "one" used in these verses means an absolute one and is synonymous with the word *yahid*, "the only one," "alone." Ecclesiastes 4:8 makes this abundantly clear. Two parallel modifying clauses are added to emphasize that "one" is used to speak of a human who is singularly alone within the family structure. In speaking of God, no such modifying clauses are called for, since the biblical record recognizes no divisions or persons in the ontological being of God. The Jewish Scriptures, with even greater refinement implicitly teach that *'ehad* in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One," is used as a single, absolute, unqualified one. The *Zohar* (or *Tiqqunei ha-Zohar*³) provides an insight into the word "one" by reference to Isaiah 51:2: "Look to Abraham your father . . . for when he was but *one* I called him." It states:

[T]he Cause above all causes [God] . . . has no colleague of which He should take counsel, for He is the only One [*yahid*], prior to all, and has no partner. Therefore it says: "See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no *'Elohim* ["divine powers"] with Me" [Deuteronomy 32:39], of which He should take counsel, since He has no colleague and no partner, nor even number (for there is a "one" which connotes combination, such as male and female), of which it says, "for when he was but one I called him" [Isaiah

51:2]⁴; indeed, this is one without number and without combination, and therefore it is said: “and there are no *Elohim* with Me,”⁵

That God’s oneness is ontologically absolute is confirmed by Deuteronomy 32:39, in which God declares that there are no “divine powers” with Him. Whenever God speaks of Himself ontologically, rather than in the honorific plural of majesty there is an unambiguous singular. Here the “Me” serves just such a purpose. God is not composed of an “Us.” God does not declare, “There are no divine powers outside of the Us of which I am composed.” There are, God declares, no divine powers, “with Me.” That means no plurality within the Godhead. There is nothing coexisting within the essence of God that can be *with* the singular *Me* that is God. There is only one indivisible Divine Power! We use the term “one” to comprehend His total unity but it is an incomprehensible “one” in that it is “without number and without combination.” Other things and beings in the universe can be broken down beyond their atomic structure, however, the Godhead cannot be broken down to atoms or subatomic particles.

The preponderance of implicit scriptural evidence is that the phrase “the Lord is one” is not a mere numerical designation, but an ontological statement as well. Thus, there will come a day when “the Lord [*Y-H-V-H*] shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall the Lord [*Y-H-V-H*] be one, and His name one” (Zechariah 14:9). What does it mean that “the Lord” will someday be “one”? Is not *Y-H-V-H*, “the Lord,” one now? Sometime in the future, the whole world will recognize this fact, but those indoctrinated with trinitarianism, in particular, will come to realize the ontological oneness of *Y-H-V-H*. Presently, they admit to “the Lord” being God but say that the “one” is in the form of a triune being. However, “in that day” they will come to realize that “the Lord is one” not just in that He is the only true and unique God, which they already admit, but that He is one in His very essence of being. They will discard the trinitarian doctrine and no longer think of “the Lord” as a combination of “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” Furthermore, “in that day shall His name be one” in that He will not be called “Krishna,” “Allah,” or the “Great Spirit,” but the whole world will come to realize that just as He is ontologically an absolute one and there is no other god beside Him so is His Name one—*Y-H-V-H*. They will declare as did Naaman, a non-Israelite, “Behold, now I know that there is no God in the whole world, except in

Israel Your servant will never again offer a burnt-offering or a peace-offering to other gods, only to *Y-H-V-H*" (2 Kings 5:15-17).

As applied to God, the word *'ehad* has three connotations. First, there is no God other than *Y-H-V-H* (read as *HaShem* ["the Name"] or *'Ado-nai* ["my Lord," "Lord of all"] in Hebrew and rendered as "the Lord" or "Jehovah" in many English translations). Second, though we perceive God in many roles—kind, angry, merciful, wise, judging, etc.—these different manifestations are neither contradictory nor an indication of division of His ontological essence. Any action or state of being that we might ascribe to God refers to something that God created in order to interact with his creation—not to God Himself. Third, when we speak of the oneness of God, it is not like the oneness of anything in His creation. While matter can be broken down into sub-atomic particles God's unique oneness cannot be subdivided. God declares, "I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God. And who is like me?" (Isaiah 44:6-7). There is no mention here of a triune deity unless one wants to claim that "I am the first" is God the Father, "I am the last" is the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and "besides Me is no God" designates the Son, Jesus, as "no God" (Cf. the claim of Hebrews 8:1 that Jesus sits at the right hand of Majesty, i.e., God.). God says in no uncertain terms "I am the Lord that makes all things, that stretches the heavens, alone; that spreads abroad the earth by *Myself*" (Isaiah 44:24). This follows the *qere* (the marginal reading), *me'i'ti*, and means "from Me, from Myself, or without help," following the *ketiv* (the written consonantal text), the text reads, *mi'i'ti*, "who [was] with Me?" There is no being beside God equal to Him, outside of Him or as part of His essence. The absolute one God Himself, not just a part of the wholeness of God or parts of God working in conjunction with each other brought about the Creation. Therefore, only through trinitarian gymnastics do Christian commentators reconcile this verse with Paul's exaggeration, "For in him [Jesus] all things were created . . . all things have been created through him and for him" (Colossians 1:16).

The ontological oneness of Y-H-V-H

The Christian doctrine of the triune deity is the result of a controversial centuries-long process; it is neither in the Jewish Scriptures nor the New Testament. Trinitarian Christianity professes God's *singleness*, but not His *indivisibility*. What trinitarians express by "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit"

has no relation to the oneness of the essence of God expressed in the Jewish Scriptures. God asks, "To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal, and compare Me, that we may be alike?" (Isaiah 46:5). Subsequent verses show the folly of any form of idolatry. The Jewish Scriptures sometimes ascribe human traits and characteristics to the Almighty to help humans comprehend in some degree what is in essence incomprehensible. We compare the attributes of God to things in the physical world He created, but they cannot capture who He is ontologically. There is nothing physical in the realm of the Almighty.

The penetrating question asked in verse 5 goes beyond condemnation of physical idols. Will you divide God's essence into coequal parts and then compare them to each other as to their similarities and functioning? Any claim to coequal distinctive divisions in God's essential being is rejected. Thus, the verse implicitly refutes trinitarianism: the idea of the plurality of God consisting of three persons possessing intellect, will, and a bond between them existing in one being as a spirit. God, trinitarians say, exists in three distinct aspects: God, the incomprehensible; God, who appears to man in the image of man; and God, who communicates with man. Each of the three persons is said to share fully in all the activities and operations of the other. Can we compare God to Himself by conceiving of Him in three persons or aspects? Verse 5 says this is biblically invalid. What is more, trinitarianism alleges that one person of this plurality became incarnate as a fully human being while remaining part of the triune deity. Any division of the essence of God that is said to enter the physical world as a physical being (Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:7) or a claim that a physically resurrected Jesus is part of the essence of God now sitting next to God in heaven (Hebrews 8:1) is no longer speaking of God as either an absolute or a compound one. It is an allegation that God consists of actual separate entities. If Jesus is sitting next to God, as a distinct personage, he cannot be part of the essence of God. That which exists outside of God cannot be God. In the *Shem'a*, God is said to be one in an absolute sense. How do we know this? The rest of the Jewish Scriptures are a commentary on this teaching elucidating that God has no ontological division in His absolute oneness.

In a unique ontological defining moment, God explains the meaning of His Name. In so doing, we get an insight into the ontological oneness of the Creator. He declares, "I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE" (Exodus 3:14). God does not define Himself as "WE WILL BE." He does not define Himself as being in some sought of multiplicity of personages in one essence. The

Name of God encapsulates the essence of oneness expressed in the word “one” as used in the *Shem’a*. It is “My Name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations” (verse 15) declares the God of Israel. God does not say, “Our Name” but “My Name”; it is not shared with any other being. Yet, if there were ever a time for God to declare a plurality in the essence of His Being one would think that it would be done when defining the meaning of *Y-H-V-H*. Instead, God defines His name as an unequivocal Singularity.

The unique and unqualified oneness of the Creator is only challenged by misinterpreting the biblical record or misapplying the words of targumic exegesis. Targumic exegesis uses circumlocutions for God to soften the anthropomorphisms in the Hebrew text and seeks to convey an understanding of how the infinite Creator relates to His creation. Christianity did not develop in a vacuum. Early Christians employed the *targumim* to explain the role of Jesus, but they misused the concepts they taught. This misapplication is exemplified by the author of the Gospel of John who exaggerated the *Logos/Memra*’ interpretations of Philo and the synagogue *meturgamim* (Aramaic “interpreter”) when they used the concept of the *word of God* to explain the interaction between the infinite one God and finite creation.

The concept of the *word of God* develops out of an emphasis on the hearing of the voice of God and the prohibition of the embodiment of God in any image or form whatsoever. “Then God spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no image; there was only a voice” (Deuteronomy 4:12). God, it is said, is to be heard in “a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12-13) but is not seen. God’s declaration, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20) precludes any physical incarnation by any “part” of God. However, it does not preclude visionary experiences involving seeing a manifestation of God. The Torah records a remarkable incident concerning such a divine manifestation just prior to Moses receiving the Ten Commandments:

And to Moses He said: “Come up to the Lord [*alei el Y-H-V-H*], you, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship from a distance; and Moses alone shall come near to the Lord; but they shall not come near; neither shall the people go up with him.” . . . Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw [*vai-yir’u*] the God of Israel; and there was under His feet the

like of a paved work of sapphire stone, and the like of the very heaven for clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand; and they beheld [*vai-yehezū*] God, and did eat and drink. And the Lord said to Moses: “Come up to Me [*‘alai ‘alai*] into the mount, and be there; and I will give you the tables of stone, and the law and the commandment, which I have written, that you may teach them.” (Exodus 24:1-3, 9-12).

God first calls the leaders of Israel to go partway up the mountain to Him using the formal address of the third person. There they see a vision. The Hebrew verb used is *r’h* (verse 10), “look,” “see and understand,” which can also have the meaning: “experiencing” (Exodus 33:18), “appearing,” or “showing” (Exodus 23:17). Although they experienced an overwhelming vision of God, they were not killed. A further descriptive Hebrew verb is used, *hzh* (verse 11), “see that which is not normally visible,” that is, “having a vision” (Genesis 15:1, Isaiah 1:1). Following the visionary experience God, following up on what he said previously, calls upon Moses to ascend the mountain. *Y-H-V-H* uses a more intimate phraseology, “Come up to Me.” The text is clear that this was no divine incarnate appearance, but a visionary manifestation to Israel’s leaders.

The monotheistic concept is challenged in the Bible by pantheistically influenced Israelites who deny *Y-H-V-H* is the only God in the universe. In the post-biblical period Zoroastrianism and later Gnosticism taught a duality of gods ruling the universe. Yet, until the rise of Gentile Christianity, there is never a challenge to the ontological oneness of the essence of God. With all the alleged evidence Christians claim is found in the Jewish Scriptures to prove a plurality in the essence of God there never is any challenge in the biblical and inter-exilic periods to the oneness of the essence of God. No dual or triune Godhead is espoused among those pantheistically influenced Israelites even if God said, “let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26). There is never any portrayal of *Word, Wisdom, Spirit, Angel of His Presence*, etc. in the sense of a separate entity within the context of the divine essence. Specifically, there is no implicit or explicit exposition of God in three different divine personages or, for that matter, in any like division of His essence. The oneness of God, within Himself, is never challenged.

Some angelic names suggest a personification of divine attributes, e.g., Gabriel, “Strength of God,” Phanuel, “Face of God”; but, here again, they

remain separate entities irrelevant to the divine essence. In some rabbinic texts God's *memra*, word, and especially His *Shechinah*, Presence, are treated as in some measure indirect manifestations of God's transcendent Being. Nevertheless, these concepts never attain an independent existence within the Being of God; they do not become physical beings and are only vaguely perceived as personages.

The angel of the Lord

Some trinitarian commentators claim that whenever the Scriptures mention *malach 'Adon-ai*, "an angel of the Lord [*Y-H-V-H*]," the angel is Jesus. They translate all passages mentioning such an angel as "the Angel of the Lord," although the Hebrew may just as well mean "an angel of the Lord" (literally "a messenger of the Lord"; cf. Judges 2:1, 6:11-22). True, in the construct state, when the second noun has the definite article, the first noun is automatically definite without the need for the article, however, with proper nouns, which are automatically definite, only context determines whether the first noun attached to it is to be taken as definite or indefinite. The context, in all the verses where *malach 'Adon-ai* occurs, strongly indicates that it is not to be taken as definite.

Even when the noun "angel" (*malach*) appears with a definite article in a scriptural passage, it is not used in the sense of a definite personality, but only as a reference to the particular angel mentioned previously in the text. The angel is always an impersonal being whose name is not necessary, since he is simply a messenger (the Hebrew word *malach* means "messenger" as does the Greek *angelos*) to whom God, in whom all power resides, has entrusted a specific mission (1 Chronicles 21:16, 27; Zechariah 1:12-17). It is for this reason that the prophet Haggai, who conveyed God's message to Israel, is also called "a messenger of the Lord" (Haggai 1:13). The Hebrew term applied to Haggai, *malach 'Ado-nai*, is the same that is translated as "an angel of the Lord" and points to his prophetic role as an intermediary. Similarly, the priest is designated as "a messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 2:7). The angel who appears to Abraham does not swear by his own name but merely conveys God's message: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord" (Genesis 22:16). God sends angels to act in His name, not in their own names. Therefore, to Jacob an angel says: "Why is it that you ask my name?" (Genesis 32:30), and to Manoah an angel says: "Why is it that you ask my name, seeing it is hidden?" (Judges 13:18).⁶ There is no

indication that these verses all refer to one specific angel. The angels that appeared to various biblical personalities were acting only as messengers bearing God's word. That the words of a messenger of God may be attributed directly to God is evident from Isaiah 7:10, which reads: "And the Lord spoke again to Ahaz." Ahaz received this message through Isaiah, but it is nevertheless reported as if God Himself spoke directly to him because a messenger represents the one who sends him. Therefore, an action of an angel may be credited directly to God, who gave him the message (Zechariah 3:1-8).

In describing the beginning of Moses' career as a prophet the Torah states:

And an angel of the Lord appeared to him [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the brush was not consumed. And Moses said: "I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said: "Moses, Moses." And he said: "Here am I." Then He said: "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And He said: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said: "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; for I know their pains; and I have come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians Come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt." But Moses said to God: "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" And He said: "Certainly I will be with you; and this shall be the sign to you, that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain." Then Moses said to God: "Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and shall say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you; and they shall say to me: 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses: "I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE"; and He said: "Thus you shall say to the children of

Israel: I WILL BE has sent me to you.” And God also said to Moses: “Thus shall you say to the children of Israel: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you; this is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me And they shall hearken to your voice. And you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt, and you shall say to him: The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. And now let us go, we pray you, three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.” (Exodus 3:2-8, 10-16, 18)

Trinitarian commentators cite this passage as further evidence of their allegation that the term “angel of the Lord” refers to part of a triune deity. To them, the text seems to indicate that the angel who appears as a fiery manifestation to Moses is the same being as the God who afterwards speaks to him. However, on further examination, the textual evidence leans in favor of the view that this angel of the Lord functions here solely as a fiery manifestation that attracts Moses’ attention, while it is the God of Israel who actually “appeared,” that is, made Himself known and spoke to Moses. Yet, the issue of whether God Himself speaks at some point or an angel speaks in God’s name to Moses cannot be conclusively decided one way or the other.

For our discussion, a final decision as to whether God speaks directly to Moses or through the medium of an angel is not crucial. Even if one believes that the angel, rather than God, speaks to Moses, it should be remembered that when, as God’s representative, an angel (messenger) appears before a person, it is considered as if God Himself has appeared. As stated above, an angel repeats the exact message given to him by God. If, in verse 14, it is actually an angel that speaks directly to Moses, then he is merely conveying the Lord’s message concerning His name. That the message in this verse, even if delivered through an intermediary, is actually from the Lord is indicated by the fact that whenever an angel of the Lord is asked in the Scriptures for his name, he always refuses to give it. This is understandable, since he is only a messenger, with his own personal identity being of no importance. Therefore, he is identified with the sender of the

message. Yet, in verse 14, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob does give His name. In so doing, He indicates that He is not synonymous with what the Bible calls “an angel of the Lord.” All in all, “an angel of the Lord” can in no way be identified as part of the divine essence.

The Septuagint renders *malach 'Ado-nai* as *angelos Kyriou* with the meaning “an angel of the Lord” (e.g., Judges 6:11) and “the angel of the Lord” is rendered by *ho angelos Kyriou* (e.g., Judges 6:12). In the New Testament, the author of the Gospel of Matthew writes: “But when he [Joseph] had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord [*angelos Kyriou*] appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of holy spirit.’ . . . And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord [*ho angelos Kyriou*] commanded him, and took [her] as his wife” (Matthew 1:20-24). The wording, “an angel of the Lord,” reappears in Matthew 2:13, 19; 28:2. The author of the Gospel of Luke writes: “An angel of the Lord [*angelos Kyriou*] appeared to him [Zacharias], standing to the right of the altar of incense” (Luke 1:11). Luke 1:19a identifies the angel of the Lord as Gabriel: “And the angel . . . said to him [Zacharias], ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God.’” It is further stated: “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin . . . and the virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26-27).⁷ Elizabeth later exclaims: “And blessed is she [Mary] who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by [the] Lord [*Kyriou*]” (Luke 1:45). Although the things spoken were supposedly said to Mary by Gabriel, an angel of the Lord (Luke 1:26-27), Luke’s Elizabeth refers to them as spoken by the “Lord.” In Luke 2:9-10 it is stated, “And an angel of the Lord [*angelos Kyriou*] suddenly stood before them [the shepherds] . . . And the angel said to them . . .” The author of Luke understands the angel’s message as having come from the Lord rather than from the angel, hence in Luke 1:15 the angel’s message is said to come from the Lord.

As mentioned above, some Christian commentators maintain that “angel of the Lord” refers to Jesus in the Jewish Scriptures. In considering the New Testament usage of “angel of the Lord” with and without the definite article one must ask how if this angel is Jesus, he can be in the womb of Mary while speaking to her (Luke 1:30) and Joseph (Matthew 1:20) respectively in the third person, he can speak to the shepherds in the fields when he was in the manger (Luke 2:9), or is able to roll away the

stone from the tomb when he was supposedly inside the tomb (Matthew 28:2). Moreover, is Jesus to be identified as the angel Gabriel who the author of Luke identifies as the *angel of the Lord*? One might say that the biblical “angel of the Lord” is not the same angel identified as such by the New Testament. But, if “angel of the Lord” is consistently a title of Jesus in the Jewish Scriptures why is that name inexplicably handed over to another angel in the New Testament? It would be, indeed, strange if the New Testament angel (Gabriel) is now called after this name if it was a special title belonging to Jesus.

The Lord, our righteousness

In their effort to substantiate the belief in a triune deity, Christian commentators have alleged that a prophecy given by Jeremiah supports their contention. The prophet declares:

Behold, the days are coming says the Lord, that I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and prosper, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is his name by which he will be called: “The Lord, our righteousness.”
(Jeremiah 23:5-6)

These Christian commentators argue that only God could properly bear the name *'Ado-nai tsidkeinu*—“The Lord, our righteousness.” However, names are often given to human beings, and even to inanimate objects, with the intention of expressing honor to God (e.g., Exodus 17:15, Jeremiah 3:17). It is not at all strange to find biblical names that incorporate the divine name within them. In Jeremiah 23:5-6, the name is there to tell us why the Messiah’s rule will be just and equal for all, the source of the Messiah’s righteousness is God. “The Lord, our righteousness” indicates that God will direct His Messiah’s every step. The inclusion of God’s name signifies the total submission of the Messiah’s every action to the will of God. *The Lord, our Righteousness* is not an everyday name, but a descriptive title disclosing the level of honest judgment and compassion the Messiah will dispense as God’s wholehearted representative. That this is not an ordinary given name is evident. When a biblical personality’s name contains “God” in it, the full name, *Y-H-V-H*, is never included, most often the

name takes the shortened form *y-a-h* (e.g., Isaiah, “God is Salvation”; Zechariah, “God Remembers”), or some other shortened form of the name, such as *y-h* (e.g., Joshua, “Help of God”; Jehoshaphat, “God has Judged”). Nowhere are all four letters, *Y-H-V-H* found together in that form in a name given to a human being for everyday use. The bearer of the title *The Lord, our Righteousness* is imbued with the renown and reputation of God. He will in a very real and concrete way emulate the full meaning of the righteousness of God expressed in this name. We find that the name chosen in the Bible for a child is often descriptive of the parents’ wishes or expectations for the personality that is to mature. This is also evident in the renaming of adults in the Bible, e.g., Jacob becoming Israel (Genesis 35:10). The Messiah will be a visible testimony of God’s activity as were the prophets, and like them he is not part of the Godhead. The name explains the very character and essence of the one bearing the name as being totally in sync with God’s righteousness. By no means is there the slightest hint that the Messiah’s being is of divine origin.

The meaning of 'Elohim

In Genesis 1:1, it is stated, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Here the word for God is *'Elohim*, having a plural form as though it meant “gods.” Trinitarian commentators have maintained that this is proof that God is a plurality. However, a careful investigation of the actual use of this word in the Jewish Scriptures will unequivocally show that *'Elohim*, while plural in form, is singular in concept. In biblical Hebrew, many singular abstractions are expressed in the plural form, e.g., *rahimim*, “compassion” (Genesis 43:14, Deuteronomy 13:18); *zekunim*, “old age” (Genesis 21:2, 37:3, 44:20); *n'urim*, “youth” (Isaiah 54:6, Psalms 127:4).

The great commentator Rashi offers a significant insight into the meaning of the word *'Elohim*. In commenting on the phrase *yesh l'eil yadi*, “there is power in my hands” (Genesis 31:29), he writes, “And anywhere *'eil* denotes holiness [as in a Name of God], [it is] because [it connotes] ‘strength’ [see Proverbs 8:28] and ‘great power’ [Isaiah 40:26].” *'El* generally means “God,” and, in particular the God of Israel, because He is the sum of all power, but it can also refer to other “powers,” real or imaginary, as well (e.g., human authorities, angels, idols).

The Jewish Scriptures teach us that *'Elohim* is an honorific title, which expresses the plural of majesty. The underlying reason for the grammatically

plural form *'Elohim* is to indicate the all-inclusiveness of God's authority as possessing every conceivable attribute of power. The use of the plural for such a purpose is not limited merely to *'Elohim*, but also applies to other words of profound significance. For instance, Isaiah 19:4 uses *'adonim* ("lords") instead of *'adon* ("lord"): "Into the hand of a cruel lord" (literally "lords," even though referring to one person),⁸ and Exodus 21:29 reads: "Its owner [literally *be'alav*, "its owners"] also shall be put to death." Thus, we see that the plural of a noun is sometimes used to signify one person, as a mark of honor and distinction or for emphasis.

'Elohim, in the first verse of Genesis, does not indicate the existence of a plurality of persons in the God of Israel. Concerning human authority, it may indicate a plurality of persons. We read in Exodus 22:8: "Both parties shall come before the *'elohim* ["judges"], and whom the *'elohim* ["judges"] shall condemn, he shall pay double to his neighbor." However, Jacob wrestles with *one* being, yet that being is referred to as *'elohim* (Genesis 32:31); and the angel that appears to Manoah, the father of Sampson, is also referred to as *'elohim* (Judges 13:22). Peruse the words used by the woman in speaking to Saul when, upon seeing Samuel, she exclaimed: "I see *'elohim* coming up out of the earth" (1 Samuel 28:13). Here, *'elohim* is followed by the verb in the plural. Yet only a single individual is referred to, as is seen from verse 14: "And he said to her: 'What is his appearance?' And she said: 'An old man is coming up; and he is wrapped in a robe.'" Thus, even joined to a plural verb the noun may still refer to a single individual.

'Elohim means "gods" only when the Bible applies this plural word to pagan deities. The pagan Philistines applied the title *'elohim* to their god Dagon (Judges 16:23-24, 1 Samuel 5:7). The Moabites, likewise, used the word *'elohim* to describe their god Chemosh (Judges 11:24). If trinitarian Christians are correct in their argument that the use of *'Elohim* with a singular verb means there are three coeternal, coequal persons in one god, then the same thing *must* be true for the Philistine god Dagon and the Moabite god Chemosh. They must be respectively a plurality of persons in one god. How else could trinitarians explain the Philistines saying of Dagon: "Our god [*'eloheinu*] has delivered" (Judges 16:24)? Here, the verb is singular, yet the subject is, literally, "our gods" in the plural. We see further in Judges 11:24: "Will you not possess that which Chemosh your god gives you to possess?" Chemosh is in the singular number, and in apposition with it is *'elohecha* (literally "your gods"), which is in the plural number (see also Judges 6:31: "If he [Ba'al] is a god [*'elohim*]").

The episode of Elijah's confrontation with the priests of Ba'al gives the reader further insight into the essential oneness of God as taught by the Jewish Scriptures. Elijah demonstrates God's power and primacy on Mount Carmel. He challenges the 450 priests of Ba'al. Each side is to sacrifice a bullock before the assembled Israelites. Now they will see whose prayers calling down fire to consume the respective offerings would be answered. The prophets of Baal cry out, slashing themselves with knives and swords until their blood flows, but to no avail. Elijah prays: "Answer me, *Y-H-V-H*, answer me," and a divine fire descends from heaven to consume Elijah's offering. All the assembled Israelites cry out: "*Y-H-V-H*—He is God" [*Elohim*] (1 Kings 18:39).

Throughout this passage, Ba'al is referred to as "he," in the third-person singular, in conjunction with the plural *'elohim*. *Y-H-V-H* is also addressed in the same language. Yet, where is the plurality of Ba'al if one wants to insist on trinitarian grammatical guidelines? There is simply no justification for the notion that *'Elohim* denotes a plurality in the essence of God.

Some trinitarian commentators justify the use of the plural with Dagon, Chemosh, and Ba'al on the basis of the assumption that they were not the name of one particular idol only, but were the names of innumerable idols throughout the respective kingdoms where they were worshiped. Hence, Dagon, Chemosh, and Ba'al though in the singular form, are collective nouns, which embraced every idol of the realm. However, this interpretation is unattested and forced. It is nothing but a theory invented to support a theological need. That the plural form of *'elohim* does not at all imply the plurality of the divine essence is a fact that was known in ancient times. This is reflected in the Septuagint version of the Scriptures, which renders *'Elohim* with the singular title *ho Theos* ("The God").

One also needs to consider the frequent use of the singular *'Eloha*. For example we find: "Then he forsook God [*'Eloha*] who made him" (Deuteronomy 32:15); "You that forgot God [*'Eloha*]" (Psalms 50:22); "At the presence of the God [*'Eloha*] of Jacob" (Psalms 114:7). If *'Elohim* refers to a triune deity, how can one account for the alternate deployment of *'Elohim* and *'Eloha*? Isaiah declares: "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last, and besides Me there is no God [*'Elohim*]" (Isaiah 44:6). This is followed in verse 8 by: "Is there a God [*'Eloha*] besides Me?" If the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity depends in any measure on the plurality in form of the noun *'Elohim*, the use of *'Eloha*, the singular of the noun, most decidedly disproves it.

The meaning of 'Ado-nai

The word, אָדוֹן, 'adon ("lord"), may be used in the singular or the plural to refer to a divine or human lord. Like other honorific terms, 'adon can be used with a first-person pronominal suffix, אָדוֹנָי (plural אָדוֹנָיִם, with the short vowel *pataḥ*). But, how are we to understand the meaning of the related word form אָדוֹן (with the long vowel *qametz*), used over four hundred times in the Bible in reference to *Y-H-V-H*? (Both words are spelled with identical consonants.) To this end, we need to establish the meaning of the *-ai* (alt. *-oi*) ending in אָדוֹנָי. It may be that this is an honorific title in the first-person singular suffixed form of the plural noun אָדוֹנָיִם. This understanding fits well in passages in which *Y-H-V-H* is addressed reverently as "my Lord" (e.g., Genesis 18:30). Additional support for this understanding of the expression is seen in the fact that both the singular and plural first-person suffixed forms, (אָדוֹנָי, אָדוֹנָיִם), are used exclusively for addressing people (cf. Genesis 23:6, 19:2). On the other hand, it may be that the *-ai* (*-oi*) is an emphatic suffix which strengthens the meaning of the root word so that the term denotes "Lord without equal," "Lord of all." This understanding finds support in that אָדוֹן occurs in passages where God speaks of Himself and where accordingly the meaning "my Lord" is improbable (e.g., Ezekiel 13:9, 23:49; Job 28:28). It also occurs in passages in which more than one human speaker is represented, making a singular suffix seem incongruous (Psalms 44:24).

The intensity of meaning expressed in the term אָדוֹן by "Lord of all" fits every citation of this word found in the biblical text. Interestingly, the Septuagint does not render the term with a pronoun; it translates as *Kyrios*, "Lord," not *Kyrios mou*, "my Lord." אָדוֹן apparently is a divine epithet when used in conjunction with *Y-H-V-H* or as a parallel to it. Hence, it is written: "*Y-H-V-H*, you made a place for your dwelling, a sanctuary, 'Ado-nai, your hands established" (Exodus 15:17). One may conclude therefore that although אָדוֹן may be a plural of majesty meaning "my Lord" in some passages where God is being addressed (e.g., Genesis 15:2), it means "Lord of all" everywhere that it is used (e.g., Isaiah 48:16—'Ado-nai *Y-H-V-H*).

'El, 'Elohim, and Y-H-V-H

Trinitarian commentators make use of 'El, 'Elohim, and *Y-H-V-H*, employed in Joshua 22:22 and Psalms 50:1, as proof of their doctrine. In

actuality, these three distinct appellations are juxtaposed for the express purpose of heightening the effect, and they do not at all imply that God is a triune personality. Using the names in ascending order heightens the effect. The first of these, *'El*, is the most general, the second, *'Elohim*, is the ordinary name, and the third, *Y-H-V-H*, is the most specific name for God used in the Scriptures. As a rule, these names are used with the following connotations: *'El*, the Mighty One; *'Elohim*, the Judge; *Y-H-V-H*, the Merciful One. Their use certainly does not imply any division in the absolute unity of God's essence. In 2 Samuel 22:32, David uses these three words: "For who is God [*'El*] but the Lord [*Y-H-V-H*]? And who is the rock except our God [*'Eloheinu*]?" Obviously, no division in the absolute unity of God is intended in this verse, since its entire thrust is to impress us with the ontological oneness of God.

A *midrash* states:

The Holy One blessed be He said to Moses, "You wish to know My name? I am called according to My deeds. Sometimes, I am called by [the name] *'El Shaddai*, by [the name of Lord of] Hosts [*Tzeva'ot*], by [the name] God [*'Elohim*], by [the name] Lord [*Y-H-V-H*]. When I judge humankind, I am called 'God.' And when I make war against the wicked, I am called ['Lord of] Hosts.' And when I suspend [judgment for] a person's sins, I am called *'El Shaddai*. And when I have mercy on My world, I am called 'Lord' [*Y-H-V-H*]." For God is none other than the quality of mercy, as it says, "Lord, Lord, merciful and gracious God . . ." (Exodus 34:6). That is [what it means when it says,] "I will be that which I will be": "I am called according to My deeds."⁹

According to this *midrash*, God can be known only through His deeds, and the various names of God are merely labels reflecting God's actions. God cannot be fully known through His names. He is only known to the extent that He reveals Himself, that is, "I Will Be What I Will Be" (*'ehey 'asher 'ehey*).

"Us" and "our"

God said: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26) and "Come, let us go down, and there confound their language"

(Genesis 11:7). Trinitarians maintain that these verses are prooftexts of an alleged triune deity, but this claim is erroneous.¹⁰ The inference that “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness” refers to a plurality in God’s essence is refuted by the subsequent verse, which relates the creation of man to a singular God, “And God created man in His image” (Genesis 1:27). In this verse, the Hebrew verb “created” appears in the singular form. If “let us make man”, indicates a numerical plurality, it would be followed in the next verse by, “And *they* created man in *their* image.”¹¹ Obviously, the plural form is used in the same way as in the divine appellation *Elohim*, to indicate the all-inclusiveness of God’s attributes of authority and power, the plurality of majesty. As Isaiah relates: “I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’” (Isaiah 6:8). It is customary for one in authority to speak of himself as if he were a plurality. Hence, Absalom said to Ahithophel, “Give your counsel what we shall do” (2 Samuel 16:20). The context shows that he was seeking advice for himself yet he refers to himself as “we.” In the Book of Ezra we find that “Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king” (Ezra 4:8). In the king’s answer, he says, “Peace, and now the letter which you sent to *us* has been plainly read before me” (Ezra 4:18). There we see that although the letter is sent specifically to the king, the king’s reply speaks of “the letter that you sent to *us*.”¹²

A misconception similar to that concerning Genesis 1:27 is held by trinitarian Christians with reference to the verse, “Come, let us go down, and there confound their language” (Genesis 11:7). Here, too, the confounding of the language is related in verse 9 to God alone, “because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.” In this verse, the Hebrew verb *balal*, “he confounded,” appears in the singular form. Also, the descent is credited in verse 5 to the Lord (*Y-H-V-H*) alone, “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower.” In this verse, the Hebrew verb, *va-yeired*, “and He came down,” appears in the singular form. If a doctrine of plurality of persons is to be based on the grammatical form of words, the frequent interchanging of the singular and the plural would vitiate such an attempt as being without merit. We may safely conclude that the Jewish Scriptures most emphatically refute every opinion, which deviates from the concept of an indivisible unity of God.

Chapter 45 of Isaiah, using, *Y-H-V-H*, unequivocally asserts that He alone is the creator and ruler of all things in the universe. The six uses of

'Elohim in this chapter (verses 3, 5, 14, 15, 18, 21) show that the term *'Elohim* is used synonymously with *Y-H-V-H*, and that both epithets refer to the absolutely indivisible one-and-only God. The singularity of God, expressed in the first-person singular in verse 12, clearly shows who is meant by the phrase, "Let us create man in our image, in our likeness": "I, even I, have made the earth, and created man upon it; I, even My hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded." The prophet states further: "*Y-H-V-H*, your Maker, that spread out the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth" (Isaiah 51:13).

The angel of His presence

Some trinitarian commentators believe that the prophet Isaiah expounded the idea of the existence of three divine personalities active in man's salvation. He said:

I will make mention of the mercies of *Y-H-V-H*, and the praises of *Y-H-V-H*, according to all that *Y-H-V-H* has bestowed on us; and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His compassions, and according to the multitude of His mercies. For He said: "Surely, they are My People, children that will not deal falsely," so He was their savior. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and grieved His holy spirit; therefore He turned to be their enemy, and Himself fought against them. (Isaiah 63:7-10)

An examination of this passage will show that it describes God's special relationship with Israel, acting as Israel's savior and redeemer in times of affliction. It does not at all contain any reference or implication concerning a division in His unity. The phrase "angel of His presence" refers to the angel, which God chooses in any given incident to do His bidding.

Basing themselves on the Hebrew, which literally translated reads "angel of His face," some trinitarian commentators argue that this proves that the angel is a being in God's likeness. They then infer that this angel is synonymous with the "angel of the Lord," who, they claim is the second member of the Trinity. To say that the angel is a being in God's likeness is

an obvious distortion of the phrase because “of His face” is used in a possessive and not a qualitative sense. Furthermore, the term “face” (*panim*) is never used for *tselem*, “likeness” or “image.” *Panim* is used here to mean “presence” (cf. Genesis 4:16; Isaiah 59:2; Jonah 1:3, 10). In this passage, “angel of His presence” is simply the angel whom God appoints as His emissary to act as the representative of His presence in the cause of Israel.

God's spirit

Trinitarian commentators maintain that the terms *ruah hak-kodesh*, “holy spirit”; *ruah tov*, “good spirit”; and *ruho*, “His spirit,” are not abstract manifestations of God’s power but, on the contrary, refer to a separate entity within God’s essence that has a personality and consciousness of its own. Thus, they say, it can feel emotion as when the children of Israel “embittered His spirit” (Psalms 106:33); it can feel sorrow as when they “rebelled and grieved his holy spirit” (Isaiah 63:10), and the “spirit” can give instruction (Nehemiah 9:20; Psalms 104:30, 143:10; Zechariah 7:12). They also ask why Micah raises the question as to whether “the spirit of the Lord” can become impatient (Micah 2:7).

Let us take one example. Some trinitarian commentators allege that the phrase “and grieved His holy spirit” (Isaiah 63:10) indicates that the “holy spirit” is a separate conscious personality. How else, they ask, could it grieve? An impersonal manifestation cannot grieve! The fact is that “and grieved His holy spirit” is a figure of speech for the sorrow God felt at the children of Israel’s rebelliousness. Its usage is parallel to such statements as: “He tried my patience”; “He hurt my feelings”; “He broke my spirit”; “He broke my heart.” “Patience,” “feelings,” “spirit,” and “heart” are not entities in themselves and neither is “holy spirit.” The verse does not indicate that the holy spirit refers to a separate personality within the Godhead.

“Spirit” is a manifestation of God that is intimately felt. It is descriptive of a perception of the divine that is felt although not tangible to the touch. This divine manifestation is called in later Jewish literary sources the *Shechinah*, “the Divine Presence,” from the verb *shachan*, “dwell,” “abide,” and indicates intimate contact between God and the children of Israel as He dwells among His people. That is why it is the term used to show divine displeasure at Israel’s rebellion when that rebelliousness takes place at times when that intimate relationship is manifest. God’s holy spirit is not a person but is a manifestation of God’s imperceptible power

by which He accomplishes His divine purpose and will. Essentially, it is a synonym for an aspect of God's power, not a personification of part of His very essence.

The terms, *ruah hak-kodesh*, *ruah tov*, *ruho*, and *Shechinah*, expressing the intimate relationship of God dwelling among His people make them excellent midrashic vehicles for expressing homiletical teachings. Thus, there are *midrashim*, which have dialogues between God and His *ruah hak-kodesh* or His *Shechinah*, but they were never meant to be interpreted literally. Such dialogues are pedagogical tools used by the rabbis for teaching Torah.

We see that it is God who put His holy spirit in the midst of the children of Israel: "Then His people remembered the days of old, the days of Moses: 'Where is He that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He that put His holy spirit in the midst of them?'" (Isaiah 63:11). The holy spirit is thus a manifestation of an aspect of His power that is, so to speak, subordinate to God's will since God may dispense it to His chosen ones. If the holy spirit is one part of a coequal triune deity, how can David make a request of one part of this triune deity, "Cast me not away from Your presence" about matters controlled by another part of this triune deity, "And do not take Your holy spirit from me" (Psalms 51:13)? The fact is that often in the Jewish Scriptures something may be personified that is not actually a person. For example, Moses calls upon heaven and earth to witness his exhortation, "Give ear, heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth" (Deuteronomy 32:1); the universe praises the Creator, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims His handiwork" (Psalms 19:2); Zion speaks of her estrangement from God, "But Zion said: 'The Lord has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me'" (Isaiah 49:14); Zion gives birth, "For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (Isaiah 66:8); Zion hears and shows emotion, "Zion heard and was glad" (Psalms 97:8); "wisdom" and "understanding" are personified as females who can speak with emotion: "Wisdom cries aloud in the streets; she utters her voice in the squares" (Proverbs 1:20-23); "Does not wisdom call? and understanding put forth her voice?" (Proverbs 8:1 ff., see also Proverbs 9:1-6).

There are some trinitarian commentators who maintain that the personification of *hochmah*, "wisdom," found in Proverbs 8:22-23 refers to an actual person, namely, Jesus: "The Lord created me as the beginning of

His way, the first of His acts of old. I was set up ages ago, from the beginning, from the origin of the earth." The verb *qanah* means, "to create" (cf. Genesis 14:19, 22; Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalms 139:13). Since it is clearly stated that God created "wisdom," it becomes self-evident that whoever or whatever is personified by "wisdom" cannot be God, for that which is created cannot be God. Although "wisdom" is figuratively given a personality of its own, it is a subservient creation of God. In fact, "wisdom" has neither a personal life of its own nor any ontological existence whatsoever.

A further indication of the futility of the viewpoint expressed by trinitarian commentators concerning wisdom is found in Proverbs 3:19: "The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens." As we have seen, many of these commentators consider "wisdom" to be a real being, the second member of the Trinity, and the agent by which God created the world. But to follow this reasoning one may very well say that "understanding" also represents a real being and the agent by which God created the heavens. No doubt, if trinitarian commentators needed to prove that God is a Quaternity, they would claim that not only "wisdom" but also "understanding" is a distinct personality within the essence of God.

Paul personified the concept of sin, "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me" (Romans 7:8-11). Following the trinitarian thought process is it to be presumed that Paul meant that sin was actually an entity with its own personality and conscious?

Christian commentators who are looking for trinitarian allusions in the Jewish Scriptures translate part of Isaiah 48:16 as, "The Lord God and His Spirit have sent me." However, a proper rendering reads: And now the Lord God [*'Ado-nai Y-H-V-H*] has sent me, and His spirit." The last two Hebrew words in this verse are *shelachani ve-ruho*, "He has sent me, and His spirit," with "me, and His spirit" being the direct objects of "sent." Although a definite direct object is usually preceded by the participle *'et*, this grammatical rule is frequently not observed in the Bible (e.g., Exodus 15:9; Judges 5:12; Psalms 9:5, 20:3-4, 45:4). In fact, *'et* rarely occurs in the poetic parts of the Bible. Thus, the meaning of the verse is that God

has sent Isaiah accompanied by His prophetic spirit. There is no mention of the third member of the Trinity doctrine. Instead, Isaiah affirms that God, who has placed within him the power of prophecy, sent him.

The spirit is always at the disposal of God to bestow upon whomever He chooses, as stated in Numbers 11:17, 25, 29; Isaiah 42:1, 44:3; Joel 3:1. If this spirit referred to the third member of a coequal triune deity, how could it be ordered about at the discretion of the other members of this group? Such a condition makes it obviously impossible to consider the spirit as being an associate of God, let alone coequal with Him.¹³ Thus, we see that the Jewish Scriptures do not teach that “spirit” refers to the third person of a triune deity. God says to Moses:

And I will take of the spirit, which is upon you, and I will put it upon them And He took of the spirit, which was upon him, and He put it upon the seventy men, the elders, and it came to pass, when the spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied And Moses said . . . “would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit upon them.”
(Numbers 11:17, 25, 29)

Proving the existence of a Quaternity

It appears from the manner in which trinitarian commentators use the Jewish Scriptures that if they had a quaternity to prove, this would be demonstrated just as easily from the biblical text. That this observation is not an exaggeration can be seen from the words *ruah’ Elohim* (“the spirit of God”), found in Genesis 1:2. According to trinitarianism, the phrase “the spirit of God” represents one distinct entity of the triune deity. Following this exegetical approach to its logical conclusion, we obtain not a trinity but a quaternity. If the divine spirit is to be treated as an entity in itself, then the evil spirit should be granted similar status, for just as the “holy spirit” is referred to as a spirit of God, so is the “evil spirit.” This is clearly found in the words of Saul’s servants to him: “Behold now, an evil spirit of God is terrifying you” (1 Samuel 16:15). This is followed in verse 16 by: “when the evil spirit of God comes upon you.” Are we to surmise, then, that there really exists a divine quaternity—Father, Son, Spirit of God, and Evil Spirit of God (see also Judges 9:23, 1 Kings 22:21f.)? Evidently, the terms “spirit of God” and “evil spirit of God” express certain aspects of God’s will and action rather than His essence.

In Stephen's alleged vision just prior to his death, it is said: "But being full of holy spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the Glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). One could argue that we have here the "Holy Spirit" indwelling Stephen, the Glory of God standing at the right hand of God, Jesus also at the right hand of God, and God. In this case, the doctrine of the Quaternity would be: the Father, the Son, the Glory of God, and the Holy Spirit.

The Name of God and the Glory of God

Some trinitarian commentators allege that biblical references to *the Name of God* and *the Glory of God* are references to Jesus in his supposed pre-and post-incarnate state. This personification is unwarranted. In some biblical contexts the phrase *the Name of God* means nothing more than the Name itself, as in the examples, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7); and "And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord" (Leviticus 24:16). In other biblical contexts it serves to identify God as differentiated from all the false gods: "They shall say to me, 'What is His name?'" (Exodus 3:13) Sometimes it is synonymous with the phrases *the word of God* and *the command of God*, as in, "for My name is in him" (Exodus 23:21). The meaning of "My word/My command is in him," is that a particular person is the instrument of God's desire and will.

Similarly, the phrase *the glory of the Lord* sometimes refers to a visionary manifestation which is a reflection of the divine glory, as for example: "As the appearance of the rainbow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezekiel 1:28). The likeness of the glory of the Lord as visualized by the prophet was only the refraction of the divine glory. Apparently, *the glory of the Lord* refers to a fiery manifestation of extreme illumination (Exodus 24:17) usually obscured by a cloud (Exodus 16:10, 24:16).

As mentioned, some trinitarian commentators allege that references in the Jewish Scriptures to "the glory of God" are actually references to Jesus. It is well known that the New Testament authors in exaggerating the importance of Jesus as God's special supernatural agent¹⁴ sometimes use descriptive phraseology for him that the Jewish Scriptures reserve for God. The author of Hebrews, claims the alleged post-resurrection Jesus, "is the radiance of God's glory" (Hebrews 1:3). If the New Testament is consistent, this author could not be claiming that "the radiance of God's glory," which

he equates with Jesus, is synonymous with “the glory of God.” The author of Acts writes that while “full of the holy spirit” Stephen, “saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). That is, Stephen allegedly saw Jesus standing separately from “the glory of God.” Therefore, the author of Acts (as well as the author of Hebrews) is saying “the glory of God” and Jesus are not one and the same. Of course, it also means that the author of Acts considers “the glory of God” to be a separate entity from God, as well!

The memra’

In the Jewish Scriptures there is an inner tension between its insistence on the uniqueness of God’s absolute oneness, on the one hand, and its descriptions of God through phraseology used to describe human beings, on the other. This is not a contradiction, it is simply that the biblical anthropomorphic expressions are figures of speech designed to impress upon man God’s personal character. Nevertheless, the ancient Aramaic interpretive translations of the Jewish Scriptures, the *targumim*, sought to avoid all anthropomorphisms. Hence, the common use in the *targumim* of the term *memra’*, “word,” as a reverent circumlocution for God or the acts of God where it was felt the literal rendering would make God appear to act in the same manner as man. In targumic usage, the *memra’* is the manifestation of God’s power in creating the world and acts as a vehicle for His activities in the world; it is a circumlocution for God with no special philosophical or mystical implications. By the use of this substitute, many of the human qualities or emotions attributed to God in the Bible are moderated or removed, thus emphasizing the underlying pure spiritual conception of God (e.g., Numbers 10:35: “Rise up, Lord!” is rendered in the *Targum Yonatan* as “Reveal now the word of the Lord!”). It is in many ways synonymous with the terms “spirit” and *Shechinah* and like them has neither a personal life of its own nor any ontological existence whatsoever. The purpose of the term *memra’* is simply to express certain aspects of God’s will and action rather than His essence or nature.

The *memra’* concept may have arisen from the manner in which the Hebrew, *davar*, “word,” is used in some biblical passages as a figurative personification: “He sends His word” (Psalms 107:20), “so shall My word be that goes out of My mouth” (Isaiah 55:11), “His word runs swiftly . . . He sends out His word (Psalms 147:15-18). In the literary expression of

the poet, the animated “word” becomes a messenger of God carrying out His divine purpose and will but always subordinate to God. Thus, for example, the *Targum Yonatan* renders the following: “And [Abraham] believed in the Lord” as “And [Abraham] believed in the word of the Lord” (Genesis 15:6); “And I [the Lord] will meet with you there” as “And I will appoint my word for you there” (Exodus 25:22); “And I [the Lord] will turn to you” as “And I will turn through My word to do good to you” (Leviticus 26:9); “I the Lord have spoken” as “I the Lord decreed through my word” (Numbers 14:35); “I [the Lord] will require [it] of him” as “My word will require [it] of him” (Deuteronomy 18:19). Jacob declares: “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on that I come in peace to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God” (Genesis 28:20-21). The *Targum Yonatan* renders this as “If the word of the Lord will be with me . . . then the word of the Lord will be my God.” Does this mean the “word of the Lord” will be Jacob’s God? To the translator into Aramaic and to those listening to this rendering it is always the Lord who is understood to be God, not the circumlocution expressed as the “word.” Some Christians in the early Aramaic speaking church using the *memra’* concept and later the Greek speaking church using the *Logos* concept misapplied the intention of the targumic rendering and the philonic teaching on the Logos. But, the Christian misconception cannot change the original intentions of the targumist. The “word” is never a personified being who is a god or part of God.

Speech is attributed to God to make the concept of divine communication with humankind comprehensible. When the Bible records God communicating with the prophets through speech, it is with the understanding that through a divine process the prophets attained a supernatural knowledge. What the prophets communicate comes from God, and is not the result of their own conceptions and ideas. How this divine communication takes place is not in the ordinary sense of what is called speech.

The verbs *davar*, “to speak,” and *’amar*, “to say,” are synonyms expressing: (1) *Speech, voice*, e.g., “Moses shall speak [*yedabber*]” (Exodus 19:19); “And Pharaoh said [*vai-yomer*]” (Exodus 10:28). (2) *Thought*, as in the act or process of thinking without expressing in words, e.g., “And I said [*ve’amarti*] in my heart” (Ecclesiastes 2:15); “And your heart will speak [*yedabber*]” (Proverbs 23:33); “My heart said [*’amar*]” (Psalms 27:8); “And Esau said [*vai-yomer*] in his heart” (Genesis 27:41). (3) *Will, desire, intention*, e.g.,

“And he desired [*vai-yomer*] to slay David” (2 Samuel 21:16); “Do you desire [*’omer*] to slay me” (Exodus 2:14); “And the whole congregation intended [*vai-yomru*] to stone them” (Numbers 14:10). *Davar* and *’amar* have about the same meaning, note the verse, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the sayings [*imrei*] of the Lord which He spoke [*dibber*] to us” (Joshua 24:27).

Only examples (2) “thought” and (3) “will, desire, intention,” can apply to God. Whether the divine thought or desire became known by means of an actual sound or through inspiration, God’s speech does not employ voice or sound as produced by the human body nor do His thoughts and desires emanate from a brain or, so to speak, behave as humankind’s thoughts and desires. Human desires of themselves create nothing. For a human to create something he must proceed from some other object and perform an action or command others to do it for him. In describing God’s actions in the creation of the universe, the Jewish Scriptures describe it in terms understandable to the human mind. Thus, the term *’amar* in the sense of God’s wants (*vai-yomer*, “and He said”) appears in the account of the Creation. There it expresses that “He wished,” or “He desired.” Hence, those figurative references to speaking express divine will not actual speech. For example, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Psalms 33:6). “His mouth,” and “the breath of His mouth,” are without question figurative expressions. They are not separate personalities within the essence of God. The same may be said with reference to “the word of the Lord.” The meaning of the verse is therefore that all of Creation exists through God’s direct will and desire. There is nothing in the term “word” to denote a separate personality within the essence of God as some trinitarian commentators maintain.

Is God sitting next to Himself?

It is a contention of trinitarian commentators that several verses in Psalm 110 show that the Messiah will not only be greater than David but must also be a divine being. The psalmist states: “A Psalm concerning David. *Y-H-V-H* says to my master [“lord”]: ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Psalms 110:1). There is no problem with accepting that one’s descendants can rise to a more exalted position than we possess at present. There is no problem with David accepting that the Messiah will be greater than he is. But, there is nothing in this verse to

show that David is referring to the Messiah when he writes *'adoni*, "my master," "my lord." Moreover, there is nothing in David's words to indicate that the individual he refers to as "my master" is a supernatural being. David, "concerning" himself, wrote Psalm 110 poetically in the third person. There are several midrashic explanations of this psalm. They are not meant to be taken literally, but are homiletic presentations concerned with spiritual lessons to be learned from this text. As such, they do not concern a study of the literal meaning of the psalmist's words.

Christian commentators explain this verse based on New Testament exegesis. Mark's Jesus says:

How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself said by the holy spirit [literally "the spirit the holy"]; "The Lord [*Kyrios*] said to my Lord [*kyrio mou*], 'Sit at My right hand, until I put your enemies beneath your feet.' David himself calls him 'Lord,' how is he then his son?" (Mark 12:35-37).

Mark's rendering, as in the Septuagint of Psalms 110:1 (109:1), uses the Greek word *kyrios*, "lord," twice in the sentence, and the Christian translations into English capitalize the initial letter of the word to read "Lord" in both instances. In the Greek text, the initial *kyrios* is a reference to "the Lord" (*Y-H-V-H*). The second *kyrios*, renders *'adoni*, "my master," "my lord," which according to Mark's understanding refers to "the Christ." So the Greek, *kyrios*, is used to render two separate and distinct Hebrew words in the Greek translation. The confusion this creates in Greek does not exist in the Hebrew original.

In Mark's exposition of the text he has Jesus distance the Messiah from a Davidic descent. Why does Mark question how the Messiah could be the son of David when David calls him "my Lord" giving him more honor than conventional courtesy demands elders give their descendants? The Gospel of Mark was as much a political apologia as a religious one. Writing about the time of the Roman-Jewish War, the author of Mark found it undesirable to portray Jesus as a Davidic descendant. The Romans were very much aware that for decades the focus of Jewish aspirations centered on the establishment of a religio-political kingdom of God governed by a messianic descendant of David. Therefore, when the author of Mark wrote this Gospel, he felt that claiming Jesus as a descendant of David was not in the best political interests of the Christian community. This denial that

the Messiah must be of Davidic descent is highlighted by the fact that the author of Mark gives no Davidic genealogy for Jesus, such as we find in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Attributing the questions of Mark 12:35 and 12:37 to Jesus, the author of Mark derides the scribes and their teachings concerning the Davidic descent of the Messiah, “the Christ.” This particular discussion, if it ever took place, uses Psalms 110:1 to argue against a Davidic descent for the Messiah. Doing so, Mark’s Jesus not only distances himself from Jewish beliefs, but also assures the Roman authorities that he did not have a physical connection with the rebel-supported house of David.

In rendering Psalms 110:1 as, “the Lord said to my Lord” Christian commentators argue that it shows Jesus is greater than David and is the Messiah. Some maintain that the verse even implies that he is of divine origin (see Matthew 22:42-45, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 20:41-44, Acts 2:34-36, Hebrews 1:13). Yet, a careful examination finds these claims to be without merit.

Since *le-David*, in verse 1, does not always mean “written [composed] by David,” but sometimes “concerning David” or “in the style of David,” it cannot be said with certainty that the preposition *le*, often translated “of,” actually indicates “composed by David.” Further investigation is necessary in order to understand its meaning as governed by the context in this psalm.

Psalm 72 was written by David “for,” or “concerning,” Solomon (cf. verses 1 and 20), yet the Hebrew contains an introductory phrase similar to the one found in Psalm 110. The introduction, *li-Shlomo*, stresses that the psalm is “concerning” Solomon rather than that it is by Solomon. Furthermore, in 2 Samuel 22:51 and Psalms 144:10, David speaks of himself in the third person. There is every indication that David wrote this psalm and that the proper translation of verse 1 is: “A Psalm concerning David. *Y-H-V-H* says to my master [*’adoni*]: ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” This psalm is written from the perspective of the individual who is going to recite it. From this perspective, David, as king, is appropriately referred to as “my master,” or “my lord” (cf. “my lord the king,” “our lord David,” “my lord”—1 Kings 1:1-31). The claim that David is actually (or also) referring to the Messiah by the phrase “my master” is not found in the text. The New Testament’s messianic interpretation of this psalm, of course, connects it to Jesus. But, this exegesis, as we shall see, is faulty in light of other christological claims.

The privilege of sitting at the right hand is a mark of distinction (1 Kings 2:19). The terminology “sit at My right hand” is used here as an

idiomatic expression showing God's favoritism toward David. When God invites David to sit at His right hand, it is to show the privileged position enjoyed by David in his relationship with God. It is not to be taken literally as indicating anyone actually sitting at God's right hand. Similarly, in "until I make your enemies your footstool," the description of the subjection of David's enemies is an expression of God's will. The use of the term "footstool" is clearly a metaphor of subjection. It is a hyperbolic statement not inclusive of all David's enemies. This poetic style never intends its meaning to be in absolutes; rather it shows the overall triumph experienced by David in subduing his enemies with the help of God.

In the Christian sources, does the name of God (*Y-H-V-H*), translated as "the Lord" in many English versions of Psalms 110:1, refer to "God the Father" or to "God the Son" or does it refer inclusively to all three members of the Trinity? Christian commentators are divided on the answer. Let us examine this controversy among these commentators in more detail.

The word *'Eloheinu* ("our God"), appears in the *Shem'a*, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord [*Y-H-V-H*] our God, the Lord [*Y-H-V-H*] is One [*'Ehad*]" (Deuteronomy 6:4), that is, One as a *Singularity*. Most Christian commentators maintain that it connotes a plurality and should be understood in its literal sense as "our Gods," and in the sense of a "trinity." For this reason, they often misinterpret the verse as: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our Gods, the Lord is a compound unity."

From this Christian interpretation of the *Shem'a*, it follows that "the Lord" (*Y-H-V-H*) could not refer to either "God the Father" or "God the Son" alone, but must refer to all three members of the Trinity as a unity. If this is the case, how is it possible for Christian commentators to maintain that the phrase "to my lord" in the verse: "The Lord [*Y-H-V-H*] says to my lord [*'adoni*]: 'Sit at My right hand'" (Psalms 110:1) refers to Jesus? If "my lord" refers to the second member of a supposed Trinity, that is, Jesus, then who is the first "Lord," mentioned in the verse? If "the Lord" (*Y-H-V-H*) in the *Shem'a* is a "trinity" united in the divine name, that is, "the Lord [*Y-H-V-H*] is our Gods," the first "Lord" in Psalms 110:1 must also refer to this united Trinity. If so, then the phrase "to my lord" automatically excludes Jesus, who is already included in the first part of the verse as "the Lord." Some Christian commentators in desperation attempt to evade this problem by insisting that *Y-H-V-H* can refer to any part of their three-fold deity (see for example our discussion below of Genesis 19:24). But, then how does one identify "the Father" as differentiated from "the Son" or from "the Holy Spirit"? In any case,

if the second “lord,” supposedly Jesus, is sitting *next to* the first “Lord,” the triune deity or two-thirds of it, or any aggregate of it, then he cannot *be part of* it. That which exists outside of God cannot be God. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews takes the term “sitting” literally when he says, “When he [Jesus] had made purification of sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3); “We have such a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (8:1).

Mark’s Jesus is not simply citing Scripture with the view that the Messiah is the son of David. He is said to refer to the unanimous view of “the scribes” that this is the biblical teaching. So is he rejecting this view of the “scribes” (Mark 12:35), when he poses the question: In what sense is the Messiah the son of David if he is also, as Psalms 110:1 shows, David’s lord? Is Mark’s Jesus indirectly and allusively intimating his own messianic claims? Whether Jesus actually had this discussion with the scribes is a matter of conjecture. However, this episode is used by the author of Mark to further disassociate Jesus from any connection with the house of David. In any case, the implied answer need not be that the Messiah’s real origin is heavenly and divine. It need be only that the Messiah is not simply another king in succession to David, as were the rest of the kings of Judah, but a greater figure, through whom the kingdom of God will come.

Psalms 110:4 states, “You are a priest forever after the manner of Melchizedek.” God considers David as being in His special service in the capacity of a servant to Himself. This is expressed by the term “priest” being applied to David. However, he was not a priest in the manner of the priesthood of Aaron, but rather a priest of God, “after the manner of Melchizedek.” Genesis 14:18 describes Melchizedek as “king of Salem” and “priest of God Most High.” Melchizedek and David each ruled his people in accordance with God’s will as so to speak a priest-king. The Hebrew term *le’olam*, commonly rendered in English as “forever,” is not necessarily always synonymous with “eternal.” It is frequently used with the meaning “for a very long time,” or “for an indefinite period,” or, as in the verse under discussion, to indicate the normal life span of an individual (cf. Exodus 21:6). The analogy between Melchizedek and David focuses on the king’s priestly role, it does not imply that Melchizedek was an eternal priest. Thus, “you are a priest forever” simply means that David discharged certain priestly functions during his lifetime. We are informed that, on occasion, David wore the sacerdotal ephod (2 Samuel 6:14) and “offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord” (2 Samuel

6:17-18), which was the right of all Israelites to do themselves or through a priestly surrogate, and blessed the people (2 Samuel 6:12-19). That is, he helped officiate in some capacity, but he was not a priest in accordance with the Aaronic priesthood of the Torah. He was, as it were, a “priest” in the sense of a non-Torah dispensation, as was Melchizedek. At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon led the ceremony and offered sacrifices and prayers on behalf of the people (1 Kings 8). It is not farfetched to expect that the Messiah, when he comes, will exercise certain “priestly” prerogatives in the manner of David. But, this is not the same as the tendentious claims made by the author of Hebrews.

In his interpretation of Psalm 110, the author of Hebrews alleges that Jesus is the subject of this psalm and is literally an eternal “priest.” He also makes statements concerning Melchizedek which have no scriptural basis: “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but having been made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually” (Hebrews 7:3). The Scriptures contain no such misleading information. The absence of any reference to Melchizedek’s descent does not justify the extreme statement that he had “neither beginning of days nor end of life.” There is absolutely no biblical foundation for such a conclusion. Moreover, Melchizedek cannot be identified as an earlier manifestation of Jesus as some Christian commentators contend. If he was “made like the Son of God,” he could not actually *be* “the Son.” However, “having been made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually,” asserts that Melchizedek did not just typify Jesus, but was something more than a mere mortal. It appears that the author of Hebrews gives Melchizedek an existence not possible for a human being. If Melchizedek, without father, mother or genealogy, has “neither beginning of days nor end of life” and has “been made like the Son of God,” he must be an eternal being. Melchizedek could not have been an angel since angels are created beings and, as such, have a “beginning of days.” Elevated to the status of a divinity, Melchizedek is lifted to a level equal to the members of the Trinity. Thus, he must be a fourth member of the Christian deity, replacing the Trinity with a Quaternity. This addition of Melchizedek to the Christian godhead to form a Quaternity, rather than a Trinity, is the only conclusion it is possible to draw from the information provided by the author of Hebrews.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews has misconstrued Psalm 110 as a reference to Jesus. The biblically unsound arguments presented are merely

vain attempts to prove that Jesus was more than a mere mortal. He maintains that Jesus did not have the Aaronic priesthood, but did possess the Melchizedek priesthood and thereby could offer up himself as a sacrifice. The claim that Jesus held priesthood “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:20) is irrelevant to any discussion of sacrifice made under the Torah rule of law. But, it is the Torah that Jesus is said to have fulfilled and nullified by offering himself up (Hebrews 7:27). The so-called “better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22) allegedly instituted by Jesus and its accompanying everlasting Melchizedek priesthood relate only to Christian beliefs concerning a post-mortal Jesus. A non-Aaronic order of priesthood is irrelevant to the requirements of Torah. Moreover, what *are* the ordinances of this priestly “order of Melchizedek”?

The New Testament claims that Jesus fulfilled and nullified the law by offering up himself as a sacrifice. According to the description it provides, this came about in a manner that runs counter to the Torah. Yet, the claim is made that everything that Jesus did was in accordance with the Torah. This is a New Testament conundrum. To the rest of us, it is obvious that this New Testament claim has no basis in fact.

Concerning the Messiah, God says, “And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and My servant David prince among them; I the Lord have spoken” (Ezekiel 34:23-24). The Lord alone will be worshiped as God, while the Messiah, as the servant of God, lives with the people. God and the Messiah are not and cannot be equals; indeed, it is God alone who gives the Messiah power to rule in the capacity of His appointed servant.

Abraham's three visitors

Some Christian commentators cite Genesis 18 and 19 as proof for their trinitarian beliefs. They allege that the three visitors who appeared to Abraham as he sat in his tent door under the oaks of Mamre were actually the first, second, and third persons of the Trinity. Others allege the three consisted of Jesus accompanied by two angels. Although the complexity of the text may lend itself to several interpretations, the trinitarian understanding of these chapters as referring to a triune deity or Jesus accompanied by two angels is totally unacceptable on scriptural grounds.

Genesis 18:1 may be interpreted as the Lord speaking to Abraham prior to the arrival of the three men mentioned in verse 2. Most probably,

however, verse 1 acts as an introductory remark informing the reader that the Lord spoke to Abraham, with the following verses being the details of how that encounter was accomplished. The text of Genesis 18 and 19 is not clear as to whether the Lord spoke, at any time, directly to Abraham or solely through an angel, in the guise of a man, who acted as an intermediary. But these are quibbles compared to the problems involved in the trinitarian interpretations. The latter are of a nature that reveals the shallowness of the trinitarian assertions concerning these two chapters.

As mentioned, some Christian commentators believe that the three men who visited Abraham are the three personalities of the triune deity. But, then, which part of God would they say is the Lord who speaks to Abraham after two of the men depart (Genesis 18:22)? If the three angels are the three persons of the triune deity, then how could the Lord say: "You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live" (Exodus 33:20)? Abraham and Sarah would have certainly died had they gazed upon the supposed Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, unless what they saw was not God but three angels manifest in human form for the several purposes assigned to them. Even the author of the Gospel of John exposes this error when he declares "no man has seen God at any time" (John 1:18; see also 1 John 4:12). Since a number of people saw the faces of the three angels and still lived, we must acknowledge that none of them were God. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that God took on a temporary humanlike form and came to earth for a few hours in order to visit Abraham. Since what occurred was not a visionary experience there is nothing that substantiates a claim that God became a flesh and blood human or even gave the appearance of a human form. In any case, what occurred in Genesis is far from a claim that a part of a triune deity (the Holy Spirit) placed another third of the triune deity (to be named Jesus) into a female's womb at the behest of a third member of this triune deity (the Father) and thus created a fully human/fully god being.

We have also mentioned that some Christian commentators believe that the three men were Jesus accompanied by two angels. They allege that Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God made flesh and the exact representation of God the Father. This, they contend, explains how Jesus could visit Abraham and be called "Lord." Christian commentators might agree that one cannot see God and live, but they contend that by the preexistent being later known as Jesus becoming incarnate one can see God through an exact representative image of Him. But, New Testament

references to this notion of Jesus becoming flesh do not make it more than a unique occurrence involving the birth of Jesus. Thus, the author of John writes, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a). The context shows this refers to Jesus and not to any incarnation activity in a supposed preexistence. In speaking of "Christ Jesus," in a supposed preexistent state, Paul says, he "emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). There is nothing to suggest that the preexistent Jesus of Christian myth did this on any occasion prior to his alleged incarnation through his birth to Mary. In fact, there is no evidence that any of the authors of the New Testament thought of Jesus as actively present in Israel's past, either as the angel of the Lord, the angel of His presence, as one of the angels of Genesis 18-19, or as *Y-H-V-H* Himself. Indeed, Christian commentators should face the implications of what Paul, who believed that the preexistent Jesus was a supernatural being, said about him: "Although he existed in the form of God he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God" (Philippians 2:6). This does not mean that "form of God" equals being of the same essence as God. That Paul's Jesus "did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God," shows that he did not think it important to attain equality with God. This is an explicit admission that Jesus was not equal to God. He "emptied himself . . . being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). The preexistent being of Paul's myth gave up his supernatural state to enter the world as Jesus. It is only because he was obedient in his incarnation, even dying on a cross, that this supernatural power "found in appearance as a man" will be "highly exalted" by God (Philippians 2:8-9). But, although he is to receive homage from "those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth" (Philippians 2:10) he never attains equal status with God. Hence, although Paul says, "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" it is only "to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11). We also see in Paul's statement, "For He [God] has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when He says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to him" (1 Corinthians 15:27). Where is the oneness and equality of God in the Trinity if in the end the so-called "Son of God" will submit himself back to his Father? Thus, Paul says: "And when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself also will be subjected to the one who subjected all things to him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). That which is subject to God cannot be

God. Significantly, Paul says Jesus is called “Lord” only after his death as a reward for his obedience. There is no reason to apply the term “Lord” [*kyrios*] in Genesis 18 or for that matter in Psalms 110:1 to Jesus when it is obvious that these events were prior to Jesus allegedly earning the title.

Of the three visitors, one is specifically sent as a messenger from the Lord to Abraham. Through him, the Lord speaks, in Genesis 18, to Abraham. He is the one who delivers God’s message concerning the birth of Isaac, and it is through him that the Lord speaks to Abraham concerning that birth, and it is through him that the Lord speaks to Abraham concerning the possibility of saving the two cities. Thus, for example, it is written: “And the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham stood yet before the Lord” (verse 22), and later it says: “And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left off speaking to Abraham” (verse 33). As the Lord’s agent the messenger speaks as the Lord and is referred to accordingly. The authority which he expresses is not his own but God’s. It is God who oversees all events, and that is why, even though the Scriptures describe two of the men as going to Sodom, where they are identified as angels, *Y-H-V-H* states: “I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know” (Genesis 18:21).

Two of the men are referred to as angels, literally, “messengers,” while the third, having accomplished his mission of speaking to Abraham, is no longer involved in the narrative (Genesis 19:1). That is why only two of the visitors are mentioned as arriving at their destination. The text indicates that the function of these two men is to bring about the destruction of Sodom by exposing, through their mere presence, all the evil that resides in the hearts of the inhabitants. The two angels are never referred to as God. They are portrayed as God’s agents carrying out His commands. Simply stated, they cannot be God if they are sent by Him to do His bidding. At no time do the two angels take the initiative in making critical decisions concerning Sodom. Hence, they exclaim: “[W]e will destroy this place, because their cry has become great before the Lord; and the Lord has sent us to destroy it” (Genesis 19:13).

It is obvious that it is not the angels who decide to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah; they only act as agents for the Lord. He made the decision and sends them to carry it out. At no time do the Scriptures say that the angels declare, “we heard their cry” or “we have come on our own initiative.” The angels only speak in terms of what they are commanded to do. In contrast,

the Lord, apparently through the medium of the third man, speaks with authority throughout the narrative. However, this man is not God in human form, as some Christian commentators argue, but an angel in the guise of a human being. In the end, it is God, and not the angels, who causes the destruction of the wicked cities, as is stated: "Then the Lord [*Y-H-V-H*] caused to rain upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord [*Y-H-V-H*] out of heaven" (Genesis 19:24).

Some Christian commentators allege that the doctrine of the Trinity is supported by Genesis 19:24. They allege that there are two divine personalities mentioned in this verse, one on earth, conversing with Abraham, and the other in heaven. The one on earth, it is claimed, rained down fire upon the two cities from the one in heaven. There is, however, no grammatical basis for such an inference. In accordance with the construction of the Hebrew language, we find that in the first half of the verse, the reader is informed who caused the brimstone and fire to fall upon the two cities. In the second half of the verse, he is told for emphasis, not only from whom it came but also from where. The verse emphasizes that it is "from the Lord [*Y-H-V-H*]," in order to leave no doubt as to who is in command of events.

Biblical personalities will often speak of themselves in the third person instead of using the first person. Examples of this may be seen in the following: Lamech said, "Hear my voice you wives of Lamech" (Genesis 4:23), not "my wives"; similarly David said, "Take with you the servants of your lord" (1 Kings 1:33), and not "my servants"; and Ahasuerus said, "in the name of the king" (Esther 8:8), not "in my name." They are all referring to themselves in the third person not to another personality. Likewise, especially, when God speaks of Himself in the third person He is also not speaking of another personality. God uses the technique of speaking in the third person about Himself in a number of scriptural contexts (Genesis 18:19; Exodus 3:12, 24:1; Numbers 19:1-2; Hosea 1:7; Zechariah 1:17). These scriptural contexts show it is a common feature of the Scriptures, when the Lord (*Y-H-V-H*) speaks, for the text to repeat the noun rather than make use of a pronoun. As we can see in the verse under discussion, the use of "from *Y-H-V-H* [the Lord]" rather than "from Him," conforms to the usual biblical usage. Clearly, there is no scriptural reason to assume that two divine personalities are mentioned.

These verses, by which trinitarian commentators attempt to prove their claims, do not support the theory of a coequal triune partnership. If the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah were the act of a triune

deity, in which all three divine personalities took part, it only shows them as unequal partners. It is stated in Genesis 19:13: “[W]e will destroy this place, because their cry has become great before *Y-H-V-H* [the Lord], and *Y-H-V-H* [*the Lord*] has sent us to destroy it.” This implies that two of the divine personalities are inferior in position since they do the bidding of the third. In conclusion, the claim that any, or all, of these three angels was *Y-H-V-H* is a contradiction of the biblical text of Genesis 18 and 19. Moreover, the claim that one of these beings was Jesus is totally without scriptural support.

Jacob wrestles an angel

Trinitarian commentators use the biblical story of Jacob’s wrestling with an angel to support their belief in a triune deity. As with Genesis 18 and 19, they claim that this narrative proves God manifested Himself in human form.

And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he did not prevail against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was strained, as he wrestled with him. Then he said: “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But he said: “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” And he said to him: “What is your name?” And he said: “Jacob.” Then he said: “Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with a divine being [*’elohim*] and with men, and have prevailed.” And Jacob asked him, and said: “Tell me, I pray, your name.” But he said: “Why is it that you ask my name?” And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place *Peniel*: “For I have seen a divine being [*’elohim*] face to face, and my life is preserved.” (Genesis 32:25-31)

The word *’elohim* may mean an angel (“divine being,” or “divine power”) and this, indeed, is its meaning in our verse: “I have seen an angel [or “a divine being”] face to face.” Further confirmation for this rendering is found in Hosea 12:4-5. In speaking of Jacob, the passage, written in parallel style, says: “And by his strength he strove with a divine being [*’elohim*]; so he strove with an angel [*malach*], and prevailed.”

Jacob calls the place *Peni'el*—"The face of God" or "The face of a divine power." The name *Peni'el* is the most natural and proper commemoration of the incident that Jacob could give, since it honors God, who sent the angel. The importance of only honoring God is highlighted by the angel's refusal to divulge his name to Jacob when the latter requests it. The angel is aware that the knowledge of his name would not be of any benefit to Jacob, for all the power he possesses is directly from God. Therefore, in striving with the angel, Jacob is, in effect, striving with God.

Only God must be honored, not His messenger. The messenger only represents the one who sends him and in whose name he repeats the message exactly as given to him. To see the messenger is, as it were, equivalent to seeing the sender. As a result, *Peni'el* ("The face of God" or "The face of a divine power") is the only appropriate name Jacob could give to honor the sender rather than the messenger.

Any interpretation which would have Jacob seeing God is in direct contradiction to the teaching of the Jewish Scriptures, in which God says: "You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live" (Exodus 33:40). The fact that Jacob sees "*'elohim* face to face" only reinforces the fact that the divine being with whom Jacob wrestles is not God. Since the angel represents God, Jacob views the messenger as if it is God Himself, however, it is quite clear that this angel is not God manifested on earth as a human being. At no time does the Jewish Scriptures teach such a belief. There is no legitimate reason to believe that Jacob's encounter with an angel testifies to any claim that God has ever appeared in human form or to a belief in a triune deity.

Does Hosea 1:7 mention two divine personalities?

Some trinitarian commentators contend that two divine personalities appear in the verse: "But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them [Israel] by *Y-H-V-H* their God [*'Eloheihem*]" (Hosea 1:7). The claim is made that if one should promise another that he will do a certain work by a third person, it should be quite evident that the one who promised the work is different from the one through whom he does it. Hence the conclusion, the Lord who is speaking is different from the Lord who will actually deliver Israel. But this is an inconclusive argument, since it is not unusual for God to speak of Himself in the third person (e.g., Genesis 18:19; Exodus 3:12, 24:1; Numbers 19:1-2; Isaiah 51:15;

Zechariah 1:17). If “Y-H-V-H [the Lord] their God” means, as trinitarian commentators say, “Y-H-V-H [the Lord] their Gods,” it would have to refer to all three members of the Trinity. Under those circumstances, then, which member of the Trinity made this promise? The fact is that in this verse, God is speaking about Himself in the third person. If we look carefully at the Hebrew text, we will discover that the particular names of God are used advisedly, as each carries a definite meaning bearing on the overall idea of the verse. Accordingly, it should be rendered: “But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by means of [Myself] the Lord of Mercy [Y-H-V-H], their God of Justice [’Eloheihem].” The Divine Name Y-H-V-H represents God’s quality of mercy, i.e., the God of Mercy, and ’Elohim represents God’s quality of justice, i.e., the God of Justice.¹⁵ Not by weapons of war did God save Judah, but by using His own weapon, “an angel of the Lord” (see 2 Kings 19:34-35), to inflict punishment on Judah’s enemies.

“I will dwell in the midst of you” (Zechariah 2:15)

The prophet Zechariah writes: “And many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day, and will be My people, and I will dwell in the midst of you; and you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you” (Zechariah 2:15; in some versions 2:11). There are some Christian commentators who interpret the switch from the third person to the first person as showing that the Lord will dwell among His people but that this Lord was sent by “the Lord of hosts.” They then conclude that “me” refers to the Lord in this verse, but that He is also the one doing the sending.

This verse tells of the many nations that will come into the covenant with God. Nevertheless, it will not change the fact that Judah is God’s people and the Jerusalem Temple is the site of the presence of God among His people. But, God’s dwelling in the midst of His people does not mean He is walking around in a bodily form. The Torah says, “the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp” (Deuteronomy 23:15), but that was not as a physical manifestation. In Zechariah 2:15, it means the Lord’s presence is to be found in His Temple. In verse 15, the Lord is speaking but then the verse ends with “and you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you.” But, if that is so, does it not show that “me” is the Lord in this verse, and that he is also the one doing the sending? To understand what the text is saying it is best to follow the traditional cantillation/

punctuation which divides the phrase “and you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you” from the rest of the verse by the use of the *zaqef katon* (⋮) punctuation mark over *ve-tocheich* (“in the midst of you”). This punctuation mark acts as a comma or semi-colon. The punctuation mark over *ve-yada’at* (“and you will know”) is a *zaqef gadol* (⋮) which also acts as a pause thereby emphasizing the change in speakers, i.e., that, the prophet is now speaking. The verse is saying that God has sent Zechariah (“me”) to the people of Judah (“you”). For added corroboration let us look at Zechariah 2:12-13 where the two speakers are the Lord of hosts and the prophet: “For thus says the Lord of hosts, who *sent me* [the prophet] after glory to the nations which spoiled you: ‘Surely, he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. For behold, I will shake My hand over them, and they will be a spoil to those that served them’; and you [plural] shall know that the Lord of hosts has *sent me*.” Here, too, the phrase “that the Lord of hosts has sent me” is divided from the rest of the verse by the *zaqef gadol* punctuation mark. Thus, we see it is *not* God speaking to Himself or to a part of Himself, but to Zechariah, who says, God *sent me*.

As we have noted above, the grammatical change from the third person to the first is a common feature in the Bible, and God often speaks of Himself in the third person. But, there is no hint here of God’s oneness containing a multiplicity of persons.

Who was pierced?

Some Christian commentators have maintained that the prophet Zechariah is speaking of Jesus when he declares, “And they shall look to Me whom they have pierced; then they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only son” (Zechariah 12:10). They equate the “Me” with the “him” of verse 10 and refer both to Jesus at his supposed second coming at which time the Jews will repent their having caused his death. But, grammatically, the “Me” and the “him” cannot refer to the same individual. The author of the Gospel of John uses verse 10, but changes the wording. Thus, he wrote: “They shall look upon [*him*] whom they have pierced” (John 19:37). There is no “him” in John’s text. Compare this with the citation of verse 10 in the Book of Revelation: “Every eye will see him, everyone who pierced him” (Revelation 1:7). In Revelation, the predicted looking to the one who was pierced is interpreted as referring to events concerning the *second* coming of Jesus. But in John 19:37 the piercing is interpreted as referring to the piercing of Jesus’ side after his death with a Roman soldier’s lance. Here

Zechariah is expressly quoted, albeit with the change from an explicit “me” to an implicit “him.”

The Johannine Gospel wording not only disagrees with the Masoretic text¹⁶ but also is not in agreement with the Septuagint. The Greek interpretative reading found in the Codex Vaticanus and most other Septuagint manuscripts, “they shall look upon Me, because they have danced insultingly [=mocked],¹⁷ matches the “to me” reading of the Hebrew text. The Greek of the Vienna Codex (5th-6th centuries) is much closer to a literal rendering of the Masoretic text.

But, let us look at the context of the Johannine statement. The author of John writes: “The [Roman] soldiers therefore came . . . [and] one of the [Roman] soldiers pierced his [Jesus’] side with a spear . . . For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, ‘Not a bone of him shall be broken.’ And again another Scripture says, ‘They [the Roman soldiers] shall look on [him] whom they [the Roman soldiers] pierced’” (John 19:32-37). Both of these supposed fulfillments of Scripture are quoted as past events and have an immediate final fulfillment in the mind of the Johannine author. It is the Roman soldier who pierces the body and he and his fellow soldiers supposedly fulfill the Scripture. There is not the slightest hint of a future fulfillment following an alleged second coming of Jesus. The original commandment concerning the paschal lamb given to the Israelites reads: “They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it” (Numbers 9:12). In the Gospel of John, this Torah commandment given to the Israelites becomes a prophecy fulfilled by the Roman soldiers! So too, Zechariah’s words spoken concerning God’s saving the Jewish people from their enemies is totally reinterpreted to find fulfillment in the contemporary actions of those Roman soldiers! But, paradoxically, the author of John attaches no significance to verse 10 as providing evidence for the supposed deity of Jesus or a future fulfillment.

It must be remembered that we are dealing here with an English rendering of biblical Hebrew that has its own particular grammatical rules and usages. The sentence structure in Zechariah 12:10 may appear confusing to those reading this verse in translation. But, the translation “look to Me whom they have pierced” is correct. The relative clause “whom they have pierced” is in apposition to “Me,” the spokesman of the passage. *Et*, the Hebrew word introducing the clause marks it as the object of the verb “look to”; the Hebrew word *’asher* is always a relative pronoun in that context, and never the conjunction “because.” It should also be noted that in the Hebrew clause “they have pierced” lacks the pronominal suffix “him.”

Let us look at this verse in context. In Zechariah 12, we are told that God will defend His people and destroy their enemies. On that day, “they [the nation of Israel, i.e., the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, mentioned at the beginning of verse 10] shall look to Me [God] whom they [the nations, spoken of in verse 9, that shall come up against Jerusalem] have pierced; then they [Israel] shall mourn for him [the slain of Israel as personified by the leader of the people, the warrior Messiah who will die in battle at this time].”

Of course, God cannot literally be pierced. The idea of piercing God expresses the fact that Israel stands in a very special relationship to God among all the nations of the earth. God identifies with His people to the degree that He takes part figuratively in the nation’s destiny. To attack (pierce) Israel is to attack God. That is why God says: “Me whom they have pierced” even though it is the people of Israel and not God who is actually “pierced.” Accordingly, Isaiah says of God’s relationship to Israel: “In all their affliction He was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9), and in Psalms 83:2-6 we see that the nations that hate God manifest their hatred by seeking to destroy the Jewish people. There are many such biblical passages that show that God identifies Himself with Israel (e.g., Jeremiah 12:14, Isaiah 49:25, Exodus 23:22, Zechariah 2:12-13).

As stated above, the Gentile nations shall look to God, whom they have attacked by the persecution, death and general suffering they inflicted on the nation of Israel (“him”). It is those Israelites whose deaths will be mourned by the surviving Jewish people. The rabbis of the Talmud saw this suffering personified in the leader of the people, the warrior Messiah, the son of Joseph, who will be slain at the time discussed in verse 10 (B.T. *Sukkah* 52a). All of the nation’s dead will be mourned, but, as the people mourn for the fallen of Israel, the mourning over the death of the warrior Messiah symbolizes the collective grief.

Zechariah 12:10 does not equate Jesus with God in any way, nor does it say anything of a return by Jesus, or a mourning by the nation of Israel over his death.

Zechariah’s “day of Y-H-V-H”

In Zechariah 14 the prophet foretells a coming “day of Y-H-V-H” when the nations will be gathered against Jerusalem for a great battle. The horrors of the conflict are to be interrupted when Y-H-V-H intervenes and defends

the city against the nations. The Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem is rent asunder, providing a passageway of escape for the faithful. The enemies of God are punished and thereafter Jerusalem dwells in safety, and from year to year, the people worship *Y-H-V-H* who is “King over the whole earth.”

The prophet Zechariah relates that *Y-H-V-H* will go forth and fight against all the nations that come up against Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:3). He writes: “And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives And *Y-H-V-H* my God shall come, and all the holy ones with you” (14:4-5). Christian commentators identify *Y-H-V-H* here as referring to Jesus returning at the advent of a supposed second coming. The Jewish interpretation is that it refers to God with His angels coming to defend the people and city of Jerusalem (that is, they, “God with His angels,” are “with you,” the Jewish people and Jerusalem). Two questions have been raised: First, does this verse mean that God Himself visibly and physically will descend on the mountain? Or, alternately, does this mean that a returned Jesus who trinitarians believe to be the very image of God and the fullness of God in bodily form will descend from heaven and put his feet on the Mount of Olives?

In answer to the first question, the prophet says that God will manifest His presence on the Mount of Olives. His use of an anthropomorphic expression is not to be taken literally here anymore so than any other like descriptions throughout the Bible. Numerous times in the Bible we read of *Y-H-V-H* “coming down.” In no case does it speak of God being physically present (Genesis 11:5, 7; Exodus 3:8; Isaiah 31:4; 64:1, 3; Psalms 144:5; Nehemiah 9:13a). In Micah 1:3 we are told that God “is coming forth from His place” to “come down and tread on the high places of the earth.” How is this descriptive language different from *Y-H-V-H* standing on the Mount of Olives with the result that it will split? Micah says “the mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will be split, like wax before the fire, like water poured down a steep place” (Micah 1:4). It was not uncommon for prophets to use figurative expressions about *Y-H-V-H* “coming down,” mountains trembling, being scattered, and hills bowing (Habakkuk 3:6, 10); mountains flowing down at his presence (Isaiah 63:19); or mountains and hills singing and the trees clapping their hands (Isaiah 55:12). The prophet simply speaks in human conceptions when he speaks of God’s feet standing on the mountain.

A fundamental problem in trinitarian theology is its inability to discern the difference between the literal and figurative elements of the Scriptures.

Much of biblical prophecy is couched in figurative language, and those who do not recognize or ignore this principle are destined to give erroneous interpretations of the biblical text.

As to the second question, we must ask again whether trinitarian commentators consider the name *Y-H-V-H* as a generic name for the alleged Trinity as a whole, a name that can be applied only to "God the Father," or a name that can be applied to any single member of the Trinity? Are trinitarian commentators equating *Y-H-V-H* with Jesus because of an anthropomorphic description coupled with a need to find prophecies of a second coming? Those believing the notion that Jesus will return to the earth to reign for 1,000 years rely heavily upon Zechariah, chapter 14, as an important element of their scheme of things to come. Advocates of this belief allege that Zechariah 14:1-3 contains a description of the approaching "battle of Armageddon" (Revelation 16:16) which supposedly will be consummated by the descent of Jesus upon the Mount of Olives to overthrow his enemies and to commence his millennial reign. The truth of the matter is that Zechariah 14 makes no reference whatever to a millennial reign of Jesus upon the earth. Even from a Christian perspective, it is questionable what this prophecy has to do with a "millennial reign" of Jesus upon the earth?

If this chapter refers to the literal return of Jesus (i.e., the supposed second coming when "the Lord himself will descend from heaven"—1 Thessalonians 4:16) upon the Mount of Olives, exactly who is it that will, from a New Testament perspective, make that escape flight to the east when the mountain is cleft? It cannot be the wicked; for the New Testament teaches that they will be destroyed when Jesus returns (Matthew 25:31-33, 41-46). Moreover, it cannot be the righteous, for they will be "caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Who else will be left?

Problems for the trinitarian interpretations continue. Verse 8 speaks of living waters going forth from Jerusalem in summer and in winter. Since summer and winter will occur only as long as the earth remains (Genesis 8:22), and if, as the New Testament alleges, the earth will not remain beyond the second coming of Jesus (2 Peter 3:4, 10), it is obvious that the events of this verse cannot transpire after the supposed literal return of Jesus (which supposedly is alluded to in verse 4).

Simply stated, Zechariah 14 has nothing to do with the trinitarian claims made upon it. Biblical passages in which anthropomorphic terms are used in describing the experience of comprehending God do not in the

least imply that God actually appeared on earth clothed in a human body. They are, sometimes, mere mental representations, and at other times, external manifestations, of the divine glory. These experiences are essentially indefinable, but in order to give the reader or listener an appreciation of the experience, the prophet must resort to metaphors borrowed from the physical world.

The King of Israel

Psalms 45:7-8 reads: “Your throne, God [*'Elohim*], is for ever and ever; a scepter of equity is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God [*'Elohim*], your God [*'Elohecha*], has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows.” In particular, we are interested in the literal text of Psalms 45:7a that states, “Your throne God [*'Elohim*] is forever and ever.” The overall context shows that an earthly king of Israel is being addressed. As a result, some Christian commentators ask, “How is it possible that an earthly king is called *'Elohim*? Tendentiously, presupposing this to be a messianic passage, they then contend that verse 7a actually points to the Messiah as a divine king, and then draw the conclusion that it refers to Jesus. But, these Christian commentators ignore the poetic symbolism expressed in verse 7a. The Davidic king is the earthly ruler of God’s people. In that capacity he is God’s surrogate, the representative of the actual and eternal king of Israel, Israel’s Divine Ruler. Thus, it is said, “Solomon sat upon the throne *of the Lord* as king, in place of his father, David, and he was successful” (1 Chronicles 29:23). Verse 7a, “Your throne, God [*'Elohim*], is for ever and ever,” is a parenthetical statement placed in the text to explain why verse 8b says, “therefore God [*'Elohim*], your God [*'Elohecha*], has anointed you.” As an ideal, the earthly king of the house of David is rewarded because he has “loved righteousness, and hated wickedness” (verse 8a); this will, of course, someday include the Messiah. Yet, whoever the reigning king may be, the throne still belongs to the eternal God of Israel. The Davidic throne is God’s throne on earth. Kings of the house of David rule by God’s permission and are His representatives. Therefore, verse 7a is to be understood as an acknowledgement made to God but addressed to God’s surrogate. The reigning king is told, in effect, “Your throne is God’s forever and ever.” And, today, although this earthly kingship is temporarily suspended it is, nevertheless, God’s “for ever and ever.”

God's nature does not change

When the verse says, “For I the Lord change not” (Malachi 3:6) it is not merely speaking of God’s attributes or promises. What makes His attributes and promises unchangeable is that God’s sublime nature, His very essence, is ontologically unchangeable. He is eternally the same. Intertwined with the trinitarian allegation that God is three persons in one substance is the claim that one of these so-called persons became incarnate as a truly human being while remaining truly God. Yet, the very incarnation would disrupt the ontological unchangeable status of God as mentioned in verse 6. This mythical dualistic being, undergoing its normal biological development and functioning from womb to tomb cannot be the eternally unchangeable God of Israel. By definition, not mystery, the everlasting, ontologically absolute one God, in whole or in part, does not take on a physical bodily nature or form, die, disintegrate, or decompose. This God cannot undergo a resurrection experience for such would mean He died at some point—an impossibility.

Notes

- ¹ Moshe Chaim Luzzato, *The Way of God*, Trans. Aryeh Kaplan, Nanuet: Feldheim, 1999, p. 245.
- ² See Appendix 1.
- ³ Some scholars believe that the section of the *Zohar* between 1:22a-29a is part of the *Tiqunei ha-Zohar*, a later work of zoharic literature often incorporated into the body of the *Zohar* text.
- ⁴ Isaiah 51:2 states: “Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah that bore you, for when he was but one I called him, and blessed him, and made him many.” This verse emphasizes the uniqueness of Abraham as differentiated from the rest of humanity, at the time of his first encounter with the Almighty.
- ⁵ *Sefer HaZohar, Bereshit, Parashat Bereshit* 170-171 (1:22b). See Appendix 2.
- ⁶ Some Christian Bibles translate this verse as: “Why is it that you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?” “Wonderful is a secondary meaning which is used in the sense of “incomprehensible,” “marvelous.” It is not to be understood as a proper name identifying the angel. The Hebrew word *peli* (“hidden,” “wonderful”) indicates that the name is beyond the realm of human knowledge.
- ⁷ “Gabriel,” means “Man of God,” or “Strength of God.” In his only biblical appearance (Daniel 8:15-16, 9:21) he is described as a man. Enoch 40:2 describes him as one of

the four presences who look down from heaven (9:1), a holy angel (20:7), set over all powers (40:9). He is also the angel set over Paradise, over the serpents and the cherubim (20:7), and has the power to destroy the wicked (54:6). (See *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, Ed. R.H. Charles. Oxford: Clarendon Press, Vol. 2, 1913.)

- ⁸ For *'adonim* used in this way, see also: Genesis 24:9, 10, 51; 39:2-20; 40:1; 42:30, 33; Exodus 21:4, 6, 8; Judges 19:11, 12; Malachi 1:6.
- ⁹ Midrash *Shemot Rabbah* 3:6. See also: "The Almighty said to him [Moses], 'You want to know My name? I am called by name according to My deeds. When I sit in judgment of the world, I am called *'Elohim*. When I take revenge against the wicked, I am called *Tzevd'ot*. When I suspend [punishment] of sins, I am called *'El Shaddai*. When I dispense mercy, I am called *Rahum*. Thus, My name depends on My deeds'" (Midrash *Tanhuma*, *Shemot* 1:20).
- ¹⁰ When the sages originally made the translation of the Torah for King Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283-245 B.C.E.) they made ten emendations to the text. Instead of "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" they emended the text to read, "I will make man in the image and the likeness" (Midrash *Tanhuma*, *Shemot* 1:22).
- ¹¹ Genesis 1:26-27. "And God said: 'Let us make Adam [here *Adam* does not refer to a specific male being, but to humankind generally] in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion [the human collectivity throughout history is to have ascendancy over creation] . . . ' And God created Adam in His own image, in the image of God created He him [the first human]; male and female created He them [this refers to God's original statement—humankind is to consist of male and female made in the image and likeness of God]."

Genesis 5:1-2. "This is the book of the generations of Adam [his descendants]. In the day that God created Adam, in the likeness of God made He him [the first human]; male and female created He them [humankind is to consist of male and female made in the image and likeness of God], and blessed them, and called their name Adam [here *Adam* does not refer to a specific male being, but to humankind generally], in the day when they were created [male and female were created on the same day]."

- ¹² A *midrash* finds a lesson in interpersonal relations in "Let us make man in our image." It says: Now if a great man comes to obtain permission [for a proposed action] from one that is less than he, he may say, 'Why should I ask permission from my inferior!' Then they will say to him, 'Learn from the Creator, who created all that is above and below, yet when He came to create man He took counsel with the ministering angels'" (*Bereshit Rabbah* 8:8). According to this *midrash*, God addresses Himself to the angels and says to them, "Let us make man in our image." It is not that He invites their help,

but that it is the conventional manner of speech to express oneself in this way and not necessarily that God sought angelic help in the creation of man.

Although God often acts without assistance, He makes His intentions known to His servants. Thus, we find, “Shall I conceal from Abraham that which I am doing” (Genesis 18:17); “He made known His ways to Moses, His doings to the children of Israel” (Psalms 103:7); “For the Lord God will do nothing without revealing His counsel to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

- ¹³ In the Talmud and midrashic literature, the angel Metatron is regarded notably as the defender of the rights of Israel (cf. *Hagigah* 15a). In the Babylonian Talmud, Metatron is mentioned in three places (*Hagigah* 15a, *Sanhedrin* 38b, and *Avodah Zarah* 3b). The first two references are significant because they are used in connection with polemical refutations of heretical beliefs in “two Powers.” The tractate *Hagigah* relates that *Aher* (Elisha ben Avuyah) saw Metatron seated (next to the Divine Throne) and said, “perhaps there are two powers,” that is, Metatron himself being a second deity. The citation explains that Metatron was given permission to be seated only because he was the heavenly scribe recording the good deeds of Israel. It was shown to Elisha that Metatron could not be a second deity by the fact that Metatron was carried out and received sixty fiery lashes to emphasize that Metatron was not a god, but an angel, and could be punished.

In tractate *Sanhedrin* 38b, a *min* (“heretic”) challenges the Amora, R. Idit, on why it is written in Exodus 24:1, “And to Moses He said: ‘Come up to the Lord,’” instead of “Come up to Me.” The heretic claims that the verse shows that there are two deities: the one who commanded Moses to ascend, and the one to whom Moses was commanded to ascend. R. Idit answered that the verse refers to Metatron “whose name is like that of his Master, for it is written, ‘For My name is in him [Exodus 23:21]’” (that is, Metatron acts as God’s emissary). When the heretic argued that, if that were so, Metatron should be worshiped as a deity. R. Idit pointed out that Exodus 23:21 also says, “be not rebellious against [תמר] him.” This, R. Idit, explained, should be understood to mean “do not exchange [תמירני] from [מור] Me for him.” Metatron is not to be worshiped; to God alone belongs that honor. To worship Metatron, thereby “exchanging him for God,” is rebellion against him in that that is not within the God-given authority with which he is to deal with Israel. The verse continues, “he [the angel] will not pardon your transgression, for My name is in him.” Metatron cannot on his own pardon transgression, a power which God has not placed within his authority. The limits of his authority are set by God, in whose name he comes and who alone is the ultimate guide of Israel.

There is not a single instance in Jewish sources of Metatron being represented as *synthronos*, the co-occupant of the Divine Throne, a second power or deity. He always remains the servant of his Master, no matter what functions and powers he may exercise.

- ¹⁴ Among first century followers of Jesus there were those that saw him as strictly human. However, others speculated respectively that Jesus was a divine supernatural power who either entered the womb of Mary, indwelt the human Jesus at his baptism, or he became this supernatural agent following his alleged resurrection.
- ¹⁵ See Rashi, Genesis 1:1 as based on *Bereshit Rabbah* 33:4 and *Sifre (Parashat Va-ethannan* 27—on Deuteronomy 3:24).
- ¹⁶ Apparently to avoid what seems to be a reference to a “piercing” of God some later Hebrew manuscripts underwent scribal emendation so as to read, “look to *him* whom they have pierced,” rather than “look to *me* whom they have pierced.” Initially, these late Jewish manuscripts show this in the marginal notes (*qere*), but eventually in some manuscripts the change was made directly in the body of the text itself. However, the oldest and best Hebrew manuscripts read “me” rather than “him.”
- ¹⁷ This may reflect a misreading of the Hebrew root *dqr*, “to stab.” In Hebrew, the letter *dalet* and the letter *resh* are very similar. Thus, the translators may have inadvertently rendered the word as if it derived from the root *rqd*, “to skip about.”



APPENDIX 1

SAMARITAN INFLUENCE

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INCARNATION DOCTRINE

In analyzing the life, death, and supposed resurrection of Jesus, the formative Christian church came to the conclusion that he had to suffer and be resurrected in order to be exalted to God's right hand. Within a few years, at most, his return to judge mankind was expected. He was in their estimation the Messiah of the house of David and this was the way they presented him to fellow Jews. But, when Philip and other followers of Jesus came to Samaria in the 30's of the first century how could they present him as the Davidic Messiah? A Davidic Messiah would be unacceptable to Samaritans. How could they present Jesus within a framework attractive to Samaritans? The answer was to design a christology that was completely non-Davidic.¹

Surely, there were pagan influences that entered Christianity with new converts from idolatry and from compromises that were crafted by missionaries anxious to make those converts. But, there is another influential source rarely investigated: Samaritan Christianity and those who brought belief in Jesus to them. Herein may be found one of the roots of the incarnation myth. It is highly probable that the myth of Jesus' supernatural pre-existence and of his incarnation came through Samaritan Christianity. A hint of such beliefs is seen in that "a certain [Samaritan] man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city, and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from the smallest to the greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, 'This man is what is called the Great Power of

God” (Acts 8:9-10). Success in conversion was made among the followers of Simon, with Simon himself becoming a Christian as well (verses 12-13).² More than likely this is the same Simon of whom Justin writes that while in Rome “all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him, and acknowledge him as the first God.”³ Apparently, this group of Samaritans held to a belief that a human being (in this case one who was among them on a daily basis) could actually be a supernatural agent of God called “the Great Power of God” and “the first God.” It may well be that the followers of Jesus who came to Samaria in the 30’s and the Samaritan Christian converts they made transferred these beliefs and titles to Jesus and thus helped lay the foundation for the incarnation myth.⁴ As the Samaritan influenced author of John states: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14a).⁵ Subsequently, continued speculation on the part of some branches of the church led to the deification of Jesus.

Notes

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- ¹ The respective authors of the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke or their sources accepted certain beliefs of pagan and Samaritan origin concerning Jesus’ alleged supernatural origins. They then gave him variant Davidic genealogies to satisfy those in the church who held to a more traditional understanding of biblical messianic teaching.
 - ² There were several sectarian groups among the Samaritans and Samaritan Christianity probably drew followers from among them but never superseded mainline Samaritanism.
 - ³ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin* 26, in Eds. Roberts and Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Father*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Vol. 1, 1996, p. 171.
 - ⁴ Perhaps these phrases were touted by Christian missionaries as equivalents of the “Son of God” designation for Jesus and used accordingly to refer to him.
 - ⁵ Apparently, in the Gospel of John the alleged messiahship of Jesus is of a non-Davidic type. Jesus is not identified by John as being of Davidic descent, or of the tribe of Judah, although he is called a Jew. While he is called Savior of the world (4:29, 42) and the Son of God (11:27) he is never called the son of David. His Galilean not Judean origins are regarded by his contemporaries as suggesting that he could not be the Messiah (7:26-31, 40-43, cf. 1:46). Jesus willingly accepted the messianic title from a Samaritan woman (4:25-29) but was equivocal before Pilate when the Roman governor asked if he were “king of the Jews” (18:33-36). See Gerald Sigal, *Anti-Judaism in the New Testament*, Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2004.

APPENDIX 2

THE *ZOHAR* AND THE TRINITY DOCTRINE

Some Christians are under the assumption that the doctrine of the Trinity is supported by the *Zohar* (“Brightness,” “Splendor”)¹, because of its frequent use of twofold and threefold combinations in discussing the Godhead’s communication with creation. For example, the *Zohar* states:

Mystery [secret] of two names merging into one, their perfection three, turning back into one, corresponding to one another. This is the name inscribed and engraved, embraced by the mystery [secret] of faith.²

One commentary explains:

Mystery of two names . . . Apparently . . . *Y-H-V-H Elohim*. In rabbinic literature these two names represent, respectively, the divine qualities of compassion and justice. See *Sifrei*, Deuteronomy 26; *Bereshit Rabbah* 12:15; 33:3; and 13:3, where *Y-H-V-H Elohim* is called “a complete name.”

In Kabbalah the two names often designate *Tif’eret* [Beauty, Glory] and *Shekhinah* [Divine Presence], who were originally one and whose reunion represents the goal of religious life. See *Zohar* 1:4a, 20a, 48b; 2:161a, 229a; 3:138b (IR [*Idra Rabbah*]); *ZH* [*Zohar Hadash*] 70d (*ShS* [*Shir ha-Shirim*]). *OY* [Moses Cordovero, *Or Yaqar*] suggests two other possibilities: . . . *Y-H-V-H* and . . . *Adonai* merged into one name . . . *YAHVDVNHY*; or . . . *Y-H-V-H* and . . . *Ehyeh* merged into . . . *YAHHVYHH*.

Their perfection three . . . Apparently . . . *Ehyeh*, Y-H-V-H, *Adonai* names of *Keter*, *Tif'eret* and *Shekhinah*, respectively, all three of which are aligned in the middle column of the *sefirot*.³ The *gimatriyya* of . . . Y-H-V-H *Elohim*, 112, is equivalent to that of . . . *Ehyeh*, Y-H-V-H, *Adonai*. See KP [Shim'on Lavi, *Ketem Paz*]; Scholem; cf. *OY*.

The mystery of faith The mystery of the union of the *sefirot*, symbolized by the unification of the divine names. See *Zohar* 2:9a; 3:65b.⁴

This commentary provides insight into how careful one has to be in interpreting the esoteric teachings of Kabbalah. From the outset it should be realized that a simple reading of the text is not enough to fully understand the depth of its message. Familiar words often have arcane meanings, which further illustrate the futility of superficial claims made upon the zoharic text by those seeking trinitarian allusions. Moreover, the reader should be aware that in presenting certain texts of the *Zohar* in their writings, some of those wishing to convert Jews to Christianity have deliberately forged or altered the text to suit their preconceived notions.

The most frequently cited passage that Christian missionary literature alleges shows the Trinity doctrine in the *Zohar* says:

Why is there need of mentioning the name of God three times in the verse? The first is the Father above. The second is the stem of Jesse, the Messiah who is to come from the family of Jesse through David. And the third one is the one which is below (meaning the Holy Spirit who shows us the way) and these three are one.⁵

This passage simply does not and never did exist in any manuscript or printed edition of the *Zohar*.

Another widely used text altered by some Christians seeking to convert Jews does not come from the *Zohar* proper, but is adapted to their needs from *Raya Mehemna*, a later addition to the *Zohar* (see notes 1 and 22). The correct text presented within its context reads:

The daily [declaration] of unity [*yihuda*] is the unity for knowledge and to concentrate one's thoughts. This unity is what

we have mentioned in many places. The daily unity [to be meditated upon] is the unity [declared] in the verse: “Hear, O Israel, *Y-H-V-H 'Eloheinu Y-H-V-H* is one.” And they [the three mentions of God] are all one. Therefore He is called One. There are three Names. How can they [the three Names] be one? And although we proclaim One [in the recitation of the *Shem'a*], yet how can [the three Names] be one?

It [this concept] is made known only through the vision of the holy spirit, in the vision of the hidden eyes (the knowledge) that the three are one. This is the mystery [literally “secret”] of the audible voice. Voice is one, and it has three aspects [literally “columns”]—fire, air, and water that are all one in the mystery [the esoteric secret] of the voice. *Also here [the mystery of the threefold mention] *Y-H-V-H 'Eloheinu Y-H-V-H* are three aspects, yet they are one.

This is [comparable to the example of] the voice that a man produces in [declaring] the unity, when his intent is to unify all from the *Ein-Sof* [Infinite One, literally “without limit”]⁶ to the end of everything [that is, from the beginning of creation to the end of creation]. This voice he produces through these three [columns] that are one. This is [an explanation of] the daily [declaration of] unity that has been revealed in a secret through the holy spirit.

There are many ways of unification that were spoken of, and they are all correct. One who does it [unification] this way [it is good] and one who does it [unification] another way [it is also good], but this unification that we awaken from below [on earth finds analogy] in the mystery of the voice that is one and clarifies the matter. It is in general [that is, the *Shem'a* includes within it the three columns of the mystery, namely, *Y-H-V-H 'Eloheinu Y-H-V-H*]. Besides that, it [the *Shem'a*] is a specific statement, as has already been stated.⁷

This passage as presented by some Christians contains false and misleading interpolations. For example, a portion of the above passage (starting at the asterisk) is altered to read as follows:

. . . Thus are 'Yehovah our Elohim, Yehovah is one,' but One Unity, three Substantive Beings which are One; and this is indicated by the voice which are One; and this is indicated by the voice which a person uses in reading the words, "Hear, O Israel," thereby comprehending with the understanding the most perfect Unity of Him who is infinite, because all three (Jehovah, Elohim, Jehovah) are read with one voice, which indicates a Trinity. And this is the daily confession of faith of the unity, which is revealed by the Holy Spirit in a mystery. Although there are so many persons united in the unity, yet each person is a true *one*, what the one does, that the other does.⁸

This passage, as it actually appears in the *Zohar*, reiterates a familiar zoharic theme concerning the unity of God's names. How can the three mentions of the Almighty found in the *Shem'a* be united as an indivisible One? Can it be that there are three in the oneness of God? The *Zohar* answers that a true comprehension of the mystery of the unification of the different names of God is to be found through the mystical union of the power of God expressed in each Name respectively. The Names of God refers to the respective attributes and powers of the Almighty who is without limit and encompasses all. It is the unification of the attributes and powers that are attributed to each of the Names that the *Zohar* seeks, not a unification of the Godhead, which is indivisible in the first place. As a person given three names by his/her parents when called by any of these names or in any combination of these names is still the same one person, not three separate individuals, so too, the three Names found in the *Shem'a* refer to the One indivisible God. This passage is not speaking of the *Shem'a* as referring to three different beings within the Godhead. Quite to the contrary, it upholds the indivisible nature of the essence of God.

Concerning the verse, "Know therefore this day and consider it in your heart that the Lord He is the God [*Y-H-V-H* is '*Elohim*'] in heaven above and upon the earth beneath, there is none else" (Deuteronomy 4:39), the *Zohar* says, in the name of R. Ḥiya: "The entire secret [or mystery] of the Faith, deriving the secret of all secrets from this and knowing the most concealed of all, it stems from [this verse]: '*Y-H-V-H* is '*Elohim*' is a full name, and it indicates that it is all one."⁹ R. Ḥiya states further that:

To know that *Y-H-V-H* He is the '*Elohim*', this is the total sum of the whole secret [or "mystery"] of the Faith, of the whole Torah, the total sum of what is above and below. This is the total sum of the whole secret of the Faith. So, it is certain [that] the sum of all the Torah is the secret of the Written Torah and it is the secret of the Oral Torah. It is all one, the sum total of the Faith and because it [*Y-H-V-H 'Elohim*] is a full name it is the secret of the Faith. And what is it? "*Y-H-V-H* is one and His Name is one." "*Y-H-V-H* is one." "Hear O Israel, *Y-H-V-H 'Eloheinu Y-H-V-H* is one." This is one unity. "And His name one." "Blessed is the Name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever." This is another [aspect of] unity, so that His name should be one. And this is the secret of [the Name] "*Y-H-V-H* He is the '*Elohim*'" [1 Kings 18:39], which is written when they are in one unity.

And if you say [that "*Y-H-V-H* He is the '*Elohim*'"] is similar to [what is written]: "*Y-H-V-H* shall be One, and His Name One" [you should be aware that] it is not [similar to the verse], "*Y-H-V-H* He is the '*Elohim*.'" For if it were written: "*Y-H-V-H* shall be One, and His Name One" I would agree, but it is not written, "*Y-H-V-H* shall be One, and His Name One." [For them to be similar] it would need to say [here]: "*Y-H-V-H* He is, the '*Elohim* He is," then it would look like, "*Y-H-V-H* shall be One, and His Name One."

But, it is all one, because when these two names are unified, the one in unity and the other in another unity [as it is written, "*Y-H-V-H* is One and His Name is One," both the names become one and are combined one with the other]. It all becomes a complete name in one unity. Thus, "*Y-H-V-H* He is the '*Elohim*,'" because everything is combined with each other to become one. As long as they [the Names and the attributes they signify] are not all joined, and are each one by itself, they are not included one with the other, so that they would become one.

[The text explains here that "*Y-H-V-H* He is the '*Elohim*'" constitutes] the sum of the entire the Torah. For the Torah is the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. The Written Torah, as it is written: "*Y-H-V-H*," and the Oral Torah, as it is written: "the

'Elohim." Because the Torah is the [esoteric] secret of the holy Name ["*Y-H-V-H* He is the *'Elohim*"] it is called the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. The one [Written Torah] is general and the other [Oral Torah] is specific. The general rule needs the specific, and the specific needs the general, and they join one with the other to be all one.

Therefore, the sum of the Torah is that of above and below, because this Name [*Y-H-V-H*] is above and the other [*'Elohim*] is below]. The one is the [esoteric] secret of the upper world, and the other the [esoteric] secret of the lower world. And therefore it is written: "You have been shown to know that *Y-H-V-H* He is the *'Elohim*" [Deuteronomy 4:35]. This is the sum of everything, and this is what man must know in this world.¹⁰

'Elohim does not indicate that there are three persons in the Godhead, but that *Y-H-V-H* and *'Elohim* are interchangeable names on one level of understanding, but on another level of understanding these names signify different attributes of the Almighty as manifested in His relationship with the Creation. In particular, *'Elohim* refers to God's attribute of strict justice and *Y-H-V-H* refers to His attribute of mercy.

In a discussion between R. Ḥiya and R. Jose concerning three verses of the Torah with the phrase *shem'a Yisrael* ("Hear, O Israel"—Deuteronomy 6:4, 9:1, 27:9), R. Jose says the following:

The *Shem'a Yisrael* of the unity [*yihuda*—absolute oneness of God—Deuteronomy 6:4] certainly comes to teach us something. And here it is a hint and shows the unity [absolute oneness] in the supernal Wisdom [of what is above and what is below]. The *'aiyin* of the word *shem'a* is written large. Why? To hint concerning the oneness—to include everything above and below as one in this absolute oneness. [The word] *shem'a* [consists of the letters of] *shem* [name] and *'aiyin* [seventy]. For here this name is combined with these seventy [*'aiyin*] supernal Names in order to join them [into the word *shem'a*]. For the name is blessed by them [the seventy] and becomes part of them. They have to be combined as one [that is, in one word *shem'a*] in one unity and one has to concentrate attention in them [when reciting the *Shem'a*].¹¹

If one were to argue that in the *Zohar* lexicon “Names” (that is, *Y-H-V-H*, *’Eloheinu*, *Y-H-V-H*) refers to *Persons* in the *Shem’a* one would have to contend with seventy “Persons” not three “Persons.” When the *Zohar* explains that the esoteric secret contained in the words, “*Y-H-V-H ’Eloheinu Y-H-V-H* [“The Lord our God, the Lord”] is the secret of the unity in three sides [or aspects; that is, a combination of three groups of *sefirot*],”¹² the explanation has to do with the powers expressed by those Names being united. It has nothing to do with any trinitarian notion of three persons being mentioned in the *Shem’a*. “And we proclaim His unity,” the *Zohar* states, “when we recite ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one,’ as that declaration contains the secret of the oneness [*yihuda*]” of the Holy One, blessed is He.¹³ *Yihuda* refers to the uniqueness, the singular distinctiveness, of the ontological unity of God’s oneness. This is what is meant by: “See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no *’Elohim* [Divine Power or divine powers] with Me” (Deuteronomy 32:39). The word *’Eloheinu* in the *Shem’a* is not an indication of some sort of uniplurality, that is, a god with multiple self-contained persons. Quite the contrary, there can be no dual or triune sharing of the Godhead. To say that the *Zohar* contains material that supports the notion of a triune deity is simply nonsense.

The author of the *Zohar* himself states (in the *Idra Rabbah* embedded in the text of the *Zohar*):

Whatever I said of the Holy Ancient-One [*Atika Kadisha*]¹⁴ and whatever I said of the Small Face [*Zeir Anpin*],¹⁵ is all One; everything is absolutely One. There is no division in Him, blessed be He and blessed be His Name foreverlasting.¹⁶

The sum of all these words: the Ancient of the Ancients [*Atika de-Atikin*]¹⁷ and the Small Face [*Zeir Anpin*] are all One. All is, and all shall be. He will not change. He is unchanging, and He has not changed Should you ask, what then is the difference between the one and the other? It is all One, but from [above] His paths divide, and from [below] judgment is found. It is from *our* perspective that they differ one from another.¹⁸

The *sefirot* or groups of *sefirot* are not tangible, but manifestations of God’s powers and attributes. As such, they are actually all one with God. The sum of all that the *Zohar* says of the several spiritual formations of the

sefirot and their interplay in the universe is that the only everlasting reality is that God is an absolute unchanging indivisible One.

As with other zoharic texts cited by some Christians as if they supported the Trinity doctrine there is nothing in these passages that supports such a claim. Zoharic texts sometimes personify the individual names of God or the *sefirot* as if they were separate beings within the Godhead. This is only a symbolic means to communicate what is being taught concerning the combining of the *sefirot* and/or the unification of the divine names in order to bring about the mystic divine unity that will bring God's blessing upon the world. The symbolic language used to express the so to speak inner life of the Godhead should not be confounded with trinitarian speculations of three distinct conscious personalities of God sharing a common nature and existence. In the *Zohar*, what appear to be separate qualities within the Godhead are only so insofar as finite beings can perceive the Infinite One.

Some Christians have attempted to connect these *sefirot* with the concept of a triune deity, since the ten *sefirot* have also been fitted into a threefold division.¹⁹ But, the concept of the *sefirot* and the concept of a triune God are fundamentally at odds with each other. The *sefirot* have no mind or intelligence, nor are they addressed in prayer. Moreover, they do not become human beings. On the other hand, the triune deity concept posits that one of the three alleged conscious personalities of the Godhead became a human being and is to be worshiped. The *sefirot* are simply conduits for God's powers, not persons or beings.

A controversial point in zoharic studies is the possibility of its assumption and the judaizing of Christian theological "formulations." Researching the roots of the teachings of the *Zohar* some scholars maintain that its author judaized certain Christian teachings in expounding some kabbalistic concepts. The *Zohar* first became known in 1290 in Spain. The Catholic Church in thirteenth century Spain was subjecting the Jewish population to intensive theological propaganda in order to convert them. Jews, as a rule, were unable to openly oppose these Christian conversionist attempts directed at Jews.²⁰ The *Zohar's* response was to take Christian doctrines, especially that of the Trinity, and to rework them and integrate the results into a Jewish theological framework. By taking some of Christianity's characteristic elements of expression and absorbing them into the framework of esoteric kabbalistic teachings the author of the *Zohar* undercut their christological meaning and showed his opposition to Christian doctrine. It was, in part, his reaction to the church's use of biblical, talmudic, and midrashic literature²¹ in its attempt to convert Jews.²²

The origins of twofold and threefold zoharic usage and the possibility that they were incorporated into the *Zohar* as a defensive move responding to the Trinity doctrine is a curiosity, but what is significant is that what emerged was by no means an endorsement of the belief in a triune deity. The zoharic passages in question are, when understood correctly, forceful refutations of the doctrine of the Trinity.

There is also the alternative outlook that the *Zohar* is the work of R. Shimon bar Yoḥai, his colleagues, and disciples and that the early church misunderstood and/or misused these kabbalistic concepts. This led them to formulate distorted theological doctrines, but the *Zohar* records the proper understanding of these concepts.²³

In any case, we find in the *Zohar* a prayerful affirmation of faith that begins with the words, “Blessed is the name [*B’rich Sh’mei*] of the Master of the universe”:

I am a servant of the Holy One blessed is He, and I prostrate myself before Him and before the glory of His Torah at all times. Not in any man do I put my trust, nor on any *bar ‘Elahin* [literally “son of God” i.e., angel] do I rely—only on the God of heaven who is the God of truth, whose Torah is truth and whose prophets are true and who performs many deeds of goodness and truth. In Him do I trust, and to His glorious and holy Name do I declare praises.²⁴

Complete reliance solely on the mercy of God is the message of the *Zohar*. But it is not simply man and angels who are not to be relied on. There is also a denial of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation in the phrase, “Not in any man do I put my trust.” In the phrase, “nor on any son of God do I rely” there is a denial of Christianity’s claim that Jesus is the Son of God. It denies the claim that Jesus is God’s special supernatural agent as some in the early church believed and the later claim that he is “God the Son,” the second person of a triune deity. What clearer indication is needed to show that there is no support in the *Zohar* for the doctrine of the Trinity?

As mentioned above, the reader of the *Zohar* needs to be aware that simply understanding the words is not enough to grasp the true sense of meaning of many of its passages. Common terms and concepts are given new meanings unintelligible without first understanding what these new meanings are and how they are applied to Jewish tradition. Its own set of theological terminology and a wide range of designations and names of

God may give the impression that the text speaks of a plurality of divinities but when properly understood within the world of kabbalistic interpretation the ontological singularity of the Almighty, the *Ein-Sof*—God as He is in Himself—is never in doubt.

Notes

- ¹ The chief work of the Spanish Kabbalah, most of which is in the form of a commentary on sections of the Torah and parts of the Writings (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations). In the work, authorship of the *Zohar* is ascribed to the tanna R. Shimon bar Yoḥai (second century C.E.), his colleagues, and disciples. They discuss the mysteries of the Torah in a kabbalistic manner. The work consists of a number of sections. The material can be divided into four strata: (1) *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* (“The Hidden Midrash”); (2) the *Zohar* proper; (3) *Raya Mehemna* (“The Faithful Shepherd,” i.e., Moses, who discusses the Heavenly Academy with R. Shimon); (4) *Tiqunei ha-Zohar* (“Amendments to the *Zohar*”), the latter usually published separately. The second portion is the main body of the work and contains *Sifra di Tzeniuta* (“Book of Mysteries”), *Idra Rabbah* (“The Larger Assembly”), and *Idra Zuta* (“The Smaller Assembly”). *Raya Mehemna* was written by an author different than whomever wrote the second part and gives mystical reasons for the biblical commandments.
- ² *Sefer HaZohar, Bereshit, Parashat Bereshit* 158 (1:22a). The threefold unity of the *Zohar* has to do with the three pillars of the Tree of Life—the left side of judgment (*Elohim*), the right side of mercy (*YHVH*) and the merged “balanced” center pillar.
- ³ *Sefirah* (plural *sefirot*). God interacts with the universe through ten emanations known as the *Ten Sefirot*. These ten divine emanations serve as channels for divine energy or life force. According to Kabbalah, the *Ein-Sof*, the essence of God is so transcendent that it is entirely unknown to humans. It can only be described with reference to what it is not. *Ein-Sof* (literally “without end”), expresses God’s utter boundlessness in both time and space. The *Ein-Sof* is so transcendent that He has no direct interaction with the universe. Through the *sefirot*, the *Ein-Sof* designs and conducts the worlds and interacts with His creation. All human knowledge of God is really a perception of the ten emanations of the *sefirot*.
- ⁴ *Zohar* citation (1:22a) and notes (with adaptation) taken from, *The Zohar*, trans. Daniel C. Matt, Stanford: Stanford University Press, Vol. 1, 2004, pp. 169-170.
- ⁵ See for example, Leopold Cohn, *Do Christians Worship Three Gods?* (a tract published by the Chosen People Ministries / Sar Shalom Publications, no publication date, pp. 4-5); Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Jewishness and the Trinity*, San Francisco: Jews for Jesus, 1978,

p. 8 (This article was first published in the Jews for Jesus publication *Issues: A Jewish Christian Perspective*, 1:8, 1978.).

⁶ Frequently used in the *Zohar* to refer to God.

⁷ *Sefer HaZohar, Shemot, Parashat Bo (Raya Mehemna)* 240-243 (2:43b).

⁸ For example see the following: <http://www.studytoanswer.net/judaism/uniplurality.html>.

⁹ *Sefer HaZohar, Shemot, Parashat Terumah* 634 (2:161a).

¹⁰ *Sefer HaZohar, Shemot, Parashat Terumah* 645-649 (2:161b).

¹¹ *Sefer HaZohar, Shemot, Parashat Terumah* 624 (2:160b).

¹² *Sefer HaZohar, Shemot, Parashat Terumah* 629 (2:160b).

¹³ *Sefer HaZohar, Shemot, Parashat Vayaqhel* 153 (2:202b).

¹⁴ *Atika Kadisha* is comprised of a group of *sefirot*.

¹⁵ *Zeir Anpin* is comprised of a group of *sefirot*.

¹⁶ *Sefer HaZohar, Devarim, Parashat Ha'azinu (Idra Rabbah)* 77 (3:290a).

¹⁷ *Atika de-Atikin* is comprised of a group of *sefirot*.

¹⁸ *Sefer Ha Zohar, Bamidbar, Parashat Naso (Idra Rabbah)* 297 (3:141a).

¹⁹ The tenfold structure of the kabbalistic *sefirot* can be fitted into a threefold division, particularly in accordance with the midrashic passage which states: "The world was created through ten sayings [*ma'amarot*] . . . and of these three are they comprised—wisdom [*hokmah*], understanding [*tevunah* (not *binah*, "intuition," as in kabbalistic literature)], and knowledge [*da'at*]" (*Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* 3).

²⁰ For example, in 1263, a disputation took place at Barcelona in the presence of King James of Aragon between Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides) and the apostate Pablo Christiani at the instigation of the Dominican friars. Following a series of debates in which Moses clearly presented the reasons for Jewish rejection of Christian claims he had to flee for his life because of the wrath of the Dominicans.

²¹ The Church's missionaries especially misrepresented the midrashic presentation of what is meant by references to a Messiah from before the creation of the world. *Pesikta Rabbati*, a midrashic compilation dating not earlier than the mid-ninth century, draws upon various sources and comprises forty-eight homilies based upon the holidays and special Sabbaths of the year. A midrashic homily in *Pesikta Rabbati* states: "In the beginning of His [God's] creation of the world originated [the idea of] the King Messiah. It occurred to His [God's] mind before the world was created" (*Pesikta Rabbati* 34:6 [33:6]). Another *midrash* states: "'In Your light do we see light' (Psalms 36:10). This is the light that covers the community of Israel, this is the light of the Messiah, as it is written, 'And God saw the light that it was good' (Genesis 1:4). This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, saw the generation of the Messiah and its deeds prior to the creation of the world. And He hid the light for the Messiah and his

generation under His Throne of Glory” (*Pesikta Rabbati* 37:1 [36:1]). But, these midrashic homilies do not present a preexistent Messiah but a Messiah and his generation foreseen in the mind of God and this is also what is meant in other *midrashim* as well, which speak of the Messiah as being born or originating before the creation of the world.

- ²² See Yehuda Liebes, “Christian Influences in the Zohar,” *Immanuel* 17 (Winter 1983/84), pp. 43-67. See also, Y. Baer, “The Historical Background of the ‘Raya Mehemna,’” (Hebrew), *Zion* 5 (1939-40), pp. 1-44, which discusses the decisive influence of Franciscan thought upon the latter sections of the *Zohar*, the *Raya Mehemna* and the *Tiqunei ha-Zohar*.
- ²³ There are divergent opinions regarding the origins of the *Zohar*. Some defend its early authorship, or at least the antiquity of certain sections, others regard it as the result of a lengthy development; still others consider it to have been written as late as the end of the thirteenth century by the Spanish kabbalist Moses de Leon utilizing ancient material and adding his own contributions.
- ²⁴ *Sefer HaZohar, Shemot, Parashat Vayaqhel* 225 (2:206a).

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SCRIPTURAL INDEX

THE HEBREW BIBLE

Genesis

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Genesis 1:1—129n | Genesis 18:17—128n |
| Genesis 1:2—102 | Genesis 18:19—116, 118 |
| Genesis 1:4—143n | Genesis 18:21—115 |
| Genesis 1:5—81 | Genesis 18:22—113, 115 |
| Genesis 1:26—86, 96 | Genesis 18:30—95 |
| Genesis 1:26-27—127n | Genesis 18:33—115 |
| Genesis 1:27—97 | Genesis 19:1—115 |
| Genesis 2:24—81 | Genesis 19:2—95 |
| Genesis 4:16—99 | Genesis 19:13—115, 117 |
| Genesis 4:23—116 | Genesis 19:24—109, 116 |
| Genesis 5:1-2—127n | Genesis 21:2—92 |
| Genesis 8:22—124 | Genesis 22:16—87 |
| Genesis 11:5—97, 123 | Genesis 23:6—95 |
| Genesis 11:7—97, 123 | Genesis 24:9—127n |
| Genesis 11:9—97 | Genesis 24:10—127n |
| Genesis 14:18—110 | Genesis 24:51—127n |
| Genesis 14:19—101 | Genesis 27:41—104 |
| Genesis 14:22—101 | Genesis 28:20-21—105 |
| Genesis 15:1—86 | Genesis 31:29—92 |
| Genesis 15:2—95 | Genesis 32:24-30—29 |
| Genesis 15:6—105 | Genesis 32:25-31—117 |
| Genesis 18—79, 115, | Genesis 32:30—87 |
| Genesis 18-19—112, 113, 114, 117 | Genesis 32:31—93 |
| Genesis 18:1—112-113 | Genesis 35:10—92 |
| Genesis 18:2—112 | Genesis 37:3—92 |

Genesis 39:2-20—127n

Genesis 40:1—127n

Genesis 41:38—64

Genesis 42:30—127n

Genesis 42:33—127n

Genesis 43:14—92

Genesis 44:20—92

Exodus

Exodus 2:14—106

Exodus 3:2 ff. —29

Exodus 3:2-8—89

Exodus 3:7—63

Exodus 3:8—123

Exodus 3:10-16—89

Exodus 3:12—116, 118

Exodus 3:13—103

Exodus 3:14—41, 42, 84, 89-90

Exodus 3:15—85

Exodus 3:18—89

Exodus 9:7—81

Exodus 10:28—105

Exodus 15:9—101

Exodus 15:17—95

Exodus 16:10—103

Exodus 17:15—91

Exodus 19:19—105

Exodus 20:7—103

Exodus 21:4—127n

Exodus 21:6—110, 127n

Exodus 21:8—127n

Exodus 21:29—93

Exodus 22:8—93

Exodus 23:17—86

Exodus 23:21—103, 128n

Exodus 23:22—122

Exodus 24:1—116, 118, 128n

Exodus 24:1-3—86

Exodus 24:9-12—86

Exodus 24:10—79, 86

Exodus 24:11—86

Exodus 24:16—103

Exodus 24:17—103

Exodus 25:22—105

Exodus 33:18—86

Exodus 33:20—39, 85, 113

Exodus 33:40—118

Exodus 34:6—96

Exodus 34:34—70

Leviticus

Leviticus 24:16—103

Leviticus 26:9—105

Numbers

Numbers 9:12—121

Numbers 10:35—104

Numbers 11:17—102

Numbers 11:17-25—64

Numbers 11:25—102

Numbers 11:29—102

Numbers 14:10—106

Numbers 14:35—105

Numbers 19:1-2—116, 118

Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 3:24—129n

Deuteronomy 4:12—85

Deuteronomy 4:35—137

Deuteronomy 4:39—136

Deuteronomy 6:4—80, 81, 109, 138

Deuteronomy 9:1—138

Deuteronomy 13:18—92

Deuteronomy 17:6—38

Deuteronomy 18:5—26
 Deuteronomy 18:7—26
 Deuteronomy 18:19—105
 Deuteronomy 18:22—26
 Deuteronomy 19:15—38
 Deuteronomy 23:15—119
 Deuteronomy 26—133
 Deuteronomy 27:9—138
 Deuteronomy 32:1—100
 Deuteronomy 32:6—101
 Deuteronomy 32:39—81, 82, 138
 Deuteronomy 32:15—94
 Deuteronomy 33:2—25

Joshua

Joshua 22:22—95
 Joshua 24:27—106

Judges

Judges 2:1—29, 87
 Judges 2:16—41
 Judges 3:9—41
 Judges 3:15—41
 Judges 5:12—101
 Judges 6:11—90
 Judges 6:11-22—87
 Judges 6:12—90
 Judges 6:12-14—29
 Judges 6:31—93
 Judges 9:23—102
 Judges 11:24—93
 Judges 13:18—87
 Judges 13:21—29
 Judges 13:22—29, 93
 Judges 16:23-24—93
 Judges 16:24—93
 Judges 19:11—127n

1 Samuel

1 Samuel 5:7—93
 1 Samuel 16:15—102
 1 Samuel 17:45—26
 1 Samuel 28:13—93
 1 Samuel 28:14—93

2 Samuel

2 Samuel 6:12-19—111
 2 Samuel 6:14—110
 2 Samuel 6:17-18—110-111
 2 Samuel 6:18—26
 2 Samuel 13:30—81
 2 Samuel 16:20—97
 2 Samuel 17:12—81
 2 Samuel 17:22—81
 2 Samuel 21:16—106
 2 Samuel 22:32—96
 2 Samuel 22:51—108

1 Kings

1 Kings 1:1-31—108
 1 Kings 1:33—116
 1 Kings 2:19—108
 1 Kings 8—111
 1 Kings 18:39—94
 1 Kings 19:12-13—85
 1 Kings 22:21 f. —102

2 Kings

2 Kings 2:9—64
 2 Kings 2:24—27
 2 Kings 5:15-17—83
 2 Kings 19:34-35—119

Isaiah

Isaiah 1:1—86
 Isaiah 6:5—79
 Isaiah 6:8—97
 Isaiah 7:10—88
 Isaiah 11:2—64
 Isaiah 19:4—93
 Isaiah 31:4—123
 Isaiah 40:3—26
 Isaiah 40:10—25
 Isaiah 40:26—92
 Isaiah 42:1—102
 Isaiah 43:11—41
 Isaiah 44:3—102
 Isaiah 44:6—38, 94
 Isaiah 44:6-7—83
 Isaiah 44:8—94
 Isaiah 44:24—83
 Isaiah 45—97
 Isaiah 45:3—98
 Isaiah 45:5—98
 Isaiah 45:12—98
 Isaiah 45:14—98
 Isaiah 45:15—98
 Isaiah 45:18—98
 Isaiah 45:21—41, 98
 Isaiah 45:23—26
 Isaiah 46:5—84
 Isaiah 48:16—95, 101
 Isaiah 49:14—100
 Isaiah 49:25—122
 Isaiah 51:2—81, 82, 126n
 Isaiah 51:13—98
 Isaiah 51:15—118
 Isaiah 54:6—92
 Isaiah 55:11—104

Isaiah 55:12—123
 Isaiah 59:2—99
 Isaiah 63:7-10—98
 Isaiah 63:9—63, 122
 Isaiah 63:10—99
 Isaiah 63:11—100
 Isaiah 63:19—123
 Isaiah 64:1—123
 Isaiah 64:3—123
 Isaiah 66:8—100

Jeremiah

Jeremiah 3:17—91
 Jeremiah 9:23 (24) —26
 Jeremiah 12:14—122
 Jeremiah 23:5-6—91

Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1:26-28—79
 Ezekiel 1:28—103
 Ezekiel 13:9—95
 Ezekiel 23:49—95
 Ezekiel 34:23-24—112

Hosea

Hosea 1:7—116, 118
 Hosea 12:3-5—29
 Hosea 12:4-5—117
 Hosea 13:4—41

Joel

Joel 2:28—64
 Joel 3:1—102
 Joel 3:1-5 (2:28-32) —25

Amos

Amos 3:7—128n

Jonah

Jonah 1:3—99
 Jonah 1:10—99

Micah

Micah 1:3—123
 Micah 1:3-4—25
 Micah 1:4—123
 Micah 2:7—99

Habakkuk

Habakkuk 3:6—123
 Habakkuk 3:10—123

Haggai

Haggai 1:13—87

Zechariah

Zechariah 1:12—32
 Zechariah 1:12-17—87
 Zechariah 1:17—116, 119
 Zechariah 2:12-13—120, 122
 Zechariah 2:15 (2:11) —119
 Zechariah 3:1-8—88
 Zechariah 7:12—99
 Zechariah 12—122
 Zechariah 12:9—122
 Zechariah 12:10—120, 121, 122
 Zechariah 14—122, 124
 Zechariah 14:1-3—124
 Zechariah 14:3—123
 Zechariah 14:4—125
 Zechariah 14:4-5—123
 Zechariah 14:5b—25
 Zechariah 14:8—124
 Zechariah 14:9—82

Malachi

Malachi 1:6—127n
 Malachi 2:7—87
 Malachi 3:6—126

Psalms

Psalms 2:8—63
 Psalms 9:5—101
 Psalms 19:2—100
 Psalms 20:3-4—101
 Psalms 22:2—74
 Psalms 27:8—105
 Psalms 33:6—106
 Psalms 36:10—143n
 Psalms 44:24—95
 Psalms 45:4—101
 Psalms 45:7a—125
 Psalms 45:7-8—125
 Psalms 45:8a—125
 Psalms 45:8b—125
 Psalms 50:1—95
 Psalms 50:22—94
 Psalms 51:13—64, 100
 Psalms 72—108
 Psalms 72:1—108
 Psalms 72:20—108
 Psalms 82:6—37
 Psalms 83:2-6—122
 Psalms 90:2—43
 Psalms 90:4—53
 Psalms 97:8—100
 Psalms 103:7—128n
 Psalms 104:30—99
 Psalms 106:33—99
 Psalms 107:20—104
 Psalms 110—106-112

Psalms 110:1 (LXX, 109:1)—26,
106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 115

Psalms 110:4—110

Psalms 114:7—94

Psalms 127:4—92

Psalms 139:13—101

Psalms 143:10—99

Psalms 144:5—123

Psalms 144:10—108

Psalms 147:15-18—104

Proverbs

Proverbs 1:20-23—100

Proverbs 3:19—101

Proverbs 8—70

Proverbs 8:1 ff. —100

Proverbs 8:22-23—100

Proverbs 8:28—92

Proverbs 8:30—70

Proverbs 9—70

Proverbs 9:1-6—100

Proverbs 23:33—105

Job

Job 28:28—95

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 2:15—105

Ecclesiastes 4:8—81

Esther

Esther 8:8—116

Daniel

Daniel 8:15-16—126n

Daniel 9:21—126n

Ezra

Ezra 4:8—97

Ezra 4:18—97

Nehemiah

Nehemiah 9:13a—123

Nehemiah 9:20—99

Nehemiah 9:27—41

1 Chronicles

1 Chronicles 21:16—87

1 Chronicles 21:27—87

1 Chronicles 29:23—125

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew

Matthew 1:18—64
 Matthew 1:20—90
 Matthew 1:20-24—90
 Matthew 2:1—84
 Matthew 2:13—90
 Matthew 2:19—90
 Matthew 3:3—26
 Matthew 4:1-11—62
 Matthew 4:11—63
 Matthew 9:8—30
 Matthew 10:24—34
 Matthew 10:40—48
 Matthew 12:18—34
 Matthew 12:24—31
 Matthew 12:28—31
 Matthew 12:31-32—31
 Matthew 16:15-16—40
 Matthew 16:27—25
 Matthew 20:20-23—31
 Matthew 20:23—30
 Matthew 20:8—34
 Matthew 21:30—34
 Matthew 22:42-45—108
 Matthew 24:35-36—31
 Matthew 24:36—72

Matthew 25:31—25
 Matthew 25:31-33—124
 Matthew 25:41-46—124
 Matthew 26:39—73
 Matthew 27:46—33, 74
 Matthew 27:63—34
 Matthew 28:2—91
 Matthew 28:18—33
 Matthew 28:19—15, 65, 67, 77n,
 78n

Mark

Mark 1:3—26
 Mark 1:10-11—14
 Mark 1:13—62, 63
 Mark 8:38—25
 Mark 12:35—108, 110
 Mark 12:35-37—107, 108
 Mark 12:37—108
 Mark 13:32—30, 31, 72
 Mark 13:35—34
 Mark 14:35-36—73
 Mark 15:34—74
 Mark 15:39—58, 77n

Luke

Luke 1:11—90
 Luke 1:15—90
 Luke 1:19a—90
 Luke 1:26-27—90
 Luke 1:30—90
 Luke 1:35—64-65
 Luke 1:45—90
 Luke 2:7—84
 Luke 2:9—90
 Luke 2:9-10—90
 Luke 2:40—32
 Luke 2:52—32
 Luke 3:4—26
 Luke 4:1-13—62
 Luke 9:26—25, 72
 Luke 12:10—31
 Luke 18:18-19—40
 Luke 20:41-44—108
 Luke 22:41-44—73
 Luke 22:42—30, 32
 Luke 22:43—63, 73
 Luke 22:44—73
 Luke 23:46—76
 Luke 24:47—65

John

John 1:1—44, 56-62, 77n
 John 1:1-3—46
 John 1:3—43
 John 1:14—46, 47
 John 1:14a—114, 132
 John 1:18—39, 113
 John 1:23—26
 John 1:46—132n
 John 3:16—46
 John 3:18—46

John 4:25-29—132n
 John 4:29—132n
 John 4:42—132n
 John 5:19—32
 John 5:21-22—38
 John 5:30—30, 32, 48
 John 5:36—33, 48
 John 6:38—32, 48
 John 6:39-40—33
 John 6:51—59
 John 7:16—33
 John 7:26-31—132n
 John 7:40-43—132n
 John 8:17-18—38
 John 8:24—41
 John 8:28—31, 41
 John 8:28-29—32, 48
 John 8:29—37
 John 8:40—49
 John 8:56-58—41, 43
 John 8:58—41
 John 10:28-29—33
 John 10:30—37
 John 10:33—37
 John 10:34—37
 John 10:36—33, 37
 John 10:37-38—37
 John 10:38—38, 73
 John 11:27—132n
 John 12:44-50—49
 John 12:49—32
 John 13:16—49
 John 14:9—39
 John 14:12—49, 70
 John 14:15-26—69
 John 14:16—69, 70
 John 14:17—69, 71
 John 14:18—71

John 14:20—71
 John 14:21—71
 John 14:26—69, 70, 71
 John 14:28—30, 33, 48, 72
 John 14:31—33
 John 15:1—59
 John 15:15—49
 John 15:26—69, 70, 71
 John 16:7—70
 John 16:7-8—69
 John 16:8—71
 John 16:13—70, 71
 John 16:13-15—69
 John 16:14—71
 John 17—39
 John 17:1—39
 John 17:2—39
 John 17:3—39, 49, 72
 John 17:5—46
 John 17:22—33, 37
 John 17:24—33, 46
 John 18:11—33
 John 18:33-36—132n
 John 19:30—74
 John 19:32-37—121
 John 19:37—120
 John 20:17—33
 John 20:21—49
 John 20:28—58, 61

Acts

Acts 1:6—31
 Acts 1:7—31, 72
 Acts 1:8—68
 Acts 2:17—64
 Acts 2:22—30
 Acts 2:34-36—108
 Acts 2:36—34

Acts 2:38—67
 Acts 3:26—34
 Acts 4:25—34
 Acts 4:30—34
 Acts 5:30-31—27, 35
 Acts 5:31—41
 Acts 7:55—103, 104
 Acts 7:56—40
 Acts 8:9-10—132
 Acts 8:12-13—132
 Acts 8:15—14
 Acts 8:16—67
 Acts 9:14—26
 Acts 9:21—26
 Acts 10:38—30
 Acts 10:48—67
 Acts 14:12—61
 Acts 19:5—67
 Acts 22:16—26
 Acts 25:26—34

Romans

Romans 1:4—46
 Romans 1:23—39
 Romans 6:3—67
 Romans 7:8-11—101
 Romans 8:26—70
 Romans 8:34—47, 70
 Romans 10:12-13—25
 Romans 10:13—25, 26

1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:2—26
 1 Corinthians 1:31—26
 1 Corinthians 3:23—34
 1 Corinthians 8:5-6—57
 1 Corinthians 8:6—48, 49, 62
 1 Corinthians 9:5—22

1 Corinthians 11:3—34
 1 Corinthians 12:3—14
 1 Corinthians 15:27—114
 1 Corinthians 15:28—48, 114
 1 Corinthians 16:22—14, 22

2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 3:16-17—70
 2 Corinthians 3:17—14, 70
 2 Corinthians 3:17-18—14
 2 Corinthians 3:18—14
 2 Corinthians 4:4—40, 57
 2 Corinthians 10:17—26

Galatians

Galatians 1:19—22
 Galatians 3:27—67

Ephesians

Ephesians 1:3—48
 Ephesians 1:17—48
 Ephesians 1:20—33
 Ephesians 1:21—50
 Ephesians 1:22—33
 Ephesians 3:19—36
 Ephesians 4:5-6—36

Philippians

Philippians 1:6—25
 Philippians 1:10—25
 Philippians 2:5-11—35
 Philippians 2:6—114
 Philippians 2:6-9—35
 Philippians 2:6-11—27
 Philippians 2:7—114
 Philippians 2:8-9—35, 114
 Philippians 2:9—33, 45, 48, 50
 Philippians 2:9-11—24, 73
 Philippians 2:10—114

Philippians 2:10-11—26, 27
 Philippians 2:11—35, 36, 114
 Philippians 2:16—25

Colossians

Colossians 1:15—40, 45, 80
 Colossians 1:15-17—44, 46
 Colossians 1:15-22—47
 Colossians 1:16—43, 83
 Colossians 1:18—45
 Colossians 1:19—36
 Colossians 2:9—36, 72

1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 3:13—25
 1 Thessalonians 4:16—124
 1 Thessalonians 4:17—124
 1 Thessalonians 5:2—25

2 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians 1:6-8—24
 2 Thessalonians 1:12—25
 2 Thessalonians 2:2—25

1 Timothy

1 Timothy 1:1—41
 1 Timothy 2:5—36, 48
 1 Timothy 3:16—76n
 1 Timothy 5:21—72
 1 Timothy 6:14-16—52

2 Timothy

2 Timothy 1:8-10—41
 2 Timothy 2:22—26

Titus

Titus 1:3—40
 Titus 1:3-4—41
 Titus 1:4—40

Titus 2:10-13—41

Titus 2:13—41

Titus 3:4-6—41

Hebrews

Hebrews 1:2—43

Hebrews 1:3—80, 103, 110

Hebrews 1:3-13—46

Hebrews 1:4—50

Hebrews 1:6—51

Hebrews 1:13—108

Hebrews 2:10—34

Hebrews 2:11—38

Hebrews 2:18—63

Hebrews 4:15—63

Hebrews 5:7—41, 73

Hebrews 5:8—34

Hebrews 6:20—112

Hebrews 7:3—111

Hebrews 7:22—112

Hebrews 7:25—30, 47

Hebrews 7:27—112

Hebrews 8:1—80, 83, 84, 110

Hebrews 9:24—47

James

James 1:13—63

1 Peter

1 Peter 3:6—34

1 Peter 4:7—53

2 Peter

2 Peter 1:1—40

2 Peter 1:2—40

2 Peter 1:13-14—47

2 Peter 3:4—124

2 Peter 3:10—25, 124

1 John

1 John 1:3—72

1 John 2:1—47, 70

1 John 4:6—71

1 John 4:9—46

1 John 4:12—39, 113

1 John 4:13—64

1 John 4:14—41

1 John 5:7—14, 68

1 John 5:7-8—68-69

Revelation

Revelation 1:1—32, 53

Revelation 1:2—53

Revelation 1:4—42

Revelation 1:4-5—51

Revelation 1:5—38, 42

Revelation 1:6—50

Revelation 1:7—120

Revelation 1:8—42, 50

Revelation 1:11—51, 76n

Revelation 1:17—51

Revelation 1:17-18—38

Revelation 2:8—51

Revelation 2:18—46

Revelation 3:5—72

Revelation 3:10-11—53

Revelation 3:12—33

Revelation 3:14—43, 44, 45, 51

Revelation 4:8—42

Revelation 5:6-7—42

Revelation 5:13—42

Revelation 11:15—36

Revelation 11:17—42

Revelation 16:5—42

Revelation 16:6—42

Revelation 16:7—42

Revelation 16:16—124
Revelation 17:14—34, 52
Revelation 19:13—60
Revelation 19:16—34, 52
Revelation 21—72
Revelation 21:1—53
Revelation 21:2—53
Revelation 21:3—53
Revelation 21:4—53
Revelation 21:6—51, 52
Revelation 21:22—53
Revelation 22—52, 72
Revelation 22:1—72
Revelation 22:7—53
Revelation 22:8—53
Revelation 22:12—53
Revelation 22:13—53
Revelation 22:13-16—52
Revelation 22:20—14

SUBJECT INDEX

- Alpha and Omega*, 42, 50-53, 76n
'Ado-nai, 23, 26, 95, 101, 133, 134
'Ado-nai tsidkeinu, 91-92
 Angel of the Lord (*Malach 'Ado-nai*),
 32, 83, 87-91
Anomoean, 17
 Angel-christology, 20n
 Ashlag, Yehuda, 76n
 Aquinas, Thomas, 18
 Arianism, 14, 19
 Arius, 13, 16, 19n, 20n
 Athanasius, 16, 17
Atika de-Atikin, 139, 143n
Atika Kadisha, 139, 143n
 Augustine, 17

 baptism formula, 65-68
 Bayer, Y., 143, 145
 Barnes, Albert, 44, 45, 75, 145
B'rich Sh'mei, 141

 Cappadocian Fathers, 16
 Colwell, E.C., 57-60, 77n, 145
 Constantine, 16, 17, 20-21n, 66
 Council of Chalcedon, 10
 Council of Constantinople, 17, 19n
 Council of Nicaea, 10, 16, 19, 66-
 67, 78n

 Divine theophanies, 79-80
 Docetism, 13, 19n
 Dominicans, 143n

'ehad, 80-81, 83, 109n
Ein-sof, 141, 142n
'Elohim, 37, 81-82, 92-94, 95-96,
 97, 98, 102, 117-118, 119,
 125, 127n, 133, 134, 136-138,
 139, 142
'Eloha, 94
 Eusebius, 65-67, 77
Even Bo'hen, 78n

 Filiation, 17
 Filioque, 17

 Gnosticism, 13, 19n, 86
 God the Son, 9, 37, 74, 75, 82,
 109, 111, 141

 Harner, Philip B., 58-60, 77n, 145
 H̱iya, 136, 138
homoean, 17
homoiousian, 17
homoousion, 16, 17
 Howard, George, 28n, 78
Hypostasis, 15

- I am*, 41-43
 Idit, 128
Idra Rabbah, 133, 139, 142n
 Incarnation Doctrine, 79, 131 ff.
 Irenaeus, 18

 Jose, 138
 Justin Martyr, 78n, 132, 132n

Kabbalah, 133, 134, 141, 142n
King James Version, 50, 51, 56, 68, 76
Kyrios, 14, 22-27, 34, 50, 61, 90, 95, 107, 115

 Liebes, Yehuda, 143
 Logos, 13-14, 15, 16, 18n, 20n, 39, 47, 48-49, 54-56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 74, 75-76n, 85, 105

 Marcion, 12
Mar, Mara', 14, 22-26
 Matt, Daniel C., 142n
 Melchizedek, 110-112
Memra', 54, 85, 87, 104-106
meturgamin, 85
 Modalism, 19n
 Monarchians, 13, 19n
 Monas, 19n
 Moses ben Naḥman (Naḥmanides), 143n

 Neoplatonism, 10, 15, 20
 Nicene Creed, 11, 16, 17, 67, 68, 77, 78n, 132n

 Origen, 18, 66, 78
Ousia, 15, 16

Parakletos, 69-71
Pesikta Rabbati, 143, 144n
 Philo, 39, 47, 49, 54-56, 58, 60, 61, 74, 76n, 77n, 85, 105

Raya Mehemna, 134-135, 142n, 143n, 144n, 145

 Satan, 57, 62-63
 Sabellius, 19n
 Samaritan Christianity, 131-132
sefirah (sefirot), 139-140, 142n
 Septuagint, 23-24, 25, 27n, 90, 94, 95, 17, 121
 Shaprut, Shem-Tov, 78n
Shechinah, 87, 99, 100, 105
Shem'a, 80-81, 84, 85, 109, 127, 135-136, 138-139
 Shimon bar Yoḥai, 141, 142
 Simon the Samaritan, 131-132
 Subordinationists, 13-14

targum, targumim, 85, 105-106
 Tertullian, 16
 Theophilus of Antioch, 16
Tiqqunei ha-Zohar, 81, 126n, 142n, 144n
 Tritheism, 74-75

yahid, 81
yihuda, 134, 138, 139

Y-H-V-H, 14, 23-27, 62, 70, 80,
82-92, 94, 95-96, 97-98, 101,
106-109, 112-117, 118-125,
133-134, 135, 136-139

zakef gadol, 120

zakef katon, 120

Zeir Anpin, 139, 143n

Zohar, 76n, 81, 126n, 133-144

Zoroastrianism, 86



Gerald Sigal

Some trinitarians explain the Trinity doctrine by reference to the three main colors united in one rainbow. Others explain how the understanding, the conscience, and the will blending together in one man illustrate the Trinity. Still others compare the Trinity to three lit candles in one room blending into one light. None of these illustrations satisfactorily offer an analogy of how three distinct almighty and eternal beings make one almighty and eternal being.

The absolute uni-personality of God is the first principle of the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament. Trinitarian Christians do not deny that there is one God, but differ as to the absolute unity of God. They speak of the Godhead as a Trinity composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Trinitarianism maintains that the term *God* includes not only *the Father*, but Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Yet, even the New Testament shows that Jesus was a person as distinct from God as the disciples were distinct from him.

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