

## God

Ali (1988:76a–79a) presents an Islamic concept of God. He expresses this in eight positive metaphysical attributes and eight negative ones. The positive attributes are *Qadir*, the Almighty; *Aalim*, the All-Knowing; *Mudrik*, the Ever-Perceiving; *Hayy*, the Ever-Living; *Mureed*, the All Independent in will and action; *Mutakallim*, the Creator of Speech; and *Sadiq*, the Ever-Truthful.

The negative attributes are *Murakkab*, compound; *Makan*, accommodation; *Holool*, incarnation; *Maryee*, visibility; *Ehtiyaj*, need; *Shirkat*, association; *Mahaile hawadisor Tagha'iyyar*, change; and *Sifate-zaid*, addition of qualities. The negative attributes cannot be attributed to God. The final negative attribute, addition of qualities, forbids conceiving of the positive attributes as separable from the essence of God. Finally, according to Ali, God is a being consistent and not arbitrary, whose essential attribute is justice.

What is necessary to understand from a Christian point of view is that God in Islam is not conceived in terms of personhood or number, but as indefinably one. The doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Jesus are clearly rejected by Muslims.

The very first words of the Bible are 'In the beginning God'. The first and central issue of the Bible is God. The beliefs and practices involved with this issue are therefore fundamental. It is no use going on to establish other beliefs and practices before this issue is settled. Fortunately the Bible is clear and consistent on this matter. The most important thing happens to be the thing expressed most clearly.

It is also true that there are in existence beliefs and practices relating to God which did not exist at the time when the Bible writers were writing. It must not surprise us then that these matters are not dealt with in the Bible at all. Throughout much of the Bible the issue is whether one must worship the God of the Bible uniquely, or whether it is permissible to worship other gods as well from time to time.

The Bible clearly states that the God of the Bible must be worshipped uniquely. No others may be worshipped. One of the main ways this is brought out is by the affirmation that God is one, or that there is only one God, the God of the Bible.

The text with the highest claim to authority in the Bible is the ten commandments. These are portrayed as being spoken by God Himself to a vast number of people, mostly descendants of Jacob, but including a vast internationally mixed multitude as well. The very first commandment is in Exodus 20:1-3: `And God speak all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.'

The import of these words is radical. The sentence does not imply a hierarchy with the God of the Bible as the head of a pantheon of lesser deities below Him. We are confronted with only one speaker, the God who says `f and `me'. His message is that He will not accept any relations whatsoever between human beings and other gods.

The second commandment in verses 4-6 shows what precisely is unacceptable and what is necessary. It is unacceptable to make an image of anything to bow down to or serve, because God is jealous, that is, He does not accept other gods before Him. What is necessary is to love God and to obey His commandments.

It has now been established on the basis of the most authoritative texts in the Bible that according to the Bible, people must acknowledge the one God of the Bible alone as God, avoid making any kind of image, mental or otherwise, of any deity to be bowed down to or served, but love God and do what He tells them to do. There are plenty of supporting texts for these first basic principles. Some of them are listed below. Those which claim to be the words of God are marked with a star.

Deuteronomy 4:35. `Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightiest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him. This text, purported to be the words of Moses, clearly states four things: 1) Something has been shown, that is, revealed. 2) This revelation is not a matter of opinion or even of faith, but it is a matter of knowledge. To deny it is to be ignorant. 3) The first point of this revelation is that the one referred to as YHWH (Lord) is God. 4) The second point of this revelation is that this one is the only God.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5. `Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.' Perhaps a better translation would be: The Lord is our judge, the Lord is one. Some commentators grasping at straws try to suggest that the word `one' in fact means a group of more than one. The word *ahad* in the original Hebrew of the text does in fact mean one entity. Just as the English word `one', it only rarely refers to a unity of several entities, and when it does so it is immediately apparent from the context. The following text shows clearly that there is no room for division in our love for God. It must be wholly directed to the one true God.

Deuteronomy 32:39\*. `See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me.' This text is an important one in the Torah or books of Moses, because it claims to be the very words of God Himself. He states clearly here that by the nature of reality and definition, not merely because of divine jealousy, there is not nor can there be any associate with God. He alone is uniquely God Almighty.

Nehemiah 9:6. 'Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preserve them all; and the host of heaven worshiped thee.' The word 'thou' in the archaic English is a singular. In contrast to the word 'you', it can refer to one person only. It never refers to three persons. It is an accurate reflection of the original Hebrew text. The word 'alone' shows clearly that only the one being of God is included. The final phrase shows clearly that the Bible concept is one of a universal God, not merely a tribal god of the Hebrews competing with many other tribal gods.

Psalm 18:31. 'For who is God save the Lord? or who is a rock save our God?' Here intensive affirmation is expressed in the Hebrew interrogative. The meaning is that no other being is God except the one person called YHWH or Lord in the text. The first part of the text defines who in fact is God. The second part says that only God is a rock. The Hebrew language abounds in double meanings based on metaphor. The rock expresses safe refuge. Only God is a secure refuge in trouble, the one to whom we can turn in perfect confidence.

Psalm 86: 10. 'For thou art great, and does wondrous things: thou art God alone.' The greatness of God and the wonderful character of His actions are taken here as evidence that He alone is God. This is an attempt to show that the unity of God is evident in the reality that we perceive and is the only logical conclusion to which we can come. This verse takes a different position from that seen earlier. No longer are we constrained to understand that the unity of God is revealed knowledge. Rather, here it is shown to be a product of reason, a logical deduction from the systematic examination of observable phenomena.

Isaiah 43: 10\*. 'Ye are my witnesses, said the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.' This text claims higher authority than the preceding ones, since it claims to be a quotation of the very words of God. It rejects the idea of form being applied to God. The unity of God implies the rejection of otherness ('other' implies a minimum of two). Rejection of otherness implies no standard of comparison. Form requires space in comparison, a perceptible edge. This is not applicable to God. God is not contained in a form.

The unity of God in this text is stated to have three cognitive bases: knowledge, belief, and understanding. This may refer first of all to revealed knowledge as already noted above. Understanding can be applied to the logical process described in Psalm 86: 10. Finally a third basis is mentioned, that is, the basis of belief. These three bases may refer to the consecutive progression of cognition from revelation to belief in a given individual. On the other hand, it may refer to different coinciding aspects of cognition in a particular individual in such a way that they are all presently active at the same time. Finally, it is possible to understand them as referring to different types of cognition in different individuals.

Isaiah 44:6-8\*. 'Thus said the Lord the King of Israel and his redeemer the Lord of Hosts; I am the first,

and I am the last; and beside me there is no God... Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.'

This is another text claiming divine authority. The introductory expressions are in apposition, that is, they refer to one and the same personage who is stated to be 1) the Lord (YHWH), 2) the King of Israel, 3) the redeemer of Israel, and 4) the Lord of Hosts. This is not a reference to more than one individual. This is not only evident from the expressions themselves, but from what follows, where the first person singular 'I' is used. This accumulation of statements that God is one is supported with divine humor. It may be that human beings are so wise that they know any number of Gods. But the true God of heaven and earth knows only one.

Isaiah 45:5,21-22\*. 'I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I guided thee, though thou hast not known me... Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the Lord? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.' This final text of Isaiah also claims divine authority. Here the affirmation of the unity of God is evidence of 1) His eternity, 2) His omniscience, 3) His justice, and 4) His saving action.

It may not be immediately apparent how each of these attributes can be deduced from the unity of God. But first of all, the unity of God implies eternity. If there is time which God does not control, such time in itself implies an Other which is not God. But this is logically and textually inadmissible. Therefore, the unity of God implies His eternity.

In the same way, an area of knowledge outside the control of God implies a Knower and known outside the frame of reference of God, an Other. Therefore, the unity of God implies omniscience.

Perfect, impartial justice must have as a bare minimum access to all knowledge pertaining to a case of dispute. Such knowledge is available with certainty only to an omniscient God. The unity of God therefore implies perfect justice.

The action of salvation is logically deduced from the attribute of justice. But to call God a Savior implies action within time and space. It does not thereby imply limitation in time and space, and as such does not therefore imply that God is incarnate or takes on form.

To this point we have examined texts from the so-called Old Testament. Although Christians often refer to the Old Testament in evidence for their own belief, when they are confronted with Old Testament texts which conflict with their doctrines, they often point out that the Old Testament is done away with, nailed to the cross, and superseded by the Gospel. What does the Gospel say about the unity of God?

Matthew 19:17. 'And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is,

God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' Jesus here rejects the implication that he is God. His argument is that absolute goodness belongs only to God. In rejecting this attribute in the absolute sense, he rejects deity.

Mark 10:18. 'And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.'

Mark 12:29. 'The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.' Jesus affirms the unity of God in one being, and calls this the most important fundamental of faith, the first commandment. We are therefore justified in assuming that this point is the first and most essential message in the Gospel of Christ. The questioner did not lead Jesus on to refer to this text. He gave him complete liberty to choose what he considered to be the first and most important issue. That Christ chose this text is a devastating argument. The importance of this truth was not lost on his questioner:

Mark 12:32, 'Well, Master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God; and there is none other but he.'

Strangely enough, many Christians actually consider the Pauline epistles of more normative authority than the Gospels themselves. The unity of God is hardly a doctrine which can change from one revelation to another. If the early writings uphold it, the latter ones must uphold it too, or else discredit themselves. However, the Apostle Paul is a champion of the unity of God as well.

1 Corinthians 8:6. 'But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things.'

Galatians 3:20. 'God is one.'

Ephesians 4:4-6. 'There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.'

1 Timothy 2:5, 'There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.'

From these texts we see that Paul, as must be expected with his Biblical faith, recognizes the absolute unity of God. His expressions leave no room for a trinity. Although the New Testament speaks of Jesus in terms which Christians take as proof of his divinity, yet in every case these are attributes that are given to him by God. Whatever these attributes may be, no matter how great, it remains that Jesus is in every case a recipient. But God is not a recipient. The Apostle Paul tells us clearly what Jesus is: a man. According to the Christian Scriptures he is certainly a great and glorious man, a man sent from God, a sinless man, a man ascended to the right hand of God, a man even given all authority in heaven and in earth, and a man to whom all owe absolute loyalty and devotion. But he remains forever a man and not God.

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2:5 that there is but one God, and that the mediator at that time between God and humankind was Jesus Christ, who was a man. This Jesus Christ is therefore a different entity in this

sentence than the one God to whom Paul also refers. In addition, we know from Numbers 23:19 that God is not a man. The syllogism is clear: 1) God is not a man. 2) Jesus is a man. 3) Therefore, Jesus is not God.

Some commentators suggest that James and Paul are at odds on basic issues. Be that as it may, they are agreed on the unity of God. James 2:19 says, 'Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well.'

In sum, a large segment of the Bible serves to confirm the truth that God is one, unique, incomparable and without associate.

## A Just God

Logically speaking, to say that God is one is to say that God is impartial. That is, when we speak of God we must ignore parts. There are no parts involved in the issue. There are not two sides of the story. That is why all of the things the Bible has to say about God can be deduced from the one Bible statement, a just God (Isaiah 45:21).

Nehemiah 9:33. 'Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly.' In this prayer Nehemiah recognizes the justice of God even during difficult times. There is a tendency among some to suggest that God is the source of evil and good alike. The principle of justice denies that. Although it is possible to illuminate this principle philosophically, to do so would go beyond the Biblical text. The Bible answer to the question is that, insofar as God is concerned, 'we cannot find him out'.

Job 37:23. 'Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgement, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict.' Here is perhaps the most complete expression of the justice of God in the Bible. Justice is placed in the context of God's power and judgement. These two working together may be perceived from a human point of view as affliction. We are warned that this perception is false, and we should beware of laying any particular thing to God's account, lest we set ourselves up in judgement of God.

Psalms 89:14. 'Justice and judgement are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.' Again judgement and sovereignty are associated with justice. This verse indicates, however, that mercy and truth are also essential to the configuration of justice as applied to human affairs.

It has become apparent that some things can be said about God since they are inherent to the logic of God's unity and justice. The attributes of power, judgement, mercy and truth have already appeared. The Bible refers to other things that can truthfully be said about God, especially from the human point of

view.

Numbers 22:28. 'And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?' It is peculiar that Christian interpreters ignore a fundamental attribute of God, which is creation of speech.

Deuteronomy 32:4. 'He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgement: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.' 'Rock' is the concrete term referring to God as the perfect refuge. This is based in this text on the fact that his work is perfect, that is, complete in itself and not dependent on anything. This is stated to be possible because all his ways are judgement, that is, everything He does is based on His own judgement and is not contingent on anything else. There is therefore nothing that can weaken His capacity to be a refuge. The result of such independence is that God is perfectly true, since there is neither need nor contingent that can pressure Him to swerve from His perfect judgement.

Deuteronomy 33:27. 'The eternal God is thy refuge.' Eternity does not refer to infinite time, but the fact that God is not bound by time and space at all. According to the creation story in Genesis 1, God created space and time. God's sovereignty over space and time permit Him to be the perfect refuge from all dangers that exist in time and space. 1 Chronicles 29:11–12. 'Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.'

Job 36:26. 'Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out.'

Psalms 90:2. 'Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.' Not only is God eternal, but He is uniquely eternal. He is the only One who is not bound by time and space. Not only did He create all things, but He is God independently of all things. He does not need anything to establish His divinity by comparison. He is good without the evil which defines good relatively, He is Creator even without creation to prove His creatorship, He is without any 'is not' to support His existence.

Psalms 93:2. 'Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting.' Eternity logically gives rise to sovereignty. Note Deuteronomy 33:27.

Isaiah 40:28. 'Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.' The logical succession here is eternity, sovereignty, creatorship, omnipotence, and omniscience. Eternity or being unbounded by time and space suggests sovereignty. Sovereignty suggests the capacity to create. Creating suggests complete power over what is created and perfect knowledge of it.

Isaiah 57: 15\*. `Thus said the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' The exaltedness of God is referred before eternity, thus showing that it is not a relative but an absolute exaltedness. God is not to be compared to another. On the other side of eternity comes the attribute of holiness. Holiness, that is, separation or otherness, cannot be considered relative either, since the absoluteness of God's attributes is already established in the beginning of the verse. The last half of the verse expresses the divine penetration into the human world. The complete separateness of God might suggest that the human world can have no contact with divinity. This logical conclusion must be denied, however, since it would limit God. As exalted sovereign, eternal and holy or separate, God can choose to deal with the human world. He is not limited by it. God's penetration into the created world is always divine, that is sovereign and independent. Therefore, such penetration does not imply the possibility of incarnation, which by definition is subservient and dependent, subject to the limitations of time and space.

Jeremiah 10:6. `Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might.' The term `great' is used here in the absolute sense. The text states that there is none to be compared with God. No standard of measurement can be applied to God. There is therefore no associate or compound with God.

Jeremiah 10: 10. `But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king.' To be truly God implies that such God is living and always sovereign. As such, the idea that death can be attached to God is inconsistent and therefore invalid.

Habakkuk 1: 12. `Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One?'

Luke 19:40. `And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.' Here Jesus recognizes the attribute of God which is creation of speech.

Romans 16:26. `The everlasting God.'

1 Timothy 1: 17. `Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever.' Within one sentence Paul states the attributes of sovereignty, eternity, immortality, invisibility, and omniscience.

James 1: 17. `Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' This text states that God is unchanging. It implies at the same time that there is no compound or association with God, nor any qualities additional.

These texts are only representative of hundreds more in the Bible expressing the inherent divine attributes. We can affirm these attributes without breaking the commandment 'Thou shalt not make unto



thee any graven image<sup>1</sup> because they are overtly expressed in the Bible itself. On the basis of these texts we can say that God is eternal, almighty, all-knowing, ever-perceiving, ever-living, all-independent in will and action, creator of speech, and ever-truthful. We can affirm that God is never a compound, accommodation, incarnation, association, nor is He visible or changing, nor does He have need or qualities that may be separated, added or subtracted. But all of these things are logically deducible from His unity and justice. At this point I have reached what is sufficient in expressing the Bible faith in regard to what God is like. I conclude in brief, that a large segment of the Bible is there to show that God is just.

We can summarize the everlasting Gospel to this point: 1) God is One and there is no other God but He. 2) The one true God is inherently just, and all of his actions and attributes are consistent with His perfect justice.

We have noted that the Bible declares God to be just. The problem of justice is more complex than that, however. The metaphysical dilemma is how to reconcile the absolute sovereignty of God with the clear fact that the God of Scripture and revelation firmly calls human beings to account for their behavior.

If God is truly sovereign, does that not mean that all things are determined by His will? If all things are determined by God's will, how then can God hold people accountable for what they do? There are texts in both the Bible and Qur'an which seem to affirm either God's absolute sovereignty or determinism on one hand, and human accountability and free will on the other. If it has become apparent that a proof text method is not sufficient for resolving the issue of God's unity or trinity, it is even more apparent that a simple proof text method will tell us even less about this knotty problem.

The debate between Pelagius and Augustine, and between predestination and Arminianism, in Christianity, seems to have parallels in Islamic history as well. Sunni theology tends to opt for sovereignty. There is an attitude of awe before the decree of God which seems, from the human viewpoint, only to gain from its arbitrary character. By contrast, Shiite theology tends to reconcile sovereignty and free will in a middle ground. In brief, actual events are conceived to consist of various aspects, all of which are created by a sovereign God. The whole configuration is within the sovereignty of God, but one of the many contributing factors in any event may be free will.

The middle way between determinism and free will is not merely a means of reconciling texts which seem to conflict. It is a real attempt to deal with the metaphysical issues involved in both human suffering and human responsibility. Nevertheless, I have chosen one text to illustrate the problem. In 2 Samuel 24:1 we have a text which has been used by Ahmed Deedat to illustrate the corruption of the Bible, which is the conclusion he draws from the conflict with 1 Chronicles 21:1.

‘And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.’<sup>1</sup>

1 Samuel 24:1. ‘And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel.’ 1 Chronicles 21:1.

The conflict between the two texts is in the matter of who moved David to number Israel, the Lord or Satan. The facile Christian solution appears inadequate. It would have the 'he' of 1 Samuel 24:1 refer not to the natural antecedent (the Lord), but an unmentioned antecedent (Satan). The most natural solution is to accept that one text states the Lord to have moved David and the other Satan.

An explanation following the midway between determinism and free will would be as follows. This event includes many contributing aspects, among which are divine sovereignty, the action of Satan, and the exercise of will or choice on the part of David. It is the configuration of these aspects, along with other contributing factors, which produced the event. One aspect, divine sovereignty, is mentioned in 1 Samuel 24:1. Another aspect, Satanic temptation, is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 21:1. Both versions note the responsibility of David.

Since all three aspects are present in the text, the best interpretation is one which includes all of them. Ahmed Deedat's suggestion that the conflict between sovereignty and Satanic action in the Bible implies a corrupt text is not only weak from a scholarly point of view, but could be turned back against the Qur'an itself, God forbid.

In conclusion, we may say that the Bible definitely states that God is just. How the Justice of God fits into the working of divine sovereignty and human free will is a subject requiring metaphysical speculation. The middle way, however, between determinism and free will provides a method for reconciling the seeming conflicts in both the Bible and the holy Qur'an.

## **Son of God or God the Son?**

Despite the view of many Christians to the contrary, one need only refer to a host of Christian writers through the centuries to show that reasonable interpreters of the Bible have consistently upheld the doctrine of the unity of God throughout history.

A good example is Edward Elwall, prominent eighteenth-century Baptist merchant and writer of religious literature. In 1726 he wrote in his tract *Dagon fallen upon his stumps*, 'Is it not as gross an Absurdity to say, the One God of Heaven and Earth, is Three or Four Persons, as to say, the One King of Great Britain and Ireland, is Three or Four Persons? Is not the former altogether as false as the latter?'

According to Elwall the Bible position is simple and straightforward. God is One (Exodus 20:3). Jesus Christ is our Lord and Master, the Messiah and reigning and soon coming King of the promised Fifth Monarchy of Daniel chapter two; our Savior, who was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, worked great miracles and wonders by the permission and power of God, and was snatched up from the death of the cross and the grave to ascend to the right hand of God. But he is not God.

Elwall recognizes the authority of the ten commandments. These are the words revealed without intermediary to the multitude of humankind. These are above all the words of God Himself. To maintain that Jesus is God the Son is to break the first commandment, that is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Therefore Edward Elwall begins his tract with these words: 'Thou shalt have no other Gods but Me.

This Sacred Commandment was spoke by God himself, and not only so, but it was wrote by the Finger of God, therefore all those that Love him with all their Heart, and Soul, and Strength, ought to believe and obey this Law. Now let all Men that fear God, take particular Notice, that the very last word of this glorious Law, viz. (Me) is a certain Confutation of those who make the most high God to be a plurality of Persons.'

If Jesus Christ is not God, is not deity, then what is he? The Christian Scriptures are clear on the matter. 'There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.' 1 Timothy 2:5. This text clearly contradicts the established Christian view that the mediator between God and man must be both man and deity. The logic of that thought notwithstanding, the Scripture states him to be clearly and unequivocally man and not God.

The position does not belittle Christ by saying that he is man and not God. It may be that he is a man so far above the men we know today that to human senses he would even appear to be like God. Nevertheless we must remember that human senses are not the criteria we are dealing with, but the Christian Scriptures. That Scripture states God to be one, and we have not the right to associate or confuse anyone, even one so great as Jesus Christ, with God Almighty. To do so is to fall into polytheism and, from an Islamic viewpoint, vastly to belittle and lower the concept of God.

What does the Bible mean then, when it says that Jesus is the son of God? In most modern languages it is rare to use the words father and son in other but literal meanings of biological descent. That is why readers of the Bible in translation may be honestly mistaken. The word 'son' as applied to Christ and the word 'father' as applied to God must be understood as metaphorical, that is, in a meaning other than the literally biological one.

Indeed, few people actually understand them literally. No one, insofar as I know, actually believes that God had sexual intercourse with Mary to produce Jesus. Such an idea is revolting to most minds and is certainly not held by any of the established Christian creeds. God, even according to Christian belief, is not the father of Christ or any other humans in any literal sense.

The word 'son' is clearly used in the Bible to express the character of people, and not always their biological descent. The word is used in both ways in 1 Samuel 2:12. 'Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.' It cannot mean that these young men had two biological fathers. The genes of only one sperm can naturally combine with the ovum to produce a genetically new individual. The margin of my Bible explains that the expression 'sons of Belial' means 'wicked men', that is 'sons of

wickedness'. A 'son of God' is just the opposite.

What are the non-biological usages of the word father in the Bible? In Genesis 4:20–21 'father of such as dwell in tents' and 'father of all such as handle the harp', suggest a meaning of 'inventor, first, prototype'. The words father and sons are used in Genesis 10:21 in the sense of ancestor and descendants. Joseph was no doubt younger than Pharaoh, but still he became Pharaoh's father or counselor in Genesis 45:8.

The word father is used by a subject in addressing a king in 1 Samuel 24: 11. Elisha, while the subordinate of Elijah the prophet, addresses him as father in 2 Kings 2: 12. Again in terms of a servant to master, or in this case a soldier to a general, the accompanying soldier addresses Naaman as father in 2 Kings 5: 13. Five distinct groups of meaning appear: 1) a literal biological father, 2) an ancestor, 3) an inventor or prototype, 4) someone who gives counsel or information, and 5) someone to whom absolute obedience is due.

Considering that Jesus says that he came to do nothing but his Father's will, the last definition of father is probably the most appropriate as applied to his relationship with God. Jesus is called the Son of God because he perfectly carries out the will of God. It was Christian failure to understand this true meaning that made it necessary, for example, to use another metaphor in the Qur'an for Jesus: servant of God. Neither metaphor completely describes the uniqueness of Christ the Messiah in the Scriptural belief system. They are only two expressions among many.

All such expressions as father and son, master and servant, are merely metaphorical and cannot perfectly describe anyone's relationship to God, whose being and essence are completely outside the realm of human expression and language. To say that a person is a *child* of God or a *servant* of God is only to point out the relationship as a recipient of divine grace and the responsibility of obedience. God is not anyone's literal father or slave master. Those are human relations that merely approximate or give a direction in understanding. The Bible uses other terms as well, such as 'husband', for God, and metaphorically 'unfaithfulness' for sin. All such expressions are only useful to the extent that they inspire one to submit to God's will. They are not intended to give information about the nature of God, His essence, being or attributes.

It appears that the expression Son of God is also used, similarly to the expression Son of Man, to intimate that Jesus is the promised Messiah. That can be inferred from Daniel 3:24, if this text has a messianic implication. Let it be noted that Jesus himself did not like to use the term at all. He preferred other expressions of his Messiah ship, most especially the expression Son of Man.

# Unitarian Answers to Trinitarian claims

*Trinitarian claim:* `The New Testament clearly presents Christ as God. The names applied to Christ in the New Testament are such that they could properly be applied only to one who was God. For example, Jesus is called God in the phrase, "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" (Titus 2: 13; compare John 1: 1; Hebrews 1:8; Romans 9:5; 1 John 5:20–21).<sup>1</sup> Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter*, Living Books, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, 1973, page 11.

*Unitarian Answer:* The New Testament does not clearly present Christ as God. The names applied to Christ in the New Testament could properly be applied to one who represents God and has received `all authority in heaven and earth' from Him. McDowell claims that the following texts clearly call Christ God.

1. Titus 2: 13. `Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.'<sup>1</sup> McDowell assumes that the expressions `great God' and `Savior' are in apposition, that is, that they both refer to one and the same individual. The English translation is ambiguous. The fact is that the `of' in English, which translates the Greek genitive is repeated in the Greek with the words `Savior, Christ Jesus' so that a more literal translation would be: `the glorious appearing of our great God and of our Savior, Jesus Christ'. There is no reason to assume that these are one and the same being. The text does not `clearly' present Christ as God.

2. John 1: 1. `In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'<sup>1</sup> Our task is not to explain what this text actually means, but to demonstrate that it does not clearly present Jesus as God. The first point is that there is a difficulty in conceiving that the Word is with God on the one hand, and is God on the other.

The first clause states that there is a distinction between the Word and God (since the one is with the other), while the second states that they are one and the same. As it stands the sentence does not make sense. It does make sense, however, if we realize that the word *theos* in Greek used here is an equivalent of the Hebrew word *Elohim*. Now *Elohim* can mean God, gods, a god, judge, exalted one, and even angel. The first word refers to God, while the second to another entity.

The reference to another entity clearly shows the Word not to be the God with whom the Word is. Indeed some scholars point out that a better translation would be: `and the Word was a god'. This also appears to me to be somewhat forced. One of the other alternatives should probably be chosen.

The Christian claim depends on John 1: 14, `The Word became flesh.'<sup>1</sup> If this is taken to mean that the Almighty God became flesh, or became incarnate as a human being, this would entail a change in the essence of God, which is both logically and Scripturally unacceptable. Note that this text does not say that Jesus is God.

It is an interesting fact that the Qur'an calls Jesus the Word of God without any of its adherents suggesting that the expression 'clearly' presents him as God. Surely referring to Jesus as the Word of God is coherent with Islamic belief and terminology, and does not imply deity.

3. Hebrews 1:8. 'But unto the Son he said, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.' This is one of a series of quotations from the Old Testament. The first, Psalm 2:7 (Hebrews 1:5a), was originally spoken to David. The second, 2 Samuel 7:14 (Hebrews 1:5b), was also spoken to David about his 'seed', primarily Solomon, but no doubt also secondarily and prophetically about the Messiah.

The third quotation (Hebrews 1:6) is from a non-Biblical Jewish tradition which also appears in the Qur'an: 'And let all the angels of God worship him.' The personage primarily referred to in the original tradition is Adam, to whom the angels are commanded to prostrate. The word 'worship' in Hebrews refers to prostration before a high personage such as a king. Then comes Psalm 45:6-7 the text quoted by McDowell from Hebrews 1:8. This text was originally part of the king's wedding invocation. The word *Elohim*, translated 'God', is applied to the king. As such, it should probably best be translated as judge' or 'exalted one'. This is especially apparent from the fact that the true God Almighty is referred to in Psalm 45:7 as a different entity.

McDowell does not refer to Hebrews 1:10, which is in fact the only verse used to prove the trinity demanding careful investigation. The quotation is from Psalm 102:25-27. It is the only one of the original quotations which was originally directed to God Himself.

Let it first be noted that the quotation is not directed to Jesus in Hebrews, but is a continuation of the expression in Hebrews 1:8 pros or 'in reference to' Jesus. This is in contrast to sentences spoken 'to' someone, as in Hebrews 1:5. These phrases are not therefore spoken 'to' Jesus, but are 'in reference' to him.

The second point is that the context clearly has as its purpose to exalt Jesus Christ above even the angels. All of the quotations serve that purpose. They refer to aspects or events in the life of Jesus which show him to be in some way superior to the angels. Psalm 102 is the last of a series of martyrdom Psalms. The clear inference in this chapter is that after all of the glorious aspects and events in Jesus' life that show him to be superior to the angels, there is finally his martyrdom. This too shows his superiority and leads into the subject of the second chapter of Hebrews which is in fact that self-sacrifice.

To those of us not accustomed to the liturgical use of the Psalms, this explanation is not immediately clear. But to the Hebrews to whom these words were written, nothing could be more natural. The whole panorama of the martyrdom liturgy immediately floods into the Hebrew mind when these words are encountered. No better introduction to chapter two could have been invented.

It is not stated that Jesus is God. Superiority to the angels does not necessarily imply that Jesus is God

Almighty. The chapter deals in every possible superlative, but does not state Jesus to be God. Even verse three makes a clear distinction between the being which is Jesus and the being which is God, referred to here as 'Majesty on high'.

4. Romans 9:5. 'Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.' The implication of McDowell is again that the word 'God' is in opposition to the word 'Christ'. The original Greek has no punctuation. The word 'amen' at the end makes the sentence more understandable as a formal benediction.

In that case, it is perfectly possible to understand the divine blessing attached to the end without in the least implying that this God and the earlier Christ are one and the same being. It is not even absolutely clear whether the phrase 'who is over all' should refer to Christ, which precedes it, or to God, which comes after it. There is no theological reason why it could not refer to Christ. If God has set Christ 'over all', that in itself shows that Christ, being the recipient of divine favor, is not God himself (see Philippians 2:9–11).

5. 1 John 5:20. 'And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.' McDowell assumes that the word 'this' refers to Christ as its antecedent, thus making Christ the true God. However, we must choose between the two possible antecedents given in the first part of the verse: God and Christ. Obviously God is equal to God. This text does not clearly present Christ as God. It infinitely more clearly presents God as God and Christ as Christ.

*Trinitarian claim:* 'The Scriptures attribute characteristics to him that can be true only of God. Jesus is presented as being self-existent (John 1:4; 14:6); omnipresent (Matthew 28:20; 18:20); omniscient (John 4:16; 6:64; Matthew 17:22–27); omnipotent (Revelation 1:8; Luke 4:39–55; 7:14, 15; Matthew 8:26, 27); and possessing eternal life (1 John 5:11, 12, 20; John 1:4).' McDowell 1973, 11.

*Unitarian Answer:* It is true that these characteristics absolutely belong to God alone. But God can and does impart divine graces to human beings sent to represent Him. The language of the texts referred to by McDowell indicates that Jesus received these characteristics from God. As a recipient he cannot be God himself for two reasons: 1) It is illogical to think that the giver and the recipient are both God; 2) to become a recipient implies need or dependence on the giver, which characteristic cannot be applied to God.

The attributes of Jesus in the New Testament do not differ from the attributes claimed for the twelve holy Imams by Ali (1988:83a–96a) and Tabataba'i (123ff.). Yet in that belief system there is no inference whatsoever that these beings are God Himself. Orientalists suggest that the early Christian concept of Christ is the origin of the Islamic concept of the Imamate. Therefore, such attributes can be true without necessarily indicating that Jesus is one and the same person as God Almighty.

John 1:4. 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men.' At this point the gospel is still referring to the

Word before the supposed incarnation. It cannot therefore be taken as a direct reference to the person of Jesus. The verse does not state that Jesus possessed life in himself without the intervention of God. No Bible text does.

John 14:6. 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.' Jesus here claims a monopoly on access to God. This does not suggest that his life is independent of God.

Matthew 28:20. 'I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' This is not in fact a claim of omnipresence. It is a claim of immediate and direct access for believers. The claim is no different than that for the Shiite Imam in occultation, and may not be very different than the Jewish claim for Elijah and the Muslim claim for Enoch (*Khidr*). There is no implication of deity.

Matthew 18:20. 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' This is not omnipresence either. It is in fact even more limited than Matthew 28:20, since there are more conditions: the presence of at least two believers, the purpose of gathering (for worship?), and the invocation of the name of Jesus. There is no implication of deity.

John 4:16 and 6:64 describe knowledge of people's lives and events past and future which would not normally belong to a human being. Such knowledge would, however, normally be granted to a prophet. If Jesus is given the attributes of a prophet, it does not mean that he is therefore God any more than any of the other prophets with such knowledge is God. Matthew 17:22–27 is also a prophecy of future events. It is not a claim to omniscience. Jesus in fact denies omniscience: 'But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.' Matthew 24:36.

Revelation 1:8. 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, said the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.' This verse is supposed to attribute omnipotence to Jesus because of the reference to the word 'almighty'. However, the speaker is not identified as Jesus.

It is assumed to be Jesus because it is inferred that Jesus was the origin of the voice speaking the same words in Revelation 1:11. But these words are a quotation from Isaiah 41:4, where they are spoken by God Himself. Revelation 1:8 says these words are spoken by the Lord. The word *kyrios* in the original Greek sometimes refers to God, sometimes to Christ, and sometimes as a form of polite address to other human beings. At this point it is safe to assume on the basis of the context that the speaker is God Almighty and not Jesus Christ.

Luke 4:39–55. In this story Jesus has power to heal and authority over devils, who bear witness that he is 'the Christ, the Son of God'. Such power, delegated by God, does not imply omnipotence. It only implies God-given authority.

Luke 7:14–15. This story shows that Jesus had the power to raise the dead to life. He is not the only prophet mentioned in the Bible with such power from God. Such power does not imply omnipotence. It only implies God-given authority.



Matthew 8:26–27. This story of power to still the storm, impressive as it is, does not imply that this was anything but power delegated to Jesus from God. There is no intimation of omnipotence. For God to give a man such power is not to make that man into God Himself.

1 John 5:11–12, 20. This text speaks of no life whatsoever which is not given by God. Life that is given by God, although it be in Christ, does not imply that Jesus possesses eternal life in such a way to make him God. The text does not state or imply this.

*Trinitarian claim:* `Jesus received worship as God (Matthew 14:33; 28:9) and sometimes even demanded to be worshipped as God (John 5:23; compare Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:8–14).' McDowell 1973, 12.

*Unitarian Answer:* The worship of gods in Greek is generally expressed by other words than the one translated `worship' in the New Testament. The Greek word translated `worship' in the New Testament seems to emphasize the bodily position of prostration involved in worship. As such it differs from the general usage of the Greek word, which implies giving honor by kissing or bowing to kiss the hand or even foot.

This kind of worship in Greek generally was not for God or gods, but for people in high position from whom petitions are made. The worship of gods in Greek is generally expressed by other words. Most of the texts in the New Testament either refer clearly to worship of God or are somewhat ambiguous acts of homage. Some texts show clearly that the word does not imply divinity. Such an example is in Matthew 9:18. `While he speaks these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead...' This abject homage of the ruler was certainly not the worship of Jesus as God.

Dictionaries of New Testament Greek made even by Trinitarian scholars recognize this variety in the usage of the word. Even Matthew 2:2,8,11; 20:20; Luke 4:7; 24:52 are considered by Harper and Row's Analytical Greek Lexicon to be examples of the word in which it does not imply divinity. The line between the two meanings will therefore often be determined by the faith of the reader, and as such cannot be construed as proof of the deity of Jesus.

*Trinitarian claim:* Paul `acknowledged the Lamb of God (Jesus) as God when he said, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).' McDowell 1973, 12.

*Unitarian Answer:* The original Greek does not say `with His own blood'. It says quite literally, `with the blood of His own'. The verse does not say outright who `His own' is, but we can safely assume that Christ is meant. To equate Christ with God in this verse is to jump again to unwarranted conclusions.

*Trinitarian claim:* `Peter confessed, after Christ asked him who he was: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).' McDowell 1973, 12. The same point is made on the following page with John 11:27 and John 1:49, where the phrase `Son of God' is used.

*Unitarian Answer:* The expression 'Son of God' does not imply divinity for Jesus any more than for anyone else given 'power to become the children of God'. If Jesus is the son of God, that definitely shows him not to be God Himself. One cannot be both one's father and oneself at the same time. If Jesus is the son of God, then he certainly is not God.

Christians use the argument of species as opposed to personage in order to show that since the Father is of the species 'God', so is the Son. The fallacy of this is that the Bible does not present the species of God, but the one personage of God. The word 'son' is used in the Bible to mean much more than the biological offspring. The species argument assumes that Jesus is the biological offspring of God. But in fact this is not the Christian teaching.

The Christian teaching itself, whatever it may in fact be, is not literal. No Christian believes that Jesus is the literal, biological son of God. The traditional Christian teaching is that Jesus' mother was a virgin. If God were the biological father of Jesus, Mary could not have been a virgin. So one of the metaphorical meanings of the word must be chosen.

A good example is in 1 Samuel 2:12: 'Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.' Here the word 'son' is used first literally, and then metaphorically. The margin says that a son of Belial is a wicked man. The verse itself goes on to explain that they 'knew not the Lord'. Now Jesus, the 'Son' of God, by the same token is precisely the opposite, that is, a righteous man, one who did know the Lord. Surely the Bible means more than this by the expression. It has to do with being the promised Messiah. But being the promised Messiah does not imply that Jesus is God. It implies only that he is the Christ.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that the phrase 'Son of God' in the Bible is not limited to Jesus. See for example Genesis 6:2 and Job 1:6. It cannot in itself imply deity.

*Trinitarian claim:* 'While Stephen was being stoned, he called upon the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (Acts 7:59).' McDowell 1973, 13.

*Unitarian Answer:* The *Trinitarian claim* may be based here on the usage of the word Lord. Although the word Lord is often applied to God in the Bible, it is not limited to that use by any means. It is applied to Jesus in the sense of 'sir' or 'master' as well as to any number of people in courteous address. It is clear that the word Lord here refers to Jesus, but the word does not imply divinity.

The claim may depend, however, on Stephen's act of calling upon Jesus in this situation as an indication of his divinity. The author does not clarify what in fact here is supposed to prove that Jesus is God. Considering the fact that Stephen believed Jesus to have been crucified, resurrected and ascended into heaven, it is quite understandable that he should hope that Jesus would receive his spirit. That hope does not imply divinity, however. It only recognizes the resurrection and ascension. Although, for example, most Muslims deny the crucifixion, all Muslims believe in the ascension and second return of Jesus without believing in his divinity. Exceptional events or powers do not automatically imply divinity.

*Trinitarian claim:* `John the Baptist announced the coming of Jesus by saying that "the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:22).<sup>1</sup> McDowell 1973, 13.

*Unitarian Answer:* Apparently the author assumes that to be the Son of God in the case of Jesus implies divinity. He does not assume it in other instances, which is inconsistent. Either all Sons of God are thereby divine, or they are not.

*Trinitarian claim:* "Thomas answered and said to Him, `My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, `Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed'" (John 20:26–29). Jesus accepted Thomas's acknowledgement of him as God.<sup>1</sup> McDowell 1973, 14.

*Unitarian Answer:* This claim, like so many before it, is really based on a misunderstanding of the Bible because the claimant is referring to a translation. Much trouble could be avoided if Christians, like Jews and Muslims, printed their sacred books with the original language included. The adherents of those faiths become aware in that way at least of the fact that what they are reading in English is not authoritative. It is only a very fallible translation.

Now the Greek text of the phrase `My Lord and my God!' uses the nominative form of both `Lord' and `God'. Since both of these are from the second declension singular, there is in Greek a vocative which is clearly different in form. Thus, if the words refer to the person addressed, they should be in the vocative. If the words refer to someone other than the person to whom they are spoken, they should be in the nominative case. Now in fact they are in the nominative, not the vocative.

This suggests that they refer to some other personage than to the one to whom they are addressed. They are addressed to Jesus. So we may know that Jesus at least is not the `Lord' and `God' to whom Thomas refers. If the person to whom you exclaim `Oh, my Lord!' thereby becomes God, I am afraid that there must be thousands of new claimants to divinity every day.

This exclamation reveals Thomas's newly acquired faith in the resurrection of Jesus. That was the thing he doubted. There was never a question of whether or not Jesus was God. There was only a question of whether or not he was alive. This is what Thomas doubted, this is what Thomas saw with his own eyes and felt with his hands, and this is what those who did not see Jesus still believed.

There is no blessing for those who believe something else (such as that Jesus is God). There is only a blessing for those who believe him to be living. Jesus does not accept Thomas's acknowledgement of him as God, because Thomas never acknowledged him as God. He only acknowledged him as living.

*Trinitarian claim:* John 5: 16–18. `The Jews did not refer to God as `my Father.'<sup>1</sup> Or if they did, they would qualify the statement with `in heaven'. However, Jesus did not do this. He made a claim that the Jews could not misinterpret when he called God `my Father'. Jesus also implied that while God was working, he, the Son, was working too. Again, the Jews understood the implication that he was God's Son. As a

result of this statement, the Jews' hatred grew. Even though they were seeking, mainly, to persecute him, they then began to desire to kill him.' McDowell 1973, 16.

*Unitarian Answer:* The *Trinitarian claim* is that Jesus must have claimed to be God since some people accused him of this. It does not follow. It is very possible that those people, who in the words of McDowell, 'were seeking, mainly, to persecute him', grasped at every opportunity to misconstrue what Jesus said. The scenario must be familiar to everyone. In any verbal argument hostility induces people to misconstrue the words of their opponents. Surely such accusations cannot be taken seriously. Jesus himself does not stand by and accept the accusation, which came more than once. In John 10:33–36, Jesus makes this clear. In the face of unjustified accusation that he makes himself out to be God he says: 'Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?'

Here Jesus makes the point that to call himself 'God'(=*Elohim*) would not in fact be blasphemy since there is a Biblical precedence for it as applied to all the people. Secondly, he points out that he did not in fact even make that claim, as his accusers maintain, but that he claimed to be the 'Son of God'. In making that distinction, Jesus denies that the expression 'Son of God' refers to deity. He defines what being the 'Son of God' means: 1) being sanctified by God and 2) being sent into the world.

The fact is that the people could and did misunderstand Jesus' claims. They intended to misunderstand them. Jesus intimates that he may call himself the 'Son of God' because God sanctified him and sent him into the world. If he is a personage whom God sanctified and sent, then he is not God Himself.

*Trinitarian claim:* 'Not only did Jesus claim equality with God as his Father, but he also asserted that he was one with the Father... "I and my Father are one". (John 10:30).' McDowell 1973, 16.

*Unitarian Answer:* Again the misunderstanding of the hostile hearer is taken as evidence that Jesus claims to be God. The supposition is that when Jesus says that he and his Father are one, this means that he claims to be God. But in John 17:11, 21–23 Jesus prays that his followers might also be one, even as 'we are'. Therefore, if the oneness of Jesus and the Father implies that Jesus is divine, it also implies that in precisely the same way his followers are also divine. Instead of three persons in the Godhead, we now have millions, maybe billions. There are many ways in which to be one, in purpose, in will, in motive, in action, in many ways, without being one in essence and being.

*Trinitarian claim:* 'Jesus continuously spoke of himself as one in essence and nature with God. He boldly asserted, "If you knew Me, you would know My Father also" (John 8:19); "He who beholds me beholds the One who sent me" (John 12:45); "He who hates Me, hates My Father also" (John 15:23); "All may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23); etc. These references certainly indicate that Jesus looked at himself as being more than just a man; rather, he was equal with God.' McDowell 1973, 17.

*Unitarian Answer:* In none of these texts does Jesus claim to be one in essence and nature with God. He does claim to be sanctified and sent by God. He thus represents God to his hearers. If they knew and listened to him, they would know God. It is true that to hate and dishonor the messenger of God is to show hatred and dishonor to God Himself. Jesus certainly looked at himself as being more than just a man. But he did not look at himself as being equal with God. He just does not make that claim. His claims are precisely those made by the Shiite Imams as well. He claims to represent God to humankind and that absolute loyalty and obedience is therefore his due. But he does not claim to be God.

*Trinitarian claim:* `Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins... (Mark 2:5; see also Luke 7:48–50). By Jewish law this was something only God could do; Isaiah 43:25 restricts this prerogative to God alone.' McDowell 1973, 18.

*Unitarian Answer:* It is true that Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins. It is also true that by Jewish law this prerogative is restricted to God alone especially in view of Isaiah 43:25. The third alternative is that Jesus claims to be the authoritative representative of God to humankind, and as such worthy to represent those powers which God delegated to him (See John 5:19). He had both power to forgive sin and to heal as delegated to him by God. It was just as much the power of God which healed as which forgave sin at the word of Christ. There is no claim here to be God, despite the accusation of some onlookers.

*Trinitarian claim:* `Also in the Gospel of Mark we have the trial of Jesus (14:60–64). Those trial proceedings are one of the clearest references to Jesus' claims of deity.' McDowell 1973, 20.

*Unitarian Answer:* The attempt of the rulers to fasten a blasphemy charge on Jesus does not prove Jesus' claim to deity. Jesus' clear affirmation of his Messiahship is precisely that: his claim is to be the promised and sent Messiah. He does not claim to be God. There are more than the two alternatives, that Jesus committed blasphemy or that he was indeed God. The third alternative is that he claimed to represent God to the world, to be the divine proof to use Shiite vocabulary, or to be the express image of God or the Word made flesh to use Bible vocabulary. In so doing he only upheld the strictest monotheism and never claimed to be God.

*Trinitarian claim:* `The biblical evidence in favor of our position shows that early references attributed to God are found in the plural form: Genesis 1:26: "Let us make man in our image." Genesis 3:22: "Behold, the man has become like one of Us." Genesis 11:7: "Come, let Us go down." Ralph Larson, *Water As A Flood*, in *Land Marks* February 1994, 16.

*Unitarian Answer:* It is true that there are a handful of texts referring to God in the first person plural, generally in the form of `Let's'. But generally, in thousands of cases, the Bible refers to God with a singular. This use of the plural hardly supports the doctrine of the trinity. If anything, plurality would support polytheism.

Genesis 1:26 uses a third person masculine singular in reference to God. If every person in the world

who has ever said, 'Well, let's see now,' has thereby become a trinity, I suppose this text might be construed as evidence for the trinity of God.

The words in Genesis 3:22 and 11:7 are addressed by God to celestial listeners. Genesis 3:24 suggests that these might be angels. There are one or two similar references in the plural which Ralph Larson does not mention.

*Trinitarian claim:* 'In Isaiah 48, the One who identifies Himself as the Redeemer and the First and the Last (compare Revelation 1:11) says in verse 16: "The Lord God, and His Spirit, have sent Me [the Redeemer]".' Ibid.

*Unitarian Answer:* The author infers that the mention of three figures implies a divine trinity. This is known as exegesis, reading one's own ideas into a text. First of all, the Redeemer spoken of here is defined in verse 17 as God Himself. This cannot then be the referent of 'me' in verse 16, because God has sent 'me'. God and 'me' are two distinct figures, and the Redeemer is God and not 'me'. In Isaiah, as in some of the other prophets, the direct quotation of God and the prophet's own reference to himself in the first person, are sometimes difficult to distinguish and can lead to confusion.

We are left with God and His Spirit sending a human figure, not the Redeemer. God and His Spirit are not stated here to be distinct persons in a divine Trinity. The use of the conjunction 'and' does not necessarily imply two distinct entities, and if it did, it would still not imply that His Spirit was a co-equal divine person.

*Trinitarian claim:* 'In Ephesians 3:14, Paul mentions the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and in verse 16 he adds a reference to the Spirit.' Ibid.

*Unitarian Answer:* Mention of the three together does not imply a divine trinity, nor that Jesus is divine, or that the Spirit of God is a distinct person.

*Trinitarian claim:* 'Some may respond at this point that they are not challenging the idea of three persons but are only denying that Christ always coexisted with the Father in full equality with Him. We may find help with this question by looking at such Scriptures as these: "For in Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Colossians 2:9. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Philippians 2:6 KJV.' Ibid.

*Unitarian Answer:* The author chooses two texts to demonstrate Jesus' equality with God. The first is written to the Colossians to dispel a heresy about which we know little but that it used terminology familiar in Gnostic speculation, such as 'pleroma' or fullness. The use of the term pinpoints the area of heresy which the apostle is attempting to replace with faith in Christ. The term does not describe the nature of Christ in general terms as such. However, considering that Jesus is the 'express image of God', or a divine proof, such terminology could well be applied to him in his role of revealing God to humankind. This would not imply, however, that he is himself equal with God.

The text in Philippians gives the humility of Jesus as an example to follow. As a side issue, it is mentioned that he is in the 'form of God'. This appears to be a clear reference again to Christ's role as divine proof. The expression does not mean that God appears in a form, but that there is a form which God owns or possesses. There is no implication that God Himself appears in a form. Limitation, by definition, cannot be attached to God.

The expression in this text, 'equal with' is a bad translation of a Greek term meaning 'like'. We are again confronted with Christ's role as a perfect divine proof or witness of God's existence and attributes. Equality with God is not implied. To associate any other being as equal with God is to be guilty of polytheism.

*Trinitarian claim:* 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.' Isaiah 9:6.

*Unitarian Answer:* The argument from Isaiah 9:6 is that the child referred to is the promised Messiah, whose many names indicate his divinity. The problem is one of translation. The Hebrew sentence order is generally, as also in this case, one of verb, subject, and object. Another translation would read: 'Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father shall call his name The Prince of Peace'. Even if we accepted the King James translation, however, the fact that someone's name means Mighty God does not imply that the person is God himself.

To be fair, there are texts in the Bible which can be construed to support the doctrine of the trinity. But there are no texts which clearly do so, and none which necessarily do so. It is a historical fact that the idea of one God existing in three persons is outside the Biblical tradition. The Bible presents God as one, a fact acknowledged by both Judaism and Islam.

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