

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**The Distortion of the Trinity: An Investigation of the Trinity as Evidenced in the  
Teachings of Three Major Religions.**

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## **Abstract**

The nature of the Trinity is a central and salvific doctrine within biblical Christianity. The divine nature of the person of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is pertinent to Christian teachings and a proper understanding of God is crucial to authentic worship and belief. Cults or heterodoxic religions, such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Oneness Pentecostalism have discounted, distorted or dismissed the Three-in-One doctrine of the Trinity, as found in classical Christian theism. These false doctrines can affect teachings about justification, sanctification, the role and work of the cross and an understanding of the nature of God. The nature of the Trinity can be better understood after a careful examination of three major cultic offshoots of Christianity and their distortion of the Trinity, as evidenced by their teachings in comparison to Scripture.

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## Introduction

This paper will examine and critically engage the different distortions of the doctrine of the Trinity taught in three religious' cults, displaying how each has distorted the traditional, orthodox understanding of the triune God. The religions that will be apologetically examined are Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Oneness Pentecostals. Each religion discussed in this paper exhibits teachings that were deemed heretical in early Christianity. The doctrine of the Trinity is vital and speaks to the nature of God. The distortion of the Trinity affects who God is and how He relates to His creation. The doctrine of the Trinity should be defended. Without the Trinity, the church does not have the God of the Bible, but rather a distorted depiction and a god made in man's image. "Scripture demands from us the acknowledgment of the Unity of the Godhead, and also of those interior distinctions between Father, Son, and Spirit which we can only express by our word Person."<sup>1</sup>

In order to discuss orthodox teaching compared to heretical teaching of the Trinity, definitions must be understood. The definition of Trinity is that there is one God, and three distinct divine persons. The use of the word "person" regarding the Trinity means "that each of them subsists distinct from the others in the divine nature."<sup>2</sup> Trinity "signifies the number of persons in one essence; and hence we cannot say that the Father is the Trinity."<sup>3</sup> "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who deserve to be called God, and yet there is but one God, not three."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 127.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas V. Morris, "The Doctrine of the Trinity". In *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, edited by Khaldoun A. Swies and Chad V. Meister, 229-235 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 220.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>4</sup> James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 575.

In the Trinity, “there is one divine substance or essence or nature and three persons or perhaps hypostases.”<sup>5</sup> The “unity of God is understood by one divine essence common to all three persons.”<sup>6</sup> The Father, the Son and Holy Spirit are each God.<sup>7</sup> “As the living God, He is always beyond our necessary and particular description of Him.”<sup>8</sup> It must be understood that the Trinity “transcends reason”, but this does not negate the reality or objective truth found in the doctrine, that must be defended against heresy.<sup>9</sup>

## **Biblical and Scriptural Development of the Trinity**

### **Biblical Development**

An examination of the biblical development of Trinitarian doctrine provides a clear understanding of the triune nature of God. It is crucial to demonstrate the alignment of Christianity’s belief in the Three-in-One with the Judaic monotheistic God of the Old Testament. Jewish scriptures reflect that Israel was commanded from the very beginning to worship the one God, with one of the “clearest expressions of monotheistic belief” found in the forty-third through forty-eight chapters of Isaiah.<sup>10</sup> The Jews resisted worship of any figure including

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<sup>5</sup> Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Kyle Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together: Defending the Historic Doctrine of the Inseparable Operations of the Trinity.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no.4 (2013): 781.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Bullivant, *The Trinity: How not to be a Heretic* (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015) NP.

<sup>8</sup> John G. Flett, “In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: A Critical Reflection of the Trinitarian Theologies of Religion of S. Mark Heim and Gavin D’costa.” *International Journal of Systemic Theology* 10, no. 1(2008): 90.

<sup>9</sup> Morris, “The Doctrine of the Trinity”, 220.

<sup>10</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 30.

“divine agents” such as angels; the only recipient of their worship was the “one God of Israel.”<sup>11</sup> The monotheism of Second Temple Judaism was strict as well.<sup>12</sup> Jewish monotheism in the Roman period accommodated honorific rhetoric about various “principal-agent figures”, such as angels, and exalted figures like Moses, but drew a firm line between these and the one God in the “area of cultic practice,” reserving worship for the one God.<sup>13</sup> This defiantly monotheistic stance was the chief characteristic of Jewish religion in this time period.<sup>14</sup> The worship of another deity was possibly the “greatest sin possible” for a Jew.<sup>15</sup>

Most Jews of the Second Temple period had well-defined ideas as to how the “uniqueness of God should be understood.”<sup>16</sup> This “uniqueness of divine identity” was characterized especially by two features, specifically that the one God is sole ruler of all things and the one God is sole creator of all things.<sup>17</sup> Paul and the Jewish Christians’ “Christ-devotion” is “expressed in the context of a firmly monotheistic stance.”<sup>18</sup> New Testament texts include Jesus in the “unique divine creation of all things” and “the unique divine sovereignty of all things.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus is identified in these texts by the divine name, which “names the divine unique

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<sup>11</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 47.

<sup>19</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 19.

identity” and was accorded worship, which for the monotheistic Jews is “recognition of the unique divine identity.”<sup>20</sup> Apotheosis, the divinization of human figures, was forbidden by the Jewish monotheistic stance.<sup>21</sup> The worship afforded to Jesus by the Christian Jews of the New Testament can only be explained by the unique divine identity of Jesus. High Christology was conceivable within a Jewish monotheistic text, not by placing Jesus in a “Jewish category of semi-divine intermediary status” but by including Jesus in the unique identity of the one God, specifically “identifying Jesus directly with the one God of Israel.”<sup>22</sup>

The biblical development of the classical Christian doctrine of the Trinity is evident throughout the Scriptures and was accepted early on by the church. The doctrine of God in Christianity is strictly monotheistic and confirms that “there is one and only one God.”<sup>23</sup> The strict monotheism is “attributable to its origin in Judaism.”<sup>24</sup> The Triune nature of God is not contradictory to the belief in one God. Though the Trinity is a mystery, the Trinity explains the nature and character of the God of the Old and New Testament. The New Testament church remained faithful to the Judaic monotheistic belief, in claiming that there is only one God.<sup>25</sup> The

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<sup>20</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 92.

<sup>22</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity, an Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 38.

<sup>24</sup> J. Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 33.

<sup>25</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 576.



New Testament writers applied Old Testament proof texts concerning Yahweh to Jesus.<sup>26</sup> The Christian church has historically affirmed and taught that there is only one God.<sup>27</sup>

If the doctrine of the Trinity is objectively true and demonstrates the nature of God, the doctrine of the Trinity would be evident, beginning in the Old Testament. The triune nature of God would be demonstrated throughout the entirety of Scripture, within both the Old and New Testament. Scripture would convey the Oneness of God and display the fullness of God in His Triune nature. An examination of the scriptures will demonstrate these exact things.

In Exodus 33:11, Moses claims to have spoken to God “face to face,” like talking to a friend.<sup>28</sup> Colossians 1:15, states that Christ “is the image of the invisible God.” In Deuteronomy 6:4 states, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.” Old Testament passages which use Trinitarian language that may imply that the “Son/ Word/Lord is a distinct person from God” are Psalm 2:7, 110:1, and Daniel 7:9-14.<sup>29</sup> Old Testament passages which illustrate that the Spirit is a person are Genesis 1:2;6:3, Nehemiah 9:20-30, and Isaiah 63:10.<sup>30</sup> In Exodus 3:8 “The Son spoke to Moses and said, “ ‘I have come down to deliver them’, for He was the one who

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<sup>26</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundation*, 576 .

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Patridge, *Introduction to World Religions*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Fortress Publishers, 2013), 365.

<sup>28</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New King James Version (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

descended and ascended for the salvation of humanity.”<sup>31</sup> Reiterating Psalm 110:1, the passage is speaking of the Father and the Son.<sup>32</sup>

An understanding of the New Testament writers’ understanding of the Old Testament passages in reference to Jesus is an important consideration. The Christ-devotion attested and affirmed by Paul, a Christian Jew, cannot be explained by apotheosis, a practice forbidden by the Jews.<sup>33</sup> The book of Revelation, also written by a Christian Jew, possesses a “strong affirmation of exclusivist monotheism in belief and practice” and an “inclusion of Christ along with God”, as a rightful receiver of “cultic devotion.”<sup>34</sup> One example of this rightful receivership of worship is illustrated in the fifth chapter of Revelation, with “the lamb receiving with God the idealized worship of heaven.”<sup>35</sup> The highest possible Christology was central to the faith of the early church, “even before any New Testament writings were written, since it occurs in all of them.”<sup>36</sup>

The Hebrew Old Testament explicitly teaches that “there is but one God.”<sup>37</sup> However, in the New Testament the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies is realized; the text speaks of the reality of God the Holy Spirit and God the Son. In the Old Testament, there was a “belief in

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<sup>31</sup> Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon and James R. Payton, *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of Against Heresies* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke & Co., 2012), 61.

<sup>32</sup> Saint Justin Martyr, and Thomas B. Falls, *Saint Justin Martyr: The First Apology, the Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, the Monarchy or the Rule of God. Vol. 6:6*. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1965), 234.

<sup>33</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 92.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>36</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 19.

<sup>37</sup>Walter Ralston Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publ., 2003), 234.

the Spirit of God” by the Jews.<sup>38</sup> These truth realities are not contradictory, rather a mystery. It is pertinent in the understanding that Christianity is not a religion of polytheism, but strict monotheism. Christianity is the completion of the Jewish Old Testament, in which Judaism, like Christianity was strictly monotheistic.<sup>39</sup> “The God of the Old Testament and the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ are one and the same Person.”<sup>40</sup> There is a clear alignment between the teachings of the Old Testament and New Testaments. The uniqueness and identity of the one true God in the Old Testament is cohesive with the monotheistic beliefs of Christian Jews. The Old Testament affirms the identity of the personhood of the Trinity when the referenced passages are viewed within the contextualization of the New Testament. The Old Testament provides a Trinitarian direction as calling God, Father, wisdom, Word, and Spirit.<sup>41</sup>

When addressing Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and Oneness Pentecostals, who uphold the Bible as authoritative and as inspired, these passages of Scripture must be explained considering the entirety of Scripture. These three off-shoots of Christianity have different heretical views of the Trinity. Modalism, Arianism, and tritheism do not reflect the circumstances within the Old and New Testament. These early church heresies were deemed heretical and antithetical to the reality of the living God. An accurate depiction of the identity of the members of the Trinity, as determined by careful and accurate examination of Scripture, will facilitate a strong defense against these heresies.

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<sup>38</sup> Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 34-35.

<sup>39</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 234.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 234.

<sup>41</sup> Roger E. Olson and Christopher Alan Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 5.

## Scriptural Development

The most obvious source to reference for an examination of the doctrine of the Trinity is Scripture. Stephen R. Holmes writes that “the history of the early development of the Trinity is largely a history of biblical exegesis.”<sup>42</sup> Critics are quick to deny that the Trinity is “revealed verbally in the Bible.”<sup>43</sup> However, there is evidence for the Trinity and the deity of Jesus throughout the Bible. Malcolm B. Yarnell III. maintains that “the pattern of the Trinity is woven into the biblical revelation in both micro and macro forms.”<sup>44</sup>

### **The Baptism of Jesus, the Father and Holy Spirit Appeared**

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist is detailed in all three synoptic gospels. The first chapter of the Gospel of John provides the testimony of John the Baptist, who described seeing the Spirit in the form of a dove coming to rest on Jesus (v.32). John also related that he was told by the One who sent him, that the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit could be identified by such a sign (v.33). The baptism of Jesus is significant because all three Persons of the Trinity are present simultaneously. These passages are a strong defense against the heresy of modalism, which maintains that God reveals himself in three different modes in consecutive order throughout history, but never simultaneously.

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 33.

<sup>43</sup> Malcolm B. Yarnell III., *God the Trinity: Biblical Portraits* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Matthew 3:16

**“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”<sup>45</sup>**

The church father Jerome contends that the mystery of the Trinity is revealed in baptism.<sup>46</sup> John the Baptist’s very actions (v.14) reveal that he knows that the Messiah stands before him. Hilary of Poitiers interprets this passage as a recognition of Jesus’ deity, as he states that John refused “to baptize him as God” (14) but Jesus instructed him that he must be baptized as man (v.15).<sup>47</sup> This statement is indicative of the church’s historical acknowledgement of the doctrine of the Trinity. His interpretation is incorrect because the gospel does not indicate that John knew that Jesus was God, however it is implied that John knew that Jesus was sinless.<sup>48</sup> Baptism signals repentance and John, by the emphatic use of the pronoun *I* in verse fourteen, signifies that John realized he was the one needing to repent, not Jesus.<sup>49</sup> After Jesus was baptized the “entrance of heaven was opened” and the Holy Spirit came forth like a dove.<sup>50</sup> This is the manner by which Christ is “imbued by the anointing of the Father’s affection.”<sup>51</sup> All three persons of the Trinity are present when Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist, the Spirit descends upon the Son and the voice of the Father is heard offering testimony to the Son. Jerome’s

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<sup>45</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New King James Version (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 71.

<sup>47</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 52.

<sup>48</sup> Grant R. Osborne and Arnold Clinton, *Matthew*, edited by Staff Zondervan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 122.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

interpretation of this event is that the heavens are opened, “not by an unbolting of the elements”, the opening of the heavens is not done in a physical sense but in a spiritual one.<sup>52</sup> His interpretation, while not universally accepted, is notable because he links the verse to an Old Testament passage. Jerome likens this spiritual opening of heaven to what is recorded in Ezekiel 1:1, “the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.”<sup>53</sup> Jerome remarks that the form of the dove “sat upon the head of Jesus” to prevent anyone from thinking that the voice of the Father was speaking to John instead of the Lord.<sup>54</sup> Jesus is revealed as the Son of God both by “sight and sound,” the testimony of the Lord is by voice and image.<sup>55</sup> This passage highlights that the three persons of the Trinity are distinct, that the Son is present in bodily form, and that the Spirit is seen as a dove and the voice of God the Father is heard. This would affirm the distinctness of each person of the Trinity and that all three are present at the same place and time. In other words, they are distinct and are existing simultaneously in this situation.

Mark 1:10-11

**“And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”**

One of the most important signs of Jesus’ identity takes place at the beginning of the gospel story when John the Baptist baptizes Jesus in the river Jordan. The focus in this passage is not on the baptism or Jesus’ actions but on “his identity as the Son of God.”<sup>56</sup> The significance of

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<sup>52</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 52.

<sup>56</sup>Eckhard J.Schnabel, *Mark* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 44

the imagery is striking. Francis J. Moloney articulates that when Jesus comes up out of the water, divine signs come down.<sup>57</sup> The phrase “coming up out of the water” suggest Jesus was fully immersed in the Jordan River.<sup>58</sup> Jesus sees the heavens open and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove (v.10b).<sup>59</sup> A new era is marked by this “tearing open of the heavens.”<sup>60</sup> The opening of heaven is indicative of a revelation from God, a theophany.<sup>61</sup> The Old Testament world where “God abides in the firmament” and “the human story takes place below” has been altered.<sup>62</sup> This opening of the heavens “promises a communication from above to below.”<sup>63</sup> These verses tell of Jesus’ experiences but God’s action is reported; the Spirit descends upon Jesus.<sup>64</sup> The descension of the Spirit points back to the prophet Isaiah who announced the promise of gift of the Spirit in the new creation.<sup>65</sup> God will put His Spirit upon him in who His “soul delighteth” (Isaiah 42:1-5); “the Spirit of the Lord” shall rest upon him who is from the stem of Jesse (Is. 11:1-3) and on him who proclaims liberty to the captives (Is. 61:1). The connection between the reference in Isaiah and the gift of the Spirit renders the descent of the Spirit on Jesus an “affirmation of Jesus’ identity as Messiah and his permanent empowerment for messianic service.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 11.

<sup>58</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 45.

<sup>59</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 11

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 46.

When Scripture speaks of the Spirit descending “on” (Gr. *eis*), it is not a temporary state, but a permanent presence.<sup>67</sup> This recorded account of the Spirit also hearkens to the creation story where the Spirit of the God hovered over the waters (Gen. 1:3).<sup>68</sup> Jesus’ vision of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove is paired with the auditory experience of hearing a voice from heaven. The voice from heaven declaring that Jesus is God’s “beloved Son” is repeated at the transfiguration.<sup>69</sup> The voice from heaven uses wording similar to those of the words of God recorded in Psalm 2:7, “You are my Son”, but the voice from heaven places the pronoun first and “enhances the dignity of the Son by describing him as ‘the beloved,’” the same expression used to describe the relationship between Abraham and Isaac (Gen.22:2).<sup>70</sup> The words could also hint to the destiny awaiting Christ as a sacrifice for humanity’s sin. The final words “in whom I am well pleased” demonstrate the quality of the relationship between Father and Son.<sup>71</sup>

Luke 3:22

**“And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.”**

Jesus, who John pointed to as the Messiah who will baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit, first receives baptism himself.<sup>72</sup> The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in a very visible way and then a voice declares Jesus’ identity as the beloved Son of God.<sup>73</sup> The baptism of Jesus provides

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<sup>67</sup>Schnabel, *Mark*, 45.

<sup>68</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 11.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>72</sup> John T. Carroll, *Luke (2012)* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 96.

<sup>73</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 96.



a dramatic confirmation that Jesus is identified as the Son of God. The heavens are opened which “signifies that this is the man who would come from heaven and would teach heavenly things,” the one who would show the people the will of the Father.<sup>74</sup> This occasion is also significant because all three members of the Trinity are present. The baptism presents the occasion for the Spirit to descend from an open heaven accompanied by the voice of God directly identifying Jesus as the beloved Son of God.<sup>75</sup> This is where it is most evident that the “most blessed, glorious and everlasting Godhead are three persons.”<sup>76</sup> All three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are mentioned in the narrative introduction of Jesus’ ministry ( 3:22, 4:1,14,18).<sup>77</sup> Jesus’ baptism is his “messianic anointing”, the Spirit “impels and validates his mission.”<sup>78</sup> The Holy Spirit, who came down in the shape of a dove, testified to the Son, that “God, the Creator of heaven and earth, was his Father.”<sup>79</sup> God’s direct speech in the narrative corroborates Jesus’ statement at age twelve in Luke 2:49, in the Temple.<sup>80</sup>

### **The Actions of Jesus, He Forgave Sins**

The forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah says that only God can forgive sins (v.22). Yet, Jesus regularly forgave the sins of the people who came to him. Second Temple Judaism was

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<sup>74</sup> Beth Kreitzer, *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 87.

<sup>75</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 97.

<sup>76</sup> Kreitzer, *Luke*, 88.

<sup>77</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 97.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Kreitzer, *Luke*, 88.

<sup>80</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 97.

extremely monotheistic with a recognition of God’s “unique divine sovereignty of all things.”<sup>81</sup> Jesus’ action would have been blasphemous if he did not have the identity of God. A public miracle usually accompanied Jesus’ forgiveness of an individual’s sins, as a sign of his authority. Luke 7:48

**“And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.”**

The seventh chapter of the Gospel of Luke describes the account of the woman who washes Jesus’ feet with her tears. A Pharisee requested that Jesus dine at his house (v.36), while Jesus was there, a woman who was a sinner came in to where Jesus sat (v.37). The woman washed his feet with her tears, wiped them dry with her hair and anointed his feet with costly ointment (v.38). Scripture identifies the woman as a sinner, but this must not be something easily discernable by her appearance because Simon feels that Jesus’ knowing the status of the woman (v.39) would be indicative of his identity as a prophet.<sup>82</sup> The woman must be known locally as a sinner, but this must not be identified by her appearance. The Pharisee privately thinks that Jesus could not be a prophet, because he should have known the woman was a sinner and forbidden her to touch him (v. 39). Jesus demonstrates supernatural ability by perceiving Simeon’s thoughts and he rebukes him with a parable (vv.41-42).

Jesus proves, after he relates the parable to Simon, that he knew not only that the woman was a sinner but the extent of her sins “which are many” (v.47). The specific nature of the woman’s sin is never identified in this passage, it is only important to note that she is a “sinner”.<sup>83</sup> Jesus’ simple statement to the woman who anointed his feet with oil demonstrates

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<sup>81</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 47.

<sup>82</sup> Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 130.

<sup>83</sup> Parsons, *Luke*, 130.

Christ's authority to forgive sin. The brief words to the woman focus only on the gift of forgiveness.<sup>84</sup> Christ publicly forgives the woman and sends her away in peace.<sup>85</sup> This was a public pronouncement of a previously established fact.<sup>86</sup> Jesus' clear authority has the others who are present asking "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Matt. 9:1-8

**"And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men."**

Jesus returns to Capernaum (v.1) and is brought a crippled man to heal. They carried the man in because he was not strong enough to walk on his own.<sup>87</sup> Jesus noticed the faith of those that carried the paralytic man, not of the man himself, and he forgave the man of his sins.<sup>88</sup> Jerome finds it remarkable that Christ addressed the man as "son", this "despised cripple, weakened in all his joints, whom the priests did not consider worthy to touch"<sup>89</sup> The significance of the title of "son" is believed by St. Hilary to be a reference to Adam who was called son "because he was the first work of God" and it is in reference to a "pardon for the first transgression."<sup>90</sup> Jerome referenced the tropology of a soul lying in its body, weakened and

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<sup>84</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 180.

<sup>85</sup> Kreitzer, *Luke*, 166.

<sup>86</sup> Parsons, *Luke*, 132.

<sup>87</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 105.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>90</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 101.

brought to the Lord for healing, if the soul is healed by his mercy, it would receive such strength that it would “immediately carry its mat.”<sup>91</sup>

Jesus did not immediately heal the man; he forgave his sins instead (v.2). The scribes would know from their familiarity of the Scripture, that only God can forgive sins, believe Jesus to be a man who blasphemes.<sup>92</sup> Jesus discerns the murmurings of the scribes who were disturbed by forgiveness of sins by a “man.”<sup>93</sup> The Lord “shows himself to be God” who can “recognize what is hidden in the heart” by acknowledging their thoughts (v.4).<sup>94</sup> Jerome explains that only “he who forgave them could have known if the paralytic’s sins had been forgiven.”<sup>95</sup> Jesus demonstrates that he has the authority to forgive sins on earth (vv.6-7) by healing the man. The fact that the man got up and walked when instructed to by Jesus was evidence to both the man and the witnesses, the bodily miracle proves the truth of the spiritual one.<sup>96</sup> Saint Hilary articulates that Jesus’ healing of the man is “so that we might know that he became a man to forgiven men’s sins to obtain the resurrection of their bodies.”<sup>97</sup> The authority of Jesus’ words was evidenced by his actions.

Jesus, by his claiming to be God, as evidenced by his authority to forgive sins, demonstrates his identity as a member of the Trinity. Scripture says that only God can forgive

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<sup>91</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 106.

<sup>92</sup> “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”, Is. 43:25.

<sup>93</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 101.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 101.

sins.<sup>98</sup> Jesus demonstrates his deity by his ability to forgive sins, which is authenticated by his miracles of revealing that he knew the thoughts of the scribes (v.4) and the healing of the invalid ( v.7). Jesus cannot be “a god.” He has to be *the* God, because as Scripture emphatically states, there is only one God. The Lord clearly explains in Isaiah that He is the only God that ever has been or will be in existence.<sup>99</sup> Yet people are seeing Jesus and speaking with him in person, which presents a quandary without the existence of the Trinity, because no one can see God’s face. Moses requested to see God and he was told that no one sees God’s face and lives.<sup>100</sup> This is reinforced in John 1, which says that the only way we can see God is through the Son.<sup>101</sup> If therefore Jesus is God the Son, the Holy Spirit is God the Spirit, as seen in Jesus’ baptism instructions to the disciples to baptized the nations in the name of all three.<sup>102</sup> Paul also references the Holy Spirit and the deity of Jesus in his statement affirming that God payed for the church with his own blood.<sup>103</sup>

### **The Miracles of Jesus, He Healed the Sick and Exorcised Demons**

Jesus’s divine nature is revealed throughout Scripture by the miracles that he performed. While on the earth, Jesus healed many individuals of varied afflictions and exhibited control over

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<sup>98</sup> “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake and will not remember thy sins,” Isa. 43:25.

<sup>99</sup> “Thus saith 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”, Isa. 43:6.

<sup>100</sup> “And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.,” Exod. 33:20.

<sup>101</sup> “No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,” John 1:18.

<sup>102</sup> “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”, Matt. 28:19.

<sup>103</sup> “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood”, Acts 20:28.

demons. These events not only reveal Jesus' ability to perform the miraculous but his authority as well. The words of Jesus are effectual and exhibit power.<sup>104</sup> Jesus taught with an authority that was different than that of the scribes and recognized by the people. The divine authority of Jesus was evidenced by the supernatural acts that he performed and the command that he had over unclean spirits.

Mark 1:21-27

**“And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.”**

The record of Jesus ridding the man of the unclean spirit documents Christ's authority. Jesus taught with authority distinguishable from that of the scribes.<sup>105</sup> His listeners were amazed by the “content of his teaching” and the assumption of personal authority in his manner of presentation.<sup>106</sup> The subtle indicators of Jesus' authority over that of the scribes “becomes a public recognition” when the unclean spirit loudly cries out at Jesus.<sup>107</sup> The evil spirit's recognition of Jesus' authority is evidenced by the question “ art thou come to destroy us?”<sup>108</sup> The ancient reader would know that the evil spirit seeks to control that authority by “correctly identifying Jesus as the Holy One of God.”<sup>109</sup> In the cultural and religious world of the time,

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<sup>104</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 121.

<sup>105</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 17.

<sup>106</sup> R. Alan. Cole, *Mark* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 114.

<sup>107</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 17.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

calling a person by name gave the “one summoning a certain authority over the one summoned”, by putting together his public name (Jesus of Nazareth) and his true identify (Holy One of God), the evil spirit should have won the day.<sup>110</sup> Jesus is not bound by these “cultural and religious absolutes” and rebukes the spirit into silence and commands him to come out of the man, breaking all barriers.<sup>111</sup> Jesus’ first response was to “muzzle this involuntary-demon testimony” and free the man from the evil spirit.<sup>112</sup> The spirit’s immediate leaving at the command of Jesus is verified by the man’s convulsing and screams (v. 26). The exorcism serves to further demonstrate Jesus’ authority, the Markan author insists on the unity between what Jesus says (vv.21-22) and what he does (v.27).<sup>113</sup> The exhibition of power “confirmed the impression left in the minds of his hearers”, that Jesus was one invested with authority.<sup>114</sup>

Mark 2:3-12

**“And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.”**

The passage in Mark 2, which recounts the healing of the man with “palsy” demonstrates Jesus’ rising popularity as news of him spread through the land. The miracle in the story is remarkable not only for demonstrating Jesus’ authority to heal, but his authority to forgive sins,

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<sup>110</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 17.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 115.

<sup>113</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 17.

<sup>114</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 115.

something the Old Testament declares is only within the authority of God.<sup>115</sup> Jesus returns to Capernaum and the crowd which gathered at the house where he spoke was so large that he had to speak to them from the door (v.2). The crowd was coming not only to be healed, but to hear the word of God.<sup>116</sup> This is the first appearance of the word *ochlos* (crowd), a term that shows that Jesus' ministry did not take place in a private place.<sup>117</sup> In Mark's gospel miracles are almost always in front of a large group of witnesses.<sup>118</sup> The passage does not offer any description or information about the invalid, other than he is paralyzed and unable to walk because he is being carried on a mat.<sup>119</sup>

The four friends climbed upon the roof and dismantled part of it (v.4) to lower the man before Jesus. Jesus saw their faith through their actions (v.5). The word "faith" (*pistis*) used here, and in other places in Mark, is "closely linked with Jesus' power to heal people miraculously from diseases."<sup>120</sup> Faith is the expectation that Jesus "exercises the power of God to cure the illness."<sup>121</sup> The Jews would know that only God has the power to heal a paralyzed individual instantly, they would not expect to be healed by a demon.<sup>122</sup> The reality of the faith of the four friends was shown by its "obstinacy and stubbornness in refusing to give up hope."<sup>123</sup> Jesus'

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<sup>115</sup> "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Is. 44:22.

<sup>116</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 120.

<sup>117</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 65.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 65.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 121.



immediate response is not to heal the man but to forgive his sins (v.5).The paralyzed man must have been more concerned with his “spiritual burden than his physical need,” judging by Jesus’ actions to forgive him first.<sup>124</sup>

The statement “your sins are forgiven” is comprehended by the scribes as not merely stating a fact, but the actual act of forgiveness.<sup>125</sup> The passive verb “you are forgiven” is not a divine passive, for instance “God forgives you”, the context makes it clear that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins.<sup>126</sup> Jesus who discerns the thought of the scribes, challenges them with two questions (v.9), is it easier to say “thy sins are forgiven” or to say to the paralyzed man “arise take up your bed and walk?” which forces the scribes to come to a decision on Jesus’ authority.<sup>127</sup> The “either-or” question implies a fortiori argument (lit. ‘from something stronger’).<sup>128</sup> The ‘more difficult’ action is to order the paralyzed man to walk because the results would immediately be obvious proof of solid evidence.<sup>129</sup>

Jesus miraculously heals the individual so that he is able to immediately get up and walk and to pick up his stretcher and carry it as well (v.12).The word of Jesus proved once again to be effectual , a word of authority and power.<sup>130</sup> The public nature of this miracle verifies Jesus’ statement that he can heal the man but it also represents his authority to forgive sin.<sup>131</sup> Most of

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<sup>124</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 121.

<sup>125</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 67.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 68.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 121.

<sup>131</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 69.

the healing miracles recorded in the gospel, in addition to an exhibition of divine love, have “evidential value to prove the divine authority of Jesus.”<sup>132</sup>

Matt. 8:14-15

**“And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.”**

Jesus performs another miracle when he heals Peter’s mother-in-law from a fever simply by touching her hand. She was healed instantly (v.15). Jerome, in his writings about the book of Matthew, felt the immediateness of her healing was of special interest, as he observed that human nature is such, that after a fever is removed, the body still feels worn out because the “body still feels the effects of the illness.”<sup>133</sup> The miracle is not only that she is healed but that her strength is restored instantly. Once Peter’s mother-in-law is healed, she performs the servant’s role.<sup>134</sup> Evidence of the intensity of this restoration was that she immediately got up and went to work. The hand that Jesus had touched and healed was ministering to them.<sup>135</sup>

Luke 4:40-41

**“Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.”**

In Luke 4: 40, the people of Capernaum flock to Jesus, bringing him the sick and possessed to be healed. Jesus demonstrates great humility and care for the people, even though his fame had spread at this point, he continues to heal the sick and the afflicted.<sup>136</sup> Jesus’

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<sup>132</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 121.

<sup>133</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 101.

<sup>134</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 93.

<sup>135</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 102.

<sup>136</sup> Beth Kreitzer, *Luke*, 107.

authority is shown by the liberation of the people from demonic possession and illness.<sup>137</sup> Luke records a confrontation between Jesus and the diabolic.<sup>138</sup> The demons recognize his identity as the Christ, the Son of God.<sup>139</sup> Jesus rebukes the evil spirit (v.41) and the response to Jesus and his authority is highlighted.<sup>140</sup> Jesus not only freed the people from demonic possession(v.41a) but rebuked the evil spirits who were crying out his name and silenced them (v.42b).Christ forbade the devils from testifying about him.<sup>141</sup> Tertullian remarks that “Christ wants human beings, not unclean spirits, to acknowledge him to be the Son of God.”<sup>142</sup> The crowds were amazed by Jesus’s authoritative actions and his power over the evil spirits, this was clearly something they had never seen before.<sup>143</sup>

Mark 3:1-6

**“And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.”**

Jesus attends the synagogue service and a controversy over healing on the Sabbath is raised. The Pharisees, already angered by the disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath (Matt.

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<sup>137</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 121.

<sup>138</sup> Parsons, *Luke*, 85.

<sup>139</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 121.

<sup>140</sup> Parsons, *Luke*, 85.

<sup>141</sup> Kreitzer, *Luke*, 108.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Parsons, *Luke*, 85.

2:23-24), watch to see if Jesus will heal a man with a withered hand (vv. 1-2), who is present. The Pharisees watch Jesus closely for an infringement of the Sabbath so they can accuse him.<sup>144</sup> Jesus addresses a rhetorical question to the Pharisees, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life? Or to kill?” (v.4). They refuse to answer. Jesus looks at them in anger and he is deeply distressed by their stubborn or hardened hearts (v.5). The phrase “hardness of heart” is understood by the Hebrews to mean “ a stubborn resistance to the purpose of God” or the opposite of gentleness and teaching that God requires.<sup>145</sup> If the “seat of discernment, and volition,” the heart has become “petrified” it cannot receive new insight.<sup>146</sup> The condemnation of the Pharisees is that all they saw was a “possible ground of accusation” against Jesus, they “failed to see in this man a case of need.”<sup>147</sup> Jesus once again chooses to heal publicly, he orders the man to stretch out his hand, which before was impossible but is at once completely restored.<sup>148</sup> The man was healed as a result of his faith and obedience.<sup>149</sup> Healing is a “sign of the presence of the kingdom of God.”<sup>150</sup>

### **The Worship of Jesus, He Received Worship from his Followers**

The doctrine of the Trinity is not antithetical to monotheism. Jesus, Himself, receives and accepts worship of Himself. In Matthew 4:10, Jesus speaks to Satan and says that man is only

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<sup>144</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 79.

<sup>145</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 133.

<sup>146</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 80.

<sup>147</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 132.

<sup>148</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 80.

<sup>149</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 134.

<sup>150</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 80.

supposed to worship and serve God alone. In Matthew 2:11, the scripture reads “and when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him.” Worship of any other being was forbidden in the strictly monotheistic, Second Temple Judaism.<sup>151</sup> However, New Testament texts identified Jesus by the divine name.<sup>152</sup> This use of divine name would have been recognition of the “unique divine identity” to the monotheistic Jew.<sup>153</sup>

Matt 2:11

**“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.”**

Gifts presented to the infant Christ were arranged by a supernatural occurrence. The appearance of a star, which the wise men followed to find Christ, could be representative of the fact that pagans will so profess a belief in Christ.<sup>154</sup> The gifts brought by the wise men are tribute or a form of worship. The wise men presented the infant Jesus with gifts befitting a king. Juvencus, a fourth century Spanish Christian poet described the gifts, “Gold, myrrh, and frankincense are the gifts they bring, to a man, a God, a king.”<sup>155</sup> Saint Hilary maintains that the gifts reveal the identity of Christ, “the gold proclaims him as King, the incense as God, and the

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<sup>151</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 47.

<sup>152</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 19.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 46.

<sup>155</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Mat*, 65.

myrrh as man.”<sup>156</sup> The esteemed foreign travelers’ veneration of Jesus can be seen to represent “his death as a man, resurrection as God”, and “judgement as King.”<sup>157</sup>

Matt. 28:9

**“And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet and worshipped him.”**

Women returning from the empty tomb to tell the disciples the news of what they have seen encounter Jesus on the way. They were met with the risen Christ so that when the women present the news of the resurrection, they could “declare it from Christ’s own mouth” rather than the angel’s.<sup>158</sup> Saint Jerome felt they were merited to be the first to meet the risen Lord because they had gone seeking him.<sup>159</sup> The honor bestowed on all women through this event is embraced by many.<sup>160</sup> The women came and held the feet of Jesus and worshipped him (v.9b). The women’s taking a hold of the feet of Jesus is viewed as an act of homage and supplication.<sup>161</sup> The touching of the feet serves as further proof of the physical evidence of Jesus’ resurrected body.<sup>162</sup> The use of the verb *proskyneō* requires a low posture.<sup>163</sup> An element of worship is “strongly built into the usage of this verb” throughout the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>164</sup> This

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<sup>156</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 46.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 326.

<sup>160</sup> Saint Hilary notes that “death had its beginning from the female sex”, yet females are the first to bring the news of the glory, the sighting and the resurrection, St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 293.

<sup>161</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 727.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

perspective of the verb as an act of worship is most likely also prominent here.<sup>165</sup> Jesus does not refuse their touch or their worship.

Luke 24:52

**And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy”**

The verse Luke 24:52 contextually takes place after Jesus was carried away into heaven. Jesus took them out as far as Bethany (v.50) and makes his “exodus” into heaven.<sup>166</sup> Jesus was lifted in heaven in front of them as he gave them a final “priestly” blessing.<sup>167</sup> Most manuscripts describe the disciples directing reverential worship (*proskynesantes*) to the exalted Jesus.<sup>168</sup> Luke rarely utilizes the language of worship and the few times it is used, it is reserved for God alone.<sup>169</sup> This is the first time in the third Gospel that Jesus is the direct object of worship, before in the gospel people fell at his feet in veneration, but here he is worshipped as God.<sup>170</sup> Martin Luther wrote “through the ascension Christ accepts his rule and administration.”<sup>171</sup> According to Coverdale, Jesus was raised from the dead and taken up to heaven by God, “not in the sense of his Godhead, for in that sense he was always in heaven, but in the sense of his humanity.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 727.

<sup>166</sup> Parsons, *Luke*, 355.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 497.

<sup>169</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 592.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Kreitzer, *Luke*, 499.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

Following the resurrection, Jesus as the glorified Son of God, receives worship “due to God alone.”<sup>173</sup>

John 9:38

**“And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.”**

The ninth chapter of the gospel of John recounts of the healing of the blind man. The blind man receives his sight, but he also comes to the knowledge of the identity of Jesus. The healed man’s “expressed knowledge of Jesus grows incrementally” in what is called an “escalating Christology”.<sup>174</sup> As soon as the Word makes a more adequate interpretation possible, the formerly blind man responds with a heightened Christology.<sup>175</sup> The healed man, once he has this knowledge, immediately falls down and worshipped Jesus (v.38). As Augustine noted, it is not just that the man says he believes, it is his actions afterward that demonstrate his belief.<sup>176</sup> The Greek verb translated for “worshipped” in this verse is *proskynein*, which is always applied in John for use as divine worship.<sup>177</sup> Baur believes this verse represents “the worship of the Johannine Christ as *theos* - God” and Bultmann sees the significance of the use of *proskynein* as homage and reverence paid to the Son of Man as a divine figure.<sup>178</sup> This fits the “Johannine portrait of Jesus’s deity and invites John’s own audience to worship Jesus.”<sup>179</sup> The revelation of

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<sup>173</sup> Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 592.

<sup>174</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 553.

<sup>175</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: 2 Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 795.

<sup>176</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 588.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 795.



the Son of Man in person, standing in front of the formally blind man is so overwhelming that he prostrates himself before Jesus.<sup>180</sup> This act of worship towards the Messiah is not rebuked by Jesus, instead he takes the opportunity to explain that he has come into the world, that the blind may see and those that do see might be made blind (v.39).

John 20:28

**“And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God.”**

The disciple Thomas worships the resurrected Jesus with a more informed perspective than the blind man from the ninth chapter of the Gospel of John. The disciple’s renowned encounter occurs after Jesus has been crucified, placed in a tomb for three days and appears in the midst of the disciples as physical evidence of his resurrection from the dead. Thomas’ worship of Jesus after the encounter acknowledges his absolute certainty that he is worshipping Jesus as God.

Thomas, known throughout history now as “Doubting Thomas”, refused to believe in the risen Jesus until he saw and touched the nail prints in Jesus’ hands and the wound in his side (v. 25). Once he is confronted by Jesus and given physical evidence of the resurrected Christ, Thomas acknowledges Jesus as not only his Lord, but his God.<sup>181</sup> Thomas confirms his belief by immediately worshipping Jesus as God once he is confronted with proof of the physicality of the risen Christ. John did not hesitate to confirm Jesus as Lord and God.<sup>182</sup> The “Lord” is God’s name, a name above all names.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 588.

<sup>181</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 1118.

<sup>182</sup> Jey J. Kanagaraj, *John: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2011), 202.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

Jesus did not rebuke Thomas for his statement or worship. Instead Jesus states that Thomas believes in him as the resurrected Lord because Thomas has seen him (v.29). Jesus professes a blessing on those who “would not see the risen Christ yet believe”, keeping the wider community of future believers in mind.”<sup>184</sup> Jesus foresaw with this beatitude, that the new covenant community which he established and empowered, would grow by the worldwide mission of God.<sup>185</sup>

### **The Divine Self-Awareness of Jesus, he Expressed Knowledge of his Divinity**

Jesus of Nazareth had a self-awareness of His divinity, shown through His teachings, actions, personal authority and His claim of forgiving sins.<sup>186</sup> Jesus taught from a position of authority with a clear knowledge of his relationship with the Father.

Matt. 25:31-46

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

The imagery created by the description of the Son of man “coming in his glory” with the holy angels is reflective of the judgement mentioned in the book of Daniel.<sup>187</sup> The seventh chapter of Daniel includes the same elements of “thrones (v.9), of ‘one like a Son of Man’

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<sup>184</sup> Kanagaraj, *John: A New Covenant Commentary*, 202.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 575-576.

<sup>187</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 422.

(v.13), ‘myriads’ (i.e. angels, v.10), and glory (v.14).”<sup>188</sup> Jesus speaks as though he has authority over the angels.<sup>189</sup> This could be seen as the “culminating scene of eschatological judgement.”<sup>190</sup> Jesus is the “triumphant ruler/judge whose court includes all the angels of heaven.”<sup>191</sup> The “cosmic, divine authority invested in Jesus” is demonstrated by his judgement of all of the nations.<sup>192</sup>

Jesus is “mindful of the time of judgement” and the moment he will separate the “faithful from the unfaithful.”<sup>193</sup> Jesus promises the glory of the triumphant one, he who is seen in majesty is the Son of man.<sup>194</sup> The sheep are commanded to stand on the right hand, the goats representing sinners on the left, because under the Law, goats are always offered for sin.<sup>195</sup> When Jesus calls the blessed of his Father to inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world (v.34), it is to be understood that he does this with the “foreknowledge of God, with whom future things are already done.”<sup>196</sup> Jesus informs the disciples that feeding, clothing, giving drink to the least of these is the same as doing it unto Christ (vv.35-40), and the lack of doing these things is the

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<sup>188</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 422.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Richard P. Carlson, “Matthew 25: 13-46,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 69. no.3 (2015): 345.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 267.

<sup>194</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 289.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

same as refusing Christ. Jesus leaves no doubt to his eternal authority by promising eternal life to the just and eternal punishment to the sinner.<sup>197</sup>

Mark 8:34-38

**“And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”**

This is the beginning of a set of passages ( Mark 8:31-15:47), which make known to the reader, by word and deed, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and vindicated Son of Man.<sup>198</sup> This chapter is the first time in this Gospel that Jesus “clearly says he is the Son of Man”.<sup>199</sup> Jesus describes the destiny of the Son of Man and his resurrection.<sup>200</sup> Jesus also tries to teach the disciples and crowd that they must replace human values “with the divine logic of triumph through death.”<sup>201</sup> The expression “Son of Man” was used previously in the second chapter of Mark, with Jesus’s claim of authority to forgive sin (Mark 2:10) and his authority over the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), but not with the bold, open proclamation as seen here.<sup>202</sup>

Jesus calls to listeners and readers when he calls to the multitude as well as the disciples (v.34a), anyone who wishes to be a follower of Jesus is addressed by these words (v.34b).<sup>203</sup> A

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<sup>197</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 290.

<sup>198</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 21.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 202.

<sup>202</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 21.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 8.

disciple is called to renounce himself and take up the cross, and “lose his life for Jesus and the Gospel “ (vv. 34b-35), based upon the predicted experience of the Son of Man (v. 31).<sup>204</sup> This is “the first reference to the word ‘cross.’”<sup>205</sup> The phrase “take up the cross” refers to the practice of condemned criminals carrying the *patibulum*, or heavy horizontal beam to which their arms would be nailed, to their place of crucifixion.<sup>206</sup> While the phrase is used metaphorically in this passage, it also suggests that it originates from Jesus’ own prophetic awareness of the manner of his own execution.<sup>207</sup> Jesus embraces the destiny of the suffering Son of Man and rejects the populace expected Messianic glory.<sup>208</sup> His disciples must do the same.<sup>209</sup> This call of Jesus is a paradox, “a call to self-gift unto death and a summons to life”, the identity between Jesus and the “suffering Son of Man vindicated in the resurrection” is crucial to this paradox.<sup>210</sup> Rejection of the way of Jesus, the Son of Man, will lead to rejection when this same Son of Man comes in glory.<sup>211</sup> The promise of the Son of Man “coming in power, with angles, in the glory of his Father” to exercise authority against those who were ashamed of Jesus and the gospel, adds further explanation to the authority the Son of Man has over forgiveness of sin (Mark 2:10) and the Sabbath (Mark 2:28).<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>204</sup>Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 21.

<sup>205</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 203.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 8.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 8.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

Mark 14:61-62

**“But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”**

Mark 14 details the betrayal, capture and questioning of Jesus by the chief priests and council. The high priest attempts to question Jesus (v. 61) to illicit a response to the accusations that he has not previously responded to while being questioned. The Sanhedrin did not possess any evidence that could be used to legally convict Jesus.<sup>213</sup> There is no need for Jesus to respond. The witnesses against Jesus were contradictory and confused (Mark 14:55-59) and Jewish legal tradition supports his innocence (Deut. 17:6; 19:5).<sup>214</sup> The high priest seeks to incriminate Jesus by his own words because the false witnesses are unable to agree on their testimony.<sup>215</sup> Jesus remains silent (v.61a) because a response to contradictory testimony is not needed.<sup>216</sup> Another theory is that Jesus’ silence highlights his determination not to defend himself, Jesus “accepts suffering and impending death as the will of God.”<sup>217</sup> The high priest changes direction with his next question (v. 61b), the use of “again” indicates this change of direction.<sup>218</sup> The question he asks “ Art thou Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” takes the reader back to the opening verse (Mark :1) of the gospel.<sup>219</sup> The high priest wants to know if Jesus claims to have a unique relationship

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<sup>213</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 381.

<sup>214</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 43.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 383.

<sup>218</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 43.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 43.

to God with the “authority to rule as God’s Anointed.”<sup>220</sup> The use of the circumlocution of “the Blessed” by the high priest is done to avoid mentioning the word “God”.<sup>221</sup> In this manner, the high priest is directly asking Jesus to “accept or refuse” if he is the Christ, the Son of God.<sup>222</sup> Jesus’s answer “ I am” (v.62a) is “unqualified acceptance of his messianic sonship.”<sup>223</sup> Jesus’ statement asserts his “messianic identity and divine authority.”<sup>224</sup> This verse, which is the first and only self-revelation of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, is a Christological highpoint of the narrative.<sup>225</sup>

### **The Resurrection, He Rose Again on the Third Day**

The Resurrection also highlights the three Persons of the Trinity. This is clearly demonstrated in third chapter of 1 Peter, where it is explained that Christ suffered for our sins and was put to death but raised by the Spirit, so that humans could be brought to God.<sup>226</sup> Christ’s appearances after the resurrection proves that it was a bodily resurrection, the risen Christ is the Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus instructs that he is ascending to his Father that is in Heaven and the apostles are instructed to wait for the delivery of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>220</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 384.

<sup>221</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 43.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>224</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 384.

<sup>225</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 44.

<sup>226</sup> “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit”, 1 Peter 3:18.

1 Cor. 15:3-7

**“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.”**

The last subject Paul covers in his letter to the Corinthians is that the “resurrection of the believer is integral to the faith.”<sup>227</sup> His letter is to rebuke some of the Corinthians who denied that the dead will rise. The crucifixion is a subject that matters deeply to Paul, but for his purpose in this passage, the resurrection is of more importance, so that is the subject of his focus.<sup>228</sup>

Paul’s method was to demonstrate that Christ’s resurrection is fundamental to the Gospel and that Christ’s resurrection implies that Christians will be resurrected.<sup>229</sup> Paul, in support of this purpose, addresses the objections that have been or might be raised to the resurrection. Paul is very clear that he did not originate the message he gave; “the derivative nature of the gospel is stressed,” he simply “passed on what he has received.”<sup>230</sup> The beliefs were common property of the whole church.<sup>231</sup> The early church did not doubt the reality of the death of Jesus or the burial that is mentioned in all four Gospels.<sup>232</sup>

Paul provides a list of the resurrection appearances, beginning with Peter, using the Aramaic name of “Cephas”.<sup>233</sup> Paul follows this with “The Twelve” and an appearance to “above

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<sup>227</sup> Leon L. Morris, *1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 3097b.

<sup>228</sup> John Proctor, *First and Second Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 117.

<sup>229</sup> Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 3097b.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Proctor, *First and Second Corinthians*, 117.

<sup>232</sup> Morris, *1 Corinthian*, 3097c.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.



five hundred brethren at once (vv.5-6). Paul also makes sure to mention that most of these witnesses are still alive, which means they could be interrogated, and the facts verified.<sup>234</sup> The second name provided in the list is James. Which James is not specified, but many sources believe it to be James, the brother of Jesus.<sup>235</sup> It has been theorized that this appearance after the resurrection led to the conversion of James and his brothers, based on the fact that they were not believers during the ministry of Jesus (John 7:5), but are seen among the believers as early as Acts 1:14.<sup>236</sup> In fact, the Lord's brother James went on to lead the Jerusalem church.<sup>237</sup> Finally, Jesus appears to all of the apostles (v.7). Paul provides an extensive list of witnesses; the accounts of the resurrection are well attested, which indicates the importance of the resurrection to the Christian faith.<sup>238</sup>

Christians who shared the Gospel around the Greco-Roman world, would speak of witnesses who had met the risen Christ, Easter was not a theory, it was an event.<sup>239</sup> The Early Church was eager to attest that its faith was based on experience, memory and record.<sup>240</sup> Paul makes certain that the evidence is so reliable that it must be accepted.<sup>241</sup> Polycarp wrote in a letter to the Philippians, just forty-eight years after Paul's letters to the same church, that the

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<sup>234</sup> Morris, *1 Corinthian*, 3097c.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Proctor, *First and Second Corinthians*, 118.

<sup>238</sup> Leon L. Morris, *1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 3097d.

<sup>239</sup> John Proctor, *First and Second Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 118.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 3097d.

saints were “ordained to believe in the Lord Jesu Christ”, whose “Father raised him from the dead.”<sup>242</sup>

Matt. 28:9

**“And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet and worshipped him.”**

Jesus first appeared to the very women who came to minister unto his entombed body. The women who were encouraged by the angel at the empty tomb were immediately greeted by the Lord.<sup>243</sup> Who could possibly be more surprised to see the risen Jesus, than the very people who had set out to see to his burial traditions? Upon Jesus’ greeting, the women immediately fall prostrate before him.<sup>244</sup> They are not rebuked for their worship of him, they are only instructed to go tell the brethren that they will see him in Galilee (v.10).

Luke 24:36-43

**“And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them”**

Further proof of the resurrection is offered in Luke 24:36-43, where Jesus appears in the midst of a roomful of people. Clearly, the sight of Jesus is unexpected and supernatural. They react with questioning and fear, thinking that they are seeing a disembodied spirit.<sup>245</sup> Jesus demonstrates miraculous discernment by perceiving the inner thoughts of his disciples.<sup>246</sup> Jesus

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<sup>242</sup>Jackson Blomfield, *St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna* (New York: E. & J. B. Young & Co., 1898), 28.

<sup>243</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 293.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 490.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

proves that he is present in complete physical form by two separate actions. He instructs his disciples, who think they are seeing a ghost, to reach out and touch his hands and feet (vv.38-39) and he requested food and then ate it in front of them (vv.42-43). Jesus' instructions to touch his hands and feet are followed by a narrational statement (v.40) that he "proceeds to provide this tangible demonstration."<sup>247</sup> His instruction to touch his hands and feet presumably also provides physical proof of the crucifixion scars since the disciples are instructed to specifically touch those areas of the bodies, but this information is not specified in Luke. The full force of the legitimizing "proof" of the physical evidence of the crucifixion rests on the "authoritative word of the risen Lord, including his invitation to 'touch and see.'"<sup>248</sup> Jesus provided instruction and confirmation to his disciples in two different ways.<sup>249</sup> He showed them the reality of his body and he instructed them by showing the truth through the Scriptures.<sup>250</sup> The passage provided two assurances for the disciples and readers: they are presented with the full embodiment of the resurrected Jesus and witness the "continuity of person, self and identity" between the risen Christ and Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>251</sup> The point is driven home that this is not a disembodied spirit when Jesus asks for food, the physicality of the risen Messiah is reinforced as he eats with the disciples.<sup>252</sup> Jesus ate to prove that his body was a true body, not a spiritual one.<sup>253</sup> Coverdale

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<sup>247</sup>Carroll, *Luke*, 490 .

<sup>248</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 491.

<sup>249</sup> Kreitzer, *Luke*, 494.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 491.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Kreitzer, *Luke*, 495.

writes that a body that could be touched proves that it is a true body: the immortal body shows that it is to be glorified and of highest honor; meanwhile the prints of his wound declare that it is the same body that it was before.”<sup>254</sup>

John 20:26-30

**“Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”**

The risen Jesus appeared to his disciples behind closed doors. The “apostolic characteristic of having seen Jesus as the Lord” is displayed by the disciples.<sup>255</sup> Jesus admonished Thomas to believe and not be a doubter (v.27). Jesus spoke personally to Thomas, demonstrating that he had a divine knowledge of the doubts Thomas had expressed to the others.<sup>256</sup> Thomas had doubts when the disciples who had seen Jesus told him “We have seen the Lord” (v.20:25a). The word “Lord” is the name that was ascribed to Jesus by virtue of his resurrection by the early church.<sup>257</sup> Jesus used Thomas’s own words when he instructed Thomas where to touch his hand and side.<sup>258</sup> Thomas was implicitly invited to verify “Jesus’ own promise that he will both live and return to the Father, (Jn.14:19, 20:17).”<sup>259</sup> The sight of Jesus’

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<sup>254</sup> Kreitzer, *Luke*, 495 .

<sup>255</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 202.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 201.

<sup>259</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *John : A Commentary*, Vol. First edition. The New Testament Library (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 425.

wounds in his hands and on his side convicted Thomas to believe in Jesus' resurrection and to believe in Jesus standing there as a person.<sup>260</sup>

Thomas's conviction leads him to proclaim, "My Lord and My God". The word "Lord" is God's name, a name above every name which had been given to Jesus during his earthly ministry (v.17:11-12).<sup>261</sup> The address "my God", as applied to Jesus here, is only used in the post resurrection setting.<sup>262</sup> No one has addressed Jesus as "God" before this passage.<sup>263</sup> The possessive pronoun "my", which is repeated twice, reveals that Jesus is God and Lord, not only for Thomas but for anyone who believes in Jesus.<sup>264</sup> Thomas could perceive, as a representative of all Christians, in Jesus' resurrection, the God of the Old Testament "who spoke and acted in Jesus."<sup>265</sup> Thomas's confession does not mean that the risen Jesus alone is God, early in Scripture Jesus distinguished himself from "the only one true God", John's acclamation of Jesus as "my Lord and my God", "acknowledges the inclusion of Jesus, the Word made flesh", in the identity of the that one called 'the only true God'."<sup>266</sup> The honor and glory due to God alone was ascribed to Jesus by first century Christians.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 202.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Thompson, *John*, 425.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 202.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Thompson, *John*, 425.

<sup>267</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 202.

“After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.<sup>0</sup> Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.”

After two appearances to his disciples, the resurrected Jesus appears again to them by the Sea of Tiberias.<sup>268</sup> The phrase “and on this wise shewed he himself” looks forward to the manner in which the resurrected Jesus manifested himself as the Lord.<sup>269</sup> This is the first time that the beloved disciple is explicitly recorded as “seeing and identifying the risen Lord.”<sup>270</sup> The risen Jesus appeared on the shore in the early morning (v.4) to the disciples who initially did not know his identity. This was in spite of the disciples having seen him twice already as the risen Savior.<sup>271</sup> The risen Jesus does not appear in a supernatural way, he appears as an ordinary man, similar to his appearance to Mary Magdalene, who also did not recognize him at first.<sup>272</sup> There is

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<sup>268</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 206.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Thompson, *John*, 425.

<sup>271</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 206.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

a special concern in this chapter to validate the beloved disciple's role as a witness to the risen Christ.<sup>273</sup>

Jesus performs yet another miracle for his disciple by instructing them to throw the net over the right side of the boat, where the net is filled with so many fish that they cannot lift it into the vessel (v.6). Once the disciples reached the shore and Jesus, they found a fire there with fish and bread (v.9). Jesus provides the fish and invites the disciples to come and have breakfast, this is not only done to provide for his hungry disciples, but also serves to reveal his continuing love and communion with them.<sup>274</sup> Jesus' appearance in Galilee emphasizes Jesus' "ongoing presence and provision for his own."<sup>275</sup> The exact number of fish in the net were counted, to reveal that one hundred and fifty-three fish were caught, which "bears the stamp of an eye witness and historical accuracy" because caught fish were usually counted to be divided up among the fishermen.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Thompson, *John*, 433.

<sup>274</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 207.

<sup>275</sup> Thompson, *John*, 433.

<sup>276</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 208.

## Acts 1:3-6

**To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?**

In the prologue of Acts of the Apostles, Luke begins by emphasizing the unity between the ministry of Jesus and the beginnings of the church.<sup>277</sup> Luke summarizes Jesus' post resurrection appearances and highlights the fact that he was seen for forty days in the first chapter of Acts of the Apostles. The forty days of appearances "provide convincing proofs along with his teaching."<sup>278</sup> The disciples are "eyewitnesses" of the resurrection.<sup>279</sup> Jesus's time with the disciples was from Easter Sunday to the Ascension, this time period served two functions, it provided evidence that Jesus was alive and it was the time that Jesus instructed the disciples on their mission.<sup>280</sup> Jesus's teaching of the kingdom connects the movement in Acts to the teachings of Christ in the Book of Luke.<sup>281</sup> Luke, with the objective of stressing the certainty of the resurrection, emphasizes the extended period of time that he was with them, forty days.<sup>282</sup> The number of days that the risen Jesus was with the apostles reinforces the certainty of their testimony that he was alive. This was necessary in a culture that had many myths of ghosts or apparitions.<sup>283</sup> The apostles' conviction of the risen Savior did not rest on one experience, but

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<sup>277</sup> I. Howard Marshall and Leon Morris, *Acts*. (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 45.

<sup>278</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary Vol. 1 : Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 662.

<sup>279</sup> Yon Gyong Kwon, *A Commentary on Acts* (Lanham: Fortress Press, 2015), 7.

<sup>280</sup> Marshall and Morris, *Acts*, 45.

<sup>281</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 662.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 668.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 667.



repeated pieces of proof, multiple interactions with Jesus.<sup>284</sup> Luke emphasized the corporeality of Jesus' resurrection.<sup>285</sup> Jesus spent the post resurrection time teaching his disciples about the kingdom, preparing them for the equipping of the Holy Spirit.<sup>286</sup> Jesus commands his followers to wait for the Spirit so they can fulfill their mission.<sup>287</sup> The followers of Christ were not to start their mission on their own strength, they awaited the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus did not start his public ministry before receiving the Spirit."<sup>288</sup> Luke is concerned with showing that both Jesus and the church were "directed by the Spirit to fulfil the purpose of God for them."<sup>289</sup> The image of the Trinity is visible in this passage. Luke uses the distinctive phrase "the Father's promise", the prophets promised the coming of the Spirit (Isa. 44:3, Ezek. 37:14, Joel 2: 28-29), Jesus is the eschatological bestower of the Spirit."<sup>290</sup> The departure of Jesus is compensated for with the coming of the Holy Spirit, given by Jesus himself.<sup>291</sup>

### **The Role of Jesus in Creation, Jesus Was Referred to as Creator of all Things**

The New Testament's identification of Jesus' role in creation is applicable to his divine nature. One of the two features of the "unique divine identity" of God is that fact that He is the "sole Creator of all things."<sup>292</sup> The co-eternal nature of the Persons of the Trinity is reinforced by

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<sup>284</sup> Marshall and Morris, *Acts*, 47.

<sup>285</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 675.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 674.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 675.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 676.

<sup>289</sup> Marshall and Morris, *Acts*, 46.

<sup>290</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 678.

<sup>291</sup> Marshall and Morris, *Acts*, 48.

<sup>292</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 18.

the scriptural evidence of the Son's role in creation. These passages are significant to combat the heresy of Arianism which contends that Christ was created by the Father.

John 1:3

**“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”**

The third verse of the first chapter of John reveals that the divine Word, identified in verse one, is also the agent of the world's creation.<sup>293</sup> John describes the role of the pre-existent *Logos* (Word) in creation, meaning all things came into being through him and not one thing was made without him.<sup>294</sup> The totality of creation came into existence through the *Logos*, but it was not merely an “instrumental cause”, the “creative activity of the *Logos* was the creative activity of God.”<sup>295</sup> This verse speaks of the Word's role in creation once “positively and universally” and “once negatively and particularly.”<sup>296</sup> Everything was made by the Word and not one single thing was made without him.

This text functions to clearly define that the “Word was the agent of all of God's creation, without exception.”<sup>297</sup> The *Logos*, whose mutual indwelling and life in oneness with God are eternal, is the self-manifestation of God precisely because he exists eternally in oneness with God, the Father.<sup>298</sup> Genesis confirms creation by the divine Word: “God *said*, ‘Let there be light’

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<sup>293</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 27.

<sup>294</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 2.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>296</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 34.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>298</sup> Kanagaraj, *John*, 2.

and there was light.”<sup>299</sup> Creation is “Christomorphic and Christophoric, Christ-formed and Christ-bearing”, meaning all things were made by him and for him.<sup>300</sup> Creation came into “being exclusively through God’s Word,” John believes and repeats the conviction.<sup>301</sup> John believes the agent of God’s creation is the Word, the person of God’s eternal Son who came to earth and became Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>302</sup>

Col. 1:16-17

**“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”**

The whole of creation was into existence “in him”.<sup>303</sup> Christ is God’s means of creating the world, the context of verse 16 is that the world came into existence either by his actions or it exists “within him.”<sup>304</sup> This verse underscores the notion of “God the Father, creating the world through his pre-existent Son.”<sup>305</sup> The pairs of created things enumerated in verse 16 expands on the assertion that Christ created all things.<sup>306</sup> The paired items provide an expansive and forceful view that the Son created everything. The first pairing matches things in heaven and on earth, meaning those “beings and powers that exist in this world and in the realm above.”<sup>307</sup> The

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<sup>299</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 34.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>302</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 34.

<sup>303</sup> Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians (2008)* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2002), 66.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2009), 53.

<sup>306</sup> Sumney, *Colossians*, 66.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

second pairing, “seeable and unseeable” are also a portrayal of the all-inclusiveness of the categories of creation.<sup>308</sup> The unseen items could refer to things not visible to the naked eye, or beings in another realm who cannot be seen.<sup>309</sup> The purpose of this description is to proclaim the Superior place of Christ in all the realms of creation and the “dependence of all creation on Christ’s work in creation.”<sup>310</sup>

It is important to note that Colossians 1:16 uses the prepositions *en* (in), *dia* (through), and *eis* (for), to speak of the relationship of Christ and the world, but does not use the preposition *ek* (out of, from) to describe this relationship like he does in 1 Cor. 8:6 to reference God’s relationship to the world.<sup>311</sup> Scholars have understood this to mean that the writer of the text views “God as the source of creation, with Christ always as mediator of this act of God.”<sup>312</sup> Verse 17 reiterates that Christ existed before all things were created and then adds that he is the sustaining force of the cosmos.<sup>313</sup> Paul says that all things are sustained through Christ, this means that Christ “is the reason why there is *cosmos* instead of *chaos*.”<sup>314</sup> Christ is the means by which “God continues to hold the whole world in existence”, the whole cosmos and all of its beings are continually dependent upon him for existence.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Sumney, *Colossians*, 66.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Sumney, *Colossians*, 67.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>314</sup> Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, 54.

<sup>315</sup> Sumney, *Colossians*, 70.

## Church Fathers and Historic Trinitarian Documents

### Apostolic 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Church Fathers

Church Fathers allow the church and the witness to observe the doctrine that was proclaimed and believed from the beginnings of the early church. Church Fathers demonstrate the historicity of the doctrine of the Trinity and the establishment of what was believed throughout the ages. The word “Trinity (Greek: *trias*) was coined sometime in the second half of the second century.”<sup>316</sup> The origins of the term are not known, but the “earliest surviving mention of it is by Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century).”<sup>317</sup> The central confession of the early church was the statement “Jesus is Lord.”<sup>318</sup> It has been demonstrated that the early church addressed the Jesus of Nazareth in prayer as Lord, in 1 Corinthians 16:22.<sup>319</sup> The writings of the early Fathers demonstrated the belief of the Trinity and the Triune nature of God.

“In the writings of Clement of Rome and Ignatius the teaching seems to be solely personal and experimental, and only indirectly doctrinal.”<sup>320</sup> It is undeniable that the “threefold name of Father, Son and Spirit was used in worship” which shows that “implicitly and in practice, the Deity and Personality of the Spirit were acknowledged.”<sup>321</sup>

The *Didache* is a document that was produced in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The *Didache* notes the teachings and practice surrounding baptism. In the document, the “Matthean formula with the

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<sup>316</sup> Dale Tuggy, *What is the Trinity? Thinking About the Father, Son and Holy Spirit* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), 25.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 576.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God*, 78.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

Triple Name is clearly invoked.”<sup>322</sup> Justin Martyr, who is a 2<sup>nd</sup> century Church Father, utilized similar terminology from the Didache and added to the act of baptism the statement “ In the name of God, the Father and Lord of all, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>323</sup> Tertullian, an early church apologist in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, wrote a *Treatise on Baptism* which claimed “faith signed and sealed in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>324</sup> By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, witnessed in the act of baptism, the Trinity clearly is believed and embraced by the church. The “appeal to the names “Father, Son and the Holy Spirit takes the form of insisting that these precise names are the names by which God is to be addressed and catechumens are to be baptized.”<sup>325</sup>

Pre-Nicene theologians are responsible for the notion that the simplicity of God is not contradictory to the doctrine of the triune God.<sup>326</sup> Polycarp, a 2<sup>nd</sup> century church Father, a disciple of John, who was a disciple of Jesus, spoke a Triadic prayer.<sup>327</sup> Polycarp’s prayer contains three portions that promote Trinitarian worship.<sup>328</sup> The first part of the prayer is directed toward God the Father, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>329</sup> The second part of the

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<sup>322</sup> Khaled Anatolios, *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 5.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>326</sup> Pui Him IP, “Re-imagining Divine Simplicity in Trinitarian Theology”, *International Journal of Systemic Theology* 18, no. 3 (2016).

<sup>327</sup> Anatolios, *The Holy Trinity*, 40.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*

prayer mentions the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>330</sup> The third part of the prayer in closing, praises the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.<sup>331</sup>

Another person of influence in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Hippolytus who was the first to utilize the Greek term *Persopon*, which was used “in a strictly Trinitarian sense to indicate the individual subsistence of the Father and Son.”<sup>332</sup> During this era, Origen “gives theological significance to the term hypostasis while speaking of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>333</sup>

Furthermore, in the second century, shortly after the completion of the Bible, Tertullian used the Latin word *trinitas* when referring to the Biblical doctrine of God.<sup>334</sup> Tertullian is often accredited and known as the “Father of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity and of the person of Christ.”<sup>335</sup> Tertullian, in his work *Against Praxeas* refuted the heretical teaching of modalism.<sup>336</sup> During the same period “Theophilus, a Greek-speaking minister of the church, started speaking of God as being triune.”<sup>337</sup>

Second century Christian apologist, Justin Martyr, provided understanding and clarification of the relationship between “the pre-existing Christ and the Father.”<sup>338</sup> This early

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<sup>330</sup> Anatolios, *The Holy Trinity*, 40-41.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>332</sup> Giulio Maspero, and Robert Jozef Wozniak, *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 111.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>334</sup> Thomas, *Jehovah Witnessse*, 77-78.

<sup>335</sup> Marian Hillar, *From Logos to Trinity: The Evolution of Religious Beliefs from Pythagoras to Tertullian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 190.

<sup>336</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2009), 10.

<sup>337</sup> Thomas, *Jehovah Witnesses*, 78.

<sup>338</sup> Pui Him IP, “Re-imagining Divine Simplicity in Trinitarian Theology” *International Journal of Systemic Theology* 18, no. 3 (2016), NP.

church apologist helped with the understanding that “Christ must be distinct from the Father.”<sup>339</sup> Justin claimed that the Trinity is illustrated in the Old Testament and that there are in fact “two subjects speaking, not one.”<sup>340</sup>

Irenaeus, who was the Bishop of Lyon in 180-185 A.D., had Trinitarian formulas in his works.<sup>341</sup> Irenaeus, in his work *Demonstrations of the Apostolic Preaching*, in the second part, speaks of “the eternal existence of the Son.”<sup>342</sup> The first part of Irenaeus’ work “begins with the Trinity” and then continues describing “the human life in terms of communion with God or sharing in the life of the Trinity.”<sup>343</sup> This early church apologist understood that the Apostles, law and prophets “all declared to us that there is one God” and “one Christ the Son of God.”<sup>344</sup> “The Father is truly Lord and the Son truly Lord, the Holy Spirit had fitly designated them by the title of Lord.”<sup>345</sup> He “argues the title Father indicates not what God does, but who God is, underscoring the intimate relationship between the first and second persons and, as a result, between God and humanity.”<sup>346</sup>

Early Church Father and Christian apologist, Athenagoras of Athens has a profound understanding of Trinitarian theology and speaks of “divine unity and the distinction between the

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<sup>339</sup> IP, “Re-imagining Divine Simplicity in Trinitarian Theology”, n.p.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> J.van Oort, “The Holy Spirit and the Early Church: Doctrine and Confession.” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67, no.3 (2011): 1.

<sup>342</sup> Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*, 116.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Saint Irenaeus, *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith*, 56.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>346</sup> Jackson Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 54.



divine persons.”<sup>347</sup> Athenagoras stated “ God’s oneness,” does not consist of parts, for “created beings have contingent existence because they are composed of parts that are susceptible to dissolution and are therefore perishable.”<sup>348</sup> “The Trinity is one in power, but distinct in rank.”<sup>349</sup>

### **Church Fathers of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

Within the third and fourth centuries, the Greek term *Prosopon* was used for the first time regarding the Trinity.<sup>350</sup> This term was first used by Hippolytus in a “strictly Trinitarian sense to indicate the individual subsistence of the Father and Son.”<sup>351</sup>

Athanasius first became bishop of Alexandria, one of the Roman Empire’s most prominent cities, in 328 CE.<sup>352</sup> He fought to discredit the theory promoted by Arius that Christ was a created being, that He did not exist eternally, and that He was not of the same essence as the Father.<sup>353</sup> Athanasius was acclaimed as the “first complete theologian of the Trinity” by Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>354</sup> In his *Letters to Serapion*, Athanasius provides the “first extensive defense of and theological treatment” on the complete divinity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>355</sup> Athanasius

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<sup>347</sup> IP, “Re-imagining Divine Simplicity in Trinitarian Theology”, n.p.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Maspero and Wozniak. *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology*, 111.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Khaled Anatolios and Carol Harrison, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.

<sup>353</sup> Anatolios and Harrison, *Athanasius*, 242.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel A. Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 25.

argued it would be a regression into “paganism” to “impute anything less than full divinity to the Son”, basically it would make the worship of Christ idolatry.<sup>356</sup> He based this argument on the belief that since the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all equally worshipped, they must be equally divine or Christian worship would be idolatry.<sup>357</sup> Athanasius believed the divine Triad was imperative for human salvation.<sup>358</sup> He believed that the significance of the three members of the Trinity for human salvation was that only if “the Son was truly God did God become a human being, and in doing so, secure salvation through his human life, death, and resurrection” and through the divine Holy Spirit could human beings being taken into the “very life and love of the Father and Son.”<sup>359</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa was one of the “Cappadocian Fathers” who, along with his brother Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, helped form the Cappadocian reply to the heresy of Arius and Eunomius.<sup>360</sup> Their reply to this challenge of a form of extreme Arianism, which denied the deity of Christ, was a strong assertion of divine incomprehensibility.<sup>361</sup> The assertion of divine incomprehensibility maintained the impossibility of finding an adequate definition of Christ’s inner nature.<sup>362</sup> Gregory of Nyssa was present at the Second Ecumenical Council, which

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<sup>356</sup> Anatolios and Harrison, *Athanasius*, 12.

<sup>357</sup> Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 26.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 37.

<sup>360</sup> Anthony Meredith and Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa* (London, New York: Routledge, 1999), 11.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*

convened at Constantinople in 381 A.D., against the heresy of Macedonius.<sup>363</sup>The Nicene Creed was completed at the Second Ecumenical Council.

Gregory of Nyssa's *Great Catechetical Oration* states "we are taught in the gospel that there are three persons and Names through whom believers come to be born."<sup>364</sup> Gregory of Nyssa concludes then that if a person is "baptized into an Arian or Anomoean god, then you are the offspring of a mutable god."<sup>365</sup> This church Father stated "that we anathematize any man who says there are three God's, and hold him to be not even a Christian."<sup>366</sup>

Origen of Alexandria, understood the "idea that the Trinity constitutes three divine hypostases."<sup>367</sup> Origen explained that "it is necessary to affirm the Trinitarian distinction between God the Father and the Son" using the term hypostasis.<sup>368</sup> This distinction of the "hypostatic distinction between Father and Son" became a commonplace understanding in "later Trinitarian orthodoxy."<sup>369</sup> Origen gave "theological significance to the term hypostasis while speaking of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."<sup>370</sup> He claimed that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God and has always existed, from everlasting to everlasting.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Meredith and Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 4.

<sup>364</sup> Anatolios, *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*, 3.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>366</sup> Live Stream Ministry, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation*, 11.

<sup>367</sup> IP, "Re-imagining Divine Simplicity in Trinitarian Theology", n.p.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>370</sup> Maspero, and Wozniak, *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology*, 111.

<sup>371</sup> Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, "Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of Hypostasis." *Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 3 (07, 2012).

The fourth century “gave rise to a consensus of Trinitarian grammar,” which is referred to as “pro-Nicene theology.”<sup>372</sup> Marcellus of Ancyra (320-374 A.D.) wrote against the heresies of Arius and Tritheism.<sup>373</sup> Marcellus of Ancyra was also charged with being a modalist, but his followers “presented a statement of belief which clearly anathematized Sabellius and modalism.”<sup>374</sup>

Augustine, a 4<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, inferred that a certain Trinity can be found in “the most trifling things,” reflecting that the Triune nature of the Creator can be found within His Creation.<sup>375</sup> “Augustine conceived of divine unity in terms of the inseparable equality of one substance.”<sup>376</sup> Augustine and other western theologians “did not emphasize divine unity to the point of erasing the hypostatic distinctions in the Godhead.”<sup>377</sup> Augustine “draws the conclusion that distinction of relational predicates does not entail distinction of substance.”<sup>378</sup> He understands that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one Substance.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together”, 781.

<sup>373</sup> Live Stream Ministry, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation*, 11.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Boyd Taylor Coleman and Dale M. Coulter, eds., Hugh of St. Victor, *Trinity and Creation, Victorine Texts in Translation, Exegesis, Theology and Spirituality from the Abbey of St. Victor* (New York: New City Press, 2001), 159.

<sup>376</sup> Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together”, 783.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 785.

<sup>378</sup> Richard Cross, “Two models of the Trinity?” *The Heythrop Journal* 43, no. 3 (2002): 286.

<sup>379</sup> Mark Eli Kalderon, “I-Trinitarian Perception”, *Aristotelian Society Supplementary* 91, no.1 (2017).

## Church Fathers - 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries

The Athanasian Creed was first utilized in the sixth century.<sup>380</sup> The Athanasian Creed explains the doctrine of the Trinity as “that we worship one God in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity; neither confusing the persons, nor dividing the substance.”<sup>381</sup> The creed expounds further to state “ for there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Ghost; But the Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.”<sup>382</sup>

### Church Councils and Trinitarian Doctrine

#### First Council of Nicaea 325 A.D.

The First Council of Nicaea 325 A.D. did not “invent the doctrine of the Doctrine of the Trinity” but merely confirmed a belief that had already gained world-wide acceptance amongst the church.<sup>383</sup> At the Council of Nicaea, bishops gathered together and sought to overcome the arguments from Arius.<sup>384</sup> An Alexandrian presbyter, Arius wanted to emphasize the “transcendence and sole divinity of God” and in doing so, denied the “co-eternal state of the Logos with God.”<sup>385</sup> Arius believed that God the Father alone is “beginning, unbegotten, and

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<sup>380</sup> While the Athanasian Creed contains the name of the Alexandrian bishop, Athanasius, who died in 373 A.D., did not directly contribute to it. David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria, Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic Father* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 182.

<sup>381</sup> Thomas, *Jehovah Witnesses*, 79.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Stan Thomas, *Jehovah Witnesses: and What They Believe*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), 78.

<sup>384</sup> Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 21.

<sup>385</sup> Guido M. Berndt and Roland Steinacher, *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed* (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 9.

eternal” and to give the Son co-eternal existence would strip God of His absolute uniqueness.<sup>386</sup> He argued that the Son, as begotten of the Father, was created.<sup>387</sup> Arius believed that the Son was “wholly on the side of the Divine” but subordinate to the Father.<sup>388</sup>

This first council was under the leadership of Athanasius, who affirmed “the eternal generation of the Son (against modalism).”<sup>389</sup> At this council it was stated that “the Son was *homoousios* or of the same essence or being as the Father (against Arianism and any type of ontological hierarchialism in the Godhead).”<sup>390</sup> This council was mainly focused on the dispute between Arius and his form of tritheism against Athanasius with the orthodox teaching of the Trinity.<sup>391</sup> The result of this Council was the Nicene Creed, which refuted and overthrew Arius and his version of tritheism.<sup>392</sup> By the action of the Council of Nicaea, Sebellius’ form of modalism and tritheism, specifically, was deemed heretical.<sup>393</sup>

### **First Council of Constantinople 381 A.D.**

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed states Jesus Christ was “true God from true God, begotten not made.”<sup>394</sup> The Creed continues and proclaims, “the Holy Spirit, the Lord”, “Who

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<sup>386</sup> Berndt and Steinacher, *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed*, 9.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 34.

<sup>390</sup> Olson and Hall. *The Trinity*, 34.

<sup>391</sup> Live Stream Ministry Staff, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation of the Triune God According to the Bible* (Live Stream Ministry, 1994), 10.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*, 48.

proceeds from the Father, who is worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son.”<sup>395</sup> This creed was produced at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. and was approved at the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381 A.D.<sup>396</sup> The creed concentrates on the “equality of the Son and the Spirit to the Father.”<sup>397</sup>

### **Council of Ephesus 431 A.D.**

The Council of Ephesus convened in 431 A.D. by Christian bishops and by the Roman Emperor Theodosius II. This council confirmed the Nicene Creed and condemned the beliefs and teaching of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. Nestorius taught that Jesus was two distinct persons. The Council of Ephesus rejected this teaching and affirmed the belief that Jesus was one person with two distinct natures, fully God and fully human, and not two different persons. Nestorius’s doctrine emerged from his own rejection of the Marian title *Theotokos*, which means God bearer.

### **Council of Chalcedon 451 A.D.**

The Council of Chalcedon was held in 451 A.D. and dealt “more explicitly with the specific Christological issues.”<sup>398</sup> This council was convened by Emperor Marcian. Gregory Nazianzen, who wrote a few letters on doctrinal issues, some of which, namely “the letters to Cleodionius being important statements of the case against Apollinarius”, played a role with

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<sup>395</sup> Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*, 48.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>398</sup> Frances Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (First Fortress Press Edition, 1983), 216.

addressing these issues, in that the first of these letters were adopted by this Council.<sup>399</sup> The Apollinairians had “resorted to poetic propaganda” to promote their position.<sup>400</sup>

### **Third Council of Constantinople III 680 A.D.**

The Third Council of Constantinople was convened by Constantine IV and turned the council into an ecumenical council.<sup>401</sup> This council included Bishops from throughout the entire empire, which included the “Monothelite stronghold of Syria.”<sup>402</sup> This council condemned Monothelitism.<sup>403</sup> This council glossed over monoenergism, which is the affirming that Christ has two operations, human and divine.<sup>404</sup> At this council, it was confirmed that Christ had two wills a human and divine.<sup>405</sup>

### Names and Origins of Trinitarian Heresies

#### **The Heresy of Arianism**

Arianism began “as a theory of Christianity”, that is partly due to the “Eastern reaction of philosophy against a gospel of the Son of God.”<sup>406</sup> “Arius was a disciple of the greatest critic of his time, the venerated Martyr Lucian at Antioch.”<sup>407</sup> Martyr Lucian was known for “his

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<sup>399</sup> Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 99.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Joseph Francis Kelly, *The Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church: A History* (Liturgical Press, 2009), 58.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>404</sup> Kelly, *The Ecumenical Council*, 59.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> H.M. Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy* (Ballantyne, Hanson &, 1898), 1.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 5.



dialectical skill and mastery of subtly irony.”<sup>408</sup> At the beginning of the Arian controversy, around the year of 318, the aim of Arianism was not to “lower the person of the Lord or refuse Him worship”, but to defend against the charge of polytheism.<sup>409</sup> Arianism errors in the “making of the Trinity of persons, a trinity of substances; and that of Sabellius, who made of the unity of essence a unity of person.”<sup>410</sup>

“Arius was not denying the divinity of Christ; indeed, he called Jesus “strong God” and “full God.”<sup>411</sup> He “argued that it is blasphemous to think that” Jesus was divine by nature.<sup>412</sup> Arius validates his conclusion about the nature of Jesus Christ by iterating that Christ Himself said that the “Father is greater than He.”<sup>413</sup> Arius concluded from the Scriptures that “Christ the Word could only be a Creature like ourselves.”<sup>414</sup> “ The Arian Christ was a ‘creature’ or a “work” of God the Creator who has been promoted to the rank of a divine Son and redeemer.”<sup>415</sup> However, Jesus was different from the rest of mankind “because God had created Him directly but all other things through Him.”<sup>416</sup> Therefore, they believed Christ “had been promoted by God

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<sup>408</sup> Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy*, 5.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Morris, “The Doctrine of the Trinity”, 220.

<sup>411</sup> Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: the 4000-year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 107.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>415</sup> Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 1.

<sup>416</sup> Armstrong, *A History of God*, 109.

to divine status.”<sup>417</sup> “God had foreseen that when the Logos became man He would obey Him perfectly and had, so to speak, conferred divinity upon Jesus in advance.”<sup>418</sup> Jesus “stood in need of God’s empowering Holy Spirit”, similarly to the rest of God’s Image bearers who need to receive the Spirit.<sup>419</sup>

Jehovah Witnesses have adopted the belief of Arianism and hold to this heresy as doctrine. Arianism is the heresy that teaches that the “Logos, or Word, or Son is divine, but not co-equal or co-eternal with the Father. Created before all creatures, yet participating in the work of creation, redemption and government.”<sup>420</sup>

The main leaders that refuted the Arian heresy were Alexander and Athanasius of Alexandria.<sup>421</sup> These two bishops stated that despite the Arians’ high status of Christ, the Arian heresy demotes Christ to a “creature promoted to the status of a god.”<sup>422</sup> In the year of A.D. 324, the Bishop Alexander of Alexandria sent a letter to the Bishop of Constantinople detailing the nature and the progress of the Arian heresy in Egypt.<sup>423</sup> Athanasius “developed *Four Discourses Against the Arians* and other works are mostly based in the “relationship between Christ’s deity and humanity.”<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Armstrong, *A History of God*, 109.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, 6.

<sup>420</sup> Brumback, *God in Three Person*, 23.

<sup>421</sup> Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, 1.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>424</sup> Olson and Hall. *The Trinity*, 33.

## Heresy of Modalism

The heresy of modalism, otherwise known as Modalistic Monarchianism, Sabellianism or Patripassianism was known and encountered by the early church.<sup>425</sup> The definition of modalism is that there are “no distinctions in the Divine Being, no trinity of persons. The One God has revealed Himself in three different forms or modes.”<sup>426</sup> Once the purpose of these manifestations is accomplished, the triad will be contracted and become the monad once again.<sup>427</sup> The earliest representatives of modalism were at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, from Praxeas and Noetus.<sup>428</sup> Praxeas believed that the Father and Son were one identical person and the Father Himself became man and died on the cross in Christ.<sup>429</sup> The beliefs of Praxeas were known as Patripassianism, from the Latin words Pater (Father) and Passio (suffering), which reiterated the belief that the Father suffered on the cross.<sup>430</sup> The heresy of modalism was addressed by Tertullian in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>431</sup> Tertullian wrote against Praxeas in his work titled *Against Praxeas*, “accusing him of driving out the Holy Spirit and of crucifying the Father.”<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals, and the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 9.

<sup>426</sup> Brumback, *God in Three Persons*, 23.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Live Stream Ministry, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation*, 6-7.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

In 200 A.D. Noetus published the same views and beliefs as Praxeas.<sup>433</sup> Noetus believed that “Christ was the Father Himself, and that the Father Himself was born and suffered and died.”<sup>434</sup> Noetus taught that in order for Christ to be fully God, Christ has to be identical with the Father, therefore if Christ suffered, the Father suffered.<sup>435</sup> He believed that there is only one God “the Father, who manifested Himself as He pleased.”<sup>436</sup> The Son is a “designation of God when He reveals Himself to the world and to men.”<sup>437</sup> Sabellius was the most original of the modalists.<sup>438</sup> Sabellius had similar theology to Noetus, but Sabellius “gave a definite place to the Holy Spirit as well as to the Son.”<sup>439</sup> Sabellius was almost more concerned with preserving the unity of God in inferring that God is one person and of one essence.<sup>440</sup> Essentially, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all the names of God, in accordance to different circumstances.<sup>441</sup> “God does now act as the Father, now as the Son, and now as the Holy Spirit, but never at the same time.”<sup>442</sup> Sabellius taught that the Son ended in the ascension and the Holy Spirit continues on in regeneration and sanctification.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Live Stream Ministry, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation*, 6-7.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Live Stream Ministry Staff, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation*, 7.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>442</sup> Live Stream Ministry, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation*, 7.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

Modelist Monarchianism came into existence at the end of the second century.<sup>444</sup> Monarchianism is derived from the Greek word “Monarchia” which means the rule of one man.<sup>445</sup> Monarchianism was “concerned about the divine unity or “monarchy”.”<sup>446</sup> “The dominant principle” or Monarchianism is that God is one.<sup>447</sup> Monarchianism attempted to demonstrate that Christians did not worship three Gods and asserted the full divinity of Jesus Christ.<sup>448</sup> However, this belief system lost the independent essence of Christ and merged Christ’s essence with the Father.<sup>449</sup>

Modalism was developed during a point in history that the Church was concerned with keeping the unity of God. The Christian church was charged with tritheism and worshipping three distinct Gods. However, in attempting to keep the unity of God, modalism lost the unique role and person of the Trinity.

### **The Tritheism Heresy**

Tritheism teaches that the three persons in the Trinity are three separate Gods.<sup>450</sup> Therefore, the Father is one God, Jesus Christ is another God and the Holy Spirit as well is another God.<sup>451</sup> A form of tritheism is Arianism, in which the Father was fully God and the Son

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<sup>444</sup> Live Stream Ministry, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation*, 6.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Live Stream Ministry Staff, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation*, 6.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>451</sup> Live Stream Ministry, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation*, 9.

and Holy Spirit were types of God's but did not have the same status of Godhood as the Father<sup>452</sup> About 200 years after the Council of Nicaea, another form of Tritheism emerged from Johannes Philoponus.<sup>453</sup> Philoponus made the distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and claimed that there were three essences in the one common essence of the Godhead.<sup>454</sup>

John of Damascus, who was the last of the Eastern Greek Fathers, corrected the heresy of Tritheism and stressed the divine unity of the Godhead.<sup>455</sup> This church Father saw Jesus as the “channel through whom the divine life flows eternally from the Father to the Holy Spirit and through whom also the union of the three hypostases.”<sup>456</sup> Hypostases is “a technical term referring to the Persons of the Godhead.”<sup>457</sup>

## **Mormonism**

### The Mormon Doctrine of God

The Mormon church, officially known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, is a church that was founded by Joseph Smith. This church was officially founded by six individuals in 1830.<sup>458</sup> Joseph Smith's writings and historical documents reflect the doctrine that is taught in the LDS church.<sup>459</sup> The Mormon church had its beginnings when Joseph Smith

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<sup>452</sup> Live Stream Ministry, *Modalism, Tritheism, or the Pure Revelation*, 9. , 10.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>458</sup> Douglas James Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>459</sup> Joseph Smith and Dean C. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret BK.,2002), 113.

searched to find the church he should join among all the Christian denominations.<sup>460</sup> The church officially teaches that Joseph Smith had his first vision in 1820, when two personages spoke to him in the grove and instructed him to join no existing church.<sup>461</sup> According to Joseph Smith, Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ spoke to him and stated that all churches were false and to join none of the existing churches.<sup>462</sup> Joseph Smith was to restore the church of all the doctrines and practices that were supposedly practiced by Jesus and His apostles that were lost.<sup>463</sup> It was believed by his followers that this truth was a revelation from God and declared that Joseph Smith was a prophet of the one true church.<sup>464</sup>

The context surrounding the origins of Mormon doctrine was allegedly during a time of a religious revival in the Palmyra- Manchester area.<sup>465</sup> Two streams of thought which were prominent during the beginnings of the Mormon church were Adventism and popular magic.<sup>466</sup> In the 1800's, spiritual revival "emphasized the role played by one's own free will in choosing God's gift of salvation."<sup>467</sup> Revivals and camp meetings lasted weeks during this period, and contained strong encouragement of lay participation.<sup>468</sup> Spiritual excitement and religious zeal

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<sup>460</sup> Douglas James Davies. *An Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>461</sup> Richard Abanes, *One Nation Under God's: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2003), 12.

<sup>462</sup> Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 16.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

<sup>465</sup> Abanes, *One Nation Under God's*, 11-12.

<sup>466</sup> Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 12.

<sup>467</sup> Abanes, *One Nation Under God's*, 4.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

heightened during that time and people desired spiritual fulfillment.<sup>469</sup> Joseph Smith came to a different understanding of the Trinity reportedly through his own experience and encounter with two “personages.”

The *Pearl of Great Price*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, the *Book of Mormon*, and the King James Bible are all texts that are utilized by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter- Day Saints. The compilation of these texts produces the church’s understanding of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Bible is authoritative as long the text is translated correctly. The four volumes of books are viewed as authoritative and provide information on what the LDS church claims to be the fullness of the Gospel.

The portrait of God in Mormonism is the heretical belief of Tritheism. Tritheism is the belief that the Godhead, consisting of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three sperate gods. Jesus of Nazareth is “one of three gods overseeing this planet.”<sup>470</sup> Joseph Smith, stated that God was once a man who reached exaltation into godhood.<sup>471</sup> Therefore, the god of Mormonism is not a spirit, but has a body made of flesh and bone.<sup>472</sup> To reiterate the nature and doctrine of God taught in the Mormon church, is understood that “God Himself was once as we are now and is an exalted man.”<sup>473</sup> In the *Book of Mormon*, God appears with a body of flesh and blood.<sup>474</sup> In the *Journal of Discourses*, it states “ that God, our heavenly Father, was perhaps once a child, and

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<sup>469</sup> Abanes, *One Nation Under God’s*, 5.

<sup>470</sup> Abanes, *One Nation Under God’s*, 1

<sup>471</sup> Kirt Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution, (1830-1915)* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013), 120.

<sup>472</sup> Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God*, 12.

<sup>473</sup> Arbaugh, “Evolution of Mormon doctrine”, 164.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.



mortal like we ourselves, and rose step by step in scale of progress . . . until He has arrived at the point where He now is.”<sup>475</sup> A principle in the LDS church is that “Heavenly Father, has had to learn these principles, so that divine wisdom consists in precisely such an ever- growing knowledge.”<sup>476</sup> The God in Mormonism, Heavenly Father, is a God amongst other gods, who had to work his way to godhood, and is not the first God to exist, but existed after a series of gods in other worlds.<sup>477</sup> Within Mormon theology, “God had undergone a process of progression and that, through special rituals and ways of life, human beings could also undergo a process of transformation or apotheosis to become gods in the next world.”<sup>478</sup>

Smith preached “where was there ever a Son without a Father? And where was there ever a Father without First being a Son?” as evidence that God was once a man Himself.<sup>479</sup> Joseph Smith concluded that “Since we have a Father. Who is our God, we must also have a mother, who possesses the attributes of the Godhead?”<sup>480</sup> Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, are the source of all spirit children in the pre-existence, before the spirit children come to earth and are given bodies.<sup>481</sup> Jesus Christ in the LDS faith is a “literal Son (Spirit Child) of a god (Elohim) and his wife.”<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 236.

<sup>476</sup> Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 24.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

<sup>478</sup> Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 65.

<sup>479</sup> Arbaugh, “Evolution of Mormon doctrine”, 162.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>481</sup> Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 70.

<sup>482</sup> Abanes, *One Nation Under God's*, 378.

The book of Moses 6:9 which is in the Latter-day Saint scriptures, states “In the image of his own body, male and female, created he them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam.”<sup>483</sup> The God in Mormonism has a physical body and has given His creation the same type of body, which consists of flesh and bone. In *Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22, it states “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.”<sup>484</sup> This verse exuberates the LDS teaching that God the Father and God the Son are two separate gods within the Latter-day Saint Theology?

### **The Person of Christ In Mormonism**

A feature of LDS teaching is that the church claims that Jesus Christ is Jehovah and the God of Israel from the Old Testament.<sup>485</sup> Jesus is the Son of God, “and this in the most direct sense of God the Father engaging with Mary to engender his son.”<sup>486</sup> Brigham Young stated that “whom we call the Father was the Father of the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was also his Father pertaining to the flesh.”<sup>487</sup> Therefore, LDS theology claims that God the Father impregnated Mary similar to the way man populates the earth.<sup>488</sup> At times Jesus Christ is called

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<sup>483</sup> Joseph Smith, *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ; the Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013), n.p..

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 67.

<sup>486</sup> Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 67.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

the Father, but only on occasions when Heavenly Father declares Jesus should represent Him.<sup>489</sup> Jesus was “Son of God” who was distinct from the Father.<sup>490</sup> The Holy Spirit is referred more often as the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is a “personage of Spirit, a Spirit Person, a Spirit Man, A spirit entity.”<sup>491</sup> The Holy Ghost power and influence is omnipresent, however, the Holy Ghost Himself is not omnipresent.<sup>492</sup>

In Mormonism, the atonement “atoned only for Adam’s transgression by sweating blood in Gethsemane.”<sup>493</sup> Therefore, Jesus suffered at Gethsemane and the cross for the sins of mankind.<sup>494</sup> “Jesus’ sacrificial death is not able to cleanse some people of all their sins.”<sup>495</sup> In addition to the atonement and works, there is no salvation without accepting the belief that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God.<sup>496</sup> Within the doctrine of Mormonism, just like Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ was an exalted man who Himself became God. The moment Christ was resurrected, He became immortal, incorruptible and eternal.<sup>497</sup> The very doctrine, viewpoint and perspective of God affects the work of atonement. In the *Book of Mormon*, in 2 Nephi 25:23 states “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved,

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<sup>489</sup> Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 69.

<sup>490</sup> Arbaugh, “Evolution of Mormon doctrine”, 160.

<sup>491</sup> Marvin W. Cowan, *Mormon Claims Answered: New, Revised and Expanded* (Marvin W. Cowan, 1989), n.p..

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Abanes, *One Nation Under God’s*, 378.

<sup>494</sup> Bruce D. Porter and Gerald R. McDermott, “Is Mormonism Christian?” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 186, no. 35 (2008).

<sup>495</sup> Abanes, *One Nation Under God’s*, 378.

<sup>496</sup> Richard Abanes, *One Nation Under God’s*, 378.

<sup>497</sup> Porter and McDermott, “Is Mormonism Christian?”, n.p..

after all we can do.” If Jesus was not fully God and fully human, Jesus would not be the perfect sacrifice on the cross.

### Apologetic Defense

Origen, a 2<sup>nd</sup> century church father, states that “God therefore must not be thought to be any kind of body, not to exist in a body.”<sup>498</sup> God is specifically without a body, because a body would result in a god being confined to space and time.<sup>499</sup> “The mistake with tritheism is that it views the Trinity as a number of finite supernatural beings related externally, each existing in a sphere exclusive of the other.”<sup>500</sup>

An important verse to utilize when addressing an apologetic defense of the Trinity is found in the book of Isaiah, an accepted book by the Latter-Day Saint church, God explicitly states that “I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.”<sup>501</sup> “Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any . . . I am the Lord and there is none else.”<sup>502</sup> Mormons interpret these verses to mean that there is a “Chief or Supreme” god that presides over all the other gods.<sup>503</sup> A verse to counter this interpretation is Paul’s statement in his epistle to the Galatians that “God is one.”<sup>504</sup> However, Joseph Smith contracted the idea that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are “only one God” with the comment that it would be a “curious

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<sup>498</sup> IP, “Re-imagining Divine Simplicity in Trinitarian Theology”, n.p.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> Vincent Brummer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine* (S.I.: Routledge, 2017), 103.

<sup>501</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 233.

<sup>502</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 233.

<sup>503</sup> E. Al Roberts, *A Disparity in Doctrine and Theology, Baptist Versus Mormon Doctrine Theology* (Bloomington, IN: West Bow Press, 2011), 35.

<sup>504</sup> “Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one,” Gal. 3:20.

organization” with all three “crammed into” one God.<sup>505</sup> Christian apologist James White notes that the Trinity “solves problems rather than creating them,” because the Trinitarian doctrine helps to explain “the concept of one God while allowing for the three persons being fully and completely God.”<sup>506</sup>

The Church of Latter-Day Saints misuses John 10:34 which states “Ye are gods,” “falsely implying that Jesus endorsed godhood for man.”<sup>507</sup> The context of this passage does not reflect the LDS conclusion that Jesus endorsed godhood to man. Michael S. Heiser insists that the original context of Psalm 82:6, which is the verse Jesus is quoting, has the divine counsel as its focus.<sup>508</sup> Heiser disagrees with the *elohim* being interpreted as mere humans because he feels like it undermines Jesus’ claim to deity.<sup>509</sup> The quotation in John:34 is “bookended with two suggestions of his deity”, the identification of the Father in Jesus (v.30) and the assertion that the Father is in Jesus (v.38) respectively.<sup>510</sup> In John 10, “Jesus shows His equality with the Father and deservedly is called God.”<sup>511</sup> Mormons state that “they are gods in embryo, and they have not yet reached godhood.”<sup>512</sup> The LDS Apostle James Talmage rightly interprets John 10:34 and

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<sup>505</sup> Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, *Answering Mormon’s Questions: Ready Responses for Inquiring Latter-Day Saints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2012), 123.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>508</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), np.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>510</sup> Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, n.p.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*

Psalm 82 in the passage's proper context. This LDS Apostle writes "Divinely Appointed Judges" are called gods, and in Psalm 82:6, "judges invested by divine appointment are called gods."<sup>513</sup>

Anselm of Canterbury's ontological argument is that God is the most powerful and "greatest conceivable being."<sup>514</sup> However, the idea of God in Mormonism is that there are apparently three separate greatest conceivable beings. According to the law of non-contradiction, there cannot be three greatest conceivable beings, because that within itself cannot be the greatest being, if that being shares His greatness. The idea of God is that He is worthy to be worshipped and that nothing "could possibly detract from His goodness."<sup>515</sup> The LDS theology of salvation includes the belief that God was once a man and man can become God. The LDS doctrine confirms that men are sinners and are not perfectly good, therefore, man has done wrong and has detracted from the goodness that is supposed in God. If God was not wholly perfect, then goodness will cease to be a standard

John 4:24 states "God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." A Spirit does not have flesh and bone like man. The Bible supports the belief that God does not consist of a body with flesh and bone but is a Spirit. First Timothy 1:7 states "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to <sup>[a]</sup>God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever." God is the invisible and is made known to man through the person of Jesus Christ. In Luke 24:39, the verse states "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." God the Son has flesh and bone, but God the Father is clearly a Spirit.

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<sup>513</sup> Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, n.p.

<sup>514</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 505.

<sup>515</sup> Morris, *Our Idea of God*, 105.

There are inconsistencies in the theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Milton R. Hunter stated that “Jesus became a God and reached His great state of understanding through consistent effort and continuous obedience to all the Gospel truths.”<sup>516</sup> One of those Gospel principles is celestial marriage; therefore, Jesus must have been married.<sup>517</sup> The LDS Apostle Orson Pratt claimed that Jesus was married to Mary, Martha and Mary Magdalen.<sup>518</sup> In LDS doctrine, Jesus received His flesh and bone when God the Father impregnated Mary. Joseph Smith taught in *Doctrines and Covenants* 130:22 that God had a tangible body of flesh and bones.<sup>519</sup> However, the Holy Spirit does not have a body or “flesh and bones.”<sup>520</sup> Jesus is said to be the first born that existed was in the beginning with the “Father” but all of the lives that are “begotten through” “Jesus” and are said to have also existed in the beginning with the “Father”.<sup>521</sup> The LDS doctrines about Christ are not cohesive.

The doctrine of God, specifically Heavenly Father in LDS theology demotes His deity. The God in Mormonism is not self-sustaining or eternal as Scripture explains in Psalm 90:2, which states God is from everlasting to everlasting. Elohim is God “simply because of all these intelligences honor and sustain Him as such.”<sup>522</sup> “It follows as a corollary that if He should ever do anything to violate the confidence or sense of justice” there would be repercussions.<sup>523</sup> The

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<sup>516</sup> Cowan, *Mormon Claims Answered*, n.p..

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> McKeever and Johnson, *Answering Mormon's Questions*, 114.

<sup>520</sup> Roberts, *A Disparity in Doctrine*, 33.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

other intelligences would “promptly withdraw their support” and Elohim would cease to be God. The God in Mormonism is not self-sustaining or eternal.

### **Jehovah’s Witnesses**

Jehovah’s Witnesses and have held to the doctrine of Arianism. The beginnings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses religion are found in a group of Bible students taught by Charles Taze Russell, in the 1870’s.<sup>524</sup> In 1879, Russell founded *The Herald of the Morning* which developed into what is now known as *The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society*.<sup>525</sup> The appeal of Russell’s teaching, according to biographer Fredrick Zydek, was that he removed some of Christianity’s “shrouded mysteries” like the nature of the soul, the resurrection, and the Trinity, and gave them rational explanations.<sup>526</sup> Charles Taze Russell and his followers were formally known as Jehovah’s Witnesses in the year 1931.<sup>527</sup>

The Jehovah’s Witness doctrine of God is the belief that there is one God who is Jehovah, His Son, who is a direct creation by God, is a god. Russell believed that Jesus was born the Son of God in 2 B.C.E.<sup>528</sup> The Holy Spirit in this religion is not God, rather an impersonal force that directs Witness members to live out the commandments of Jehovah God.

### **New World Translation vs the Bible**

The New World Translation of the Bible John 1:1 reads as “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.” The New King James Version

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<sup>524</sup> Zoe Knox “Writing Witness History: The Historiography of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.” *Journal of Religious History* 35, no. 2 (2011): 160.

<sup>525</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 49.

<sup>526</sup> Knox, “The History of the Jehovah’s Witnesses”, 253.

<sup>527</sup> Knox, “Writing Witness History: The Historiography”, 160.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid.



states “the Word was God.” The New World Translation also has a different translation of 1 Timothy 3:16, which states “He was manifested in the flesh”, rather than that of the NKJV of the Bible, where the verse reads that “God was manifested in the flesh.” The New World Translation also changed Genesis 1: 1-2, which is correctly read as “the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of waters” to “God’s active force was moving to and fro over the surface of the waters.” The Jehovah’s Witnesses Bible also altered Zephaniah 12:10, which reads “so they will look on Me whom they pierced” to “they will look upon the one whom they have pierced.” These verses explicitly remove the direct references to the nature of God. These verses do not reflect an analysis of manuscript evidence but rather demonstrate a change based on reflecting the scripture to the beliefs and doctrines of the Jehovah’s Witness religion. One way to address this issue would be to clearly demonstrate that the New Testament concept of Lord is identical with the LORD of the Old Testament, also referred to as YHWH or Jehovah.

One of the best examples of this concept, that the God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament, can be found in the eighth chapter of 1 Corinthians. Paul is concerned with the eating of food offered to idols (v.4) in the pagan environment the Corinthians found themselves. In this context, Paul’s concern is “strictly monotheistic.”<sup>529</sup> Paul is very deliberate with linking the identity of God and Christ to the God of the Old Testament with creedal statements. In verse 4, Paul uses the typical Jewish monotheistic formula “there is no God, except one.”<sup>530</sup> He uses the *Shema*, the classical Jewish statement of the uniqueness of God, “taken from the Torah itself” in verse six when speaking of the Father and Christ.<sup>531</sup> The apostle

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<sup>529</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 27.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

reproduced all the words of the statement about YHWH in the *Shema*, but he rearranged the words in such a way as to “produce an affirmation of both one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ.”<sup>532</sup> Paul is including Jesus in the unique identity reserved for the one God, which is affirmed in the *Shema*.<sup>533</sup>

#### Jehovah’s Witnesses Doctrine of God

The Jehovah’s Witnesses reject the triune nature of God and the deity of Christ.<sup>534</sup> Jesus of Nazareth was the “Son of God, not God Himself.”<sup>535</sup> It is stated within the Witness religion that “Jesus had an existence in heaven before coming to earth. But was it as one of the persons in an almighty, eternal triune Godhead?” the answer is unquestionably “No.”<sup>536</sup> It is said within Witness teaching that “Jesus was a created Spirit being, just as angels were spirit beings created by God.”<sup>537</sup> Within the doctrine of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ did not have a physical resurrection but a spiritual resurrection.<sup>538</sup> This is in direct contradiction with John 20:27, which states “Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving but believing.” The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ translation of this verse in their *New World Translation* is virtually the same, however they attempt to deny that Christ is in a physical body in this verse by arguing that the

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<sup>532</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 28.

<sup>533</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 28.

<sup>534</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 55.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

doors were shut, so Jesus must have been in spiritual form to enter the room.<sup>539</sup> The Jehovah's Witness theories of Jesus appearing only in a spiritual sense, and not a physical one, are clearly discredited by other references in Scripture. In Luke 24 Jesus requests food (v. 41) and then eats it (v.43) to demonstrate his physicality. The Lord made an explicit point in this chapter of Luke that he not a spirit but "flesh and bone" to prove his bodily resurrection.<sup>540</sup>

The Holy Spirit is "the invisible active force of Almighty God that moves His servants to do His will."<sup>541</sup> The Holy Spirit is not the third person in the Trinity or a person altogether, rather it is an active force of God.<sup>542</sup> The Holy Spirit is "not equal to God but is always at His disposition and subordinate to Him."<sup>543</sup>

Bible verses such as 2 Corinthians 2:9 and Philippians 2:5-11, were often used by Arians to demonstrate the Bible's support for the Arian doctrine of Christ.<sup>544</sup> Arianism focuses on the human characteristics of Jesus.<sup>545</sup> Arians view biblical passages that describe Jesus receiving His authority and function as indicative of the Son's derivative character.<sup>546</sup> Scriptures that can be interpreted this way are Matthew 28:18, where Jesus says "all authority has been given to me", and John 3:35, where it is said that the Father loves Jesus and "gives all things into His hand."

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<sup>539</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 104.

<sup>540</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 104.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>544</sup> Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, 2.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

Jehovah's Witnesses conclude that Jesus is not equal to the Father because Jesus was sent to redeem man.<sup>547</sup>

In rebuttal, being sent by the Father does not equate to inequality between the Father and Son.<sup>548</sup> The Son was not compelled to die for man, but freely laid down His life to redeem man.<sup>549</sup> John 10:18 states "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

The Watchtower Society claims that it is not reasonable to believe that "three persons exist in one Godhead."<sup>550</sup> Therefore, since the belief cannot be understood, any belief that cannot be understood should not be believed.<sup>551</sup> The Watchtower Society states that "there are no mysteries in the Bible" and the Trinity is a mystery.<sup>552</sup> The proclamation from the Witnesses that nothing that is a mystery can be accepted as truth is counterintuitive to the idea of God. God is a God that can never be exhaustively understood, but He can be sufficiently understood and remain largely a mystery. The acts of miracles within the Bible such as the virgin birth, resurrection, the salvation of mankind are great acts of God done through mystery.

Jehovah's Witnesses often charge Trinitarian believers with the fact that the word Trinity does not appear in Scripture. However, their concern should not be if the word Trinity appears in Scripture, rather, if the doctrine of the Trinity is an accurate depiction of God founded in the

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<sup>547</sup> Brumback, *God in Three Persons*, 139.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

<sup>550</sup> Thomas, *Jehovah Witnesses*, 79.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid.

context of the whole Bible.<sup>553</sup> Therefore, the question must be: Does the Bible depict a Triune God in the context of the entirety of Scripture?<sup>554</sup>

Some Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Council of Nicaea which was conducted in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, "invented the doctrine of the Trinity", however, it must be understood that the Council merely confirmed a belief that had already "gained world-wide acceptance amongst Christians."<sup>555</sup> The Trinity was already accepted as an object of Christian faith prior to Nicaea.<sup>556</sup> References to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were infused throughout "liturgical formulae, creeds, and the rite of baptism", trinitarian doctrine was "inscribed into the grammar of the Christian faith."<sup>557</sup> It was taken for granted that Christian faith and worship was "oriented to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."<sup>558</sup> The common Christian belief before the Council of Nicaea was that Jesus was believed to be both human and divine and that "this combination of humanity and divinity was salvific."<sup>559</sup>

The Council merely affirmed a belief that was already viewed as truth. The doctrine of the Trinity is a belief that did not emerge from the church fathers but was proclaimed and affirmed by the authors of the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses will be forced to reconcile the not-Triune God to the eternity of God's love. In 1 John 4:8, it states God is love, in absence of the

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<sup>553</sup> Thomas, *Jehovah Witnesses*, 78.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> Thomas, *Jehovah Witnesses*, 78.

<sup>556</sup> Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 36.

<sup>557</sup> Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 36.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 37.

doctrine of the Trinity, who was the object of God's love before creation?<sup>560</sup> Witnesses will be forced to claim that this is a mystery.<sup>561</sup> God, in the tri-unity of his own being, enjoys the complete and unchanging "love relationships among the persons of the Trinity"<sup>562</sup>

There is a belief within Arianism which claims that "if therefore God is unchanging and unchangeable, but whatever is unchanging and unchangeable is neither begotten nor begetting."<sup>563</sup> This claim is futile to the argument for the Trinity. Jesus, who is Triune, has never ceased to be in the Godhead, the Godhead is unchangeable and unchanging. Simply for Christ to be begotten does not cease His eternity as God. God does not change and neither does the Godhead, though the Son is begotten of the Father. Arianism destroys the Christian monotheistic principle. "When another god is introduced against the Creator, then is it evil, when it leads to the dethronement of the Creator."<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> Thomas, *Jehovah Witnesses*, 78.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 562.

<sup>563</sup> Marius Victorinus and Mary T. Clark, *Theological Treatises on the Trinity (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 69)*, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1981. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 13, 2018), 47.

<sup>564</sup> Tertullian and A. Souter, D. LITT, *Tertullian Against Praxeas* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 31.

## Apologetic Defense

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the Jehovah witness religion should be understood, in order to critically analyze the differences between the orthodox teaching of the Trinity and the heretical teaching of the nature of God. The testified basis of both Jehovah's Witness and Christianity for the origins of their respective religions is the Word of God. Therefore, the Bible should be thoroughly examined to determine the cohesiveness of Scripture with the teachings of each religion.

The standard Watchtower argument states that in John 1:1 the original Greek made a distinction between "the God" "with whom the Word is said to be, and the Word himself as "a god."<sup>565</sup> Witnesses claim that the word "god" used in the verse simply means "a mighty, exalted one."<sup>566</sup> The translation of John 1:1 in the New World Translation was changed from "the Word was God" to the "word was a god." Charles Taze Russell claimed that the New World Translation was a more accurate translation of the Greek text of the New Testament. Any arguments Russel formulated to this theory are quickly invalidated by his lack of knowledge of the Greek language. In the court case Russell vs Ross, the attorney asked Russell if he himself knew the Greek alphabet, in which Russell responded with a yes.<sup>567</sup> The attorney continued and asked Russell to translate the Greek words at the top of a document and he could not translate the letters from Greek to English.<sup>568</sup> At the conclusion of the attorney's questions for Russell,

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<sup>565</sup> Thomas, *Jehovah Witnesses*, 83.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

<sup>567</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 55.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

Russell admitted to not knowing the Greek alphabet.<sup>569</sup> During the same trial, Russell admitted to not knowing or understanding the Latin and Hebrew languages.<sup>570</sup>

The New World translation of the Bible added the word “other” to Colossians 1:16-17. The New World translation states “because by means of him all “other” things were created in the heavens and on the earth . . . All “other” things have been created through him. . . . Also, he is before all other things, and by means of him all “other” things were made to exist.” The word “other” is found in no other translation of scripture except the New World Translation.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses religion’s doctrine of God in accordance to the purpose of the cross/stake is not coherent. If Jehovah alone saves, then analogous Jesus could not save mankind through His death on the upright stake. If Jesus was not God in the flesh, who was fully God and fully man, that sacrifice would not be satisfactory for the atonement of man. Christ, and the miracles that He performed, displayed His deity and the validity of His kingdom.<sup>571</sup> The idea of a perfect sacrifice is a sacrifice that is in accordance to the standard of God. Jehovah alone can satisfy His standard because He alone is God. If Jesus is not God in the flesh, that sacrifice would be insufficient for the saving grace of man. The doctrine of God in the Jehovah’s Witnesses, religion is incompatible historically, scripturally and philosophically.

### **Oneness Pentecostal Church**

The Oneness movement really began in the Assemblies of God denomination.<sup>572</sup> A large majority of those who become part of the Pentecostal movement are from Trinitarian

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<sup>569</sup> Martin, *The Kingdom of Cults*, 55.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> John Chrysostom, Saint, Margaret A. Schatkin and Paul W. Harkins, *Apologist*. Vol. 73; 73. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 179.

<sup>572</sup> Frank D. Macchia, “The Oneness-Trinitarian Pentecostal Dialogue: Exploring the Diversity of Apostolic Faith.” *Harvard Theological Review* 130, no. 3 (2010).



backgrounds.<sup>573</sup> The United Pentecostal Church holds to the heresy of modalism. Oneness Pentecostals often associate the doctrine of the Trinity as a product that was invented by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman Catholic Church.<sup>574</sup> The Oneness doctrine about God is based on two Spiritual Truths. These two truths are “that there is only one God, and the second is that Jesus Christ is God.”<sup>575</sup> From these two truths, the conclusion is that Jesus must be the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>576</sup> Oneness Pentecostals state that “only if Jesus is Himself Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can the unity of God and the full deity of Christ be acknowledged with consistency.”<sup>577</sup> A writer, who is part of the Oneness movement, David Bernard, stated that “if there is only one God and that God is the Father, and if Jesus is God, then it logically follows that Jesus is the Father.”<sup>578</sup> The same argument is used to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is God the Holy Spirit.<sup>579</sup>

The Oneness Pentecostal church has unique teachings for each Person in the Trinity. Proponents of this theology believe that the “nature” and “person” are fallible attempts to understand the unity of the Godhead.<sup>580</sup> They contend that the meaning of the word “person” has changed over time and the subtle nuances applied to the word by ancient Greek and Latin theologians have been lost in the modern translation, leaving a false interpretation of the nature

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<sup>573</sup> Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals*, 10.

<sup>574</sup> Brumback, *God in Three Persons*, 19-20.

<sup>575</sup> Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals*, 24.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> Daniel Segraves, “A Oneness Pentecostal Response” *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*. 30.2 (2008): 236.

of God.<sup>581</sup> Jesus is the Father in Oneness theology and this belief is supported through cross-referencing Bible verses that demonstrate that the Father and Jesus “performed certain divine functions.”<sup>582</sup> They understand the distinction found between the Father and the Son in the New Testament as the “same distinction between the humanity of Jesus Christ and the deity of Jesus Christ.”<sup>583</sup> In essence, “To say that Jesus is both the Father and the Son is to say He is both God and man.”<sup>584</sup>

### Oneness Pentecostal Doctrine of God

Oneness Pentecostal minister, Frank Ewart states “we saw that if the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was Jesus Christ, then in some mysterious way, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were made one in person.”<sup>585</sup> Ewart “saw that all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus, bodily.”<sup>586</sup> In Jesus Himself, “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and that Jesus is the one name that fully reveals the one God in His Salvific work as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”<sup>587</sup> Oneness Pentecostals highlight the humanity of Christ in the atonement for mankind rather than His divinity.<sup>588</sup> This religion is similar to Nestorian Christianity in their Monarchian

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<sup>581</sup> Segraves, “A Oneness Pentecostal Response”, 236.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>583</sup> Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals, and the Trinity*, 32.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>585</sup> Macchia, “The Oneness-Trinitarian”, n.p.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*

theology, “in which Christ could relate interactively to the one God who is both omnipresent and incarnate with Him.”<sup>589</sup>

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all titles that were “all manifestations of God that only had functional significance.”<sup>590</sup> In the “modalistic concept of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not equally and eternally co-existent but are merely three successive manifestations of God.”<sup>591</sup> The concept of God in modalism is that there are “three temporary modes of His activity.”<sup>592</sup> “The Father, Son, and Spirit are either temporary or successive roles adopted by God in carrying out the divine plan of redemption.”<sup>593</sup> Oneness doctrine rejects the independent personality of Christ.<sup>594</sup>

Bible Verses that are used in support of Oneness doctrine are verses like Colossians 2:9, which states that the “fullness of the Godhead” dwells in Him.<sup>595</sup> Prophetic passages, such as Isaiah 9:6, speaks of Jesus as the everlasting Father, therefore they conclude, he is God the Father.<sup>596</sup> John 10:30 also demonstrates that the Father and the Son are one, which correlates to the doctrine of modalism.<sup>597</sup>

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<sup>589</sup> Macchia, “The Oneness-Trinitarian”, n.p..

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

<sup>591</sup> Live Stream Ministry, *Modalism, Tritheism*, 6.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals*, 28.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

In Oneness theology, the Son began to exist the moment that Jesus was born in Bethlehem or the preconceived idea of the Son when Jesus was the Father.<sup>598</sup> This does not comply with the distinction which is made between the Father and Son in the first chapter of John.<sup>599</sup>

### **Concept of the Cross in Oneness Pentecostalism**

The Oneness Pentecostal Church's doctrine of modalism has ramifications for the understanding of the cross. In Matthew 27:46, the passage states "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" If Jesus was not distinct from the Father, how can Jesus forsake Himself on the cross?

The doctrine of modalism appears to be innocuous, however is pernicious, and undermines the very Character of God. To understand the seriousness of this issues, there are 14 to 17 million followers of this heretical religion, who are sincerely pursuing this false god.<sup>600</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity is a name for the correct truth claim about God, which is testified in the wholeness of Scripture. The Trinity was "implicitly held by the apostles and other New Testament writers."<sup>601</sup>

### **Apologetic Defense**

It is vital that Oneness members understand that the doctrine of the Trinity is not the heretical teaching of Tritheism.<sup>602</sup> St. Augustine states that the view of the Godhead in the

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<sup>598</sup> Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals*, 94.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

<sup>600</sup> Macchia, "The Oneness-Trinitarian", 329.

<sup>601</sup> Brumback, *God in Three Persons*, 21.

<sup>602</sup> Macchia, "The Oneness-Trinitarian", 329.

Christian faith is “according to the Scriptures Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity; and therefore there are not three gods but one God.”<sup>603</sup> “The Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son.”<sup>604</sup> The Trinity is a belief that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are coequal.<sup>605</sup>

The Oneness Pentecostal Church baptized only in the name of Jesus. Within Oneness doctrine, Jesus Christ has the fullness of God within Him, therefore the church solely baptizes in His name alone. However, this is contradictory to the command in Matthew 28:19, which states “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

The Oneness doctrine teaches that only one manifestation of God appears at a time and that there are not distinct persons that are in the Godhead. This results in a problem regarding the crucifixion of the Son. In Oneness theology Jesus died on the cross, therefore, even if it were for a second, there was no God governing the heavens and the earth, the moment of Jesus’ death. The heretical teaching in this church believes that only one persona appears at a given time.

Oneness Pentecostals claim that in John 1:1-2, “the Word” (*logos*) is not a person rather an expression or a concept of God.<sup>606</sup> However, this interpretation is incompatible to the context of John 1 in its entirety.<sup>607</sup> “The Word is explicitly said to be Himself God, and God , of course

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<sup>603</sup> Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together”, 787.

<sup>604</sup> Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together”, 787.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals*, 94.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

is not a mere impersonal concept.”<sup>608</sup> The term that is used in the verse “with” is “most frequently used to describe personal relationships.”<sup>609</sup> The Word is described in scripture as “who is the life and light of all men”, and “rejected by, His own Creation.”<sup>610</sup> The terminology displays personalness and not simply a mere thought.<sup>611</sup> It must be remembered that “the Father is the same Being as the Son” but the “Father is not the same person as the Son.”<sup>612</sup>

The first century church Father Ignatius, was alive during the time of the apostles and it has been cited that Ignatius knew Mary, the Mother of Jesus and James, Jesus’ half-brother.<sup>613</sup> Ignatius was the Bishop of Antioch.<sup>614</sup> Ignatius stated “ neither the Father nor the Paraclete, but the Son only (become incarnate) for the Word became flesh” “And God the Word was born a man.”<sup>615</sup> In Ignatius’ Epistle to the Tarsians, Ignatius defends the deity and humanity of Jesus.<sup>616</sup> He states that man is to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit “not unto one person having three names nor into three persons who became incarnate but into three possessed

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<sup>608</sup> Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals*, 95.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid.

<sup>611</sup> Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals*, 95.

<sup>612</sup> H.E. Baber, “The Trinity in Advance: Relative Identity Redux” *Faith and Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (April 2015): 162.

<sup>613</sup> Mark Carpenter “A Synopsis of the Development of Trinitarian Thought from the First Century Church Fathers to the Second Century Apologists.” *Trinity Journal* 26, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>614</sup> Ignatius, Saint, Bishop of Antioch, and J.H. Srawley. *The Epistles of St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), 16.

<sup>615</sup> Carpenter “A Synopsis of the Development of Trinitarian Thought”, n.p.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

of equal honor.”<sup>617</sup> The theology of the Trinity was already developed in the first century and not an invention at the Council of Nicaea.

### **Verses for Modalism**

The Oneness Pentecostal Church utilize certain Bible verses to demonstrate the reported truth that is found in Modalism. The Oneness doctrine of God does not fit with the entirety of Scripture. The baptism of Jesus is one event in the Bible that does not reflect the belief of modalism. “The Son is the one born of the virgin Mary; the Spirit is the one who descends upon Jesus at His baptism; the Father is the one who speaks from heaven at Jesus baptism.”<sup>618</sup> There were three different persons at the baptism who played different roles within the baptism.

The Oneness Pentecostal Church must be understood as to be holding heretical doctrine. This seemingly innocuous teaching is leading numerous Trinitarian Christians to Oneness Churches.<sup>619</sup> The teaching may appear to be compatible with Christian doctrine but destroys the nature and character of God. Questions that should be asked to the Oneness believers should be rooted in Scripture, which both Christians and Oneness believers hold as inspired. Luke 22:42 which states “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.” However, if the Father and the Son are the same Person and have identical wills, then why did Jesus desire to escape the cup, but submitted to not His will but the Fathers? In the Oneness Pentecostal Church, the Father is God of the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, in John 6, the believer learns that no person has seen the Father. However, in Exodus 6:2-3, God speaks to Moses and tells him that He appeared to former prophets. If the Father

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<sup>617</sup> Carpenter “A Synopsis of the Development of Trinitarian Thought”, n.p.

<sup>618</sup> Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together”, 797.

<sup>619</sup> Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals, and the Trinity*, 10.

cannot be seen by man, who appeared to the prophets in the Old Testament, but the person of Jesus? Additionally, John 14:23 states “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” If the Father and the Son were one person, then why does the verse emphasize that “we will come.”

### **Biblical Defense for the Trinity**

The Bible is a declaration of the Lord, and a testament to the Triune nature of God. The Trinity is not against the teachings of the Scriptures, rather a proclaimed belief from the Word of God itself. “The New Testament writers refer to Jesus principally as “Lord” (*Kyrios*), the same word the Septuagint translators used in place of God’s name Yahweh.”<sup>620</sup> This is significant considering the strict monotheism of Judaism. Deuteronomy 6:4 which states, “Hear, O, Israel: the LORD our God, The LORD is one” was so central to the faith of ancient Israel that it was repeated constantly throughout people’s life and worship.”<sup>621</sup> Jesus was identified by the divine name and to the monotheistic Jews this was recognition of the “unique divine identity.”<sup>622</sup>

There are numerous Bible verses that demonstrate the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. The Gospel of John is written after the synoptic Gospels and is partly a rebuttal due to the heresies that were arising in the early church against the divinity of Christ.<sup>623</sup> In the “prologue John declares Christ’s eternal divinity, to teach us that He is the eternal God, manifest in the flesh.”<sup>624</sup> In John 1:1, the verse demonstrates the doctrine of the triune God. John 1:1 states that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

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<sup>620</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 576.

<sup>621</sup> Fairbairn, *An Introduction Theology*, 40.

<sup>622</sup> Bauckman, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 19.

<sup>623</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 5.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.



John 10:30 states “I and *My* Father are one.” The oneness that is between the Father and the Son is the “mutual grip on believers,” illustrating that believers are in the faithful hands of God.<sup>625</sup> The word “are” in John 10:30 is the plural form of the word and demonstrates the distinction of persons in the Godhead.<sup>626</sup> Therefore, when the Jewish people came to faith, it was only then they would be able to realize “that it was precisely their accusing Jesus of blasphemy that was itself blasphemous.”<sup>627</sup> John 14:14 states “ If you ask anything in my name, I will do it”, which provides a clear distinction to the name of Jesus, the Son.

### Bible Verses that Demonstrate the Trinity

#### **John 1:1, 14**

**“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”**

Early Christians in the first centuries had a commonly held belief that “emphasis on Jesus’ deity was a major reason for the Fourth Gospel.”<sup>628</sup> The first chapter of John demonstrates the doctrine of the triune God. John “declares that the Son was the beginning of the things that exist; that is he was in the beginning because He always was.”<sup>629</sup> John does not say that the Word was “in” the beginning, the Word simply “was.” John omits Jesus’ creation and merely declares he “was” which suggests the Word’s eternal preexistence.<sup>630</sup> If the Word was not eternal and did not always exist, then Jesus was not the one from the beginning, as stated in John 1:1.<sup>631</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 639.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid, 645.

<sup>628</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 370.

<sup>629</sup> Joel C. Elowsky, *John 1-10* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 70.

<sup>630</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 369.

<sup>631</sup> Elowsky, *John 1-10*, 70.

“The meaning of the Word is found in the Gospel of John, since He is the first terminus of the things that exist.”<sup>632</sup> “If He is the first terminus, however, it was never when He was not because He always was.”<sup>633</sup> In this book, the reader learns that “the Person of the Word of God in this Word’s eternal dimension,” always existed<sup>634</sup> Verse 14 states “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1: 1,14 is “not dealing with a demigod when we deal with the subject of the Gospel” but dealing with the very God of the universe.<sup>635</sup>

The prologue of John addresses the “Word in Pre-creation.”<sup>636</sup> The prologue’s first paragraph teaches on the very subject of the Gospel, the “Person of the Word of God in this Word’s eternal dimensions,” these verses are not dealing with some type of demigod, the subject is “no one less than the very God”.<sup>637</sup> The correlation between the presentation of the Word and Pre-creation and the Word made flesh is dramatic. The single verse, sixth paragraph of the first chapter comes to what Bruner calls “the lowest explicit place in the text” and “yet in Christendom the most thrilling place in the Prologue” where the divine, eternal, seeking Word came into mortal flesh in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> Elowsky, *John 1-10*, 70.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid.

<sup>634</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 6.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>638</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 27.

## John 10:30

“I and My Father are one.”

This verse has played a very significant role in Christological confessions.<sup>639</sup> The oneness that is between the Father and the Son is the “mutual grip on believers”, illustrating that believers are in the faithful hands of God.<sup>640</sup> This verse, in its immediate context, emphasized the unity of the saving work of God and Jesus.<sup>641</sup> The Father never works against the Son or apart from the Son, and the Son never works apart or against the Father’s purposes.<sup>642</sup> The Father has given the Son prerogatives to judge and give life and the “Son does the Father’s work and the Father does his work through the Son.”<sup>643</sup> The word “are” in John 10:30 is the plural form of the word and demonstrates the distinction of persons in the Godhead.<sup>644</sup> Therefore, when the Jewish people came to faith, it was only then they would be able to realize “that it was precisely their accusing Jesus of blasphemy that was itself blasphemous.”<sup>645</sup>

Jesus indicates his equality and unique union with the Father in this single verse.<sup>646</sup> Patristic commentators have used John 10:30 to defend against views that dismissed the unity of Father and Son, as well as to combat views that would “emphasize their unity to point of denying

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<sup>639</sup> Thompson, *John : A Commentary*, 233.

<sup>640</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 639.

<sup>641</sup> Thompson, *John :A Commentary*, 233.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 639.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid., 645.

<sup>646</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 820.

their distinction.<sup>647</sup> This verse expresses “one particular facet of the comprehensive unity of the being, revelation, and work of the Father and Son.”<sup>648</sup>

### **John 1:14**

**“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” Jesus prays in John 17:11, that disciples may be one as he and the Father are one.**

The Word made flesh is a primary and pivotal verse in the prologue of John. Bruner states that the “mystery of the divine Incarnation of in a real human being ranks” with the mysteries of the “death of God” in the Crucifixion and the “Resurrection-from-the-dead wonder of Easter Sunday morning” in subjects of amazement to humans.<sup>649</sup> Jesus’ unique relationship to the Father exists in this Gospel “long before his public, official glorification, probably in his preincarnate state.”<sup>650</sup> This verse specifies that the “pre-existent, divine, all creating” Lord of the cosmos became flesh.<sup>651</sup> The distinction is clear, the Word was not just spirit or person but “a completely physical, real, ‘fleshy’ human being.”<sup>652</sup> The One who created all things, the only Son of Almighty God, became the man Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>653</sup> The phrase “full of grace and truth” possibly references when God revealed His glory to Moses (Ex. 34:5-6), he revealed His character was “abounding in covenant-love and faithfulness” which translates into the Greek

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<sup>647</sup> Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 233.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>649</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 28.

<sup>650</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 413.

<sup>651</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 51.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*

expression used here by John as, “full of grace and truth.”<sup>654</sup> The accumulation of references to Exodus 33-34 in John 1: 14-18, demonstrate that John’s phrase is a purposed allusion to the occurrence in that context.<sup>655</sup> Moses only saw a part of God’s glory at Mount Sinai, “what was an incomplete revelation of grace and truth through Moses was completed through Christ.”<sup>656</sup>

## **2 Corinthians 3:17**

**“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”**

Paul’s concern in this chapter is to contrast the lesser glory of the Old Testament covenant of the law with the greater glory of the new covenant of the Spirit.<sup>657</sup> Paul is saying that just as when Moses took off his veil when he met with God, the veil of misunderstanding will fall aside when a person turns to the Lord (v.16).<sup>658</sup> Paul’s contemporaries “related to God through the law” but New Testament believers related to God through the Spirit, it is important to note that “the Lord” in verse 16 refers to God and not Christ, so the same meaning can be inferred in this following verse.<sup>659</sup> The point of verses 3:16-17 is that the time of the old covenant law has finished and the new covenant of the Spirit has arrived, so when believers turn to the Lord they experience the Lord as the Spirit.<sup>660</sup> Colin Kruse specifies that “*the Lord is the Spirit* is not a one-to-one identification”, but instead a way to of saying that “under the new

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<sup>654</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: 2 Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 416.

<sup>655</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 416.

<sup>656</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 416.

<sup>657</sup> Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 135.

<sup>658</sup> Proctor, *First and Second Corinthians*, 170.

<sup>659</sup> Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthian*, 135.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*

covenant we experience the Lord as the Holy Spirit.”<sup>661</sup> Paul thinks that the Holy Spirit gives a person “clarity of vision”, the Spirit makes it possible to recognize God’s true glory.<sup>662</sup> It is noteworthy that Paul refers to the Spirit as the Spirit of the Lord (*pneuma kyriou*) an expression found twenty-two times in the LXX where most of the time it refers to the Spirit of God, confirming that Paul is speaking of God and not Christ in this verse.<sup>663</sup>

## **Colossians 2:9**

**“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”**

Verse 9 specifies that the fullness of Christ is “all the fullness of deity.”<sup>664</sup> Colossians adds “all” (*pan*) to “fullness” to add emphasis to the point.<sup>665</sup> Paul seeks to justify the superiority of the Messiah to the common philosophies of the day, by informing listeners that the “fulness of deity dwells bodily”, is a reference to the incarnation.<sup>666</sup> The writer’s intent to use the most exalted language available to speak of the fullness that dwells in Christ is demonstrated by the word choice of *theotetos* over *theiotes*. *Theotetos* refers to the essence of divinity or the divine nature itself, while *theiotes* could refer to many kinds of beings in the spirit world.<sup>667</sup> The importance of this use of language is that it is not a “godlikeness” that dwells in Christ but the

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<sup>661</sup> Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 135.

<sup>662</sup> Proctor, *First and Second Corinthians*, 170.

<sup>663</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 135.

<sup>664</sup> Sumney, *Colossians*, 132.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, 77.

<sup>667</sup> Sumney, *Colossians*, 133.

divine nature itself.<sup>668</sup> Jesus is not an angelic intermediary or a “cosmic aeon” but the “self-revelation of God in human form.”<sup>669</sup> The continual state of Christ’s existence may possibly be affirmed by the use of the present tense “lives” (*katoieki*).<sup>670</sup> The continual dwelling of deity in Christ is defined in verse 9 as also being “bodily” (*somatikos*), which with the present tense “lives” refers to “the incarnation and present, risen existence of Christ.”<sup>671</sup> Jerry L. Sumney offers the supposition that Colossians inserts “bodily” here to show the fullness of deity is embodied, the fullness of deity continues to dwell in Christ bodily.<sup>672</sup>

### **Isaiah 44:6**

**“Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and His Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the First and the Last; Besides Me there is no God.”**

This verse contains a rebuke to those who were practicing idolatry, exhorting the people and teaching them that there is no other God, there is no other and neither will any come later.<sup>673</sup> The theme of God’s kingship and control of world history are familiar to the people.<sup>674</sup> This verse begins with the “contrast between the Lord and idols”, God is “within himself, every possible power.”<sup>675</sup> Israel’s God is unique.<sup>676</sup> The “Lord of Hosts” recalls Isaiah 6:3 and the song

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<sup>668</sup> Sumney, *Colossians*, 133.

<sup>669</sup> Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, 77.

<sup>670</sup> Sumney, *Colossians*, 133.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>672</sup> Sumney, *Colossians*, 134.

<sup>673</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 221.

<sup>674</sup> John F.A. Sawyer, *Isaiah through the Centuries*. 1st ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 258.

<sup>675</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 344.

<sup>676</sup> Sawyer, *Isaiah through the Centuries*, 258.

of the seraphim.<sup>677</sup> The teaching of this passage is that there is no other God, that “which is unbegotten is one, and the monarchial authority over all is one.”<sup>678</sup> This verse highlights the “devastating exclusivity of biblical monotheism.”<sup>679</sup> The statement “I am the First and the Last” reveals the nature of God, He did not originate from elsewhere, He is self-sufficient and self-sustaining and at last God remains at the end, totally fulfilled, supreme.<sup>680</sup> God controls all that is past and all that is to come.<sup>681</sup> Theodoret of Cyr comments on this verse and its explicit explanation that there is only one God, “If the Son is God and the prophetic word is true that openly states, the divinity of the Holy Trinity is one” then there is no other God<sup>682</sup> Christian doctrine cites this verse in support of the doctrine of the Three in One, in the form “I am the Alpha and Omega” the verse was applied to Christ in the Book of Revelation.<sup>683</sup>

### **Matthew 28:19**

**“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”**

Jesus, having been exalted, is now in the position to send his disciples out on mission.<sup>684</sup> Jesus’ commission is based in Christology, his authority is described in a language that alludes to the seventh chapter of Daniel (vv. 13-14, 18, 22, 27).<sup>685</sup> The disciples are instructed to first teach

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<sup>677</sup> Sawyer, *Isaiah through the Centuries*, 258.

<sup>678</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Isaiah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 221.

<sup>679</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 343.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>681</sup> Sawyer, *Isaiah through the Centuries*, 258.

<sup>682</sup> Mark W. Elliott, *Isaiah 40-66* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 118.

<sup>683</sup> Sawyer, *Isaiah through the Centuries*, 258.

<sup>684</sup> David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 690.

<sup>685</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 691.



the nations the gospel and then baptize them because it is “not possible that the body receives the sacrament of Baptism unless the soul first receives the truth of the faith.”<sup>686</sup> Jesus’ followers are commanded to “make disciples.”<sup>687</sup> To disciple someone means “to teach”, a disciple is one who learns.<sup>688</sup> Baptism is the “key first step to initiate new believers into the church.”<sup>689</sup> This baptism, different from Jewish ritual washings, is a single act.<sup>690</sup> Believers are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there is “one gift for those whose divinity is one.”<sup>691</sup> Jerome sums up the verse succinctly, “the name of Trinity is one God.”<sup>692</sup> This baptism is also different from John’s baptism in that it is done with “the trinitarian formula invoking the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”<sup>693</sup> This three-fold formula was in use in the practice of baptism by the time of the writing of Matthew.<sup>694</sup> Older texts even demonstrate the “three-fold affirmation of faith associated with baptism.”<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>686</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 327.

<sup>687</sup> Anna Case-Winters, *Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 339.

<sup>688</sup> Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 339.

<sup>689</sup> David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 690.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 327.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

<sup>693</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 690.

<sup>694</sup> Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 339.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid.

### **Matthew 14:33**

**“Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”**

The disciples worship Jesus as the Son of God after he walks on water (v.25) and calms the storm (v.32). Peter worshipped Jesus immediately after he was rebuked for his lack of faith after he started to sink into the water as he walked to Jesus (v.31). Peter with his mixture of faith and doubt exemplifies the experience of most Christians.<sup>696</sup> Peter is the “archetypal disciple” for the common man, his early faith is often matched with frailty.<sup>697</sup> Peter does indeed step out into faith on the stormy waters of the sea (v.29), but once he is standing on the waves he becomes afraid and doubtful with the force of the winds buffeting him (v.30). Jesus immediately reaches out his hand to save Peter but asks Peter why he doubted (v.31). The word used for “doubt” here is the Greek word “distazo” which means to hesitate and implies a personal uncertainty that prevents commitment or action.<sup>698</sup> The disciples, after witnessing these miraculous events, worship Jesus as “the Son of God” (v.33). Warren Carter in his book *Matthew and the Margins*, says that by worshipping Jesus they align themselves with the subversive and marginal wisemen.<sup>699</sup>

### **John 14:14**

**“If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.”**

Jesus promises to do whatever the disciples ask in his name.<sup>700</sup> Jesus’ words demonstrate his continued presence in the life of the disciples and his “responsiveness to their needs and

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<sup>696</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 196.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>700</sup> Thompson, *John : A Commentary*, 310.

requests.”<sup>701</sup> The power of Jesus is illustrated by the promise that a prayer will be fulfilled by the name of Christ. This verse makes it clear that the risen Lord, who acts on behalf of the disciples to grant their requests, is always at his Father’s side,<sup>702</sup> This verse is prefaced by the explanation in verse 13, that the “Father may be glorified in the Son”.<sup>703</sup> The observation is made by Beutler, in *Habt Keine Angst*, 50, that “ the reference of ‘the glorification of the Father through the Son’ provides, then, not only the goal of Christian petitionary prayer but also such prayer’s boundaries”<sup>704</sup> It would be out of bounds for a Christian to pray for anything that would not be conducive to the glory of the Father through the Son.<sup>705</sup> The “whatever” (*ho ti an*) in the previous verse 13, “seem to be Jesus beckoning us to be brave in our prayers” but the qualified “so that the Father can be glorified in the Son” functions to limit our prayers so they do not “become impertinent.”<sup>706</sup> The disciples, as they carry out their mission, authorized by Jesus as his representatives, it is understood that “their prayers will be granted because of his love for them and his position with the Father.”<sup>707</sup>

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<sup>701</sup> Thompson, *John : A Commentary*, 310.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>703</sup> “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son”, John 14:13.

<sup>704</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John : A Commentary*, 804.

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>706</sup> Craig S.Keener, *Romans : A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2011), 101.

<sup>707</sup> Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 312.

## Romans 8:9

**“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”**

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a component of Christianity that is a gift to the Christian at the point of salvation and also reveals more about the nature and existence of the Trinity. Paul provided instruction about this phenomenon to believers in his letter to the Romans. The use of the plural “you” in this verse suggest that Paul is speaking to a group of people about their status as believers in Christ.<sup>708</sup> Those who are in the flesh are not of the of the world if the Spirit of God dwells in them, because the Spirit of God cannot dwell in one who “follows fleshly things.”<sup>709</sup> Paul emphasizes that all who “belong to Christ have the Spirit dwelling in them.”<sup>710</sup> In this passage, Pauls’ focus is not on the one the believer being “in Christ” but on Christ by his Spirit being “in the Christian”, this emphasizes that these two features of Christian existence are both reciprocal in nature and true.<sup>711</sup> Believers are in the “sphere of the Spirit” rather than the “sphere of the flesh.”<sup>712</sup> This means that those who are not in Christ walk carnally, in the flesh, while those who are in Christ, are able to live righteously because they have the Spirit.<sup>713</sup> The apostle in the second part of the verse calls the *Spirit of God*, the *Spirit of Christ*, because one who submits to the sins mentioned above does not belong to Christ.<sup>714</sup> This verse signifies that

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<sup>708</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 658.

<sup>709</sup> *Ambrosiaster's Commentary on the Pauline Epistle: Romans* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 150.

<sup>710</sup> Keener, *Roman*, 101.

<sup>711</sup> Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 658.

<sup>712</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 101.

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

“everything the Father has, the Son has”, further evidence of the members of the Trinity.<sup>715</sup> The ease with which Paul speaks about “Christ by his Spirit” being “in the Christian” and the “Spirit of God” dwelling in the believer, unites all three persons of the Trinity working together in a unique personal relationship.

### **Romans 8:26**

**“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”**

Believers have been given the Holy Spirit, who helps them in their weakness.<sup>716</sup> Paul is not focusing on the eschatological future in this verse but the prayers of Christ’s people here and now.<sup>717</sup> The Spirit aids believers in the weakness of their current bodily state.<sup>718</sup> The apostle explains that the Spirit of the Lord “intercedes not with human eloquence, but in keeping with his nature.”<sup>719</sup> Christ’s own Spirit “groans with believers in their suffering, eager for their deliverance.”<sup>720</sup> This verse highlights the nature of the Holy Spirit, its deity and relation in the Trinity. During their sufferings, the Spirit works within believers to prepare them for “conformity of the image of the crucified and resurrected Christ.”<sup>721</sup> The intercession of the Holy Spirit would not be one of human speech because “when what is of God speaks with God, it

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<sup>715</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 101.

<sup>716</sup> *Ambrosiaster's Commentary on the Pauline Epistles: Romans*, 161.

<sup>717</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 689.

<sup>718</sup> Keener, *Roman*, 107.

<sup>719</sup> *Ambrosiaster's Commentary on the Pauline Epistles: Romans*, 161.

<sup>720</sup> .Keener, *Romans*, 107.

<sup>721</sup> *Ibid.*

necessarily speaks in the same way that the one from whom his is speaks.”<sup>722</sup> Douglas Moo expresses this phenomenon regarding the Spirit’s prayer language as “a ministry of intercession that takes place in our heart in a manner imperceptible to us.”<sup>723</sup> The Spirit offers an inarticulate prayer when believers in the current age are pressed by hardships.<sup>724</sup> The Trinity is further revealed in that while the Spirit intercedes within believers, Christ in on God’s right hand interceding for them as well (v.34).

### Bible Verses Commonly Used Against the Trinity

The Bible is often used by non-trinitarian religions to illustrate that the Trinity is not conducive and contradictory to Scripture. Non-Trinitarian religions that regard the Bible as authoritative and inspired, attempt to demonstrate the heresy that is believed by that religion, is scriptural. Mark 15:34, which states “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” This is one of many verses that have been historically used to dispute the Trinity. A careful analysis of biblical text will reveal verses such as this one, while sometime requiring in-depth study, not only do not dispute the Trinity but are actually foundational for it.

#### **Mark 15:34**

**“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”**

Athanasius writes in *The Incarnation of the Word of God* that Jesus had to assume a human body so that death might be destroyed, and men renewed to the Image.<sup>725</sup> Jesus’ words as

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<sup>722</sup> Ambrosiaster's Commentary on the Pauline Epistles: Romans, 161.

<sup>723</sup> Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Roman*, 689.

<sup>724</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 107.

<sup>725</sup> William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, eds., *Christian Apologetics Past and Present, Volume 1*, to 1500 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 184.

he cried out have been the subject of much debate and are often referred to by skeptics to deny his very deity. Christian reflection has “long struggled that Jesus’ final words on the cross could have been words of such dereliction.”<sup>726</sup> Mark’s description of Jesus’ cry is “doubly emphatic”, which indicates Jesus’ intense physical suffering, intense emotion, or his “strength as the Son of God.”<sup>727</sup> Jesus cries out the words from Psalm 22:1 in Aramaic the “language which he used to expound Scripture.”<sup>728</sup> Jesus had addressed God as *Abba* (Father) in Gethsemane but here he addressed Him as *Eloi* (my God) which expresses a personal, continual relationship with God.<sup>729</sup> Jesus’ cry is acknowledgement that the sin of the world has been placed upon him and is witness that he is experiencing “the stark reality of the ‘cup’ of God’s judgment.”<sup>730</sup>

The events of the “ninth hour” (v 34a) take place in “eschatological darkness”, the “darkness over the whole land” (v.33), which Francis J. Moloney believes is a direct reference to Amos 8:9.<sup>731</sup> The original setting of the prophecy in Amos was eschatological, marked by the phrase “on that day” which was widely used to in prophetic traditions to “indicate God’s final and decisive intervention into human affairs.”<sup>732</sup> Darkness historically has sometimes been a symbol of God’s displeasure and judgement.<sup>733</sup> The darkness signals the death of Jesus is an

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<sup>726</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 58.

<sup>727</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 420.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

<sup>729</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 420.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid., 421.

<sup>731</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 58.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid.

<sup>733</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 419.

extraordinary event.<sup>734</sup> The recording of the death of Jesus does not detail just any death, the Markan reader is “aware that the moment of God’s definitive intervention into human history has arrived.”<sup>735</sup>

In the ninth hour, in the midst of this darkness, Jesus loudly cries out in Aramaic the opening words of Psalm 22, which is translated into Greek by the evangelist as “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”<sup>736</sup> The misinterpretation of these words of Christ began almost immediately after they were cried out. Some nearby bystanders thought that Jesus cried out to Elijah (v.35). Their belief that Jesus called to Elijah, the traditional Jewish figure who comes to those who are beyond help, demonstrates the belief that Jesus can only “claim acceptance if he comes off of the cross.”<sup>737</sup> The irony in this belief of Elijah appearing to save Jesus is that Jesus has already told Peter, James and John (Matt. 11:14) that John the Baptist was “Elijah, the prophet of the end times.”<sup>738</sup>

Many contemporary critics have argued that Jesus’ crying out to God invalidates his claim as the Son. This verse does no such thing. The Gospel has steadily affirmed that Jesus is the Son of God.<sup>739</sup> Many have argued that Jesus’ citation of the first verse of Psalm 22 is an “implicit citation of the complete Psalm” , which expresses thanksgiving and confidence in the “saving action of God” and the “universal proclamation of God’s eschatological dominion.”<sup>740</sup>

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<sup>734</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 419.

<sup>735</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 58.

<sup>736</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 1105.

<sup>737</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 1105.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*



No matter how desperate his cry, Jesus remains focused on God.<sup>741</sup> The sense of abandonment by this cry is key to another theory of the significance to these words, only as “the crucified savior, Christ and king of Israel,” does Jesus reveal himself to be the Son of God.<sup>742</sup> Further proof of the eschatological nature of the death of Jesus, symbolized by the darkness over the whole land between the sixth and ninth hour, occurs with two events, at the moment of his death the curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom (v. 38) and the Roman centurion, a Gentile, confesses that Jesus was surely the Son of God (v.39).<sup>743</sup>

### **John 14:28**

**“Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.”**

Jesus asks the disciples to share in the joy of the coming messianic age by rejoicing that because he is going to the Father, who is greater.<sup>744</sup> This verse played a significant role in the foundational Christological and trinitarian controversies and the subsequent convictions and decisions of the early Church.<sup>745</sup> The subordination of Jesus displayed in this verse has been the subject of much debate. The early Church defense of the full deity of Jesus in respect to this verse is to utilize the Ingenerate-Father Argument, which is to remind believers that the Son is the “*Only-Begotten* of the *UnBegotten-Father*”.<sup>746</sup> Another argument used to clarify the deity of

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<sup>740</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 1105.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

<sup>744</sup> Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 317.

<sup>745</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of Joh : A Commentary*, 820.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

Christ in response to the historical misunderstanding of this verse is the Two-Natures Argument which stresses the “divine Son’s subordination in becoming human in his mission to the world.”<sup>747</sup> The Father sent the Son.<sup>748</sup> The Church has believed for years that the Nicene creed comprehensively explains the nature of Christ as fully divine and this understanding came from the Holy Spirit of Truth, which did “lead the Church into the ‘everything you ever need to know’ by reminding her of ‘everything I ever said to you.’”<sup>749</sup> Simply put, the verse while completely accurate, must only be interpreted within the context of the full Gospel of Christ.

### **Mark 13:32**

**“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”**

Mark 13:32 is a verse that has been used to dispute the deity of Jesus. Jesus had previously spoken of the imminent coming of the end days (Mark 13:30) but the knowledge of exactly when the end time will come is reserved for the Father.<sup>750</sup> The phrase “that day” references the day of judgment.<sup>751</sup> The use of “that day” references Old Testament warnings about the “Day of the Lord” found in Isaiah 2:12 and Amos 5:18 and it remains the time of the Lord.<sup>752</sup> The knowledge of the exact time and day of this event is reserved for the Father, no one

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<sup>747</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of Joh : A Commentary*, 820.

<sup>748</sup> Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, 317.

<sup>749</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 1105.

<sup>750</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 22.

<sup>751</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 337.

<sup>752</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 22.

else has this knowledge, not the celestial angels or the even the Son.<sup>753</sup> God knows everything, including the future, so He knows the date of the Son's return.<sup>754</sup> Jesus' confidence of the impending end days (v. 30) does not contradict his lack of knowledge of the exact day and hour of the event (v. 32), one can be certain that an event will take place without knowing the exact time it will occur.<sup>755</sup> The reader is informed of the urgency and need to be prepared for "God's decisive action" of bringing the world to an end, but is also informed that "the exact hour is the unknowable design of God."<sup>756</sup>

### **1 Tim. 2:5**

**"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"**

The verse of 1 Timothy 2:5 has been used to refute the Trinity because Christ is described as a man and mediator between God and men. This verse displays the true nature of God. There is one God who deserves the honor of all people.<sup>757</sup> A Jew would enthusiastically affirm the first part of the verse, as Moses explicitly states in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."<sup>758</sup> Jews were renowned for their belief in on God, the Roman historian Tacitus described them as having a "purely spiritual monotheism".<sup>759</sup> Paul's phrasing in this verse

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<sup>753</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 22.

<sup>754</sup> Schnabel, *Mark*, 337.

<sup>755</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 22.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid.

<sup>757</sup> David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 29.

<sup>758</sup> Aída Besançon Spencer, *1 Timothy: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2011), 49.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid.

acknowledges that God is unique, he is the only one able to save humans and “the only deity before whom a human needs approval.”<sup>760</sup> Jesus is the mediator between God and man, he is the “constant continual means” by which in worship, we approach the throne of God.<sup>761</sup>

The One who requires purity from humans and the One who can accomplish that purity are the same, “the Godhead is able to accomplish salvation completely.”<sup>762</sup> This verse contains an allusion to the “plurality within the one God.”<sup>763</sup> One can refer to two people united in marriage as seen in Genesis, they are “one flesh”.<sup>764</sup> The word *Elohim* is an abstract plural word for God that has a singular verb when “referring to the unique, living God.”<sup>765</sup> The Lord has three persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, but one “name”.<sup>766</sup> Jesus, the mediator between God and humans, the mediator (*mesites*) is in the middle (*mesos*) position between several parties, here between God and humans.<sup>767</sup> Just as Job lamented for a mediator (*mesites*) between God and himself.<sup>768</sup> Jesus is the perfect mediator, he can identify with God because “He is divine, fully God (Col. 2:9), yet he is able to fully identify with humans because Jesus is human only without

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<sup>760</sup> Spencer, *1 Timothy: A New Covenant Commentary*, 49.

<sup>761</sup> Platt, Akin, and Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 30.

<sup>762</sup> Spencer, *1 Timothy: A New Covenant Commentary*, 50.

<sup>763</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>764</sup> “Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” Gen. 2:24.

<sup>765</sup> Spencer, *1 Timothy: A New Covenant Commentary*, 50.

<sup>766</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>768</sup> “If I wash myself with snow water, And cleanse my hands with soap, Yet You will plunge me into the pit, And my own clothes will abhor me. “For *He is* not a man, as I *am*, *That* I may answer Him, *And that* we should go to court together.<sup>33</sup> Nor is there any mediator between us, *Who* may lay his hand on us both.” Job 9:30-33 NKJV.

sin (Heb. 4:15).<sup>769</sup> Jesus is the only mediator between God and humans, “Paul places in juxtaposition the term human (*anthropos*) and humans” because if Jesus is to “represent humans, he must be “human” first of all.”<sup>770</sup>

## 1 Cor. 8:6

**“But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one LORD Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”**

In sharp contrast to idolaters who are referenced in the earlier part of the chapter, Christians are essentially monotheistic, which is why Paul emphatically states that there “is but one God” in this verse.<sup>771</sup> Paul says that God is unique, but Jesus shares in the Father’s uniqueness.<sup>772</sup> Paul uses the characteristic title of *the Father*, partly to indicate his tender care for his people, and partly to point to his relationship to *the Son*.<sup>773</sup> In relation to the many gods of the pagans who have separate spheres in their stories of creation, God is responsible for *all things*, humans came from Him and live for Him.<sup>774</sup> Paul also mentions, the Son, *the one Lord Jesus Christ*, “one” drawing attention to Christian monotheism in contrast to the plurality of the pagan gods and “Lord” emphasizing the deity of Christ.<sup>775</sup> The Son is mentioned in “the same breath as the Father”, Paul is saying that there is one God and he is including the “Lord Jesus Christ within

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<sup>769</sup> Platt, Akin, and Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 30.

<sup>770</sup> Spencer, *1 Timothy: A New Covenant Commentary*, 50.

<sup>771</sup> Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 40.

<sup>772</sup> Proctor, *First and Second Corinthians*, 70.

<sup>773</sup> Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 40.

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>775</sup> *Ibid.*

that one Godhead.”<sup>776</sup> In this period all groups regarded Jesus as divine.<sup>777</sup> A chief characteristic of the Jewish religion in this time period was its “strictly monotheistic stance.”<sup>778</sup> Worship of another deity was possible the most grievous sin possible to a Jew.<sup>779</sup> Paul and the Jewish Christians’ “Christ-devotion” was expressed in a “strongly monotheistic” manner.<sup>780</sup>

The phrase “by whom are all things” reveals Christ as an Agent in creation, the Father created through the Son.<sup>781</sup> This verse, with its emphatic claims about the identity of Jesus and his relationship with God, is one of the most pivotal texts which formed the Church’s doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>782</sup> This verse speaks about the Father and Son being equal in intent and achievement standing apart from other beings.<sup>783</sup> Jesus is shown in “the closest possible association with his Father as Lord of ‘all things’ and the church”.<sup>784</sup>

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<sup>776</sup> Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 40.

<sup>777</sup> Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 55.

<sup>778</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 47.

<sup>779</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 29.

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>781</sup> Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 40.

<sup>782</sup> Proctor, *First and Second Corinthians*, 70.

<sup>783</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>784</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Matt. 12:32**

**“And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come”**

The distinction of the three persons of the Trinity is seen when Jesus says that a word against the Son of man will be forgiven but speaking blasphemy against the Holy Ghost will not be forgiven. The twelfth chapter of Matthew focused on the Spirit empowered miracles of Jesus which should have been viewed as his authority to forgive sins on earth and his messianic status.<sup>785</sup> It is not because the Holy Spirit is greater than Christ that this pronouncement is made but because of the intent of the blasphemer.<sup>786</sup> Since the “power of the Spirit is behind Jesus’ works”, it is really the Spirit who is being slandered by the Pharisees, not Jesus.<sup>787</sup> This verse in no way diminishes the deity of Christ. The forgiven sin is that of mistaking Christ as human, the unforgiven sins is “confusing the Spirit’s work with that of Satan.”<sup>788</sup> Jerome explains the distinction by saying that those who speak against Jesus because they think he is a man, the “son of a carpenter” who has “James, Joseph, and Judas as brothers”, while not without guilt, can be pardoned.<sup>789</sup> The one who is not forgiven is one who “understands the works of God” because he “cannot deny the miraculous power” and yet blasphemes against the Christ, the Word of God and the works of the Holy Spirit.<sup>790</sup> Jerome in his explanation, highlights the separation of the

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<sup>785</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 324.

<sup>786</sup> Thomas C. Oden, James A. Kellerman, and Credo Reference (Firm), *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew (Opus Imperfectum): Volume 2*, Enhanc Cr ed. (Boston, Massachusetts; Downers Grove, Illinois;: Credo Reference, 2013), np.

<sup>787</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 324.

<sup>788</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 156.

<sup>789</sup> Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 145.

<sup>790</sup> *Ibid.*

persons of the Trinity in the distinction of identity, yet also demonstrates the oneness of God by saying that speaking against the Holy Spirit also offends Christ.

### **John 20:17**

**“Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.”**

The older English versions translate the verse as “Do not touch me” but most modern translations have “respected the force” of the Greek present-tense imperative, *me mou haptou*, which means to stop doing something one is already doing.<sup>791</sup> Jesus’ words can actually be interpreted “Stop clinging to me.”<sup>792</sup> In this translation of the verse, Jesus permits Mary to embrace him for a period of time, he is not an untouchable ghost, he has been raised back into true living humanity, not just into ethereal spirituality.<sup>793</sup> Bruner interprets this verse to mean that Jesus permits Mary’s touch but she must let go so he can be about the mission to be done.<sup>794</sup> The second part of the sentence, “I am not yet ascended to the Father”, also generates speculation. The gospel of John, unlike the Gospel of Luke, does not specifically report Jesus’s ascension to the Father.

The final phrasing of 17b is also a point of contention for some, the scripture reads “but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” While there is a distinction between Jesus’ relationship to the Father, as His only Son and that of the disciples to the Father, the phrase “My Father and your Father, and to my

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<sup>791</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 1105.

<sup>792</sup> Kanagaraj, *John: A New Covenant Commentary*, 226.

<sup>793</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John : A Commentary*, 1105.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.*



God and your God”, is actually affirmation of the oneness with which Jesus’ followers can now approach God through Jesus “by virtue of his death and resurrection.”<sup>795</sup> The second part of the verse is validation that the disciples through the Atonement have been elevated to the status of brothers. Jesus had previously addressed his followers as disciples or friends but now he has decided to call them “brothers” an act of adoption.<sup>796</sup> Mary is sent by Jesus to tell the disciples of the news of his ascent and also of the new filial relationship that is established by naming them as “brothers.”<sup>797</sup> Finally, the designation for the Father is of significance, previously, Jesus had not referred to God as “our” Father in sermon or conversation, except when he taught them how to pray in Matthew 6:9, this further displays their adoption as brothers.<sup>798</sup> It is important to note that Jesus maintains the “my-your” distinction in this verse because Jesus has a unique relationship with the Father as the Only-Begotten Son.<sup>799</sup>

### **Theological Defense of the Trinity**

#### Salvation Through the Cross, Christ and his Deity

Martin Luther, Father of the protestant reformation, emphasized the doctrine of the Trinity and the Trinity’s main role in Soteriology.<sup>800</sup> “It was the view of salvation that provided the grounds for their claim that Christ was both divine and human” by the conviction of the

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<sup>795</sup> Kanagaraj, *John: A New Covenant Commentary*, 227.

<sup>796</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 1106.

<sup>797</sup> Kanagaraj, *John: A New Covenant Commentary*, 226.

<sup>798</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 1106.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid.

<sup>800</sup> Maspero, and Wozniak. *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology*, 46.

church fathers.<sup>801</sup> This conviction was based on the scriptural claim that only God can save.<sup>802</sup> Irenaeus and Tertullian argued that in order for Christ to save mankind “Christ had to really become what we are, giving His body for our body and His soul for our soul.”<sup>803</sup> Athanasius believed that only if “the Son was truly God, did God become a human being, and in doing so, secure salvation through his human life, death, and resurrection.”<sup>804</sup> Origen stated that “the whole man could not have been saved unless Christ has not taken upon Himself the whole man.”<sup>805</sup> “God’s acts of atonement are Trinitarian in the sense all three persons of the Trinity are involved in reconciling us to God.”<sup>806</sup> “God had made Himself known in the Person of Jesus, the Messiah” “offering salvation to men through Him, and that He poured out His Holy Spirit upon the church.”<sup>807</sup> Jesus “was to be worshiped, just as the Jews had worshipped Jehovah.”<sup>808</sup>

The importance of knowing God and His Triune nature, “was to give us a true notion of the salvation of the human race, salvation which is accomplished by the incarnation of the Son and by the gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>809</sup> The Trinity is grounded in salvation which demonstrates that there are real distinctions in God’s own being.<sup>810</sup> The “Trinity allows God to be God-with-

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<sup>801</sup> Brummer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 81.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid, 81-82.

<sup>804</sup> Weinandy and Keating, *Athanasius and His Legacy*, 37.

<sup>805</sup> Brummer, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity*, 82.

<sup>806</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>807</sup> Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 34.

<sup>808</sup> Ibid.

<sup>809</sup> Morris, “The Doctrine of the Trinity”, 221.

<sup>810</sup> Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005), 24.

us, not through a proxy, but through God's very self.<sup>811</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity is a "mystery of salvation" and without the doctrine of the Trinity, salvation ceases to be logically consistent with the rest of Scripture.<sup>812</sup> Man "should on no account seek life and salvation outside God, how can our faith rest in Christ" if Christ is not fully God?<sup>813</sup>

#### God and the Holy Spirit, Defense of his Deity and Person

The Holy Spirit is God and co-existent and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit is vital in the understanding of the nature and Character of God. The Holy Spirit is not merely a force that is impersonal and does not speak. John 14:28 states "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." John 14 demonstrates that the Holy Spirit is a "He" and He will teach the body of Christ. Furthermore, in the Athanasian Creed, the creed declares that the Holy Spirit is fully God and Fully Lord.<sup>814</sup>

In Mark 13:11, the passage states " But when they arrest *you* and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit." In Mark 13, the Holy Spirit speaks and is working through a person. Though the Holy Spirit does not have a tangible body, He speaks and teaches the church of Christ. The Holy Spirit, "He is Himself so truly God that He may also be called the gift of God."<sup>815</sup>

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<sup>811</sup> Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition*, 24.

<sup>812</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: the Doctrine of God in Scripture, History, and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012) , 10.

<sup>813</sup> Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 5.

<sup>814</sup> Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, 224.

<sup>815</sup> Oort, "The Holy Spirit and the Early Church: Doctrine and Confession. ", 1.

Jesus Christ is known as the “Savior” throughout the New Testament. Usually, beginning in the Old Testament, God is “described as the Savior both of the individual and the nation.”<sup>816</sup> “Some of the prophets assert that God alone can save”, the truth can be found in passages like Jeremiah 2:28 and Jeremiah 11:12.<sup>817</sup> Isaiah 43:11 states “ I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Savior.” The Old and New Testament are not in contradiction when Jesus claims to be Savior of the world, rather it is a cohesive message of claiming His divinity.

### **Philosophical Defense of the Trinity**

#### The Sufficiency of God

The Trinity explains the sufficiency of God. “God is a necessarily good.”<sup>818</sup> God is also necessarily omnipotent and omniscient.<sup>819</sup> A Unitarian God is not conducive to the necessarily good of the greatest kind of love. “Aquinas identifies love as the ultimate attribute of the Trinity in which the Father and the Son communicate God’s goodness to one another.”<sup>820</sup>

Within the Trinity is discovered the “communion of unity, coeivity of eternity, and the equality of immeasurability, and indeed the communion of unity without division.”<sup>821</sup> Understanding that there are three divine persons in the doctrine of the Trinity, but only one God, is a metaphysical question.<sup>822</sup> “God is the Creator and His existence is not contingent” on any

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<sup>816</sup> Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, 156.

<sup>817</sup> Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, 156.

<sup>818</sup> Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology*, 106.

<sup>819</sup> Ibid.

<sup>820</sup> Schumacher, Lydia. “The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Western Theological Tradition: Underdeveloped or Misunderstood?” *The Heythrop Journal* 57, no.6 (2016).

<sup>821</sup> Coleman and Coulter, *Trinity and Creation*, 157.

<sup>822</sup> Maspero, and Wozniak, *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology*, 27.

external factor.<sup>823</sup> “The triune God- who cannot exist without being love, justice and wisdom.”<sup>824</sup> Therefore, If God was not triune, His love would be dependent on creation, consequently alluding that God is not enough within Himself.

The acknowledgement and awareness of the divine persons in the Trinity is necessary because it gives “us the right idea of creation.”<sup>825</sup> A theology without the triune nature of God, is to accept the error that God created mankind out of necessity.<sup>826</sup> God created man, not out of extrinsic need, but “through love of His goodness.”<sup>827</sup>

### The Love of God

In order to love, there must be an object to love and a love that could be reciprocated. If God was not triune by nature, God would be dependent on His creation for love. However, for God to be contingent based on another object other than Himself, He would cease to be God. “God enjoys the full and unchanging love relationships among the persons of the Trinity.”<sup>828</sup> “Creation is thus unnecessary for God and is sheer gift, bestowed for the sake of the creatures that we might experience the joy and fulfillment of knowing God.”<sup>829</sup> The Lord invites man “into the intratrinitarian love relationship as His adopted children.”<sup>830</sup>

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<sup>823</sup> IP, “Re-imagining Divine Simplicity in Trinitarian Theology”, n.p.

<sup>824</sup> Ibid.

<sup>825</sup> Morris, “The Doctrine of the Trinity”, 221.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid.

<sup>828</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundation*, 562.

<sup>829</sup> Ibid.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid.

The concept of God is the greatest conceivable being that is worthy of being worshipped. A being that is worthy of worship is a being that is purely and perfectly good. Goodness is concept and attribute of God that is linked to the love of God. The greatest type of love is a love that is an outward action and not an action toward oneself. God's love is innately the greatest conceivable love, in that it reflects His own triune nature. God is omniscient and knows that only His love will be able to satisfy the very soul of human beings. Therefore, God can only offer Himself to offer the greatest satisfaction to the human heart.

### The Eternity of God

Humans have not existed for time and eternity like God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Mankind gives glory, adoration and love to the God of the universe. Man is also the recipient of the love of God. 1 John 4:8 states "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God who designed man, knew that the only person that could satisfy human desires was God Himself. God does not need the praise of man but understands that man desires to worship and to love. The only worship and love that can ever satisfy the human soul is for the recipient of that worship and love to be God.

The Trinity is more plausible than any unitarian doctrine of God. When examining the philosophical and scriptural bases of love, a unitarian God is not sufficient. The doctrine of the Trinity is what distinguished the Christian doctrine of God as Christian.<sup>831</sup>

"It is the distinction between the principle of divine action and the subject of divine action."<sup>832</sup> "The principle of all divine action is the one undivided substance" and the subject of

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<sup>831</sup> Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*, 4.

<sup>832</sup> Claunch, "What God Hath Done Together", 797.

that divine action is either the Father, Son or Holy Spirit.<sup>833</sup> “God is revealed as Father because Jesus is revealed as Son.”<sup>834</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The doctrine of the Trinity is essential to the character and nature of God. If the distinctiveness of three persons, such as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are negated, Scripture will be self-contradictory and self-refuting. The absence of the Trinity, salvation and the very nature of God will be inconsistent. The Trinity is not merely a belief about God, but who God is by nature and character. The heresies of Arianism, Modalism and Tritheism do not satisfy the testimony scripturally, philosophically, theologically.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a salvific doctrine that allows salvation to be consistent in scriptural teaching. The absence of Jesus Christ being fully God and fully man, make the atonement void and insufficient to represent man as a perfect sacrifice. The Son is God in the flesh which equates to perfection of Jesus. If Jesus was only partly God, this would be insufficient for the atonement and reconciliation of man to God.

The Holy Spirit is God and dwells within each believer in the risen Christ. Romans 15:15-16 states that man is sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The word sanctified means “to make holy, consecrate, sanctify-hallowed, keep himself holy.”<sup>835</sup> God alone can declare and transform a person to be holy. The saving work of God can only be done by God, which is evident by the saving works of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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<sup>833</sup> Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together”, 797.

<sup>834</sup> Geoffrey Preston, "The Church and the Trinity III: The Church of the Father" *New Blackfriars* 68, no.808 (1987): 395.

<sup>835</sup> *The Strongest NASB Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 1503.

Rejecting the Trinity equates to rejecting God. Denying the equality and eternality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is denying the nature of God. The rejection of the Trinity will consequently lead to worshipping a false deity. The God Most High must be worshipped in fullness and in truth. Worship would be inadequate without the worship of all three persons in the Trinity.

Belief in the Triune God and Christ's work on the cross is what gives access to man for salvation. A faith based upon a God who is not Triune, means that one's faith is placed in a different God than the one of the Bible and therefore that person would still be in their sin. Faith is the "noun corresponding to the verb 'I believe'."<sup>836</sup> The Godhead is the most mysterious gift that God has given to His church and must be believed by the church.

Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Oneness Pentecostals have rejected the Godhead and therefore have rejected God entirely. Faith is only valid when based on the object of that belief. Each of these religions have demoted the divinity and personhood of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, therefore, nullifying the religion. Without the full divinity of each person in the Trinity, the strict belief in one God and three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, that person is worshipping in vain and idolatry.

The Trinity is a radical and mysterious doctrine that is Orthodox. It may not be fully understood but can be sufficiently understood. The lack of understanding of the Triune God should not eliminate the belief in the object of that mystery. The Godhead is confirmed in Scripture and is the only logically consistent answer for the description of God found in the Old

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<sup>836</sup> Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 431.



and New Testament. Truth is truth, no matter how difficult the concept may be to believe. God has revealed Himself in Trinity and must be accepted by the Church.

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