A Review of and Response to *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*. By Anthony F. Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting. Pp. vii + 378. Lanham: International Scholars Publications, 1998. ISBN 1 57309 309 2. Paperback.

My grandfather, Edward W. Farrar (1918-2002), a lifelong Christadelphian, was a correspondent of Sir Anthony Buzzard. It has been my privilege, too, to be Anthony's correspondent and count him a friend (though we have never met in person). We share common interests including orchestral music, gardening, and above all, faith in Jesus Christ and exegesis of Sacred Scripture. I must also acknowledge Anthony as an influence, since it was his article *Satan, The Personal Devil* that first compelled me to seriously question the Christadelphian view of the devil as a metaphor for human sin. While Anthony and I are now of one mind on the matter of the devil's real personal existence, we differ on a matter of far greater importance, namely the doctrine of the Trinity. He belongs to a unitarian sect called Restoration Fellowship. When the subject of the Trinity came up in our correspondence, I realised that I had never read Anthony's writings on this subject. Anthony generously sent me copies of his two books on the Trinity. This is my review of the first book, co-authored with the late Charles F. Hunting (whose acquaintance I never had the honour of making). I will henceforth refer to the book as *TDT* and the authors as AB+CH.

As its subtitle suggests, *TDT* is a polemical work seeking to persuade the reader to abandon the doctrine of the Trinity. In its place, AB+CH propose the unitarian doctrine of a unipersonal God. Jesus, it is argued, is the Messiah, "the supremely elevated divine agent of God" (p. 343), who is ontologically human only and did not personally pre-exist. Of the Holy Spirit (treated more briefly), they write that "It is God's outreach. God's Spirit is His personality extended to His creation" (p. 227). *TDT* makes numerous cogent arguments and, at some points, offers insightful exegesis. Most of the biblical texts that one would expect to be discussed are, although not always proportionately to their importance. The book could have been shortened by avoiding repetition of arguments, but is nonetheless dense with substance. AB+CH engage with a vast array of secondary literature, mainly from theologians and biblical scholars of the 20th century but also some earlier works. They show a special fondness for 'hostile witness' testimony: Trinitarian statements that support unitarian arguments. Regrettably, the authors seldom engage with scholarship that argues for exegetical positions contrary to their own. This suggests that they may have fallen prey to confirmation bias. While primarily concerned with biblical exegesis, AB+CH also have much to say about ecclesiastical history, both ancient and post-Reformation. For this part of their analysis, the authors seem to be largely reliant on secondary sources.

While forceful and sometimes biting in their critique, the authors maintain a gentlemanly tone and offer a carefully reasoned discourse. In what follows I will enter into conversation with the book, summarising its arguments and engaging them with an open mind. I have endeavoured, as the authors wished, to "examine the evidence presented with an open mind" (p. 2).

Due to the length of this review and response, I have included a table of contents and an index of Scripture references, to aid readers who may be interested in my comments on specific passages.

Thomas Farrar, Cape Town, South Africa

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Introduction

AB+CH state from the outset that their concern is with a single question: "Does the Bible teach that God is one unique person, the sole creator of the universe, or is the Godhead composed of two or three coequal partners?" (p. 1). The authors note that they are both former Trinitarians whose study of Scripture and history led them to change their views. (As a former unitarian and now Trinitarian, my own study has taken me in the opposite direction.)

The introduction provides insight into the authors' epistemological framework. They state, "Biblical doctrines must be established by the plain, straightforward texts which bear directly on the subject in question" (p. 1). This shows that they are beholden to the Protestant ideas of *sola Scriptura* and the perspicuity of Scripture—that divine revelation is "plain" and "straightforward," such that any diligent individual may correctly interpret its message. It therefore counts against the doctrine of the Trinity that it can only be "based on inference, rather than plain statements" (p. 4).[1] The book presupposes a high view of Scripture (p. 8), with which I would concur.

A key paragraph lays out a "technical point" about personhood:

> [W]e want to declare our conscious decision to speak of God and Jesus as 'persons,' without the use of a capital 'P.' We are aware that well-instructed Trinitarians express their belief in three 'Persons,' and that by 'Person' they do not mean what we now normally understand by that word. Since, however, it seems quite obvious that *in the Bible* the Father and Jesus are presented as persons, i.e., distinct individuals, in the modern sense, we object to the confusing procedure of trying to explain the Bible by introducing the unbiblical notion of 'Person.' Thoughtful Trinitarians have been unable to define what they mean by 'Person' in the Godhead. (p. 10)

What matters, however, is not whether the word 'person' is capitalised, but what it means. It is remarkable—given that the entire book defends the thesis that God is "*unipersonal*,"[2] with sub-theses such as "the Holy Spirit is *not a person*"—that the authors neither offer nor defend a careful definition of personhood. They limit themselves to stating that by persons, they mean "distinct individuals, in the modern sense." This cursory definition is problematic for two reasons. First, it is imprecise: distinct individual *what?* Distinct individual rocks? Snails? Humans? Angels? The qualifier, "in the modern sense," helps little. Personhood is a highly abstract and complicated concept that still engenders heated debate among philosophers and has far-reaching ethical implications. For instance, one's definition of "person" will inform the rights and protections that accrue to different living entities (e.g., an elephant, a foetus, an

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[1] See below under chapter XIII for a brief critique of this epistemological framework.

[2] According to one definition of personhood, the idea that God is unipersonal is self-contradictory. Greek Orthodox theologian and prelate John D. Zizioulas argues that personhood must be defined in terms of *communion*. Consequently, a unipersonal God would not be a person at all: "Both in the case of God and of man the identity of a person is recognized and posited clearly and unequivocally, but this is so only in and through a relationship, and not through an objective ontology in which this identity would be isolated, pointed at and described in itself. Personal identity is totally lost if isolated, for its ontological condition is relationship" ("On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood," in Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (eds.), *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991], 46).

infant, or an adult with dementia).[3] Moreover, contemporary philosophical discourse is heavily indebted to the early Church, whose discourse on God contributed immensely to the philosophical development of the category "person." The classical philosophical definition of personhood—heavily informed by Trinitarian theology—is that of Boethius (d. 524 C.E.): "an individual substance of a rational nature."[4] When personhood is the very issue under debate, it seems inadequate to lean on some unexplained "modern sense" without offering a working technical definition.[5] There seems to be a lack of appreciation that even *human* personhood is a very complex concept,[6] and that we might expect *divine* personhood to be far more so.

The second problem is that "person," "in the *modern sense*," is no more a biblical term or concept than "Person"! With that in mind, the authors ought to recognise that when they interpret texts like the Shemaʿ (Deut. 6:4) to mean that God is one *person*, their judgment is "based on inference, rather than plain statements," since the text does not use the term "person." In that sense, *both* Trinitarianism and unitarianism are properly called post-biblical doctrines, the latter being a reaction against the former's concept of Divine Personhood.

I appreciate that the authors are not dismissive of the category of "mystery," stating, "We do not deny the existence of 'mystery' in religion…But mystery and contradiction are two different things" (p. 10). Amen to that!

Chapter I. The God of the Jews

In this chapter, AB+CH appeal to the Hebrew Bible to establish the Israelite worldview as a baseline that should then be maintained unless the New Testament provides compelling evidence to move beyond it. The Old Testament text that receives the most attention in this chapter is the Shemaʿ (Deut. 6:4), which has since antiquity functioned as the creed of Judaism. The authors state, "It is certain that the nation of Israel…knew nothing about a duality or Trinity of persons in the Godhead" (p. 14). True, but one also risks anachronism in describing the Israelite worldview as "Belief in a unipersonal God" (p. 15). Granted, the Israelites—informed by texts such as the Shemaʿ—came to believe in one God, and that God was understood as one "he"[7] (the masculine pronoun being to some degree an anthropomorphism, like biblical references to God's arm or eyes). However, it is not as though Israel had applied the later philosophical concept of personhood, rejected the notion that Yahweh could be one

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[3] Stanley Rudman observes the moral consequences of defining "personhood" in rational terms: "Although a definition of personhood in terms of rationality would not automatically justify abortion or infanticide, it is clear that the emphasis on rationality easily leads to diminished concern for certain human beings such as infants, idiots, and the senile, groups of people who have, under the influence of both Christian and humanistic considerations, been given special protection" (*Concepts of Person and Christian Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 47).

[4] "Person (In Philosophy)." New Catholic Encyclopedia. *Encyclopedia.com*. 26 Apr. 2021 <https://www.encyclopedia.com>.

[5] I have been amazed at the number of debates on the Trinity I have witnessed in which neither side properly addresses what they mean by "person." On p. 98, AB+CH repeat that they use the word "person" "in the modern sense of that word," without further explanation.

[6] "Various criteria have been proposed for distinguishing 'persons' from entities that are not persons…'Persons' have been variously defined in terms of material criteria such as body or brain, mental criteria such as self consciousness, rationality or intentionality, moral criteria such as rights or respect, and religious criteria such as soul or relationship to God" (Rudman, *Concepts of Person*, 2).

[7] The reader's forgiveness is begged for my non-use of honorific capitalisation of pronouns referring to God. This decision is made in the interest of semantic precision, not irreverence.

multipersonal God, and thus settled on a doctrine of one unipersonal God. They experienced God as analogous to a human, only infinitely greater in power, majesty, goodness, etc. There was no reason for them to think of God as multipersonal, but neither had they rejected the idea—*because it had never yet been proposed*, and a philosophically precise concept of "personhood" did not yet exist.

No scholarly consensus exists on the precise meaning of the Shemaʿ; several renderings of the Hebrew are possible.[8] There is also disagreement on what is meant by "one"; many scholars do not regard the Shemaʿ as originally a direct statement of monotheism. Proposals include that it refers to Yahweh's uniqueness *for Israel*, or uniqueness relative to all other reality, or to Yahweh's moral integrity.[9] In later portions of the Hebrew Bible (deutero-Isaiah and Zechariah, for instance), an unambiguous monotheism is apparent. However, even here, the concern is not with philosophical precision about Yahweh's *internal* nature (unipersonal vs. multipersonal), but with Yahweh's absolute uniqueness and superiority vis-à-vis all other reality. The polytheistic worldviews of Israel's neighbours that she was warned to reject did not contain anything analogous to the Trinity (a communion of persons united in perfect love), but pantheons of deities with distinct domains, conflicting interests, and fickle demands, as well as worship of created things (idolatry). This is what "There is no other" was designed to exclude. The Hebrew Bible certainly does not teach a Trinity doctrine, but neither does it contradict it.

The authors rightly object to the claims of some Trinitarians that the Hebrew word for "God" (ʾĕlōhîm) implies the Trinity because it is syntactically plural. The word is semantically singular when applied to Yahweh. They also rightly reject the idea that the Hebrew word for "one," ʾeḥāḏ, implies plurality-in-unity. In fact, the word simply means "numerically one," though it *can* be applied to compound entities, like herds or married couples. Hence, the use of this word neither supports nor contradicts Trinitarian dogma.

Concerning Genesis 1:26 ("Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness'"), AB+CH correctly observe that biblical scholars have long abandoned any notion that the "us" here are the persons of the Godhead. However, some nuance is needed. At the level of the grammatical-historical meaning, it is likely, as AB+CH suggest, that God is addressing the heavenly council. This, however, does not rule out the possibility of a *sensus plenior*, a richer theological meaning that may have escaped the original (human) author. As I have documented elsewhere,[10] Christian writers from the early second century onward consistently interpreted this text as the Father addressing the Son, and there is some evidence

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[8] Daniel I. Block lists five possible renderings after "Hear, O Israel:", namely, "Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one"; "Yahweh our God is one Yahweh"; "Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one"; "Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is unique"; "Yahweh is our God; Yahweh alone" ("How Many is God? An Investigation into the Meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4-5," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 47* [2004]: 196). Judah Kraut plausibly proposes that the verse follows a "staircase parallelism" structure, in which the AB/AC pattern can be reduced semantically to ABC. Hence, "Yahweh our God, Yahweh one" simply means, "Yahweh our God is one" ("Deciphering the Shema: Staircase Parallelism and the Syntax of Deuteronomy 6:4," *Vetus Testamentum 61* [2011]: 582-602).

[9] See, e.g., J. Gerald Janzen, "On the Most Important Word in the Shema (Deuteronomy VI 4-5)," *Vetus Testamentum 37* (1987): 280-300; Nathan MacDonald, *One God or one Lord?: Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism'* (PhD dissertation; Durham University, 2001); Lucien-Jean Bord and David Hamidović, "Écoute Israël (Deut. VI 4)," *Vetus Testamentum 52* (2002): 13-29.

[10] See my article, *Early Christian Interpretation of the 'Us' of Genesis 1:26*.

that Paul held this view. There are numerous cases where a New Testament writer gives a Christological application to a text that, in its original context, had nothing to do with Christ—the use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 being a classic example. Thus, while we have no explicit New Testament warrant for understanding Genesis 1:26 as addressed to Christ, this interpretation is in keeping with New Testament hermeneutics, and consistent with New Testament testimony (to be discussed below) to Christ's participation in creation.

A final observation, which struck me as ironic, is that some of the texts cited in the book to establish the character of Israelite monotheism are among those *applied to Christ in the New Testament*, directly or by allusion (e.g., Deut. 32:39; Isa. 43:10; 44:6; 45:21-22).[11]

Chapter II. Jesus and the God of the Jews

Jesus and the Shemaʿ

One of the central arguments of the book is drawn from Mark 12:28-34, where Jesus and a scribe dialogue concerning the greatest commandment of Torah. Jesus responds with the Shemaʿ; the scribe agrees and adds a further statement, "He is One and there is no other than he," for which Jesus commends his understanding. AB+CH argue that "If [Jesus] were to introduce a shattering, radical change in Judaism's understanding about God, this would have been an obvious opportunity" (p. 35). They infer, "Jesus evidently knows nothing at all of any Trinity" (p. 36).

This is, however, an argument from silence. The authors are reminded that it is not our prerogative to dictate to God how he ought to reveal truths to us. We may prefer "plain statements" in Scripture at what seem to be appropriate places, but God need not oblige us. The clay cannot dictate terms to the potter. As for the case at hand, the scribe has asked Jesus, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" meaning *in the Torah* (cf. Matt. 22:36). A question about Torah is *not* an obvious opportunity to introduce a significant new development in the doctrine of God; had Jesus responded with a Trinitarian statement, it would not have answered the scribe's question. It is, however, significant that Mark follows this pericope immediately with Jesus' question, directed to the scribes, about the Messiah's lordship over David, based on Psalm 110:1 (Mark 12:35-37). It is as though Mark wishes to balance the affirmation of the Shemaʿ with a high—albeit veiled—Christological statement. Veiled statements of Christology are, in fact, the norm in Mark, due to the well-known "Messianic secret" motif. Given that Jesus keeps his Messiahship secret in his public ministry in Mark, would we expect him to be open about his divinity?

"The only true God" (John 17:3)

AB+CH proceed to argue that John 17:3 contains an equally important creedal statement. Here, Jesus prays, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (NRSV). The authors note Augustine's attempt to rephrase the saying, and offer their own interpretation: "It is straightforward and clear. Jesus is a person

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[11] Deuteronomy 32:39 and Isaiah 43:10 are among the Old Testament "I am he" sayings of God after which Jesus' *egō eimi* sayings in the Gospel of John are patterned (see below). Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX is also the likely source of the biblical quotation of Hebrews 1:6. Isaiah 44:6 is applied to Christ in Revelation (1:17; 2:8; 22:13). Isaiah 45:23 is applied to Christ in Philippians 2:10-11. AB+CH astutely notice that some of these texts ascribe the title of "Saviour" to Yahweh in an exclusive sense, and yet that the New Testament epistles refer to both God and Jesus interchangeably as "our Saviour."

separate and distinct from his Father, the only true God. Jesus has not been incorporated into the Godhead" (p. 39). They go on to stress the absoluteness of the adjectives "only" and "true." Context is important, however. John 17 is referred to by biblical scholars as the High-Priestly prayer, because Jesus is offering the Father a prayer of intercession on behalf of his followers, thereby assuming a priestly, mediatorial role. The prayer is also clearly designed to be overheard by the disciples (and if it were not, how was it preserved?) Hence, he addresses the Father—*as his followers' representative and in their hearing*—as "the only true God." Would it have been appropriate, in this setting, for the intercessor to also name himself as an addressee, to clarify that he too is God? I think not; and the Evangelist has given the readers ample evidence of his deity elsewhere (1:1, 1:18, 8:58, 20:28; see below). If the Father is the only true God, or "the only God" (5:44) *to the exclusion of the Son*, what sort of "god" does that make Jesus? It seems, then, that when Jesus addresses the Father, and not himself, as the only true God, he is not making an implicit statement about his own non-divinity; he is fulfilling the role of intercessor, of Paraclete. Furthermore, we should not overlook that Jesus nonetheless identifies himself alongside the Father as an *object*, not merely an agent, of life-giving knowledge.

This statement finds a close parallel in 1 John 5:20: "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life" (NRSV). The masculine demonstrative pronoun *houtos* in the last clause could refer to the Father or to the Son. This is part of a widely recognised pattern in 1 John whereby the writer uses ambiguous pronouns that could refer either to the Father or to the Son.[12] This seems to be a deliberate strategy—a stylistic working out of the Gospel's declaration, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). At the least, such ambiguity is inexplicable if the intention of the earlier statement in John 17:3 was to sharply distinguish between Jesus and Deity.

"Son of God," "the Son," and "God the Son"

AB+CH next turn to the biblical title, "Son of God." They posit that this title is a designation of kingship and incompatible with the later dogmatic designation, "God the Son." The meaning of the title, of course, depends on the context. In some instances in the Synoptic Gospels, "Son of God" perhaps messianic kingship and nothing else. However, the stand-alone designation "the Son" that emerges in the Synoptic tradition (e.g., Matt. 11:27; 24:36; 28:19), the Johannine tradition (frequently), and the epistles (1 Cor. 15:28; Heb. 1:2, 8) suggests loftier reflection on the implications of divine sonship. Moreover, as I have pointed out in my article, *Jesus: Son of God, God the Son, or both?*, the title *monogenēs theos* in John 1:18 is tantamount to "God the Son." Thus, if *monogenēs theos* is the original reading (as most textual critics now agree),[13] rather than *monogenēs huios*, then the term "God the Son" is practically biblical.

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[12] There are more than two dozen such instances in this short letter. See my article, *Like Father, Like Son: Ambiguous Pronouns in 1 John*.

[13] The Editorial Committee of the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament gave the reading *monogenēs theos* a "B," meaning that they regard this reading as "almost certain." Brian J. Wright, in his meticulous study, concludes with a near certainty that John 1:18 calls Jesus *theos* ("Jesus as ΘΕΟΣ," in Daniel B. Wallace (ed.), *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic, and Apocryphal Evidence* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011], 265). AB+CH note in passing the possibility that John 1:18 calls Jesus "God," calling it a disputed point (p. 292).

Deity and Agency in John 10:30-36

AB+CH refer to two instances in the Gospel of John where Jesus' opponents accuse him of making blasphemous claims to deity (John 5:18; 10:33). The first is an aside where the narrator explains that the Jews sought to kill Jesus, "because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God" (NRSV). The authors argue that the equality claimed by Jesus was that of "function[ing] on behalf of the One God as His representative" (p. 45 n. 11), and describe it as anachronistic to infer ontological equality. However, the equality described here is that of *sonship*. A son is not merely his father's representative; he is his heir.[14] Moreover, a claim of agency, devoid of ontological grounding and analogous to that of kings and prophets, is unlikely to have elicited a charge of blasphemy.

The second instance confirms that the accusation is in fact an ontological one: "You, a man, are making yourself God." AB+CH characterise Jesus' defense (vv. 34-36) thus:

> Jesus laid claim to a unique position as divine agent. He is the supreme example of a human ruler invested with divine powers…Jesus' defense of his own status explicitly contains the claim *not* to be God" (p. 46).

This interpretation understands Jesus to be denying the charge by downplaying his status, but this is not so. First, Jesus agrees that he is *theos* in some sense; otherwise he would not have provided biblical justification for men being called *theoi*. What he rejects is that he is *making himself* God, like a usurper. Second, the notion that Jesus is downplaying his status misses the *a fortiori* nature of his argument. Jesus' point is not, "I am only claiming for myself what Scripture ascribes to other men." His point is, "If even those men to whom the word of God came are *theoi*, *how much more* am I?" The *a fortiori* leaves open what sort of divinity Jesus claims for himself as "the Son of God," whom the Father "consecrated and sent into the world," but *does not place any upper boundary on the claim*, *pace* AB+CH.

Old Testament Expectation about the Messiah

AB+CH next turn to two Old Testament texts that are interpreted messianically in the New Testament, arguing that both designate the Messiah as sub-divine. The first is the promise of a prophet like Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-18. The authors observe that "God consented to Israel's request that God's agent, *and not God Himself*, would address them" (pp. 46-47). When people in the Gospel of John affirm that Jesus is "the Prophet" (6:14; 7:40), they are probably alluding to this passage.[15] AB+CH argue, "To claim, therefore, that John intended to present Jesus as *God* would throw his testimony into hopeless contradiction" (p. 47). However, it is worth noting *why* the people requested to hear a prophet's voice and not God's (Ex. 20:19; Deut. 18:16). They feared that, if they heard God's voice directly, they would die. What if, in acceding to their request, God—who does far more than we ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20)—spoke to them gently in a way that would *not* strike them dead, in the person of a human prophet who was his divine Son? Perhaps this sheds light on the Gospel of John's reassurance that the Son

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[14] Cf. the parable of Mark 12:1-9, where the tenants assume that by killing the landlord's son, they will gain for themselves what belongs to the landlord.

[15] The text is cited explicitly in Acts 3:22 and 7:37, as AB+CH note.

has not come into the world to condemn it (John 3:17; 12:47). What human prophet would need to make such a statement?

The second text, on which *TDT* places great emphasis, is Psalm 110:1. AB+CH state,

> Psalm 110:1 provides a major key to understanding who Jesus is. The Hebrew Bible carefully distinguishes the divine title *adonai*, the Supreme Lord, from *adoni*, the form of address appropriate to human and angelic superiors. *Adoni*, 'my lord,' 'my master' on no occasion refers to the deity. *Adonai*, on the other hand, is the special form of *adon*, Lord, reserved for address to the One God only… Jesus is the lord whom David addressed prophetically as 'my lord' (*adoni*). Jesus is indeed *kurios* (lord) but certainly not the Lord God. That title, *adoni*, invariably distinguishes a *human* superior from the One God in the Old Testament. It is a distinction which is clear cut and consistent. (pp. 49-51)

This lexical argument merits a careful response. First, in the Hebrew text, the words *ʾǎḏōnāy* and *ʾǎḏōnî* are morphologically identical in their consonants (אדני).[16] As AB+CH acknowledge, they differ only in the vowel points. However, vowel points were included in the written Hebrew text only by the Masoretes, many centuries after Christ.[17] In fact, *ʾǎḏōnāy* and *ʾǎḏōnî* were originally the same word, within a change in pronunciation introduced some time before the 8th century B.C.E. to distinguish divine from human referents.[18] We must rely on oral tradition and scribal opinion to reconstruct how the psalm's original author vocalised it. Thus, it is risky to assign the weight of divine authority to a theological inference based on the difference between *ʾǎḏōnî* and *ʾǎḏōnāy* at Psalm 110:1. There is evidence of uncertainty over the vocalisation of אדני in other texts, suggesting that the vocalisation was not fixed early in antiquity.[19]

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[16] This review follows the Society of Biblical Literature's academic conventions for transliterating Hebrew.

[17] AB+CH insist that the distinction between *ʾǎḏōnāy* and *ʾǎḏōnî* is preserved in the LXX and the NT, since the former is rendered with *kyrios* and the latter with *tō kyriō mou*. Yet both *ʾǎḏōnāy* and *ʾǎḏōnî* are frequently rendered into Greek with the vocative *kyrie*. Moreover, *ʾǎḏōnāy* is translated with *ho kyrios mou* (semantically identical to *tō kyriō mou*, differing only in case) in passages such as Exodus 34:9 and Psalm 35(34):23.

[18] "It might be assumed that somewhere before the 8th century BCE, people felt the necessity to distinguish between the secular and the divine uses of the word. Thus, the pronunciation with *-ay* was devoted to the address form concerning God, leaving the pronunciation with *-i* for the same word when the interlocutor was a person" (Yoel Elitzur, "The Divine Name ADNY in the Hebrew Bible: Surprising Findings," *Liber Annuus* 65 [2015]: 106). *ʾǎḏōnāy* subsequently became a proper name for God, and was pronounced in place of YHWH when the latter was encountered in oral reading.

[19] In Genesis 19:2, Lot addresses his angelic visitors as *ʾǎḏōnay* (note the distinction from *ʾǎḏōnāy*), "my lords." In 19:18, however, after the angels urge him to flee, Lot responds with *ʾǎḏōnāy*, "my Lord." It is ambiguous whether he is still addressing the angels—in which case some scribe(s) mistakenly changed *ʾǎḏōnay* to *ʾǎḏōnāy*—or Yahweh (who seems to be the singular respondent in vv. 21-22). The Septuagint translators understood Lot to be addressing God, as they have translated *ʾǎḏōnāy* with the singular *kyrie*. In Ezra 10:3, Shecaniah apparently addresses Ezra as *ʾǎḏōnāy*. As Fensham writes, "The Hebrew has 'the Lord' (*ʾǎḏōnāy*) referring to God. This is impossible in the context, however. It must refer to Ezra. With a minor change of vowels (*ʾǎḏōnî*) we can arrive at 'my lord'" (F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 135). Thus, some scribe(s) apparently mistook *ʾǎḏōnî* here for *ʾǎḏōnāy*. Yoel Elitzur notes Talmudic disagreement on whether Genesis 18:3 should be read as *ʾǎḏōnî* or *ʾǎḏōnāy*. And, in Judges 6:13-15, Gideon addresses his angelic

Let us assume for the sake of argument that the original author of Psalm 110 intended אדני in v. 1 to be vocalised as *ᵃḏōnî* and not *ᵃḏōnāy*—as is contextually likely. AB+CH maintain that *ᵃḏōnî* is never used of Yahweh and thus implies sub-divine status. However, *ᵃḏōnî* is simply *ᵃḏôn* ("lord") with a first-person singular pronominal suffix ("*my* lord"). It thus conveys the same quality of lordship as any other occurrence of *ᵃḏôn*, and the word *ᵃḏôn* is used of God numerous times in the Hebrew Bible.[20] Notably, in Psalm 97:5, Yahweh is called *ᵃḏôn* in the context of an enthronement psalm celebrating his divine *kingship*![21] That being the case, it can hardly be maintained that the use of *ᵃḏôn* in Psalm 110 is intended specifically to highlight the king's sub-divine status.[22]

We might further ask why, if the distinction between *ᵃḏōnî* and *ᵃḏōnāy* is so vital to Christology, the New Testament writers make no attempt to convey it in translation. Instead, the foundational confession of Paul's theology is that "Jesus is Lord" (*kyrios*)—the same Greek word that typically translates *ᵃḏōnāy* and indeed YHWH. Moreover, while AB+CH make much of Jesus not being called *ᵃḏōnāy* in Psalm 110:1, they are in fact unmoved by New Testament texts in which scriptures about *ᵃḏōnāy* or even YHWH are applied to Jesus.[23] They regard this as mere functional "agency" like that exercised by angels in the Hebrew Bible (p. 48); "That he was *actually* Yahweh was out of the question" (p. 58). Yet New Testament writers state that this Name has been "bestowed" on Jesus or "inherited" by him (Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1:4). A name borne by a Son reflects who he is; an heir is no mere agent. AB+CH are reluctant even to capitalise the title "lord" when applied to Jesus. By their logic, the climactic confession of Paul's gospel (e.g., Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3) can be reduced to "Jesus is lord."

Chapter III. Did Jesus' followers think he was God?

Luke's Notion of Divine Sonship

The next chapter of *TDT* focuses on whom Jesus' followers thought he was, primarily as reported in the Gospels. One substantial argument on offer is that Matthew and Luke do not

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visitor first as *ᵃḏōnî* (v. 13) and then as *ᵃḏōnāy* (v. 15). At the time of speaking, Gideon is not even aware that he is conversing with an angel. The reading *ᵃḏōnāy* in v. 15 may have been introduced due to a scribal observation that this angel is referred to as YHWH in vv. 14, 16.

[20] E.g., Ex. 34:23; Josh. 3:11, 13; Ps. 97:5; 114:7; Isa. 10:16, 33; Mic. 4:13; Zech. 4:14; 6:5; Mal. 3:1. There are also numerous occurrences of the plural form *ᵃḏōnîm* for God (e.g., Deut. 10:17; Ps. 8:1, 9; 45:11; 135:5; 136:3; 147:5; Isa. 51:22; Hos. 12:14; Mal. 1:6).

[21] See Peter Craig Hamilton, *Theological Implications of the Divine Title* אֲדֹנָי יהוה *in Ezekiel* (PhD Dissertation; Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990), 75.

[22] AB+CH emphasise the "sharp" distinction between *ᵃḏōnî* in v. 1 and *ᵃḏōnāy* in v. 5. However, the reading *ᵃḏōnāy* is uncertain, as numerous manuscripts have instead the Tetragrammaton.

[23] We will see below that John 12:36-41 and John 20:28 are two instances of *ᵃḏōnāy* texts (Isaiah 6:1 and Psalm 35:23 respectively) being applied to Jesus. Examples of YHWH texts being applied to Jesus include Joel 3:5 (cf. Rom. 10:9-13), Isaiah 45:21-23 (cf. Phil. 2:9-11), Jeremiah 17:10 (cf. Rev. 2:23); Zech. 14:5 (cf. 1 Thess. 3:13); Isaiah 13:6 (cf. 1 Thess. 5:2); Isaiah 2:10, 19, 21 (cf. 2 Thess. 1:9). There are many subtler cases that easily escape notice, where biblical language about YHWH is applied to Jesus. For instance, the vision of the exalted Christ in Revelation 1:12-16 is modelled after the "son of man" figure of Daniel 7:13, but the description of the figure's hair as white as wool is taken from the description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9 (as the white hair signifies ancientness, this is probably intended to signal Christ's preexistence). Again, the Lamb in the throne vision of Revelation 4-5 has seven eyes, an allusion to the seven eyes of YHWH in Zechariah 4:10.

report Jesus' pre-existence, and seem to believe that Jesus' conception in Mary's womb was the beginning of his existence. Moreover, the angel's statement in Luke 1:35 seems to imply a causal relationship between the virgin birth and Jesus' identity as Son of God: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (NRSV). Does this not suggest that any notion of the Trinity was foreign to Luke's thought?

Perhaps. However, it is not Luke's understanding that is canonical, but his words. The great dogmas of the Church emerged from reflection upon the collective testimony of the apostles. Thus, it is not necessary that every point of the dogma be present in every witness, or that any part of the deposit of faith contain the whole. I would, at this point, break with the Protestant epistemology of B. B. Warfield who, as reported by AB+CH, believed that the doctrine of the Trinity is not presented in detail in the New Testament because it was already a settled affair by the time the books were written. A better model is that of St. John Henry Cardinal Newman, as proposed in his famous *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845). Newman wrote primarily for an Anglican audience that shared his Trinitarianism. However, he adduces the doctrine as an example of the problem of doctrinal development. Responding to the rule of Vincent of Lerins (that "Christianity is what has been held always, everywhere, and by all"), he surveys the ante-Nicene Church Fathers and finds that most of them were defective in some aspect of their understanding of the Trinity. Hence, it is not in any individual writer but in an organic, catholic process of development that dogma emerges.

The same could be said of the New Testament writers—not that their writings contain theological error, but that no individual writer could see the doctrinal whole to which he was contributing. Luke's apparent silence on pre-existence is no strike against this doctrine, just as Mark's silence on virgin birth and James's silence on Jesus' atoning death are no strikes against those doctrines. Each is a New Testament doctrine, even if not every New Testament document testifies to it. Did Luke believe that Jesus is the Son of God because, and only because, he was born of a virgin? This is a *possible*—but not *necessary*—implication of his statement that the child will *be called* the Son of God because of the manner of his conception. The statement seems analogous to Romans 1:4, where Paul states that Jesus was *declared* to be the Son of God by the resurrection of the dead. Yet for Paul, Jesus was already the Son of God before his resurrection (e.g., Rom. 8:3). Similarly, Luke himself (assuming he wrote Acts) has Peter announce that God has *made* the crucified Jesus "Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36), but we know from his Gospel that he understood Jesus to be Lord and Messiah already at his birth (Luke 2:11), and even as a foetus (Luke 1:43)!

TDT places enormous weight on an uncertain inference from Luke 1:35, while making no mention of evidence from the Synoptic Gospels that has convinced numerous biblical scholars

that they implicitly depict Jesus as divine.[24] Indeed, Simon J. Gathercole has put forth exegetical arguments for pre-existence in the Synoptic Gospels as well.[25]

The Messiah in the Book of Hebrews

TDT next turns to the Book of Hebrews, emphasising that this book places "special emphasis" "on the humanity of Jesus" (p. 73). True, but most New Testament scholars also agree that the letter emphasises Christ's pre-existence. AB+CH do not really engage with the evidence for pre-existence but appeal to the late James D. G. Dunn, who argued that pre-existence in Hebrews is ideal rather than personal.[26] The ideal pre-existence reading of Hebrews was subsequently also articulated by Kenneth Schenck.[27] This view rests on the premise that the referent of the letter's exordium and catena (Heb. 1:1-14) is not Christ personally but *Wisdom*. Moreover, Dunn characterises Hebrews' worldview as a synthesis between "Platonic cosmology and Judaeo-Christian eschatology."[28] However, while the language of the exordium surely draws on Wisdom motifs (e.g., by alluding to Wisdom of Solomon 7:26 in Hebrews 1:3), the writer is explicit that he is referring to God's *Son*, whom he contrasts with angels. The word *sophia* ("wisdom") does not even occur in Hebrews! For exaggerating the importance of the Wisdom motif in Hebrews 1 and downplaying the personal nature of its father-son language, Dunn's and Schenck's exegesis has rightly been criticised by scholars such as

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[24] See, for example, Marcus Throup, *Mark's Jesus, Divine?: A Study of Aspects of Mark's Christology with Special Reference to Hebrew Divine Warrior Traditions in Mark, and in Relation to Contemporary Debates on Primitive Christology* (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2014); C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Sigurd Grindheim, *God's Equal: What Can We Know about Jesus' Self-Understanding in the Synoptic Gospels?* (London: T&T Clark, 2011). To name just two of the relevant arguments, Throup discusses how Mark 6:48b alludes to Job 9:8 LXX (which describes God as the one who "alone…walks on the sea as on dry ground"). Grindheim observes that Jesus' description of himself as "the bridegroom" (Mark 2:19-20 par.) draws on an OT metaphor used to describe God's relationship to Israel (Hos. 2:19-20; Isa. 54:4-5; Ezek. 16:8). Notably, much of the evidence discussed by these authors becomes apparent only when the Gospels are read against the background of the Jewish Scriptures. It is thus very much *not* the case that exegetical arguments for the deity of Christ entail divorcing the New Testament from its Jewish background.

[25] *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). Gathercole's main argument is that sayings of the form "I/you have come" or "The Son of Man came" followed by an infinitive of purpose imply pre-existence (Mark 1:24; 1:38; 2:17; 10:45; Matt. 5:17; 8:29; 10:34-35; Luke 12:49; 19:10), since their nearest analogue in ancient Jewish literature is to angelic visitations (e.g., Dan. 9:22-23; 10:12, 14, 20; 11:2; Tob. 5:5; 4 Ezra 6:30). He offers further arguments based on texts such as Matthew 23:37 and Luke 1:78. Admittedly, the idea that the Synoptic Gospels convey Jesus' pre-existence remains a minority position in New Testament scholarship.

[26] "Christ alone so embodies God's Wisdom, that is, God's creative, revelatory and redemptive action, that what can be said of Wisdom can be said of Christ without remainder. The thought of pre-existence is present, but in terms of Wisdom christology it is the act and power of God which properly speaking is what pre-exists; Christ is not so much the pre-existent act and power of God as its eschatological embodiment" (*Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of Incarnation,* 2nd edn [London: SCM, 1989], 209).

[27] Kenneth Schenck, "Keeping His Appointment: Creation and Enthronement in Hebrews," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament 19* (1997): 91-117; Kenneth L. Schenk, A Celebration of the Enthroned Son: The Catena of Hebrews 1," *Journal of Biblical Literature 120* (2001): 469-485.

[28] Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 52.

Cockerill, Peeler, and Adams.[29] Furthermore, Adams has rightly observed that, despite the use of Platonic language in Hebrews 10:1, the letter's cosmology does not correspond to the Platonic notion that heaven is the realm of ideas. Rather, heaven is portrayed as a great city inhabited by personal beings (Heb. 12:22-24).[30]

Hebrews 1:2c says of the Son that it was he "through whom [God] also created the worlds" (NRSV; *di' hou kai epoiēsen tous aiōnas*). AB+CH interpret this clause to mean "that the One God… established the ages of human history with Jesus *at the center of His purpose*" (p. 75, emphasis added). They probably err in reading *aiōnas* as "ages," since the plural form can denote the spatial world and clearly has this meaning in Hebrews 11:3 (which is also concerned with God's creative work). A more significant error concerns the prepositional phrase *di' hou*. The meaning of the Greek preposition *dia* depends on whether it modifies a noun in the genitive or the accusative case. If genitive, the relevant meaning is "immediate agency, causation, instrumentality," i.e. *through, by,* or *by means of*.[31] If accusative, the relevant meaning is "causation which is not direct and immediate in the production of a result," i.e. *on account of, because of, for the sake of*, or *with a view to*.[32] In Hebrews 1:2c, *dia* modifies *hou*, a genitive pronoun. Therefore, *dia* indicates the Son's agency or instrumentality in creation. By contrast, AB+CH's interpretation, in which the Son is not an agent of the act but a *purpose* thereof, requires that *dia* modify a noun in the accusative case. It can therefore be positively ruled out.[33]

Hebrews 1:2c unmistakably asserts the Son's personal participation in the creation of the universe. Indeed, the writer provides biblical support for this statement in Hebrews 1:10-12 in a surprising way: by applying to the Son a passage from the psalms that was originally addressed to God.[34] This is, in fact, the text that—more than any other—changed my own mind about the pre-existence and deity of Christ. Regrettably, *TDT* gives only cursory attention to this passage (p. 337). They refer the reader to F. F. Bruce's commentary and note that the writer states in Hebrews 2:5 that he is speaking about "the world to come." Yet Hebrews 1:10-12 (like

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[29] Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 99-100; Amy L. B. Peeler, *You Are My Son: The Family of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 23-28; Edward Adams, "The Cosmology of Hebrews," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, and Nathan MacDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 122-39.

[30] Adams, "The Cosmology of Hebrews," 132-34.

[31] This construction is used of intermediate agents, such as prophets (Matt. 1:22; 2:15; Luke 18:31), angels (Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2), or Jesus (Acts 2:22; 10:36; Gal. 1:1). It is also used of the originator of an action, including God (1 Cor. 1:9; Rom. 11:36; Heb. 2:10).

[32] William D. Mounce, *An Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 136-37. See, similarly, Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 223-24.

[33] The contrast between *dia* + genitive and *dia* + accusative is evident in Hebrews 2:10, which describes God as the one "for whom (*di' hon*, accusative) and through whom (*di' hou*, genitive) all things exist." This verse also demonstrates that agency in creation is a divine prerogative for the author of Hebrews. The philosophical distinction between these two levels of causality is also made by Philo of Alexandria (see note 45 below).

[34] For more detail on how the writer of Hebrews came to regard Psalm 102:25-27 as referring to the Son, see my online article, *How Hebrews Came to Interpret Psalm 102:25-27 as Spoken by God to/of the Son*.

Psalm 102:25-27) obviously refers to the original creation.[35] Christ's involvement in creation is also implied in Hebrews 3:3, a text not mentioned in the book. For exegesis of this and other relevant texts (such as Hebrews 7:3 and 10:5-7, both of which imply preexistence), see my article, *The Contribution of Hebrews to New Testament Christology*. Note also that Hebrews 1:3c describes the Son as also *sustaining* the universe ("he sustains all things by his powerful word," NRSV; cf. Col. 1:17) using language reminiscent of a statement about God in Wisdom of Solomon 18:15.[36]

Jesus' Humanity

AB+CD assert that the New Testament places special emphasis on the humanity of Jesus. Aware that Christian orthodoxy also affirms the humanity of Jesus, they assert that "Someone who was fully God and fully man cannot be totally human" (pp. 81-82). But asserting this does not make it true. The claim that the Incarnation is a logical impossibility is a philosophical claim, and thus requires a philosophical argument. However, the writers decline to offer one, or to engage seriously with orthodox philosophical theologians, ancient or modern.

They add, "God cannot die… It is obvious sophistry to maintain that the immortal God died!" (p. 82) Indeed, God cannot die, but the God-man can. While it is technically only the human nature that dies, the united theanthropic person *experiences this death*, and in that carefully qualified sense it can be said that the immortal God died on the cross. An analogy can be made to the idea that the Virgin Mary is the mother of God (a claim also implicit in the Chalcedonian Definition's use of the word *theotokos*, "God-bearer," for Mary). Mary is not the mother of God in the sense that her womb gave life to God. The notion of God being born *qua* God is as absurd as that of God dying *qua* God. However, Mary's womb gave human life to an infant who is also God. By giving birth to a person who is God Incarnate, Mary gave birth to God. She is, in that sense, the mother of God. She is not the mother of God *qua* God, nor did God die *qua* God. But the language of God being born and dying follows from the idea of the hypostatic union. It requires careful nuance, but this does not make it sophistry.

AB+CD observe that "Jews were looking for a human deliverer," "certainly not for God to become man" (pp. 83-84). This is true, but the Jews were also looking for a warrior who would defeat the Roman armies, certainly not a man whom the Romans would crucify. Jesus was not the Messiah that the Jews were expecting, but it is the expectations that were wrong, not the Messiah.

Doubting Thomas' Lord and God

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[35] The heavens and earth that the addressed Lord founded, according to Hebrews 1:10-12, were established at the beginning and will perish and grow old. The writer's statement in 2:5 that he is "speaking about" the world to come refers back to the reference to "those who are to inherit salvation" in 1:14, and possibly also to the old heavens and earth being "changed" like clothing in 1:12 (which implies that they will give way to something new).

[36] Wisdom 18:15-16a addresses God thus: "from heaven, from the royal throne, your all-powerful word leapt as a stern warrior into the midst of the land marked for destruction, bearing your irrevocable command as a sharp rapier" (NETS). The verb translated "bearing" (*pherō*) is the same verb translated "sustains" in Hebrews 1:3c. This, coupled with the reference to God's powerful word, makes an allusion likely. This likelihood is further strengthened by the even clearer allusion to Wisdom (7:26) in Hebrews 1:3a-b (the word *apaugasma* occurs nowhere else in the Greek Bible but in these two texts).

AB+CD next turn to John 20:28, the only New Testament text that without any doubt whatsoever calls Jesus "God" (*ho theos*). They are at pains to downplay the significance of the title, to paint it as an outlier that cannot singlehandedly support a doctrine of the deity of Christ. In fact, New Testament evidence for the deity of Christ goes far beyond the title *ho theos*. However, this text must be allowed to speak, and two key observations are in order. First, Thomas' confession "My Lord and my God" functions as the kerygmatic climax of the Gospel of John. Chapter 21 reads like an epilogue and was probably added in a "revised edition." Originally, the Gospel likely ended with Thomas' confession, Jesus pronouncement about the blessedness of faith without sight, and the concluding purpose statement. Thomas' confession is the finishing touch on the narrative structure, and creates an *inclusio* with the profound use of *theos* for the Logos in John 1:1. Read with the Prologue, Thomas' confession does not merely consist of "Messianic titles" (p. 89); it captures the Gospel's central theological claim.

Secondly, AB+CH urge us to read the Gospel of John through Jewish lenses. Let us do so: Thomas' confession alludes to Psalm 35:23. The preceding verses align closely with Thomas' situation,[37] and the verbal parallel between the forms of address in Psalm 35:23 ("my God and my Lord") and John 20:28 ("my Lord and my God") is too striking to be coincidental. The Septuagint phrase (*ho theos mou kai ho kyrios mou*, Ps. 34:23 LXX) is identical to that in John 20:28 (*ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou*) apart from the reordering of *kyrios* and *theos*. This reordering is probably stylistic, creating a crescendo to the most climactic title, *theos*, which brings the Gospel full circle from John 1:1. What is the exegetical implication of this biblical background to Thomas' confession? Simply this: Thomas is undoubtedly ascribing deity to Jesus (*pace* AB+CH, who claim that in this text Jesus is not "addressed as God in the absolute sense" [p. 343 n. 4]). Psalm 35:23 is addressed to God, and "my Lord" in the Hebrew of Psalm 35:23 translates ʾaḏōnāy, which—as discussed earlier—AB+CH themselves maintain is reserved for God alone. Besides that, it is unthinkable that a monotheistic Jew would address another man as "*my* God" and not fear he had violated the first of the Ten Commandments ("*You* shall not have other gods before/besides me," Ex. 20:3).[38]

John 20:28 is only one short verse, but if we are to accept the canonicity of this Gospel—which means allowing it a distinct voice and theological contribution, without forced "harmonisation" efforts—it really is "case closed" on unitarianism. We may wish for a hundred "plain statements" of Christ's deity in Scripture. If we are given but one, shall we then balk at it?

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[37] His fellow disciples claim to have seen Jesus, but he does not believe them—they are lying. The psalmist states, "…they conceive deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land. They open wide their mouths against me; they say, 'Aha, Aha, our eyes have seen it'" (35:21, NRSV). He then petitions God: "You have seen, O Lord; do not be silent! O Lord, do not be far from me! Wake up! Bestir yourself for my defense, for my cause, my God and my Lord!" (vv. 22-23, NRSV). The call to awaken and not be silent resonates with Jesus' apparent neglect of Thomas by not appearing when he was present. It therefore seems plausible that Thomas could have been meditating on this psalm in his despair prior to the Lord's appearance to him.

[38] The Hebrew ʿal-panay is ambiguous and could mean "before me" or "besides me." The Septuagint (*plēn emou*, "except me") understands it in the latter sense. Even if the sense "before me" is correct (and refers to rank, "ahead of me," rather than presence, "in front of me"), the Jews of Jesus' day certainly did not take this as a warrant to have other gods *after* Yahweh.

Chapter IV. Paul and the Trinity

TDT sets out to "examine [Paul's] harmony or disharmony with both the Old Testament and the words of Jesus, the Messiah, on the key issue of the nature of the Godhead" (p. 91). AB+CH note that "Paul claimed special revelation from the resurrected Jesus" (p. 91). They make no Christological inference from this, but it is in fact significant that Paul's experience of Christ is founded on Christ's being a medium of divine revelation: "For I did not receive [my gospel] from a human being, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12; cf. vv. 15-16). Notice, too, how an appearance of Jesus to Paul in Acts is modelled after an appearance of Yahweh to Isaac:

> The Lord said to Paul by a vision in the night, 'Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent, because I am with you…' (Acts 18:9-10a NRSV)[39]

> The LORD appeared to him that night and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you…' (Gen. 26:24 NRSV)[40]

"One God…and one Lord" (1 Corinthians 8:6)

AB+CH rely on several texts in the Pauline corpus to argue for his "belief in the one true God *as a single person*" (p. 92, emphasis original). The most detailed of these is 1 Corinthians 8:5-6:

> Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is
>
> one God, the Father,
>   from whom are all things and for whom we exist,
> and one Lord, Jesus Christ,
>   through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (NRSV)

It is remarkable that, though this text is mentioned frequently throughout the book, the authors never offer a line-by-line exegesis; in fact, they often quote only the first four words, "One God, the Father" (pp. 56, 157, 180-81, 283, 311, 313, 315, 333), calling this opening phrase "the biblical creed" (p. 333). Their comments on the second "leg" of this creed downplay its importance: "He goes on to say, certainly, that there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, but he does not say (here or anywhere else) that Jesus is 'the *one God*'" (p. 96). However, by writing "there is one God, the Father," Paul no more excludes Jesus from the designation "God" than he excludes the Father from the designation "Lord" by writing, "[there is] one Lord, Jesus Christ." His convention is to use the title "God" for the Father and "Lord" for the Son.

The authors dismiss the idea that Paul has here "split the *Shema* of Israel between two persons" (p. 56)—this would be "to abandon his precious Jewish creed." They rule out this possibility *a*

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[39] That *ho kyrios* in this text is Jesus is evident from the preceding verse, which states that "Crispus, the synagogue official, came to believe in the Lord" (18:8). In Acts, belief is in the name of the Lord *Jesus* (11:17; 16:31). If this does not suffice, Paul addresses Jesus as *kyrie* in his original conversion appearance (Acts 9:5). *ho kyrios* then appears to Ananias in a vision, who relates the vision thus: "Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, *Jesus who appeared to you…*" (Acts 9:17).
[40] See also the night vision of Jacob in Genesis 28:12-15, the call of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:7-8, and similar pronouncements of Yahweh of the form, "Do not fear, for I am with you" (Isa. 41:10; 43:5; Jer. 42:11; 46:28).

priori on the grounds of their own theological presuppositions. Their language shows their awareness of the argument of N. T. Wright, Richard Bauckham, and others that Paul has done exactly that.[41] Regrettably, they do not engage with the linguistic details of this argument.

Crispin Fletcher-Louis can, in fact, write of an "emerging consensus" in New Testament scholarship that "*Jesus was fully and firmly included, as a divine being, within a monotheistic theological framework, and that a high Christology is very early*."[42] Careful study of 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 has contributed significantly to this consensus. As Fletcher-Louis points out, 8:6 (beyond the initial *all'*, "but") reads unmistakably like a self-standing formula, i.e. a creed:

> According to the conventions of Greco-Roman rhetoric, it is an isocolon composed of an equal number of words (13 in v. 6a-c and 13 in v. 6d-e) and syllables (8 + 11 in v. 6a + b-c and 8 + 11 in v. 6d + e-f) in each of its two halves. It contains no verb in the Greek; an ellipsis that reflects both the lack of a verb in the main clause of Deut 6:4 and the way in which the confession functions as a well-known and much used summary of the church's early faith. (p. 36)

The statement's dependence on the Shemaʿ is also not in doubt, given that the Shemaʿ by this time functioned liturgically like a Jewish creed. As Richard Bauckham states, Paul has "taken over all of the words of this statement, but rearranged them in such a way as to produce an affirmation of both one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ."[43] He is

> identifying Jesus as the 'Lord' (YHWH) whom the Shemaʿ affirms to be one. Thus, in Paul's quite unprecedented reformulation of the Shemaʿ, the unique identity of the one God *consists of* the one God, the Father, *and* the one Lord, his Messiah.[44]

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[41] The exegetical argument was originally made by N. T. Wright in his book, *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and The Law in Pauline Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 1991), 120-36. Comparing the Greek of Deuteronomy 6:4 LXX with that of 1 Corinthians 8:6, Wright states that Paul "has expanded the formula…so as to include a gloss on θεός and another on κύριος…Paul has placed Jesus *within* an explicit statement, drawn from the Old Testament's quarry of emphatically monotheistic texts, of the doctrine that Israel's God is the one and only God, the creator of the world. The *Shema* was already, at this stage of Judaism, in widespread use as *the* Jewish daily prayer. Paul has redefined it christologically, producing what we can only call a sort of christological monotheism" (*Climax*, 129). The matter was much-discussed throughout the 1990s, and must therefore be the source of *TDT*'s allusion to "split[ting] the *Shema*."

[42] Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism 1: Christological Origins: The Emerging Consensus & Beyond* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 8 (emphasis original). This consensus is specifically said to be *against* James D. G. Dunn, whose exegesis AB+CH rely on rather uncritically throughout *TDT*. Note, however, that the emerging consensus "agreed with Dunn that Paul (and the Synoptics) belong firmly within a Jewish religious context and that NT Christology cannot be explained, as Bousset argued, with recourse to the influence of a Greco-Roman model." So the new consensus does not result from abandoning the Jewish context of the New Testament, but embracing it.

[43] *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 212.

[44] *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 213. Bauckham further notes that, "Even if 'Lord' in verse 6 means no more than 'lords' in verse 5—and it must mean at least this—there can be no doubt that the *addition* of a unique Lord to the unique God of the Shemaʿ would flatly *contradict* the uniqueness of the latter" (212-13). Thus, the interpretation of AB+CH, in which a separate Lord is appended to the one Lord God of the Shemaʿ, is far *more* problematic for monotheism than the "reformulated Shemaʿ" reading.

We must also not overlook the importance of the subordinate clauses of 1 Corinthians 8:6. Paul writes of the Father, literally, "from whom (*ex hou*) [are] all things and we for him (*eis auton*)," and of Jesus Christ, "through whom (*di' hou*) [are] all things and we through him (*di autou*)." Compare a similar statement of Paul in Romans 11:36, which (apparently) refers only to God (cf. vv. 32-35): "For from him (*ex autou*) and through him (*di' autou*) and for him (*eis auton*) are all things." The use of such prepositional phrases to describe the causative power of deity is typical of Greek philosophical literature, as Gregory Sterling points out.[45] Notably, where Paul elsewhere ascribes all three levels of causality (from, through, for) to God, in 1 Corinthians 8:6 he divides them between God (from, for) and Christ (through). He therefore "splits" his philosophical description of deity, just as he "splits" the Shemaʿ!

"One Lord…one God" (Ephesians 4:4-6)

AB+CD refer to other monotheistic assertions from the Pauline corpus. In Ephesians 4:4-6, the unity of the spirit is described:

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (NRSV).

Here, it is clear that "one God and Father of all" refers only to the Father, since Jesus ("one Lord") and the Holy Spirit ("one Spirit") are mentioned separately. As with 1 Corinthians 8:6, the Father being called the "one God" does not exclude Christ from divinity any more than Christ being called the "one Lord" excludes the Father from lordship. Moreover, just as in Romans 11:36, this text describes God's divine transcendence through prepositional phrases: "above all" (*epi pantōn*), "through all" (*dia pantōn*), and "in all" (*en pasin*). The same assertion is made about Christ elsewhere: all things are through him (1 Cor. 8:6) and were created in him and through him (Col. 1:16). Thus, the statement in Ephesians 4:4-6 adds weight to the idea that Paul ascribes deity to Christ in 1 Corinthians 8:6.

"One God…one mediator" (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

In 1 Timothy 2:5-6, we have another traditional formulation:

> For there is one God;
>   there is also one mediator between God and humankind,
> Christ Jesus, himself human,
>   who gave himself a ransom for all (NSRV)

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[45] "Prepositional Metaphysics in Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Early Christian Liturgical Texts," *Studia Philonica 9* (1997): 219-38. Examples he cites include the following: "all things are from God (*ek theou*) and through God (*dia theou*) hold together for us" (Pseudo-Aristotle, *De mundo* 397b, 3rd century B.C.); "For all things everywhere are through you (*dia sou*) and have become for us on account of you (*dia se*)" (Aelius Aristides 45.14, 2nd century C.E., addressing the god Serapis). The Hellenistic Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria described four kinds of causality: "For to bring anything into being needs all these conjointly, the 'by which' (*to huph' hou*), the 'from which' (*to ex hou*), the 'through which' (*to di' hou*), and the 'for which' (*to di' ho*), and the first of these is the cause, the second the material, the third the tool or instrument, and the fourth the end or object" (*On the Cherubim* 125, 1st century C.E.). The translation of Philo is taken from *Philo, Volume II* (Loeb Classical Library; ed. G. P. Goold; trans. F. H. Colson & G. H. Whitaker; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 83.

The statement about Jesus' redemptive work is regarded as a Graecised adaptation of the dominical saying recorded in Mark 10:45, "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."[46] The Semitic idiom "son of man," for instance, has been altered to "man" (*anthrōpos*). The emphasis on Jesus' humanity and his mediatorial role supports the assertion of v. 4 that God "wills all men (*pantas anthrōpous*) to be saved." If this were the only statement about God and Christ in the Pauline corpus, we might well accept it as a unitarian proof-text: God is God, Jesus is a man, end of discussion. However, we must read this statement in the wider Pauline context, and when we do, we find that, for Paul, Jesus' humanity and pre-existent divinity are compatible.

Moreover, even within the Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Timothy and Titus) a rich theological portrait of the one mediator, the man Christ Jesus, emerges. There may be hints of Christ's pre-existence in 1 Timothy 1:15 and 3:16, but the language of 2 Timothy 1:9-10 ("made manifest through the appearance of our Saviour Jesus Christ") "clearly indicates the entrance of a pre-existent figure into the world to save, *viz.* the incarnation (personal manifestation) of Christ."[47] The first coming of Christ is here described as his *epiphaneia*, just as his second coming is described elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Tit. 2:3). As BDAG lexicon states,

> As a *terminus technicus* relating to transcendence [the word *epiphaneia*] refers to a visible and frequently sudden manifestation of a hidden divinity, either in the form of a personal appearance, or by some deed of power or oracular communication by which its presence is made known.[48]

Finally, the statement on Christ's atoning work in Titus 2:14—who in v. 13 has been called "God" or, more likely, "the glory of God"[49]—applies several expressions about God from the Jewish Scriptures to Christ. Verse 14 says of Christ, "He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (NRSV). There is a clear allusion in 14b (*lutrōsētai hēmas apo pasēs anomias*) to Psalm 129:8 LXX, which says of the Lord (God) that he "will redeem Israel from all its lawlessness" (*lutrōsētai ton Israēl ek pasōn tōn anomiōn autou*). The next clause alludes to several statements in Ezekiel 36-37, in which God promises to cleanse Israel from their lawless

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[46] See, for instance, Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 183; Andrew Yu-Yee Lau, *Manifest in Flesh: The Epiphany Christology of the Pastoral Epistles* (PhD Dissertation; University of Aberdeen, 1993), 111-12.

[47] Lau, *Manifest in Flesh*, 158.

[48] Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 385. See, further, the detailed study of the background and nuances of epiphany language in Lau, *Manifest in Flesh*, 231-288. He concludes, "We suggest that ἐπιφάνεια should therefore be considered as referring to a complex event in which a visible (and at times audible) manifestation of an otherwise invisible deity is perceived, either in the form of a personal or veiled/partial appearance, or by some helping action by which its presence is conceived or made known" (*Manifest in Flesh*, 285-86). He thus infers that the epiphany Christology of the Pastoral Epistles offers an "indisputable" indication of the incarnation and that "a tacit acceptance of Christ's pre-existence is presupposed, if not explicitly stated" (*Manifest in Flesh*, 325).

[49] The syntax of Titus 2:13 is disputed. On the one hand, there is the grammatical issue of the "Granville Sharp" rule, and thus whether reference is made to "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" or "the great God *and* our Saviour Jesus Christ." On the other hand, there is the issue of whether—if the Sharp rule applies—"Jesus Christ" is in apposition to "our God and Saviour" or "*the glory of* our God and Saviour." For an excellent discussion, see Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 750-58.

acts, so that they will be for him a people and he for them a God. For instance, in Ezekiel 37:23 LXX states, "and I will cleanse them, and they shall be for me as a people" (*kai kathariō autous, kai esontai moi eis laon*)—compare Titus 2:14c, *kai katharisē eautō laon periousion*.[50] Lastly, the phrase "a people of his own" (*laon periousion*) echoes a phrase found in LXX texts such as Exodus 19:5 and Deuteronomy 7:6. The latter reads, "the Lord your God has chosen you to be for him an exceptional people (*autō laon periousion*)". There is no mistaking, therefore, that Titus 2:14 ascribes to Jesus Christ prerogatives that, according to the Jewish Scriptures, belong uniquely to Yahweh.

"Existing in the form of God" (Philippians 2:5-11)

AB+CH observe that "Many have viewed Paul's statement in Philippians 2:5-8 as proof that he believed in a Messiah who was both preexistent and God in his own right" (p. 99). However, by foregrounding other statements about "one God" from the Pauline corpus (e.g., Rom. 16:27; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Tim. 2:5; 6:15-16), they rule out this interpretation *a priori*. Having mentioned some sympathy with James Dunn's "Adam Christology" interpretation of the passage, they render Phil. 2:5-8 thus:

> Adopt the same attitude as Messiah Jesus: Who, though having divine status, did not consider his equality with God something to be exploited for his own advantage, but made nothing of his rank by taking the role of a slave and by being like other men. Appearing to be like an ordinary man, he humbled himself by being obedient to the point of death, even death by crucifixion. (p. 104)

Few biblical passages have received as much scholarly attention over the past century as Philippians 2:5-11. No consensus exists on its meaning; much hinges on the disputed phrase, *hos en morphē theou huparchōn* ("who in [the] form of God existing"). Some, like Dunn, see *morphē theou* as semantically equivalent to "the image of God" and thus read the passage through the lens of Genesis 1-3 in terms of Adam Christology. Whereas Adam, although made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27), sought to become like God through disobedience (Gen. 3:5), Christ did not grasp at equality with God, but humbled himself, even unto death on a cross.[51] Others dispute on *structural* grounds that the passage entails pre-existence. While for Dunn, verse 7d ("and being found human in appearance") is a bridge between two chronological "stages" of Christ's mission,[52] Charles H. Talbert argues that the two strophes of Phil. 2:6-8 (vv. 6-7b and 7c-8) are in synonymous parallelism, and "Parallel structure points to parallel meanings." Thus, *both* strophes of vv. 6-8 express the same basic idea, about Jesus' action of emptying/humbling himself unto death, in contrast to Adam.[53]

While Adam Christology is indisputably present in Paul's thought, defenders of the "Adam Christology" interpretation of Philippians 2:6-8 cannot point to an explicit reference to Adam

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[50] See also Ezekiel 36:25-33 and discussion in Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* 758-66.

[51] For a full description of this view, see Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 115-19.

[52] "Verse 7d…provides a bridge to the next movement: for it clearly picks up the last clause of the first movement, the end result of the first stage of Christ's odyssey, and by means of the passive construction makes it the basis for the next movement of thought, the next stage – Christ's death" (*Christology in the Making*, 115).

[53] "The Problem of Pre-existence in Philippians 2:6-11," in *The Development of Christology during the First Hundred Years and Other Essays on Early Christian Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 45-59. Originally published 1967.

or citation of early Genesis in this passage, as is present elsewhere (e.g., Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-49). Moreover, the Adam Christology interpretation rests on synonymity between *en morphē theou* in v. 6 and *kat' eikona theou* ("according to the image of God") in Genesis 1:27. However, a detailed study by Dave Steenburg argued that the linguistic evidence does not support the equation of *morphē* and *eikōn*.[54]

Instead, most biblical scholars understand *en morphē theou huparchōn* "to be an assertion of Christ's pre-existence and divinity."[55] The lexemes and syntax of the passage are understood by most to describe a two-stage process in which Christ first takes on human form and then submits to death on a cross.[56] There is not a conclusive case for this interpretation, which is why it is contested. It should be acknowledged that this is a difficult passage and that exegetical arguments on both sides have merit.[57]

I have personally agonised and vacillated a good deal over this text. What finally tips the scales, in my judgment, in favour of the pre-existence interpretation is Paul's similar but more succinct statement in 2 Corinthians 8:9.

"Though he was rich…he became poor" (2 Corinthians 8:9)

"For you know the generous act [lit. "grace"] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (NRSV). AB+CH mention this text in passing (p. 103) while discussing Philippians 2:5-11; they summarise it as describing "Jesus' career as a demonstration of humility…The Messiah, though designated King of Israel and the world, sacrificed himself for others."

The parallel between this text and Philippians 2:6-11 is close. In both passages, Paul appeals to his readers to imitate some moral quality of Jesus Christ, illustrated by an action in which he moved from a higher to a lower state, leading to some positive outcome. The syntax of Philippians 2:6-7a and 2 Corinthians 8:9 is very similar: Christ's initial state is described with a present participle (*en morphē theou huparchōn*, "existing in the form of God"; *plousios ōn*, "being rich"), and his self-effacing act with an aorist indicative (*heauton ekenōsen*, "emptied himself"; *eptōcheusen*, "became poor").

What does Paul mean that Christ, being rich, became poor? It is clear that "rich" and "poverty" here are metaphorical terms—he is not talking about financial wealth. Nevertheless, for the metaphor to work, the riches and poverty *must be the same kind of thing*. The symmetry

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[54] "The Case against the Synonymity of *Morphē and Eikōn*," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament 34* (1988): 77-86.

[55] Michael Wade Martin and Bryan A. Nash, "Philippians 2:6-11 as Subversive *Hymnos*: A Study in the Light of Ancient Rhetorical Theory," *The Journal of Theological Studies 66* (2015): 110.

[56] "[A] majority take ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων (2:6) to refer to Christ in his pre-existent and divine origins, whether μορφή, is understood to be the equivalent of οὐσία, δόξα, kabod, condition/status, form of appearance, bodily appearance, Daisensweisse, etc. The alternative view, that μορφή signifies the Adamic εἰκών (Gen. 1:27) so that Christ is depicted in his humanity, has persuaded only a minority of scholars, and of this group, a good number still take 2:6 to extol Christ in his pre-existence" (Martin and Nash, "Philippians 2:6-11 as Subversive *Hymnos*," 114-15).

[57] Yet, while an "Adam Christology" reading—in which Christ's humility *in his earthly life* is celebrated—is consistent with Trinitarian Christology, a pre-existence reading is *not* consistent with unitarian Christology. Thus, the stakes are very high for AB+CH: if the majority of biblical scholars are right about this passage, and they are wrong, their entire theological system is seriously jeopardised.

between the two clauses provides another clue. The rich Christ became poor so that others might become rich. This implies that those others were also poor, and further that Christ's riches and those of his brethren *are the same kind of thing*; likewise his poverty and theirs.

This gives us two criteria that an internally consistent interpretation must meet: (i) the riches and poverty must be the same kind of thing; (ii) Christ's riches and poverty must correspond to the riches and poverty of his brethren. A natural interpretation suggests itself: the poverty from which Christ's brethren need deliverance is the mortal human condition. The riches for which they hope are what Paul has earlier called "an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17). Therefore, the riches that Christ gave up were his heavenly glory (cf. John 17:5), while the poverty into which he entered was the mortal human condition. This exegesis implies Christ's personal pre-existence, since his becoming human is presented as his act of grace.

This interpretation is simple and internally consistent. The riches and poverty are the same kind of thing—they are both levels of glory (or of *form*, to use the terminology of Philippians 2). Moreover, the poverty into which Christ entered is the poverty from which his brethren need rescue. The riches Christ laid aside are the riches his brethren can share.

Indeed, no other interpretation passes this test of internal consistency. AB+CH interpret Christ's riches in terms of his royal designation and his poverty in terms of his life of self-sacrifice. Not only are the riches and poverty different kinds of thing (one, a matter of *status*, which in fact he never gave up; the other, a *way of life*), but there is a mismatch between Christ and his brethren. Under a unitarian view, Christ was not "rich" in the sense that he enables his brethren to be, while his poverty (of a *moral* kind) is not the poverty from which his brethren are rescued.

Other suggestions fail on similar grounds. James D. G. Dunn's "Adam Christology" interpretation—in which "being rich" corresponds to Adam's pre-fall state and poverty to his fallen state[58]—suffers from the difficulty that Christ's "being rich" then "has no real content, but remains a purely hypothetical possibility."[59] There was no point in Jesus' earthly life at which he did not share in the ontological poverty of his brethren. Therefore, as Margaret E. Thrall argues,

> [T]o make sense of the present assertion, we need some point of reference for Christ's state of 'wealth' which is 'chronologically prior' to the 'poverty' of his historical life and death, and pre-existent glory is the most likely possibility.[60]

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[58] *Christology in the Making*, 122-23. This is one of two interpretations of the imagery that Dunn offers; the other is that the richness consisted of his communion with God and the poverty of his desolation on the cross (cf. Mark 15:34). Murray J. Harris, however, comments on the weakness of a view that depicts "the riches-poverty contrast merely in terms of the human consciousness of Jesus" (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 579).

[59] Margaret E. Thrall, *2 Corinthians 8-13* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 533.

[60] *2 Corinthians 8-13*, 534. Similarly, Harris: "More straightforward and more consonant with the temporal riches-poverty sequence is the traditional and prevailing view that πλούσιος describes the glory of heavenly existence and ἐπτώχευσεν points to the relative lowliness and destitution of earthly existence. Christ himself chose to exchange his royal status as an eternal inhabitant of heaven for a slave's status as a temporary resident on earth" (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 579).

"The firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15-17)

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (NRSV)

AB+CH quote at length from Dunn, who comments on this text, "What [Paul] is saying is that Wisdom, whatever precisely that term meant for his readers, is now fully expressed in Jesus— *Jesus is the exhaustive embodiment of divine wisdom*".[61] Now, Paul's Christology may well have been influenced by Jewish traditions about Wisdom. He does subsequently assert that "in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3; cf. 1 Cor. 1:24, 30). Nevertheless, whatever their "Hebrew context" (*TDT*, p. 105), Paul's assertions in Colossians 1:15-17 are about *Christ*, (God's "beloved Son," v. 13), not about Wisdom-expressed-in-Christ. We must therefore face them head-on and not use a putative Wisdom *leitmotif* to deflect their Christological implications.

With respect to the term *prototokos pasēs ktiseōs* ("firstborn of all creation"), AB+CH state, "Taken in its natural sense, the expression first-born excludes the notion of an uncreated, eternal being. To be born requires a beginning" (p. 106). Such an argument is a catch-22 for a unitarian Christology since, "taken in its natural sense," "firstborn of all creation" *also implies pre-existence*.[62] Perhaps for this reason, AB+CH immediately leave aside the chronological implications of "firstborn" and opt for the sense of the word found in Psalm 89:27, where it refers to the firstborn's rank, not birth order.[63] Not so fast, however: the conjunction *hoti* ("because") that opens Colossians 1:16 explicitly links the title "firstborn of all creation" to his involvement in creation described in that verse. Without discounting the relevance of Psalm 89:27, Paul clearly assigns chronological significance to *prototokos* here, as he does in v. 18: Christ is chronologically "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead."

In their comments on v. 16, AB+CH repeat their earlier error concerning the meaning of the preposition *dia*. They write,

> The prepositions in Colossians 1:16 need to be translated exactly… What Paul actually wrote was that 'all things'—in this case 'thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities'—were created 'in' Jesus, 'through' him and 'for' him. It was not that Jesus was the creator in the opening verse of Genesis…The point is rather that God made all things with Jesus in mind, with him as the occasion for creation, and thus for him. (pp. 106-107)

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[61] Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 195; emphasis original.

[62] Taken in a chronological sense, "firstborn" is consistent with the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed's proposition, "born of the Father before all ages." Important questions include whether this "birth" constitutes creation *ex nihilo* or something else, and whether this beginning occurs before time or in time. These questions were not definitively resolved until the fourth century. However, already in the second century, Justin Martyr understood the term *prototokos* to entail Christ's pre-existence (cf. *1 Apology* 46.1-2), while maintaining that Christ's birth from God was not "birth" in the ordinary sense of the word (*1 Apology* 22.2). In *Dialogue with Trypho* 61.1, Justin says not that God begot the Logos "in the beginning" (*en archē*), but *as* "a beginning" (*archēn*).

[63] The LXX explicitly uses a future verb, *thēsomai*: "firstborn I will make him".

Now, the three prepositional phrases Paul uses to describe Christ's relation to the divine passives *ktiseōs/ektistai* ("were created")[64] are *en autō* ("in him"), *di' autou* ("through him"), and *eis auton* ("for him"). The preposition *en* is so varied in its meanings that its sense here is ambiguous.[65] However, there is no such ambiguity with *dia*. As was discussed earlier in connection with Hebrews 1:2, *dia* when followed by a genitive noun (as here) denotes the means (instrument or agent) of an action. Only when *dia* is followed by an accusative noun does it denote the end (occasion for) an action. AB+CH's interpretation can thus be positively ruled out on syntactic grounds, since they are interpreting *dia* as though followed by an accusative. Their interpretation is also tautologous, because it makes "through him" and "for him" mean the same thing, whereas they are clearly intended to indicate different modes of causality (as also in Romans 11:36).[66]

Finally, AB+CH assert that, given the context, the creation in view in Colossians 1:16 is "the *new* order which God had in mind from the beginning" (p. 107, emphasis added). Yet Paul could not have been any clearer that *ta panta* here really means every kind of created reality: "in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible." If AB+CH can name some created thing that is neither in heaven nor on earth, neither visible nor invisible, I will concede that the scope of Paul's declaration excludes it. The qualifying phrase, "whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers" is not designed to limit the scope; quite the opposite, it emphasises the qualitative difference between Christ and even the highest of creatures. Paul places Christ squarely on the divine side of the sharp line that, in Jewish monotheism, distinguished Creator from creature.

"God blessed forever" (Romans 9:5)

AB+CH interact with this text only much later in the book (pp. 281-83), but because it is Pauline, I will discuss it here. As any study Bible will note, this verse *may* call Jesus *theos*, but the syntax is ambiguous: *ho ōn epi pantōn theos eulogētos eis tous aiōnas* could be understood as a subordinate clause (thus, e.g., "the Messiah…who is over all, God blessed forever") or a new sentence (e.g., "May he who is over all, God, be blessed forever").

The syntactic ambiguity cannot be resolved with certainty, and we cannot rehearse all of the arguments here. Two things are worth noting, however. First, while AB+CH cite Romans 1:25 and Galatians 1:4-5 in support of understanding God as the referent of *theos* in Romans 9:5, this evidence is less supportive than they may realise. On the one hand, Romans 1:25 and Galatians 1:4-5 have doxologies directed to God, not Christ. On the other hand, the syntax of these two doxologies matches the Christological reading of *theos* in Romans 9:5: a subordinate clause beginning with a relative pronoun and referring back to an earlier mention of the addressee.[67]

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[64] The first occurrence of *ktizō* is in the aorist tense, the second in the perfect.

[65] BDAG (326-30) list means or instrumentality, agency, and reason among the numerous meanings of *en*. The case of *autō* cannot help us disambiguate because *en* is always followed by the dative case.

[66] The prepositional phrase *di' autou kai eis auton* in Romans 11:36 and Colossians 1:16 is identical. Romans 11:36 prepends *ex autou* ("from him"), something the New Testament never asserts about Christ. The Son's role in creation is always subordinate to the Father's, as the agent rather than originator of the act; nevertheless the Son is an active participant in the act.

[67] Galatians 1:4-5 has "our God and Father, *to whom be* the glory forever and ever. Amen" (NRSV). Romans 1:25 has "the Creator, *who is* blessed forever. Amen" (NRSV). Thus, if the relative pronoun

Second, it is worth noting Richard N. Longenecker's recent description of the trend in biblical scholarship concerning this verse:

> The debate among biblical scholars during an earlier generation has been almost equally divided. Of late, however, scholarly opinion in favor of the Christological interpretation seems to have become dominant.[68]

It is true that the vast majority of the over 500 occurrences of *theos* in the Pauline corpus refer to God (as AB+CH observe). However, biblical scholars are aware of this. Perhaps, therefore, it might be worth consulting a recent commentary (such as Longenecker's) to find out the exegetical reasons for the resurgence of the Christological interpretation of *theos* in Romans 9:5.

AB+CH end their chapter on Paul with a discussion of 1 Corinthians 10:4 (pp. 108-113). In the interest of space, I will not engage with this passage here. However, I do want to highlight a feature of the Pauline corpus that receives scant attention in *TDT*: the application of Old Testament YHWH texts to Jesus.

Jesus as Yahweh in the Pauline Corpus

"Lord" (*kyrios*) is a frequent title applied to Jesus in the Pauline corpus; indeed it is used much more frequently of Jesus than of God. Should we understand this title as akin to "Master," a more modest appellation than *theos*? Jeffrey A. D. Weima observes,

> The apostle's exalted view of Jesus Christ is reflected in the title 'Lord,' which was the regular word used in the Septuagint for Yahweh and also a common term used in Hellenistic sources for their pagan gods.[69]

By applying Yahweh texts from the Jewish Scriptures to Jesus, Paul signals his identification of Jesus as *kyrios* in the highest possible sense—as a rendering of the divine Name. The most emphatic such instance (in addition to 1 Corinthians 8:6, already discussed) is found in Romans 10:9-13. Here, Paul epitomises the Christian confession as, "Jesus is Lord." Further expounding on its salvific significance, he declares that "the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him." He supports this assertion with a quotation from the prophet Joel: "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" The Hebrew text of Joel 3:5, however, proclaims that everyone who calls on the name of *Yahweh* will be saved. In Philippians 2:9-11, we read that God bestowed on Jesus "the name that is above every name"—seemingly an allusion to the divine Name. This is confirmed when Paul adds "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the

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functions in the same way in Romans 9:5, we would have "the Messiah…*who is* over all, God blessed forever. Amen."

[68] Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 789.

[69] *1-2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 100. He adds that Paul's pattern of opening his letters by joining God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as the double object of the single preposition *en* is significant, though easily overlooked because of its frequency.

Father" (NRSV). Paul alludes to Isaiah 45:23, where it is Yahweh who declares, "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."[70]

Highly noteworthy is Paul's use of *kyrios* in 1 Thessalonians, thought by many scholars to be Paul's earliest extant letter.[71] The title *kyrios* occurs 24 times in this letter. Eleven instances certainly refer to Jesus, as *kyrios* is accompanied by the name *Iēsous*.[72] In the remaining thirteen cases, *kyrios* is a stand-alone designation, but based on context and the pattern of usage, it is likely that all of them refer to Jesus.[73] A striking, but often overlooked, Christological text is Paul's prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13:

> Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (NRSV)

Notice, first, that in verse 11, God and Jesus are jointly the objects of Paul's prayer, and jointly the subject of a third-person *singular* verb, *kateuthunai*. In verse 12, the Lord is asked to "make you increase and abound in love" and "strengthen your hearts in holiness." Given that *kyrios* is Jesus in vv. 11 and 13, this prayer is certainly not directed to God without Jesus. It is either directed to Jesus, or—an intriguing possibility in light of the singular verb in v. 11—"the Lord" in v. 12 is *both God and Jesus*, jointly. Verse 13 again refers to both "our God and Father" and "our Lord Jesus." The reference to "the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones" alludes to another prophetic text about Yahweh, Zechariah 14:5 ("Then Yahweh my God will come, and all the holy ones with him"). Several other passages in the letter depict Jesus as *kyrios* using phraseology used of Yahweh in the Jewish Scriptures: "word of the Lord" (1:8; 4:15),[74] "the Lord is an avenger" (4:6),[75] "the coming of the Lord" (4:15),[76] "the Lord himself" (4:16),[77] "the Lord…will descend from heaven" (4:16),[78] "the day of the Lord" (5:2),[79] and "I adjure you by the Lord" (5:27).[80]

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[70] One might object that God *bestows* this name on Jesus; it is not his intrinsically. However, one inherits that to which one is legally entitled. Only one who is in fact divine can have the divine Name bestowed upon him. Secondly, one might object that these honours are granted to Jesus "to the glory of God the Father." This qualification is necessary, not to detract from the honour given to Jesus, but to clarify that Jesus is not honoured instead of God; rather, God is honoured when his Son is honoured (cf. John 5:23).

[71] "[T]he consensus view of Pauline chronology places 1 Thessalonians as Paul's first letter written in the late 40s and Galatians as the second written around 49 or 50" (Robert James Mason, "Galatians 3:28: An Aspect of Eschatological Asceticism in Paul," in David Lertis Matson & K.C. Richardson (eds.), *One in Christ Jesus: Essays on Early Christianity and "All That Jazz," in Honor of S. Scott Bartchy* [Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014], 234).

[72] 1 Thess. 1:1; 1:3; 2:15; 2:19; 3:11; 3:13; 4:1; 4:2; 5:9; 5:23; 5:28.

[73] 1 Thess. 1:6; 1:8; 3:8; 3:12; 4:6; 4:15 (twice); 4:16; 4:17 (twice); 5:2; 5:12; 5:27.

[74] Cf. Ps. 33:4-6, 2 Kgs 13:1, etc.

[75] Cf. Ex. 12:12, Ps. 94:1, etc.

[76] Cf. Ps. 96:12-13, Zech. 14:5, Mal. 3:1-2.

[77] Cf. 1 Chr. 16:14, Isa. 63:9, etc.

[78] Cf. Ex. 19:11, Mic. 1:3, Ps. 143:5, etc.

[79] Cf. Isa. 13:6, Joel 1:15, etc.

[80] Cf. 2 Kgs 2:42, 2 Chr. 36:13, etc.

Whereas AB+CH seek to limit Jesus' lordship to the sense conveyed by the word *ᵃdōnî* in Psalm 110:1, Paul consistently grounds Jesus' lordship in the Tetragrammaton itself.

Chapter V. From the Hebrew World of the Bible to the Twentieth Century via Greek Philosophy

Greek Philosophy in Early Christianity

In this chapter, AB+CH propose that Trinitarian orthodoxy is the result of Christianity having been influenced by Hellenistic philosophy, particularly neo-Platonism. To their credit, the authors do not—as sectarian writers sometimes do—posit a sharp dichotomy between philosophy and Christianity, the former bad, the latter good. They acknowledge that "Biblical Christianity itself…presents a 'philosophy'" (p. 115). They do, however, posit a sharp divide between Hebraic and Greek forms of thought, and assert that this divide is an explanation, if not *the* explanation, for the origin of the doctrine of the Trinity—a notion foreign, as they suppose, to the Bible.

The authors assert that the Christian faith gradually "suffered a radical alteration under the influence of alien philosophies" (p. 116); it was in fact "invaded by Greek philosophy" (p. 119). They aver,

> The point at which Greek philosophy was able to interfere with biblical teaching was the Gospel of John and particularly his prologue. A misunderstanding of John's Gospel led to the projection of Jesus back onto the preexisting 'logos.' (p. 130)

They give the second-century Christian writer Justin Martyr as an example of one whose Platonist background led him to misinterpret John's *logos* as the preexisting Son. Their counterclaim is that we must "enter into the thought-world of the New Testament" and hear its words as "the New Testament Hebrew Christians" heard them (p. 123). The result, in the case of John's Prologue, follows thus: "No Trinitarianism is found in John's prologue if the 'Word' is given a lower-case 'w' and if it is thought of as a way of describing the intention or Plan of God, not (at that stage) the *Son* of God" (p. 131). AB+CH echo Reformation-era anti-Trinitarian Michael Servetus in characterising the Trinity as "a mistaken attempt to translate apostolic belief in one God, the Father, into the language of Greek metaphysics" (p. 128).

In response, I will first deal with the epistemological and historical matter of the use of Greek philosophy by the Church Fathers, and secondly with the exegetical issue of whether the *logos* in John's Prologue refers to Christ.

As a matter of history, the Church began in Jerusalem as a small group of Jews with a mission to witness "throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In time, it became apparent that most Jews did not accept the gospel message, while the Gentile mission was successful. Already in the late 50s, Paul must provide a theological explanation for this turn of events (Romans 9-11). One of the biggest controversies in the early church concerned whether Gentile men had to be circumcised—in effect, to become Jews—to be saved. The apostles and elders ruled decisively that they did not (Acts 15:28-29). Gentile believers could continue living as Gentiles, including culturally and linguistically. For instance, there is no evidence of the apostles teaching Hebrew to their Gentile converts. The Greek Septuagint

translation of the Jewish Scriptures was the Bible used by most of the early Church, at least outside the holy land; and the New Testament itself was entirely written in Greek.

What about the claim that Christianity was invaded by Greek philosophy? One might counter that it was more the other way around. Already in Acts 17, Paul is engaged by Athenian philosophers and addresses them at the Areopagus, even quoting from Greek poets to support his argument (Acts 17:28). This exemplifies the principle Paul articulates in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some" (NRSV). He moves, physically and intellectually, into the Greek philosophers' space to reach them on their terms. One of the sayings Paul quotes from a Greek poet is, "In him (*en autō*) we live and move and have our being." This is an example of what Gregory E. Sterling calls *prepositional metaphysics* (as was mentioned earlier under 1 Corinthians 8:5-6).[81] It was characteristic of Greek philosophical discourse to use prepositional phrases like this to describe metaphysical relationships, such as kinds of causality. And we find Paul and other New Testament writers resorting to such metaphysical language to describe God and Christ, not only when addressing outsiders, but even when writing letters to fellow believers (as in Romans 11:36, Colossians 1:16-17, Hebrews 2:10, and other texts discussed above). The language of Greek philosophy is harnessed, not only as an evangelistic tool, but even in creedal statements like 1 Corinthians 8:6.

To be sure, from the second century onward, we find Christian apologists and theologians engaging with Greek philosophy in a more thoroughgoing way. However, in so doing they were simply travelling further down a road on which their apostolic forebears had embarked. Moreover, they do not uncritically adopt the worldview of the neo-Platonists (or any other philosophical school) but engage with it critically.[82] They sought to show that Christianity was philosophically sound. Certainly, Christian theologians also drew on the intellectual resources of Greek philosophy in order to express truths about God in metaphysical terms. The doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, as expounded in the conciliar statements of the fourth and fifth centuries, are ample evidence of this. Yet, while the Scriptures generally do not express ideas in technical philosophical language or with ontology as their main concern, this does not mean it is a mistake to express truth in such terms.

To summarise, we must distinguish between Christianity being invaded by philosophy and Christianity harnessing philosophy for good ends. Much depends on whether we assume that any post-biblical or non-Hebraic intellectual development in Christianity is inherently suspect, or whether—with Newman, as discussed earlier—we allow for development in Christian doctrine. Not an *alteration* of the deposit of faith, mind you, but a fuller articulation thereof as the Church matures in its understanding of that revelation. Even modern unitarians are part of the legacy of that maturation, for they debate philosophical questions like how many "persons" God is, and whether the Holy Spirit is a "person," and whether Christ preexisted "personally."

The Prologue of the Gospel of John

AB+CH claim that the *logos* in the Johannine Prologue (John 1:1-18) is an abstraction, something like the Plan of God, "the self-expressive activity of God" (p. 190), and not the

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[81] Gregory E. Sterling, "Prepositional Metaphysics."
[82] For a more detailed analysis of Justin Martyr's use of philosophy, for instance, see my article, *Greek Philosophy and Early Gentile Christianity*.

personal Son of God. Thus, "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14) describes not the transition "*of a divine person becoming a human person, but of an impersonal personification…becoming embodied as a human being*" (p. 129, emphasis original). Christ was not the Word from eternity; he is "what the Word…*became*" (pp. 172, 198, 200). Concerning the words *theos ēn ho logos* ("the Word was God") in John 1:1c, they offer the gloss, "was fully expressive of God" (p. 191). They ask whether the usual translation of John 1:1 is even intelligible: "Does the phrase 'the Word was with God' mean anything in English? When was your word last 'with you'?" (p. 193)[83]

They argue that John's Prologue must be understood within its Old Testament background, where God's word is never conceived of as a person. Having reviewed some Old Testament texts about God's word and wisdom, the authors assert that in John's Prologue, "We are surely in the atmosphere of the God who spoke and it was done in Genesis 1" (p. 198). This, we agree, is a good starting point, for John's Prologue unmistakably echoes the creation account in Genesis 1. The same words, "In the beginning" (*en archē*) open John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1 LXX. While Genesis 1-2 LXX never uses the term *logos*, its creation account repeatedly uses the aorist verb *egeneto* ("came to be") to describe created things coming into existence (Gen. 1:3; 1:6; 1:9; 1:11; 1:15; 1:20; 1:24; 1:30; 2:4; 2:7), *always as a result of God speaking*. Thus, when John writes of the *logos*, "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:3 NRSV; cf. 1:10), he is simply summarising Genesis 1-2. The difference is that while God's word is only implicitly present in Genesis ("And God *said*"), John focuses on the word explicitly—building, doubtless, on later Jewish ideas about God's word and wisdom (cf., e.g., Ps. 33:6; Isa. 55:8-11; Prov. 8:22-31).

By writing, "the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1bc), John signals that the *logos* is both distinct from God and yet one with God—a key premise of later Trinitarian logic. The preposition *pros* in the statement "the Word was *with* God" (1:1b; 1:2) is distinctive, but does not—as AB+CH suggest—imply the Word's impersonality.[84] The preposition itself does not convey personhood or lack thereof, and the Fourth Evangelist uses it in a personal sense in 1 John 2:1 ("we have an advocate *with* the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," NRSV). When followed by an accusative, *pros* is a "marker of movement or orientation toward someone/something" (BDAG 874). Its most common sense is "toward," and John uses it repeatedly of Jesus' movement or orientation toward God (e.g., 5:45; 13:1-3; 20:17). When it takes the sense "with," as in John 1:1-2, it still has a dynamic, directional quality that *para* lacks. Charles Homer Giblin has suggested that John's phraseology builds on the opening line of several of the prophetic books in the LXX: e.g., "The word (*logos*) of the Lord, that came to (*pros*) Hosea…" (Hos. 1:1).[85] The key difference is that while the *logos* became *pros* these

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[83] I would begin to answer this personal question by observing that I am not God. It is precisely in the context of sending forth his word that God reminds Israel, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9 NRSV). It is thus very dangerous to use a man's word as the measure of what God's Word might be.

[84] They write, "Significantly, John always uses the preposition *para* (with) to express the proximity of one *person* to another (1:39; 4:40; 8:38, etc.). Yet in his prologue he chooses *pros* (with), suggesting that 'the word' is not meant to designate a *person* alongside God" (pp. 194-95).

[85] "The expression *ho logos ēn pros ton theon* apparently builds on the notion of divine communication to the prophets; the pattern is usually *logos kyriou* + aorist of *ginomai* + *pros* + accusative (Hos 1:1; Mic 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Zech 1:1; compare Jer 1:1). *Pros* has a directional sense that is dynamic even without requiring a verb of motion or of speaking. The evangelist, however, pointedly

human prophets on particular occasions (as signalled by the aorist verbs), the *logos* simply "was" *pros* God on an ongoing basis (*ēn*, imperfect tense).

The language of John 1:1-4 neither establishes nor rules out that the *logos* is to be understood as "personal."[86] Though it is noteworthy that the *logos* is called "God" (or, at a minimum, a god)[87]—which the Old Testament never does in a positive sense for any abstraction—if vv. 1-4 were the entirety of the Prologue, we would do well to interpret it as an abstraction, as usually elsewhere in Scripture.[88] However, that John's *logos* is not merely an abstraction but identified with the Son of God becomes evident in John 1:5-13—a portion of the Prologue that *TDT* (along with some of its sources) pointedly neglects—as well as in vv. 14-16.

Here I can only briefly recapitulate an argument I have made elsewhere in more detail.[89] First, in John 1:14-16, *ho logos* is the referent throughout. For instance, in v. 14, "we beheld his glory (*tēn doxan autou*), glory as of the only Son of the Father," the antecedent of the pronoun *autou* is *ho logos*—the Word, not "what the Word…*became*." So, too, *peri autou* ("about him") in v. 15 refers to *ho logos*. Since unitarian exegetes urge us to translate pronouns referring to *ho logos* as "it" in John 1:1-3, we must ask whether they will be consistent and do so also in vv. 14-16. Or, if they recognise that, "we beheld *its* glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father…John testified about *it*…" manifestly makes no sense, and translate these pronouns "his" and "him," consistency dictates they should also do so in vv. 1-3.

Vv. 5-13 contain further important evidence, even though the word *logos* is not used. Note how the light/darkness imagery of these verses also echoes the creation story (Gen. 1:2-5, 14-18). AB+CH prevail upon us that *logos* is not a personal noun. However, *phōs* ("light"), also not a personal noun, is clearly used of a person in John 1:9-12. Indeed, the Evangelist finds it necessary, after introducing John as a witness to the Light, to stress, "He was not the Light" (John 1:8). This statement is pointless, unless "the Light" is some other person (cf. John 1:19-27; 8:12; 9:5). In fact, from a close reading of vv. 9-12 there is no doubt that the Light is Christ himself ("…to those who believe in his name"; cp. John 2:23; 3:18). Not only so, but the parallel between John 1:10 ("the world came into being through him," *ho kosmos di' autou egeneto*) and 1:3 ("all things came into being through him," *panta di' autou egeneto*) establishes that the Light and the Word are one and the same.[90] Thus, just as *to phōs* is an abstract noun—a neuter one, at that—and nonetheless refers to Christ personally, so also the Word.

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uses *ēn* instead of *egeneto/egenēthē* and directs the 'word' not to a human prophet but to God" ("Two Complementary Literary Structures in John 1:1-18," *Journal of Biblical Literature 104* [1985]: 90 n. 10).

[86] We must remind the reader at this point of the thorny philosophical issue of what "person" means, which *TDT* almost entirely ignores despite that its central theses hinge on whether certain entities are or are not persons!

[87] *Theos* is anarthrous in John 1:1c. However, this is fairly common in the Gospel of John, even when the referent is God himself. In this instance, the Greek word order makes *theos* the clause's emphatic word (*theos ēn ho logos*), making it unlikely that the word carries less than its full force.

[88] A notable exception is Revelation 19:13, attributed to an author named John, where the exalted Christ is said to be named "the Word of God" (*ho logos tou theou*).

[89] See my online article, *Jesus Christ in the Prologue of John: The Word Per Se, or the Word Made Flesh Only?*

[90] This is another instance of the *dia* + genitive construction, and therefore again entails that the referent was an instrument or agent in the creation of the world.

A final comment on the prologue concerns its relationship to the opening verses of 1 John. AB+CH interpret 1 John 1:1-2 as a commentary on John 1:1-18 that reinforces that the *logos* is impersonal:

> The impersonality of the word is suggested by John's own commentary on John 1:1 in 1 John 1:2. It was impersonal 'eternal life' which was 'with the Father' (*pros ton theon* [*sic*], 1 John 1:2; cp. the 'word' which was *pros ton theon*), i.e., the promise of eternal life to be provided through Jesus. (p. 191)

The opening lines of 1 John read thus:

> We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us… (NRSV)

There are some obvious echoes here of the Prologue of John: the reference to "the beginning," to "the word," to the word's relationship to life (cp. John 1:4), and to that which was "with" (*pros*) God/the Father. Nothing about this language suggests, however, that the author seeks to correct a misunderstanding of what he meant by *logos* in the Gospel Prologue. Rather, his emphasis is on the *concrete, empirical reality* of his message ("what we have heard…seen…looked at…touched"), an emphasis repeated in the insistence on "Jesus Christ come in the flesh" over against the writer's opponents (1 John 4:2-3).

Examination of the Greek text reveals further differences between 1 John 1:1-3 and John's Prologue. The referent throughout v. 1, reintroduced in v. 3, is denoted by a neuter relative pronoun, *ho*.[91] It thus refers neither to *ho logos* (masculine) or to *hē zōē* ("the life," feminine); indeed, it is "about" (*peri*) the *logos* and thus cannot *be* the *logos*. If we were to supply the implicit noun, it might be *euangelion* ("good news," which happens to be neuter). In any case, it denotes the content of the writer's message (*ho…apangellomen*, "that which we declare"). The *logos* is not a major theme here; after mentioning that the message is about "the word of life" (*tou logou tēs zōēs*), the writer proceeds to talk primarily about "the life" rather than "the word." This move can be explained by interpreting *tēs zōēs* as an epexegetical genitive, i.e., "the Word who is Life."[92]

Furthermore, we should not too quickly conclude (with AB+CH) that "life" in 1 John 1:2 is "impersonal." The emphasis throughout 1 John 1:1-2 is not on an abstraction but a visible, tangible manifestation that can only refer to the historical person Jesus, and notably Jesus refers to himself personally as "the life" in John's Gospel (11:25; 14:6). Moreover, the statement that the eternal life "was with the Father and was revealed (*ephanerōthē*) to us" anticipates subsequent statements in the letter about the Son of God being revealed (*ephanerōthē*; 1 John

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[91] The neuter relative pronoun ὅ is not to be confused with the masculine nominative article ὁ.
[92] So Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 51.

2:28; 3:2, 5, 8). It is therefore best understood as a restatement of the Gospel's teaching of the Son's preexistence.[93]

Chapter VI. The Trinity and Politics

In this chapter, AB+CH discuss the relationship between politics and the historical development of Trinitarian dogma. In terms of the doctrine's development, they note,

> Some Christian writers hold that the Trinity was already completely at home in Christian circles by the time the New Testament was composed. New Testament authors therefore saw no need to make other than indirect reference to the Trinity. It was supposedly so much an accepted part of church tradition that they scarcely bothered to record what would have been the most dramatic change ever to invade the religious community of the first century. Other writers, recording the same theological event, are in complete disagreement. They point to a bloody centuries-long battle among Christians, in which thousands paid with their lives, before the Trinity was finally canonized as Christian dogma, more than three centuries after the death of Christianity's founder. (p. 144)

I am certainly not part of the first group; nor would be, I think, any well-informed Catholic. Working within Newman's paradigm of doctrinal development, we can readily admit that while the *raw materials* for Trinitarian doctrine are found in Scripture—namely, monotheism together with the divinity of God, Christ, and the Spirit, and distinction made between them— the dogma is not formally spelled out in Scripture, and was never formalised with metaphysical precision until the councils of the fourth century. (On the other hand, to speak of "a bloody centuries-long battle among Christians" before the dogma of the Trinity was formalised is an exaggeration.[94])

It is also worth noting that neither party to the Arian controversy was unitarian in the modern sense of the word. Although Arius' theology cannot be reconstructed with certainty (since his ideas survive only as reported by his opponents), it appears that he understood himself to be following within the theological tradition of Origen, his Alexandrian forebear.[95] He believed in Christ's preexistence and divinity, but divinity of a lesser sort than the Father's. These two positions within the fourth-century debate were theologically much closer to *each other* than to modern unitarians (or to ancient adoptionist monarchianists).[96]

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[93] 1 John 2:28 and 3:2 refer to Christ's future coming and 3:5 and 3:8 to his past coming. Notably, in the first three cases, the subject of the verb is ambiguous and in 3:2 and 3:5 the nearest antecedent is God (see note 12 on ambiguous pronouns in 1 John). Moreover, if 1 John 3:5, 8 are read in light of 1:2 then they would appear to reinforce the Son's preexistence: "the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us…he was revealed to take away sins…the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil." The Son's past and future comings are described with the same verb, *phaneroō* (to be made visible).

[94] As far as I am aware, bloodshed between Christians concerning the doctrine of the Trinity began only in the fourth century, and primarily in the decades *following* the Council of Nicea.

[95] See, e.g., Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 195-98.

[96] The adoptionist form of monarchianism seems to be the ancient position nearest to Reformation-era unitarianism. For a review of fourth-century monarchianism, see D. H. Williams, "Monarchianism

AB+CH are particularly interested in the role of Emperor Constantine at the Council of Nicaea, which formally propagated the dogma of Christ's deity. Though it seems to contain certain factual errors,[97] I will not here contest the book's account of the fourth-century theological controversies, though I have written something on this subject in a review of R. E. Rubenstein's book *When Jesus Became God* (which AB+CH cite as a "well-researched account," p. 153 n. 20).[98] The question of how saintly or otherwise Constantine was does not bear on the validity of the doctrine of the Trinity.[99]

The authors then jump forward by over a millennium to the time of the Reformation, narrating the story of the anti-Trinitarian Michael Servetus, who was burned at the behest of John Calvin. All can agree, with the hindsight afforded by modern ideas about human liberty, that the execution of Servetus (and countless other religious dissenters) represent a blot on the Church's record. It is worth noting that Pope John Paul II apologised on behalf of the Catholic Church for abuses committed under the Inquisition.

AB+CH argue, at the end of this chapter, that the doctrine of the Trinity is responsible for Christian disunity:

> When Christianity took its formal initial step forcing a division of God into two (Father and Son), it fragmented itself, not God. So the Christian world remains to this day; not unified as Christ prayed, but segmented into conflicting denominations. (p. 158)

There is a certain historical irony in this statement, in that the fourth-century creed that formalised the doctrine of the Trinity has been the touchstone of Christian orthodoxy and ecumenical unity for over sixteen centuries, and remains so. Meanwhile, although the Church did experience schisms thereafter (most notably in the fifth and eleventh centuries), the fragmentation of Christianity into "conflicting denominations" was hugely augmented by the Protestant Reformation—the same event that led to the rise of unitarianism.

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and Photinus of Sirmium as the Persistent Heretical Face of the Fourth Century," *Harvard Theological Review 99* (2006): 187-206.

[97] For instance, "Thus [at Nicaea] the second leg of the triangle of the Trinity became dogma. It was to be completed in the next century by the declaration that the Holy Spirit was the third Person of the Godhead" (p. 151). In fact, this declaration came in the same century, at the Council of Constantinople (381 C.E.)

[98] *Review of "When Jesus became God" by Richard E. Rubenstein*.

[99] AB+CH state, "For reasons best known to himself, this largely biblically illiterate emperor, who did not fully understand the theological issues at hand, presided over one of the most significant debates ever to be conducted by the Church. The resolution adopted by the council was to have dramatically important long-term effects on the entire body of believers. Constantine's judgment favored the minority opinion at the council" (p. 151). There are several dubious assertions here. Firstly, it seems clear that Constantine's reasons for calling and presiding over the council were political: he wanted to preserve order and peace and saw this controversy as a threat to it. Thus, he wanted an inclusive solution. Secondly, although Constantine presided and his presence was obviously influential, it was not he who judged the matter. Chadwick notes, "Despite the emperor's dominance, the decisions were made by the bishops which Constantine then confirmed and enforced" (*The Church in Ancient Society*, 200). The council reached a formal consensus; AB+CH do not substantiate their claim that the minority view prevailed.

Chapter VII. The Nature of Preexistence in the New Testament

The main premise of this chapter is that Jews and Greeks had distinct ideas about preexistence. Jews spoke of things already existing in heaven, when what they really meant was that these things were predestined or foreordained. Because Gentile Christians failed to interpret the New Testament in its Jewish context, they mistakenly thought writers who made statements about Christ having been predestined were referring to his "actually preexisting" (pp. 160-61).

The authors describe how "the Jew" thought and spoke, as though Jewish thought in the first century was monolithic. In fact, biblical scholars are now agreed that the late Second Temple period was a time of considerable religious diversity among Jews. The New Testament attests to this when it mentions theological disagreements between the Sadducees and Pharisees over resurrection, angels, and spirits (Acts 23:8). The authors also seem to present a false dichotomy between predestination and preexistence. In fact, the eminent Jewish scholar Ephraim E. Urbach stated concerning rabbinic Jewish ideas about the Messiah, "there are no grounds…for the distinction between the 'pre-existence' of his name and the 'pre-existence' of his personality".[100]

Moreover, there is evidence that Jewish Christians in the first century could and did believe in the personal preexistence of Christ. The *Ascension of Isaiah* is a Jewish Christian apocalypse that, by scholarly consensus, consists of two parts: chapters 6-11 (written in the late first century), and chapters 1-5 (added in the early second century).[101] Both sections of the *Ascension of Isaiah* affirm the personal preexistence of the Beloved (Christ). Chapter 10 (part of the portion dated to the first century) narrates how the Most High instructs Christ to descend from heaven to earth. His descent through the seven heavens is then narrated, with Christ changing his form to avoid being recognised by the angels as he passes. This is followed immediately by an account of the virgin birth. The *Ascension* is not cited here as a theological authority, but to refute the claim that belief in the Messiah's personal preexistence was foreign to Jewish ways of thinking.

Further Jewish (and possibly pre-Christian) testimony to the Messiah's preexistence may be found in the *Parables of Enoch*, which is usually now dated to the early first century C.E. Scholars who maintained that this work depicts the Messiah as a preexistent heavenly individual included James D. G. Dunn.[102] Considering this evidence, we cannot follow AB+CH in boxing preexistence into strictly Jewish (ideal) and Greek (personal) categories. Rather, we must carefully study the relevant biblical texts to identify the kind of preexistence being described in each.

To be sure, when 1 Peter 1:20 states that Christ "was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages" (NRSV), this could refer to ideal as opposed to personal preexistence, but ideal and personal preexistence are not mutually exclusive. Texts

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[100] *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 685.

[101] For more detail on the date and character of this work, with scholarly sources cited, see my article, *Incipient Trinitarianism in First-Century Jewish Christianity: The Evidence of the Ascension of Isaiah*.

[102] "It is certainly clear enough that the Son of Man is a heavenly *individual* in the Similitudes" (*Christology in the Making*, 75). Dunn disputes the relevance of this evidence for New Testament Christology because he dates the *Parables* (also known as *Similitudes*) to after 70 C.E. However, in recent decades, a consensus has emerged that the *Parables* date to around the turn of the era. See my article, *The Son of Man, the Parables of Enoch, and New Testament Christology*, for more details.

that speak of God having sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3; cf. Gal. 4:4; Mark 12:6) are also ambiguous.[103] However, we have already seen that numerous New Testament texts use the *dia* + genitive prepositional construction to unambiguously affirm Christ's personal participation in creation (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; John 1:3, 10). Besides this, several passages in Hebrews affirm Christ's personal preexistence unambiguously or by implication (1:10-12; 3:3-6; 7:3; 10:5-7), as do numerous passages in the Gospel of John (1:1-18; 1:30; 3:13; 3:31-32; 6:62; 8:42; 8:58; 12:39-41; 13:3; 17:5; see below).

AB+CH assert, "There is a deafening silence about any real preexistence of Christ in Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts and Peter, and the whole of the Old Testament" (p. 168). The reader is referred to Gathercole's book (cited earlier) for arguments for Christ's preexistence from the Synoptic Gospels. As for the Old Testament, some of the strongest New Testament evidence for Christ's personal preexistence only fully emerges when these texts (e.g., John 8:58; Hebrews 1:10-12) are understood against their Old Testament background. There are Old Testament texts, such as Genesis 1:26, Proverbs 8:22-31, and Isaiah 48:16, that provide evidence for preexistence if interpreted Christologically, as they were in the early Church.

The writers observe that Jesus in the Gospels seems to "have no memory" of having "been the creator of the Genesis heaven and earth" (p. 169). Such arguments from silence carry little weight. We should attend to what the text says rather than build inferences from what we think the text ought to have said.

Chapter VIII. John, Preexistence and the Trinity

AB+CH rightly devote a chapter at this point to the issue of preexistence in the Gospel of John.[104] The writers state,

> Prodigious efforts have been made to turn the God of Israel into more than one person. 'Clues' pointing to the Trinity have been found in the most unlikely places, as for example, the 'holy, holy, holy' of Isaiah's vision (Isa. 6:3). (p. 181)

There is unintended irony in this statement, for it is precisely the Gospel of John that gives us a warrant for interpreting Isaiah's throne vision Christologically—yet *TDT* never even mentions this passage (John 12:36-41)! Here, at the close of the Book of Signs, the Evangelist

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[103] AB+CH claim that Galatians 4:4 and Romans 1:3 rule out Christ's preexistence since they state that God's Son "came into existence." Matthew W. Bates, however, in a detailed study of Romans 1:3-4, argues that "the emphasis with respect to γίνομαι in both Gal 4:4 and Phil 2:7 appears to be on *change of status from a heavenly mode of existence to an earthly one* rather than on ordinary human birth—although of course the natural birthing process is almost certainly presupposed as the mode by which this change in status was actualized. In fact, using the NT as the database, it is roughly fifty times more likely that the author of the protocreed would have used γεννάω rather than γίνομαι if the author's intention was to signal merely 'natural human birth,' which the author emphatically did *not* do. Thus, 'change in status' from pre-existence to human existence is far and away the most likely intended primary meaning of τοῦ γενομένου for the author of the protocreed in Rom 1:3" ("A Christology of Incarnation and Enthronement: Romans 1:3-4 as Unified, Nonadoptionist, and Nonconciliatory," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77 [2015]: 116-17).

[104] Some of the most important Christological texts in this book (the Prologue, John 1:1-18; 10:30-36; 17:3; 20:28) were discussed under earlier chapters and thus, although the Prologue again features prominently in this chapter, we will limit our focus to texts that have not already been discussed.

laments that "Although [Jesus] had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. This was to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah…" (vv. 37-38). He then quotes from Isaiah 53:1 and 6:9-10 and adds the following remarkable statement: "Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him" (v. 41, NRSV).[105] These third-person pronouns (*autos*) can only denote the referent of the *autos* of v. 37, namely Jesus. John has made two earlier editorial statements about Jesus' glory being revealed or seen during his earthly life (John 1:14, 2:11).[106] But in what sense had *Isaiah* seen Jesus' glory centuries earlier? The answer comes from Isaiah's throne vision in Isaiah 6:1-8 that precedes the lines quoted in John 12:40. In this vision, Isaiah "*saw* the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and raised up, and the house was full of *his glory*" (6:1 NETS). The Hebrew text has *ʾaḏōnāy* here—significant in view of our earlier discussion of this word—who is then identified as YHWH in vv. 3, 5. Thus, Isaiah is said to have seen God, but *John interprets him to have seen Christ*.[107] Thus we have an unambiguous statement of Christ's personal preexistence (and deity) in a passage that *TDT* passes over in silence.[108]

The authors further assert that Christ's preexistence and his humanity are incompatible, but do offer anything like a rigorous logical argument.[109] They also repeat the claim—discussed already under chapter 3—that the Synoptic Gospels do not portray Christ as preexistent, and thus Trinitarians "must seek their main support from John at the risk of contradicting Matthew and Luke." They argue, instead, for interpreting the Fourth Gospel in "a way which harmonizes him with his fellow Gospel writers" (p. 190). Yet it is a basic principle of biblical exegesis to allow each writer his own unique ideas and emphases. Harmonisation should occur at the level of systematic theology; at the level of exegesis it is dangerous. To borrow a line from James D. G. Dunn, we should "let John be John," and not force him to be another Matthew, Mark, or Luke.

Jesus and John the Baptist

The writers ask whether John's language about Jesus being sent from God or coming from the Father imply his preexistence. Asserting that it does not, they point to others who are said to have been "sent from God" (John the Baptist, John 1:6), to be "from God" (the disciples, 8:47), or to have "gone out into the world" (false prophets, 1 John 4:1). It is true that such

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[105] While *hoti* ("*because* he saw his glory") has the best manuscript support, and is thus adopted by NA28, some ancient manuscripts have *hote* ("*when* he saw his glory"). The distinction makes little difference to the overall meaning, however.

[106] "…we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son" (1:14); "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (2:11). The latter text seems to echo Isaiah 40:5, which foretells that the glory of the Lord would be revealed. Isaiah 40 had been quoted directly in John 1:23.

[107] In John 1:18, the author states, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (NRSV). This may indicate that the Evangelist understood biblical theophanies such as that of Isaiah 6 to be appearances of the preexistent Christ and not of God the Father. This hermeneutic is applied to many Old Testament theophanies by Justin Martyr in the second century.

[108] It is clearly not a vision from the future, since the seraphim and the Lord himself interact directly with Isaiah.

[109] Furthermore, they ask, "Is it possible to be a human being in any meaningful sense if one does not originate in the womb of one's mother?" (p. 184). If not, then Adam and Eve apparently do not qualify as humans. Given that Christ is referred to as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), we should not be surprised if his human origin is likewise exceptional.

sending/coming language does not intrinsically convey preexistence; we need to look more closely at the details of such statements.

The Fourth Gospel's depiction of John the Baptist indeed marks a useful point of comparison with that of Jesus. Both are said to have been "sent from God," yes; but there are also significant contrasts. First, John 1:6 states, literally, "A man came to be (*egeneto*), sent from God, named John." By using the verb *egeneto*, the writer groups John with all the created things that came to be (*egeneto*) through the *logos* (1:3, 10), in contrast to Christ, who as the *logos* did not come to be (*egeneto*, aorist) but simply "was" (*ēn*, imperfect) in the beginning.[110]

The contrast becomes more explicit in John 1:15, 30:

> (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") (John 1:15 NRSV)

> The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' (John 1:29-30 NRSV)

As was noted earlier, the antecedent for "him" (*autos*) in v. 15 is *ho logos*, the Word; in v. 30, John emphasises that Jesus of Nazareth is the referent of that earlier statement. The content of John's testimony is straightforward, and I submit that *we could hardly ask for a plainer statement of Christ's personal preexistence*. Before looking at the syntax, recall again that this contrast is between Jesus and John, the great prophet and forerunner (John 1:23; cf. Luke 7:26) who was "sent from God." If this Gospel's language about Christ's preexistence refers to predestination, in the sense that the prophet Jeremiah was foreknown (Jer. 1:5), then the same is surely true of John the Baptist, and there are no grounds for a contrast between Jesus and John. Yet such a contrast is what the Gospel gives us.

Noting that Jesus comes after him (*opisō mou*), John testifies that, literally, he "ahead of me has become, because before me he was (*emprosthen mou genonen*, *hoti prōtos mou ēn*)." AB+CH state that

> the ambiguous phrase 'before me' may refer to superiority of rank, rather than priority in time. The verse may be translated, 'A follower of mine has taken precedence of me, for he (always) was before me, my superior.'" (p. 204)

There are several reasons why this interpretation is implausible. Firstly, the conjunction *hoti* ("because") indicates that the last clause ("before me he was") gives the *reason* for the previous assertion ("ahead of me [he] has become"). Yet—while it is semantically possible for *prōtos* to denote priority in rank—if both clauses refer to rank here, we have a tautology. To try to assign some meaning to the last clause, AB+CH must supply an adverb "always" that is not in the text. Secondly, taking both clauses to refer to priority in rank ruins the contrast with the first part of the statement ("after me comes"), which is clearly *temporal*. Thirdly, as the statement in John 1:15 occurs within the Prologue and refers to the *logos*, we must interpret the imperfect verb *ēn* according to the use of that verb of the *logos* in John 1:1-4, where it

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[110] The *logos* "came to be" or "became" (*egeneto*) flesh (John 1:14; cp. Rom. 1:3), but in context this did not mark the beginning of the *logos*' existence.

denotes the *logos*' having existed in the beginning with God, in contrast to John who "came to be" (v. 6). Thus, John's testimony is not merely that Jesus came into existence before him, but that *his existence is of an entirely different character*—a contrast that will reappear in John 8:58.[111]

"The One Who Descended from Heaven" (John 3:13)

AB+CH next turn to two statements about the Son of Man's ascension to heaven that seem to indicate that he had been there previously. In the context of Jesus' nocturnal dialogue with Nicodemus, we have:

> If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (John 3:12-13 NRSV)

One can agree with AB+CH that, as translated above, John 3:13 is "enigmatic" (p. 205). If the words are taken as Jesus' own, rather than John's editorial aside,[112] they appear to indicate that Jesus had already ascended to heaven at the time of his conversation with Nicodemus. This, however, would seem to contradict Jesus' post-resurrection assertion that he has not yet ascended to the Father (John 20:17). AB+CH note that the use of the perfect tense of the verb *anabainō* ("ascend") is surprising here, and contrasts with aorist tense of *katabainō* ("descend"). This brings us to a thorny matter of Greek grammar on which experts disagree. Many grammarians claim that Greek verb tenses explicitly convey *aspect* rather than *time*. That is, they describe the kind of action rather than when it occurred; the time must be inferred from context and conventions of use. The perfect tense describes an action that is completed but with results continuing afterward. It thus usually describes past events.[113] However, a recent study by Madison N. Pierce and Benjamin E. Reynolds has argued that, in line with verbal aspect theory,

> John 3:13 may legitimately be translated: 'No one ascends to heaven', expressing what earlier grammars have called a 'timeless perfect', and therefore the verse describes a unique quality of the Son of Man.[114]

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[111] Given the wider dependence of John's Christology on deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55), it is possible that the use of *prōtos* in John 1:15, 30 alludes to its use as a descriptor of God's eternality in Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, and 48:12 LXX (cf. Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13).

[112] It is not clear where Jesus' answer beginning in v. 10 ends. It could continue up until v. 21 or end at some point prior. The original Greek did not contain quotation marks, so there is no way to determine with certainty where the quotation ends.

[113] "for the most part, the perfect and pluperfect tenses are identical in aspect though different in time. Thus both speak of an event accomplished in the past (in the indicative mood, that is) with results existing afterwards—the perfect speaking of results existing in the present" (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 572-73). Similarly, "forms built on the perfect stem (pf., plupf. and fut. pf. indic., pf. subj./opt./imp./inf./ptc.) express the state (or ongoing effects) resulting from an action completed in the past" (Evert van Emde Boas and Luuk Huitink, "Syntax," in Egbert J. Bakker, *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language* [Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], 140).

[114] "The Perfect Tense-Form and the Son of Man in John 3.13: Developments in Greek Grammar as a Viable Solution to the Timing of the Ascent and Descent," *New Testament Studies 60* (2014): 154. Pierce and Reynolds relied heavily on the grammatical expertise of Stanley E. Porter, who subsequently criticised their research in an essay co-authored with Andrew W. Pitts ("The Perfect Tense-Form, the

Thus, while the timing of the ascension described in John 3:13 remains enigmatic, it is grammatically possible to reconcile it with Jesus' not having *yet* ascended to heaven at the time of speaking. The saying may in fact allude to Proverbs 30:4. In any case, the statement about the Son of Man having descended from heaven (with aorist verb) stands. Language of ascent and descent is used literally elsewhere in John (1:51; 20:17), so there is no justification for taking Jesus' descent from heaven as "a Jewish expression meaning…that he is God's gift to the world (cp. James 1:17; 3:15)" (p. 207).

"Where He Was Before" (John 6:62)

> But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about [the teaching], said to them, 'Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?' (John 6:61-62 NRSV)

This statement, taken at face value, indicates that if the Son of Man were to ascend to heaven, he would be ascending to "where he was before" (*hopou ēn to proteron*). AB+CH argue that, since the designation "Son of Man" comes from Daniel 7:13, this saying alludes to that text:

> If we ask where *the Son of Man* was before, the biblical answer is found in Daniel 7:13. The *man* Messiah was seen in heaven in a vision of the future which became reality at the ascension…In John 6:62 [Jesus] anticipates his future ascension in order to fulfil what was predetermined for him according to the divine plan revealed in Daniel's vision. (pp. 208-209)

This interpretation is inventive but farfetched. It requires that we assign to the simple imperfect verb *ēn* ("was") an extremely elaborate and unprecedented meaning. "Was" must mean "was seen," but in a vision that did not yet reflect reality. "Was" denotes what did not yet exist! Yet we have already seen what language John uses to describe another Old Testament vision of Christ, in John 12:41. There, John uses only aorist verbs, and explicitly uses the verb *eiden* ("saw").[115] Consequently, while the designation "Son of Man" does primarily derive from Daniel 7, there is no warrant for importing an elaborate allusion to that text into the simple words of John 6:62. Jesus means what he appears to mean: that if he ascended to heaven, he would be going where he was before.

The Fourth Gospel's language of Christ's being sent, coming from God, and descending must be interpreted carefully. However, there are several indications that such language refers, in Christ's case, to personal preexistence. One indication is that this language is used alongside references to Christ's ascension, which we know to be literal and personal (John 3:13; 6:62; 13:3; 20:17). A second indication is that Christ refers to his *purpose* in coming down from heaven or from the Father: "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38 NRSV). One who was merely predestined could not

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Son of Man, and John 3:13, Once More," *Biblical and Ancient Greek Linguistics 6* [2017]: 127-36). However, Porter and Pitts took issue with their methodology rather than their conclusion, and concluded that "the semantics of the entire conditional structure of John 3:13 can be rendered as indicating something like: 'except for there being one who is a coming-down-from-heaven one, the Son of Man, there is no one in an ascended-into-heaven state'—though, again, a range of translational renderings of the semantics may be possible" ("Perfect Tense-Form," 134-35).

[115] Moreover, we noted earlier that John understands Isaiah to have seen Christ's divine glory *in reality*, not as a glimpse of a future reality.

distinguish between different possible reasons that he had for coming down. Similarly, "I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me" (John 8:42 NRSV). "I am here" refers to Jesus' spatial location and thus implies that "came from God" denotes spatial, not merely figurative, movement; and it is "I" (*egō*) that moves from "God" to "here." Again, it would be superfluous for any person whose existence began in the womb to state that he did not come at his own initiative! A third indication is that there are several statements that refer to Christ having seen and heard things in heaven, or with the Father. "The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard" (John 3:31-32 NRSV; cf. 3:11-13). "And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form" (John 5:37 NRSV). This seemingly implies that Jesus *has* heard the Father's voice and seen his form. "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God (*para theou*); he has seen the Father" (John 6:45-46 NRSV).[116] "I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence (*para tō patri*, literally "with the Father"); as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father" (John 8:38 NRSV).[117] In view of this evidence, it cannot be maintained that Christ preexisted merely in God's plan.

"The Glory That I Had with You before the World Existed" (John 17:5)

This passage occurs within Jesus' high-priestly prayer (John 17:1-26), discussed earlier in connection with John 17:3. Jesus prays,

> 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. (NRSV)

At issue is whether the phrase, "the glory that I had in your presence (*para soi*, literally "with you") before the world existed" implies Jesus' personal preexistence. AB+CH argue that it does not, because "In biblical ways of speaking and thinking one may 'have' something which is promised in God's plan before one actually has it" (p. 210). They further point out that Jesus' prayer uses other apparently past-tense verbs *proleptically*, that is, with a future sense. Examples include "I have finished" (John 17:4), though the cross still lies ahead; "I am no longer in the world" (17:11), spoken while still in the world; "I have sent them" (17:18), though the sending really occurs only in chapter 20; "The glory that you have given me I have given them" (17:22), which apparently had not yet occurred. Accordingly, they conclude,

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[116] Since Jesus asserts in John 8:47 that "Whoever is of God (*ek theou*) hears the words of God," and in 14:9 that "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father," it is possible that John 6:46 likewise refers to a generic person of God, who has seen the Father via the Son. However, given the apparent contrast with v. 45, it is more likely that v. 46 is describing Christ's own unique experience of having seen God.

[117] There is some text-critical uncertainty over the last clause of John 8:38. NA28 favours *para tou patros* ("from the Father"), in which case there is a contrast between Jesus' experience of the Father ("seen *with* the Father," *para* + dative) and theirs ("heard *from* the Father," *para* + genitive). Other manuscripts add *humōn* ("heard from *your* father"), perhaps referring to the Devil (8:44), and some of these also have *para* + dative ("heard *with* your father"). Whatever the case, the text describes Jesus as having *seen things with* the Father and contrasts this with his opponents' access to transcendent knowledge.

> [I]t is clear that the glory he 'had' is the glory prepared for him in God's plan…He 'had' it laid up for him from eternity, just as Christian now 'have' their yet future inheritance of the Kingdom of God (pp. 216-17).

This interpretation of the petition in John 17:5 is not impossible. However, it is more likely that the glory Jesus had before the world was refers to preexistence than predestination, for the following reasons. Firstly, we have already observed that, in John's understanding, the prophet Isaiah had "seen" Jesus' preexistent glory in a heavenly vision long before his birth (John 12:36-41). Secondly, language about being with the Father before the *kosmos* existed is best interpreted in terms of the Prologue, where the Word is with God in the beginning (John 1:1), the Word/Light participates in the creation of the *kosmos* (John 1:3, 10), and the Word's glory is beheld by the faithful (John 1:14). Thirdly, the twofold use of the preposition *para* ("with") indicates a parallel between what Jesus is asking for (to be glorified "with" the Father) and what he recalls (having had glory "with" the Father). Since being glorified "with" the Father is naturally interpreted in terms of Christ's ascending/going to the Father's presence, the parallel suggests that the past glory was also experienced in God's presence (cf. John 13:3). Hence, the NRSV translation of *para* as "in the presence of" makes sense.

Fourthly, the Greek syntax of John 17:5 is inconsonant with a "predestination" interpretation. In particular, the verbs used are markedly different both from the proleptic statements within John 17, and from predestination language in the New Testament more generally. The verb translated "had" is *eichon*, imperfect active indicative of *echō* ("have"), while the verbal structure translated "was" is *tou…einai*, a subsequent-in-time use of the present infinitive.[118] The imperfect tense generally is used for *ongoing* or *repeated* actions in the past.[119] It would thus be a natural tense to use when describing preexistence before the world was.

By contrast, of the "proleptic" statements in John 17 identified by AB+CH, none are in the imperfect tense; indeed, standard Greek grammars do not know of any proleptic imperfect.[120] Similarly, if we consider other New Testament texts that refer to people or their eternal inheritance being predestined by God, the imperfect tense is *never* used, and the one predestined is never the subject of an active verb (as Jesus is with *eichon* in John 17:5). Thus, the syntax of John 17:5 is unparalleled in other Johannine and New Testament texts that are

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[118] Wallace classifies instances of *pro tou* + infinitive under the "subsequent" infinitive: "The action of the infinitive of subsequent time occurs *after* the action of the controlling verb" (*Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 596). Hence, in this case, the world's existence is subsequent to Jesus' having had glory with the Father.

[119] "the imperfect is used for ongoing or repeated actions" (van Emde Boas and Huitink, "Syntax," 141); "The imperfect is a secondary (historical) tense, used for a continuous, habitual, or repeated act in past tense (i.e., for action going on in the past) as opposed to the aorist tense…which is used for a single act in past time (or action simply taking place in the past" (C. A. E. Luschnig and Deborah Mitchell, *An Introduction to Ancient Greek: A Literary Approach*, 2nd edn [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007], 43). Wallace states, "For the most part, the aorist takes a *snapshot* of the action while the imperfect (like the present) takes a *motion picture*, portraying the action as it unfolds" (*Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 541).

[120] "I have finished" (John 17:4) is aorist (*teleiōsas*), "I am no longer in the world" (17:11) is present (*eimi*), "I have sent them" (17:18) is aorist (*apesteilas*), and "I have given them" (17:22) is perfect (*dedōka*). Wallace describes both a proleptic aorist and a proleptic perfect (*Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 563-64, 581), but no proleptic imperfect. Thus, if John wished to convey a proleptic sense of "had" in John 17:5, he would almost certainly have used a tense other than imperfect.

either proleptic or that convey the notion of predestination or foreknowledge.[121] However, the imperfect verb in John 17:5 accords with John's Prologue, where imperfect verbs are used of the *logos*' existence in the beginning with God (John 1:1-4).

"Before Abraham Was, I Am He" (John 8:58)

In this text Jesus makes a starting claim about himself: "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (NRSV). AB+CH survey the use of the Greek expression *egō eimi* ("I am [he]") in John and find that "Jesus' 'I am he' declarations in John can be satisfactorily explained as a claim to be *the Messiah…*the unique agent of the One God" (p. 219). They add,

> Even if one were to connect Jesus' *ego eimi* ("I am") statements with the words of God in the Old Testament, there would still be no justification for identifying Jesus with God in the Trinitarian sense. Jesus, as Messiah, may bear a divine title without being God. (p. 219)

It is unfortunate that, despite their repeated insistence that Old Testament context is vital to sound interpretation of the Gospel of John, they do not even mention—much less discuss— these "words of God in the Old Testament" to which they allude. They do, in passing, dismiss the idea that Jesus is using the divine Name of Exodus 3:14, since the Septuagint translates the Name as *egō eimi ho ōn*, not merely *egō eimi*. Yet the authors fail to mention that in numerous other instances in the Septuagint, God does use precisely the standalone phrase *egō eimi*, corresponding to *ᵃnî hûʾ* in the MT (Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6). Not only so, but God uses this self-designation precisely to emphasise his divine uniqueness in contrast to all other reality. Furthermore, there are striking contextual parallels between the divine *egō eimi* sayings in the Septuagint and the dominical *egō eimi* sayings in John. I have written about this in detail elsewhere,[122] but for sake of brevity here will just mention one striking parallel. In John 8:24, Jesus declares, "For if you do not believe that I am [he], you will die in your sins." This closely echoes Isaiah 43:10 LXX, where God declares that he is a witness "so that you may know and believe and understand that I am [he]" (NETS); a few verses later, God reminds Israel, "in your sins and iniquities I have stood before you" (Isa. 43:24 NETS). The parallel in Greek is virtually word-for-word.[123] One cannot reasonably doubt that Jesus' words in John 8:24 are intended to echo those of God in Isaiah 43:10. *This*

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[121] Examples include: Jeremiah 1:5 LXX, where *epistamai* ("knew") is present active while *hēriaka* ("consecrated") and *tetheika* ("assigned") are perfect active (with God as the subject); Matthew 13:35, where *kekrummena* ("kept hidden") is a perfect passive; Matthew 20:23, 25:34, where *hētoimasmenēn* ("prepared") is a perfect passive; Romans 8:29-30, where *proeggō* ("foreknew") and *proōrisen* ("predestined") are aorist active (with God as the subject); Ephesians 1:4-5, where *exelexato* ("chose") and *proorisas* ("predestined") are aorist middle and aorist active respectively, with God as the subject; 1 Peter 1:20, where *proeggōsmenou* ("foreknew") is perfect passive; Revelation 13:8 and 17:8, where *gegraphtai* ("written") and *esphagmenou* ("slain") are perfect passive.

[122] See my three-part blog series, *'Believe that I Am': Encountering John's Christ in the Light of Isaiah* (Part 1; Part 2; Part 3).

[123] Isaiah 43:10 has *hina gnōste kai pisteusēte kai sunēte hoti egō eimi* while John 8:24 has *ean gar mē pisteusēte hoti egō eimi*. The only differences are that Isaiah uses three verbs (*gnōste, pisteusēte, sunēte*) while John uses only *pisteusēte*, and that in Isaiah the statement is phrased positively ("in order that…") but in John negatively ("unless…") Again, the Greek expression rendered "in your sins" is identical in Isaiah 43:24 LXX and John 8:24, except that in Isaiah the second-person pronoun is a collective singular referring to Israel (*en tais hamartiais sou*) while in John it is plural (*en tais hamartiais humōn*).

compels us to interpret Jesus' egō eimi *sayings in John, including the one in 8:58, in terms of the use of this expression by God in the Old Testament.*

How do AB+CH understand the saying in John 8:58? They offer two distinct interpretations. In the first case, they observe that "John can also describe [Jesus] as 'crucified before the foundation of the world' (Rev. 13:8)"—which may not be the case[124]—and therefore, "If Jesus was 'crucified before Abraham,' he himself may be said to have 'existed' in the eternal counsels of God" (p. 221). Again, the phrase *egō eimi* is not remotely similar to any other statement of predestination in the Gospels, and based on the Isaiah 43/John 8:24 parallel, we must instead read Jesus' words as grounded in God's assertions of deity and of absolute existence in the Old Testament. Notably, *egō eimi* takes on a *temporal* sense in Isaiah 43:10, as the expression is followed immediately with, "*Before me* there was no other god, nor shall there be any after me." Thus, Jesus' claim is that he literally existed before Abraham.

The second interpretation suggested by AB+CH is more technical. The Greek of Jesus' assertion in John 8:58 is *prin Abraam genesthai egō eimi*. The verb *genesthai* is an aorist infinitive, and AB+CH state,

> It is an elementary fact of language that a Greek aorist infinitive takes its meaning from the context. It may refer to events future or past. Thus Matthew writes, 'Before the cock will have crowed' (Matt. 26:34; *prin*, 'before,' + aorist infinitive)…The question arises, What is the proper rendering of John 8:58? Did Jesus say: 'Before Abraham comes to be [i.e., returns to life in the resurrection], I am,' or 'Before Abraham came to be [i.e., was born], I am [he]'? (p. 222)

In support of the futuristic reading of the infinitive, they note that in Job 14:14 LXX, an aorist infinitive of *ginomai* (the same verb used in John 8:58) is used of resurrection. In response, we must say that while this ingenious interpretation of John 8:58 is syntactically possible, it is contextually implausible. First, we can observe that the Greek of John 8:58 is not similar to that of Job 14:14 LXX.[125] The kind of aorist infinitive in John 8:58 is an *infinitive of subsequent time* (already discussed under John 17:5; see note 118). It thus indicates that the action of the verb *ginomai* ("came to be") is subsequent to the action of the verb *eimi* ("am"), but does not explicitly indicate whether the action of *ginomai* is past or future relative to when the statement was made.

This syntactic ambiguity in the Greek is disambiguated both by the immediate context and the biblical background of Jesus' saying. The context of Jesus' remark is a dialogue with "the Jews" concerning Abraham. The Jews ask, "Are you greater than our father Abraham, who

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[124] The syntax of Revelation 13:8 is ambiguous; the phrase *apo katabolēs kosmou* ("from the foundation of the world") could modify either "written" (*gegraphtai*) or "slain" (*esphagmenou*). The phrase immediately follows *esphagmenou* in the Greek text, but in Greek, word order is not determinative of meaning, as in English. Because the same phrase modifies *gegraphtai* in Revelation 17:8 ("names…written in the book of life from the foundation of the world") and it would be temporally odd to think that Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world, most translators and commentators (*pace* KJV) now render Revelation 13:8 in terms of names written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, *not* the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

[125] In Job 14:14 LXX, the aorist infinitive expresses an action subsequent in time to the *future* verb *hupomenō*, and the future sense of *genōmai* is also signalled by *heōs* ("until") and *palin* ("again"). There are thus three explicit indications in the Greek that the aorist infinitive of *ginomai* has a future sense; in John 8:58 there are none.

died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?" (8:53). In response, Jesus asserts, "Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad" (8:56).[126] The Jews then ask, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" (8:57). The scope of the dialogue concerns Jesus' identity in relation to the patriarch Abraham. The resurrection is not under dispute, and the saying explicitly responds to a question about having seen Abraham *in the past*. Moreover, after Jesus' saying in 8:58, the Jews pick up stones to throw at him, something they do elsewhere in John when they understand him to be making himself equal to God or making himself God (John 5:18; 10:31-33). This suggests that the Jews understood him to be making a (blasphemous) divine claim in 8:58 as well. Simply put, the rendering "Before Abraham came to be, I am [he]"—with "I am [he]" understood in reference to God's use of this phrase in the Old Testament—both responds to the question of v. 57 and explains the reaction in v. 59. The rendering "Before Abraham comes to be [resurrected], I am [the Messiah]" *does neither*.

An interpretation of John 8:58 must also account for the odd contrast in verb forms in the saying, from aorist infinitive to present indicative. From an *aspect* point of view,

> all forms built on the present stem (present and imperfect indicative, present subjunctive/optative/imperative/infinitive/participle) have 'imperfective' aspect, meaning that the action expressed is viewed as incomplete (ongoing or repeated)… [whereas] all forms built on the aorist stem (all moods, infinitive and participle) have 'perfective' aspect, meaning that the action expressed is viewed in its entirety, as an undivided whole[127]

Thus, when an aorist verb is juxtaposed with a present or imperfect verb, there may be a contrast not only in when the actions occurred but in the kind of action. This is particularly

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[126] All of the verbs in the saying of 8:56 are aorist, and it appears that two distinct past events are in view. "Abraham your father rejoiced that he might see (*idē*, aorist subjunctive) my day" refers to some expectation on Abraham's part that was subsequently fulfilled: "And he saw it and was glad" (aorist indicatives). The exact sense in which Abraham's expectation was fulfilled is unclear. Mary Coloe points out that the Targum on Isaiah 43:10-12 (alluded to in John 8:24, as noted above) mentions that God had "declared to Abraham your father what was about to come" and that the 2nd-century-B.C. Jewish text *Book of Jubilees* describes Abraham observing the Feast of Tabernacles—the setting of the dialogue in John 8—and rejoicing in the knowledge that "from him there would be a righteous planting for eternal generations and a holy seed from him" ("Like Father, Like Son: The Role of Abraham in Tabernacles – John 8:31-59," *Pacifica 12* [1999]: 1-11; cf. *Jub.* 16.26). However, while these texts help to account for Abraham's joyful *expectation*, they do not explain the apparent fulfilment ("and he *saw it*"). Recognising the parallel between *eiden* in John 8:56 and 12:41 (discussed earlier), we may surmise that Jesus is claiming that Abraham had some visionary experience of the preexistent Christ. Kirk R. MacGregor has recently argued that the contrast in John 8:40 between Jesus' opponents (who try to kill him, a man that has told them the truth from God) and Abraham (who "did not do this") implies that Jesus had also appeared to Abraham, who had responded positively ("According to John 8, Did Abraham in His Lifetime See Jesus?" in *A Historical and Theological Investigation of John's Gospel* [Cham: Palgrave, 2020], 159-80). We know from Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* 56-57 that there was a Christian tradition, at least within a few decades of John's Gospel, of interpreting the theophany of Genesis 18 as an appearance of the preexistent Christ. This is one possible explanation of Abraham's having seen Jesus' day. Another possibility is that Abraham is understood to still be in existence (cf. Luke 16:19-31 and the transfiguration narratives that depict Moses and Elijah as still existing) and thus a transcendent eyewitness to Jesus' earthly life.

[127] van Emde Boas and Huitink, "Syntax," 140.

likely when the aorist verb is *ginomai* ("become" or "come to be") and the present or imperfect verb is *eimi* ("is/was"). Hence, in John's Prologue, we have a contrast between "all things" that "came to be" (*egeneto*, aorist of *ginomai*) and the *logos* that simply "was" (*ēn*, imperfect of *eimi*). The same kind of contrast is probably in view in John 8:58: whereas Abraham "came to be" at a point in time (*genesthai*, aorist of *ginomai*) at a point in time, Jesus simply "is," continually (*eimi*, present). We have just such a contrast in Psalm 89:2 LXX:

> Before mountains were brought forth (*genēthēnai*) and the earth and the world were formed, and from everlasting to everlasting you are (*su ei*). (Psalm 89:2 NETS)

The syntax here closely parallels that of John 8:58. In both cases, the assertion is that *before* something great and ancient (mountains; Abraham) *came to be* (aorist infinitive of *ginomai*), the divine one simply *is*, continuously (present indicative of *eimi*). *Su ei* is the second-person equivalent of the first-person *egō eimi*. Another comparable text (though less similar in vocabulary) is Psalm 101:26-28 LXX, where the psalmist contrasts the heavens and earth that were founded (aorist) with the divine one who is the same (present). This text, as noted earlier, is applied to Christ in Hebrews 1:10-12. This, then, provides a much more compelling framework for interpreting John 8:58 than a gloss about Abraham's future resurrection that has no relevance to the context and neglects the wider biblical significance of such absolute statements that God simply "is."

Chapter IX. The Holy Spirit: A Third Person or God in Action?

The first eight chapters had dealt largely with the unity of God and with Christology; but classical Christian orthodoxy is Trinitarian, not binitarian. Accordingly, in this chapter the writers turn to the Holy Spirit, understood by Trinitarians as the third person of the Trinity. The authors "define the Spirit of God as God in effective action, God in communication, His power and personality extending their influence to touch the creation in a variety of ways…God's energy…God in action" (p. 226). They insist that the Spirit is not a "Person":

> It is hard for us to believe that Scripture, read without the benefit of later creeds, clearly presents the Holy Spirit as a 'Person' (whatever that means – Trinitarians seem unable to define the word with any confidence), distinct from the Father and Son. (p. 225)

We noted at the beginning of this review that the authors do not themselves define the term "person" with any precision. Headway is unlikely to be made on deciding whether the Holy Spirit is a person so long as there is no agreement on what a person is. However, this does not necessarily leave us at an impasse, for there are significant points of contact between orthodoxy and the affirmations about the Holy Spirit that AB+CH make in this chapter.

Firstly, the authors acknowledge that the word "spirit" in the Bible "has several different meanings, all related, however, to the basic idea of invisible power and mind" (p. 226). This multivalence means that we should not rush to box the Holy Spirit into one particular meaning of *pneuma* to support a theological position.[128] Secondly, while the authors object to calling

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[128] For instance, there are passages where the sense of "wind" or "breath" has obviously influenced the depiction of the Spirit (e.g., John 3:8; 20:22; Acts 2:2). There are other occasions where the Holy Spirit or Spirit of God is contrasted with an "unclean spirit," which is a kind of personal being (e.g., Mark

the Holy Spirit *a person*, they insist that it is *personal*: "The Spirit of God is certainly not just an abstract power. Since it is God in action, it is most personal" (p. 227).

AB+CH thus agree with Trinitarians on two important points: that the Spirit is *God*, and that the Spirit is *personal*. This common ground is very helpful, because debates concerning the Holy Spirit often become bogged down on these two issues, especially the second. One side cites scriptural texts where personal attributes are ascribed to the Spirit (such as speaking, grieving, or having a will);[129] the other cites texts where *impersonal* attributes are ascribed to the Spirit (such as being measured, poured, or described as though a force). *TDT* is not devoid of such tendencies,[130] but since the authors affirm that the Holy Spirit is personal, we can largely circumvent the question of personhood and move on to the major sticking point that remains: *whether the Holy Spirit is numerically distinct from the Father*. If so, it follows that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, as Trinitarians maintain. If not, it follows that the Holy Spirit's personality is indistinguishable from the Father's. AB+CH aver that

> It is going beyond the evidence of Scripture to equate the Spirit of God with a person distinct from the One God, *in the same sense as the Son is distinct from the Father*. (p. 227, emphasis original)

While I disagree, I believe the authors are on the right track in drawing an analogy between the Spirit and the Son, because this is precisely what we find in the New Testament. Indeed, Christology is a prerequisite for Christian pneumatology, and this explains why it is not possible to conclude that the Spirit of God is a person from the Old Testament alone. AB+CH's above-quoted definition of the Spirit is adequate, as far as the Old Testament is concerned,[131] but in the New Testament we have a new development in that the Spirit is reconceptualised *precisely by analogy to the Son*. A key text here is Jesus' farewell discourse

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3:29-30), or with the spirit of a human (e.g., Rom. 8:16), or is mentioned in synonymous parallelism with an angel (Isa. 63:9-10; Acts 8:26-29; cf. Acts 23:8-9).

[129] This evidence is significant but, on its own, inconclusive. Reviewing the abundant "personal" language used of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts, Max Turner argues that the evidence "is in fact matched by the Old Testament and Judaism…Indeed, the personification of the Spirit in rabbinic Judaism occasionally goes *beyond* that encountered in Acts, at least in the violence of the personal language used" (*Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* [Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2000], 46).

[130] For instance, the writers cite the synonymous parallelism of Luke 1:35 as evidence that the Spirit is a power rather than a person (pp. 228-29), and state with reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, "Persons, surely, are not poured out" (p. 235). In fact, Scripture does speak of people, or their souls, being poured out (e.g., 1 Sam. 1:15; Ps. 21:15 LXX; 42:5). More fundamentally, as AB+CH admit that the Spirit is personal, they should also acknowledge that divine personhood does not necessarily coincide with an anthropomorphic concept of personhood.

[131] Mehrdad Fatehi arrives at a similar definition after surveying the Old Testament evidence: "The *ruach Yahweh* in the OT is a relational concept referring to Yahweh in his active relation to his creation and his people. This has three important corollaries: 1) The Spirit does not refer primarily to Yahweh as he is in himself or to his inner being or personality, but to Yahweh as he communicates himself, i.e. his power, his life, his wisdom, his will, or his presence, to the world. 2) Nevertheless, the Spirit of Yahweh is never regarded as an entity distinct or separable from Yahweh. It rather represents Yahweh *himself* in his action towards the world. 3) Yahweh though is not reduced to his *ruach*. The identification between Yahweh and his Spirit is always *dynamic*. Yahweh is always greater than his revelatory or redemptive act through his Spirit" (*The Spirit's Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul: An Examination of Its Christological Implications* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000], 63).

in John 14-16, where "John presents the Spirit-Paraclete as a figure set in parallel to Jesus":[132] Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as *another of what he is*: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate. This is the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16 NRSV). The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and comes from the Father (John 14:26; 15:26), just like the Son. Again, just as the Son emphasises that he does not speak on his own, but only as he hears (John 5:30-31; 7:16-17; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10), so it is with the Spirit: "he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears" (John 16:13 NRSV). These parallels imply that the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father precisely "*in the same sense as the Son is.*" It is difficult to assign any meaning to this saying in John 16:13 if the Holy Spirit is indistinct from the Father.

This analogy from Christology to pneumatology is also why certain New Testament texts that mention Father, Son, and Spirit are so significant. Unitarians typically dismiss such passages as having no bearing on the doctrine, as AB+CH do of Matthew 28:19 (pp. 235-36). However, the command to baptise the nations "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" implies that the Holy Spirit is another of what the Father and the Son are; or that "he" is related to the Father as the Son is. Faced with such language, it is difficult to argue that the Father and the Son are numerically distinct, but the Father and the Spirit are not. A vivid depiction of their distinctness is also on display in Matthew 3:16-17, where the Son ascends from the water, the Spirit descends like a dove upon him, and the Father speaks audibly from heaven. Similar juxtapositions that set Father, Son, and Spirit in parallel occur elsewhere (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:4-6, 2 Cor. 13:13).

AB+CH object to thinking of the Holy Spirit as one thinks of the Father and the Son:

> There are clear differences between what the Bible says about the Father and the Son and what it says about the Spirit. God and Christ are obviously separate individuals worthy of receiving worship, the Father in His capacity as creator, the Son Jesus as instrument and agent in the salvation of mankind. Yet the Holy Spirit has no personal name. Why is it that in no text of Scripture is the Holy Spirit worshipped or prayed to? Not once does the Holy Spirit send greetings to the churches (pp. 227-28)

The Holy Spirit does have a name, as *kai tou hagiou pneumatos* ("and of the Holy Spirit") modifies *onoma* ("name") in Matthew 28:19. The reason why no text of Scripture describes the Holy Spirit as worshipped or prayed *to* is that the New Testament writers conceive of worship as something that happens *in* the Holy Spirit (John 4:23-24; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 3:3; Jude 20), which is no less significant. As for sending greetings to churches, the author of Revelation writes to the seven churches of Asia, "Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:4-5 NRSV). Bogdan G. Bucur writes,

> The blessing with 'grace and peace' is suggestive of a divine origin. The three must, then, in some way stand for the divinity…It seems most likely, therefore, that the mentioning of the 'seven spirits' corresponds to the expected reference to the Holy

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[132] Turner, *Power from on High*, 45.

Spirit. In other words, the author's expression 'seven spirits' would designate what the early Church usually referred to as 'Holy Spirit.'[133]

Similarly, Paul writes at the end of 2 Corinthians, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (13:13 NRSV).[134] And even if the Spirit is not explicitly mentioned in most epistolary greetings, "he" would be understood as a speaker of these epistles once they came to be regarded as inspired Scripture.

The Spirit of Jesus

AB+CH rightly observe that

> The spirit which operated in the early Church was recognized as the 'Spirit of Jesus,' his very personality extended to empower and inspire the believers…There is apparently no essential difference between the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus (p. 229)

Relevant New Testament texts include those that refer to the Spirit as *Christ's* Spirit rather than God's (Acts 16:6-7, Rom. 8:9, Gal. 4:6, Phil. 1:19; cf. Acts 5:9, 8:39, 2 Cor. 3:17-18), and those that refer to the Spirit as *sent by* Christ (John 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:33). This observation has profound implications. In terms of Christology, Mehrdad Fatehi surveys the Old Testament and Judaism and finds that "the Spirit-language is used precisely when God's own personal presence and activity, in *distinction from* his use of other agents, is in view. In other words, the Spirit-language is *exclusively* God-language."[135] This "establishes that Paul and the Pauline believers viewed Christ as 'divine'", and indicates that in Paul's letters "we have the experiential base for a Trinitarian theology."[136] In terms of pneumatology, the Spirit is dynamically identified with and related to both God and Christ, whom unitarians and Trinitarians agree are distinct persons. The Spirit could hardly bear or extend the personality of *two distinct persons* unless "it" is numerically distinct from them.

Pneumatological Developments in Early Christianity

Another claim made in this chapter concerns the slow development of what became orthodox pneumatology:

> A serious difficulty for Trinitarianism is the fact that nothing is said in the earliest post-biblical times of the Spirit as the third person in the Godhead. No formal

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[133] *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 92. Bucur suggests that the unusual terminology "seven spirits" accentuates the dualism between the sevenfold Spirit and the sevenfold demonic power (Rev. 12:3; 13:1). The idea of "seven spirits" likely derives from the sevenfold delineation of the Spirit of God in Isaiah 11:2-3 LXX (where the MT has only a sixfold delineation), though the imagery used of the seven spirits in Revelation (seven torches; seven eyes) also derives from Zechariah 4. Thus, "seven spirits" does not contradict the oneness of the Spirit mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Eph. 4:4). Revelation itself frequently refers simply to "the Spirit."

[134] The parallel structure (*…kai…kai…*) suggests that all three expressions are subjective genitives: *charis* is an attribute of the Lord Jesus Christ, *agapē* an attribute of God (the Father), and *koinōnia* an attribute of the Holy Spirit. Thus, "the communion (or fellowship) of the Holy Spirit be with you all" is a greeting or blessing from the Holy Spirit.

[135] *The Spirit's Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul*, 163.

[136] *The Spirit's Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul*, 331-33.

Trinitarian definition of the Holy Spirit appears until 381 AD at the Council of Constantinople. (p. 237)

Christology, not pneumatology, was the main point at issue in the Arian controversy of the early fourth century. Pneumatology came to the fore thereafter, with the Church arriving at a consensus that was codified at the Council of Constantinople in 381. This is, indeed, the moment when the dogma of the Trinity was formally defined by the Church. It should be acknowledged that before that, there was diversity and development in Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. None of this is inconsistent with the Newmannian model of doctrinal development referred to earlier.

However, it must be stressed that the notion of the Holy Spirit as another analogous to the Father and Son was present long before the fourth century, and is not an idea of Greek origin. We have already seen the roots of this idea in the New Testament. While space does not allow a survey of the development of Christian pneumatology outside the canonical writings, we can comment briefly on the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the writings of Justin Martyr.

As noted earlier, the *Ascension of Isaiah* is a Jewish Christian apocalypse of which the latter portion (chapters 6-11) probably dates from the late first century. The usual designation for the Holy Spirit in this text—as noted in *TDT* (p. 227)—is "angel of the (Holy) Spirit,"[137] reflecting "an 'angel pneumatology' in which the Holy Spirit is analogous, yet superior, to all the other angels."[138] The angel of the Holy Spirit receives worship (*Ascen. Is.* 9.36) but also worships God (9.40), and sits at God's *left* hand while the Beloved (Christ) sits at his right (11.33). Stuckenbruck states,

> Ascension of Isaiah constitutes our earliest evidence of worship being rendered to the Holy Spirit alongside Christ and God. From the above analysis it seems that this 'Trinitarian devotion' is a Christian development…the worship of 'the angel of the Holy Spirit' is in the *Ascension of Isaiah* an extension of binitarian devotion which was so characteristic of Christian faith.[139]

Noting that Isaiah is instructed to worship the "angel of the Holy Spirit" despite being forbidden to worship other angels, Fatehi adds,

> Though the Spirit and the Lord Christ are clearly portrayed as inferior and subordinate to the Most high God, it is also clear that they are put on the side of God in contrast to all the other glorious angels. So one should understand the writer's portrait of the Spirit in Trinitarian terms.[140]

The *Ascension of Isaiah* is not cited here as an authority, but merely to illustrate that identifying the Holy Spirit as a "personal" object of worship analogous to the Father and Son is neither a

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[137] Note the similar language used in *The Shepherd of Hermas* (early second century), where the Holy Spirit is referred to as "the most holy angel" (*Mandates* 5.1.7) and "the angel of the prophetic spirit" (*Mandates* 11.9).
[138] Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "Worship and Monotheism in the *Ascension of Isaiah*," in Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis (eds.), *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 78.
[139] "Worship and Monotheism," 82.
[140] *The Spirit's Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul*, 137.

late nor a Gentile development in Christianity but can be found in first-century Jewish Christianity.

The mid-second century apologist Justin Martyr mentions the Holy Spirit—often called the "Spirit of prophecy" or occasionally "divine Spirit"—frequently in his *Dialogue with Trypho* and *Apologies*, usually as the speaker of scriptural passages (an idea found also in the New Testament; e.g., Heb. 3:7). In *1 Apology* 6.2, Justin describes whom Christians worship:

> This God we do venerate and worship, and also the Son who came from him and taught us these things, and the company of the other good angels who follow him and are like him, and also the prophetic Spirit.[141]

Lest we should think that Justin ranks the Spirit below the company of angels, this statement should be read together with that of *1 Apology* 13.3: "For we have learnt that [Jesus Christ] is the son of the true God, and we hold him in second place, with the prophetic Spirit in the third rank."[142] Justin obviously has a subordinationist understanding of the Trinity as far as rank is concerned, but there is no question that he understands the Spirit to be another of what the Son is. When the Spirit speaks through Scripture, Justin distinguishes between the Spirit speaking in the Father's name, the Son's name, or his own name. In *1 Apology* 38.1, he refers to "when the prophetic Spirit speaks from the character of Christ" (*apo prosōpou tou Christou*), and in *Dialogue* 36.6, he expresses uncertainty as to whether, in a certain passage, the Holy Spirit speaks "from the character of the Father" (*apo prosōpou tou patros*) or "from his own" (*apo tou idiou*). This shows that Justin regards the Spirit as having a "personal" identity distinct from those of the Father and the Son. Such "prosopological exegesis" of the Jewish Scriptures has been identified by scholars as instrumental in the development of Trinitarian theology.[143]

Chapter X. The Conflict over the Trinity in Church History and the Current Debate

In this chapter, AB+CH offer a very brief and selective "historical sketch" of controversy over the Christian doctrine of God and Christ, mentioning nonconformist theologians (or heretics, depending on one's perspective) such as Paul of Samosata, Photinus of Sirmium, and Michael Servetus. The sketch contains a gap of nearly a millennium, from the Synod of Toledo (7th century) to Michael Servetus (16th century). This gap is of considerable historical and theological significance, since it indicates that—as far as the evidence goes—non-Trinitarian Christian communities *did not exist* for an extended period of Church history. I have argued elsewhere that all Christian groups in existence today can trace their history back to the catholic-orthodox church of the fourth-century councils.[144] That is, all Christian groups today—whether Trinitarian or non-Trinitarian—are descended from Trinitarian Christianity. All non-Trinitarian movements in the early Church died out, thus showing—following the

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[141] Trans. Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 93, 95.

[142] Trans. Minns and Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr*, 111.

[143] See Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament & Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Kyle R. Hughes, *The Trinitarian Testimony of the Spirit: Prosopological Exegesis and the Development of Pre-Nicene Pneumatology* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

[144] See my article, Our Nicene Common Ancestor: An Ecclesiological-Historical Argument for Trinitarian Orthodoxy.

criterion set out by Gamaliel in Acts 5:34-39—that they were not of God. Put differently, no non-Trinitarian group in existence today can trace its history back to the apostles except via Trinitarian Christianity. This is surely significant, given the promises of Christ that he would nourish his Church, be with her to the end of the age, that the gates of Hades would not prevail against her, etc. (Eph. 5:29-30; Matt. 28:20; 16:18).

After discussing some non-Trinitarian theologians of the seventeenth century (John Biddle, John Milton, Sir Isaac Newton, John Locke, and John Knox), AB+CH turn their attention to "The Contemporary Debate about Preexistence" (p. 253). They survey the work of certain modern biblical scholars and theologians who have challenged Christological orthodoxy (or some of its exegetical basis), such as James Dunn, James Mackey, John A. T. Robinson, contributors to the volume *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977), Karl-Josef Kuschel, and Karl-Heinz Ohlig.

The authors are not entirely clear about what the purpose of this chapter is, but presumably they want to show that their heterodox Christology has some credibility in modern scholarship. If so, point taken, but that Christological orthodoxy has its detractors is no surprise. Should we expect unanimity in the age of postmodernism? If, on the other hand, this section of the book aims to identify the prevailing *trend* in modern scholarship,[145] the authors should in fairness have also highlighted developments such as the "early high Christology" school.

Chapter XI. The Challenge Facing Trinitarianism Today

AB+CH open this chapter by asserting that "Contemporary Trinitarianism faces a formidable battery of arguments which have undermined some of its cherished biblical 'proofs'" (p. 271). This chapter uses the hostile witness tactic, appealing to *Trinitarian* writers who interpret important biblical texts about God and Christ along unitarian, rather than Trinitarian, lines. Personally, I do not find the hostile witness tactic compelling. While all of us have biases, one who engages in intellectual discourse should assume that others are operating in good faith, and try to do so oneself. Accordingly, both Trinitarians and unitarians should be able to admit whenever they judge that a particular text does not support their position, or is ambiguous. That AB+CH find evidence of Trinitarians doing this is evidence of the honesty of these Trinitarians, but it does not follow that the biblical evidence in support of the doctrine of the Trinity is weak.

Let me then comment briefly on some of the "disputed texts" raised in this chapter. On Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1, AB+CH note that some exegetes appeal to the so-called Granville Sharp rule to argue that these texts call Christ "God." I have already noted the disputed nature of Titus 2:13 (see note 49). After summarising the textual and exegetical issues concerning 2 Peter 1:1 in detail, Wright finds it "highly probable that Jesus is explicitly called θεός" here.[146] Romans 9:5 has been discussed already under chapter 4.

Concerning John 1:1, AB+CH quote some Trinitarian scholars who argue that the anarthrous *theos* there refers to the nature of the *logos*. This not even "hostile witness" testimony, since

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[145] As is suggested in the book's introduction, where AB+CH refer to "a growing number of Catholic and Protestant theologians" who question whether the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical (p. 7).
[146] "Jesus as ΘΕΟΣ," 264. The reader is referred to Wright's essay for details.

these scholars are merely emphasising that John 1:1 is not a statement of Sabellianism. I, too, maintain that *theos* in John 1:1c describes the nature of the *logos*.

Concerning Mark 13:32, AB+CH state,

> This verse reports Jesus' statement that he did not know the day of his return. It seems plainly contradictory to assert that omniscient Deity can be ignorant in any respect. Some Trinitarians appeal to the doctrine of the divine and human natures in Jesus to solve the problem. The Son did in fact know, but as a human being he did not. This seems little different from saying that one is poor because one has no money in one pocket, though in the other pocket one has a million dollars. (p. 288)

One might improve the financial analogy as follows. Suppose this millionaire locks all his money away in a vault and arranges that he cannot access it. It could then be simultaneously said, without contradiction, that this person is a millionaire and is penniless. In similar fashion, orthodoxy holds that Christ, in the days of his flesh, willingly gave up *access to* divine attributes such as omniscience.

Concerning Matthew 1:23, the writers state that the meaning of the name Immanuel ("God is with us") does not intrinsically imply that Jesus is God (p. 289). They point out that if it did, the child to whom the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 applied in the days of Ahaz must also be identified as God, and that the name Ithiel ("God is with me") used in the Hebrew Bible would carry the same implication. The argument is sound. It is *possible* that Matthew understood the name Immanuel in the incarnational sense "God with us," but this would have to be established on grounds other than the mere application of the name to Jesus.

Concerning John 10:30 ("I and the Father are one"), the writers state that the word "one" (*hen*, neuter adjective) should not be interpreted in an ontological sense. They observe that Jesus prays to the Father in John 17:11 that the disciples should be "one like us" (*hen kathōs hēmeis*), referring therefore to a unity of *purpose*, not nature (pp. 289-90). Given the "one body" language of Paul's letters, even the oneness of the Church may denote something more profound here than common purpose. *A fortiori*, we should be cautious about limiting the scope of the oneness described in John 10:30 to "purpose." Indeed, such a restrained sense would not have caused the Jews to pick up rocks to stone him, accusing him of blasphemy in that "You, though only a human being, are making yourself God" (10:31-33). AB+CH warn that we should not assume that Jesus' opponents have properly evaluated his words. We have already noted in chapter 2 that Jesus' response in John 10:34-36 is an *a fortiori* argument. He does deny *making himself* God, but he does not deny *being* God, which this Gospel affirms he is (John 1:1, 18; 20:28). AB+CH then return to John 20:28 and 1 John 5:20, both of which we have discussed under chapters 2-3.

The writers next turn from difficult texts to "The Argument from History," where they state that "the doctrine of the Trinity as it was solidified at Nicea (325 AD) and Chalcedon (451 AD) was the end product of a process of development" (p. 294). True; the question is whether Christian doctrine ought to remain static or to develop; see again Cardinal Newman's famous essay. And even unitarians would have to concede that the New Testament canon is the product of a process of development that likewise continued well into the fourth century.

In the conclusion to this chapter, AB+CH state, "There are no texts advanced in support of the orthodox understanding of the Godhead which have not been assigned another interpretation

by Trinitarians themselves" (p. 298). On this point, I must observe that I have observed a similar phenomenon among unitarian interpretations of "difficult" Christological texts (e.g., John 1:1; 8:58; 20:28; Heb. 1:10-12; etc.) Unitarian exegetes all agree that these texts do *not* indicate Christ's divinity or preexistence, but they cannot seem to find consensus on what the texts *do* mean.

The authors also assert that "Nothing of the glory of the Son is lost" if he is understood in unitarian terms as the unique human representative of God. Biblically speaking this cannot be so, for if we regard Christ in such terms, we cannot agree with the Fourth Evangelist (John 12:41) that Isaiah saw Christ's glory in the throne vision of Isaiah 6. In other words, we lose Christ's preexistent glory. Consequently, we also lose the glory of the Incarnation. There is no longer any merit in Christ's decision to share our humanity; it was simply his lot, rather than something he graciously willed to do (2 Cor. 8:9; Heb. 10:5-7).

Chapter XII. Have we Bartered for Another God?

The authors recount the story of Joseph Priestley, a minister and scientist whose property was destroyed by a mob due to his nonconformist doctrinal views (p. 301). This leads them to pose a series of pointed questions:

> What did these men, and many others who paid with their lives, find in the Bible which caused them to arrive at a different conviction about the nature of God? Why was this persuasion so powerful that they were willing to surrender everything for it? Why did religious leadership feel so threatened that they punished their opponents by putting them to death? Why even today, in many circles, does any questioning of the Trinity provoke such extraordinary alarm? (p. 301)

To stand by one's beliefs even when one's property and very life are under threat is evidence of one's sincerity and courage. Unfortunately, it is not evidence that one's beliefs are true. It is possible to be sincere and courageous and yet mistaken; it is also possible to be coercive and oppressive and yet correct. Jews, for instance, have faced persecution over the centuries by Christians for their denial that Jesus is the Messiah, and have often endured forced conversions. Presumably, AB+CH would agree that Jews who persisted in their religious beliefs under persecution are praiseworthy (and that Christian suppression of Judaism is reprehensible) while at the same time holding orthodox Judaism to be mistaken about the identity of the Messiah.

Open dialogue and inquiry concerning Christian doctrine should always be welcomed. Honest questions deserve satisfactory answers. However, to ask questions *about* the Trinity is one thing; to *question* the Trinity (in the sense of *challenging* the doctrine) is another. Any time a dogma of the Church is challenged, it is cause for alarm: souls are at stake. Now, the Church's way of responding to doctrinal nonconformists has matured in recent centuries, in recognition of the right to liberty of conscience. However, this does not mean that her zeal for defending truth and dispelling error ought to fade.

The authors proceed to assert,

> When Christianity adopted a Godhead of more than one person, it unwittingly flirted with idolatry. It embarked on a course of lawlessness by embracing 'another God' besides the only true God, the Father, Christianity thus broke the first

commandment and has continued on the same troubled path, unaware of the source
of its intractable problems. (pp. 308-309)

Trinitarians do not, of course, regard themselves as violating the first commandment, since the dogma maintains that there is one God in three persons, not three Gods. Unitarians must shoulder the burden of proving that there is a risk of making a false god out of God's Son. Where in the New Testament does any writer show concern to limit the honour, glory, or worship given to Christ, thereby to maintain the absolute distinction between God and his ostensible foremost creature? We have clear examples of Jesus' followers (Acts 14:8-18) and angels (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9) refusing honours that are properly due to God, but when it comes to Jesus it is different. He is worshipped alongside God (Rev. 5:13-14; 7:10; 22:3) and has doxologies addressed to him (2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Pet. 3:18; Rev. 1:5-6).[147] *TDT* calls it "highly significant" that the verb *latreuō* ("render cultic service") is applied only to the Father in the New Testament (pp. 139, 343). This is hardly surprising, however, given that Christ's role in the cultic economy is that of priest and victim.[148]

Significantly, no New Testament text warns against giving excessive honour to Christ and thereby dishonouring God. To the contrary, the Gospel of John warns us that one dishonours the Father when one does not honour the Son just as (*kathōs*) the Father (John 5:23). It is inevitable that the earliest Christians, being fiercely monotheistic Jews, would have wrestled with the question of how much glory and honour were due to the Messiah as compared to God. And it is extraordinary that they seem, with one accord, to have resolved this question by giving the Messiah precisely that limitless glory and honour that is due only to God.

AB+CH themselves inadvertently acknowledge this. Accusing the early Church of a "drift into polytheism," and having "proclaimed 'another Jesus' who was very God" and thus "another God (p. 311), they contrast this belief with

> The God of the Old Testament who said through Isaiah, 'Understand that I am He. Before me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me…and I will not give My glory to another' (Isa. 43:10; 42:8). (pp. 310-11)

Yet we have already seen that *Jesus applies this very language from Isaiah 43:10 to himself* in John 8:24 and 8:58, while John tells us that when Isaiah saw Yahweh in the heavenly temple

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[147] There are also doxologies addressed to God (e.g., Luke 2:14; Gal. 1:4-5; Eph. 3:20-21; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16; 1 Pet. 5:11; Rev. 7:12; 19:1) and doxologies addressed to God *through* Christ (Rom. 16:27; Jude 24-25). The doxologies in Revelation 5:13 and 7:10 are distinctive in that they are addressed not to God *through* Christ but to God *and* Christ.

[148] For instance, many of the occurrences of *latreuō* and the cognate noun *latreia* occur in Hebrews and Revelation. The former book concentrates on Christ's sacerdotal function, while the latter consistently depicts him as the cultic victim, the Lamb. Moreover, we should take notice of Revelation 22:3, which says of the New Jerusalem, "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship (*latreusousin*) him." It is possible that the antecedent of these singular pronouns (*autou*; *autō*) is *jointly* "God and the Lamb." There are other occasions in Revelation where a singular verb or pronoun seemingly refers to both God and Christ (6:17 [there is text-critical uncertainty between *orgēs autou* ("his wrath") vs. *orgēs autōn* ("their wrath") here]; 11:15), as we have seen also in Paul (1 Thess. 3:11-13). Note also that Revelation 22:4 states that "his name" will be in their foreheads; this echoes a statement in Revelation 14:1 which refers to "[the Lamb's] name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." The pronouns in Revelation 22:3-4 are ambiguous, but the writer certainly shows no concern to exclude the Lamb from receiving *latreia*.

(Isaiah 6), it was *Christ's* glory that he saw. Thus, the Gospel of John depicts Jesus in terms that AB+CH acknowledge the Old Testament reserves for God alone.

Chapter XIII. An Appeal for a Return to the Biblical Christ

In this final chapter, AB+CH argue that patristic ideas about the Sonship of Christ are without exegetical foundations. For instance, concerning John 8:42 ("I came from God and now I am here"), they cite Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown's observation that since the verb *exēlthon* ("came out") is an aorist, it cannot refer to the Son's eternal generation (p. 321). They thus conclude that Augustine and others misinterpreted John's Christology. However, a text that features more prominently in Augustine's notion of eternal generation is John 5:26: "For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (NRSV). Augustine writes,

> And let him who can understand, in that which the Son says, 'As the Father has life in Himself, so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself,' not that the Father gave life to the Son already existing without life, but that He so begot Him apart from time, that the life which the Father gave to the Son by begetting Him is co-eternal with the life of the Father who gave it. (*de Trinitate* 15.47)

Is Augustine justified in interpreting this saying with regard to the Son's generation outside of time? Let us investigate. While the Scriptures nowhere else refer to God as "having life in himself," this phrase seems to connote God's self-existence; that his life is immutable and intrinsic. The idea is equivalent to that conveyed by the biblical phrase, "the living God," which distinguishes God's nature from mere mortals or idols (e.g., Deut. 5:26; Jer. 10:10; Dan. 6:27; Acts 14:15).[149] Indeed, in a saying very similar to John 5:26, Jesus refers to God as the living Father: "Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me" (John 6:57).[150] Urban von Wahlde argues that John 5:26 should be interpreted against the backdrop of Wisdom of Solomon 15:8-17, which describes mortals as having life only lent to them, and consequently as unable to impart life to their idols.[151] Thus, in stating that the Son has "life in himself," John 5:26 declares that the Son too is self-existent; intrinsically and immutably alive. Yet the Son's self-existence has been given him by the Father! Here, the full paradox of Johannine Christology is on display: the Son has the divine attribute of self-existence, but his is a derived self-existence. The Son's intrinsic, immutable life enables him to give life to others (John 5:21; 6:57); indeed, to *be* "the Life" (John 11:25; 14:6).[152] As von Wahlde summarises,

> Thus the fact that the Father has life in himself sets him apart from all humanity.
> Moreover the fact that the Father gives to the Son to have life in himself not only

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[149] Note also the proverbial oath, "As the Lord lives," (e.g., Jer. 23:8 etc.) or, as used by God himself, "As I live" (e.g., Ezek. 33:11).

[150] On the significance of the designation "the living Father" and the relationship between John 6:57 and 5:26, see Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Living Father," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 21-26.

[151] Urban C. von Wahlde, "He Has Given to the Son To Have Life in Himself (John 5,26)," *Biblica* 85 (2004): 409-12.

[152] John declares that "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36), but no one other than the Father and the Son is said to have life "in himself." Believers are consequently unable to confer life on one another; they can only draw it from the Son.

sets the Son apart and identifies him as divine but also provides the basis for his ability to give life to others.[153]

But does John 5:26 convey the notion of eternal generation, of begettal outside of time, as Augustine claims? If "life in himself," as for the Father, so for the Son, means immutable, divine life, then this could by definition not be imparted in time. Moreover, the Gospel of John does not say that the Son received "life in himself" at his resurrection (or at any other point within time). Rather, it says of the divine Word that, already in the beginning, "In him was life" (John 1:4). In fact, John seems to view Jesus' derived self-existence as the *cause*, not the result, of his resurrection. Uniquely among the New Testament writers, John portrays Jesus as *actively involved in his own resurrection* (John 2:19; 10:17-18).[154] It appears, therefore, that Augustine's teaching on eternal generation has biblical support after all.

AB+CH proceed to emphasise "The absence of any biblical evidence for Jesus being the *Son of God before his conception*" (p. 327). This conclusion, however, rests on flawed exegesis of numerous Johannine references to Christ's preexistence (see above on chapter VIII), as well as texts such as Hebrews 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-17, and 1 John 3:8. There is some irony in their stated "desire to avoid any such abstract Jesus" (p. 331) as that of orthodoxy in their understanding "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). It is in fact unitarianism that reduces Christ's preexistence to an abstraction. The authors would have us choose between Christ's real preexistence and real humanity, insisting we cannot have both. But the Church affirms the glorious paradox of the Incarnation.

Two statements at the close of the book reveal much about the authors' epistemological presuppositions. They state, "It is questionable whether traditional, orthodox definitions of Jesus pay close enough attention to the proportions of the biblical material" (p. 336), arguing that orthodox theologians have placed too much weight on the Gospel of John and Philippians 2, and not enough on the Synoptic Gospels, Acts, and the non-Pauline epistles. They further assert, "Occasional 'difficult verses' must not override the plain evidence distributed throughout Scripture" (p. 337).

From an orthodox perspective, neither the "proportions" nor the "plainness" of the biblical evidence are decisive. Sacred Scripture is not written like a theological treatise, and need not bend to humans' expectations with regard to proportionality or plainness. Scripture is revelation from God, for humans, but on God's terms. Paul reminds us in Romans 11:33-36 that God's ways are inscrutable, and that no one can counsel him. We therefore can say nothing about how God *ought to have revealed himself*, or what Scripture *could be expected to look like*, if the doctrine of the Trinity were true. All we can do is to interpret Scripture as we have it. Dogma emerges from the collective witness of divine revelation as interpreted by that body to whom it has been entrusted, the Church.

If a truth emerges only from one passage of Scripture, and then only implicitly, it is nonetheless a divine truth, worthy of belief. By way of example, consider Jesus' disputation with the Sadducees on resurrection as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:18-27 par.). Jesus

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[153] "He Has Given to the Son To Have Life in Himself (John 5,26)," 411.
[154] For detailed exegesis of these two texts, see my article, *Did Jesus Raise Himself from the Dead?*

does not cite a litany of texts to demonstrate some acceptable degree of "proportionality,"[155] nor does he cite a single plain text about resurrection. Instead, he cites a single text (Ex. 3:6) that makes no mention of resurrection, but refers to God at the time of Moses as the God of Abraham. From this oblique clue, he not only infers a doctrine of eschatological resurrection, but rebukes the Sadducees for their ignorance of Scripture!

In fact, the biblical evidence for the dogma of the Trinity—or at least for its constituent premises (the oneness of God; the deity and preexistence of the Son; the distinction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)—far exceeds both in quantity and in clarity the evidence on which Jesus argued for the resurrection. There is, moreover, no biblical warrant for setting aside some passages on the grounds that they are "difficult," while making others normative. Orthodox Christology arises, not from subordinating one biblical book or passage to another, but from allowing every passage to contribute to the whole picture, from which—through systematic reflection by the Church—right doctrine emerges.

Reviewer's Conclusion

The reasons why the argument of *TDT* has not convinced me to return to my former unitarian position are of two kinds; methodological and exegetical. At a methodological level, my objections are as follows:

(1) The authors make a significant oversight by not giving due diligence to formulating definitions of key terms—above all, *personhood*—on which the whole subject of the book hinges.
(2) The authors assert repeatedly that aspects of Trinitarian dogma are self-contradictory, but do not attempt to demonstrate this by rigorous logical argument; nor do the authors interact in any depth with Trinitarian philosophical theologians, ancient or modern.
(3) The authors cite a great deal of secondary literature, but largely avoid engaging with biblical scholarship that differs from their own exegetical findings.
(4) The writers appear to assume a radical Protestant ecclesiology, under which the Church Fathers are approached with a hermeneutic of suspicion rather than with the reverence due one's forebears. No allowance is made for the possibility that, as the Church matured in its reflection on the deposit of faith, legitimate developments in doctrine might have taken place.
(5) The authors dichotomise sharply between Jewish and Greek thought, failing to recognise that the Jewish authors of the New Testament already resort to Greek philosophical language to describe God.
(6) The authors operate under a rigid epistemological framework that imposes on Scripture their own presuppositions about how God ought to have revealed the doctrine of the Trinity, had he wished to do so, in terms of the quantity and plainness of texts. A more

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[155] In fact, biblical scholars today observe that, in the entire Hebrew Bible, read in strictly grammatical-historical terms, only "one text speaks unmistakably and unambiguously of personal resurrection," namely Daniel 12:2 (Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002], 225; similarly, Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* [New York: Doubleday, 2004], 261).

prudent approach would surrender any such preconditions and allow God's Word to address us in his own terms.

At an exegetical level, my objections are as follows:

(1) The authors overlook vast swathes of implicit evidence for high Christology in the New Testament (e.g., in the Synoptic Gospels and Revelation).

(2) When it comes to some of the great Christological texts in Hebrews, Paul's letters, and the Gospel of John, the authors seem only to want to *parry* these texts by providing some conceivable interpretation that is consistent with unitarian theology, rather than pursuing the interpretation that is most probable in terms of syntax and context.

(3) The authors urge their readers to interpret the New Testament within its Old Testament and Jewish context, but often neglect to follow their own advice, missing biblical allusions that illuminate the meaning of key Christological texts.

(4) The authors make some syntactical errors with significant exegetical consequences—for instance, interpreting occurrences of *dia* + genitive as though they were *dia* + accusative in passages about Christ's role in creation.

(5) The authors do not adequately attend to New Testament witness to the idea that the Holy Spirit is another of what the Son is, and thus similarly distinct from the Father.

Index of Biblical References

Note: a bold page number indicates that considerable attention is devoted to exegesis of the given text.