

God is *Not* a Trinity!



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God is *Not* a Trinity!

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Ask the average church-goer to define trinitarianism and chances are he won't be able to do so. Explain to him the meaning of "trinity" and he is likely to say that it makes no sense to him, or that he doesn't believe it. Most never bother to investigate this subject. Those who do are often left in a state of confusion, and for good reason—trinitarian dogma *is* confusion.

Part One

The Trinity and the Bible

If you were asked to explain the doctrine of the trinity, what would you say? I have posed this question before Bible study groups on at least five occasions, and in each instance, I received replies such as these:

“The doctrine of the trinity states that God is a family of three Persons.” “It means that there are three Beings—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and that each one is a part of God.”

While these answers indicate some familiarity with the doctrine of the trinity, they also reveal that many people—I would say the vast majority—do not really understand “official” trinitarian dogma.

For instance, trinitarian dogma—as defined by the Athanasian Creed, which represents the official position of mainstream Christianity—does *not* state that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three “Beings,” each of whom is a “part of God.” Trinitarian theologians explain that God is *one* Being, not three, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are “personal distinctions,” or *hypostases*, within that one Being. Further, they say that the three personal distinctions are not “parts” of God, for God is infinite Being, and infinite Being cannot be divided into “parts.”

Trinitarian apologist Robert M. Bowman, Jr., writes: “Another aspect of God’s oneness is the fact that there are no separations or divisions or partitions in God. The trinitarian doctrine holds that God is a single infinite being, transcending the bounds of space and time, having no body either material or spiritual (except the body that the Son assumed in becoming a man). Thus, the trinitarian God has no parts. You cannot divide infinite being into components. The Athanasian Creed affirms that

God is not divided by the three persons when it states that the trinitarian faith does not allow for ‘dividing the substance’ (using ‘substance’ to mean the essence or being of God). The three persons, consequently, are not three parts of God, but three personal distinctions within God, each of whom is fully God” (*Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989, pp. 12,13).

Someone will surely ask, “But don’t trinitarians teach that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct Persons?” Yes, they do. However, trinitarians who “know their stuff” are careful to explain that the term *persons*, as it is used in trinitarian doctrine, does not mean “persons” in the ordinary sense; it refers to the “personal distinctions” of the one Being known as “God.”

Bowman writes: “...the statement that this one God is ‘three persons’ is also one that has often been misunderstood. People often assume that ‘person’ is used to refer to a separate individual being, which would imply that three divine persons were three Gods. The belief in three Gods, called *tritheism*, has always been condemned by trinitarian Christians....If ‘person’ is used to mean a separate individual being, then in that sense trinitarians frankly would confess to believe that God is one ‘person.’

“However, there is another sense of the word *person* that focuses not on separate existence but on relationship; trinitarians believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three ‘persons’ in the sense that each is aware of the others, speaks to the others, and loves and honors the others. Thus, God may be described as ‘one person’ or as ‘three persons,’ depending on the meaning of ‘persons’” (*ibid.* pp. 13,14).

Under the entry “Person,” *The Concise Dictionary of the Christian Tradition* has this to say: “A technical word when used of the Holy Trinity or of the Lord Jesus Christ. Translating *hypostasis*, it is used of the modes of being of the one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...” (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989, p. 292).

However, trinitarians are careful to point out that the expression “modes of being” does not mean that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are indistinct, as “modalism” (i.e., “Jesus only”) teaches. The three *hypostases* of the Godhead are *distinct*, trinitarians assert, but they are one God, one divine Being. Moreover, “Each one of the three Persons (*hypostases*) of the Holy Trinity is the entire divinity” (*A Companion to the Greek Orthodox Church*, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, New York, 1984, p. 158).

Thus, according to trinitarianism, the one God, who is one infinite, indivisible Being, is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are not three

Gods, but one God. They are “distinct, but not separate.”

Trinitarians claim that the “triune” nature of God is *alogical* (*above* logic, or above human comprehension), but not *illogical* (contrary to logic). Since God is not confined to the boundaries of time and space, they say, His very nature is incomprehensible—alogical, but not illogical. Thus, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct, but not separate—a concept incomprehensible to the finite human mind. They relate to each other, love each other, and have distinct functions, but they are indivisibly one.

Of course, the doctrine is illogical, as anyone should be able to see. In order to accept it as “gospel truth,” one must conclude that biblical descriptions of God the Father and Jesus Christ are mere metaphors—and potentially misleading ones at that!

For example, the Bible depicts Jesus Christ as sitting at the right hand of the Father. Even if this description is to some extent metaphorical, it certainly does *not*, by any stretch of the imagination, leave the impression that the Father and the Son are *hypostases* (“personal distinctions” or “modes of being”—or “consciousnesses,” as some have suggested) within one indivisible Being. Rather, it pictures *two* distinct Beings—one called “the Father,” the other called “the Son,” and one positioned side-by-side with the other.

The same picture of the Father and the Son as two distinct Beings is presented over and over in the New Testament. The Father sent the Son; the Father raised the Son from the state of death; the Son prayed to the Father; the Son said He was sent to do not His own will, but the will of the Father; the Son ascended to the Father; the Son acts as Mediator between man and the Father; the Son will return to this earth and ultimately deliver His Kingdom to the Father; the Son referred to the Father as “my Father” and “my God”; the Son was on earth while the Father was in heaven. None of these many clear, scriptural descriptions of the Son and His relationship to the Father remotely hint at the idea of two of three *hypostases* who are one indivisible Being!

Any honest, unbiased student of the Bible should admit (as do *many* New Testament scholars) that the writers of the New Testament never thought in trinitarian terms. They clearly saw the Father and the Son as two divine Beings, not as *hypostases* within one Being. The trinitarian interpretation requires that one read forced and unnatural meanings into passages that were written for people with ordinary abilities in comprehension and understanding.

No doubt, if the apostle Paul were here today he would say something like this to those among God’s people who have blindly accepted such a

teaching: “Oh you foolish brethren! Who has bewitched you that you should believe such nonsense? Has not God given you the Spirit of truth whereby you can discern between truth and error?”

To those who claim that God cannot be understood, perhaps the apostle would quote the words God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah: “But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he *understandeth* and *knoweth* me...” (Jeremiah 9:24).

Trinity or Family?

Over the decades, evangelicals and “cult watchers” have published many books, tracts, articles, and pamphlets on the so-called “errors” of “Armstrongism.” Many of them take issue not only with our understanding regarding the Holy Spirit, but with our belief that the Bible presents God the Father and Christ the Son as a divine *Family*.

Perhaps those who argue so vigorously against the concept of a divine Family should pay closer attention to the works of other trinitarians, who find the term an appropriate one in describing God. For instance, Spiros Zodhiates, a widely-recognized Greek scholar, commenting on John 1:18, states:

“John wants to emphasize here that He who came to dwell upon the face of this earth in the person of Jesus Christ was of the same nature of God Himself.... The word *monogenees* [translated “only begotten” in John 1:18] actually is a compound of the word *monos*, ‘alone,’ and the word *genos*, ‘race, stock, family.’ Here we are told that He who came to reveal God—Jesus Christ—is of the same family, of the same stock, of the same race as God.”

Zodhiates continues: “There is ample evidence in the Scriptures that the Godhead is a *family* [emphasis mine] made up of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit” (*Was Jesus God?*, AMG Publishers, 1966, p. 21).

Zodhiates is not the only trinitarian who describes God as a Family. Scott Hahn, a Roman Catholic apologist, stated in a taped lecture on the “seven sacraments” that “God is a Family,” and suggested that Christians can become part of God’s family.

So what’s the big deal? *Why* do some make such a great issue out of our use of the term *Family* in our descriptions of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son—especially in view of the fact that theologians *from among their own number* use the same term?

The very fact that God the Father and Jesus Christ are called “the Father” and “the Son” in Scripture indicates a family relationship. No trinitarian denies that the nature of the Son is the same as the nature of

the Father, or that they are distinct Personalities. If they are distinct, and if they belong to the same category, kind, or class, then they are a *Family!*

Unfortunately, some attempt to dismiss the “Family” concept by applying a narrow definition to the term *family*. One writer recently stated that since the angels do not marry or reproduce—since there are no “father angels,” “mother angels,” and “son or daughter angels”—angels are not a family. Of course, anyone should be able to see the absurdity of such an argument. The term *family* can apply to “[a]ny class or group of like or related things” (*Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary*). Therefore, by that definition, the angels *are* a family—and so are God the Father and Christ the Son! The Father and the Son were a Family even before the latter literally became the Son of God through His human conception and birth.

Some have even suggested that the terms “Father” and “Son” are mere metaphors. This, in my opinion, borders on *blasphemy*, for, if anything, *we* are the “metaphors”! Human relationships, as God intended them to be, are patterns of heavenly realities—not the other way around!

In spite of evidence to the contrary, the concept of a “God Family” continues to come under attack. Almost without fail, those who attack this concept focus on the term *elohim* (a Hebrew term translated “God” in the Old Testament), and point out that this word does not mean “family.”

It is true that the term does not technically mean “family.” But then, the Hebrew term *adam* does not technically mean “family,” either; yet, it is abundantly clear that *adam* (most often translated “man” in the KJV) can be used in reference to a family. The question, then, does not depend upon the dictionary definition of *elohim*, but upon whether the term can refer to a family.

Can *Elohim* Refer to a Family?

Psalm 97:7 states, “worship Him, all ye gods.” The word translated “gods” is *elohim*. Hebrews 1:6 makes it clear that the *elohim* of Psalm 97:7 are the angels.

But are the angels a family? As mentioned above, some say they are not because there are no fathers and mothers or sons and daughters among the angels, for angels “neither marry nor are given in marriage.” But remember, the term *family* does not necessarily refer to a group consisting of father, mother, and children. It also refers to a class, category, or kind. In that sense, the angels are *definitely* a family.

Paul wrote, “...I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole *family* in heaven and earth is named”

(Ephesians 3:14,15).

Undoubtedly, the heavenly family Paul had in mind includes the class known as angels, which are called *elohim* in Psalm 97:7. Therefore, while the term *elohim* does not technically mean “family,” it certainly may be used in reference to a family.

Notice that the “whole family in heaven and earth” derives its name from God the Father, who, in the same statement, is called the “*Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Do you see the obvious connection between “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” and “whole family in heaven and earth”? If the whole family in heaven and earth is named after the Father of Jesus Christ, then isn’t it obvious that God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are a Family?

We may conclude, then, that if the Father and the Son are distinct Personalities (regardless how we define “personalities”) belonging to the same category or class, then *they are a Family!*

The Hebrew term *elohim* can be used in either the singular or plural sense, depending upon grammatical context. (In the Hebrew Scriptures, it is most often used in the singular sense, but occasionally appears in the plural.) Thus, the Father is *Elohim*, the Son is *Elohim*, and the two together are *Elohim*—a divine Family.

But are they distinct *Beings*? Trinitarians say *no*, claiming that the Father and the Son are *hypostases*, or “personal distinctions,” within *one* Being.

What is a “Being”?

The term *being* is related to the term *be*, which indicates existence, or that which exists. If the Father and the Son are distinct Personalities (or “consciousnesses,” if you prefer), if they are aware of each other, if they love each other, if they communicate with each other, and if each exists, then each is a Being! Thus, the Father and the Son are two distinct Beings; and if they belong to the same class of being, then they are a *Family* of Beings!

Those who argue that the Father and Son are “distinct, but not separate” are resorting to an argument of semantics. If the Father and Son are distinct, then they are in some sense separate. They are not separate where nature and purpose are concerned, but as intelligent Personalities (or “consciousnesses”) who know, love, and communicate with each other, they are separate. If not, then the Father’s love for the Son is really love for Himself, and vice versa.

Some may argue that the Father’s love for the Son is, in a sense, love for Himself, since the two are one indivisible Being. But is this true?

Are the Father and Son One Indivisible Being?

During the last moments of His life as a mortal human being, Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou *forsaken* me?" (Matthew 27:46). Was this theatrics on the part of the Son of God? Or did He perceive that His Father had at that moment forsaken Him? The answer is obvious, and it clearly refutes the notion that the Father and the Son are one indivisible Being.

The fact is, the Father *did* temporarily forsake His Son, which means that they were *separated* for a time. Trinitarians, holding the unbiblical view that the Father and Son are *hypostases* within one indivisible Being, dismiss this fact by claiming that it is a "great mystery" that cannot be understood by the finite human mind. But if these words of Jesus were not meant to convey an understandable meaning, then why were they recorded?

Further, if Jesus perceived Himself and the Father as "personalities," "consciousnesses," "personal distinctions," or *hypostases* within one Being (i.e., God), then one cannot help but wonder why He called the Father "my God." This simply doesn't fit the trinitarian formula, so trinitarians are forced to admit that the term *God* in this case cannot mean "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Trinitarians often cite John 10:30 as proof that the Father and the Son are one Being. The passage reads, "I [Jesus] and my Father are one." But does this mean that the Father and the Son are one *Being*? Or does it mean they are "one" in some other way?

In the night of His betrayal, Jesus prayed that His disciples "may be one, even as we [Christ and the Father] are one" (John 17:22). He went on to describe the "oneness" He had in mind: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one..." (verse 23).

The "oneness" of the Father and the Son is described precisely the same way in John 10. When the Jews took up stones to cast at Jesus, after He had said "I and the Father are one," Jesus described His "oneness" with the Father:

"If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, *that the Father is in me, and I in the Father* (verse 38).

The unity Jesus spoke of in John 10:30 and in John 17:22 pertains to fellowship and purpose. By no means can either of these passages be properly interpreted to mean that the Father and the Son are one Being. If that were the meaning, then we have grounds for claiming that all true

Christians are (or shall be) one being, for Jesus prayed that His followers be "one" just as He and the Father are "one."

Scripture is clear in declaring that "God is one," but does this mean that the one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Who is the God Who Sent Jesus?

As we have noted, trinitarians say that the one true God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are not three Gods, but one God. They are not three Beings, but one Being. As the Athanasian Creed states, "...we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance." Thus, according to trinitarian dogma, when Scripture declares that God is one, it is speaking of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But let's see how this works out when we apply the trinitarian definition to several scriptures.

Paul said that "there is none other God but one" (I Corinthians 8:4). Trinitarians add that the one God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, in the same context, Paul states: "But to us there is but one God, *the Father*, of whom are all things, and we in Him; *and* one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him" (verse 6). (Notice that the "one God" is distinct from the "one Lord.")

If the one God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then why did Paul say that the "one God" is *the Father*? Why did He speak of the "one God" (the Father) *and* the "one Lord" (Jesus Christ)? Obviously, the word *God*, as it is used in this passage, does not refer to the Father and the Son, but to the Father alone. Here, the term means "Supreme Sovereign and Head of all," and refers exclusively to the Father.

The truth is, the vast majority of New Testament references to "God" are references to the Father *alone*! The term appears hundreds of times in the New Testament, and refers to the Son in only a few instances.

Peter said, "Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you..." (Acts 3:26); that "God raised [Jesus] from the dead" (Acts 4:10; cf. 2:24, 32); that "God hath made that same Jesus...both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Paul said that "God...raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus" (Acts 13:23; cf. 13:30), and repeatedly spoke of "God our Father, *and* the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:7; I Corinthians 1:3; II Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:3; I Thessalonians 1:1; II Thessalonians 1:2).

Again and again the New Testament tells us that God raised Jesus from the dead, that God sent Jesus, that Jesus sits at God's right hand, and that Jesus is God's Son. Clearly, few references to "God" in the New

Testament are references to any other than *God the Father!*

However, in a few instances, Christ is called “God” (John 1:1; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8). “God,” in that sense, refers to a *kind*, or *class*, of Being. Christ is the same *kind* as the Father. But when “God” is used in the sense of Supreme Sovereign and Head of all, the term applies *exclusively* to the Father!

Notice how the word *God* is used in several passages:

Jesus, speaking to the Father in prayer, said, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Notice that the “only true God” *sent* “Jesus Christ,” and is distinct from Him. If the “only true God” is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, how could He be distinct from the Son? The term *God*, in this passage, clearly means “Supreme Sovereign and Head of all.” It applies to the Father alone.

After His resurrection, Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to *my God*, and your God” (John 20:17). Again, the word *God* is used in the sense of “Supreme Sovereign and Head of all.” The Father is Jesus’ God—that is, He is the Head of all, including Christ.

The apostle Paul said that “the head of Christ is God” (I Corinthians 11:3). If “God” is defined as “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” then Paul’s statement makes no sense. Paul understood that there is but one Supreme Sovereign, and that the Supreme Sovereign is the Head of Christ. Try reading “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” in place of the term *God* in this passage. Surely any reasonable student of the Bible will instantly see that the trinitarian definition of “God” does not work here.

In fact, if you were to read through the New Testament and substitute the phrase “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” for the term *God* in each place the term appears, you would see that the trinitarian definition could not possibly apply in a great many instances. You would have the writers of the New Testament speaking of “the Son of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” You would have them speaking of “the Spirit of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” (We find references to the “Spirit of the Father” and the “Spirit of Christ,” but never do we find mention of the “Spirit of the Holy Spirit.” The reason is obvious!)

Yet, in spite of the obvious, trinitarians claim that those passages which speak of “one God” are speaking of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For instance, one writer recently cited I Corinthians 8:4 (“...and there is none other God but one”) and asserted that the one God Paul spoke of was the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet, two verses later, Paul stated plainly that the “one God” is “the Father,” who is clearly distinct

from the “one Lord,” who is “Jesus Christ” (see verse 6). It’s a wonder that so many sincere students of Scripture don’t seem to notice such sloppy exegesis.

An Unnatural Interpretation

No *natural* reading of the Scriptures would yield the trinitarian formula. At least a few honest trinitarians, especially those of the Roman Catholic persuasion, admit this fact. For instance, Catholic apologist Karl Keating writes: “Consider the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not present on the face of Scripture, not just in the sense that the word Trinity is never used...but also in the sense that it is by no means obvious, from the surface meaning of the text, that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person” (*Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 144). Keating’s conclusion is that a proper understanding of Scripture requires the divinely-guided interpretative skills of the “Magisterium of the Church.”

Virtually *nobody* unfamiliar with trinitarian dogma would *naturally* arrive at the trinitarian formula by simply reading the Scriptures. In fact, tens of thousands of Bible-reading, professing Christians who belong to trinitarian churches but haven’t been taught trinitarian doctrine think of God the Father and Jesus Christ as two divine Beings. The idea of a Being who is three yet indivisibly one has never occurred to them. Why? Because they are ignorant? Because they don’t have the refined and polished exegetical skills of the theologically “elite”? *No!* It is because it is not natural to think of distinct persons as a single being, and because *the Bible does not present them that way!*

Are we to understand God the Father and Jesus Christ in a way that the Bible does not present them? Of course not! But such is the folly of those who place “Christian” tradition equal to, or above, inspired revelation.

Many of the widely-known names among today’s mainstream theologians earned their degrees *after* “accepting Christ.” It is doubtful that they had given much thought to the details of trinitarian doctrine before entering the seminaries. Probably, most never thought of challenging traditional beliefs because they believed at the outset that their teachers were God-fearing, Spirit-filled men and women who shared a common faith with them, and were the present generation of a centuries-long line of faithful expositors of the true faith.

However, quite a large number of present-day theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, *have* challenged the traditional beliefs of their denominations. The so-called “higher critics” and their disciples have

challenged virtually every article of faith ever to be set forth in the “Christian” creeds. While we take great exception to the way the “higher critics” approach the Bible (i.e., their denial of divine inspiration and of the supernatural), we have to acknowledge the fact that their freedom from the shackles of tradition has produced at least a few refreshing insights. For instance, all of them acknowledge the fact that Paul’s many statements about God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit show clearly that the apostle never thought in terms of a “three in one” Being. Further, unlike virtually all mainstream theologians, they realize that fourth-century politics played an important part in the emergence of full-blown trinitarian dogma, and freely explore the possibilities of how pagan influences may have contributed to early trinitarian thought.

Without the influence of long-held tradition, or some “infallible” teaching authority, no group of people studying the Bible for themselves would arrive at trinitarian dogma. However, once an “infallible” teaching authority (or group of “leaders” believed to have some special, divinely-inspired insights) has been established, thousands (who otherwise would never have accepted trinitarian ideas) will blindly accept whatever is taught. If they don’t understand the teaching, they assume that “God will work it out,” or that, given time, God will lead their leaders to a more accurate understanding.

Indeed, God WILL work it out! But those who blindly follow their leaders may be surprised at *how* God works it out, and of the importance He places on *personal* responsibility!

Part Two

The Divine Spokesman

The apostle John wrote: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-3,14).

In the ancient Orient, petitioners brought their concerns to the throne room and presented them to the king. But to avoid disturbance, a curtain was often used to separate the petitioners from the throne room, thus making the throne inaccessible to the public. The king’s official spokesman, an authorized agent who spoke on behalf of the king, met with petitioners on the side of the curtain opposite the throne room. Because of the spokesman’s authority to speak and act on behalf of the king, he could say, in effect, “If you have seen me, you have seen the king.” Similarly, Christ (God’s Spokesman) said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). His coming in the flesh is comparable to the king’s spokesman coming from behind the veil to meet with those wishing to express their concerns to the king.

No doubt, John was familiar with the king’s use of an interpreter who acted and spoke as the king’s representative, and apparently saw it as a fitting analogy of the functional distinctions of God the Father and Christ the Son. He wrote: “No man hath seen God at any time [just as petitioners did not see the king, who was behind the veil]; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him [just as the appointed agent served as the king’s visible representative, declaring the will of the king]” (John 1:18).

Some have argued that the term *Logos* (translated “Word” in the above passage) does not mean “Spokesman.” However, in view of the analogy (which John seems to have had in mind) of a king’s use of a spokesman who acted on his behalf, and of John’s presentation of Jesus as the One

who represents and reveals the Father, it is clear that John wanted his readers to understand that the divine *Logos* was the Spokesman who acted on behalf of the Supreme Sovereign.

When Christ came in the flesh, He came as His Father's Representative. He said, "For I came down from heaven [from "behind the veil," as it were], not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me" (John 6:38).

But remember, Christ served as God's divine Spokesman even *before* He came in the flesh, as John 1:1-3 clearly reveals. Correctly rendered, verse 3 states, "All things were made *through* Him," meaning that God made all things *through the agency* of His divine Spokesman.

The same divine Agent accompanied the children of Israel during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

The "Rock" Who Accompanied Israel

Speaking of the ancient Israelites, the apostle Paul said: "And [they] did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed [or *accompanied*] them: and that Rock was Christ" (I Corinthians 10:3,4).

The "spiritual meat" and "spiritual drink" Paul spoke of were the manna that miraculously appeared (Exodus 16:15) and the water that miraculously came forth from a rock (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11). The manna and the water were *material* substances. Paul called them "spiritual" food and drink because they were produced supernaturally. The term *spiritual*, then, does not refer to the nature of the food and drink, but to the *Source* of those substances.

However, the rock from which the water miraculously flowed was not supernaturally produced, as were the manna and water. Therefore, the term *spiritual* (in "spiritual Rock") does not refer to the source of the "Rock," but to the *nature* of the Rock. Paul was not speaking of the material rock from which the water flowed, but of the spiritual Rock that *caused* the water to come forth: *And that Rock was Christ!*

Paul was saying that Christ was *literally* with the Israelites during their trek through the wilderness. Further evidence that this is so is seen a few verses later, where Paul warns, "We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents" (verse 9, NRSV). (Some manuscripts read "Lord" instead of "Christ," but early patristic testimony supports the view that "Christ" was in the original.) The Israelites of old could not have "put Christ to the test" had He not literally been there.

While the association of the supernatural "Rock" with the material

rock was deliberate, Paul was not speaking of the material rock as a metaphorical reference to Christ. He knew that "Rock" was one of the divine titles (see Deuteronomy 32:4,15,18,30,31; Psalm 18:2,4,31; Isaiah 17:10), and that the Old Testament itself identifies the supernatural Source of the miracle.

Notice how the supernatural Source is associated with the material rock, but identified as being other than the material rock: "And the Lord said unto Moses...Behold, *I will stand before thee there upon the rock* in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it..." (Exodus 17:5,6). This was the "spiritual Rock" Paul was speaking of when he said, "And that Rock was Christ."

The One who stood upon the rock and caused water to miraculously come forth was *not* the Supreme Sovereign (the One who became the Father of Jesus Christ); rather, He was God's Spokesman—the divine Agent, or Representative—who spoke and acted on behalf of the Supreme Sovereign.

The New Testament declares that no one has seen God at any time (John 1:18; 6:46; I John 4:12). Jesus said, "Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape" (John 5:37). Therefore, the divine Personage who was both seen and heard on many occasions during the Old Testament period was the *Logos*, or Spokesman, who acted on behalf of the Supreme Sovereign. He often appeared to the ancients, and was therefore God's visible Representative. He acted as God's "voice," or means through which the will of the Supreme Sovereign was revealed—just as a king's representative voiced the will of the king.

The Image of the Invisible God

The Old Testament relates many accounts of a Being identified as "the Lord God" who appeared to and spoke with the ancients. He conversed with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8-19). He spoke to Cain, Noah, and Abraham (Genesis 4:6-15; 6:13-21; 12:1-4). On several occasions, He was both seen and heard (Genesis 12:7; 18:1; 26:2; 35:1). He spoke to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, giving them the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-19). Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel "saw the God of Israel" (Exodus 24:9,10).

Yet, the New Testament declares, "No man hath seen God [the Father] at any time..." (John 1:18). Speaking of God the Father, Jesus said, "Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape" (John 5:37).

If no man has seen God or heard His voice, then *who* appeared to and spoke with the ancients? It could not have been the Father, so it must

have been the divine *Logos*, or Spokesman, whom the apostle Paul described as “the *image* of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15).

An “image” is something that is seen. As the Image of the invisible God, Christ is the *visible* Representative of the God whose form has not been seen and whose voice has not been heard. Therefore, it was the divine Spokesman—the preexistent Christ—who appeared to and spoke with the ancients. He appeared and spoke *on behalf* of the invisible God, and always spoke in the first person, acting as the “voice” of the Supreme Sovereign.

As we shall later see, several New Testament passages identify the “Lord God” of the Israelites as the Father of Jesus Christ. Yet, many Old Testament passages identify the One who appeared and spoke to the ancients as “the Lord God.” At first glance, this may seem to be a contradiction, since no one has seen the Father at any time. The seeming contradiction is resolved once we realize that the One who appeared to and spoke with the ancients acted as the “voice”—the Spokesman—of the “Lord God,” or Supreme Sovereign.

Scripture reveals that God has on many occasions worked through the agency of angels. When the preexistent Christ appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, two angels, appearing as “men,” accompanied Him (Genesis 18:1,2). The same two angels were sent to Sodom to warn Lot of the destruction that was to befall that city (Genesis 18:20-22; 19:1,12,13).

An angelic being named Gabriel was sent to give the prophet Daniel “skill and understanding” concerning things to come (Daniel 9:21-23; cf. 10:5-14,20,21). An angel appeared to Zacharias and foretold the birth of John the Baptist, who would prepare the way before the Messiah (Luke 1:11-17). The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and foretold the birth of Jesus (verses 26-33).

Angels were involved in giving the Revelation to John (Revelation 17:1), and are presented as divinely-appointed agents who play a role in bringing about end-time events (Revelation 7:1-3; 8:1,6-13; 9:1-3,13; 10:7; 11:15; 15:1; 16:1-17).

Of all the spirit beings who act as God’s agents, one seems to be singled out as a special Angel, or Messenger, and is more closely associated with “the Lord God” than any other being. In fact, He is often addressed as “Lord God,” and speaks in the first person *as* the Lord God. However, several scriptures clearly identify Him as a Being *other than* the Lord God. When He appeared to the ancients, He served as the *visible* Representative of the *invisible* God.

The concept of a divine Spokesman is not unique to the New

Testament. The Old Testament has much more to say about Him and His activity than most realize.

The Angel of the Lord

Carefully read the following words:

“...*I* made you [the children of Israel] to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which *I* swore unto your fathers; and *I* said, *I* will never break *my* covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed *my* voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore *I* also said, *I* will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you” (emphasis mine).

Notice that the words *I* and *my* are emphasized. Who was speaking? Who made the Israelites to go up out of Egypt? Who brought them into the land? Who promised the land to the fathers? Who made a covenant with Israel?

The answer, of course, is *God*. Many scriptures tell us in the clearest of terms that it was God Almighty who made a covenant with Israel, and who did all the things mentioned above.

But turn to the passage and read the parts not quoted above. It is found in Judges the second chapter:

“And an *angel* [messenger] *of the Lord* spake these words [quoted above] unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept” (verse 4).

Notice that the *Angel of the Lord*, not the Supreme Sovereign Himself, spoke all the above words to the children of Israel. It was the *Angel*, or Messenger, who said, “*I* made you to go up out of Egypt...*I* will never break *my* covenant...*I* will not drive them out...”

Other scripture tell us that “the Lord” did all the above things. Clearly, the Lord—the Supreme Sovereign—spoke and acted through the agency of His Angel (Messenger). When the Angel spoke in the first person, using the personal pronouns *I* and *my*, He was speaking on behalf of the Supreme Sovereign whose form no man has seen and whose voice no man has heard. The Angel was acting as God’s “voice,” or means through which God spoke. He was God’s *Spokesman*!

The Angel of the Lord was *with* God, and, as John’s Gospel tells us, He *was* God, meaning that He was *of the same kind*, the same *Family*, as the One who sent Him! Therefore, He has a right to all the names and titles of divinity.

Some may object by pointing out that the book of Hebrews clearly reveals that the preexistent Christ was not an angel (Hebrews 1:5-

8,13,14). However, it must be remembered that the writer of Hebrews was speaking of the created angels, or messengers. The word *angel* can refer to any of the created spirit beings, to any *human* messenger, or to a *divine* Messenger.

The term *angel* merely means “messenger.” An “angel” is an agent, representative, or *spokesman* sent on behalf of another. The Angel of the Lord who addressed Israel was God’s Messenger—His Agent, His Spokesman—who spoke and acted on behalf of the One who sent Him. He was “that Rock” who accompanied Israel in the wilderness.

Notice the description of the One who went with Israel:

“Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for *my name is in him*. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off” (Exodus 23:20-23).

Notice that the Angel was to be obeyed, had power to judge, and performed His work in God’s name. While this does not prove that the Angel was the preexistent Christ, this description along with Paul’s assertion that the Rock who went with Israel was Christ leave us with little doubt that this was the divine Spokesman.

Several other scriptures support this conclusion. Exodus 13:21 states: “And *the Lord* went before them [the Israelites] in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night,” while Exodus 14:19 states: “And *the angel of God*, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them.” The first scripture tells us that God went before them, and the second scripture tells us *how* God went with them. He was with them *through the agency* of His Angel.

Earlier, the Angel of the Lord had appeared to Moses in a burning bush. Notice the account:

“And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush...Moreover He said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:2,6).

Since the New Testament tells us that God the Father (the Supreme Sovereign) was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Acts 3:13), it is

obvious that the Angel who spoke to Moses was acting as the Spokesman of the Supreme Sovereign.

When Moses asked, “What is thy name?” the Angel, speaking for God, said, “I AM THAT I AM...Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Exodus 3:14,15).

Interestingly, when the Spokesman of God came in the human flesh, He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). Jesus was identifying Himself as the One who appeared to Moses and spoke on the authority of the Supreme Sovereign.

Several Old Testament scriptures reveal clearly that God always spoke and acted through the agency of His Angel (see Genesis 16:10-13; 31:11-13; Exodus 32:34; 33:2,14,15). The Angel, speaking for the Supreme Sovereign, used the personal pronouns *I* and *me*, and was addressed as “Lord” and “God.” His words were God’s words. As Jesus later said, “...the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me” (John 14:23).

Speaking of God’s love for Israel, Isaiah wrote: “In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the *angel of His presence* saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old” (Isaiah 63:9).

Can there be any doubt that the Angel who accompanied Israel was the One who later came as the Messenger of the New Covenant? Through the prophet Malachi, God said: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord [Jesus Christ], whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger [*Angel*—same word] of the Covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:1).

Does *Logos* Mean “Spokesman”?

Some trinitarians object to our description of the preexistent Christ as the Spokesman of God, pointing out that the term *Logos* does not mean “Spokesman,” but refers to the “thoughts and utterances” of God. The *Logos*, they claim, is the “thought” of the Father; and since there was never a time when the Father was without thought, there was never a time when the *Logos* did not exist. God’s “thought” is supposedly His image of Himself. His self-image is so perfect that it is as personal as the Father and is a distinct *hypostasis* who is capable of communicating with the Father and returning love to Him.

Here’s the way *My Catholic Faith* explains it: “*This is the simplest*

way by which the *distinct origin* of each Divine Person has been explained: *God is a spirit, and the first act of a Spirit is to know and understand. God, knowing Himself* from all eternity, *brings forth the knowledge of Himself*, His own image. This was not a mere thought, as our knowledge of ourselves would be, but *a Living Person*, of the same substance and one with the Father. *This is God the Son. Thus the Father 'begets' the Son*, the Divine Word, the Wisdom of the Father" (Louis Laravoire Morrow, S.T.D., My Mission House, Kenosha, Wisconsin, 1961, p. 31).

When one examines the pagan Greek philosophers' concept of *logos* as "inner reason," and compares the Greek ideas with the speculative ideas of the early church "fathers," many of whom were strongly influenced by Greek philosophy, one can see how such a concept came to be infused with Christian thought.

Trinitarians argue vigorously that trinitarian dogma was not derived from paganism. It is true that the framers of the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds did not draw from pagan sources, but it should be noted that Greek philosophical views had already affected Christian thought by the time those creeds were composed. One has but to read the esoteric writings of the Greek "fathers" to see that their ideas played an important role in the later development of full-blown trinitarian dogma.

According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "Justin Martyr, the first of the sub-apostolic Fathers, sought to unite the Scriptural idea of the Logos as Word with the Hellenic idea of Reason. According to him God produced in His own nature a rational power which was His agent in creation and took the form in history of the Divine Man" (Vol. III, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1956, article: "Logos," p. 117).

Justin (A.D. 100-165) described Greek philosophy and God's revelation to the Hebrews as two "streams" flowing through history. He claimed that Christianity was formed where those two streams ran together. His vigorous renunciation of paganism did not preserve him from the influence of his own culture, so claims that Justin was a good Christian who opposed paganism are inconsequential.

Obviously, the apostles did not think along the same lines as the Greek philosophers. John's presentation of the *Logos*, therefore, should not be interpreted on the basis of Greek philosophical concepts.

It is true that the word *logos* does not technically mean "spokesman," and it was not used in that sense among Greek philosophers, but it must be remembered that John's background was Jewish. The Jewish concept of *logos* differed considerably from that of Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Plato,

Aristotle, or the Stoics.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states: "Though strictly speaking it is incorrect to separate the inner Reason from the outer expression in the term Logos, still in the Hellenistic usage the doctrine was substantially a doctrine of Reason, while in Jewish lit. it was more esp. the outward expression or word that was emphasized" (pp. 1912,1913).

John's concept of *Logos* finds its origin in the Old Testament (in addition to the direct revelation John received) and, perhaps to some extent, in the post-canonical literature, such as *The Wisdom of Solomon*. In the Old Testament, the "Word of the Lord" is the expression of God's will, and is often presented as being sent, or coming from, God.

Psalm 107:20 states, "He sent His word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." God says: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 2:11). God "sendeth forth His commandment upon earth: His word runneth very swiftly" (Psalm 147:15). The Psalmist wrote, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made..." (Psalm 33:6).

Many such statements are found in the Old Testament. The "word of God" goes forth, creates, heals, judges, returns to God, and is often presented as having personal qualities. Of course, these many descriptions are merely ways of speaking of the expression of God's will. However, once we see that God's will was so often carried out through the agency of the Angel of the Lord, it is not difficult to see how the Word of the Lord and the Angel of the Lord came to be associated. The Angel was the *personal* Representative of God who acted as Intermediary between God and man.

Thus, while it is true that the word *logos* may not be strictly defined as "spokesman," the idea that John never thought of the *Logos* as the personal Spokesman of God is unconscionable!

God of the Old Testament

We have stated many times that the One who became Jesus of Nazareth was the God of the Old Testament. Since the preexistent Christ was God (though not the Supreme Sovereign), and since He was active during the Old Testament period, our assertion that He was "the God of the Old Testament" is correct. However, it needs some qualification, for several New Testament scriptures say clearly that the God of Israel was the One who became the Father of Jesus Christ.

Peter said, "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the *God*

of our fathers [clearly, the “God of the Old Testament”], hath glorified His Son Jesus...” (Acts 3:13).

The apostle further stated: “For Moses truly said unto the fathers [i.e., the Israelites], A prophet [referring to Christ] shall the Lord your God [the God of Israel] raise up unto you of your brethren...Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God [the God of Israel] made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed [referring to Christ] shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first, God [the same God—the God of Israel], having raised His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you...” (Acts 3:22,25,26).

The church at Jerusalem prayed: “Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of David hast said [notice, the church was praying to the Creator God—the God who spoke through David—the “God of the Old Testament”], Why did the heathen rage...The kings of the earth stood up...For a truth against thy holy child Jesus...” (Acts 4:24-27).

Peter and the apostles affirmed: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God [the same God—the “God of our fathers”] exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:30,31).

The book of Hebrews states: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets [this is clearly speaking of the God of Israel], Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by [or through] whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1,2).

These and many other New Testament scriptures show clearly that the God of the Old Testament was the One who became the Father of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christ was the God of the Old Testament in that He was the One who *appeared* to and *spoke* with the ancients. Remember, the ancients never saw the Father; they saw the preexistent Christ. It was His voice they heard and His form they saw. In that sense, He was the God of the Old Testament.

Of course, it should be understood that a person cannot accept or reject one without accepting or rejecting the other (John 12:44,45; 13:20; 14:7-14; 15:23,24). While it is important to understand the functional differences between the Father (the Supreme Sovereign) and the Son (the divine Spokesman), it is senseless to argue over who was the God of the Old Testament. If “God” is understood as the Supreme Sovereign and Head of all, the Father was. If “God” is understood as the divine Spokesman who appeared to and spoke with the ancients, Christ was. If

“God” is understood as the divine Family consisting of the Supreme Sovereign and divine Spokesman, *both were!*

What Do You Mean, “One God”?

In the first part of this booklet, we saw that the term *God* is used in different ways in Scripture. When Paul said, “...there is none other God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4), he was speaking of the Father (verse 6). Here, the term *God* [Greek: *Theos*] means “Supreme Sovereign and Head of all.” The term carries the same meaning in John 17:3, where Christ addresses the Father as “the only true God.”

However, when the term is used in reference to Christ, it does not mean “Supreme Sovereign and Head of all”; rather, it refers to a *kind* of Being (i.e., the Creator-kind). Both meanings are used in John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God [the Supreme Sovereign], and the Word was God [of the same kind as the Supreme Sovereign].”

Similarly, both senses are used in Hebrews 1:8,9: “But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O *God*, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even *thy God*, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (cf. Psalm 45:7,8).

Notice that the Son is called “God.” Notice also that the Son *has* a God! The Son’s God is the Father, the Supreme Sovereign. Since the Son has a God, the Son’s God must be “God” in a way that the Son is not. The Son is of the same kind as the Father, but the Father is the “only true God” (John 17:3) in that He is Head of all, including the Son.

There is a third way in which the term “God” may be used. The term can refer to the divine Family—the Father and the Son together, as a composite unity, or two of the same kind. The occasional use of plural verbs with the noun *Elohim* in the Old Testament may suggest a plurality of Persons (though there are other ways of explaining these occurrences).

Thus, the phrase “one God” can be understood in two ways. It can refer to the one and only Supreme Sovereign (the Father), or it can refer to the divine Family (the Father and the Son). In either case, the scriptural assertion that there is *one God* is not compromised.

We need not argue over the technicalities of Hebrew usage, such as the question of whether the term *Elohim* implies plurality, whether of Persons or majesty. That there is more than one divine Person is clearly indicated in Genesis 1:26: “And God said, Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness....”

Yet, verse 27 says, "So God created [singular verb, indicating that "God," or *Elohim*, should be understood in the singular sense] man in His [singular] own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them."

Notice that plural pronouns ("us" and "our") are used in verse 26. Yet, in verse 27, the singular verb ("created") and singular pronoun ("He") are used. How do we resolve this seeming contradiction?

The answer is that the Supreme Sovereign (the Father) created man, but He did so through the Agency of the *Logos* (Christ). Thus, *two* divine Persons were involved in the creation of man, a fact confirmed by John 1:2 and Hebrews 1:2.

The word *man* (Hebrew: *adam*) is also singular. Yet, "man" (singular) was created "male *and* female." This is most revealing. It shows that "man" (*adam*) was *two persons*. The two were distinct, both functionally and personally, and constituted a *family*—a kind, or class, of being. Paul wrote, "...the head of the woman [the wife] is the man [the husband]; and the head of Christ is God" (I Corinthians 11:3).

Do you see the implications of this comparison? The husband and wife are functionally and personally distinct, though they are in a sense "one." They are equal in nature, but not in function. The same is true of God and Christ.

The name of the first human being was Adam, who was the head of humankind. Yet, the same term (*adam*) can be used in reference to the entirety of humankind, or to any individual member of the human race. In the same way, the term *God* (*Elohim*) can refer to the Father, to the Son, or to the divine Family consisting of Father and Son.

No God But One

God repeatedly told Israel that there is no God but one. He said, "See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with [besides] me" (Deuteronomy 32:39); "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6); "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me" (Isaiah 45:5).

These are a few of the many scriptures revealing that there is no God but one. Theologians from various schools of thought have attempted to reconcile this truth with the New Testament teaching that Christ is God. Modalists attempt to explain it by asserting that God is one Person who manifests Himself through three modes—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Trinitarians attempt to resolve the difficulty by explaining that the one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three personal distinctions within one indivisible Being. Unitarians say that since the New Testament

teaches that the one God is the Father of Jesus, Jesus is not God.

Modalism is problematic in that it sees no distinction between the Father and the Son—a clear departure from both scriptural revelation and natural understanding. Unitarianism has an element of logic, but spiritualizes away the many scriptures on the divinity of Christ. The problems of trinitarianism are manifold, as we have seen.

We of the Church of God, International hold that the problem can be resolved by considering two important facts.

First, in each of the above scriptures, the divine Spokesman is speaking on behalf of the Supreme Sovereign, who is the Spokesman's God, as we have seen. As far as *functional priority* is concerned, the Supreme Sovereign is the "One God and Father of all [including Christ]" (Ephesians 4:6), the "only true God" (John 17:3), the "one God" (I Corinthians 8:6; I Timothy 2:5) who is the Father of Jesus Christ.

Second, in each case God is contrasting Himself with pagan "gods." When He says "There is no God besides me," He is simply saying that none of the "gods" of the pagans are equal to Him; not one is truly God. The so-called "gods" do not belong to the same category as Yahweh. They are not eternal. They are not self-existent. They cannot bless, heal, reveal truth, or create.

God is not saying that there is only one divine Person, or Being. He is saying that there is only one true *Source* of blessings, healing, truth, and creation. The pagan nations believed in many sources, many "gods," who could be appeased through various means, including bizarre rituals and sacrifices. Different pagan gods were associated with different blessings. Some were thought of as agricultural gods, some as fertility gods, some as healing gods, and so on. The gods were often associated with the elements—earth, water, fire, wind—and were sometimes perceived as being in competition with each other.

The divine Spokesman does not belong to the same category as the pagan deities. He is not in competition with the Supreme Sovereign, and will not receive worship apart from Him. When He, speaking on behalf of the Supreme Sovereign, says, "There is no God besides me," He (the Spokesman) is certainly to be included with the Supreme Sovereign as the one Source of creation and all true blessings, for all true blessings come from God (the Father) through Jesus Christ (the Son).

Not a Mystery

The Bible was not written in such a way that only the great theologians and "doctors of the church" could understand it. It was written for ordinary people. Without the influence of trinitarianism, it is

extremely unlikely that any ordinary person reading the Bible would ever conclude that God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are two (of three) *hypostases*, or “personal distinctions,” who somehow, mysteriously, exist as one indivisible Being. The Bible simply does not present them that way. Both Old and New Testaments present them as two distinct Beings working side-by-side in perfect harmony and singleness of purpose.

I once asked my mother, “Do you believe in the trinity?” Though she had attended Protestant churches all her life, she replied, “What does that word mean? I’ve heard it before, but I don’t know what it means.” When I explained trinitarianism to her, she said, “Why, no, I don’t believe that.” I learned that her belief is essentially the same as mine. She believes that the Father and the Son are two divine Beings, and has never thought of the Holy Spirit as the “third Person” of a triune God. Her belief was derived from simply reading the Bible and believing what it says.

Is such simplicity to be regarded “inferior” as a method of biblical exegesis? Does it have no place in theology?

Should we abandon simplicity, don the shackles of “Christian tradition,” and assume that the many descriptions of Jesus Christ and His relationship with the Father are merely metaphorical ways of describing the incomprehensible “mystery” of two (of three) *hypostases* within one indivisible Being?

Or should we simply understand God the way He has presented Himself to us in His inspired Word?

Part Three

The Holy Spirit

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of God,” the “Spirit of Him that raised Jesus from the dead,” the “Comforter” (“Consoler,” or “Counselor”), the “Spirit of truth,” the “Spirit of Christ,” the “mind of the Lord,” the “finger of God,” and the “power of the Highest.”

The Spirit is also presented as having personal attributes. For example, the Holy Spirit is described as having the power to speak, hear, reveal, prophesy, and intercede, and is said to proceed from the Father through the Son. It is here that trinitarians find support for their belief that the Holy Spirit is a third Person within the Godhead.

Most trinitarian treatises on the Holy Spirit deal almost exclusively with passages from the New Testament, for it is there, they claim, that the Spirit’s personality, work, and unity with the Father and Son are fully disclosed.

Actually, the trinitarian conception of the Holy Spirit depends heavily upon a narrow interpretation of only a few New Testament texts. Trinitarians begin with favorite “prooftexts,” interpret them narrowly, form conclusions, and then read those conclusions into other texts on the Holy Spirit. But if they would endeavor to understand the New Testament in the light of previous revelation—the Old Testament—they would soon discover that the traditional concept of the Holy Spirit is without biblical support.

The Spirit of God in the Old Testament

The phrase *Spirit of God*, or *Spirit of the Lord*, appears hundreds of times in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word *ruach*, translated “spirit” in the Old Testament, has a fairly wide range of meanings. According to *Nelson’s Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament*, the term denotes “breath; air; strength; wind; breeze; spirit; courage; temper; Spirit”

(Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1980, p. 393).

Notice how the term is used in several passages:

Genesis 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath [*ruach*] of life...."

Psalms 33:6: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath [*ruach*] of His mouth."

Exodus 15:10: "Thou didst blow with thy wind [*ruach*], the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters."

Joshua 3:11: "...our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage [*ruach*] in any man."

Proverbs 16:2: "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits [*ruach*, translated "motives" in the NASB]."

Ecclesiastes 10:4: "If the spirit [*ruach*, translated "temper" in the NASB] of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place...."

Scripture speaks of the "spirit of jealousy" (Numbers 5:14), the "spirit of wisdom" (Exodus 28:3), "anguish of spirit" (Exodus 6:9), a "contrite spirit" (Psalm 34:18), a "right spirit" (Psalm 51:10), a "broken spirit" (Psalm 51:17), a "faithful spirit" (Proverbs 11:13), a "humble spirit" (Proverbs 16:19), a "wounded spirit" (Proverbs 18:14), the "spirit of judgment" (Isaiah 4:4), the "spirit of wisdom and understanding...counsel and might...knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:2), the "spirit of Egypt" (Isaiah 19:3), and the "spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3). Each of these refers to a disposition or mind-set—the internal motivational forces that find expression in various forms of behavior.

From the above we can see that the term *ruach* generally refers to the invisible forces, both internal and external, that affect us. It can refer to wind or breath, to an inner disposition or mind-set, to the life principle, or to any invisible force that animates, possesses, overwhelms, or inspires.

In view of this general definition, one would naturally conclude that the "Spirit of God" is a force or power that comes from God, not a person who is somehow distinct from other persons within the Being called "God."

In fact, many scholars throughout the professing Christian world—including trinitarian scholars—admit that the Old Testament does not present the Spirit of God as a person, or "personal distinction" within God, but as the power of God at work in the natural world.

Catholic theologian Dr. Ludwig Ott stated: "The Old Testament frequently speaks of the 'Spirit of God,' or of the 'Holy Ghost.' By this is to be understood not a Divine Person, but 'a power proceeding from God, which gives life, bestows strength, illuminates and impels towards the good' (P. Heinisch)" (*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, Tan Books and

Publishers, Inc., Rockford, Illinois, Fourth Edition, 1960, p. 54).

Under the subheading "God's Spirit Not Presented as a Person," the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* states: "The OT clearly does not envisage God's spirit as a person, neither in the strict philosophical sense, nor in the Semitic sense. God's spirit is simply God's power. If it is sometimes represented as being distinct from God, it is because the breath of Yahweh acts exteriorly....Very rarely do the OT writers attribute to God's spirit emotions or intellectual activity....When such expressions are used, they are mere figures of speech that are explained by the fact that *ruach* was regarded also as the seat of intellectual acts and feelings....Neither is there found in the OT or in rabbinical literature the notion that God's spirit is an intermediary being between God and the world. This activity is proper to the angels, although to them is ascribed some of the activity that elsewhere is ascribed to the spirit of God" (Vol. XIII, McGraw-Hill, 1967, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., p. 564).

In the book of Isaiah, God compares the pouring out of His Spirit with the pouring out of water. He says: "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry grounds: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring" (Isaiah 44:3).

In the future, God will say, "Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel..." (Ezekiel 39:29).

Through the prophet Joel, God said: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh....And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit" (Joel 2:28,29).

Notice that the Spirit is "poured out," and that it is God who "pours" it out. If "God" is a trinity, then this description of God *pouring out* His Spirit is misleading, for it suggests that the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) will pour out His Spirit, which makes no sense. Further, if the Spirit is a third Person within God, why does God use a description (i.e., "pour out") that leaves the reader with the impression that the Spirit is not a Person? If it is a "mere metaphor," as some trinitarians claim, then we must admit that it is a misleading metaphor!

Of course, trinitarians retort by saying that God Himself is described with metaphors. The problem with that argument is that no one ever doubted that God is a Person. To use a metaphor to describe something understood to be a person is one thing, but to use a metaphor to describe something that is not presented as a person is quite another.

The phrase "power of God" is but one way of understanding what Scripture means by "Spirit of God," or "Holy Spirit." Isaiah 63:11,12

states: "...where is He that put His holy Spirit within him [Moses]? That led them by the right hand of Moses with His glorious arm...." Here, "His holy Spirit" is equated with "His glorious arm," which is a way of speaking of the *spiritual presence, power, and activity* of God.

God dwells in heaven, the transcendent realm; yet, He was with Moses *in Spirit*. Thus, the Holy Spirit is God's *spiritual presence*. By "reaching" from his transcendent realm into the natural world, God is capable of being "with" His people. The Spirit, as the spiritual presence and power of God, is the direct link God has with His people.

None of the patriarchs or prophets of the Old Testament ever thought of the Spirit of God as a Person who was somehow distinct from the One from which it proceeds. Nor did the learned rabbis or people who frequented the synagogues in the time of Jesus. The ordinary Jewish understanding was founded solidly on the Old Testament.

Why so much emphasis on the Old Testament? Why is it important to first gain a clear picture of the Jewish/Old Testament understanding of the Holy Spirit?

It is important for three reasons: First, the New Testament itself stresses the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures in deriving sound doctrine. Second, the early church was, at first, *entirely Jewish!* Third, the apostles and writers of the New Testament spoke of the Holy Spirit as something the early converts were already familiar with, not as some new revelation or "mystery" that had not been understood.

Importance of the Old Testament

Speaking of the Old Testament, the apostle Paul said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is *profitable for doctrine*, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16).

If the Old Testament Scripture was "given by inspiration of God" and "is profitable for doctrine," then its importance in deriving truth should not be underestimated. It should be viewed as *foundational* to a proper understanding of the New Testament!

Many people take a "backward" approach to understanding the Scriptures. They attempt to understand the New Testament without the benefit of the Old Testament background, or they form ideas based on certain New Testament passages (or traditional interpretations of New Testament passages), and then read those ideas into the Old Testament.

If we were to lay aside everything we have been taught about what the Bible supposedly says, begin afresh with a study of the Old Testament, and then, with our new foundation of understanding, study the New

Testament, we would come to a much clearer understanding of what the apostles taught and of what the early church believed. We would also come to see that many of the traditional beliefs of mainline churches are not based solely on the Bible.

Many do not realize that a fair percentage of the New Testament is quotations from, allusions to, and paraphrases of passages from the Old Testament. Some scholars claim to have identified over two thousand quotations and allusions to Old Testament passages in the New Testament, with at least one who claims to have identified over four thousand.

As Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., rightly notes: "The frequency with which the NT writings appeal to the OT must be judged by all to be most impressive....The impact of the OT on the NT will always remain a major consideration in coming to terms with the meaning of the NT. Unfortunately, the wisdom of this advice is not frequently observed in NT exegesis today" (*The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1985, p. 225).

Jesus Himself made many references to the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. He said, "...and the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). When the devil attempted to entice Him, He quoted the Scriptures (Matthew 4, Luke 4). He said that the Old Testament Scriptures testify of Him (John 5:39), and referred to the authority of Scripture when the Pharisees accused His disciples of breaking the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-4) and tested Him on the matter of divorce (Matthew 19:3-6).

As we read through the New Testament, time and again we come to such phrases as "...that the Scripture might be fulfilled," "...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet," "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken....," and "Have you not read...?"

The apostles and evangelists preached Christ from the Old Testament (Acts 2; 3; 8:32,35; 13:27; 17:2; 18:24; 28:23), for it foretold His coming and is essential to proving whether Jesus is the prophesied Messiah.

Clearly, the Old Testament is absolutely essential to a correct understanding of the New. As Kaiser states: "The OT cannot be dispensed with in formulating Christian theology or doctrine. To treat the older Testament merely as a vessel that has little or no content until the interpreter imports Christian meaning from NT texts is demeaning to both the older revelation of God and to those who first heard what they thought was the abiding word of God" (*ibid.* p. 145).

Since the Old Testament describes the Holy Spirit as the power of God and means through which the transcendent God is present with His

people, not as a Person distinct from the One from which it proceeds, why should anyone assume that the writers of the New Testament held a different view of the Spirit of God? This question is especially significant when we consider the Jewish roots of the New Testament church.

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

The New Testament has much to say about the Holy Spirit. While trinitarians rely on favorite “prooftexts” to support their position (these will be discussed later), most New Testament references to the Spirit employ language similar to or identical with that of the Old Testament.

When the angel Gabriel foretold the birth of Jesus, he said to Mary: “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Notice that the “Holy Spirit” is equated with the “power of the Highest.” Here we find no departure from or addition to previous revelation. The Holy Spirit is the power of God. Mary, being Jewish and having a good understanding of Old Testament descriptions of the Spirit of God, surely understood “Holy Spirit” to mean “power of the Highest.”

The angel who appeared to Zacharias and foretold the birth of John (the Baptist) said, “...and he [John] shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (verse 15). Elisabeth, John’s mother, was “filled with the Holy Spirit” when the babe leaped in her womb (verse 41), and Zacharias was “filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied” after John was born (verse 67). The description of the Holy Spirit as something a person can be “filled with” matches Old Testament descriptions perfectly. Again, we find no new revelation, no addition to previous revelation—and no hint that the Holy Spirit is a personal distinction among other personal distinctions within one indivisible Being.

Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit” and was “led by the Spirit” when He went into the wilderness to be tested of the devil (Luke 4:1). He returned to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” (verse 14). These descriptions must have reminded Luke’s first readers of the many similar Old Testament accounts of God’s Spirit leading, inspiring, and empowering the prophets.

After the Holy Spirit filled the disciples on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4), Peter declared, “...this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh...” (verses 16,17; cf. Joel 2:28). What did “my Spirit” mean to Peter? What did it mean to those who heard him? What did it

mean to Luke, who recorded this account? Obviously, neither Peter nor anyone in his Jewish audience thought of the Holy Spirit in trinitarian terms.

Notice again the descriptions in the above passages. Zacharias and Elizabeth were *filled with* the Holy Spirit. Jesus was *full of* the Spirit. God promised to *pour out* His Spirit. No one with a good understanding of the Old Testament and Jewish concept of the Holy Spirit would read these scriptures and *naturally* conclude that the Spirit is a Person distinct from the the One who sends it. And certainly neither Peter nor any of the many Jews who heard him proclaim the fulfillment of prophecy thought in such terms.

Many passages from both the Old Testament and the New speak of God being “with” His people. Yet, He is also transcendent—that is, His existence transcends the natural world. He is neither dependent upon nor affected by the laws that govern the universe, but is above and beyond their scope.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God says: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place [that is, He is transcendent; His “dwelling,” His existence, is above and beyond the physical realm], *with him also* that is of contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15).

Notice that God, who is transcendent, is also *with* those of a contrite and humble spirit. Though God dwells in the transcendent realm (heaven) and is not part of the physical universe, He is capable of being “with” His people, who live within the natural world and are a part of it. He is with them *in Spirit*. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the spiritual presence and power of God at work in the natural world.

This truth is echoed throughout the New Testament. Paul asked the Corinthians, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). This simply means that God the Father dwells in His spiritual temple, the church. He is with His people *in Spirit*.

Time and again the New Testament speaks of God and Christ being “with” or “in” the church. Christ promised His disciples that He would be with them always (Matthew 28:20). He promised, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). Paul said that “Christ in you” is the “hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). John said, “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us....Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4:12,13).

Jesus said: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). John must have had this promise in mind when he wrote, "If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father" (I John 2:24); "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (I John 4:16); and, "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (II John 9).

Paul wrote: "...for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (II Corinthians 6:16). How does the transcendent God dwell in His people? "And hereby we know that He [God the Father] abideth in us, *by the Spirit* which He hath given us" (I John 3:24).

Do you see how the spiritual indwelling of God, both Father and Son, is equated with "the Spirit which He hath given us"? The Holy Spirit is clearly presented as the spiritual extension, presence, and power of God, not as some "third Person" or *hypostasis* who is somehow at one with yet distinct from the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit is described as the "finger of God" (Luke 11:20; cf. Matthew 12:28), the "mind of Christ," and the "mind of the Lord" (I Corinthians 2:16; cf. Isaiah 40:13). The "Spirit of God" is contrasted with the "spirit of man" (I Corinthians 2:11), and is compared with wind, water, and fire (Acts 2:1-3; John 4:10-15; 7:38,39). These descriptions are revealing. They tell us that Christ and His disciples thought of the Holy Spirit as the spiritual extension, presence, indwelling, and power of God.

The apostle Paul repeatedly wrote "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" (as in Romans 1:7, for example) in his salutations to the churches. If Paul thought in trinitarian terms, why didn't he include the Holy Spirit along with the Father and Christ as the Source of grace and peace? He obviously did not think of the Holy Spirit as one of three co-equal *hypostases* (or "personal distinctions") within God.

Jesus said: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27, NRSV). But what about the Holy Spirit? If the Spirit is the "third Person" of the Godhead, He knows the Father and the Son, and does not need to have them revealed to Him.

With so much evidence against the trinitarian conception of the Holy

Spirit, why do so many evangelicals insist that belief in the trinity is essential to true Christianity? The answer to this question may be surprising to many.

First, trinitarianism relies heavily upon the "authority" of the historic, visible church (to be discussed later). Second, the trinitarian conception of the Holy Spirit as a distinct Person is based on a narrow interpretation of a few selected "prooftexts."

Let's examine the most commonly cited of those selected texts; but rather than interpret them in isolation, let's consider them in light of the clear revelation we have thus far seen.

The Other "Comforter"

Chief among the "prooftexts" trinitarians use to establish the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit is John's account of Jesus' teaching about the "Comforter," or "Counselor," He promised to send to His disciples after His departure.

Jesus said, "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth..." (John 14:16,17).

The word translated "Comforter" in the King James Version is the Greek *Parakletos*. Vine has this to say about the word:

"...lit., called to one's side, i.e., to one's aid, is primarily a verbal adjective, and suggests the capability or adaptability for giving aid. It was used in a court of justice to denote a legal assistant, counsel for the defence, an advocate; then, generally, one who pleads another's cause, an intercessor, advocate, as in I John 2:1, of the Lord Jesus. In the widest sense, it signifies a succourer, comforter. Christ was this to His disciples, by the implication of His word 'another (*allos*, another of the same sort, not *heteros*, different) Comforter,' when speaking of the Holy Spirit....He calls Him 'the Comforter.' 'Comforter' or 'Consoler' corresponds to the name '*Menahem*,' given by the Hebrews to the Messiah" (W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, p. 200).

Jesus' description of the Comforter is found in John 14:15-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-15. Christ said that the Comforter would abide with His disciples; that they would know Him; that He would teach them all things and bring all things to their remembrance; that He would proceed from the Father and would be sent by Christ; that He would convict, guide, speak, hear, and reveal.

All these descriptions certainly seem to suggest that the Holy Spirit is a personality distinct from Christ or the Father. However, one simple

statement Jesus made toward the end of His discourse sheds significant light on His description of the Comforter, and is usually ignored or overlooked by trinitarians. That statement is found in John 16:25:

Jesus said: "These things have I spoken to you in *proverbs* ["figurative language"]: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in *proverbs*, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father."

Throughout His discourse (John 14-16), Jesus used "proverbs," or *figurative language*, in teaching the disciples about His Father, His work of redemption, His going away and coming again to His disciples, and the work they were to perform in His bodily absence.

The disciples did not know what Jesus meant when He told them that He was going away and that He would send a "Comforter," or "Counselor," to them. They apparently thought He was saying that He was going to a far-off location on this earth, and that He would send a representative, perhaps a legal counselor, who would assist them during His absence. He used figurative language throughout the discourse, and though He paused to define His terms (for instance, He explained that the "Comforter" is the Holy Spirit), the disciples still did not fully understand His meaning.

Though the disciples failed to grasp the full meaning of Jesus' words, we need not be confused. A careful examination of Jesus' own explanations of the figurative language He used leaves us with a clear understanding of what He meant when He spoke of the Comforter.

Immediately after His first reference to the Comforter, Jesus explained His meaning. Notice carefully:

"I will not leave you comfortless: *I will come to you*. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

"Judas saith unto Him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and *we will come unto him, and make our abode with him*" (John 14:18-23).

Jesus' promise to come to His disciples after His departure may be an allusion to His post-resurrection appearances, but the context—and especially the promise of Christ and His Father making their abode with the disciples—clearly indicates that He was also speaking of the fact that He and the Father would be with them *in Spirit*. Jesus' description of the

Comforter, then, was *figurative language* for the spiritual presence of God, both Father and Son.

The use of such figurative language was not uncommon among the Jewish rabbis. In fact, in rabbinic writings after the time of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is described as Israel's "defense counsel." None of the rabbis thought of the Spirit as a distinct personality, but they spoke of it as if it were distinct from the One who sends it. While such descriptions appear after the time of Jesus, it is probable that they were derived from earlier sources. It is not surprising, then, that Jesus, whose methods of teaching were strikingly similar to those of other Jewish teachers, described the Holy Spirit in similar terms.

If we take Jesus' comments in isolation, ignoring everything else the Scriptures teach about the Holy Spirit, then perhaps we have legitimate grounds for thinking of the Spirit as a distinct personality. But when we consider the Old Testament revelation, the continuity between the Old Testament and the New, the fact that Jesus plainly said that He used figurative language, the common Jewish understanding, the Jewish roots of the New Testament church, and the similarity between the teaching methods of Jesus and the rabbis, then we must admit that John 14-16 provides *no support* for the trinitarian conception of the Holy Spirit.

The Name of the Holy Spirit

Jesus said: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Trinitarians argue that the phrase "in the name of...the Holy Spirit" proves that the Spirit is a Person (*hypostasis*) just as the Father and the Son are Persons (*hypostases*), and that "He" is one of three "personal distinctions" within God.

Bowman admits that the word *name* is used for "power or authority," but argues that "it stands for the power or authority of *someone*..." (*Why You Should Believe...*, p. 115). According to trinitarians, then, the Holy Spirit is one of three Persons having authority.

Unfortunately, this interpretation ignores the context as well as the *many* scriptures that conflict with the trinitarian view.

Jesus said, "All power is given unto me *in heaven* and *in earth*." Jesus is in heaven, but His sphere of power (or authority) is not confined to heaven. He promised, "And, lo, I am *with you* always, even unto the end of the world [age]."

How can Christ be in heaven, and, at the same time, with His disciples on earth? The answer is simple: He is *spiritually present* with His people. As we have seen, the Holy Spirit is presented in Scripture as the spiritual presence of God—that is, the means through which God, who is in heaven, is present with His people, who are on earth.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus spoke of the work His disciples were to accomplish *on this earth*, and of His involvement in that work. He mentioned the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is His (and the Father's—John 14:23) spiritual presence—the ever-present power, or authority, by which His disciples were to preach the gospel and baptize repentant believers. It is the means through which the disciples *experience* the presence of God as they go about doing His work.

In effect, Jesus said, “The Father has given me all authority in heaven and on the earth; *therefore*, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in recognition of the authority of the Father, who is in heaven, and of the Son, who is in heaven, and of the Holy Spirit, which is my spiritual presence with you as you do the work I have given you to do on this earth.”

Bowman is right: the word *name* does stand for “power or authority,” and “it stands for the power or authority of *someone*.” That “someone” is Christ, whose authority derives from the Father! His spiritual presence is the authority that empowers the work of God on this earth—and that authority originates in heaven.

To single out a passage such as this one as “proof” that God is a trinity violates the sound principles of biblical exegesis. Such reasoning begins with the assumption that the phrase “in the name of” suggests that every name or title following the phrase is a person. This may be *inferred*, but the text does not demand it.

Since the Holy Spirit is the means through which God's people, who are on this earth, experience fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, both of whom dwell in the transcendent realm (heaven), it is no wonder that Jesus mentioned Father, Son, *and* Holy Spirit. Jesus said that all power in heaven (the transcendent realm) *and* in earth (the natural world) had been given to Him. The Holy Spirit is the means through which the Son's authority (which is the Father's authority) is expressed in the natural world. The entire discourse pertains to the work the disciples were to perform *on this earth* after Jesus' departure to heaven, so it was only natural that Jesus mention the Holy Spirit, or means through which Christ would be with His disciples until the end of the age.

Communion of the Holy Spirit

Another commonly cited trinitarian “prooftext” is II Corinthians 13:14. Paul wrote, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

Trinitarians cite this verse as evidence that the Holy Spirit is a Person just as Christ and God are Persons. However, even trinitarians admit that the verse does not by itself *prove* that God is a trinity.

The phrase “and the communion of the Holy Spirit” could be translated “and the sharing in the Holy Spirit” (see note in the NRSV). According to Vine, the phrase means “participation in what is derived from the Holy Spirit” (*An Expository Dictionary...*, p. 207).

The word translated “communion” is the Greek *koinonia*. The same term is used in Philippians 3:10, which speaks of the “fellowship [*koinonia*] of His sufferings” (or *participation* in Christ's sufferings), and in I Corinthians 10:16, which speaks of the “communion [*koinonia*] of the blood...and of the body of Christ” (or *sharing* in the knowledge of the effects of His sacrifice).

The same term is found in Philippians 2:1. Paul wrote, “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship [*koinonia*, or “sharing in,” NRSV] of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies [or “affection and compassion,” NASB]....”

Notice: “consolation in Christ,” “comfort of love,” “sharing in the Holy Spirit.” Paul's reference to Christ, love, and the Holy Spirit as sources of comfort, consolation, and other good things Christians should experience obviously does not mean that all three sources are distinct personalities—just as Paul's mention of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in II Corinthians 13:14 does not mean that all three subjects are co-equal Persons.

As noted, the same apostle repeatedly named God the Father and Jesus Christ in his salutations, but did not include the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to cite a passage such as II Corinthians 13:14 as evidence that Paul thought in trinitarian terms is theological folly!

Personal Attributes

Another way trinitarians attempt to prove that the Holy Spirit is a personal distinction within God is by linking passages that present the Spirit as having personal attributes. They point out that the Holy Spirit can be lied to, and is equated with God (Acts 5:3,4); that the Spirit speaks (Acts 13:2; 28:25), intercedes (Romans 8:26,27), teaches (I Corinthians

2:13), imparts gifts (I Corinthians 12), and dwells in God's people (I Corinthians 3:16).

If we restrict the definition of the Holy Spirit to "force" or "power," then we might have difficulty in explaining why Scripture speaks of the Spirit as having attributes associated with personality. But once we understand that Scripture presents the Holy Spirit as the power of God as well as the spiritual presence of God in the minds of His people and in the natural world, no such difficulty exists.

Commenting on Matthew 28:19, which speaks of the "name" (power or authority) of the Holy Spirit, Bowman argues: "An impersonal force cannot have authority; only a person can. Radio waves, electricity, energies, forces, and the like, have no authority or personal power" (*Why You Should Believe...*, p. 115).

However, if the Holy Spirit is defined as the power of God *as well as* the spiritual presence, extension, and indwelling of God, both Father and Son, then Bowman's argument loses its force. (In fairness to Bowman, it should be noted that his book takes issue with the Jehovah's Witnesses' teaching, which limits the definition of the Holy Spirit to "God's active force.")

Moreover, Bowman's argument that only a person can have authority greatly limits the meaning of "authority." Would any Bible-believing professing Christian claim that the Bible, the holy Word of God, has no authority? The Bible is not a "person," yet we speak of the "authority of the Word of God." The Word has authority because it comes from God.

It could be argued that only a person can be "living and active...and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"; yet, according to the New Testament, that is precisely what the Word of God is able to do (Hebrews 4:12, NASB). One might argue that anything that "dwells" and "works" in God's people, as the Holy Spirit does, must be a person; yet, Paul admonished, "Let the word of Christ *dwell in you* richly in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16), and said that "the word of God...effectually *worketh also in you* that believe" (I Thessalonians 2:13).

The Scripture "foresaw" and "preached" (Galatians 3:8). It could be argued that only a person can do these things, but no one would argue that the Scripture is a person, though we might agree that it has authority.

Since the Holy Spirit is not some external force that God somehow manages to use to accomplish His will, but is God's own power that proceeds from Him, and is His spiritual presence in the minds of His people and in the world, it is natural to equate the Spirit with God and attribute to it the things that pertain to Him.

The idea of "one God in three Persons" is *not* taught in Scripture. Yet,

among evangelicals it often heads the list of "essentials" of the true Christian faith. Why?

***Sola Scriptura*, or "Ecumenical Councils"?**

In spite of the Protestant insistence upon *sola scriptura* ("the Bible alone") as the one and only source of divine revelation, even Protestant evangelicals resort to the "authority" of the church councils, or doctrinal development within the historic visible church, as "proof" that the doctrine of the trinity is a true doctrine.

Bowman writes: "...to be a responsible Christian—not merely in the sense of obtaining personal salvation, but in the sense of being a full partner with the rest of Christ's church in the fellowship and service of Christ—one must accept the doctrine of the Trinity. Not to accept the Trinity, after the church carefully and cautiously developed it in response to attacks on its faith, is to deny that Christ preserved his church through the ravages of heresy and apostasy, and thereby implicitly to insult Christ" (*Why You Should Believe...*, p. 132).

Bowman's argument assumes that the church that developed the doctrine of the trinity is the true church. While Bowman may deny it, his argument also assumes that the majority opinion is always right, and implies that one need only look to the "ecumenical councils" to resolve doctrinal issues. This is precisely the same line of reasoning that Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologians use to defend their doctrinal beliefs.

Of course, Bowman claims that the trinity *is* a biblical doctrine, and that the "formal expressions of trinitarianism" (i.e., the Athanasian Creed) was merely designed to safeguard the true biblical faith (*ibid.*). Yet, Bowman, as many other Protestants, rejects Catholic concepts regarding the Virgin Mary, the Eucharist, the saints, apostolic succession, sacraments, and salvation—though these concepts were formulated by the same historic church that formulated the doctrine of the trinity. Did Christ fail to preserve His church "through the ravages of heresy and apostasy" during the period in which these doctrinal beliefs were formed?

What about all those centuries when *there was no Protestant church*? Were Christians living during that time supposed to believe that anyone who opposed the majority was a heretic? If so, then the Catholic Church was right in branding Martin Luther a heretic and apostate, and Protestants today should return to "Peter's fold," the great "mother church," which has for centuries claimed to be the preserver and defender of the true faith.

Moreover, if the majority opinion is to be considered in deriving truth, what were Christians to believe during the brief period following the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) when Arianism, or some form of it, was favored (or, at least, unopposed) by the majority of bishops? The point is this: *Majority opinions, whether short-lived or held for centuries, are not reliable indicators of doctrinal truth!*

The importance of doctrinal development within the historic “universal church” is expressed by other Protestants, as well. *The Concise Dictionary of the Christian Tradition* states: “The NT has a skeleton of the doctrine of the Trinity....The early church, not the apostles, however, clothed the skeleton. The results are to be found in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds” (J.D. Douglas, Walter A. Elwell, Peter Toon; Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989, p. 385).

In the sense that the New Testament teaches the divinity of the Father and the Son, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from God and is therefore divine, the New Testament does have a “skeleton” upon which trinitarian clothing has been placed. However, it must be admitted that many components of the trinitarian attire are simply not found in the Bible. For instance, the trinitarian assertion that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three co-equal *hypostases* within one Being, and that each is “the entire divinity,” is clearly not part of the “skeleton” provided by the New Testament.

Therefore, we can only conclude that acceptance of full-blown trinitarianism requires a departure from the Protestant notion of *sola scriptura*.

Trinitarian Dogma and the Bible

Unless we accept the historic, visible church as the ark upon which truth has been preserved and vehicle through which divine revelation has progressively unfolded, we need not adopt such terms as “*hypostasis*” and “co-equality.” Nor do we need to split hairs over terms such as “Being” and “Person.”

Jesus prayed: “That they [His disciples] may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one *in us*...” (John 17:21). Through sharing in the Holy Spirit, God’s people are, in a sense, “one” with God. If we, being flesh, are “one” with God through the Spirit He has given us, then the Father and the Son, who *are* Spirit, are united as “one” in a far greater way. Our description of the Father and the Son as two divine Beings in no way diminishes our perception of the unity they share; nor does it in any way conflict with the way the Bible presents them.

We need not, and should not, think of each of the two divine Persons as “the entire divinity,” for the Bible does not present them that way. We *should* think of them as a Family—two divine Persons, the Father and the Son, who are of the same kind, and who exist in perfect unity with each other—for the Bible *does* present them that way.

We need not fear labels, such as “polytheist” or “subordinationist.” If Scripture reveals that God is the Head of Christ, and that Christ both *is* God and *has* a God, then we should accept it—labels notwithstanding.

Even trinitarians admit that the sophisticated trinitarian theology expressed in the creeds and expounded by the theologians was not derived from the Bible alone.

Roman Catholic theologian Richard P. McBrien, affirming his belief in the trinity, adds: “But we cannot read back into the New Testament, much less into the Old Testament, the more sophisticated trinitarian theology and doctrine which slowly and often unevenly developed over the course of some fifteen centuries” (*Catholicism*, Study Edition, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1981, p. 347).

McBrien says: “...the New Testament does not specify the terms of the relationship between Father and Son, nor among Father and Son and Holy Spirit. It assumes only that there *is* some relationship” (*ibid.*).

After citing several scriptures showing that some relationship exists, McBrien continues: “Many other texts focus more explicitly on the Father-Son relationship....But none of these texts individually, nor all of them together, express a theology of the Trinity as such” (*ibid.*).

McBrien further states, “The Trinity is an *absolute mystery* in the sense that we do not understand it even after it has been revealed” (*ibid.* p. 351). If it is such an incomprehensible mystery, and if scriptures on the Father-Son relationship do not “express a theology of the Trinity as such,” one cannot help but question the source through which the trinity was “revealed.”

Surely God never intended that we think of Him and His Son in such terms. Surely God, who is a *personal* God, intended that we understand Him in the way He has presented Himself to us in Scripture—rather than engage in philosophical double talk and esoteric speculation.

God says, “But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he *understandeth* and *knoweth* me...” (Jeremiah 9:24). □