

THE PROBLEM OF TRINITARIAN TRANSLATION

Leading Catholic Scholar Raymond Brown sees the following texts as dubious regarding any proof that Jesus is the Almighty God: John 1:18; Acts 20:28; Romans 9:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; and 1 John 5:20.

William Barclay's analysis is that:

It is when we begin to examine the evidence that we run into very real difficulties. The evidence is not extensive. But we shall find that on almost every occasion in the New Testament on which Jesus seems to be called God **there is a problem either of textual criticism or of translation**. In almost every case we have to discuss which of two readings is to be accepted or which of two possible translations is to be accepted.

Jesus as They Saw Him, p.21.

Trinitarian D.A. Fennema observes:

Most of the passages which may call Jesus 'God' are **plagued by textual variants** or syntactical obscurity, either of which permits an entirely different interpretation of the passage. *John 1.18: 'God the Only Son,' NTS 31 (1985): p. 125.*

Similarly Oscar Cullmann notes that:

Passages which apply the designation 'God' to Jesus are not numerous, and some of them are uncertain from the standpoint of textual criticism. Even in ancient times some people apparently attributed undue importance to the question whether or not Jesus was to be called 'God'...This explains the **many textual variants** precisely in the passages. *Christology*, pp. 307-8.

What is being referred to by the above quoted scholars is the problem that textual experts find in the ancient Greek manuscripts of the NT. These sometimes involve alterations to the verses by copyists. (See Bart Ehrman's *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*). Now when the Greek manuscripts of the NT were originally written, they had **no punctuation**, were written in **upper case letters** called 'uncials,' and with **no spaces** between the words, and so creating uncertainty for translators regarding the complex grammatical issues of the verses relevant to christology. So Murray Harris states that:

it is a curious fact that each of the [disputed *theos*] texts ... contains an interpretative problem of some description; actually, most contain two or three. *Jesus as God*, p. 11.

A.E. Harvey explains that:

The New Testament writers ... show no tendency to describe Jesus in terms of divinity; the few apparent exceptions are either grammatically and textually uncertain or have an explanation which,...brings them within the constraint of Jewish monotheism.

Jesus and the Constraint of History, p. 157.

THE TRANSLATION ISSUES

The issues concern: textual variants in the Greek, grammatical structure (syntax), punctuation, and misapplication of grammatical rules. So when a passage can equally be rendered in either a Trinitarian/pre-existence way or in a Unitarian/non pre-existence way, then the immediate context must be taken into account. Furthermore, the wider context of the entire Scriptures must be taken into account and this is unequivocally Unitarian.

THE WELL-KNOWN SPURIOUS VERSE –

1 JOHN 5:7

* “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.”

According to Hans Küng this forgery came into being in the third or fourth century in either North Africa or Spain but was not incorporated into the Scriptures until the 16th century. It is still to be found in the KJV and NKJV.

A TEXTUAL VARIANT IN THE GREEK TEXT

JOHN 1:18

* “No one has ever seen God; the only **God**, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known” (ESV).

CONTEXTUALLY MORE ACCURATE:

➤ “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten [*pref. ‘unique’*] **Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” (NKJV).

NOTE: Other translations which have “Son” are: KJV, RSV, NEB, REB, NJB, S&G, UVNT, Darby and Young’s Literal. Some Translations combine both terms.

J.A.T. Robinson reasons:

It would however be precarious to rest any answer on the quotation of John 1.18, that ‘the only one, himself God, the nearest to the Father’s heart, has made him known’ (NEB margin). For there is a notorious textual crux at this point. From the manuscript evidence there is every reason to believe that *monogenes theos* is the reading that reaches furthest back to source, and every modern edition of the Greek Testament properly gives it precedence. It is equally noticeable however that both the RSV and the NEB still prefer *ὁ monogenes huios* in their text, as opposed to the margin, and I am inclined to judge that they are right. For the contrast with ‘the Father’ appears overwhelmingly to demand ‘the only Son’ (as in 1.14), and *monogenes theos* is literally untranslatable (‘the only one, himself God’ is a paraphrase to make the best of it) and out of line with Johannine usage (contrast 5.44 and 17.3 of the Father). In other words, I believe that *theos* may indeed be the best attested reading, and even go back to the autograph, but that it was a slip for *huios* (there is only the difference between UC and QC) and the author would have been the first to correct it. But nothing should be made to turn or rest on this, one way or the other. *The Priority of John*, pp. 372-373.

Bart D. Ehrman’s studies reveal:

...[T]he majority of manuscripts are right in ending the prologue with the words: “No one has seen God at any time, but the unique Son (*ὁ monogenes huios*) who is in the bosom of the Father, that one has made him known.” The variant reading of the Alexandrian tradition, which substitutes “God” for “Son,” represents an orthodox corruption of the text in which the complete deity of Christ is affirmed: “the unique God [*(ὁ) monogenes theos*] who is in the bosom of the Father, that one has made him known.” ... It must be acknowledged at the outset that the Alexandrian reading is more commonly preferred by textual critics, in no small measure because of its external support. Not only is it the reading of the great Alexandrian uncials (a B C), it is also attested by the earliest available witnesses, the Bodmer papyri ̳66 and ̳75, discovered

in the middle of the present [20th] century ... Here it must be emphasized that outside of the Alexandrian tradition, the reading *monogenes theos*, has not fared well at all. Virtually every other representative of every other textual grouping—Western, Caesarean, Byzantine—attests *ὁ monogenes huios*). And the reading even occurs in several of the secondary Alexandrian witnesses (e.g., C3 Y 892 1241 Ath Alex). This is not simply a case of one reading supported by the earliest and best manuscripts and another supported by late and inferior ones, but of one reading found almost exclusively in the Alexandrian tradition and another found sporadically there and virtually everywhere else. And although the witnesses supporting *ὁ monogenes huios* cannot individually match the antiquity of the Alexandrian papyri, there can be little doubt that this reading must also be dated at least to the time of their production. There is virtually no other way to explain its predominance in the Greek, Latin, and Syriac traditions, not to mention its occurrence in fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertullian, who were writing before our earliest surviving manuscripts were produced. Thus, both readings are ancient; one is fairly localized, the other is almost ubiquitous ... It is on internal grounds that the real superiority of *ὁ monogenes huios* shines forth. Not only does it conform with established Johannine usage, a point its opponents readily concede, but the Alexandrian variant, although perfectly amenable to scribes for theological reasons, is virtually impossible to understand within a Johannine context.” *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp. 78-79.

In his *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* leading Greek scholar Bruce Metzger acknowledges that:

It is doubtful that the author would have written ONLY BEGOTTEN GOD [Greek letters], which may be a primitive, transcriptional error in the Alexandrian tradition. At least a D decision would be preferable. –

NOTE: 'D' shows that there is a very high degree of doubt concerning the reading, 'A' being virtually certain. The scale does not exceed 'D'.

DIFFERENCES IN PUNCTUATION AND SYNTAX

ROMANS 9:5:

* “To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the **Christ, who is God** over all, blessed forever! Amen” (ESV).

CONTEXTUALLY MORE ACCURATE:

➤ “...theirs the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, is the Messiah. **God** who is over all be blessed forever. Amen” (NAB, Moffatt, RSV).

➤ “The patriarchs are theirs, and from them by natural descent came the Messiah. May **God** supreme above all, be blessed for ever! Amen” (REB, Barclay).

The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology states that:

Rom. 9.5 is disputed. After Paul has expounded the position of Israel in salvation history and has emphasized as an especial advantage the fact that Christ according to the flesh, stems from this people, he adds a relative clause, which runs lit. “who is over all God blessed for ever. Amen.” Even so, Christ would not be equated absolutely with God, but only described as a being of divine nature, for the word *theos* has no article.

But this ascription of majesty does not occur anywhere else in Paul. The much more probable explanation is that the statement is a doxology directed to God, stemming from Jewish tradition and adopted by Paul. Overwhelmed by God's dealings with Israel, Paul concludes with an ascription of praise to God. The translation would then read:

"The one who is God over all be blessed for ever. Amen." Or alternatively, "God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.

Under the heading "God" in, vol. 2, ed. Colin Brown, p. 80.

Emeritus professor of Divinity James Dunn states that:

...the Christ according to the flesh. He who is over all, God, may he be blessed forever.

And there is more to be said for this latter reading than is often appreciated. Above all there is the fact that the passage is a catalogue of Israel's privileges...It would be entirely fitting after such a listing of God's goodness towards Israel to utter a doxology to this God, rather as Paul does in Romans 1.25 and 11.33-36.

Did the First Christians Worship Jesus, p. 133

An almost identical statement is made concerning praise to be received by the Father:

"The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever..." (2 Cor. 11:31)

DIFFERENCES IN RENDERINGS BECAUSE OF THE GRANVILLE SHARP RULE

TITUS 2:13 and 2 PETER 1:1:

* "...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great **God and Saviour, Jesus Christ**..." (ESV).

* "...by the righteousness of **our God and Savior Jesus Christ**" (ESV).

CONTEXTUALLY MORE ACCURATE:

➤ "...as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of the great God and **of our savior Jesus Christ**" (NAB, Moffatt, Rotherham, Philips, KJV. NWT has "and of [the] savior of us.)"

➤ "Through the righteousness of God and **our** saviour Jesus Christ" (KJV, Weymouth, and Rotherham footnote). NWT has "and [the] savior.)"

Philips says: "our God, and saviour Jesus Christ."

However, the footnote for 2 Peter 1:1 in the NAB states: "Could also be rendered '**Our God and the savior Jesus Christ.**'" This is seen to be the better translation because of the immediate context given **in verse 3** which speaks of: "*the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*" Also the wider context of the salutations at the beginning of most of the letters of the New Testament shows a complete distinction between God and Jesus Christ. With reference to Titus 2:13 James Dunn adds that:

...the 'appearing' (epiphania) in view is the appearing of divine glory, not the appearing of Jesus Christ in glory. *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus*, p. 133

NO SUCH 'RULE' WAS USED BEFORE THE 7TH CENTURY

Furthermore, the early Greek speaking church fathers and others in the early church seem to be completely unaware of what came much later to be called 'the Granville Sharp Rule.' If this was a known rule in the 4th century then the first Trinitarians would certainly have used it in support of their theory. However, such a usage only occurred in a very limited way after the 7th century.

UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE VALIDITY OF THE 'RULE'

In his book *Truth in Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament* Jason David BeDuhn explains that:

Those who defend translations that read as if only Jesus is spoken of in both Titus 2.13 and 2 Peter 1.1 attempt to distinguish those two passages from the parallel examples I have given by something called "Sharp's Rule." In 1798, the amateur theologian Granville Sharp published a book in which he argued that when there are two nouns of the same form ("case") joined by "and" (*kai*), only the first of which has the article, the nouns are identified as the same thing. Close examination of this much used "rule" shows it to be a fiction concocted by a man who had a theological agenda in creating it, namely to prove that the verses we are examining in this chapter call Jesus "God" ... We have no sure way to judge which translations correctly understand the verse and which ones do not. But with the long overdue dismissal of the phantom of "Sharp's Rule," the position of those who insist "God" and "Savior" must refer to the same being in this verse is decidedly weakened. There is no legitimate way to distinguish the grammar of Titus 2.13 from that of Titus 1.4 and 2 Thessalonians 1.12, just as there is no way to consider 2 Peter 1.1 different in its grammar from 2 Peter 1.2. This is a case where grammar alone will not settle the matter. All we can do is suggest, by analysis of context and comparable passages, the "more likely" and "less likely" translations, and leave the question open for further light." pp. 92, 94.

THE 'RULE' CANNOT BE APPLIED CONSISTENTLY

Dr. Nigel Turner observed that:

The repetition of the article was not strictly necessary to ensure that the items be considered separately ... Unfortunately, at this period of Greek we cannot be sure that such a rule [regarding the article] is really decisive. Sometimes the definite article is not repeated even where there is clearly a separation in idea."

A Grammar of New Testament Greek (Moulton-Turner, 1963).

APPLICATION TO TWO ENTITIES WITH A SINGLE FUNCTION

D. A. Carson research professor of NT at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School states:

The fallacy, of course, lies in relying upon the Granville Sharp rule where Sharp himself explicitly insists his rule does not operate. The error of the commentators is at least understandable, since so many of the standard grammars also get this point wrong... only one article governs both nouns in expressions like 'the Epicureans and Stoics' (Acts 17:18). Indeed, the only place where *ton Pharisaion kai Saddoukaion* is found outside Matthew is Acts 23:7; and in this context the **doctrinal disparity between the two groups is presupposed**. In each pair, the two nouns are *linked together for the purpose in hand*...presumably they function together as representatives of the Sanhedrin. *Exegetical Fallacies*, p. 82.

HOW BOTH VERSES APPEAR IN THE GREEK

Titus 2:13 reads: “...of the great God and of Savior of us of Christ Jesus.”

2 Peter 1:1 reads: “...of the God of us and of Savior Jesus Christ.”

On the basis of the explanation by Carson it becomes clear that both of these verses are linking God and Jesus together in **their united function**. The fact that they are separate individuals **is presupposed** and was well known to the readers of these letters and even shown in those letters. Otherwise it would be comparable to saying that “*the Epicureans and Stoics*” were a single group of philosophers united in their beliefs because Luke did not say “*the Epicureans and the Stoics*.” Yet these two disparate groups did function as a single group in their criticism of Paul’s teaching. The same point can be made regarding “the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Simply put, why would Peter and Paul not distinguish between God and Jesus here when they clearly do so throughout the rest of their writings?

EXAMPLES OF SAME GREEK GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE

➤ “...according to the grace **of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ**” (2 Thess. 1:12 ESV).

Other examples are Acts 13:50, 15:22; Eph 5:5; 1 Tim. 5; 21, 6:13; and 2 Tim 4:1.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:12

The NAB and the NLT seem to be the only ones that render the verse as:

* “...that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, in accord with the grace of **our God and Lord Jesus Christ**.”

CONTEXTUALLY MORE ACCURATE:

➤ “...so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of **our God and the Lord Jesus Christ**” (ESV and most others).

Raymond Brown concludes that:

There are two possible interpretations of the Greek genitives: (a) “the grace of our God-and-Lord Jesus Christ”; (b) “the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The first interpretation, which gives Jesus the title “God,” is favored by the absence in the Greek of an article before “Lord,” creating the impression that the two genitives are bound together and governed by the one article that precedes “God.” Yet, the exact three-word Greek combination for “God and Lord” is not found elsewhere in the Bible in reference to one person; and perhaps “Lord Jesus Christ” was so common a phrase that it would automatically be thought of as a separate entity and could be used without the article. The second interpretation is favored by the fact that pronominal “of us” (= “our”) separates the two titles; but, as we shall see below in discussing 2 Pet. 1.1; this is not a decisive argument. The most impressive argument for the second interpretation is that “our God” occurs four times in 1 and 2 Thessalonians as a title for God the Father. By analogy in the passage at hand, then, “our God” should be distinguished from “(the) Lord Jesus Christ,” as most commentators acknowledge. Thus this text cannot be offered as an example of the use of the title “God” for Jesus.

An Introduction to New Testament Christology, p. 180.

ERROR OF OMISSION IN THE GREEK TEXT

ACTS 20:28:

* “...to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with **His own blood**” (ESV).

This last phrase is literally “blood of His own” whereby a scribal omission has occurred.

CONTEXTUALLY MORE ACCURATE:

- “...to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the **blood of his own Son**” (NRSV).
- “...to be the shepherds of the church of God, which he has bought with the **blood of his own One**” (Barclay).

Raymond Brown comments:

Grammatically [the] reading raises the possibility that the passage is referring to Jesus as God who obtained the church “with his own blood.” However, there is another possibility: Perhaps “God” refers to the Father and “his own” refers to the Son; thus, “the church of God (the Father) which He obtained with the blood of His own (Son).” Many favor this interpretation or an alternative: “the church of God which he (Christ) obtained with his own blood,” positing an unexpressed change of subject. And so, even when we read “the church of God,” we are by no means certain that this verse calls Jesus God. *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, pp. 177-178.

‘ADONAI’ MEANS YAHWEH GOD AS LORD –
‘ADONI’ MEANS A HUMAN LORD

PSALM 110:1:

“The LORD [Heb. *YHWH*] said to my **Lord** (Heb. *adoni* – pronounced *adonee*). ‘Sit at my right hand...’” NRSV, NAB, REB, Moffatt, Smith & Goodspeed.

Many Trinitarian commentators express this as: “*YHWH* said to my **Lord** (Heb. *adonai*)” as if God is speaking to God or in Trinitarian terms God the Father is speaking to God the Son. However, in the 7th century A.D. the scribes added vowel points to the Hebrew consonants so that the word was shown to be *adoni* and not *adonai*. This addition was merely to confirm what was fully understood as the logical ancient traditional reading of the text. So in Psalm 110:1 “The LORD” is Yahweh – the Lord God. The one spoken to as “my **Lord**” [Heb. *l’adoni* = Gk *kyrios mou* = “my lord”] is a human lord because the word *adoni* for lord refers only to **human** lords. (Note: It is also used of the angel in Judges 6:13 and in Daniel 12:8). In the Christian Scriptures the Greek *kyrios mou* for “my lord” is never used to refer to God. Only *kyrios* without the personal possessive pronoun is so used. However, many translations of Psalm 110:1 (NASB, KJV, ESV, NIV, NLT, NWT [*but see footnote in the NWT*]) have capitalised the first letter of **Lord** (**L**ord) as if to indicate that the word is *adonai* - a reference throughout the Hebrew Scriptures **only to God**. So clearly in Psalm 110:1 God – Yahweh - is addressing prophetically a human lord who later exists and is revealed in the Christian Scriptures as “The Lord (*kyrios*) Jesus Christ.” Yet Christ = Messiah. So Jesus is the Lord Messiah:

- “God has *made him* both **Lord and Christ**, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).
- “...peace from God our Father and the **Lord Jesus Christ** (*Messiah*)” (Gal. 1:3).

In the O.T the word *adonai* for the Lord God occurs 449 times and *adoni* for those who are not God 195 times. Furthermore, Thomas’ calling Jesus “My **Lord** (Gk *kyrios mou*) and my God!” at John 20:28, when taken from the original Hebrew that they almost certainly spoke would be *Adoni ve Eli* and not *Adonai ve Eli* showing that Jesus is being referred to as a human lord and not the Lord God. Please see the book *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian* by Anthony Buzzard p.147-186.

JESUS AS “MIGHTY GOD”

Isaiah 9:6:

“...to us a son is given...his name shall be called Wonderful counsellor, **Mighty God** (Heb. *el gibbor*), **Everlasting Father**, Prince of Peace.”

The Hebrew term *el gibbor* is better translated as **Divine Hero** as in Moffatt’s translation. It is rendered **Mighty Hero** in the REB and **Divine Champion** in Byington. The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon gives both *mighty hero* and *divine hero* as the correct renderings. So the application to the Messiah is appropriate as is the phrase **Everlasting Father**, which refers to Messiah as “*father of the age to come*”—the rendering in the Septuagint. The NET Bible Notes state that:

(gibbor) is probably an attributive adjective ("mighty God"), though one might translate "God is a warrior" or "God is mighty." Scholars have interpreted this title in two ways. A number of them have argued that the title portrays **the king as God's representative** on the battlefield, whom God empowers in a supernatural way (see J. H. Hayes and S. A. Irvine, Isaiah, 181–82). They contend that this sense seems more likely in the original context of the prophecy. They would suggest that having read the NT, we might in retrospect interpret this title as indicating the coming king's deity, but it is unlikely that Isaiah or his audience would have understood the title in such a bold way. Ps 45:6 addresses the Davidic king as "God" because he ruled and fought as God's representative on earth.

THERE IS VIRTUALLY NO TEXT EXPLICITLY CALLING JESUS ‘GOD’

In his article *The Worship of Jesus: A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?* R.T. France concludes that:

in many cases the apparent direct attribution of divinity to Jesus melts away in the light of uncertainty about either **the text**, or **the punctuation**, or **the syntax**, *leaving us with no undisputed* (or almost undisputed!), direct attribution of divinity to Jesus outside the opening and closing declarations of the Gospel of John (Jn. 1:1; 1:18, 20:28).”

Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie, ed. H. H. Rowdon, p. 23.

NOTE:

John 1:18 has been examined at the beginning of this study.

John 20:28 is examined in the next study and shown to be not a reference to Jesus as Almighty God.

John 1:1 is examined in STUDY 17 and shown not to apply to a person.

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