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Elohim and Other Key Terms

The Danger of Confusing the Doctrine of God by Inventing Our Own Definitions and Vocabulary

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Thomas Ken (1637-1711) Hymnotheo poet, wks., 1727, III , 335:

“Strange generation this? Father and Son coeval: two distinct and yet but one.”

“It is difficult to place three billiard balls on one spot” (J.A.T. Robinson)

1720: Daniel Waterland, *Sermons*: “The Arians had some plausible things to urge particularly in respect of the **generation** of the Son.”

1848: Wilberforce on the Incarnation : “Origen introduced the phrase ‘the Son’s **eternal generation.**’”

Professor Colin Brown, general editor of *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*: “To be called Son of God in the NT means that you are not God... To read John 1:1 as though it means ‘In the beginning was the Son’ is patently wrong.”^[1]

“God is one WHAT in three WHO’s” — Hank Hanegraaf, Bible Answer Man

“The New Testament offers no new doctrine of God, but simply proclaims that the Old Testament God has now acted definitively. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is now the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Even the fatherhood of God is not new (Isaiah 64:8). Thus all Old Testament theology is implied in the New Testament: God is the creator and Lord of history, the God who acts, who calls Israel into covenant, who promises the redemption of his people. The New Testament proclaims that these promises have now been fulfilled, or rather are now in the process of being fulfilled” (*Oxford Companion to the Bible*, “Biblical Theology,” NT).

Professor Mauch, Trinity College, CT:

“These [traditional] ways of reading the Philippian hymn contain an emphasis on Jesus Christ as a divine being who previously was with God, emptied himself of his *pre-existent* divinity, became a man on earth, and then went back up where he properly belonged. When people do read Philippians 2, the ‘heavy hand of tradition’ keeps them reading along these lines. The Fathers, countering the Arian dilution of Christ’s divinity, clarified the terms ‘in the form of God’ and ‘he emptied himself’ to show that Christ is fully equal and co-existent with God. This dominant theology is evident in Calvin’s explanation of Philippians 2, ‘For a time his Divine glory was invisible, and nothing appeared but the human form, in a mean and abject condition.’”

Defining God in the Bible:

“It is as dangerous to get it wrong as it is difficult to get it right” — Morgridge

“At the Trinity reason stands aghast and faith itself is half confounded” — Bishop Hurd

“Nothing to support the dogma [of the Trinity] can be pointed out in Scripture” — Luther

The Importance of Our Topic

At present the world is deeply divided over who God is. Millions of Jews and over a billion Muslims are alike repelled by the historic Christian doctrine that God is Three in One. As long as that central tenet is maintained it fosters a religious hostility between peoples of the world-faiths. Our difficulties as a human race are firstly theological. Collectively we do not know who God is and which God to serve. And we have apparently forgotten that Jesus was a Jew reciting as his most precious doctrine the *Shema* (“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord”) of Deut. 6:4 (cp. Mark 12:28ff.) which as everyone should know is a **unitarian creed**. At stake is the question of obeying and following the teaching of Jesus. If our God is not the God of the Hebrew Bible, of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and of Jesus himself, are we floundering in the chaos of polytheism? It is at least worthwhile exploring that threatening possibility. In so doing we may be able to confirm our salvation and rejoice in the truth as Jesus taught it. No considerations of party loyalty, “what we have always believed,” or fear of standing alone should deter us for one second from the Berean exercise to which we are all committed (Acts 17:11). God is to be worshiped, Jesus said, “in spirit and truth.” Error can only obstruct our relationship with God.

“Distinguished but undivided, bound together in otherness, one in three: that is the Godhead and the three are one (Credo of Gregory of Nazianzus, Jan. 6, 381). This language is still heard in Roman Catholic liturgy. Thus Hans Kung has spoken of ‘the unbiblical very abstractly constructed speculation of the Roman Catholic treatises’ and ‘the **Hellenization** of the Christian primordial message by **Greek theology**’ and expresses ‘the genuine concern of many Christians and the justified frustration of Jews and Muslims in trying to find in such formulas the pure faith in One God.’ Claus Westerman said, ‘the question of relationships of the persons in the Trinity to one another and the question of the divinity and humanity in the person of Christ as a question of ontic [having to do with ‘essence’] relationships could only arise when the Old Testament had lost its significance for the early church. The Christological and Trinitarian questions structurally correspond to the *mythological questions into relationships of the gods to one another in a pantheon*’” (From *Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine, A Dialogue Between Pinchas Lapide and Jurgen Moltmann*, Fortress Press, 1981, pp. 40, 41).

A Mother of Muddles: A Confusion over the Bible’s Word for God

One does not have to advance very far into Scripture to arrive at the word God, with capital G (although in the original there are no capitals as distinct from lower case).

“In the beginning **God** created....”

We confront here the Hebrew word Elohim followed by a verb which is singular (“he,” not “they,” created).

In **G.T. Armstrong’s** paperback of 1977, *The Real Jesus*, the author announces that “it is time you met the real Jesus” (p. 1). After a spirited description of the human being, Jesus of Nazareth, we learn that the Creator, obviously here not Jesus but *the Father*, was announcing the birth of His Son through three different groups of individuals. Surprisingly the visitation of Gabriel to Mary declaring *the basis on* which Jesus might be called Son of God, that is, by the procreating activity of the Father (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20) is bypassed in our author’s account. We are immediately, however, plunged into a chapter entitled “Jesus the Creator — His Former Life.”

Jesus in his former life, we are told, had spoken to Abraham in Genesis 18. Jesus, said Mr. Armstrong, was not understood by his opponents when he spoke of Abraham having looked forward to his appearance (p. 14). “Jesus was thinking in another dimension — the full knowledge and awareness of who and what he was, of his spiritual background and timelessness.” Mr. Armstrong then moves from Abraham to John 1:1: “There are two other important Scriptures relative to Christ’s preexistence: ‘In the beginning God created...’ (Gen. 1:1) and ‘in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.’”

Now I do not wish in any way to come over as “smart” or condemning, but what follows in *The Real Jesus* sets out a whole theology which has had dramatic consequences for the education and spiritual journeys of countless people over some 70 years. G.T. Armstrong says: “The Hebrew word for God is *Elohim*. It is an interesting word with a plural form (the *-im* ending).” “A little research,” says Mr. Armstrong, “demonstrates that Elohim can indicate **more than one person**; and can be taken to mean a **family of persons**.” Our author goes on. “Elohim means *more than one* and while not necessarily limiting the number, many other texts prove there was the Father (whom no man has ever seen at any time) and the Son. Therefore in our modern English language, the beginning text of the Bible would be more understandable if it were written thus: ‘In the beginning **the family of God** consisting of the Father and the Son, created the heaven and the earth.’”

Presumably it would follow that the thousands of appearances of that same word Elohim in the Hebrew Bible are likewise, according to the Armstrong scheme, mistranslated, and really mean “the one God-Family.” The proposal is surely a momentous one setting the standard for an entire theology. At the same time this proposal corrects all the standard translations of the Scripture.

The dye is now set. We are launched, I think, into polytheism — based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the facts of the Hebrew language — the use of the word Elohim.

I would invite you to pause and reflect on what is happening here. Let us ask this question: Since the Bible was translated into English from Hebrew and Greek in hundreds and hundreds of translations into hundreds and hundreds of languages, has any single translator or committee of scholars who rendered the sacred text from the Hebrew, *at any time*, proposed or sanctioned that translation, which our author, who would claim no specialist training in language modern or ancient, offers us: “In the beginning the family of God, Father and Son, created the heavens and the earth”?

He goes on: “The Hebrew word *elohim* in Genesis 1:1 means that there **was more than one member of the God family** involved in the creating... The Word of John 1 was the executive member of the Godhead of whom the Bible says all things were made by him. Perhaps the clearest description absolutely proving that the Jesus Christ of the New Testament was the same Being who was the Eternal Creator of the OT, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is Col 1:16... The Bible clearly shows, without any interpretation or exegesis, that the creator being who is called ‘God’ (*Elohim* or *Yahweh*) in the Old Testament is the same individual who became the Jesus Christ of the New Testament... The personage who emptied himself and became flesh, born of the virgin Mary to become the baby Jesus in Bethlehem was the *same individual* who created Adam, who saved Noah, who appeared to Abraham. He was the same personality of the Godhead or God family who wrote the 10 commandments and ruled Israel. The Bible absolutely proves the fact that Jesus Christ of the NT is the same person as the God of the OT” (p. 18).

If we now review the information presented in *The Real Jesus*, we have been told that:

- 1) Elohim is plural in meaning
- 2) It means the Family of God
- 3) It means one member of that family, the one who became Jesus.

There are a number of serious problems with these declarations.

If Elohim is plural in *meaning* then it should always be translated Gods. In this case it would refer to two or more Gods. A word cannot mean both God *and* Family. This would be to assign two completely different meanings to the same word. If the Bible wanted to speak of the Family of God it could do this quite easily, as for example in the “family of David,” “family of Egypt.” There is a perfectly good Hebrew word for family, but the Creator is nowhere said to be a Family of Persons.

However, if Elohim means “family,” and yet is a plural word, why should it not be rendered “families”? And if it means in Gen. 1:1 “Gods,” or *Family* of God, how can it *also* refer to *one* single member of that family, Jesus Christ?

A number of more serious problems arise on these premises:

If Elohim is plural and thus means Gods then what is the significance of the *singular* verb following? (“he [not they] created”). We would have to translate, “In the beginning Gods, he created” or “Gods was the creator.”

We are rapidly reducing the sacred text to nonsense.

What we are seeing here is a highly problematic shifting of definitions, which in every other field would be recognized as a form of confusion and deception. What Mr. Armstrong presents is a grammatical method in which all sorts of grammatical laws, rules and definitions are thrown aside. Dictionaries and lexicons are discarded as unnecessary and imagination is given free rein. A kind of mystical grammatical category is created by which an innocent word like *Elohim* has taken on a speculative new dimension, allowing this disaster: that precious monotheism is

undermined — and the evidence of standard lexicons and commentaries is allowed no place. Moreover, the Jewish understanding of God (remembering that the sacred oracles were committed to Jews) is overthrown.

Unfortunately, it is by changing, or interchanging, the meaning of words, without notice, that disinformation can be created.

Firstly, then, **Elohim** cannot mean at the same time in Gen. 1:1 three *different* things:

1) Gods, 2) Family of God and 3) One member of that Family. Gods is of course plural, family is a singular word and one member of the family is also singular. To ask the same word in Gen. 1:1 to have all three definitions is utterly impossible. God and family are quite distinct ideas and cannot possibly be covered by the one term Elohim. Now one *could* argue that Elohim is a **collective noun**, like team, family, committee. But in that case it is not plural — not like teams, families or committees. A collective noun denotes a collection of persons, places or things regarded as one (flock, forest, crowd, committee, jury, class, herd, covey, legislature, battalion, squad, and squadron). The objects collected into one term have some characteristics in common, enabling us to regard them as a group. The word “audience” or “congregation” enables us to gather individuals into a single unit.

But the fact needs to be stated clearly: Elohim is **never in the Bible a collective noun** — never. It is not a “group” word when used of the One God. It does not function like the word family. No lexicon lists it as a collective noun.

Peloubet’s Dictionary of the Bible (F.N. Peloubet, D.D. and Alice Adams, MA, 1947) stated the truth: “The fanciful idea that Elohim referred to a Trinity [or we could add Binity] of persons in the Godhead hardly finds now a supporter among scholars.”

In presenting what Mr. Armstrong called *The Real Jesus* we were introduced into the realm of grammatical fiction and fancy. We were invited in fact under the guise of intelligent Bible study, to embrace a pagan godhead consisting of more than one Person.

Twenty years later, when **Ernest Martin** issued his comprehensive account of the *Essentials of New Testament Doctrine* in 1999, the same confusion over God was reinforced and with a greater degree of dogmatism:

It is worth observing first, though, an extraordinary assertion of E.L. Martin in regard to the status of the teaching of Jesus. His ultra-dispensationalist point of view represents, I think, a dangerous rejection of Jesus:

“All the teachings Christ gave to the Jews during his earthly ministry within the Old Covenant framework were of no importance to Paul (in matters relating to salvation). Paul did not refer to any of Christ’s teachings (other than the bread and wine) given by Christ while in the flesh” (p. 78).

This amazing dictum would mean that the sermon on the mount and the parable of the sower and the rest of Jesus’ precious utterances (including his affirmation of the creed of Israel) are of no interest to the Christian.

This confusion is compounded when ELM declares: “We need to know what ‘God’ signifies in

Scripture... It will be found that both God the Father and His Son are 'God,' yet they are both separate personalities united together in a singular purpose." Martin then speaks of "confusion regarding who or what 'God' really is" (p. 450). "This misjudgment occurs because most people assume the term 'God' always means a singular and exclusive Supreme Being" (*ibid*). Now this: "Whether the Greek word *theos* is used to describe the Deity or the Hebrew word *elohim*, it was fully accepted [by the writers of the Bible] that there existed more than one 'god'" (p. 451). "Elohim is clearly a plural word. The two terminal letters '*im*' make the word to be plural.... Since Elohim is plural, the simple meaning of Elohim is 'Powers,' or 'powerful ones.' However, we will see that when Elohim is governed by a singular verb (which occurs often in Scripture) the stress coalesces the plural meaning into a singular understanding (*but still with plural significance*)" (p. 488). "The plural is fused into meaning a singular 'group of powers,' or worded differently 'a Congregation of Powers.'" "No matter what we have been taught over the years about the singularity of God, the word Elohim is a simple plural. If we wish to use the English word 'God' as its translation, we must (to be grammatically harmonious and consistent) place the letter 's' on our word God throughout the Hebrew Scriptures" (p. 488).

Martin here proposes a corruption of the Hebrew Bible and accuses, by implication, the writers of the NT of ignorance. No NT writer ever rendered the Hebrew word for the One God as "theoi" (Gods).

Elohim when referring to the One God comes into the inspired Greek of the NT (some 1320 times) as *theos* (singular). This proves of course that the translations are all correct when they say "in the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth." Thousands of singular personal pronouns standing for Elohim, and His other names, can only affirm, massively, the fact that God is a Single Personal Being.

Martin repeats himself: "If one wishes to retain the English word 'God' one must put an 's' on 'God' each time it is used. By stating this I would normally be subjected to ridicule by those who read and know the Hebrew language, because it is evident that in the great majority of cases Elohim, though plural in grammatical construction, is governed by singular verbs and must be understood in a singular manner. Yes, but **I state dogmatically** [here ELM goes into bold print] that the only way to make sense out of the Hebrew in regard to understanding the Godhead is to put the letter 's' on the end of every word translated 'God' in the English language if the Hebrew word is Elohim" (p. 490). "[In the Shema] the very text itself says that Elohim ('Gods') is **ONE**. This cardinal point emphasizes the singularity of the plural word Elohim." "The Hebrew word 'one' can actually carry the meaning of more than 'one' (a single person). Note carefully when Adam was married to Eve they became 'one flesh' (*echad*) though they represented two separate personalities (Gen. 2:24)" (p. 495). "The Hebrew word *echad* is more expansive in the plural meaning than that...." "So the plural Elohim refers to **ONE Godhead made up of many individuals (the Father, the Firstborn and other Sons of God, along with female members, see Proverbs 8:2-31)**" (p. 495). "**Just what is God? Elohim is the One divine family to which all of us belong**" (p. 499).

All this prodigious effort to turn One into Two or Three, of course, began early in church history and continues unabated in some evangelical Trinitarian and especially Messianic Jewish Trinitarian circles. By the time of Origen (c. 185-254) a confusion over God was in full swing. The historical Son of God had been turned into the "eternally generated" Son. This concept was at the heart of the whole traditional creedal system of Roman Catholics and Protestants. It

produced the problem that though God is One, yet since the Son is God, somehow Two has to be One.

Ernest Martin and Ted Armstrong were unwittingly in the Roman Catholic tradition, a tradition, however, based on arguments about *Elohim* constantly, in fact, *rejected* by the best Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars of the biblical languages, for many centuries.

Before illustrating some of the ancient debate over Elohim and the supposed plurality in the Godhead (Binity or Trinity), here is the state of play in the 3rd century (a papyrus first published in 1949): Origen is discussing the Godhead with a certain Bishop Heraclides. He wants to check him out and verify his “orthodoxy.”

“Since the bishops present had raised questions about the faith of the bishop Heraclides, so that in the presence of all he might acknowledge his faith, and each of them had made remarks and had raised the question, the bishop Heraclides said: ‘And I too believe exactly what the divine Scriptures say: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence through him, and nothing came into existence apart from him.’ So we agree in the faith and, furthermore, we believe that the Christ assumed flesh, that he was born, that he ascended into the heavens with the flesh in which he arose, and that he is seated at the right hand of the Father, whence he is going to come and judge the living and the dead, being God and man.’

Origen said: ‘Since a debate is now beginning and one may speak on the subject of the debate, I will speak. The whole church is here to listen. One church should not differ from another in knowledge, since you are not the false community. I ask you, Father Heraclides, God is the Almighty, the uncreated, the supreme one who made all things. Do you agree?’

Heraclides said: ‘I agree; for this I too believe.’

Origen said: ‘Christ Jesus, who exists in the form of God, though he is distinct from God in the form in which he existed, was he God before he entered a body or not?’

Heraclides said: ‘He was God before.’

Origen said: ‘He was God before he entered a body, or not?’

Heraclides said: ‘Yes.’

Origen said: ‘God distinct from this God in whose form he existed?’

Heraclides said: ‘Obviously distinct from any other, since he is in the form of that one who created everything.’

Origen said: ‘Was there not a God, Son of God, the only-begotten of God, the first-born of all creation, and do we not devoutly say that in one sense there are two Gods and, in another, one God?’

Heraclides said: ‘What you say is clear; but we say that there is God, the Almighty, without beginning and without end, containing all things but not contained, and there is his Word, Son of the living God, God and man, through whom all things came into existence, God in relation to

the Spirit and man in that he was born of Mary.’

Origen said: ‘You do not seem to have answered my question. Make it clear; perhaps I did not follow you. Is the Father God?’

Heraclides said: ‘Certainly.’

Origen said: ‘Is the Son distinct from the Father?’

Heraclides said: ‘How can he be Son if he is also Father?’

Origen said: ‘While distinct from the Father, is the Son himself also God?’

Heraclides said: ‘He himself is also God.’

Origen said: ‘And the two Gods become one?’

Heraclides said: ‘Yes.’

Origen said: ‘Do we acknowledge two Gods?’

Heraclides said: ‘Yes; the power is one.’

Origen said: ‘But since our brethren are shocked by the affirmation that **there are two Gods**, the subject must be examined with care in order to show in what respect they are two and in what respect the two are one God.’”

This today remains the problem for all those who propose that God is in some sense more than One. Once the unitary nature of God slipped from the church’s grasp, and once a Trinity or Binity is embraced, it becomes necessary to force that idea back on to the Bible. Elohim is the point of attack in this procedure.

(For a full *history* of the protests of good scholars about the futility of arguing for the Trinity [or Binity] from *Elohim*, please see the Appendix of this paper)

Lexical Facts about Elohim

Elohim, in fact, is singular in meaning when referred to the One God. This is shown by the singular verbs which normally follow. And by thousands of singular personal pronouns.

Elohim has a plural meaning when it refers to pagan “gods.”

Elohim has a singular meaning when designating a single pagan god, Milchom, Astarte, etc.

Elohim, El, Eloah, and Yahweh are identical in meaning and singular in meaning when referring to the one true God. They are replaced by singular personal pronouns.

This information can be inspected in the Hebrew text, in translations and in all the standard Hebrew Lexicons (Brown, Driver and Briggs, Kohler Baumgartner, Jenni and Westermann, etc.)

Those of us who followed the Armstrongs in defining God rejected the testimony of history, of

the Hebrew text and the Hebrew lexicons and grammarians. We preferred to believe the teaching of those who had no training in languages, biblical or otherwise.

The Problem: How to Reconcile One with Two or One with Three

We have seen that *Elohim* meaning the One God will not yield to any attempts to force it into a support for a Trinity or God-Family of two or more. The fundamental problem remains for all subscribers to the Trinity or Binity as to how Three X's can be One X. This is logically impossible. But the Athanasian creed which speaks of the Father being God, the Son being God and the Holy Spirit being God, "and yet these are not three Gods but One God" asks us to indulge in illogical nonsense. As Geoffrey Lampe, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge remarked with restrained British humor: "The classical statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, the so-called Athanasian creed, ends: 'This is the Catholick Faith, which unless a man believes it faithfully he cannot be saved.' This has been paraphrased in less dignified language: 'Accept my model or I'll do you,' or rather, 'This is God's model: accept it or He will do you'" ("What Future for the Trinity," *Explorations in Theology*, 8, SCM Press, 1981, p. 31).

The churches have been amazingly cruel to those noble souls who challenged the extraordinary proposition that God is more than One Person and that Jesus is 100% God and 100% Man. They burned dissenters, exiled them, defrocked them and passed laws of Parliament against them.

Back to our subject: What then if the Trinity or Binity means 3 X's or 2 X's = I Y. This is logically feasible, but what does it mean in terms of defining X and Y?

On the admission of the best contemporary Trinitarian experts, no one has ever been able to explain **in what sense they mean God is one and in what *different* sense more than one**. Thus the leading exponent of the Trinity among contemporary evangelicals admits the desperation of the situation:

Professor Erickson (*God in Three Persons*, 1993):

First he comments on the state of the Trinity in the mind of an average churchgoer: It is

"A matter of not knowing whether they believe or disbelieve the Trinity because they do not know what the doctrine says" (p. 46). No one has preached to them on this central doctrine.

"Christians who believe this strange doctrine seem incoherent..."

"We can make it partially understandable..."

Erickson continues: "Stephen Davis (a logician) does not say the doctrine can *never* be shown to be coherent but this has not yet been achieved."

"Davis the logician has examined the major contemporary explanations and having found them not to accomplish what they claim to do has been honest in acknowledging that he feels he is dealing with a mystery. In so doing, he has perhaps been more candid than many of us who when pressed may have to admit that we really do not know in what way God is one and in what different way He is three" (Erickson, p. 258).

“To say the doctrine has been revealed is a bit too strong, however, at least with respect to the biblical revelation” (p. 258).

“It simply is not possible to explain the Trinity unequivocally. What must be done is to offer a series, a whole assortment of illustrations and analogies with the hope that some discernment will take place. We must approach the matter from various angles, ‘nibbling at the meaning’ of the doctrine as it were... It may be necessary, in order to convey the unusual meaning involved in this doctrine, to utilize what analytical philosophers would term ‘logically odd language.’ This means using language in such a way as intentionally to commit grammatical errors. Thus, I have said of the Trinity, ‘He are three,’ or ‘They is one.’ For we have here a being whose nature falls outside our usual understanding of persons, and that nature can perhaps be adequately expressed by using language that calls attention to the almost paradoxical character of the concepts” (p. 270).

But this is desperation. Where does the Bible say that God breaks the rules of grammar in order to reveal Himself? Erickson has surrendered the grammatical method. God speaks to us in terms which are meant to reveal truth, not confuse us. We are reminded here of GTA’s assertion that Elohim must be taken as plural resulting in “Gods, he created.”

Echad (one)

It is customary for some Binitarians and most evangelical Trinitarians (especially Messianics) to propose that the Hebrew word for one, the numeral one (*echad*), is really “compound one.” This is a clever device which confuses logical thought. *Echad* occurs some 960 times in the Hebrew Bible, and it is the numeral “one.” It is a numeral adjective when it modifies a noun. “One day,” “one person,” etc. *Echad* is the ordinary cardinal number, “one.” Eleven in Hebrew is ten and one. Abraham “was only one,” said Ezekiel 33:24 (NASU), “only one man” (NIV).

Just as the famous Armstrongian phrase “uniplural” does not appear in the Webster’s (thus it represents the DIY grammatical venture on which Worldwide theology was done in respect to defining God), “compound one” as a definition of *echad* is also not recognized in standard texts describing the grammar of the Hebrew language. It is an invented grammatical category which confuses and divides.

The Hebrew word for one operates as does the word “one” in English. You can have one thing, one person. And of course the noun modified by *echad* may be collective, one family, one people, one flesh, as a single *unit* composed of two — Adam and Eve, in that case. But to say that “one” carries the meaning of “compound one” is misleading in the extreme. The basic meaning of *echad* given by the lexicons is “one single,” even the indefinite article “a.” Sometimes “the only one,” or even “unique” is the proper translation of *echad*.

Suppose now we say that “one” implies more than one. We could prove our point like this: In the phrase “one tripod,” is it not obvious that one really implies three? Does not one dozen mean that one is really 12? Or one million? Is one equivalent to a million? Does this not suggest the plurality of “one”? What about “one quartet” or “one duplex”? To carry this madness to an extreme, we could argue that in the phrase “one zebra,” the word one really means “black and white.”

What is happening here? We are being asked to believe that in the phrase “the Lord our God is one Lord,” that “one” is “compound.” That “Lord” is more than one Lord, perhaps two or perhaps three. We are being lured into a complete falsehood that “one” implies plurality. We are asked to believe this on the basis of a tiny fraction of the appearances of *echad* when it *modifies a compound noun* (the vast majority of the occurrences of *echad* when it does not modify a compound noun are left unmentioned). Even when “one” modifies a compound noun — one family, one cluster — the word “one” retains its meaning as “one single...” There is no such thing as “compound one” as a definition of *echad*.

This procedure is to confuse the numeral adjective “one” with the noun it modifies. It is to “bleed” the meaning of a compound *noun* back into the numeral. This will take the unwary by surprise. Thus “one flesh” is supposed to mean that one can mean more than one. The point, obviously, is that “flesh” as a combination of Adam and Eve does have a collective, family sense. But one is still one: “one flesh and not two fleshes.” “One **cluster (singular)** of grapes” **does not in any way illustrate a plural meaning for the word “one.”** “Cluster” has indeed a collective, plural sense. But one is still one: “one cluster” and not “two clusters.” Just imagine if at the check-out the clerk announces that your one dollar purchase is really “compound one.” You could become bankrupt.

So then, Yahweh, the personal name of the One God, occurs some 6,800 times. In no case does it have a plural verb, or adjective. And never is a plural pronoun put in its place. Pronouns are most useful grammatical markers, since they tell us about the nouns they stand for. The very fact that the God who is Yahweh speaks of Himself as “I” and “Me” and is referred to as “You” (singular) and “He” and “Him” thousands upon thousands of times should convince all Bible readers of the singularity of God. The fact that God further speaks of Himself in every exclusive fashion known to language — “by myself,” “all alone” etc., — only adds to this proof. “There is none besides Me,” “none before Me” and “none after Me.” “I alone am Elohim, and Yahweh.” “I created the heavens and the earth by Myself; none was with Me.”

A Sample of the Use of *echad* (one)

Genesis 42:13: “Joseph’s brothers said, ‘We are 12 brothers, sons of one (*echad*) man, in the land of Canaan. The youngest is this day with our father and one (*echad*) is not.’” Verse 16: “Send one (*echad*) of you.” Verse 19: “Let one (*echad*) of your brothers...” Verse 27: “One (*echad*) of them opened his sack.” Verse 32: “One (*echad*) is not.” Verse 33: “One (*echad*) of your brothers.” There are well over 900 other examples in the OT.

Elohim, El, Yahweh are different names for the same One Person.

Furthermore: Ps. 83:13: “Let them know that **Thou** alone, whose name is **Yahweh**, art the Most High over all the earth.” Neh. 9:6: “Thou art **Yahweh**, thou alone. **Thou** has made the heavens, the heaven of heavens, with all their hosts, the earth and all that is in it, the seas and all that is in them.” II Sam. 22:32: “For who is **El** but **Yahweh**? And who is a rock except our **Elohim**?” Isa. 43:10, 11: “You, Jacob, are my witnesses, says Yahweh, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Before **Me** no **El** was formed nor shall there be after Me, I, I am **Yahweh**, and besides Me there is no Savior.” Isa. 45:42: “For I am **El** and there is no other.” Ps. 18:31: “For who is **Eloah** [singular form of Elohim] but **Yahweh**? And who is a rock except our **Elohim**?” Ps. 114:7: “Tremble, O earth, at the presence

of Yahweh, at the presence of the **Eloah** of Jacob.” Jer 10:10: “But **Yahweh** is the true **Elohim**, he is the living **Elohim** and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble and the nations will not be able to abide his indignation.”

Then consider this: Of the 4,400 occurrences of the word **Elohim (God)** or **theos (Gk. God)**, not one of them can be shown to mean “The Triune God” or “The Biune God.” Never, in fact, in Scripture when men wrote about their God did they ever imagine a tripersonal or bipersonal God. Such a God is foreign to Scripture and to Jesus. Is it surprising then that the end-products of a theology of God-Family, of uniplural God(s) do not demonstrate the unity of the spirit to which the Bible directs and exhorts us?

We have the strange paradox in churches (speaking generally) that the most important of all doctrines that God is two or three is seldom if ever preached on. But if these strange concepts are challenged, then the full force of dogma comes into play and threats of excommunication and heresy go flying. When the detail of the argument for a Triune God emerges, the questioner is invited to believe that:

1) “Today” (“You are My Son: *Today* I have begotten you” — Ps. 2:7) means “In eternity you are My Son.” In this church-speak, which is at the root of all our problems, “today = in eternity.” How then could God say “today” if He meant “today”? God here is being muzzled and told what He can say and what not.

2) “Person” in Trinitarian definitions does not mean person. Beget does not mean beget, bring into existence. God is one **OUSIA** (essence or substance) existing in three **HYPOSTASES** (subsistencies).

The term OUSIA is never used of God in the Bible. Hypostasis is not used to describe Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

3) “I will be his Father” (II Sam. 7:14) really means “I have *always been* his Father.” Note how history is replaced by timelessness.

Augustine (*On the Trinity*): “Human learning is scanty and affords no terms to express it. It is therefore answered ‘three Persons,’ not as if that was to the purpose [had any meaning] but something must be said and we must not be silent” (*De Trinitate*, Bk 5, ch. 9). The same Augustine in his *Homilies on John* felt it necessary to tamper with the sacred text of John 17:3, declaring that Jesus had said: “This is eternal life: that they believe in You and Jesus Christ whom You sent, as the One True God.” Note the complete alteration here in the interests of squeezing the Messiah into the Godhead. Jesus in fact described the Father here as “the only one who is truly God.”

Professor Stuart of Yale and Andover (1780-1852), one of the most learned Trinitarians in the world, speaking of the definition of **Person** in the Trinity said: “I do not and cannot understand them. And to a definition I cannot consent, still less defend it, until I do understand what it signifies. I have no hesitation in saying that my mind is absolutely unable to elicit any distinct and certain ideas from any of the definitions of **Person** which I have ever examined.”

It is a relief to turn from this strange grammar and “church-speak” to some sound facts, from standard authorities:

The Truth about God Has Been Clearly Stated by Good Scholars

Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels: “The relation of Christ to the Father is that of a real Son, including dependence and subordination (I Cor 3:23; 11:3; 15:24-28).”

This brings refreshing and brilliant light.

What, Then, Went Wrong?

Martin Werner, DD, Prof., University of Bern: “There was certainly no justification for substituting, in the interpretation of the person of Jesus, for the original concept of the Messiah, simply a Hellenistic analogy such as that of a redeeming divine being. The analogy was no more appropriate or proper than that which had become problematical, and it did not deserve to serve as a substitute for it. It was a myth behind which the historical Jesus completely disappeared, because there was nothing common between them” (*Formation of Christian Dogma*, Harper Bros., 1957, p. 298).

He spoke also of “The transformation of the eschatological Primitive Christianity into the Hellenistic mystery-religion of Early Catholicism” (p. vii).

Professor Loofs:

How the Church, from the second century AD, lost sight of the historical Jesus and replaced him with a spirit-being who took on human flesh, but was not really a human being! How the unity of God, the first and most important of all commandments (Mark 12:28ff.), was permanently damaged because of the speculative Greek philosophical influence which invaded the original church. Our contemporary problems, in the church and the nation, go back to the drastically weakening process that began when the poison of Greek philosophy mounted a kind of terrorist attack on the supreme unity of the One God of the Bible.

Friedrich Loofs (church historian and theologian, 1858-1928)

“The Apologists [‘church fathers’ like Justin Martyr, mid-2nd century] laid the foundation for the perversion/corruption (*Verkehrung*) of Christianity into a revealed [philosophical] teaching. Specifically, their Christology affected the later development disastrously. By taking for granted the transfer of the concept of **Son of God onto the preexisting Christ**, they were the cause of the Christological problem of the 4th century. They caused a **shift** in the point of departure of Christological thinking — *away from the historical Christ* and onto the issue of preexistence. They thus **shifted** attention away from the **historical life of Jesus**, putting it into the shadow and promoting instead the Incarnation. They tied Christology to cosmology and could not tie it to soteriology. The Logos teaching is not a ‘higher’ Christology than the customary one. It lags in fact far behind the genuine appreciation of Christ. According to their teaching it is no longer God who reveals Himself in Christ, but the Logos, the inferior God, a God who as God is subordinated to the Highest God (inferiorism or subordinationism).

“In addition, the suppression of economic-trinitarian ideas by metaphysical-pluralistic concepts

of the divine triad (*trias*) can be traced to the Apologists” (Friedrich Loofs, *Leitfaden zum Studium des Dogmengeschichte* [Manual for the Study of the History of Dogma] (1890), part 1 ch. 2, section 18: “Christianity as a Revealed Philosophy. The Greek Apologists,” Niemeyer Verlag, 1951, p. 97).^[2]

This disastrous development is reflected exactly in modern popular evangelism:

James Kennedy says: “Many people today think that the essence of Christianity is Jesus’ teaching, but that is not so... Christianity centers not in the teachings of Jesus, but in the person of Jesus as Incarnate God who came into the world to take upon Himself our guilt and die in our place” (“How I know Jesus is God,” Truths that Transform, 11th Nov., 1989).

The proposition that “Jesus is God” is impossible, since God cannot die. He is immortal (I Tim 6:16). Holy angels cannot die (Luke 20:35). Thus Jesus cannot be Michael the Archangel either. Only a mortal human being can die, and only a mortal human Son of God died for the sins of the world.

Jesus died. We, too, die, but we can be brought back from death to life, as was Jesus.

Oxford Companion to the Bible (Metzger, Coogan, eds.)

“Because the Trinity is such an important part of later Christian doctrine it is striking that the term does not appear in the NT. Likewise the developed concept of 3 coequal partners in the Godhead found in later creedal formulations cannot be clearly detected within the confines of the canon” (Art. “Trinity”).

J.A.T. Robinson of Cambridge: “John is as undeviating a witness as any NT writer to the unitary monotheism of Judaism.”

The Bampton lectures for 1818, said to have been “full of abuse, bigotry and dogmatism, rudeness, misunderstanding and ignorance” were in response to the growing protest by unitarians. The official Church replied in its annual lecture with “The Doctrines of Unitarians Examined and Opposed to the Church of England.” The Bampton Lectures of 1976, 1980 and 1984 promoted, by contrast, a rather severe criticism of plurality in the Godhead. They were unitarian in substance as was the famous series of essays which appeared in *The Myth of God Incarnate* in 1977. The light of the central doctrine of the Bible is perhaps returning.

Part 2

The Virginal Begetting/Conception Vs. Preexistence

(How can you exist before you exist? How can you be before you are?)

Imagine Meeting a Man Whose Father Is God

We often ask friends and acquaintances about their parents. “What did your father or mother do? Is he or she still living?” Sometimes we learn of a distinguished father or mother who has

brought honor to their family. Imagine now that on meeting Jesus (say at the wedding in Cana where he had just transformed 120 gallons of water into wine for celebration) you inquire, “Who was your father? What did he do? Was he well known in town?”

“In fact,” comes the reply, “my father is God.”

Quite a conversation stopper. One can imagine the questioner trying to process that information and assess the one who provided it. “God?” “Yes, my Father was and is God.” Not, of course, that Jesus said “I am God.” What he *did* affirm was that his Father was God. There is a huge difference.

Jesus as *Son* of God — that is what the New Testament documents record over and over again as the facts about Jesus’ family history. His passport would presumably have read rather differently from that of the average citizen. Next of kin? God, the Creator.

The concepts may seem bizarre, but we intend to show that we Christians are to claim a similar parentage, modeled after that of our older and uniquely begotten Brother. Strictly speaking, of course, Jesus could well also have referred to his father — his legal father — as Joseph. The New Testament records do not hesitate to refer to Jesus’ human father. Jesus is known as the son of Joseph.

Very strikingly, only in Mark 6:3, we read “Is not this the carpenter, **the son of Mary**, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.” This reference to Jesus as the **son of Mary** is unique in the New Testament. It was certainly not customary to refer to a man as the son of his mother, rather than of his father. Luke’s and Matthew’s genealogical tables consistently list children as the sons of their father, with an occasional addition of the mother’s name. Luke notes that “When he began his ministry, Jesus himself was about thirty years of age, being, *as was supposed*, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli...” (Luke 3:23).

Have you pondered the stupendous fact that there walked in Palestine a human person of whom it can be stated in all seriousness that he was the Son of *God*; that God was his Father; that his mother conceived him by sheer, unheard-of miracle?

This is the uniqueness of the Christian faith and of Jesus. In two matchlessly simple passages of the New Testament (Matt. 1 and Luke 1) we are presented with an unparalleled historical occurrence — one that is apparently glossed over even by believers. What makes the challenge of Jesus so compelling is that he was the “miracle man” par excellence, the amazing “genius” — the only human being ever to have stepped the earth of whom it may be truthfully claimed and asserted that his father was the God of Heaven and Earth, the Maker of all things.

The miracle of the “begetting” of Jesus by the Father through His operational presence, the holy spirit, deserves careful meditation. Those innocent accounts of the origin of the Son of God have been at the same time the object of much sincere piety and the happy hunting ground of skeptics and critics who dismiss out of hand the notion that a man can be conceived and born without a human father. They have also suffered severely at the hands of speculative Greek theologians who invented a pre-history for Jesus which actually destroys the truth that he *came into existence* — i.e., was begotten supernaturally in history in Israel.

But why all the debate and doubt? The Genesis creation proposes that the One God called into being by spoken word the entire complex universe. Included in that creation was the fashioning of man from the dust of the ground and the animation of that extraordinary creature by the life-imparting breath of God. The first man Adam was from the dust of the ground, the pinnacle of the Genesis creation.

That miracle — the existence of thinking, speaking, human beings — confronts us daily, but we take it almost entirely for granted. We have forgotten about the appearance of the *first* man. We have been misinformed by “scientific” stories about the millions of years that man is supposed to have been on earth and, worse still, we have been told that he developed by accident from the slime. The whole process was so interminably long and uneventful that it ceases to have meaning. We are here simply because man has, more or less, always been here.

But not if we take Scripture seriously. Man according to the Bible is the ultimate masterpiece of the Divine Creative Hand. God saw that all was good. Sometimes watching a breath-taking display of ballet, gymnastics or ice-skating, we marvel at what this phenomenal creature, man, can do! Sometimes when we are exposed to the astonishing capacity of the well-trained human voice we are stopped in our tracks in wonder at what God has made possible. Sometimes, watching film of Auschwitz or visiting the Holocaust Museum we marvel at the sickening cruelty of which this masterpiece of creation is capable when left to his own wickedness.

But what fact of history can measure up to the appearance in Palestine some 2000 years ago of a member of the human race who claimed that his Father was no mortal, but God Himself? That event should get our attention. Something quite extraordinary has occurred. A second Adam, the beginning of a brand new race of human beings, has made his appearance, distinguished by the unique miracle that his begetting — coming into existence — was the direct result of a divine intervention in the human biological chain. No other religion makes that claim. Christianity does. Certainly pagan saviors have arisen in earlier times saying that their mothers bore them without benefit of a human father. But these crude legends about the sexual cohabitation of women and serpents or gods are totally unlike the story of how the Son of God began to exist.

The biblical account and the meaning of the virginal conception/begetting of Jesus has also not escaped the ravages of human imagination by which it has been turned into something which departs from the original story as penned by Matthew and Luke.

By speaking of the so-called *Incarnation* of the Son, church members actually contradict the biblical account of the genesis of the Son of God.

Matthew opens his gospel with an account of “the book of the **genesis**, or origin, or family history of Jesus Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). The alert reader will hear in these words an echo of Genesis 2:4: “This is the **genesis** or origin or family history of the heaven and the earth when they came into existence, on the day when God made the heaven and the earth.”

What Matthew describes is the beginning of a new creation, and the celebrated, promised descendant of David and Abraham is the star of this great new world event. God had announced to David news of the Messiah to come: “I *will be* Father to him and he *will be* Son to Me” (2 Sam. 7:14, quoted of Jesus in Heb. 1:5). In addition, the famous Messianic Psalm 2 had spoken

of a prophetic decree by which the Father could say of the Son who was to come “You are my Son. Today I have begotten you — become your Father” (Ps. 2:7, quoted of the coming into existence of the Son by Paul in Acts 13:33^[3] and Heb. 1:5).

After listing the family tree of Jesus from Abraham onwards through the kings of Judah, Matthew arrives at the climax of human history: “Jacob begat [became the father of] Joseph, the husband of Mary, from who was begotten [i.e., by God]^[4] Jesus, the one whose title is Christ” (Matt. 1:16).

Matthew notes that three groups of 14 names complete the list from Abraham to Jesus. Fourteen is the numerical value of David in Hebrew, marking the whole history as thoroughly in keeping with the great Davidic promise of 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17.

I can imagine Matthew lowering his voice for extra effect when he comes to verse 18. “Now the **genesis**, origin, creation of Jesus Christ was as follows: When his mother was engaged to be married to Joseph, before they came together, she was discovered to be pregnant from holy spirit [divine creative energy, just as the holy spirit had hovered over the waters in Gen. 1 and God had said ‘Let there be light’].” The story continues: “Now Joseph, her husband [i.e., to be, by modern customs], since he was an upright man and did not want to expose her to disgrace, planned to divorce her secretly. As he was thinking about these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and announced: ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Because what has been **generated**, brought into existence [by God] in her is from the holy spirit.’”

Matthew 1:18 in the best Greek manuscripts describes not just the “birth” of Jesus but more precisely the “origin” or creation or generation of Jesus — his coming into existence. There are two words in Greek which are very much alike: “**gennesis**” and “**genesis**.” The difference is only of one letter, double n versus single n. The latter word is in the best manuscripts and this means that we are witnessing here the creation, the **origin**, of the Son of God, by miracle. The parallel with the first book of the Bible, Genesis, is clear.

If we turn to the corroborating account in Luke we have a concise message from Gabriel as to how Mary will bear a Son while as yet unmarried to Joseph. The announcement to Mary begins with the promise of the future restored Kingdom to Mary’s son, in line with the whole thrust of Old Testament prophecy: “Don’t be alarmed, Mary,” Gabriel says, “you have found favor in God’s sight. You are going to conceive in your womb and bear a son and you will call him Jesus. He will be a greatly distinguished person and will be called the Son of the Highest One, and the Lord God will give him the royal throne of his ancestor David, and he will be king over the House of Jacob during the ages, and of his Kingdom there will be no end.” Mary then said to the angel, “How is this going to happen since I do not know any man?” The angel replied: “Holy spirit will come upon you and power from the Highest One will overshadow you and for that reason precisely the one being begotten will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1:30-35).

The detail of this extraordinary visitation merits careful attention. God is the Most High. God is to be the Father of the promised Messiah, descended of course from David through his mother. The child will thus be Davidic royalty and his father will be none other than God Himself. What we are seeing here is a divine procreation (totally unlike the pagan sexual unions promoted by counterfeit mystery religions). The phrase at the end of Gabriel’s brief conversation is

particularly to be noted:

“*For this reason* precisely [5] (*dio kai*) the child will be called [or the child will *be* — that is the sense] the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). For what reason? What is the basis for the Sonship of Jesus? On what foundation does the doctrine of Jesus’ Sonship rest? Precisely because God is about to become his Father, *not because of any mysterious preexistence of the Son*. Simply because he is the new creation by holy spirit effected in history in the womb of a Jewish maiden. This truly is the New Adam, the start of a new type of human being, a model for others as well as their Savior. Adam was also the son of God (Luke 3:38).

The comments of the leading commentary on the birth narratives are highly instructive. Raymond Brown refers to Matthew’s description of the origin of the Son: “God’s creative action in the conception of Jesus (attested negatively by the absence of human fatherhood) **begets Jesus as God’s Son**. Clearly here in this divine Sonship there is no suggestion of an Incarnation whereby a figure who was previously with God takes on flesh.” Then Brown says of *later* Christian theology, “the conception of Jesus is the beginning of an *earthly career*, but *not the begetting of God’s Son*. The virginal conception was *no longer* seen as the begetting of God’s Son but as the Incarnation of God’s Son *and that became orthodox doctrine*” (*The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 141).

We trust that the reader will not miss the enormous implications of this comment. Brown first of all describes what is obvious to every reader of Matthew and Luke that the Son of God was a created person, coming into existence by miracle without a human father. In a dramatic development “later theology” suppressed this sublime story and replaced it by a different one, namely that the Son of God did *not* begin in the womb *but was already in existence prior to his conception*. Later theology thus obscured the information provided for us in the Bible as the explanation for and basis of the doctrine of Jesus as Son of God. The teaching of Gabriel was overridden and replaced by a *new* and different idea of how Jesus was the Son of God. It was not because he was begotten in the womb, but because he had in fact *always been* the Son of God. He had been the Son from eternity and had no beginning. This latter concept became “orthodox,” the so-called right view, and all other views were ruled out of court on pain of heresy. The Bible, in other words, was assaulted.

I do not think that churchgoers have pondered these amazing accounts of the beginning and creation of the Son of God. Do they see the marvel that God wrought when He decided to repeat His activity in creating Adam — the second time producing His own Son, not from the dust, but within the human biological chain and in the family of David?

Many have not sat down to think what a confusing contradiction is forced on Scripture when the “later” theology of an *uncreated Son of God with no beginning was substituted for the historically created Son of God*. It would seem that this “later” Jesus was radically different from the one presented by Gabriel, the one whom Mary recognized as her son and the Son of God. The “later” Jesus was Son of God in eternity, consciously active in Old Testament times and then decided one day to reduce himself to a fetus and pass into the world through Mary — instead of *originating* in and from Mary by divine creation.

The Son of God of these foundational accounts of the faith in Matthew and Luke takes us back behind the very complex speculations of “later theology” to the pristine view of the New Testament community. Their Jesus was veritably a member of the human race. He had no “super-

history” in ages past. His “divinity” was ascribed to and explained by the amazing miracle that God had wrought in history in Mary. “For this reason indeed he will be the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). God was his father. Thus there was no suggestion at all that he was actually God. That would make no sense, since as Son he had been procreated at conception and God cannot come into existence. Jesus, the Son of God, did. God cannot be born. Jesus was begotten and born. Furthermore the Jews knew that there was only One God. All else would amount to polytheism and was to be avoided as a threat to the command against idolatry.

It would appear that a kind of sleight of hand operates when the public is invited to believe in both the virginal conception/begetting/beginning of Jesus and *at the same time* in his Incarnation into an earthly existence, from an endless prehistoric preexistence. Can one really *come into existence* as the Son of God if one is *already* existing as the Son? This would appear to be something close to nonsense, an abuse of language.

It is not without reason that the theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg states: “Sonship cannot at the same time consist in preexistence and still have its origin only in the divine procreation of Jesus in Mary” (*Jesus, God and Man*, p. 143). He further maintains that “virgin birth” stands in irreconcilable contradiction to the Christology of the Incarnation.

Try reading the Bible with the belief that Jesus was a human being whose fundamental superiority to the rest of us lay in his miraculous beginning from Mary. That Jesus presented himself as the head of a new race of men. That is why we, who can boast no such supernatural origin, must nevertheless acquire one by being “born again.” The miracle for us as human beings invited to the new creation happens when we are *born again* by accepting the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus and the Apostles. That Gospel of the Kingdom provides the divine “seed” (Luke 8:11; Matt. 13:19), the essential spark of the new life which will end in immortality. In John’s epistle he not only speaks of this miraculously potent “seed” residing in the believer (1 John 3:9), he speaks of Christians having been “born of God.” He is referring of course to the Christian’s rebirth. But in 1 John 5:18 he draws a parallel between the believer’s rebirth and the begetting of the Messiah, Son of God: “We know that no one who *has been born* from God continues in sin, but the one who *was born* from God preserves him and the evil one cannot touch him.”

With extreme precision the rebirth of the Christian is described as an event of the past with present consequences. The begetting/birth of Jesus is described in the aorist tense pointing to a once and for all event. We have learned when that miraculous coming-into-existence of the Son occurred: in history and in time, celebrating the inauguration of a new race of men and women destined, by divine “seed,” for immortality. In coming to understand Jesus you are becoming acquainted with the One who could say uniquely, “my Father is God.”

God is One and Jesus is not God

There are lots of supporters of **unitary monotheism**.

Tom Harpur on the Trinity (*For Christ’s Sake*, p. 81)

“What is most embarrassing for the Church is the difficulty of proving any of these statements of dogma from the NT documents. You simply cannot find the doctrine of the Trinity [or Binity] set out anywhere in the Bible. St Paul has the highest view of Jesus’ role and person, but nowhere does he call him God. Nor does Jesus himself anywhere explicitly claim to be the Second Person of the Trinity, wholly equal to the heavenly Father. As a pious Jew, he would have been shocked and offended by such an idea. This research has led me to believe that the great majority of regular churchgoers are for all practical purposes Tritheists. That is, they profess to believe in One God, but in reality worship Three. Small wonder Christianity has always had difficulty trying to convert Jews and Muslims. Members of both these faiths have such an abhorrence of anything that runs counter to their monotheism, or faith in the unity of God, that a seemingly polytheistic Gospel has little appeal for them.”

Exegetical Dictionary of the NT:

“One”: **“Early Christianity consciously adopts from Judaism (Deut 6:4) the monotheistic formula, ‘God is one.’... According to Mark 12:29, 32, Jesus explicitly approves the Jewish monotheistic formula.”**

The Jewish People and Jesus Christ, Jacob Jocz, London: SPCK, 1949 (p. 262):

“Room for the Master of Nazareth within the structure of Jewish thought is only possible on the condition of a clear distinction between the Christ of the Christian dogma and Jesus the Jew... The Christian perception of Jesus in terms of the Holy Trinity rests upon a tragic misunderstanding... The rehabilitation of the ‘historic Jesus’ can only be at the expense of the orthodox Son of God.... It is only a vague and diluted Christian theology which imagines it possible to come to terms with Judaism. **In reality there is no understanding between the two faiths:** They possess no common denominator which could form the basis for a ‘bridge theology.’....That Montefiore is well aware of the difficulty can be seen from an earlier remark: ‘The center of the teaching of the historic Jesus is God: the center of the teaching of the Church is he (i.e. Jesus himself). It is this peculiar attitude to Jesus which divides for ever the Church from the Synagogue.’

“The Unity of God: The essence of Judaism is the doctrine of the absolute and **unmodified unity of God.** Prof. Moore’s masterly definition of the Jewish conception of that unity can hardly be surpassed. He calls it **‘the numerically exclusive and uncompromisingly personal monotheism.’** With it Judaism stands or falls. Indeed the absolute unity of the God of Israel together with the Torah, i.e., the revelation of this one and only God, form the heart and essence of Judaism. The rest of Jewish thought and practice is of secondary importance when compared with these two fundamental truths.... This most vital tenet, as conceived by orthodox and liberal Judaism alike, stands thus in direct opposition to the Trinitarian doctrine of the Christian Church” (p. 265).

Professor Hodgson, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford (Seven lectures on *Christian Faith and Practice*), 1951, p. 74:

“Christianity, as I said last week, began as a trinitarian religion with a unitarian theology. It arose within Judaism and the monotheism of Judaism was then, as it still is, unitarian.... Could the monotheism be revised so as to include the new revelation without ceasing to be monotheistic? I

shall now try to show that the upshot of this development was a revision both of the theological idea of monotheism [the unitarian Jewish idea, as he just said] and of the philosophical idea of unity.”

The amazing suggestion that Jesus revised the monotheism of Judaism is flatly contradicted by the New Testament.

Otto Kirn, Ph D. Th D. Professor of Dogmatics in the University of Leipzig.

(1950, *New Schaff Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*)

“The Trinity: the Biblical Doctrine; Early dogmaticians were of the opinion that so essential a doctrine as that of the Trinity could not have been unknown to the men of the OT. However, no modern theologian who clearly distinguishes between the degrees of revelation in the OT and the NT can longer maintain such a view. Only an inaccurate exegesis which overlooks the more immediate grounds of interpretation can see references to the Trinity in the plural form of the divine name **Elohim** and the use of the plural in Gen. 1:26 or such liturgical phrases of the three members of the Aaronic blessing of Num 6:24-26 and the Trisagion of Isa 6:3.”

Pannenberg (*Jesus, God and Man*, p. 32):

“Jesus is what he is only in the context of Israel’s expectation. Without the background of this tradition, Jesus would never have become the object of a Christology. Certainly this connection is also clear in other titles and generally throughout the NT, especially in Jesus’ own message. His message can only be understood within the horizon of Jewish apocalyptic expectations, and **the God whom Jesus called Father was none other than the God of the OT**. This context is concentrated in the most particular way in the title *Christos*... This justifies the formulation of the content of the confession of Jesus at the beginning of this chapter: He is the ‘Christ of God.’”
[What nonsense then to say he IS God]

Murray Harris: *Jesus as God. The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus*, Baker, 1992

“It was not the Triune God of Christian theology who spoke to the forefathers in the prophets...It would be inappropriate for **Elohim [2,570 times] or **Yahweh** [6,800 times] ever to refer to the Trinity in the OT when in the NT theos regularly refers to the Father alone and apparently never to the Trinity” (fn 112, p. 47).**

Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels (“Incarnation”):

“To the men of the NT, God was the God of the OT, the Living God, a Person, loving, energizing, seeking the accomplishment of an everlasting purpose of mercy the satisfaction of his own loving nature.... Perhaps it would be more correct to say that the monotheism of the OT was never abstract, because the God of the OT was never a conception, or a substance (essence), but always a PERSON. Personality has never indeed the bare unity of a monad.”

Murray Harris (*Jesus as God*):

“No attempt has been made in the preceding summary to be exhaustive. But we have seen that

throughout the NT (*o theos* is so often associated with and yet differentiated from *kurios Yesous Christos* that the reader is forced to assume that there must be a hypostatic distinction and an interpersonal relationship between the two. The writers of the New Testament themselves **supply the key** by speaking not only of *o theos* and *Yesous* but also of *Pater* (Father) and *Uios* (Son), of the Son of God and of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father (in the Trinitarian sense), Jesus is the Lord (I Cor 8:6). **When *o theos* is used, we are to assume that the NT writers have *o pater* (the Father) in mind unless the context [twice for certain] makes this sense of *o theos* impossible.**” [Footnote]:

“A related question demands brief treatment. To whom did the NT writers attribute the divine action described in the OT? To answer ‘the Lord God’ is to beg the question for the authors of the NT wrote of OT events in the light of *their trinitarian understanding* of God [**Yet above he just said God never refers to the Trinity!**]. A clear distinction must be drawn between **what the OT text meant to its authors and readers and how it was understood by the early Christians who lived after the advent of the Messiah and the coming of the Spirit.**

“Certainly the person who projects the Trinitarian teaching of the NT back into the OT reads the OT through the spectacles of the dynamic trinitarian monotheism of the NT and is thinking anachronistically. On the other hand it does not seem illegitimate to pose a question such as this:

To whom was the author of Hebrews referring when he said (1:1) ‘At many times and in various ways **GOD spoke** in the past to our forefathers through the prophets’? That it was not the Holy Spirit in an ultimate sense is evident from the fact that neither in the OT **nor in the NT is the Spirit called ‘God’ in so many words.** And, in spite of the fact that the Septuagint equivalent of YHVH, viz. *kurios*, is regularly applied to Jesus in the NT so that it becomes less a title than a proper name, it is not possible that *o theos* in Heb 1:1 denotes Jesus Christ, for the same sentence (in Greek) contains “[The God who spoke]... in these last days has spoken to us in a Son (*en uio*).

“Since the author is emphasizing the continuity of the two phases of divine speech (‘God having spoken, later spoke’), **this reference to a Son shows that *o theos* (God) was understood to be ‘God the Father.’** [No one ever said God the Son.]

“Similarly, the differentiation made between *o theos* as the one who speaks in both eras [throughout the entire Bible] and *uios* (Son) as his final means of speaking shows **that in the author’s mind it was not the Triune God of Christian theology who spoke to the forefathers in the prophets.**

“That is to say, for the author of Hebrews (as for all NT writers, one may suggest) ‘the God of our fathers,’ Yahweh, was no other than ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (compare Acts 2:30 and 2:33; 3:13 and 3:18; 3:25 and 3:26; note also 5:30).

“Such a conclusion is entirely consistent with the regular NT usage of *o theos*. It would be inappropriate for **Elohim [2,570 times] or Yahweh [6,800 times] ever to refer to the Trinity in the OT when in the NT *theos* regularly refers to the Father alone and apparently never to the Trinity**” (fn 112, p. 47).

Footnote 113, p. 48: “In classical Greek *to theion* often signifies divine power or activity or the divine nature considered generically, without reference to one particular god. There

appears to be no NT instance where theos (God) signifies merely *to theion* (= *numen divinum*, as in Xenophon, *Mem* 1:4;18, deity in general, although both Philo (Agric 17) and Josephus (Ant. 14:183; Bell 3:352) use *to theion* of the one true God of Israel's monotheism. In Acts 17:29 (see also the reading of D in Acts 17:27 and the addition to Titus 1:9 in miniscule 460) *to theion* is used of the Deity that is often represented 'by the art and imagination of man.' See further Ch. 13. section 1."

"Theos," Murray says, "applies to Jesus Christ:

Certainly in John 1:1; 20:28;

Very probably in Rom 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:8; II Pet. 1:1

Probably in John 1:18

Possibly in Acts 20:28; Heb 1:9; I John 5:20."

In fact the term "God" for Jesus is **certain** only in John 20:28 and Heb 1:8.

Karl Rahner, leading Roman Catholic scholar:

"We may outline our results as follows: Nowhere in the NT is there to be found a text with 'o theos' (God) which has unquestionably to be referred to the Trinitarian God as a whole existing in three Persons [the God Trinity]. In by far the greater number of texts o theos refers to the Father as a Person of the Trinity... In addition o theos is never used in the NT to speak of the holy spirit. **Fn** Thus for example in the whole OT saving history is ascribed to the God who sends Jesus, thus to the Father (Acts 3:12-26; cp. Heb 1:1). In Acts 4:24, Eph 3:9 and Heb 1:2 **the God** who created all things is clearly characterized as **the Father** in virtue of his distinction from the Son (Servant, Christ). Now if creation and saving history are ascribed to God the Father, there can hardly be a single statement about God (o theos) which is not included therein.

"Where Christ's Person and Nature are to be declared with the greatest theological strictness and precision, he is called **the Son of God**... For these [NT writers] the expression o theos was just as exact and precise as 'Father.'... When in consequence of all this we say that o theos in the language of the NT signifies the Father... all that is meant is that **when the NT thinks of God, it is the concrete individual uninterchangeable Person who comes into its mind**, who is in fact **the Father** and is called 'o theos.' So that inversely, when o theos is being spoken of, it is not the single divine nature that is seen, subsisting in three hypostases, but the concrete **Person** who possesses the divine nature unoriginately and communicates it by **eternal generation** to a Son too and by spiration to the Spirit" (*Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1 Darton Longman and Todd, 1961).

Concluding Comments:

The quotations above are amazing and astonishing admissions from top Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars to the effect that when the Bible says God, it never once means "the Triune God" or "the Biune God." This is a dramatic admission that the Bible writers were unitarians, while the churches which claim the Bible as their authority are not.

At the simplest level it should be sufficient to show one's friends that none of the 4,400

occurrences of the word God in the Bible means “God in three or two Persons.” What does that evidence tell us? That the Bible readers knew nothing of a Triune or Biune God.

Jesus quoted the *Shema* and affirmed it as the most important divine utterance and command.

Jesus spoke of his Father as “the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3), echoing the exclusive claims for the One God found throughout the OT.

Malachi 2:5 had asked “Have we not all one Father: Has not One God created us?”

Paul according to the Amplified New Testament of Gal. 3:20 said “God was [only] one Person — and he was the sole party in giving that promise to Abraham.”

The Roman Catholic translation (NAB) most helpfully renders Psalm 45:6: “Your throne, **o god**, stands forever; your royal scepter is a scepter for justice.” It notes that “the king, in courtly language, is called ‘god.’”

Psalm 110:1, the controlling Christological text of the whole NT (cited 23 times), speaks of One Yahweh addressing “my lord” (the capital is misleading in many translations, but NEB, NAB, RSV, NRSV have lower case correctly). Adoni, my lord, means a non-Deity superior. It never in all of its 195 occurrences refers to God who is the Lord God (Adonai). Jesus is the Lord Messiah (adoni, my lord, and hence in the NT “our lord”). God is still the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 8:4-6 defines the Christian faith in opposition to polytheism. Paul asserts that “there is One God, the Father.” That of course is a plain unitarian statement. He adds that there is “one **Lord Jesus Messiah**.” That statement defines the Son of God as the Lord *Messiah*, not the Lord God. Paul is in complete agreement with his colleague Luke who introduces Jesus as the “Lord Messiah” (Luke 2:11) and reports that Elizabeth rejoices that Mary is “the mother of my Lord” (Luke 1:43) — i.e. the mother, not of God, but of the Lord Messiah, the “my Lord” of Psalm 110:1, which is the key Christological text of the whole NT. The Roman Catholic priest who remarked on TV that God came to Mary and said, “Will you please be My mother?” did not reflect the world of the Bible at all, but the later creeds of the Church. Once Jesus was turned into God, a more suitable and sympathetic mediator was needed and Mary was put in heaven (though she is actually dead) to supply the need.

Finally, the concept that Jesus is God obstructs the marvelous biblical account of what God has done with *man*, the Man Messiah. The Trinitarian idea demotes man, and does not allow God to work through his chosen Man. The remedy for this is the Pauline statement that “there is One God and one mediator between God and man, the Man Messiah Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5).

Appendix

The History of the Struggle over the Meaning of Elohim

Elohim: Is it really plural in meaning? And if it is, why not speak of two or three Gods?

“Polytheism entered the Church camouflaged” -- Loofs

From: *The Concessions of Trinitarians, Being a Selection of Extracts from the Writings of the*

Most Eminent Biblical Critics and Commentators, by John Wilson, James Munroe and Co., Boston and Manchester, England, 1845. This extraordinarily diligent researcher decided to demonstrate that Trinitarians often explain their own Trinitarian (or Binitarian) “proof-texts” in a *unitarian* fashion.

This shows how tenuous the whole argument for plurality in God is.

“Even our enemies themselves being judges” — Moses

“There is scarcely one text alleged to the Trinitarians which is not otherwise expounded by their own writers” — John Locke, *Common-place Book: Lord King’s Life of John Locke*, vol. 2, p. 103.

(John Locke, John Milton and Sir Isaac Newton — the latter wrote much more on theology than on science — were passionately engaged in anti-Trinitarian protest, as is shown by their writings)

“There is this distinction which we may boast of, and a proud distinction it is, since the like to it belongs to no other party that I am aware of, — there is this distinction which attaches to us, that the sense which we put upon the most important passages referring to the points in discussion between us and our Trinitarian brethren, is the very sense given to them by orthodox writers of the highest reputation. Destroy, I would say every professed Unitarian commentary on the Scriptures now in existence, and there will still remain, in the writings of *learned Trinitarians* themselves, those expositions and explanations of Scripture by which our leading [unitarian] principles are maintained and defended” — Thomas Madge, *Discourses on the Union Between God and Christ*, pp. 46, 47. Rector of Norwich, UK, 1825.

But before developing our point about the meaning of the word Elohim as discussed over the centuries, I quote from commentary from our present time.

State of the art evangelical commentary in our day. *Word Bible Commentary on Genesis*, Gordon Wenham:

“**Elohim**: The first subject of Genesis and the Bible is God. The word is the second most frequent noun in the OT. It is derived from the common semitic word for God, *il*. As here, Hebrew generally prefers the plural form of the noun, which except when it means ‘gods,’ i.e., heathen deities, is **construed with the singular verb** [interesting that when it *is* taken as a plural **it refers to pagan gods!**]. Though it has often been taken as a plural of majesty or power, it is doubtful whether this is relevant to the interpretation of Elohim. It is simply the ordinary word for God, plural in form and singular in meaning. Strictly speaking Elohim is an appellative, that is, it can be used of any deity. It is not a personal name, such as Yahweh, El Shaddai, Marduk or Chemosh. Nevertheless as with the English word God it often acts almost as a proper name...Elohim implies that God is the sovereign Creator of the whole universe, not just Israel’s personal God.”

The Hebrew word **Panim** is also plural in form but it means face, not faces. God did not meet Moses “faces to faces” but “face to face.” So much for the idea that a plural ending always requires a plural meaning. Joseph is called *the lords* of the land. Was he plural?

On Gen. 1:26, “let us make...” Word Bible Commentary)

“I do not find the difficulties raised against the view that God was consulting the angels compelling.... When angels do appear in the OT they are frequently described as ‘men’ (Gen. 18:2). And the use of the singular verb ‘created’ in v. 27 does in fact suggest that **God worked alone** in the creation of mankind [cp. Isa. 44:24]. ‘Let us make man’ could therefore be regarded as a divine announcement to the heavenly courts, drawing the angelic host’s attention to the master stroke of creation, man. As Job 38:4 puts it, ‘When I laid the foundation of the earth... all the sons of God shouted for joy’ (cp. Luke 2:13, 14).”

“From the Epistle of Barnabus and Justin Martyr [150 AD] who saw the plural as a reference to Christ Christians have traditionally seen this verse as adumbrating the Trinity [or Binity]. It is now universally admitted that this was not what the plural meant to the original author.”

He adds: *“Certainly the NT sees Christ as active in the creation with the Father and this provided the foundation for the early church to develop a trinitarian [in fact, first an Arian] interpretation. But such insights were certainly beyond the horizon of the editor of Genesis.”*

For myself, I question only this last statement, believing that the Son came into existence as per Matt. 1:20, II Sam. 7:14-16; Luke 1:35, Acts 13:33, I Peter 1:20, I John 5:18 (not KJV) and that God was unaccompanied at creation (Isa. 44:24), and that God, not Jesus, rested after the creative work was complete (Heb. 4:4). God, not Jesus “made them male and female.”

Jesus did not say “In the beginning *I* made them male and female,” but “in the beginning *God* made them...” (Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6). God, not the Son, rested after the work of creation (Heb. 4:4) and God did not speak through a Son until the NT period (Heb 1:1-2). If there was indeed a Son of God in OT times, God did not speak through him. The better solution to the puzzle is that in Old Testament times God was preparing, through promise and prediction, that He was going to beget His Son in Israel.

Isaiah 44:24 presents God as solo at the creation of the universe — a privilege which I think should not be compromised in any way.

A steady stream of commentators has resisted the idea of reading Jesus, as a second God, into the Old Testament. John Wilson assembled a wide range of authorities from the 15th century onwards:

Gen. 1:1: “In the Beginning God...”

“Calvin properly observes that to explain the word *bereshit*, in the beginning, of Christ is exceedingly frivolous” (Rivet, *Op. Theol*, vol. 1, p. 3, Professor of Theology at Leyden, 1572).

“God created...”

Roman Catholic Commentators:

“The second principal authority which the Master of Sentences [Peter Lombard of the 12th century] adduces for the plurality of persons in the Godhead is Gen. 1:1, ‘In the beginning God created,’ where in the original the noun **Elohim** is put in the plural, and the verb in the singular; the former signifying a plurality of subsistencies; and the latter [the singular verb] meaning a unity of nature. But this cannot be maintained, for the plural is here used for the singular... It is evident that the noun is to be taken *improprie*, as otherwise it would indicate many gods as many men. Those err egregiously who would prove a plurality of divine persons from such passages. For the change of number does not arise from any mystery, but from **an idiom**. Such changes are made from the usage of the Hebrew language” (Alphonsus Tostat, *tom.*, 12, *De Sanctissima Trinitate, Opera Omnia*, pub. 1613, 13 Vols.) Tostat (1414-1454) was Bishop of Avila in Spain.

“With the exception of Peter of Lombardy and Paul of Burgos, there has not been, amongst the Greek, Latin and Hebrew writers, one commentator worthy of imitation who has explained the word **Elohim** of the Trinity” (Sixtus Senensis, *Bib Sanct.* lib. 5, note 1. A Dominican who died in 1569).

“A certain catholic and learned writer is of the opinion that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are Gods because in the OT the name of the Almighty is always expressed in the plural number, as **Elohim**, which he thinks ought to be rendered *Gods*. The doctrine itself I do not oppose, but convinced by other arguments, I acknowledge *this* argument to be not solid” (Turrien, *Clem Constit.* 3, 17. *apud Sandium*). Sandium was a Polish Arian who wrote on ecclesiastical history, 1669.

“It is not on account of the mystery of divine persons, but because the signification of **Elohim** is singular that Moses joins this noun with the verb *created* in the singular number” (Cardinal Cajetan (1469-1534), Dominican Cardinal. A reformer, very modern, who reasoned with Luther and opposed Henry VIII’s divorce).

“To prove the doctrine of the Trinity many allege that Scripture joins the plural name of God with a singular verb — *bara Elohim*, Gods created... But I do not think that the argument is at all solid, since according to the usage of Scripture, the names of illustrious persons are put in the plural number, though the verbs retain their singular form. This is a usage which we Italians partly imitate when in addressing any eminent individual we say not *thou*, but *you*. Lest this however should be thought to savor of Rabbinism, to which I am greatly opposed, I shall adduce for my opinion the reason by which I have been convinced:

1) In Scripture the same phraseology is adopted in speaking of men or of false deities, as Exod. 20:3: ‘You shall not have strange gods.’ Gen. 29:9: ‘He put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his *lords* (*adonay*).’ Also Exod. 21:4.

2) If such words have a plural *significance* it would be proper to say that there are many true Gods; for who could blame us if we followed the Scriptures in this matter? And I ask, why should it be allowable in Hebrew to call the divine persons **Gods**, but not in Latin? (*deos*). If you reply that the Name of God in the OT is put in the plural number only when joined with a singular verb, I answer that this is not true, for we read in II Sam. 7:23, ‘what nation is there upon earth as Thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem?’ In Hebrew ‘*the Gods* went.’ And in

other passages you will find similar examples. Why is it lawful in Hebrew to say ‘**the Gods went**’ and not also in Latin? Certainly for no other reason than this: that the Hebrews were accustomed to employ a plural noun with a singular signification. Whereas the writers in the Latin tongue have no such usage.

3) Neither Jerome nor the translators of the Septuagint version ever rendered the word *Elohim* in the plural number [when applied to the Divine Being] which proves that in these passages such nouns **have not a plural but a singular signification**.

4) If this Hebrew word **Elohim** has a plural meaning wherever it is found in the plural number there would be a most evident and very common contradiction in the language of the Bible. For we often read that there is only One God, and yet as frequently that there are gods. But it is incredible that the Deity should by these obvious contradictions harass His people and afford an occasion of blasphemy to their adversaries” (Cardinal Bellarmine, *Disputatio de Contraversia: De Christo*, ch. 6, book 2). Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) was a theologian and controversialist, Jesuit professor of theology known for his fine scholarship. He produced a revised edition of the Vulgate. One of the saintliest figures in the counter-Reformation. Tried to limit Papal authority. He was made a “Doctor of the Church,” 1931.

“Cajetan was accused of impiety in denying that the conjunction of the plural noun Elohim with the singular verb *bara* (he created) denoted the mystery of the Trinity. But if this is a crime it is certainly not peculiar to Cajetan, but common to other learned and more ancient men, as Tostat, who wrote a hundred years before him. This discrepancy between *Elohim* of the plural number and *bara* of the singular does not contain any mystery but is **an idiom of the Hebrew language** in which there are many discrepancies of the same kind. Besides, if Moses by this mode of speech had wished to indicate the mystery of the Trinity, he certainly wrote with great impropriety. For if the divine persons could be called **Gods** it might be said that there are many or three Gods — a doctrine which is condemned both in Sacred Scripture and in the Athanasian creed” (abridged from Periera, a Spanish Jesuit, 1535-1610, *Opera Theologica*).

“It is much more probable that no mystery is implied in this word, for according to the usage of the Hebrew language, the plural number is here used for the singular. As Aben Ezra says in his commentary on the first chapter of Genesis it is usual with inferiors to employ the plural as a mark of honour in conversing with their superiors or in discoursing of them. Thus in speaking of an individual they say *baalim*, owners, and *adonim*, lords or masters. For example in Gen. 24:9; 29:2; 40:1 and other places often” (Petavius, *Theol. Dogm.*, tome 2, p. 139; *De Trinitate*, book 2, ch. 7, sec. 3. Jesuit Professor of Theology, 1583-1682).

“Instead of ‘God created’ it is, according to the original, literally ‘*the Gods created*.’ From this some have derived an argument for the Trinity of persons in the unity of the divine Essence. But these proofs do not appear very solid. Such anomalous expressions are found in the Hebrew, as in all other languages, and in passages where there does not seem to be any mystery. Some plural nouns, without changing the sense are construed sometimes with a plural, sometimes with a singular verb — as *adonim*, lords; *panim*, faces; see Isaiah 19:4; Gen. 9:23, etc.” (Calmet, French Benedictine monk, 1672-1757, Commentary on OT and NT and Dictionary of the Holy Bible).

“It is truly strange that such a notion [that Elohim denotes a plurality of persons] should ever have been entertained. And indeed it is only a modern notion, of the same age as

scholastic [Roman Catholic] theology. The Christian Fathers of the church, who were eager enough to discover in the OT proofs of the Trinity never dreamed of appealing to the word Elohim.

“The plural number is no proof of the Trinity of persons and this is, indeed, allowed by the best commentators. Its meaning was generally restricted to the One God, by putting the verb or adjective which goes with it in the singular number. Every language has some such peculiarities. The Greeks, even the polite Athenians, could write: *Zoa trechee*, the animals *runs*; through a cloud the bodies *appears* larger. The correct and elegant Plato could say ‘there is some persons...’ just as the French do not scruple to say, ‘there is some men, there is some cases’; nor we: It *was* the French who *were* the aggressors. Strictly speaking all these phrases are real solecisms. And so is the word *means* with a singular verb or adjective: ‘one means of doing this...’” (abridged from Dr. Geddes, *Critical Remarks*, p. 8. Roman Catholic, LL D. Clergyman in Banffshire, 1737-1802. Translation of the Bible with explanatory notes. Critical remarks on the OT).

From Protestant Commentators

“Moses uses Elohim, a noun of the plural number, from which it is used to infer that there are three persons in the Godhead. This proof, however, of so important a doctrine appears to me by no means solid. And therefore I will not insist on the word but rather warn my readers against violent interpretations of this kind. To me it is sufficient that the plural number signifies the powers of Deity, which he exerted in creating the world” (John Calvin, 1509-1564).

“From the words ‘God created’ our commentators in general deduce the mystery of the most Holy Trinity: the noun, as they conceive, denoting the Trinity of persons and the verb the unity of Essence — Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. The reason assigned for this inference is that the expression in the original signifies not ‘Gods, they created,’ but ‘Gods *He* created.’ The Hebrews however attribute this phraseology to an **idiom of their language**. For the plural words **Elohim** and Baalim (masters) are used of men and lords, in relation to *individuals*, as *adonim kasha* = lords (plural) oppressive (singular), Isa 19:4 [“a harsh lord”], and elsewhere. I am loath indeed to countenance the Jews, unless when they have truth manifestly on their side. But from other passages of Scripture the doctrine of the Trinity can be more clearly and expressly established. And we must contend against our adversaries with stronger weapons than this [argument from Elohim], **if we would not, by ignorance of their language, expose ourselves to their ridicule**. I agree with the Jews in referring the usage under notice to a **Hebrew idiom**, but conceive that the plural noun is ascribed to God, chiefly in order to express the fullness of His excellencies, by which He diffuses Himself throughout the universe and exerts His majesty and power which are immense and inexhaustible” (John Mercer, Professor of Hebrew, Royal College, Paris, d. 1572).

“The argument taken from the plural noun *Elohim* joined to the singular verb *bara* is exceedingly poor. Since by the usage of their language the Hebrews in designating honorable persons are elsewhere accustomed to employ the plural number for the singular. And this is not surely for denoting some divine mystery, but merely on account of dignity and aggrandizement” (Lambert Daneau, *Opusc. Theol*, p.2027. French Calvinist and Professor of Theology at Leyden, 1530-1596).

“In ‘Elohim created’ it is thought that a mystery is concealed and that a plurality of persons is implied. For what reason? Because a plural noun is construed with a singular verb [cp. news is good: the sheep are good, the sheep is good]. This is partly true and partly false as to the sense. For when **Elohim** is spoken of one [person], its significance is singular, being used of the **one God** everywhere and of an **individual** angel, calf, idol and man [and thus of the individual One God, Elohim]. And our opinion is demonstrated by other arguments. Both Jerome and Procopius call it a noun of the common number,^[6] because it is used of one God and of a plurality. But if this true, and of this there cannot be any doubt, the argument drawn from the number falls to the ground; for when employed of an individual, what child would say that this noun has ever a plural sense? [and JHVH is an individual!] Who would affirm that there are various cities of the names of Athenoe, Theboe, Salonoe, because these are each spoken of in the plural number? Who would deny that there is one supreme heaven, which the apostle terms the third and David the heaven of the heavens, because in Hebrew it is called *shamayim* in the dual form, or as preferred by Jerome in the plural? Who would infer that there are many *darknesses* because in Latin the corresponding word is not employed in the singular number? (*tenebrae*). There is equally a mystery — but which no one recognizes — in the plural *baalim* (lords). This word is sometimes used of **one lord** and having a singular sense; as well as in **adonim** (lords) when said of the One God. Because I have written that the noun **Elohim** does not from its termination signify the Trinity, I am accused of being a Unitarian Arian, when my adversaries should rather be called Sabellians (Modalists) since they make the holy spirit the spirit of himself and say that Christ was self-begotten and what is very absurd constitute **a plurality in individual persons**. For though they do not say so expressly, yet all of this necessarily results from their opinion. So true it is that ‘when fools fly from one fault they run into the contrary.’ And when unlearned men avoid errors they fall into others” [!] (John Drusius, Professor of Hebrew at Franeker, 1550-1616. *Commentaries on Scripture*).

“The weakness of the argument constructed by **Peter of Lombardy** has been acutely observed and clearly set forth by Tostat, Cajetan, Bellarmine, Sixtus Senessius, Calvin, Mercer, Pareus, Drusius and De Muys who in an appendix to Bellarmine’s Grammar produce many arguments to prove that nothing solid can be concluded from the plural form of **Elohim**” (abridged from Sixtinus Amama, *Anti-barb. Bib. Bk 2*, pp 174, 175. A disciple of Drusius (above). Professor of Hebrew at Franeker, d. 1629).

“When the word Elohim is used with verbs in the singular number, the construction is elliptical representing *elohe elohim*, God of gods; as Behemot is put for *Behemat Behemot*, fera, ferorum or the most distinguished of wild beasts. And *Hochmot* is put for *Hochmat Hochmot*, the most excellent of instructions” (Hugo Grotius: Explanation of Exod 20:1, annexed to his *Notes on the Gospels*. Dutch Arminian, 1538-1645. *Annotations on the NT*).

“The difference between *Elohim* of the plural number and *bara* of the singular does not contain a mystery but is an **idiom of the Hebrew language** as in Num. 32:25: and the Sons of Gad, (he) said. If Moses had joined a plural noun with singular verb to denote plurality of persons and unity of essence then when in Gen. 20:13 he speaks of God and connects the plural noun Elohim with a plural verb he would signify not only a plurality of divine persons but also a plurality of Essences (divine nature)” (Andrew Rivet, D.D. *Op*, Col. 1, p. 6. Professor of Theology at Leyden, 1572-1651).

“The argument sole and naked drawn from the word Elohim does not seem sufficiently valid to convince the perversity of the Jews and the determined enemies of the Holy Trinity” (Lewis Cappel, *Crit. Sac.*, p. 690. French Protestant, Professor of Hebrew at Saumur, d. 1658. *Commentary on OT*).

“According to the usage of the Hebrew tongue Elohim is almost always put in the plural of majesty to indicate supreme majesty and glory” (Bethner, *Lyra Proph.* On Ps. 3, no. 137).

“In the Hebrew, the word for God is **Elohim**, of the plural number, which signifies strong, potent, mighty. And for ‘he created’ the Hebrew word is *bara* of the singular number: whence some learned and pious expositors have deduced the doctrine of the Trinity of persons in the Unity of the divine essence. Others, among whom are divines, who are likewise learned and religious conceive the words will not warrant any such deduction. The proof of the Trinity from this place is denied by them because first, the phrase joining words of different numbers is a **Hebraism**. Secondly the words, though indefinitely they may import a plurality, do not precisely and determinately note or design a Trinity. Thirdly, the word Elohim with a verb of the singular number is ascribed to strange gods. Exod 20:3. Fourthly, the word Elohim is used sometimes of a particular person of the Trinity as of the Holy Ghost, v. 2 of this chapter and Ps. 45:6 it is used of the Son. [This is true, but of course it does not mean that the Son was part of an eternal God-Family, AB]. And yet there is only One Son, and one Holy Ghost. Fifthly, those ancient Fathers who were most skilful in the Hebrew tongue make no mysterious exposition of the words *bara Elohim*. For these reasons, this place is no good proof of the Trinity against the Anti-Trinitarians especially if it be taken alone or set in the forefront of any conflict with them...” (abridged from Ley. *Assembly’s Annotations*. Subdean of Chester, *Annotations on the Pentateuch*).

“The word Elohim, though in its declension it is plural number, yet the sense of the word is singular. It is sometimes used to signify the Godhead [If he means the Trinity, this is not right, AB], sometimes applied to each of the persons singly, and so no argument can be based on it” (Dr. Goodwin. *Works*, Vol. 2, *Of the Knowledge of God the Father*, p. 5. Member of the Assembly of Divines, 1600-1679).

“Some conclude that the former word **Elohim** imports a plurality of persons and the latter a Unity of Essence. But others deny that any such peculiar meaning ought or can be gathered from that which is indeed no more than **an idiom and propriety of the Hebrew language**. So that Elohim applied to others besides God is often joined with a singular number” (Dr. South, D.D. *Sermons*, Vol. 4, p. 298. Prebendary of Westminster, 1633-1716, *Considerations Concerning the Trinity*).

“The argument taken from the plural noun Elohim joined either to a singular or plural verb does not very strongly aid the orthodox cause, but exposes it to the derision of the infidels” (abridged from F. Spannheim, *Op.*, Tome 3, p. 1209).

“We do not believe that any argument can be deduced from the plural termination of the noun **Elohim** for a plurality of persons in the Essence of the Godhead. This doctrine requires to be supported by clear passages taken especially from the New Testament. It is **an idiom of the Hebrew language** that nouns denoting dominion, even when the subject relates only to an individual are put in the plural number to signify excellence or a plurality of distinguished qualities. Thus in Genesis 24:9, *adonim* is employed respecting Abraham. In Exodus 22:11 Baal

is in its plural form and means one lord or owner; and in Ps. 45: 6, 7 Elohim is used both of God the Father and of Solomon as a type of Christ [showing that Elohim is a single individual!]. The word is sometimes used of an angel (Gen. 32: 28, 30; Hosea 12:3; Exod 3:4; Jud. 13:22), indeed of one man (Exod. 4:16; 7:1) and is construed sometimes with a verb in the singular number and sometimes in the plural” (Philip Limborch, *Theol Christ*, Bk 1, ch. 2, sec 11, Professor of Theology at Amsterdam, 1633-1712. Commentaries).

“**Elohim** has a plural ending but very often and always when the One Supreme God is spoken of, a singular signification. Accordingly we sometimes find it joined to a verb, adjective or pronoun in the singular number on account of its singular signification and sometimes to one in the plural number on account of its plural termination. **No mystery lies in this.** And they who infer from this both the unity of God and a plurality of persons in the Godhead not only show themselves to be void of true critical skill, but by producing and urging such weak and frivolous arguments in its defence do a manifest injury to the cause which they are so zealous to support and establish” (Abraham Dawson, Rector of Ringfield, Suffolk. *A New Translation of the First Five Chapters of Genesis*, 1763).

“**Luther** had exclaimed with great vehemence against both Jews and Anti-Trinitarians for not admitting that in these words in the first verse of Genesis God created, *bara Elohim*, there is contained a proof of the Trinity because the noun signifying God in the Hebrew has a plural form though joined to a verb in the singular. **John Calvin**, on the contrary, refutes this argument or quibble rather, at some length and adds judiciously, speaking of this expression: ‘Readers are warned to beware of violent language of this sort’” (Dr. George Campbell, D.D. FRS, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, p. 489. Translator of the Four Gospels, 1719-1796).

“The plural form is customarily used in Hebrew to indicate great and distinguished individuals, and is therefore commonly termed *the plural of majesty*. Thus *shamayim* means great height, that is heaven. *Kodshim* means most holy, Hosea 11:12; Prov 9:10; *Adonai*, the highest Lord, Gen. 43:30. By reason of their termination such plurals are sometimes treated *as* plurals, Gen. 20:13. But they are generally construed with words in the singular number on account of their signification” (abridged from Christian Friedrich Schulz, Professor of Theology and Oriental Languages at Giessen, 1783).

“**Elohim** is the plural of the word **Eloah** (God). It is generally construed by writers of the OT as a singular when used of the One True God. By a **peculiarity of the Hebrew language** the plural whether masculine or feminine is employed of ONE thing which is great and excellent in its kind, for example *yamim*, a sea; *adonim*, a lord” (E.F.C. Rosenmuller, Professor of Arabic, Leipzig, d. 1836).

“The original word for God is a very remarkable word occurring for the most part in the plural and yet usually connected as in Gen. 1:1 with a verb in the singular. The evidence however, drawn by some from this fact in proof of the Trinity, is not in itself conclusive, because a **similar idiom** in Hebrew in respect to words denoting ‘rank, authority, eminence, majesty,’ is by no means uncommon (see Exod. 21:4; Isa. 19:4; Mal. 1:6; Ps. 58:11). The use of the plural in such cases seems to be merely for the purpose of giving to the word greater fullness, emphasis, and intensity of meaning” (Professor George Bush, Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages, NY City University. *Notes on Genesis*, 1838).

Extracts from Hebrew Grammarians and Lexicographers, Protestant and Roman Catholic

“There is a special situation when plural nouns of dominion are joined to a singular verb or pronoun to express the greatest majesty or as the Hebrews say to indicate a plurality of virtues and powers in the person bearing rule. As in Gen. 1:1, Exod. 21:4, 8; Josh. 24:19; Mal. 1:6” (Buxtorf, sen. *Thes. Gram Heb.* de Synt Verb, bk. 2, ch. 10, Professor of Hebrew, 1564-1629).

“In agreeing with Calvin, Mercer, Pareus, Drusius, Bellarmine and others that the Hebrew plural Elohim does not prove a plurality or a Trinity of persons in the divine essence, we are convinced particularly by the following reasons. First, because the plural number by itself signifies not Trinity but plurality. Secondly, because when used of God it does not denote the three persons, but sometimes only one, as the Father: ‘God your God has anointed you above your fellows’ (Ps. 45:7) or the Son: ‘Your throne, O Elohim, is for ever and ever,’ v.6. ‘I will save them by the Lord their Elohim,’ Hos 1:7. Sometimes the Father and the holy spirit: ‘And the spirit of Elohim moved upon the face of the waters’ (Gen. 1:2). But surely if the word Elohim signified the Trinity, it could not be orthodoxly said that the Father is Elohim, the Son is Elohim, and the Holy Spirit is Elohim. Thirdly, Because the same noun in the plural number is used also of other individuals, in which there is neither trinity nor plurality. Thus Elohim is used of **one calf** (Exod. 32:31; cp. Neh. 9:18); of Moses (Exod 4:16 and 7:1), of an angel (Jud. 13:22); the word is applied even to idols individually, i.e., to Dagon (Jud. 16:23); to Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians; to Chemosh, the God of the Moabites, and to Milchom, the god of the Ammonites (I Kings 11:33). Does the plural noun in these instances denote either a trinity or plurality? It is a **peculiarity in the Hebrew language** that nouns of dominion should be used sometimes in the singular number and sometimes in the plural with a singular signification and hence by reason rather of *the sense* than of the grammatical construction these plural nouns are joined to a verb in the singular number. According to some writers this is done to indicate the highest majesty and honour; and according to others the plurality of powers and dominions, or the multitude and variety of operations and influences flowing, as it were, from the inexhaustible fullness of a fountain” (abridged from Buxtorf, jun. *Dissert Philologico-Theol, Dei Heb*, sec. 42, Professor of Hebrew at Basl, d. 1664).

“This singular verb *bara* is in Gen. 1:1 joined to a noun of plural number. The plural nouns denoting dominion as *baalim*, *elohim*, *adonai* are connected with a verb in the singular number and ‘his owner(s) shall be put (sing.) to death’ (Exod 21:29), ‘and if his masters *has* given...’ (v. 4). Hence it is asked whether from this and similar constructions a plurality of persons in the divine essence can be proved. In answer to the question see the negative opinion confirmed by many arguments in Philo” (*Heb. Dissert*, 32. Leusden, *Clavis Hebraica*, p. 2, Professor of Hebrew at Utrecht, *Keys to the Hebrew of the OT*, 1624-1669).

“It is worthy of observation that many nouns really plural are yet to be taken singularly and joined to adjectives, pronouns and persons of verbs in the singular number, as *elohim*, *adonim*, *baalim*, *behemoth*, *tehomot*, *chochmot*, etc. See Gen. 1:1; Josh. 24:19; II Kings 19:4; Exod.21:29; Job 12:7; Prov. 9:1; Ps. 78: 15; Jer. 29:26. Grammarians say that this is done in order to denote magnitude and excellence, as in Ps. 22:3; 43:5; Ezek. 28:10; Lam 3:22. Though Elohim has a plural termination and is sometimes really plural it commonly has a singular signification” (abridged from Francis Masclef. *Gram Heb.*, Vol. 1, pp. 289-90, 391, Canon of Amiens, 1662-1728).

“Nouns of dominion *eloah*, *baal* and *adon* are frequently used in the plural number instead of the singular to express the dignity of the person who rules or from the usage of the holy language, as in Gen. 1:1; 24:9; 40:1; 42:30; Exod. 21:4, 6, 8, 29; Isa. 1:3; Josh. 24:19 and many other passages” (Peter Guarin, *Gram Heb*, Vol. 1, p.477, can 3. French Benedictine, Grammar of Hebrew and Chaldee, 1678-1729).

“Plural nouns which have the signification of the singular number are mostly construed as if they were singular as *bara Elohim*, God created. Thus also Hosea 11:12; Isa. 19:4; Exod. 21:29. Ezek. 29:3; Micah 1:9” (Dr. James Robertson, D.D. *Gram Heb*, p. 309, Professor of Oriental Languages in the University of Edinburgh, 1783).

“I consider Elohim which is generally construed with verbs and adjectives in the singular number to be plurals of majesty, and deny that it can at all refer to the mystery of the Trinity. If this word signified the Holy Trinity it would imply that the doctrine was by the constant use of the language far better known under the OT than it is under the New” (abridged from Dr. John David Michaelis. *Sup. ad Lex. Heb*, p. 8, Professor of Philosophy at Gottingen, 1717-1791).

“The plural number is used of things singular, which are great and distinguished; as *yamim* is equivalent to a great sea, Ps 46:2; *Tanim* is said of a large dragon, Ezek 29:3; *adonim*, lords, for a great and powerful lord; *elohim*, gods, for a god eminently to be worshipped. *Kodshim*, holy ones, for the most holy God. *Behemot*, of a huge beast. *Naharot*, rivers, for a great river” (Schroeder. *Inst ad Fund Ling Heb*. sec. 7, reg. 100, note 1, p. 30, Professor of Greek and Oriental Languages at Grongen, 1721-1798).

“The plural number is used of things singular which are great and distinguished; as *yamim* is equivalent to great sea...*Elohim*, gods, of the Supremely Adorable One; *Shaddai*, plural form [perhaps intensive affirmative, AB], of the greatest strength. *Adonim*, lords, of a mighty lord, Gen. 40:1; 42:30. But because every servant gave this title by way of honor to his master, the plural (*adonim*) was at length employed of any lord or possessor, Exod. 21:4, 6, 8; Mal. 1:6; I Kings 16:24; and so also it happens with respect to the word *baal*, an owner, Exod. 21:29, 34, 36; 22:11, 14, 15. Since there occur so many examples of the plural of greatness, that is, of nouns indicating an individual thing that is great, it is not safe enough to consider the plural word *Elohim* as denoting a multitude or as a proof of a plurality in God” (Storr. *Observ. ad Analog et Syntax*. Heb. pp. 97-99, Professor of Divinity, University of Tübingen, 1746-1805).

“The agreement between *bara* (sing.) and *Elohim* (plur.) is logical not formal” (Professor Samuel Lee. *Gram of Heb. Lang*. p. 278, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge. *Grammar of the Hebrew Language*, 1832).

“Some nouns in English as news, mathematics, ethics are construed as singular” (R. Johnson, *Grammar of the English Language*).

“Enough has been said to show that a great majority of the most learned authors in the ‘orthodox’ body who have treated of the subject acknowledge that the argument drawn from the plural forms of Hebrew nouns applied to Deity are totally invalid, in support either of a Trinity or any plurality of Persons in the Godhead. To deduce a plurality in God from a **Hebrew idiom** is impossible. The argument for plurality in God seems never to have been thought of before the time of Peter Lombard, a puerile writer who lived in the twelfth century” — John Wilson,

concluding remarks

Genesis 1:26, from Wilson

“In citing verses from the OT nothing will be proved in favor of the Trinity; for that plurality may be understood in a different manner, namely, that in the creation of man, God addressed the angels. God, who is One, is here represented as speaking to the angels in council, or as deliberating with them...” (Tostat. *De Sanctissima Trinitate*, pp. 3, 6, 1414-1454).

“With how much confidence did Augustine treat of these words, ‘let us make man,’ as an assertion of the Trinity, since this doctrine cannot be proved from the passage” (abridged from **Luther**, *Epist ad Dangersheim*; apud Sandium, p. 83).

“It is the **custom of the Hebrews** to speak of God as King. In important matters sovereigns are guided by the advice of their principal subjects, I Kings 12:6; II Chron. 10:9. So God is represented in I Kings 22:19, 20” (Grotius, Dutch Arminian, *Annotations on OT and NT*, 1583-1645).

“Nor were those who were accounted orthodox altogether exempt from the same fault of presumptuous speculation. ‘Who,’ says Chrysostum, ‘was he to whom God said, “Let us make man,” but he, the Son of God?’ And Epiphanius on the same passage says ‘This is the language of God to his Word.’ Each of these writers it may be observed in representing God under that title as addressing Himself to the Son as a distinct being, previously to the birth of Jesus, approaches very closely to the Arian tritheism” “Archbishop Richard Whately, D.D., *Elements of Logic*, pp. 375, 6, 1836”.

“The language employed is not however in itself any more decisive as an argument in favour of the doctrine of the Trinity than the use of the plural term Elohim in verse 1, on which we have already remarked. Compare Job 18:2, 3; II Sam. 24:14” (Professor George Bush, Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages, 1838).

The above since the 1400s should lay to rest any doubts about the meaning of the Hebrew word for God. It is remarkable that grammarians and other expert commentators have for centuries protested the imposition of plurality of meaning on the word Elohim. But this is what some in both Protestant and Catholic circles did. Herbert Armstrong apparently was unaware of the objections to his fundamental concept of God as “two Gods in the God-family.” But is this not to build on a very false foundation?

[1] “Trinity and Incarnation: In search of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Ex Auditu* (7), 1991.

[2] The translation is mine, and further translation by leading writers follows later in the course of these notes.

[3] Acts 13:33 refers to **the beginning of the Son** and v. 34 by contrast describes the *resurrection* of the Messiah. The KJV is misleading here since it adds to the Greek the word “again” in verse 33. But it is verse 34, in contrast to verse 33, which speaks of the resurrection from the dead.

[4] Known to commentators as the divine passive, i.e., it was God who begat Jesus.

[5] Not as in the KJV, “for this reason *also...*” as if there might be TWO reasons for his being Son!

[6] But not singular and plural *at the same time!* And not a collective noun.