

John 20:28

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. (*KJV*)

1. Jesus never referred to himself as “God” in the absolute sense, so what precedent then did Thomas have for calling Jesus “my God?” The Greek language uses the word *theos*, (“God” or “god”) with a broader meaning than is customary today. In the Greek language and in the culture of the day, “GOD” (all early manuscripts of the Bible were written in all capital letters) was a descriptive title applied to a range of authorities, including the Roman governor (Acts 12:22), and even the Devil (2 Cor. 4:4). It was used of someone with divine authority. It was not limited to its absolute sense as a personal name for the supreme Deity as we use it today.

2. Given the language of the time, and given that Jesus did represent the Father and have divine authority, the expression used by Thomas is certainly understandable. On the other hand, to make Thomas say that Jesus was “God,” and thus 1/3 of a triune God, seems incredible. In *Concessions of Trinitarians*, Michaelis, a Trinitarian, writes:

I do not affirm that Thomas passed all at once from the extreme of doubt to the highest degree of faith, *and acknowledged Christ to be the true God*. This appears to me too much for the then existing knowledge of the disciples; and we have no intimation that they recognized the divine nature of Christ before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I am therefore inclined to understand this expression, which broke out in the height of his astonishment, in a figurative sense, denoting only “whom I shall ever reverence in the highest degree”...Or a person raised from the dead might be regarded as a divinity; for the word *God* is not always used in the strict doctrinal sense” [Michaelis is quoted by Dana, ref. below].

Remember that it was common at that time to call the God’s representatives “God,” and the Old Testament contains quite a few examples. When Jacob wrestled with “God,” it is clear that he was actually wrestling with an angel (Hosea 12:4—For more on that, see the note on Genesis 16:7-13).

3. There are many Trinitarian authorities who admit that there was no knowledge of Trinitarian doctrine at the time Thomas spoke. For example, if the disciples believed that Jesus was “God” in the sense that many Christians do, they would not have “all fled” just a few days before when he was arrested. The confession of the two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus demonstrated the thoughts of Jesus’ followers at the time. Speaking to the resurrected Christ, whom they mistook as just a traveler, they talked about Jesus. They said Jesus “was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God...and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:19-21). The Bible is clear that these disciples thought Jesus was a “prophet.” Even though some of the apostles realized that Jesus was the Christ, they knew that according to the Old Testament prophecies, the Christ, the anointed of God, was to be a man. There is no evidence from the gospel accounts that Jesus’ disciples believed him to be God, and Thomas, upon seeing the resurrected Christ, was not birthing a new theology in a moment of surprise.

4. The context of the verse shows that its subject is the fact that Jesus was *alive*. Only three verses earlier, Thomas had ignored the eyewitness testimony of the other apostles when they told him they had seen the Lord. The resurrection of Christ was such a disputed doctrine that Thomas did not believe it (the other apostles had not either), and thus Jesus' death would have caused Thomas to doubt that Jesus was who he said he was—the Messiah. Thomas believed Jesus was *dead*. Thus, he was shocked and astonished when he saw—and was confronted by— Jesus Himself. Thomas, upon being confronted by the *living* Christ, instantly believed in the resurrection, *i.e.*, that God had raised the man Jesus from the dead, and, given the standard use of “God” in the culture as one with God's authority, it certainly makes sense that Thomas would proclaim, “My Lord and my God.” There is no mention of the Trinity in the context, and there is no reason to believe that the disciples would have even been aware of such a doctrine. Thomas spoke what he would have known: that the man Jesus who he thought was dead was alive and had divine authority.

5. For other uses of *theos* applicable to this verse, see Hebrews 1:8 below.

Buzzard, pp. 39-41,61 and 62,136 and 137

Dana, pp. 23-25

Farley, pp. 62-64

Morgridge, pp. 109 and 110

Norton, pp. 299-304

Snedeker, pp. 271 and 272, 426-430

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