

ABOLISHING JESUS?

Christianity is the only world religion which begins by discarding its own founder's creed (Mark 12:29) ¹

The chaos of many denominations in Christianity is the best proof of the fact that something has gone badly wrong! Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, instructs us to “contend, battle hard, for the faith once and for all handed to the saints” (Jude 3).¹ Thousands of denominations, unable to agree, is proof positive that we have done a very poor job with the teaching of Jude on this point! And we must have done a totally inadequate job with the teachings of Jesus, the founder of our claimed Christian faith.

So what can you and I do to repair a broken system? Our current American politics is laced with discussion about how to repair a broken system. That is, fix a healthcare system, build a wall or not, etc. But no one seems to know about, care much about, or talk about the broken system which is current Christianity, with all its chaotic disagreements and divisions. How well are we doing in view of Paul's directive to us in 1 Corinthians 1:10: “I urge you, brothers and sisters, that you all be in perfect harmony in what you say, that there be no dissensions or factions among you, but that you be perfectly united in your common understanding, opinions and judgments” (Amplified Bible).

So let us call a special counsel to investigate (again note the parallel with current American politics). We can do this simply and easily by starting with Jesus. Start where he started. Where did he start? The straightforward answer is found in Jesus' reply to a fellow Jewish scholar, who, checking Jesus out, asked him: “Master, what is the first and greatest and most important command of all?” (Mark 12:28).

The question was firstly about defining who God is. To get this wrong was to commit the crime of idolatry, worshipping the wrong God, a God one has imagined, a God one has invented for oneself, or a God one has accepted blindly and uncritically. The danger of “group think” is a peril against which Jesus warned very often.

So then, what is the Christian mind, the mind of Christ, on the Great Question about who God is? Jesus gave the answer by quoting the celebrated passage in Deuteronomy 6:4, which Jews were willing to die for. They knew, as God's people, to whom the sacred oracles, the Scriptures, had been entrusted, that there is only One Person who is God. His name was Yahweh, referred to by Israel since probably about 300 BC as ADONAI, the Lord God.

As we look at the basic answer to the problem we defined above about all the confusion in churches, we see immediately that Jesus defined GOD as precisely the One God of the faith of Israel, that is precisely as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses.

There is nothing to argue about here. These are just Bible facts which every real scholar and historian knows about. For example:

Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics has this to say about how Jews defined God: “Abraham, Moses and Elijah were all **equally zealous monotheists**, and in none of their successors was there any retrogression from the highest and **purest form of unitarian belief.**” Another expert: “Mark's point in Mark 12:28ff was to emphasize **the essential orthodoxy of Jesus and his faithfulness to the law...**Mark's emphasis on the **strict monotheism** of Christianity was particularly necessary.” ²

¹ This article is used with permission of Professor Anthony Buzzard. I consider it of such high importance that every Christian in the world should prayerfully read it. It first appeared in *Focus on the Kingdom* edited by Professor Buzzard in Vol. 20 No.4. See the link on this website at www.restorationfellowship.org All emphases are original.

² Dr. D. Nineham, *Pelican Commentary on Mark*, p.323

When the Regius Professor of Theology at Oxford, Leonard Hodgson, D.D., dedicated a series of lectures on the Trinity in 1944, he reported correctly: “The **monotheism of the Jews** was then, as it is still, **unitarian.**”³

The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1906: “Judaism has always been rigorously **unitarian.**” Emil Brunner: “Judaism [is] Unitarian.”⁴ Richard E. Rubenstein: “The monolithic God worshipped by **the Jews** [is worshiped] by...**unitarians.**”⁵ Bishop Beveridge: “The Jews...to this day... still assert that God is only **one in Person**, as well as nature.”⁶

“There was no real doubt as to the great commandment, **the Shema [Mark 12:29]**, which was repeated daily by the Jews. It was the foundation text of their **monotheism**, which was not a speculative theory but a practical conviction.”⁷

Bishop Tom Wright: “The answer Jesus gave [in Mark 12:29] was thoroughly noncontroversial, quoting the most famous of **Jewish** prayers. ‘Hear O Israel, YHVH our God is one.’ The prayer, **the Shema** which begins with these lines, was as central to Judaism **then as it is now...Jesus was a first-century Jewish monotheist.**”⁸

Hugh Anderson: “We must suppose that the Markan form goes back to oral tradition passed on by a Church that **did not any longer recite the Shema. [What was the church doing giving up on Jesus, leaving him behind, departing company with him?!]** But here at least in his statement of the first commandment **Jesus stands foursquare within the orbit of Jewish piety.**”

“The God of whom Jesus speaks is the one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”¹⁰ “With **the Shema**, Jesus stood in complete and conscious agreement with Pharisaism.”⁹

For all Jews, “Polytheism is the religion of paganism.” By contrast, **Israel’s monotheism**: God speaks to Moses as “a person speaks to a friend (Ex. 33:11)”

“In order to protect the Oneness of God from every multiplication, watering down, or amalgamation with the surrounding world, Israel chose for itself the verse of the Bible to be its credo, which to this day is impressed on every five-year-old child. This is the confession which Jesus acknowledged as the most important of all the commandments, and which is spoken by every child of Israel in the hour of death: **‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is One Lord’** (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29).

“After this all other questions shrink to secondary ones. The creed is **the credo of Jesus** and all his brothers and sisters in the flesh. To the average Jew the Trinity sounds much too like polytheism.”

“The Trinity indeed contradicts the Jewish understanding [i.e. Jesus’ understanding!] of God. The Apostle Paul held fast to the monotheism of his heritage [1 Cor. 8:4-6], to the monotheism of his lord. In the first century God is still **monotheistic in good Jewish fashion.** In the second century God becomes two-in-one.

From the third century God gradually becomes threefold. Only in 381 is the Trinity fixed. Hans Kung laments the genuine concern of many Christians and justified frustration of Jews and Muslims at trying to find in the Trinity the pure faith in One God.

“The God on the lips of Moses, the prophets and Jesus of Nazareth remained always only the one, only indivisible God of Israel.”¹⁰

I trust the point is clear and unarguable, and simple. Jesus’ definition of the only God who is to be believed in or worshiped is the God of the Hebrew, i.e. Jewish Bible (our Old Testament). He is the God of the famous **Shema** = “Hear O Israel...” (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29). He is the God who in the New Testament Greek Scriptures appears about

³ *Christian Faith and Practice*, 1952, p.74.

⁴ *Dogmatics, Vol. 1*, p. 205.

⁵ *When Jesus Became God*, 1999, p. 209

⁶ *Private Thoughts on Religion*, 1829, p. 66.

⁷ Arthur Samuel Peake, *A Commentary on the Bible*, 1920, p. 696.

⁸ *Jesus And The Victory of God*, p. 305, 652.

⁹ Schlatter, *Wort Jesu*, p. 221.

¹⁰ Lapide and Moltmann, *Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine*, 1981, p. 27ff

1300 times as “*The God,*” and often as “the God who is one Person,” or “only one (**monos**) person” (eis, pronounced “ees” in modern Greek, meaning “one and not more than one”). You can show that from an exact language parallel: “Abraham was **only one person**” (Isa. 51:2; Ezek. 33:24; Greek eis, Heb. echad).

This is an easy point and bears repetition. Exactly the same language is used of God as is used of Abraham, who is equally “only one Person” (Ezek. 33:24; Isa. 51:2). Thus the Emphatic Bible captures the same very easy truth in Galatians 3:20: “Now an intermediary has to do with and implies more than one party; there can be no mediator with just one person. Yet **God is only one Person**, and He was the sole party in giving that promise to Abraham.”

The unitarian definition of God is plain, uncomplicated and clear. **He is one Person**. He is also called the Father, the “Father of Jesus Christ” and of Christians. Listen to how well Israel was schooled on this massive truth: “Do we not all have **one Father**? Has not **One God** created us?” (Mal. 2:10). Then remember the 1300 places in the New Testament where “the one GOD” means the Father. And the One God never ever means a Trinity. 11,500 times (roughly 1/3 of all the Bible verses) we read the various titles for God (YHVH, Elohim, Adonai, theos). Not one of them can be shown to mean a Triune God.

Why do we not follow Jesus on **the Great Command**? No one would think of discarding the Lord’s Prayer or the Lord’s Supper, but what about the Lord’s creed in Mark 12:29, John 17:3?

No one would imagine disregarding the Great Commission as the final summary of Christian obligation (Matt. 28:19-20). But we seem uninterested in knowing about what Jesus called the **Great (in fact the Greatest) of all commands in Mark 12:29**.

There appears to be a gaping hole in the system we have inherited from tradition. Have we been building on sand? Why is it that in church we do not all insist on defining God as Jesus did? Are we really following and obeying Jesus at this foundational point? (Heb. 5:9). ¹¹

Eric Chang, Trinitarian turned unitarian, expert and teacher, backed us up with this challenge: “The fundamental problem created by elevating Jesus to the level of Deity is that a situation is created in which there are at least **two persons who are both equally God**; this brings Trinitarianism into conflict with the **monotheism** of the Bible [and of Jesus]...In regard to the New Testament, it is Trinitarianism that is on trial; **it will have to explain why it has taken the monotheistic Word of God and interpreted it in polytheistic terms**, thereby utterly distorting its fundamental character...Could it not be this distortion that is the reason for the disastrous disappearance of the **Shema** from our prayer lives? Jesus was a thoroughgoing, monotheistic, **Shema**-reciting Jew. We have redefined the core principle inherent in the Shema. Is this valid?” ¹²

A leading commentary on Mark (above) asks itself this incriminating question. It wonders why Mark wanted to include the Shema in his account (Mark 12:29), since as the author thinks, his audience was “a church which no longer recited **the Shema**.” Excuse me? A church which had discarded Jesus at the most basic of all levels? This needs to be pondered, and acted upon.

John is sometimes brought forward to undo everything we have shown above. But John is the one who explicitly tells us why he wrote his whole book! “**These things have been written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**, and by believing this, you might have the life of the age to come” (John 20:31). John is also the one who at the start of his book, as a master-teacher laying out his definitions at the beginning, lists no less than 8 titles to identify who Jesus is:

Jesus is **the Son of Man = The Human Being**, the **Son of God**, the **King of Israel**, **Rabbi**, the **prophet predicted by Moses**, the **Lamb of God**, **Messiah**, **son of Joseph** (John 1:29, 34, 38, 41, 45, 49, 51). Very soon he adds yet another title: Jesus is “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

¹¹ Lapide and Moltmann, *Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine*, 1981, p. 27ff.

¹² Chang, *The Only True God*, 2009, p.2.

How easy it would have been for him simply to say “Jesus is God” (or to our JW friends, “Jesus is Michael”!). This would have contradicted the very unitarian creed of Jesus in Mark 12:29 and the rest of the Bible. It would make John contradict himself since he tells us why he wrote the whole book: to prove that “Jesus is the Christ” and that life is found in that confession (John 20:31).

John has a dogmatically clear view of how and when the Son of God was brought into existence (that is “begotten”), and it was not in eternity but just as Luke and Matthew report, it was in time and in the womb of Mary some 2000 years ago.

Astute NT professors have clearly seen that “John is as undeviating a witness as any in the New Testament to the fundamental tenet of Judaism, of unitary monotheism (cp. Rom. 3:30; James 2:19). There is the one true and only God (John 5:44; 17:3); everything else is idols (1 John 5:21). In fact nowhere is the Jewishness of John, which has emerged in all recent study, more clear.”¹³

The Virginal Begetting in John

John also taught us when and how the Son of God, Jesus, began to exist, was begotten. To follow me here one needs the easy definition of a key word not so much used in current English — the word “beget.” Here is what it means now, and what it also meant in the Greek of the NT:

Beget (typically of a man, sometimes of a man and a woman): **bring (a child) into existence** by the process of reproduction.

Example: “They hoped that the king might beget an heir by his new queen.” Synonyms: to father, sire, have, bring into the world, give life to, bring into being, spawn. Example: “he begat a son.”

The teaching of Matthew and Luke is lucidly clear on this easy point: “The one begotten in her is from holy spirit” (Matt. 1:20). Note carefully that the word here is “beget” which means **to cause to begin to exist**. Yes, the mother, Mary, of course, conceived, but Matthew was emphasizing the **begetting, bringing into existence** of the Son of God by the miracle caused by the Father: “And this is how Jesus the Son began to exist” (see Matt. 1:18, the “genesis, origin,” of Jesus). The same truth is carefully stated in Luke 1:35.

Little known to the public is the fact that in John 1:13 John described the same origin of the Son. The oldest known reading of that verse applies it to Jesus and not to Christians. The (older) Jerusalem Bible has this in its text: **“he who was begotten, not of blood nor of the will of flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”** rather than “they who were begotten...”

John 1:13 in most translations says that believers in Jesus become children of God not through any of the three natural causes mentioned, but through God who is the immediate cause of the new spiritual life. They were born (the Greek verb can also mean “begotten”) — not from a male, or “born” from a female, or from human parents. However, **the variant version reads in the Greek “he who was begotten,” asserting Jesus’ virginal conception.** The New Jerusalem Bible says in its footnote, “There are strong arguments for reading ‘who was born.’”

A well-known German translator of the NT, Albrecht, says: “I follow here a very old reading known to Irenaeus and Tertullian. The simple ‘was born’ was indeed the dominant reading in the West from the 2nd to 4th century and in the East in old sources it left significant traces. **John recognizes here emphatically the virginal conception and birth of the Son.**”¹⁴

Another prominent NT scholar has this to say: “There are strong reasons for John 1:13 reading ‘he who was born [i.e. Jesus] not of the will of man...but of God.’ For John would then have expressly acknowledged the traditions in Matthew 1 and Luke 1...I have become convinced of the originality of the reading ‘he who was begotten’ which prevailed until the fourth century in the western Church...According to the original text in John 1:13...John describes

¹³ J.A.T. Robinson, *Twelve More New Testament Studies*, 1984, p. 175.

¹⁴ Albrecht New Testament, my translation from German.

the begetting and birth of Jesus without the assistance of a man...There is no doubt that John calls Jesus the unique Son of God because of this wonderful entrance into human life.”¹⁵

All of this of course confirms Matthew 1:18, 20 and Luke 1:35, which describe with complete clarity how and when Jesus the Son began to exist. If this information had been believed and clung to, along with **the Shema**, the whole doctrine of the Trinity could never have started.

Jesus cannot possibly have believed he was GOD, second member of a Trinity. The creed he affirmed in Mark 12:29 denied any such idea. And in John 17:3 in his final prayer to God, Jesus spoke of God as “the only one who is true God.” He then placed himself alongside God as the “one sent or commissioned by God.”

Now consider this astonishing information (show your friends): When the Trinitarian Augustine came to John 17:3, he was stuck! He crashed in to the notion that only the Father was God. This was not Augustine’s tradition. So what did he do? Repent and believe the words of Jesus? Alas, no, he simply rewrote the text of Scripture. In his Homilies on John he said, “The proper order of the words is, ‘That they may know You and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent, as the only true God.’”

John 17:3 is an absolutely clear statement repeating the **Shema** (Mark 12:29), and Psalm 110:1 repeats the very same truth. “The Lord (YHVH) sent an oracle to my lord” (**adoni** in the Hebrew, and it always means, all 195 times, non-Deity). The one God, the Father, now has an immortalized **human being at His right hand** (Ps. 110:1). The unique position of the Father as the one God of the Bible is not in any way disturbed by the session of the non-Deity lord at the right hand of God.

1 Timothy 2:5 speaks of the one God and the **man** Messiah Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 speaks of Christians as abandoning idols and turning to God, **the one true and living God**, and then eagerly looking forward to the Second Coming of His Son from heaven, Jesus, the one whom God raised from the dead and who will rescue us from the vengeance to come. The **unitary monotheism** of the entire Scriptures can facilitate unity among billions of Muslims, Christians and Jews, combined.

¹⁵ Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pp.266,288,310.