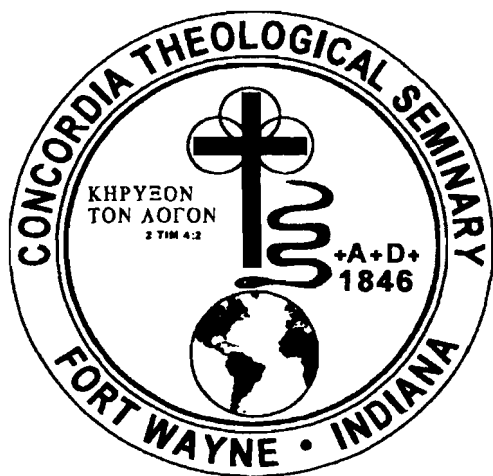


CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 67:3/4

July/October 2003

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The Bud Has Flowered: Trinitarian Theology in the New Testament

Michael Middendorf

Dr. Horace Hummel, professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, used the analogy of a bud that flowered to describe how certain doctrines were indeed present in the Old Testament but then revealed further in the New. The nature of God as triune is a classic example. There has always been one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The bud of that truth is present in the Old Testament. Reading the Old Testament through what is revealed in the New we can discern that. But it is precisely because the Old Testament bud has opened further in the New that we are able to see now what was always there. We now turn to the flowering that has been revealed in the New Testament.

The focus of this paper is on three main teachings within the New Testament that are critical to trinitarian theology. So this one paper will have three parts, yet there are not three papers, but only one paper immutable, indivisible, and, perhaps, incomprehensible! The three aspects are as follows: first, the repeated assertion of a monotheism in continuity with the Old Testament. The second part involves a recognition of the deity of Jesus Christ.¹ Part three analyzes various statements in the New Testament that speak of the three-ness of God's nature within which the Holy Spirit is also included.

To us today, these three aspects of New Testament theology may seem a given. This paper may appear to be basic review. However, at the time of the New Testament, they had an enormous theological impact. As the New Testament looked back, its authors revealed aspects of the nature of God that it asserted were wholly continuous with the Old Testament "bud." Yet they also went beyond it and, in so doing, presented challenges the church wrestled to comprehend and articulate in the centuries to follow. Indeed, the revelation of God that flowered in the New Testament pushed the church toward the formal expression of the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet the church's expressions of trinitarian theology and, particularly, its basis within the New Testament, continue to be a matter of debate. For example, Karl Barth stated the challenge for New Testament theology as follows: "The Bible does not expressly state that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are of equal essence and thus in the same sense God Himself. Nor does it expressly state that thus and

¹The point here is that Jesus is not divine because the Scriptures say He is, but that Jesus is divine and the Scriptures attest to that fact.

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only thus, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, God is God. These two express declarations, which go beyond the witness of the Bible, are the twofold content of the Church doctrine of the Trinity."²

It is significant to acknowledge that simply in terms of terminology, Barth has a point. Words like "trinity" and "homoousias" are not part of the text of the New Testament. One wonders what the Apostle Paul would have thought about such terms in A. D. 60. How would St. John have responded in A. D. 90 if asked whether he accepted the statement from the Athanasian Creed "that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance"? Apart from further discussion and explanation, the response of both inspired authors may well have been something of a blank stare. The more critical issue is this: Does what the New Testament expresses legitimately lead to the church's orthodox trinitarian formulations? We will return to that question at the conclusion of this paper.

Part 1: First, Christianity was careful to avoid the charge of advocating something other than the monotheism of the Old Testament. As Stauffer puts it, "Early Christian monotheism is confirmed rather than shattered by the Christology of the N[ew] T[estament]."³ In Mark 10 Jesus challenges the young man who gave Him the title Διδάσκαλε ἀγαθε, with the response: Τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν; οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἶ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός (Mark 10:18).⁴ Jesus' affirmation of the *Shema* of Deut. 6:4 seems evident here.⁵ However, it is direct in Mark 12:29 when Jesus refers to that text just before identifying the foremost commandment of all: Ἀκουε, Ἰσραήλ, κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν⁶ [Deut. 6:4 may not have originally been a direct statement of

²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, bk. I, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2nd edition, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 381. Emil Brunner similarly asserts, "The idea of the 'Triune God' does not form part of the witness and message of Primitive Christianity" (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950], 217).

³Ethelbert Stauffer, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. G. Friedrich and G. Kittel, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1973), s.v. "θεός" 3:102 [Hereafter abbreviated as *TDNT*.]; see also Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, 1:351ff.

⁴Stauffer, in *TDNT*, s.v. "θεός" 3:102.

⁵Deut. 6:4 in Hebrew and from the Septuagint reads as follows: יהוה אחד אקוה ישראל κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν

⁶Parallels are Matt. 23:37; Luke 10:27.

monotheism or of Yahweh's one-ness.⁷ However, the assertion that there is, in fact, only "one God" is at least implied here⁸ and made explicit elsewhere (cf. Deut. 4:35; Isa. 45:6). Even if the *Shema* was simply Israel's confession of allegiance to Yahweh alone,⁹ to acknowledge and, indeed, worship both God the Father and also Jesus as Lord (e.g., Matt. 2:11; 28:17; Phil. 2:10-11) would certainly appear to violate that statement.]

Matt. 23:8-9 is an intriguing text particularly for those of us who are called "teachers." Jesus rebukes the love of privilege, recognition, and self-glorification that motivated the Scribes and Pharisees. He then mandates this contrast among His disciples: ὑμεῖς δὲ μὴ κληθῆτε, 'Ραββί· εἷς γάρ ἐστιν ὑμῶν ὁ διδάσκαλος, πάντες δὲ ὑμεῖς ἀδελφοί ἐστε. καὶ πατέρα μὴ καλέσητε ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, εἷς γάρ ἐστιν ὑμῶν ὁ πατὴρ ὁ οὐράνιος. As the following verse makes clear, Jesus alone is the "one" teacher and our ultimate father is our heavenly "one."

Paul clearly reaffirms monotheism as well. After his most concise articulation of the doctrine of justification by faith in Rom. 3:28, Paul buttresses that assertion in the following verses: ἡ Ἰουδαίων ὁ θεὸς μόνον; οὐχὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν; ναὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν, εἴπερ εἷς ὁ θεὸς ὃς δικαιώσει περιτομὴν ἐκ πίστεως καὶ ἀκροβυστίαν διὰ τῆς πίστεως (28-29). The one-ness of God supports the teaching that Jews and Gentiles are justified before Him in the same manner.¹⁰ In Galatians 3, the Torah was mediated through a plurality of angels, ὁ δὲ θεὸς εἷς ἐστιν (3:19-20).

⁷The exact force of Deut. 6:4 is debated. See Quell, in *TDNT*, s.v. κύριος, 3:1079-81. Quell concludes, "It is not possible to determine the content of the words with a logical precision free from all possible objection" (1081). It is probably neither simply a statement about Yahweh's oneness nor is it a statement of classic monotheism. More likely it is a confession that Israel worships only one God. This is called "practical monotheism" by Andrew Hill and John Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 100-101.

⁸Horace Hummel similarly concludes: "While grammatically no airtight case can be made for monotheistic doctrine on its basis (as is also true of the First Commandment), functionally the statement certainly has that import" (*The Word Becoming Flesh* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1979], 93).

⁹As Quell, who concludes the force is, "Yahweh is our God, Yahweh as the only one." He adds, "Deut. 6:4 does not seem to have had any influence on the ancient Christian formula εἷς ὁ θεός" (*TDNT*, s.v. κύριος, 3:1081). But see the discussion of passages here, as well as 1 Cor. 8 and Eph. 4 below.

¹⁰Some try to make a distinction between ἐκ and διὰ, in this passage. See C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary, eds. J. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1:222, who concludes that such attempts "are unconvincing."

The next three Pauline texts have more complicated implications for the second section of this paper, but their meaning in regard to monotheism is clear. 1 Cor. 8 announces that an idol is nothing in the world ὅτι οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς. There are many who are being called "gods" and "lords," ἀλλ' ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἔξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν. In a whole string of "ones," Eph. 4:6 includes: εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν. 1 Tim. 2:5 declares, εἷς γὰρ θεός.

One relevant non-Pauline text is James 2:19. It challenges: σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, καλῶς ποιεῖς· καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πιστεύουσιν καὶ φρίσσουν. Here, above all, there is continuity with the Old Testament. Monotheism is unequivocally maintained. Unless one accepts the charge of contradictory voices and glaring inconsistencies within the New Testament, the suggestion that it openly or consciously abandons monotheism is to be rejected.¹¹ The New Testament consistently asserts that there is "one God." In current discussions with Judaism (and Islam as well), the dominant note of monotheism voiced by the New Testament ought to be firmly upheld.

Part 2: Even in the face of this open and consistent reassertion of monotheism, the New Testament also pushes us toward what Peter Toon calls a "Mutation in Monotheism."¹² This is seen, first and foremost, in the New Testament's confession of the divinity of Jesus. Apart from this assertion of Jesus' divinity, one wonders how, when, or even if the church's confession of the Trinity would have been struggled over, formulated or even deemed necessary.¹³ The matter here, of course, has been debated and disputed in volumes of theological discussion. For example, Emil Brunner states, "It was never the intention of the original witnesses to Christ in the New Testament to set before us an intellectual problem—that of the Three Divine

¹¹Islam claims Christianity rejects monotheism. For example, *The Holy Quran*, 2nd edition states: "O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and his word, which he bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from him: so believe in God and his apostles. Say not 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God: Glory be to him: (far exalted is he) above having a son. To him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs" (trans. and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali [Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1977], Sura 4:171, 233-234).

¹²Peter Toon, *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996); this is the title of ch. 6, 113-130.

¹³See, for example, Walter Bowie, *Jesus and the Trinity*, "The title [of this book] . . . embodies an emphasis which must not be forgotten. *Trinity* was not the first word, but the last one; the first was *Jesus*" (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960, 72). Barth similarly states: "The doctrine of the Trinity is simply a development of the knowledge that Jesus is the Christ or the Lord" (*Church Dogmatics* I, 1:334).

Persons – and then to tell us silently to worship this mystery of the ‘Three in One.’ There is no trace of such an idea in the New Testament.”¹⁴

The dominant contemporary “consensus” for rejecting the divinity of Jesus is the Butlmannian separation between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of faith. Jesus of Nazareth lived and died a simple man’s life; later, either under persecution or from a position of power when Christianity became one of the dominant religions of the empire, Jesus was gradually turned into a divine being.¹⁵

However, the divine nature of Jesus is expressed a number of ways within the texts of the New Testament itself. First, a few passages appear to assert Jesus’ divinity directly. Rom. 9:5 is speaking of the Israelites ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὧν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν. Here the punctuation is a problem.¹⁶ Is there to be a hard break after σάρκα followed by a doxology to God who is blessed? Or, as John Murray forcefully argues, is the latter phrase also in reference to ὁ Χριστὸς who is, in fact, “the one being God over all”?¹⁷ In Titus 2:13 Paul describes believers as προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The question here is the referent of τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ. It may refer to God the Father (cf. 2 Thess. 1:12; 2 Pet. 1:1), but it may also identify Jesus as “the majestic God.”¹⁸ Heb. 1:8 applies words from Ps. 45:6 to Jesus: “And to the Son [He said], “Your Throne, O God, is for ever and ever.”

John’s Gospel begins, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. The significance of the lack of the definite article with the final θεός has been disputed through the centuries, but seems to have been resolved as a grammatical issue.¹⁹ As a result ὁ λόγος was God in the fullest sense in the beginning and then became flesh (v. 14). Later in chapter one, verse 18 refers to Jesus as μονογευῆς θεὸς ὁ ὧν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς.

¹⁴Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 226.

¹⁵On the popular front, this is the conclusion of recent Frontline video on PBS whose title says it all, “From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians” (a Frontline coproduction with Invision Productions, Ltd.; c. 1988 by WGBH Educational Foundation).

¹⁶For more details, see Stauffer, in *TDNT*, s.v. “θεός” 3:105.

¹⁷John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 245-248.

¹⁸See J. Schneider in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols., ed. C. Brown [*DNTT*] (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference House, 1976), s.v. “God,” 2:82.

¹⁹The conclusive study is E. C. Collwell, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 53 (1933): 12-21; see the discussion in *DNTT*, 2:80-81.

While some texts omit θεός, the earliest ones support its inclusion.²⁰ After the resurrection, Thomas clearly identifies Jesus as ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (20:29).

If these statements are not sufficient, the point about Jesus' divinity can be discerned in a number of other more indirect or subtle ways. Secondly, it is also implied in statements about the person and activity of Jesus. Jesus was present "in the beginning" (John 1:1,14; 17:5; 1 John 1:1-2). The pre-existence of Christ by itself implies His "divine nature, divine origin, and divine power."²¹ Phil. 2 further asserts that Jesus was ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ (v. 6). Exactly what this means is explained later in the verse as τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ. In Him πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος dwells in bodily form (Col. 2:9). He is not creature, but, rather, took part in creation (John 1:3; Col. 1:16; 1 Cor. 8:6).

For Jesus, God is "my Father" and the Father sends Jesus with His authority (John 5:22,27; 7:28-29; 8:18,26; etc.). Jesus reveals the Father to us (John 1:18); He speaks from the Father (John 9:4) and shares the Father's glory (John 17:5). He exhibits the divine authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:7), does miraculous works (e.g., Luke 7:16; John 3:2; 9:32-33), and now sits on God's throne to judge the world (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). While Jesus is separate from the Father, He is also in some sense "in" and "one" with the Father (John 10:30; 14:10; 17:11,21). Indeed, those who see Jesus have in fact seen the Father (John 12:45; 14:9). All this leads Stauffer to conclude that Jesus "is *the* representative of God in the world and in history. For He is instituted and equipped by God the Father. He is Himself the Bearer of the divine office."²² As a result, hymns are sung to Jesus (e.g., Col. 1:15-20; Phil. 2:5-11). His people call upon His Name (e.g., Acts 9:14,21; 22:19) and address prayers to Him (Acts 7:59; 1 Cor. 16:22; 2 Cor. 12:8).²³

Third, the titles used by and given to Jesus also identify Him as divine. Some of these are less direct. He is ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (Mark 1:24; John 6:69), ὁ εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου (Col. 1:15; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 4:13, etc.) and so forth. In and of themselves these titles do not necessarily assert divinity. However, the manner in which the titles are filled out expresses more than mere election or functionality.²⁴ For

²⁰For example, p66 and p75; see Bruce Metzger, ed., *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 198.

²¹Edmund Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 17.

²²E. Stauffer in *TDNT*, s.v. "θεός" 3:106.

²³Toon, *Our Triune God*, 118-120.

²⁴As could be surmised from Stauffer's quote just cited; page 8, n. 22.

example, He is not merely one of "God's sons," but His "only/unique" Son (μονογενής in John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9; cf. Acts 13:32-33; Rom. 8:3, 32).

As a whole, these titles give Jesus divine attributes or characteristics, and then also relate Jesus to God in some manner, normally with the genitive to follow. They convey the idea that Jesus is in some way on the same level as the Father, yet also differentiated from Him.²⁵ Indeed, the very terms "Father" and "Son" imply some type of subordinate relationship between the two as 1 Cor. 15:28 makes clear.²⁶ This can be viewed in terms of role or function rather than essence. But, in any case, the explicit nature of the relationship is not fully worked out within the New Testament.

More to the point, two of these titles make assertions which are much more direct. Jesus' use of ἐγώ εἰμι strikingly identifies Himself with that which "is the self-declaration of God in the O[ld] T[estament]."²⁷ ἐγώ εἰμι statements do occur at significant junctures in the Synoptics. At Jesus' trial before Caiaphas, His answer to the question, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" begins, "ἐγώ εἰμι" (Mark 14:62; see also Mark 6:50).

However, Jesus' use of ἐγώ εἰμι is particularly prominent in John's Gospel. Here ἐγώ εἰμι often takes a predicate (ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς, 6:68; τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου, 8:12; ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός, 10:11; etc.). Yet in a number of cases the pronouncements have no predicate and, as a result, are even more forceful. The following are three examples from John 8:

ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ πιστεύσητε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι, ἀποθανεῖσθε ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν (v. 24).

Ὅταν ὑψώσητε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τότε γνώσεσθε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι (v. 28).

πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγώ εἰμι (v. 58).

A number of related statements are also made in Revelation. In 1:8 the Lord God declares, Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ; in 1:17 the Son of Man says, ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος. In Rev. 21:6 God says, ἐγώ [εἰμι] τὸ

²⁵Colin Brown, Schneider, *DNTT*, 2:84, states, "In all these statements the two facts, that God and Christ belong together and that they are distinct, are equally stressed, with the precedence in every case due to God the Father, who stand above Christ."

²⁶Ὅταν δὲ ὑποταγῆ αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, τότε [καὶ] αὐτὸς ὁ υἱὸς ὑποταγήσεται τῷ ὑποτάξαντι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, ἵνα ἡ ὁ θεὸς [τὰ] πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν.

²⁷Stauffer, in *TDNT*, s.v. "θεός" 3:104; see also Stauffer, in *TDNT*, s.v. ἐγώ, 2:348-54. In addition to the obvious connection with the revelation of the divine Name in Exod. 3:14, one should also note other "I am" assertions based upon that Name within the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 48:12).

Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος. Only a few short verses later, Jesus Himself declares, ἐγὼ τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος (22:13). The implication seems clear enough.

Just as significant is the identification of Jesus as κύριος (e.g., Acts 2:36; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11). The assertion that "Jesus is Lord" was the earliest Christian confession.²⁸ In our day, this all too often comes off as a legalistic and demanding assertion of Jesus' dominance and power (e.g., "Jesus must be Lord of your life!"). However, the significance goes far beyond the dominical title to the very name of God. The key is not merely the Septuagint's use of κύριος to translate Yahweh over 6,000 times,²⁹ but also the textual basis from within the Old Testament upon which the New Testament confession is made.³⁰

The most prominent of these is Phil. 2:5-11. After the humiliation of Jesus' death, even on a cross, the climax of His exaltation is expressed in verses 10-11: ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πάντων γόνων κάμψῃ ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων καὶ πάντα γλώσσα ἐξομολογήσῃται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς. The background here is Isa. 45 where the Septuagint translates Yahweh as saying of Himself, ὅτι ἐμοὶ κάμψει πάντων γόνων καὶ ἐξομολογήσεται πάντα γλώσσα τῷ θεῷ (v. 23b; cf. v. 21).³¹

Both Acts 2:21 and Rom. 10:13 quote Joel 3:5 from the Septuagint, which reads: καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται.³² Here, as usual, κύριος translates Yahweh. Within the immediate context of the quotation from Joel, both New Testament chapters explicitly identify Jesus as κύριος.

καὶ κύριον αὐτὸν καὶ Χριστὸν ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός, τοῦτον τὸν Ἰησοῦν
(Acts 2:39)

ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν (Rom. 10:9)

²⁸J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (Essex: Longman, 1972), 14-15.

²⁹Quell, in *TDNT*, s.v. "κύριος" 3:1059 notes that the Septuagint renders Yahweh with κύριος 6,156 times. It is only rarely used for *el* (23 times) or *elohim* (193 times) Quell, 3:1059. The direct connection with Jesus is disputed, but note the argument here in response.

³⁰Here I am indebted to Charles B. Cousar for emphasizing the Old Testament basis in a paper on "Christology and Monotheism in Paul" presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Toronto, Canada, November, 2002.

³¹כִּי לִי תִכְרַע כָּל-בָּרָךְ חֲשָׁבַע כָּל-לְשׁוֹן:

³²2:32 in English; 3:5 in the Masoretic text reads: כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה יִשְׁלָט

The *Shema* of Deut. 6:4 underlies 1 Cor. 8:6 which states: ἀλλ' ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἷς αὐτόν, καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ. It is significant that the identification of θεὸς as our "one" Father and Creator is immediately followed by the assertion that Jesus is κύριος and that He is similarly the "one" through whom all things exist. [This passage suggests that Eph. 4:5-6 should be interpreted in like fashion: εἷς κύριος, μία πίστις, ἐν βάπτισμα, εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν. The one κύριος is to be identified as Jesus; at the same time God is also still one (see also 1 Cor. 12 discussed below).]

Jesus' decisive question remains, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15). Together all these passages make the identification of Jesus with Yahweh, the I AM, all but inescapable. Thus the confession κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς serves primarily as a statement of His divinity. Jesus is God.

These texts also bring us to a decisive point. In line with Deut. 6:4, the New Testament affirms that the Lord God is one. God is our one Father. However, apart from quotations from the Old Testament, "κύριος was not a very common term for God" in the New Testament.³³ κύριος normally refers to the "Lord" Jesus who is distinguished from God the "Abba" Father (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; etc.). Significantly, then, there is also one Lord (Yahweh) whom the New Testament now identifies as Jesus. As a result, the one-ness of God is maintained and the divine nature of Jesus is also clearly stated and implied. As long as these two seemingly paradoxical truths are asserted, the way has been paved toward discerning a trinitarian theology in the New Testament and into the final section of this paper.

Part 3: In a number of places the New Testament articulates what came to be understood as expressions of the three persons of the Trinity. At times this occurs in formulaic expressions. Matt. 28:19 states: πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.³⁴ 2 Cor. 13:13 is another example. Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.

³³Foerster, in *TDNT*, s.v. "κύριος" 3:1087; he observes that in "the Marcan material and Q, God is never called ο κύριος except in Mark 5:19." Other exceptions include Matt. 11:25 (Luke 10:21); 1 Tim. 6:15; see also Fortman, *The Triune God*, 19.

³⁴It is interesting that this is the only text with a trinitarian formula attached to baptism. Note the many references to baptism into the Name of Jesus, Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus, etc. (e.g., Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5).

More often, the description seems less "deliberate." Instead it occurs regularly and almost inevitably as the New Testament aims to describe God's saving work in all its fulness.³⁵ The voice from heaven together with the dove descending upon Jesus at His baptism is commonly identified in this way (Mark 1:9-11). On Pentecost day, Peter describes what is happening in these words about Jesus: τῇ δεξιᾷ οὖν τοῦ θεοῦ ὑψωθείς, τὴν τε ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου λαβὼν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐξέχεεν τοῦτο ὃ ὑμεῖς [καὶ] βλέπετε καὶ ἀκούετε (Acts 2:33). Gal. 4:6 is another example. "Ὅτι δὲ ἐστε υἱοί, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν κρᾶζον, Ἀββα ὁ πατήρ. 1 Cor. 12:3 affirmed the identity of Jesus as κύριος. Verses 4-6 state: Διαίρέσεις δὲ χαρισμάτων εἰσὶν, τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα· καὶ διαίρέσεις διακονιῶν εἰσὶν, καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς κύριος· καὶ διαίρέσεις ἐνεργημάτων εἰσὶν, ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς θεὸς ὁ ἐνεργῶν τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν.

Perhaps the most surprising thing here is the inclusion of the Spirit in descriptions of God along with Father and Son. Though not as often as with Jesus, a few passages do appear to identify the Holy Spirit as God directly. For example, 2 Cor. 3:17 states, ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν· οὐ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου, ἐλευθερία.³⁶ Other times the Holy Spirit is used interchangeably with references to God (e.g., Acts 5:3-4). More often, however, the situation is similar to the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus. The Spirit's personal nature and divine activity are simply described and confessed. Fortman summarizes:

The fullest presentation of the Holy Spirit is found in the Paraclete passages [of John's Gospel]. . . . He is "another Paraclete" (14:16), the "Spirit of truth" (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), who "dwells with" the Apostles, "whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him" (14:17). He is sent by the Father and by Jesus (14:26; 15:26), and proceeds from the Father (15:27). "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (14:26). "He will bear witness to me" (15:26). "He will guide you into all truth . . . and will declare to you the things that are to come" (16:13). "He will glorify

³⁵In addition to those noted here, see also Rom. 5:1-5; 8:14-17; 14:17-18; 15:16,30; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 3:3; Gal. 3:11-14; Eph. 1:11-14,17; 2:18; Col. 1:3-8; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; Titus 3:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:1-2. This is often referred to as an "economic" expression of the Trinity, by Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I, 1:333, for example. This kind of expression is present repeatedly, but do the Scripture's assert more? Barth replies negatively in regard to expressions which go beyond this to God's "essence" or "immanence"; see Barth, "None of this is directly biblical, i.e., explicitly stated in the Bible; it is Church doctrine."

³⁶John 4:24 has also been suggested: πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας αὐτὸν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν. It seems less likely that this is a direct reference to the Holy Spirit.

me, for he will take from what is mine and declare it to you" (16:14).
 "He will be with you forever" (14:16).³⁷

The relationship between Jesus and the Spirit is similar to the "Father/Son" relationship noted above. As Toon states, "The Paraclete is to Christ as Christ is to the Father."³⁸ On the one hand, the two are intimately related. For example, "By Jesus Christ we receive the adoption as sons, yet the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption (Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:15). We are justified in the Spirit and in the Lord (1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 2:17), sanctified in the Spirit and in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11)."³⁹ As a result, it is not surprising when Acts refers to "the Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7) and Paul speaks of "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9).⁴⁰ At the same time, however, the Holy Spirit is distinguished from Jesus. It is the Spirit who intercedes for us in prayer (Rom. 8:26), assures us that we are God's children (Rom. 8:16,23), fills us with wisdom (1 Cor. 2:11,14), and strengthens us in our inner being (Eph. 3:16). All of this legitimately leads Fortman to conclude that in the New Testament, the divine Spirit "is a person distinct from the Father and the Son."⁴¹

Conclusion

In conclusion, what can we say about the relationship between the New Testament and the trinitarian theology of the church? Brunner concludes, "The ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity is not only the product of genuine Biblical thought, it is also the product of philosophical speculation, which is remote from the thought of the Bible. . . . Similarly, the idea of the Three Persons is more than questionable."⁴² So is there a trinitarian theology in the New Testament or not? I believe that the three points emphasized in this paper lead to the conclusion that there is. The New Testament affirms that (1) there is only one true God, (2) Jesus Christ, along with the Father, is divine Lord and God, and (3) it portrays God as three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, acting "for us and for our salvation."

A more complicated challenge is the suggestion that the New Testament provides only the foundation upon which the church later built a trinitarian theology. Schneider illustrates that view by stating: "All this underlines the

³⁷Fortman, *The Triune God*, 28.

³⁸Toon, *Our Triune God*, 184; citing passages from John's Gospel, he notes, 184-85, that both Jesus and the Spirit are sent from the Father, are called holy, teach, reveal, convince and convict.

³⁹Fortman, *The Triune God*, 20.

⁴⁰Toon, *Our Triune God*, 190, even speaks of a "merging" of the two.

⁴¹Fortman, *The Triune God*, 28.

⁴²Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 239.

point that primitive Christianity did not have an explicit doctrine of the Trinity such as was subsequently elaborated in the creeds of the early church"⁴³ Fortman similarly concludes that the New Testament merely provides "a trinitarian schema or ground plan."⁴⁴ Bowie states that the doctrine of the Trinity is not "already formulated" in the New Testament, but developed as "the progressive charting of a course like the course of a ship."⁴⁵ Barth says that only the "root" which subsequently grew into trinitarian doctrine is present in the New Testament.⁴⁶ Brunner asserts that the church later "created the doctrine of the Trinity."⁴⁷ What is a proper response?

In *One God in Trinity*, Christopher Kaiser writes an article titled "The Discernment of Triunity."⁴⁸ This is perhaps an adequate way of addressing the issue. To return to the bud and flower analogy, one might ask, "Has the church's articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity been a further flowering that developed subsequent to the New Testament? Does the doctrine of the Trinity go beyond the witness of Scripture?" In response, I would agree with Toon's assessment, which states: "I do not believe that there is a precise or formal doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament materials. At the same time, I do think that the whole of the New Testament bears witness – mostly implicitly but sometimes explicitly – to the plurality within unity of the one true God, *Yahweh Elohim*."⁴⁹

What we can say is that in the New Testament the flower has opened as far as God's nature has now been revealed to us.⁵⁰ In formulating the doctrine of the Trinity, the church did not go beyond or add to what the New Testament said. Rather, it simply described the flower as far as it had already blossomed in Scripture. In that sense the doctrine does not add to what was revealed.⁵¹ Rather, the church simply practiced discernment in regard to

⁴³J. Schneider in *DNTT*, s.v. "God," 2:84.

⁴⁴Fortman, *The Triune God*, 32.

⁴⁵Bowie, *Jesus and the Trinity*, 72; he adds, "The expression they developed had to find its way through trial and error; and the test for them as between truth and error was not a doctrine already formulated but. . ."

⁴⁶Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, 1:346, 375, etc.

⁴⁷Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 222.

⁴⁸Christopher Kaiser, "The Discernment of Triunity" in *One God in Trinity*, ed. P. Toon and J. Spiceland (Westchester, Ill.: Cornerstone Books, 1980), 27-41.

⁴⁹Toon, *Our Triune God*, 67.

⁵⁰More of God's nature, as well as many other things, will be revealed and opened further to us on the day we see God face to face. Now, we still see many things in a mirror dimly (1 John; 3:2; 1 Cor. 13:12).

⁵¹Perhaps Brunner is asserting something like this in these words: "This then is the biblical evidence – not for the Trinity, but evidence which points in the direction of the doctrine of the Trinity" (*Christian Doctrine of God*, 217).

explaining and carefully articulating what was already fully there in the text of the New Testament. A clear answer to this question is the challenge with which we are to wrestle as these papers continue our progression toward "Confessing the Trinity Today."⁵²

⁵²Quotation from the conclusion of Athanasian Creed.