

# The God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ: A Personal Testimony

SIDNEY A. HATCH\*

My transition from trinitarianism to unitarianism has been a gradual one. Over thirty years ago, I observed in Scripture that the Holy Spirit was the power of God, not a "third person." Here I can only mention several salient features of this experience, features which may be familiar to many of my readers. I noticed the interchange of terminology which Luke uses regarding the Holy Spirit. In Luke 24:49, he calls the Holy Spirit "power from on high." In Acts 1:5, he refers to the Holy Spirit as "Holy Ghost" or "Holy Spirit" (there is no article in the Greek text). Hence the Holy Spirit is, indeed, simply God's power from on high.

The terminology in the Greek text for Holy Spirit caused a significant shift in my thinking. The word for "spirit" (*pneuma*) is neuter in gender. Translators, if they would, could easily use the pronoun "it," rather than "he," in reference to the Holy Spirit. Also to be taken into consideration was the phraseology for "Holy Spirit." Sometimes it is simply "Holy Spirit," sometimes "the Holy Spirit." But the occurrence of the definite article does not indicate that the Holy Spirit is a person.

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On March 22, Pastor Hatch spoke on the theme, "Why I Believe God Is One (not Three-in-One)," and on March 23 on the theme, "Why I Believe Jesus Is the Son of God (not God-the-Son)." The following article is a synopsis of remarks delivered on the first of these occasions.

The Lord Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as "the Comforter." But this is simply a matter of personification, a common literary device in Scripture. Paul personifies "charity" or "love" in 1 Corinthians 13. The writer of Proverbs personifies "wisdom" in chapter 8.

Finally, regarding the Holy Spirit, we must resort to simple logic. Mary, the mother of our Lord, was with child by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18-20). Therefore, if the Holy Spirit is a person, it follows then that the Holy Spirit is the Father of our Lord, an evidently impossible conclusion.

The simplest solution to this problem is to recognize that the Holy Spirit is the power of God, not a person. It is the power by which God operates throughout the universe, and by which Mary conceived a child.

I have several reasons for my conviction that the one God of Scripture is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### I. SCRIPTURAL REASONS

1. Deuteronomy 6:4. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." This is the famous "Shema" of Israel. It informs us that Jehovah is "one." The Hebrew term for "one" is *'echad* meaning "one" in the sense of "alone, a single one." It is Jehovah alone who is God. The Hebrew word *yachad* means "one" in the sense of "union." But *yachad* is not the word in Deuteronomy 6:4.

2. Mark 12:29. Here Jesus reiterates the Shema to a scribe who had asked Him, "Which is the first [i.e., most important] commandment of all?" (Mark 12:28.) "First of all the commandments," our Lord says, "is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord." From this answer, we may infer that the unity of God's being is preeminent in the New Testament. Obviously, the Lord Jesus was not a trinitarian.

3. John 17:3. Here Jesus addresses His Father as "the only true God." He describes Himself as the one "whom thou hast sent." The word for "true" is *alethinos*, meaning "true" in the sense of real or genuine. Jesus does not claim deity here. He recognizes His Father as the only One who is truly God. For Himself, He claims to be the messenger of God, the Apostle of God.

4. John 14:28. Here are the familiar words of Jesus, "My Father is greater than I." It is a simple, unequivocal statement, meant to give assurance to the disciples on the eve of His departure.

Most of the writers whom I consulted here explain this passage as referring to His office or rank in the trinity (the subordination of the Son).

Most interesting, however, was the explanation of H.A.W. Meyer. Meyer defends the trinitarian position. But, at the same time, he sees here a reference to "the *absolute monotheism of Jesus* (xvii. 3) and of the whole N.T."<sup>1</sup> (The emphasis is Meyer's.)

If we settle for the plain sense of Jesus' words, our Lord was not a trinitarian—nor did He claim to be God or Deity. His Father was "greater" because, in Jesus' words, He was the only true God (John 17:3). But He, Jesus, was a human being, the Messiah, and God's Son. But being God's Son did not make Him a second God or the second person in a trinity; rather, it made Him the second or last Adam, and God's ideal representative.

5. Ephesians 1:3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." From this beautiful statement we learn two plain truths. The God of heaven was also the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, hence Jesus Himself was not God, but God's Son who also worshiped the God of heaven.

6. Ephesians 4:4-6. Here are the seven unities of the Spirit. Jesus is identified as the "one Lord," that is, the Messiah. The God of heaven is the "one God and Father of all." There is no trinitarianism in this passage.

7. 1 Corinthians 8:6, "But to us there is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ." Again the Father in heaven is the one God. Jesus is the "one Lord." Paul rules out the possibility of there being any other God. Jesus is God's Messiah for the earth, the "one Lord."

8. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. The Son will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father. The Son will also be subject to God, "that God may be all in all." If the Son is to be subject to God, and God is to be "all in all," there is no room for another who may be called "God the Son."

9. 1 Timothy 2:5. This verse, especially in its Greek text, is an epitome of Biblical theology. "For *one* is God." Not three are God! And one is Mediator of God and men. But this second one is an *anthropos*, a human being.

10. Acts 7:56. Here is Stephen's dying testimony. He saw the heavens opened, and a human being ("the son of man") on the right hand of God. Certainly he did not see a trinity of Gods.

11. Revelation 4:2. John sees one, not three, seated on the throne of heaven.

12. Revelation 7:10. God is seen seated on the throne of heaven. The

<sup>1</sup>H.A.W. Meyer, *Commentary on John*, Funk and Wagnalls, 1884, 423.

other one in that great scene is identified as "the Lamb," not as the second person of a trinity.

## II. LINGUISTIC REASONS

1. In Genesis 1:26, God says, "Let us make man." The plural "us" is sometimes taken as an intimation of the trinity. However, God is here speaking to His heavenly council, the "sons of Elohim" who surround Him and minister to Him.<sup>2</sup>

2. The Hebrew word '*elohim*,' "God," is actually masculine plural in form, as indicated by the ending, "-im." Therefore some might infer that the one God is three persons.

But this plural form is a common feature of the Hebrew language and is called by various names, plural of excellence, plural of majesty, or plural of eminence. It is discussed at length in the Hebrew grammars. Compare Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar*, edited by Kautzsch, section 124, or A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*, p. 18. The latter says it expresses an intensification of the idea of the singular (p. 16). This is just the opposite of what trinitarians would infer.

3. In Deuteronomy 6:4, we are told that "The LORD our God is one LORD." As indicated above, the Hebrew word for "one" is '*echad*' which means "one" in the sense of single one. The lexicon of Ludwig Koehler says that the sense of Deuteronomy 6:4 is that God is the only Jehovah: "der eine J., the only Y." (p. 27.)

## III. PRACTICAL REASONS

1. In Mark 12:28-34, Jesus reasserts the truth of Deuteronomy 6:4, that the Lord our God is one Lord. Three things are linked together in this passage: God is one; we are to love Him with all our heart, and love our neighbor as ourself.

Here, then, is the secret of loving God and loving man. When we recognize that God is one, He becomes a *person* whom we *can* love. And when we truly love God, we are granted the spiritual resources to love our fellowman.

2. In 1 John 5:1, we read that whosoever believes that Jesus is the

<sup>2</sup>Cf. A.B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, T & T Clark, 1904, 129, 295.

Messiah has been begotten of God. This contradicts the trinitarian insistence that unless one believes in the trinity, he cannot be saved.

3. The doctrine of the trinity is a philosophical abstraction, its origins being found in ancient Gnosticism. Who can comprehend a philosophical abstraction?

4. The trinitarian, A.H. Strong, explains that the omniscience of God does not embrace matters which are self-contradictory and impossible. For example, God does not know what the result would be if two and two made five, nor does He know of round squares, etc. These are not objects of knowledge. God, Strong says, cannot know self-contradiction and nonsense.<sup>3</sup>

I reply, then, that not even God could understand the doctrine of the trinity. The idea that one plus one plus one makes one is not an object of knowledge.

5. Trinitarianism breeds fear, in contrast to the Scriptural principle that "perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18). Many ordinary Christians find it incomprehensible, and absent from Scripture. But centuries of tradition and indoctrination have instilled in churchgoers a fear of abandoning it. The theologian who teaches it is alarmed at any opposition to it. The pastor or theologian who wishes to "rethink" the doctrine may find himself under peer pressure not to do so.

## IV. HISTORICAL REASONS

1. In the history of Christendom, the doctrine of the trinity has not produced the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). Rather, it has led to persecution and death. The Code of Justinian imposed the death penalty on those who denied the trinity, and the ugly record of the Inquisition is notorious. Only God in heaven knows how many earnest Christians have been put to death because they were loyal to the Scriptures rather than the trinity.

Thus the doctrine of the trinity has, throughout the centuries, maintained itself by force. This is in contrast to the Biblical principle that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Cor. 10:4).

As we look back over the history of Christendom, we cannot help but ask ourselves if the existence of the United States, with its principle of religious liberty, is at least partly due to a desire to escape traditional

<sup>3</sup>See the discussion in *Systematic Theology*, Judson Press, 1907, 286.

European trinitarianism. There appears to be a philosophical or idealistic connection between the Socinians of the sixteenth century, John Locke in the seventeenth century, Thomas Jefferson in the eighteenth century, and then the American "Bill of Rights," produced toward the end of the eighteenth century. One influenced the other.

2. Paul tells us that it is given to us in behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but to suffer for Him (Phil. 1:29). In the relationship between trinitarians and nontrinitarians, it is always the nontrinitarian who suffers.

#### V. PROPHETIC REASON

Finally we consider the matter of Bible prophecy to be a powerful indicator that God is one, not three-in-one.

Many wonderful things will take place on the earth when Jesus returns. One of them is a universal recognition that God is one. The trinitarian concept will be swept off the surface of the earth.

Zechariah 14:9 tells us that the unity or oneness of God will be the fundamental doctrine of the age to come. The passage, as it reads in the King James Version, says, "And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one."

The translation of Isaac Leeser supplies the word "acknowledged," which better conveys the intent of the passage: "And the LORD will be king over all the earth: on that day shall the LORD be (acknowledged) one, and his name be one."

The Hebrew verb which Leeser has translated "be (acknowledged)" is *hayah* in its future or "imperfect" tense. This verb is much stronger than our English verb "to be," and has the sense of "become, occur, happen, appear," or "come about." However we take it, the thought is that it will *become obvious* to all the world that Jehovah is one.

Of added interest is the fact that the Hebrew word for "one" in Zechariah 14:9 is *'echad*, "a single one." It occurs twice in this prophecy, and is the same word which occurs in the celebrated "Shema" of Deuteronomy 6:4, "The LORD our God is one LORD."

*The Interpreter's Bible* provides an excellent comment here. The Kingdom of God, it says, will be established over all the earth, and the Jewish confession of faith, the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4, will become the universal creed (VI, 1112).