

EDITORIAL

A JOURNAL FROM THE RADICAL REFORMATION takes its stand upon what seems to us the most explicit and clear doctrine of the Bible — that God is One. It is one of the tragedies of the history of theology that this supremely unifying tenet of the faith has been subjected, often, to the worst forms of disputatiousness. That controversy, spanning centuries and brought to an end only by a dogmatic settlement on pain of excommunication, has resulted in a “reign of terror.” Today, at least in evangelical circles, it is virtually impossible to question the extraordinary version of monotheism proposed by the ecclesiastical tradition: that God is One Being in three Persons.

Firstly it is impossible to know exactly what this proposition entails. God is three Persons, but, we are told, by “person” we do not mean person. What do we mean? It is unclear. If person is to mean an individual, the Trinitarian idea is a clear lapse into tritheism. But no one knows what is meant by “person” in the Trinitarian formulation.

And what is the “Being” of God, which is “one”? It seems to be His essence. But is it a thing or a personal being? If essence is a Person, then Trinitarianism has fallen into the inescapable contradiction that 3x can equal 1x. So the “Being of God” remains a foggy concept. The textbooks, while claiming that the doctrine is an inexplicable mystery, offer us nevertheless a mass of complex explanations. Surely this in itself makes the whole enterprise suspicious.

The “oneness” of God — His “essence”— is supposed to correspond to the biblical idea of the One God. But it is a futile exercise to establish this correspondence. The word “God” appears some 3,800 times in the Revised Standard English Bible. The Trinitarian or Binitarian is unable to point to a single one of those occurrences of the word “God” (*elohim*, etc; *theos*) and demonstrate that the writer intended us to understand “God existing in three Persons,” “God existing in two Persons” or the one “Essence of God.” This is surely an amazing fact which should put to rest all argument. If the God of the Bible presents Himself as a God whose Being is trifold or bifold, is it imaginable that that God would never appear — not once — under the designation “God”? The absence of any reference to a Triune or Biune God would indicate that such a God is unknown to the pages of Scripture. It seems to be utterly arbitrary to compel believers to worship a “God in three Persons,” who is never once so named under the title “God” in the Bible.

Following this major conclusion from the evidence, it would then appear that the Father of Jesus Christ is the one designated “God,” some 1300 times in the New Testament. In the Hebrew Bible the same One God reveals Himself as a single Personal Being, and He does this constantly by speaking of Himself as “I,” “Me,” and being addressed as “Thou,” “Thee” and referred to as “He,” “Him,” thousands upon thousands of times.

Single personal pronouns describe single persons, human or Divine.

Against this massive testimony it would be unreasonable to appeal to those four texts which associate this unipersonal God with the plural pronoun “us.” In Isaiah 6, the Deity asks, “Who will go for us?” The scene of the question is set in heaven, where the singular Person ADONAI, the Lord God, is surrounded by a council of angels. To these attendants He addresses Himself and invites them to join Him. “Who will go for Me and You — i.e. us?” The same angels are invoked in the three other cases where the One God speaks to others than Himself.

It is an extraordinarily illogical leap to plead that “us” in connection with the Deity must tell us that the Father was addressing exactly two others — a coequal Son, about whom the Hebrew Bible has nothing to say — and even more improbably that He was addressing His own Holy Spirit. Nowhere in Scripture does God speak to His Spirit.

According to the *New Bible Dictionary*, “no one would have taken the Old Testament to affirm anything but the *exclusive*, i.e., unipersonal monotheism which is the hallmark of Judaism and Islam.”¹ If that is the case then the Trinity is revealed only in the New Testament. But there is not a shred of evidence that “God” in the New Testament ever means a Triune or Biune God. On the contrary Jesus, in conversation with a Jewish scholar trained in the Hebrew Bible and therefore in unitary monotheism, affirms his belief in the central cardinal tenet of his Jewish heritage. The Shema of Israel (Deut. 6:4), that God is a single Lord has not been altered one iota. Jesus confirms belief in his Father as the One God and makes this the supreme element in true theology and devotion.

“There is one God, the Father” (1 Cor. 8:4-6) is the creed of Paul, following Jesus. That Jesus is recognized as the Lord Messiah needs no demonstration, but equally clear is the New Testament insistence on the creed of Jesus and the Hebrew Bible, that the One God is a single divine Person, never two or three.

Popular presentations of the Trinity are liable to reinforce the disbelief of the unbelievers. When they are told that Christianity’s central doctrine of the Godhead means understanding that the fetus Jesus or the baby Jesus, being fully God, was at the same time upholding the universe with the personal power of the Deity, they will do more than raise eyebrows. They will ridicule such an absurdity. We suggest that the Bible should not be dishonored by incredible speculation. Nor is it conceivable that the one who grew in wisdom, did not know the day of his future coming, and learned obedience from the things he suffered, was at the same time the omnipotent, eternal God, coequal and coeternal with his Father. A Son of God who is God cannot die. And God, his Father, cannot lie. He described Himself as immortal, incapable of death. This alone should convince the open-minded that Jesus is not God and that the biblical God is One unequalled Divine Person. Jesus is His unique agent and Son.

¹ I. Howard Marshall, A.R. Millard, J.I. Packer, D.R. Wiseman, eds, Intervarsity Press,