

## ON JOHN 20:28: WHAT DID THOMAS SAY IN HEBREW?

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The book by Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), which has sold over forty million copies to date, and the recently released movie version (May 19, 2006), which will be seen by at least an equal number of people, has focused attention upon Mary of Magdala (Mary Magdalene), who appears in John 20:1-18 and is credited by the narrative as being the first person to whom Jesus appeared after his execution by Pontius Pilate on the charge of claiming to be “The King of the Jews.”<sup>1</sup> The phenomenal bestselling novel has also focused attention upon Constantine and the first ecumenical council held at Nicea (modern-day Iznik, Turkey), where, drawing heavily upon the fourth Gospel, the Christian bishops defined God and Jesus in this way: “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance [ὁμοούσιον] with the Father, by Whom all things were made: who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven.”<sup>2</sup>

There are two more apparitions in this first conclusion of the fourth Gospel: one to ten of the original twelve apostles on the evening of the same day (John 20:19-23), Thomas being absent, and one eight days later, at which time he was present (20:26-29). These two episodes have given to Thomas a paradoxical fame. On the one hand, for his skepticism after being told by the ten that they had seen the Lord (20:24-25), he is known as Doubting Thomas (and all who like him

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<sup>1</sup> According to Paul, Peter (whom he calls by his Hebrew nickname Kepha) was the first person to whom Jesus appeared (1 Cor. 15:5). According to *The Gospel According to the Hebrews*, which was used by the Ebionites, fragments of which still survive in patristic citations, James (Ya’akov), the brother of Jesus, was the first.

<sup>2</sup> See “Nicene Creed” and “Ecumenical council” at Wikipedia.com; also “Seven Ecumenical Councils” and “Iznik (Nicaea)” at allaboutturkey.com. For an enlightening account of this important turning point in the history of Christianity, when the Church became the pawn of a pagan emperor of the Roman Empire and the Trinitarians defeated the Arians, read *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity During the Last Days of the Roman Empire* by the Jewish scholar Richard Rubenstein.

doubt the resurrection of Jesus are called Doubting Thomases).<sup>3</sup> “Thomas, called... ‘Twin,’ who was one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord,’ but he answered, ‘Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe’” (New Jerusalem Bible).

On the other hand, for the fragmentary statement he makes eight days later (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου, John 20:28), Thomas is considered the apostle who made a “confession” greater than that of Peter in the Synoptics (“You are the Messiah,” Mark 8:29 and parallels, *The New American Bible*).<sup>4</sup>

Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, “Put your finger here, look, here are my hands. Give me your hand, put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving anymore but believe.” Thomas replied, “My [L]ord and my God!” Jesus said to him: “You believe because you [have seen] me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (20:26-29).

Was Thomas by his exclamation giving utterance to a more profound revelation than Peter at Caesarea Philippi? Did the early Jewish believers teach that “Jesus is LORD and God” (John 20:28) rather than “Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36)? Is that a correct interpretation of what Thomas uttered? Is that how we are to understand what we are told he said here in the fourth Gospel?

Trinitarians commonly consider the fragmentary statement of Thomas (John 20:28) the strongest proof in the New Testament that “Jesus is God” — a formulation which, apparently no one seems to be aware, constitutes

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul employs an apostolic creed and the Aristotelian syllogism in an attempt to persuade the Corinthian “Doubting Thomases,” who said, “There is no resurrection of the dead.”

<sup>4</sup> The fourth Gospel reports a different saying of Peter according to most recent translations, based as they are upon better manuscript evidence than earlier translations: “and we believe [and] we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:69). According to the Greek text of the Nestle-Aland 27th edition of the fourth Gospel, John the Baptist is the first to call Jesus “the Son of God,” that is, the Messiah (1:34). And he is followed in turn by Andrew: “We have found the Messiah! (which is translated Anointed)” (1:41, NAB); Philip: “We have found him of whom Moses wrote in the Law, and the Prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, of Nazareth!” (1:45); and Nathanael: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!” On 1:41, the New American Bible notes: “the Hebrew word masiah, ‘anointed one’...appears in Greek as the transliterated messias only here and in John 4:25.” And on 1:49, the NAB states: “this title is used in the Old Testament, among other ways, as a title of adoption for the Davidic king (2 Sam 7:14; Psalm 2:7; 89:27), and thus here with King of Israel, in a messianic sense. For the evangelist, Son of God also points to Jesus’ divinity (cf. John 20:28).”

Euthychianism or monophysitism, a view anathematized by the fifth ecumenical council, the Council of Chalcedon (553 CE). See, for example, Raymond Brown's comment in his magisterial Anchor Bible commentary *The Gospel According to John* where he calls it "the supreme Christological pronouncement of the fourth Gospel,"<sup>5</sup> and in his more recent *Introduction to New Testament Christology* he says in the essay in the appendix "Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?": "This is the clearest example in the NT of the use of 'God' for Jesus."<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Bultmann writes of John 20:28: "the only passage in which Jesus is undoubtedly designated or, more exactly, addressed as God."<sup>7</sup>

More than a century before these two, Adam Clarke in his commentary on the Bible (famous for its rejection of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son) had this to say about the famous fragment of Thomas: "Thomas was the first who gave the title 'God' to Jesus, and, by this glorious confession, made amends for his former obstinate incredulity."

Even much earlier still, in the third century Novatian in his *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* twice used John 20:28 as proof that it is correct to believe that "Jesus is God." In Chapter XIII, he writes:

And if, whereas it is the portion of no man to come from heaven, He descended by coming from heaven; and if, whereas this word can be true of no man, "I and the Father are one," Christ alone declared this word out of the consciousness of His divinity; and if, finally, the Apostle Thomas, instructed in all the proofs and conditions of Christ's divinity, says in reply to Christ, "My Lord and my God"; and if, besides, the Apostle Paul says, "Whose are the fathers, and of whom Christ came according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed for evermore," writing in his epistles; and if the same apostle declares that he was ordained "an apostle not by men, nor of man, but by Jesus Christ"; and if the same contends that he learned the Gospel not from men or by man, but received it from Jesus Christ, reasonably Christ is God. Therefore, in this respect, one of two things must needs be established. For since it is evident that all things were made by Christ, He is either before all things, since all things were by Him, and so He is justly God; or because He is man He is subsequent to all things, and justly nothing was made by Him. But we cannot say that nothing was made by Him, when we observe it written that all things were made by Him. He is not therefore subsequent to all things; that is, He is not man only, who is subsequent to all things, but God also, since God is prior to all things. For He is before all things, because all things are by Him, while if He were only man, nothing would be by Him; or if

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1970, 1047.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Brown, *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 1994, 188.

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "The Christological Confession of the World Council of Churches," in his *Essays Philosophical and Theological*, 1955.

all things were by Him, He would not be man only, because if He were only man, all things would not be by Him; nay, nothing would be by Him. What, then, do they reply? That nothing is by Him, so that He is man only? How then are all things by Him? Therefore He is not man only, but God also, since all things are by Him; so that we reasonably ought to understand that Christ is not man only, who is subsequent to all things, but God also, since by Him all things were made.

And in Chapter XXX, where he seeks to show that “Jesus is LORD and God,” he writes:

And let us therefore believe this, since it is most faithful that Jesus Christ the Son of God is our Lord and God; because “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word. The same was in the beginning with God.” And, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt in us.” And, “My Lord and my God.” And, “Whose are the fathers, and of whom according to the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for evermore.” What, then, shall we say? Does Scripture set before us two Gods? How, then, does it say that “God is one”? Or is not Christ God also? How, then, is it said to Christ, “My Lord and my God”? Unless, therefore, we hold all this with fitting veneration and lawful argument, we shall reasonably be thought to have furnished a scandal to the heretics, not assuredly by the fault of the heavenly Scriptures, which never deceive; but by the presumption of human error, whereby they have chosen to be heretics. And in the first place, we must turn the attack against them who undertake to make against us the charge of saying that there are two Gods. It is written, and they cannot deny it, that “there is one Lord.” What, then, do they think of Christ? — that He is Lord, or that He is not Lord at all? But they do not doubt absolutely that He is Lord; therefore, if their reasoning be true, here are already two Lords. How, then, is it true according to the Scriptures, there is one Lord? And Christ is called the “one Master.” Nevertheless we read that the Apostle Paul also is a master. Then, according to this, our Master is not one, for from these things we conclude that there are two masters. How, then, according to the Scriptures, is “one our Master, even Christ”? In the Scriptures there is one “called good, even God”; but in the same Scriptures Christ is also asserted to be good. There is not, then, if they rightly conclude, one good, but even two good. How, then, according to the scriptural faith, is there said to be only one good? But if they do not think that it can by any means interfere with the truth that there is one Lord, that Christ also is Lord, nor with the truth that one is our Master, that Paul also is our master, or with the truth that one is good, that Christ also is called good; on the same reasoning, let them understand that, from the fact that God is one, no obstruction arises to the truth that Christ also is declared to be God.

The confusion caused by interpreting the fragmentary statement of Thomas as a proof that it is correct to assert that “Jesus is LORD and God” is evident here. The Hebrew Scriptures teach that “Yahweh is one” (Deut. 6:4). Jews recite the Shema in prayer every day, hanging it on the doorposts of their homes (mezuzah) and binding it to the head and hand (tefillin). This statement of God’s Oneness constitutes the first words a Jewish child is taught to say, and the last words uttered before a Jew dies. Jesus taught the Shema (Mark 12:29; see Appendix I).<sup>8</sup> If one asserts that John 20:28 proves that “Jesus is LORD and God,” one is then placed on the horns of a dilemma and faced with an apparent contradiction, as Novatian above pointed out and sought to resolve.

The purpose of this article is to present considerations which show that the exclamation of Thomas in John 20:28 has been misinterpreted because it has been read out of context and because the underlying Hebrew words for “lord” and “God,”<sup>9</sup> which would have been known and, I argue, spoken by Thomas in such a situation, are universally overlooked. The words will also be discussed in Aramaic, though such a term for the language spoken by the Jews in that time is not used in the Greek New Testament, and David Flusser, the eminent Jewish scholar who wrote a book on Jesus and the article on him in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, argued that Jesus and his disciples spoke Hebrew.<sup>10</sup>

By the early half of the 20th century, modern scholars reached a nearly unanimous opinion that Aramaic became a spoken language in the land of Israel by the start of Israel’s Hellenistic Period in the 4th century BCE, and thus Hebrew ceased to function as a spoken language around the same time. However, during the latter half of the 20th century, accumulating archeological evidence and especially linguistic analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls has qualified the previous consensus. Alongside Aramaic, Hebrew also flourished as a living spoken language. Hebrew

<sup>8</sup> The parallel accounts in Matthew (22:37) and Luke (10:27) omit the first line of the Shema, which Mark has. And Luke places the scene much earlier than Mark and Matthew.

<sup>9</sup> See John 5:1; 20:16; 19:13, 17, 20; Rev. 9:11, 16:16 = seven texts; in addition, John 1:41; 4:25; compare Acts 21:40; Acts 22:6; also Acts 26:14.

<sup>10</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 10:10, Jerusalem, 1971. See also now the article by one of his students at the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research at Hebrew University, Dr. Shmuel Safrai, “Spoken Languages in the Time of Jesus,” at [JerusalemPerspective.com](http://JerusalemPerspective.com), where he says, “Hebrew was the primary language spoken in the land of Israel in the time of Jesus.” This echoes what had been suggested by Hebrew University professor M.H. Segal as early as 1909 when he argued that Mishnaic Hebrew showed the characteristics of a living language, and that the Jewish people in the land of Israel at the time of Jesus used Hebrew as their primary written and spoken language (see M.H. Segal, “Mishnaic Hebrew and Its Relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Old Series 20 (1908-1909), 647-737; also Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew*, Oxford, 1927).

flourished until near the end of the Roman Period, when it continued on as a literary language [in] the Byzantine Period in the 4th century CE...

Although the survival of Hebrew as a spoken language until the Byzantine Period is well-known among Hebrew linguists, there remains a lag in awareness among some historians who do not necessarily keep up-to-speed with linguistic research and rely on outdated scholarship. Nevertheless, the vigor of Hebrew is slowly but surely making its way through the academic literature. *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* distinguishes the Dead Sea Scrolls Hebrew from the various dialects of Biblical Hebrew it evolved out of: “This book presents the specific features of DSS Hebrew, emphasizing deviations from classical BH.” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* that once said in 1958 in its first edition, Hebrew “ceased to be a spoken language around the fourth century BC,” now says in 1997 in its third edition, Hebrew “continued to be used as a spoken and written language in the New Testament period.” *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew* says, “It is generally believed that the Dead Sea Scrolls, specifically the Copper Scroll and also the Bar Kokhba letters, have furnished clear evidence of the popular character of MH [Mishnaic Hebrew].” And so on. Israeli scholars now tend to take it for granted that Hebrew as a spoken language is a feature of Israel’s Roman Period.<sup>11</sup>

### ὁ κύριος in John 20

First, then, does anyone learned in the Scriptures maintain that John 20:28 teaches that Jesus is LORD and God, Yahweh and Elohim, like his Father and God? Yes. Raymond Brown, the most distinguished Roman Catholic biblical scholar of the 20th century in the United States, in his landmark commentary in *The Anchor Bible, The Gospel According to John*, says, “It is Thomas who makes clear that one may address Jesus in the same language in which Israel addressed Yahweh,”<sup>12</sup> thereby justifying prayer to Jesus as well as to God the Father

<sup>11</sup> “Hebrew Language” at Wikipedia.com. It is universally agreed that Jesus and the twelve used the Hebrew Scriptures in their teaching in the land of Israel (see Matt. 5:17, where Jesus says, “Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not one [yod] and [qots] is to disappear” and 23:35: “and so you will draw down on yourselves the blood of every upright person that has been shed on earth, from the blood of Abel the holy to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah,” where the Hebrew Bible, its text and canon, are alluded to by Jesus. It is to be noted in passing here that the mistake of Matthew, “Zechariah son of Barachiah,” is corrected in Luke 11:51.)

<sup>12</sup> *The Gospel According to John*, 1047.

Himself, though Jesus himself taught his disciples to pray to the Father alone.<sup>13</sup> In *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, Brown writes:

Here Jesus is addressed as “God” (a nominative form with the definite article, which functions as a vocative). The scene is designed to serve as a climax to the Gospel: As the resurrected Jesus stands before the disciples, one of their number at last gives expression to an adequate faith in Jesus. He does this by applying to Jesus the Greek (Septuagint) equivalent of two terms applied to the God of the OT (κύριος, “Lord,” rendering *YHWH*, and θεός, “God,” rendering *Elohim*)...In three reasonably clear instances in the NT [Heb. 1:8-9; John 1:1; 20:28] and in five instances that have probability [John 1:18; 1 John 5:20; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1] Jesus is called [“]God.[”]The use of “God” for Jesus that is attested in the early 2nd century [in the seven authentic letters of Ignatius of Antioch] was a continuation of a usage that had begun in the NT times. There is no reason to be surprised at this. “Jesus is Lord” was evidently a popular confessional formula in NT times, and in this formula Christians gave Jesus the title κύριος which was the Septuagint translation of *YHWH*. If Jesus could be given this title, why could he not be called “God” (θεός), which the Septuagint often used to translate *Elohim*? The two Hebrew words had become relatively interchangeable, and indeed *YHWH* was the more sacred term.<sup>14</sup>

In a footnote he adds:

The earliest major preserved copies of the Septuagint were copied by Christians in the 4th and 5th centuries AD. We are not certain about how consistently earlier copies and other Greek translations circulating in NT times used κύριος for *YHWH*. I make no claim that all “high christology” appearances of κύριος for Jesus in the NT consciously reflected a translation of *YHWH*. Yet in general the NT authors were aware that Jesus was being given a title which in Greek was used to refer to the God of Israel.

Where, I ask, is this clearly so indicated in the NT? Where, in particular, in the fourth Gospel?

Now, that the words ὁ κύριός μου are not equivalent to “my *YHWH*”<sup>15</sup> the context shows.<sup>16</sup> Mary of Magdala calls Jesus ὁ κύριος three times earlier, in verses 2, 13, and 18:

<sup>13</sup> John 15:15; 16:23; see also the Matthean and Lukan forms of the prayer he gave to the apostles, Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4.

<sup>14</sup> *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 189.

<sup>15</sup> *YHWH* occurs some 7000 times in the Hebrew Bible but never with a possessive pronoun, that is, never as “my *YHWH*” — *ed.*

<sup>16</sup> See David Bivin, “Jehovah — A Christian Misunderstanding,” at [JerusalemPerspective.com](http://JerusalemPerspective.com)

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. “They have taken the Lord [τὸν κύριον] out of the tomb,” she said, “and we don’t know where they have put him”...But Mary was standing outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, as she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said “Woman, why are you weeping?” “They have taken my [I]ord [τὸν κύριόν μου] away,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him”...So Mary of Magdala told the disciples, “I have seen the Lord [τὸν κύριον],” and that he had said these things to her.

In verse 15, she addresses the man whom she thinks is the gardener as κύριε (“sir”): “Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, ‘Sir [κύριε], if you have taken him away tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him.’” And in verse 20b the author says, “The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord [τὸν κύριον].” Later, in verse 25, “They said to him that they had seen the Lord [τὸν κύριον].”

Who will argue, or has argued, that in the six uses of the term ὁ κύριος in this section of the narrative it means YHWH? In verses 18, 20, and 25, the term τὸν κύριον (“the Lord”) refers to Jesus in the resurrected state. It does not mean YHWH in those places. Why should it mean so now in the mouth of Thomas at 20:28?

Totally, then, there are seven occurrences of the word ὁ κύριος in the Johannine resurrection narrative in John 20. Four times it is used by Mary (vv. 2, 13, 15, and 18), once by the author (v. 20), once by the ten (v. 25), and once by Thomas (v. 28). In neither of the first four instances does the term signify YHWH, nor in the next two; in particular, in the three places where it refers to Jesus in the resurrected state (vv. 18, 20, and 25) it is not equivalent to YHWH. What is there in the text to suggest that in the seventh use by Thomas at 20:28 ὁ κύριός μου = “my YHWH”?

The verses that follow, when carefully considered, reinforce this. Observe that Thomas is not given a benediction by Jesus for the statement. He does not say, “Blessed are you, Thomas [‘Twin’]! For flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.” Rather, he is gently rebuked. “You believe [that I have been raised from the dead] because you [have seen]. Blessed are those who have not seen but believed” (John 20:29). Moreover, the author himself does not claim that the statement by Thomas is a proof that “Jesus is LORD and God.” He indicates immediately afterwards that this story and all the others in the book were written for the purpose of proving that *the Messiah, the*

*Son of God, is Jesus:*<sup>17</sup> “There were many other signs that Jesus worked in the sight of the disciples, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you might believe that *the Messiah, the Son of God, is Jesus*, and that believing this you might have life through his name” (John 20:30-31, my translation). So the author himself gives us his intention in writing the story of Thomas. It is not given to prove that “Jesus is LORD and God,” Yahweh and Elohim, like his Father and his God, but that *the Messiah, the Son of God, is Jesus*.

After all, eight days earlier, Mary had claimed that Jesus had appeared to her and had told her to tell the eleven that he had a Father and a God, and that his Father and his God was their Father and their God. “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and find my brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (20:17). Was Thomas with the other ten when Mary came with this message? If so, how could he now contradict what Jesus said by calling him YHWH?

And a little before this, Jesus had prayed, in the presence of the eleven, this way in part: “And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (17:3). He and Thomas had even spoken with each other at this same time in this way: “Thomas said, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’ Jesus said: ‘I am the Way... Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him’” (14:5-7).

Jesus explains what he means when he says, “From this moment you know him and have seen him” in the immediately succeeding conversation with Philip:

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, Philip, and you still do not know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? What I say to you I do not speak of my own accord: it is the Father, [who is] in me, who is doing the works. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe it on the evidence of these works...for the Father is greater than I” (14:8-11, 28).

“The Father is greater than I,” “the Father is *in* me,” “*in* me,” “the Father is *in* me.” These words of Jesus are overlooked by those who take John 20:28 out of context, or, if considered, they are not understood correctly. Six times the

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<sup>17</sup> So the Greek should be rendered in English, as D.A. Carson pointed out in a major article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* a few years ago: “The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered,” *JBL* 106/4, 1987, 639-651; see now his recent commentary on *The Gospel According to John*, 1991.

Johannine Jesus says “the Father is *in* me” (10:38, 14:10-11; 17:21 and 23). This was taught also by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19: “God was *in* Christ.” (It should be carefully noted that “God” in the Greek here is anarthrous, articleless, as is “God” in John 1:1c.) And Colossians 2:9 states, “*In* him dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily” (AV).

We can go further back. Jesus declares publicly at one point (John 12:44-50) the well-nigh same statement that he made to Thomas and Philip: “Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me” (12:45).

Does this mean that Jesus was claiming to be God? No, it means exactly what it says: Jesus was claiming to represent his Father and God. The fourth Gospel (12:49; 14:9) expands the teaching of Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:4 that Jesus is “the image of God.” And in Colossians 1:15, Jesus is called “the image of the invisible God.” The author of Hebrews says of him, as the New Jerusalem Bible puts it, “He is the reflection of God’s glory<sup>18</sup> and bears the impress of God’s own being [*hypostasis*]” (Heb. 1:3; compare Wisdom of Solomon 7:26: “For she [Wisdom] is a reflection of the eternal light, untarnished mirror of God’s active power, and *image of his goodness*.”)

In the fourth Gospel, as in the Synoptics, Jesus calls himself “the son of man.” Thirteen times in the first thirteen chapters this term, which has sparked much interest and discussion among modern biblical scholars since the end of the nineteenth century, occurs (eleven times in the mouth of Jesus and twice in the mouth of “the Jews”); and, even plainly, one time in the fourth Gospel, Jesus calls himself a man: “As it is, you want to kill me, a man who has told you the truth as I have heard it from God” (8:40).

He does not claim to be God, whom, as we have seen, he calls “the only true God” (17:3). He says in another place that God is “the one God” (5:44). If, then, God is “the one God,” as Jesus taught, then Jesus cannot be that God. And if God is “the only true God,” as Jesus prayed, then Jesus cannot be that only true God or “true God of true God,” as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed formulated in the fourth century CE puts it, basing this on an erroneous reading of 1 John 5:20.

### **ὁ κύριος and ὁ θεός in John 21**

If the material in the appended second conclusion of the book, John 21, is considered, in connection with an attempt to correctly comprehend John 20:28, though this has never been done to my knowledge, it can be seen that even there ὁ κύριος (“the Lord”) does not connote YHWH. In this appendix or second conclusion, there are seven more verses where ὁ κύριος (“the Lord” in the nominative case) or κύριε (“Lord” in the vocative case) occurs. In 21:7 it appears twice (once in the mouth of the anonymous disciple whom Jesus loved, and once by the author): “The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord’ (ὁ

<sup>18</sup> See the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: “Light of Light.”

κύριος). At these words ‘It is the Lord,’ (ὁ κύριος), Simon Peter tied his outer garment round him (for he had nothing on) and jumped into the water.”

Again it is used by the author in 21:12: “Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, ‘Who are you?’ They knew quite well it was the Lord (ὁ κύριος).”

And three times in the mouth of Peter in verses 15, 16, and 17 it appears again.

When they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others do?” He answered, “Yes, Lord (κύριε), you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He replied, “Yes, Lord (κύριε), you know I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Look after my sheep.” Then he said to him a third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt that he asked him a third time, “Do you love me?” and said, “Lord (κύριε), you know everything; you know I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. In all truth I tell you, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you like, but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go.” In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God (20:15-19).<sup>19</sup>

In 21:20, κύριε (“Lord”) appears in the mouth of the anonymous disciple again: “Peter turned and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them — the one who had leant back close to his chest at the supper and said to him, ‘Lord (κύριε), who is it that will betray you?’”

And, lastly, again in the mouth of Peter in 21:21: “Seeing him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘What about him, Lord (κύριε)?’”

Totally, then, there are eight occurrences of κύριος (“Lord”) in these seven verses: five are in the vocative (κύριε) and three in the nominative case (ὁ κύριος). In none of these instances after the exclamation of Thomas at 20:28 can it be construed to mean YHWH, even though the term refers to Jesus in the resurrected state. Is this not strange if Thomas really called Jesus LORD and

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<sup>19</sup> Notice that the only occurrence of the word “God” in John 21 appears here (v. 19), and it refers to God the Father, not to Jesus. The supposedly momentous declaration of Thomas at 20:28 is not amplified and reinforced, and the author takes no notice of it, even though Thomas is listed at the beginning of this section as being among the seven disciples present when this apparition of Jesus is alleged to have occurred (John 21:2). John 21 makes no mention of it, nor does the text allude in any way to it, as one can see is the case likewise immediately afterwards in Acts, the record of the preaching of Peter, apostle and leader of the Jewish believers (the Nazarenes), and Paul, apostle to the Gentiles.

God? Why is this so-called confession not reinforced and amplified in the immediately following second conclusion or appendix?

### **The Exclamation of Thomas in Hebrew (and Aramaic)**

It appears that it has never been noticed in the history of the interpretation of the fourth Gospel that in the original language that Thomas and Jesus spoke, Hebrew (John 20:16; Acts 26:14),<sup>20</sup> the fragment of Thomas at 20:28 would have been:

*Adoni ve Eli!* (אֲדֹנָי וְאֵלִי) and not *Adonai ve Eli* (אֲדֹנָי וְאֵלִי)

If we translate this expression into Aramaic, Thomas answered and said to him:

*Mari ve Elahi!* (מַרְאִי וְאֵלְהִי)

In neither case is Jesus being equated with YHWH in the first title (*Adoni* in Hebrew and *Mari* in Aramaic). And the second title (*Eli* in Hebrew and *Elahi* in Aramaic) must be read in the light of what Jesus taught at 10:34-38, where he claimed to be “Son of God,” not God, and that God “the Father is in me” (10:38), and he said that this was not blasphemy because the Jews themselves are called “gods” (*elohim*) in the Hebrew Scriptures. This is, indeed, not blasphemy, and this is not making them equal to YHWH. Neither is it the case here that Thomas is blaspheming or making Jesus YHWH or equal to YHWH. We do not say, “How can this man talk like that? He is being blasphemous” (Mark 2:6). And Jesus does not say, “Why do you call me God? There is no one who is God but one — God.” We do well to remember here what he said to the young man who had addressed him in the Gospel of Mark as “Good master”: “Why do you call me good? No one is good but one — God” (Mark 10:18; see Appendix II). Observe, moreover, that:

**(1) It is Thomas who makes this statement, not Jesus.** If Jesus is called “God” in John 20:28, it is Thomas who calls him so. No other Gospel bears witness to this. This climactic incident and saying is not corroborated by the Synoptics, that is to say, by neither the inauthentic longer ending of Mark (16:9-20), nor Matthew 28:1-20, nor Luke 24:1-53. *The traditional Chalcedonian Trinitarian interpretation of John 20:28 as a proof-text for the teaching that Jesus is a divinity, a deity, the second Person of the Trinity is euhemerism.* The Holy Qur’an, the scriptures which are sacred to Islam and which are as strongly monotheistic as the Hebrew Bible of Judaism, have this to say (and who can gainsay it?): “They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. The Messiah (himself) said: O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord” (The Qu’ran, Surah 5:72a).

**(2) Even more precisely, it is the author who reports this who makes Thomas say so.** If Jesus is called “God,” it is John who makes him so (compare

<sup>20</sup> See Brenton Minge, “Jesus Spoke Hebrew: Busting the Aramaic Myth” at [sharesong.org/JESUSSPOKEHEBREW.htm](http://sharesong.org/JESUSSPOKEHEBREW.htm)

Acts 2:36, where it is said that God made Jesus “Lord and Messiah”). If Jesus is called “God,” it is John who lifts up very highly or super-exalts Jesus, and it is John who through the mouth of Thomas gives him the name “God” (compare the so-called Christ hymn at Phil. 2:5-11, where it is said that it is God who “super-exalted” Jesus, God who gave him the name “Lord”).

**(3) If Jesus is truly called “God” by Thomas, why is it no one calls Thomas “the brother of God,” or Peter, or John, or any of the other Apostles, as Mary came to be called “the mother of God” (*theotokos*)?** After all, Jesus himself called them his brothers, did he not? “Go and find *my brothers* [see also Matt. 28:20; Heb. 2:11-13] and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (20:17). It must be conceded that “In the *Liturgy of St James*, the brother of Jesus is raised to the dignity of *the brother of the [true] God (Adelphotheos)*.”<sup>21</sup> But “the *Liturgy of St James* as it presently exists has been brought into conformity with developed Trinitarian Christianity and Eastern Orthodoxy...Forming the historical basis of the Liturgy of Antioch, it is still the principal liturgy of the Syriac Orthodox Church and Syrian Catholic Church in communion with Rome in Syriac and, in the ancient Indian Orthodox Church, the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in translations into Malayalam, Hindi and English.”<sup>22</sup>

**(4) Jesus did not call himself LORD and God in the fourth Gospel. He only sanctioned being called Lord and Master.** He said to the twelve the night before he died, “You call me *Master* and *Lord*, and rightly; so I am. If I then, *the Lord* and *Master*, have washed your feet, you must wash each other’s feet” (John 13:13). And in John 20 Mary of Magdala calls him *the Lord* (vv. 2 and 18), *my [l]ord* (v. 15), and, in Hebrew, *Rabbouni* (“my Master,” v. 16).<sup>23</sup> As Julian wrote in 363 CE:

At any rate neither Paul nor Matthew nor Luke nor Mark ventured to call Jesus God. But the worthy John, since he perceived that a great number of people in many of the towns of Greece and Italy had already been infected by this disease, and because he heard, I suppose, that even the tombs of Peter and Paul were being worshipped — secretly, it is true, but still he did hear this — he, I say, was the first to venture to call Jesus God” (*Contra Galilaeos*).

<sup>21</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, chapter 4, section 29 as quoted in “James the Just” at Wikipedia.com.

<sup>22</sup> “Liturgy of St James” at Wikipedia.com.

<sup>23</sup> Observe that “Rabbouni” is transcribed in the preceding sentence with an “o” as it is in the koine Greek of the New Testament. Also, note that this is a Hebrew word. See the note in the New American Bible: “a Hebrew or Aramaic word.”

**But, what about John 1:1?**

John 1:1-3, 10b (“In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God...and the world was made by him”) is the statement of the author of the fourth Gospel (compare 1 Cor. 7:10: “I, Paul, say this, not the Lord”) and is a midrash of Proverbs 8:22 (“Yahweh created me the beginning...”) and Genesis 1:1 after the manner of the anonymous author of Hebrews 1:2 and 1:8-12, where “the Son” (Jesus) is called “God” on the basis of the Septuagint version of Psalm 44:7-8 (45:6-7).<sup>24</sup> Further, “the Son” is called “LORD” on the basis of Psalm 101:25-27 LXX (102:25-27), a psalm originally addressed to YHWH (see the Hebrew text), and he is credited with the creation of the world.<sup>25</sup> As the aforementioned Julian writes concerning this verse:

<sup>24</sup> Which, by the way, is a mistranslation of the Hebrew: see *The Tanakh*, New Jewish Society Publication Version; also Raymond Brown, *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 186, footnote 269: “Actually, the Septuagint reading is a misunderstanding of the Hebrew (Masoretic) text of the psalm.” [However the New Testament validates the Septuagint, so that “Thy throne, O God” remains an acceptable translation — *ed.*]

<sup>25</sup> The exegetical key to John 1:1-3, 10b and Hebrews 1:2 and 1:8-12 — passages which have baffled everyone for centuries now — I have recently discovered here in Istanbul in the 2nd-century work by Irenaeus called *The Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, 43-55, where there is an exegesis of Genesis 1:1 *mistranslated* from a *corrupt* Hebrew text (*Baresith bara Elowin basan benuam samenthares*, “In the beginning, the Son, God, established then the heaven and the earth”); Genesis 19:24; Psalm 44:7-8 LXX (45:6-7); Psalm 109:1, 3 LXX (110:1, 3); Proverbs 8:22; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6 based on the Septuagint and where these verses are used to prove that Jesus is LORD and God and that he created the world (“So then the Father is Lord and the Son is Lord, and the Father is God and the Son is God; for that which is begotten of God is God”) — argumentation very similar to which can be found in Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* (see Demetrios Christ Trakatellis, *The Pre-Existence of Christ in Justin Martyr: An Exegetical Study with Reference to the Humiliation and Exaltation Christology*, Harvard Dissertation Series 8, Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976; consult also Günther Reim, “Jesus as God in the Fourth Gospel: The Old Testament Background,” *New Testament Studies*, 30, 1984, 58-60, for a brief analysis of Justin Martyr’s use of Psalm 44:7-8 LXX as a proof-text for showing that Jesus is “God.”) Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, who was a student of John the Apostle at Ephesus in Asia Minor or present-day Turkey (see his work at [tertullian.org/fathers](http://tertullian.org/fathers)). This work by Irenaeus was discovered in December 1904 in the Church of the Blessed Virgin at Eriwan in Armenia by Dr. Karapet Ter-Mekerttshian, one of the most learned scholars of the Armenian clergy. It was edited by him with the translation into German in collaboration with Dr. Erwand Ter-Minassiantz in 1907 in *Texte und Untersuchungen* (xxx. 1). Dr. Adolf Harnack added a brief dissertation and some notes. In 1912 Dr. Simon Weber of the Faculty of Catholic Theology in the University of Friburg in Breisgau published another translation with the help of some Armenian scholars. Dr. J. Armitage Robinson, Dean of Wells, published a translation in English in 1920. Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* mentions that Irenaeus, in addition to his great work *Against Heresies*, had written *A Discourse in Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. As Dr. Robinson remarks, “This work was entirely lost sight of:

But that Moses believed in one God, the God of Israel, he says in Deuteronomy: “So that thou mightest know that the Lord thy God he is one God; and there is none else beside him.” And moreover he says besides, “And lay it to thine heart that this the Lord thy God is God in the heaven above and upon the earth beneath, and there is none else.” And again, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord.” And again, “See that I am and there is no God save me.” These then are the words of Moses when he insists that there is only one God. But perhaps the Galilaeans will reply: “But we do not assert that there are two gods or three.” But I will show that they do assert this also, and I call John to witness, who says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” You see that the Word is said to be with God? Now whether this is he who was born of Mary or someone else — that I may answer Photinus at the same time — this now makes no difference; indeed I leave the dispute to you; but it is enough to bring forward the evidence that he says “with God,” and “in the beginning.” How then does this agree with the teachings of Moses? (*Contra Galilaeos*).

#### **What about John 1:18?**

John 1:18 reads this way in the Jerusalem Bible (1966) and the New Jerusalem Bible (1985): “No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” The translators have twice rejected the text recently introduced in the latter part of the 20th century by other major translations. And rightly so, as I see it. Shall it be thought credible that a text which calls Jesus “God” would have disappeared for 1,500 years and no Christian knew about it? Shall a text which the New Revised Standard, the Bible endorsed by the World Council of Churches and favored by the Society of Biblical Literature, has just included in 1989, though it was well known when the Revised Version was made at the end of the 19th century — shall this awkward-sounding Gnostic and Arian-like text be now considered along with John 20:28 as one of the strongest proof-texts for the euhemeristic teaching that Jesus who was called “the Messiah” was/is also God? Call me a Doubting Thomas, if you will, on this one, but I cannot accept it. Neither does the eminent textual critic and New Testament scholar, Bart Ehrman (see his book *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* for a penetrating and illuminating discussion).

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no one seems ever to have quoted a word of it.” After its discovery and translation in the early part of the 20th century, it has not been generally known. It was placed online by Roger Pearse of Ipswich, United Kingdom in 2003. I happened to discover it this week, June 14, 2006 while doing research for this article.

**What about John 3:13?**

John 3:13 (“No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man, who is in heaven”), which the Tome of Damasus (382 CE) used as a proof-text to teach that Christians were bound to believe that Jesus was in heaven with God the Father while he lived on earth, is a corrupt text and all recent major translations of the New Testament omit the relative clause at the end “who is in heaven,” which is found in the King James Version, the Douay-Rheims-Challoner Bible, and even in the New American Bible (1970, first edition).

**What about John 8:58?**

John 8:58 (“Before Abraham was, I am [he]”) has been mistranslated for centuries (see now the New American Bible: “Before Abraham was, I AM”). The Jerusalem Bible (1966) translated the *ego eimi* of the Greek as “I Am,” but changed this to the still incorrect “I am” in the New Jerusalem Bible (1985).<sup>26</sup>

**What about John 10:30?**

John 10:30 (“I and the Father are one”) has been misinterpreted. Trinitarians misread the *en* (“one”), which is neuter in the Greek, as *eis*, a masculine form. John Calvin in his commentary on the Bible says this concerning this verse: “The ancients greatly perverted this passage, when they would prove from it that Christ is identically of the same nature (or consubstantial) with the Father, for Christ speaks not concerning an unity of substance, but of the mutual agreement between the Father and himself, to wit, affirming that whatsoever he does would be sanctioned by the power of the Father.”

**(5) If Jesus is indeed called “God” here,** in the sense which Chalcedonian Trinitarians take it, why is it that he himself appears to John on the island of Patmos and claims in the very first verse that God has given him a revelation to show unto his servants “things which must soon take place” (Rev. 1:1)? In Revelation 5:1-14, we are even shown the vision of the exact time when Jesus received from “him who sits on the throne” the knowledge of these things of the future which he did not know before and which he commanded John to write on the Lord’s Day while he was on the isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea:

I saw in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne there was a scroll that was written on back and front and was sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a powerful angel who called with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” But there was no one, in heaven or on the earth or under the earth, who was able to open the scroll and read it. I wept bitterly because no one could be found to open the scroll and

<sup>26</sup> See Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound*, University Press of America, 1998.

read it, but one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed, and so he will open the scroll and its seven seals.” Then I saw, in the middle of the throne with its four living creatures and the circle of the elders, a Lamb that seemed to have been sacrificed; it had seven horns, and it had seven eyes, which are the seven spirits that God has sent out over the whole world. The Lamb came forward to take the scroll from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne; when he took it, the four living creatures prostrated themselves before him and with them the twenty-four elders; each one of them was holding a harp and had a golden bowl full of incense which are the prayers of the saints. They sang a new hymn: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to break its seals, because you were sacrificed and with your blood you bought people for God of every race, language, people and nation and made them a line of kings and priests for God, to rule the world.”

In my vision, I heard the sound of an immense number of angels gathered round the throne and the living creatures and the elders; there were ten thousand times ten thousand of them and thousands upon thousands, loudly chanting: “Worthy is the Lamb that was sacrificed to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessing.” Then I heard all the living things in creation — everything that lives in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, crying: “To the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb be all the praise, honor, glory and power, for ever and ever.” And the four living creatures said, “Amen”; and the elders prostrated themselves to worship.

**(6) And, yet again, if Jesus is indeed called “God” by Thomas at John 20:28** in a sense different from that in Psalm 82:6 in the Hebrew Bible, why is it that Jesus himself still calls God “my Father” and “my God” when he descends from heaven and speaks with John on the island of Patmos, just as he did when he spoke to Mary of Magdala in the garden in Jerusalem after he rose from the dead according to John 20:17? Observe the use of “my Father” (three times) and “my God” (five times) in these words of Jesus:

“To anyone who proves victorious, and keeps working for me until the end, I will give the authority over the nations which I myself have been given by **my Father**, to rule them with an iron scepter and shatter them like so many pots. And I will give such a person the Morning Star. Let anyone who can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev. 2:27; at 2:7 many manuscripts read, “Let anyone who can hear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches: those who prove victorious I will feed from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of **my God**.”)

“So far I have failed to notice anything in your behavior that **my God** could possibly call perfect. Remember how you first heard the message. Hold on to that. Repent!” (Rev. 3:2b).

“Anyone who proves victorious will be dressed, like these, in white robes; I shall not blot that name out of the book of life, but acknowledge it in the presence of **my Father** and his angels” (Rev. 3:5).

“Anyone who proves victorious I will make a pillar in the sanctuary of **my God**, and it will stay there for ever; I will inscribe on it the name of **my God** and the name of the city of **my God**, the new Jerusalem which is coming down from **my God** in heaven, and my own new name as well” (Rev. 3:12).

“Write to the angel of the church of Laodicea and say, ‘Here is the message of the Amen, the trustworthy, the true witness, the beginning of the creation of God...’” (Rev. 3:14, my translation; see Prov. 8:22 in the Hebrew Bible, and the commentary on it in *Bereshit Rabbah*).

“Anyone who proves victorious I will allow to share my throne, just as I myself have overcome and have taken my seat with **my Father** on his throne” (Rev. 3:21).

**(7) If Jesus is indeed to be called “God” in the Chalcedonian sense because of John 20:28**, how is it that John also in the epistolary prescript of the same book, Revelation of Jesus Christ, speaks of Jesus as having a God and a Father?

John, to the seven churches of Asia: grace and peace to you from him who is, who was, and who is to come, from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, the highest of earthly kings. He loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood, and made us a Kingdom of Priests to serve **his God and Father**; to him, then, be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

**(8) The last book of the New Testament is more properly and fully called Revelation of Jesus Christ** (Rev. 1:1). This whole book of 22 chapters consists of information about the future which Jesus claims to have received in heaven from his God and his Father after his ascension and which clearly he did not know before — a fact which ill accords with Chalcedonian Trinitarianism.

**(9) Jesus never says in the body of the fourth Gospel** that his name is The Word — this is the late first-century ascription of the author of the prologue (John 1:1, 14).<sup>27</sup>

**(10) Likewise, Jesus never says that he is the only-begotten/only son of God** in the fourth Gospel (see the New American Bible and the New Revised Standard Version of John 3:16 and 18, where these words are those of the author of the fourth Gospel and not the words of Jesus).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> John says that all things came into existence through the word, through “it,” as all translations of the prologue before Rheims-Douay and KJV read — *Ed.*

<sup>28</sup> But nevertheless very much part of Scripture and thus authoritative — *Ed.*

### The Reason for the Confusion over “Lord” and “LORD”

The Greek Septuagint and the New Testament authors who used Greek and quoted from it did not distinguish between the term κύριος when it referred to Yahweh and κύριος when it referred to a human being, as the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible does.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, all, Trinitarians especially, have been confused when they come to John 20:28, as we see in R. Brown’s statement in the introduction above. (I call this *the blind spot in fourth Gospel scholarship* — alas, but one of several.) **But Thomas and Jesus knew the difference between Adoni and Adonai** (with kametz). This is the key which unlocks the mystery which has surrounded this otherwise puzzling statement of Thomas in the fourth Gospel. If we retrovert the fragment into Hebrew (John 20:16) or Aramaic, we see that what Thomas says harmonizes with the three uses of κύριος referring to Jesus in the resurrected state which precede his statement (John 20:18, 20 and 25) and the eight uses that follow afterwards in the seven verses in the second conclusion or appendix (John 21:7, 12, 15, 16, 17, 20 and 21). If it was indeed Jesus that he addressed, and not the Father in Jesus, as it has been and can be more precisely read, he did not say the equivalent of “my YHWH!” but rather he said, “*Adoni ve Eli*” (“my lord and my God!”)

This is certainly what Peter taught about 40 days later at the Feast of Weeks (Shavuoth) or Pentecost when he quoted Psalm 110:1 from the Hebrew Scriptures (“YHWH said to *adoni*, ‘Sit at my right hand’”) and then concluded, “For this reason the whole House of Israel can be certain that the Lord [*Adon/Mar*] and Messiah [*Meshicha*] whom God [*Elohim*] has made is this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).

As Geza Vermes, the famous Jewish scholar at Oxford University, states in his recent book *The Changing Faces of Jesus*:

It is well known that the Jews employed “Lord” as a synonym for God in their religious language. The various divine names, the sacrosanct and unpronounced YHWH (“Jehovah”), as well as the Hebrew *Adon* (“Lord”) and *Adonay* or the Aramaic *Mar* (“Lord”) are all translated into Greek by the same word, *Kurios* (“Lord”). We can be sure that Jews, whatever language they spoke, had no difficulty in distinguishing a divine “Lord”

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<sup>29</sup> The confusion this has caused in the minds of Gentile Christians can be seen in the manuscript tradition at John 12:41; Acts 10:36b (“He is the God who is Lord of all,” Hippolytus, *Against Noetus*, 13); 13:48; 15:40; 20:28 and 32; Rom. 10:16-17; 14:10-11; 1 Cor. 2:16; 10:9 (the RSV reads “the Lord”; the NRSV reads “Christ”; the NJB reads “the Lord”; the NAB reads “Christ”); 1 Pet. 3:14-15; 5:1 (p 72 reads “suffering of God”; all other versions read “suffering of Christ”); 2 Pet. 1:2 (most mss. read “May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and our Lord Jesus”; p 72 deletes the “and” and reads “God our Lord Jesus”); Jude 4 and 5 (the Vulgate and Douay-Rheims read “Jesus”; p 72 reads “God Christ”; all other versions read “the Lord”); and Rev. 1:8 (the KJV reads “the Lord”; all modern versions “the Lord God”).

from a human one. The hurdle which Hellenized Gentile Christians, like the members of the church of John, had to leap was considerably higher.<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion

John Calvin, a Chalcedonian Trinitarian and a leading light of the Reformation, pointed out that the Church Fathers had made a wrong use of John 10:30. And Sir Anthony Buzzard in his book *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound* has pointed out how John 8:58 has been misread. It should now be pointed out that John 20:28 as a proof-text that Jesus is YHWH is likewise a misreading. It is an exegetical fallacy that should be abandoned as have many, but not yet all, of the “proofs” of the Trinity from the Hebrew Bible used by Chalcedonian Trinitarians, such as Genesis 1:1 and 26; 16:9 (the angel of Yahweh as pre-incarnate Christ); 18:1ff (the three men who visit Abraham — one of whom is called Yahweh, and the other two “angels”); 19:24 (“The LORD rained fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah from the LORD from heaven,” KJV); Exodus 4:2ff (the angel of Yahweh at the burning bush on Horeb, “the mountain of God,” in Sinai who reveals to Moses his name, Ex. 3:14, 15); the angel of great counsel (Isaiah 9:6, LXX); the Word of God (the Johannine name of Jesus at Rev. 19:11); the personification of Wisdom as a Lady in Proverbs 8 = the so-called pre-incarnate Christ! So also “the Son of God” (KJV) — “a most unfortunate translation” (Adam Clarke) — in the fiery furnace in Babylon with the three Jewish friends of Daniel (Daniel 3:25) = Jesus! Concerning this notorious Christian error in translation and interpretation, the Jerusalem Talmud reports one of the rabbis as saying, “When Nebuchadnezzar spoke of ‘the Son of God’ (Dan. iii. 25), an angel came and smote him on the face, saying, ‘Does God have a son?’” (Yer. Shab. vi. 8d).

### Summary

In fourteen instances (six in John 20 before 20:28 and eight in the appendix John 21 after 20:28) the word ὁ κύριος does not mean YHWH. This contextual evidence, therefore, indicates quite plainly that the two-millennia-old construal of ὁ κύριός μου at John 20:28 as equivalent to “my YHWH” is not correct. And the *theos* in ὁ θεός μου should be read as having the same metaphorical signification as it does in Psalm 82:6, as Jesus taught in the body of the fourth Gospel (John 10:34-36). This reading of both terms in the exclamation of Thomas, ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (John 20:28) is further confirmed when the underlying Hebrew, the original language of the saying, is considered. The use of θεός in the prologue (1:1) is a statement from the author, not Jesus, and is similar to its use by the anonymous author of Hebrews, where at 1:8-12 the titles “God” (ὁ θεός, 1:8) and “Lord” (κύριε, 1:10) are applied to “the Son” (1:1ff) by

<sup>30</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus*, 2001, 39.

means of quotations from Psalm 44:7-8 (45:6-7) and Psalm 101:25-27 (102:25-27) in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, and where the creation of the world is credited to him. Irenaeus in his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* does the same, using Psalm 44:7-8, and adding a *mistranslation* of a *corrupt* Hebrew text of Genesis 1:1 (*Baresith bara Elowin basan benuam samenthars*: “In the beginning, the Son, God, established then the heaven and the earth”). **But these three texts** — Psalm 44:7-8, Psalm 101:25-27, and Genesis 1:1— in the version of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures used by Irenaeus **do not correspond to the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible.**

## APPENDIX I God and Lord The Only God There Is

“The command that brings Israel into being is the Shema. It is read aloud in the form, *Shema Israel Adonai Eloheynu Adonai Echad* (Deuteronomy 6:4). Translated word for word, that means, ‘Hear, O Israel, my [LORD] our God my [LORD] One.’ The words sound strange, but they hold the all-important key that unlocks the Jewish understanding of God. ‘*Adonai*’ means ‘my [LORD]’<sup>31</sup> but that word does not actually appear in the Hebrew text. Written in the text are the four letters YHWH (known, from the Greek for ‘four-lettered,’ as the Tetragrammaton). YHWH was the name revealed by God to Moses, but because it shared in the holiness of God, it was pronounced by no one except the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Many Jews prefer to say instead *haShem*, the Name, translating it perhaps as ‘the Eternal’; and wherever the letters YHWH occur in the text of scripture, the vowels of Adonai are inserted, to remind the reader not to try to pronounce the name, but to say instead Adonai. That is why, in English translations of what Christians call the Old Testament, the name of God is translated as ‘the LORD.’ Older translations made a mistaken attempt to transliterate the name, putting the vowels of Adonai into YHWH and producing the impossible form, Jehovah. In academic scholarship, it has become conventional to represent this name of God as Yahweh. Already, therefore, this reveals something important about the self-revelation of God: God’s holiness extends even to God’s name, which must be treated with due reverence. The word *eloheynu* is the word *elohim*, God, with a pronoun added to its end, so that it means ‘our God.’ So the sentence means ‘Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is One’; or ‘Yahweh our God, Yahweh is One’; or ‘Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.’”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Or “the LORD” — *ed.*

<sup>32</sup> John Bowker, *GOD: A Brief History*, 2003, 178.

## APPENDIX II

Note on Matthew 19:17 and Parallels<sup>33</sup>

It is often claimed that the text of the New Testament can be reconstructed from quotations of the early Church Fathers. As an example — Matthew 19:17/Mark 10:18/Luke 18:19:

- JUSTIN, an early Church Father, writing in 140-160, writes in his Dialogue 101.2: “One is good, my Father in the heavens.” This very early quotation is not what we read in the Bible today.
- EPHREM: Commentary on the Diatessaron, XV.9, in both the original Syriac and the Armenian (2 manuscripts) reads: “One is good, the/my Father who [is] in the heaven.” Ephrem died in 373, and the Syriac manuscript of the Commentary is fifth century.
- TATIAN, about 172, composed the Diatessaron (the Gospel harmony upon which Ephrem was commenting), on the basis of the Gospel texts current then. And this citation agrees precisely with Justin’s.
- IRENAEUS: Haer. V.7.25 (pre-185): “One is good, the/my Father in the heavens.” Another second century source confirming the “wrong” version of Matthew 19:17.
- HIPPOLYTUS: Haer. V.7.25 (pre-222): “One is good, the/my Father in the heavens.” Another early Christian Father has the “wrong” version.
- CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Strom. V.10.63 (composed c. 207): “One is good, the/my Father.”
- PSEUDO-CLEMENTINE HOMILIES: XVI.3.4 about 260 AD. “For one is good, the/my Father in the heavens.”
- VETUS LATINA MS e (apud Matthew, 5th century): “Unus est bonus, pater.” This is the second most ancient manuscript and it also has “Father.”
- VETUS LATINA MS d (apud Luke, 5th century): “Nemo bonus nisi unus Deus pater.” “Father” again.

The Douay-Rheims-Challoner Version and the King James Version (1611) read that “no one is good except God alone.” This was changed from the older “no one is good except the Father” so as to conform with the evolving idea that Jesus was also God, just like the Father. The saying in Matthew has been changed yet again recently in all major modern translations to read “Why do you ask me about what is good?” And the man who talks to Jesus does not address him as “Good Master” but as simply “Master”!

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<sup>33</sup> From “New Testament Alterations” at <http://essenes.net/gop31nt.htm> — with minor corrections.

**APPENDIX III****The Confusion over “Lord” and “LORD” in a Recent Papal Document**

In “Apostolic Letter **Dies Domini** of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of the Catholic Church on Keeping the Lord’s Day Holy” we find the following: “And when Christians spoke of the ‘Lord’s Day,’ they did so giving this term the full sense of the Easter proclamation: ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’ (Phil. 2:11; cf. Acts 2:36; I Cor. 12:3). Thus Christ was given the same title which the Septuagint used to translate what in the revelation of the Old Testament was the unutterable name of God: YHWH.” The word “lord,” however, in Acts 2:26 refers to a human being, for it is the conclusion drawn from the quotation of Psalm 110:1 (“YHWH said to *adoni*”) by Kepha (Peter) on the day of Pentecost. And in the Hebrew Bible, from which Kepha quoted, there is a distinction made between the two persons in the opening of that psalm. **YHWH** (elsewhere *Adonai*) refers to the Lord God and **adoni** refers to the Messiah. The Septuagint gives both of these personages the title “lord” and thus leads to the common confusion witnessed in the pope’s letter and seen in Raymond Brown’s *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*.

As a concluding aside, be it noted that such a confusion occurs also throughout the notes of the New Jerusalem Bible, the most popular Bible among Catholics in Europe (see, for example, 1691e: “So he is the Messiah awaited, but he will be ‘Lord,’ a title which the OT meticulously reserved for God.” See also earlier 1689x. Likewise, 1801x: “The Christians style themselves ‘those who invoke the name of the Lord,’ 9:14, 21; 22:16; 1 Co 1:2; 2Tm 2:22; the title ‘Lord’ indicates no longer Yahweh but Jesus.”)