

EDITORIAL

2007 saw the publication of an important new book on the Deity of Jesus. Its opening pages contain enthusiastic acclamation, by no less than nineteen evangelical scholars, of Robert M. Bowman's and J. Ed Komoszewski's *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ*.¹

We must respectfully declare our disagreement with the entire thesis. Their selection of biblical verses is much too limited for fair coverage of the whole of Scripture, and both what they concede at certain points in the book as well as what they leave out show that they have not grasped the unitary monotheism of Israel, of Jesus and of the New Testament.

It is noteworthy that in the Scripture index there is a disproportionately large number of texts from John. It would be more convincing if the proposition "Jesus is God" could be demonstrated from the whole range of the Bible. When pondering why, as they admit, the New Testament so rarely says that Jesus is God, all the authors can offer is that the writers were Jews who hesitated to say that someone else than the Father was God. How very true: so very hesitant, because they never imagined that the anointed one was a second eternal God Person. The argument from Bowman and Komoszewski seems to be that the New Testament writers always believed that Jesus was God but they never, or very rarely, said this expressly!

That is exactly the point. The New Testament calls Jesus God once for certain in Hebrews 1:8.² The New Testament calls the Father God (*ho theos*) about 1317 times. Surely those statistics speak loudly. If the Son of God is equally God with his Father, why this obvious absence of any such declaration when it comes to naming who God is?

The most significant paragraph perhaps occurs on p. 166, where the authors discuss the Shema which Jesus, agreeing with a Jewish scribe, declared to be the most important commandment of all. The authors fully concede that:

in first-century Judaism, the affirmations of "one God" and "one Lord" were synonymous and referred to the same divine being, YHWH, the God of the patriarchs, of Moses, and of the

¹ Kregel, 2007.

² In John 20:28, as the sequel to and resolution of the issue in ch. 14, Thomas is probably recognizing finally that Jesus is "my Lord Messiah" and that God is seen and encountered in him. "My Lord and my God" — the repetition of the article suggests two different persons are in Thomas' mind, cp. John 14:7.

prophets. Jesus affirmed the Shema as the first and greatest commandment (Matt. 22:36-38; Mark 12:28-30; cf. Luke 10:25-28), and in that regard his view was in the mainstream of Judaism.

Exactly so. And one is left wondering why the authors do not feel the need to share Jesus' unitary monotheistic view of God as declared by him as the pinnacle of all commandments. Surely John's warning to us all is clear: "He who does not bring the teachings of Messiah does not have a relationship with God" (2 John 9).

It is not convincing for the authors to appeal to Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 against Jesus in Mark 12:28-34. Paul certainly calls Jesus the "one Lord Messiah," but he has already agreed with Jesus and the rest of the Bible by stating that "for us, there is one God, the Father." This statement is exactly that of Jesus in John 17:3 where the Father is likewise defined as "the only one who is truly God" (ὁ μόνος ἀληθινὸς θεός, *ho monos alethinos theos*).

It is a desperate move to try to persuade us that Paul's "one Lord Jesus Christ" means that Jesus *is* the one Lord YHVH! The creed has already taught us that there is only one Yahweh, not two. Paul speaks very often of "our Lord Jesus Christ," and it must be clear that no one ever thought in terms of "our Yahweh" or "my Yahweh." The Lordship of Jesus is defined with complete precision by Luke 2:11 (the Lord Christ) and by the woman of Canaan and the blind men (Matt. 15:22; 20:30) who know that Jesus is "Lord, son of David" — certainly not "YHVH, Son of God."

The authors leave untouched and without comment the glaring presence of Psalm 110:1 as an umbrella text over the whole New Testament and cited by Peter in Acts 2:34-36 as the key to the status of Jesus. He is now the Lord Messiah at the right hand of God. He is the "my lord" (no capital letter, NAB, RSV, etc.) of Psalm 110:1, where *adoni* (my lord) is never the title of Deity but always (195 times) of a highly ranked human (occasionally angelic) person. Paul, reflecting the oracle of Psalm 110:1, gives us in all its simplicity the right view of God and the Messiah and their relationship: "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Messiah Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). He is indeed our Lord Jesus Messiah, the "our Lord" of the early Aramaic cry *maranatha*, "Our Lord come!"

We can concur with Bowman and Komoszewski in the fine things they say about Jesus' deeds, words, and claims. But all this demonstrates the wonderful and astonishing thing the One God, the Father has achieved in His unique and sinless Son, the *human* Messiah,

supernaturally begotten and thus *coming into existence* as the Son of God (Luke 1:35). He is Son of God for Luke precisely because of (*dio kai*) his supernatural origin by biological miracle in Mary. The virgin birth is the sign that the one coming into existence, and therefore not pre-existing, is the Son of God. His Sonship, Saviorhood and Lordship are determined by the moment of his begetting in Mary.

Bowman and Komoszewski have missed this point in Luke 1:35 and try to get rid of it: “Luke states that Jesus would be *called* God’s Son because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit (This is not the same thing as saying that he would *be* God’s Son only as a result of that virginal conception)” (88).

Raymond Brown provides the necessary correction of this erroneous claim. Brown states what is really quite obvious: “I have stressed...that being ‘called’ Son of the Most High or Son of God is tantamount here to being God’s Son”³ He “‘will be called holy’ — Son of God is tantamount to saying ‘he will be.’ And so I cannot follow those theologians who try to avoid the causal connection in the ‘therefore’ [Luke 1:35] which begins this line by arguing that for Luke the conception of the child does not bring the Son of God into being, but only enables us to call him ‘Son of God’ who already was the Son of God.”⁴ Raymond Brown shows that Bowman is avoiding the awkward fact that Luke did not believe in the Incarnation of a preexisting Son. Brown again on Luke 1:32: “‘will be called’ brings to expression what one is, so that it means not less than ‘he will be.’ Interchangeability of the two phrases is seen by comparing Matt. 5:9, ‘they will *be called* sons of God,’ and Luke 6:35, ‘you will *be* sons of God.’”⁵

It is not exegetically convincing to maintain that there are two who are equally Yahweh and at the same time that Jesus was a committed adherent of the central unitarian creed of his heritage (Mark 12:29). If one insists on the Deity of Jesus, one must realize that neither Jesus nor Paul held that doctrine. Meanwhile Muslims and Jews stand aghast that Christians can defy their own Savior’s stated definition of God as a single Divine Person.

Perhaps the time has come for the world’s seekers after truth to agree that the Bible presents Jesus as the begotten Son of God (as described in Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35) and not “God the Son” of the later councils.

³ *The Birth of the Messiah*, Geoffrey Chapman, 1977, 314.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 289.