

Torah Observant “SHOMER MITZVOT”

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוֹת

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)
By Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

EXPLORING THE SHEMA: Discussions on the Issues of Trinity

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

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EXPLORING THE SHEMA (Paper One of Three): God is One

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Paper One Topics (click link to access topic of choice):

1. [Introduction](#)
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1. Introduction

I want to give my opinion on the Ineffable Truth of the Oneness of HaShem, couched in the Revelation that the Son of God and the Spirit of God share the same Essential Nature as God the Father. This somewhat ongoing study (updated as need arises) will take various turns along the way. The commentaries will range from raw data (Scriptural citations), to rabbinic Midrash (known in Christian circles as homiletic discourse), to apologetics (critical reasoning), to possible polemics (theology on the offense against heresy). As a by-standing reader (and at times a participating one) I don't want anyone to walk away without warning.

I am not infallible. Moreover, I am not above correction. Please consider this commentary set as an attempt to uncover Truth, but consider that my weakness is also your weakness: personal opinion and personal conviction.

This particular topic is not a trivial undertaking. But it certainly produces many mixed emotions among its adherents. As a Torah Teacher, I am personally impassioned about this particular topic. Folks are usually fairly convicted one way or another as to the decision of whether Yeshua is YHVH veiled in flesh or not. And they rightfully should be! For in my opinion this conviction of necessity becomes a salvific issue (one related to salvation) for believers. After reading the second installment of my commentary you will understand why I make such a statement.

I would like to begin with a quote from Kevin J. Conner, author of 'The Tabernacle of David.' Here is my quote:

'Truth must be seen in all of its glorious facets as one related whole. One of the hardest things to maintain in all of these various facets of truth that God is bringing to the Church is BALANCE! It is a point worthy of recognition that heresy in its many forms originated in truth. In fact, it is impossible to have heresy apart from truth. There can never be the counterfeit without the genuine article first. The counterfeit is never the original. The

original comes first; the imitation follows. So it is with truth and error. Truth existed before error. Error uses truth to launch out upon, build upon. What is heresy? Heresy is simply an aspect of truth taken to an extreme and pushed out of proportion with the whole body of truth. It creates party-spirit in those that respond to it.

'It is because TRUTH is not seen as one related whole that this happens. No one facet of truth can be used to contradict or distort another facet of truth, or otherwise heresy begins. Taking one facet of truth and majoring on it alone to the neglect or violation of other truth brings discord; hence, the need for balance in every emphasis that is being brought to the Church today. Balance is harmony, and harmony is having all parts combined in an orderly and pleasing arrangement.'¹

This is the first installment in my personal ongoing study into the subject of the Incarnation. I want to share with you what I believe the “Shema” (basically a quote from Deuteronomy 6:4) can be hinting at, using the typical Jewish answer first, and then going on to explain how a non-Jewish believer can better “arm” himself against such an answer. This is simply an exercise designed to explain to some why many Jewish People are unwilling to give up their monotheism. This commentary set is not to be used as a standard witnessing technique among my people, but if the material proves helpful in explaining the difficult topic to unbelievers and anti-missionaries, then the commentary will have served its purposes.

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2. God is One

“God is ONE. There is no other god (or God) worthy of worship aside from YHVH.” This is a typical, monotheistic answer, based on a traditional Jewish view of Deut. 6:4, aka, the Shema.

This subject will continue to baffle many Jews and Christians alike: how can God be “One” and yet somehow “three.” The matter is really made clear when Christians explain that correct Christianity does not believe in three gods! We believe in ONE God who expresses himself in a “unity of three distinct persons.”

God is one. The Shema affirms this. The characters of the Scriptures, both “Old and New Testaments” confirm this. The Shema is the “watchword of Jewish monotheism.” The Shema is foundation. The word “shema” means “hear,” “listen intently.” It is a Hebrew imperative that carries the notion of an action-oriented command. In other words, “Now that you have heard, go and do something about it!” The Shema often introduces the discussions on the difficult concept of the “tri-unity” of our unexplainable God. The ancients called HaShem “Eyn-Sof,” a term which quite literally means “without borders.” Our God is infinitely unknowable. Yet because of our

¹ Kevin J. Connor, *The Tabernacle of David* (Bible Temple Publishing, Portland Oregon, 1976), Foreword p. 1.

finite minds, he has chosen to express himself in ways that we can perceive. However we shall have to wait to gain a fuller perception of him, once we put off this corruptible flesh and our eyes are able to see through this mirror clearly instead of darkly.

The “trinity” is a doctrine that has long been characterized by misunderstanding, both among my people, as well as a few Christians. I believe that most of the confusion actually stems from the language that we choose to use when describing the unified nature of our somewhat incomprehensible God. However, the Torah does not expect us to label God and stuff him in box. Nor are we so smart that our systematic theological viewpoints of him will ever fully describe his wonderful glory. Yet the revelation that has been graciously granted to us is a complete one, in that, all that we need to know to maintain a right-standing relationship with HaShem is found within the pages of his Word, and most specifically, in the person of his only and unique Son Yeshua our Messiah.

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3. What does “Echad” Mean?

Allow me to quote the passage in question and comment on it. To be sure, it is the most famous passage in the Torah: the “Shema” of Deuteronomy 6:4.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

“Sh’ma Yisra’el, ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad” [Hear, Isra’el! ADONAI our God, ADONAI is one].”

Anyone with some knowledge of the Hebrew text will realize that the word translated ADONAI is the four-letter name for HaShem, YHVH, also known as the “Tetragrammaton.” The Jewish people use this name only in a very sacred and personal way. To be sure, today Torah-observant Jews, in reverential fear of misuse never speak it. Because of the understanding that the Shema “defines” the oneness of YHVH (which is what the Hebrew word **echad** implies), many Jews are fiercely monotheistic. After all, is this not what the plain sense (**p’shat**) of the verse in Deuteronomy is teaching?

The word “echad” teaches us that God is the **ONLY** God that we are to serve. To be sure, some translations render this verse as, “Hear Isra’el, the LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” This is the primary meaning conveyed by the use of this word “echad.” That God is our only God is paramount to correctly understanding any revelation of him in his Word.

Dr. Michael Brown is widely recognized as the world’s foremost Messianic Jewish apologist. He writes in his lengthy Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, vol. 2,

The Shema—“Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4)—is the most basic Jewish confession of faith. What is meant by the word one ('ehad) that is found in this confession? Messianic Jews understand this to mean a compound unity, while traditional Jews understand it to be an absolute unity. The word can mean a compound unity, though it doesn't have to; however, contra Maimonides, it does not mean an absolute unity. Most likely, Maimonides maintained that Jews have to believe that God is “only” one as a reaction to exaggerated Christian concepts of God as “three.” His idea of absolute unity simply cannot be found in the Scriptures.

It might help to understand the meaning of 'ehad by looking at some other Scripture passages in which this word is found. In Genesis 2:4, it is used in the phrase “one flesh,” which occurs when a man is united to a woman; in other words, this use of “one” refers to a compound unity. In Exodus 36:13, the joining together of all the many pieces into the one Tabernacle is described by the word 'ehad. In 2 Samuel 7:23 and Ezekiel 37:22, Israel is described as one nation made up of hundreds of thousands of people. Other examples could be produced, but the basic point should be clear: To say that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is 'ehad does not tell us anything about his essential nature, whether he is three in one or ten in one.

God and Moses strictly warned Israel to ignore all the other gods worshipped by the surrounding nations and to worship YHWH, and only YHWH. This is the primary meaning of the Shema, and this use of the word 'ehad (“alone,” “only”) can be found elsewhere in the Scriptures (e.g., 1 Chron. 29:1). Certain medieval commentators, including Abraham Ibn Ezra and Rashbam, believed the Shema was emphasizing that “the LORD is our God, the LORD alone,” or as Moshe Weinfeld entitles his discussion of the Shema, “Exclusive Allegiance to YHWH.” This interpretation is also found in the midrash to this passage (see b. Pesahim 56a; Sifre Deuteronomy 31; Genesis Rabbah 98:4). The prophet Isaiah echoes this call to allegiance (see Isa. 44:8; 45:5a; 45:18; 45:22). In other words, this understanding of the word “one” is not primarily interested in the nature of God's being, but is meant to be a profession of faith.²

Even though there is only One, True God, the TaNaKH is full of instances where God appeared in “less than familiar” form. God has appeared as his Angelic Messenger, as a Flame, as a Man with two angelic hosts, as Light, and as a Thick Cloud. All of these revelations are uniquely and completely God! Yet all were for the sake of the one being visited. God of necessity must “veil” his glory so that we as frail men are not consumed in his holiness.

Yet, the Renewed Covenant teaches us that Yeshua is the final and most complete revelation of God that the world has ever known! To look at Yeshua is to see the Father in flesh! Such a revelation requires a metamorphosis of the heart of a man! A natural man cannot understand the incarnation; only a man with a renewed spirit can understand this revelation. In a crude way you could liken seeing Yeshua like beholding someone in a mirror: the image in the mirror exactly resembles that which the mirror is reflecting, but in actuality you are beholding the mirror image! Such is Yeshua! To look at him is to gaze at the exact mirror image of the Father without actually beholding the

² <http://realmessiah.com/index.php/en/answers> (but for the full answer see his book at pp. 3-14).

Father himself! Yeshua is the “veil” by which the Father covered himself when walking among mankind. Yet Yeshua is more than that! In his own words, *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”* (Read John 14:8, 9)

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4. Beholding Yeshua... Beholding God!

According to some scholars every instance when a mortal encountered the divine God they were in some way beholding Yeshua! In this understanding Yeshua is the common factor in every single revelation of God in the Scriptures. To be sure, they declare that *“No one has ever seen God; but the only and unique Son, who is identical with God and is at the Father’s side,”* (read John 1:18).

Yet Yeshua is also uniquely the Son of Man. Yeshua is NOT the Father, nor is God simply “Yeshua in disguise.” Rather, and I’m stretching human language to its limits to explain this, Yeshua is the Word made flesh, the Word which was WITH God, and the Word which WAS God! It is not as if Yeshua became God somehow. It is rather that God the Word became a human being and we beheld such glory in the person and work of the Messiah named Yeshua. Such profundity!

But, by understanding what the B’rit Chadashah (New Covenant) teaches believers about the unity of Yeshua and the Father (John 10:30), we are given the ability to interpret the Shema in a more theologically correct light. ADONAI is echad.... Yet, according to Yeshua’s own testimony, He and the Father also constitute an echad. Is HaShem more than one?! No! Is Yeshua “meshugga” (Yiddish for “crazy”)? Of course not! This relationship of the Father to the Son has long since been a problem for my people to grasp.

It also continues to baffle anyone attempting to put God in a neat, theological box.

Do we believe in three gods? No. That is the heresy called “Tritheism.” Do we believe in one God who simply wears three different “masks” to interact with mankind? No. That is the heresy called “Modalism.” What we believe in is ONE God who expresses himself in a “unity of three.” The mystery is that each expression is uniquely God and yet uniquely single.

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5. Our God is “Complex”

Ontology is defined as: “a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relations of being; a particular theory about the nature of being or the kinds of existents.” The ontological implications of the very words, names, and “titles” used in the Scriptures help us to relate to God himself.

Observe: All of what the word “God” implies is not exhausted in the use of the words “his Son”; all of what the name “Yeshua” implies is not exhausted in the term “the Father”; all of what the term “Ruach HaKodesh” implies is not exhausted in “the Man Yeshua” and so on and so forth. We cannot logically collapse each name, phrase, and title into the others without doing damage to the import of the Scriptural references. Indeed to attempt to do so is to approach the Scriptures from an incorrect mind set. Historically, the Hebraists thought of God in concepts of “this” and “that,” i.e., he can be two simultaneously seemingly contradictory concepts at the same time (case in point: he cannot be and has never been seen according to John 1:18; 1 John 4:12, and yet Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, and 70 of the elders of Isra'el saw him in Exodus chapter 24). God is both “this” (seen) and “that” (unseen) at the same time. Conversely, the historic Greek mindset from which Western thought also developed, approached God in concepts of “this” or “that,” i.e., he cannot be two simultaneously seemingly contradictory concepts at the same time (case in point: Yeshua cannot be God because God is an eternal being, while Yeshua was a finite human). The tension created by affirming two seemingly contradictory concepts at the same time (a paradox) is referred to by some scholars as “Hebrew tension.”

As many scholars have been keen to explain, it is vital that we as biblically accurate students of the Word understand and affirm that God's nature is properly explained as “one what yet with three whos.” Dr. James White of Alpha & Omega Ministries will help us to understand this very valuable lesson on “being vs. person” as it pertains to how to accurately understand and articulate the biblical concept of Trinity:

It is necessary here to distinguish between the terms “being” and “person.” It would be a contradiction, obviously, to say that there are three beings within one being, or three persons within one person. So what is the difference? We clearly recognize the difference between being and person every day. We recognize what something is, yet we also recognize individuals within a classification. For example, we speak of the “being” of man—human being. A rock has “being”—the being of a rock, as does a cat, a dog, etc. Yet, we also know that there are personal attributes as well. That is, we recognize both “what” and “who” when we talk about a person.

The Bible tells us there are three classifications of personal beings—God, man, and angels. What is personality? The ability to have emotion, will, to express oneself. Rocks cannot speak. Cats cannot think of themselves over against others, and, say, work for the common good of “cat kind.” Hence, we are saying that there is one eternal, infinite being of God, shared fully and completely by three persons, Father, Son and Spirit. One what, three whos.

NOTE: We are not saying that the Father is the Son, or the Son the Spirit, or the Spirit the Father. It is very common for people to misunderstand the doctrine as to mean that we are saying Jesus is the Father. The doctrine of the Trinity does not in any way say this!

The three Biblical doctrines that flow directly into the river that is the Trinity are as follows:

- 1) There is one and only one God, eternal, immutable.
- 2) There are three eternal Persons described in Scripture – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. These Persons are never identified with one another – that is, they are carefully differentiated as Persons.
- 3) The Father, the Son, and the Spirit, are identified as being fully deity—that is, the Bible teaches the Deity of Christ and the Deity of the Holy Spirit.³

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6. Conclusions

Yeshua is God veiled in flesh and the Spirit of God is God himself. The matter of authority comes into play when I examine the roles of each deity. The role of God is as head over Yeshua and the role of the Ruach is as witness to Yeshua. Yet the role of Yeshua is as witness of the Father and the role of the Spirit is as active agent of the Father as well. The part that brings it all together is when we remember that true worship belongs to God and God alone! As such, whenever Yeshua or the Ruach is also worshipped we catch a glimpse of the “oneness” of the “three-ness” of God.

Are you confused yet? As mentioned earlier, the historic Greek mind would be! But the historic Hebrew mind lives with these tensions as foundational Biblical truths! And yet some skeptics will always twist and distort the Truth into something it was not meant to be! I even imagine someone may eventually make this very article say something that I did not intend for it to say. But with language failing to fully describe the unknowable Eyn-Sof I shall have to rely on this “best approximation” for now. One day this glass that I see through dimly shall be made clear!

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EXPLORING THE SHEMA (Paper Two of Three): YHVH and Yeshua

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Paper Two Topics (click link to access topic of choice):

³ <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/1998/04/29/a-brief-definition-of-the-trinity/>

1. [Introduction: Is “Trinitarianism” Logically Incoherent?](#)
2. [Let’s Get a Little Bit Technical](#)
3. [Is Yeshua God? \(An Appeal to Mystery\)](#)
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1. Introduction: Is “Trinitarianism” Logically Incoherent?

*Hint: Philosophy and theology actually make for good “study buddies”

This is the second installment in an ongoing study into the subject of the nature of the One True God, with an emphasis on the Incarnation of Yeshua as fully God and yet fully man. Attempts at understanding the hypostatic nature of God and Yeshua forces one to rely on a fair amount of philosophizing along the way. But one should never lose sight of the fact that the Bible is not so much a book of philosophy as it is a book about the revelation of God, his Messiah, his Spirit, and his covenanted people.

Many Christians, both historical and contemporary, often express a convictional belief in the Trinity of the Bible without being able to logically comprehend or understand the full scope of the Trinity as a whole. Indeed without the additional benefit of professional training in analytic logic or philosophy, a layman’s level understanding of the Bible and its God is perfectly fine to accomplish the goal of Messiah in bringing about the genuine, personal salvation of an individual, correct? As mentioned briefly in Paper One (and which will be articulated later in Paper Two), there is every good reason to consider an appeal to the triune nature of God as a mystery an admirable approach to the topic since it is easily understandable from Isaiah 55:8 that **“As high as the sky is above the earth are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”** Indeed, commenting on “Hebraic thought vs. Greek thought” (also see my Paper One of this commentary), and within the scope of attempting to unravel the ontological nature of God and Christology, Messianic author Tim Hegg has aptly noted,

We are faced, then, with this challenge: we must seek to know Yeshua from the pages of Scripture without forcing an ontological template upon them. We cannot begin by asking the Greek questions of “essence and being” and then expect to find answers in the Hebraic-oriented text of the Bible. Rather, we must accept the fact that the identity and definition of God and the Messiah He has sent will be known in the Scriptures as we read of the work of God and His Messiah. Or to put it another way: the language of the Bible will be properly understood only when we interpret it within the Hebrew worldview in which it was written.

This will never satisfy the linear logic of the Greek mind. Nor will it work to use the categories of linear logic to describe the God of Israel. We must be satisfied with knowing and defining God and His Messiah by understanding and appreciating the work of God and what He has and will accomplish through it.

In the end, the Hebraic worldview has learned to be at home with mystery. While the goal of solving quadratic equations is to discover the value of the unknown element, the

goal of knowing God is worship (Hebrew avodah). In the linear logic of mathematics, one fails if one does not discover the value of the unknown element in the equation. In the revelation of God to man in the Scriptures and in the Messiah, one fails if one cannot be satisfied with the unknown. For though we may, through the work of God's grace, know Him indeed, we can never know Him exhaustively. Nor is our limited knowledge of Him able to provide comprehensive explanations of His person and works. When we reach the end of our ability to know Him, we are left with the mystery of His inexplicable greatness. By faith, we hold the treasure of this mystery in earthen vessels (2Cor 4:7).⁴

As reinforced in Paper One, in order to correctly understand the biblical God and to understand this particular commentary, the reader must believe by faith that the Torah correctly teaches that God is ONE (Hebrew "echad," cf. Deut. 6:4), and that there is NO room in the Scriptures for any other god, created or otherwise (cf. Isaiah 44:6). Despite the fact that God expresses himself in a unity of three persons, the monotheistic truth of God's Oneness must remain axiomatic in order for God to emerge as the ONE and ONLY recognizable YHVH who alone is worthy of worship.

How can God be ONE and yet THREE at the same time? What is more, if God is God then how can Yeshua and the Holy Spirit also be God? Doesn't this position present logical incoherency? As many Trinitarian critics like to argue, "The math doesn't add up!" This "trinity math problem" (also referred to as the "logical problem of the Trinity" by many philosophers, both Christian and non-Christian) leads to frequent accusations of worshipping three gods. To my own personal understanding of the Trinitarian landscape, many varied approaches to understanding and disambiguating the Bible's—how shall we say—"proprietary language" surrounding God's ontological nature can be articulated for today's modern believers. It is truly the benefit of many centuries of refining the unique unfolding revelation of the TaNaKH, adding to that the strong inferences from the Apostolic Scriptures, and then finally systematizing the language and theology from the Bible during the Patristic periods—leading into the various councils and formulations of creeds—that we modern Christians today can enjoy having words to express how we understand YHVH as Trinity. In the words of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy under the Trinity entry, "No trinitarian doctrine is explicitly taught in the Old Testament. Sophisticated trinitarians grant this, holding that the doctrine was revealed by God only later, in New Testament times (c.50–c.100) and/or in the Patristic era (c. 100–800). They usually also add, though, that with hindsight, we can see that a number of texts either portray or foreshadow [sic] the co-working of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."⁵

Daniel Molto writing for Sophia (an International Journal of Philosophy and Traditions) approaches the logical problem of the Trinity in this way:

In recent philosophical theology, various accounts of the doctrine of the Trinity, the claim that the Christian God is triune (existing in three persons), have tried to steer a middle path between two heresies. On the one hand, orthodoxy is threatened by tritheism, the

⁴ Tim Hegg, *The Messiah: An Introduction to Christology* (TorahResource, 2006), p. 9.

⁵ <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/trinity/>

heretical view that there are three Gods, while on the other hand, avoiding tritheism runs the risk of falling into modalism, the heretical view that the individual persons of the Trinity are merely modes of the same entity. Social Trinitarianism tries to avoid modalism by stressing the distinctness of the divine persons. In so doing, it has faced accusations of tritheism. Latin Trinitarianism, by contrast, stresses the unity of God, at the expense of the distinctness of the persons and has traditionally been accused, by its detractors, of modalism. Social Trinitarianism has traditionally been much favored by the Eastern Church, while the most notable exponents of the Latin view have come from the Western Church (though by no means are all Western theologians defenders of Latin Trinitarianism). One of the historical reasons for the disagreement is the greater role accorded to the Athanasian Creed by the Western Church, and the corresponding emphasis placed by the latter on each of the persons of the Trinity being God 'whole and entire.' In recent years, perhaps the most important defender of the Latin tradition, and critic of Social Trinitarianism, has been Leftow (1999), who has argued that, among other problems with Social Trinitarianism, it risks collapsing into a form of Arianism, because it posits multiple ways in which something may be divine. However, as we shall see, constructing a Trinitarian account which avoids positing multiple ways of being divine is no easy feat.⁶

Of course there are also a number of (now recognized and categorized) heretical approaches to this issue that history has and continues to demonstrate. Indeed, one may be inclined to suggest that it was the very existence of those historical errant postulations of the doctrine of the Trinity from outside of the Church (and some from within the Church) that forced, as it were, Christian Church fathers to utilize the language and thinking of their day (i.e., Greek logic and platonic reasoning, etc.) to formulate the various systematic creeds that we have in our possession today. Monergism.com presents this short listing of some of the more well-known, historical, yet contrary to orthodox Christian, beliefs in explaining God's nature:

Modalism (i.e. Sabellianism, Noetianism and Patripassianism)

...taught that the three persons of the Trinity as different "modes" of the Godhead. Adherants believed that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not distinct personalities, but different modes of God's self-revelation. A typical modalist approach is to regard God as the Father in creation, the Son in redemption, and the Spirit in sanctification. In other words, God exists as Father, Son and Spirit in different eras, but never as triune. Stemming from Modalism, Patripassianism believed that the Father suffered as the Son.

Tritheism

...Tritheism confesses the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three independent divine beings; three separate gods who share the 'same substance'. This is a common mistake because of misunderstanding of the use of the term 'persons' in defining the Trinity.

Arianism

...taught that the preexistent Christ was the first and greatest of God's creatures but denied his fully divine status. The Arian controversy was of major importance in the development of Christology during the fourth century and was addressed definitely in the Nicene Creed.

⁶ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11841-017-0612-y>

Docetism

...taught that Jesus Christ as a purely divine being who only had the “appearance” of being human. Regarding his suffering, some versions taught that Jesus’ divinity abandoned or left him upon the cross while other claimed that he only appeared to suffer (much like he only appeared to be human).

Ebionitism

...taught that while Jesus was endowed with particular charismatic gifts which distinguished him from other humans but nonetheless regarded Him as a purely human figure.

Macedonianism

...that that the Holy Spirit is a created being.

Adoptionism

...taught that Jesus was born totally human and only later was “adopted” – either at his baptism or at his resurrection – by God in a special (i.e. divine) way.

Partialism

...taught that Father, Son and Holy Spirit together are components of the one God. This led them to believe that each of the persons of the Trinity is only part God, only becoming fully God when they come together.⁷

So, is the concept of a Trinitarian God truly logically incoherent? Some professionally trained logicians would readily answer in the affirmative, due to the fact that some of the truth claims articulated in many of the historical Christian creeds contain conclusions that do not logically follow from their supporting premises. However, as we shall find out later in this study, one of the most often encountered solutions to the logical problem of the Trinity, utilized across a wide spectrum range of trained and untrained religious folks, is a non-logical appeal to “mystery” (referred to as “Mysterianism” by philosophers in this field), a proposed solution that actually appears to warrant a satisfactory amount of biblical support for many Christians, both theologians and laymen alike.

It has come to my attention, as one who answers a lot of email on this subject that the everyday, familiar terminology used both in the Bible as well as by Christians can also lend to misunderstandings among those both for and against this tri-personal position. The word “trinity” is not found in the Bible, but the later coinage of it by Christians usually only means ONE thing to anti-missionaries and non-Trinitarians: Three Gods! Does it convey that meaning among educated Christians? No. Orthodox Christianity (naturally including those in the Western as well as Eastern Church), do NOT espouse to a belief in three Gods! The very language of the foundational Ecumenical (viz, Patristic) Church creeds (i.e., Nicene, Apostles’, and Athanasian) will instantly affirm this truth. Thus, as the creeds will readily express, the term trinity has been historically used to convey a belief in a single God who, nevertheless, has been written about in the Bible using triadic language (i.e., Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Christians need to take care when

⁷ <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/Trinitarian%20Heresies.html>

using the word “trinity” around unsuspecting listeners since words outside of context can unintentionally carry equivocation (i.e., ambiguity and double meanings). A simplistic solution to ambiguity is usually to disambiguate by articulating the context. Indeed, among rising modern critics of the biblical Trinitarian concepts of historic importance, many of the apparent contradictions presented by Trinitarian metaphysics turn out not to be formally contradictory but merely apparently contradictory results based on the absence of further clarification. In plain language, the Bible doesn’t supply all of the technical wording that we moderns would like to see in order to satisfy our ontological itch.

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2. Let’s Get a Little Bit Technical

I want to create a sort of case study in this part of my commentary on the issue of challenging the Trinity position and whether or not Yeshua is very God in flesh, by presenting and then challenging the perspectives of a well-known, well-trained Unitarian Christian by the name of Dr. Dale Tuggy. I’m not just picking on Dr. Tuggy for no good reason. Dr. Tuggy is Professor of Philosophy at the State University of New York, a blogger, a podcast producer, and an analytic theologian. Dr. Tuggy also wrote the Trinity entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Tuggy argues, with admirable force, that the Bible does not present Trinitarian doctrine, but instead reflects Unitarian theology. Thus, for our interests here in Paper Two of my commentary, Tuggy’s teachings that Yeshua is most definitely NOT God are worthy of our careful investigation. Therefore, his insightful remarks about the “confusion” (his perspective) of speaking about God in “selves,” and “three’s,” and in “modes” is worth taking a brief look at here in this portion of my notes. Tuggy’s own Christian beliefs surrounding the Trinity can be summarized by his own opening statement to a recent public YouTube debate with Dr. Michael Brown. Here is what Tuggy stated:

My thesis is that the God of the Bible is not the Trinity because the God of the Bible is the Father alone. The NT is just as monotheistic as the OT. But it also tells us who this one God is, and contrary to catholic traditions, in the NT the one God is not the Trinity. In the New Testament this one God is the one Jesus referred to as “Our Father in heaven,” the one Paul calls “God the Father.” In the NT the one God just is the Father, and the Father just is the one God: “they” are one and the same. This is the defining thesis of Unitarian Christian theology, and it is contradicted by any trinitarian theology.

A trinitarian thinks that the one God is the tripersonal god. But no one thinks that the Father is tripersonal. The trinitarian says the one God is the Trinity, and so the Father gets demoted to being in some sense one third of God, whether a part of God, a personality of God, a mode of God, or a “Person” within God. The trinitarian’s theory requires that the one God is not numerically the same as the Father – but rather, he must distinguish the one God, the tripersonal god, from the Father. But here, fourth-century speculations clash with plain NT teaching.⁸

⁸ <https://trinities.org/blog/the-tuggy-brown-debate-dales-opening-statement/>

Tuggy identifies Yeshua, not as very God in flesh, but merely as a unique man, a simple created human being (viz, Jesus is reduced to a creature like the rest of us humans). However, because he was “deified” (i.e., glorified) by God the Father, this makes him worthy of being called “God” in special contexts, and worthy of human worship because God the Father commands it to be so. Tuggy does not believe that Yeshua is the Word of God made flesh. Instead, like “Lady Wisdom” of the book of Proverbs, Tuggy maintains that the Word of God of John’s Prologue is simply a “personification” of the thoughts and plans of God; to Tuggy, the Word of God is not a human being. Tuggy prefers to identify himself with the historical brand of non-Trinitarians known as Dynamic Monarchians (also known as Subordinationists). Tuggy’s Christology also closely resembles that of historic Socinianism, which also rejects a pre-existent Jesus (earlier drafts of this study incorrectly identified Dr. Tuggy as identifying with Arianism). Tuggy believes that most Trinitarian truth claims represent logical incoherency. A primary charge that he has against Trinitarianism is that it simply presents one too many gods! Writing for the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy he states,

“Trinitarians hold this revelation of the one God as a great self to have been either supplemented or superceded by later revelation which shows the one God in some sense to be three “persons.” (Greek: hypostaseis or prosopa, Latin: personae) But if these divine “persons” are selves, then the claim is that there are three divine selves, which is to say, three gods. Some Trinity theories understand the “persons” to be selves, and then try to show that the falsity of monotheism does not follow. But a rival approach is to explain that these three divine “persons” are really ways the one divine self is, that is say, modes of the one god. In current terms, one reduces all but one of the three or four apparent divine selves (Father, Son, Spirit, the triune God) to the remaining one. One of these four is the one god, and the others are his modes. Because the New Testament seems to portray the Son and Spirit as somehow subordinate to the one God, one-self Trinity theories always either reduce Father, Son, and Spirit to modes of the one, triune God, or reduce the Son and Spirit to modes of the Father, who is supposed to be numerically identical to the one God.⁹

As a Unitarian Christian, Tuggy likes to publicly challenge the traditional Trinitarian approach to understanding the ontological nature of God by use of his expertise in analytics and philosophy. Tuggy, although a Christian, nevertheless believes the historical creedal truth-claims to represent incoherent formal logic when describing God and all language related to his nature and his being. On his trinities blog webpage, he makes the following remarks about the confusing language that many Christians (particularly Evangelical ones) frequently use when speaking about the claim that Jesus is God:

In contemporary American evangelicalism, in practice, the old catholic christology has been simplified into this: “Jesus is God.” This is particularly true for many contemporary apologists, for whom “Jesus is God” is the central Christian claim. This is ordinarily understood to mean that Jesus just is God himself (though many a sophisticated

⁹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/trinity/>

trinitarian disagrees). One sees this belief in ordinary church life when a pastor freely interchanges “Jesus,” “God,” and “Father” while praying, or when people use “Jesus” as the proper name for the Christian God, in distinction to other alleged gods. At the same time, when evangelicals read the Bible, they intuit that there, Jesus is someone, and his God is someone else. This insight doesn’t jibe with the slogan that “Jesus is God,” so emphasized in some apologetic contexts. Confusion reigns. One way to deal with it is to celebrate it, treat it as a good thing. “Jesus is God and he isn’t – it’s a mystery.” Well, that’s one response... But is it the best response? WWJD?¹⁰

Messianic Jewish author and apologist Dr. Michael Brown in a recent (2019) online YouTube debate between Tuggy and himself offered this somewhat standard yet foundationally biblical rebuttal to Tuggy’s opening remarks regarding Unitarian vs. Trinitarian beliefs:

I will lay out the clear scriptural case that the Son is fully divine, and since there is only one God, then God must be complex in His unity. Simply stated, this one God has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son, and Spirit, and if we are to accept the testimony of the Scripture, this is the only fair conclusion.

For Dr. Tuggy and others, this is a logical contradiction, but the day we can fully wrap our minds around the nature of God is the day we’ve reduced Him to our level, thereby making a god in our image. The God of the Bible is marvelous and transcendent, without beginning and without end, rightly called in Judaism the *eyn sof* – the infinite One – and, according to the Scriptures, clearly complex in His unity. Will we accept the biblical witness, or will we try to create a god based on our own limitations and perceptions?

In the Old Testament, the Lord stated categorically that He would share His glory with no one. As written in Isaiah 42:8, “I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.” (See also 48:11, “For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.”)

Yet we see in the New Testament that massive glory and honor are given to the Son. As Revelation records, “Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped” (Rev. 5:11-14).

Either God has gone back on His Word, and another, created being is sharing in His unique honor and glory, or the Son is one with the Father, equally God. And note here that all creation worships the Lamb, meaning that He Himself is not created.¹¹

¹⁰ <https://trinities.org/blog/podcast-124-a-challenge-to-jesus-is-god-apologists/>

¹¹ <https://askdrbrown.org/library/dr-brown%E2%80%99s-opening-comments-debate-dr-dale-tuggy-january-11-2019>

As we can observe from this brief excerpt, Dr. Brown did not feel the need to address Tuggy's logical perspectives in the Trinitarian debate. Instead, Dr. Brown did what I also believe is recommended of all serious students of the Word of God: ground your Trinitarian theology in what is recorded for us as God's self-revelation, as well as his actions in and among mankind, coupled with the way the Apostolic Scriptures record Yeshua's relationship to his Heavenly Father. With this particular emphasis on the foundational truth that indeed God is Yeshua's eternal Father, then the Son will likewise emerge from the scriptures as eternally existing with God himself. And if he is eternal, then he is deity. And if he is deity, then he is indeed fully God.

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3. Is Yeshua God? (An Appeal to Mystery)

Dr. James Anderson of the School of Divinity of Edinburgh favors the approach of disambiguating the Trinity using nomenclature that is referred to by theologians as "Mysterian." Anderson suggests that the "mystery" bound up in the language of the Bible, in regards to understanding God's relationship to his Son Jesus, may in fact be qualified and expressed as a MACRUE (a proprietary term that I believe Anderson himself coined). We will examine the biblical possibilities of this actual biblical term "mystery" a bit further down into this commentary, but for now let's allow Anderson to explain this MACRUE acronym in his own words:

My basic proposal is that genuine theological paradoxes, such as the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, are best understood as merely apparent contradictions resulting from unarticulated equivocation (MACRUE). The logical conflict in question is rarely, if ever, explicit (e.g. 'the Son is God' and 'the Son is not God') but may constitute a formal contradiction, as seems to be the case with the set of claims [that a leading analytic Christian philosophers] analyses. In other cases, the perceived contradiction will be merely implicit (but no less awkward for that). Moreover, these apparent contradictions in our formulations of Christian doctrine will be the product of theological theorizing from source data that also strikes us as implicitly contradictory. After all, the Bible nowhere makes any explicitly or formally contradictory statements about God's triune nature, but rather supplies copious data about God from which we infer the sort of neat, succinct set of statements which serve as a formal statement of orthodox Trinitarian belief such as the Athanasian Creed. Furthermore, these doctrinal inferences are not conducted in an epistemic vacuum, so to speak; they draw on a considerable amount of extra-biblical background knowledge and prior experience about the concepts and categories employed by the biblical text, including natural intuitions about conceptual entailments and metaphysical necessities. As we will see, this fact has significant epistemic consequences.

According to my proposal, paradoxical formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity must involve an unarticulated equivocation on one or more of the terms employed: 'God', 'is', 'divine', 'distinct', 'one', 'three', and so forth, depending on the particular formulation in view. This being the case, it follows that a formally consistent expression of Trinitarian doctrine can be constructed simply by explicitly articulating distinctions between the

relevant terms: distinguishing 'is version 1' and 'is version 2', say, or 'divine version 1' and 'divine version 2'. Alternatively, problematic terms can be appropriately qualified so as to eliminate formal inconsistency; for example, the term 'one' can be redefined to accommodate the enumerative oddities raised by the metaphysics of divine personhood (while still applying in the usual way to non-divine persons and other mundane entities). Whatever route is taken, however, the essential point is this: given that we are dealing with a MACRUE, the vocabulary used to express the doctrine can in principle be adapted so as to eliminate any formal contradiction.¹²

This may all sound rather complicated and perhaps even unnecessary to the non-philosophical mind. Indeed, when approaching the supposed "logical problem of the Trinity," your average Christian need not wax too analytical in their defense of biblical Trinitarian concepts. However, it is fair and honest to recognize that non-Trinitarian critics have good grounds for desiring the Bible (and Christians) to be more exacting in expressing the unique relationship between the Father and the Son, for example. "Wonky metaphysics" and fuzzy theological verbiage involving unexplainable equivocations are hardly complimentary of the wonder and majesty that construes our One, True God and his Son Yeshua. God is mysterious yet God can also be logical, correct?

What is more, an appeal to the "mysterious" nature of God in Trinity can be interpreted as an act of worship. Once again, in the words of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (quoting Dr. Tuggy's entry on Trinity):

Often "mystery" is used in a merely honorific sense, meaning a great and important truth or thing relating to religion. In this vein it's often said that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery to be adored, rather than a problem to be solved.

Mysterians view their stance as an exercise of theological sophistication and epistemic humility. Some mysterians appeal to the medieval tradition of apophatic or negative theology, the view that one can understand say what God is not, but not what God is, while others simply appeal to the idea that the human mind is ill-equipped to think about transcendent realities.

Tuggy lists five different meanings of "mystery" in the literature:

[1]...a truth formerly unknown, and perhaps undiscoverable by unaided human reason, but which has now been revealed by God and is known to some... [2] something we don't completely understand... [3] some fact we can't explain, or can't fully or adequately explain... [4] an unintelligible doctrine, the meaning of which can't be grasped....[5] a truth which one should believe even though it seems, even after careful reflection, to be impossible and/or contradictory and thus false. (Tuggy 2003, 175–6)

Sophisticated mysterians about the Trinity appeal to "mysteries" in the fourth and fifth senses. The common core of meaning between them is that a "mystery" is a doctrine which is (to some degree) not understood, in the sense explained above. We here call

¹² https://www.proginosko.com/docs/In_Defence_of_Mystery.pdf

those who call the Trinity a mystery in the fourth sense “negative mysterians” and those who call it a mystery in the fifth sense “positive mysterians”. It is most common for theologians to combine the two views, though usually one or the other is emphasized.¹³

Dr. Anderson reacts to Tuggy’s definitions of mystery in this brief quote from his ‘In Defense of Mystery’ paper that I referenced above. In this section he states:

Now which of these types of ‘mystery’ do I have in mind? At first glance, the last appears most appropriate: I maintain that the doctrine of the Trinity is an apparent contradiction (though the contradiction is merely apparent) but it is true nonetheless and ought to be believed. However, this does not quite get to the root of the matter. For if the doctrine is a ‘mystery’ in the fifth sense, it is due to the presence of a ‘mystery’ in the second sense (a species of mystery that Tuggy himself takes to be ubiquitous even within the created universe).

Thus, while the totality of biblical data suggests that God is ‘numerically one divinity’ in some sense and yet not ‘numerically one divinity’ in some other sense, all we have at our cognitive disposal is our common or garden notions of numerical oneness and divinity – concepts which serves us perfectly well in all non-theological matters and nearly all theological matters, but happen to throw up some odd results when pressed into action for answering certain questions about God’s intrapersonal relations... some of our intuitive concepts and categories are simply too coarse and indiscriminating to allow us to grasp the distinctions that would lay bare, as it were, the metaphysical connections between the divine essence and the divine persons. God (we may presume) has a perfect grasp of these distinctions and hence can see without difficulty just how there is no breach of the law of noncontradiction; we must rest satisfied (at least for now) only knowing that there is no breach. In a nutshell, the fundamental ‘mystery’ here is one of informational limitation rather than logical violation.¹⁴

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4. Is Yeshua God? (An Appeal to History)

Lastly, before we go on to explore the scriptural basis for drawing Trinitarian theology from the actual pages of the Bible itself, let us see how another professionally trained analytic philosopher of Christian theology solves the logical problem of the Trinity using language that appeals to what he labels the Historical approach. Dr. Beau Branson is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Brescia University in Kentucky, and his research focuses on the philosophy of the early Church Fathers. Dr. Branson frequently interacts with Dr. Tuggy’s research on Social Trinitarianism (ST), Relative Identity Trinitarianism (RI), and the approach that Dr. Branson himself favors called Monarchical Trinitarianism (MT). The definitions of these different Trinitarian theories will be summarized alongside each other in the last few bullet points of the final quote from Dr. Branson below. Briefly explaining Monarchical Trinitarianism first he writes:

¹³ <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/trinity/>

¹⁴ https://www.proginosko.com/docs/In_Defence_of_Mystery.pdf

So, what's the logic here? ...[s]imply put, it's analytic that a Father must have a Son. God is a necessary being, and so exists at all times in all possible worlds. So, if The One God is essentially a Father, if Fatherhood is what Gregory [of Nyssa] would call God's idioma (roughly what we in analytic philosophy would call God's individual essence), then the Son of God exists and has always existed – indeed, necessarily exists. But if the Son of God is Himself a necessary being, then He is not a creature. And if the Son of God is not a creature, then He is divine.

Whether or not Trinitarianism is defensible (logically, metaphysically, biblically, or what have you) depends not only on whether some particular account of the Trinity is defensible in that sense, but also on which particular accounts of the Trinity count as Trinitarian. After all, Arianism and Modalism are both accounts of the Trinity, but neither counts as Trinitarian. This is why defenses of Arianism or Modalism would not count as defenses of Trinitarianism, and conversely why one way to criticize accounts of the Trinity is to say that they are forms of Arianism or Modalism. But this raises the question, if not just any account of the Trinity (however defensible) would count as Trinitarian, which accounts do count as Trinitarian, so that a defense of one of them would count as a defense of Trinitarianism? Much recent analytic theology has been concerned with devising (hopefully defensible) accounts of the Trinity, but comparatively little attention has been given to this question of what it takes for an account of the Trinity to count as Trinitarian. Indeed, to my knowledge, only Dale Tuggy has given an explicit definition of Trinitarian (versus Unitarian) theology. But Tuggy's definitions are not given as a mere formality. He puts them to quite substantive use in his evaluations of both contemporary and historical sources, and they turn out to be essential to what is probably his most important criticism of Trinitarian theology.¹⁵

Clarifying his understanding of the importance of the Monarchical Trinitarianism view, he states,

This is a doctrine that was accepted (as far as I can tell) by literally all of the fourth century church fathers who lie at the source of the “official” formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine which later became one of the chief causes of the Great Schism, and a doctrine which continues to be a source of division between Catholic and Orthodox theology to this day. It is also a doctrine which has received almost no attention in analytic theology. More precisely, however, I should say that it is a certain (very strong) interpretation of the doctrine of the Monarchy of the Father, an interpretation which suggests in some ways a fresh alternative to the standard approaches of Social Trinitarianism (ST) and Relative Identity Trinitarianism (RI), an approach I will label “Monarchical Trinitarianism” (MT). We might briefly describe MT, by way of contrast to ST and RI (perhaps a bit simplistically, but still usefully) as follows:

- ST says that The One God is all of the divine persons (taken together).
- RI says that The One God is each of the divine persons (taken individually).
- MT says that The One God is one of the divine persons (namely, the Father).¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Dr. Branson's final analysis of Tuggy's Unitarian perspective of the Trinity reveals that in the end Dr. Tuggy, although highly intelligent and expertly trained in analytic theology and philosophy, nevertheless likely has an invalid understanding of the historical theological landscape from which he draws his own definitions and logical Unitarian vs. Trinitarian conclusions. In the words of Dr. Branson himself:

In conclusion, without keeping "one eye" on history, Tuggy's definitions may initially seem perfectly reasonable. But his substantive arguments really just amount to the Biblical case for the Strong Monarchy View. Coupled with definitions that rule out Monarchical models of the Trinity from even counting as Trinitarian, and reclassifying them as Unitarian, this obviously results in a bleak picture for "Trinitarianism" so defined. But when we take a closer look at the actual history of the doctrine of the Trinity, the neglected doctrine of the Monarchy comes back into focus. Whether we conclude that Monarchical Trinitarianism just is "the" doctrine of the Trinity, or whether we merely acknowledge that it is at least one legitimate form of Trinitarian Theology, in either case, Tuggy's central objection to Trinitarianism loses its force entirely. In sum, if we look at this debate in philosophical theology from a more historically informed perspective, the landscape of the debate changes drastically. To sum it up in two words: History matters.¹⁷

Therefore, of these three approaches to disambiguating the logical problem of the Trinity (Social Trinitarianism, Relative Identity Trinitarianism, and Monarchical Trinitarianism), I believe that the Relative Identity Trinitarian and the Monarchical Trinitarianism theories, grounded in a foundational reliance upon scriptural authority—and with an allowance for some good old fashioned mysterianism—present many of the most likely explanations, not only for the common logical objections to Trinitarianism, but to appreciating the Christian history that is built up around the received text as sufficient and as authoritative.

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5. Is Yeshua God? (An Examination of Passages about the Trinity)

Matt Slick of Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry (CARM) has this to say about the term Economic Trinity:

The Economic Trinity is the doctrine concerning how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to each other and the world. The word economic is used from the Greek *oikonomikos*, which means relating to arrangement of activities. Each person has different roles within the Godhead, and each has different roles in relationship to the world (some roles overlap)...

¹⁷ <https://www.beaubranson.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Monarchy-Louvain-4.pdf>

To be overly simplistic, we could say that the Ontological Trinity deals with what God is and the Economic Trinity deals with what God does.¹⁸

Is Yeshua God? Yes, Yeshua is the Fullness of YHVH existing in bodily form. Are we saying that Yeshua has existed from eternity past just as YHVH has? Not exactly (but hear me out before you cry foul). Yeshua was a real human being who was born at a definitive time in human history. Yeshua the man had a birth. Yeshua the human being had a body prepared for him according to Hebrews 10:5. That flesh and bones body could not have existed in eternity past or else Adam was not really the first human being that God created. Thus, we can state with certainty that Yeshua the human being did not exist in eternity past. It is more accurate to say that the Eternal Word, which did exist in eternity past with YHVH became flesh, and by his mother Miryam (Mary) was named Yeshua. This is why the Apostolic Scriptures specifically state that a body was prepared for the Word who was made flesh, the Eternal Word who would become known to the world as the man named Yeshua. The man Yeshua was born in the first century; the Word, however, existed in eternity past with YHVH and as YHVH.

Many anti-missionaries object to the observation that no explicit text exists stating that God is a Uni-plural being. The TaNaKH will not come out and say explicitly that Yeshua is YAH because ontologically this would not be completely accurate (YAH is God and Jesus is God, yet YAH is the Father, while Jesus is NOT the Father). The Bible does not need to stoop and satisfy the foolish and vain imaginings of the illogicality and clouded way of thinking of the critics and the doubters of the world. Instead, God in his wisdom decided to teach those with “ears to hear” and “eyes open to see” the complexity of his ontological nature, from the progressive time period of the TaNaKH leading into the times of the Apostolic Scriptures, by the multiplied reliable records of Yeshua’s miracles, his usages of the “I AM” statements from the TaNaKH, and also by indirect references that link the inner nature and purposes of HaShem with his Son (see verses below).

A p’shat (simple) examination of the Scriptures involved is going to be examined here. The first thing we need to find out is simply what the verses actually say in English (a full treatment of the Hebrew and Greek is beyond the scope of this present study although I will attempt to offer some Hebrew and Greek insights for isolated words from time to time). How would the average, unlearned listener or reader have interpreted the verses in question? This approach must be considered because, while I do believe that we need to consider the insightful quotations from trained Christian philosophers and Christian analytic theologians, not everyone is a scholar, rabbi, philosopher, professor, or theologian. To be sure, with the resources supplied to the Body of Messiah by varying offices and human capabilities, God seems to intend for his Word to be read and understood by all believers especially (recall the words of Ephesians 4:11-13¹⁹),

¹⁸ <https://carm.org/dictionary-economic-trinity>

¹⁹ *“And it was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for works of ministry, to build up the*

and by many unbelievers of sound body and mind as well. Essentially, the Word of God is intelligible to anyone willing to read and rely on the Spirit for understanding.

The format of the following table will be simple: Names, titles, roles, attributes, and otherwise EXCLUSIVE character traits of YHVH (God) are examined in light of the overwhelming Scriptural references which seem to place these attributes also upon Yeshua (and some upon the Ruach HaKodesh as well). The choice should be simple: either YHVH is God alone (as the Shema teaches), making Yeshua an imposter posing as God and fooling millions of believers with his blasphemy...

Or...

Yeshua does in fact exist as YHVH revealed in human flesh, while not exhausting the titles and roles that the Father and Son enjoy respective of each other, and the Holy Spirit exists as very God in the third Person of the Trinity. With regards to Yeshua, he is echad with YHVH but Yeshua is also distinct from YHVH. With regards to the Holy Spirit, he is also echad with YHVH but he is also distinct from YHVH. This is a fantastic display of “Hebrew tension,” (recall Hegg's comments above) where multiple seemingly opposite truths co-exist within the same environment (moderns would call this a “paradox”). To be sure, the Torah contains more than a few paradoxes.

Hegg's additional remarks on this subject are fitting at this time:

The question that we must answer at the outset of our Christological investigations is whether we are willing to listen to the Scriptures as they speak on their own terms without imposing upon them the requirement of answering ontological questions created by our Western worldview. This is not to suggest that the Hebrews were unconcerned about what we have come to know as the “attributes of God,” but once again, the “attributes of God” were known by His deeds, not by a philosophical analysis of what defines “deity” (cf. Ex 34:6f).

What I am saying is this: if we desire to know what the Scriptures tell us about Yeshua and His relationship to the Father, we cannot expect them to describe this relationship in terms of “essence” and “being” because the authors of the Apostolic Scriptures were Hebrews, not Greeks. When they sought to define the God of Israel as the unique God (meaning the “only God,” אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶחָד Adonai is one” meaning “the only one”) Who therefore is the only One worthy of mankind's worship, they did so by describing Him as Creator and Savior of Israel. In similar fashion, when the Apostles describe the uniqueness of Yeshua as God's Messiah, they do so by describing His works, not by detailing essential attributes of His essence or being. If we wonder why, for instance, Yeshua never boldly declared Himself to be God, we are asking an ontological question that would have made no sense to the Semitic mind. God is known by His works, not by claiming a category of divinity. Note that even when the imprisoned Yochanan HaMatbil (John the baptizer) sent messengers to Yeshua to inquire: “Are You the Expected One, or shall we

body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, as we mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ.” (ESV)

look for someone else?” (Matt 11:3), Yeshua’s answer was that Yochanan should take notice of the works He was performing.

If we impose upon the Scriptures, all of which were written within the milieu of Hebraic thought, the requirement to answer questions generated from a Greek ontological perspective, we will be greatly disappointed. Moreover, if we insist that the Scriptures answer questions for which they were never written to answer, we will inevitably misinterpret and twist them to derive the answers we desire.²⁰

Lastly, before we briefly exegete each passage in the Trinity chart below, Matt Slick and Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry (CARM) provide this widely accepted, somewhat “standard Christian representation” and articulation of the concept of Trinity for us to remind ourselves of before going into the scriptures themselves:

God is a trinity of persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the same person as the Son; the Son is not the same person as the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is not the same person as Father. They are not three gods and not three beings. They are three distinct persons; yet, they are all the one God. Each has a will, can speak, can love, etc., and these are demonstrations of personhood. They are in absolute perfect harmony consisting of one substance. They are coeternal, coequal, and copowerful. If any one of the three were removed, there would be no God.

Jesus, the Son, is one person with two natures: Divine and Human. This is called the Hypostatic Union. The Holy Spirit is also divine in nature and is self-aware, the third person of the Trinity.

There is, though, an apparent separation of some functions among the members of the Godhead. For example, the Father chooses who will be saved (Eph. 1:4); the Son redeems them (Eph. 1:7); and the Holy Spirit seals them, (Eph. 1:13).²¹

On the same page, they go on to provide the following helpful chart of scriptural passages, many of which have been and continue to be historically utilized by mainstream, Orthodox and Catholic Christianity to support Trinitarian concepts.

**CARM’s Trinity Chart of scriptural passages.* “The chart below should help you to see how the doctrine of the Trinity is systematically derived from Scripture. The list is not exhaustive, only illustrative.”

	FATHER	SON	HOLY Spirit
Called God	Phil. 1:2	John 1:1,14; Col. 2:9	Acts 5:3-4
Creator	Isaiah 64:8	John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17	Job 33:4, 26:13

²⁰ Tim Hegg, *The Messiah: An Introduction to Christology* (TorahResource, 2006), p. 9.

²¹ <https://carm.org/trinity>

Resurrects	1 Thess. 1:10	John 2:19, 10:17	Rom. 8:11
Indwells	2 Cor. 6:16	Col. 1:27	John 14:17
Everywhere	1 Kings 8:27	Matt. 28:20	Psalms 139:7-10
All knowing	1 John 3:20	John 16:30; 21:17	1 Cor. 2:10-11
Sanctifies	1 Thess. 5:23	Heb. 2:11	1 Pet. 1:2
Life giver	Gen. 2:7; John 5:21	John 1:3; 5:21	2 Cor. 3:6,8
Fellowship	1 John 1:3	1 Cor. 1:9	2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1
Eternal	Psalms 90:2	Micah 5:1-2	Rom. 8:11; Heb. 9:14
A Will	Luke 22:42	Luke 22:42	1 Cor. 12:11
Speaks	Matt. 3:17; Luke 9:35	Luke 5:20; 7:48	Acts 8:29; 11:12; 13:2
Love	John 3:16	Eph. 5:25	Rom. 15:30
Searches the heart	Jer. 17:10	Rev. 2:23	1 Cor. 2:10
We belong to	John 17:9	John 17:6	...
Savior	1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10	2 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:4; 3:6	...
We serve	Matt. 4:10	Col. 3:24	
Believe in	John 14:1	John 14:1	
Gives joy		John 15:11	Rom. 14:7
Judges	John 8:50	John 5:22-30	

CARM's concluding chart statement is appropriate to close out this Paper Two of my commentary:

Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is arrived at by looking at the whole of scripture, not in a single verse. It is the doctrine that there is only one God, not three, and that the one God exists in three persons: Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. An analogy would be time. Time is past, present, and future. But, there are not three times, only one.²²

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EXPLORING THE SHEMA (Paper Three of Three): Who or What is the Holy Spirit?

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Paper Three Topics (click link to access topic of choice):

1. [Introduction: My “BLUF” \(Bottom Line Up Front\)](#)
2. [Who or What is the Holy Spirit? \(Spirit of God vs. Spirit of Christ vs. the Holy Spirit\)](#)
3. [Who or What is the Holy Spirit? \(Who or What Spirit is Indwelling Believers?\)](#)
4. [Who or What is the Holy Spirit? \(The Filioque Debate, Eastern Orthodoxy, the Latter-day Saints, and Social Trinitarian Thoughts\)](#)
5. [Who or What is the Holy Spirit? \(Rabbinic Jewish Thoughts From the Jewish Encyclopedia\)](#)
6. [Who or What is the Holy Spirit? \(Unitarian Thoughts vs. Classical Trinitarian Thoughts\)](#)
7. [Who or What is the Holy Spirit? \(Revisiting the Holy Spirit Passages from Paper Two\)](#)
8. [Excursus: Ruach “Within” vs. Ruach “Upon”](#)

1. Introduction: My “BLUF” (Bottom Line Up Front)

The term Pneumatology is “the branch of Christian theology concerned with the Holy Spirit; the study of spirits or spiritual beings.”²³ Since we are talking about discussing the

²² Ibid.

²³ Google online dictionary, © 2021, pneumatology.

ontology²⁴ of the God of the Bible, I imagine that Pneumatology is going to necessarily have a bit of overlap with Theology (the study of the nature of God), as well as with Christology (the study of the nature of Christ). I want to begin this third installment of my “Trinity” study firstly by sharing what I’m calling my “bottom line up front.”

As I have maintained throughout this commentary as a whole, it is vital that we orthodox biblical Trinitarian believers hold to a balanced view of what the scriptures teach concerning the nature of the One True God that we serve. In the end, as I mentioned at the onset of this commentary, “Heresy is simply an aspect of truth taken to an extreme and pushed out of proportion with the whole body of truth.”²⁵ When discussing the topic of the Ruach HaKodesh²⁶, aka the Holy Spirit, the questions are naturally raised as to whether or not we are simply dealing with an impersonal force of God (such as one of God’s attributes) or if instead we are dealing with the third Person of the Trinity. Or perhaps, depending on context, are we simply talking about God’s very own personal Spirit when we say Holy Spirit? To be sure, perhaps more than one application from this short list of options may in fact apply from any given context in question. Research is obviously important when seeking to uncover truth. And of course, as important as scientific findings that include theological and specialist opinions in these fields of study are, as noble Bereans, we need to allow the authoritative Word of God to supply the final answers when addressing topics such as these.

As a biblical Trinitarian and a Messianic Jewish believer, how do I wish to articulate my “BLUF” (Bottom Line Up Front)? I believe that the Third Person of the Trinity, known by believers as the Holy Spirit, is very God in his divine essence; this person—like the other two Persons of the Godhead—possesses a nature that is full Deity. And yet, apart from being identified as the Third Person of the Godhead, I also affirm that in some mysterious way that the Holy Spirit is identified in scripture as the Father’s very own Spirit, while at the same time he is identified in scripture as the Resurrected Messiah’s very own Spirit. I also affirm that these very same scriptures undeniably teach that spiritual regeneration (i.e., salvation) of a man is only possible by having this One and Only Holy Spirit take up residency within the very spirit of a man (cf. Rom 8:16, **“the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...”**). At this point you would acknowledge that this is beginning to sound all very philosophical and esoteric and probably not the least bit incoherent and I would not readily disagree.

²⁴ According to the same Google online dictionary, ontology is “the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being; a set of concepts and categories in a subject area or domain that shows their properties and the relations between them.”

²⁵ Kevin J. Connor, *The Tabernacle of David* (Bible Temple Publishing, Portland Oregon, 1976), Foreword p. 1.

²⁶ By the way, did you know that the Hebrew word for Spirit is “ruach,” which can also be translated variously as “breath,” or “wind”? When Messianic Jews such as myself refer to the Holy Spirit, quite often we use the term “Ruach HaKodesh.” Since the Hebrew word “kodesh” is a noun, a verse like Ps 51:11 where the phrase “Ruach HaKodesh” is found literally conveys the sense of “the Spirit of Holiness.” But “Holy Spirit” (with “holy” functioning as an adjective) works just fine as well.

Admittedly, as a Torah Teacher who is moderately versed in biblical Hebrew and biblical Greek, I cannot logically explain how God (who himself is a Spirit) can at one time be a Spirit and yet at the same time send forth his personal, Living Spirit—the Third Person of the Godhead—to accomplish his Will (remind yourself that it was Elohim [God] who created the heavens and the earth, and yet it was the Ruach Elohim [Spirit of God] who hovered over the surface of the waters). And yet, in point of fact, because the scriptures do indeed convey this very reality, I must affirm it by faith and hold these paradoxical truths in tension (recall as I mentioned in Paper Two that biblical students can easily attribute such “paradoxes” to the phenomena referred to as ‘merely apparent contradictions that are the result of unarticulated equivocations,’ viz, a MACRUE).²⁷

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2. Who or What is the Holy Spirit? (Spirit of God, vs. Spirit of Christ, vs. the Holy Spirit)

Most folks who are Trinitarians state that the Holy Spirit is a separate person, while most folks who are nontrinitarians state that the Holy Spirit is simply God’s very own personal Spirit, or they admit that the Spirit is an impersonal “force” of God. I want to admit very early on in this study that, as a biblical, Messianic Jewish, orthodox with a small “o” Trinitarian believer in Yeshua, in my understanding of the scriptures, particularly when examining the TaNaKH exclusively, there is indeed room to speak of the Holy Spirit as God’s very own personal Spirit, without the need to conceptualize this Spirit as separate and distinct from the very same God in focus at any given time. In other words, we often find passages describing God doing such-and-such and then other passages describing the Spirit doing such-and-such, and it is quite natural to arrive at the conclusion that we are only observing one single God in both places. And since God is indeed a Spirit himself, it makes sense that poetic parallelism would make use of describing this God using Spirit language in those secondary passages. We also find passages depicting the Spirit of God “empowering” individuals as if a “heavenly electricity” were supercharging their senses and abilities. Thus, I can somewhat understand the nontrinitarian arguments to a degree.

Yet at the same time, given what has been revealed through the “progressive nature” of the bible as a whole—particularly within the Apostolic Scriptures part of God’s Word—I believe that we must honestly admit that there is definitely language in this “New Testament” section of our bibles that conveys the truth of a “Spirit Being” that is described at times using masculine personal pronouns²⁸ along with personal attributes

²⁷ See my explanation of Dr. Anderson’s MACRUE in Paper Two above, under the section entitled *Is Yeshua God? (An Appeal to Mystery)*.

²⁸ Jesus uses a personal/possessive pronoun in the accusative, masculine, 3rd person singular, and a demonstrative, nominative masculine singular in the Greek of John 16:7 and 8, respectively, which even the Jehovah’s Witnesses who deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit

and character traits that equate “Him” with acceptable definitions of “personhood,” making it impossible to identify this “Spirit Being” as anything other than one of what theologians have come to refer to as one of the Persons of the triune Godhead (remember: God the Father is also a “Spirit Being” whereas, comparatively, Yeshua the Messiah is a “Human Being”). In other words, based on the testimony of the Apostolic Scriptures it would be intellectually dishonest to call this “Spirit Being” an “it.” After all, God himself is a Spirit, and yet despite the fact that we cannot prove his anatomy with empirical evidence, he chooses to identify himself to mankind as a He and not an It (and most definitely not a She)! Anyone reading the Bible with a moderate amount of comprehension can plainly see that the Person of the Ruach HaKodesh most definitely displays traits akin to personality. To be sure, the Spirit Person that we read about in the latter parts of our Bible enjoys most of the same personhood attributes that we humans possess: he can be grieved, he can be lied to, he can be resisted, and he has his own will, etc. Surely, an impersonal force (like electricity) cannot be grieved or lied to, nor is it ordinary to describe humans as capable of having “fellowship” with an impersonal force of power. Yet, the Bible definitely states that we can and do have fellowship with the Ruach HaKodesh.

And in respect to the Risen Messiah, the Bible also effortlessly overlaps the Spirit of God with the Spirit of Christ in some references. I mean, admittedly, in order for the Spirit of an Eternal God such as the Father (viz, his Eternal Holy Spirit) to be equated with, for example, the Spirit of his Son Messiah Yeshua, the human being known as the Messiah would have to, in some mysterious way, at the very least be intimately connected with the Being of God the Father himself. How else are we to make sense of passages that speak of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, and the Person of the Holy Spirit himself—all coming to dwell within genuine believers to form the Body of Messiah? (See references in paragraph point number 3 below) How is this possible if, according to the skeptics, only God himself possesses the quality of omnipresence? Doubters and disbelievers must answer the question of exactly how the “Spirit of the (now risen) Jesus” can come to live inside of every believer simultaneously if this very same Jesus was merely a human being. I submit to you that, using language that may often appear to be ambiguous (viz, equivocal) without the context of the scriptures as a whole, the Word of God, in point of fact, reveals to us a God who is complex in his nature, who exists eternally as one “What” and three “Whos,” and that in mystery and in majesty comes to dwell within true believers as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—harmoniously as One and yet uniquely as Three—all at the same time!

must nevertheless translate in their New World Translation as, “7 Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth, it is for your benefit that I am going away. For if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you; but if I do go, I will send him to you. 8 And when that one comes, he will give the world convincing evidence concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment...” (emphases, mine) In their commentary reference to John 16:8 they offer this “unconvincing” explanation: Both “that one” and “he” in this verse refer back to “the helper,” mentioned in the preceding verse. Jesus used a figure of speech called personification when he spoke of the holy spirit, an impersonal force, as a helper. (John 16:1-33 | The New World Translation (Study Edition) | NWT Study Bible (jw.org))

Recall that God the Father is pure Spirit. And this predetermines that this Spirit, whether you identify “it” as the Father’s very own, or whether you identify “Him” as a separate Person of the Holy Spirit—separate and distinct from the Person of the Father—either way, the Spirit we are discussing here is most definitely an invisible, non-corporeal entity. And yet, Yeshua was and is most definitely a flesh and blood human that was seen by ordinary men when he walked the earth. The last time I checked, humans cannot be in multiple locations at the same time. Nor can the limited spirit of a human being transcend its own fleshly body without suffering the loss of life to the physical host.

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3. Who or What is the Holy Spirit? (Who or What Spirit is Indwelling Believers?)

Philosophically speaking, as a matter of deductive reasoning, in order for the Spirit of the Risen Messiah to come to dwell inside of all believers across both space and time, such a spirit would have to be capable of possessing an eternal, dynamic and living quality the likes of which only God the Father is known to possess, namely eternal timelessness and boundlessness. Moreover, such a Messiah (as **“the Word who was with God and was God,” “the Word made flesh”**) had to have had this eternal quality prior to even being born in Bethlehem. To be sure, the bible illustrates that the “Old Testament” saints who were genuinely saved had to have had the Spirit of Messiah in them due to the fact that they were saved by placing their faith in the Messiah *to come*, whereas, we are saved by placing our faith in the Messiah who *has come*. Eternal salvation is of course exclusive to placing one’s faith in the Messiah Yeshua, and this type of salvation surely spans the distance from the Old to the “New Testament” (recall John 14:6 where Jesus categorically states that he is **“the way, truth, and life, and that no one can come to the Father except through me”**). His truth statement must be efficacious in both directions of what sci-fi buffs would call the “space-time continuum.”

Using father Abraham as his example, Paul teaches this very truth in one of his many “Spirit and Gospel” masterpieces, this time to the churches at Galatia:

1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— 6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? 7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached

the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:1-9, ESV, emphases, mine)

The gospel is plain and open to us right here in the bible. To wit, if you believe that God the Father sent his Only, Unique Son into the world to die a cruel death in order to free you from your own personal sin and shame, then, no matter if you are Jewish or Gentile, no matter if you lived before the “cross event” or after it, you are a genuine child of Abraham, and if so, then the same Spirit of Messiah who was in Abraham is the same Spirit of Messiah who is in you!

Having read the gospel truth of Galatians Chapter Three, now let us observe these various “location and identity of the Spirit” passages and decide for ourselves exactly who it is that is residing and operating from within the very inside of a genuine child of God:

Isaiah 63:11, KJV - “Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?”

Ezekiel 36:27, ESV - “And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

Matthew 10:20, NASB - “For it is not you who are speaking, but it is the Spirit of your Father who is speaking in you.”

Luke 12:12, KJV - “For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”

John 14:17, ESV - “...even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

Acts 2:4, KJV - “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Acts 7:55, NASB - “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God...”

Romans 8:9-11, ESV - “9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who

raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

1 Corinthians 3:16, ESV - “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

1 Corinthians 6:19, ESV - “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own...”

1 Corinthians 12:4, ESV - “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 1:21, 22, ESV - “21 And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, 22 and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

2 Corinthians 3:3, ESV - “And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

2 Corinthians 3:14-18, ESV - “14 But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. 15 Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. 16 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 13:14, ESV - “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Galatians 4:6, ESV - “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!””

Ephesians 2:17-22, ESV - “17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple

in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

Ephesians 3:14-19, ESV - “14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

2 Timothy 1:13, 14, ESV - “13 Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14 By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

James 4:5, ESV - “Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?”

1 Peter 1:10, 11, ESV - “10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.”

1 John 3:24, ESV - “Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”

1 John 4:12, 13, ESV - “12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”

So, after studying the above passages carefully, are we to imagine that Christians have three different “Spirits” living within us? Nonsense! Actually, continuing along this illogical line of reasoning, we would have to account for four spirits (three divine “Spirits” and one “non-divine spirit,” adding our very own human spirit in the numbering)! I worship God who dwells inside of me; I worship Jesus who dwells inside of me. And yet as a son of Abraham, at the same time I equally affirm the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and that he is a separate and distinct Person of God who possesses all of the same attributes as God the Father, without deficiency, entitling this Spirit to be worshipped as the One, True God also.

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4. Who or What is the Holy Spirit? (The Filioque Debate, Eastern Orthodoxy, the Latter-day Saints, and Social Trinitarian Thoughts)

Okay, it's time to get a little bit technical once more...

In order to fully appreciate where the role of the Holy Spirit falls in regards to various modern day Trinity models, we need to “digress” a bit about one of the Trinity theories that arose historically out of the First Council of Nicea in AD 325, as well as some of its later “West vs. East” theological and philosophical discussions on God's nature over 600 years later. To be sure, many mainstream Protestant Christians might find it surprisingly relevant to be familiar with what a major “cultic Christian group” teaches concerning the Holy Spirit, especially as it concerns today’s ongoing dialogue between Trinitarians and Unitarians. Specifically, in this paragraph section, I want to eventually discuss the Trinity theory of the modern Latter-day Saints (aka, LDS or the Mormons), as seen through the lens of Social Trinitarianism, however a quick Wikipedia take on Eastern (Greek) Orthodox beliefs is in order first:

In Eastern Orthodoxy, theology starts with the Father hypostasis, not the essence of God, since the Father is the God of the Old Testament. The Father is the origin of all things and this is the basis and starting point of the Orthodox trinitarian teaching of one God in Father, one God, of the essence of the Father (as the uncreated comes from the Father as this is what the Father is). In Eastern Orthodox theology, God's uncreatedness or being or essence in Greek is called ousia. Jesus Christ is the Son (God Man) of the uncreated Father (God). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the uncreated Father (God).²⁹

Related to the “how and why” of the specific Holy Spirit beliefs of Eastern Orthodoxy is the divisive topic referred to as filioque. Indeed, a Holy Spirit commentary would not be complete without including some references to this well-documented, religiously-important historical occurrence. As is well known by historians in theological circles, the Church of the West and the Church of the East split from one another (the Great Schism of 1054) over matters related to differences in interpretation over some key passages in the New Testament, and particularly a single verse in the book of John as it pertains to a line in the later Western creedal confession with its “extraneous” details surrounding “the procession” of the Spirit (better known by its Latin term “filioque,” which means, “and from the Son”). John 15:26 in the ESV reads (with my own emphasis added):

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” (The SBLGNT Greek reads, “Ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ Παράκλητος ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω

²⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_teaching_regarding_the_Filioque

ὕμῖν παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὃ παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ”)

I personally think that the verse in question is self-explanatory without the need of fancy exegesis to understand its central meaning: **God the Father is the one who causes the Holy Spirit to “issue from its place of origin vis-a-vis believers being influenced by the Spirit’s presence, but not necessarily in relation to some sort of ‘creation aspect of the Spirit’ by the Father himself”** (Greek=ἐκπορεύεται ekporeuetai - Strong’s Concordance to root word #1607 ἐκπορεύομαι ekporeuomai: to make to go forth, to go forth; i.e., to “proceed”), **while Yeshua the Son authoritatively and of his own volition freely “dispatches,” as it were, that which proceeds from the Father, that is, the Son “sends” the Holy Spirit to believers** (Greek=πέμψω pempso - Strong’s Concordance to root word #3992 πέμπω pempo: send, transmit, permit to go, put forth).

The same Wikipedia article we just cited also states this concerning the filioque:

The Eastern Orthodox interpretation of the Trinity is that the Holy Spirit originates, has his cause for existence or being (manner of existence) from the Father alone as "One God, One Father" and that the filioque confuses the theology as it was defined at the councils at both Nicea and Constantinople. The position that having the creed say "the Holy Spirit which proceeds from the Father and the Son", does not mean that the Holy Spirit now has two origins, is the position the West took at the Council of Florence, as the Council declared the Holy Spirit "has His essence and His subsistent being from the Father together with the Son, and proceeds from both eternally as from one principle and a single spiration [viz, “spiration” is a somewhat obsolete term that refers to “the action of breathing as a creative or life-giving function of the Deity, or the action of breathing as a physical function of man and animals.”]³⁰

Additionally, the Encyclopedia Britannica (online edition) provides this information on the filioque:

The so-called Filioque clause (Latin filioque, “and the son”), inserted after the words “the Holy Spirit,...who proceeds from the Father,” was gradually introduced as part of the creed in the Western church, beginning in the 6th century. It was probably finally accepted by the papacy in the 11th century. It has been retained by the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant churches. The Eastern churches have always rejected it because they consider it a theological error and an unauthorized addition to a venerable document.³¹

In point of fact, as a non-Catholic and a non-Eastern Orthodox Christian, I have always been a bit troubled by the details surrounding the Great Schism. I personally do not believe that a centuries-long Church split—seemingly over something as “trivial” as the

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nicene-Creed>

difference over two Greek words—was God-sanctioned (although, historians will remind me that it was much more complex than a split over two simple words). However, given the long-lasting and wide-reaching effects of a Schism that has persisted right down to this day, surely, we as Spirit-led believers can and must recognize that the Adversary was hard at work in those days to divide us as a Body of Messiah—and he is still hard at work these days seeking to accomplish the very same thing! Oy vey!

Transitioning now away from the initial filioque discussion and specifically to our next section here on Eastern Orthodoxy and the Holy Spirit, we encounter a Trinity model known as Social Trinitarianism. Defined (again, according to Wikipedia) this Trinity theory is described as “...a Christian interpretation of the Trinity as consisting of three persons in a loving relationship, which reflects a model for human relationships. The teaching emphasizes that God is an inherently social being.”³² Interestingly, in my assessment, Social Trinitarianism models would likely appear quite “innocent enough” to the average Protestant Christian Bible student, even without any Eastern Orthodox axe to grind. Indeed, this same Wikipedia article goes on to explain concerning Social Trinitarianism:

“Orthodox Christian theology asserts that the one God is manifest in three 'persons' (this term was generally used in the Latin West). Social trinitarian thought argues that the three persons are each distinct realities—this was generally presented in the East with the Greek term 'hypostasis' from the First Council of Nicaea onward. Hypostasis was here employed to denote a specific individual instance of being. So, the Trinity is composed of three distinct 'persons' or 'hypostases' which are in integral relation with one another.”³³

So, I imagine that your average evangelical Christian believer may find him or herself naturally drawn to the Social Trinitarian model, however I should be quick to remind you of what biblical Unitarian Christian Dr. Dale Tuggy wrote in his Stanford Encyclopedia entry on Trinity concerning some of the “weaknesses” of the Social Trinitarian model:

“Western or Latin or Augustinian theories are contrasted with Eastern or Greek or Cappadocian theories, and the difference between the camps is said to be merely one of emphases or “starting points”. The Western theories, it is said, emphasize or “start with” God’s oneness, and try to show how God is also three, whereas the Eastern theories emphasize or “start with” God’s threeness, and try to show how God is also one. The two are thought to emphasize, respectively, psychological or social analogies for understanding the Trinity, and so the latter is often called “social” trinitarianism. But this paradigm has been criticized as confused, unhelpful, and simply not accurate to the history of Trinitarian theology (Cross 2002, 2009; Holmes 2012; McCall 2003).”³⁴

³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_trinitarianism

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trinity/>

Indeed, as we observed from Paper Two above, Dr. Molto went on to explain, “Leftow has argued that, among other problems with Social Trinitarianism, it risks collapsing into a form of Arianism, because it posits multiple ways in which something may be divine.”³⁵

At this point, one may be inclined to ask as to how all of this information on Eastern Orthodoxy and Social Trinitarianism is related to the Latter-day Saints’ view on the Holy Spirit, and why should the average evangelical Protestant Christian even care? Well, as I have come to understand the pneumatology of the Latter-day Saints, they hold to a position that (at least to me) closely resembles many standard Christian Trinity models (both Catholic and Protestant models). However, specifically the LDS model appears to bear an “uncomfortable” resemblance to the Greek Orthodox model we just examined, albeit, when examining the specific language of the LDS vs. Eastern Orthodox models, the LDS affirmation (as we will see below) appears to present language that is way too close to outright confessing the heresy known as tritheism (a belief in three separate gods). Thus, germane to our short digression here on Latter Day Saints’ pneumatology, is the point of fact that they believe the Holy Spirit to be the third distinct member of the Godhead, and that he possesses a body of “spirit” (in distinction to the Father and the Son who have bodies that are “tangible like human beings”). According to what appears to be their “official” denominational website, here is what they provide under their “statement of beliefs” section:

“Like many Christians, we believe in God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. However, we don’t believe in the traditional concept of the Trinity. We believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are three separate beings who are one in purpose. The Church’s first Article of Faith states, “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.” We believe They are three distinct personages, not one singular being. We call Them the Godhead. Each member of the Godhead has a specific role, united in the purpose of bringing all of God’s children back to His presence. The Holy Ghost is the messenger and revealer of the Father and the Son. A personage of spirit, He helps us learn and recognize the truth of all things, including the gospel. It is through the Holy Ghost that God and Jesus Christ communicate their love, comfort, and peace to us. Though the Godhead is made up of three distinct divine beings with certain different roles and characteristics, They are perfectly united in purpose. They work in harmony to help us come to know God, live righteously, be forgiven, and ultimately return to live with Them again. Together, They work “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).”³⁶

So, in conclusion to this section on the filioque, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Latter-day Saints, and the probable categorization of the LDS under the model known as Social Trinitarianism (a model that emphasizes the “threeness” of God, yet runs the risk of failing to fully affirm the “oneness” of God), I wish to make Protestant evangelical Christians aware of the “theological” attraction that LDS pneumatology might present to unsuspecting Christians seeking acceptance and fellowship from a wider circle of

³⁵ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11841-017-0612-y>

³⁶ <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/comeuntochrist/article/do-Latter-day-saints-believe-in-the-trinity>

“Christian” groups that they might encounter on an everyday basis. The following scenario is not impossible to imagine: Your average Protestant Church-goer becomes confused and unconvinced about historic, mainstream (orthodox with a small “o”) Christian teachings on Trinity, and even though they are unlikely to immediately run into the arms of an Eastern Orthodox Church, they just might find “pseudo comfort and false affirmation” in the unbiblical teachings of some forms of Unitarianism that they read about online, or worse they might have a visit from a “friendly neighborhood, door-knocking cult member” the likes of the Jehovah’s witnesses or the Latter Day Saints. And given those latter two groups’ positions on Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they might just find themselves in a worse-off place than they began with when they left their mainstream, Protestant, evangelical “Trinity-believing” church.

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5. Who or What is the Holy Spirit? (Rabbinic Jewish Thoughts from the Jewish Encyclopedia)

This particular section of my Holy Spirit commentary will be quite short since mainstream Jewish views on this topic itself are quite succinct and “to the point.” Rabbinic Judaism (the branch that identifies itself over and against Messianic Judaism and Evangelical Christianity) takes what I like to identify as a “foundational” aspect on this question of Who or What is the Holy Spirit. I say “foundational” because much of their articulated interpretations are rooted in the very scriptures that orthodox Trinitarian Christianity holds to be infallible as well. What is more, since our understanding of Trinitarian doctrine comes firstly from the TaNaKH as it gave rise to the Apostolic Scriptures, then it only makes logical sense that historic Jewish thought should at times closely resemble some of the main points of Christian thought in regards to matters of ontology and pneumatology. To be sure, the oft-proclaimed “One God of the Jews” is, in point of fact, the very same exclusive, “One God of the Christians.”

And yet, as we shall shortly discover, most of the historic Judaisms that formed after the destruction of the 2nd Temple in 70 AD chose to articulate their ontological and pneumatological understanding of God and his Spirit in distinct polemical viewpoints that separated them from the rapidly-growing Christian (predominantly Greek thinking) Church of the late 1st century and following. In fact, when reading through ancient rabbinic resources, due to the nature of how history played its hand in demonstrating the rise and spread of Christianity in and throughout the ancient Near Eastern part of the world, it is hard sometimes to tell where original thought ends and reactionary sentiment begins. Indeed, in my opinion, a healthy percentage of ancient rabbinic theology seems at times to function as “damage control” against extant forms of Christian theology vis-à-vis God and his Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, let’s take a peek at a sampling of Jewish thought as it has been preserved for us in the “reasonably reliable” Jewish Encyclopedia. The version I am

going to be interacting with is the online version accessible at JewishEncyclopedia.com. Observe:

“Nature of the Holy Spirit.

Although the Holy Spirit is often named instead of God (e.g., in Sifre, Deut. 31 [ed. Friedmann, p. 72]), yet it was conceived as being something distinct. The Spirit was among the ten things that were created on the first day (Ḥag. 12a, b). Though the nature of the Holy Spirit is really nowhere described, the name indicates that it was conceived as a kind of wind that became manifest through noise and light. As early as Ezek. iii. 12 it is stated, “the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing,” the expression “behind me” characterizing the unusual nature of the noise. The Shekinah made a noise before Samson like a bell (Soṭah 9b, below). When the Holy Spirit was resting upon him, his hair gave forth a sound like a bell, which could be heard from afar. It imbued him with such strength that he could uproot two mountains and rub them together like pebbles, and could cover leagues at one step (ib. 17b; Lev. R. viii. 2). Similarly Acts ii. 2 reads: “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (it must be noted that this happened at Pentecost, i.e., the Feast of Revelation). Although the accompanying lights are not expressly mentioned, the frequently recurring phrase “he beheld [“heṣiz”] in the Holy Spirit” shows that he upon whom the spirit rested saw a light. The Holy Spirit gleamed in the court of Shem, of Samuel, and of King Solomon (Gen. R. lxxxv. 12). It “glimmered” in Tamar (Gen. xxxviii. 18), in the sons of Jacob (Gen. xlii. 11), and in Moses (Ex. ii. 12), i.e., it settled upon the persons in question (see Gen. R. lxxxv. 9, xci. 7; Lev. R. xxxii. 4, “niṣoṣah” and “heṣiz”; comp. also Lev. R. viii. 2, “hiṭhil le-gashgesh”). From the day that Joseph was sold the Holy Spirit left Jacob, who saw and heard only indistinctly (Gen. R. xci. 6). The Holy Spirit, being of heavenly origin, is composed, like everything that comes from heaven, of light and fire. When it rested upon Phinehas his face burned like a torch (Lev. R. xxi., end). When the Temple was destroyed and Israel went into exile, the Holy Spirit returned to heaven; this is indicated in Eccl. xii. 7: “the spirit shall return unto God” (Eccl. R. xii. 7). The spirit talks sometimes with a masculine and sometimes with a feminine voice (Eccl. vii. 29 [A. V. 28]); i.e., as the word “ruah” is both masculine and feminine, the Holy Spirit was conceived as being sometimes a man and sometimes a woman.”³⁷

That ubiquitous web resource known as Wikipedia—that many folks have a “love-hate” relationship with—also has their own opinion on what Rabbinic Judaism believes about the Holy Spirit. Here is a brief section from their article:

The term ruach haqodesh is found frequently in talmudic and midrashic literature. In some cases it signifies prophetic inspiration, while in others it is used as a hypostatization or a metonym for God. The rabbinical understanding of the Holy Spirit has a certain degree of personification, but it remains, “a quality belonging to God, one of his attributes”.

In Rabbinic Judaism, the references to “the Spirit of God”, the Holy Spirit of YHWH, abound, however apart from Kabbalistic mysticism it has rejected any idea of God as

³⁷ <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13966-Spirit>

being either dualistic, tri-personal, or ontologically complex. The idea of God as a duality or trinity is considered shituf (or "not purely monotheistic")."³⁸

Evangelical Christians who hold to an historical Trinitarian perspective on God (see more on Classical Trinitarianism below) should not be surprised at Rabbinic Judaism's rejection of a tri-personal God, as this is essentially part and parcel with their rejection of Yeshua (Jesus) as the true Messiah since the late 1st century AD. And of course, since historical Christianity (nearly all branches) assert the divinity of Jesus as the Son of God, it only makes sense that mainstream Judaism would mount a reasonable defense of their views of monotheism by positing a God who is indivisible and incorporeal. Indeed, one of the most famous Jewish sages by the name of Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, aka, Rambam) composed the now famous Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith in which he reiterates rather matter-of-factly concerning HaShem in point number Three, "The belief in G-d's non-corporeality, nor that He will be affected by any physical occurrences, such as movement, or rest, or dwelling."³⁹

So much for expecting them to hold to any semblance of a "Third Person of the Trinity" belief with regards to the Holy Spirit.

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6. Who or What is the Holy Spirit? (Unitarian Thoughts vs. Classical Trinitarian Thoughts)

In Paper Two above we made extensive references to Dr. Dale Tuggy, a leading Unitarian Christian, philosopher, and analytic theologian in today's logical discussions on God's "supposed triune nature." As an orthodox Trinitarian Christian myself, I actually highly recommend his podcast blog (see trinities.org). Interestingly enough, one of his podcast tags is "Do you love God enough...to think about him?" Being the highly analytical, neurodivergent type of thinker that I am, I actually DO love God enough to think about him and thus in direct response to Dr. Tuggy's scripturally and historically inaccurate Unitarian theology, I "think" God is absolutely a single Being of complex unity. Dr. Tuggy wrote the Trinity article in the highly esteemed and well-respected Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. We have cited this reference before in Paper Two. Allow me to once again make a lengthy quote under the section on the Holy Spirit:

1.8 The Holy Spirit as a Mode of God

Some ancient Christians, most 17th-19th century unitarians, present-day "biblical unitarians", and some modern subordinationists such as the Jehovah's Witnesses hold the Holy Spirit to be a mode of God—God's power, presence, or action in the world. (See the supplementary document on unitarianism.) Not implying modalism about the

³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Spirit_in_Judaism#Rabbinic_literature

³⁹ https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/332555/jewish/Maimonides-13-Principles-of-Faith.htm

Son, this position is harder to refute on New Testament grounds, although mainstream theologians and some subordinationist unitarians reject it as inconsistent with New Testament language from which we should infer that the Holy Spirit is a self (Clarke 1738, 147). Modalists about the Spirit counter with other biblical language which suggests that the “Spirit of God” or “Holy Spirit” refers to either God himself, a mode of God (e.g., his power), or an effect of a mode of God (e.g., supernatural human abilities such as healing). (See Burnap 1845, 226–52; Lardner 1793, 79–174; Wilson 1846, 325–32.) This exegetical dispute is difficult, as all natural languages allow persons to be described in mode-terms (“Hillary is Bill’s strength.”) and modes to be described in language which literally applies only to persons. (“God’s wisdom told him not to create beer-sap trees.”)⁴⁰

Additionally, in agreement with most of what Dr. Tuggy teaches, one popular Internet resource by the name of biblicalunitarian.com has this to say about the Holy Spirit:

Since “the only true God” is “the Father,” and since He is “holy” and He is “spirit,” He is also referred to in Scripture as “the Holy Spirit.” For further study read the Giver and His gift. The Giver is God, the only true God, the Father, the Holy Spirit. His gift is incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23), His own divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3), holy spirit (Acts 2:39). Jesus expressed this truth in John 3:6: “That which is born of Spirit [God, the giver] is spirit [His nature, the gift].” If there is no such thing as the “Trinity,” there is no such thing as “the third Person of the Trinity” known as “the Holy Spirit.”

When one is born again of God’s spirit, he does not receive a “Person,” but rather the divine nature of God, given to men to transform them into the image of His Son. This gift is referred to in Scripture by a number of synonymous terms, including: “holy spirit,” “the spirit,” “the spirit of God,” “the spirit of Christ,” “the spirit of the Lord,” “the spirit of truth,” “the spirit of Sonship,” and “the holy spirit of promise,” as well as “the new man” and “the divine nature.” None of these suggest that the gift is a person. Such teaching is not only biblically groundless, but also logically incomprehensible to the rational human mind. Translators, however, influenced by Trinitarian tradition, have unnecessarily muddied the clear waters of the Word in regard to the gift of holy spirit.⁴¹

I personally have wondered out loud that if the TaNaKH was all that we had to work with in respects to understanding this mysterious God that we serve, then perhaps Unitarian Christianity might actually have somewhat of a leg to stand on since due to the unfolding revelatory nature of the Word of God, we don’t really have seem to have explicit “Trinitarian” theology showing up until the later parts of the Bible—namely, the Apostolic Scriptures. To be sure, Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3:16, **“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”** (ESV, emphasis, mine) What is more, it is likewise well known in Christian circles that one of the theological dictionary definitions of a “mystery”

⁴⁰ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trinity/#HolSpiMod>

⁴¹ <https://www.biblicalunitarian.com/articles/holy-spirit/what-about-the-holy-spirit>

(Greek=μυστήριον *musterion*) is: “the counsels of God, once hidden but now revealed in the Gospel or some fact thereof.”⁴² Case in point stated.

However, in direct response and challenge to the Unitarian denial of Trinitarian concepts vis-à-vis the Holy Spirit, standard orthodox Trinitarian Christian literature affirms the notion that the One True God does in fact subsist in three Persons and that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity. As we learned in Part One of this Shema study, one of the preferred methods of explaining this perceived logical inconsistency is to appeal to the mysterious nature of a complex, singular God with separate components known as Persons. Johannes van Oort, writing for the *Hervormde Theologische Studies (HTS)* carefully notes how the early Christian Church confessed these Trinitarian truths in creeds and confessions, even if they did not fully articulate their attempts at “unveiling divine truth in a rationalistic manner.”

“True dogmatic reflection is aimed at expressing the mystery of God in the realm of human thinking, but without trying to unveil divine truth in a rationalistic manner. The dogma of the Trinity, and with it the dogma of the Holy Spirit, is an interpretation of who God is, expressed in rational words. It is not; however, a case of logical reasoning, but of confession.”⁴³

Speaking specifically of some of the earliest recorded baptismal confessions as they have been preserved in various extra-biblical Christian texts from the Church in Rome he comments,

“As a matter of fact, there is no evidence of an elaborated trinitarian theology, the likes of which are to be found, for instance, with the church fathers of the fourth century. It cannot be denied, however, that these early testimonies also see the Spirit as a divine 'Person', who is closely associated with the Father and the Son; and not simply as a gift or power. Already at the end of the first century, the divine status of the Spirit is affirmed by Clement of Rome in his letter to Corinth. Justin Martyr, in his Apology, says that the Christians worship and adore the prophetic Spirit: '...pneuma te to prophētikon sebometha kai proskunoumen ...' (Apologia I, 6, 2; Krüger 1968:4-5; cf. Marcovich 1994:40). For Irenaeus, the Spirit is the wisdom of God, who, together with the Son, was present with God even before the world's creation. The Spirit, moreover, is affirmed by Irenaeus as one of the two hands with which God once created and still recreates mankind. From the very beginning, the Church's liturgical formulas and doxologies mention the Spirit together with the Father and the Son.”⁴⁴

And so when we return to an accurate account of the early Christian Church and what I am calling Classical Trinitarianism we find that most of the founding fathers affirmed the authority of the scriptural passages which provided a view of God that supported a Trinitarian perspective rather than a Unitarian one. Coleman Ford, writing for The Gospel Coalition shares these invaluable insights for modern Christians to dwell upon:

⁴² <https://biblehub.com/greek/3466.htm>, Strong's Concordance, μυστήριον.

⁴³ http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222011000300020

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Evangelicals have much to consider when it comes to trinitarian reflection in the early church. First, the early church vigorously defended the Trinity from Scripture. Understanding the Trinity was not an exercise in proof-texting or philosophical sophistry, but rather deep Holy Spirit-driven whole-Bible reading. Their trinitarian consciousness was woven throughout their writing, their worship, and their witness. Second, it is important for the church to speak correctly about the Trinity. We cannot fully grasp the depth of mystery that is the triune God, yet we should not be flippant with trinitarian doctrine either. It matters how we understand the roles of Father, Son, and Spirit in our redemption. It also matters that we take trinitarian doctrine seriously when approaching any ministry effort of the church, whether that be Sunday morning worship or a middle-school Bible study. Last, trinitarian doctrine sets Christianity apart from any other faith commitment. Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Unitarians, and others who claim to worship God do not worship the God proclaimed by Scripture, the testimony of the apostles, and the witness of the early church. Unless the God you worship is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit then you worship a false god. The early church vigorously fought for trinitarian theology in the wake of multiple waves of heresy. We should continue to contend for it today.⁴⁵

And lastly, a lengthy quote from Tim Hegg and then the late Charles Haddon Spurgeon will close out this section of my commentary. First Tim Hegg:

“As we have seen, the primary issue faced by the early Christian Church as it sought to define the Godhead was how to avoid two opposing errors. On the one side was the need to maintain the infinite oneness of God, that is, to avoid teaching a di-theism or a tri-theism. For in seeking to emphasize the deity of the Son as equal with that of the Father, it appeared too close to affirming a di-theism. And to add the deity of the Spirit as equal with that of the Father and the Son moved toward a tri-theism. On the other side, however, was the issue of accepting the Son and the Spirit as having distinct individuality in relationship to each other and to Father. When the infinite oneness of the Godhead was emphasized, this tended toward some form of Sabellianism or modality, which then de-emphasized or even denied the individual distinctions of the Son and the Spirit as clearly portrayed in the Scriptures. In short, the Christian Church, in requiring a way to define the Godhead in ontological terms, had come face to face with defining the undefinable.”⁴⁶

And now a timeless quote from the late Charles Haddon Spurgeon:

“We are so much accustomed to talk about the influence of the Holy Ghost and his sacred operations and graces, that we are apt to forget that the Holy Spirit is truly and actually a person—that he is a subsistence—an existence; or, as we Trinitarians usually say, one person in the essence of the Godhead. I am afraid that, though we do not know it, we have acquired the habit of regarding the Holy Ghost as an emanation flowing from the Father and the Son, but not as being actually a person himself. I know it is not easy to carry about in our mind the idea of the Holy Spirit as a person. I can think of the

⁴⁵ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/trinitarianism-in-the-early-church/>

⁴⁶ Tim Hegg, *God's Self-Revelation: A Course in Theology Proper* (TorahResource, 2012), pp. 121-22.

Father as a person, because his acts are such as I can understand. I see him hang the world in ether; I behold him swaddling a new-born sea in bands of darkness; I know it is he who formed the drops of hail, who leadeth forth the stars by their hosts, and calleth them by their name; I can conceive of Him as a person, because I behold his operations. I can realize Jesus, the Son of Man, as a real person, because he is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. It takes no great stretch of my imagination to picture the babe in Bethlehem, or to behold the “Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” of the king of martyrs, as he was persecuted in Pilate's hall, or nailed to the accursed tree for our sins. Nor do I find it difficult at times to realize the person of my Jesus sitting on his throne in heaven; or girt with clouds and wearing the diadem of all creation, calling the earth to judgment, and summoning us to hear our final sentence. But when I come to deal with the Holy Ghost, his operations are so mysterious, his doings are so secret, his acts are so removed from everything that is of sense, and of the body, that I cannot so easily get the idea of his being a person; but a person he is. God the Holy Ghost is not an influence, an emanation, a stream of something flowing from the Father; but he is as much an actual person as either God the Son, or God the Father.”⁴⁷

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7. Who or What is the Holy Spirit? (Revisiting the Holy Spirit Passages from Paper Two)

I do not subscribe to language that relegates the Spirit of God, viz, the Holy Spirit to a mere impersonal force of energy who has decidedly been divested of his personal attributes. To be sure, nontrinitarian Christian and quasi-Christian denominations such as Biblical Unitarians, Oneness Pentecostals, Iglesia Ni Cristo, Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, La Luz del Mundos, Church of the Blessed Hope, The Way International, United Church of God, and others likely not listed here, often have similar beliefs with each other when it comes to the issues of the deity of Yeshua (Jesus) and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Germane to our study is that, almost without exception, the majority of these nontrinitarian groups relegate the Holy Spirit to the category of a power from God, an aspect of God's personal power, an active force that God uses to accomplish his will, the essence of God, a mode of God (i.e., a mask that resembles the Person of the Holy Spirit, which God can swap out with a mask that, to we humans, resembles the Father at times or that resembles the Son at times), or perhaps, they conclude, that the Holy Spirit is merely a manifestation of the One, True God. (Would this place the Spirit into the category of an Old Testament theophany?)

As we are beginning to ascertain, non-Messianic Judaism, Unitarian Christianity, and orthodox Trinitarian Christianity all have their sometimes-opposing views on this enigmatic topic. However, as familiar and helpful as the ancient Christian creeds and confessional formulas are to historical and orthodox forms of Trinitarian Christianity, who or what the Holy Spirit actually is must, at the end of the day, be derived from the

⁴⁷ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Personality of the Holy Ghost* (New Park Street Pulpit Volume 1), taken from a sermon dated 1855 accessed from <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-personality-of-the-holy-ghost/#flipbook/> on June 6, 2021.

only authoritative sources we have that contain HaShem's complete and inspired stamp of approval. Those sources just so happen to be the TaNaKH and the Apostolic Scriptures. Therefore, let us revisit some of the passages that we briefly surveyed in Part Two when we were primarily investigating whether or not Yeshua is indeed “very God veiled in human flesh.” Here are the verses that appeared under the column for the Holy Spirit for us to zero in on a bit more closely. In the order in which CARM listed them they are:

HOLY Spirit	
Called God	Acts 5:3-4
Creator	Job 33:4, 26:13
Resurrects	Rom. 8:11
Indwells	John 14:17
Everywhere	Psalms 139:7-10
All knowing	1 Cor. 2:10-11
Sanctifies	1 Pet. 1:2
Life giver	2 Cor. 3:6,8
Fellowship	2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1
Eternal	Rom. 8:11; Heb. 9:14
A Will	1 Cor. 12:11
Speaks	Acts 8:29; 11:12; 13:2
Love	Rom. 15:30
Searches the heart	1 Cor. 2:10

Gives joy	Rom. 14:7
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Having read through the above-mentioned passages with a mind in tuned to listen to the voice of God speaking about himself, I can only hope that we have situated ourselves as able to “challenged” to come to the conclusion that the Spirit of God is just what the scriptures reveal him to be: fully God and yet fully unique. At times his actions are likened to that of a “power from God” and at other times he reacts and interacts with God as an equal (viz, the Third Person of the Trinity). Still, at other times he interacts with humanity in ways that unmistakably reveal his personality as the Spirit of the Living God and not simply as an impersonal attribute of God. Through the bible he clearly reveals himself to be God’s very own Spirit, to be very God himself, and yet these same scriptures allow him to be revealed to mankind as the Person known as the Holy Spirit sent by God. As long as we remember that God can and does reveal himself to mankind progressively, resulting in information limitation as I read the bible from beginning to ending, then I find no logical contradiction with God’s self-disclosure as the orthodox Christian Trinitarian position conveys it. Tim Hegg’s seminary-level “theology proper” commentary adds a fitting conclusion to this section of my paper:

The fact is obvious that in the Tanach as well as in the Apostolic Scriptures, the Spirit is viewed and spoken of with the same language as God. Further- more, that which is ascribed to the Almighty (creation, sovereignty, omnipresence, righteousness, holiness) is equally ascribed to His Spirit.

- 1) Isa 6:9, revelation to the prophet ascribed to Adonai, cf. Acts 28:25, where it is ascribed to the Holy Spirit.
- 2) Jer 31:31ff is said to be the words which Adonai spoke, but in Heb 10:15 the words are attributed to the Spirit.
- 3) Creation is attributed to the Spirit, Jb 33:4, but is equally attributed to Elohim (Gen 1:1) as well as to the Messiah, Isa 48:12ff; Jn 1:3; Col 1:16f.

There is no doubt that the Scriptures, when taken as a whole, speak of the Spirit as though He is a person, and attribute to Him works and characteristics ascribed to Adonai in other places. It is also of interest that in the Greek Scriptures, πνεῦμα, pneuma, though usually neuter, when speaking of the Spirit of God is regularly referred to by masculine pronouns (e.g., John 16:13, 14). This fact, coupled with the fact that He leads, teaches, sanctifies, and comforts the individual believer as well as the community of the faithful, would indicate His individual personality. He equips for specific ministry and duty (as Bezalel in the construction of the Tabernacle, or Barnabas and Paul in outreach ministries) and appoints those who should lead the congregation.⁴⁸

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8. Excursus: Ruach “Within” vs. Ruach “Upon”

⁴⁸ Tim Hegg, *God’s Self-Revelation, A Course in Theology Proper* (TorahResource, 2012), p. 124.

Lastly, I would like to borrow some material from other commentaries that I have written to provide a “digression” of edifying information on the Ruach HaKodesh from the argument of whether or not the Holy Spirit was present within people in the time period of the TaNaKH, as compared to the time period of the Apostolic Scriptures (i.e., the New Testament), or was he actually within folks back then the same as he is in believers now—and why or why not it should matter to us today.

The very first mention of the Ruach in the Torah is in Genesis 1:2:

וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

“...v’Ruach-Elohim m’rachefet al-paney ha-mayim”

(...and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water)

The word translated as “**hovered**,” in verse two of chapter one, is מְרַחֶפֶת “**m’rachefet**”. The root word is רָחַף “rachaf,” and conveys the sense of “shaking,” “moving,” or “fluttering,”⁴⁹ as when a bird softly relaxes its flight to alight upon its young. It adequately describes the actions of the Ruach (Spirit) as he lovingly and closely watches over the created substance. How so? Well, this verb, although found three times in Scripture, is defined as “hovering” only one other time in the entire TaNaKH:

“He found his people in desert country, in a howling, wasted wilderness. He protected him and cared for him, guarded him like the pupil of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up her nest, hovers over her young, spreads out her wings, takes them and carries them as she flies.” (Deuteronomy 32:10-11)

This beautiful illustration of the protective power of the Spirit, in relation to his children, Am Yisra’el (People of Isra’el), as they traveled through the wilderness reminds me of the same Spirit that hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation. The word translated “hovers,” in our above verse, is the same root as the one used in Genesis 1:2, “rachaf.” In fact, to strengthen the connection between the two applications, the **Haftarah** to **B’resheet** is **Isaiah 42:5-43:10**. A “haftarah” is a prescribed reading portion from the prophets and writings, chosen to compliment the Torah portion. In this passage, we read in the opening seventeen Hebrew words, a summary of the first chapter in Genesis:

“Thus says God, ADONAI, who created the heavens and spread them out, who stretched out the earth and all that grows from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk on it....” (Isaiah 42:5-43:10)

Along with the foundational reference in Genesis 1:2, the Ruach is also mentioned in quite a few other surprising locations in the entire TaNaKH (Old Testament). Some

⁴⁹ Brown, Driver, Briggs (BDB), רָחַף.

rather familiar references are found in the story of Shimshon (Samson), where we learn that he enjoyed a special anointing from the Ruach (read Judges 13:24-14:20). In these verses the Ruach is described as “coming upon him powerfully.” But was the Ruach within him? I’ve heard it taught that the Ruach did not enter into men until the New Covenant. However, concerning the construction of the Mishkan, B’tzal’el, the master craftsman, is said to have been “filled with the spirit of God...”⁵⁰ according to the 1917 JPS translation of the TaNaKH.

The confusion stirred up within the debate of “IN” vs. “ON,” that is, a teaching which purports that “in the Old Testament the Spirit merely resided upon (on) folks, while in the New Testament the Spirit resides within (in) a person” firstly seems to ignore the fact that Scripture teaches us plainly that regeneration of a man cannot take place without the Ruach HaKodesh! Observe the language of this pasuk from Sha’ul:

1 But, brothers, I do not want you to go on being ignorant about the things of the Spirit. 2 You know that when you were pagans, no matter how you felt you were being led, you were being led astray to idols, which can't speak at all. 3 Therefore, I want to make it clear to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, “Yeshua is cursed!” and no one can say, “Yeshua is Lord,” except by the Ruach HaKodesh. (1 Cor. 12:1-3)

Verse one seems as relevant today as it was back then! We believers seem to be ignorant concerning the work of the Spirit and as a result go about bickering and arguing about topics such as “IN” vs. “ON.” Sha’ul’s wish is that with the help of the unified Word of HaShem and the witness of the genuine indwelling Spirit we should all come to the unifying knowledge that God has graciously granted unto us, as demonstrated by sending us gifted individuals capable of disseminating genuine Truth to the Body:

12 Their task is to equip God's people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah, 13 until we all arrive at the unity implied by trusting and knowing the Son of God, at full manhood, at the standard of maturity set by the Messiah's perfection. 14 We will then no longer be infants tossed about by the waves and blown along by every wind of teaching, at the mercy of people clever in devising ways to deceive. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in every respect grow up into him who is the head, the Messiah. 16 Under his control, the whole body is being fitted and held together by the support of every joint, with each part working to fulfill its function; this is how the body grows and builds itself up in love. (Eph. 4:12-16)

What is it about the Spirit that will unite us as believers? Simply and foundationally that: only the Spirit can regenerate a man so as to cause him to declare Jesus as LORD!

⁵⁰ The Hebrew of Exodus 35:31 reads, “יִמְלֵא אֹתוֹ רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים”

Verse two of our Corinthians passage above contrasts our former blindness and ignorance as “pagans being led by other than holy spirits” with now being led by the one and only Holy Spirit. The Greek word ἔθνος ethnos, often rendered as “Gentiles,” “pagans” must be understood within each individual context presented. Here it connotes a foreigner from the nations devoid of true knowledge and worship of HaShem, i.e., a pagan. Compare this now with the reality that we have in Messiah, viz, brought to life along with him through the gift of the Spirit. In this sense, we are no longer “pagans.” Did we come to this revelation on our own? No. Regeneration is accomplished solely by the divine fiat of God. Man is incapable of calling God “Abba” without becoming “born again” first (cf. all of Romans chapter eight, but specifically verses 14-17). The second clause of verse three of our Corinthian passage confirms this reality. That the second clause is perhaps a lesson in ontology is also a possibility, one that I will not explore in this particular study.

What have we learned thus far? Simply that a person must experience the genuine regeneration from the Spirit in order to be genuinely saved. This truth is fundamentally applicable from Adam to today! No man approaches the Father except through Yeshua, and no man may come unless the Father draws him (see John 6:30-71 where the primary discussion is eternal life offered exclusively through Yeshua)!

Now let us turn to a discussion on Yeshua’s promise of the Spirit in Acts chapter one:

6 When they were together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore self-rule to Isra’el?” 7 He answered, “You don’t need to know the dates or the times; the Father has kept these under his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Ruach HaKodesh comes upon you; you will be my witnesses both in Yerushalayim and in all Y’hudah and Shomron, indeed to the ends of the earth!” (Acts 1:6-8)

Amazingly, we find a “New Testament” passage utilizing the word “upon” instead of “in.” The Greek word for “upon” above is ἐπί *epi* and its primary meaning is in fact “upon.”⁵¹ In fact, this word is never translated as “in” anywhere that I can find in the Apostolic Scriptures! Clearly the work of the Spirit in these verses refers to taking the Gospel message beyond the confines of the city limits, into the foreign mission field of the non-Jews, something “unthinkable” for the ethnocentric Jewish 1st century Judaisms. The Jewish core of the talmidim needed the empowering of the Ruach HaKodesh if they were going to overcome the social barriers created by the prevailing rabbinic halakhah that sought to separate Jew from non-Jew. Acts chapter two, which cites Joel 3:1-5 (2:28-32), is proof positive that God was using Jewish believers to reach out to non-Jewish peoples everywhere.

⁵¹ According to Thayer’s and Smith’s Bible Dictionary (TSBD) ἐπί also means “on, at, by, before, over, against, to, across.”

Another passage in the Apostolic Scriptures that uses the language of “on” where we would think it should read “in” is 1 Peter 4:12-16:

12 Dear friends, don't regard as strange the fiery ordeal occurring among you to test you, as if something extraordinary were happening to you. 13 Rather, to the extent that you share the fellowship of the Messiah's sufferings, rejoice; so that you will rejoice even more when his Sh'khinah is revealed. 14 If you are being insulted because you bear the name of the Messiah, how blessed you are! For the Spirit of the Sh'khinah, that is, the Spirit of God, is resting on you! 15 Let none of you suffer for being a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler in other people's affairs. 16 But if anyone suffers for being Messianic, let him not be ashamed; but let him bring glory to God by the way he bears this name.

Again, the Greek word for “on” in verse 14 is ἐπί ἐπί. Context again shows that an already genuine believer is receiving subsequent empowering to withstand the trails that come as a result of bearing the name of Yeshua in the first place! Verse fourteen clearly shows the proper order in which to understand the “IN” vs. “ON” debate, namely, the Spirit saves an individual and then the Spirit subsequently empowers such an individual to witness for Yeshua.

What then is the “work of the Spirit” taught throughout the Apostolic Scriptures? Simply the subsequent empowering of an already saved individual to do things that he normally could not do under his own power. The crucial key to unlocking the debate over “IN” vs. “ON” is knowing that the Ruach HaKodesh firstly works “IN” us to bring about regeneration and then works “ON” us to bring about empowerment to do the Will of God. I personally think we should change our language from “IN” vs. “ON” to a more accurate depiction of “IN” as well as “ON.” The Spirit saves and the Spirit empowers! Why can't we grasp these two important biblical truths simultaneously? The “Old Testament saints” were saved exactly the same way as we in the 21st century are saved: by grace, through faith in the gift of God, namely, the Son of God and the Spirit of God within us.

Yet, in a very real way, the presence and ministry of the Ruach HaKodesh, as we know him today, according to the times of the TaNaKH, would not be fully realized until the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Yeshua (read entire chapter of John 14, specifically vv. 16-18, 26). Of this ministry and individual power of the Spirit, Ezekiel prophesied about in 11:19, 20 and 36:25-29. Again, this is also the same individual “spirit” spoken about in Joel 2:28, 29, which is confirmed by Peter in Acts 2:16-18. The Ruach HaKodesh was indeed present in the days of the TaNaKH, empowering individuals such as B'tzal'el and Shimshon, yet his ministry was slightly different than that of today because of his unique role in what happened after Acts chapter two. Perhaps it is best to think of his ministry in the TaNaKH as “less expansive” than as compared to today. “Less expansive” is not to be equated with “non-existent.” A survey of the passages and wording used in “both testaments” will show that the “Old” does not exclusively employ an “ON” reading as ostensibly compared to an exclusive “IN”

reading in the “New.” Rather, a survey of the passages and wording used in “both testaments” will demonstrate “ON” and “IN” being utilized interchangeably to teach that the Ruach HaKodesh both saves (“IN”) and empowers (“ON”), and that he does so consistently with the eternal plans and purposes of God the Father.

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