

## Observations on the “Monotheism” Affirmed in the New Testament

Larry W. Hurtado (University of Edinburgh)

In a book first published in 1988, I used the phrase “ancient Jewish monotheism” in the title, to designate the crucial religio-historical context in which to situate and appreciate historically the intense Jesus-devotion that erupted so early and so quickly in the first century CE.<sup>1</sup> I also proposed that the effects of this intense Jesus-devotion involved the emergence of a novel innovation or “mutation” in ancient Jewish monotheism that I characterized as a “binitarian” devotional pattern in which Jesus was both distinguished from God (“the Father”) and yet also linked with God in a unique manner in beliefs and devotional practices.<sup>2</sup> In a number of publications subsequently, I have sought to clarify and articulate my views further, also engaging with the work of other participants in the discussion of these important matters.<sup>3</sup> In this presentation I seek to continue the discussion by underscoring some key features of this early Christian “mutation” in ancient Jewish monotheism as they are reflected in some texts of earliest Christianity.

### *The Terminology Question*

Before we turn to this matter, however, it is necessary to consider recent questions about the suitability of the term “monotheism” to describe ancient Jewish and Christian religion.

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<sup>1</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998). Paul Rainbow captured this aspect of the book in the title of his review-essay: “Jewish Monotheism as the Matrix for New Testament Christology: A Review Article,” *NovT* 33 (1991): 78-91.

<sup>2</sup> See esp. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, chapter 5, “The Early Christian Mutation,” 93-124.

<sup>3</sup> On ancient Jewish monotheism, L. W. Hurtado, “First Century Jewish Monotheism,” *JSNT* 71 (1998): 3-26, republished in my book, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 111-33, which I cite here; also *idem*, “Monotheism, Principal Angels, and the Background of Christology,” in *Oxford Handbook to the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. J. J. Collins and T. H. Lim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 546-64; *idem*, “Monotheism,” *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, eds. J. J. Collins and Daniel Harlow (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). On early Jesus-devotion, see, e.g., Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), esp. 63-97; *idem*, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003); *idem*, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). I have engaged work of other scholars in the discussion in the preface to the second edition of *One God, One Lord* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), vii-xxii; and subsequently in *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* 13-30. More recently still, see my essay, “The Origins of Jesus-Devotion: A Response to Crispin Fletcher-Louis.” *TB* 61 (2010): 1-20.

In 1991, Peter Hayman contended flatly that “monotheism” is inappropriate as a descriptor for ancient Judaism.<sup>4</sup> Essentially, his reason was that the common, modern definition of the term is the denial of the existence of any more than one deity; and he rightly noted that the evidence is either unclear that ancient Jews really did this, or clearly indicates that they did not.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, to judge from quite a number of sources, ancient devout Jews, all through the second-temple period, seem to have seen the heavens as rather thickly populated with a variety of spiritual beings in addition to the biblical deity.<sup>6</sup> As I noted in my 1988 book, “Jewish belief in the uniqueness of God was able to accommodate surprising kinds of reverence for and interest in other heavenly figures . . .”<sup>7</sup>

A few others subsequently have made basically the same argument as Hayman, including Paula Fredriksen, who (with her characteristic verve) has called for the “mandatory retirement” of the word “monotheism” from discussions of ancient Judaism and Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Noting that in the modern context in which the term originated, it “denotes belief in a single god who is the only god,” she then alleges (in a bit of an over-generalization) that “when modern scholars transpose the term to antiquity, the definition remains constant,” and that this works mischief.<sup>9</sup> In his 2004 PhD thesis, Michael Heiser insisted for essentially the same reason that it is incorrect to apply “monotheism” to second-temple Jewish religion, and he expressed a preference for “monolatry” as a better label for ancient Jewish religious beliefs and

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Hayman, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” *JJS* 42 (1991): 1-13.

<sup>5</sup> As an example of the sort of popular definition that one finds in dictionaries, note the following: “Monotheism: The doctrine or belief that there is only one God,”

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/monotheism>

<sup>6</sup> For a recent, incisive discussion, see Michael S. Heiser, “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” *BBR* 18 (2008): 1-30. In this article, Heiser focuses more on selected canonical texts, but notes that on into the second-temple period devout Jews continued to think of multiple divine beings (albeit fully subordinated to YHWH). He gives a much fuller discussion of extra-canonical evidence in his unpublished PhD thesis: “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature” (PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004). See also Michael Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabinischer Zeit*, TSAJ 34 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), who shows increased interest in various angelic/heavenly beings in second-temple Judaism.

<sup>7</sup> Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go,” *SR* 35 (2006): 231-46; also published in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity*, eds. D. B. Capes, A. D. DeConick, H. K. Bond, T. A. Miller (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 25-38. I cite the latter publication here.

<sup>9</sup> Fredriksen, “Monotheism,” 35. In response to her sweeping allegation cited here, I note that in my 1998 essay, “First Century Jewish Monotheism,” I specifically indicated how the conventional definition of “monotheism” does not fit the ancient evidence, and appealed for an inductively-derived definition of the term when applied to ancient contexts.

practice.<sup>10</sup> Heiser showed in particular that second-temple Jewish texts continued to reflect the idea that God has a council of heavenly beings that can be referred to as “gods” (Heb. *elim* or *b<sup>e</sup>ney elohim*), and also that ancient Jews appear often to have accepted the reality of the gods that were worshipped by other peoples. So, he concluded, the modern term “monotheism” cannot validly be applied to ancient Jews.<sup>11</sup> Nathan MacDonald probed the modern origins of the term “monotheism” and has also argued that the modern definition of the word ill fits the ancient setting.<sup>12</sup>

I am not myself married to the term “monotheism” (I think of it as more a relationship of convenience), but I am not yet convinced that it should simply be discarded (or retired from service). Nor is it clear that there is ready at hand a fully superior alternative label (and, for convenience of discussion, I suspect that we will continue to need a label). Instead, I propose that, when used with sufficient care and with appropriate modifiers, “monotheism” can continue to serve in scholarly vocabulary in describing ancient Jewish and Christian religion in particular. To be sure, as noted by the scholars I have mentioned, it can be misleading to ascribe “monotheism” *simpliciter* to ancient Jewish and Christian traditions, if the modern and simple definition of the term is applied. That is why, in several publications beginning with my 1988 volume, I have repeatedly urged that in any usage of the term “monotheism” the specific meaning *should be derived inductively from relevant evidence*, and also that we should distinguish different kinds of ancient “monotheistic” belief and practice (none of them conforming to the modern dictionary definition of “monotheism”).<sup>13</sup> Indeed, I devoted a whole essay to making this point, with extended reference to Jewish tradition of the first century CE, highlighting two key features:

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<sup>10</sup> Heiser, “The Divine Council,” 15. In a subsequent study, Heiser noted that “monolatry” (as typically defined in dictionaries) also has limitations as a label for ancient Jewish religion, and urged scholars to focus simply on describing beliefs and practices rather than relying on “singular, imprecise modern terms”: “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism?” 27-29, citing 28.

<sup>11</sup> Heiser cited some 185 instances in Qumran sectarian texts where a “divine council” is referred to as “sons of God,” and “gods” (*b<sup>e</sup>ney elohim*, *elim/elohim*): “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism?” 3; *idem*, “The Divine Council,” 176-213.

<sup>12</sup> Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> See Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, e.g., 129 (n. 1), where I briefly note differences between so-called “pagan monotheism” and the religious stance advocated in ancient Jewish texts. At that point, I proposed that “monotheism” be reserved for the latter stance. I have come to think now that it is better to use the appropriate modifier to identify the particular religious outlook of texts and groups: e.g., “pagan monotheism,” “ancient Jewish monotheism,” “early Christian monotheism”.

(1) a remarkable ability to combine a genuine concern for God's uniqueness with an interest in other figures with transcendent attributes [figures] described in the most exalted terms . . . and (2) an exhibition of monotheistic scruples, particularly and most distinctively in public cultic/liturgical behavior.<sup>14</sup>

In the following brief comments, I develop further my point that there are in fact different kinds of “monotheism” and that we have to reflect this in our usage of the term. I begin by noting that there seems to be surprisingly little scholarly objection to the expression “pagan monotheism” as a label for the Roman-era beliefs reflected in some pagan sources that there is one supreme deity over a pantheon, or that the many gods are all manifestations of one supreme deity or one divine principle/essence. To cite an illustration of such a viewpoint, there is the statement of Maximus of Tyre (*Who is God according to Plato* 17.5): θεός εις καὶ θεοὶ πόλλοι (“there is one god and the gods are many”). As is clear from Maximus’ statement, it is important to note that what is called “pagan monotheism” manifestly did not involve denying either the existence of multiple deities or (still more importantly) the cultic worship of them.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, this “pagan monotheism” was essentially a topic of conversation among philosophers and the cultural elite, whose musings seem to have had “little impact on popular religious behavior, not even their own.”<sup>16</sup> In short, “pagan monotheism” is very different (I think crucially so) from the modern dictionary definitions of “monotheism”.

Moreover, it is as important to note that “pagan monotheism” is also very different from the religious stance advocated typically in ancient Jewish texts, the stance which I refer to as “ancient Jewish monotheism.” The crucial difference between “pagan monotheism” and “ancient Jewish monotheism” is in cultic

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<sup>14</sup> Hurtado, “First-Century Jewish Monotheism,” 111.

<sup>15</sup> Javier Teixidor, *The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Graeco-Roman Near East* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1977), 13-17, referred to pagan monotheism, but acknowledged that this was not the exclusive devotion to one deity characteristic of ancient Judaism. Ramsay McMullen referred to “megalodaimonia” to describe the pagan idea of a chief deity: *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 83-94. More recently, see the studies in Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), and in Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen (eds.), *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). The “pagan monotheism” in question seems to be basically the unremarkable philosophical speculations about which we already knew, that were intended to pose a unifying principle for the world and to provide some coherence to the wild diversity of ancient pagan religions and the many gods.

<sup>16</sup> L. W. Hurtado, *God in New Testament Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 28.

practice/behaviour. Specifically, “ancient Jewish monotheism” was most characteristically and explicitly expressed in a refusal to take part in the worship of any god other than the biblical deity. John Peter Kenney somewhat similarly urged that there are differing versions of “monotheism,” drawing attention specifically to the differences between what he called “the ‘exclusive’ monotheism of the Jewish or Christian theological traditions” and the “inclusive” notions of divine oneness in pagan antiquity.<sup>17</sup> I agree, and so also heartily endorse the exhortation by Athanassiadi and Frede that “in order to do justice to Judaism, Christianity, and the various forms of pagan thought and worship, one needs in each case to define the term ‘monotheism’ very carefully.”<sup>18</sup>

So, if “pagan monotheism” serves acceptably to designate the more inclusive sort of religious outlook reflected in some ancient circles of philosophers and other cultural sophisticates, the adjective “pagan” functioning to distinguish this outlook from other versions of “monotheism”, then I propose that “ancient Jewish monotheism” can serve to refer to the sort of exclusive religious outlook and practice advocated and reflected in Jewish sources, especially those of the second-temple period.<sup>19</sup> Granted, as is the case with “pagan monotheism,” “ancient Jewish monotheism” does not fit the typical definition of “monotheism” in modern dictionaries, which focuses simply on the denial of the existence of other divine beings. The adjectives in “ancient Jewish monotheism” signal a crucial difference and, I contend, make this phrasing a serviceable label.

As noted earlier, Michael Heiser proposed “monolatry” as a better term for capturing this ancient Jewish exclusivist stance on worship, but this term has its own limitations. By itself, this term need only connote a cultic practice in which worship is given to one deity from among many, with no necessary ranking of deities. Ancient Jewish texts, however, often go farther, ascribing a universal domain and unique significance to the biblical God, and sometimes even portraying the worship of other

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<sup>17</sup> John Peter Kenney, “Monotheistic and Polytheistic Elements in Classical Mediterranean Spirituality,” *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 269-292 (citing 270-71). Kenney here refers to the “cultic polytheism” (i.e., the continuing “ritual observance of cults related to multiple gods”) as the key difference between pagan/philosophical “monotheism” and the religious stance typical of ancient Jewish and Christian traditions.

<sup>18</sup> Athanassiadi and Frede, *Pagan Monotheism*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. William Horbury, “Jewish and Christian Monotheism in the Herodian Age,” in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, ed. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 16-44, who curiously claims that Jewish religion of the Herodian period was more “inclusive” and became more “exclusive” in the aftermath of the Jewish revolt of 70 CE. I think he misjudges things badly, and uses the terms “inclusive” and “exclusive” in an idiosyncratic manner.

gods by gentiles as at best misguided and at worst as the grossest sin (e.g., *Jub.* 15:30-32; *Wis* 13—15).<sup>20</sup> That is, the religious stance dominantly reflected in a number of ancient Jewish texts involves positing that the biblical God is categorically superior to other deities, and that this God alone should be worshipped by all the earth, not simply by Jews. This ideological element about God’s uniqueness is not readily connoted in the word “monolatry,” requiring us to construct a more complex label such as “universalizing monolatry” or “intolerant monolatry.”<sup>21</sup> *Chacun a son gout* in this terminological matter, of course; and so for me, “ancient Jewish monotheism” still seems a serviceable descriptor (when used as I propose). I emphasize again, however, that this is not the modern “monotheism” of the dictionaries, but “ancient Jewish monotheism”, the distinguishing features of which we must take into account.

In particular, I underscore the point that the most crucial aspect of “ancient Jewish monotheism” was not the denial of the existence of other deities, but instead the reluctance to grant cultic worship to any recipient other than the biblical deity. There was, to be sure, a Jewish religious rhetoric emphasizing the uniqueness of the biblical deity, but there was an even greater emphasis on exclusivity of worship.<sup>22</sup> Devout Jews typically were expected to refuse to participate in the worship of the many other divine beings of the time, including even God’s own entourage of powerful beings (e.g., angels). Worship was the crucial criterion, the key factor, the major identifying marker of devout Jewish piety, and the key expression of “ancient Jewish monotheism”.

### *The Early Christian “Mutation”*

In earliest Christianity, I propose that we see the emergence of yet another kind of ancient “monotheism” to which I now turn. In previous publications I have characterized this as a novel “mutation” or innovation, which appeared initially within the first-century Jewish religious matrix of earliest Christian faith, and thereafter quickly developed as a new and distinguishable form of monotheistic piety in which

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<sup>20</sup> We see this stance reflected also by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, where he forbids participation in the worship of Roman-era deities, calling it “idolatry” (v. 14), and referring to the pagan gods as “demons” (v. 20-21), likely drawing upon a similar characterization in Deuteronomy 32:17.

<sup>21</sup> As noted earlier, Heiser later granted the limitations of “monolatry” too: “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism?” esp. 27-29.

<sup>22</sup> In a recent essay, I have described the apparent hardening of emphasis on the uniqueness of God among devout Jews in the period after the Maccabean crisis: L. W. Hurtado, “How Do We Recognize ‘Jewish Monotheism’ in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods?” (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, November 2010).

God and Jesus were uniquely linked in belief and practice. By referring to this development as a “mutation”, I mean that there is both a recognizable organic connection to the “parent” religious tradition (in this case, second-temple Judaism) and also an equally recognizable element of innovation that distinguishes what we may call “early Christian monotheism”. My own focus here and in previous discussions is on the earliest observable expressions of this stance as we see them in the NT. As I have discussed the matter more fully in previous publications, I will confine myself here to discussing a few basic points, focusing on some illustrative texts.<sup>23</sup>

### *One God, One Lord*

First, I trust that it will not be controversial to begin by noting that earliest Christian religious discourse and practice reflect the exclusivist stance of “ancient Jewish monotheism,” rejecting the worship of the many deities of the first-century religious setting in favour of the one deity of biblical tradition.<sup>24</sup> Note, for example, how (in what is likely the earliest Christian text extant) Paul describes the religious re-orientation of his Thessalonian readers. They “turned to God [τον θεου] from the idols, to serve a true and living God, and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the coming wrath” (1 Thess. 1:9-10). The disdain for pagan deities and the worship of them is evident in this statement. They are mere “idols” (ειδωλα), the derisive term taken from Jewish religious discourse of the time, and the Thessalonian believers have now turned away from (επεστρέψατε) these unworthy beings to serve (δουλουειν) “a true and living God”.<sup>25</sup> It is obvious that we have here an unhesitating expression of the religious exclusivity that marked “ancient Jewish monotheism.” As with conversion to Judaism of the time, so in becoming a member of the ecclesial groups established by Paul, pagans were expected to renounce their former deities and commit themselves to an exclusive devotion to the one biblical deity. Moreover, as I have emphasized concerning

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<sup>23</sup> E.g., Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 93-124; *id.*, “The Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, eds. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, Gladys S. Lewis (JSJSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 187-214; *id.*, *At the Origins of Christian Worship*, 63-97.

<sup>24</sup> I draw here upon my discussion in *God in New Testament Theology*, esp. 27-31.

<sup>25</sup> The word δουλουειν here carries the connotation it has in some OT contexts, e.g., Exod 23:33; Psa 2:11; 1 Sam 12:20; 2 Chron 30:8, where it designates an exclusive worship and obedience. Cf. Paul’s reference to the Galatian believers as having served “things/beings that by nature are not gods” (Gal. 4:8-9) prior to their conversion.

ancient Judaism, so in these early Christian groups this exclusivity was expressed most blatantly and firmly in worship practice.

In the context of this sharp distinction between the error of reverencing the many deities of the Roman religious environment and a proper devotion to the one God, it is all the more interesting to note the place of Jesus in the new religious orientation of Paul's converts.<sup>26</sup> Jesus is referred to here as God's (unique) Son (as indicated by the definite article: *τον υιον αυτου*), whom God has raised from death, and who now is the divinely-designated deliverer from eschatological "wrath". In short, Jesus here is clearly the unique agent of God, and the one whom believers look to and await for their promised salvation.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, Jesus is certainly defined with reference to God's actions (especially God's resurrection of him) and purposes (eschatological salvation), and so is subordinate to and distinguishable from this God. On the other hand, we can say that Jesus is centrally integral to Paul's religious discourse here and to the religious re-orientation of Paul's converts, bearing a unique significance and role in executing God's salvation. That is, Jesus is to feature crucially in their faith, and in a manner for which we have no analogy in Jewish traditions of the time.

Indeed, we see this striking and unique duality or what we might call a "dyadic pattern" involving God and Jesus already from the opening words of this epistle, where Paul refers to the Thessalonian church as "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1), the religious position of these believers now identified with reference both to God and Jesus.<sup>28</sup> As a further and more extended illustration, note the prayer-wish in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, where Paul appeals both to God and Jesus to enable a reunion with his addressees, and then specifically invokes "the Lord" (who must be Jesus here) to cause them to flourish in love and holiness, in anticipation of

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<sup>26</sup> See also my discussion in *God in New Testament Theology*, 49-71, esp. 59-64.

<sup>27</sup> C. A. Wanamaker, "Christ as a Divine Agent in Paul," *JTS* 39 (1986): 517-28.

<sup>28</sup> In a number of previous publications, I referred to a "binitarian" shape to earliest Christian devotion, meaning by this term only an inclusion of Jesus with God, not as a second deity but as the unique agent of God, Jesus' divine status defined consistently with reference to God. Unfortunately, however, some scholars have wrongly supposed that my use of "binitarian" implied (or allowed) imputing to NT texts doctrinal concepts from later Trinitarian debates. So, I resort here to referring simply to a "duality" or "dyadic pattern" in early Christian discourse and devotion, as described as above. Understanding the data is my primary concern, not defending any particular label for them. Some have referred to the phenomena as comprising a "christological monotheism", as, e.g., Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), chap. 2, "Christological Monotheism in the New Testament," 25-42; and in the title of the volume from the 1998 conference in St. Andrews: Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, Gladys S. Lewis, *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

their being presented before God at the *parousia* of “our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”<sup>29</sup> At various other points in this epistle as well, we have reflections of this same strong linkage of God and Jesus, such as Paul’s reference in 5:9-10 to God’s designation of believers for “salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,” whose redemptive death and risen life comprise the basis for their hope. Notice also how Paul exhorts his readers to “give thanks in everything, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (5:18).

Paul’s most extended discussion of the religious stance of Christian believers in the larger Roman religious environment, however, is in 1 Corinthians 8–10. Here, too, we have the same intense distinction between the vain worship of the pagan deities and the valid worship of the one God. This distinction is apparent from the outset of this discussion 8:1, where Paul refers to sacrifices to the pagan deities as “offerings to idols” (ειδωλοθυτα), using similarly derisive language again in 8:4, where he dismisses pagan deities as idols and affirms that there is only one God (ουδεις θεος ει μη εις). We see this same viewpoint in vv. 5-6, where Paul contrasts the pagan polytheistic outlook with the exclusivist stance that believers should affirm. Derisively referring to “so-called gods” and to the “many gods and many lords”, Paul then declares (v. 6),

But for us there is one God, the Father, from whom (are) all things, and we (are) for him [και ημεις εις αυτον], and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom (are) all things, and we (are) through him [και ημεις δι’ αυτου].

It is widely (but not universally) recognized that Paul’s statement here draws upon and adapts the traditional Jewish confession of God’s uniqueness, the *Shema* ‘ (derived from Deut. 6:4), with motifs that also reflect Hellenistic Jewish discourse about God (e.g., the use of the several Greek prepositions which likely stem from Greek philosophical tradition).<sup>30</sup> But the most striking thing about Paul’s statement is the

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<sup>29</sup> In 1 Thess 5:1-6, we have Paul’s further exhortation to believers to live in anticipation of Jesus’ *parousia*.

<sup>30</sup> Erik Peterson, *Eis Θεος* (FRLANT 23; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 219-40, suggested that Paul’s language here is influenced by the *Shema* ‘, and this view has been taken up subsequently by others. See, e.g., the extended discussions in Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 635-38; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 315-18; and Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: Hermeneia Commentary* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 142-45; Charles H. Giblin, “Three Monotheistic Texts in Paul,” *CBQ* 37 (1975): 528-47 (esp. 529-37). Oddly, Birger Gerhardsson, “The *Shema* ‘ in Early Christianity,” *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans*

line about Jesus in v. 6b.<sup>31</sup> Thereby, Paul includes the affirmation of Jesus' unique and universal role as an equally central component of the religious stance that he commends, reflecting a conspicuous duality of God and Jesus similar to that which we noted in the several texts examined in 1 Thessalonians. It is especially noteworthy here that Paul portrays "all things" (τα παντα) with reference both to God and to Jesus, ascribing a universal scope to both. Yet, again, this duality is one in which Jesus is also functionally subordinate to "God the Father", all things and believers *from* God and *for* God, all things and believers *through* Jesus, who here, as typically in the texts considered earlier, is represented as the unique agent of divine purposes. Nevertheless, this programmatic linkage of Jesus with God is without precedent or analogy in second-temple Jewish tradition, and is certainly remarkable.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, we can even note that this inclusion of Jesus into early Christian devotional discourse and practice is the probable reason why God is so often referred to as "Father" in early Christian texts, as the case in 1 Corinthians 8:6. "Father" both reflects the paradigmatic relationship of God to Jesus, and also serves to distinguish clearly "God" from the divine "Lord" Jesus.

There is, however, no hint in any Pauline text that this subordination reflects any hesitation or reserve about what Jesus' significance should be in belief and devotional life.<sup>33</sup> Instead, it is impressive how Paul boldly refers to Jesus in statements where he might simply have referred to God. For example, in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, Paul counter-poses "the worship of idols [ειδωλολατρία]" against participation/fellowship in the blood and body of Christ (vv. 14-16), urging that "you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake

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Neirynek, ed. F. van Segbroeck *et al.* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 275-93, makes no mention of 1 Cor, 8:4-6.

<sup>31</sup> I will not engage here the question of whether in 8:6b Paul incorporates Jesus into the confession of God in the *Shema* or couples an assertion about Jesus to it. Cf. opinions discussed by James D. G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (London: SPCK, 2010), 107-10. James McGrath prefers the latter option: *The Only True God: Early Christian monotheism in its Jewish Context* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 38-44. In any event, he certainly errs in claiming that such a coupling of Jesus with God was "not in fact unparalleled in Jewish literature" (40). In fact, he provides no true analogy or precedent, and I know of none. However one construes 1 Cor. 8:6 it is a novel and even astonishing statement in the way Jesus is so closely linked with God. Cf. the recent in-depth study by Erik Waaler, *The Shema and the First Commandment in First Corinthians* (WUNT 2/253; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), who concludes decisively that "in 1 Cor 8:6 Paul divided the *Shema* in two" and "reinterpreted" and "expanded" the traditional Jewish confession to accommodate Jesus (433).

<sup>32</sup> This I demonstrated most fully in my book, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London: T&T Clark, 1998; orig. ed., 1988).

<sup>33</sup> Paul was no first-century Unitarian reacting against what he saw as exaggerated Christological claims.

of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (v. 21), and warning against provoking “the Lord” to jealousy (v. 22). Although the idea of divine jealousy stems from OT references to *Yahweh*’s response to idolatry (e.g., Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 5:8-9; and esp. Deut 32:15-21), in the passage before us “the Lord” must obviously be the risen Jesus, whose table, bread and cup comprise the Christian sacred meal.<sup>34</sup> The broad effect of Paul’s statements here is certainly to make Jesus centrally integral in Christian worship and to identify Christian worship as much with reference to Jesus as to God.

Likewise, notice how in the opening lines of 1 Corinthians Paul so easily combines references to the Corinthian believers as “the church of God” and as “sanctified in Christ Jesus,” and then even designates Christians simply as “all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, (who is) their Lord and ours” (1:2). As is well recognized among exegetes, the verb *επικαλεω* (in middle voice form) used with reference to a deity typically connotes an act of worship.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the full phrase that Paul uses here is specifically a remarkable adaptation of a familiar OT formula, to “call upon the name of the Lord,” that designates offering worship (typically sacrifice) to *Yahweh* (e.g., Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25; Psa. 99:6; 105:1; Joel 2:32 [Heb. 3:5]). But Paul’s remarkable use of the phrase explicitly makes Jesus the recipient of this action.<sup>36</sup> As Conzelmann noted, we have here “a technical expression for ‘Christians’,” referring to a ritual action that is reflected in other NT texts as well (Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16; 2 Tim. 2:22).<sup>37</sup> It is also one of the most obvious instances of Paul’s application to Jesus of what David Capes called “Yahweh texts”.<sup>38</sup>

In Romans 10:9-13, we get another reference to this ritual invocation/confession of Jesus as a common feature of gathered worship. Moreover,

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<sup>34</sup> So, e.g., Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 778; and see Collins, *First Corinthians*, 381, for references to divine jealousy in OT and post-biblical Jewish texts.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 78-80, who cites examples of the verb used in pagan texts (Plato, *Timaeus* 27c; Epictetus, *Dissertations* 2.7.12), in addition to the more commonly recognized OT uses.

<sup>36</sup> Note also how in Acts 9:14 Saul is pictured as persecuting Jewish believers, referred to simply as “all who call upon your name” (Ananias addressing the risen Jesus who has appeared to him in a vision). For further discussion of the verb see, e.g., K. L. Schmidt, “*επικαλεω*,” *TDNT* 3: 496-500; W. Kirchschräger, “*επικαλεω*,” *EDNT* 2: 28-29, who emphasizes the confessional nature of the act and seems to me to ignore the cultic connotation. For more on the OT background of the phrase and the cultic action it connotes, and the NT instances of the phrase, see Carl J. Davis, *The Name and Way of the Lord* (JSNTSup 129; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 103-40.

<sup>37</sup> Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> David B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology*, WUNT, no. 2/47 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992), esp. 116-23.

in v. 13 Paul's obvious (indeed, remarkable) use here of the statement from Joel, "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved," shows that he sees the ritual acclamation of Jesus in this light. The acclamation of Jesus is now the proper way in which to "call upon the name of the Lord." That is, the worship of God must now be done with reference to Jesus, and the acclamation of Jesus is now integral (even requisite) to the proper worship of God.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, this close linkage of Jesus and God is by no means peculiar to Paul, but, instead, is reflected rather broadly across the NT. To cite a text from a very different provenance, consider, for example, the Johannine statement, "this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (17:4). Note here that the salvific knowledge involves both God and Jesus. It is all the more significant that this statement is part of John 17, the priestly prayer of Jesus, which is typically taken as the passage that most likely reflects the theological outlook of the author.<sup>40</sup> This duality of God and Jesus in v. 4 is echoed all through the prayer. But it is a "shaped" duality, by which I mean that Jesus' divine status is consistently defined with reference to God (the Father), Jesus represented as the unique agent of, and subordinate to, the Father.<sup>41</sup> For example, God has given the Son "authority over all flesh to grant eternal life to all whom you [God] have given to him" (v. 2). Jesus claims to have made God's name known to those given to him by God (v. 6), and affirms "All mine are yours, and yours are mine" (v. 10). Indeed, the prayer presents Jesus and the Father as in some real sense "one" (vv. 11, 22). Nevertheless, Jesus repeatedly affirms here that he has been sent by God (vv. 3, 18, 23), and also that his glory is conferred by God (vv. 5, 22, 24). In short, the passage presents Jesus here as both integral to the knowledge of God and "one" with God, sharing in divine glory, and yet also as a distinguishable figure, "the Son" who was sent forth by God (the Father). Indeed, this remarkable presentation of Jesus as linked

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<sup>39</sup> A point emphasized by C. Kavin Rowe, "Romans 10:13: What is the Name of the Lord?" *HBT* 22 (2000): 135-73.

<sup>40</sup> For proposals on the origin of John 17, cf., e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi)* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 744-51; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John, Volume Three, Commentary on Chapters 13-21* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 197-202.

<sup>41</sup> Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, WUNT, 2/78 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996); Jan-A. Bühner, *Der Gesandte und sein Weg im 4. Evangelium: Die kultur- und religionsgeschichtlichen Grundlagen der johanneischen Sendungschristologie sowie ihre traditionsgeschichtliche Entwicklung*, WUNT, 2/2 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1977); Rudolf Schnackenburg, "Der Vater, der mich gesandt hat': Zur johanneischen Christologie," in *Anfänge der Christologie: Festschrift für Ferdinand Hahn zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and Henning Paulsen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 275-91.

with and yet also distinct from God (the Father) appears right from the opening words of GJohn, where the author declares that “the Word” was both “with God” and “was God” (1:1).<sup>42</sup>

In Mark 12:29 we have the only explicit quotation of the *Shema* ‘ in the NT, in the response of Jesus to the scribe’s question about the greatest commandment. But we also have a rather obvious allusion in another scene where a man asks Jesus how to obtain eternal life (Mark 10:17-22; Matt. 12:16-22; Luke 18:18-22), and Jesus’ responds, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone [εἰ μὴ εἰς ὁ θεός].”<sup>43</sup> In both of these scenes, Jesus is presented as a pious and humble Jew, affirming God’s uniqueness and, in the second scene especially, as demurring from flattery and self-exaltation. In the larger context of each of the Gospels, however, it is clear that this in no way was regarded as in tension with the affirmation of Jesus’ unique significance, e.g., as “Son of God,” Messiah, and exalted “Lord”.<sup>44</sup> Instead, these monotheistic statements simply reflect the typical stance of earliest Christian circles that they really were loyal adherents of the one God, and aligned themselves with what they took as the biblical tradition.<sup>45</sup>

Let us consider one additional NT writing to illustrate further this close association of Jesus with God. Over thirty years ago Richard Bauckham drew attention to the noteworthy way that the author of Revelation both strongly affirms an exclusivist worship-stance and yet also approves of Jesus being a co-recipient of worship with the one God.<sup>46</sup> The prophet John rejects as idolatry and religious “fornication” offerings to the pagan deities (2:14; 9:20-21), condemns as blasphemy the worship of “the beast” (13:1-4), and, conspicuously, also reflects a prohibition of worshipping God’s angels (19:10; 22:8-9), insisting that solely the one biblical deity is to be worshipped (19:10; 22:8-9).<sup>47</sup> Yet his portrayal of heavenly worship in

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<sup>42</sup> That is, each affirmation in John 1:1-2 is intended to be read in connection with the others.

<sup>43</sup> The Matthew passage has slightly different wording: “Why do you ask me about the good? There is one who is good [εἰς ἑστὶν ὁ ἀγαθός].” I cannot engage questions about what this variation may have represented for the author of Matthew.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Mark 8:34—9:1 makes one’s commitment to Jesus the determining factor in eschatological judgement, and in 14:62-64 Jesus declares that he is to be given the unique status as God’s vizier.

<sup>45</sup> In James 2:19 we have another allusion to the *Shema* ‘: “You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe (this) and they fear.” But the allusion does not contribute much to our concern to map out early Christian beliefs.

<sup>46</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, “The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 322-41. See also his revised and expanded discussion: Richard J. Bauckham, “The Worship of Jesus,” in *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 118-49.

<sup>47</sup> Bauckham’s seminal observations were taken up for more extended investigation by Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen

Revelation 4–5 (which John must intend as ideal and paradigmatic), culminates in a scene where the heavenly courtiers (the four “living creatures” and the twenty-four “elders”) sing “a new song” acclaiming “the Lamb” as worthy of their praise on account of his redemptive death (5:9-10), this praise then echoed by an innumerable host of heavenly beings (5:11-12). Then, climactically, John depicts worship directed “to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” given by “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea” (5:13-14). It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the author intends to depict true/heavenly/ideal worship as inclusive of Jesus “the Lamb” along with God. As Bauckham emphasized in his seminal article, this inclusion of Jesus is all the more remarkable in a text that elsewhere (19:10; 22:8-9) even treats the worship of a high angel sent from God as inappropriate, and insists that worship be directed to God alone.

Nevertheless, Revelation also reflects the sort of structured duality noted in the other NT texts previously examined. John’s book records “the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place” (1:1). John’s greeting to readers (1:4-6) invokes grace and peace from God (“the one who is and who was and who is to come”), from “the seven spirits”, and from “Jesus Christ”.<sup>48</sup> This greeting is followed by doxology that seems to be directed to Jesus, but note also that Jesus’ redemptive work here was to constitute people as “a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (v. 6). Likewise, the august and glorious Jesus who appears to John (1:9-20) and dictates messages to the seven churches refers to having received “authority from my Father” so that he can give to faithful believers “authority over the nations” (2:26-28). In 21:22-23, “the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” together comprise the temple of the new Jerusalem, also “the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb,” and in 22:1 the author refers to “the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

This structured/shaped duality of God and Jesus in the discourse and religious practices reflected in the NT could be illustrated further, but I trust that the texts considered here will suffice to demonstrate the extraordinary linkage of Jesus with

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Testament, 2/70 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Siebeck), 1995), who referred to a “refusal tradition” in a number of ancient Jewish and Christian texts reflected in scenes where a human attempts to offer worship to an angel, who then refuses this and directs the human to worship God. In Rev. 19:10 and 22:8-9, we have this tradition affirmed by John.

<sup>48</sup> Granted, we have here what seems more a triadic-shaped statement, the “seven spirits” likely a curious way of referring to the divine Spirit, who also is mentioned as the co-source of the messages to the churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

God in the distinctive religious stance that I have labelled “early Christian monotheism”.

### *The Spirit*

Although the most distinctive feature of the discourse about God in the NT is the prominence of references to Jesus, references to the divine Spirit certainly comprise another salient feature of this discourse.<sup>49</sup> Of course, the OT and second-temple Jewish texts refer to the divine Spirit, but there is a far greater frequency of references in the NT.<sup>50</sup> Compare, for example, the roughly 75 references to the Spirit in the OT (Hebrew *Tanach*) with some 275 in the NT. When one takes into account the far greater size of the OT, the frequency of references to the Spirit in the NT is all the more impressive. Likewise, although the divine Spirit is certainly a part of the religious discourse attested in extra-canonical Jewish texts, there is a considerably greater frequency of references to the Spirit in the NT. For instance, compare the 27 references to the Spirit in Paul’s epistle to the Romans, or the 58 references in Acts, with the total of 35 references identified by Sekki in the whole body of non-biblical Hebrew texts from Qumran.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, the NT references often portray actions that seem to give the Spirit an intensely personal quality, probably more so than in OT or ancient Jewish texts. So, e.g., the Spirit “drove” Jesus into the wilderness (Mark 1:12; cf. “led” in Matt. 4:1/Luke 4:1), and Paul refers to the Spirit interceding for believers (Rom. 8:26-27), and witnessing to believers about their filial status with God (Rom. 8:14-16). To cite other examples of this, in Acts the Spirit alerts Peter to the arrival of visitors from Cornelius (10:19), directs the church in Antioch to send forth Barnabas and Saul (13:2-4), guides the Jerusalem council to a decision about Gentile converts (15:28), at one point forbids Paul to missionize in Asia (16:6), and at another point warns Paul (via prophetic oracles) of trouble ahead in Jerusalem (21:11).

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<sup>49</sup> I draw here on my discussion of the Spirit in *God in New Testament Theology*, 73-94, where I also cite a number of other publications. Most recently, see John R. Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), esp. 225-421 for his discussion of NT texts.

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts* (JSNTSup 54; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), esp. 52-112; and now Levison, *Filled with the Spirit*, 109-221, for discussions of second-temple Jewish evidence.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur Everett Sekki, *The Meaning of Ruah at Qumran* (SBLDS 110; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 71.

But perhaps the most striking feature of NT references to the Spirit of God is the repeated connection made with Jesus. There is certainly no similar linkage of the divine Spirit with any figure other than God in biblical and Jewish tradition of the time.<sup>52</sup> This linkage includes such statements as Paul's declaration that the Spirit prompts the confession "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3), where Paul seems to make this confession a distinction between God's Spirit and the spiritual forces connected with the "idols". Likewise, in 1 John 4:1-3, we have a similar and even more explicit statement: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God" (NRSV).

Still more arresting are NT statements that interweave references to the Spirit and Jesus. Consider, for example, Paul's discussion of Christian empowerment for life in Romans 8, and his combination of stating that believers are "in Christ Jesus (8:1) with a summons to live "according to the Spirit" and to set their minds on the Spirit (8:4-6). In the same immediate context, Paul declares that believers are "in the Spirit" and indwelt by the Spirit of God (8:9), and also that they have "the Spirit of Christ" and that "Christ is in you" (8:10), all of these phrases likely complementary descriptions of the same boon given to believers. Similarly, in Galatians 4:6, Paul writes that "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts."

In what is the most extended discourse about the Spirit in the NT, John 14–16, the Spirit is given the distinctive sobriquet "the *Paraklētos*" (ὁ παράκλητος), indicative of what is to be the Spirit's role as advocate of Jesus sent by God in Jesus' name (14:25) and consequent on Jesus departure and glorification (14:15-17; 16:7). As Jesus' advocate, the Spirit will teach and remind believers about Jesus (14:25-26), and testify to them about Jesus (15:26), guiding them "into all truth" (about Jesus), glorifying Jesus (to believers) and declaring his significance (16:12-15).

In sum, the greater frequency of references to the divine Spirit, the frequent depiction of the Spirit in personalized terms, and the strong linkage of God's Spirit to Jesus combine to make the representation and place of Spirit in the NT distinctive in

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<sup>52</sup> Max Turner, "The Spirit of Christ and Christology," in *Christ the Lord: Studies Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. H. H. Rowdon (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1982), 168-90; *idem*, "The Spirit of Christ and 'Divine' Christology," in *Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 413-36. Mehrdad Fatehi, *The Spirit's Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul* (WUNT 2/128; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), esp. 586-93.

the context of second-temple Judaism. But, though the Spirit features prominently in the “God-discourse” reflected in the NT, it is noteworthy that the Spirit is not portrayed as a recipient of cultic devotion, which, instead, is typically offered to God and to the risen/glorified Jesus. Although what became mainstream Christianity subsequently affirmed the propriety of including the Spirit as recipient of worship (as reflected in the developed form of the “Nicene Creed”), perhaps the closest that we get to this in the NT is in Paul’s famous benediction at the end of 2 Corinthians, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (13:13), or the triadic baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19.<sup>53</sup>

### *A Triadic-Shaped Discourse*

Nevertheless, though the NT devotional/worship pattern has what we might term a “dyadic shape”, devotion directed to God and to Jesus, it is appropriate to characterize the discourse about God in the NT as having a certain “triadic shape”, with God (the Father), Jesus and the Spirit featuring regularly.<sup>54</sup> Of course, we should not ascribe the later developed doctrine of the Trinity to NT writers (not because they rejected such a doctrine, but because the philosophical questions and categories had not arisen among them in their time). But it is clear that the theological developments that led to the doctrine of the Trinity were to some significant degree prompted and even made unavoidable by the dyadic devotional pattern and the triadic shape of discourse about God that we see amply attested in the NT texts.

That is, the NT writings vigorously affirm the “one God” stance inherited from the Jewish matrix of earliest Christian faith, but also (and with at least equal vigor) affirm especially the non-negotiable significance of Jesus in belief and devotional practice, and further, frequently refer to the divine Spirit as the mode or agency by which “God” and Jesus are made present and real to believers. So, the

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<sup>53</sup> The affirmation of the legitimacy of including the Spirit as explicitly co-recipient of worship was added in the later, enlarged form of the Nicene Creed, the “Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed” (usually linked to the second Ecumenical Council of 381 CE). The added material includes the statement that the Spirit “with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified”. See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (3 vols; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 [1931]), 1:24-29. Curiously, in standard histories of the early Christian Trinitarian controversies there are only limited discussions of the question about worshipping the Spirit. See, e.g., Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma* (New York: Dover Publications, 1961 [1900]), 4: 108-37.; and more recently R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 738-90.

<sup>54</sup> I refer to my fuller discussion in *God in New Testament Theology*, 99-110, “The Triadic Shape of God-Discourse in the NT.”

question of how to harmonize these affirmations, particularly how to posit “one God” genuinely and yet also recognize Jesus as somehow really sharing in divine glory, could not be avoided by Christians in the second and third centuries C.E.<sup>55</sup>

### *Corollaries of Early Christian Monotheism*

In the final part of this discussion, I briefly consider two matters that may serve as examples of corollaries of the monotheistic stance affirmed in the NT. Each of these illustrates for us how early Christian monotheism was not simply a matter of belief and a pattern of devotional practice; there were wider implications.

The first and perhaps the earliest illustration is reflected in Romans 3:27-31, where Paul uses the traditional affirmation of the one God (εἷς ὁ θεός) as a premise for a strong soteriological implication with practical consequences for the terms on which Jewish and gentile believers should relate to one another.<sup>56</sup> Here, one God means one basis for putting people right with God, which is faith (in Christ), whether they be Jews or Gentiles.<sup>57</sup> “There is no distinction” (Rom. 3:22), for “all have sinned” and so stand dependent on the redemptive provision of the one God.

This line of thought, which we might refer to as a “monotheistic soteriology,” is reflected also in Romans 10:1-13, except that in this passage the emphasis is placed on the one Lord Jesus and the universal dimensions of his redemptive significance. Here Paul declares that “Christ is the end-purpose/goal [τέλος] of the Law for righteousness to every one who believes (in him)” (v. 4).<sup>58</sup> Then, after a rather creative appropriation of texts from Leviticus and Deuteronomy (vv. 5-8), he posits as the appropriate responses the acclamation of, and faith in Jesus as, the risen Lord, and

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 100. That is, this question could not be avoided by Christians in the so-called “proto-orthodox” circles.

<sup>56</sup> See fuller discussion of this passage in, e.g., Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Critical Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 299-302; Paul-Gerhard Klumbies, “Der Eine Gott des Paulus—Röm 3.21-31 als Brennpunkt paulinischer Theologie,” *ZNW* 85 (1994) 192-206; Giblin, “Three Monotheistic Texts,” 543-45. On Paul’s monotheistic stance more broadly, see Wolfgang Schrage, *Unterwegs zur Einzigkeit und Einheit Gottes: Zum “Monotheismus” des Paulus und seiner alttestamentlich-frühjüdischen Tradition* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> I emphasize that “faith” in Paul is not some abstract principle. Even when stated in absolute form, as in Rom. 3:30-31, “faith” always means trusting in God, and this side of Jesus’ appearance that always means trusting in him as God’s final provision for salvation.

<sup>58</sup> I take this frequently commented on statement as primarily reflecting Paul’s view of Jesus’ eschatological significance *vis-a-vis* the Torah. He supersedes Torah but also brings to reality the ultimate purpose of Torah in making righteousness available to all. So also, e.g., Jewett, *Romans*, 619-20.

he cites the scriptural assurance that “No one who believes in him will be made ashamed” (v. 11, citing Isa. 28:16). This leads to Paul’s proclamation that “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and generous to all who call upon him” (v. 12), which means that “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (v. 13). Essentially, in this passage Paul declares that the universality of the one God is expressed now in the finality and universality of Jesus as the Lord upon whom all may (indeed, must!) call for salvation.<sup>59</sup>

In Galatians 3:19-22, we see yet another instance where Paul invokes a monotheistic statement in the course of making a case for the universal salvific relevance of the faith in Jesus. These statements form part of Paul’s larger discussion of the relationship of Torah and faith in Christ in 3:1—4:6. In 3:6-18, Paul lays out an intricate argument that the promise to Abraham is fulfilled not through Torah but through Christ. This prompts the question in 3:19, “Why then the Law?” to which Paul answers that Torah was a provisional measure with a limited purpose. Reflecting this relative inferiority of Torah, says Paul, it was delivered by angels and through “a mediator” who must obviously be Moses. Then comes the key statement, “But/so the mediator is not of one; but God is one” (v. 20).<sup>60</sup> That is, Moses was mediator of a revelation given to him by angels, this plurality (of angels) contrasting with the oneness of God, whose promises Paul has made primary in the preceding discussion. The logic seems to be that the oneness of God must issue in a revelation that directly corresponds to God’s promise, and Paul’s obvious claim is that this revelation has come in Christ, the fulfilment of the promise thus available to all who trust in him (v. 22).

In Revelation, we have another but different practical expression of early Christian monotheism, in this case in what we might term the socio-political sphere. Although there is no explicit statement of, or direct allusion to, the *Shema* ‘ in Revelation, it is undeniable that the author held an exclusivist monotheistic stance. As we have noted earlier in this discussion, the text treats as idolatry the worship of any deity but the biblical deity (e.g., 9:20-21; 14:6-7). As a further indication of the author’s strictness, he is sharply critical of those in the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira who promoted what he regarded as a dangerously lax attitude about “food

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<sup>59</sup> See also discussion by Rowe, “Romans 10:13,” esp. 146-50.

<sup>60</sup> I follow here the analysis by Giblin, “Three Monotheistic Texts,” 537-43, esp. 540-41 on how to understand v. 20.

sacrificed to idols” (2:14-15, 20-23). To be sure, as noted already, Revelation portrays the true and proper worship of God as inclusive of “the Lamb”, seeing no conflict with his exclusivist stance in this “dyadic” devotional pattern, nor any weakening of his negative attitude toward the worship of other deities.

But the author’s sharply negative view about giving worship to other deities extends also specifically to a condemnation of “the Beast” (Revelation 13), which is commonly taken as the author’s term for what he regards as the (increasingly) monstrous and blasphemous demands and claims of the Roman imperial rulers.<sup>61</sup> In 14:9-12, an angel warns earth’s inhabitants not to worship “the Beast” or accept his mark, for the penalty of doing so will be the wrath of God. The seat of the Beast’s rule is “Babylon” (also used in 1 Pet. 5:13), a term emblematic of the rapacious and adversarial nature that the author ascribes to this regime. In Revelation 18 the author depicts a future angelic celebration of the downfall of “Babylon”, citing the many sins of this evil city, and concluding with the charge that “in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who have been slain upon the earth” (18:24).

This is clearly a political and economic regime, indeed of international dimensions, but the author’s critique is not really based on what we would regard as a “political” or “economic” premise. Instead, the author’s primary line of attack is against the (rising?) religious claims and demands of “the Beast” and the regime that he leads. The readiness of kings and merchants to ally themselves with “Babylon” must mean that there were advantages to be shared. But, first and foremost, for this author allegiance to “the Beast” and his regime constitutes idolatry. In short, the author’s strict monotheistic stance here leads to his warning of a looming, unavoidable conflict with the imperial authority.

### *Conclusion*

I conclude simply by underscoring the main points in the preceding discussion. The first of these points is terminological. It is, of course, completely misleading to ascribe the “monotheism” of the modern dictionaries to ancient Jews and Christians,

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<sup>61</sup> It appears that under the Flavians (and thereafter), the religious claims of the sitting/living emperor escalated, from being the designated “son” of the deified (dead) emperor (his immediate predecessor) to being himself divine and so to be given cultic reverence. See, e.g., Paul Keresztes, “The Imperial Roman Government and the Christian Church I. From Nero to the Severi,” *ANRW* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 2:23/1, 247-315; Kenneth Scott, *The Imperial Cult Under the Flavians*, reprint ed. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975); Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalyp of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

for their religious outlook did not focus on denying the existence of other deities, but instead on denying them worship. Nevertheless, it is clear that ancient Jews (and Christians, at least as reflected in the NT) typically took a stance that involved rejecting the worship of the many deities of the religious environment in favour of an exclusive worship of the one deity of biblical tradition, and that this comprised a distinctive religious posture in the ancient Roman setting. The cultic exclusivity typical of ancient Judaism may be referred to as “ancient Jewish monotheism”.

Moreover, the NT reflects a further distinctive feature central to the religious stance it reflects, which involves the inclusion of the risen/exalted Jesus uniquely as a co-recipient of devotion along with the one God. Yet Jesus is not represented as a second deity; instead, he is designated by God as the unique agent of divine purposes, and as the rightful recipient of devotion. In obedience to God, therefore, the proper worship of the one God must now include the exalted Jesus. To avoid confusion, this dyadic pattern of devotion can be designated “early Christian monotheism”. It comprises a distinctive mutation or innovation in “ancient Jewish monotheism”. It reflects and shares the cultic exclusivity of the Jewish matrix from which it historically derived, but has this distinctive “dyadic shape”, making “early Christian monotheism” a further distinguishable kind of religious posture and practice.

The kind of monotheism that we see affirmed in the NT also served as the basis for engaging questions beyond whether to worship other deities. Paul argues from a “one God” premise that there must be one basis of salvation for Jews and Gentiles, this in support of his Gentile mission. In Revelation, we see how the cultic exclusivity of the author makes it impossible to accept the rising claims and demands of the Roman imperial system, leading to the stark alternatives of acquiescence or martyrdom that are held out in this text.

In sum, there is a distinctive kind of “monotheism” affirmed in the NT, and it clearly had profound significance in what we regard as the “religious” sphere and in other spheres of life as well.