

A Critique of *The Doctrine of the Trinity:*
Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound

by Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting

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In 2005 I was asked to read the book by Anthony Buzzard and offer clear evidence against his presentation.

For years I have heard critics make the claim that the term “trinity” does not appear in the New Testament and that the concept of the trinity was lacking in the primitive church. This was an objection I faced some 30 years ago as a new believer, one I have been consistently asked about over the course of my time as a university pastor, but only now, after all these years have I taken the time to examine the issue more carefully. I needed to review this book by Mr. Buzzard which provided the impetus to spend what has become a fair amount of time on this project.¹ Several people have complained that this review is difficult to follow without a copy of Buzzard’s text handy. My apologies.

Throughout his book, Mr. Buzzard makes some good observations, but he approaches each biblical text straining for ways to use it to support his position. This straining quickly becomes apparent. My plan is to present some of Buzzard’s basic arguments which represent the various arguments I have heard against the doctrine of the trinity. I realize the difficulty of reading references to Buzzard if the reader has not read the work in question, but this occurs with any reference of another work. I will cite his work properly and attempt to present his arguments clearly.

Chapter One

The God of the Jews

I basically agree with the thesis of this chapter - the Jews strongly held to a monotheistic faith. This separated them from all other cultures. Larry Hurtado shows how this is something of a misperception.²

Chapter Two

Jesus and the God of the Jews

Jesus was a first century Jew speaking to monotheistic Jews. Buzzard, by necessity, takes a strong Ebionitic (*an emphasis on the humanity of Christ*) position – Jesus was only a man, anointed to be Messiah, and not (as the Council of Chalcedon affirms) two coexistent natures. Buzzard points to the OT for his rationale, saying that we must use the OT understanding to explain Jesus since this was a man living under the Law,

¹ *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-inflicted Wound*, Buzzard, Anthony F. and Hunting, Charles F. (International Scholars Publications 1998). All citations of the Buzzard text are simply listed with a page number ("On page 46" or simply "p.56").

² Hurtado’s work on this topic should be consulted: Hurtado, Larry, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Eerdmans 2003). Another text to explore on this subject is the newly released, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?: The New Testament Evidence*, by James D. G. Dunn (Westminster John Knox Press 2010); I have not yet read this volume, but I know that Dunn addresses, and is in disagreement with Hurtado's work.

speaking to Jews living under the Law. Although I mostly agree that Jesus was a man while he walked the earth, I cannot apply OT monotheism to the NT – I will explain this point a bit later.

Again and again in this chapter Buzzard rhetorically asks why would Jesus consistently speak in monotheistic terms if he knew himself to be coequal with God? This is a strong argument to face for anyone who claims omniscience for Jesus while he walked the earth. For me it makes no difference since I agree with Buzzard on this point – I do not assume Jesus to have divine knowledge in his earthly existence. Whenever the text indicates that he knew something extraordinary it can be attributed to what would be called a spiritual gift rather than inherent knowledge.

Buzzard points to two texts where John records the Pharisees attacking Jesus by accusing him of claiming to be equal with God,

“This fellow blasphemes. Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Mark 2:5,7, p.43

“For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make yourself out to be God.” John 10:32-36, p.45.

Jesus does not defend himself by arguing for divinity, but rather in the second text actually answers the attack in a way that seems to argue against his divinity. Buzzard minimizes the attack, but no matter how Jesus answered them, the attack speaks volumes. The gospel writers did not invent these charges and if they had been concerned that a non-divinity message be heard they would have clearly stated it as they do with other topics on several other occasions.³ Mark is especially fond of giving explanations (see 4:33,34). These accusations against Jesus were not trivial.

On page 46, Buzzard uses an anachronistic argument, “Moses would have been shocked to learn that the prophet...preexisted as God.” This argument is quite simplistic. Indeed, Moses would have been utterly shocked to know that Messiah would be born of a virgin and be himself raised from the dead! The entire section beginning on page 46, “Old Testament Expectations about the Messiah,” is based on a faulty premise, yet one that continually appears in Buzzard’s presentation: that the people in the OT correctly understood the promised Messiah and that the apostles correctly understood it as well. This is an overly optimistic view, an argument which I will address more fully later.

Buzzard consistently falls back to the Hebrew OT for background and his historical/literary critical observations. His main focus is to parse the usage of Hebrew *Adonai* and *Adoni* in Psalms 110:1,

³ Serious consideration should be given to the possibility of editorial insertions in John’s gospel. There is plenty of research on this topic. I would suggest C.H. Dodd as a good starting point, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge 1963). The evidence presented in this paper will confirm that John’s divinity presentation is far more developed than the synoptic gospel writers.

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.

Parsing the Hebrew text is not typically helpful when attempting to discern literary meaning in NT writings. Though Jesus spoke Aramaic and could possibly read the Hebrew OT, Mark and Luke write in Greek and used the Greek OT (LXX) for their OT citations. Matthew and John *may* have been familiar with the Hebrew text, but their citations reference the LXX as well.

The point is, all of Buzzard's discussion of OT *Adonai* and *Adoni* have little merit except to give historical background to the first century Jewish understanding of the Hebrew OT. The only exception would be to the reference of Psalms 110:1. Though his analysis of this text appears sound, it continues to give unmerited emphasis on the Hebrew OT understanding of distinctions with reference to God, not relevant to NT discussion. Quite simply, if the NT writers understood this distinction between *Adonai* and *Adoni*, they would have been more careful with their usage of "Lord." They would have given some explanation, yet this never happens.⁴

Buzzard's comments on Paul's simple creedal formula in 1 Corinthians 8:6 is an interesting example of how Buzzard deals with textual criticism. He first states that Paul has the Hebrew Bible in his mind (I can only assume that he thinks Paul has Psalm 110 in view since this is Buzzard's main OT text focus), "Paul carefully distinguishes...between the 'one God, the Father,' and the 'one Lord Jesus Christ'." (p.56) Yet he fails to inform the reader of two very critical points: Paul *never* cites Psalm 110 in any of his writings, making it difficult to ever assume that he has this text in mind or is being guided by it; and secondly, Paul uses the same construction in this text to describe God and Christ,

"but to us God is one the Father, from whom all things [come] and in whom we [are], (ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν) and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things [come] and in whom we [are] (δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν)."

So when Buzzard says that Paul "carefully" distinguishes between the two I partially agree. Paul has been careful – he has carefully used the same wording for both the Father and Jesus which indicates that God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ are seen and related to us identically. In the next chapter Buzzard states,

"...the New Testament applies the word God – in its Greek form *ho theos* – to God, the Father alone some 1350 times. The words *ho theos* (i.e., the one God), used absolutely, are nowhere with certainty applied to Jesus." p.87

Here in 1 Cor. 8:6, in this carefully crafted creed, Paul does not use the article ὁ with God, thus according to Buzzard's strictly enforced Greek grammar, Paul is saying "a

⁴ Hurtado should be consulted on this point. As will be seen below, he gives convincing arguments for an openness in first century Jewish monotheism for a "binitarian" worship of "Lord" (kurios) Jesus along with YHWH.

God.” Perhaps Paul is actually referring here to the Greek understanding of the *demiurge* God, the evil “god” that created the world. Of course not, but this is how we could use Buzzard’s strict grammatical logic to misrepresent the text.

Hurtado deals extensively with the early usage of *kurios* in his comprehensive work and gives a good account of how Paul uses “Lord” as a designation for Jesus to clearly identify him with YHWH in the Old Testament.⁵ Hurtado reminds us that in the LXX YHWH is translated as *kurios*,

In this astonishingly bold association of Jesus with God, Paul adapts wording from the tradition Jewish confession of God's uniqueness, known as the Shema, from Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Kyrios heis estin [LXX], translating Heb. Yahweh 'echad). *Lord Jesus Christ*, p.114

Finally, in this chapter Buzzard cites Bart Ehrman as a scholar who “records extensive evidence of deliberate alteration of the New Testament manuscripts...by which Jesus is called God instead of Christ.” (p.57) Ehrman is a well known NT scholar at UNC and author of many books. I have not read the volume cited by Buzzard (*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Oxford Press 1993) but I have read four of Ehrman’s works including *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford Press 2005) hailed by the liberals of our day as revealing and honest scholarship, yet replete with examples of cleverly stated half truths. Ehrman rarely says anything I can completely disagree with, but he consistently ignores contrary data commonly known among early church historians.⁶ It should be noted that after making this bold claim for Ehrman’s work of “extensive evidence,” the only example Buzzard cites from Ehrman is a reference to a Persian harmony of the Gospels. Surely Buzzard could have found more examples, or a better one, from Ehrman’s “extensive” evidence.

Chapter Three

Did Jesus’ Followers Think He was God?

The only item I want to comment on in this chapter is Buzzard’s analysis of the Thomas confession in John 20.

As mentioned in the discussion in the previous section, it rarely works when a person builds a theology or doctrine on a particular linguistic thread. The reason for this is that no writer or body of literature is 100% consistent if the corpus is of any significant size. Once a position is established based mainly on a linguistic phrase, any deviant text must be explained. Buzzard’s explanation of the Thomas confession strains credulity. Thomas realized that after his resurrection Jesus was to be “God” for the Coming Age. (p.89)

⁵ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, see pp. 108-118 where he specifically deals with 1 Cor. 8:6 and the Philippians 2 text mentioned further below.

⁶ You can read my reviews of two Ehrman works on my web site - <http://www.churchhistory101.com/feedback/book-reviews.php>.

This makes even less sense when you take into account the fact that John uses the article ὁ when Thomas confesses, “My Lord and my God” (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου).

Interesting that the gospel writers, recording the history some 30-60 years later fail to clearly reflect this keen idea presented by Buzzard. Throughout this chapter Buzzard sarcastically asks why the apostles did not openly speak of the divinity of Jesus if it had been so. Would this not also apply to this realization of Jesus being the “God” of the Coming Age? Much of his rationale is based on the assumption that the Lord wants us to know and understand – that the gospel writers tell us exactly what we need to know. Yet only John gives us this glimpse of what Buzzard calls the important role and title (*god* of the coming age) of the resurrected Christ and he gives this message in a most encrypted fashion. This is an absurd argument.

Chapter Four

Paul and the Trinity

Buzzard opens this chapter stating the obvious: that Saul was a monotheistic first century Jew. Then he states that Saul’s opposition to the early Christians was due to his rejection of the Messianic claim of Jesus and the threat to the established religion of Israel.

Buzzard again exegetes 1 Cor. 8:6, but really adds nothing new to his argument. For the most part his argument is based on rhetoric: Paul was a monotheist and why, if he had become a Trinitarian, does he not explain this change. Notice in this creed that Paul does not say, “there is only one God, *Adonai* and Jesus the Messiah who is *adoni*.” Buzzard used this rubric as his foundation for the OT understanding and wants the reader to believe that this was the guiding principle for the gospel writers. While I have serious doubts that most of the NT writers knew the Hebrew text, Paul certainly did, yet he makes no overt effort to guard the sacred Name of YHWH. If Paul is so guided by his Hebrew understanding, why does he only use Greek terms to designate *theos*, *kurios* and *christos*? He uses Hebrew terms at other times (as do other NT writers) but nowhere does he make the kind of reference to the sacred name. Buzzard fails again to address the internal construction of this creed in which Paul uses identical phrases to describe the believer’s relationship with both the Father (not *Adonai*) and *kurios* Jesus.

He deals with the Philippians 2 text (pp.99-104) in the same way. He outlines what he has already stated concerning Paul’s belief of one God – the bulk of his argument goes over the same old ground. Only in the last paragraph does he address the key factor of this text, “every knee will bow and every tongue confess.” Of course, Buzzard opens this paragraph with the key Messianic Psalm 110:1 which Paul *never* uses, and states that rather than *at* the name of Jesus, the text should read *in* the name. (p.104) Paul is citing Isaiah 45:23, part of a text that is clearly a “one God” text. Yet Paul is using it in reference to Jesus. He does this in Rom 14:11 as well, but in Romans he more accurately cites “every tongue” confessing to God (τῷ θεῷ). In the Philippians text his use of this

text, “...every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord *to* the glory of God the Father.” Even if this confession is to the Father, the confession is about Jesus as κύριος. In this text Paul has just said that God has “exalted him *to the highest place* and gave him the name above *every* name.” “Well,” (I am sure Buzzard would say) “we know Paul does not mean *every* name, being a law abiding, first century Jew he would never think Jesus would be above YHWH.” Yet, this is exactly what Paul is saying.

There are two very important points here: 1. Paul (and some other NT writers) consistently uses very similar, or exact wordings referring to Jesus that are used in the OT in reference to God. 2. Buzzard consistently overlooks key aspects of textual criticism in his arguments. He does, however, end this particular presentation with his tenth reminder of what seems like his only real textual evidence, “The lord at God’s right hand, it must remembered, is *adoni* (“lord”), which is never the title of Deity.” p.104

Chapter Five

The Hebrew World and Greek Philosophy

Buzzard has an easy target when it comes to criticizing the Platonism of the early church. The church fathers, many of them trained in the classics, did allow their Christian faith to be influenced by Platonism. Blaming this Platonism, Buzzard consistently says the trinity and deity issues did not come up in Christianity until Nicea (325 AD) and then “Christians were forced to accept belief in a preexistent, second person of the Godhead...” p.37. He is either ignorant of early second century Christian writers, or dismissive of these writings, or would offer some strange interpretation of them as he does with NT texts. In any case, the divinity of Jesus had been established long before the time of Justin Martyr. Here we have Ignatius of Antioch (cir. 112-114 AD) affirming Jesus as God in the flesh, the Word – and to keep anyone from misunderstanding that he might be speaking of Jesus as some kind of intermediary spirit, “both made and not made,”

There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God; first possible and then impossible, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ignatius to the Ephesians 7 (short version)

...our Physician is the only true God, the unbegotten and unapproachable, the Lord of all, the Father and Begetter of the only-begotten Son. We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin. For "the Word was made flesh."

Ignatius to the Ephesians 7 (long version)

While it is true that we have two versions of Ignatius (a short and a longer, more “orthodox” version), one can see a strong pre-existence Christology even in the shorter version.⁷

Buzzard attacked Justin Martyr as embracing Greek philosophy so we will skip his testimony. Irenaeus represents another strain in the early church that spoke against what he called “heretics” and against philosophy. Here he is arguing against one of the Gnostic views of Jesus (making this text somewhat difficult to follow), and in the midst of this he interjects the contemporary view of Christ. Note that Irenaeus is fairly consistent with Ignatius, but also further elaborates the divinity of Jesus,

Learn then, ye foolish men, that Jesus who suffered for us, and who dwelt among us, is Himself the Word of God. For if any other of the AEons had become flesh for our salvation, it would have been probable that the apostle spoke of another. But if the Word of the Father who descended is the same also that ascended, He, namely, the Only-begotten Son of the only God, who, according to the good pleasure of the Father, became flesh for the sake of men, the apostle certainly does not speak regarding any other, or concerning any Ogdoad, but respecting our Lord Jesus Christ. For, according to them, the Word did not originally become flesh. For they maintain that the Saviour assumed an animal body, formed in accordance with a special dispensation by an unspeakable providence, so as to become visible and palpable. But flesh is that which was of old formed for Adam by God out of the dust, and it is this that John has declared the Word of God became. Thus is their primary and first-begotten Ogdoad brought to nought. For, since Logos, and Monogenes, and Zoe, and Phos, and Soror, and Christus, and the Son of God, and He who became incarnate for us, have been proved to be one and the same, the Ogdoad which they have built up at once falls to pieces.

Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 9.3

The Church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father "to gather all things in one," and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father...

Against the Heresies 10.1

Buzzard knows enough about what he calls neo-Platonism (p.117) to point to Philo and his city of Alexandria, but his analysis falls woefully short. The movement he refers to is

⁷ The Roberts-Donaldson introduction on this issue is sound and should be consulted. This can be found online: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/info/ignatius.html>.

now known as Middle Platonism, and indeed, Philo of Alexandria is a source. Philo does make reference to the Eternal Logos, but his position is much more nuanced than Buzzard makes out. He maintains that John is actually disputing the Philonian influence that had infiltrated the Church via Apollos in Acts 18:24-28 (p.133). Yet according to Luke, Apollos was well received by the saints. By the time Paul writes to the Corinthians he acknowledges that the Alexandrian Apollos, a man skilled in rhetoric, had left a positive mark on the church, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gives the increase." (1 Cor.3:6) Buzzard says that the Alexandrians (this would include Apollos) "opposed the Truth with their speculation." (p.133) Yet the biblical text reads that Apollos "vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." There are numerous signs of Alexandrian (and perhaps Platonic) influence in the NT, making it difficult to denigrate it completely.

In his attempt to prove that Jesus is not worshipped in the NT, Buzzard tells the reader, The Greek verb *proskuneo* is used both of worship to God and doing obeisance to human persons....It is highly significant that another Greek word, *latreuo*, which is used of religious service only, is applied in all of its 21 occurrences exclusively to the Father in the New Testament. p.139

Buzzard is only partially correct here. He is correct that προσκυνέω is used with both humans and God as the object in the NT, but there are three critical texts ignored by Buzzard (Acts 10:25, Rev 19:10, 22:8) – all three speak of someone falling on the ground (προσκυνέω) in front of a person or an angel and being rebuked for doing so. Yet in Matthew 28:9 and 17 we read, "Suddenly Jesus met them, 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped (προσεκύνησαν) him." In three NT texts when this is done the "worshipper" is rebuked, the object of the "worship" states that the worship is inappropriate. In the Acts text Peter actually says, "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." Yet Jesus does not rebuke his worshippers. Buzzard (p.139) wants us to believe that Jesus is here being worshipped appropriately as the Messiah, but the contrast of this text with the other three makes this a weak argument. It is also never stated that Jesus is being worshipped as Messiah. When Thomas confesses, "My Lord and my God," (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου) how is the reader to know that Thomas is really worshipping Jesus as Messiah? He could have simply said, "My Messiah!" As many times as the gospel writers explain pericopes to make sure the reader gets the point, this is one text that either reads simply and plainly (which I believe it does) or needs some explanation.

Next I want to point out Buzzard's error in his comment on λατρεύω. For the most part he is correct – λατρεύω is *mainly* used in reference to the Father, but Buzzard says this word is used *exclusively* in reference to the Father (p.139). In Acts 7:42 this word is used to refer to "the worship (λατρεύειν) of heavenly bodies." This is not just an error with respect to the evidence, but reveals a weakness in Buzzard's methodology. Buzzard bases many of his arguments on word usage. Using his logic, Jesus is not worshipped as

God (since *proskuneo* is used at times in reference to humans) and the Father is not worshipped either since *latreo* was used once pointing to idolatry. Buzzard's methodology fails in one argument after the next because ancient authors do not tend to use particular words in the same fashion all the time.

Buzzard's position on παντοκράτωρ at the end of this chapter is another example of his strained methodology of using a word or phrase as a proof. He states that the "title, *pantokrator*, is nowhere given to Jesus." He then continues with a very cumbersome reading of two critical texts that tie παντοκράτωρ and the Α-Ω (Alpha and Omega) to the one who is "coming soon," Revelation 1:8 and 22:7,12. Buzzard is trying to assign speaking roles to the angel of the Lord, and while he does make his case with a subjunctive, "it may well be" – his argument takes his assumption for granted. There are, however, a few items in these two texts that point to Jesus and παντοκράτωρ as one and the same.

Buzzard maintains that the Father is the one coming on the clouds in power rather than Jesus. How he comes to this decision is not clear, but that he is incorrect is exceedingly clear. The text quoted in Rev. 1:7 says that "he is coming with the clouds" and everyone will see him, "even those who pierced him," an obvious allusion to Jesus. The Lord Jesus says he is coming in Rev. 2:25 and in 3:11. Then 22:20 says, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Paul writes of the returning of the Lord in both Thessalonian letters, clearly referencing Jesus in 2 Thess. 1:7, "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed (ἀποκαλύψει) from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels." Finally, the words of Jesus himself make it clear, "...the Son of Man will appear in the sky...the Son of Man coming on the clouds." (Matt. 24:30) Finally, in Rev. 16:14 the day of the *pantokrator* is mentioned, followed by "See, I am coming as a thief," in verse 15. There is no indication of any change of subject – this "coming" is a direct gospel quote of Jesus from Matt. 24:42-44 (referenced by Paul in 1 Thess. 5:2). Add to all of these instances the fact that Buzzard (in chapter 8, p.206) refers to the "Son of Man" vision in Daniel 7:13,14 as the historical backdrop for the Messianic ascension texts, and his argument is frustrated all the more. It is clear that Jesus is the One coming on the clouds.

Once it is admitted that Jesus is the One coming on the clouds with powerful angels, Rev. 22:12,13 shows him (Jesus) to be the Alpha and Omega and also the παντοκράτωρ. This, of course, is why Buzzard must have an alternative explanation for who is coming. But there are more soft spots in his argument. If it is the Father speaking in Rev. 22:13, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End," (all three of these have the same meaning) then Jesus refers to himself in the same way. In Rev. 1:17 and 2:8 Jesus says "I am the First and the Last," (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος) – the exact phrase used in Rev. 22:13.

With an accidental caveat, Buzzard admits that his entire *λογος* argument is dubious when he ends this chapter saying, “In John’s Gospel the *logos* (word), being a somewhat ambiguous term, might be liable to misunderstanding.” (p.140) Buzzard’s explanations are obtuse enough to warrant such an admission.

Chapter Six

The Trinity and Politics

It is not my place in this paper to defend 2,000 years of Christian history, but Buzzard makes no attempt to present this history with an objective voice. He skips the testimony of the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists of the second century. He completely overlooks the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (circa 107-120 AD) which affirm the pre-existent Logos of John 1:1. Buzzard paints the most negative picture of Constantine possible without any effort to give the positive evidence that comes from the admittedly biased writings of Eusebius. Because Buzzard has concluded that Constantine is the great Trinitarian heretic, he refers to his “supposed vision” that helped lead him to victory in the Battle of the Milvian bridge. While we are certain that Constantine held too tightly to many of his pagan rites, there are also numerous indications that he had some kind of genuine faith.

When he recounts the story of Arius (pp.149-153) he implies that only the Arians suffered persecution. He fails to report how many times Athanasius was driven into hiding to escape possible execution at the hands of the dominant Arians in the Alexandrian region.

Chapter Seven

The Nature of Preexistence in the New Testament

I do not know enough about this topic to make an abundance of comment, but I do have a few observations. First, on page 160, Buzzard makes the following citation, “When the Jew wished to designate something as predestined, he spoke of it as already ‘existing’ in heaven.” He is quoting Selwyn’s work on First Peter. I am not familiar with Selwyn or his work, but regardless, Buzzard uses this citation to state a somewhat arcane position. In over 20 years of reading and study I do not remember ever having heard any substantial discussion on this topic. Because this topic is not a common one, a good scholarly treatment would have done far more than what Buzzard has done – he simply gives the reader the work and the page number. I am supposed to believe this statement because Selwyn (who may be a good scholar) says it is so? Even the best scholar will sometimes present a position with weak evidence. Nonetheless, Buzzard should give us more of Selwyn’s evidence if he is resting his position on Selwyn’s work.

Buzzard goes on to discuss predestination and foreknowledge, two complicated concepts, and problematic from a human standpoint no matter which position is taken. Yet

Buzzard is able to explain these difficult concepts in 3-4 pages. After further discussion on “the ‘preexistence’ of Jesus” he makes this statement,

There is a perfectly good word for “real” preexistence in the Greek language (*prouparchon*). It is very significant that it appears nowhere in Scripture with reference to Jesus, but it does in the writings of Greek Church Fathers of the second century.
pp.166,167

Buzzard selectively cites the use of Greek without proper explanation – he tells you only what he wants you to know. When he says that προὔπάρχω is never used to refer to the preexistence Jesus, yet is a “perfectly good word for ‘real’ preexistence” he simply obfuscates the NT usage of this word. He is correct when he says that προὔπάρχω is never used to describe Jesus – this word is only used twice in the NT and neither time is it used for preexistence.

That day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this (προὔπῆρχον) they had been enemies. Luke 23:12

Now for some time (προὔπῆρχεν) a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria... Acts 8:9
[Other translations render “had previously practiced” here.]

Both times this word is used in the NT it is clearly used for a span of time in the past, but this span is clearly “in space and time.” If the Greek fathers used this word for preexistence it only shows how the Greek language changed from first century NT usage to second century (mainly) non-Jewish usage. Buzzard’s use of this Greek word is a red herring. He uses it because he knows that most of his audience either will not know how to check Greek usage, will not have the tools to do so, or will simply believe his misrepresentation.

Chapter Eight

John, Preexistence and the Trinity

Buzzard states (pp.182-83) that William Tyndale had translated αὐτος in John 1:1-4 as “it” – “All things were made by *it*...” and says the use of this pronoun is ambiguous (p.191). The translation of the pronouns αὐτος and οὗτος is always dependent on context and John uses both in the context of an aforementioned person. For clear examples of αὐτος translated for a person, see (John 1:27; 2:12,25; 7:10; 9:21; 14:10; 18:1). For clear examples of οὗτος translated for a person, see (John 1:7; 3:2; 4:47; 5:26; 6:46; 7:40,41).

There are several reasons that justify a translation of αὐτος and οὗτος as personal pronouns. Buzzard says (p.192) that the original reader would not have thought of “word” as the pre-existent Son until verse 14 when the “word” becomes “flesh.” Yes! And this is context. The original OT reader would not think the snake lifted up on the

staff in the desert was supposed to foreshadow the Messiah, but it did. Verse 14 has a great deal to do with the translation of John 1:1-4. But there's more.

Buzzard correctly attempts to use other Johannine writings to help interpret/translate John 1:1-4. However, his exegesis of 1 John 1:2 (p. 191) is grossly inadequate. He tells us that John gives his own commentary of John 1:1 in 1 John 1:2 where the writer uses a similar construction. Buzzard's exegesis of this verse in 1 John is one sentence in length, then he moves on to show supposed parallels in 1 Peter. As we are consistently finding with Buzzard, he flings sand in the eyes of the reader while failing to touch on the most salient points of evidence. Indeed, he hopes nobody will notice!

Buzzard fails to point out that in 1 John the writer is speaking of "That which was from the beginning" (ὃ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς – very similar to the opening of John). What is this "something?" Should ὃ be translated "it" throughout this passage? I doubt it since John says this "it" was *heard, seen with the eyes, and touched by their hands*. Buzzard would respond, "Yes, and what does John say they are proclaiming – the Word (λογος) of life. So you see that *word* is not at all the preexistent person of Jesus." The text obviously speaks of Jesus who was *heard, seen, and touched* by the disciples. But John goes on to say that this "life appeared" (ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη) – the same word used in 1 Timothy, "he appeared in the flesh" (3:16).

There is another literary critical argument that would lead to a translation of the masculine article in front of *logos* – John uses *logos* in Revelation in the same way,

I saw...a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True.... His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns....and his name is the Word of God....Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword..." (Rev 19:11-15)

The name of this rider is "the Word of God" (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ). This person is also called "Faithful and True," a title Jesus uses to refer to himself in Rev 3:14. His eyes are like blazing fire, the same description used of Jesus (Rev 1:14; 2:18). This rider has a sharp sword coming out of his mouth, almost exactly like the description of Jesus (Rev 1:16; 2:12,16).

It is certainly true that John is the only NT writer to clearly refer to Jesus as the "word," or *logos*, but he does so in his gospel, the Revelation, and at least the subtle reference in 1 John 1:1. This fact alone allows for the translation of *logos* as a masculine noun. Buzzard insists that the gospels all stand in harmony and that to use John's gospel as the Trinitarians do would put that gospel in contradiction with the synoptics (p.190). As I will clearly point out in the conclusion, there are distinct differences in the way the synoptics and *John* present Jesus. For example, the synoptic gospels refer to Jesus as "Son of Man" significantly more often than "Son of God," 3-4 times more often. John uses these two appellations equally, yet refers to Jesus most often (more than twice as much) as "Lord." Paul differs from all four gospels. He never uses "Son of Man" and

rarely uses “Son of God,” but refers to “our Lord Jesus Christ” quite often. Do these differences represent a contradiction? I do not think so. As I will discuss more fully in the conclusion, I think it does point to a developing Christology in the primitive church.

Buzzard makes the same claim in the previous chapter (p.168) using another weak argument from the Greek text, “Not only do they [the synoptics, Acts and Peter] not hint at a pre-human Son of God, they contradict the idea by talking of the *origin* (*genesis*) of Jesus (Matt. 1:18).” The problem here is that γένησις is never translated “origin” in the NT. This word occurs twice (Matt. 1:18; Lk 1:14) and both times is translated as “birth.” *Genesis* comes from the root verb, γέννᾶω which means “to beget.”⁸ This is a lexicon for *all* Greek usage, from Homeric Greek to Classical and NT Greek. There is a preferred NT word for “origin” - ἀρχή, the same word used by John to indicate the *origin* of the *logos*. Again, Liddell and Scott defines ἀρχή, “a beginning, first cause, origin,” (p.106). In fact, when Jesus refers to OT Genesis he uses ἀρχή, “...at the beginning (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς) the Creator ‘made them male and female’.” (Matt 19:4; Mk 10:6) I am no longer surprised when I read Buzzard’s inaccurate and patently false statements concerning Greek.

One last comment on the biblical use of *logos* – I believe there is a precedent for John’s use of *logos* in Luke’s gospel, “...the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς) were eyewitnesses and servants of the word (τοῦ λόγου)” (Lk 1:2). There are several points to note in this verse: 1. It occurs at the beginning of Luke’s gospel as does John’s *logos* text; 2. Luke uses ἀρχή, though admittedly not as a reference to creation; 3. The text says that they were eyewitnesses to the word. An eyewitness, implying something physical, and a servant *of the word* (in the genitive). Luke is referring to Jesus, but John takes the *logos* to the next level.

On pages 193-194 Buzzard argues that “no occurrence of the Hebrew word *davar* (word) corresponding to John’s Greek word *logos* provides any evidence that the ‘word from the beginning’ means a *person*...” First, I am unconvinced that the usage of the Hebrew *davar* informs us of the Greek *logos* at all. There is a similar word usage in John 1 that, I believe, can inform us, “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (John 1:9). Is there any doubt that John is here referring to Jesus? There is probably not a corresponding usage in the OT – “light” coming into the world as a person – but in the Johannine corpus, Jesus is the Light (John 8:12). This does not mean that every occurrence of φῶς is a reference to Jesus, but John 1:7-9 certainly is one. It is no surprise that John also says “God is light,” (ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν).

Buzzard’s commentary on John 3:13 and 6:62 (pp.205-210) are inadequately based on the underlying concept that John’s gospel is in complete harmony with the synoptics. He

⁸ Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1989), p.140.

rightly points to “Son of Man” vision in Daniel 7:13,14 as the historical backdrop for these ascension texts, but his logic is strained. Twelve times in these five pages, Buzzard refers to these “ascended” passages as “enigmatic,” “difficult,” and “challenging.” His explanation is that *“things may be said to have already happened in God’s intention, while they await actual fulfillment in history in the future.”* (p.209) These certainly are difficult passages if you cannot accept preexistence – Buzzard comes up with the only way to explain it otherwise. Yet, does Jesus speak this way on any other subject? And why would he speak this way on such an important topic? A simple reading of these texts gives the plain meaning – Jesus somehow came from heaven.

Buzzard’s presentation and argument of the “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι) texts (pp.218-221) is weak and continues to reveal weaknesses in his overall argument. Buzzard wants to insert the personal pronoun “he” into these texts, thus “Before Abraham was, I am [he],” John 8:58. This would be beyond belief except that the reader, by page 218, has become accustomed to these anemic arguments. In his comments on John 1:1-2 he goes to great lengths to argue against the use of a personal pronoun (although, as I documented, John uses αὐτός and οὗτος as a personal pronoun), and now he wants to insert “he” where absolutely no pronoun exists.

The famous “I AM” text of Exodus is rendered ἐγώ εἰμι in the Septuagint. It is important to remember that Jesus almost certainly did *not* speak these words in Greek, but rather in Aramaic. This, of course, would put more emphasis on the declaration than even ἐγώ εἰμι can convey. The fact that John records these pericopes with ἐγώ εἰμι in Greek seems to indicate his intention of showing the claim of Jesus, or at least the view the church had of Jesus at the end of the first century.

Against the suggestion that we insert the personal pronoun after “I am,” it also needs to be pointed out that the construction of the John 8:58 text is unusual. Either the statement ends as most translations render it, “I am,” or it must read “I am before Abraham was born.” Either reading is unusual and points to the intentionality of John to make a point of showing a claim of Jesus to divine equality. Other “I am” texts just make no sense if John is not making this point (John 6:20; 13:19; 18:5). Buzzard explains the “I am” texts this way, “Before Abraham was, I am [he, the Messiah].” (p.220) This reading makes some sense in John 4:26, but not John 8.

Chapter Ten

The Conflict Over The Trinity in Church History

Buzzard’s mistrust of the early church fathers seems to begin with Justin Martyr. He singled out Justin in chapter five, and now he does it again saying that Martyr “was one of the first of the post-biblical writers to develop the doctrine of the preexistence of Christ.” (p.241) From Justin moving forward, Buzzard tries to show that the “Logos” presented in John’s gospel was highly disputed. While it is true that the Christology of

the early church was not static, it is also true that most of the early writers erred on the side of doceticism. But it is also true that these early writers were struggling to understand and explain how John's presentation of Jesus fit together with the synoptics. Unlike Buzzard, these writers were not in denial – they openly addressed the apparent preexistence in John's Christ. As was documented in the chapter five discussion above, the first early writer we can point to was Ignatius of Antioch (112-114 AD), "both made and not made; God existing in flesh...even Jesus Christ our Lord." (*To the Ephesians* 7, short version)

While it is true that Justin's *logos* theory expands the meaning in John's gospel, there are several second century examples of *logos* that illustrate a closer connection. At the very least these writers illustrate the early belief in the eternal nature of Jesus, taking John's presentation at face value.

Theophilus of Antioch (cir. 168-180 AD)

"...the Word of God, who is also His Son... 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God' ...The Word, then, being God, and being naturally produced from God..." *Theophilus to Autolycus* II.22

Athenagoras (cir. 177 AD)

"But the Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one...." *A Plea for the Christians* 10

While this text does suggest the *logos* of Justin (*logos* being the mind and reason of the Father) the point here is that the early fathers saw Logos in John 1:1 to be one and same with Jesus.

Clement of Alexandria (cir. 190-198)

"This Word, then, the Christ, the cause of both our being at first (for He was in God) and of our well-being, this very Word has now appeared as man, He alone being both, both God and man..." *Exhortation to the Heathen* 1

There are many places where Clement diverges from the standard orthodoxy of the day, but here we see him giving a straight forward reading and interpretation of John 1. Here is where Buzzard's presentation of early Christianity fails miserably. Early Christianity, like the primitive NT church, was very diverse. Buzzard consistently refers to Nicea (325 AD) and the approved creed of that council as the place and time of a major theological shift. While it is true that Nicea is the first formal declaration of the divinity of Christ, we have demonstrated the divinity of Christ from documents (cir. 110-200 AD) prior to Nicea. Those in attendance at Nicea were familiar with the early writings. In fact, the opinions of the church fathers held great influence on each succeeding generation. This can be illustrated by highlighting a portion of the Letter of Ignatius *To the Trallians* where we find an early witness to what later becomes The Apostle's Creed and The Nicene Creed.

9:1 Be ye deaf therefore, when any man speaketh to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth;
9:2 who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him...

While the Arian controversy was the main reason for the historic council (only around 220 bishops attended with almost none coming from the western region), Arius' views were soundly rejected. It is important to understand that the various councils and creeds were called to make *attempts* at doctrinal harmony. Just as Paul's writings were typically didactic or correctional in nature, so too the numerous early church writings. Buzzard points out that traditional Christology has always suffered from a latent docetism (p.128). This is true, but there were also attacks from ebionitic error. This is exactly why councils were called and creeds written. Buzzard picks out various characters who diverged from traditional Christology, but one can find dissenting opinions and controversies throughout church history. This only shows that there could not have been some conspiracy or doctrine posited solely for political expediency. More often than not one finds the fathers openly struggling with the difficulties presented in the biblical text.

Finally in this chapter Buzzard points to several more recent critics. I am compelled to pull a comment from one of the citations Buzzard uses. Commenting on orthodox Christology, John Knox says it is "as difficult to define as to defend."⁹ Buzzard, like many fundamentalists and literalists, believes that the text answers all questions - he does not seem to see any tension or gray areas. As mentioned above, many of the fathers realized that the biblical text is the very best attempt at the impossible – to define and explain the eternal and infinite God.

Chapter Eleven

The Challenge Facing Trinitarianism Today

The first thing I want to address in this chapter is another example of Buzzard's lack of good scholarship. On page 283, while discussing Romans 9:5, Buzzard cites F.F. Bruce as a conservative who "warns against charging" as "unorthodox" those who treat the words ['who is over all, forever praised'] "as applicable to the Father." Bruce does say this, but only after a full page of affirming the reading as one that applies to the divinity of Christ:

They may be taken, on the other hand, as in apposition to 'the Christ'; so RSV margin: 'who is God over all, blessed for ever' (similarly AV, RV, NIV). The latter construction is more in keeping with the general structure of the sentence.¹⁰

⁹ Knox, John, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ*, 1987, pp.98-99).

¹⁰ Bruce, F.F., *Romans, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Eerdmans 1990), 3rd edition, p. 176.

Yet for Paul Christ is the one in whom, through whom and for whom all things were created (Col. 1:16), in whom ‘the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily’ (Col. 2:9).

Moreover, when Paul gives Jesus the title ‘Lord’, he does so because God the Father has bestowed this title on him as ‘the name which is above every name’ (Phil. 2:9). This title ‘Lord’ is given to Jesus by Paul as the equivalent of Yahweh; his application of Isaiah 45:23 (cf. Rom. 14:11) to Jesus in Philippians 2:10-11 indicates that to him the confession ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’ is equivalent to ‘Jesus Christ is Yahweh.’¹¹

It is only after making these statements that Bruce concedes the other reading is plausible, but “involves a delicate assessment of the balance of probability this way and that.”¹² F.F. Bruce uses his British humor here to say that these arguments are strained, and failed attempts. Bruce also points the reader to five scholars for further research who at least give a valid rationale to disagree with him.

This is just another example of how Buzzard uses secondary scholarship. He cites Bruce in a way that implies Bruce’s agreement with him on the particular issue. Because I have used several works by Bruce in my research through the years, I doubted Buzzard’s representation of him – and I was correct.

Buzzard’s comments on Mark 13:32 (pp. 288-89) also need to be addressed. His basic point is to take issue with the Chalcedon creedal statement that both human and divine natures resided equally in Jesus. Buzzard rightly states that this formula cannot be found within the biblical text. He is also correct in his critique of the difficulties of this position: how can Jesus be both fully human and fully divine at the same time? It strains logic. The focus in the Markan text is the knowledge, or limited knowledge, of Jesus. “The theory by which Jesus did and did not know the day of his future coming would render all of his sayings unintelligible.” (p.288) The Chalcedon creed is problematic. The fathers of this council (and in every age) were struggling to comprehend and explain the God of the universe, while at the same time protect biblical concepts from error. But this is the same critique made against the omniscience of the Father. How can Yahweh know the future without impinging on man’s freewill? Being omniscient, Yahweh is necessarily directly responsible for evil. I know the kind of straining used to explain these points – I present these arguments of logic to illustrate the difficulties faced when trying to explain the infinite God.

The easy way to refute Buzzard’s critique is to affirm the full humanity of Jesus *while he walked this earth as a man* (per Philippians 2) and that he did *not* know *all* – the past, the future, nor everything happening concurrently with him while he lived on the earth.

Buzzard maintains (p.140) that it is the Father speaking in Rev. 22:13, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End,” (all three of these

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, pp.176-77.

have the same meaning). We have already shown that Jesus refers to himself in the same way in Rev. 1:17 and 2:8 by saying “I am the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.” I agree with Buzzard that God cannot die, and therefore Jesus could not have been God since he died. But these logical and theological difficulties are exactly the kinds of issues that lead to difficult creeds...like Chalcedon.

Conclusions

It is time to draw some conclusions. Before doing so, I would like to first affirm my personal belief in orthodoxy. I continue to believe in the trinity, although I cannot explain it. I believe in the dual natures of Christ, although I freely admit the difficulties of holding this position. I base my positions on my reading of the NT and on the canons of the various Church councils. I do not agree with those who claim the councils were dictated by politics more than the biblical text. Those who make this claim clearly are not familiar with the church fathers of the early centuries. The leaders of the councils based their opinions on the NT texts *and* on the writings of the early fathers.

I also admit that the creeds are difficult to defend at every point. The early creeds were drafted to combat particular problems – it is unfortunate that the creeds raised new issues with each draft.

It is apparent to anyone reading Athanasius’s diatribes against the Arians that what is at stake is not which texts from Scripture are used, but the way in which they are used....The lesson for our purposes is that proof texting is not enough, and it must be acknowledged that there is some doubt as to whether Scripture supports the creedal confession directly or without great labor.¹³

Of course, this only agrees with Buzzard’s position that the creeds are, in fact, *not* based on the biblical text, but on Platonistic ideas that had infiltrated the Church. As stated earlier, the creeds are based on the biblical text *and* the writings of the second century fathers. But my point here is more to the first part of Gunton’s statement: what is at issue (and has been the focus of my critique against Buzzard) is not the specific proof text as much as how the text is being used. Because Buzzard is a fundamentalist, he is bound to a narrow understanding of the biblical text, and inspiration, that leads to the straining of the text. Buzzard does this, other fundamentalists do this, and many of the early fathers did this. Literalists cannot easily accept paradox and, as Gunton concludes (referencing Kierkegaard) nothing important can be said without paradox.¹⁴

After looking at these particular texts and issues, it is time to put forth an alternative explanation of the trinity in the NT. Buzzard says (p.168) that the synoptic gospels are silent when it comes to the preexistence (and divinity) of Christ and much of his theory is

¹³ Colin Gunton, “And in One Lord, Jesus Christ...Begotten, Not Made,” in *Nicene Christianity, The Future for a New Ecumenism*, ed. Christopher R. Seitz (Grand Rapids 2001), pp. 35-48.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 47-48.

based on the assumption that John's gospel must be in harmony with the synoptic gospels. There certainly is a distinct difference between the representation we get of Jesus in the synoptics and what we see in John's gospel. Even the early fathers saw this, referring to John's gospel as the "spiritual" one.

The belief that all biblical text is basically in harmony represents a conservative view, one that emphasizes the hand of God on the text. This view is fairly consistent with the "inerrancy" position held by many conservative evangelicals. Volumes have been written on this subject so my simplistic statements will not suffice for those who need further explanation.

We will proceed in this study with the assumption that Jesus is eternal; that He existed with the Father from eternity. The Council of Chalcedon affirms that two natures resided in Christ, "without confusion, without change, without division." Putting aside the difficulties of this affirmation for the time, part of this creed deals with the humanity of Jesus. If we accept the full humanity of Jesus as presented in Philippians 2, then we can say that Jesus did not have full knowledge – he would not fully know His eternal nature. Even if he knew his eternal nature through spiritual revelation from the Father, as a man he would not completely understand it. And so, my alternate theory begins with the concept that Jesus did not fully know nor understand his eternal nature, thus he was not able to explain it fully to the disciples.¹⁵ Perhaps this is part of why Jesus, when telling his disciples about the coming Holy Spirit, says that the "Counselor...will teach you all things..." (John 14:26).

The next supposition is that the disciples had difficulty accepting and understanding who Jesus was and why he had come - the gospel writers give us glimpses of this (in Matthew alone, 8:27; 15:10-20; 16:5-12, 21-23). They argued amongst themselves about who would be the greatest, fled from Jesus during his passion, had difficulty understanding why he had died, and refused at first to believe the report of his resurrection (Mk 16:11; Lk 24:11). All of this even though Jesus had prepared them in advance (Mt 20:17-19). Did the apostles truly understand the Great Commission? Peter seems to have returned to his trade (John 21) and it appears to have been a few years before he first preaches to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Even taking the gospel to the Samaritans took quite a while and does not appear to be initiated by the apostles (Acts 8).

The evidence shows a progressive movement of the NT writers from Messiah to Son of God, to Lord and finally to God's equivalent. The table below gives the references of the various NT writers.

¹⁵ I know this is difficult for Christians (like me) who have always been taught that Jesus was fully God while a man, and thus able to know definitively who he was. For me, N.T. Wright does the best job at laying out this argument. See, Wright, N.T., *The Challenge of Jesus* (IVP 1999), see especially pp. 120-122.

NT writing	Son of Man	Son of God	Lord ⁺	Almighty
Matthew	20	5	14	0
Mark	10	3	*	0
Luke	23	4	*	0
John	8	9	17	0
Acts	1	1	24	0
Paul (totals)	0	4	dozens	1 (OT cit.)
Revelation	0	1	12	9

⁺ References to Lord do not count multiple references in a pericope, those referring to “God” in general, or references not clearly directed at Jesus.

* Likely to be the same frequency as Matthew.

First we note that the synoptic gospel writers often referred to Jesus as “Son of Man” and significantly less as “Son of God.” They refer to Jesus as “Lord,” but most of these references are what could be called casual as in the following: “After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two...” (Lk 10:1). Based on the totality of evidence in this section, I believe these casual occurrences are closer to the kind of usage Buzzard calls for when he makes the distinction between *Adonai* and *adoni*. The formal uses of Lord are much different. For example, “Then the man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.” (John 9:38) These occurrences come much closer to references to deity.

By the time of John’s gospel, the difference is clear – references to “Lord” outnumber references to “Son of Man” and “Son of God” combined. This alone indicates a movement towards a clearer portrayal of deity. In addition to this, we see more direct references to the deity of Jesus and of his equality with God (see listing below).

John	Topic or key terms used
1:1-3	the “Word” was God and all things were made through him
1:10	the world was made through him
1:14	the Word became flesh and “tabernacled” among us...who came from the Father...
3:31	the one who comes from above is above all
5:18	he was calling God his Father, making himself equal with God
6:38-42	for I have come down from heaven (the people question how he can say this).
6:46	No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.
8:23	“I am from above; I am not of this world.”
8:58	“...before Abraham was, I am.”
9:38	“Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.
10:30	“...I am the Father are one.”
10:33	“...you, a mere man, claim to be God.”
13:3	he had come from God and was returning to God
14:7	“If you know me, you know the Father...from now on, you do know him and have seen him.”
14:11	“I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”

16:28	"I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."
20:17	"...I have not yet returned to the Father."
20:28	"My Lord and my God!"

Next we look at Luke's recording in the book of *Acts*. Jesus is "Son of Man" and "Son of God" only once each while he is referred to as "Lord" more than twenty times. While it is granted that many of these references to "Lord" are casual and not formal declarations of deity, it is nonetheless an important development in how Jesus is viewed. What we see is a movement from humanity to something more *after* the resurrection.

I realize that the time gap between *Luke* and *Acts* is probably not very great, but most textual critics believe Luke is sharing/using the same source as Matthew and Mark, thus the gospels naturally reflect a pre-resurrection tone towards Jesus.¹⁶ After all, these are records of Jesus while he lived in the flesh. It makes sense that *Acts* flows more from Luke's personal experience with the risen Christ, thus the tone is post-resurrection.

Paul's writings were the first NT writings to be circulated. One can see the stark difference in the table above: Paul *never* refers to Jesus as "Son of Man," only calls him "Son of God" four times, but refers to him as "Lord" countless times. For Paul Jesus is not simply "Lord;" he refers most often to "the Lord Jesus Christ" – coupling "Lord" (more like deity) with "Jesus" (the man) and "Christ" (the Messiah title).¹⁷

In the NT, *kurios* is a very critical reference when used for Jesus. Buzzard recognizes in a footnote (p.50n19) that *kurios* is a reference to God, "the LXX renders *adonai*, as usually, *kurios*." He makes this admission *after* he has gone to great lengths to show that "the divine title *adonai*, the Supreme Lord." (p.49) "It is a distinction which is clear cut and consistent. *Adonai*, by contrast, marks the one and only supreme God of the Bible 449 times." (p.51) In this I agree with Buzzard, and this is why Paul's use of the/our "Lord Jesus Christ" is significant. Paul uses this construction far more than any other NT writer and his intention is to reflect the triple reference cited above, deity/humanity/Messiah.

Paul also gives us some of the stronger NT references to deity:¹⁸

Pauline texts	Topic or key terms used
1 Cor 1:2	prayer directed to Christ
1 Cor 1:3	salutations from the Father "and" the Lord Jesus Christ 2 Cor 1:2,3; 13:14; Gal 1:1-3, etc. in almost every letter.
1 Cor 8:6	exact same construction for the Father and for Jesus

¹⁶ I need to add a reference to F.F. Bruce where he indicates that Luke had very early Aramaic sources, this of course would further illustrate the earliest views of the primitive Church [I think the ref is in *Men and Movements*, but could also be in Bruce's NIV commentary on *Acts*].

¹⁷ I need to add some comment/reference from Marcus Borg and John Crossan's work, "The First Paul," where they do a good job of showing how the Roman world had already used divine language for Caesar. This makes Paul's presentation with "Lord [*kurios*] Jesus Christ" more important.

¹⁸ I am not making any distinctions regarding Pauline authorship.

2 Cor 4:4-6	Christ is the image of God
2 Cor 5:10	the judgment seat of Christ (typically judgment is left to <i>theos</i>)
2 Cor 12:8,9	significant prayer to Christ for His power; Christ responds
Phil 2:6-8	though being in the form of God, took the form of the servant
2:10-12	at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess
3:8-12	Paul belongs to Christ Jesus (cf. we are “in Christ”)
Col 1:15-20	Christ the image of God, all things were created, all the fulness of God, also 2:9
1 Thess 5:28	here he leaves the Father off, “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...”
2 Thess 1:7-12	comments below
2:14; 3:6,12	obtain the glory of Jesus; we command you in the name of Jesus (2x)
3:18	again, salutation without the Father – only the Lord Jesus Christ
1 Tim 1:9,10	grace in Christ “before time”
4:1,8	in presence of Christ, who will judge
Titus 2:13	the appearing of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ

2 Thessalonians 1:7-12

We have already seen in our discussion above (on Chapter Five - *pantokrator* in Revelation) that the coming of the Lord on the clouds in the NT always refers to the *parousia* (appearing) of Jesus. This text in 2 *Thessalonians* is one of the clear examples of Paul’s teaching of the “second coming.” This text revolves around “the righteous judgment of God,” yet throughout the text Jesus is the subject:

- when Jesus is “revealed from heaven”
- it is Jesus who will punish them
- the presence of the Lord and his mighty power refers to Jesus due to the reference of his coming on the clouds again
- this is all to glorify the name of “our Lord Jesus.”

There are far too many unknowns with the General Epistles (authorship issues, dating issues, etc.), thus I am not considering them in this analysis and will skip to the *Revelation*.

Both *John* and *Revelation* probably came to their final form in the 90’s of the first century. Some doubt these two works had the same writer, but all would agree that whoever authored the *Revelation* was in the Johannine community.¹⁹ Other than a single reference to “Son of God,” Jesus is most often referred to as “Lord.” As in *John*, Jesus is also referred to in figurative terms: the Word, the rider on a white horse, the Lamb, the

¹⁹ While I understand that there are some excellent scholars who dispute the use of “Johannine” as a separate community, most scholars hold to this theory. Richard Bauckham is certainly the most published and respected scholar who disputes this view, see his site for numerous articles/books where he writes on this topic: <http://richardbauckham.co.uk/index.php?page=articles>. While doing my work at St Andrews Bauckham and Philip Esler (both were on the St Andrews faculty at the time) engaged in a healthy exchange on the topic in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*. Bauckham’s article would serve to introduce the discussion, “Response to Philip Esler,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998) 253-249 (a response to an article review of *The Gospels for All Christians*). In my opinion this debate does not affect the point I am making here.

Alpha and the Omega, etc. (in *John* he was the Word, the Good Shepherd, the Light of the World, etc.). However, there are a few significant differences that illustrate further development in the Christology of the primitive church.

The use of παντοκράτωρ (*pantokrator*, “the Almighty”) in *Revelation* has already been mentioned in the discussion of chapter five. Here we must note how this word only appears 10 times in the NT, all but one in *Revelation*. The reference in 2 Corinthians is a quotation from the LXX, so the NT use of *pantokrator* is unique to *Revelation*. The writer uses *pantokrator* (*pan*-“all” and *kratos*-“strength, might”) to indicate the omnipotent nature of the eternal God, and as was shown above (discussion of Chapter Five), also uses the word in reference to Jesus.

In addition to the use of παντοκράτωρ, the writer of *Revelation* points to the equality of Jesus with God the Father by assigning to him attributes used for God in the OT (1:18 – voice like waters, Ez. 43:2 and Rev. 2:8 – the first and last, Is. 44:6). The writer also uses similar, or exact language to refer to Jesus and to the Father. Many of these references have already been discussed above, thus a simple listing is sufficient here.

References to the Father		References to Jesus	
1:4; 4:8	who was, who is, and who is to come	1:8	
4:11	Worthy of glory, honor and power	5:12	
5:13; 7:10; 11:15	worship to both		
21:22	both are the temple		
21:23, 22:5	both are the light for the new city		
22:3	both have a throne in the city		
21:6-8	Alpha and Omega, etc.	22:12-15	

Summary and Conclusion

One issue to be faced by the serious and objective reader of the New Testament is the absence of the Trinitarian concept within the texts. In this discussion we have focused on the person of Jesus, not addressing the Holy Spirit at all. The issue of the Holy Spirit within the trinity is not relevant if we cannot see evidence of this concept expressed in Jesus. A case for the divinity of the Holy Spirit could certainly be argued via the Pauline writings, but the evidence is sparse. Most attacks on the doctrine of the trinity (as is the case with Buzzard) focus on Jesus. We have found that even with Jesus the evidence for the trinity is not perfectly clear.

What we do find is a development of these concepts in the apostolic writings. Is it too much to imagine that the apostles had difficulty understanding the exact nature of the man they lived with for those short years? These men openly reveal their lack of understanding in numerous NT pericopes:

- they argued about who was the greatest in their ranks (Matt. 20:20-28; Lk 9:46-48) to such a degree that Jesus makes special effort to teach them (John 13)
- they did not understand his mission of sacrifice (Matt. 16:21-23; Lk 24:13-32)
- general lack of understanding (John 14:5, 8)

They certainly did not understand the Gentile mission. Though Jesus appears to have given them a clear example of reaching out to Gentiles, and the “Great Commission,” they had great difficulty breaking through the racial barriers. Peter must receive a dramatic vision where Jesus tells him not to call “unclean” that which Jesus has called “clean” to help him preach to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). Peter then must answer to the brothers for entering the house of a Gentile. This same group attacks the Gentile mission of Paul insisting that Gentiles be circumcised (Acts 15).

If the disciples had difficulty grasping these concepts, why would we expect that they completely understood the complex nature of Jesus, the Messiah and possibly sharing God’s eternal nature? In fact, it is quite clear they did not. How could we expect first century monotheistic Jews to completely understand that this man Jesus was, in fact, the God of the OT? Could this not be part of the meaning when Jesus is recorded to say to them, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.” John 16:12-13

The synoptics give us the best indication of how the disciples viewed Jesus during his earthly ministry, referring to him primarily in terms of the Messianic and apocalyptic Son of Man as seen in Daniel 7:13-14. What we find is that the writers of the synoptic gospels remained true to historical sources they had in front of them. Thus, even though *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke* took their final form 15 to 30 years *after* Paul’s ministry and writings, the Christology remains faithful to early sources that predated Paul. Some of these early sources were either oral or written Aramaic documents.²⁰

Paul’s influence cannot be underestimated. He makes it clear that he “did not receive it [his gospel] from any man...I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” (Gal 2:11-12) We have already seen how Paul’s references to Jesus are markedly different from the synoptics. Add to this the descriptions of the eternal nature of Jesus (Phil 2:6ff; Col 1:15ff) and Paul’s influence is clear. Next we have Luke’s account in *Acts* where Jesus

²⁰ I am currently working on another project, a review of “*Paul and Jesus, How the Apostle Transformed Christianity*” James D. Tabor (New York 2012). Tabor argues that Pauline influence is found throughout the synoptic gospels. While I do not disagree completely with Tabor, the data I am presently in this paper shows how the synoptic gospel writers actually remained true to earlier sources when it comes to Christology. There is plenty of data to show that these writers had some kind of Aramaic source(s) in front of them while composing. A very good treatment of this can be found in “*Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*,” Bart D. Ehrman (New York 2012). I have been critical of Ehrman’s work in the past, but this is an excellent text I would highly recommend. Chapter Three, “The Gospels as Historical Sources” deals with this question of Aramaic sources behind the synoptic gospels. See especially pp.87-92.

interacts with the disciples in prayer as one would expect from God (Acts 9:4ff; 16:7). By the time of John in the late first century the understanding of who Jesus was had developed more fully, and so had the concept of the divinity of Jesus and the trinity.

What we see is a development of the concept of divinity with respect to Jesus. This development can be traced through the NT documents (taking into consideration the chronological timeline of the writings) and into the early post-New Testament writings of the early church writers. By the early second century the divinity of Jesus had become a strongly held tenet of what we now call orthodox Christianity. This view continued to be debated, refined, and is more narrowly defined at the first “global” council in 325 AD at Nicea, then again at Chalcedon in 451 AD.

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