

## **The Doctrine of God in History**

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The doctrine of God in history is not only one of the most important and fascinating subjects of study, it is also one of the most complex. Part of the complexity stems from the fact that one can legitimately understand *the doctrine of God in history* in at least two different ways. First, one can understand it as referring to *the ways in which people have thought about God throughout the ages*. The development and refinement of the Trinity doctrine is a good example. Second, the doctrine of God in history may be understood as referring to *God's role in historic eventuation*. With this understanding, God's kingdom programs would be legitimate areas of study. The purpose of this paper is not only to consider man's developing understanding of what and who God is, but also to explore the origin, nature, and destiny of his kingdom programs.

The Bible opens with the words, "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth."<sup>1</sup> This statement, arguably the most important ever to be penned, answers the most profoundly important metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical questions a person can ask. If God created the heaven and the earth, then the world is not random, accidental and meaningless. There is a plan and a purpose to the creation, and this means that there is an objectively correct conceptual scheme, generated by God himself, according to which human beings ought to interrelate and interpret their particular experiences. If it were not so, contingency would be ultimate, and literally anything would be possible. The quest for understanding in such a world would be both foolish and futile. In short, God alone can and does guarantee that there are meaningful answers to meaningful questions about life and the universe. This does not, however, mean that the answers will

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<sup>1</sup>All Scripture from the King James Version of the Bible

be easily discovered or fully understood by the finite minds of men. This is especially true with respect to questions related to either understanding of the doctrine of God in history.

Prior to the initial creation event, the three Persons of the Trinity alone existed in a state devoid of change or sequential relationship. Many Christian thinkers have described this eternal state prior to the creation as timeless.<sup>2</sup> Others disagree, preferring to understand time as duration without necessarily entailing change or sequential relationship.<sup>3</sup> On this view one can truly speak of God existing *prior* to the creation. In the former account of God and time therefore, God existed atemporally *sans* the universe, but became temporal and entered into history *at* the creation. In the latter account, history is in a sense as eternal as God himself. On either view, God experienced an *extrinsic* change from existing *sans* a contingent universe to existing *with* such a universe. Both of these views entail a dynamic theory of time, which sees temporal becoming as real and not merely apparent to human observers.<sup>4</sup>

A competing view of God and time sees God as eternally atemporal. On this view, all of God's dealings with the world, which human beings *perceive* as being sequential and relational in much the same way as humans relate to one another, are actually part of one seamless, timeless act. This view necessarily entails a static theory of time, which

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<sup>2</sup>William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 152.

<sup>3</sup>Douglas Groothuis, *Cosmological Arguments 1*, audio lecture available at <http://www.apologetics315.com/2008/03/ultimate-apologetics-mp3-audio-page.html> (Accessed December 30, 2014).

<sup>4</sup>

E. J. Lowe, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, New Edition, Ed. Ted Honderich, s.v. "Time" (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2005).

holds that all of history still exists though humans occupying different stretches of the timeline will *perceive* the future as “not yet,” and the past as “no more.”<sup>5</sup>

One may argue that the atemporal view takes the doctrine of God’s immutability more seriously, but advocates of divine temporality can respond by insisting that God experiences changes in history that are merely *extrinsic* in character; essentially he remains forever the same. Though the temporal view appears to make better sense of God’s reactions to events and people than the atemporal alternative, this is no guarantee that it is correct. For finite people trying to comprehend the actions of the infinite God, it is equally legitimate to hold to the atemporality of God and view his ways as belonging to the category of divine mystery. Ascertaining which of these views of God and time is correct is appears to be beyond the finite mind of man.

The first beings that God created capable of reflecting upon the doctrine of God in history were angels. These creatures sang for joy when God created the earth (Job 38:1-7), indicating that they were probably created on the first day of creation week (Genesis 1:1-5; Exodus 20:11). Their joyful cries expressed not only their wonder at God’s mighty acts of creation, but indicate that they understood something of God’s wise plan for the earth and their role in it (*cf.* Hebrews 1:14). Observing God’s creative acts throughout the rest of the week must confirmed in the minds of the angels that God indeed does all that he pleases, “in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psalm 135:6).

On the sixth day of creation week, God created the first human couple. (Genesis 1:26-27). The man, Adam, was created first from the dust of the ground and animated by the breath of God (Genesis 2:7). God’s commands to Adam indicate that he must have already had considerable innate knowledge of the doctrine of God in history. Adam knew

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

immediately, as all rational thinking people do,<sup>6</sup> that he was finite and stood in relation to one who is infinite. God gave Adam permission to eat freely from any tree he wished but one. “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). Adam must have understood that, though he was granted a legitimate choice to either obey or disobey God, he was not free to escape the ghastly consequences should he choose the latter. He must have known that God is the sovereign Creator and Lord over historic eventuation.

In Genesis 2:18-20, Adam gives names to various animal kinds. Included among these were “every fowl of the air,” which were created “out of the ground” (Genesis 2:19). According to Genesis 1:20-23, however, God already created the fowl *out of the water* on the fifth day of creation week. This apparent discrepancy has led many to conclude, wrongly, that the first and second chapters of Genesis are in fact two contradictory creation accounts.<sup>7</sup> The apparent contradiction is resolved by supposing that God created the flying creatures from the water on day five, but made a new batch of representatives of their various kinds out of the ground on day six. This new group of flying creatures were created *in front of Adam*. Proper theology must begin with knowledge of God alone as the sovereign creator. God’s demonstration of his creative capabilities served as a powerful object lesson for Adam. God taught by outward act what Jeremiah would later declare in words:

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<sup>6</sup>Many eastern religions teach that man is actually infinitely divine. The realization of this “truth” is only achievable through mind-numbing mediation techniques calculated to short-circuit rational thought. This is proof that, if left to contemplate his existence rationally, man knows he is a finite creature in need of something (or someone) eternal to ground his existence.

<sup>7</sup>

*The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, J. J. S. Perowne, Ed., (Cambridge University Press, 1882), electronic *e-sword* module at [www.esword.com](http://www.esword.com) (Accessed December 31, 2014).

The LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king. . . . The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion” (Jeremiah 10:10-12).

This essential theological truth was not lost to history, but was preserved not only in Israel’s religion, but in the belief systems of people groups the world over.<sup>8</sup>

In naming the animals, Adam demonstrated his authority over the earth. God, however, is absolutely sovereign over the *whole* creation, upholding and sustaining it moment by moment. God’s sovereignty over the created order may be referred to as his *universal* kingdom. Nevertheless, God choose to delegate authority to a divinely appointed man on the earth. The Bible explains that “the heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men” (Psalm 115:16). This delegated authority is the essence of God’s *mediatorial* kingdom program. Reflecting on original man’s dominion, David mused:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth (Psalm 8:3-9).

Adam soon discovered that among the earthly creatures none existed comparable to himself. God declared the situation “not good” (Genesis 2:18), and he made a bride for Adam from a portion of the man’s body (Genesis 2:21-22). Adam said of her, “This is

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<sup>8</sup>Don Richardson, *Eternity in the Their Hearts: Startling Evidence of Belief in the One True God in Hundreds of Cultures Throughout the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984).

now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23). In naming the woman, Adam was again demonstrating and exercising authority. Man is the head of the woman (1 Corinthians 11:3), and God’s ideal plan is that man would be head of the familial unit. Nevertheless, the woman is to be a helper to the man, standing at his side and not under his feet. God’s dominion mandate was extended to both of them (Genesis 1:28). After establishing the first human family, God pronounced his creation “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Soon after creation week, there was open rebellion in the high angelic realm. Lifted up with pride, one of the chief angels sought to supplant God as sovereign of the universe (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-15; 2 Timothy 3:6). This creature was condemned as an enemy of God and expelled from heaven (Luke 10:18), though he still enjoys some limited access there (Job 1:6-7, 2:1-2; Revelation 12:10). This Satan (adversary) exercises kingship authority over all the spiritual forces of darkness that followed him in his rebellion (Revelation 9:1-11). It is difficult to understand how any created being, let alone a high-ranking member of the angelic realm, could hope to defeat the eternal, all-powerful, omniscient creator of the universe. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), and it is almost certain that the first person he lied to was himself. Henry Morris suggests that in order to justify his open rebellion against God, Satan convinced himself that everything, including God, owes its existence to some form of evolutionary process.<sup>9</sup> For the first time in history, God was seen as less than eternal and ultimate. Furthermore, his power over historic eventuation was seen as inferior to that of irresistible naturalistic process. Soon Satan was on the earth seeking to lure the first

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<sup>9</sup>Henry Morris, “Abraham and the Covenant of Faith,” *The Genesis Record*, Audio Lecture series (Dallas, TX: Institute for Creation Research, 2010).

human couple into rebellion against God. Possessing the body of a serpent, he began a dialogue with the woman:

Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:1-5).

The woman's response to Satan marks a major turning point in the doctrine of God in history. Initially humankind regarded God's word as having ultimate authority, the final court of appeal. In response to Satan's temptation, however, the woman began to see contingency as ultimate and her own experience as authoritative. She partook of the forbidden fruit and persuaded her husband to do likewise (Genesis 3:6, 17). Their disobedience caused the intrusion of death and decay into God's once perfect creation (Romans 5:12, Romans 8:19-22). Instantly the man and his wife saw themselves as loathsome and despicable. Though they attempted to hide from God, he nonetheless found and confronted both them and the serpent. To the serpent he declared:

Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Genesis 3:14-15).

This is, in somewhat cryptic form, the first proclamation of the gospel. The Seed of the woman refers to the Lord Jesus, who would utterly defeat Satan (crush his head), though he himself would suffer injury (his heel bruised). Though God pronounced a series of judgments on the couple, including pain in childbirth for the woman (Genesis 3:16), a cursed and inhospitable environment (Genesis 3:17-18), and finally physical death

(Genesis 3:19), Adam nonetheless saw hope for humanity in the promised Seed.

Immediately “Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20).

Before their rebellion against God, Adam and his wife were naked but not ashamed (Genesis 2:25). After their fall they suddenly felt the shame of nakedness and tried to cover themselves with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). By slaying an animal and using its skin to make coats for them, God communicated two important truths to Adam and Eve. First, they learned that God alone can provide atonement for human sin; he alone can counter its devastating effects. Second, they learned about *substitution*. Based on God’s warning (Genesis 2:17), Adam must have assumed he was going to die on the very day he sinned. Instead he observed the death of an innocent animal in order to cover his own shame. Before his sin Adam saw God as sovereign creator and provider. After his confrontation in the garden, however, Adam saw God as much more. God was now seen as both just and merciful. Though he will not turn a blind eye to moral evil in his universe, he is nonetheless willing and able to provide for man’s deepest need. Adam must have recognised that the slain animal in some way prefigured the promised Seed who would be wounded. The sacrificial system immediately inaugurated (Genesis 4:1-4) was no doubt intended to act as a continual reminder that God would one day provide the ultimate sacrifice atone for human sin.

There is some indication that Adam and Eve may have seen the promised Seed as divine. At the birth of their first child, Cain, Eve proclaimed, “I have gotten a man from the LORD” (Genesis 4:1). Adam Clarke observes that “it is extremely difficult to ascertain the sense in which Eve used these words, which have been as variously

translated as understood. Most expositors think that Eve imagined Cain to be the promised seed that should bruise the head of the serpent.”<sup>10</sup> He rejects this understanding, however, seeing it as “too refined for that period.”<sup>11</sup> The Cambridge Bible commentary agrees with Clarke, and raises an objection of its own:

According to the traditional Patristic and mediaeval interpretation, the sentence admitted of a literal rendering in a Messianic sense: “I have gotten a man, even Jehovah,” i.e. “In the birth of a child I have gotten one in whom I foresee the Incarnation of the Lord.” But, apart from the inadmissibility of this N.T. thought, it is surely impossible that the Messianic hope should thus be associated with the name of Cain.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, if Eve really saw the child as divine, she would have named him “Jehovah,” not “Cain.” Interestingly, Gill sees Cain’s name as evidence for the popular interpretation:

however, having imbibed this notion, it is no wonder she should call him Cain, a possession or inheritance; since had this been the case, she had got a goodly one indeed: but in this she was sadly mistaken, he proved not only to be a mere man, but to be a very bad man: the Targum of Jonathan favours this sense, rendering the words, “I have gotten a man, the angel of the Lord.”

Though the passage is admittedly difficult, outright rejection of the traditional interpretation, based on the couples’ assumed theological ignorance or the name given to their first child, appears unjustified. Contemporary Hebrew scholars see the traditional interpretation as certainly possible, of not highly likely.<sup>13</sup> Thus, original man was most

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Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible* (1831), available at <http://sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/clarke/gen004.htm> (Accessed January 1, 2015).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>*Cambridge Bible*, Commentary on Genesis 4:1.

<sup>13</sup>Menno Kalisher, *Interview with Menno Kalisher*, audio interview available at <http://www.carewinnipeg.com/audio-and-video/88-spitfire-wingman-series> (Accessed January 1, 2015).

certainly a monotheist who saw God not only as the creator of the universe, but as the ground of objective morality as well. He understood that sacrifice was the key to the atonement for sin and that one day a divinely appointed man would make reconciliation for fallen humanity.

Over the next 1,656 years, mankind became all but incurably depraved. The thoughts of man's heart were only evil continually (Genesis 6:5), and the earth was filled with violence (Genesis 6:11, 13). In addition, demonic forces profoundly contributed to the prevailing wickedness in unimaginable ways.<sup>14</sup> Before the human race could become irredeemable, God saved one righteous family alive (and representatives of all air-breathing, land-dwelling animals) through a deluge that was global in extent and catastrophic in nature (Genesis 6-9). The physical evidence for this event is abundant and unambiguous.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, those that deny the biblical flood narrative are left with no plausible naturalistic explanation to account for the plethora of flood legends in cultures the world over.<sup>16</sup> Anthropologists have discovered more than 270 such legends in cultures often separated by oceans and mountains.<sup>17</sup>

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Phil Fernandes, *Nephilim—The Real Ancient Aliens*, audio lecture, available at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1117141830135> (Accessed January 1, 2015).

<sup>15</sup>Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Flood and Its Scientific Implications* (City, State: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1961).

<sup>16</sup>Peter James and Nick Thorpe, *Ancient Mysteries Revealed* (New York, NY: Random House, 1999), pp. 13-15.

<sup>17</sup>

Duane Gish, *Dinosaurs by Design* (Green Forrest, AR: New Leaf Publishing, 2012), p.73.

Several generations after the flood, the entire human population, which probably numbered in the millions,<sup>18</sup> gathered on the plains of Shinar in open defiance of God. In response, God supernaturally changed their languages, causing the people to disperse in all directions. Several centuries later, the earliest post-flood nations were formed. It was in this world of newly formed nations that God called Abram of Ur to father a people that would represent him to the world. God promised Abram that kings would be among his descendants (Genesis 17:6). His grandson, Jacob, had 12 sons who became the patriarchal heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. Near the end of his life, Jacob prophesied over his son Judah, stating that, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Genesis 49:10). Though several translations of this obscure text exist, the most plausible renderings are undeniably messianic.<sup>19</sup> Judah would be the tribe through whom Israel’s ultimate king would come. With this prophecy, God made known his intention to re-activate his mediatorial kingdom program. The first divinely appointed man in Israel with regal authority was the great deliverer and lawgiver, Moses. He was followed by Joshua, who was followed by a succession of judges who also had regal authority. Roughly 1,000 years before Christ, God chose David, of the tribe of Judah, to be king over his people Israel (1 Samuel 16:12; 2 Samuel 2:4). He further promised that the Davidic Dynasty would be an everlasting dynasty (Psalm 89:3-4). Both Isaiah and Micah prophesied that the coming ultimate Davidic king would be both human and divine (Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2).

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<sup>18</sup>Henry Morris, “Abraham and the Covenant of Faith,” *The Genesis Record*, Audio Lecture series (Dallas, TX: Institute for Creation Research, 2010).

<sup>19</sup>

Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, Commentary on Genesis 49:10.

The nature of the kingdom under Israel's final king is a major theme in both Testaments.<sup>20</sup> The prophets were in agreement that the kingdom age will be a return to Eden-like conditions. They predict that all animals will return to peaceful vegetarianism (Isaiah 11:6-9), that sickness will be no more (Isaiah 33:24, 35:4-6), and that human longevity will match that of the pre-flood age (Isaiah 65:20-22; Zechariah 8:3-5). The prophets predict a world with abundant of food (Isaiah 51:3), where there is produce even on the tops of mountains (Psalm 72:16; Amos 9:13). The Lord Jesus claimed to be Israel's long-awaited Davidic king, and as evidence for his stupendous claims, he went about re-creating, locally, Eden-like conditions just as the prophets had predicted. This is precisely why the epistle to the Hebrews refers to Christ's sign miracles as "the powers of the world to come" (Hebrews 6:5). Though many Jews, and many more Gentiles, came to trust in Christ as the promised Seed (Genesis 3:15), God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14), and mankind's only savior (John 14:6), Israel as a nation rejected him and his kingdom. The situation, however, is not indefinite. One day Israel will recognise her Messiah. They will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39; Luke 13:35). At his second coming, the Lord will return to rescue Israel from her enemies (Zechariah 14:1-4), smash all opposition to his wise rule (Daniel 2:44), and establish his kingdom—a Jewish kingdom—on the earth (Luke 1:31-33). Jesus will be king of Israel, the head of the nations (Deuteronomy 26:19; 28:1, 13) and, by extension, king over the whole world (Psalm 2:1-12).

The Christian doctrine of God in history admittedly contradicts popular notions concerning the evolution of religion. Whereas the Bible teaches that the original religion

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<sup>20</sup>Alva J. McClean, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), pp. 4-5.

was monotheism, (though in the post-flood world, many cultures have degenerated into polytheism and animism), the popular evolution story sees monotheism as among the latest religious developments.<sup>21</sup> Just as Darwinism is fundamentally a religious commitment prior to scientific investigation,<sup>22</sup> so too the secularist account of the evolution of religion is an *a priori* faith commitment often maintained in spite of clear evidence to the contrary.<sup>23</sup> Schmidt's cultural historic method, which is based upon non-controversial assumptions regarding human migration and cultural interaction,<sup>24</sup> leads to the inescapable conclusion that the original religion was monotheism.<sup>25</sup> The case for original monotheism may be made, apart from the cultural-historical method, by simple common sense reasoning. For instance, in cultures where memory of the Supreme Being exists, he is often seen as the creator and moral lawgiver, who nonetheless remains somewhat distant, often said to have retreated to the sky.<sup>26</sup> The animism and polytheism present within these cultures is best explained as human reaction to the Supreme Being, who could not be manipulated either by sacrifice or ritual into granting the selfish desires of men. Andrew Lang observed:

A moral creator in need of no gifts, and opposed to lust and mischief, will not help a man with love-spells, or with malevolent "sendings" of disease by

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<sup>21</sup>David S. Noss, *A History of the World's Religions* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003), p. 15.

<sup>22</sup>

Michael Ruse, "How Evolution Became a Religion: Creationists Correct?" *National Post*, pp. B1,B3, B7 May 13, 2000.

<sup>23</sup>

Winfried Corduan, *In the Beginning God: A Fresh Look at the Case for Original Monothiesm* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), p. 271.

<sup>24</sup>

Ibid, pp. 150-175.

<sup>25</sup>

Wilhelm Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion: Facts and Theories* (Proctorville, OH: Wythe-North Publishing, 2014), p. 271.

<sup>26</sup>Corduan, pp. 72-80.

witchcraft; will not favor one man above his neighbor, or one tribe above its rivals, as reward for sacrifice that he does not accept, or as constrained by charms which do not touch his omnipotence. Ghosts and ghost-gods, on the other hand, in need of food and blood, afraid of spells and binding charms, are corrupted, but, to man, a useful constituency.<sup>27</sup>

Noss suggests that,

Probably, the idea of a great Originator that has little to do with humanity . . . arose very naturally when people attempted to answer such questions as “Where did our rituals come from?” or “Who began everything?” . . . Unable to think that any of the local powers with which they had daily dealings could have originated all things, they hit upon a rather speculative monotheistic explanation.<sup>28</sup>

Noss *presupposes* that ancient man asked questions about origins only *after* the advent of the so-called “lower” religious systems (e.g. animism, polytheism). There is no reason this ought to be the case, however; people could have just as easily pondered the question of cosmic origin *prior* to any animistic/polytheistic faith commitments. The popular evolutionary view of religion also *presupposes* that God, if he does exist, has never revealed his existence, attributes, or moral imperatives to man. This is just to *assume* Christianity false. In the light of the historic evidence for the Bible’s claims,<sup>29</sup> along with the fact that Christian theism alone can account for the validity of historical research in the first place,<sup>30</sup> the evolutionist’s assumption is dubious to say the least.

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Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* (New York: Longmans Green, 1898, pp. 243-244; repr., Charleston SC: Bibliobazaar, 1968) as quoted in Corduan, p. 79.

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Noss, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup>See for instance, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999).

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All historical research assumes the validity of inductive principle, which no secularist philosophy has been able to account for *logically*. See Barry Lower, “Hume’s Problem of Induction,” *30-Second Philosophies* (Lewes, East Sussex, UK, 2009). For a Christian account of induction see Greg Bahnsen vs. Edward Tabash audio debate *Does*

The first coming of Christ caused the greatest development of the doctrine of God in history. Jesus was worshipped as the Old Testament God even in the earliest Christian communities. In fact, the problematic issue was not over his divinity, but whether a genuinely *human* Jesus could be accommodated.”<sup>31</sup> Holmes notes that many scholars today simply assume “that the monotheistic inheritance of Judaism needed to be broken in some cataclysmic philosophical shift before Jesus could be worshipped.” However, “on the evidence of the Old Testament texts, this assumption appears to be incorrect.”<sup>32</sup>

Homes suggests a reason for this:

Old Testament monotheism . . . is not a careful claim as to the numbers of deities; rather it is an exclusive devotion that must be learned and won, and remains constantly precarious. This perhaps makes it easier to understand how Trinitarian devotion could develop so rapidly after the ascension of Jesus: there was no need to overcome a developed and defended metaphysical conception of deity. . . . The operative definition of the divine, therefore, is not metaphysical but doxological: God is the one to whom worship may properly be given.<sup>33</sup>

Presupposing both the deity of Christ and the primacy of the Scriptures, the early church went to work searching for passages that would support and illuminate their view of Christ as divine. They drew upon many Old Testament passages that refer to God in mysterious singular-plural fashion (Genesis 1:26, 11:6-7, 19:24; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 6:8; Zechariah 3:2, 12:10), as well as New Testament texts that recognize Jesus as acting in ways that only God can, such as creating (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17 *cf.* Genesis

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*God Exist*, available from Covenant Media Foundation, [www.cmfnow.com](http://www.cmfnow.com).

<sup>31</sup>

Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 650.

<sup>32</sup>

Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History, and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), p. 47.

<sup>33</sup>

*Ibid*, pp. 45-46.

1:1; Isaiah 44:24), and forgiving sin (Mark 2:5-7 *cf.* Isaiah 43:25.) By the fourth century, the church was able to articulate, in reasonably precise philosophical language, what the Bible teaches about the nature and character of God. Holmes argues that in order to properly understand the traditional Trinity doctrine, one must resist the temptation to define God as one in being yet three in *person*. This view, he contends, is “a simple departure from . . . the unified witness of the entire theological tradition.”<sup>34</sup> Rather, one must understand the traditional doctrine of the Trinity as seeing God as one eternal and undivided substance who nonetheless eternally exists as three distinct *hypostases* (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), which are instantiations of the divine nature.<sup>35</sup> The distinction between the hypostases is exclusively that of origin; the Father generates the Son, while the Holy Spirit *proceeds* from either the Father or both the Father and the Son.<sup>36</sup>

Any attempt to understand the nature of, and relationship between, the members of the Trinity must duly acknowledge Holmes’s problem with the definition of *person*. He argues that being personal necessarily entails the possession of a discursive intellectual nature. Since God is omniscient, no member of the Trinity can be properly called a person.<sup>37</sup> In response to Holmes’s objection, it may be pointed out that the Father and Son exist in love relationship (John 3:35; 5:20; 15:9; 17:23, 26), and it is difficult to imagine genuine love relationship existing where persons do not. It is equally difficult to understand how the Spirit of God could be capable of fellowshiping with people (2 Corinthians 13:14), having opinions (Acts 15:28), issuing commands (Acts 13:2-4), being

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid, p. 195.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, pp. 199-200.

<sup>36</sup>

Ibid, p. 164, 200.

<sup>37</sup>

Ibid,

lied to (Acts 5:3-4), and grieved (Ephesians 4:30) if he is not indeed a person. Holmes's key criterion for personhood, namely, discursive thought, is arbitrary. Unless one is willing to deny personhood to unborn children or mentally disabled individuals, Holmes's assertion that personhood necessarily entails discursive thought must be seen as false. His insistence that attributes of origin alone, and nothing else, can distinguish between the members of the Trinity is equally doubtful. One could, with equal validity, view the members of the Trinity as genuine persons who are distinguished not in terms of origin, but of volition. In the nature of the case theological mysteries must continue to exist, though the latter view answers more questions than it raises. Perhaps in the future, when the curse will be no more and the tabernacle of God will be with man (Revelation 21:3) these theological questions will be answered. In the meantime, man is tasked with searching the scriptures, trusting the Holy Spirit to illumine his text and activate man's God-given intellect and spiritual understanding to the end that man will better love, honor, and serve the king of eternity (Jeremiah 10:10).

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