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Forward

The concerned aunt in my church wanted someone to interact with her niece about her niece's conversion to Jehovah's Witnesses, and I was the one she wanted to interact with her. I agreed, and what ensued over the next several months was a lengthy letter correspondence (this was before email) with Christie. I've included all the correspondence in the appendix. My letters were very much focused on who Jesus is according to Scripture. Her responses were very frustrating to say the least. And, from the standpoint of bringing the niece to her senses, my letters were a failure. However, I got a chance to clearly exposit and clarify the truth of this tremendous passage, John 1:1, and its powerful witness to the deity of Jesus Christ.

You would think John's words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," could not be any plainer. But for someone who wants to deny the deity of Jesus Christ, it is a passage that must be overcome as to its plain meaning. Jehovah's Witnesses assert that the translation I gave, and that most Bible translators agree with,¹¹ is a mistranslation of the Greek text and that it should read, "and the Word was a god." Is that the right translation, or even a possible translation? NO! And that is what I endeavor to show in this book.

I'm going to be explaining some pretty technical aspects of the Greek language, but, in a way that you'll get and understand, and be able to defend and explain to others, especially to Jehovah's Witnesses. And I'm going to also show you Biblical and theological reasons why the traditional translation of John 1:1 is the only possible translation.

I can't wait to show you. But first, a brief history of Jehovah's Witnesses.

¹ see <https://www.4witness.org/101-translations-of-john-11-and-the-word-was-god/> and the few translations the Jehovah's Witnesses produce that support their translation, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1101989307>

A Brief History of Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses was birthed out of the restorationist movement of the 1800's, which also birthed the Churches of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Mormons or Latter Day Saints, Adventist and Seventh Day Adventist churches and a host of other such movements.² These groups were of varied orthodoxy but all operated from a belief that the church as represented in the major denominations of Protestantism was failing to conduct itself like the New Testament church, so they needed to restore it.

Jehovah's Witnesses themselves came out of the Watch Tower Society International Bible Students, a group that emphasized literal reading of Scripture, rejection of creeds, a rejection of the Trinitarian belief of the orthodox churches, rejection of a literal hell, and a belief that Jesus was coming soon (adventist beliefs). Charles Taze Russell, influenced by this teaching, developed his own unique beliefs, including a conviction that Jesus was returning in 1914, at which time every human would be resurrected to earth to have a chance to live an eternally perfect life.³ In 1879 he began publishing his own monthly magazine, *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, and in 1881 formed *Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society* as an unincorporated administrative agency to disseminate his writings.⁴ With his death in 1916 the movement made a large organizational shift. Joseph Franklin Rutherford succeeded Russell and declared its adherents to be Jehovah's witnesses, separating themselves from the other Bible Student members, and made appointment of leaders in each congregation his prerogative, and so took greater control over their message.⁵

Eschatology (Beliefs About the Last Days)

The key beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses have varied some through the years, especially concerning that 1914 date and what occurred. Witnesses acknowledge this,⁶ though they are not as forthcoming on the details of those changes. The graphic⁷ that follows highlights the struggle Jehovah's Witnesses have had explaining the multiple dates they set for Christ's coming. For example, from 1879 to 1929 Witnesses' publications were teaching that the last days had begun in 1799. From 1929 to 1930 they taught that the last days had begun in 1914. From 1930 to the present they have been teaching that the last days, as well as the presence of Christ on earth and his being made king, began in 1914. And you can see, their teaching on the separating of the sheep and the goats in judgment has made an about face twice, from 1879-1923 seeing it as taking place during the millennium (which hasn't happened yet), from 1923 to 1995 seeing it taking place during the time of Christ's presence (the date for which they have

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restorationism>

³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20060320020952/http://www.heraldmag.org/olb/contents/history/3worlds.pdf>, page 158.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Jehovah's_Witnesses

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Jehovah's_Witnesses

⁶ <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jw-doctrine-changes/>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Jehovah's_Witnesses

changed through the years), but now they teach that it will take place during the Great Tribulation. The constant struggle for Witnesses has been explaining that somehow Jesus came, was enthroned, and the 144,000 were resurrected without anybody being able to see this. It had to be explained as a spiritual coming. Interestingly, Rutherford made an apology of sorts for the confusion after the expectations of many followers were dashed when these fulfillments didn't occur.⁸

History of Eschatological Doctrine								
	Last Days begin	Start of Christ's Presence	Christ made King	Resurrection of 144,000	Judgment of Religion	Separating Sheep & Goats	Great Tribulation	
1879–1920	1799	1874	1878			during Millennium	1914, 1915, 1918, 1920	
1920–1923			1914	1878	1878		1925	
1923–1925						1918	1919	within generation of 1914
1925–1927								
1927–1929								
1929–1930	1914				during Christ's presence			
1930–1966	1914			1918	1919	during Great Tribulation		
1966–1975							1975?	
1975–1995							within generation of 1914	
1995–present						imminent		

⁸ Vindication, Vol. 1, by J.F. Rutherford, (1931), p.338–339, "There was a measure of disappointment on the part of Jehovah's faithful ones on earth concerning the years 1914, 1918, and 1925, which disappointment lasted for a time. Later the faithful learned that these dates were definitely fixed in the Scriptures; and they also learned to quit fixing dates for the future and predicting what would come to pass on a certain date, but to rely (and they do rely) upon the Word of God as to the events that must come to pass."

Witnesses have developed the very odd view that only 144,000 humans will be chosen for heaven, while the rest of humanity will be resurrected to dwell on the earth in God's kingdom and have a chance to live perfect lives. The 144,000 are believers from all Christian ages and their number has mostly been filled. Their resurrection was supposed to have occurred in 1918, a spiritual resurrection, not a bodily one.

Salvation

The teaching about the 144,000 who get to heaven and the remainder of mankind who get resurrected to the earthly kingdom for a chance to live a perfect life, raises naturally the question of what Jehovah's Witnesses believe is the way of salvation. In their publications they teach that "Jehovah provided the way to free us from sin and death," through sending his Son Jesus, "his very first creation" and a "perfect human, without sin," to pay the ransom to God to "remove death for all of Adam's children."⁹ They teach:

Jesus gave his Father the value of his life. In the year 33, on Nisan 14 of the Jewish calendar, Jehovah allowed Jesus' enemies to kill him. (Hebrews 10:10) Three days after that, Jehovah brought Jesus back to life, not as a human, but as a spirit person. Later, when Jesus returned to his Father in heaven, he presented the value of his perfect human life to Jehovah as the ransom. (Hebrews 9:24) Now that the ransom has been paid, we have the opportunity to be set free from sin and death.^{9,10}

To benefit from this ransom we must "be truly sorry for what we have done wrong and humbly ask Jehovah to forgive us," we must "accept Jesus' ransom sacrifice," which means to believe in the Son (which they define as doing what Jesus taught us to do)," and "attend [not participate in] the Memorial of Christ's death," which is communion or the Lord's supper but where only the 144,000 are allowed to take the bread and wine.¹¹

When we die we do not go to heaven (that is only for the 144,000) but cease to exist.¹² But we will be resurrected, and not just us who believe, but also all who had no chance to learn of Jesus. Each of us will be replicated from God's memory and restored to life on a perfect earth.¹³

⁹ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/bible-study/meaning-jesus-ransom-sacrifice/>

¹⁰ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/bible-study/meaning-jesus-ransom-sacrifice/>

¹¹ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/bible-study/meaning-jesus-ransom-sacrifice/>

¹² <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/bible-study/what-happens-when-we-die/>

¹³ [There Will Be a Resurrection! \(jw.org\)](https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/bible-study/what-happens-when-we-die/)

Anti-Trinitarianism

It is hard to talk to a Jehovah's Witness without being introduced to their belief that the doctrine of the Trinity is a pagan concept. In their publication *Should You Believe in the Trinity* the focus is really on their belief that Jesus is a created being and not God:

Various Trinitarian concepts exist. But generally the Trinity teaching is that in the Godhead there are three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; yet, together they are but one God. The doctrine says that the three are co-equal, almighty, and uncreated, having existed eternally in the Godhead.

Others, however, say that the Trinity doctrine is false, that Almighty God stands alone as a separate, eternal, and all-powerful being. They say that Jesus in his pre human existence was, like the angels, a separate spirit person created by God, and for this reason he must have had a beginning. They teach that Jesus has never been Almighty God's equal in any sense; he has always been subject to God and still is. They also believe that the holy ghost is not a person but God's spirit, his active force.¹⁴

The "they" who teach that the doctrine of the Trinity is false are the Witnesses, of course.

The Name of God

Jehovah's Witnesses believe it is of "utmost importance" to use God's divine name, which they declare is Jehovah.¹⁵ They say his name has been removed from most Bible translations "because the original way to pronounce it is unknown today," or because we should follow the "long-standing tradition of the Jews" of not pronouncing his name aloud. But they argue that "knowing its meaning and using it freely in our worship are powerful aids in drawing closer to our heavenly Father, Jehovah."¹⁶

Oddly, they themselves have failed to understand God's name. God's name in Hebrew is יהוה (the consonants yodh, heh, vav, and heh written from right to left, as all Hebrew is) but because in post-biblical Jewish tradition the Jews did not want to pronounce the divine name out loud when reading Scripture, they gave it vowel pointings that would remind readers to say *adonai*, which means "Lord." If you use the consonants of the divine name with the vowels of *adonai*, however, you get Yehovah, or Jehovah, and that is the incorrect pronunciation of the divine name. We **do** know how the divine name should be pronounced because we see it used in

¹⁴ <https://www.scribd.com/document/299915150/Watchtower-Should-You-Believe-in-the-Trinity-1989>

¹⁵ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/bible-teach/jehovah-meaning-of-gods-name/>

¹⁶ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/bible-teach/jehovah-meaning-of-gods-name/>

Biblical names and expressions such as “hallelujah.” It should be pronounced Yahweh, not Jehovah.

It is Jehovah’s Witnesses’ belief that Jesus is God’s highest created being that has forced them to explain away all references in the New Testament to the deity of Jesus, especially John 1:1, which in our translations reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In their own translation of the Bible, John 1:1 reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.”¹⁷

It will be the burden of this book to show that this New World Translation is incorrect and that the view of the Witnesses that Jesus is not the true and almighty God is incorrect.

¹⁷ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/john/1/>

The New Beginning

“In the **beginning** was the Word...” (John 1:1a)

[*en archē ēn ho logos*]

When you hear or read the words, “In the beginning,” where does your mind go? Do you not think of Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”? How could you not? And the same is true of the readers of John’s Gospel when he first penned it. It was written for the church and the church swam in the waters of Genesis.¹⁸

The Same Genesis Beginning

John is mentioning the same “beginning” that Moses is describing in Genesis 1:1. It is the beginning of the existence of our universe, or perhaps, more particularly, the beginning of our own planet and solar system. And at the beginning, John is saying, the Word was. Jesus **was**, Jesus existed, “in the beginning.” John does not say, “In the beginning Jesus **became**,” but rather, “In the beginning Jesus **was**.” The difference is huge.

If I were to describe the beginning of my family, I could say, “In the beginning of my family, my wife and I were.” But couched in that statement is also the idea that my wife and I had something to do with the beginning. And couched in John’s statement is not just the idea that Jesus was already existing at the beginning, but that he had something to do with the beginning.

Of course, John makes that more plain just two verses later:

All things came into being through him, and nothing that came into being came into being without him. (John 1:3, author’s translation)

Of course, the Jehovah’s Witnesses view is that Jesus is the first and highest created being who came into existence at the beginning and he helped with creation. On their official website they say,

He was God’s first creation, and he helped in the creation of all other things. He is the only one created directly by Jehovah and is therefore appropriately called God’s “only-begotten” Son.¹⁹

The implication is that Jesus was directly created by the Father, then the Father used him to “help” create all other things. Of course, that is not what John says. He doesn’t say Jesus helped God create. He said, “nothing came into being without him.”

¹⁸ <http://www.creationstudies.org/Education/quotations.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/good-news-from-god/who-is-jesus-christ/>

But, we might ask, if, according to Witnesses, Jesus helped God create, how would he do that? What would he bring to the table? Did he advise God how to do His creation? “Father, why don’t you make a moon for earth, and how about making a billion different kinds of flowers.” Did he actually bring things into existence, create things out of nothing? Can a created being do that? If a being can create something out of nothing, doesn’t that, by definition, make him God? Or did he somehow take something God made out of nothing and add some finishing touches to it?

When we ask the question, “Exactly how did Jesus help God create,” none of the answers sound very acceptable. God doesn’t need advice on how to order His creation. He very plainly tells Job that in Job 40&41. Jesus couldn’t help by creating things out of nothing because only God can do that, as He indicates in several places:

Exodus 20:11, For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and **all** that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Revelation 10:6, and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay.

Psalms 104:24, O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom have you made them **all**; the earth is full of your creatures.

Acts 17:24, The God who made the world and **everything** in it

And certainly, Jesus didn’t help God create by taking what God already created it and working with that, because Scripture clearly tells us that Jesus created all things:

Colossians 1:16, For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

Indeed, Jesus has created living beings, certainly included in “all things” and specified in “rulers” and “authorities. And he created us! Can a created being do that?

Jehovah’s Witnesses would have us believe that “in the beginning” God first created Jesus, then used Jesus somehow to create everything else. But if we interpret John 1:1 this way, “In the beginning **the created** Word was,” then are we justified in interpreting Genesis 1:1 the same way: “In the beginning **the created** God created the heavens and the earth”? Hardly (though perhaps Latter-Day Saints would approve)! There is plenty of evidence throughout Scripture that the Father is uncreated and that Jesus is uncreated.

Of the Father, one testimony to this is worth noting. Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:16,

The only one who has immortality, the one who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen nor is able to see, to Him be honor and eternal sovereignty. Amen.
(author's translation).

To say that God alone has immortality (non-death, the Greek word is *athanatos*) seems at first to be a contradiction of what He has promised to us, that is, immortality through Christ. But that is only immortality on the back end. God has immortality on the front end. He has no beginning. He is the beginning. That's why Paul can say He alone has immortality. Hence His claim to be the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last letter of the alphabet of eternity (Revelation 1:8). No one else has that kind of immortality, no human that is. But as we will see, Jesus claims this same immortality as Alpha and Omega.

The Alpha and Omega

Of course, Jehovah's Witnesses acknowledge this fact about the Father, just not about the Son, even though the Son claims to be the Alpha and Omega, as well (Revelation 22:13).

Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward with me, to repay each one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.
(Revelation 22:12,13)

You can't have two "firsts" and two "lasts," can you? And if the Father claims to be the first, because He was in the beginning, then isn't Jesus stealing glory from the Father by also claiming to be the first?

But Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Jesus is not the one saying he is the Alpha and Omega here, but that it is the Father speaking here. They are arguing that there is confusion as to who is speaking, an angel speaking in verses 8 and 9 and possibly 10 and 11, so that the option is open for who is speaking verses 12 and 13.²⁰ It is true that an angel speaks in verses 8 and 9, but it is clearly a divine presence declaring that He is coming. Could it be the Father who is speaking? The Father was, and is, and is to come (1:4,8; 4:8), but Jesus "comes" like a thief (16:15), will "come" to the churches (2:6,15,25; 3:3,20), and is "coming" (1:7; 3:11), and most certainly must be the one who says he is "coming soon" in Revelation 22:6 and 12, because at the last the "Spirit and the Bride say 'Come'" to Jesus in 22:17 and to the one who says he is coming soon in verse 20, John says, "Come, Lord Jesus."

²⁰ <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/101978608>

If further proof is needed that it is Jesus who is proclaiming his coming in Revelation 22, not the Father, we can see an obvious parallel structure²¹ to verses 6-20 that serves to highlight that it is Jesus who is coming:

22:7 "Behold I am coming soon (Proclamation)	22:12 "Behold I am coming soon" (Proclamation)
22:7b " Blessed is he who keeps the words of prophecy"	22:14 " Blessed are those who wash their clothes" a basis of entry to and exclusion from the city
22:8 " I John... " "Fell down to worship the angel" "Saw the things"	22:16 " I Jesus... " "Sent the angel" "Testify to you about these things"
22:9b John , the angel , and " fellow servants " are to worship the one coming	22:17 The Spirit and the Bride and John plead with Jesus to come
22:10-11 The Book Do not seal, Time is near, let the filthy remain filthy and the holy ones holy	22:18-19 The Book To the one who adds, God adds plagues, to the one who takes away, God takes away their share of life

Rev 22:20 "Yes I am coming soon" (Proclamation) "Amen come Lord Jesus" (Response)

From this parallelism it seems clear that the Son, Jesus, is speaking in both instances and he is addressed at the end in the appeal from John to "come." And so, Jesus is the one who declares that he is "the Alpha and the Omega" in complete equality with the Father who declares that of Himself in Revelation 1:8.

²¹ Adapted from Rabach Symon Odek's article, The Promise "I Am Coming Soon" in Revelation (<http://archive.atsjats.org/Odek%20-%20The%20Promise%20final%20format.pdf>)

Jesus is not the first created being but is equally the Alpha, the First, and the Beginning, just as the Father is, and Jesus is worthy of worship for it, unlike the angel who is a created being. The angel rebukes John for falling down before him, rather than worship Christ, Revelation 22:9.

Sleight of Hand

But do you notice the sleight of hand the Witnesses' website uses about Jesus: "He is the only one created directly by Jehovah and is therefore appropriately called God's 'only-begotten' Son."²²

The implication of this statement is that "only-begotten" equals "only direct creation." But nothing could be further from the truth. When you create, you create something different than yourself. Even if I could create a human-like android that looked like and acted like me, it would still be different than me. But when I beget, I beget something exactly like me at the DNA level. What I beget is other than me but is not different from me. We're of the same stuff. We're "related" in the most basic of ways.

This is how the Biblical writers think of Jesus' sonship. Sonship means equality.

*...God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by the Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world, He being the radiance of God's glory and the **exact imprint** of His nature...*
(Hebrews 1:1-3, author's translation)

The word translated "exact imprint" is the Greek word *character*, and is used in the New Testament only in Hebrews 1:3. It originally referred to the engraving tool and then came to mean the mold or form with which something was shaped. You cannot be the exact imprint of someone's nature and not be just like them. My sons and daughters are the exact imprint of mine and my wife's nature. They share our DNA. We are all the exact imprint of Adam's nature, our original father.

Creating is totally different from begetting or birthing. So, it is incorrect for Jehovah's Witnesses or anybody to define "only begotten" as "only created." If being the unique Son of God meant the first and highest created being, Jesus could have avoided accusations of blasphemy and the cross. It was when he claimed a unique sonship to the Father that the leadership among the Jews decided he needed to be killed. The apostle John recounts for us:

And because of this the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he did these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus responded to them, "My Father is working until now and I too am working." For this reason, then, the Jews began seeking rather to kill him, because

²² https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/good-news-from-god/who-is-jesus-christ/&sa=D&ust=1593548193545000&usg=AFQjCNGrDmbriFhISrHQAqwAok6Y_7On3A

not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was saying God was his own Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:16-18, author's translation)

Sonship with the Father means equality with the Father. Because Jesus and the Father are the same thing, him being begotten, not created, by the Father, they share the same divinity. What the Father is able to do, the Son is also able to do. Their work is the same work because they are the same kind of being, deity. John understands this. It is not only the interpretation of the Jews that he is sharing, but his own interpretation. "Saying God was his own Father" was the same as "making himself equal with God." If John did not share that same interpretation, he should have challenged it. But, of course, he didn't challenge it.

The Firstborn of Creation

But doesn't the Scriptures call Jesus the "firstborn of creation"? Indeed, they do.

*He is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn** of all creation. Because by him all things were created, whether in the heavens or on the earth, visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and all things are held together by him, and he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the **firstborn** from the dead, in order that in all things he might be preeminent. (Colossians 1:15-18, ESV)*

Prepositions are something we learned about in grammar class and probably didn't give much concern to them. But they are very important. In its simplest definition, a preposition is "a word which can link verbs, nouns and pronouns together."²³ And there are all kinds of relationships these prepositions can define, such as place, time or direction. The Greek language can express a prepositional concept, can link, for example, two nouns in two ways, one, by using an actual Greek preposition, and two, by the use of a particular form of a noun.

So, for example, in the passage above the word "of" (which is a preposition in English) does not reflect an actual Greek preposition. New Testament Greek does not have a preposition "of." But the ending of the noun "creation" that Paul uses here tells us that it expresses a relationship to the noun "firstborn" and we translate that relationship with the word "of." The word "of" can express several kinds of relationship.

If I say, "I am the king of the world," I mean that I am king over the world. If I say, "I am the husband of Mary Ann," I mean the husband who belongs to the wife, Mary Ann. If I say, "The love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14), do I mean "love for Christ compels us" or do I mean "Christ's love for us compels us"? Here is where the word "of" does not describe with

²³<https://7esl.com/prepositions/#:~:text=In%20the%20English%20language%2C%20prepositions%20are%20words%20which,%28%20prepositions%20of%20movement%20%29%2C%E2%80%A6%20in%20a%20sentence.>

enough specificity and we must use a different preposition (like “for”) or a different way of expressing it (like “Christ’s love for us”).

In Paul’s description of Christ as “the firstborn of all creation,” am I to understand “the firstborn in creation,” meaning the first created being, or “the firstborn over all creation,” meaning the one who holds title and authority over all creation. Well, I think you can see from the remainder of Paul’s description of Jesus that he is concerned to show Jesus’ authority over all creation. And it might be true that being the first created being could give him this authority in some limited sense, but Paul is trying to emphasize that Jesus created all things, has authority over all things in creation, in fact, holds all the creation together by his divine power.

So just what does the word “firstborn” mean? In Scripture it can mean several things. The Hebrew word normally translated “firstborn” in our Bibles is *b^ekor*, and the Greek word so translated is *prototokos*. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament the Greek word *prototokos* is used to translate the Hebrew *b^ekor*. The concept behind “firstborn” comes simply from the first male child born to parents or the first offspring of an animal. This is the most common way it is used in the Old Testament. Custom said the firstborn son would have a double inheritance from his father. Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob by his wife Leah (Genesis 35:23, but lost his firstborn privilege because of sin against his father, Genesis 49:4). When God sent a plague that killed all the firstborn children and animals of Egypt, He passed over the firstborn sons of Israel if they sacrificed a lamb and put its blood on their doorways (Exodus 12:1-13).

But “firstborn” is used another way, as well. In Exodus 4:22 Yahweh tells Moses to assert to Pharaoh that Israel, the nation, is God’s firstborn son. But as a nation, Israel is not the first nation birthed by God. There were many nations birthed before Israel. Is God saying Israel is the only nation He has birthed? No, the term for that would be what we have already seen, *monogenes*, or “only begotten.” God takes credit for birthing all nations:

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. (Acts 17:26)

But “firstborn” can indicate one holding a special place of blessing and responsibility. Israel is special to God in that way, as He explains through Moses,

For you are a people holy to Yahweh your God. Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that Yahweh set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because Yahweh loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that Yahweh has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

God has given Israel the honor of being “firstborn” because He has chosen her from among all the nations to cradle the Messiah. Throughout the Old Testament it is predicted that Israel will be head over all the nations in the end:

Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Foreigners will join them and unite with the descendants of Jacob. Nations will take them and bring them to their own place. And Israel will take possession of the nations and make them male and female servants in Yahweh’s land. They will make captives of their captors and rule over their oppressors. (Isaiah 14:1,2)

“Firstborn” in this sense, then, is a position of favor. Is this the meaning in Colossians 1 when applied to Jesus? It certainly does not mean first created. Even if it is not saying Jesus is literally born first, it is saying his is the honor of the first born, not the first created. Whichever meaning it takes it cannot have the meaning “first created.” But Paul’s second use of the word for Jesus is “firstborn from the dead” and that phrase has absolutely no connotation of first created. It is obvious that the Witnesses have an axe to grind and are imposing this meaning on the word.

In the Beginning Was the Word

So, John’s very first phrase as he begins his Gospel is that the eternal Word is the beginner in the beginning of all things. He is indeed the Alpha, the Firstborn, the preeminent one, in fact, the Almighty God, Yahweh. But the very next thing he will tell us sets up a kind of complication that is critical for us in understanding who this Word is.

The Eternal Fellowship

“...and the Word was with God...” (John 1:1b)

[kai ho logos ēn pros ton theon]

John has startled us in John 1:1a by describing the Word, Jesus, as the beginner, in the beginning, of all things. That is a declaration that Jesus, the Word, is the Creator God. As if that were not enough of a curveball, John now introduces the Someone whom we have always associated with the beginning, the Creator God, and told us that the Word was **with** Him. What is going on here? Isn't the Word the very Creator God who made the beginning happen? Yes, John has told us so. But now we learn he was in fellowship with the Creator God. Fellowship?

The Mighty Preposition

We talked earlier of prepositions, how they relate verbs, nouns and pronouns together. And here in John 1:1b is a genuine preposition, *pros*, which relates the Word and God. We have translated it “with.” The Word was “with” God.

Venerable lexicographer (that's a dictionary person) Joseph Henry Thayer²⁴ says of this preposition's use in John 1:1, “equivalent to...**with**...after verbs of remaining, dwelling, tarrying, etc. (which require one to be conceived of as always turned toward one).”²⁵ Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich,²⁶ also great lexicographers, describe the use of *pros* here as to “be (in company) with someone.”²⁷

Why is it important to John for us to know that the Word was in fellowship with, in company with, God? His description has already told us that the Word is the Creator God, which he expands upon in verse 3:

All things came into being through him, and nothing that came into being came into being without him. (John 1:3, author's translation)

But now John wants us to know that there are two persons who might be legitimately called God, and boy oh boy, is that ever a mindblower. It has been the genius of Judaism that there is only one God. John is a good Jewish boy who grew up affirming the truth of the Scriptures that God is one. But now his perspective has taken a definite shift. Is he denying that God is one? By no means.

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Henry_Thayer

²⁵ <https://biblehub.com/greek/4314.htm>

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bauer%27s_Lexicon

²⁷ https://www.wenstrom.org/downloads/written/word_studies/greek/pros.pdf

Plurality in the Godhead

There are definite hints in the Old Testament that the one God is not a singular individual. We see it, of course, in Genesis 1:26, when God plans man's creation:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.

Or Genesis 3:22, when He disciplines man's rebellion:

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.

A history of Jewish interpretation of this apparent plurality includes that God was consulting with angels, that He consulted figuratively with the tangible (animals, trees, etc.) and intangible (angels) creatures already created, that He consulted the pre-existing souls of humans, that He consulted His own heart, that He consulted wisdom or His own Word, personalized in a metaphorical way, that He consulted with the Torah or Law, and there were suggestions made that the plural "us" was not the correct way of understanding the Hebrew (a minority view, for sure).²⁸ A very common view is that God is using a plural of majesty, speaking of Himself in plural terms to convey how majestic a person He is.²⁹

But there are plenty of other clues in the Old Testament that God is not a singularity but a composite unity. Perhaps the clearest evidence is in the visitations of the Angel or Messenger of Yahweh.

The Angel of Yahweh

The word "angel" literally means messenger, and "messenger" would be a better translation of the Hebrew word *melek* in this context. We first meet the Messenger of Yahweh in Genesis 16, when Sarah harshly mistreats Hagar, her servant, who has become pregnant with a child on her behalf as a concubine of Abraham. The pregnant Hagar flees into the wilderness in despair. The Messenger of Yahweh finds Hagar seeking shelter at a spring and initially asks her questions about what is going on. We may assume from what Hagar says later, that the Messenger of Yahweh appears to her in human form, because it is not until He begins prophesying to her about her child and commanding her to return that she realizes it is Yahweh who is speaking to her. In fact, though throughout it keeps describing this man who is speaking to her as the Messenger of Yahweh, in verse 13 a shift occurs:

²⁸https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329148193_History_of_the_Jewish_interpretation_of_Genesis_126_35_322_in_the_Middle_Ages

²⁹ <https://www.compellingtruth.org/majestic-plural.html#:~:text=The%20Latin%20language%20has%20another%20term%20for%20the,ancient%20Hebrew%2C%20Punjabi%2C%20Telugu%2C%20Hindustani%2C%20and%20Egyptian%20Arabic.>

So she called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me."

Now, instead of identifying the person speaking to her as the Messenger of Yahweh, Scripture says it is "the name of Yahweh who spoke to her." And Hagar believes she has seen God.

What do we make of this odd phrase, "the name of Yahweh who spoke to her"? The name of Yahweh is described as a personal being who can speak. This person yet seems to be separate from Yahweh, being described, of course, initially as the Messenger or Angel of Yahweh.

During the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, Yahweh told Moses:

"Behold, I send an angel [messenger] before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. "But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. (Exodus 23:20-22)

This angel or messenger is protecting and leading Israel and must be obeyed. If he is rebelled against, he will not forgive Israel. Yahweh's name is in him. He is to be viewed as Yahweh Himself. Obeying the messenger's voice is obeying Yahweh. This seems to be the same person who has appeared to Hagar.

Our next encounter with the Angel or Messenger of Yahweh is in Genesis 22, where Abraham has traveled with his son Isaac to Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (Genesis 22:9-12)

The Angel or Messenger of Yahweh calls to Abraham from heaven. Though he is Yahweh's messenger, he says to Abraham that Abraham has not withheld his only son from him, as if he, the messenger, is God, the one who told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:1,2).

And the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your

offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” (Genesis 22:15–18)

Here the Angel of Yahweh identifies as Yahweh (“By myself I have sworn,” “declares Yahweh,” “I will surely bless you,” and “you have obeyed my voice”). We could argue, perhaps, that as the one speaking for Yahweh (but why does Yahweh have someone speaking for Him?) the Angel or Messenger speaks as Yahweh, because he faithfully speaks Yahweh’s message. But we will see in Exodus 3, our next encounter with the Angel of Yahweh, that there is actual identity of the Messenger with Yahweh Himself.

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.” When Yahweh saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him from the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3:1–6)

Whereas it says the Angel of Yahweh appeared to Moses in the flame inside the bush, it then says that God Himself called to Moses out of the bush. And the place is made holy ground by the presence of the Messenger of Yahweh in the bush. Moses is afraid to look at God.

The messenger sent from Yahweh is Yahweh, is God. They are separate and distinct, the One sending the other, yet to see the messenger is to see God.

Two Yahwehs

Nowhere is this more clear than in Genesis 18 and 19. Abraham is visited by three men:

And Yahweh appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. (Genesis 18:1–3)

One of the three “men” is Yahweh, the other two, we learn soon, are angels. Abraham seems to recognize that Yahweh is visiting him, and he addresses Yahweh as Lord, in the Hebrew, *adonai* (lord, master). When Yahweh tells Abraham that He is going to judge Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham questions if He will destroy these communities if they have righteous people in them and Yahweh says that even if they have 10 righteous people in them He will not

destroy them. But the only righteous among them are Lot and his family, less than 10. So Yahweh sends the two angels to evacuate Lot and his family from Sodom before the coming judgment, and Yahweh goes and stands overlooking these two cities and brings judgment.

Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. Yahweh said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice, so that Yahweh may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Then Yahweh said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know." (Genesis 18:16–21)

And Yahweh went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place. (Genesis 18:33)

Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from Yahweh out of heaven. (Genesis 19:24)

There is the Yahweh who has visited Abraham, the Yahweh who has been accompanied by two angels, all of them appearing in human form, come to judge the twin cities of the plain. And there is Yahweh in heaven. Yahweh on earth rains sulfur and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah from Yahweh in heaven. His investigation is complete, Lot rescued from the city, and Yahweh on earth authorizes sulfur and fire from Yahweh in heaven.

It seems there is a Yahweh who interacts with people on earth and a Yahweh who is in heaven, the former personage usually designated the Angel or Messenger of Yahweh (or, as in Genesis 31:9-13, the Angel of God). In Genesis 32, the level of interaction this earthly Yahweh has with Jacob is extraordinary.

Jacob has fled from his father-in-law, Laban, to return with his now large family to his home in Canaan. As he enters the land, we read:

Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim. (Genesis 32:1–2, ESV)

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I

will not let you go unless you bless me.” And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.” (Genesis 32:22–30, ESV)

Jacob clearly recognizes the divine nature of this person with whom he is wrestling and demands a blessing from him. The man changes Jacob’s name to Israel, so Jacob/Israel now wants to know the man’s name. This is the same thing Moses asks of Yahweh in Exodus 3. There is a desire to know the divine name. The man does not tell Jacob/Israel his name, but he does bless Jacob/Israel, a divine action. And Jacob is convinced he has seen God face to face without being killed.

In the prophet Hosea’s commentary on this event in Jacob’s life, he writes:

In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us — Yahweh, the God of hosts, Yahweh is his name. (Hosea 12:3–5)

God with God

So when we come to John 1:1b and read that the Word was in fellowship with God (*ton theon*, in the Greek), we certainly have precedent for this from the Old Testament. And in what follows in John’s Gospel we see John’s description of this intimate connection Jesus has with the Father, and Jesus’ own description of it, repeated again and again.

And the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us, and we saw his glory, glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

No one has ever seen God. The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained Him. (John 1:16-18)

But Jesus responded to them, “My Father is working until now and I too am working.” For this reason then the Jews began seeking rather to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was saying God was his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus answered them, therefore, saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son is not able to do anything by himself, but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever he sees Him do, these things he likewise does. Because the Father loves the Son and has shown him what He Himself does, and greater works than these He will show him so that you might be amazed. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so

also to whomever the Son chooses he gives life. For the Father does not judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all might honor the Son even as they honor the Father. The one who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly I say to you that the one who hears my word and believes in the One who sent me has eternal life and will not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:17-24)

I and the Father are one thing. (John 10:30)

And now, glorify me, Father, from Yourself, with the glory I had with you before the world existed.” (John 17:5)

Jesus and the Father have the fellowship of those who are on the same level, though there is an obvious deference Jesus gives to the Father. Is it possible to be equal to someone and yet for that person to be your leader? Of course. Human beings are all equal to each other, despite our attempts to place ourselves in positions and classes above and separate from one another. And yet fellow humans act as “superiors” or leaders over us. In the divine Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equally God, but the Father directs the Son (“*the Son is not able to do anything by himself, but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever he sees Him do, these things he likewise does*”) and the Son directs the Spirit (“*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father is sending in my name, He will teach you all things and remind you of all the things I have told you*”).

God Is One

But how does this square with the Biblical, and thus very Jewish, perspective that God is one. In fact, the Jewish creed is found in Deuteronomy 6:4, which the English Standard Version translates this way:

“Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one.

The Hebrew word translated “one” is the word *echad*. And in point of fact it can be translated and often is translated “one” in many Old Testament passages. But it does not always represent a numerical oneness, a solitary oneness. There are many passages where it obviously means a oneness of many in unity:

Judges 20:8, *And all the people arose as one man*

1 Samuel 11:7, *they came out with one consent* (literally, as one man)

Ezra 2:64, *The whole congregation together* (literally, as one)

Ecclesiastes 11:6, *whether they both shall be alike* (literally, as one) *good*

Isaiah 65:7, *Your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together* (literally, as one)

Isaiah 65:25, *The wolf and the lamb shall feed together* (literally, as one)

So to say that God is one does not necessarily mean He is a solitary personality who alone possesses deity or the divine nature. It is not unlike Moses' declaration of the marital relationship of husband and wife, that the two become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). And we have clearly seen in our examination of the Old Testament passages a suggestion of plurality in the Godhead, that such a oneness in the Godhead is not only plausible, but demanded.

Nevertheless, a more likely translation of Deuteronomy 6:4, consistent with the usage of *echad* in the Old Testament, would be,

Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.

Another instance of "one" translated this way would be 1 Kings 4:19, *he was the only* (literally, one) *officer in the land.*

This plurality in oneness is why Paul could say,

Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Corinthians 8:4–6, ESV)

And notice the subtlety of the prepositions (the mighty prepositions). Of the Father it is said that all things are "from" Him and we exist "for" Him. And of the Son it is said that all things are "through" Him and we exist "through" Him. Their equality is affirmed, and yet also their line of authority and distinctiveness is affirmed.

This is the very thing John is seeking to affirm in John 1:1. Jesus, the Word, is the beginner of all things, the Yahweh of Genesis 1:1 who created all things. Yet He is distinct from the Father as a separate personality with whom the Father may have fellowship. In the beginning, the Word was with God.

Jehovah's Witnesses can affirm the distinction, but not the equality.

The Word Was...a god?

“...and the Word was God...” (John 1:1c)

Kai theos ēn ho logos

The Word, Jesus, the Son of God who adopted human nature, was in the beginning, was, we should say, the beginner at the beginning, and was in fellowship with *ho theos*, God, and so was separate from, yet equal to, God. And John finishes this description by stating very clearly...well, what did he clearly state? That is the question.

The Proper Predicate Nominative and the Elusive Definite Article

With John’s third statement about the Word, we are once again thrown into the realm of grammar. There are some 722 predicate nominatives (see appendix 2) in the New Testament and about 40% of them are in John’s writings (his Gospel, three letters, and Revelation).

A predicate nominative is a noun that is linked by a verb of being to the subject of that verb and thus forms a referencing description of that subject. In English we normally have the order subject, verb of being, and predicate nominative, as in the statement, “Jesus is the Lord.” Our most common verb of being is the verb ‘to be’ in all its forms. We could form it in past tense (Jesus was a teacher), future tense (Jesus will be king), the infinitive (We knew Jesus to be the savior), and the participle (Jesus being our master).

But in the Greek language, word order is not essential, and in fact, we see every possible word order in the New Testament. Here in John 1:1 the word order, if written in English, would be, “and God was the Word.” We suppose that “the Word” is the subject, since that has been John’s subject throughout, though the nature of a predicate nominative is that it equates the subject and the predicate. If the Word was God then it is also true that God was the Word.

The other grammatical issue in this verse, the one that Jehovah’s Witnesses capitalize on, is that the predicate nominative, “God,” does not have the definite article on it, as it did in the second part of this verse. Here is the verse in English with a transliterated Greek underneath it:

*In the beginning was **the** Word, and **the** Word was with God, and **the** Word was God
en archē ēn **ho** logos, kai ho logos ēn pros **ton** theon, kai theos ēn **ho** logos*

We see the definite article “the” (highlighted in bold) with “the Word,” *logos*, throughout, but with the word “God” we see the article with the first mention of God but not the second. How significant is that? It could be very significant. Let me explain the Greek usage of the definite article.

The definite article makes a word definite. Which book am I talking about? I’m talking about “the” book. If I don’t intend any book in particular, in English I can say “a” book. Greek does the

same thing, but the Greek language of the New Testament does not have an indefinite article “a” (“an” before words beginning with a vowel). The Greek language is less precise in this regard. For the Greek speaker to make a word intentionally indefinite he or she has to omit the definite article “the” from the noun.

But the odd thing about it is that just omitting a definite article from a noun doesn’t mean for the Greek speaker that he or she intends the noun to be indefinite. Here is an example:

“for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas” (John 18:13)

In the Greek there is not a definite article “the” with the noun “father-in-law,” but it would be a mistake to translate this, “He was ‘a’ father-in-law of Caiaphas,” unless Caiaphas had more than one wife, and therefore Caiaphas had more than one father-in-law. So we see that John, in this case, intended “father-in-law” to be definite but he did not use the article. And this situation is repeated over and over in the New Testament.

What this means is that it is up to the reader to interpret the author’s intended meaning. Does the author intend the noun to be viewed as definite or indefinite? And to compound the problem of interpretation, leaving off the article could also be a way the Greek speaker signaled that the noun should be understood as qualitative. Here is an example of that:

Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” (Luke 12:1)

“Hypocrisy” is the predicate nominative noun in this sentence (yeast...is hypocrisy) and Luke does not put a definite article on it (If he had it would be translated, “which is the hypocrisy”). But it does not make sense to say Luke meant, “which is ‘a’ hypocrisy.” The yeast of the Pharisees, the thing about them that permeates all they do, is not ‘a’ hypocrisy, but is the quality of hypocrisy.

Here is another example of how leaving off the article leads to a qualitative sense to the noun:

“What was good to me became death” (Romans 7:13)

What was good to Paul, the law of Moses, did not become ‘a’ death, nor ‘the’ death, to Paul, but the quality of death, death itself.

This use or lack of use of the definite article is especially confusing for English speakers when it comes to proper names and titles. Here in John 1:1 the apostle puts an article on “God” in the second part of his sentence, but in English we don’t translate it, “and the Word was with ‘the’ God.” We would say that of course there is only one God so we don’t need the definite article in this case. If we thought John was emphasizing the one and only true God, that the Word was with **the** one and only God, we would put the article in our translation. And maybe John was

emphasizing this, but it would still work for our translation to simply say, “the Word was with God,” because for English speakers that communicates the true God.

So what does it mean when John leaves the article off of the word “God” in the last part of John 1:1? Well, it could mean one of three things. Either John still intends the word “God” to be considered definite, “and the Word was [the] God,” or he meant it to be indefinite, “and the Word was a god,” or he meant it to be qualitative, “and the Word was Godness/divine/deity.” How do we decide?

Figuring Out John’s Intent

Since John could have intended either meaning for “God” by leaving off the article, we need a clue for understanding his intent. Some have sought the answer in the very word order John uses in the Greek. It has been proposed³⁰ that predicate nominatives that are put before the verb are intended to be either definite or qualitative. That would be a great clue for John’s meaning in John 1:1, but unfortunately it isn’t borne out in practice. In my study of over 700 predicate nominatives in the New Testament, the evidence doesn’t bear out this proposal.³¹

There are plenty of examples of predicate nominatives without the definite article coming before the verb that are certainly indefinite. Here are a couple of them:

When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. (Matthew 14:26)

It is not “the” ghost, some particular ghost that they are seeing, and highly unlikely that they are expressing that it is the quality of ghost that scares them. Only an indefinite translation makes sense of their intention.

“For I myself am a man under authority” (Luke 7:8)

The Centurion who wants Jesus to heal his servant is not “the” man under authority (as if he were the only one) and certainly not ‘man’ under authority, as the qualitative everyman (“I am man the species under authority), but ‘a’ man under authority. And we need an example from John:

“Did we not rightly say that you are a Samaritan” (John 8:48)

Here we have a definite noun, Samaritan, but Jesus’ enemies are not saying Jesus is ‘the’ Samaritan, some particular Samaritan, nor are they saying he is Samaritan-ish, the qualitative perspective, but rather simply ‘a’ Samaritan. That is an insult, in their minds.

³⁰ A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament, E. C. Colwell and Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1, Philip B. Harner

³¹ See Appendix 2

In each of these cases the Greek word order is predicate nominative then verb, but it is clear that the Greek speaker is not thereby making it clear that he intends the predicate nominative to be definite or qualitative. We determine his intent by thinking clearly about what he could intend.

So what could John intend about his last segment of John 1:1, “and the Word was...”?

Could Jesus Be ‘a’ god

From John’s perspective, could he, would he, describe Jesus as ‘a’ god? Jehovah’s Witnesses claim so in their online commentary:

the Word was a god: Or “the Word was divine [or, “a godlike one”].” This statement by John describes a quality or characteristic of “the Word” (Greek, *ho lo’gos*; see study note on **the Word** in this verse), that is, Jesus Christ. The Word’s preeminent position as the firstborn Son of God through whom God created all other things is a basis for describing him as “a god; a godlike one; divine; a divine being.” Many translators favor the rendering “the Word was God,” equating him with God Almighty. However, there are good reasons for saying that John did not mean that “the Word” was the same as Almighty God. First, the preceding clause and the following clause both clearly state that “the Word” was “*with* God.” Also, the Greek word *the·os’* occurs three times in verses 1 and 2. In the first and third occurrences, *the·os’* is preceded by the definite article in Greek; in the second occurrence, there is no article. Many scholars agree that the absence of the definite article before the second *the·os’* is significant. When the article is used in this context, *the·os’* refers to God Almighty. On the other hand, the absence of the article in this grammatical construction makes *the·os’* qualitative in meaning and describes a characteristic of “the Word.”³²

This commentary appears to be taking both the view that “God” should be viewed as indefinite and as qualitative, two very different meanings. Since they believe that Jesus is a created being they cannot mean by “divine” (their qualitative translation) equal in essence, but rather choose to view it as “godlike,” less than God. And to be fair, in English we do use the word “divine” to mean, often, godlike, not equal to God. But is that what John would mean?

The Biblical Perspective on ‘gods’

To get at John’s intent it would be helpful to understand the Jewish perspective on gods and godlike beings. And helpfully, we have in one place in the Old Testament, a clear teaching from no less than Moses on the nature of gods, and that forms the consistent perspective throughout

³² <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/john/1/#v43001001>

the rest of the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 32 Moses recites the words of a song to the whole assembly of Israel. His song begins:

^{32:1} Pay attention, heavens, and I will speak; listen, earth, to the words from my mouth.

Moses is not only speaking the words of this song to earth's inhabitants, but heaven's inhabitants, as well. Which inhabitants of heaven would he be addressing? He isn't instructing God, but other members of the heavens, whom he will describe later.

² Let my teaching fall like rain and my word settle like dew, like gentle rain on new grass and showers on tender plants.

His song is one of instruction, designed to spark growth in the one's listening, and that certainly does not include God.

³ For I will proclaim Yahweh's name. Declare the greatness of our God! ⁴ The Rock—his work is perfect; all his ways are just. A faithful God, without bias, he is righteous and true.

What is God's name? Moses states it here, though it is hidden in our English translation. Whenever you see the word LORD with the 'ORD' in small capital letters in most English translations, that is a representation of the Hebrew word for God's name, Yahweh. So Moses wants to declare Yahweh's name, which means he wants to declare the character of Yahweh, what it is that makes Yahweh special. Yahweh is a Rock, not shifting sands or drowning waters, and His ways are perfect and just, a Rock who never falters, faithful and without bias, righteous and true.

⁵ His people have acted corruptly toward him; this is their defect—they are not his children but a devious and crooked generation. ⁶ Is this how you repay Yahweh, you foolish and senseless people? Isn't he your Father and Creator? Didn't he make you and sustain you?

Do you recall how, almost immediately after released by Yahweh from slavery in Egypt, when Israel had come to Mt. Sinai and saw the display of Yahweh's power on the mountain, that Moses went up on the mountain to receive the ten commandments? While Moses is getting the Law from Yahweh, the people convince Aaron to form out of gold a god or gods for them to worship (Exodus 32). And there were several occasions on which they were "foolish and senseless" about their Father and Creator.

⁷ Remember the days of old; consider the years of past generations. Ask your father, and he will tell you, your elders, and they will teach you. ⁸ When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance and divided the human race, he set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the people of Israel. ⁹ But Yahweh's portion is his people, Jacob, his own inheritance.

Yahweh is God of all the nations, determining their boundaries, the lands they inherit. But He is especially the God of Israel, His people, viewing them as His special inheritance who receives His special affection. They are the center of His world, the focus of His attention, the ones He has chosen to use as the example for all the other nations. The people of Israel are the ones Yahweh intended to teach the other nations about Him, the true God.

¹⁰ He found him in a desolate land, in a barren, howling wilderness; he surrounded him, cared for him, and protected him as the pupil of his eye. ¹¹ He watches over his nest like an eagle and hovers over his young; he spreads his wings, catches him, and carries him on his feathers. ¹² Yahweh alone led him, with no help from a foreign god. ¹³ He made him ride on the heights of the land and eat the produce of the field. He nourished him with honey from the rock and oil from flinty rock, ¹⁴ curds from the herd and milk from the flock, with the fat of lambs, rams from Bashan, and goats, with the choicest grains of wheat; you drank wine from the finest grapes.

Yahweh had done everything possible to make Israel a flourishing nation, without the help of any foreign god. Israel was aware of the various gods the peoples around them worshiped. Egypt worshiped Osiris, Isis, Horus, Re, Amon, and Anubis, among others. The peoples of Canaan worshiped Baal, Asherah, Chemosh, Dagon, El, and Moloch. None of those gods helped Israel make it through the desert.

In Exodus 12:12 Yahweh told Moses, before the eve of Passover and Israel's departure or exodus from Egypt, "For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD." Whom did Yahweh judge? If these "gods" are not real entities, the entities Moses is addressing in the heavens, there is no real judgment on them. Rather, the judgment is on Egypt, not their gods.

¹⁵ Then Jeshurun became fat and rebelled—you became fat, bloated, and gorged. He abandoned the God who made him and scorned the Rock of his salvation. ¹⁶ They provoked his jealousy with different gods; they enraged him with detestable practices.

My wife and I support a young woman in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We had led her to the Lord in 2008. Her parents had died of AIDS and her grandmother could not afford to feed her, so her grandmother gave her to God one day, which means she took her out in the middle of the city and she abandoned her on the street and left her to God to take care of her. Well, He did. She made her way to our ministry there in Addis and she got saved. We helped her with room and board and school and now she is studying accounting in college. What do you think we would feel if we started seeing Facebook posts from her thanking Fred Smith from FedEx for sustaining her? I'm pretty sure Fred is a good guy, but he had nothing to do with Mitu's rescue from the streets. He hasn't been taking care of her for 12 years. He hasn't answered her questions, commiserated with her when she's down, or prayed for her all this time. What could

possibly motivate her to do such a thing? We've been faithful and loyal to her. It would be the utmost betrayal.

But that is exactly what Israel did to Yahweh. They gave credit to Baal for making their crops grow, for making their cows birth calves, and for sustaining their lives. They brought sacrifices to Baal and Molech, in some instances even sacrificing their infant children to Molech to move him to act on their behalf. But Moses explains what was really happening.

¹⁷ They sacrificed to demons, not God, to gods they had not known, new gods that had just arrived, which your ancestors did not fear.

The gods that Israel began sacrificing to were not who Israel thought they were. Baal was not the god of fertility and storms. He was a fallen angel who was masquerading as a god who deserved worship and to whom you must sacrifice to get his blessing. No doubt this demon was able to persuade his followers with supernatural acts of power. No doubt he was able to communicate to his prophets and priests to express his desires and wishes. But was this demon a Rock, something solid to stand on in a desert storm, not shifting sands or drowning waters. Was everything about him perfection and justice. Was he true and faithful to those who worshiped him and not moved to bias or prejudice when it came to how he treated each and every one of his people. Was the demon representing himself as Baal the standard of what is right and true? No way.

¹⁸ You ignored the Rock who gave you birth; you forgot the God who gave birth to you.

¹⁹ When Yahweh saw this, he despised them, angered by his sons and daughters. ²⁰ He said, "I will hide my face from them; I will see what will become of them, for they are a perverse generation—unfaithful children. ²¹ They have provoked my jealousy with what is not a god; they have enraged me with their worthless idols.

So here is the final verdict. Israel has worshiped worthless idols that represent what is not really a god. The demons who masquerade as gods are not really gods in the sense of the true God, Yahweh. They are real, supernatural beings with abilities beyond that of humans, we might even say "divine," but who are nothing compared to Yahweh. Only Yahweh can create something out of nothing. Only Yahweh knows all things, is everywhere present, is eternal, is indeed uncreated. Only He is capable of providing the rain that gently waters the new grass and tender plants, that causes the crops to produce their yield, that makes plants and animals and humans fertile for reproduction. Only He is capable of rescuing us from the consequences of our rebellion.

This is the perspective Israelites had of gods. The gods are not good things, but bad things. They are evil spirits pretending to be gods who deserve worship. They are what the apostle Paul describes as "so-called gods" (1 Corinthians 8:5) and why Paul says you cannot go to the worship services of idols because that is participating in "the table of demons" (1 Corinthians 10:21). Such gods always demand worship and claim to be the creators, but they are not. Would the apostle John really have depicted Jesus as a god? Well, it is still possible. Perhaps

he is giving a new spin to gods, making a new definition. Jehovah's Witnesses would define 'god' in this sense as one who has the "preeminent position as the firstborn Son of God through whom God created all other things," thus "describing him as a god; a godlike one; divine; a divine being." Is this the way John describes Jesus throughout the rest of his Gospel?

John's View of Jesus in the Rest of His Gospel

If we would understand how John intended us to understand John 1:1c, “and the Word was God,” we need to see John's representation of Jesus in places outside of John 1:1, that is, in the remainder of his Gospel.

The Only Begotten

John further describes Jesus in his Gospel in some pretty stunning ways. In verse 14 of chapter one he says,

And the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us, and we saw his glory, glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And just a few verses later he says,

Because from his fullness we have received even grace after grace. Because though the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained Him. (John 1:16-18)

To be sure, the description “only begotten God” is not in all Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of John. Some read “the only begotten Son,” some “the only begotten Son of God,” and some simply “the only begotten.” But remember, begotten does not equal created. If we call it a creation at all it is not to be considered a making of something different than me, but rather making someone just like me, someone of the same stuff, and so we call this generating rather than creating.

If Jesus is, as John says, the only begotten from the Father, he would have to be of the same stuff as the Father. Is the Father eternal? Then the Son would have to be eternal, as well. Is the Father omnipotent (all powerful)? Then so is the Son. Omnipresent (everywhere present)? So is the Son. So there could not be a time when the Son did not exist, else he would not be eternal. And so there would be no reason not to consider him God, and it would be defamatory to consider him ‘a’ god.

The Messiah to Whom the Spirit Is Given Without Measure

John the Baptist is challenged by his own disciples with the fact that now Jesus and his disciples are baptizing more people than John the Baptist. John the Baptist gives this reply:

John answered, “No one can receive anything unless it is given to him from heaven. You can bear witness that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah, but I am one sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom, who

stands and hears him, greatly rejoices at the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine is full. He must increase and I must decrease."

"The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is from the earth is from the earth and speaks from the earth. The one who is from heaven is above all. What he says and hears he bears witness to, and yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony has put his seal on this, that God is true. For the one God sent speaks the words of God, for God gives him the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him." (John 3:27-36)

John clearly denies being the Messiah, the promised Anointed One, but indicates that Jesus is that Anointed One. Jesus is the bridegroom, Israel his bride, while John the Baptist is the less important friend of the bridegroom, charged with bringing the bride to the groom. It is the bridegroom who must become the most important person to the bride.

But John the Baptist further characterizes Jesus as the one who is "above all." Does he exclude God from being under Jesus? Not specifically, he doesn't. But he does speak of Jesus being sent by God and speaking God's words, to whom God has given the Holy Spirit without measure. These are the acts of a superior, we would suppose. Jesus obeys the Father and is supplied by the Father with the Holy Spirit. Yet, at the same time, the Father has given all things into Jesus' hand.

There are two things at work here. One, even though Jesus is the same stuff as the Father, the same DNA, to use an analogy, and is as eternal as the Father, nevertheless, he was generated by the Father, begotten, and so the generator has superiority/authority over the generated. But since this generation resulted in someone exactly like the Father, the "exact imprint of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3), then he must be considered equal in every sense. Superior authority does not make for superior nature.

So the Apostle John communicates through the sharing of John the Baptist's testimony, his own understanding of Jesus as the center of all God's plan for redeeming humankind. Believe in Jesus and you will have eternal life. Don't believe, and you will have the Father's wrath.

Equal with God

When, as recounted in John 5, Jesus heals a man who had been an invalid for 38 years, and does so on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders are incensed and challenge Jesus and his legitimacy as sent from God. Jesus responds this way:

And because of this the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he did these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus responded to them, "My Father is working until now and I too

am working.” For this reason then the Jews began seeking rather to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was saying God was his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus answered them, therefore, saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son is not able to do anything by himself, but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever he sees Him do, these things he likewise does. Because the Father loves the Son and has shown him what He Himself does, and greater works than these He will show him so that you might be amazed. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also to whomever the Son chooses he gives life. For the Father does not judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all might honor the Son even as they honor the Father. The one who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly I say to you that the one who hears my word and believes in the One who sent me has eternal life and will not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:16-24)

Why does Jesus’ statement that the Father is working and Jesus is working too, shock the Jewish religious leaders into seeking to kill Jesus? Because this is blasphemy, if Jesus is a created being. It is making himself equal with God. What is the working that the Father is doing until now? Well it started with God the Father creating all things and then it continued with the Father upholding all things. He upholds creation (keeping it running, we might say; Genesis 9:8-17; Job 38&39; Psalm 104; Psalm 135; Matthew 10:29-30; Acts 17:28), He upholds Israel forever (2 Chronicles 9:8), He upholds the righteous individual (Psalm 37:17), He upholds the needy (Psalm 140:12), and He upholds David’s throne (Isaiah 9:7). But Jesus does this, as well:

Colossians 1:¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Are the Jews wrong to believe that Jesus is making himself equal with the Father? That is what the Jehovah’s Witnesses claim:

While properly referring to God as his Father, Jesus never claimed equality with God.³³ (Joh 5:17) Rather, it was the Jews who accused Jesus of attempting to make himself God’s equal by claiming God as his Father. Just as the Jews were wrong in stating that

³³ <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1001070673>

Jesus was a Sabbath breaker, they were wrong in making this accusation. Jesus makes this evident by what he says as recorded in verses 19 through 24—he could do nothing of his own initiative. Clearly, he was not claiming to be equal to God.—Joh 14:28.

But Jesus himself has said to the Jews, “He [the Father] has given all judgment to the Son, so that all might honor the Son even as they honor the Father.” If the Father wants all to honor His Son as they honor Him, does that not make Jesus equal with the Father? The Jews have not mistaken Jesus in this matter. Yes, Jesus is doing what he sees the Father do, and as John the Baptist said, the Father has sent the Son and given him the Spirit, but that is a function of superior authority, not superior essence or nature. Husbands and wives are equal in essence, nature or substance, but God gives husbands authority over their wives. That does not make wives any less equal to their husbands.

And this is why Jesus can say, in John 14:28, the passage cited at the end of the Witnesses commentary on John 5, “the Father is greater than I am,” not meaning, greater in essence or substance, but greater in authority, and so he does what his Father commands him (14:31).

No, John obviously accepts the conclusion of the Jews that Jesus is claiming to be equal with God. That is why he has included this incident in his Gospel.

The Only One Who Has Seen the Father

After Jesus feeds the 5,000 and walks on water, the crowds come to him seeking more free food, choosing to see Jesus as only a provider of their physical needs. But Jesus does not give them that option. He is the source of all their life, of eternal life.

And they were saying, “Isn’t this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now be saying that he is come down from heaven?” Jesus responded, “Don’t grumble with each other. No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard from the Father and learned will come to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God, he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness and died. This is the bread that has come down from heaven, that anyone who eats of it may not die. I am the bread of life come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:42-51)

What does Jesus mean when he says no one but him has seen the Father? What about angels who attend Yahweh and sing “holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh Almighty”? What about those who have reported seeing Yahweh, like Abraham and Moses? Even John has been given a glimpse of the Father according to his account in Revelation 4&5.

No, Jesus must mean something different than this. What does it mean to truly see God? John has told us in chapter 1, verse 18, that no one has seen God. Paul describes God in 1 Timothy 6:16 as, "The only one who has immortality, the one who dwells in unapproachable light, whom **no one has seen nor is able to see**, to Him be honor and eternal sovereignty." The vision that angels and chosen saints like Abraham, Moses and the apostle John have seen of God, is not the ultimate seeing of Him. It is seeing a representation of Him. Only God can see Himself in the ultimate sense. And that is what Jesus claims of himself. He alone has seen the Father.

I Am

In John 8 Jesus gets into another debate with the Jewish leaders. They dispute Jesus' testimony and its validity, they dispute his origin from God, and they dispute his claim that they are not really Abraham's children. This leads to one really amazing claim by Jesus.

The Jews answered and said to him, "Did we not say well that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" Jesus responded, "I don't have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. But I don't seek my own glory. There is One who seeks it and who judges. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will not see death forever." The Jews said, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died and the prophets, and you say, 'If anyone keeps my word he will not taste death forever.' You aren't greater than our father Abraham who died, or the prophets who died. Who do you think you are?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. My Father is the One who glorifies me and you claim Him as your God. And yet, you don't know Him, but I know him. If I said I didn't know Him, I would be a liar like you all. But I know Him and I keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and rejoiced." Then the Jews said, "You aren't fifty years old and you've seen Abraham?" Jesus told them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." Then they took up stones to cast at him. But Jesus was hidden from them and went out of the temple. (John 8:48-59)

The Jewish leaders' anger at Jesus' suggesting that he is greater than their father Abraham prompts Jesus' cryptic statement, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day." They point out the obvious, that Jesus isn't even 50 years old yet (my guess is he was about 39) and so he couldn't in any way be contemporary with Abraham. But they take up stones to kill the blasphemer when he says, "Before Abraham was, I am."

In Exodus 3 we read of Moses' encounter with the Angel of Yahweh in the burning bush and Moses' recognition that he is interacting with God. He asks God what His name is, who he should say is sending him to Egypt to bring Israel out of slavery, and God responds, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" The Jewish leaders get the reference Jesus is making. Jesus is claiming to be Yahweh, the great I AM.

Not surprisingly, Jehovah's Witnesses must do some gymnastics to explain this away:

The opposing Jews wanted to stone Jesus for claiming that he had "seen Abraham," although, as they said, Jesus was "not yet 50 years old." (Joh 8:57) Jesus' response was to tell them about his prehuman existence as a mighty spirit creature in heaven before Abraham was born. Some claim that this verse identifies Jesus with God. They argue that the Greek expression used here, *e-go' ei-mi'* (rendered "I am" in some Bibles), is an allusion to the Septuagint rendering of Ex 3:14 and that both verses should be rendered the same way. (See study note on Joh 4:26.) In this context, however, the action expressed by the Greek verb *ei-mi'* started "before Abraham came into existence" and was still in progress. It is therefore properly translated "I have been" rather than "I am," and a number of ancient and modern translations use wording similar to "I have been." In fact, at Joh 14:9, the same form of the Greek verb *ei-mi'* is used to render Jesus' words: "Even after I have been with you men for such a long time, Philip, have you not come to know me?" Most translations use a similar wording, showing that depending on context there is no valid grammatical objection to rendering *ei-mi'* as "have been."³⁴

There may be no grammatical objection in general to rendering *eimi* as "have been," but what we are then being asked to believe in this context is that the Jewish leaders deliberately misunderstood Jesus' intent. They are willing to stone Jesus because he said he has been in existence as a "mighty spirit creature in heaven before Abraham was born?" Doesn't make sense. They would not stone an angel, who has existed as a mighty spirit creature in heaven before Abraham was born.

I and the Father Are One

As Jesus interacts with the Jewish leaders again and claims to be the good shepherd who brings life to the sheep and whose true sheep know him, the leaders enter into conflict with him, challenging his claim to be the Messiah. Jesus' response is extraordinary:

The works I do in my Father's name, these bear witness to me. But you do not believe because you are not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one thing."

Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him. Jesus told them, "I've shown you many good works from my Father. For which of them do you want to stone me?" The Jews said, "We don't want to stone you for good works but for blasphemy, since you, a man, make yourself out to be God." Jesus answered, "Isn't it written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods'? If God called them gods to whom the word of God came, and the Scriptures cannot be broken, then the one whom the Father set apart as holy and sent into the

³⁴ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/john/8/#v43008058>

world, can you say he blasphemes, just because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I am not doing my Father's works, don't believe in me. But if I am doing them, even if you don't believe in me, believe the works, so that you may really know that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." (John 10:25-38)

Jesus' comment about being "one" with the Father hinges on the fact that the word "one" in Greek has to take a gender: masculine, feminine or neuter. Now we know Jesus spoke in Aramaic, but John is representing his words in Greek, and the word "one" Jesus uses is in the neuter gender, which is why I translated it, "one thing." Jesus is not one man with the Father (nor one woman) but one thing. Jesus is claiming to be the same stuff as the Father, the same DNA, the same essence or nature. The Jewish leaders again get his drift. They pick up stones to kill him for blasphemy.

Jesus then uses what to us seems an odd form of reasoning. He points out the one "positive" reference to gods in the Old Testament, and argues a typical Jewish argument from Scripture, the argument from the lesser to the greater. Jesus refers to Psalm 82:6 where Yahweh addresses the rulers, the gods, of Israel and chides them for ruling without knowledge and judging unjustly. The "gods" have been interpreted as either the human leaders of Israel or the angelic rulers like those mentioned in Daniel 10. In either case, Jesus is pointing out that created beings are viewed as "gods" by Yahweh because they rule under His direction and so have god-like characteristics. So if created beings can be considered "gods" how much more the one who is the Son of God, who is in the Father and the Father is in him. Jesus is not backing away from his claim to be deity, equal to the Father. He is doubling down on it.

We should not be surprised that the Jehovah's Witnesses have a different slant on Jesus' statement:

one: Or "at unity." Jesus' comment here shows that he and his Father are unified in protecting sheeplike ones and leading them to everlasting life. Such shepherding is a joint task of the Father and the Son. They are equally concerned about the sheep, not allowing anyone to snatch them out of their hand. (Joh 10:27-29; compare Eze 34:23, 24.) In John's Gospel, the unity in fellowship, will, and purpose between the Father and the Son is often mentioned. The Greek word here rendered "one" is, not in the masculine gender (denoting "one person"), but in the neuter gender (denoting "one thing"), supporting the thought that Jesus and his Father are "one" in action and cooperation, not in person. (Joh 5:19; 14:9, 23) That Jesus referred, not to an equality of godship, but to a oneness of purpose and action is confirmed by comparing the words recorded here with his prayer recorded in John chapter 17. (Joh 10:25-29; 17:2, 9-11) This is especially evident when he prays that his followers "may be one just as we are one." (Joh 17:11) So the kind of oneness referred to in chapter 10 as well as in chapter 17 would be the same.³⁵

³⁵ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/john/10/>

For Jesus to say, "I and the Father are one thing" does not indicate they are merely one in purpose, and again, those listening to Jesus understand what he is claiming. It is not blasphemy to say my purpose is the same as the Father's. That should be true of all of us. And it is not legitimate to say that the oneness Jesus prays we may have with the Father in John 17 is intended to convey the same thing he is saying here. The Jews clearly understand Jesus is making a bid to equality with the Father.

The Glory of Yahweh

During the last week of his life, Jesus goes to Jerusalem and many of the residents of the city receive him with "hosannas" but they are also confused by his comments that he must die. Jesus tries to help them understand that the light is only among them for a little while longer.

Jesus told them, "For a short while the light is among you. Walk while you have the day, so that the darkness doesn't overcome you. The one who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light." When he had said these things he left and was hidden from them.

Even though he had performed so many signs in front of them, they did not believe in him, in order that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled when he said, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they are not able to believe, because again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, that they might not see with their eyes and understand with their hearts, and so turn and I would heal them."

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about him. (John 12:35-41)

John is referring to the vision Isaiah had, recorded in Isaiah 6, of Yahweh high and lifted up, seated on His throne in the heavenly temple, surrounded by angels called seraphim who are declaring, "Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh almighty." The Jehovah's Witnesses commentary on this verse says,

Isaiah . . . saw his glory: When Isaiah saw a vision of the heavenly courts where Jehovah was sitting on his lofty throne, Jehovah asked Isaiah: "Who will go for us?" (Isa 6:1, 8-10) The use of the plural pronoun "us" indicates that at least one other person was with God in this vision. So it is reasonable to conclude that when John wrote that Isaiah "saw his glory," this refers to Jesus' prehuman glory alongside Jehovah.³⁶

But is that really what John means? John says Isaiah saw "his" glory, and he is referring to Jesus, as the Witness commentary agrees. But Isaiah was not focused on those less than God who might be attending Him. Isaiah is focusing on Yahweh, the one seated on the throne, and

³⁶ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/john/12/#v43012041>

the term “glory” must certainly pertain to Yahweh alone, not lesser glories that are in attendance.

So here is John’s own testimony that he considers Jesus to be Yahweh, the one whom the seraphim addressed as holy, the one whose robe filled the temple, the one who called Isaiah to his role as prophet, the King, Yahweh Almighty.

My Lord and My God

The apostle John gives further evidence to his own view of who Jesus is when he recounts the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples in the upper room. At his first appearance Thomas is not present, so Thomas expresses skepticism when told what happened, but then Thomas is present the next time Jesus appears to his disciples.

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples were telling him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the marks of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Eight days later his disciples were inside with Thomas. Jesus entered, though the door was locked, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace to you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Bring your finger here and see my hands and bring your hand and put it into my side, and don’t be unbelieving but believing.” Thomas answered, “My Lord and my God.” (John 20:24-28)

Are we to suppose that John includes this account for any reason other than to attest to the truth about who Jesus is? If he didn’t agree with this perspective, it hardly seems possible he would have included it. We shouldn’t be surprised that Jehovah’s Witnesses must do a bit of hemming and hawing about this passage:

My Lord and my God! Lit., “The Lord of me and the God [ho the-os] of me!” Some scholars view this expression as an exclamation of astonishment spoken to Jesus but actually directed to God, his Father. Others claim that the original Greek requires that the words be viewed as being directed to Jesus. Even if this is so, the intent of the expression “my Lord and my God” is best understood in the context of the rest of the inspired Scriptures. Since the record shows that Jesus had previously sent his disciples the message, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father and to my God and your God,” there is no reason to believe that Thomas thought that Jesus was the almighty God. (See study note on Joh 20:17.) Thomas had heard Jesus pray to his “Father,” calling him “the only true God.” (Joh 17:1-3) So Thomas may have addressed Jesus as “my God” for the following reasons: He viewed Jesus as being “a god” though not the almighty God. (See study note on Joh 1:1.) Or he may have addressed Jesus in a manner similar to the way that servants of God addressed angelic messengers of

Jehovah, as recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. Thomas would have been familiar with accounts in which individuals, or at times the Bible writer of the account, responded to or spoke of an angelic messenger as though he were Jehovah God. (Compare Ge 16:7-11, 13; 18:1-5, 22-33; 32:24-30; Jg 6:11-15; 13:20-22.) Therefore, Thomas may have called Jesus “my God” in this sense, acknowledging Jesus as the representative and spokesman of the true God.

Some argue that the use of the Greek definite article before the words for “lord” and “god” indicates that these words refer to the almighty God. However, in this context the use of the article may simply reflect Greek grammar. Cases where a nominative noun with the definite article is used as vocative in Greek can be illustrated by a literal translation of such scriptures as Lu 12:32 (lit., “the little flock”) and Col 3:18–4:1 (lit., “the wives”; “the husbands”; “the children”; “the fathers”; “the slaves”; “the masters”). In a similar way, a literal translation of 1Pe 3:7 would read: “The husbands.” So the use of the article here may not be of significance in determining what Thomas had in mind when he made his statement.³⁷

The Witnesses’ commentary here would divert us from the obvious meaning by noting that some commentators (which ones, why no references?) suppose that Thomas is not addressing Jesus but exclaiming like many in our culture, “Oh my God!” But the Witnesses’ commentary knows that is not the case, so they resort to the view that Thomas is acting like others who have been in the presence of the Angel of Yahweh and addressed him as God. But we have already seen that the Angel of Yahweh was Yahweh, not a created being, so addressing him as Yahweh was entirely appropriate. Knowing this, the Witnesses’ commentary explores the idea that the use of the definite article in Thomas’ remark, “the Lord of me and the God of me,” is more a function of the vocative voice in Greek than a testimony to Thomas’ belief that Jesus is Yahweh.

The vocative in Greek is the form Greek speakers give to expressions of declaration or address like this one by Thomas. There is a question as to whether the vocative is being used here.³⁸ We would expect the vocative to read, *ho kuri’e kai ho the’e*, as in Matthew 27:46, but it reads instead, *ho kurios kai ho theos*, which are typically nominative in form, not vocative. However, many Greek speakers used the nominative like a vocative.

But it doesn’t matter! Thomas is here addressing Jesus as his God. And if Jesus is not God, Jesus should correct Thomas. This is what those mistaken for God did in Scripture. In Revelation 19:9,10, the apostle John says he fell at an angel’s feet to worship him, but the angel corrected him, saying, “Don’t do that (literally, watch out), I am a servant like you and your brothers who holds to the testimony of Jesus.” Then the angel says, “Worship (literally, bow down to) God.” But Jesus doesn’t correct Thomas. He receives what Thomas says of him. He is Thomas’ Lord and God. He is not ‘a’ god but ‘the’ God.

³⁷ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/john/20/#v43020028>

³⁸ <https://www.billmounce.com/blog/%ce%ba%cf%85%cf%81%ce%b9%ce%bf%cf%82-nominative-or-vocative-john-20-28>

So could John have intended in John 1:1c that the Word was 'a' god? Hardly. Everything else in the rest of John's Gospel screams that his view of Jesus is that he is the true God, God Almighty, Yahweh Himself, worthy of worship. And we have already seen that this is consistent with John's other writings, specifically Revelation, where John acknowledges that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega that the Father also claims to be (see chapter 2 and Revelation 22:12,13) and depicts Jesus as receiving the same praise and worship as the Father (Revelation 5:12,13).

But there is more evidence concerning John's worldview that would prevent him from ever believing that Jesus was 'a' god, a created being, no matter how powerful or exalted.

John's Old Testament Heritage

Could John have intended that the Word was 'a' god? Wouldn't it make sense that John's worldview was shaped by the Old Testament Scriptures? It is not inconsistent for him to view Jesus as Yahweh, because as we have seen, there are two Yahweh's in the Old Testament, one of whom is often designated as the Angel or Messenger of Yahweh. And as we will see, there are multiple Messianic prophecies that also suggest there is more than one person who makes up the Godhead.

The Priest Forever

This is a psalm of David, according to the heading, and Jesus takes it this way in his questioning of the Pharisees (Matthew 22:41-46). The importance of this is that David speaks of Yahweh and David also speaks of his Lord, two different personages, both of whom David views as more authoritative than him. As the most powerful man in his kingdom, David should submit to no one other than God.

Yahweh to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. The rod of your strength Yahweh will send from Zion. Rule in the midst of your enemies. Your people will be willing in the day of your power, dressed in the garments of holiness, your young men like dew from the womb of the morning.

Yahweh has sworn and will not retract it: You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.

My Lord is at your right hand. He will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge among the nations, piling up bodies and crushing the head of the earth. He will drink from the brook along the way and so lift high his head.

The Pharisees recognized the "the Lord" about whom this psalm was speaking was the Messiah. They understood the Messiah to be an offspring of king David who would have the right to David's throne and fulfill the prophecies of the restoration of that throne. So Jesus asks them the logical question: How can this "Lord" be David's offspring and yet be David's Lord? The one who is the progenitor is lord over the descendant.

The only way Messiah can be David's Lord is if he is God. But David clearly makes a distinction between David's Lord and Yahweh. Yahweh, who speaks here to David's Lord, defeats David's Lord's enemies, and declares David's Lord a priest (in addition to a king) in the order of Melchizedek, who himself was both a king and a priest (see Genesis 14:17-24). David's Lord sits at Yahweh's right hand, leads his armies in battle, and judges all the nations.

We know that the Messiah, Jesus, was able to be David's Lord as well as David's offspring, because Yahweh God, the Son, took on human nature and was born in David's line to David's offspring Mary. Jesus was both divine and human, was both God and man. He did not give up being God to become human, but retained two natures, deity and humanity. After all, how could God stop being God. That's impossible!

God with Us

The prophet Isaiah has been sent to the king of Judah, Ahaz, to warn him against fearing the alliance of Israel with Syria, against fearing their coalition's attack of Judah, and against Judah allying with Assyria. Yahweh offers Ahaz a sign to strengthen his faith that the two kings of these nations will come to nothing, but Ahaz, with false piety, refuses, saying he will not tempt Yahweh this way. Isaiah says this wears Yahweh and that Yahweh himself will nevertheless give Ahaz a sign.

Therefore, my Lord will give you a sign. Look, a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and she will call his name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he learns to reject evil and choose the good. For before the boy learns to reject evil and choose the good, the land of the two kings you fear will be forsaken. (Isaiah 7:14-16)

Some interpreters see this as a direct prophecy of Jesus' birth. After all, Matthew quotes it (Matthew 1:23) as fulfilled by Jesus. However, I view this prophecy and the child born to the virgin in Isaiah's day, as a typological prophecy. By that is meant that the prophecy, because it relates to a prophet, Isaiah in this case, must also find expression in the Messiah in the future. It is Isaiah's child who is born and who provides a sign to Ahaz, timewise, as to how short a time it will be before these kings come to nothing. But Messiah is the ultimate prophet, and so this event must somehow be ultimately fulfilled by Jesus.

And so, whereas Isaiah's wife, the virgin at the time of his marriage to her, conceives in the normal way, through sexual intercourse with her husband, and names her son Immanuel, which means God With Us (signifying that God will be with and protect Judah), the ultimate fulfillment is that Jesus' mother is a virgin when she conceives and remains so, having had no sexual intercourse, and her son truly and literally is God with us. The ultimate fulfillment always takes it to a more literal and extraordinary level.

Another example of this is the prophecy in Psalm 34:20, of the righteous man, "[the Lord] protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken." The righteous man, for whom God promises protection in exaggerated terms, is, like the prophet, a type of the truly righteous One, Christ, with whom God fulfills this promise in literal terms. John 19:36 shows us that what was figuratively true of the righteous person has been literally fulfilled in Christ. Not one of his bones was broken on the cross. Just as it is literally fulfilled this way with Jesus, so the prophecy of Messiah being God With Us is literally fulfilled in Jesus.

The Everlasting Father, the Mighty God

Isaiah has another prophecy about the Messiah that is equally as astounding as his prophetic word that the Messiah will be God with us, and is, in fact, a continuation of that prophetic word. It begins with Isaiah seeing that the northern region of Israel, inhabited by the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and otherwise known as the area of Galilee, will see a great light and a removal of their oppressors (Isaiah 9:1-5). And the way this will come about?

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Yahweh Almighty will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Isaiah's children have been used by Yahweh as signs to His people, including, as we have seen, to Ahaz, king of Judah. Here will be another child, a son, who will fulfill the prediction of Genesis 3:15, that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent and restore God's kingdom. This son, this seed of the woman, will rule on his father David's throne and establish worldwide peace and righteousness forever. And he will rightly be called "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father." These terms are quite inappropriate for any created being to wear. They belong rightly and only to Yahweh Himself. But this is Yahweh who has taken on human nature, Yahweh the Son. Jesus rightly fulfills this prophetic word. He is not 'a' god, but **the** God.

One Like a Son of Man

Daniel has a vision, in chapter 7 of the book of Daniel, concerning the kingdoms of the world and God's rule over them.

"As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened....

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:9-10,13-14, ESV)

Daniel's vision has two main actors, the Ancient of Days, or Yahweh, and this one like a son of man, that is, to all appearances, a man. But this man is given all authority over every kingdom and people on earth, a kingdom that will last forever and will never be destroyed. This is surely God's kingdom. And all persons shall "serve" him. The word for "serve" here is used also in Daniel 3:12,

There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.
(ESV)

The idea of serving gods is parallel to worship. The one like a son of man to whom the Ancient of Days gives all the kingdom is served, that is, worshiped. When this chapter 7 vision is interpreted for Daniel, at the end he is told this,

And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.' (ESV)

Here it is the Most High to whom the kingdom belongs and whom all the peoples of the earth serve and obey. The Most High and the one like a son of man both share the same obedience and worship, and are both said to possess this everlasting kingdom.

The Messenger of the Covenant

In Malachi's prophecy Yahweh is reprimanding His people, responding to their complaints and murmurings. In chapter 3 Yahweh declares that He will send a messenger to prepare for His coming:

"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says Yahweh of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)

So who is coming? Yahweh says He is coming and that is why He is sending His messenger (Malachi's name and the word usually translated "angel" in our texts is the word used here and translated, "my messenger"). Israel is seeking the Lord (Master, *adonai*) and they delight in the messenger, who is coming. Yahweh is coming to His temple and the messenger is coming.

But he is not coming in a way that Israel will enjoy. He is coming in judgment.

But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver,

and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to Yahweh. (Malachi 3:2–3)

Malachi is predicting the end of the age and the final judgment, with Israel being restored to faith and righteousness. Yahweh is doing this, and the messenger of the covenant is doing this. They are equated in their actions and in Israel's desire to see them.

Interestingly, when Jesus refers to this passage, he relates it to John the Baptist. John the Baptist is the messenger that Yahweh has sent to prepare His way. But that means then that Jesus is Yahweh, whom John the Baptist is preparing God's people to receive. Jesus does say, "If you will receive it," this John the Baptist is Elijah whom Malachi later predicts (4:5,6) will come before the "great and terrible day of Yahweh," that is, before this day of judgment at the end of days.

Jesus' first coming did not result in this judgment because he first had to die for our redemption. It is Jesus' second coming that will result in the final judgment. There will likely be another Elijah like prophet to announce that coming.

What we are seeing is that the Apostle John's perspective is informed by the teachings and prophecies of the Old Testament. He could not conceive of Messiah, the Son of Man in Daniel 7, as 'a' god. Though a predicate nominative coming before the verb and having no article, as in John 1:1c ("and the Word was *theos*") cannot be understood as indefinite, 'a' god. That does not fit with John's consistent testimony in the rest of his Gospel, nor with John's Old Testament perspective and heritage.

John's Unity with Other New Testament Authors

As we're seeking to understand how to translate John 1:1c, we've seen that three possibilities exist, "and the Word was a god," "and the Word was divine," and "and the Word was God." We've been trying to show why it could not or would not make sense for John to be saying that Jesus was 'a' god. Would the apostle John be out of step with the other apostles and view Jesus as a created being? John spoke of the unity of the apostles in 1 John 1,

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have beheld and our hands have handled concerning the Word of life - and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and announce to you that eternal life which was with the Father and manifested to us - what we have seen and heard, we announce also to you, that you also might have fellowship with us. And this fellowship of ours is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. (verses 1-3)

We can see that the rest of the apostles whose writings we have in our New Testament, did not view Jesus as a created being but as the One who was worthy of worship, the living and Almighty God, Yahweh Himself, the Yahweh who called fire and brimstone from Yahweh out of heaven (Genesis 19).

The Apostle Peter

We hear Peter's voice through the Gospel of Mark (tradition tells us that Mark recorded Peter's expression of the gospel) and through Peter's letters, 1&2 Peter. And in both places we see clear recognition that Jesus is God.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, a voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'" John the baptizer came in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:1-4)

Mark's quotation is actually a combination of Malachi 3:1, which we saw earlier, and Isaiah 40:3. Yahweh is sending His messenger before the face of the Messenger of the Covenant, Malachi tells us, and Isaiah says this voice crying in the wilderness is preparing the way for Yahweh (translated "Lord" in our text). Mark identifies the voice crying in the wilderness as John the Baptist's voice, and of course, John the Baptist is preparing the way for Jesus. Jesus is that Messenger of the Covenant of Malachi 3 and Yahweh of Isaiah 40.

They came carrying with them a paralytic, borne up by four of them. And because they were unable to bring him before Jesus on account of the crowd, they took the roof apart where he was, and digging out the roof they lowered the mat on which the paralytic was lying. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven." The

Scribes sitting there reasoned in their hearts, "Why is he saying this? Blasphemy! Who is able to forgive sins except God alone?" (Mark 2:3-7)

The reasoning of the Scribes is valid. Only God can forgive our sins. Jesus offers proof that "the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth" (verse 10) by healing the paralytic. Jesus uses this title that we have seen comes from Daniel 7, the one like a son of man to whom all the kingdoms of earth are given and whom all the people of earth give service or worship to. Jesus is exercising his authority now. He expresses that authority again in another instance.

When Jesus' disciples are picking heads of grain on the Sabbath, because they are so hungry, the Pharisees take exception. But Jesus gives them biblical evidence that their understanding of the law of the Sabbath is incorrect, and then seals that by declaring, "The Son of Man is Lord indeed of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). There is only one Lord of the Sabbath, only one person who can declare the meaning of the Law, and that is Yahweh.

Then there is Peter's address to the recipients of his second letter.

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been chosen for the equally privileged faith as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of our God and Jesus our Lord. (2 Peter 1:1,2)

It is acknowledged that this could be translated, "the righteousness of our God and of our Savior Jesus Christ," making this a righteous act of both the Father and the Son, in line, perhaps, with verse 2, "the knowledge of our God and Jesus our Lord." And even if it were, this would be an acknowledgement that Jesus and the Father are equal, both choosing us in righteousness, both multiplying grace and peace to us through knowing them.

But there is every reason to translate Peter's greeting in the way I have above, making an even clearer statement by Peter that Jesus is both God and Savior. In his letter it has been noted³⁹ that (1) Peter uses the term "savior" only without the definite article (*soter*) and only referring to Jesus, (2) "savior" never stands by itself but is always connected to a preceding noun with the definite article, and (3) the two nouns so linked always refer to the same person, Jesus. Here are the four usages:

³⁹ Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God*, pp. 234-235

1:1 *tou theou hemon kai soterou Iesou Christou*
The God of us and savior Jesus Christ

1:11 *tou kuriou hemon kai soterou Iesou Christou*
The Lord of us and savior Jesus Christ

2:20 *tou kuriou hemon kai soterou Iesou Christou*
The Lord of us and savior Jesus Christ

3:2 *tou kuriou kai soterou*
The Lord and savior

3:18 *tou kuriou hemon kai soterou Iesou Christou*
The Lord of us and savior Jesus Christ

Peter's clear pattern is to conceive of the two titles as describing one person. Peter does not consider Jesus 'a' god, but the God. And that is equally clear from the doxology Peter gives to Jesus in 3:18:

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom be glory both now and for eternal days.

Doxologies belong to God only. New Testament doxologies are regularly addressed to God the Father (Romans 16:27; Jude 25; and 1 Peter 4:11, for example), but there are four doxologies made to Jesus (2 Timothy 4:18; 2 Peter 3:18; Revelation 1:5-6; and 5:13). The latter two doxologies are found in the apostle John's writings, showing that he is in absolute agreement with the rest of the apostles as to Jesus' deity.

The Apostle Paul

Paul has one of those doxologies to Jesus,

The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and save me to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory for ever and ever, Amen. (2 Timothy 4:18)

The "Lord" whom Paul is praising is the one who, according to verses 16 and 17, stood by him during his first trial in Rome and enabled him to proclaim the gospel and enabled his release. It is Jesus who did this.

And Paul, like Peter, includes both the Father and Jesus in his blessings to his letter readers:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; Philemon 3)

Paul and Silas and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace. (1 Thessalonians 1:1)

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. (Titus 1:3)

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2)

For Paul, both the Father and the Lord Jesus are the equal source of grace, mercy and peace.

Paul also identifies Yahweh with Jesus on several occasions:

- He quotes Joel 2:23, "Whoever calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved," in Romans 10:13 in reference to Jesus. As he says there, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9).
- Paul alludes to Jeremiah 9:24, "'Let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares Yahweh," when he says in 1 Corinthians 1:31, "As it is written, 'Let the one who boasts make his boast in the Lord.'" Paul has just described Jesus as the one who has become wisdom for us from God, has become our righteousness, holiness and redemption, and as he says in the second chapter, the one whom he preaches.
- Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13, "Who has known the mind of Yahweh so as to instruct him?" and then declares, in his next words, "But we have the mind of Christ," (1 Corinthians 2:16).
- Paul tells us in Philippians 2:9-11 that God has exalted Christ and given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. He is referencing Isaiah 45:23, which says, "By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'" Paul is attributing to Jesus what Yahweh has attributed to Himself.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul describes believers as those who call upon the name of Jesus in prayer. Should we pray to 'a' god? Of course not! No one but God Himself should receive prayer.

Paul makes an extraordinary statement in 1 Corinthians 8:6. He says, "But to us there is one God the Father, from whom are all things and we are for him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ,

through whom are all things and we are through him." This is a clear reference to Deuteronomy 6:4, which says, "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one." Jehovah's Witnesses would have no trouble explaining that there is only one God the Father, but how could it be possible that there is only one Lord? Witnesses might perhaps say there is only one Lord Jesus Christ. But why is he called "Lord"? Isn't the Father the Lord? Of course He is, and that is what makes this statement so extraordinary. Both the Father and Jesus are the Lord. Paul includes both here with unique prepositions ("from" whom and "through" whom) but has them on equal footing.

In Colossians 2:9 Paul has begun defending against the false philosophies the Colossians have been influenced by and argues that they shouldn't accept these non-Christ-centered alternatives, "Because," as he says, "in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." What is the fullness of the Godhead? We may describe God's fullness using the Westminster Shorter Catechism answer to the question, "Who is God": God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. God's fullness is all the attributes of God that make Him God. And all those attributes belong to Jesus in addition to His human nature. He is God and He is human. To not acknowledge Jesus' deity is to embrace a false theology.

And this is why Paul uses a Christian hymn in Philippians 2:5-11 to describe the humility of Jesus Christ. As Paul writes, "Think this way in yourselves as also Christ Jesus did, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be greedily grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant, becoming in the likeness of humans, and while found in guise as a human, humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation purposely obscures the plain meaning with their translation of verse 6:

who, although he was existing in God's form, gave no consideration to a seizure, namely, that he should be equal to God.⁴⁰

Jesus existed in equality with the Father, in the form of God, "infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." God cannot become not-God, and Jesus did not become not-God, but gave up acknowledgement and worship as God by taking on human nature. It is this humbling of himself that resulted, Paul says, in him being exalted by the Father and given the name that is above all names (verse 9), and there is no name higher than God's name. Jesus is God. That is Paul's testimony.

⁴⁰ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/philippians/2/>

The Apostle Matthew

We've already seen that it is Matthew who sees in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 of the virgin bearing a son who is God with us. And like Mark, Matthew identifies Yahweh, who is coming and being announced by John the Baptist, as Jesus (Matthew 3:1-6). And also, like Mark, in Matthew 9:1-8 Matthew also recounts Jesus forgiving a man's sins to the shock and horror of the Pharisees, who consider this blasphemy, and such it is if Jesus isn't God.

Matthew recounts Jesus' trial before the chief priests and the Sanhedrin where Jesus is asked to declare whether he is the Messiah and the Son of God (Matthew 26:57-68). There Jesus declares that their description is true but that in the future they will see the Son of Man seated at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven, a clear reference as we have seen to the figure in Daniel 7 to whom all kingdoms will be given and whom all will serve and worship. The chief priest says at this response, "He has blasphemed! What more do we need of witnesses? See now, you hear this blasphemy." This means the religious leaders recognize in Daniel's prophecy that this figure, one like a son of man, is deity, is God, who alone deserves worship, and whom to claim to be is blasphemy if one is not God.

Matthew also records Jesus' declaration that he is the sender of prophets, sages and teachers whom the ungodly will persecute (Matthew 23:34). This is an action that is only elsewhere attributed to Yahweh, as in Jeremiah's calling and Isaiah's sending, and all the other prophets (Genesis 45:8; Isaiah 6:8; Jeremiah 1:7; 2 Samuel 12:1; Ezekiel 2:3; Amos 2:11; 3:7).

And Matthew relates Jesus' commission to his disciples to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). To be baptized in these names makes them equal in authority and glory.

The Author of Hebrews

We don't know who the author of Hebrews was, or whether he was an apostle, but his letter has been received by the church as Scripture. And in the opening of his letter he is at pains to make the point that Jesus is superior to angels. The reason for this argument is that his audience, Jews who have professed faith in Jesus as Messiah, but who are considering abandoning Christianity for their previous Judaism, are steeped in the notion that angels delivered the Law. So they might be willing to consider that Jesus is such an angel, a created being, whom God has used to proclaim the gospel.

But the author of Hebrews insists that Jesus is the Son and superior to angels (chapters 1 and 2), superior to Moses and Joshua (chapters 3 and 4), superior to the priesthood of Israel (chapters 5 through 7), superior as the mediator of the New Covenant (chapter 8), and superior

as the sacrifice that truly takes away sin (chapters 9 and 10). Angels have no equality with the Son, nor do any of Israel's prophets or leaders.

Understanding that the kings of Israel were types or foreshadowings of the Messiah, the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 45, a wedding song for the king and his bride, as applicable to the Messiah, Jesus the Son of God, and what it says there of the king of Israel must be taken more literally and supremely of the Christ. And it says,

But to the Son, Scripture says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the upright scepter will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. For this reason God your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness with your companions." And also, "In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands. They will all pass away, but you remain, and they all like an old cloak will be rendered obsolete, and you will roll them up like clothing, and like a cloak they will be removed. But you are the same and your years will not cease."

The second quote comes from Psalm 102:25-27. Each of these quotes then refer to Jesus as God. Even if we take the first one to read, "God is your throne," which is a possibility, the passages overall are meant to refer to Jesus as God and therefore superior to angels. The Psalm 102 passage is referring directly to Yahweh and the author of Hebrews applies it to Jesus. God is the same, He does not change. This is a divine attribute. And the author of Hebrews doubles down on that when he says, in 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

In Hebrews 1:6 the author says of Jesus, "Let all the angels of God worship him," worship Jesus, and the author is quoting the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 32:43, which is clearly referring to worship of Yahweh. This is why this author refers to Jesus as, "the exact imprint of [God's] nature" (1:3). For him, Jesus is God, not 'a' god.

The "Apostle" James

The James who authors the epistle in our New Testament is not the Apostle James, brother of the Apostle John. That James was killed by Herod early in the days after Jesus' resurrection and ascension (Acts 12:1,2). This James is the half-brother of Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph, we may presume, who became a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15; Galatians 1:19; 2:12).

James says, "My brothers, do not associate partiality with the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (James 2:1). To call Jesus glorious is to speak of his deity. God and His name are "glorious" (Deuteronomy 28:58; 33:29; 1 Chronicles 29:13; Nehemiah 9:5; Psalm 66:2; Isaiah 3:8; 4:2; 11:10; etc.)

It is true that other passages, however, speak of things glorious besides God: Psalm 45:13 (the king's bride); Isaiah 28:1,4 (Ephraim); 64:11 (the temple); Jeremiah 14:21; 17:12; Matthew 19:28; 25:31 (the throne of Yahweh); Jeremiah 48:17 (the Davidic king); Luke 9:30 (the splendor of Moses' and Elijah's appearance); Acts 2:20 (the Day of the Lord); 2 Corinthians 3:8,9 (the ministry of the Spirit in the gospel); 3:9,10 (the ministry of the Law); Ephesians 1:18 (the inheritance of God's people); Ephesians 3:16 (God's riches); Philippians 3:21 (Christ's resurrection body); 1 Peter 1:8 (the believer's joy in faith). There is a relative glory to humans and things associated with God.

Could James conceivably view Jesus as relatively glorious but not divine? Possibly, but James would need to explain this since his bare statement sounds like he is giving Jesus the glory that properly belongs to the Father. Yahweh tells us in Isaiah 42:8, "I am Yahweh. That is my name. I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols."

James also attributes actions and roles to Jesus as Lord that are attributed to Yahweh in the Old Testament:

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. Look how the farmer waits patiently for the precious fruit of the earth, until it receives the early and late rain. You also be patient, strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming has drawn near. Do not grumble among yourselves, brothers and sisters, lest you be judged. Look, the judge stands at the door. Take as an example, brothers and sisters, the suffering and patience of the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name. We consider blessed those who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and you know the end accomplished, because the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. (James 5:5-11)

It is the Lord (Jesus) who is coming soon. It is the Lord (Jesus) as Judge who is standing at the door. It is the Lord (Yahweh) who was compassionate to Job. For James, it is the Lord across the board. Jesus is Yahweh.

So if John is in unity with the rest of the apostles as he claims in 1 John 1, then he could not mean by "and the Word was *theos*" the sense of "and the Word was a god." That is not what the rest of our New Testament writers believed. Besides, Yahweh clearly declares in Isaiah 43:10, the founding verse of Jehovah's Witnesses, "'You are my witnesses,' declares Yahweh, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be after me.'" Jesus cannot be 'a' god whom Yahweh formed. He hasn't and won't do that. There is only one God and this one God is a plurality within the one.

Is the Word (the) God or Divine?

If “and the Word was a god” is not a viable translation for John 1:1c, then what is? Is the predicate nominative, “*theos* (God),” definite (even though there is no definite article there) or qualitative (purposely left without the definite article to emphasize a qualitative meaning)? Either one is a viable choice, with multiple other examples in John and the New Testament as parallels.

The Case for “the Word Was Divine”

The qualitative sense for predicate nominatives without the direct article is fairly common in the New Testament. Here are some examples:

- John 1:14, ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (“The Word became flesh”) – Jesus did not become “a” or “the” flesh, but flesh as an element.
- John 2:9, τὸ ὕδωρ οἶνον γεγεννημένον (“the water had become wine”) – not “a” or “the” wine but wine as a substance
- John 3:6, τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς σὰρξ ἐστίν, καὶ τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος πνεῦμά ἐστίν (“that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”) – That which is born of the flesh is not “a” flesh or “the” flesh, but the quality “flesh”

But here is the question: Would the word “God” be used in that qualitative way? There is no example of this in the New Testament unless John 1:1c is that example, but it is not impossible. It is possible that John left the definite article off of *theos* purposely to direct us to a qualitative meaning. His concern would be that if he made the word “God” definite (‘the’ God) as he did in the second part of the verse (“and the Word was with [the] God”) it might communicate that the Father and the Son were the same person.

What would the qualitative sense communicate? John would be saying that the Word, Jesus, was the quality of God. We might communicate that with the ideas of Jesus being of the same essence as the Father, divine in the sense that he has all the attributes of God. And again, this would lead to an understanding that the one God has a plurality of personalities. He is not one person but one being with three personages. Of course, John doesn’t mention the Holy Spirit here, but once we see that there can be two personages in the Godhead we can then see three as well.

We don’t have a qualitative version of the word “God” in our language. The best we could do would be something like, “and the Word was Godness.” But that is not really a word we use. We have resorted to using the word “divine” to convey the sense of being God or the word “deity” to convey that same meaning. If we translate, “and the Word was divine,” we run into the danger, however, that this word would not convey full deity, because we often use “divine” for things less than God. “Deity” doesn’t seem to have that same limitation, so perhaps the better

translation would be, “and the Word was deity.” This communicates that Jesus was fully God but not the same person as the Father.

The Case for “the Word was God”

It is equally possible that John intended us to see *theos* as definite even without the definite article. There are plenty of examples of this in the New Testament, as well:

- John 1:41, εὐρήκαμεν τὸν Μεσσίαν, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνεύμενον χριστός (“We have found the Messiah, which being translated is [the] Christ”) – If there is equivalence between the Hebrew and the Greek, τὸν Μεσσίαν, the Messiah, must translate as ὁ χριστός, the Christ.
- John 18:13a, ἦν γὰρ πενθερὸς τοῦ Καϊάφα (“for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas”) – Unless Caiaphas had more than one wife, and therefore more than one father-in-law, definite is the only possibility.
- John 18:13b, ὃς ἦν ἀρχιερεὺς τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ ἐκείνου (“he was the high priest that year”) – Unless there was more than one high priest, definite is the only possibility.

But as has been remarked earlier, making *theos* definite in meaning here might lead readers to think that the Word and the Father (God) were one and the same person. There are, however, several factors that militate against this:

1. John has made it clear in the second part of his statement about the Word (“and the Word was with God”) that the Word and God are separate persons.
2. John shows us the apostle Thomas’ response to the risen Lord Jesus in John 20:28, where Thomas says, “My Lord and my God.” The definite article is on the word *theos*, “God.” John is endorsing “the God” as a legitimate title for Jesus without, apparently, concern for confusion about Jesus being a separate person from the Father.
3. The Old Testament gives precedent for two Yahwehs without concern that they would be confused as one person. This suggests that “the God” is not always intended as a specific identification of the Father, just as Yahweh is not always intended as a personal name for one person. Recall Genesis 19:24, “Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from Yahweh out of heaven.”

The translation of this sense would be the traditional translation of John 1:1c, “and the Word was God.” By not using a definite article on “God” we achieve almost the same meaning as the qualitative interpretation. Jesus is God, fully divine, absolute deity, but not the same person as the Father.

Jehovah’s Witnesses cannot accept either the qualitative or the definite meaning for *kai theos en ho logos*. Each one contradicts their view of Jesus as being the highest created being in the universe.

It might seem sad that so many false teachers have arisen to challenge the church and her adherence to Jesus Christ, but in fact, it is these false teachers and their false doctrines that have served to strengthen the church in two ways. Our interaction with the false teaching has honed our understanding of the truth and how to defend it. And the abandonment of some to follow false teachings has revealed who are and who are not true believers. What the devil meant for evil, God has used for good.

We will never be free of false teachers. People who desire control and acclaim will always need to have something unique about them to draw people to them. A distorted perspective on the Scriptures is a convenient avenue for gathering followers. Like Russell and Rutherford and the Jehovah's Witnesses, you can play on people's ignorance of Scripture by slipping in your own clever interpretations. So believers, know the Scriptures!

Appendix 1: Original Correspondence with Christie

The following letters are a series of correspondences in 1990 between me and a woman named Christie. These sprang out of a request of her aunt's that I read some literature Christie sent her and respond to her with my thoughts. The particular booklet I responded to was *Should You Believe in the Trinity (Is Jesus Christ the Almighty God)?* It was my goal to deal directly with one of the main passages that Jehovah's Witnesses assert supports their view that Jesus is the first and highest creation of God, and not Almighty God Himself. They translate John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." They note, correctly, that the word God (Greek, *theos*) does have the definite article "the" in front of the first instance of its occurrence in the verse, but does not in the second occurrence. They suppose, incorrectly, that this means you can translate the last phrase of the verse, "the Word was a god." So in my first letter, I deal with this passage and other related passages that assert the deity of Jesus.

Dear Christy,

I appreciate the opportunity to try to explain what the church has deemed the true perspective of who God is and what He requires of us. I have read the publication of Jehovah's Witnesses, "*Should You Believe in the Trinity (Is Jesus Christ the Almighty God?)*" and I guess that you are already convinced that He is not. Since, however, you have asked your aunt to have one of her ministers respond, I am grateful for the chance to be able to present our case for your consideration. I am afraid it will get a little technical in places but I see no way to avoid that. I will try my best to make it as clear as possible.

I am well aware of the historical process of the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, which, admittedly, was not a matter of smooth agreement along the way, but a process of debate and dialogue for many years. My preference, however, in approaching the matter of the Trinity is to begin with the person of Jesus Christ. That, after all, is how the process began. The church was forced to consider who Jesus was and when they decided that He was indeed God they were forced to explain how that harmonized with the teaching of one God. What eventually resulted was the doctrine of the Trinity.

The most basic place to start is John's Gospel. In John 1:1 it says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (New International Version). The Greek reads like this:

En archē ēn ho logos, kai ho logos ēn pros ton theon, kai theos ēn ho logos.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the God, and God was the Word.

I have placed an English equivalent under the Greek transliteration following the word order of the Greek but that is not necessarily the way it should be translated. How it should be translated is, of course, at issue. The Greek language does not depend entirely on word order, as does English, to communicate meaning. In the sentence, "I hit the ball to Charlie," we know the subject, direct object and indirect object (all nouns) by their place in the sentence. The only

way we could change the word order and still say the same thing is, “I hit Charlie the ball.” Those of us who speak the language know that “I” of this sentence did not hit Charlie (as though he were the direct object of the verb). But in Greek nouns have different spellings (case endings, if you have ever studied Latin) that show what their function in the sentence is. The Greek could say, “Charlie I the ball hit” or “Charlie the ball I hit” and mean what our English equivalent means by giving “Charlie” the indirect object ending and “ball” the direct object ending. The subject “I” could either be included in the form of the verb or as a pronoun with the verb (like English).

All this is to point out that in John 1:1 the word order is not the final determinative of meaning. What is different about John 1:1, however, is that the endings in the last two nouns “God” and “Word” are both the ending for the subjects of sentences in Greek. This is because the verb that connects them is a verb of being (“was”) which requires that the noun that is the subject and the noun that is the predicate (the one which follows the verb) must agree as to ending. The question is, which noun is the subject and which is the predicate? We could either read, “God was the Word” or “the Word was God.” Because “the Word” is the topic of the whole sentence and the subject of the verb right before this (“the Word was with God”) it only makes sense to see it as the subject here, also. All the translations in “*Should You Believe in the Trinity?*” (I’ll just abbreviate it SYBT from now on) agree with this.

The next question, naturally, is that of why there is no definite article “the” before “God” when John says, “the Word was God.” It is hard for English speakers to understand how the Greeks used the definite article or why, at times, they left it off. We know that they used the definite article like we do often, to mark a noun as definite (not “a man” but “the man,” that is, a certain one in particular, perhaps one that has just been referred to previously). They sometimes used it as a relative pronoun, “the one who” like in John 1:29, “Behold the Lamb of God, the taking away the sin of the world one,” that is, “the one who takes away the sin of the world.”

The definite article could be left off (there is not an indefinite article like “a” or “an” in Greek) to make something indefinite as in John 1:6, “There was a man sent from God.” Or the article could be left off if the writer wanted to emphasize the noun as a quality, as John does in 3:2, “(Nicodemus) came to (Jesus) by night” (“night” is the noun and has no article). But there are times when the noun is definitely definite and you would expect the definite article to be there and it is not. In John 1:18 it says, “No one has seen God at any time,” but “God” does not have the article. We would not translate it “No one has seen a god at any time.” Similarly, in John 3:2 Nicodemus said to Jesus, “We know that you are a teacher sent from God,” but there is no article on “god” and certainly Nicodemus did not mean, “We know that you are a teacher sent from a god.” Many such instances can be found (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 2:14; 20:38; Rom. 8:8,33; 2 Cor. 1:21; 5:19; Gal. 2:19; 4:8; 2 Thess. 1:8; Tit. 1:16; etc., etc.) but it is obvious in each context that the true God is meant. Thus a Greek speaker could mean the noun to be definite without using the definite article.

In John 1:1 there is also another issue. In the phrase “the Word was God” God is the predicate but actually comes before the verb “was” in the Greek. The rule of Colwell referred to in SYBT suggests that when a predicate noun is meant to be definite and it comes before the verb it

does not usually have the definite article on it. If that were true, John could leave off the article on “God” and still mean the true God and not “a god.” This fits with several instances where to translate the predicate noun as indefinite (“a...”) would not make sense. In John 8:54 Jesus says, “It is my Father who glorifies me, whom you say that He is our God.” “God” comes before the verb in the Greek without the article (“that God of us He is” is a word for word translation) but could not mean, “He is a god of ours.”

On the other hand, SYBT points out that in John 8:44 Satan is said to be “a murderer from the beginning” and “a liar and the father of lies” but “murderer” and “liar” are predicate nouns coming before the verb. Why wouldn’t they be translated “the murderer” and “the liar” according to Colwell’s rule? Well, they could be. SYBT is wrong when it says, “most translations insert the word ‘a’ because Greek grammar and the context require it.” Greek grammar certainly does not “require” it as we have seen and though the context suggests it, it does not require it. But the other error here is that Colwell’s rule does not refer to all predicate nouns coming before the verb, but to all definite predicate nouns coming before the verb, that is, nouns which have already been judged to be definite.

Christy, I realize this is confusing if you are not familiar with Greek grammar, and it sounds like Colwell’s rule is begging the question. What right do we have to assume that John views “god” as a definite noun in John 1:1? Why could he not view “god” as indefinite and so mean it to be translated indefinitely, “The Word was a god?” Well, consider what that would have John saying. John is a Jew who has been taught, “I am the Lord (Jehovah) your God.... You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2,3). And, “All the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD (Jehovah) made the heavens” (1 Chron. 16:26). Also, “What god is there in heaven and on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do?” (Deut. 3:24). And, “Before Me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me” (Isa. 43:10). And yet we are expected to believe, if the New World Translation is right, that John would call Jesus “a god” who was formed after God, who made the heavens and earth, who does the mighty works of God.

Then John proceeds to describe this Jesus not only as the one through whom all things were made (1:3), but the light of men who has light in himself that gives life, the true light who has glory and is full of grace and truth (1:4-14). For John to say that Jesus was even “a god” would be to fly in the face of all the Old Testament teaching about God’s uniqueness.

So, for the sake of argument, we say it is just as likely that John meant to say that Jesus is “God” as to say he is “a god.” On the church’s view of the Trinity, however, John would be saying that He is the same God of the Old Testament who said, “Before Me no god was formed, nor will there be one after Me.” Given the church’s explanation of this, it would not be directly contradictory of the Old Testament revelation. I’ll explain in a moment. On SYBT’s view John is introducing a concept that directly contradicts Isaiah 43:10. He would be saying that there was a god formed after God, who is in league with God, to be sure, but who is accorded special honor as God’s special servant.

That is why the church has chosen to understand John’s statement in John 1:1 to mean, “The Word was God.” The church has looked at the testimony of the apostles to Christ and at

Jehovah's statement in Isaiah 42:5-8, for example, and has concluded, "This is talking about Jesus!" That passage reads:

This is what God the LORD [Jehovah] says – he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: [Hey, that's what John said about Jesus] "I, the LORD [Jehovah], have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open the eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. [Hey, wait a minute, that sounds like Jesus, too! How could Jesus be talking to himself?] I am the LORD [Jehovah]; that is my Name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." [But Jesus seems to be given such glory when John says, "We beheld his glory" or when Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began," John 17:5, or when the living creatures in heaven praise the Lamb saying, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise," after saying basically the same thing about God, Revelation 5:12 and 4:11, and then in the same breath singing, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" 5:13].

Or the church has looked at Isaiah 44:6 which reads:

This is what the LORD [Jehovah] says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD [Jehovah] Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.

And the church has realized that this is what John heard coming from the lips of the resurrected Jesus: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living one; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever!" (Revelation 1:17,18). And they see another reflection of Isaiah in the New Testament when Jehovah says, "There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me....By Myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear" (Isaiah 45:21,23). They compare this with the words of Paul in Philippians 2:9-11, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

So why should it be strange if the church also accepts the possible translations of Romans 9:5, "From them [the Jews] is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!" and Titus 2:13, "We wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ," and 2 Peter 1:1, "The righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ."

This view of Jesus is also the only view that really makes sense of the attitude of the New Testament writers. They talk about the "church of God in Corinth...together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours." No one should ever do this if Jesus is just a created being. And then the New Testament letter writers

offer “grace and peace” from both “God our Father and the Lord Jesus” as if they are on an equal standing (1 Corinthians 1:2-3). They talk about being “servants of Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:1) and of Christ being “Immanuel – which mans ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:6), and of “all the fullness of the Deity” dwelling in Christ “in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). They call him the “radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3) and picture the Father saying to Christ, “Your throne, O God, will last forever” (Hebrews 1:8), quoting of him, “In the beginning, O Lord [this Old Testament quote uses the name Jehovah] you laid the foundations of the earth...they will perish, but you remain” (Hebrews 1:10-11).

Peter calls him the “Chief Shepherd” and the “Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 5:4; 2:25), even though in the Old Testament Jehovah is said to be our Shepherd (Psalm 23). He speaks of the “eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11). John considers it no injustice to the Father to proclaim that his “fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3) and freely says, “We are in him who is true – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

I am aware, of course, that some of the passages I have referred to are retranslated by Jehovah’s Witnesses in their New World Translation, but I am trying to establish a general perspective that the writers of the New Testament had such an exalted view of Jesus Christ that even if he were the first created being it would be too high a view of any creature.

That brings me to Colossians 1:15, which is supposed to be the basis for the view that Jesus is the first creation of God. If those who spoke the Greek language understood “firstborn” to mean the first child begotten and born by his father as opposed to subsequent children born, then we would need to consider that possibility here, also. And, in fact, they did. But that is not the only meaning they had when using this word. The word could be used as a metaphor for one who had the priority of position over others, with no idea of birth or coming into existence being included. For example, in Psalm 89:27 Jehovah says of David, “I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.” The second line of this poetic statement explains the meaning of “firstborn,” that is, “the most exalted.” David obviously was not God’s son by generation (procreation). The word “appoint” also helps us see that fathering in the literal sense is not in view, but fathering in a figurative sense. Jehovah calls Israel his “firstborn son” when telling Moses to warn Pharaoh to let Israel go (Exodus 4:22,23), but Israel was, though not the first nation God birthed, yet God’s most “treasured possession” (Exodus 19:5) among the nations.

So which use of “firstborn” makes most sense when used of Jesus? Well in the very next breath after Paul calls Jesus the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15) he says Jesus is “before all things” and the “firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy” (Colossians 1:17,18). The word “firstborn” in verse 18 is obviously figurative, coming to life after dying being compared to being born, the word “firstborn” signifying that Jesus is the most important one brought back, the initiator of resurrection (even though others had been raised from the dead, though not with resurrection bodies). This seems to indicate that the figurative use of “firstborn” is being used in Colossians 1:15, also. Besides, ‘giving birth to’ is not the same as creating. ‘Giving birth to’ results in someone of your same nature being

born. Even if we were to take it literally in this passage it would suggest that Jesus has the same nature as God, that is, he is deity himself.

What I need to explain at this point, Christy, is how there can also be so many other passages that speak of Jesus as submitting to the Father's authority (1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:28, for example). The church saw in the Bible four strands of testimony concerning the Father and Son. God is everywhere declared to be one (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 8:6, etc.). Jesus is said to be God (John 1:1; 20:28). Each is viewed as a different person (Jesus prays to the Father, goes to the Father, etc.). Each has a different function that is carried out in a line of authority from the Father to the Son (John 5:16-24).

To preserve the Biblical concept of God's oneness they felt they had to assert that there is only one essence (nature, an aggregate of characteristics which makes up a being). To preserve the Biblical concept of the distinction of Jesus' personality from the Father's they allowed that more than one personality could possess the one same essence. Jesus, then, could be said to have the same essence as the Father and be called God, and yet be a different personality from the Father. He could also take on a unique function, that of adding to Himself another nature or essence, human nature, in order to pay the penalty for our sins by dying in our place.

In so doing Jesus took a submissive role, but submission does not mean inferiority of nature or essence. Wives are to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:23) but that does not mean they are inferior to their husbands in essence. On the contrary, they are equally made in the image of God. In certain areas they will be superior to their husbands but they still submit. Even so, Jesus submits to the Father, not because he is inferior, but because He has so chosen to fulfill the plan of redemption. That is why He can be the mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5), because He is both God and man (He is one personality who possesses two natures). As SYBT says, "If Jesus, however, were part of a Godhead, the ransom price would have been infinitely higher than what God's own law required," suggesting that Jesus only had to be a finite sacrifice to die for Adam. But the price had to be infinitely high because Jesus was not the ransom for Adam's sin alone, but for the whole world (1 John 2:2). We are not only guilty of Adam's sin but all our own, also (Colossians 2:13,14).

And so we are to be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Each is listed because they each have a critical role in our salvation and they are the ones into whom we are equally to be baptized because they are not just any Tom, Dick or Harry, but the authors of our salvation. We look to "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Corinthians 13:13, notice the order, by the way) because our salvation is equally dependent on each of them. Yet, because the Son submits His will to the Father, the Father is the one usually designated "God."

The early church fathers writing after the apostles express this same belief. Ignatius (he lived from 30-107 A.D.), in his epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 1, could talk of "the blood of God" when speaking of Jesus' sacrifice. In chapter 7 he could describe Christ as "one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh" and in chapter 18 as "our God, Jesus Christ." He could also say, in his epistle to the Magnesians,

chapter 7, “The Lord did nothing without the Father, being united to Him,” and then, that “there is one Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is more excellent.” To the Trallians, chapter 7, he commands, “Continue in intimate union with Jesus Christ our God,” and again to the Smyrnaeans he refers to “Christ our God” (chapter 10).

In his dialogue with Trypho, Justin Martyr (114-165 A.D.) includes a lengthy argument attempting to prove to Trypho, a Jew, that Jesus is God. Irenaeus (120-202 A.D.) writes at length about how “neither the prophets nor the apostles did ever name another God, or call him Lord, except the true and only God” (Against Heresies, chapter 8), whereas, of course, Irenaeus and all the writers of the New Testament called Jesus Lord repeatedly.

The list of witnesses to Jesus’ deity and equality with God could go on and on, but the point is that this is what necessitated an explanation of the Trinity. When Arius (around 300 A.D.) sought to clarify the distinction of Jesus’ personality from the Father’s in reaction to those who denied it, he felt it better to reduce Jesus’ status to the highest created being in order to highlight it. When Athanasius sought to correct this idea without denying Jesus’ distinct personality, yet proclaiming His co-equality of essence with the Father, a battle ensued. Arius and those who followed managed several times to have Athanasius exiled (5 times, in fact, in 335, 339, 356, 361, and 363 A.D.). Yet eventually his arguments convinced the majority of the church’s leaders. Constantine, who presided over the first council that rejected Arius’s views, was later persuaded to restore Arius’s views, and Arius then had enough power to banish Athanasius. Constantine died before the issue was ever settled and played relatively little role in the final outcome of the argument.

It is a shame that so much fighting has taken place over this issue from both sides. I wish I could meet with you and express to you that I do not hate Jehovah’s Witnesses because of their views. I am dismayed, though, that such a view is so strongly propounded and that, to me, it takes from the glory due my Lord, Jesus Christ. But the Lord is able to fight His own battles. I believe He wants me to witness to His majesty and glory and to tell the world that forgiveness of sins, of all our sins, past, present, and future (Colossians 2:13) is available in Him through faith only, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-10). I would enjoy any response from you to this lengthy and complex letter. I hope it is not too confusing. But frankly, if God were someone I could completely understand, around whom no mystery existed, all aspects of whose being were completely intelligible to me, He would not be the infinite God whose thoughts are higher than mine.

Thank you for receiving my letter,

Randall Johnson

[What follows is Christie’s response]

Dear Randall,

Thank you for taking time to write me such a lengthy and detailed letter. I'm sorry that it has taken me so long to respond but I have received so much literature from my Aunt Marjorie that it has taken me some time to sort through it all.

Your letter was very informative and quite involved. But you answered my question in the second and the final paragraphs of your letter when you wrote:

The church was forced to consider who Jesus was and when they decided that He was indeed God they were forced to explain how that harmonized with the teaching of one God. What eventually resulted was the doctrine of the Trinity.

This is what I wanted clarified: Is the trinity a bible teaching or a church teaching? I believe in the bible and I believe it is God's word. When something is unclear, I turn to God's word as brought out in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

All scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.

I couldn't find the word "trinity" in any bible translation and your letter brings out that it is indeed a church teaching.

I was raised a Catholic and the Catholic Church doesn't encourage bible study, so when I began studying the bible on my own (even before I came across Jehovah's Witnesses), the trinity doctrine seemed confusing and difficult to understand. But the bible brings out that Jehovah is not a God of confusion. 1 Corinthians 14:33:

For God is (a God), not of disorder, but of peace.

Jehovah is a God of peace. I agree with you, it is a shame there has been so much fighting over this issue. Organized religion, in particular the Catholic Church, has persecuted people over this issue for centuries. But as Catholic theologians and both Catholic and Protestant encyclopedias bring out, the trinity doctrine is not a bible teaching. If only religions would follow the bible counsel at 1 Corinthians 4:6:

...Do not go beyond the things that are written, in order that you may not be puffed up individually in favor of the one against the other.

And John 15:17:

These things I commend you, that you love one another.

Regarding Justin Martyr's dialogue with Trypho, where can I find this? I think that Justin was trying to prove that Jesus was Lord, the Messiah. But I would like to read from your source. The sources listed on page 7 of the Trinity pamphlet I sent, bring out that Justin Martyr and Irenaeus did not support the trinity doctrine.

Using "Lord" does not always mean Jehovah. Depending on the Hebrew or Greek form being translated, "Lord" could mean Jehovah, Jesus, or it could be a title of respect as in 1 Peter 3:6. I'm enclosing literature on the use of God's name in the scriptures. I'm sure you will find it interesting. I would appreciate your comments, especially insight into why God is called Jehovah in the King James Version at Psalm 83:18.

Also, you mention in your letter that some of the passages you referred to have been retranslated in the New World Translation. Translations vary from bible to bible. I use many different bibles in my research including the King James Version, the Living Bible, and the Revised Standard. The New World Translation does restore Jehovah's name to its proper place but the King James, as well as other bibles, uses God's name also.

There is a translation you made of Romans 9:5 that I couldn't find in any bible:

From them (the Jews) is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!

Even the Living Bible renders the end of that verse, "Praise God forever!" which has quite a different meaning. Please tell me what bible contains your translation.

You also mentioned that it is through faith we are saved, not by works. I agree. But the bible also brings out in James 2:26:

Faith without works is dead.

Please know that I do accept Jesus Christ as my Savior, the Son of Jehovah God. Even the American Heritage dictionary makes this distinction.

Thank you again for taking interest in me. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Christie M. Lear

[My response]

Dear Christie,

I apologize first of all for misspelling your name. I thank you, however, for sending a letter to tell me of your thoughts about what I wrote.

I am a little discouraged that you did not respond to what I consider the heart of the letter. Far from intending to suggest that the church decided on the doctrine of the trinity apart from the

Word of God, I tried to show that it was precisely because of the testimony of the New Testament to who Jesus is that the church was forced to explain His relation to God. And the evidence I sought to present was for the full deity of Jesus the Messiah. I would greatly appreciate your sincere consideration of this matter.

I have read the booklet you sent with great interest. I will comment just briefly.

If there is anything we do know it is that Jehovah is definitely not the correct pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. Yahweh is certainly closer if not exactly correct. But we cannot even say that we know it is exactly correct for certain. Yet the logical end of the kind of reasoning given in this booklet about how concerned God is that everyone use His personal name correctly would certainly lead us to abandon the use of Jehovah and at least move closer to the correct form with Yahweh.

We should certainly not retain Jehovah because it has “currency and familiarity” (p. 9). But the point is that God is not giving brownie points to whoever uses His name exactly right or He would have ensured that the correct vocalization would have been preserved. As the booklet pointed out when it quoted Dr. Walter Lowrie (p. 29), we cannot know God if we know Him “only as an impersonal force.” But having God’s name in its exact vocalization is not necessary to knowing Him as the personal God who loves us and gave Himself for us on the cross.

As the booklet further explains, the way to really honor God’s name is to live in a way that brings glory to Him (pointing others to the kingdom, obeying His law, etc.). God is not the kind of God who is so insecure that He takes offense when we don’t properly pronounce His name. He is the God who is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), the one whose grace increases where sin abounds (Romans 5:21).

It seems to me that the issue this booklet is trying to assert does more to create the kind of fighting we have both regretted seeing. The real issue is, “Who is Jesus?” Please carefully review the evidence I recounted, Christie, and let me know your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Randall

[Her response]

Dear Randall,

I received your reply to my letter and I too am discouraged. You write you did not intend to suggest that the church decided on the doctrine of the trinity apart from the Word of God, but that is exactly what the early church did. All my research, including writings by Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, shows that the trinity doctrine was developed apart from scriptural teachings and was influenced by paganism. Your letter is sprinkled with “the church has chosen to

understand,” “the church concludes,” and “the early church fathers writing after the apostles.” You might not have intended it, but your letter shows the trinity doctrine was a conclusion of the church. (Hundreds of years after the bible was written!)

If the trinity doctrine is a doctrine of the bible, why isn't it clearly stated in the scriptures? Why isn't the word “trinity” in the bible?

You cited a great many scriptures in trying to show that Jesus is Almighty God. I will respond to a few of them:

You wrote if John 1:1 was translated “the Word was a god,” we would be expected to believe that John would call Jesus “a god” who was formed after Jehovah (which contradicts Isaiah 43:10). But calling Jesus “a god” is not calling him Almighty God – which is what Isaiah is referring to. For indeed many “gods” were formed (by human hands) after Almighty God. But these were pagan gods and not Almighty. I am in no way comparing Jesus with pagan gods – I'm just commenting on the use of the word “god.” When John 1:1 is translated “the Word was a god,” it highlights the divine, godlike quality of the Word. It is not calling Jesus Almighty God. “This harmonizes with the rest of the Bible, which shows that Jesus here called ‘the Word’ in his role as God’s Spokesman, was an obedient subordinate sent to earth by his Superior, Almighty God.” (Trinity booklet, p. 27)

You cite Isaiah 42:5-8 and say the church concluded, “This is talking about Jesus.” Let's examine that scripture: This is what God, Jehovah, says – he who created the heavens...” (Then you commented, “Hey, that's what John said about Jesus”) – But John 1:3 said all things were made through Jesus. As “wisdom” in his pre-human existence, Jesus says he was “by his (God's) side, a master craftsman” (Proverbs 8:30). “It was by means of this master worker, his junior partner, as it were, that Almighty God created all things. The Bible summarizes the matter this way: ‘For us there is one God, (not a triune God), the Father, from whom are all things...and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things’ – 1 Corinthians 8:6 RS Catholic edition.” (Trinity booklet, pg. 14)

Let's continue with Isaiah: “I, Jehovah, have called you in righteousness; will make you to be a covenant for the people...to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.” Then you comment, “Hey, wait a minute, that sounds like Jesus, too! How could Jesus be talking to himself?” But it isn't Jesus talking to himself (as would be the case if God was a trinity). It's Jehovah talking to Jesus in his pre-human (John 17:5) existence.

Isaiah continues: “I am Jehovah; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.” Then you comment, “But Jesus seems to be given such glory when John says, ‘We beheld his glory.’” Jesus indeed was given glory (John 17:5; Rev. 5:11,12) but he was not given the glory that was exclusively Jehovah's (my glory, my praise).

You also cited Isaiah 44:6 where Jehovah says, “I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.” Then you cite Revelation 1:17,18 and conclude it is Christ speaking in Isaiah. But in Isaiah “I am the first and the last,” describes Jehovah's Godship. Jehovah was making a

statement about his unique position as the true God. He is God eternal and besides him there is indeed no God (1 Tim. 1:17).

In Revelation, Jesus is presenting himself by the title “the First and the Last,” he is not claiming equality with Jehovah, the Grand Creator. He is using a title given to him by God – this title calls attention to Jesus’ unique resurrection. Jesus was “the First” human to be resurrected to immortal life (Col. 1:18). Jesus is “the Last” to be resurrected by Jehovah personally. So, Jesus becomes “the living one...living forever and ever.” He enjoys immortality. In this, he is like his immortal Father, who is called “the living God” (Rev. 7:2; Psalm 42:2). For all others of humanity, Jesus himself is “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). In harmony with this, Jesus says to John: “I became dead but look! I am living forever and ever, and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (Rev. 1:18b). Jehovah has given Jesus the authority to resurrect the dead. That is why Jesus can say that he has the keys to unlock the gates for those bound by death and Hades (Matthew 16:18). [See Revelation, It’s Grand Climax at Hand! Pp. 27-28]

You cited many other scriptures, but for me to take time to address each one would take several pages. However, I am willing to do that. Please tell me which scripture you want me to address.

In your letter, you stated in presenting specific scriptures you sought to show the full deity of Jesus the Messiah, and that you would greatly appreciate my sincere consideration of this matter. You concluded in your letter: “The real issue is, ‘Who is Jesus?’” After reading your letter, researching various secular sources and studying with Jehovah’s Witnesses, I have come to this conclusion:

Jesus is the Son of God (Matt. 3:16,17; John 3:16).

Jesus had a pre-human existence (John 3:13; Genesis 1:26).

Jesus is the Messiah (John 1:41; 4:25,26).

Jesus was sent by God to offer his life as a ransom that everyone might gain everlasting life (Matthew 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18,19).

Jesus is the mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5; 2 Cor. 1:20; Hebrews 7:25).

Jesus is God’s subordinate servant, not God’s equal (1 Cor. 11:3; John 14:28; Luke 22:42; Matthew 20:23).

Now I would ask you to again give careful consideration to pages 14-20 of the “Should You Believe in the Trinity?” booklet. And the question I leave with you – which I consider the real issue – “Who is Jehovah?”

Thank you for your letter. I hope to hear from you and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Christie M. Lear

[My response]

Dear Christie,

I must take exception to your conclusion that the church decided on the doctrine of the trinity apart from the Word of God. Whether or not you agree with the interpretations of key passages that I wrote about in my letter you must acknowledge that the passages are the source of our beliefs, not pagan sources. To suggest such a thing is an evasion of the historical evidence. You may assume outright that anything other than your view is pagan but it is just that, an assumption. The fact is that there were plenty of pagan sources for the idea of a created son of God (that's what all the old myths are about) but there is no pagan doctrine that ever comes close to envisaging the existence of the tri-personal God. SYBT's pretense at this, accomplished by showing triads of pagan gods, ignores the fact that these pagan concepts were nothing like the Christian concept of God and so in no way a real claim to trinity as defined in the doctrine of the church.

The absence of the word "trinity" from the Bible is a meaningless argument. The concept can exist without the name and that is what I have been seeking to show – that indeed Jesus is identified as equal to Yahweh and yet a distinct person or personality who willingly submits Himself to the Father's will. Whether you call it trinity or something else is irrelevant as long as it is Scripturally substantiated. Come on Christie, you are obviously very intelligent and can see through logical fallacies.

I know this sounds harsh but don't you see, Christie, that it is this kind of unfairness to opposing views that leads to continued misunderstanding and unnecessary bickering. It also prevents honest consideration of the opposing views. Whatever you have read of Justin or Irenaeus it must be admitted that they nowhere address the issue of the origin of the doctrine of the trinity and so nowhere indicate that it is from an unscriptural source. Instead, what we must evaluate is what they said about who Jesus is and who the Father is. WE may decide that they make no clear statement one way or the other about Jesus' deity or that they clearly deny or affirm it. But that does not logically lead to the view that such a doctrine as the church later affirmed is therefore pagan in origin.

But let me also repeat the evidence from these church fathers that I included in my first letter.

The early church fathers writing after the apostles express this same belief. Ignatius (lived 30-107 A.D.), in his epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 1, could talk of “the blood of God” when speaking of Jesus’ sacrifice. In chapter 7 he could describe Christ as “one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh” and in 18 as “our God, Jesus Christ.” He could also say, in his epistle to the Magnesians, chapter 7, “The Lord did nothing without the Father, being united to Him,” and then, that “there is one Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is more excellent.” And to the Trallians, chapter 7, he commands, “Continue in intimate union with Jesus Christ our God,” and again to the Smyrnaeans he refers to “Christ our God” (chapter 10).

In his dialogue with Trypho, Justin Martyr (114-165 A.D.) includes a lengthy argument attempting to prove to Trypho, a Jew, that Jesus is God. Irenaeus (120-202 A.D.) writes at length about how “neither the prophets nor the apostles did ever name another God, or call him Lord except the true and only God” (Against Heresies, ch. 8), whereas, of course, Irenaeus and all the writers of the New Testament called Jesus Lord repeatedly.

Of course, Justin and Irenaeus are well-respected witnesses to early church history, but they are, after all, fallible witnesses. Let’s look again at the Scriptures involved. Isaiah 43:10 says, “Before me no God was formed, nor will there be one after me.” Was Yahweh “formed?” No, there are two contrasts here. Yahweh is the only true God and not formed but eternally existent. The gods others worship were formed, according to the pagans, by the primal gods or forces of the universe. Any “formed” god is automatically not the true God, but God is in fact saying there are no formed gods with real existence after all. But if John is saying that Jesus is, in fact, a god (formed, according to Jehovah’s Witnesses, by God Himself) then John contradicts Yahweh. To say that this is John’s way of highlighting Jesus’ “divine, godlike quality” does not satisfy. Nothing created is divine. None who bear the title god is ever viewed in Scripture as other than a pretender to godhood, a false god. To anyone in John’s day who was an adherent of Scripture, the idea of Jesus being a god who was with God and was creator of all things would be abhorrent.

Admittedly, to declare that Jesus was God is also difficult. But it can be harmonized with Isaiah 43:10. Jesus is not a god formed or created after the God. He is God Himself who yet is a distinct personality from the Father (which is why John could also say that Jesus was “with” God in the beginning). It is not the case, as you say, that if God is a trinity, then Jesus talks or relates to Himself. The doctrine of the trinity clearly asserts that though God is one as to His essence, yet He is three as to personality. Each person, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, shares the one, undivided essence as a unique person able to relate to the others. Thus the Bible can affirm that there is only one God (Deut. 6:4; 1 Tim. 1:17; etc.) and yet also affirm that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are also God (e.g., John 1:1 and Acts 5:2-4).

On this view of God He is not lying then when He says He will not share His glory with another (Isaiah 42:8). To share it with Jesus would be to validly attribute it to God alone because Jesus shares that deity with the Father. If, however, Jesus is a created, obedient subordinate who is not equal to God, not infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness,

justice, goodness and truth, then to encourage praise and honor for Him (Jesus) like that encouraged for the Father, would be idolatry.

And yet, the writers of the New Testament consistently give the glory due the Father to Jesus, as well. In every greeting Paul makes in his letters he always conveys “grace and peace...from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7, et al). How could Paul equate the grace and peace that comes from God the Father with that of a created, obedient subordinate? If this is not what he is doing he is certainly not making that clear by his wording. How could John or the other writers of the Gospels even make Jesus the focus of their books without encouraging readers to share their praise of the Father with Jesus, also? How could John say he wrote his Gospel so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we might have life in Jesus’ name (20:31)? How could life ever be in the name of one who is a created, obedient subordinate of God?

How could John the Baptist be declared the messenger who would come ahead of Christ to prepare His way when in Malachi Yahweh says, “See I will send My messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly Yahweh you are seeking will come to His temple” (Malachi 3:1)? Isaiah 40:3 says, “In the desert prepare the way for Yahweh; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God” and yet Mark uses these references in his Gospel to introduce and explain the coming of Jesus. Admittedly it could be argued that Jesus’ coming is, by extension, Yahweh’s coming through His representative. But Yahweh had always and often “come” through created representatives before. This new coming was supposed to be personal. It is if Jesus is God Almighty. It is not if He isn’t. And He gets far too much acclaim by the Gospel writers for any created subordinate to receive since it is the acclaim for glory due God alone.

And when Paul explains that Jesus was given a name above all names so that everyone would bow to Him and confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:9-11), that could not be to the glory of God the Father if Jesus were a created being. Because God said in Isaiah 45:23,24 that before Him every knee would bow and by Him every tongue would swear. In other words, His name would be above all names in the eyes of every person. They would be forced to admit that “in Yahweh alone are righteousness and strength.”

If your view of Jesus is correct then John is again doing us a disservice when he records the inhabitants of heaven ascribing praise to God by saying,

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things. (Revelation 4:11)

Then, in 5:11, the inhabitants of heaven say basically the same about Jesus (except they use even more words to extol Him), saying He is worthy to receive “power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.” Then he represents them praising the Father and the Son in the same breath with the same ascription in 5:13,

To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever!

John should explain that Jesus doesn't really deserve praise here in the same way the Father does because, as a created subordinate, God will not share His glory with him who is less than the true God. But that is the whole point. Jesus is not less than the true God and deserves the same praise and glory the Father does. And so heaven rejoices saying, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (7:10).

Of particular poignancy in this regard is the statement by John in his Gospel that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke about Him (12:41). John is explaining why many in Jesus' day did not believe Him and paraphrases Isaiah 6:10,

He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so that they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn – and I would heal them (John 12:40).

He says Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory (in the Greek text it says "he saw his glory" but the context makes it evident that John means Jesus because it is failure to believe in Jesus that is at issue, and seeing the Father's glory would not be a reason in John's mind for Isaiah explaining why the Jews were blinded to Jesus). Isaiah, of course, saw Yahweh's glory and heard the angels proclaim **three** times that Yahweh was "holy" (Isaiah 6:3).

Other passages in which it appears God does share His own glory with Jesus include 2 Corinthians 4:6,

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

And 2 Peter 3:18 says,

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (Compare this with Hebrews 13:21; 2 Timothy 4:18; 1 Timothy 6:15,16; 1:17; etc.)

Just as an aside, the phrase "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" is constructed in the Greek New Testament this way: "the (only article) Lord of us and savior Jesus Christ." The general rule is that if there is only one article it governs both titles and indicates both refer to the same person. This is the same construction found in Titus 2:13: "the great God and savior of us Jesus Christ." If translated the same way it should read, "Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." The New International Version uses this translation. 2 Peter 1:1 is an identical construction.

Revelation 1:5,6 says, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." Then in 1:8 the Father Himself speaks and says, "I am the

Alpha and the Omega.” In 1:17 Jesus says, “I am the First and the Last,” concepts which are synonymous. My interpretation of this passage related this to Yahweh’s claim to be the First and the Last in Isaiah 44:6. Your view that Jesus meant He was the first to be resurrected and the last to be resurrected by Jehovah personally is unsupported by a later context, Revelation 22:12-16. This is a direct message from Jesus through an angel (v. 16) in which he declares, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” The first description the Father used of Himself, the last defines the meaning of the first two. The same description used of the Father and the Son most likely indicates that they are the speaking of the same concept. And we would certainly be wrong to say of the Father that He is the first and last to be resurrected.

If you want to make comment on any additional Scriptures referred to in my first letter I would appreciate your view of Hebrews 1:8-12. This is a section in which the author contrasts Old Testament references to angels with those of the Son. I am aware that some would prefer to translate Psalm 45:6, “God is your throne” rather than see Jesus referred to in “Your throne, O God” and that is technically possible in both Hebrew and Greek. But Hebrews 1:10, quoting Psalm 102:25 is clearly addressing a remark to Jesus that in the Psalm is addressed to God.

I would also appreciate comment on my interpretation of Colossians 1:15 in the first letter. And a passage I did not mention, but would like to see your response to, is Isaiah 9:6.

Yours Sincerely,

Randall Johnson

[Christie’s response]

Dear Randall,

I apologize for the long delay in my response. October was a very busy month for me and your letter was long and detailed and I wanted to respond to a number of things.

First of all, I don’t consider any view other than mine is pagan. What I meant by pagan are beliefs that find their source in ancient Babylon such as belief of multi-gods. To the Babylonians and other pagans their gods were personal and their rituals and literature reveal this.

Secondly, I don’t agree that the absence of the word “trinity” from the bible is a meaningless argument and I don’t believe the concept of trinity even exists in the bible. But you are entitled to your own opinion. What I take exception to is what you repeatedly refer to as “opposing views that lead to continued misunderstanding and unnecessary bickering.” I don’t see the free exchange of ideas (even when there is no agreement) as bickering. 1 Timothy 6:3-4 shows us

we are to avoid arguing over words. It was not my intention to argue but to carefully examine the Scriptures as to whether these things (in this case the trinity doctrine) were so, Acts 17:11.

Also, you wrote, according to Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus was formed by God himself. This is not a personal interpretation. This is what the scriptures reveal to us: Colossians 1:15 Jesus is called "the firstborn of all creation." In Revelation 3:14, Jesus is called the beginning of creation of God.

You write John 1:1's use of "a god" to highlight Jesus' divine, godlike quality does not satisfy. That is your opinion. I think it not only satisfies but it is also in harmony with the rest of the Scriptures.

You write, "Nothing created is divine." But Jesus was created (Colossians 1:15; Proverbs 8:22) which is another reason he can't be Almighty God. But Jesus can have divine qualities, grace and truth – John 1:14. You wrote, "none who bear the title 'god' is ever viewed in Scripture as other than a pretender to godhead, a false god." But Jesus is called "Mighty God" at Isaiah 9:6 (note: not Almighty God). At Psalm 82:1,6 "gods" is used of human judges in Israel. Similarly, Moses was told that he was to serve as "God" to Aaron and Pharaoh – Exodus 4:16. You further reason, if Jesus was created then to encourage praise and honor for Jesus would be idolatry. I disagree. By his entire life course of integrity to God, including his sacrifice, and by his resurrection from the dead to life as a heavenly Son of God, Jesus was "declared righteous in spirit" (1 Timothy 3:16) and heavenly creatures proclaimed him "worthy to receive the power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing" (Revelation 5:5-13).

You asked for my view of Hebrews 1:8-12 and which translation of Hebrews 1:8 ("God is your throne" or "Your throne, O God") is in harmony with the context. The preceding verses show that God is speaking, not that God is being spoken to. The next verse (Hebrews 1:9) uses the expression "God, thy God." This shows that the one spoken to is not Almighty God but a worshiper of Almighty God. Hebrews 1:10 quotes Psalm 102:25-27 which is addressed to God. But Hebrews 1:10-12 applies to the Son because the Son is the one through whom God "laid the foundations" of the earth and made the heavens. See Colossians 1:15,16; Proverbs 8:22,27-30.

Also, Hebrews 1:5 – a quotation is made from 2 Samuel 7:14 and applied to the Son of God. Just because the first application is to Solomon and the later is to Jesus doesn't mean that Solomon and Jesus are the same. Jesus is "greater than Solomon" and carries out a work foreshadowed by Solomon – Luke 11:31 (*Reasoning From the Scriptures*).

In response to your interpretation of Colossians 1:15 in your first letter, I agree the word "firstborn" could be used as "a metaphor for one who had the priority of position over others." But, in these verses, Jesus is shown to be "the firstborn of all creation" as well as "the firstborn from the dead" – not just the most distinguished in relation to those created or those resurrected but the first one actually created and the first raised from the dead to endless life (Colossians 1:15,18; Revelation 1:15; 3:14).

In regards to Isaiah 9:6, you probably want me to respond to “Mighty God.” As I’ve already noted, this is not Almighty God. Also, the Living Bible reads: “...These will be his royal titles: Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” None of these were given as “names” when Jesus was born to Mary, nor when he took up his ministry. They were all prophetic “title-names” by which Messiah would be identified. “Jesus lived up to the meaning of these names in every respect, and that is the sense in which they were prophetically given, to show his qualities and the good offices he would perform toward all those accepting him as Messiah.” (*Insight Into the Scriptures*)

In my last letter, I stated whom I believed, based on the scriptures, Jesus is. And I asked you why the King James Version uses God’s personal name Jehovah. I am glad to see you use the Hebrew form “Yahweh.” At least you recognize that God has a personal name.

Now I would like to continue examining what the Scriptures say about Jesus in relation to God. Job 2:1,2 and 6 shows that Satan knows who God is, Satan knows who the sons of God are and Satan knows God is more powerful than Satan. Matthew 4:1 brings out that Satan tries to tempt Jesus. Satan knows God can’t be tempted but the sons of God can be tempted and can sin (Jude 6). And that’s who Jesus is – not God, but the Son of God. Satan knows Jesus is not God (Matthew 4:3). At Matthew 4:4, Jesus is saying he is a man. And Jesus sets the Scriptural formulae on how to determine the truth. So at Matthew 4:5, Satan quotes scripture – he knows how to twist the meaning of Scripture. In reply at Matthew 4:7, Jesus shows how Scriptures have to blend with the rest of the Scriptures. Scriptures can’t be taken out of context. If Jesus is God, how can Satan offer him all these kingdoms at Matthew 4:8? And Matthew 4:9 shows again that Satan knows Jesus is not God.

Are Jesus and the Father equal? At John 14:28 the answer is clear – no. Did Jesus care who people thought he was? Matthew 16:13-17 shows Jesus was concerned with what his true disciples thought. They would be responsible to teach who he is. No one thought Jesus was God. And Jesus blessed Peter for giving the correct answer: the Son of the living God.

You wrote, “To anyone in John’s day who was an adherent of Scripture, the idea of Jesus being a god who was with God and was creator of all things would be abhorrent.” This is not what I wrote. Again, I suggested the use of “a god” in John 1:1 highlighted Jesus’ divine qualities and the Scriptures clearly state Jesus was with God before coming to the earth and it was through Jesus all things were created, but Jesus is not the Creator. Genesis 1:26; Proverbs 8:22,30; John 1:2,3.

And finally, why were all the Scriptures in John written? To support the trinity doctrine – which is the corner stone to many “Christian” religions? No, but that “you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”

The testimony of God (Matthew 3:17), Jesus, and the true disciples is unanimous: Jesus is the Son of God.

Thank you again for your letters. I look forward to your response and I would appreciate your insight on another matter. With all that is happening in the Middle East, what is your view on Christians participating in man's wars? – John 13:34,35; 1 John 3:10-12; John 18:36; Romans 12:17-21.

Sincerely,

Christie M. Lear

It was apparent to me after this letter that our correspondence was getting us nowhere. I wrote a letter in response to Christie letting her know that we were not communicating and that I would not continue corresponding. She seemed unwilling to really consider the arguments for their merit but would rather quote other Jehovah's Witnesses publications. She seemed unable to interact with the Scriptural explanations given, but was predisposed to see things from the limited perspective of Jehovah's Witnesses.

It has occurred to me since that I took a completely wrong approach to interacting with Christie. To engage her on only a doctrinal or Biblical basis communicated that I only saw her as a one-dimensional person. It seemed that if I just gave her enough "powerful" information she would have to see the light. What I failed to do was engage her on a personal level, developing a friendship of trust. I didn't know what was really motivating her to follow this viewpoint. I didn't understand her as a full person. I hope I won't make that mistake in the future.

Randall Johnson

Appendix 2: Predicate Nominatives in the New Testament and the “Problem” of John 1:1 and Other Passages

A predicate nominative in the New Testament is, by definition, a noun in the nominative case that is linked by a stative or copulative verb to the subject of that verb and thus forms a referential description of that subject. The nature of the referential description that a predicate nominative gives to the subject varies. There are three kinds of referential descriptions of the subject: either as another identity of the subject (John is the brother of James), or as a category to which the subject belongs¹ (John is an apostle), or as a quality inherent in the subject (God is love). These referential categories correspond roughly to what we would describe as **definite** predicate nominatives, **indefinite** predicate nominatives, and **qualitative** predicate nominatives.

With predicate nominatives that have the article (arthrous or articular predicate nominatives), the referential description is almost always **definite**, or a one-to-one correspondence of identity, whether literal or figurative.

Literal:

Mt 12:23, μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς Δαυὶδ (“This isn’t the son of David, is it?”)

Mt 13:34, ὁ σπείρων τὸ καλὸν σπέρμα ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (“The one sowing the good seed is the Son of Man”)

Mt 16:16, σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος (“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”)

Mt 27:11, σὺ εἶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων (“You are the king of the Jews”)

2 Co 3:17, ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν (“The Lord is the Spirit”)

Figurative:

Mt 5:13, Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς (“You are the salt of the earth”)

Mt 6:22, Ὁ λύχνος τοῦ σώματός ἐστιν ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς (“The lamp of the body is the eye”)

Mt 13:38c, τὰ δὲ ζιζάνιά εἰσιν οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ πονηροῦ (“The weeds are the sons of the evil one”)

Mk 14:22, τοῦτο ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμά μου (“This is my body”)

Ac 4:11, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ λίθος (“This is the stone”)

Mt 7:12, οὗτος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται (“for this is the law and the prophets,” that is, this golden rule sums up the law and the prophets)

But being articular doesn't guarantee that it always refers to identity, strictly speaking, as the following examples indicate:

Ac 4:12a, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἄλλῳ οὐδενὶ ἢ σωτηρία (“There is salvation in no other”), a qualitative sense, rather than “there is the (or, this) salvation in no other.”

1 John 3:4, Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία (“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness”), not “the sin” or “the lawlessness,” but qualitative

These feel more like **qualitative** references, than identity references, which is why, in our English translations, we don't include the article.

When it comes to anarthrous predicate nominatives, things get a bit more complicated. The reason for this is that despite the lack of an article a Greek speaker could still intend that noun to be **definite**. And if not, the noun could be **indefinite** or **qualitative**. Is there no sure way to tell? It is the thesis of this article that there is not. But there have been those who have cleverly suggested that word order holds the key to determining which option, **definite**, **indefinite**, or **qualitative**, is in the author's or speaker's mind. The suggestion has been that if the anarthrous predicate nominative comes before the verb this signals a definite (Colwell) or qualitative (Harner) sense in the author's or speaker's mind.

The Myth of Definite Nouns

Some of the evidence for this suggestion has relied on the concept of definite nouns. Colwell has suggested that nouns already considered definite, when they appear before the verb in a predicate nominative construction, are to be taken as definite. But the concept of an inherently definite noun is a difficult one to sustain.

Can there be a more definite noun than a person's name? And perhaps this could explain why, in the New Testament, the name Elijah (Mt 11:14; 16:14; 17:3,4,10,11,12; 27:47,49; Mk 6:15; 8:28; 9:4,5,11,12,13; 15:35,36; Lk 4:25,26; 9:8,19,30,33; Jn 1:21a,25; Ro 11:2; Ja 5:17) never has the article. But when you look at other proper names in the New Testament you are soon disabused of this idea. Without seeming rhyme or reason names like Jesus, Andrew, and Simon Peter, will have or not have an article. If you think you find one pattern with certain words, for example articular Jesus with λέγει ([the] Jesus says...) and anarthrous Jesus with ἀπεκρίθη (Jesus answered), your pattern gets exploded (Mt 28:9; Lk 22:48,52; 23:28; Jn 13:31; 18:4; 19:26; 20:15, etc., and Mt 3:5; 11:4,25; 15:28; 16:17; 17:17; 20:22; 21:21, etc.).

And is it not possible to think of even a proper name as indefinite (“I am a Matthew like you are”)? And even a noun we would normally consider definite, God, for example, or a title like Lord, is used indefinitely and qualitatively in the New Testament:

- 2 Thessalonians 2:4, πάντα λεγόμενον θεὸν, “every so-called god”

- John 10:34, ἐγὼ εἶπα· θεοὶ ἐστε, “I said, ‘You are gods,’” though the fact that gods is plural almost necessitates an indefinite sense here, whereas the singular would not. But if Yahweh could say to plural individuals, “You are gods,” He could certainly say to one of them, “You are a god.”
- Mark 2:28, κύριός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τοῦ σαββάτου (“The Son of Man is lord indeed of the Sabbath”), though this could be conceived as “the Lord of all,” as could the next example, it could also indeed be qualitative.
- Acts 10:36, οὗτός ἐστιν πάντων κύριος (“This one is lord of all”)
- 1 Corinthians 8:5, ὡσπερ εἰσὶν θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοί (“Even as there are many gods and many lords”)

So it is impossible to say that a “definite” noun must always be definite. Consequently, it is best not to think of this as a category for our investigation of word order signaling whether an anarthrous predicate nominative is definite, indefinite or qualitative.

As to word order as a clue, an examination of all the predicate nominatives in the New Testament should help us determine whether this is a signal or not. I have endeavored to examine every predicate nominative in the text of the New Testament (728 of them). I am sure I have missed some. Some that I label as a predicate nominative might not be so labeled by others. John’s writings (Gospel, letters, and Revelation), though they make up 20% of the New Testament, have 45% of the predicate nominatives (333).

The stative verbs I have found that render predicate nominatives are **εἶμι** (most), **γίνομαι** (Mk 1:17; Lk 20:33; Jn 1:12,14; 2:9; 4:14; 5:14; 9:27; 12:36; 15:8; Ro 4:18; 7:13; 1 Co 4:9; 2 Co 5:21; Ga 4:16; 1 Th 1:6; 2:14; He 5:9; 10:33; 11:7; Ja 2:4,11; Re 12:10; 16:3,4; 18:2), **δοκέω** (Lk 22:24; Ga 2:9; 6:3), **λέγω** (Mt 1:16; 2:23a; 4:18; 9:9; 10:12; 13:55; 16:13; 26:3,14,36; 27:16,17,33; Mk 8:27; Lk 22:1,47; Jn 4:5,25; 11:16,54; 19:13,17; 20:24; 21:2; Ac 3:2; 6:9; 9:36; 1 Co 8:5; Ep 2:11; Col 4:11; 2 Th 2:4; He 9:2,3; 11:24; Re 2:2,9,20,24; 3:9), **καλέω** (Mt 2:23b; 5:9,19; 23:8a,10,13; 27:8; Mk 11:17; Lk 1:32,35,60,76; 2:4; 7:11; 9:10; 15:21; 22:25; Jn 1:42; Ac 1:19,23; 4:36; 14:12; 28:1; Ro 9:26; 1 Co 15:9; He 3:13; 11:16; Ja 2:23; 1 Jn 3:1a; Re 1:9; 11:8; 12:9; 16:16; 19:13), and **χρηματίζω** (Ac 11:26; Ro 7:3).

Kinds and Numbers of Predicate Nominatives in the New Testament

There are several different kinds of predicate nominatives in the New Testament.

The most common predicate nominative construction is with a pronominal subject, that is with a pronoun as the subject. By my count there are 211 of these, categorized as those with arthrous predicate nominatives following or preceding the verb, and those with anarthrous predicate

nominatives following or preceding the verb. Those with an arthrous predicate nominative following the verb: Mt 1:23; 3:3,17; 5:13; 7:12; 12:23,48; 13:19,22,23,55a; 16:16; 17:5; 19:17; 21:11a,38; 22:32a,38; 23:8b,9; 24:45; 26:26,28,63; 27:11; Mk 3:11,33; 6:3a; 8:29; 9:7; 12:7; 13:11; 14:22,24,61; 15:2; Lk 3:22; 4:41; 9:35; 20:14; 21:19; 22:53,70; Jn 1:8,19,20,21c,25,34; 3:10,19,28; 4:29,42; 5:12,35; 6:14,29,35,40,41,42,48,50,51,58,69; 7:26,40,41; 9:19,20; 10:7,9,11,14,24; 11:25,27; 14:6; 15:1a,5a,b,12; 17:3; 18:33; 21:24; Ac 4:11; 8:10; 9:20,22; 17:3a; 21:28,38; 1 Co 4:17; 9:1b; 11:24; Ep 1:18,23; 2:14; Php 3:3; Col 1:18a,24; 1 Pe 1:5; 2 Pe 1:17; 1 Jn 1:5a; 2:22a,c,25; 3:11; 4:3; 5:3,4,5a,6a,14; 2 Jn 7; Re 1:8,17a,b; 2:23; 4:5; 5:8; 11:4; 19:9; 20:14; 21:6,12; 22:16; with the arthrous predicate nominative preceding the verb: Jn 1:21c; 1 Co 9:1b; 11:25; 2 Pe 1:17; Re 19:9; 20:14; with the anarthrous predicate nominative following the verb: Mt 11:14; 14:2; 23:8a; Mk 3:17; 15:22,42; Lk 1:35,76; 2:11a,b; 12:1; 15:21; Jn 1:41,42a; 4:14,46; 6:42,70; 18:13b; Ac 4:36b; 5:17; 10:36; 17:3b; Ro 4:11,16; 8:29; 16:5; 1 Co 12:27; 2 Co 4:4; 5:21; Ga 3:6; 4:24a,26; Ep 1:14; 3:14; 6:2,17; Col 1:15a,b,18b,27; 3:5,14; 1 Th 4:3; 2 Th 2:4a,b; 3:17; 1 Ti 3:15; 4:10; He 2:6; 9:2; 1 Pe 5:12; 1 Jn 5:20b; Re 11:8; 21:7b; and with the anarthrous predicate nominative preceding the verb: Mt 5:9; 12:50; 23:8c; 27:54; Mk 3:35; 15:39; Lk 1:32,36; 2:4; 4:22; 19:9; 23:2; Jn 1:21a,49; 4:9,19; 8:44a; 9:24,27,28,31; 10:1,33; 15:14; 18:35,37a; Ac 9:15; 1 Co 3:17; 2 Co 6:16; 1 Th 1:6; 2:14; 1 Jn 2:2; Re 2:9; 3:9a.

Examples from each category are:

- Matthew 3:17, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός (“This one is the Son of Me, the beloved one”)
- John 1:21c, ὁ προφήτης εἶ σύ (“Are you the prophet?”)
- Ephesians 1:14, ὁ ἐστιν ἀρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν (“He is the downpayment of our inheritance”)
- John 1:49, σὺ βασιλεὺς εἶ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ (“You are the king of Israel”)

The next most popular construction, 189 by count, is that with the subject contained in the verb, with an arthrous predicate nominative following the verb (Mt 24:6; Ac 4:12a; 1 Pe 2:15; Jn 1:9; 5:9; 8:12; 19:31; Re 12:10; 22:14), an arthrous predicate nominative preceding the verb (Ac 12:15; Jn 20:15; 21:7,12), with an anarthrous predicate nominative following the verb (Mt 2:23b; 4:3,6; 5:34; 22:23,32b; 23:10a; 26:14; 27:43; Mk 9:35; 12:27; Lk 1:35,60; 6:35; 7:39a,b; 11:8; 15:21; 20:33; 22:1,47; Jn 1:9; 5:9; 8:12,55; 9:14; 11:2,38; 12:20; 13:30; 15:8; 18:13a,39; 19:12,14,31; 20:19,24; 21:2; Ac 2:15; 4:12b; 9:36; 14:12; 25:16; Ro 4:18; 8:16; 9:26; 10:12; 13:1; 1 Co 8:5b; 9:1a,16; 12:15,16; 13:1; 15:9,44; Ga 5:23; Ep 2:11; 2 Th 2:4b; 2 Ti 3:1; Hb 4:13; 5:9; 8:6; 9:3; 11:7,24; Ja 2:4; 1 Jn 5:16; Re 2:2a,20; 12:10(3x); 16:14; 17:14; 18:2; 20:6; 21:7a,b; 22:14), and with an anarthrous predicate nominative preceding the verb (Mt 5:19,34; 14:26,33; 22:42,45; 27:6,40; Mk 6:15a,49; 11:32; 12:31,37; Lk 1:32; 4:3,9;

7:8,39b; 14:22; 20:27,38,44; 22:25,59; Jn 5:10,13,14,27; 8:33,37,39b,44b,48,54; 9:4,5,8,17,25; 10:13,22,34,36; 11:49,51; 12:6,36; 13:13,35; 18:18,26,37b; 19:21,40; 20:1,14,15; 21:4,7,12;

25:14; Ac 25:14; Ro 1:16; 2:28,29; 7:3; 13:4; 1 Co 1:18; 4:9; 6:7; 11:14,15; 12:6; 15:12; Ga 4:16,31; 5:3; Php 1:7; 2:13; Hb 5:13; 9:15; 10:33; Ja 2:23; 4:14,17; 1 Jn 2:18a,b; 3:2; 4:20; Re 10:6; Re 13:18; 18:7; 19:10; 21:3a; 22:9). Examples from each category are:

- 1 Peter 2:15, ἐστὶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ (“It is the will of God”)
- Ac 12:15, ὁ ἄγγελός ἐστιν αὐτοῦ (“It is the angel of him”)
- John 5:9, Ἦν δὲ σάββατον (“It is [was] a/the Sabbath”)
- James 4:14, ἀτμίς γάρ ἐστε (“For you are a mist”)

The next most popular construction (149 by count) is with a stated subject (not a pronoun) with an arthrous predicate nominative following the verb (Mt 6:22; 13:34,37,38a,b,c,39a; Lk 8:11b; 11:34; Jn 1:4,40; 6:64a; 20:31; Ep 4:10; 1 Jn 2:7,22b; 3:4; 4:15; 5:1,5b,6b,c,20a; Re 17:18; 18:23; 20:2b; 21:8), with an arthrous predicate nominative preceding the verb (Jn 15:1b; 1 Co 11:3a; 2 Co 3:17; Re 19:8), with an anarthrous predicate nominative following the verb (Mt 2:23a; 10:2; 13:55; 23:36; 27:8,16,17,33; Lk 9:10; 19:46; Jn 1:8,9; 4:5,18; 6:55; 11:16; 18:10,40; 19:13,38; Ac 1:19,23; 3:2; 4:36a; 10:34; 11:26; Ro 5:14; 8:24; 11:6; 12:12,14; 16:15; Ga 5:22(9x); Ep 5:5,23a; Col 4:11; 1 Ti 1:5; 6:6; Hb 11:1; 1 Jn 2:27b; 1 Jn 5:20b; Re 1:9; 5:6,11; 16:16; 17:15(2x); 20:2a; 21:3b), and with an anarthrous predicate nominative preceding the verb (Mt 9:9; 12:8; 13:39b,c; 23:10b,13; Mk 11:17; 12:35; Lk 1:63; 6:5; Jn 1:1,14; 2:9; 3:4,6a,b,29; 6:63b; 8:34,39a,42; 10:8,12; 11:54; 12:50; 17:17; Ac 7:33; 17:7; 22:26; 28:1,4; Ro 1:9; 1 Co 3:19; 4:4; 6:19; 7:22a,b; 10:16; 11:7a,b; Ga 2:9; 4:1,25; 1 Ti 6:10; Hb 11:16; Ja 3:4,5; 4:4; 1 Jn 1:5b; 2:4,27a; 3:15; 4:8,16; 5:7,17; Re 1:20; 17:12,15(2x), 21:22). Examples from each category are:

- John 15:1b, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ γεωργός ἐστιν (“and my Father is the vinedresser”)
- Luke 8:11b, ὁ σπόρος ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ (“The seed is the word of God”)
- Ephesians 5:23a, ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς (“the husband is the head of the wife”)
- John 8:42, εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατήρ ὑμῶν ἦν (“If God was the father of you all”)

There are 68 examples of pronominal predicate nominatives, pronouns or number words that serve as predicate nominatives (Mt 10:20; 21:10; 23:16,18; 26:48,68; Mk 5:14; 8:27; 9:10,39; 12:28; Lk 7:49; 8:11a,25,30; 9:9; 10:29; 12:42; 20:12,17; 22:64; Jn 1:22; 5:13,14,32; 6:20,64a; 7:36,50; 8:25; 9:36; 10:30; 12:2,34; 13:25,26; 14:21; 16:17,18; 18:38; 21:20; Ac 21:22; 23:19; Ro 14:4; 1 Co 3:5(2x),7,11; 7:19(2x); 9:3,18; 10:19(2x); 14:15; 2 Co 1:12; 12:11,13; Ga 4:24b; 6:3; Ep 4:9; Ja 2:19; 1 Jn 3:23; 5:7,9,11a; 2 Jn 6:a; Re 7:13). Many of these are in a question

(“Who is it”) where, if we turn the question into an assertion, we can see which word is the predicate nominative (“it is who”). Some interesting examples are:

- Galatians 6:3, εἰ γὰρ δοκεῖ τις εἶναί τι μηδὲν ὧν (“For if someone considers [himself] to be something, when he is nothing”). Here, τι acts as predicate nominative following the infinitive εἶναί, and μηδὲν as predicate nominative to the subject contained in the participle ὧν.
- John 10:30, ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἓν ἐσμεν (“I and the Father are one thing”). Is a number a pronoun? No, but the similarity between its function here makes me put it in the pronominal category.
- John 21:25, Ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἃ ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς (“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did”)
- 1 John 5:9, αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ (“This is the testimony of God,” or, “The testimony of God is this”). Is the pronoun the subject of this sentence or the predicate nominative? I’m taking it as a predicate nominative and there are several like this that could go either way.

Participial phrases make up the next most numerous category of predicate nominatives, being 41 in number (Mt 3:3; 13:22,23; Mk 4:16,18a,b,20; 7:15; 15:7; Lk 16:15; Jn 1:15,33; 4:10,26,37(2x); 5:15,39,45; 6:33,63a,64a,b; 7:25; 8:18,50(2x); Ac 2:16; 9:21; 10:42; Ro 3:11a,b,c; 1 Co 8:5a; Ga 1:7; 1 Jn 5:5a,6a; Re 1:18; 2:23; 7:14; 14:4). Examples are:

- Matthew 3:3, οὗτος γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ῥηθεις διὰ Ἡσαΐου (“For this is the one who spoke through Isaiah”)
- Revelation 14:4, οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν (“These are those who did not defile themselves with women”)

There are 17 instances of unstated but understood predicate nominatives: Mt 11:10; 26:22,25; Mk 13:6; Lk 7:27; Jn 1:30; 8:24,28; 9:9; 13:19; 18:5,6,8; 18:25; 2 Co 2:3; 1 Jn 3:1b; Re 20:12. Some examples are:

- Matthew 11:10, οὗτός ἐστιν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται (“this is [the one] concerning whom I wrote”)
- 1 John 3:1b, καὶ ἐσμεν (“and we are [the children of God]”)

Ten cases of missing, but understood, stative verbs that take predicate nominatives are Lk 23:38; Ro 7:7; 10:9; 1 Co 11:3b,c; 15:20; 2 Co 2:2; Ep 5:23b; Php 1:8; Re 21:21. For example:

- Revelation 21:21, καὶ οἱ δώδεκα πυλῶνες δώδεκα μαργαρίται (“and the twelve gates [are] twelve pearls”)

A case may be made for 32 “predicate nominatives” that are not in the nominative case: Mt 9:9; 10:25; 23:9a; 26:3(gen); 27:17,33; Lk 7:11; 9:10; 20:41; Jn 1:12; 4:5; 11:54; 19:13,17b; 20:19; Ac 6:9(gen); 8:37; 11:26; 14:12; 19:35; Ro 16:1; Ep 2:11b(gen); Php 1:7; 2 Th 2:4a; 1 Ti 6:5; Ja 2:11; Re 1:9(dat); 2:9,20,24; 3:9a; 16:3,4. Examples:

- Luke 20:41, πῶς λέγουσιν τὸν χριστὸν εἶναι Δαυὶδ υἱόν; (“How do they say the Christ to be David’s son?”). What they say is in the accusative case so that the subject of εἶναι, τὸν χριστὸν, is in the accusative as is the predicate nominative, υἱόν. Do we call it a predicate accusative?
- Acts 8:37(txt), Πιστεύω τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι τὸν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν (“I believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God”). This passage is not in all Greek manuscripts of Acts, but the Greek is genuine. Here again we have a predicate nominative type relationship expressed in the accusative case, “Jesus is the Son of God.” Ditto for Acts 19:35, Romans 16:1, Philippians 1:7, and Revelation 3:9a.
- John 20:19, Οὔσης οὖν ὀψίας τῇ ἡμέρᾳ (“When it was evening of that day”). This is a genitive absolute, the subject “it” being understood in the participle and evening, though in the genitive case, acting as a predicate nominative.

A case could be made three times for adjectives acting as substantives and therefore as predicate nominatives:

- Mark 6:35, ἔρημός ἐστιν ὁ τόπος (“This place is a desert [literally, deserted]”)
- John 9:30, τὸ θαυμαστόν ἐστιν (“It is the marvelous”)
- Jn 18:15, ὁ δὲ μαθητὴς ἐκεῖνος ἦν γνωστός τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ (“Now that disciple was known to the high priest”)

There is one place where a prepositional phrase acts as a predicate nominative:

- James 5:3, ὁ ἶδος αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῖν ἔσται (“Their corrosion will be for a witness to you”)

A hina-clause can act as a predicate nominative:

John 4:34, ἐμὸν βρῶμά ἐστιν ἵνα ποιήσω τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με (“My food is that I might do the will of the One who sent me”)

Then there are some cases (6) where the adjective μείζων could be construed as a substantive and thus a predicate nominative (Mt 18:1; Mk 4:32; Lk 22:24; JN 8:53; 10:29; 14:28):

- Matthew 18:1, τίς ἄρα μείζων ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ (“Who, then, is a greater one in the kingdom”)
- John 8:53, μὴ σὺ μείζων εἶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ (“You are not a greater one than our father Abraham”)

Anarthrous Predicate Nominatives that Are Clearly Definite, Qualitative, or Indefinite

Now, since it is really only the anarthrous predicate nominatives that are in question as to interpretation (definite, indefinite, or qualitative), it makes sense to look at only those that can only be one or the other, either definite, indefinite, or qualitative, and what order they come in, in relationship to the stative verb. Some of those are not worth considering because they are names, which we have seen are commonly arthrous or anarthrous with no rhyme or reason. They won't tell us anything about whether the writers were using a pattern of word order or not to intend anarthrous predicate nominatives as either definite, indefinite or qualitative. When we exclude these names, our list looks like this:

Anarthrous Predicate Nominatives following the verb where a **definite** interpretation seems the only possibility:

Matthew 27:43, εἶπεν γὰρ ὅτι θεοῦ εἰμι υἱός (“Because he said that I am the Son of God”) – Jesus would not be in trouble for claiming to be “a” son of God.

Mark 15:42a, ἐπεὶ ἦν παρασκευὴ (“because it was the Preparation Day”) – It could not have been “a” day of preparation since there was only one and this term had taken on a proper name status.

Mark 15:42b, ὃ ἐστὶν προσάββατον (“which is the day before Sabbath”) – It was not “a” day before Sabbath but, in equivalence with παρασκευὴ, must be “the” day before Sabbath, likely also a proper name status.

- John 1:41, εὐρήκαμεν τὸν Μεσσίαν, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον χριστός (“We have found the Messiah, which being translated is [the] Christ”) – If there is equivalence between the Hebrew and the Greek, τὸν Μεσσίαν must translate as ὁ χριστός, and though John did not feel obligated to add the article before χριστός, it is equivalent.
- John 18:13a, ἦν γὰρ πενθερὸς τοῦ Καϊάφα (“for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas”) – Unless Caiaphas had more than one wife, and therefore more than one father-in-law, definite is the only possibility.
- John 18:13b, ὃς ἦν ἀρχιερεὺς τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ ἐκείνου (“he was the high priest that year”) – Unless there was more than one high priest, definite is the only possibility.
- John 19:14, ἦν δὲ παρασκευὴ τοῦ πάσχα (“Now it was the Preparation Day for Passover”) – It could not have been “a” day of preparation since there was only one and this term had taken on a proper name status.
- Acts 2:15, ἔστιν γὰρ ὥρα τρίτη τῆς ἡμέρας (“for it is [was] the third hour of the day”) – Being the third hour makes this a unique reference, so it could not be “a” third hour of the day, there being only one.
- Acts 5:17, ἡ οὖσα αἵρεσις τῶν Σαδδουκαίων (“who being the sect of the Sadducees”) – The high priest did not belong to “a” sect of the Sadducees among other sects of the Sadducees, but “the” sect of the Sadducees as opposed to the Pharisees.
- Acts 17:3, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς (“This is the Christ, Jesus”) – As the textual addition in some manuscripts shows, there was an expectation that this Ἰησοῦς should have an article, and that is the only logical possibility, since it is a proper name.
- Romans 4:16, ὃς ἐστὶν πατὴρ πάντων ἡμῶν (“who is the father of us all”) – Abraham is not “a” father of us all, as if we have many fathers, and to say this is qualitative seems too fine a distinction.
- Romans 8:29, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς (“So that he might be the firstborn among many brothers”) – There is only one firstborn.
- Romans 16:5, ὃς ἐστὶν ἀπαρχὴ τῆς Ἀσίας (“who is the firstfruits of Asia”) – There can only be one firstfruits, cannot be “a” firstfruits and others in addition.
- 1 Corinthians 16:15, τὴν οἰκίαν Στεφανᾶ, ὅτι ἐστὶν ἀπαρχὴ τῆς Ἀχαΐας (“the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia”) – There can only be one firstfruits, cannot be “a” firstfruits and others in addition.
- 2 Corinthians 4:4, ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ (“who is the image of God”) – There is only one image of God, so Christ cannot be “an” image of God, as if there is another.

2 Corinthians 5:21, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (“in order that we might become the righteousness of God”) – There is only one righteousness of God, not “a” righteousness among others.

2 Corinthians 6:16, ἡμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς θεοῦ ἐσμεν ζῶντος (“for we are the temple of the living God”) – We are not “a” temple of the living God, for there is only one, and qualitative (“we are temple of the living God”) seems strained.

Galatians 4:26, ἣτις ἐστὶν μήτηρ ἡμῶν (“who is the mother of us”) – We can only have one mother.

Ephesians 1:14, ὃ ἐστὶν ἀρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν (“who is the down payment of our inheritance”) - Unless there are other down payments besides the Holy Spirit, this must be definite.

Ephesians 5:23a, ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναίκος (“the husband is the head of the wife”) – The wife cannot have more than one head over her in the home, and there is equivalence between his headship over her and Christ’s headship over the church.

Ephesians 5:23b, ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας (“as Christ is the head of the church”) – There is only one head of the church.

Ephesians 6:2, ἣτις ἐστὶν ἐντολὴ πρώτη (“which is the first commandment”) – There is only one commandment that can be πρώτη with a promise.

Ephesians 6:17, ὃ ἐστὶν ῥῆμα θεοῦ (“which is the word of God”) – The sword of the Spirit cannot only be “a” word of God.

Colossians 1:15, ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως (“who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation”) – There is only one image of God and only one firstborn.

Colossians 1:18b, ὃς ἐστὶν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν (“who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead”) – There is only one beginning and only one firstborn.

Colossians 1:27, ὃ ἐστὶν Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν (“which is Christ in you”) – If Χριστὸς is being used as a proper name, then we should exclude this one. But if it is translating ‘anointed one,’ then Paul is saying, “which is [the] Messiah in you.” He could not mean “a” messiah in us.

Colossians 3:14, ὃ ἐστὶν σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος (“which is the bond of perfection”) – There is only one perfect bond – love.

1 Thessalonians 4:3, Τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ὑμῶν [txt] (“For this is the will of God, your sanctification”) – There is only one will or desire of God when it comes to marital fidelity, that is, our sanctification.

1 Timothy 3:15, ἥτις ἐστὶν ἐκκλησία θεοῦ (“which is the church of God”) – There is only one church.

Hebrews 8:6, κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης (“of a better covenant he is the mediator”) – There is only one mediator of this covenant.

1 Peter 5:12, ταύτην εἶναι ἀληθῆ χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ (predicate accusative) (“this to be the true grace of God”) – There is only one true grace of God, which Peter references in verse 10.

Revelation 20:2, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς (“the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan”) – The definite article on ὄφις identifies this as one unique Διάβολος, as does the article on Σατανᾶς.

Revelation 21:3b, καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς μετ’ αὐτῶν ἔσται [αὐτῶν θεός] (txt) (“and God Himself with them will be [and] [the] God of them”) – If the textual addition is allowed, perhaps this verse should be translated, “And God-with-them Himself (or, “He, God with them, will be”) will be the God of them.” And, of course, there is only one God, so He cannot be “a” God of them.

=33 instances.

We would not expect to see this many definite anarthrous predicate nominatives following the stative verb if Colwell’s Rule applied, unless he would argue that many of these predicate nominatives are not definite nouns to begin with.

Anarthrous Predicate Nominatives following the verb where a **qualitative** interpretation seems the most likely possibility:

Luke 12:1, ἥτις ἐστὶν ὑπόκρισις (“which is hypocrisy”) – The leaven of the Pharisees is not the hypocrisy (there are others), nor a hypocrisy among others (possible but not likely), but rather the quality of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is the leaven of the Pharisees.

Romans 7:13, Τὸ οὖν ἀγαθὸν ἐμοὶ ἐγένετο θάνατος (“What was good to me became death”) – What was good, the law, did not become a death or the death to Paul, but the quality of death.

Romans 8:24, ἐλπίς δὲ βλεπομένη οὐκ ἔστιν ἐλπίς (“Now hope that is seen is not hope”) – Paul is probably not saying that seen hope is not a hope, or the hope, but hope itself.

Romans 10:12, οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολή (“for there is no distinction”) – Definite or indefinite could work but make less sense.

Romans 11:6, ἐπεὶ ἡ χάρις οὐκέτι γίνεται χάρις (“otherwise grace is no longer grace”) – See Romans 8:24.

Galatians 5:22, ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἀγάπη... (“Now the fruit of the Spirit is love...”) – A list of qualities alone makes sense here.

Colossians 3:5, ἣτις ἐστὶν εἰδωλολατρία (“which is idolatry”) – It cannot be definite (Covetousness is not “the” idolatry.” There are others.), indefinite could work (covetousness is an idolatry), but the least clumsy is qualitative.

1 Timothy 1:5, τὸ δὲ τέλος τῆς παραγγελίας ἐστὶν ἀγάπη (“Now the goal of this instruction is love”) – The goal of Paul’s charge is not “the” love, nor “a” love indiscriminate, but love as a quality.

1 Timothy 6:6, Ἔστιν δὲ πορισμὸς μέγας ἢ εὐσέβεια (“but godliness is great gain”) – Godliness could be “a” great gain, but qualitative seems most likely.

Hebrews 5:9, ἐγένετο πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ αἴπιος σωτηρίας αἰωνίου (“he became, for all who heed him, eternal salvation”) – Definite is possible (“the eternal salvation”) but qualitative seems most likely.

Revelation 5:11, ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων (“the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands”) – The plurals make either definite or indefinite implausible.

=11 instances.

We would also expect these qualitative anarthrous nouns to precede the verb if Harner’s Rule was correct.

Anarthrous Predicate Nominatives following the verb where an **indefinite** interpretation seems the most likely possibility:

Matthew 14:26, φάντασμά ἐστιν (“It is a ghost”) – It is doubtful the disciples would have been commenting on the qualitative aspect of this apparition (“It is ghostly”), and they certainly were not referencing some specific ghost (“It is the ghost”).

Matthew 22:23, μὴ εἶναι ἀνάστασιν (“not to be a resurrection”) – indefinite, though could be definite in the Sadducees’ minds if they were thinking about “the” resurrection that the Pharisees believed in, or qualitative if they were thinking of the concept of resurrection period.

Luke 7:39a, οὗτος εἰ ἦν προφήτης (“if this one was a prophet”) – most likely indefinite (unless Simon is thinking Jesus has been identified as “the” prophet of Dt 18)

Luke 11:8, διὰ τὸ εἶναι φίλον αὐτοῦ (“since he is a friend of his”)

Luke 19:46, ἔσται ὁ οἶκός μου οἶκος προσευχῆς (“My house will be a house of prayer”)

John 4:14, ὃ δώσω αὐτῷ γενήσεται ἐν αὐτῷ πηγή ὕδατος (“What I give him will become in him a spring of water”)

John 4:46, ἦν τις βασιλικὸς (“there was a certain official”) – The use of τις guarantees the indefinite sense

John 8:55, ἔσομαι ὅμοιος ὑμῖν ψεύστης (“I will be a liar like you”)

John 11:38, ἦν δὲ σπήλαιον (“it was a cave”)

John 18:40, ἦν δὲ ὁ Βαραββᾶς ληστής (“Now Barabbas was a thief”)

John 19:12, οὐκ εἶ φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος (“you are not a friend of Caesar”)

Acts 4:12b, οὐδὲ γὰρ ὄνομά ἐστιν ἕτερον (“for there is not another name”) – ἕτερον helps insure the indefiniteness of this term

Acts 10:34, οὐκ ἔστιν προσωπολήμπτης ὁ θεός (“God is not a partiality-shower”)

1 Corinthians 8:5a, γὰρ εἴπερ εἰσὶν λεγόμενοι θεοὶ (“For even if there are so-called gods”) – Paul is thinking about pagan gods and this is therefore indefinite.

1 Corinthians 8:5b, ὥσπερ εἰσὶν θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοί - Paul is thinking about pagan gods and pagan lords and this is therefore indefinite.

1 Corinthians 9:1a, οὐκ εἰμὶ ἀπόστολος (“Am I not an apostle”) – Would Paul be calling himself “the” apostle or apostle-ish?

1 Corinthians 9:16, οὐκ ἔστιν μοι καύχημα (“it is not to me a reason for boasting”)

1 Corinthians 12:14, τὸ σῶμα οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν μέλος (“the body is not one member”)

1 Corinthians 13:1, γέγονα χαλκὸς ἡχῶν (“I have become a noisy gong”)

1 Corinthians 15:44, Εἰ ἔστιν σῶμα ψυχικόν (“If it is a natural body”)

Romans 16:1, οὗσαν [καὶ] διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας (“who is a servant of the churches”) – Phoebe is not the only servant/deaconess of the churches, and qualitative seems too fine a distinction.

Galatians 4:24, αὗται γὰρ εἰσὶν δύο διαθήκαι (“for these are two covenants”)

Galatians 5:23, οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος (“there is not a law”) – But see CSB, CJB, NLV which reflect a definite aspect to law.

Philippians 1:28, ἥτις ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἔνδειξις ἀπωλείας (“which is to them a sign of destruction”)

Hebrews 4:13, οὐκ ἔστιν κτίσις (“there is not a creature”)

James 2:4, ἐγένεσθε κριταὶ (“you have become judges”) – indefinite only possibility by virtue of being plural

James 2:11, γέγονας παραβάτης νόμου (predicate accusative) (“having become a transgressor of the law”)

Revelation 21:7b, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι υἱός (“and they will be sons to me”)

=28 instances.

Indefinite anarthrous nouns following the verb makes sense for both Colwell’s and Harner’s Rules, whereas they would not be expected preceding the verb, unless, as Colwell argues, they are not be considered definite nouns to begin with, which, however, doesn’t make sense with 1 Corinthians 8:5.

Anarthrous Predicate Nominatives preceding the verb where a **definite** interpretation seems the most likely possibility:

Matthew 5:34, θρόνος ἐστὶν τοῦ θεοῦ (“it is the throne of God”) – There is only one throne of God.

Matthew 5:35, μήτε εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα, ὅτι πόλις ἐστὶν τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως (“nor by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the Great King”) – There is only one Jerusalem, one city of the great King.

Matthew 12:50, αὐτός μου ἀδελφὸς καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν (“he is the brother of me and the sister of me and the mother of me”) – By comparison with v.48 where brother, sister and mother have the article, it is evident that these terms are definite here as well.

Matthew 13:39b, ὁ δὲ θερισμὸς συντέλεια αἰῶνός ἐστιν (“and the harvest is the end of the age”)

Matthew 14:33, ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ (“You are truly the Son of God”) – Jesus’ disciples had the correct and highest evaluation of Jesus.

Matthew 27:40, εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ (“If you are the Son of God”) – The mockers are mocking Jesus with his own words. It would not make sense to tease him with being “a” son of God. But is this the concept the Roman soldier repeated when he became aware of Jesus’ uniqueness (27:54)?

Mark 12:28, ποία ἐστὶν ἐντολὴ πρώτη πάντων (“which is the first commandment of all”) – definite only possibility because of πρώτη

Luke 1:36, οὗτος μὴν ἕκτος ἐστὶν (“this is the sixth month”) – There is only one sixth month.

Luke 1:63, Ἰωάννης ἐστὶν ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (“the name of him is John” or “John is the name of him”) – The only question is whether John is the subject or the predicate nominative

Luke 4:3, εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ (“If you are the Son of God”) – It would not make sense for Satan to challenge Jesus with being “a” son of God.

Luke 4:9, εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ (“If you are the Son of God”) – It would not make sense for Satan to challenge Jesus with being “a” son of God.

John 1:49, σὺ βασιλεὺς εἶ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ (“you are the king of Israel”) – It would not be much of a declaration by Jesus’ disciple that Jesus is a king of Israel.

John 3:29, ὁ ἔχων τὴν νύμφην νυμφίος ἐστίν (“the one who has the bride is the bridegroom”)

John 8:42, εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἦν (“if God was the father of you”) – He is not “a” father of us

John 8:54, ὃν ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι θεὸς ἡμῶν ἐστίν (“whom you say that he is the God of you”) – Jesus wasn’t accusing the Jews of making God only one of many.

John 9:5, φῶς εἰμι τοῦ κόσμου (“I am the light of the world”)

John 9:37, ὁ λαλῶν μετὰ σοῦ ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν (“the one speaking to you is that one”) – The pronoun makes for a definite sense.

John 10:2, ὁ δὲ εἰσερχόμενος διὰ τῆς θύρας ποιμὴν ἐστὶν τῶν προβάτων (“the one who enters through the door is the shepherd of the sheep”)– Jesus’ point in context is that he is that definite and only shepherd

John 10:36, ὅτι εἶπον· υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ εἰμι (“because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’”) – There is a bit of theological wrangling going on in this exchange but it does not seem likely that Jesus is backing down his self-evaluation to “a” son of God to escape the charge of blasphemy.

John 11:49, ἀρχιερεὺς ὢν τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ ἐκείνου (“being the high priest that year”) – There is only one high priest.

John 11:51, ἀρχιερεὺς ὢν τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ ἐκείνου ἐπροφήτευσεν (“being the high priest that year, he prophesied”)

Acts 19:35, τὴν Ἐφεσίων πόλιν νεωκόρον οὖσαν (“the city of Ephesus is the temple-keeper”) – It must be “the” city since it is further identified as Ephesus.

Romans 1:16, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστίν (“the gospel, for it is the power of God”) – The gospel is not “a” power of God to salvation but “the” power.

1 Corinthians 1:18, δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστίν (“It is the power of God”) – The gospel, the word of the cross, is “the” power of God to those being saved.

1 Corinthians 4:4, ὁ δὲ ἀνακρίνων με κύριός ἐστιν (“the one who judges me is the Lord”) – not “a” lord

1 Corinthians 11:7a, δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων (“being the image of God”) – only one image of God

1 Corinthians 11:7b, ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρός ἐστίν (“and the wife is the glory of the husband”) – not “a” husband”

Philippians 2:13, θεὸς γὰρ ἐστίν (“for it is God”) – There is only one God

1 John 2:18a, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν (“it is the last hour”) – definite only possibility because of ἐσχάτη

Revelation 1:20, οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσὶν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν (“the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the churches”) – Jesus is making identifications, making definite the meaning of symbols

Revelation 21:22, ὁ γὰρ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ναὸς αὐτῆς ἐστίν καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον (“For the Lord God Almighty is the temple, and the Lamb”) – God and the Lamb are the only temple of the New Jerusalem

=31 instances.

We expect this with Colwell’s Rule, but not with the same frequency as those following the verb. Those exceptions seem to disprove the rule.

Anarthrous Predicate Nominatives preceding the verb where a **qualitative** interpretation seems the most likely possibility:

Matthew 23:8b, πάντες δὲ ὑμεῖς ἀδελφοί ἐστε (“You are all brothers”) – All Jesus’ disciples share the same quality, they are brothers/sisters. They are not all “the” brothers.

Matthew 27:6, τιμὴ αἵματος ἐστὶν (“It is money of blood”) – It is the kind of money that cannot be allowed in the temple treasury.

Mark 12:29, κύριος εἷς ἐστὶν (“the Lord is one”) – not “a” one or “the” one but the quality of oneness

Luke 14:22, ἔτι τόπος ἐστὶν (“there is still room”) – The servants are not concerned that there is still “a” room available for the wedding, but the quality of room, space available still at the banquet.

John 1:14, ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (“The Word became flesh”) – Jesus did not become “a” or “the” flesh, but flesh as an element.

John 2:9, τὸ ὕδωρ οἶνον γεγεννημένον [pred acc or d/o] (“the water had become wine”) – not “a” or “the” wine but wine as a substance

John 3:4, ἄνθρωπος γεννηθῆναι γέρων ὢν (“a man to be born, when he is old”) – Γέρων is a noun, not an adjective, but the qualitative predicate nominative can act like an adjective

John 3:6, τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς σὰρξ ἐστὶν, καὶ τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος πνεῦμα ἐστὶν (“that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”) – neither “a” nor “the” work

John 6:63b, τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λελάληκα ὑμῖν πνεῦμα ἐστὶν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστὶν (“the words that I speak are spirit and life”) – neither “a” nor “the” work

John 9:4, ἕως ἡμέρα ἐστὶν (“while it is day”)

John 10:22, χειμῶν ἦν (“it was winter”)

John 12:50, ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ ζωὴ αἰώνιος ἐστὶν (“His command is eternal life”)

John 17:17, ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ἀλήθειά ἐστὶν (“Your word is truth”)

John 20:1, σκοτίας ἔτι οὐσης (“while it was still dark”)

Acts 7:33, τόπος ἐφ’ ᾧ ἕστηκας γῆ ἁγία ἐστὶν (“the place on which you stand is holy ground”)

1 Corinthians 3:19, ἡ γὰρ σοφία τοῦ κόσμου τούτου μωρία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ ἐστὶν (“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God”)

1 Thessalonians 1:6, ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε (“You became imitators of us”) – Likely not “some” or “the” imitators, but those with the quality of imitation.

1 Thessalonians 2:14, Ὑμεῖς γὰρ μιμηταὶ ἐγενήθητε (“You became imitators”) – Likely not “some” or “the” imitators, but those with the quality of imitation.

James 2:19, εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός (“God is one”)

James 3:4, τὰ πλοῖα τηλικαῦτα ὄντα (“the boat, though it is small”) – τηλικαῦτα is a demonstrative pronoun, not an adjective, but the qualitative sense gives it an adjectival sense

1 John 1:5b, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεμία (“that God is light, and there is no darkness at all in Him”)

1 John 4:8, ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν (“God is love”) – God is not literally love but it is a defining quality of His

1 John 4:16, Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν (“God is love”)

1 John 5:7, τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες (“those which bear witness are three”) – the triadic Spirit, water and blood

1 John 5:17, πᾶσα ἀδικία ἀμαρτία ἐστίν (“All unrighteousness is sin”)

=25 instances.

These are consistent with Harner’s Rule and definitely more frequent preceding the verb, but that there are so many above that follow the verb seem the exceptions that disprove the rule.

Anarthrous Predicate Nominatives preceding the verb where an **indefinite** interpretation seems the most likely possibility:

Matthew 14:26, φάντασμα ἐστίν (“it is a ghost”) – It is doubtful the disciples would have been commenting on the qualitative aspect of this apparition (“It is ghostly”), and they certainly were not referencing some specific ghost (“It is the ghost”).

Matthew 22:42, τίνος υἱὸς ἐστίν (“whose son is he”) – Jesus is asking whose indefinite son the Messiah would be, the answer being “David’s.”

Mark 6:49, φάντασμα ἐστίν (“it is a ghost”) – It is doubtful the disciples would have been commenting on the qualitative aspect of this apparition (“It is ghostly”), and they certainly were not referencing some specific ghost (“It is the ghost”).

Luke 7:8, γὰρ ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπός εἰμι ὑπὸ ἐξουσίαν (“For I am a man under authority”) – What would the Centurion mean if he said, “I am the man under authority”? There are other soldiers under authority.

John 8:31, ἀληθῶς μαθηταί μου ἐστε (“truly you are a disciple of me”) – not “the” as if the only disciple, nor disciplish.

John 8:34, πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας (“everyone who does sin is a servant of that sin”)

John 8:44b, ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν (“because he is a liar”) – Satan is a liar and “the” father of lies

John 8:48, οὐ καλῶς λέγομεν ἡμεῖς ὅτι Σαμαρίτης εἶ (“Did we not rightly say that you are a Samaritan”) – Here is a “definite” noun being used indefinitely with qualitative overtones

John 10:13, ὅτι μισθωτός ἐστιν (“because he is a hireling”)

John 12:6, ὅτι κλέπτης ἦν (“because he is [was] a thief”) – Judas, being a thief, had thieving qualities

Acts 17:7, βασιλέα ἕτερον λέγοντες εἶναι Ἰησοῦν (“saying Jesus is another king”) – ἕτερον helps make this indefinite

Acts 22:26, ὁ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος Ῥωμαῖός ἐστιν (“For the man is a Roman citizen”) – Paul is not “the” Roman citizen.

Ac 25:14, ἀνὴρ τίς ἐστιν (“there is a man”) – Festus is letting King Agrippa know that there is a nondescript person whom he further describes, Paul.

Acts 28:4, φονεὺς ἐστὶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος (“this man is a murderer”)

1 Corinthians 4:9, ὅτι θέατρον ἐγενήθημεν τῷ κόσμῳ (“because we have become a spectacle to the world”) – Paul and the apostles are not “the” spectacle to the world but one such spectacle.

1 Corinthians 6:7, ἡττημα ὑμῖν ἐστὶν (“it is a defeat for you”) – Going to court with brothers is not “the” defeat for the Corinthian believers (there were several), but “a” defeat, one among many in this congregation.

1 Corinthians 15:12, ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔστιν (“there is not a resurrection from the dead”) – A declaration of some of the Corinthians is that there is not “a” resurrection, so they have been “resurrected” spiritually, a source of pride for them.

1 John 2:4, ὁ λέγων...ψεύστης ἐστίν (“the one who says...is a liar”)

Revelation 18:7, χήρα οὐκ εἶμι (“I am not a widow”)

=19 instances.

This is not expected in Colwell's Rule (unless, again, it be argued that none of these examples are of nouns that are already definite, something that doesn't work well, however, for Matthew 22:42, John 8:48, Acts 17:7, or Acts 22:26), but happens nonetheless.

And what do we do with instances where the anarthrous predicate nominatives both precede and follow the stative verb:

John 10:8, πάντες ὅσοι ἦλθον [πρὸ ἐμοῦ] κλέπται εἰσὶν καὶ λησταί ("Everyone who came before me a thief is and a robber"). We should have expected both these predicate nominatives to follow the verb because they are indefinite, and we cannot argue that the one preceding is definite or qualitative while the one following is indefinite.

Revelation 17:15, τὰ ὕδατα ἃ εἶδες...λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλῶσσαι ("the waters that you saw peoples and multitudes are and nations and languages"). The predicate nominatives have the same character (indefinite, I would argue) but are not signaled by following the verb in each case. Colwell might argue that none of these nouns is considered inherently definite, but as we have argued, no noun can be considered inherently definite.

What all this shows is that there is no hard and fast rule that can be applied when it comes to making decisions about the definiteness, indefiniteness, or qualitiveness of the author's intent with anarthrous predicate nominatives. We are forced to make that decision based on other factors than word order. And sometimes it is hard to make that decision.

Can the Author Intend More than One Meaning (Definite, Indefinite, or Qualitative) for an Anarthrous Predicate Nominative?

The answer to the question of whether an author can intend more than one meaning for an anarthrous predicate nominative is: Of course! An author can intend any meaning. But the concern is, with anarthrous predicate nominatives, whether the author's intended meaning, if it is somehow to include two or more meanings (definite, indefinite or qualitative) can be so discerned without clear cues. Can an author intend to say "it was a Sabbath" and also mean "it was the Sabbath"? He or she could, but how would this be signaled and what would be the point? And if the author intends contradictory meanings, what would be the point?

Someone advocating this possibility has written,

In the English sentence "Charles is a prince," I can mean several possibilities, two of which combine categories....

- 1) Charles is the son of a monarch (indefinite)
- 2) Charles is the son of a monarch and is also of princely character but I am emphasizing the group (indefinite and qualitative with indefinite emphasis)
- 3) Charles is of princely character and also happens to be a son of a monarch (qualitative and indefinite with qualitative emphasis)
- 4) Charles is a prince of a man and is not the son of a monarch (qualitative)

But what is striking here is that this advocate of multiple meanings or at least emphases, has to tell us what he intends. Without seeing his statement in context we have no way of knowing what he intends. A skillful writer could, in the context of his writing, signal us this multiple intent, but there is always the possibility that the author's intended meaning could not be determined because we lack clear signals or satisfactory knowledge of the author's perspective.

With the many examples given above where the clear likelihood of a definite, indefinite, or qualitative anarthrous predicate nominative exists, there are also many hard to determine. For example, when Mark writes in 2:28, κύριός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τοῦ σαββάτου ("The Son of Man is lord indeed of the Sabbath"), this could be conceived as qualitative (as I translated it) or as definite ("The Son of Man is the Lord indeed of the Sabbath") and either fits well with what we know of Mark's perspective. Could Mark have intended both. If Jesus is "the" Lord of the Sabbath he is also easily lord, sovereign, of the Sabbath, and vice versa. To discern whether Mark meant both, however, is not clearly signaled in any way and, in some ways, does not matter.

One needs pretty good arguments and evidence to substantiate an author's dual or triple meaning.

And the Word was a god/the God/God

Of course, John 1:1 contains the most controversial predicate nominative of the New Testament. Is the Word "a" god, "the" God, or Godish (divine, deity)? The rejection of "a" god is easiest because this would necessitate that John conceive of Jesus in a way that throughout Scripture is almost exclusively meant in a negative way (the "gods" are demons, Deuteronomy 32, 1 Corinthians 10:20) rather than John's clear attempt to display Jesus as "the" Son of God, the Son of Man of Daniel 7 who is equal to the Ancient of Days, and indeed as "the Lord of me and the God of me" (John 20:28).

There would seem to be an issue with seeing John's intent as definite, "the" God, since this would perhaps make the Word not just divine but the same person with whom the Word was supposedly in fellowship with in the second part of the verse. It could lead to a modalistic view

of the Trinity. However, John has used the definite article on θεός in 20:28 in the mouth of Thomas the apostle. Does he see Thomas as making an understandable error, but he records it anyway, or is he using Thomas' declaration as his own? The latter seems more likely. The issue raised here may be akin to that of two Yahweh's in the Old Testament (Genesis 19:24 being one instance), which to the careful theologian might suggest oneness of personality rather than substance, but clearly does not in the given instance. Supposing John to intend θεός as definite in John 1:1 does not seem insurmountable.

Conceiving of θεός as qualitative has no issues and would fit clearly in the intentions of John and his explanation in his Gospel about who Jesus is. It is simply a character of the English language that we don't have an easy way to make "God" qualitative (I used "Godish," which is clearly unsatisfactory, a coining of a word, and even that has issues, since "ish" often means less than an equality in our language). We shift to words like "the Word was divine," or "the Word was deity." Because these words might convey something less than fully God as to substance or essence, does not argue against the qualitative sense being used by John, only the inadequacy of our language. The qualitative sense makes sense on every level and does protect against a possible personality identification between the Father and the Son.

The Centurion's Declaration

What about the Centurion's declaration at Golgotha, about Jesus being "a" or "the" Son of God? It should be clear from this study that word order in his statement, ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος ("Truly, this one was a/the Son of God," in Matthew 27:54) or ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς ἦν θεοῦ ("Truly this man was a/the Son of God," in Mark 15:39), isn't the determiner in this matter. To know the speaker's intended meaning is difficult. As a Roman we might suppose that he did not have a Jewish concept of "the" Son of God, but would rather think in terms of "a" son of God, a divine being. But we know that the Jews there at the cross were jeering at Jesus and mocking him with his own words, εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ κατάβηθι ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ ("If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross," Matthew 27:40) and πέποιθεν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, ῥυσάσθω νῦν εἰ θέλει αὐτόν· εἶπεν γὰρ ὅτι θεοῦ εἰμι υἱός ("He trusts in God, let Him deliver him now if He wants, for he said, 'I am the Son of God,'" Matthew 27:43). They would not be mocking Jesus that he claimed to be "a" son of God. If the Centurion heard these words he might now see events of the cross as confirming that Jesus is "the" Son of God. So again, the decision comes down to what makes the most sense of the author's intent.

Conclusion

It is the contention of this study that the author's intent is always the basis for determining the meaning of anarthrous (and even arthrous, in some cases) predicate nominatives in the New Testament as to whether they are definite, indefinite or qualitative. There is no rule that

necessitates one interpretation over another, but rather good, solid thinking and contextual understanding that gets at the author's intended meaning.

Appendix 3: A Case for the Son Being the Main Interactor with Old Testament Saints as the Angel of Yahweh or God

The place to begin on the question of whether the Son of God makes an appearance in the Old Testament is Genesis 18 and 19.

Two Yahweh's

Abraham is visited by three men:

And Yahweh appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. (Genesis 18:1–3)

Moses tells us that Yahweh visits Abraham at his tent, but to Abraham it appears that three men are standing in front of him (Abraham mentions washing their feet, v.4). Hospitality requires that Abraham provide care for these visitors, but it seems he has a sense that God is among them and does not want to be passed by. He runs to meet them, something a dignified person does not do and bows to the earth. The conversation definitely makes it clear that he is talking to God, to Yahweh.

Yahweh discusses Abraham and Sarah's childless situation and promises a child within the year, evoking a laugh from Sarah who has remained in the tent eavesdropping. "Then," we are told, "the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way" (Genesis 18:16). But before they depart, Yahweh, with some seeming indecision, addressing the two men with him and asking if He should hide this from him, tells Abraham that He is going to judge Sodom and Gomorrah. He will "go down" and investigate first. The other two men leave, but Abraham stands before Yahweh and questions if He will destroy these communities if they have righteous people in them, and Yahweh says that even if they have 10 righteous people in them, He will not destroy them. And then Yahweh goes His way.

What follows is the two men's, the two angels', arrival in Sodom evacuate Lot and his family from the city.

Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from Yahweh out of heaven. (Genesis 19:24)

In the history of interpretation of this event there has been a consistent Jewish view that Yahweh was not among the "three men" who visited Abraham, but that they were three angels

(Michael, Gabriel and Raphael) and that Yahweh appeared only in Shekinah glory, not in physical form.⁴¹ But here we see that Yahweh, who talked to Abraham, has now followed the two angels, who evacuated Lot and family, to the rise above Sodom and Gomorrah in order to bring the necessary judgment. He is clearly one of the “men” who appeared to Abraham and now rains down sulfur and fire **from** Yahweh out of heaven.

Rashi⁴² explains the wording here,

It is customary for the Scriptural verses to speak in this manner, as in (above 4:23): “wives of Lemech,” and he did not say, “my wives.” And so did David say (I Kings 1:33): “Take with you the servants of your lord,” and he did not say, “my servants”; and so did Ahasuerus say (Esther 8:8): “in the name of the king,” and he did not say, “in my name.” Here too it states “from the Lord,” and it does not state “from Him.” - [from Sanh. 38b]⁴³

In Rashi’s view Yahweh’s action here is said to be from himself, that is, Yahweh rained sulfur and fire from himself out of heaven. But we have a clear description of Yahweh leaving Abraham’s presence to go see if the charges against Sodom and Gomorrah are true, and He does so in human form on the earth. There are clearly two Yahweh’s here, one who is interacting with Abraham on earth and one who at earthly Yahweh’s request sends fiery rain on Sodom and Gomorrah from heaven. Is there further evidence of a Yahweh who works in the earthly realm, often in physical form, in distinction from the Yahweh in heaven?

The Earthly Yahweh

In Genesis 3, with the rebellion of Adam and Eve from Yahweh’s clear instructions not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve, we’re told, “heard the sound of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). In what form does Yahweh appear to Adam and Eve? We’re not told, but he is heard walking, so He has feet. We may presume he appeared in human form to our fore parents. After pronouncing judgments on the serpent, the woman, and the man, Yahweh then addresses others in verse 22 asserting, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” and Yahweh expels Adam and Eve from the garden.

We see an encounter with Cain and Yahweh in Genesis 4 and are given no evidence whether Yahweh was in human form as He interacted with Cain, but we are told that Cain then “went away from the presence of Yahweh” (v.16) and settled in Nod. Should we think of the earthly Yahweh as dwelling with Adam and his offspring and that Cain left this human settlement to live

⁴¹https://www.academia.edu/491270/Abrahams_Angels_Jewish_and_Christian_Exegesis_of_Genesis_18_19

⁴² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashi>

⁴³ https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8214/showrashi>true

elsewhere? We're told at the end of chapter 4 that at that time "men began to call upon the name of Yahweh" (v.26). Has He removed Himself from living with the community of men in His human form? Must men call upon Him in prayer now, rather than meeting Him in person?

The Angel of Yahweh, the Angel of God

Genesis

Our first experience of the Angel of Yahweh (מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה, messenger of Yahweh) is found in the account of Sarah's slave whom Sarah gave to her husband to bear a child for her and who she has now banished from their home because of Hagar's contempt for Sarah. Hagar wanders in the desert until she sees the Angel or Messenger of Yahweh.

The angel of Yahweh found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." The angel of Yahweh said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." The angel of Yahweh also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." And the angel of Yahweh said to her,

"Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because Yahweh has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."

So she called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." (Genesis 16:7–13, ESV)

We say that the Angel of Yahweh appears as a man who speaks to Hagar because at first she does not recognize she is speaking to the Angel of Yahweh, and because it says she saw him. It is only when he speaks prophetically to her about her child to be born and the multiplication of her offspring ("seed") that she seems to realize who is speaking to her. And the text says Yahweh was speaking to her ("Yahweh who spoke to her"). So the messenger of Yahweh, who mentions Yahweh seeing Hagar's affliction, is also Yahweh.

Then there is our next encounter with the Angel of Yahweh, who appears to Abraham and stops him from sacrificing Isaac:

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a

ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "Yahweh will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of Yahweh it shall be provided."

And the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:9–18, ESV)

In this instance it is the Angel of Yahweh speaking from heaven, so that we may suppose that he does not make a physical appearance. So He has access to heaven and earth, but in this case only speaks to Abraham and does not appear in any form to Abraham. The same may be said of the Angel of God's appearance to Jacob in a dream.

Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred.'" (Genesis 31:11–13, ESV)

It is evident here that the Angel of Yahweh/God is equal to Yahweh ("I am the God of Bethel"), as it is in Moses' encounter with the Angel of Yahweh.

Exodus

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When Yahweh saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then Yahweh said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, (Exodus 3:1–7)

To be sure some interpreters have held that the Angel of Yahweh could be called Yahweh or God because God is in him (Augustine⁴⁴), but this does not really square with the fact that the text clearly says God called to Moses out of the bush and that the place became holy by His presence. Moses clearly believes he is looking at God. Here, of course, Yahweh/the Angel of Yahweh does not appear as a human, but as a flame. Nevertheless, he is taking on a visible form.

Numbers

Our next glimpse of the Angel of Yahweh is found in Numbers 22, where Balaam chooses to go curse Israel for Balak.

So Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab.

But God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of Yahweh took his stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. And the donkey saw the angel of Yahweh standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. And the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the road. Then the angel of Yahweh stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. And when the donkey saw the angel of Yahweh, she pushed against the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again. Then the angel of Yahweh went ahead and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of Yahweh, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then Yahweh opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you." And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?" And he said, "No."

*Then Yahweh opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of Yahweh standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face.
(Numbers 22:21–31)*

In this case the distinction between Yahweh and the Angel of Yahweh is maintained, Yahweh opening Balaam's eyes so he could see the Angel of Yahweh standing in front of him, and in this case also the Angel of Yahweh appears as a human dressed for war. That he was initially invisible to Balaam suggests that his true nature is not human but he is rather a spiritual being who is able to take form, as he did in the flaming bush, and can vary that form as desired. Interestingly, in verse 35 ("speak only the word that I tell you"), the Angel of Yahweh speaks as

⁴⁴ Pope, Hugh. "Angels" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907

Yahweh did earlier to Balaam (v.20), telling him to say only what He tells him to say, so in this way the Angel of Yahweh is identified with Yahweh.

Joshua

He is not called the Angel or Messenger of Yahweh here, but rather, “the Commander of the army of Yahweh.”

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?” And the commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13–15, ESV)

By calling himself the commander of Yahweh’s army, he distinguishes himself from Yahweh. But by saying the ground on which Joshua is standing is holy ground, as Yahweh did when He spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3), He identifies Himself with Yahweh.

In chapter 6, we may presume Joshua is still speaking to the Commander of the army of Yahweh, but the Scripture renders it this way:

And the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. (Joshua 6:2, ESV)

It is Yahweh, the text says, who is speaking to Joshua, a clear identification of the Commander with Yahweh. And the Commander is clearly in appearance as a man dressed for war, with his sword drawn in his “hand.”

Judges

There are several instances in the book of Judges where the Angel of Yahweh meets people, and first, with the nation in general:

Now the angel of Yahweh went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.” As soon as the angel of Yahweh spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to Yahweh. (Judges 2:1–5)

There are two things striking about this event. One, the Angel of Yahweh is described as “going up” from Gilgal to Bochim, which suggests he is moving in a conventional way. How did he go from one town to another? Was he in physical form? Second, he speaks to a large group of people, not to an individual, as he did with Abraham, Hagar, Jacob, and others. But it may be noted that when the Captain of Yahweh’s host Some have suggested that it is a prophet who has come to Bochim, not the Angel of Yahweh (so the Jewish interpreter R. Tranchum), whereas others argue that the message is not, “Thus says Yahweh,” but is in first person.⁴⁵

The next mention of the Angel of Yahweh is in the song of Deborah after Israel’s victory over Jabin king of Canaan. All the tribes of Israel who were called to supply soldiers for the battle sent armies except for some from the tribe of Reuben, and particularly the town of Meroz:

*“Curse Meroz, says the angel of Yahweh,
curse its inhabitants thoroughly,
because they did not come to the help of Yahweh,
to the help of Yahweh against the mighty. (Judges 5:23)*

Throughout this song Deborah has only been addressing Yahweh, but here she references the Angel of Yahweh pronouncing a curse on Meroz. Deborah was a prophet, so perhaps the Angel of Yahweh spoke directly to her.

The Angel of Yahweh next appears to Gideon.

Now the angel of Yahweh came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of Yahweh appeared to him and said to him, “Yahweh is with you, O mighty man of valor.” And Gideon said to him, “Please, my lord, if Yahweh is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?’ But now Yahweh has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian.” And Yahweh turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?” And he said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” And Yahweh said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.” And he said to him, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you.” And he said, “I will stay till you return.”

So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. And the angel of God said

⁴⁵ <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/judges/2-1.htm> (Ellicott, MacLaren, Gill, Cambridge, Keil and Delitzsch)

to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." And he did so. Then the angel of Yahweh reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of Yahweh vanished from his sight. Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of Yahweh. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord Yahweh! For now I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face." But Yahweh said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die." Then Gideon built an altar there to Yahweh and called it, Yahweh Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites. (Judges 6:11–24)

It could not be more clear that the Angel of Yahweh appears to Gideon at first as a man, sitting under a tree while Gideon works. Gideon even feels safe to complain about Yahweh to this man. But as the conversation proceeds Gideon begins to get the feeling that this man is more than just a man, so he asks for a sign that God is speaking through this man and makes an offering for him. He gets his sign as the Angel of Yahweh touches the offering and fire consumes it, then he vanishes. Then Gideon perceived that this was the Angel of Yahweh and he has seen him face to face, and seeing God's face means death. But then Yahweh somehow communicates to Gideon that he is safe. The Angel of Yahweh has vanished, so we may suppose that this is Yahweh speaking directly to Gideon, out loud or in Gideon's mind. Twice, the Angel of Yahweh is said to be Yahweh (vv 16 and 23) and in verse 20 he is called the Angel of God (*Elohim*).

Next, the Angel of Yahweh appears to Samson's parents:

There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. And the angel of Yahweh appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name, but he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'" (Judges 13:2-7)

The Angel of Yahweh appears to the woman as a man of God. We're not told what made him look like an angel of God, but the woman was impressed and mentions that she did not ask him his name, a theme we see often with appearances of God to humans (Genesis 16, Exodus 3). So he looks human and then some.

Then Manoah prayed to Yahweh and said, "O Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be

born." And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field. But Manoah, her husband, was not with her. So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, "Behold, the man who came to me the other day has appeared to me." And Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the man and said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to this woman?" And he said, "I am." And Manoah said, "Now when your words come true, what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?" And the angel of Yahweh said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing. All that I commanded her let her observe." (Judges 13:8-14)

This time the Angel of Yahweh is called the Angel of God (*Elohim*), but once again Manoah's wife calls him "the man" who visited her before, and Manoah addresses him as "the man" who spoke to his wife. Then he is referred to as the Angel of Yahweh.

Manoah said to the angel of Yahweh, "Please let us detain you and prepare a young goat for you." And the angel of Yahweh said to Manoah, "If you detain me, I will not eat of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to Yahweh." (For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of Yahweh.) And Manoah said to the angel of Yahweh, "What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?" And the angel of Yahweh said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to Yahweh, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching. And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of Yahweh went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground. (Judges 13:15-20)

Manoah is instructed by the Angel of Yahweh to make an offering to Yahweh, hence their distinction, and we're told that Manoah did not know this man was the Angel of Yahweh. But Manoah asks him his name, something we see means he suspects this is God appearing to him. The Angel of Yahweh demurs to tell Manoah his name, then disappears with the smoke rising to heaven, and the couple worships.

The angel of Yahweh appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of Yahweh. And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." But his wife said to him, "If Yahweh had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these." And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and Yahweh blessed him. And the Spirit of Yahweh began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol. (Judges 13:21-25)

Manoah fears death because he has seen God, but his wife wisely corrects him. The Angel of Yahweh is viewed as Yahweh (whom to see causes death), though distinct in some way from

Yahweh. And we're introduced to a third person, the Spirit of Yahweh, who begins to work in Samson, the son born to Manoah and his wife.

2 Samuel

Our next encounter with the Angel of Yahweh is in 2 Samuel 24, where David, after sinfully doing a census of Israel, and feeling repentant for it, is told to choose a judgment God will bring on Israel, and David chooses Yahweh's direct judgment, administered by the destroying Angel of Yahweh:

So Yahweh sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men. And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, Yahweh relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of Yahweh was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Then David spoke to Yahweh when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house." (2 Samuel 24:15–17)

We see again a clear distinction between Yahweh and the Angel of Yahweh, and told that the Angel of Yahweh can be seen carrying out Yahweh's judgment. And we see that the Angel of Yahweh has a human form ("the Angel of Yahweh was standing by the threshing floor") in 1 Chronicles 21:14–15,

So Yahweh sent a pestilence on Israel, and 70,000 men of Israel fell. And God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but as he was about to destroy it, Yahweh saw, and he relented from the calamity. And he said to the angel who was working destruction, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of Yahweh was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

We're also told that the Angel of Yahweh told Gad, the prophet, to instruct David to build an altar to Yahweh there (1 Chronicles 21:18), but that David did not use this altar to inquire of Yahweh:

At that time, when David saw that Yahweh had answered him at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of Yahweh, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time in the high place at Gibeon, but David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of Yahweh. (1 Chronicles 21:28–30)

1 Kings

The Angel of Yahweh ministers to Elijah after his amazing contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, when Elijah flees Jezebel and runs away to the desert, obviously depressed:

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Yahweh, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of Yahweh came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. (1 Kings 19:4–8)

Elijah is ministered to twice by the Angel of Yahweh, being "touched" by the angel and so having some physical form, not just an appearance of physical form, but real physical form.

When Elijah gets to Horeb (or Mt. Sinai) we're told "the word of Yahweh" comes to him (v.9) and speaks to him and tells him to go outside the cave he is in, and as he does Yahweh passes by in various forms, wind, earthquake and fire, but then finally in the sound of a low whisper. Is the word of Yahweh the Angel of Yahweh, or is it Yahweh's word to Elijah from Yahweh Himself and the one who passes in front of Elijah is the Angel of Yahweh? Because it seems the Angel of Yahweh is the one who appears to God's people in some form (fire, human, wind, earthquake), that the one who passes by Elijah is the Angel of Yahweh.

2 Kings

In 2 Kings 1 the Angel of Yahweh speaks to Elijah twice (vv.3,15) but we are not told that he appears to Elijah. But in 2 Kings 19 we see the Angel of Yahweh make an appearance in the judgment on Sennacherib preventing this Assyrian king from laying siege to Jerusalem.

And that night the angel of Yahweh went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. (2 Kings 19:35)

Psalms

The Psalms mention the Angel of Yahweh a couple of times:

*The angel of Yahweh encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them. (Psalm 34:7)*

*Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of Yahweh driving them away!
Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of Yahweh pursuing them! (Psalm 35:5–6)*

This does not add too much to our understanding of the Angel of Yahweh, except that he is committed to our safety and to bringing judgment against our enemies.

Zechariah

Zechariah the prophet has a vision,

“I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. Then I said, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who talked with me said to me, ‘I will show you what they are.’ So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, ‘These are they whom Yahweh has sent to patrol the earth.’ And they answered the angel of Yahweh who was standing among the myrtle trees, and said, ‘We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest.’ Then the angel of Yahweh said, ‘O Yahweh of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?’ And Yahweh answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out, Thus says Yahweh of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster. Therefore, thus says Yahweh, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it, declares Yahweh of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Cry out again, Thus says Yahweh of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and Yahweh will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.’” (Zechariah 1:8–17)

The Angel of Yahweh is first identified as an angel talking to Zechariah, but then is subsequently identified as the Angel of Yahweh. The Angel of Yahweh in this vision is distinct from Yahweh (he addresses Yahweh of Hosts v.12) and appears as “a man riding on a red horse” and then “standing” among myrtle trees (he has a physical appearance as a man). He calls for mercy from Yahweh for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah from the judgment Yahweh has sent, and Yahweh speaks comfort to the angel. Then the Angel of Yahweh pronounces God’s mercy to Jerusalem. This is the first time we have seen interaction between Yahweh and the Angel of Yahweh.

Zechariah has another vision:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Yahweh, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And Yahweh said to Satan, “Yahweh rebuke you, O Satan! Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you! Isn’t this a brand plucked from the fire?” Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.” And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of Yahweh was standing by.

And the angel of Yahweh solemnly assured Joshua, "Thus says Yahweh of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. (Zechariah 3:1–7)

Here the Angel of Yahweh is standing with Joshua, the high priest, and Satan too is standing by them, so that both the Angel of Yahweh and Satan both seem to be appearing in human form, in this vision, of course. But then it says Yahweh spoke to Satan, so the Angel of Yahweh is called Yahweh, who then appeals to Yahweh to rebuke Satan (so he is both distinct from Yahweh and yet identified as Yahweh). The Angel of Yahweh also pronounces Joshua clean, his iniquity removed, a decidedly divine action. So we see the equality of the Angel of Yahweh to Yahweh, and the distinction between them as two persons. It is interesting to compare this vision with another Zechariah has (ch. 6) in which it seems a "regular" angel or messenger, not the Angel of Yahweh, interacts with him, and we see none of the features of this vision.

The Divine Man

There are two places in Scripture that depict men interacting with God's saints, men who obviously are divine, but who are not designated as the Angel of Yahweh. The first is in Genesis 32, after Jacob has fled from his father-in-law Laban back to Canaan, sees angels of God meeting him in the land and camping, and he prepares to meet his brother Esau, whom he is certain is angry still at him for taking his birthright.

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." (Genesis 32:22–30, ESV)

That Jacob is wrestling with someone of flesh and bone like himself is undeniable. You can hardly experience the humanity of someone more closely than wrestling with them. But somewhere in this process Jacob realizes this is no normal man and he asks the man his name, again a theme we are familiar with at divine manifestations. The man does not tell Jacob his

name but he does change Jacob's name to Israel, a divine action Jacob was no doubt familiar with because God had changed Abram's and Sarai's names (Genesis 17:5).

The second instance of a divine man is the encounter Joshua has:

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of Yahweh. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13–15)

The man who identifies himself as the "commander of the army of Yahweh" makes the ground on which he stands holy, as the Angel of Yahweh/Yahweh did when He appeared to Moses (Exodus 3). Joshua no doubt found this comforting that even like his master Moses, he too experienced a visitation from Yahweh as he took Moses' place as leader of Israel. Joshua rightly worships.

The Word Made Flesh

Are we right to identify this second Yahweh, this Angel of Yahweh or of God, this divine man, with the Son of God who later took on human nature? John would have us do so. It is John who tells us that Abraham saw Jesus' day and rejoiced (John 8:56) and that Jesus was the "I am" to whom Moses was introduced at the burning bush (John 8:58). John tells us that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke of him (John 12:41). In each of these cases the Scriptures tell us Abraham, Moses and Isaiah saw the Angel of Yahweh or Yahweh.

But why would the Son be the one who served as Yahweh's messenger (angel) and representative on earth? Why not the Holy Spirit? And perhaps John has the answer for us here, as well. John describes Jesus as "the Word" (John 1:1,14). Essential to Jesus' nature and calling is to explain God. He is the Word who teaches us about God. If you've seen him, you've seen or experienced the Father (John 14:9). No one has physically seen the Father at any time, but Jesus has made Him known, has exegeted (Greek, *exēgēō*) Him (John 1:18).

So even before Jesus took on human nature, he has been the one who took on physical form or appearance at various times to be Yahweh to those of earth. He is the Yahweh of earth in counterpart to the Yahweh of heaven. Both the Father and the Son equally own the name Yahweh, and we may suppose that the Spirit of Yahweh does, also. Even though each is a distinct person, they share the divine 'name' as they share the divine attributes. Yahweh, then, in this sense, is not strictly a personal name so much as a title by which God may be distinguished from any so-called gods. He is the true God whose title or name means "I am."

Appendix 4: Implications of the Trinity

Getting Our Arms Around the Trinity

If there is one thing we know clearly from Scripture it is that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6; 1 Corinthians 8:6). But the other thing we know clearly from Scripture is that Jesus is God (John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5 NIV). And for that matter, the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3,4). So what do we do with these facts?

One thing we know is that we're dealing with a God who is beyond our ability to fathom. But He has given us a revelation of Himself that enables us to stay within the boundaries of truth about who He is and to avoid false thinking about Him:

God is one in essence. By this we mean that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit each **share** the one and same essence or nature of deity (infinite power, eternal existence, all knowledge, etc.). The divine essence is not split up somehow between them.

God is three in person. Each person of the godhead is a unique and separate individual who can relate in love to the other, who can think his own thoughts and yet remain at one with the others in terms of purpose and character.

Each person has a different function. The Father is the head of the Trinity, but not because He is superior to the others (they share the same undivided essence). The Son is the one who took on human nature in addition to the divine nature (or essence) in order to die for our sins. The Holy Spirit is the one who comes to live in us to enable us to become more like Christ.

Thus, we do not believe that God is three Gods with three separate divine essences. We do not believe that God is one person who plays three different roles (Father, Son and Spirit). We do not believe that the Son is a creation, even the highest creation of God, but rather, we believe that He is fully God.

Each person of the Trinity is worthy of the same honor and praise. Neither is jealous of the other. Each loves the other with perfect love. The Son is bringing all of earth under His dominion in order to give the kingdom finally to the Father that He might be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The Spirit bears witness to the Son and brings glory to Him (John 15:26; 16:14). The Father says, "This is my beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17).

This is the example of perfect teamwork as each person of the Godhead fulfills His own role in accomplishing our salvation from sin. The Father planned our redemption, the Son was our sacrifice, and the Spirit makes it real in our lives. Neither has His own agenda but yields to the purpose of the Father. All hail the Godhead, three in one!

The Trinity and Other Religions

There is no other view of God like that of Christianity! The concept of God as a triune being, the Trinity, has been a source of stumbling for many.

Islam, which was created about 600 years after Christ, was formed as a rebuttal to the Trinity. Allah is one person only and is not a begetter of any (Jesus, according to Scripture, is God's only begotten Son, John 3:16). In Muhammad's scheme, Jesus is a major prophet of Allah, but He is not God (and is, for that matter, somewhat inferior to Muhammad, the final prophet of Allah).

There is no singular representative of Hinduism's view of God. Some Hindus believe that there is one personal God who reveals Himself through a number, a big number, of versions of Himself (Vishnu, Krishna and Shiva being three main ones). Others believe God is an "it," an underlying force that unifies the universe, but somehow beyond personality.

Even so-called Christian movements have gotten this wrong. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is God's highest created being, but is not God. Mormons believe that the Father was once a man and became God, as did Jesus, and as we may. Unitarians also believe that Jesus is not God, that the Godhead is only one person. The Jesus Only or Oneness movement believes there is one person in the Godhead who represents Himself in three roles, thus only appearing to be three separate personalities. This makes each of these movements worthy of the label "heretics," meaning outside the pale of orthodox Christianity and thus not truly Christian.

As we will see, however, this is the only view of God that makes sense of our universe and makes sense out of us. This view of God was only possible by His revelation to us, especially in the person of the Lord Jesus Himself. The Biblical view of God as Trinity is a keystone of defending the truth of Christianity in the marketplace of religions.

Love and the Trinity

How would you demonstrate that your love is perfect? If you're all by yourself it is pretty hard to prove that you have love. But if you are in relationship with someone, experiencing the rough and tumble of personal interaction, facing each other day after day, you have a case for saying your love is real based on how you interact with them.

But isn't there another test required to give evidence of your love? What if someone else is entered into the relationship equation? How does your love fare if there is "competition"? Can you share the love you have had with one other in a triad of relationship?

The Bible says, "God is love," (1 John 4:8,16). Before anything existed, God was experiencing and demonstrating love at the deepest level. But love must have an object. Each member of the Trinity was showing love to the other perfectly, without competition, jealousy, or selfishness

of any kind. He could not have proven that He is love without a triad of relationship. To be love, God has to be triune.

The Trinity is the model of how relationship should go in our lives. It is the basis of family love, because God has lived as a family for all eternity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They trust one another enough to give of themselves totally, they take delight in each one's love for the other, they demonstrate respect for each one's character and function, they cooperate at the most difficult levels, and they have allegiance to and gratitude for the love each one has for the other.

How are you doing in this respect? How are you patterning your relationships after the Trinity? God delights to see His love imitated (Ephesians 5:1,2). If you are dating, is your goal to maintain the relationship at all costs, or is it to help the other find out if you or someone else is the best for them? If you're a parent, is your goal to lavish all your attention on one of your kids, or is it to help the whole family have a balanced relationship of love and responsibility. As a church member, are you there to see what you can get for yourself, or do you consider the interests and needs of others as more important than your own (Philippians 2:3,4)?

How the Trinity Determines Our Purpose

So you can see that before we existed God was not lonely and needing someone with whom to fellowship. Of course not! Because He has always existed as a trinity of persons who share the one, undivided essence of deity. The Godhead has forever been in fellowship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What this tells us is that the decision to create was not out of need for others, but out of a desire to share His love with others. The angels were created for that reason, and so was the human race. Relationship is the essence of existence. When God made us He made us in His image so that we could have relationship with Him and each other.

When the Bible says, "God is love," (1 John 4:8,16) it is because relationship is the very purpose for which we were created and love is its greatest currency. When Jesus wanted the disciples to know what it was they could do to convince the world that He was the Messiah, He said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

Love doesn't just make the world go round, it makes the universe go round! We were made to reflect the love of God to others. When Paul wants to describe the life worthy of the calling we have received as Christians in Ephesians 4-6, it all comes out finally to love for one another: "speaking the truth in love" (4:15), "builds itself up in love" (4:16), "live a life of love" (5:2), "love your wives" (5:25), "Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love" (6:24).

If loving relationship is not the focus of your life, whether that is seen in the way you care for your immediate family or the larger family of the world, you are not reflecting the Trinity. You were meant to be a love factory, a love machine in the holiest sense of those words. Being

made in the image of the Holy Trinity means your purpose in life is to mimic them by loving as they love, by making relationships the priority over tasks, accomplishments, success, money, and all the other things people vie for.

Being Special in the Trinity

Are you satisfied to look the same, act the same, or think the same as everyone else at Church? Of course not! Are you just being selfish, then, unwilling to join your brothers and sisters in unity? Of course not! But don't you also want to belong to your family at church and share in enough of the same things that you could be identified as a member of this body? Of course you do! What's going on?

Because we are made in God's image, and God is a Trinity – one God, three persons – we also feel two compelling desires within us. We desire to be a part of a community where we are loved and cared for, where we feel that we have much in common, where we are willing to set aside personal interests in order to accomplish the purpose of the community. But we also desire to be seen as individuals who are special and unique, not just a number on the roll.

As sinners who no longer can keep life between the rails, we are often jumping the track in this area of our lives. The tension between community and individuality often becomes the tension between conformity and rebellion. But the model of the Trinity teaches us to value both our individual self-expression (You like cowboy boots, I like sandals) and our joy in community (We both follow the leadership of our elders, or sit in the same Sunday school class, or join the same small group).

It is our allegiance to the Triune God that enables us to celebrate both the individual and the community. Are you making the individuals in your group feel special? Are you sacrificing for the sake of the group when necessary? We need individual differences (spiritual gifts, temperaments) and we need togetherness. Ephesians 4:3-16.

Perhaps this is nowhere more needed than in a family. Do you celebrate your spouse's and children's unique differences? Do you allow each other to be unique and yet one family? Does each member to some extent put aside their individuality for the sake of being a family? Is your family modeling the Trinity?

The Trinity and the One and the Many

The history of the Medal of Honor is the history of men and women who have acted bravely on the belief that the need of the many outweighed the need of the one. They sacrificed themselves to save the lives of their fellow soldiers.

However, our Constitution also acknowledges the importance of the **one** when it protects individual liberties and makes it possible for someone to maintain his or her individuality even if it seems contradictory to our national values.

In the Church we are taught to restore someone “caught in a sin” (Galatians 6:1) but also to watch ourselves or we might also be tempted. And if those who sin continue in their disobedience, we should take note that “a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” (1 Corinthians 5:6) and “get rid of the old yeast” (v.7).

We see a constant interplay between the individual and the community. Which is more important? If we regard the Trinity as our model, we must argue that both are equally important. God is one God, but three persons. Each individual, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is vitally important, but they are also a community that must be valued as a community.

If one of our own church members is in disagreement with the direction we are going, we cannot dismiss him and exclude him as if he doesn't matter. We must seek to examine ourselves and make sure that we have not missed something important and, if necessary, change. But if the community is threatened, its unity disturbed, we must strive to keep the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). One member cannot determine the direction of the church by his concerns if they go contrary to the way the Lord is leading.

We need the wisdom and example of the Trinity to know how to make decisions that affect both individuals and the community. We must imitate the model of the Trinity. This means careful listening to all viewpoints, careful weighing of everyone's needs, but finally, it also means implementation of what will bring the most benefit to the body.

Revelation and Reason

And so, by revelation and by reason, we see it is essential for God to be a Trinity, a triune being, three persons who share one essence and are thus one God. We see the truth of the Trinity in the Old Testament if we're careful in our examination, but it is Jesus who showed us the truth of the Trinity in its fullness. He is God.