

WAS JESUS GOD?

by Eric V. Snow

Was Jesus God? Was Jesus the Eternal? If so, how are He and the Father still one God? Was Herbert Armstrong right when writing this? "Christ and the Father are one God, not two Gods--one Elohim"? (his emphasis, "Is Jesus God?," reprint article, 1955, p. 2). Recently, our traditional teaching has been questioned by a former UCG pastor in Australia, Orest Solyma, and by recent letters to The Journal by Anthony Buzzard and Duane Giles. So let's review briefly some of the Scriptural evidence bearing on this question. Below, it shall be shown that Jesus was God and had existed from all eternity with the Father.

DOES IT MATTER WHETHER JESUS WAS GOD?

But before turning to the evidence favoring Jesus being God, let's examine why this issue even matters. Especially in the UCG, many seem to believe the nature of God question is irrelevant to practical, everyday Christian living, unlike (say) the Sabbath, Holy Days, tithing, and other matters the Worldwide Church of God changed its doctrines on in late 1994. Here, I suspect, the predominantly Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage of most church members comes home to roost, especially among us pragmatic Americans: We are especially apt to dismiss philosophy and high theology as having no practical effect on our lives. But having a mistaken and/or vague notion of the God we serve inevitably affects our spiritual lives. In reply to the Samaritan woman, Jesus remarked, "You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22, NASB throughout, unless otherwise stated). If we have mistaken ideas of who and what God is, it inevitably causes us to worship Him equally incorrectly. Jesus noted that "those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (v. 24).

PROBLEMS WITH THE UNITARIAN THEORY OF REDEMPTION

For example, consider the fundamental problem with Unitarian (Socinian) theology for the theory of redemption. Suppose Jesus was not the Creator of humanity or the world, and had no preexistence. How can

the death of a mere man, a man who (despite being virgin born and sinless) was no greater than (say) the prophets Isaiah or Jeremiah, save us from our sins? Herbert Armstrong's theory of the atonement (Mystery of the Ages, pp. 210-11) maintains that since Jesus was God and the actual Creator of all humans, His life was worth far more than all human lives combined. God, being a consistent enforcer of His law, had condemned all humans to death for their sins, and couldn't arbitrarily cancel them without putting His sense of justice in question. Consequently, to rescue mankind from its sins, only the life of Someone worth more than all our lives put together could pay the penalty of our sins while keeping His law intact. But that price couldn't be paid, unless the Creator in all respects became also like the part of the Creation to be redeemed. Jesus had to die, because only human death could pay the penalties for human sin. Yet, He also had to be the Creator of humanity, since only then would His life would be worth more than all the other human beings who had ever lived. Importantly, Jesus' sinlessness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for saving humanity, for that isn't enough by itself to do the job. Ultimately, Unitarian theology undermines our appreciation for what Jesus did because the level of sacrifice He engaged in is almost infinitely lessened (cf. Rom. 5:7): No longer does the Almighty Jehovah who lived from all eternity and created the universe die for us, but rather just (perhaps) a virgin-born, sinless man who is just like ourselves otherwise.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN PROVES JESUS IS GOD

The Gospel of John poses more problems for Unitarian theology than any other book of the Bible. Indeed, its theme can be summarized as describing Jesus Christ, the One who was fully God and fully man, and His teachings for those already converted. In order to refute Gnostic teachings that denied Jesus came in the flesh, but just appeared to have a body of flesh and blood (II John 7; I John 4:2-3), John also emphasized Jesus' humanity. Its opening verse affirms the Deity of Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Since in verse 14 "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us," the Word undeniably was Jesus. To evade this verse, Unitarians have argued that the "Word" merely was a thought in the Father's mind, since verses 2-3 refer to the "Word" impersonally. (For verse 2, the NASB literal marginal rendering is "This one.") This argument is simply unpersuasive, since this

"thought" is called "God," and because this "thought" was the Creator "itself" in verse 2: "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." Could a mere "thought" alone in the Father's mind create the universe by itself?

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ON JOHN 1:1

Jehovah's Witnesses tackle John 1:1 differently. Importantly, they are Arians who deny Jesus was God but who (unlike Unitarians) do affirm His preexistence before the Holy Spirit impregnated the Virgin Mary. They assert the last clause should be translated "and the Word was a god" (New World Translation). To really prove this translation's dishonesty by examining the Greek grammar would consume much more space than is available here. Such complicated issues like Colwell's rule appear, which states a "definite predicate nominative" never acquires an article ("the" or "a") when preceding the verb. Interested readers should turn to John M. Bowman's Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989) for a thorough refutation. But consider this intuitive point: Since John mentions the "Word" was in the beginning in the first clause before referring to the Father ("God") in the second, this by itself strongly implies His eternal preexistence. Furthermore, John deliberately wrote a seemingly self-contradictory, equivocal, paradoxical statement, since the "Word" was with "God," yet the "Word" also was "God." To say the Word was merely "a god," robs this poetic verse of its power. Using a small "g," this translation makes a distinction possible only in few languages besides English. (Ironically, many of the earliest Greek manuscripts are in all capitals!) Furthermore, this mistranslation leads to polytheism, since Jesus is a "little god," the Father is a "big God," making $1 + 1 = 2!$ Tersely yet poetically, John uses the word "God" in two different ways, first to refer to the Father, second to the Godhead or Divine Family generally, which includes Jesus as well as the Father.

JESUS' UNIQUELY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER

Another key verse showing Jesus is God is John 5:18: "For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill [Jesus], because He not only was breaking the Sabbath [as they defined it], but also was

calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." Jesus referred to the Father in such a familiar way (v. 17), unlike other Jews, they thought He was committing blasphemy. Similarly, Jesus stated in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." For this remark, the Jews immediately (v. 31) picked "up stones again to stone Him." Why? "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God" (v. 33). At this point, if Jesus wasn't God, immediately He could have clarified His identity by issuing a simply plain denial right then. Instead, side-stepping the accusation by quoting Psalms 82:6, He affirms He is the Son of God (v. 34).

As the Jews understood Jesus when He used this title, "the Son of God" implied divinity and not just Messiahship. (Theoretically, one could claim to be the Messiah yet deny being God). Taking on this title cost Jesus His life. His crucifixion followed the supposed blasphemy of saying He was the Son of God (John 19:7; Luke 22:67-71; Matt. 26:63-66; Mark 14:61-64). After all, in John 10:30-34 and elsewhere, He got into trouble for calling God His Father, and for saying He had a special, close relationship with Him that all other humans didn't have, i.e., He was a special son of God, the "only begotten" (John 3:16; cf. His avoidance of "our Father" in John 20:17).

JESUS IDENTIFIES HIMSELF AS YAHWEH

Then consider John 8:58: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.'" Implying He was Jehovah, Jesus alluded to the burning bush incident, in which God stated "I am who I am" (Ex. 3:14). To evade this verse's implications, Unitarians and Arians attempt to retranslate one or more words in it. One option is to turn "was born" (NASB, lit. margin, "came into being") into a reference to the resurrection ("came to be") of Abraham. Another claims "I am" should be translated "I was" or "I have been," in order to say Jesus merely asserted He lived before Abraham did. Again, the technicalisms of Greek grammar can't be pursued here, but the reader is referred to Bowman's work mentioned above. But both of these alternate strategies totally fail before the implications of verse 59: "Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him." Why did they want to stone Him? For blasphemy! If Jesus merely was announcing He lived or would be resurrected before Abraham did or would be, unbelieving Jews might have marked Him down as eccentric (re:

verse 56). But certainly this was no offense worthy of death.

The context of John 8:58-59 concerns issues about Jesus' identity (see verses 12, 19, 24, 25, 28, 53). The chapter ends by Jesus asserting that He is the Eternal, the uncreated Creator, by contrasting Abraham's coming into being with His eternal existence (cf. Ps. 90:2). Later, during His arrest (John 18:5-8), Jesus' saying "I am" (the "He," is italicized, showing the translators added it) caused the crowd to draw back and fall to the ground. Their response strongly implies Jesus was making a divine claim, not merely stating when He lived compared to Abraham. By these statements, Jesus was likely also alluding to where the Eternal says "I am (He)" in Isaiah 41:4; 43:10, 46:4; 52:6.

THE APOSTLE THOMAS' AFFIRMATION OF JESUS' DEITY

After His resurrection, Jesus confronted doubting Thomas, who replied in total astonishment, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Again, if Jesus wasn't God, this exclamation presented Him with the golden opportunity to correct Thomas' would-be misimpression. But, of course, He did no such thing. Thomas wasn't using a irreverent euphemism, something which may be common today but was virtually unknown in his culture. Instead, remembering that Thomas' earlier devotion and service to Jesus shows he wouldn't casually throw around God's name in vain, in context his previous unbelief was overwhelmed, dazzled, and rebuked by the personal proof of Jesus' Deity by His resurrection from the dead.

The Gospel of John is full of statements by Jesus which no Old Testament prophet would dare make about himself, but which came naturally to Him. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies" (John 11:25). "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). "I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:54). "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:5-6). "I am the

bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). "All may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (John 8:23). Would have Daniel or Ezekiel even dream of uttering such thoughts in reference to themselves?

JESUS COULD FORGIVE SINS BY HIS OWN AUTHORITY

Turning to further proofs of Jesus' Deity found in the other Gospels, consider Jesus' ability to forgive sins by His own authority. While healing the paralytic, Jesus told him "your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5; cf. Luke 5:19). Immediately, some of the scribes hearing Him questioned His apparent presumption: "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). Despite knowing their thinking, Jesus proceeded to assert His authority to forgive sins (v. 10), without doing anything to correct their interpretation of His statement. Remember, He wasn't forgiving sins committed against Himself, i.e., as an individual who had been wronged or offended, but was forgiving sins generically.

JESUS WAS WORSHIPED

Since only God is worthy of worship (Matt. 4:10), if Jesus was worshiped by anyone without Him rebuking him (cf. Rev. 22:8-9; Acts 10:25-26; 14:12-15), that would prove His Deity. The Magi from the east "came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him" (Matt. 2:11). Now, the standard Unitarian/Arian reply states that the Greek word translated "worshiped" here is ambiguous. It can refer to people paying their respects to a king or high authority figure by bowing down to them. Hence, Jehovah's Witnesses, in their New World Translation, have "falling down, they did obeisance to it." But is this alternative translation always persuasive, given the context of the situation in which Jesus was "worshiped"? Consider when Jesus miraculously walked on water and controlled the weather by making the wind stop the moment He and Peter (who ran out on the water towards Him, only to sink) got back into their boat (Matt. 14:33): "And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'" Having just so overawed them by demonstrating His powers over nature, as God has, was

this mere "obeisance"? That hardly seems likely. Similarly, when the disciples first met Jesus after His resurrection (Matt. 28:9; cf. v. 17): "They came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him." Considering Thomas' exclamation when he first met the risen Christ, is it plausible to think after Jesus' stunning victory of life over death that the disciples merely bowed down to Him as if he were a human king, as if He were Henry VIII? Hebrews 1:6 states the angels worshiped Christ: "And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says: 'And let all the angels of God worship Him.'" Since Jesus in the immediate context is being deliberately contrasted with the angels (v. 4-5, 7), is this mere "obeisance" to a Being that Jehovah's Witnesses identify also as Michael the Archangel? Is Jesus then just a superior, but fellow, angel? Notice then Heb. 1:8: "But of the son He says, 'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever'" Jehovah's Witnesses attempt to elude this verse by this alternative translation: "God is your throne forever and ever" (NWT). Although grammatically possible, is this sensible? How does God Himself become a "throne"? If this (somehow) means Jesus derives His authority from God, then He is no different from the angels that this verse is supposed to be contrasting Him with. Verse 10 cites from Ps. 102:25: "And, 'Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands.'" Identifying Jesus as the Creator, the author of Hebrews plainly applies to Jesus the Psalmist's words about Yahweh (notice Ps. 102:18, 20, 22). Since Jesus is Yahweh, He is surely worthy of the angels' worship!

One interesting reference about Jesus receiving worship as God obliquely occurs in Revelation 7:10-11, 17: "And they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God. . . . for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd." Notice how God sits on the throne in v. 10, and receives worship, but v. 17 affirms Jesus sits on that throne Himself! The worship that these great spirit beings gave to God on His throne can't possibly be downgraded to the kind of respect humans show when bowing to a king. Although it's affirmed indirectly, these verses still remain strong evidence for Jesus receiving worship.

JESUS WAS THE CREATOR

Further evidence that Jesus is God comes from statements stating He was the Creator, a major defining attribute of God. If Jesus was the Creator, it also proves His preexistence, which refutes Unitarianism if not Arianism. "From the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9, NKJV). "Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" (I Cor. 8:6). "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3, NKJV). "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16-17). Logically, if Jesus made "ALL things," then He Himself couldn't be one of the "things" made!

THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA

At the beginning of Revelation appears a most intriguing text for the Deity of Christ. "'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,' says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Rev. 1:8, NKJV). "Alpha" is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, while "omega" is the last. In red letter Bibles, these words will properly appear in red, since Rev. 22:12-13 shows Jesus spoke them: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (See also Rev. 1:17-18; 2:8 for further evidence). Could someone else besides Jehovah be "the first and the last"? Note Isa. 44:6: "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.'" (See also Isa. 41:4). If the Eternal is the only God, could anyone besides Him be "the first and the last"? The following text plainly identifies "God" and "the Alpha and the Omega" as one and the same (Rev. 21:6-7): "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. . . . He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son."

PAUL AFFIRMS JESUS IS GOD

Paul affirmed the Deity of Christ in Col. 2:9: "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Trying to dodge this verse, Jehovah's Witnesses mistranslate it as "all the fullness of the divine quality dwells bodily" (NWT). But the word translated "Deity" here is "theotetos," not "theiot." Despite Thayer was a Unitarian himself, his Greek-English Lexicon (p. 288) denied this interpretation of "theot" (his emphasis): "deity i.e. the state of being God, Godhead . . . theot [in Greek letters]. deity differs from theiot [in Greek letters]. divinity, as essence differs from quality or attribute." Since the verse mentions Christ as possessing "all the fullness of Deity," its immediate context completely destroys any attempt to translate this word as weakly affirming Jesus's divinity anyway.

Expectantly awaiting Christ's return, Paul wrote (Titus 2:13): "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." A similar expression appears in II Peter 1:1: "by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." These translations are disputed--Jehovah's Witnesses are not alone with such renderings as "the great God and of [the] Savior of us, Christ Jesus" (NWT) and "of our God and [the] Savior Jesus Christ" (NWT). The latter translations assert "God" and the "Savior" separately refer to the Father and Son, instead of combining the two expressions together to refer to the Son alone. Does ambiguity reign? In fact, a major problem arises against the New World Translation's rendering. In the Greek, this grammatical construction connects the two nouns with the word "and" (kai) in between, while placing a definite article "the" before the first noun but not the second. Bowman maintains that every time this construction appears when using singular nouns and common ones denoting persons (brother, Savior, Lord, Son, Father, etc.), both nouns refer to just one person. Josh McDowell and Bart Larson (Jesus: A Biblical Defense of His Deity (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1983), p. 26) call this a "Granville Sharpe construction" because one article refers to both nouns inseparably. Furthermore, at least for Titus 2:13, note that the context points to Christ's second coming--Paul can't be referring to the Father's appearance!

While describing God's dealings with Israel, Paul identifies Jesus as Jehovah in I Cor. 10:4, 9 (NKJV): "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. . . . nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents." Jehovah's

Witnesses attempt to evade the first text by translating the word for "was" as "meant" (NWT). But the straightforward normal meaning of the Greek is "was," not "meant." Only while laboring under the theological view that Jesus couldn't possibly be Yahweh could someone insist on translating/interpreting the Greek so unconventionally. Similarly, Paul in Rom. 14:9-12 (NKJV) calls Christ "Lord of both the dead and the living," states, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ," applies an Old Testament text about "the Lord" (the Eternal) to Him, and finishes, "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." While discussing humans giving an account of themselves to God as their judge, Paul plainly equates Jesus, God, and Yahweh as one and the same!

MESSIANIC TEXTS AND JESUS' DEITY

Does Matthew 1:23 show Jesus is God? "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'" The name Jesus received strongly implies His Deity, because God and the Jewish culture in Scripture often name people for what they are. Hence, Moses was drawn out of the water as a baby, Abraham became the father of many nations, Jacob did supplant his brother for the birthright, Esau was hairy, Israel did strive with both God and men, Eve was the mother of all living, and Adam was the (first) man. Although today in our culture parents rarely name their children to describe who and/or what their offspring are, the Bible reveals God and patriarchal culture operated differently. Since Jesus was the God-Man who lived among humanity as a man while being God as well, "Immanuel" as a name fits perfectly.

Since the Old Testament portrays the Messiah as being God, this means Jesus must be God (Isa. 9:6-7): "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father [or "Father of Eternity"], Prince of Peace." If the Unitarian replies the title "Mighty God" shouldn't be taken literally, then neither can the other three titles, which is unacceptable. Does Jesus being "Mighty God" make Him into an inferior semi-divine being compared to the "Almighty God" who is the Father? Isaiah's next chapter (verses 21-22) refutes this claim, for Yahweh is called "the mighty God." The Old Testament also describes the Messiah as preexisting before the Virgin Mary became pregnant, even as

eternally existing by one meaning of "olam" ("forever") (Micah 5:2; cf. Heb. 7:3): "From you [Bethlehem] One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Furthermore, "They will look on Me [Yahweh] whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10).

OTHER TEXTS THAT POTENTIALLY AFFIRM JESUS' DEITY

Although perhaps more disputable, other texts given a standard translation or interpretation say Jesus is God. For example, I John 5:20 reads: "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." The most natural reference for "This is the true God" is "His Son Jesus Christ." Remember that John began his letter referring to Jesus as someone who could be touched "and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (I John 1:2). If Jesus was "the eternal life" at the beginning of John's letter, presumably He still is the "eternal life" at its end!

Consider now Romans 9:5 (NKJV): "of whom are the fathers and from who, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen." Of course, this verse can easily be translated to avoid the reference to Jesus being God. But the mere fact that's a perfectly possible meaning indicates how Paul, at least here, didn't strive to avoid grammatical constructions that could point to multiplicity within the Godhead--a thought once unthinkable to any true Jew. Acts 20:28 presents another example: "The Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." True, "Son" in brackets can be inserted to complete the thought after the word "blood." But again, since the first translation is the simplest, it indicates Paul (who was speaking here) didn't strive to avoid language at all costs that potentially referred to Jesus as God, as possibly compromising monotheism (belief in one God).

One controversial text is I Timothy 3:16 (NKJV): "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: 'God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.'" The alternative reading places "He who" for "God." The dispute here concerns not translation as

such, but the long-running debate between the Received/Byzantine text that underlies the KJV and NKJV, and the Critical/Alexandrine text that underlies most modern Bible translations. "Theos," "God" appears in the Received text, while "os," "(He) who," surfaces in the Critical text (i.e., Westcott-Hort, Nestle-Aland). Excepting for the spurious Trinitarian interpolation inserted into I John 5:7-8, the WCG traditionally maintained the Received text was normally the better of the two. The space isn't available to explain the reasons why it's better to follow the vast majority (but later) manuscripts representing the Received text instead of the older (but many fewer) manuscripts upholding the Critical. Skeptics questioning the reading of "God" for I Timothy 3:16 would find it worthwhile tracking down the English textual critic John Burgon's 76-page defense of it in The Revision Revised. (A good general defense of the Received text can be found in David Otis Fuller, ed., Which Bible? (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975)).

DOES THE ONENESS OF GOD RULE OUT JESUS BEING GOD?

Having presented above briefly the positive case for Jesus' Deity, it's necessary now to examine some of the objections raised against it. The leading objection goes like this: Since Scripture repeatedly says God is one or that only one God exists (Deut. 6:4; Gal. 3:20; James 2:19; I Cor. 8:4; Rom. 3:30; Isa. 44:6,8; Jude 25; II Sam. 7:22, I Kings 8:60; Deut. 4:35, 39; Mark 12:32), calling both Jesus and the Father "God" contradicts the rest of the Bible. If Jesus is one God, and the Father another, that makes for two Gods--which is absurd, and a total denial of traditional Jewish monotheism. In reply, it's necessary to recall Gary Fakhoury's brilliant insight that we should define the word "one" as the Bible does, not as our a priori (before experience) human reasoning and speculations indicate (cf. "The Nature of God: A Biblical Review," pp. 10-17). As Herbert Armstrong always stated, let the Bible interpret itself.

Now the word translated "one" in the Shema of Deut. 6:4 is "echod." This word can mean composite unity, not an indivisible, solitary unity. Genesis 2:24 uses the word "echod" thus: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Here two separate individuals become "one." Similarly, the giant cluster of grapes carried on a branch between two of the spies scouting out the Holy Land for Israel was "echod" (Num. 13:23).

Despite apparently having hundreds of grapes, the cluster still was called "one" or "single." The Greek word for one, "heis," merely repeats the same story, since it can refer to composite unity as well. For example, the analogy between the human body and the church makes "one" out of many (I Cor. 12:12): "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." Similarly, many can be "one" in Phil. 2:2 (NKJV): "fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." The non-spurious part of I John 5:7 (ASV) makes three into one: "For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one." In light of this Scriptural evidence, it's wrong to insist the texts that affirm God's oneness must mean God is one single Person (center of consciousness).

GENESIS 1:26 AND THE PLURAL OF MAJESTY

Does the Old Testament ever attribute to God a plurality of Persons? Although Hebrew term for God, "elohim," is in the plural, it almost always takes singular verbs or pronouns. But a few exceptions do arise (Isa. 6:8; Gen. 11:7), most notoriously Gen. 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let US make man in OUR image, according to OUR likeness.'" Those asserting monotheism requires God to be a single Person commonly employ two interpretive strategies to evade this text's implications. One asserts that God spoke to the angels here. But since Scripture never says the angels are creators, even assistant creators, this claim is totally unpersuasive. Another approach maintains God here used the "plural of majesty," as Queen Victoria did in this statement attributed to her, "We are not amused." Of course, the question then becomes why God almost never uses the plural of majesty, even when in Isaiah He is affirming His greatness compared to His creation and mankind, except in a very few, isolated cases. (A serious scholarly investigation should be launched to see how and whether Israelite and other kings of a Semitic culture commonly used the plural of majesty, or whether it appeared in myths about false gods of the ancient Middle East). But must ambiguity reign? Notice Gen. 3:22: "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil.'" This construction can't be explained as a "plural of majesty" because "one" is set against "Us." Despite being not the most straightforward interpretation, the claim God used the "plural of majesty" in

Gen. 1:26 may not be able to be decisively refuted at the present state of knowledge. But in light of Gen. 3:22, the view "Elohim" can't refer to a plurality of Persons in the Godhead wears exceedingly thin.

HOW THE WORD "GOD" HAS MORE THAN ONE MEANING

Arians and Unitarians like to trot out texts such as I Cor. 8:6 to prove Jesus is Lord but not God: "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." So if there's only "one God, the Father," does this exclude Jesus? But inverting this question is easy: If Jesus is the only "Lord," does that mean the Father is never the "Lord"? Yet Jesus Himself calls the Father "Lord" in Matt. 11:25: "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and Earth." Similarly, Jesus' citation of Ps. 110:1 plainly applies the name "Yahweh" to the Father, although He used the standard Jewish terminology of "the Lord" for the Tetragrammaton (YHWH): "For David himself says in the book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my Lord . . . David therefore calls Him 'Lord,' and how is He his son?'" (Luke 20:42, 44). Plainly, as Vance Stinson observes in the CGI booklet Who, What Is God?, pp. 36-37, the word "God" has more than one meaning. Often the word "God" refers to the Father in particular, as distinct from Jesus. But other times, "God" refers to the divine Family or Godhead, to all Persons who are of the same eternal substance and essence, so it includes Jesus and the Father together. In this light, the use of both meanings of "God" in the one verse of John 1:1 is especially noteworthy, since the Word (Jesus) was with God and the Word was God.

DOES REVELATION 3:14 PROVE JESUS WAS CREATED?

Another verse Arians seize upon to "prove" Christ was created appears in one of the letters to the churches, where Jesus is speaking (Rev. 3:14): "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God." On its face, this verse is unclear: Was Jesus "the Beginning of the creation of God," i.e., the first being made by the Father, or was Jesus "the Beginning of the creation of God" by starting the making of the universe? The word translated "Beginning," arche, has more than one meaning. First of all, it can mean "ruler." The NIV translates the key part of this verse as "the ruler

of God's creation." Second, arche can simply mean "origin," which merely confirms again Jesus as the Creator, as Moffatt brings out: "the origin of God's creation." The TEV (GNB) has "the faithful and true witness, who is the origin of all that God has created." Third, it's true--this verse can mean Jesus was created first. But this verse's very ambiguity leads us to state a basic principle of interpreting Scripture: It's illegitimate to take one or a few verses to contradict the great weight of evidence going in the opposite direction. It's much easier to take the relatively few verses that purportedly deny Jesus' Deity, and reconcile them with the many that affirm it directly or indirectly, clearly or somewhat arguably, than to exalt the few verses that supposedly deny it, then engage in all the great sweat and effort of constantly having to explain this, that, and more away. Fundamentally, Jehovah's Witnesses and all Unitarians opted for the latter choice, which simply becomes unpersuasive since they're inevitably, almost constantly, on the defensive when facing knowledgeable opposition. Their defenses take on the feel of scientists propping up an old paradigm under attack by constantly devising ad hoc "explanations" for numerous anomalous facts that contradict it.

HOW WAS THE FATHER GREATER THAN JESUS?

In order to deny Jesus is God, Arians and Unitarians commonly turn to John 14:28 as proof: "Because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I." But since Jesus was in the flesh when saying this, it's fundamentally unconvincing. So long as Jesus was a human, He voluntarily limited His Divine prerogatives. In a text that proves Jesus' preexistence, He asked the Father to restore "the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5). Notice He had it "with" the Father--this can't be a reference to Jesus' existence being a mere thought in the Father's mind that He willed to do. If the Unitarian interpretation was correct, that unactualized thought would have to have the same glory Jesus possessed when really existing--which is absurd. Instead, He is asking to have back what He used to have, when He had in unlimited measure all the attributes of the Almighty Yahweh. The pouring or emptying out (kenosis) of Jesus meant He choose to limit His divine prerogatives (Phil. 2:6-8). For example, Jesus was not omniscient while He walked the earth, since He didn't know the day of His return (Matt. 24:36). (Although here we (and HWA in the past) run into the theoretical

theological problem of asserting Jesus was God when He lacked some of the defining attributes of God such as omnipotence while in the flesh, we should still call Jesus "God" then as well as "man" because Scripture does). As for John 14:28 itself, consider what your reaction would be to someone you know telling you, "Well, God is greater than me." You'd consider him or her unbearably pompous for stating the stunningly obvious. Such a statement by Jesus implies the highness of His earlier claims about His relationship with the Father.

Other texts about Jesus' relationship with the Father plainly show He was subordinate to Him: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ" (I Cor. 11:3). "And when all things are subject to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:28). In light of the other texts affirming Jesus' Deity, these Scriptures merely show Jesus had less authority than the Father--that the Father was Jesus' "boss." But just as men and women are both intrinsically equal in their ultimate spiritual destinies, despite within marriage husbands have authority over their wives (I Cor. 11:3), these texts don't prove Jesus' essence or substance differed from the Father's.

JESUS WAS "THE FIRST-BORN OF ALL CREATION"

Another text Arians and Unitarians appeal to is Col. 1:15, which calls Jesus "the first-born of all creation." Does this mean Jesus was the first being created? First, it's important to examine this term in its Old Testament, Jewish cultural context, not in light of our modern presuppositions. Receiving a double portion as an inheritance, the firstborn son of a Jewish family was considered preeminent over his siblings (cf. Reuben in Gen. 49:3). He, not his younger brothers, became the head of the family after his father's death. Hence, the term "firstborn" took on a connotation of authority and position of favor. Job uses it metaphorically to refer to death (Job 18:13), and Isaiah to the poorest of the poor (Isa. 14:30). Although Manasseh was the firstborn of Joseph's sons (Gen. 48:14-20), Ephraim gained the greater blessing from God through Jacob, so he is referred as the firstborn in Jer. 31:9: "For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born." Similarly, God calls the nation of Israel His "firstborn" (Ex. 4:22). Furthermore, there's the

possibility for an alternative translation for the Greek word translated "first-born," "prototokos," can mean "original bringer forth," according to the Roman Catholic scholar Erasmus (1466?-1536), although admittedly neither Thayer's nor Baur-Arndt-Gingrich confirms this meaning.

Second, we in the Church of God should remember that Jesus was the first to be "born again" by eventually becoming a spirit being after His resurrection (I Cor. 15:44-45). Jesus was the "first-born from the dead" which gave Him "first place in everything" (Col. 1:18). But we Christians at the resurrection are to be "born again" just as He was (Rom. 8:29): "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren." Although Jesus became the Son of God once the Virgin Mary became pregnant (not before, nor from all eternity--Heb. 1:5), He "was declared the Son of God with power by ['as a result of,' NASB margin] the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). John 3:6, 8 should be given a plain interpretation, not a metaphorical one: "That which is born of the flesh IS flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit IS spirit. . . . The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so IS everyone who is born of the Spirit." As the GCG minister Dave Pack has so ably shown in his book "Except There Come a Falling Away", Herbert W. Armstrong's teaching on the subject of being begotten by the Spirit at baptism, but born again at the resurrection, is fundamentally sound. HWA's insights on this matter show Arians and Unitarians are grasping at straws when using this text to prove Jesus was a created being.

ON THIS SUBJECT, THE COUNCIL OF NICEA WAS RIGHT!

Much more Scriptural evidence in favor of Jesus being Jehovah, the Almighty God, could be presented. Although a number of the texts discussed above can be evaded to one degree to another, and alternatively retranslated, reinterpreted, and/or dismissed as textual errors, still so often the main weight of the semi-ambiguous texts point to the Deity of Christ, over and above the clear ones. The great insight of Herbert W. Armstrong on the nature of God was to deny the Trinity while still affirming the Deity of Christ and plurality in the Godhead, since most non-Trinitarians reject the latter teachings as well. Although the Trinitarians are wrong overall, their affirmation that Jesus is God is thoroughly correct. Given the two basic

choices the Council of Nicea faced in 325 A.D., the bishops who voted for Athanasius and against Arius were right. (The original Nicene declaration merely asserted they believed "in the Holy Spirit," saying nothing about its nature. Arguably, so far as it goes, HWA could have affirmed it!) For this article, I lifted arguments in favor of the Divinity of Christ from such deeply flawed works as Walter Martin and Norman Klann's Jehovah of the Watchtower, Robert M. Bowman Jr.'s Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses, and Josh McDowell and Don Stewart's Handbook of Today's Religions: Understanding the Cults. Although full of doctrinal error, these books by defenders of traditional Christian doctrines are undeniably right on this one doctrine. It seems 80% or more of the emotional energy of Trinitarians is eaten up defending Jesus is God--denials that the Holy Spirit is a Person and/or God simply arouse their visceral reactions far less. Despite Herbert W. Armstrong went against so much traditional Protestant and Catholic theology, in this regard he sided with them, for good reason. We should avoid the knee-jerk reaction that "because they teach it, it must be wrong," but instead concern ourselves with what the Bible teaches. Ultimately, it's much more persuasive to fit the Bible's jigsaw pieces together to declare "Jesus is God," rather than to twist and pound them into place to proclaim "Jesus isn't God."