

EDITORIAL

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BIBLICAL CREED

A current Messianic website presents us with a faith statement as follows:

GOD - We believe that the Shema, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4), teaches that God is Echad, as so declared: a united one, a composite unity, eternally existent in plural oneness: Gen. 1:1 (Elohim: God); Gen. 1:26 "Let us make man in our image"; Gen. 2:24 Adam & Eve were created to be as one flesh (basar echad), that He is a personal God who created us (Gen. 1 & 2), and that He exists forever in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as mentioned in Romans 8:14-17 (Father, Spirit, and Messiah - Son) and Matt. 28:18-20 (immersing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).¹

For the editors of *A Journal from the Radical Reformation* it is a matter of sadness and concern that the Jewish Scriptures, at the hands of Jews, should be forced to teach a much later post-biblical development in the doctrine of God. How many scholars today could possibly agree that Moses presented Israel with a triune God? The argument from *echad* is a grand though popular fallacy. *Echad* means "one single." It functions in all of its 970 occurrences in the Old Testament just like the word "one" in English. The God of Israel is designated by singular personal pronouns thousands upon thousands of times and uses every possible form of language to convey the idea that He is alone, by Himself and unaccompanied at the creation (Isa. 44:24). It seems to us an insult to Hebrew Scripture and language, and to the Jews as its custodians, that word tricks would be played with the public. In our time the *Word Biblical Commentary* represents the best of evangelical scholarship. Referring to Genesis 1:26, Dr. Gordon Wenham, who is professor of Old Testament at Trinity College, Bristol, states, "From the Epistle of Barnabas and Justin Martyr, who saw the plural as a reference to Christ, Christians have traditionally seen this verse [Gen. 1:26] as adumbrating the Trinity. It is now universally admitted that this was not what the plural meant to the original author."²

Equally clear is the statement of the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*: "There is in the OT no indication of interior distinctions in the Godhead; it is an anachronism to find either the doctrine of Incarnation or that of the Trinity in its pages."³

This point of view is echoed by *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*:

¹ International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues, "What We Believe," www.iamcs.org/WhatWeBelieve.php

² *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, Word Books, 1987, 27.

³ *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, T. & T. Clark, 1913, 6:254.

Early dogmaticians were of the opinion that so essential a doctrine as that of the Trinity could not have been unknown to the men of the Old Testament. However, no modern theologian...can longer maintain such a view. Only an inaccurate exegesis which overlooks the more immediate grounds of interpretation can see references to the Trinity in the plural form of the divine name Elohim, the use of the plural in Gen. 1:26, or such liturgical phrases of three members as the Aaronic blessing of Num. 6:24-26 and the Trisagion of Isa. 6:3.⁴

The Messianic website has twisted Israel's sacred creed, the creed fully confirmed by Jesus himself (see Mark 12:28-34). In so doing it further alienates Jews from the Messiah Jesus. Jews everywhere should be invited to inspect the claims of the first-century Jesus, who never deviated one iota from the Hebrew creed of his heritage. What a fine basis for Christian-Jewish dialogue.

Would that the warning of Dr. William Smith might be heard. He urged us to be suspicious of the imaginative attempts to find the Trinity in the Hebrew Bible: "The plural form of Elohim has given rise to much discussion. The fanciful idea that it referred to the *trinity of persons* in the Godhead hardly finds now a supporter among scholars."⁵

⁴ *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Baker, 1960, 12:18.

⁵ *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, Thomas Nelson, 1986, 220.