

The Only True God: A Study of Biblical Monotheism

by Eric H.H. Chang

Book Review by Barbara Buzzard

“Where there is belief in more than one person who is God, that is polytheism by definition.”

Rarely do I find a book with so much riveting content in its introduction that I can write a review based solely on that — but this is one such book. (And rarely do books have introductions of 41 pages!)

I also wanted to make readers aware of the fact that this volume is available free online — **theonlytruegod.org** You will be the richer for having read it. It is a must-read for all Christians who desire to defend the faith.

Author Eric Chang opens by stating that Jesus used the word “monotheism” when he said, “This is eternal life: that they know You, the only [*monos*] true God [*theos*], and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). He notes this as central to the heart and mind of Jesus, the very foundation of his teaching. How then could this foundational element be viewed by our current society as non-essential?

“Jesus’ words are so clear that no complicated linguistic techniques are needed to explain them. What Jesus states with crystal clarity is that there is only one God, the One he called ‘Father,’ and asked his disciples to call upon Him in the same way...Jesus speaks of himself as the one sent by ‘the only true God.’ It should therefore, have been perfectly obvious to anyone truly listening to what Jesus said that if the Father is the one and only true God, then no one else can also be God alongside Him.”¹

The Fundamental Problem

“But the fundamental problem created by elevating Jesus to the level of deity is that a situation is created in which there are at least two persons who are both equally God; this brings Trinitarianism into conflict with the monotheism of the Bible.”²

Chang explains that when the church cut its connection with its Jewish roots, believers lost understanding of the meanings of terms and concepts once well known. This loss had serious consequences when it came to the origin and meaning of “the Word.” And then followed some pretty desperate measures to dignify ideas foreign to the text, and to impress, and to twist verses into something other than was intended.

“The later Gentile church however, failed...to distinguish in significance between ‘Lord’ as applied to Jesus and ‘LORD’ as applied to God.”³ And thus, says Chang, Trinitarianism was born, but with an extremely serious consequence: the Father was sidelined or marginalized as Jesus was worshipped as God. Chang then asks perceptively: “Are we really monotheists as we suppose ourselves to be?”⁴ He makes the point that Jesus lived and taught as a monotheist but that we as disciples seem to have veered off course.

“Trinitarian Christians like to rank themselves among Jews and Muslims as monotheists. The problem is that neither Judaism nor Islam recognizes Trinitarian Christianity as truly monotheistic, regardless of Christian claims.”⁵

The Gospel Cannot Be Preached to Muslims and Jews

Eric Chang was himself a devoted Trinitarian for over 50 years, having been a pastor, church leader and teacher for 40 years. While pondering the question of how Muslims might be reached with Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom, he came to the full realization that it couldn’t happen. This was his “Aha!” moment. They won’t hear the Gospel because it doesn’t come from a foundation of monotheism. This stark and shocking reality made Chang conclude that the Gospel *cannot* be preached to Muslim and Jewish nations!

¹ *The Only True God, A Study of Biblical Monotheism*, Eric H. H. Chang, 2009, Xlibris, p. 2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 4

³ *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19

Hand in hand with that, Chang saw that he needed to re-evaluate whether his own Christianity was monotheistic. He concluded this: “When I examined my own thoughts, I too realized that my Trinitarianism was at root incompatible with Biblical monotheism.”⁶ I say, praise God for an honest man!

I particularly love Chang’s description of the changes he found it necessary to make: “To my surprise, once I began to put aside my own prejudices and preconceptions and re-evaluate each text to see what it is actually saying, and not how we as Trinitarians had interpreted it, the message which emerged from the text proved to be different from what I had supposed it to be. This was especially true of John 1:1. Because of my deeply entrenched Trinitarianism, this process resulted in a long struggle (and a lot of hard work) to get to the truth of the Biblical message.”⁷ Sadly, I know of too many who have not had the courage to take the steps he did, nor the honesty to admit being wrong.

Chang speaks of thinking he was alone in his beliefs, and his surprise at finding that Hans Kung had previously declared the doctrine of the Trinity to be unbiblical.” In fact, Kung had this to say: “Indeed, throughout the New Testament, while there is belief in God the Father, in Jesus the Son and in God’s Holy Spirit, there is no doctrine of one God in three persons...no doctrine of a ‘triune God,’ a ‘Trinity.’”⁸ The systematic theologian, Kuschel, after an in-depth study, came to the same conclusion.⁹

A Modicum of Critical Thinking

Chang makes a brilliant point when he explains that in India there are three gods more important than all the rest. He then asks this: “If those in India who worship these three supreme gods are called polytheists by Christians, in what way is the Christian Trinitarian concept fundamentally different from the Indian?...Indoctrination has the powerful effect of making us insist that Trinitarianism represents monotheism — something which true monotheists like the Jews and the Muslims reject. If we still have a modicum of logical thinking left in us we would see that: if there is *God* the Father, *God* the Son, and *God* the Spirit, then, obviously, there are three Gods according to this dogma. Yet we seem unable to face up squarely to the plain fact of the matter! Here we see the power of indoctrination and its capacity to overpower logical thought.”¹⁰

Chang’s book includes 12 appendices and a Scripture index, for a total of 668 pages. It is a real tome for a Bible student and an invaluable tool for research. Chang studied at the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow, Scotland, as well as London Bible College, and he graduated from the University of London. He ministered in Canada where two dozen churches sprang up from the original small fellowship. I regret to say that he died in 2012. I would like to have known him. However, I do know something of his character from the boldness of this book and I think he possesses something of the clarity that he so admires in Jesus.

Demotivation

Note this insightful thought: “Apart from this difficult problem of practically having to re-learn how to read the Bible in a new light, that of monotheism, there is also the demotivating factor of reckoning with the external pressures of being labeled a ‘heretic,’ which is intimidating for most Christians. **That someone who proclaims that the Bible is monotheistic because it is the word of ‘the only true God’ can be labeled a ‘heretic’ by the Gentile church shows just how far the church has strayed from the word of God.**”¹¹ This is a hugely important point — which Chang terms demotivation.

Many who “stumble” upon the truth of who God is are totally shocked when they take it to their pastor and brethren. Rather than rejoicing in what they found, they find that they are warned to back off and go no further. They have entered dangerous territory (i.e. thinking!). After all, the church councils decided these important matters years ago. Read about the incredible goings-on, violence, political intrigue, murder

⁶ Ibid., p. 22

⁷ Ibid., p. 23

⁸ Hans Kung, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, p. 95.

⁹ *Born Before All Time? The Dispute over Christ’s Origin*.

¹⁰ *The Only True God*, pp. 24, 25

¹¹ Ibid. p. 27, emphasis mine.

and mayhem, bloodthirsty mob-like behavior, and out-of-control clergy in *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What You Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years*.¹²

Isn't it interesting that a church council was necessary? There were no councils needed to decide about the virgin birth, the resurrection, baptism, etc.

On Trial

“The NT is not a polytheistic or Trinitarian document which we are now trying to explain monotheistically. If we were doing this we would have to justify our actions or defend our case. But it is precisely the reverse that is true. In regard to the NT, it is Trinitarianism that is on trial: it will have to explain why it has taken the monotheistic Word of God and interpreted it in polytheistic terms, thereby utterly distorting its fundamental character.”¹³ Great point, and very indicative of the biblical illiteracy which pervades our land. When truth is heard, it is regarded as heresy. In coming to terms with how this has played out, Chang offers this memorable picture:

“But are Trinitarians not monotheists? As Trinitarians we argued that we are monotheists, not polytheists, because our faith is in one God in three persons. We closed our eyes (and ears) to the fact which should have been perfectly obvious: If the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, and all three are coequal and coeternal, then the conclusion is inescapable that there are three Gods. So how did we manage to maintain that we still believe in one God? There was only one way: *the definition of the word ‘God’ had to be changed* — from ‘Person’ to a divine ‘Substance’ (or ‘Nature’) in which the three persons share equally.”¹⁴

Only at our very great peril do we mess with the definition of God. It is not as though He has not told us Who He is; it is that we have not listened. Chang traces Christianity's break with Biblical monotheism to the second century and cites James Dunn as to the parting of the ways.¹⁵

Two Gods?!

Chang sums up: “God was now no longer one personal Being but a group of three coequal persons...Hear, O Church, the Lord your God is THREE.”¹⁶ Chang is utterly appalled at the daring of Origen who said: “We are not afraid to speak in one sense of two Gods.”¹⁷ It was at that time, says Chang, that the floodgates of polytheism under the thinly disguised veil of “Trinitarian monotheism” were thrown open.

“‘God is Spirit’ (John 4:24) as Jesus said, yet we do not hesitate to declare that God's Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, is actually a different person from Him. The tragedy is that as Trinitarians we have become so accustomed to this sort of teaching that we are no longer capable of seeing its absurdity. Surely, we assure ourselves, we are not that stupid. The problem is not stupidity but spiritual blindness.”¹⁸

In a Nutshell

In a nutshell, this is what happened historically: “The church leaders at Nicaea finally (there was considerable tension among them) came up with what we know as the Nicene Creed in which the Deity of Jesus was declared to be what Christians must believe. *On what was the declaration based?* This is the important question that needs to be asked. Was it based on the Bible, or at least on the NT? *No, there is not a single reference to the Bible anywhere in this creed.* So on what authority was it based? It was based on the authority of these church leaders, who considered themselves as acting in God's Name on behalf of His

¹² by Philip Jenkins.

¹³ *The Only True God*, p. 30

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 30, emphasis added.

¹⁵ James Dunn, *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, AD 70 to 135*.

¹⁶ *The Only True God*, Chang, p. 32

¹⁷ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 129.

¹⁸ *The Only True God*, p. 35

church.”¹⁹ Frankly, it is hard not to put this whole paragraph in bold type, but I shall restrain myself. This story, however, is one of the best kept secrets of all time. And the apathy that accompanies it ensures that it remain a secret. Chang sees it as a matter of life or death, a true faith or a false one.

One of the powerful strengths of this book is that Chang has been able to view this subject, about which he writes so cogently, from the inside out, as it were. Having worshipped the Trinity for years, he is able to describe his journey in a dramatic and forceful way. I think that there is a spiritual interplay which happens when a person begins to “see.” I think that at that point, he can choose to see further, or not. The choice is his. I thank God that Eric Chang chose to see and to come out of his spiritual blindness, thereby helping others to see.

Polytheism

“Where there is belief in more than one person who is God, that is polytheism by definition. What we need to realize is that Trinitarianism is in essence, therefore, a different faith from Biblical monotheism.”²⁰ These are such stark and sobering words to end with, and yet so profound and, I believe, wise. This is a very powerful book. I must commend this man for his boldness and clarity and indeed, the risk to his reputation, for being willing to be named a heretic. We hear much about “junk science.” Chang has exposed some “junk theology.” He has written a stunning book. May we all be blessed by this labor of love. ✧

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 38, emphasis mine

²⁰ Ibid., p. 40