

Trinity Debate: Sanders vs. Buzzard

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[Fred Sanders](#)

[Theology](#)

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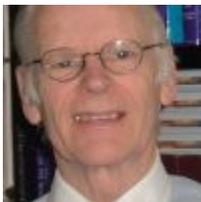
A few years ago I was invited to engage in a public debate on the Trinity with an anti-trinitarian teacher named [Anthony Buzzard](#). Professor Buzzard teaches that Jesus was nothing more than a human uniquely used by God. His theology is basically [Socinian](#), and he teaches at [Atlanta Bible College](#), which is not your average Bible College, but an anti-trinitarian school from a denomination that is recognized under the unwieldy title [The Church of God General Conference \(Abrahamic Faith\)](#).

The people who organized the debate entitled it “God: One Person or Three?” Professor Buzzard argued the thesis “The one God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, and the Scriptures, is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” which sounds OK except that it pointedly leaves Jesus out of the identity of the one God. So I countered with the thesis “Jesus is God.”

When we met for the public debate, we stood and exchanged unscripted speeches with each other at considerable length. It was a pretty long debate, held in an outdoor amphitheater on at the Norco Campus of Riverside Community College on Friday, April 25, 2003. This transcript (24,000 words!) has been lightly edited to remove our ums and ers, but it faithfully preserves much of the sloppiness of our spoken delivery. Professor Buzzard has agreed with me that this transcript is a fair and accurate representation of what we said that night, and I post it here with his permission.

Of course I think I won, because even though in retrospect I can see places where I could have argued far better, I had the great advantage of having the truth on my side. No doubt Professor Buzzard also thinks he won, and our supporters must have gone home that night confirmed in their own opinions. That’s public debate for you! All of these arguments are available in print elsewhere: better, more thorough, and footnoted. But it may be that the informality of the tone of voice in this debate transcript helps you get into the argument better.

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Professor Buzzard's Introduction

Good evening! I speak English with a British accent and, if you listen carefully, you'll probably follow most of what I say; however if I say to you that I am mad about my flat – I probably won't be saying that actually, but that's an example – you'll have to translate that into your language. I just said that I was excited about my apartment, and you just heard that as "I'm angry about my flat tire;" but apart from those communication difficulties I feel that we will have no problem communicating.

I feel very honored to be here in California. I've been living in the states for 20 years now. My impression is that sermons on the Trinity are never given here, or at least very seldom given. There are "Bible Answer People" who take this issue very seriously, but nobody really quite knows what the Trinity is, so I hope to listen carefully as Professor Sanders defines exactly what he means by the Trinity.

Let me start by simply making this comment to you: this is a very momentous subject because there are a billion Muslims on the earth who are offended at the notion that God is three in one and there are many millions of Jews who are equally troubled and puzzled by the notion that Jesus is God. So this is no small deal.

If it would turn out, after your patient examination of the subject over a period of time – nobody changes their mind overnight about these sort of things, by the way, but taking this as a start – if it should turn out that God in fact is one single person and the Messiah, Jesus, is the son of God, supernaturally conceived in the womb of his mother... if that should be the case, immediately the Muslims and the Jews would be attracted to our Christian faith in a greater way; so these are not small issues.

Secondly of course you know that people have died for these various arguments. I remind you that John Calvin orchestrated the murder of Michael Servetus on the issue of the Trinity. The event took place in fifteen-fifty-three, I think... so, people have shed blood. It was true in England that you were generally put to death up until about sixteen-hundred-and-something if you dared to say that God was other than the Triune God. Happily, in these wonderful days of freedom, and in America where we can say more or less anything and get away with it, we can have this sort of debate in a friendly manner; and I am sure that we are all going to learn from what is said and also from the questions that will be asked here.

God is One Individual Person

Here's my basic premise: I start from a Church of England basis, originally. I just wanted to add to that, though, and tell you that I am not a Bible expert "from this high" at all. I knew nothing about scripture until I was twenty. I was given a Bible and I have never been the same since – I'm still reeling from what I read in there. So I am not one who was trained to know anything about the Trinity or the non-Trinity.

I get the impression that most of us (and, probably, Professor Sanders) to some extent are Unitarians. What I mean by that is this: that we generally talk about God and praying to God through Jesus. I don't hear people praying to the Trinity. John Calvin, who was a Trinitarian, said "I don't like that prayer about 'oh divine Trinity!'" So most people are, perhaps, partly Unitarianist in varying degrees. Churches pray to God through Jesus. They don't pray to the Trinity, and they don't address God as Trinity, mostly.

Secondly, when they do pray, they are not doing it from some theologically worked out basis because they mostly don't know what the Trinity is. Most people, when told (as the Athanasian Creed says) that "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God," are thinking of three "Gods", because never in your life did you ever say, "That's a book, that's a book, that's a book - but it's one book!" You don't say that kind of thing; so it conveys no recognizable meaning to your mind. But what has happened is that you are told that you've got to say, "Jesus is God" to be orthodox and often people don't actually know what that entails.

So perhaps in the course of these discussions we can examine these various slogans about it and find out what we really are trying to say, and correct each other, and modify our positions as we hear better arguments - because we are all Bereans, searching the scriptures daily to see if what we are hearing is true - and that is the only way to make any progress. And while we are doing that exercise we are not killing each other these days, which is wonderful... we have really advanced in that respect.

So if you look at the Bible - pick it up, take the whole Bible, and seventy-five percent of your Bible is the Hebrew Bible, as you know; seventy-five percent of it is the Old Testament, it cannot be ignored - I think you'd get the impression there that God is a single person.

I've probably said the word "I" a couple of times, perhaps several times - and you really didn't need an army of theologians to tell you that when I use the singular pronoun, "I," I mean that I am one individual. I suggest to you that in the Bible that is true to the tune of about fifteen thousand times. In the Old Testament - although I'm not going to recite all the verses or tell you where all the verses are, I'll cite them and refer to them in this sense - you know that there God says "I," "I am he there is none beside me," "I am the only one," "Nobody created the world except me, I was alone when I did it." Isaiah 44:24, a very eye opening text, says: "The heavens and the earth were thrown into existence by myself, nobody was with me," and so on. You know the Sh'ma of Israel, the famous Deuteronomy 6:4, which invites Israel to listen and to pay attention to the fact that "the Lord our God is one Lord"; and most of you, when you hear one Lord, don't think of three Lords. When you hear the singular pronoun over and over again, most of you don't immediately say that means three persons.

So one of the bottom-line arguments of Unitarianism is that the natural meaning of the Old Testament and the New, when taken at their simplest level, produces the idea that God is a single person on the basis of those singular pronouns. You're dealing with a very difficult issue when you begin to deviate, I think, from that rather simple basic truth. You seem to be dealing with putting three billiard balls on one spot. But reading the Old Testament you don't get any idea at all that that's a problem; it doesn't seem to be difficult.

What you do have is the promise of the Messiah. You have this son of God, originally of course, the seed that is going to be coming in the future. He does not say that this seed is already there, because it's the seed of the woman; and so your mind is carried forward in the story. You are not thinking of that seed as being already in existence, I don't think. Then you hear in 2 Samuel 7 that the son who is going to be the son of the Father is going to be in the future tense: "I will be his Father and he will be my son," again, you don't get the impression from those texts that this son already exists.

Jewish Theology is Unitarian

So said the Jews – who never believed in the Trinity – and their theology is Unitarian. Many good Hebrew scholars would say that the Old Testament, at least, is a Unitarian book. Our Exodus is simply laced with Unitarianism rather than Trinitarianism. Most of those Jews were looking forward to a Messiah who would be a human person – of course a dramatically divine person, if you like – I mean an extraordinary person, with all of these ‘divine’ qualities of the Spirit – but nevertheless a member of the human race. The whole point of the Messiah from their angle is that he would be a member of the human race – not God becoming a man. That would be strange.

So at that basic level then, as an observer of words and of language, I simply cannot see how one can deviate from the singularity – the individuality – of God. Which of course, not only appeared to Jews to be such. No Jew today or very few Jews can be persuaded otherwise. Some can, but generally they are not. But any ordinary reader – even a child of ten – picking up the Hebrew Bible would find that God is a single individual.

I want to make one other point. The current situation in theology is very interesting in this sense: I think that a great number of standard authorities, of great names in the theological world, are really Unitarian. Now they may be part of Trinitarian camps, but they sound to me as though they argue as Unitarians. That becomes very interesting. They seem to be being compelled by the Unitarian argument that it is easier to think of the Father as the sole and only God and of Jesus as the son of God and not “God the Son”; and there is a huge difference!

So I am going to be throwing out to you a few quotations. Honestly, this is such a vast subject and we have very limited time, but I want to just leave you contemplating some of these remarks. For example: Colin Brown, a professor of theology at Fuller, says the following: “...to be the Son of God in the Bible means you are not God.” I think that is a very interesting statement. I think it is true; and you can examine the expression “Son of God” in the Old Testament and see what you think; but that is a significant statement. It sounds very Unitarian to me. So he doesn’t know anything about “God the Son” based on that statement. Secondly he says the following: “...to read John 1, ‘In the beginning was the Word,’ as though it says, ‘in the beginning was the Son,’ is patently wrong.” Those quotes are from a learned journal article – you can inquire at the end if you want to find out where that’s from and read it – but those two statements give me the sense that a lot of scholars are moving in a Unitarian direction, namely, the notion that God is a single person. However if we look back over the last five hundred years, we find the same things being said by learned Trinitarians. Many of them – in trying to explain so-called Trinitarian verses – many learned Trinitarians have agreed that those verses really were better explained on a Unitarian basis.

The Meaning of the Trinity Unclear

Let me then tackle this issue of the meaning of the Trinity. Here is what learned Trinitarians said in regard to their own doctrine of the Trinity quite often. For example, Professor Stewart, who was known as a very prominent exegete in the 1800s, says this: “I do not and cannot understand the meaning of the word ‘person’ in the proposition ‘three persons in one God.’” I do not and cannot understand this idea of the word ‘person.’ I don’t know what it means; and therefore I cannot really consent to it, and I can’t defend the idea of three persons in one God because I don’t know what the word ‘person’ means there. Now, until I do understand what it signifies, I have no hesitation in saying that my mind is absolutely unable to elicit any distinct and certain ideas from any of the definitions of the word ‘person’ I’ve ever come across.

Now I'm speaking as a Trinitarian here. We want to be clear that we are saying something meaningful when we say "three persons in one God"; so my proposition to you is that that's not possible in the Biblical language. If you stay with the Biblical language you're going to find God as a single person over and over and over again. You're also going to find it if you look at the credal statements in the Bible. That's a good place to start. You don't start by pulling one isolated text from a passage that's not dealing expressly with the question in mind, namely, "Who is God? Is he one, or two, or three?" You start with those credal statements in the Bible.

In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul said: "To us Christians there is one God the Father." He never said there was 'one God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.' He went on to say, "There is one God and one mediator between that one God and man, the man, Messiaich Jesus, the Messiah Jesus." That's rather clear to me. In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul is asking, 'How many Gods are there in the world? We know that in pagan religions there are lots of Gods, but to us Christians now, there is only one God: the Father,' and of course he goes on to say that there is one Lord, Messiah. But he doesn't say that Messiah was God. He says, "There is one God come of the Father." In fact he said "We know there's no God but one, there's only one God the Father." When you compact those two sentences together, you have "There's no God but the one God the Father."

In John 17:3 Jesus said in prayer to the Father, "You, Father" [here Jesus is addressing the one God of the universe], "are the only one who is truly God." Monos alethinous theos are the Greek words. This, to my understanding - and, I may be wrong, I'm waiting to be corrected if necessary - speaks of the unitary monotheism against which I really can't argue. And that's my basic proposition.



Professor Sanders' Introduction

Well, I want to confess to being at a disadvantage - a disadvantage that Danny has already drawn attention to in the fact that he and I have southern accents, while Professor Buzzard has rolling stentorian British cadences, which I envy him. A British person can say, "Honey, hand me the remote, wrestling is on," and it just sounds brilliant... a southern man can say, "E=MC2," and somehow make it sound hillbilly! So if you hear a little bit of that in me, or I'm drawling "E=MC2", I apologize.

I am dedicated to the doctrine of the Trinity because I believe Jesus is God, and from my position as a Trinitarian I can look around me and say, "Oh, there are many ways to do this doctrine wrong. There are many ways to misunderstand part of it, to overemphasize or underemphasize parts of the whole counsel of the word of God, to read the Bible with one eye and only see texts that indicate the humanity of Christ and completely miss all the texts which indicate the divinity of Christ." A wise man has said that there are many angles at which to fall, and only one angle at which to stand. I believe I occupy the angle at which you stand as a Christian: the Trinitarian position.

Now I look around from this position realizing there are many kinds of Unitarians in the world. Most Unitarians that I've dealt with or have read from fall into one of two camps; one camp would be just the hard rationalist position which finds a way of explaining away scripture in general and so as not to have to deal with it. If they find the revelation of the gospel of John too hard to deal with as a non-Trinitarian, they simply say, "Well, it's a late edition... we don't have to leave it in God's word anyway – let's just worship God." That's one Unitarian position. It's kind of a rationalist Unitarianism, but the other position you find among people who claim to be Bible-believers and try to read the Bible right is this: you find a lot of Unitarians 'of the second person of the Trinity.' I mean people who are trying to be Christians who are so convinced that Jesus is God that they think "Well, he's just 'God God,' that's all there is to it... we pray directly to him. Even when we pray 'our Father who art in heaven,' I'm thinking about Jesus in my mind. If I ever stop and ask myself the question, 'who did Jesus pray to,' my circuit's fried because for some reason I only think that Jesus is God." That's a form of 'Unitarianism of the second person.'

From my Trinitarian position I can look at that and say, "Oh yeah, that's one of the angles at which you fall. That hard rationalist position is one of the angles at which you fall." I have rarely read or interacted with the kind of anti-Trinitarianism I am dealing with here with Professor Buzzard, that is, a kind of Biblicist committed to the Bible but who, when he finds a hard verse, doesn't say "Well, this is a later development." He actually finds a way to try to explain it. I think he explains it wrongly, but he's actually - and this is a good word in my vocabulary – Biblicist. A Biblicist is committed to interpreting what the Bible says. Yet he is a non-Trinitarian of the Socinian type. He is someone who says, "I am a Unitarian of the first person: only God the Father is God. The 'Son of God', Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is not God." So it's an interesting kind of Unitarianism that I haven't dealt with that much.

Professor Buzzard mentions the Islamic critique of Christianity. Muslims have an interesting word for Christians. They refer to Christians as "associators" – those who take the one God and then associate someone else with him. That is their reason for rejecting Christianity. "Well, ok", they'll say, "you've got the one God, but then you add someone else to him - you're associators." That's an interesting objection to Christianity; how do you respond to it? One way to respond to it is to say, "Yeah, that's right, we associate Jesus with God." I think the proper response is to say, "Jesus Christ is associated with God so much so that God is Jesus Christ. God is revealed in Jesus Christ, and if you are dealing with any other God then you are dealing with an abstract God-concept that you got from somewhere else [somewhere other than Christianity]." We see the glory of God shining forth in the face of Jesus Christ – this is the revelation of God. This is the word of God.

When God reveals himself, what we see is Jesus Christ. Jesus said to his disciples, "If you've seen the Father, you've seen me." He also said, "I and the Father are one," which I always think of as kind of an interesting riff on Jesus' good, Jewish commitments to the Deuteronomy text – the Sh'ma – the creed of Israel; "Hear oh Israel, the Lord your God is one God." Jesus didn't come along and say, "You know what? Judaism, that was a bad idea...that whole oneness of God thing...I disagree. Turns out I'm God too; so there's two of us." No, Jesus comes along as a good Jew and says, "That's right, the Lord your God is one God, and what kind of unity is that? Well, I'll tell you what: I and the Father are one." It's a redefinition of the unity of God. Now who is entitled to pull off a redefinition of the unity of God? I think only God would be.

I really also appreciate Professor Buzzard's interest in the Old Testament and his really close-to-the-ground reading of the Old Testament, his asking, "Who's coming?" Starting from Genesis chapter 3, we know that the seed of a woman is going to appear, the Messiah is going to come...

what is God going to do to complete his covenant with Israel, to carry out the promise and to bring the kingdom? What will God do in the future when this comes about?

I like to picture myself with the Old Testament believers, reading scriptures, looking for the Messiah, searching them, thinking about "What is this thing God is going to carry out when the anointed one comes? When the prophet who is greater than Moses comes? When the ultimate Davidic King takes his seat on the throne of David? Who is that person going to be?" You can just imagine the old covenant believers looking at the different scripture texts and saying, "Ah, so he's going to rule and restore the kingdom to Israel and all of this is going to take place! He'll be on the throne of David over the nations. The glory of the Lord will be poured out over the earth. The nations will stream up to Jerusalem and learn of the one true God, and then somehow (I'm not sure how this works out) he's also going to suffer and be rejected and die. Maybe they are two different people? Maybe there is the king who is coming and then there is the Messiah who is coming, maybe there is the suffering servant?"

You can't fault Old Covenant believers for looking at the Bible text and not figuring that out. Least of all, it seems to me, can you fault them for reading all of these prophecies and all of these promises - clinging to them, waiting to see who the Messiah was going to be, how God was going to deliver his people - you can't fault them for not thinking, "You know, these promises are so big - what God has in store for us is so unusual, so difficult to interpret - it seems to me that the only way God can pull this off is if he shows up in person... if he somehow not only tabernacles among his people as he did with Moses, but comes as a 'greater than Moses' and reveals himself fully, and lives among us in a deeper way than we ever imagined."

God Must be Both Father and Son

I don't think anyone sitting there waiting for the Messiah expected for Yahweh to be his own Messiah. I don't think that anyone could have been expected to think that the covenant would be completed when God, who had always said, "I will be your God and you will be my people," completed his own covenant by saying, "Fine, you're not going to be my people? I'll be my people myself. I will become incarnate. I will send my Son - God in the flesh." Now only when you buy that do you begin to say, "...therefore God must be both God the Father and God the Son, and unless he turned into God the Son on the first Christmas day, then he must always have been that. Now if that's true, then I'm going to go read the Old Testament and see if I've missed any clues along the way."

It's a real mistake I think, to go to the Old Testament and say, "Well since I know the Trinity is true, everybody must have always known that. So let me see if Abraham points it out, or let me see where this shows up throughout the whole Old Testament." No; nobody knew that God had a Son until God revealed that God had a Son, and that the Son was God. This is what it means to be a Biblicist and be committed to a revealed religion: we don't sort of intuit [the religion], or figure it out by common sense, or philosophize about it. We know there is one God, and when he shows up as the Son of God, then we know that the one God must have existed in eternal fellowship of Father and Son. Unless he changed - unless Christmas is not just an important time where the incarnation takes place but is actually a massive change in God where he splits into two persons - then God has always been who he is. He has always been Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now, only when you take that and make that commitment to reading the full counsel of the Word of God, coming to grips with all the things that Jesus does - and this will be part of my affirmative statement later on - once you take in all of that evidence and read the Bible with both eyes open,

saying, "Yes, it's true that Jesus Christ is a man, and is the Messiah, and is the son of David, and fulfills all of these human expected things," the evidence also stacks up over here to say he is also doing things only God can do and carrying out God's plan as God. Only once you've done that do you have the evidence on both sides.

I will admit we've talked a little bit before about surprising areas of agreement that we are going to have. They will be very limited – when I read Professor Buzzard's résumé and writings I thought, "Oh, this is the anti-me, I'm finally going to meet me! What will happen if we shake hands? ...Will there be an explosion? What will happen?" We have surprising areas of agreement in this: just as it is possible to read the Bible with one eye closed and miss the divinity of Christ, it is possible to read the Bible with the other eye closed and miss the humanity of Christ. And if you are in a good Bible-believing church with pious people you will every now and then run into someone who, when you say to them, "Jesus is human right?" will reply, "Well, yeah, 'human'..." Now, they're not just rank heretics who deny the humanity of Christ, but they can't picture it, they can't imagine it, because they are so sure of the divinity of Christ, they've got the other eye closed. They can't see the whole counsel of the word of God.

The Christian Church's One Right Answer

This is what the doctrine of the Trinity is: it is the Christian church's one right answer to the question "Who is God?" If you take in the full counsel of the word of God, read the Bible with both eyes open, come to grips with the massiveness of what occurred in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, run it back through the whole counsel of scripture and say "Who is God?" ...the Christian answer is, "Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (Now, as always, we are kind of leaving the Holy Spirit aside because there is so much to talk about in the Trinity that the poor Holy Spirit always gets left out. But he can fend for himself! He is really just there to point you to Jesus Christ anyway, so if you are talking about Jesus, the Holy Spirit is quite pleased. There is too much to talk about in the Trinity. I think that if you sort the Father-Son relationship out, you've really solved it in principle.) So the Christian answer to the question "Who is God?" is: "The Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Unless God massively changed at the incarnation there must have always been this fellowship going on.

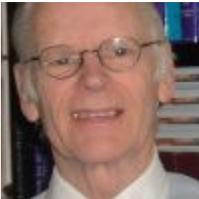
Origin of the Doctrine of the Trinity

Why did it take so long for this to come up? Why is it not until 325 A.D., at the council of Nicaea, that a bunch of people finally get together and vote on this and say, "Oh, we get it! That's what the Bible means!" I think I'll go ahead and introduce this question – it's in your writings, although it wasn't part of your affirmative statement yet – I think the answer to why that question finally comes up (not why it took so long, but why it actually comes up at all) is because the gospel spread into the Greco-Roman world. It spread, not to the east, to the Asian countries; not to the south, into Africa; not to the north, into whomever those pre-Germans were who were doing barbaric things at that time; it spread into the Greco-Roman world because that is where the roads were good. Part of what it means for Christ to come 'in the fullness of time' is once the infrastructure was good enough that there were roads, so the gospel could spread rapidly. It goes into the country formed by Greek thought.

Now, what does that mean, 'Greek thought'? I get to teach a lot of Greek philosophy on a regular basis, and I'll just really bottom-line what is going on in 'Greek thought.' That sounds like a bugaboo right? "Ooh, the Bible really says that only the Father is God, but then, if you put a veil of 'Greek thought' over it, suddenly you have the Trinity! ...I don't really know what happened..."

Well, here's what happened. Let's go with Socrates as the king of the Greek philosophers. Socrates is this annoying guy you would invite to parties and you would ask, "Socrates, would you like a glass of water?" to which he'd reply, "Well that depends: what is water?" It's the big question. It's a whole new trick really, the "WHAT IS?" question. There was the ad a while ago that ran "You want to have a hamburger and put steak sauce on it... why are you putting steak sauce on it? Well my friends, what is hamburger? Is it chopped ham? It is chopped steak, isn't it? Put steak sauce on it." That was Socrates' whole trick: the 'what is' question. "You want water? Well, what is water? What is the is-ness of water? What is the thing that water is? What is it? Don't beat around the bush, I want to know the essence of the thing." This is the whole Greek mentality.

So, the point is everyone is going along being a Christian, speaking Biblical language, and then things get Greek enough that someone asks the question: "Well, my friends, what is Jesus? What is the is-ness of Jesus? What is the being that Jesus has?" The first answer (given Greek categories) is: not God. That's the is-ness of Jesus: "Not God." Why? Because there is one high God; because we've all read Plato and we know that there is this one God. Everyone believes that for a while until it becomes a crisis. A council is called, Constantine kind of throws everyone in a room and says, "I don't care what your answer is, just come out with one church!"...What does come out actually is the opposite answer to the question "What is Jesus?" The Christian church faced the facts in the year 325 A.D. with the help of some Greek thinkers and said, "Alright, it's not a question the Bible exactly raises, but it is the right interpretation. And if you are going to ask the question, 'What is Jesus,' there is only one right answer. We know who Jesus is - what is he? We know he is God and he is man." That is the essence that is the is-ness of Jesus Christ.



Professor Buzzard: The Unitarian Tradition

Pick up your New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology, edited by Colin Brown (whom I've quoted and will quote again): "To be called Son of God in the Bible means that you are not God." Brown is a systematic theologian at Fuller. He's very distinguished, the general editor of massive volumes. He writes: "The Trinity: the New Testament does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit are of equal essence, and therefore in an equal sense, God himself. And the other express declaration is also lacking, that God is God thus and only thus (i.e.- he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit). These two express declarations which go beyond the witness of the Bible are the twofold content of the church doctrine of the Trinity."

Oh my goodness! It sounds like a Unitarian statement absolutely straight out. So what's happening now? This is the most sophisticated Biblical work you could find practically on earth, and any Unitarian will say, "That's what we've always said." We're dealing with some very powerful people in the Unitarian world; Sir Isaac Newton would have loved to be here tonight (of course it doesn't make him right at all; and you can quote names till the cows come home). But Sir Isaac Newton, John Locke and John Milton, presumably some of the brightest brains of the seventeenth century, were vigorous non-Trinitarians. That was embarrassing for them because they were

politically connected. In the case of John Milton, his works were lost for over two hundred years and found again in the houses of the House of Commons. It turned out he was an absolute 'heretic'; he was an Arian: he denied the Trinity. And if you like you can read his "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" book – one cannot dismiss people like John Milton as idiots – they were very clever with words and very intelligent with words. John Locke was very sympathetic to Socinians (and I do thank professor Sanders for mentioning that word, "Socinian," because what you are hearing from me is a straight Socinian Christology. That name comes from the Italian Sozzini brothers (who actually aren't brothers, but an uncle and a nephew), who rebelled against the orthodox Trinitarian view in the 1600s.

So John Locke then, Isaac Newton and John Milton were very concerned that the Trinity makes no sense from a language point of view. It was simply incomprehensible. There is simply no way that one could be turned into three. One can say, "Jesus is God, the Holy Spirit is God, the Father is God," but unless one defines what one means more precisely, one really isn't saying anything. If you just say, "That means one God: three cannot be one," it's clear, and Trinitarians understand that. I'm not satisfied though with their attempt to deal with that problem. I am asked to believe by Trinitarians that God is one 'what' in three 'who's.' I don't find that in scripture – I find God being one 'who.' Singular pronouns in the Old Testament speak of a 'who,' not a 'what.'

God is not an essence in scripture. And so my major point would be – not mine alone but the Unitarian tradition's, which is now many, many years old, of course – my main point would be that you've really got to reinvent language or at least go outside Biblical language to describe this Trinity. Why do I have to believe in an essence to describe God? Why do I have to talk of essence at all? The Bible doesn't. That word, 'ousia' in Greek, is not anywhere used in scripture of God. Why do I have to use the word 'hypostasis' (persons) when that is not used of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the scriptures? Why do I have to believe that the phrase "Today I have begotten you" really means, "In eternity I have begotten you?" And how indeed can you be begotten in eternity? The idea seems to me incomprehensible. To be begotten means to bring into existence, to give existence to something that doesn't exist already. You can't be eternally begotten. The word eternal is outside of time. And thus the whole notion of Trinitarian language – that is, when you unpack it and try and explain it – becomes very, very complex.

I really am most impressed with professor Sander's artistic skills, simply wonderful! You must get a copy of his attempt to do the Trinity for children. It's really quite a splendid thing. But when he gets to the section about explaining the meaning of these words, I wonder if children will understand them. See if you can; it's very complex.

Our general construction then, in the Unitarian camp, is that we don't need the Trinity to explain the Bible. We can say all those wonderful things that you want to say (and I'll say them now): Jesus is the exact expression of the Father; if you've seen Jesus you've seen the Father. It doesn't mean he is the Father of course, it doesn't mean that he is God.

Jesus never said he was God

He doesn't go around saying, "I am God" – he never said that. He actually argued that he wasn't God. When he was accused of being God he very quickly put that argument to rest saying, 'I'm not God,' in John 10, following the statement that "I and the Father are one." (Incidentally, that is 'one' in the neuter sense, not as in one person – that wasn't suggested, of course, but simply 'one.') He immediately says that the judges were also called 'god'. Those verses are sometimes omitted. His explanation is that since judges, human judges, in the Old Testament were often called 'god',

then is it unreasonable that he – who was virginally conceived and dispatched into the world as God’s commissioner, God’s agent – is it unreasonable, he asks, that he should be called (and could call himself) the son of God? That’s what Jesus says he is, the son of God, and I remind you of Colin brown’s statement that to be called “son of God” in the Bible means that you are not God.

Israel was called “son of God,” but nobody thought that Israel was God. The judges were called “sons of God,” but Jesus is explaining there that that term, “God,” can be used in a secondary sense. You must be careful when you read scripture that you don’t just hear it as an American in the twenty-first century. When you say, “God,” you probably mean “the Supreme Being.” Are you so sure that the Bible always means that when it uses the word God? For example: Moses was said to be “God” to Pharaoh (using the Greek “Elohim,” and “Theos” to describe him). Clearly, Moses wasn’t God, and there are some other examples.

Now here’s a very interesting fact – just a broad, basic language fact – about scripture: if you look up the word “God” in the Bible, thousands of times (“Ho Theos”, or “Elohim”), thousands and thousands of times, in no single case can a Trinitarian show that that word means “God in three persons”. You can examine every single example of the word God; yet can you produce one of them where clearly the word means “God as a Triune God,” or “God in three persons?” That seems to me to be extraordinarily important because, if that Triune God is not mentioned under the term God... well, perhaps he is not there. I cannot imagine the Bible revealing who God is, and failing on every single occasion – thousands and thousands of times – actually to give us the word God with the meaning, “Triune God.” That’s a weakness [for Trinitarian theology].

Now I come to those passages that are critically creedal; I think they define the difference between God and Jesus. Take John 17:3: “You, Father, are the only true God and we’re to believe in you,” that is, we want people to believe for salvation in you, the only true God. It is also said here that Jesus cries out to that God... I clearly see a distinction between God and Jesus. The book is about God and Jesus, not about God and God! So Howard Marshall, a very famous commentator, says that “The Christology of the New Testament is always subordinationalist: God is always superior to Jesus. He is the head of Jesus. Jesus is the son of God; all sons are younger than their fathers.” Again I have to make an extraordinary language leap to believe that a son is the same age, is eternal, as the Father... that’s extraordinary.

Origin of “Eternal Generation” Idea is Questionable

I have already mentioned the word beget, which means “To bring into existence.” You’ve really got to satisfy yourself that eternal begetting is a genuine Biblical idea in order to get the Trinity started; without that there really is no Trinity. I do recommend that if you are taking this study seriously in the months ahead you should get the book by Millard Erickson. [Erickson] is evangelicalism’s splendid proponent of Trinitarianism –he really works at it very hard, and very thoroughly. He says in that book that he doesn’t believe in the “eternal generation of the Son”; he can’t find that [in the Bible]. He still believes in the Trinity, so he believes in three preexistent ‘something’s,’ but it isn’t “the Son” that’s generated, apparently. He’s given up that argument. That’s a considerable move in the direction of Unitarian theology in fact.

I should remind you that people like Adam Clarke the Methodist expositor have said, “I find this idea of an eternal generation of the Son very dangerous and anti-scriptural, because ‘to generate’ means ‘to bring into existence,’ and if you are going to talk about generation of the son, you are immediately giving up the Trinity because it means that one has been brought into existence who was not in existence before that time.” These are major arguments that have to be confronted.

Now another point is this: if you read the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) you certainly could not mount much of an argument, if any, for the Trinity from there. I've already suggested you can't mount any argument from the Old Testament (and many scholars would agree with that, by the way). I sense from Professor Sanders' remarks earlier that perhaps he doesn't base the Trinity on the Old Testament at all; he talked about a revision in the New Testament. But if you look at the Synoptics you'll find that Gabriel is quite precise in this issue of the son of God. In Luke 1:35 he says to Mary that "the Holy Spirit will come over you, Maryam, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you," and for that reason precisely – consequent upon this miraculous event in the womb of Mary – he is the son of God. That's what is miracle about Jesus, that's why we can speak of his "divinity," if you like; it is due to the fact that he's been miraculously conceived. That's what Gabriel said, and I will put it to you that Gabriel was not a Trinitarian. He knew nothing about the "pre-existing Son".

In our discussion before we began Professor Sanders rightly said, "This is really an argument about the nature of the Son." We're all agreed that the Father is God – no disagreement on that – but as we move into the rest of our debate, we're going to be talking more, obviously, about the nature of "the Son". I'm suggesting to you that the son comes into existence in the womb of his mother. Luke 1:35 and the parallel text Matthew 1:20 are finished with this: Joseph is told, "That which is begotten in her is from the Holy Spirit." That is, which is brought into existence! There is no pre-existing Son here, and most scholars would agree with that; so you can take that into the data that you feed into the arguments as you make up your mind about the Trinity or the non-Trinity.



Professor Sanders: Defining "Doctrine"

I'm going to start with the claim that the New Testament does not contain the doctrine of the Trinity. The New Testament, Professor Buzzard says, does not contain the doctrine of the Trinity. Let me back off one step on that. The New Testament does not contain the word "Trinity"... Ok, that's a nice debating point. We can have a really short debate. Actually, we can just take 30 hours, read the entire New Testament, and then look up and say, "You're right, the word Trinity is not in there!" Right, that would be very easy. However, the question "Does it contain the doctrine of the Trinity?" That's a little bit different. You'll notice that as I argue, I never go to one killer, magic, bullet-proof text that I think establishes once and for all – knock down, for all time – the doctrine of the Trinity. There is nothing that anyone can cite that's going to say to you – because the word isn't there, right? – there's no one verse that's going to shout absolutely "This is the doctrine of the Trinity!" That's because the Trinity is a doctrine about God. It's a doctrine. You have to think in order to construct it. So I would say all of the materials for Trinitarian theology are right there in scripture, unavoidably. It's already there; just add thought.

So here's a question (I'm going to be Socrates here, right?): well, what is a doctrine? What is in the Bible? What would it mean for the doctrine of the Trinity to be in the New Testament? I like to freely admit, "No, there's not a verse that says it." Now there are verses that, if you're going to be

anti-Trinitarian, are just going to drive you nuts... Right? You get to the end of Matthew and it says, "Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Not the names of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And you hit that and you say, "Ok... that doesn't lay it all out - that's not a magic verse that says, 'there is one God, and the Father is God; and the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods.' There is no verse that says that. There is that hard verse at the end of Matthew, and then there's all this stuff all over John. It's kind of popping out all over, it's driving me crazy."

So I do want to concede that, if by "doctrine" you mean an explicitly formulated systematic statement that brings together all relevant evidence, the doctrine of the Trinity is not in that sense "in" the New Testament. Nevertheless, the doctrine of the Trinity is the correct interpretation of the full evidence of the New Testament. In fact, the pressure of the entire Biblical witness pushes you inexorably, if you're going to confess Jesus Christ rightly, to confess the doctrine of the Trinity as the Christian understanding of God.

Majority of Christian Authority Figures are Self-professedly Trinitarian

Now, before I go on to another point I want to interact a little bit with the authorities that you cited. First of all, it's interesting that Professor Buzzard is citing authorities because I would sort of look at this debate and say, "Ok... pretty much all the authorities are on my side." All the Christians get together and say, "We're Trinitarian," and then you could sort of look around and say, "Oh yeah, well, Milton and Locke and Newton... right, they're not Trinitarian." So their status as Christians is kind of questionable. For instance, Milton is just an Arian. It's interesting looking at Locke and Newton being non-Trinitarian, because what you are getting there is the emergence of modern science and rationalism in the Enlightenment period; so it's no surprise that some of the greatest minds start peeling off because they're more committed to reason than to scripture. I'd say, "I don't know anything about God - except he's got to fit my rationalist categories." So then I'm going to read the Bible, and I do a Thomas Jefferson, which is something like: produce a version of the Bible where I eliminate all the difficult text and have a sort of "Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah, Who Taught Nice Ethical Principles which we will Follow." So sort of an expurgated Bible would be a great option at that point.

As for some of the other evidences - Brown, especially, a systematic theologian; Howard Marshall, a great New Testament scholar; and Millard Erickson, another systematic theologian - it's interesting that you cite these three evangelical Christian Trinitarian scholars as making arguments that sound Unitarian to you. But of course they all go on, and are committed in print, on the record, repeatedly, to the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact if their names start showing up as Unitarians they are going to start making noise right away. I want to say something else about Erickson a little bit later. Just to point out now: I find it odd to be arguing about authority because I kind of look at that and say, "Well it's not an interesting debate to just ask all Christians to vote on the Trinity. I'd win the vote." That's not an interesting debate because we'd massively outnumber those who have rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and have really moved themselves beyond the pale of Christian orthodoxy.

This is just massively to my advantage if you go at this from a tradition, or authority, or history angle... or 'wake up all the dead Christians and have them vote', a 'democracy of the dead' angle... get everyone to say what they say about the Trinity. One of the reasons it's massively to my advantage is that if you ask me, "Well what should I read to know more about the doctrine of the Trinity?" I can actually say to you, "You know what? Go read just about anything." Did the pope write about this? Read that. I disagree with a whole lot of what the pope has to say, but I bet he

and I have the same Trinitarian theology because we're Christians. Bob Morey's ministry is here selling a book about the Trinity; I probably disagree with a million things that Bob Morey would teach but I bet his doctrine of the Trinity is about the same as mine because it's the Christian view of God.

Professor Buzzard is in the position of having to say, "Well if you want the real scoop on the doctrine of the Trinity you could buy my book; that would have the right stuff. I can also indicate this Unitarian Socinian thread" (it's a thin trickle, but it's there) "in the history of doctrine that goes back to the radical reformation. Before that you can kind of look around and find hints of it." But I do think - actually, I don't think, it's just a fact - that the broad, main stream of the Christian tradition is resolutely Trinitarian.

The Doctrine of the Trinity does not Contradict Reason

Now, I'm going to put off eternal begetting for a minute and move on to this statement that one can't be made to be three. This is Thomas Jefferson, and if you type in "Jefferson anti-Trinitarian" or something on the web you get these great, horrible quotations from Thomas Jefferson about - well, first he beats up Calvin for a while - but then he says, "You know, I just can't believe the doctrine of the Trinity... all of that complex mathematical stuff about one being three, and three being one." Ok, that's just, it's not even a cheap shot, it's sort of a... what is it? To accuse the doctrine of the Trinity of asserting that one is three and three is one is sort of crazy. You would expect all Trinitarians to not be able to balance their checkbooks right, because they'd try to add one and three and get two and - "No, wait a minute, let me try that again" - and they try it again and they get six, you know? "Ah well, you know, I just sacrificed my ability to do math when I affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity."

I hope when you hear me badmouth rationalism and describe "...someone who just lets rationalist, hardcore rationalist categories, run their theology and then trims the Bible to fit it..." I hope you don't hear me saying, "Oh, reason is evil, it's of the devil, and getting a lobotomy helps you be a Christian." I like for things to make sense; I think to understand what I believe. In fact, I think faith is a great spur to that. I think faith seeks understanding. If you believe something and love it, you will examine it mentally: you will love God with your mind.

So, if I have a set of beliefs which include a flat, logical contradiction - if I believe something that just cannot be true, is utterly irrational - I have to get rid of it, or keep it on a shelf and say, "Those are words that I keep around and I say but I don't know what they mean so I can't really even explain them." For instance: if I believed in square circles, I might say "Here are the things I believe in: I believe this, and that, and the other thing, and I believe in square circles. They are simultaneously square and yet a circle." Wait, I'm thinking? "Oh yeah, I'm believing it; I'm not understanding it, but I'm believing that somehow a circle is a square."

What would the doctrine of the Trinity be if it were a flat contradiction of reason? Well it would be a contradiction of the law of non-contradiction, from Aristotle, which is something like: "A cannot be A and not A at the same time in the same sense." That's pretty basic. Now the doctrine of the Trinity would violate that if it said, "God is simultaneously one person and three persons." At the same time and in the same sense God is one person and three persons... That's just irrational, that can't make any sense. Or if the doctrine of the Trinity said, "God is simultaneously one being and yet three beings." That doesn't make any sense. No Trinitarian has ever claimed that.

What the doctrine of the Trinity teaches is, "The one God is three persons. The three persons are the one God. God is one being, three persons." Now that might be a mystery – it certainly is a mystery in the sense that I can't point to anyone around here who is one being and three persons – right? "God is a Trinity, like you!" ...I just can't do that. I don't know anyone that is one being and three persons, except for God. God I know: God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; one being. So, it's a mystery in the sense that there is nothing to compare to it. For instance, I have never seen three books that I would describe as one book in the same sense. Sure, you could get a trilogy bound in one volume, blah, blah, blah... that's not what we're talking about with the Trinity. We're talking about three persons really sharing the same being, being the same God. So the charge that Trinitarianism teaches that one is three and three is one is just a non-starter. No, we teach that God is three "A's" and one "B." In fact you can just swap out the terms all you want, but it's not a flat contradiction.

Now, to move on from there: the doctrine of the Trinity is complex, as Professor Buzzard points out. And so this is another kind of a Thomas Jefferson move, to say "Look, all I want to do is believe in that Jesus the Messiah who taught me to be nice, and say my prayers, and not push old ladies into traffic... I just want to believe in that. You've got a problem with that? I don't want to go do this mystical mumbo jumbo about threes being one somehow and perichoresis and hypostasis and ousias...I don't get all that, I'm just a simple believer." The doctrine of the Trinity is complex because it's real knowledge, and it's complex because theology is (this is kind of a cheeky way to say it) but the science of God: Theos - Logos, right? It means knowledge, structured knowledge, about God.

Theology is a Science

Science...I've done some work with theology and science. Science is an interesting endeavor in that if you get an answer right, it doesn't give you the right to stop thinking. You don't say, "Oh, we finally figured that out? Great, now we can quit thinking about it." No, no! If you get an answer right in science, it raises more questions. Things get really interesting as soon as you get an answer right in science because more questions appear on the horizon... because it's a knowledge tradition. You can actually go on and learn something. Science gets uninteresting if you get the answer wrong. Right? If you just decide, "Oh well, apples fall because they have the properties of falling-ness inside of them. There, that's it, ok" ...no more interesting questions ever come up, because you didn't even get the answer right enough to sort of be able to ask the next question.

The doctrine of the Trinity is like that. Jesus comes to you and you say, "Who are you?" and he says, "Well, I'm Jesus the Son of God." And you say, "What are you?" and the right answer is...? Well, a "What" question needs an "Essence" answer, and, "My essence is: I am God." That's when all the interesting questions pick up, right after that. When you get that first answer right, because theology is a structured knowledge discipline, interesting questions then begin to emerge; so it's good that the doctrine of the Trinity has complexities. It's a sign that it's real truth. We didn't make it up. I could make up something a lot easier than that if I were going to make up a religion.

Origin of "Eternal Generation" Idea

By way of rebuttal I want to go straight to this question which I think Professor Buzzard and I talked about before, saying, "When all this is said and done, we're going to have tried various things on each other, but really we flatly disagree about the preexistence of the Son of God." That's the nub a lot of this comes down to. By preexistence I mean, "Did Jesus start to be when he was born? Did the person who is Jesus Christ come into existence on the first Christmas? First

there was not a Son of God, Jesus Christ, and then there was. There he is – baby Jesus, just now popped into existence.” Now obviously, humanly speaking, the incarnation occurred on the first Christmas. A real, amazing event happened. An unforeseen, unforeseeable event – a majestic miracle whereby God intervened in human history more directly than any of us imagined or had reason to believe he was going to do... That’s important, but it’s not the sudden emergence into being of the Son of God.

As Christians wrestled with this and dealt with it, they came up with this weird phrase, ‘eternal begetting,’ or ‘eternal generation.’ The Son of God comes from the Father and always has come from the Father; there never was a time when he was not, and yet, he is always from. If you look at John 1:1, the classic understanding of this is, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” The word was with God – toward God, God-ward – the Word of God was related to God in some way, and yet was God. By the way, if you want to look at a passage in scripture that you have to look at and ask, “Does ‘God’ ever mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit?” Look at John 1:1. None of the occurrences of the word God there – the word Theos –mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That’s why I said that this is a doctrine. It’s not like you can solve it with a dictionary; you have to actually think to construct this doctrine.

But if you look at, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” what does ‘God’ mean there? “The Word was with God,” and yet the Word was God. How can you be with God and be God? How can the Word be both with God and be God? For example, I wouldn’t say, “I am Fred, and I am with Fred, and I am Fred.” That would be strange. If I had my son, Fred, then we could say that, but then we could say my son is with Fred, but we couldn’t say he is Fred in the same sense. Right? He’s a different Fred. That’s what is going on in John 1:1. What you’ve got there is a distinction: “The Word was with God...” and a union: “...the Word was God.” Now you have to believe here that that Word, “Logos” in that passage, means (as 1:14 tells us) Jesus Christ, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

John 1:1 establishes that the Word has this God-ward relation. Somehow the Word is God and yet has this God-ward relationship; is both identical with God and has a relationship that is specified as being toward or with God. That’s the same thing that goes on when the church Fathers get to this idea of eternal generation. What would that mean – to be eternally generated? To always have been a son, to have a father and a son who are (to say it bluntly) the same age, or who were never without each other? There was never a time when God the Father suddenly became God the Father – “Oh boy! A baby boy, now I’m God the Father!” God was always God the Father because God the Son was always with him.

“He was in the beginning with God and all things came into being through him; without him, nothing came into being that came into being.” Here’s God on the one hand; on the other hand, there’s everything that came into being. The Word of God is not one of the things that came into being but is on the side of God, and always has been. That’s where you get this idea of eternal generation. Now, the poor church Fathers, hammering away at this in the Greek language in Alexandria in the fourth century... they’re doing the best they can to do justice to the miracle that has been revealed in scripture. They say, as Mary says to Gabriel at the annunciation, “How can this be?” She doesn’t say, “Oh, that’s impossible. I reject this incarnation idea.” She says, “How can this be? Be it unto me according to thy word,” and that’s the posture of faith: this is an amazing thing. How can it be? She’s probably still waiting for an answer, right? “Yeah, how can that be, that whole incarnation... That’s amazing!”

So, eternal generation gets us to a crucial distinction: the Son of God both is God in essence and is not God the Father, and the Father is not the Son. This is all in the much-dreaded Athanasian Creed: The Father is not the Son, and yet the Father is God and the Son is God. It's that John 1:1 thing. There's unity and there's distinction. That's the doctrine of the Trinity: one God, three persons; with God and God; unity and distinction.



Professor Buzzard: The Son Began to Be

I agree with Professor Sanders very much regarding Jefferson's treatment [of the scripture, which] is totally unfair, I'm not proposing that approach at all; you have to take every text seriously. But we also have to look a little bit more deeply, I think, into what is going on in a lot of current comment on these very critical issues about preexistence. This is a debate about the nature of preexistence. If you have a son of God that is "God the Son" - I'm not prepared to make that switch, there's a vast difference between those two terms - but if you've got a son of God who is "God the Son," clearly you have a totally different proposition on your hands than if you have a son who begins in the womb of his mother.

I just want to reiterate my point that I think that Luke 1:35 requires that you believe that the son began to be. I would recommend you read Raymond Brown's massive account of the birth narratives. Now, citing authorities is for this purpose: that you and I are not always smart enough by ourselves, and we need help from people who spend their lifetime studying the Bible. In Raymond Brown's piece on the birth narratives Mr. Brown keeps repeating the fact that neither Luke nor Matthew knew anything about the incarnation, if you read their language fairly. I think that's a very significant point, and I want to repeat what Gabriel said here. When Mary was told she would have this child, Gabriel said, "I want you to understand that the reason for this child being the son of God is the miracle in your womb." Now that would not be true if in fact the Son of God had existed in eternity. It would not be the same proposition at all.

There is a direct causal relationship between the son-ship and the miracle. That's what leads the vast majority of New Testament scholars not to find any Trinitarianism in the Synoptics: because there is no preexistent Son there. Now it's suggested that there's no preexistent Son in the Old Testament either; that's 75% of your Bible. Now you have Matthew, Mark and Luke, three corroborating reports of the account of the birth and the teaching and death and resurrection of Jesus. There's no Trinity there. Very few New Testament scholars would argue for a Trinity in the Synoptic Gospels.

Again, Matthew 1:20, "that which is begotten in her," slightly veiled in your translation by the word conceived, it doesn't say that. In "that which is begotten in her," the word "beget," now, means to bring into existence what was not in existence before that time. So the eternal begetting idea is really "square circle" language use, from my point of view. It's "square circle" language use... it's two-plus-two-is-seventeen. It doesn't make any intelligible sense, and many excellent expositors have complained against that - including John MacArthur in his earlier days, who

expressly said that eternal generation is not there in the Bible – as well as other writers. So you have to wrestle with that and see if you're prepared to accept the idea of eternal generation.

"The Word" is God's Utterance, not God himself

When we get to John 1, we also have to be a bit careful that we look deeply into what's said there. Are we saying, "In the beginning was the Son, and the Son was with God" – and presumably that would mean the Father, would it not? The Son, according to a Trinitarian, would have to mean the Father, so are we saying – "In the beginning was the Son, and the Son was with the Father, and the Son was the Father?" If, in other words, we take that first account of the word Theos there as the word "Father", we have: the Son was with the Father; but are we prepared to switch that to mean "not the Father" in the very next phrase? We seem to be stuck there. We would have, "In the beginning was the Son, the Son was with the Father, and the Son was the Father." That doesn't work.

If we look at the English translations of the Bible before the King James Version – there are about eight of them – we read the following: "In the beginning was the word." Small letter "w" in "word", not a capital – that's an editorial addition, and I'm going to propose to you that Trinitarianism has a lot invested in the translations, because that's the massively popular view. In the beginning was the (small letter) word, God's plan, God's utterance. Your word is the very essence of what you are and what you think. In the beginning there was that word. That word was with God. In the Hebrew Bible you find many occurrences of the notion of your word being with you as a plan or a decree. Now, however, one doesn't use that kind of language. When was your word last with you? That question makes no sense to you, but if you probe the Hebrew – the very Hebrew – atmosphere of John's Gospel, you find there it's quite possible to understand this to mean "In the beginning was God's plan, it was with him." It was his decree, and it was fully expressive of him (Theos) without the article, the slightly adjectival sense. It was with him, it was fully expressive of himself. Now that expressive quality, the intelligence of God, became a man. So we read, "the word became flesh;" we don't read, "the Son became flesh." There was no son until the word became flesh, and when it did become flesh then you have mister Walking Wisdom.

Jesus is the closest thing to God you can get... in a six-foot tall, besandled, Palestinian human being. He says, "If you've seen me, you've seen God." The wonder of this is he is a human being. The problem if he is not – if he begins by not being a human being – is that he never really is one. How can you be before you are? What is preexistence all about? How can you be before you are? Are we looking in Luke and Matthew at a preexisting person of the Trinity, reducing himself to a fetus? You see, the church Fathers, when they worked this out, found this very difficult. They said in fact (let me give you the Trinitarian teaching here) "Jesus was man, but not a man." Is that your impression of the New Testament? Do you think that Jesus was only man but not a man?

The public doesn't know the ins and outs of Trinitarian theology very well because you don't get sermons on that. But if you probe this a little deeper, it might be just easier to think that Jesus was the son of God, coming into existence as the very expression of God the Father. This then avoids all of our complex talk about three persons being one being. We avoid all that. We simply say that the Father is the only true God, the only one who is truly God. Any Jew would like that; any Muslim would find that easier; and we'll say that the son is the very expression of the Father in human being. He is mister wisdom; he's the embodiment of wisdom; the very character and plan and teaching of God is exemplified in this human person; but he begins as all human beings do, in the womb of his mother.

His uniqueness then is in the fact that he is uniquely begotten (monogenes), is in that miracle that occurred in the womb of his mother. That's Socinian Christology, and that makes better sense of the Bible taken as a whole. I agree with Professor Sanders entirely, you have to take the whole thing. It relieves us of some of the terrible complexities of how three "X's" are amounting to one "Y" ...we'll go into that in greater detail later if we have time.



Professor Sanders: The Whole Bible as Evidence

Well, I feel as if I've been asked to use the Bible to prove that God exists. That's how the challenge before me seems as I sit and think, "Ah - how many things can I say - in the time allotted to me - with self-evident propositions..." I also feel as if the argument asks for something like, "I finally found a verse that explicitly says God exists! You know, Hebrews says that 'He is and he is a rewarder of those who seek him...'" Then there's immediately an explanation that says, "Oh well, that 'is', that's a Greek category, you know..."

But what I'm going to do is go way too fast, and just cannonball a whole lot of what I consider to be the New Testament evidence at you. There is evidence; that's what I'm talking about when I encourage 'reading the Bible with both eyes open, not neglecting any evidence'. This is not the most exciting set up I could possibly give you: "Hold onto your seats, folks, I'm going to talk really fast and say a lot of Bible verses!" But instead of just waving my hands at the whole Bible, saying, "You know... it's in there!"...it seems to me that the responsible thing to do is to cite all the evidence I can think of that counts.

So, you already noticed my strategy - why I believe the doctrine of the Trinity, why I believe that Jesus is God - it's not that I think there is that one magic verse. Again, you could just deal with that in 30 hours by reading the whole New Testament and asking yourself, "Where is the sentence, 'Jesus is God?' " Or, preferably, even this sentence: "Jesus said, 'I am God.' " That would be the magic verse you'd really want. Yet that's not the way things work - because that's not how God revealed himself in the New Testament.

Instead I want to tell the whole story, and we've done the big picture already. We've talked about this long and slow crawl through salvation history where 'the Messiah' was coming... the 'suffering servant' was coming... the 'Davidic King' was coming... God was going to undertake to complete his covenant and bring things to a conclusion, and to save his people. All of that was going to happen; how it would happen was the mystery. And then - it really is amazing when the New Testament opens - you get that brand New Testament opening where everything comes to a conclusion in Jesus Christ, all bundled together in ways you never could have imagined! It would have been pretty reasonable to expect a series of about nineteen redeemer-like figures to show up in a serial, you know? "...Oh look, there's the Suffering Servant, and now the Davidic King showed up! Man, so many redeemers. They just keep coming..." Instead, one person showed up: God the Son in the flesh. Yahweh was undertaking to complete his own salvation historical work by taking on flesh and tabernacling among us. That's the big story, and it's that story that drives the whole

of New Testament Christology; that is why we believe that Jesus is God. It is because of the whole story of scripture, not because I found one verse somewhere in Philippians that makes me believe in the deity of Christ.

Jesus is the Creator

The “Christology of the Bible” is about who and what Jesus is according to the Bible. Jesus does a lot of things that only God can do, and the Son of God is referred to in other parts of the Bible as doing things and being involved in things in which only God is ever involved. For instance, the Son of God is the Creator according to John 1:3, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 1:2; you read of the Son of God being the one who creates. In the John 1:2 passage that we’ve looked at we have this really firm distinction drawn between God and everything which has come into being; there is this ‘Being’ and ‘becoming’ language going on there. God is and he was, and the Word was in the beginning with God; and then, you have all this ‘becoming’ language.

So on the one hand is God and on the other there is all this stuff that went through a process of becoming until it came into being. The Son – the Word – is on the first side, the side of Being, and it is that same Word who takes on flesh. John 1 says “This Word who was in the beginning and was with God and was God, this one whom we beheld, and who became flesh, and dwelt among us.” To view that as a personification of a plan that God had seems to be really abstract and bloodless compared to understanding it as signifying an actual person. Why not this person, “the Word” or the Logos, whom we call the Son in other places, “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14)? “We beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten” (John 1:14). So the Son of God is the Creator. He is the sustainer of the universe; he keeps things in motion. The Son of God is the one who gives life, according to John 1:3, 4: “All things came into being through him ...in him was life, and this life was the light of men”. He’s the ruler of all things according to Matthew 28:18.

Jesus’ Authority Surpasses Moses’ Authority

Now, in relation to human beings – and this is where we turn to the incarnate Word, to the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, and get into the synoptic theology of the three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) – you have Jesus walking around, doing amazing things. He is healing the sick, and teaching with authority. His teaching with authority is very important. You know the Sermon on the Mount; Jesus talks for three chapters in red print (if you read King James Bible with red print!). (This Sermon on the Mount was my first favorite passage of scripture, because I was flipping through the New Testament and hit three chapters of red and I thought, “Well that has got to be the important stuff, right?”)! Jesus teaches this Sermon, and the crowd is astonished. Why? Because this guy teaches with authority, and not like the scribes or Pharisees. Now you could just look at that and say, “Oh, so he had a lot of stage presence. He taught with authority in that he didn’t hem and haw or talk in scholarly footnotes or any of that sort of thing. He really knew what he believed, and said it.”

Now if you look into the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is doing some really cocky things there when he teaches “with authority”! He says, “You might have heard that it was said by them of old time...” (Matthew 5:21, 27, 33) – who are them of old time? Moses? Moses is fairly important. Now who’s got the right to stand on a hilltop and say, “Yeah, Moses said this, but let me tell you something; here’s the real deal...” You’d better be bigger than Moses to do that. Who’s bigger than Moses? Well, God’s bigger than Moses. If Yahweh undertakes to reinstate his law – I mean the law by which God interacts with his people – if the God who gave the covenant shows up and defines and elaborates and applies the law by which he expresses his righteous standards to his people, that’s

really something. No wonder the crowd put down their lunches and said, "That guy teaches with authority. He just laid Moses out and set him straight; that's authority."

Jesus Forgives Sins

Jesus forgives sins, too. There are these really interesting passages in the synoptic gospels where they bring the sick person out of the crowd to Jesus and he says to that person, "Your sins are forgiven you." The crowd protests, "Hey! Only God can forgive sins," and Jesus says, "Which is better: healing someone or forgiving sins? ...I'm tired of talking to you; get up and walk." There's sort of this, "Yeah, I can forgive sins, I can heal people, whatever is needed..." He's doing things that really only God can do. I don't just mean that in the sense that healing is a miracle only God can do. I mean who can forgive sins?

David says in Psalm 51, "Against you only I have sinned." Sin is directed straight at God. Now if you know what David is confessing in Psalm 51, you will realize there's a pretty long list of people he's sinned against. Uriah, certainly... Bathsheba... his own commanders... the entire people of Israel... he's sinned all over the place, and wounded and offended entire nations. Yet what he says to God is, "Against you only I have sinned," because sin is a slap in the face of God. It's rebellion; it's doing the opposite of what reflects the character of God. So who can forgive sins? Well Jesus is standing in the gospel saying, "Your sins are forgiven you."

Jesus Imparts Eternal Life and Gives the Holy Spirit

Jesus goes through the gospels granting salvation and imparting eternal life, and in Acts 4:12 and Romans 10:12 the apostles tell us that that is in fact what Jesus Christ does. Jesus gives the Spirit. You know Matthew 3:11: John the Baptist is baptizing Jesus in the Jordan and there's this whole interesting argument there from John the Baptist's point of view: "So you're here to be baptized? Now why would I baptize you?" Because, as John the Baptist says elsewhere, "You're coming after me, but you're before me - you're greater than me (that's odd)." As John the Baptist baptizes him, he's saying, "The one who's coming after me is going to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire." So Jesus is the one who gives the Spirit - who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

Then of course Acts 2:17 concerns Pentecost, where in fact the risen Lord gives the Holy Spirit. Now who has authority to give the Holy Spirit of God to human beings? Classic Trinitarian theology - the Christian answer - says: the person who, as God, took on flesh and established a beachhead in our humanity. You really can picture God saying, "Humanity, I want to give you my Holy Spirit, but you can't handle it. I've never met the man who can handle the Holy Spirit of God... You know, for God to dwell in the heart and in the life and being of a sinful person would just burn them up, so you know what I'm going to do? I am going to take on flesh and receive the Holy Spirit in its fullness, and then impart it to my brothers of the assumed nature that I've taken on, of the human nature of the Christ." He gives the Spirit.

Jesus Raises the Dead and Judges the Earth

Jesus raises the dead, obviously. He also exercises judgment; this is crucial, especially in view of Jesus' big message: the coming of the kingdom of God, and the coming of judgment on the last day. Now Jesus walks around saying, "All judgment has been handed to me by the Father. You know how God is supposed to judge everybody? Psalm 98 says 'The Lord is coming to judge the earth; he will judge the peoples with equity'. Well you know, instead of the Lord Yahweh doing

that, he handed it all over to me – I'm doing it now. I'm in charge, so if you need judging, come see me."

Jesus the Possessor of many Divine Attributes

Moving on to divine status claimed by or accorded to Jesus... the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, is accorded divine attributes. He's the possessor of divine attributes (John 1:4, 10:30, 21:17... blah, blah, blah – I'm going fast here!). He always was – that's something that only God does – he always was, according to John 1:1, John 8:58 – "Before Abraham was, I am" – and other passages in John. In Philippians 2:6, Paul is just doing an ethical exhortation, saying "Hey guys, be like me, be like Epaphras, and have the same mind in you which was in Jesus Christ. Who, by the way, though he was in very nature God, didn't grasp onto equality with God but made himself nothing and took on the form of a servant."

Jesus is equal in dignity with God. (Though really the best place to look for this is Revelation, I'm going to get to Revelation in a minute). He perfectly reveals God. That's an amazing thing to say, isn't it? Moses didn't perfectly reveal God. Moses chatted familiarly with God and yet even he was not allowed to see anything but the passing by of God's glory. Jesus shows up and perfectly reveals God.

He is the embodiment of truth. As he says, "I am the truth"; that's pretty blunt. He is the joint possessor with God of the kingdom (Ephesians 5:5, Revelation 11:15). Let me say something really quickly about the kingdom: in the synoptic gospels, Jesus' message is quite obviously, "the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe!" The kingdom of God – this is the message of Jesus. It's valuable to see this in the sermons that Jesus preached, in every message that he was driving home; what he essentially came to tell the house of Israel was "the kingdom is coming."

Jesus is the Kingdom of God

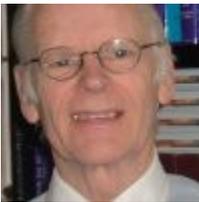
Suddenly now in the gospel of John there is very little talk of the kingdom, and a whole lot of "I am" statements: I am this, I am that, I am the door, I am the Good Shepherd, I am the way, the truth and the life, I am, I am, I am. Does Jesus go from being sort of a God-centered, kingdom-focused guy in the synoptics to suddenly being self-obsessed in the gospel of John? Does the message suddenly quit being about the kingdom of God and start being about him? What's going on when John reports the things he does – all those 'I am' statements – and does not report very many 'kingdom' statements? It seems to me that what's going on is this: John is restating the same theology. The four gospels share the same theology; John states it differently. Instead of quoting all the things Jesus ever said about the kingdom, he quotes all the things Jesus ever said about himself, because if you take all the gospels together you'll realize, "Oh yeah, Jesus' message of the coming kingdom? It was all wrapped up in him. He wasn't just a neutral prophet, who showed up and said, 'HEY, God sent me with a message: the kingdom is coming. Now watch for it, here it comes.' No, he came and said, 'God sent me with a message: the kingdom of God is coming, and it is intimately involved with ME, with my person, with who I am, with the authority that I have to carry out the very work of God in human history.'" It really is all about Jesus Christ and who he is.

So, you might switch to asking, "What did he teach in his sermons?" "Well, he talked about the kingdom." To which you might respond, "So, let's us talk about the kingdom and leave his person and his claims out of it!" Well he is – this is kind of a wild paraphrase just to bracket all four gospels together, bringing out a point – Jesus is the kingdom. Either that or John wrote a lousy

gospel and left out Jesus' main message! He didn't leaving out Jesus' message of the kingdom. He translated it. He quoted the things that Jesus said which revealed that all that 'kingdom' emphasis was really focused in the person (the being) of Jesus Christ.

Now, in relation to humans: Jesus receives the praise of humans. (This shows up less in the synoptic gospels and more in Matthew and the letters where people praise Jesus Christ). He receives prayer: people pray to him, we pray to him, and have Biblical warrant for doing so. The first Christian martyr, Steven, looked into the heavens and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Jesus is the object of saving faith. You have faith in Jesus Christ, and he saves you. He is the object of worship. In fact, in Philippians chapter 2, he is the object of the worship of all things: every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. He receives all worship. He gives blessings; Paul pronounces benedictions saying, "God bless you and Jesus bless you."

He is the object of doxologies. And then there is a fascinating range of passages – I wish I had a chart or a blackboard or something – there's a lot of passages in the Old Testament that say, "Yahweh," "The day of Yahweh is coming," or "The way of Yahweh..." that use the divine name, or the Tetragrammaton, which is the revealed covenant name of God. And then in the New Testament these passages are quoted and applied to Jesus. "The day of the Lord is coming," for example; the best example is Joel chapter 2, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," used by Paul in Romans 10, where he says, "Confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord because 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'." Joel says whoever calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved; Paul says: confess Jesus Christ, because whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!



Professor Buzzard: Jesus is the son of God in Scripture but not God the Son

It is certain he is Lord – there is no question about that – he is the Lord. The only question is, is he the Lord God or the Lord Messiah? How would we answer that question? We would go to the most obvious passages where Jesus asks this question, "Who do you say that I am?" I would mention in passing, he didn't say, "What do you say that I am?" Nowhere does the Bible say that God is a "what." It says he's a person, a single person, thousands and thousands of times via the singular pronoun; that's a remarkable fact. So the question of Jesus is very Hebrew: not, "What do you say that I am?" – so much of this is extra-Biblical language that has to be fed into the system, I think, to get this Trinity thing going – but "Who do you say I am?"

Well, what was the answer to that? What was the rock on which the church is founded? "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God" – those things are equal in meaning. Messiah is son of God – Psalm 2 – there's no difference essentially between Messiah and the son of God, and in the New Testament, consistently, you are to believe that Jesus is the son of God. That's the criterion for salvation; that's the criterion of authenticity; to believe that he is the Messiah, the son of God. No mention is made there at all about God the Son. This language has become so familiar to us

through liturgy and so on and so forth, that we don't question it anymore perhaps. But it is worth asking the question, "Where are we getting this 'God the Son' language from?" Certainly not from scripture!

So we don't have any word for God that means 'Triune God'. We don't have any word equivalent to 'God the Son'. We don't have any word which tells us the word beget could mean other than, 'to bring into existence', nor do we have any indication in scripture that the word 'today' (as in "Today I have begotten you") means, 'In eternity I have begotten you.' So we are stuck then with a great deal of Biblical language in sharp contrast to later unbiblical language under the influence of Greek philosophy.

It seems to me that the problem is simply this: when you move beyond the New Testament period, you are entering, as Professor Sanders said, the Greek world, and you are beginning to describe these great truths about God and the son of God in a completely different language – a foreign language. You have to be very careful with that. If you introduce a whole lot of vocabulary into the discussion that isn't in scripture, you may wind up talking about something that isn't scriptural. It's an obvious danger. For those of you reading Maurice Wiles – whom Professor Sanders mentioned with approval – at the end of his book on archetypal heresies, he gives a very strong caution. He says, "It's extremely dangerous to discuss Christology and who God is in terms of Greek philosophy and Greek philosophical terms that are not Biblical." There's an enormous danger there. You might wind up talking about God in Greek terms rather than Hebrew terms, and that could be dangerous.

Jesus' Actions Do Not Necessitate his Divinity

As far then as the son-ship of Jesus is concerned – and that's the whole crux of this debate – I don't think that you have to be God to do all those wonderful things that Jesus did. What if God decides that he'll do all those wonderful things through his human, divinely generated, son? You don't have to be God to forgive sins if God authorizes you to forgive sins as a human being. The text in Matthew 12 says that the public – who were often extremely wise, wiser than the Pharisees, wiser than the theology police – the public discerned and marveled at the fact that God had given such great authority to a man. They didn't think that God had given such great authority to a second person of a divine, Triune God. The beauty of this whole picture is that here is a human being who can sympathize with you, who was tempted in all points as you are. Maintaining this picture becomes extremely difficult if Jesus is God, because God cannot be tempted, as we know.

There are certain things that God cannot do: he cannot die, and so the extraordinarily complex arguments that we've heard in post-Biblical times about how Jesus could be God, and how Jesus could die, are worth examining. Suppose we make it simple: Jesus isn't God. God cannot die, Jesus died; that should be obvious. It isn't true that Jesus' body died but he himself didn't; that becomes very dualistic and complex. You introduce a principle of division all over the place, which isn't there in the text. It might simply be easier to say – with Jesus – that the Father is the only one who is truly God, while he himself is the Messiah.

The Hebrew Bible Self-Evidently Unitarian

What then, if we look at the word Lord carefully? I appreciate very much the fact that Professor Sanders points out the evident truth: that there are Yahweh texts in the Old Testament, which are applied to Jesus in the new. Does that mean that he is Yahweh? Now wait a minute, there are 7,000 accounts of the word Yahweh in the Old Testament, always with a singular verb. I thought

we learned in English grammar (or in Hebrew grammar, because it works the same way) that singular pronouns and singular verbs indicate that a person is one individual. "Yahweh" is always singular; it never has a plural verb, thousands of times – 7,000 times.

Those Jews, you know – learning the scriptures with the same zeal and excitement as is demonstrated by Professor Sanders – those Jews were impressed with this fact: that they should never, ever stray from the notion that God is a single, undivided individual. An undifferentiated individual. And they learned it because he kept saying, "I," and is referred to as "me," or "him," and so on. So, the fact is (I think) self-evident that the Hebrew Bible is a Unitarian piece. (By the way, many, many Trinitarian theologians working out of the New Testament would fully admit that the Hebrew Bible doesn't have any hint of any kind of Trinity, and some of the standard arguments are being abandoned all over the place, including arguments that came out of the Catholic church, incidentally, where Elohim was supposed to be a plural; "Let us make man;" just pick up your NIV study Bible, and you'll see that those arguments have been abandoned. So they're not proofs of anything.)

You still have to recognize the fact that this son is not Yahweh himself – although certainly he can do things that Yahweh is said to do. For example, the second coming of Jesus in the New Testament, in the Old Testament it's called the second coming of God. It's God who comes in power – not the second coming of God – but the coming of God in power and glory, to destroy his enemies on the day of the Lord, is said to be done by God. But what if Jesus does it as the representative of Yahweh? In what sense then, is he Lord?

Well, it's always good in considering such matters to look at the verse which is a favorite "refrigerator" proof-text verse in the New Testament. Which verse, speaking of the Lordship of Jesus, do the apostles use consistently throughout the range of the New Testament writings? And the answer would be: Psalm 110:1.

The Christological Psalm Does Not Establish Christ's Divinity

Psalm 110:1 says that Yahweh – the Lord – speaks to my Lord; you have God speaking to someone other than God: Yahweh (the single person) speaking to another single person... but who is that second Lord? That's a very important verse, not only because it's alluded to or cited some twenty-three times in the New Testament, but because it is a very plain statement about the relationship of that second "Lord" to the first "Lord". You've got two Lords there, but only one of them is Yahweh. Yahweh speaks to Adoni – you may have to consult a rabbi or read your Hebrew text – but look carefully at that word used to describe the Messiah. You know, Jesus quoted that verse in the synoptics. It is quoted in a discussion with the Pharisees, and both the Pharisees and Jesus agreed that it was indeed the Messiah that was being spoken of there in advance of his coming. This is the divine oracle of David in Psalm 110:1.

The Lord speaks by oracle to "my Lord" – now who is this "my Lord?" If that word there were Adonai, which is the Hebrew word for the Lord God, I would concede at least divinity, if not a Trinity – but it isn't the word Adonai, and the amazing thing is that numerous authorities have miss-cited this or misquoted the fact of the language here. I've written even to Dallas Theological Seminary where, inadvertently, they told us that that second word there is Adonai.

I wrote to the Lockman Foundation (which oversees the New American Standard Version); when this verse is quoted by Peter in a critically important passage in Acts 2, where Peter explains to the people that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ, and he quotes – guess what? – Psalm

110:1, and the Lockman Foundation wrote in their margin that the word there is Adonai. It isn't. That's a remarkable, remarkable fact. It's very unusual – and I'm not suggesting this is done deliberately in any way – it's very unusual for standard, printed authorities to actually misstate the Hebrew word. Very unusual. But the fact remains that this is a sort of – not a conspiracy deliberately, but – I suggest there is a certain carelessness here with the language.

If in Psalm 110:1 it said that Yahweh speaks to Adonai, you'd have Yahweh speaking to the Lord God. Adonai is the word in the Hebrew Bible, which refers to God 449 times. When you hear Jews praying, they don't use the word Yahweh; they don't use the divine name, but they speak of God as "Adonai, Adonai, Adonai." You can remember this; it rhymes with El Shaddai (and everybody knows that song). Now in that Psalm 110:1, it in fact says, "The Lord says to Adoni," my Lord. Now Adoni occurs 195 times in the Hebrew Bible. In every single account it refers to somebody who isn't God. This here sounds awfully like Colin Brown, at Fuller seminary, telling us, "To be sons of God means you are not God." Here we have God (Yahweh) speaking to Adoni. Adoni: check it with your computers and you'll find out it invariably means a superior, a 'lord' who is not God. Those meticulous Masoretes carefully distinguished this; they carefully distinguished God from man, because those Jews did not want to confuse God and man.

So in that marvelous Psalm, you have an extraordinary oracle, but one in which that second person – the Messiah, "my Lord," should be spelled: m-y l-o-r-d (small "m" and small "l") ... as it is in some careful translations like the RV (revised version), RSV, and so on. You'll simply have to check that with a rabbi, but what I propose is simply this: that Jesus, on the basis of that Psalm, is not the Lord God Adonai, but simply "my lord," the Messiah. The same term is used of David, for instance; one would talk to the king as "my lord." We Brits know that, because in the House of Lords they address each other as "lord so and so." So "my lord" is the highest form of titled address to a superior, but it certainly doesn't mean you are God.

So that Psalm should, I think, be taken very seriously as a master Christological text, governing in fact the atmosphere of the entirety of the New Testament, where none of those Jews imagined that the Messiah was God himself. They didn't need to imagine; they'd learned that God was one. So all of those incredible things – wonderful things – that Jesus did, like healing the sick by miraculous powers, happened because God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. He's made this marvelous creation in the womb of Mary, invested this person with the fullness of Spirit. So what Jesus says is perfectly a reflection of what God thinks and says, but he's still the man, the Messiah, Jesus – in contrast to the one God of Israel. That would seem to make much better sense of the text taken as a whole, pictured as a whole.

Meaning of "word" in John 1:1 Ambiguous in Greek

I was going to point out also that in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the word," I put a small "w" on there, I would say, "all things were made through it." I'm not twisting the Greek here; it's entirely ambiguous in Greek, so the meaning of the sentence depends on what you've decided the word means. If you think it's "In the beginning was the Son," then clearly you're going to have all things are made "through him." But if you read those eight translations in English before the King James Version was made, they read, "All things were made throughout it, and without it nothing was made that was made." At Qumran the Jews say that kind of thing – this is extra-Biblical stuff, not in the Bible, but it reflects on the Bible – here's a nice saying then, in the Qumran, in the Dead Sea scrolls: "God made everything through wisdom, without wisdom he made nothing." Everything that was made was made through his wisdom, his divine plan, his conception – his mental conception.

So I don't find any difficulty at all with John 1:1. It does not say, "In the beginning was God the Son"... that, simply, is a much later development. The authority of Jesus then, is invested in him as the supreme plenipotentiary of the Father. That seems to me quite clear, and John is saying that over and over again. But when confronted with the idea that Jesus himself is God - he denies that flatly. When accused of making himself equal with God, or on par with God, Jesus immediately says, "I can do nothing by myself." Well what kind of deep, potent, almighty God is that? "I can do nothing by myself; I can only do what the Father tells me to do." C. K. Barrett in his commentary on John asks, "Is Jesus really saying, 'I am God, and as God I do what I'm told?'" That's extraordinary. There's no need for that. We don't need the Trinitarian explanation to deal with the fact, I think, quite adequately and in a way which harmonizes the broad message of the text from the beginning of Genesis right through to Revelation.



Professor Sanders: Purpose of Extra-Biblical Words

I hadn't heard that line from C. K. Barrett, "I am God, and as God, I do as I am told;" I actually like that. I understand you would say that's not necessary, but I would think, "Hey! There's some good Trinitarianism." That's a real understanding of who God the Son is, and why the Father is not the Son, and why they are always in fellowship.

Let me start with the question of Biblical language and unbiblical language. We started to scare out plenty of Bible verses here, while we both admit that there's no magic bullet one of us will find that is going to send the other person home crying because it turned out he hadn't read the Bible closely enough and there was a plain verse that utterly refuted his position. You'd have to be really... well, you wouldn't even have to be a bad scholar, you'd just have to be sort of dumb to have a Biblical position and yet end up saying, "Oh, I hadn't read Zechariah, doggone it! Well I can't have that idea anymore." Neither of us is going to find a verse that will do that. We have sort of an intractable problem: if we could be here all night we could really scare out all of these verses, and we could diagram them, and we could go back and forth and I could say, "What? That sounds crazy! Give me your interpretation of that again. I can't even wrap my mind around that."

That is, in fact, exactly what happened at the council of Nicaea, when a whole bunch of church Fathers and bishops got together and argued about this issue. The Orthodox side would roll out an argument and say, "Well look: John 1:1.... Trinity, don't you think?" and one of the Arians would say, "No, no, we can find a way to explain that. You see, logos here means God's Big Idea. When the word becomes flesh it doesn't mean an incarnation takes place, it means that when a human Messiah showed up, he really represented God's Big Idea. That's our explanation." Actually, Arians wouldn't have done that; Arians would have said Jesus is "like a super angel! He's Hercules and he showed up with God's Big Idea."

So... they go round and round about these Bible passages and they just don't get anywhere. Finally someone has the big idea of saying, "Ok, we have argued Bible verses till we are blue in the face. What if we pick a word that's not in the Bible that specifies what we mean by all the Bible

verses we are quoting? Why don't we just come up with one?" In their case, in their particular argument, they came up with the word "homoousios" – "of one essence". Then, although there was so much stuff being said about Jesus – is he "the word", is he "the Lord Messiah" as opposed to "the Lord God", and how do we keep all of that straight as we read the Bible – the question could finally be framed. Answer me this: is he of the same essence of the Father? Is he a different thing than God the Father?

That question finally drove the Arians nuts. They could have stayed there all day quoting the Bible at each other, because as long as they quote the Bible, as long as they're all saying Bible verses, they're allowed to believe whatever they want. Until someone steps up and says, "Nope, here's a word. It's not in the Bible, but it will nail down what you mean by the Bible...." Now both sides do this, frankly. To say that Trinitarianism uses unbiblical language is just to say that this is a theology that is trying to be precise and tell you exactly what it means by how it interprets the Bible.

Unitarianism does the same thing. The clearest phrases that Professor Buzzard has used in his descriptions are these: "The Bible says that God is a single person, and it says so thousands of times. A single, undivided, undifferentiated individual." Now that's crystal clear. I know exactly what he means when he says that; all ambiguity goes away. So does the problem of being unsure as to where our disagreement is. Everything's crystal clear when he says, "A single person, a single, undivided, undifferentiated individual;" that's clear, but it's not Biblical – that phrase is nowhere – the Bible certainly does not say, thousands of times, "he is a single person." It uses a pronoun. Well, what does that mean? Ah! To specify what it means you've got to use unbiblical terminology, because the whole fight is over the meaning of the Bible.

There was a Christian theologian early on – in the second century, a guy named Irenaeus in Lyon, France – who was arguing with a different group, a bit of a crazy group, called the Gnostics. He argued, "You know what the Gnostics are doing? They're taking the Biblical message" – they didn't have verses back in the second century, but bear with me on this – "and it's as if they're taking every verse of the Bible, and they've got them all, but they've got them all mixed up and interpreted crazily. You know what it's like? It's like there was a beautiful picture, a mosaic of a king, and everyone could go and look at this mosaic, and at all the precious jewels that go to make up the face of this king, and everyone could say, 'What a beautiful picture this is.' The heretics have come along with their chisels, dug every jewel out and rearranged them to make a picture of a dog, and glued them back into place, you see? All the right stuff is there, the interpretive grid is just totally wrong."

That's what's at stake. And that's why people go to non-Biblical language. It's why both sides go to non-Biblical language to specify what they mean by the Biblical language. It keeps you from running round and round in circles. It's interesting to note that during the reformation someone came to Geneva and tried to get Calvin to sign the Nicene Creed. Well, you know, Calvin's kind of a cocky guy – he doesn't take kindly to someone coming to Geneva and telling him, "You've got to sign this." So first he said, "Yeah, it's more of a song than a creed, don't you think?" And then he said, "You know... I don't care about the word Trinity. I don't even care about the terminology person or essence, but I do know I have to fight with non-Trinitarians..." (Non-Trinitarians or Anti-Trinitarians were really coming out of the woodwork during the reformation, saying "Hey, let's get rid of the pope, let's get rid of transubstantiation, let's get rid of the Trinity! ...How far are we gonna go with this?" Well that's where the radical reformation argument came from – those people who decided to get totally radical and throw out anything that ever came along anywhere in the Christian tradition.) Calvin actually looked at the Nicene creed and said, "I don't care a bit about

these terms: Trinity, person, essence... but I do know that as soon as I pronounce the word Trinity, all of those Socinians just hit the doors. We can argue about Bible words all we want, but I can just say this word, and blow away a whole haze." That's what it's for.

The Trinity an Overarching, Invisible Principle -like Gravity

A comparison, for what it's worth: looking at the Bible and asking, "Where is the doctrine of the Trinity (or the word Trinity)?" is like looking at nature and saying, "Where is gravity? Show me gravity! I want to see it. All I see is apples falling to the ground and bouncing. I want to see gravity, show me where I can put my finger on it." Now scientists kind of hem and haw and say, "Well you can kind of... It's not that we're embarrassed here, it's just that... it's kind of an obtuse question to ask, 'where can you show me gravity,' when the apples falling to the ground display gravity..." But I suppose if you want to you may just go on being skeptical and saying, "No, I don't see it. All I see is the apples falling. Until you can show me the object called gravity, I'm not going to believe in it." That's kind of what it is like to look through the Bible and say, "Until I can see the doctrine of the Trinity stated, until I see the word Trinity in print, I'm not going to believe in it. All I see is Jesus being the Lord, and sitting on the throne of God, and bringing judgment, but I don't see this, 'Jesus is God,' anywhere."

Variations of "Eternal Generation" Within Trinitarianism

Let me say one quick thing about eternal generation: this is a complex discussion. Millard Erickson - I just have to speak up briefly on his behalf - when he says he doesn't believe in eternal generation - and actually I haven't chased down John McArthur's earlier position on this - but when someone like that says they don't believe in eternal generation, it's a complex distinction. It belongs under "Advanced Topics in Trinitarianism," because you're dealing with Trinitarians here who also say this odd thing, "I don't believe in eternal generation." Well, what is eternal generation?

There's two big ways to think about it. One is as a state. The Son always exists in a relationship of "from-ness" from the Father. In book four of mere Christianity, C. S. Lewis writes an illustration of this: "Imagine two books stacked on top of each other, and the top book owes its position to the bottom book, right? It wouldn't be up here if the other book weren't under it. So, it sort of depends on the bottom book for its position... but now imagine that they were always there - that you had never stacked them. You'd say, 'That top book is dependent on the bottom book, but there was never a time when it wasn't dependent on the bottom book for what it is.'" So Lewis describes eternal generation without using any technical terms. He does this because C. S. Lewis is a genius at using little baby easy words to communicate profound Christian truth. I hope to grow up someday and talk that simply. For now I'll just have to use big words because I'm not smart enough to use little words. What he's stating then is the position that eternal generation is a relationship.

Now the other option is to say that eternal generation is a process (but an eternal one). So we start with the analogy of something coming forth and coming into being, yet then we say, "But it's eternal." So, to put this really bluntly - this is not my position, but I'm trying to be fair to this Trinitarian position - if you could go to heaven and look at God, you would see the Son always flowing forth from the Father. If you could behold the dynamics of the divine life, you would see the Son always in a process of streaming forth from the Father like light from the sun, like beams of light always coming forth from the Father and always being in the process of coming forth.

Now, you can tell that if you've got a poetic sort of sensibility, you might really like that, right? Oooh, the eternal process of the son streaming forth from the Father! Calvin didn't have that kind of bone in his body. So, he just said, "I don't like that kind of stuff. But let me go for this relation: the Son was always from the Father, the Son always has this relationship with the Father." Ok, that's "Advanced Topics in Trinitarianism"...

Some people who are Trinitarians and who agree about all that stuff still ask, "What do we mean by eternal generation?" Occasionally those people are sloppy and will say (in public), "I do not believe in eternal generation." Generally - I know this is the case with Miller Erickson - generally what they mean is, "I don't hold to that sort of eternal process view, because I don't know what that means and it's kind of weird-sounding." I've now said too much about that... but maybe you can tell this doctrine of the Trinity is one of my favorite subjects, and even the pools and eddies within the vast doctrine of the Being of God are exciting to me.

The Trinity Born out of a Knowledge Tradition

Ok, before I wrap this up I've got to say one more thing about "Advanced Topics in Trinitarianism" because Professor Buzzard cited the Fifth Ecumenical Council - not the First, which was at Nicaea in 325 AD, and which we are talking about - but the Fifth of 553 AD. This is a much later council where this phrase Professor Buzzard cited, "Jesus is man but not a man," originated. I just have to say that's one of those things that if you have already accepted the Biblical mandate to affirm the deity of Christ, you will then start thinking about; you'll think through the obvious question "How, could he being God, become man? How could this thing occur?" ...Then you've become involved in a knowledge tradition. You have to sort that question out. You have to be consistent because we don't have irrational faith.

At that point you get where that Fifth Council eventually got. It isn't really fair to say in English, "He's man but not a man..." Jesus Christ is a man and is "an incarnate person" - he is a person. I'd have to lay this all out on a chart, but there is this anhypostatic/enhypostatic Christology where the Fifth Council affirms, in effect, that: there was no mister Jesus running around whom the Son of God then came down from heaven and hijacked, saying, "I am now possessing you and taking you over and kicking out one person and being a different person." There never was a mister Jesus who suddenly turned into God. That's what the Fifth Council says. All right, I'm the only one interested in that whole discussion.

God's Glory Kept for God by Doctrine of the Trinity

Let me say this: one of the consistent strands that I hear in Professor Buzzard's entire approach is a concern for monotheism, for the one-ness of God and for the God-ness of God; the fact that God is a jealous God who doesn't give his glory to another. Isaiah is full of this stuff: "There is no other God besides me, a righteous God and a Savior," "There is none except me," "Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth," "I am God, there is no other," "I have sworn by myself, the word has gone forth from my mouth in righteousness, it will not turn back," "To me, every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance." "They will say of me, 'only in the Lord are righteousness and strength'," "I am the Lord, that is my name, I will not give my glory to another." This is the concern of the Bible: the unity of God, that jealous, "I will not give my glory to another," one-ness of God.

The problem with the view of Jesus Christ presented by Socinianism (or Arianism) is that it takes all of God's glory - all of his prerogatives, his being the one to whom every knee will bow and

every tongue confess – takes all of that and gives it to Jesus Christ. It takes the man Jesus Christ and puts him on the throne of God, in the driver’s seat of the universe, as the consummator of the covenant of God’s ways with the world. It hands all this over to a man. And at that point, when Muslims look at Christianity and misunderstand it – they look at Christianity and see it as Socinian – they say, “You just handed all the glory of God to a man, a mere man. You’re an associator; you’ve associated someone with God.” I submit that the only way out of that is if God doesn’t give his glory to another because the Son is not an “other;” not another being; not something else, but is God; God the Son.



Professor Buzzard: Jesus is not the Creator

I heard [Professor Sanders saying] that Jesus was the Creator of heaven and earth. I think you can take a Bible and you can see what is said about who created the heavens and the earth. I think you’ll find it was God; and the word ‘God’ in Scripture – in the New Testament, 1,320 times – refers to the Father. When Roman Catholic scholars like Rahner sit down and do a patient study of what is meant by the word ‘God’ (which in Greek is Ho Theos, using the modern Greek pronunciation) in the New Testament, they say that it invariably means the Father. There are two sure occasions only in which the word ‘God’ is applied to Jesus in some sense. The very imbalance of that evidence would suggest to me that they are not equally God. That’s extraordinary.

I’ve already mentioned that if you count up the uses of the Hebrew word Elohim, it refers to a single person multiple thousands of times. I have to say that a pronoun, it seems to me, does describe an undifferentiated person. I grant that the word ‘undifferentiated’ doesn’t occur in scripture, but the pronouns: “I,” “Ani,” and so on in Hebrew, do; and I think we have to ask, “What does a singular pronoun mean?” Since everybody agrees, Trinitarians (apparently) and non-Trinitarians, that none of those occurrences of the word ‘God’ gives you a threefold God, then it seems to be a massively important point that God is described as a single person so often.

Now then, I hear Professor Sanders saying that Jesus is the Creator. I don’t think he was the Creator. Hebrews 4:4 says that God rested. The word ‘God’ in Hebrews means the Father, as it does almost invariably in the New Testament. So it was God who rested on the seventh day – it wasn’t Jesus. The passage in Colossians is difficult because it speaks of everything being made in Christ, and through him, and for him. It doesn’t say that everything was made by Christ. I would certainly recommend you look at James Donne (I’m quoting authorities here, but we’re all quoting authorities; either ourselves or someone else) – look at James Dunn and see if you find anything of interest in what he does with those passages. He says that we must not read Paul through our Trinitarian spectacles. Paul’s not saying there that Jesus is the creator of heaven and earth. He’s saying rather that God made everything with Jesus in mind, “...in Jesus everything was created.” Well you are also ‘in Christ’ before the foundation of the world.

Jesus the Firstborn of Created Beings

At least we should attempt to put this kind of a hypothesis on our studies and say, "Let's think like Jews now." We know the Jews think in terms of plans and projects – everything in advance. Let's think that way for a moment. Everything was made by God in Jesus. You were also in Jesus before the foundation of the world as a Christian. He's talking there not about the creation of the bees, and the trees, and the grass; he's talking about intelligent beings, angelic authorities. He's simply saying that Jesus is the firstborn of his whole creation. There are many excellent scholars who have said that when Jesus is said to be the first of the creation, that's exactly what it means: he's the first created being. Many of the standard Bible dictionaries admit this.

Again, I see the danger of just quoting authorities; but my point has been here that there exists a mass of very significant authorities who undermine the Trinitarian argument at almost every point. That's got to be significant. I think that the Trinity is on the way out. I think that scholarship is now so sophisticated, so attuned to the Hebrew melodies of the Bible, that it's beginning to cause the Trinitarian case to become weaker. I think that's interesting if you are investigating these things.

The Pre-existence of Christ Not Self-Evident

Just as a parenthesis... in my own case, when this Socinian Christology was put to me, I gave myself at least two years even to consider it. I objected at every point; I can remember thinking, "I've got 50 verses that say that Jesus preexisted his birth." I'm going to give you an example of one: "The rock that followed them was Christ." Well then he must have been there; but upon reflection, reading the context carefully – and again I recommend James Donne's monumental study, a 'Christology in the making' book – it doesn't say Christ, the rock, was a human being walking around. And Paul, in that very passage, says he is speaking typically – well of course! He also says they were baptized in the red sea, as a type. Yes, indeed; that rock was a type of Christ, but it wasn't Christ actually there.

So Trinitarians tend to assume that God the Son is a given. I don't see that at all; I have first established that. They seem to assume that Colossians 1:16 is talking about Jesus being the creator of heaven and earth. When we get to Philippians 2, I read it this way: "Let this mind be in you." Now let's take some alternatives: is Paul there saying to you, "Imagine what it's like to be an eternal, uncreated being in heaven, and one day decide to be humble enough to become a man." Does that make a lot of sense to you? Or is he rather saying, as even Luther (another authority) says and many other good exegetes say, "There's nothing to do with preexistence there at all." He says, "Look at the man, Messiah, Jesus;" he calls him "Messiah Jesus" there, Christ Jesus. Elsewhere he calls him "The man, Messiah, Jesus." Let's suppose for a moment, that Paul didn't believe in the preexistence of Jesus literally. He says, "Look at the example of the historical Jesus, who being in the form of God" – a serious mistranslation in the NIV by the way (the 'Nearly Inspired Version') you must be careful about is due to a huge Christological bias. It doesn't say, "In his very nature God," oh no; "Being in the form of God..." you're going to have to look at that very carefully and weigh the possibilities. Being in the form of God; in the image of God; reflecting God; being so much like God that he can say, "If you've seen me, you've seen God;" yet he didn't use that power, that extraordinary divine power, for his own advantage.

Christ is our Example Because he was Human

As king, he could have commanded the world, he could have killed everybody off who resisted him, but rather than use that extraordinary prerogative – because Jesus is not just a man, he's an absolutely uniquely generated man – he didn't use that power for his own. He did have an equality

with God of course. He is on a par with God in the sense that he's reflecting God as a human being. He didn't use that power to his own advantage when he washed the dishes. He humbled himself. Now that's more of a lesson for you. You watch that Messiah walk through Galilee there, and copy that; but you don't need to copy some uncreated being who has existed from forever... who decided to become a man... that's extraordinary. That sounds more like Greek mythology where gods become men. That's not, I think, what Paul is getting at.

So in view of the fact that he was so humble and set that example of humility, God then exalted him to the highest point short of being God the Father: to the glory of God the Father. He is exalted certainly to the position of Lord Messiah. We know that, and I went through at some length the point about Psalm 110 indicating that he is the human superior, the Lord Messiah. That's what Luke 2:11 says: the shepherds were told "Today is born in Bethlehem, the Lord Messiah." Not the Lord God; the Lord Messiah. He's also the "Lord's Messiah" in Luke 2:26. He's Yahweh's Messiah, Yahweh's unique son. That makes pretty good sense. And so the fact that he was worshipped proves absolutely nothing in terms of his being God.

You're going to have to look at the language here. The Greek word *proskuneo* is used of David in the Septuagint; it's used of many authorities. You can worship an authority. In England you call the mayor "His worship;" you can worship the mayor. It doesn't mean the mayor is God. It's totally misleading to think that when Jesus is worshipped he's being worshipped as God. That's simply not true. There's another Greek word, *latreuo*, which is used only of worship of the Father. These language points have to be investigated carefully to see if there might be a distinction there. So simply to say that Jesus is worshipped doesn't make him God, I think.

Jesus does Miracles by Divine Empowerment - But not his own Divinity

The other thing is that he does miracles. Of course - because God empowers him to do these miracles, as he did with the apostles in the book of Acts. Peter is clearly not God merely because he can heal by having his shadow pass over people. So I don't find either of those to be convincing arguments, and I'll admit to a very simple - I think Professor Sanders would probably feel simplistic - approach to this. I don't feel the need for what I think is a rather romantic theological view: "We've got to construct the Trinity because that really is doing justice to the complexity of scripture;" I don't see that complexity there.

I find very satisfying the idea that God still remains a single person and a son of God, Jesus, is perfectly adequate to the task. He also seems much more real to me, and the Bible comes alive to me in an extraordinary way when I see this extraordinary human being and the marvelous thing that God has done with a man. As for the arguments about him being "'man' and not 'a man'," I can only refer to those many scholars who were taught that very thing in theological college. They were taught that they have to believe that Jesus was man, generic man, but not a man. R. P. C. Hanson, whom you should read carefully, says, "When I was taught that [in the theological college] I later gave it up as hopeless. It doesn't make any sense at all. Jesus is clearly a man and not just 'man'." So I don't think that those things can be dismissed quite so easily. There is also the fact that, for instance, one of the Church Fathers - Clement of Alexandria - felt that Jesus didn't really need to eat - which means Jesus has become very non-human (to some followers). He became very much unlike a human person.

A final point I want to make is that there was a development towards the Trinity. It's a complete mistake to say that the Trinity just arrived suddenly out of the sky; it isn't there in the early church Fathers. Tertullian - who is the father, for instance, of Latin Christology, of Latin theology -

Tertullian says there was a time when the Father was not Father and there wasn't a son. That doesn't sound like the Trinity to me. Justin Martyr says that God begat a son before the creation; God brought into existence another god; arithmetically, a second god, but very much subordinate to the big God. He wasn't suggesting that that son was equal with the Father.

Fascinatingly enough, one of the fine things that scholars have done recently – as R. P. C. Hanson has done in his book on the development of Christology – is to suggest that we have to rethink what we've been taught in this area. We've been taught that Arius was some rogue who came up with a brand new idea that the Trinity wasn't right. That is not true, according to Professor Hanson. What actually happened was that nobody knew exactly how divine Jesus was, and they were actually still arguing about that, when Arius represented what was really the earlier view. Athanasius is the real innovator, says Professor Hanson; he's the guy who comes along with the brand new ideas.

So there's no way that you can trace that Trinity back into the New Testament in history from 325 AD. It doesn't work, and I think that the history of the patristic studies is rather sophisticated now. I can only recommend you read these experts like Maurice Wiles and R. P. C. Hanson, and evaluate the evidence – see if you can really trace that Trinity all the way back faithfully to the New Testament. I don't think it can be done. So that tends to strengthen my position that the good old Unitarian monotheism of the Bible was really intact until it got spoilt, as I see it, at Chalcedon and Nicaea.

Three Whos in One What? Or Three Whats in One Who?

I'd just like to comment on some of the very fascinating drawings that Professor Sanders has here in his "Comics for Children," a really interesting exercise in trying to make the Trinity clear to children. Professor Sanders earlier said that it's quite wrong to think that Trinitarians believe that three "Xs" are one "X" and he's of course absolutely right. We should never ever say that. Nobody's going to imagine that one "X" can be three "Xs." So in saying that there are three persons in one God, one must distinguish between the persons and the one God; they can't be equal. The problem is that most Trinitarians don't say that, what they say is that each one is God... and that's one God. So they come over as apparently saying that three "Xs" are one "X", which is illogical and contradictory. But if we probe further, doing justice to the Trinitarian cause, then we've got to recognize this distinction between the three persons and the being.

Alright, so we say then – if you're Hank Hanegraaff, the Bible answer man – that God is three "who's" in one "what," but it's rather alarming for me then to go to Alister McGrath, the Oxford Trinitarian who writes with a passion on the Trinity, and he says, "No that's not right at all, God is one person in three 'what's.'" You've got the difference, here, right? Hank Hanegraaff and others present the Trinity and you've got three "who's" in one "what;" but Alister McGrath has got one "who" in three "what's."

Well, if this is so self-evident, why such extraordinary disagreement in the Trinitarian camp? Because Professor McGrath, presumably very learned, knows his stuff very well, and he's not able then to agree at all that there are three "who's" and one "what." So he says God is a single person with three roles. That's the very opposite then of what Hank Hanegraaff is telling us – that God is one "what" in three "who's."

Well, in a very interesting way, Professor Sanders tackles that instantly. (Erickson is extremely gentle in his approach here. He's almost conceding that this is illogical whichever way you do it.

He quotes a logician, Steven Davis, as saying that nobody in the Trinitarian camp has been able to achieve a coherent explanation of this issue of how three can be one. Nobody, he says; it hasn't been done. He says it may be done in the future, but so far it hasn't been done, and that leaves us Socinians very puzzled. You think there should be some explanation of how this Trinity thing really works logically.)

God Always a Person and Never an Essence

So then what we learn from professor Sander's pictures – and they're just brilliant, you should see they're most entertaining – we have a notion that you cannot love a "what," and yet you are to love God. It seems illogical to me. We're told that Jesus is a "who" and a "what," he's both a "who" and a "what," and the Father is a "who" and a "what," so you apparently have then, two or three "who-what's" in one "who-what," as it seems, although maybe the last one is a "what." Maybe I haven't studied this in detail – I have actually in some detail tried to study it – but I would be surprised if a child would come away with a clear idea of what this is about. So my bottom line, again, is simply that the Biblical God is never Triune: he's always a "who." He is always a person. The Hebrews simply don't think in terms of essences. God is a person: he's very active, very involved, and interacting with humanity. But he's not an essence. I don't see that at all, and if I can't find a single text that says that God is an essence, I'm perturbed by the notion that I have to believe he is in order to be saved. But I have to remind you... this Trinitarian thing has been very tough.

I'm just delighted of course with Dr. Sanders' gentle approach, and I expected that entirely; I wasn't expecting anything other than that, but it hasn't always been so. They get awfully hard on you if you don't subscribe to the Trinity. You're kicked out of every church in the past and to some extent even now. My final point here would be that there surely has got to be a better way to dialogue about this, rather than saying "You can't be saved unless you believe in this three "who's" in one "what" doctrine!" I don't believe people even know what that is. Well, if they don't know what the doctrine is, how can they say they really believe it? If you don't preach on it and teach it, how can it be that it is the one doctrine that you must believe to be saved (according to some evangelical pastors)? It all seems to me very odd and very strange.

Mechanics of the Trinity Never Clearly Explained

I think you teach the thing and make it clear, and then people will say, "I believe it and I'm going to be saved by believing it," or you say, "It really doesn't count, it isn't there at all." I don't think most churchgoers even know what this doctrine is, much less can they explain it when they – even Professor Sanders with all of his brilliance here – leave me certainly very puzzled as to just how this three in one thing works. So that's the negative side of this debate. What I can say positively is that Jesus constantly refers to the Father as God. The Bible constantly does this. Jesus (I think) makes a Unitarian statement over and over again, and my cousin J.T. Robertson says that John is as undeviating a witness to Unitarian monotheism in his gospel as any New Testament writer.

Once again, there are so many huge names in theology undermining the Trinitarian cause. Now you may feel this is simply an apostasy. I say it's waking up to the fact that as good as this Greek thing may be in its own terms – it may be admirable as a way of explaining God in Greek terminology – it isn't the Biblical way. The Hebrew Bible will not entertain this Greek philosophical language. By all means, study them separately and admire the virtues of both, but I think it's wrong to read the Trinity back into the New Testament all the time. As Professor Loofs (who lectured in Ohio in 1922) says, at worst the Trinity idea could have caused a veiled polytheism to enter the church. It entered the church camouflaged. If you look at the state of the church – it is

mass chaos. Paul said, "I want you to have one judgment – all of you – to be perfectly united in one judgment." Denominationalism is mass chaos! Something seems to have gone wrong. Could it be that we would get back to the God of the Bible by believing with Jesus (as I think he does) that God is one single person, and that he, the Messiah, is the son of God, totally dependent upon God? That might be a way back to unity, and that's what I would suggest as a real possibility.



Dr. Sanders: Complexity of a Doctrine No Guarantor of Error

To approach a complex doctrine and assume that you ought to be able to understand it without thinking about it is strange; you just wouldn't approach anything else in the world that way. You wouldn't be handed a book in French and object, "What the heck? You mean I have to go read another book – like a French grammar – before I can even read this?" To expect to be able to approach a serious doctrinal topic and just "get" all the ins and outs of it is, frankly, a little bit philistine. It's sort of low brow – and I'm not attributing that to you, I know that you are speaking on behalf of other poor benighted people out there who have been given this really awful training so that they misunderstand... and somebody has taught poor R.P.C. Hanson that Jesus is "generic 'man', but not a man"... which is, I agree, utterly inconceivable. How could you read stories about Jesus walking around in Nazareth and go, "Oh, that's humanity!" It's impossible: you actually can't conceive that. That would be a square circle... some wicked, dumb, Christian professor taught little R.P.C. Hanson that and R.P.C. Hanson never got over it. Somehow, in spite of his massive erudition and his writing a 900-page book about fourth century Christology which seems to be evidence of his having read everything patristic – somehow he never got over the fact that some bad nun told him theology in a completely wrong and irresponsible way...It probably wasn't a nun, right, who taught R.P.C. Hanson?

It's philistine in this sense: my wife is a mathematician and it would be pretty easy for me to go to her and say, "What is this calculus stuff? It's like space under a curve, but it's infinite, or it's not infinite but it's like one infinite against another infinite, and somehow that gives you this finite space? I mean how does that even work? That is crazy talk, you know? Sure it's 'calculus!'" Well, I'm an idiot, and I never took calculus, so I wouldn't expect to understand it! And if she tells me, "Listen, take this one on my authority: this stuff works. You'd be amazed how it works. Let me show you rocket ships and other things that are impressive even to math idiots like you, who can understand (at least) that this stuff works."

Anyway, to hem and haw because "It's two or three who-what's in one who-what," is rather like standing on the outside of the issue: it's not to have made the basic fundamental decision to grapple with the evidence of the New Testament, not to agree that it says, "The divinity of Christ is here and must be dealt with," and it is then to look at the "Advanced Topics" and decide, "Therefore those out there don't make sense."

Basically, a God you fully comprehend isn't God. Again, I don't want to use that as warrant for me to just go out and obfuscate anything I want and have the "Orange, not- Orange" God. I've got

Biblical evidence that points me to something where I say, "I see the lines going this way... I can't see where they connect, but I wouldn't expect to be able to draw you a diagram of how God works. I know a whole lot of ways he doesn't work: he can't just be the Father and he can't just be the son." I want to tease out a couple of phrases, something you've used here. You've talked about Jesus as being divine "in a sense," and I assume that sense is sort of the sense in which my wife's cooking is divine: "Oooh, thanks honey, the meal was divine!" But it is certainly not in the sense of having the nature of God or being, in essence, God.

Socinianism Lacking Rationale for the Worship of Christ

You've also talked about worshipping Christ, but interestingly, you cited evidence of worshipping non-divine persons. So I guess my question would be: do you worship Jesus Christ, and in what sense? Who else do you worship? Do you pray to Jesus Christ? And, if prayer is something that can be offered to humans, what other humans do you pray to? It's kind of the question, "What kind of 'in a sense' divine are we talking about?" On page 167 of your book you say, "For the early Christians, Jesus had the value and reality of God, but he wasn't God, but he had the value and reality of God for the early Christians." I'm afraid that what you're doing is trying to stay radically committed to monotheism so much so that you even remove Jesus from the definition of who God is, but then you introduce his being "divine in a sense," and the "value and reality of God for the early Christians", and we worship him but only "worship" him.

Socinus himself had this problem, right? He worshipped Jesus Christ but taught that he was not God, and then his followers said, "Well if he isn't God, we're not going to worship him," and Socinus didn't like this and said, "No, you've got to worship him because the Bible says you do," and his followers were more consistent and said, "No, we don't worship anyone but God, so we're not worshipping Jesus."

You've pointed out and so I'd like to say something about [the position stating] "You can go to hell if you don't believe in the Trinity..." If you manage to somehow get to heaven without believing in the Trinity, you are going to be really shocked to find out you have to hang out with the Trinity for all of eternity. It's not that God has a list of things you've got to be able to get right on a test, and says "Wellhe got the Trinity question wrong... so he goes to hell." No, it's more a question of just how wrong one can be about God and still be saved. Just how wrong can you be and still participate in salvation?