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## The Trinity in the Old Testament: From Daniel 7:13-14 to Matt 28:19

### I

Up until the last few decades it was customary in manuals of Christian theology to provide a section on the biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. This section even included a short subsection on the Old Testament, despite the Old Testament's well-known emphasis on monotheism or at least on henotheism. Drawing mainly upon the views of the church fathers and of the scholastics, manualists listed four kinds of «proof texts.»<sup>1</sup>

First came allusions to a plurality in the Godhead. For example, at the creation, God says: «Let us make man» (Gen 1:26; cf. 3:22; 9:6; 11:7). Many fathers understood these puzzling plurals as a dialogue among the persons of the Trinity, although Origen took it as God speaking to the angels. Some scholastics saw further hints in the plural *Elohim* followed by a verb in the singular (Gen 1:1), in the threefold «Holy» of Isaiah (6:3), in the threefold invocation of Yahweh in the Aaronic blessing (Num 6:24-26), or in Psalm 67:7-8.

A second form of trinitarian hint was found in some of the theophanies in the Pentateuch. For example, in Gen 16:7-14; 21:17-19; 22:11-18; Exod 14:19, God's emissary appears as representative of the invisible Yahweh. This is his «angel», the elusive *mal'ak Yahweh*. Though distinct from Yahweh, he yet «stands in» for Him; his presence alternates with that of God himself. The fathers before Augustine understood this angel of God as the divine Logos. But when the Arians twisted this interpretation in a subordinationist sense, the orthodox fathers dropped it. St. Augustine explains these passages as angelophanies, as did many fourth century fathers, but Leo the Great kept to the earlier view.

A third line of argument consists in the biblical speculations on the figure of wisdom as a hypostasis or person, «Lady Wisdom», for example in Prov

<sup>1</sup> E. g. B. Bartmann, *Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, vol. 1, Freiburg i.Br. 1932, 8th edition, §48, 178-182.

8:21-31; 9:1-6; Sirach 24; Wisdom 6:12-9:18. The biblical quasi-personification of *the word of God* also played an important role in this type of argument. In such texts as Ps 33:6; 147:18; Isa 9:7; and especially Isa 55:10-11, the word of God is spoken of as a creative force (cf. also Sirach 42:15b; Wis 9:1; 18:14-16; 16:12, where however it is Aaron's word which is effective). This contrasts with the spirit of God, which does not appear as a hypostasis in the Old Testament (but cf. I Kgs 22:21-24). The spirit is rather presented as a force in the cosmos, by means of which God organizes and gives life to all things (Gen 1:2; 8:1; Job 33:4), inspires prophets and sanctifies the ideal anointed high priest (Isa 61:1). The *name of God* also functions as a powerful force (Isa 30:27-33).

The final way to find Old Testament anticipations of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity was through a consideration of those texts which spoke of (divine) «sonship» or of a messiah or anointed one in terms which described him as divine or which could be construed in this way. Thus passages in proto-Isaiah name the royal child Immanuel, which can be translated «with us is God» (Isa 7:14; 8:8-10). In Isa 9:6 this child is named «Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty God* (*El gibbor*), *Everlasting Father*, Prince of Peace» (so NRSV; cf. NJPS: «The Mighty God is planning grace [as in Isa 25:1], the Eternal Father, a peaceable ruler»). In Psalm 2:7b, God says to his anointed: «You are my son; today I have begotten you.» The Hebrew text of Ps 110:3 is of uncertain meaning. Basing itself on the ancient Greek and Latin versions the NAB reads: «Yours is princely power in the day of your birth, in holy splendor; before the daystar, like the dew, I have begotten you.» This is a far cry from the NRSV: «Your people will offer themselves willingly on the day you lead your forces on the holy mountains. From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to you.» The differences, though apparently enormous, are primarily on the level of vocalization; thus «your youth», with different vowels in the Hebrew, can be read «I have begotten you.» One may suspect an anti-Christian vocalization by the Massoretes during the early middle ages, but it is not easy to prove this. Alternatively, supposing the Massoretic vocalization to be traditional, i.e., pre-Christian, its reading may have been an effort to avoid the otherwise apparent polytheism. If one accepts that Ps 110 is an ancient text that has undergone successive rereadings, one may conclude (a) that the original form is by now irrecoverable, and (b) that all the rereadings have their own value. What is important here is that the early Christian fathers, Greek, Latin and Syriac, read a text close to the NAB, and some thought it referred to the generation of the Son by the Father at Jesus' baptism or at his resurrection and ascension. Ps 110 is the most frequently quoted chapter of the Old Testament in the New Testament, but v. 3 is not quoted. Ps 2:7 sufficed to make the point, as one can see particularly clearly in Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5. Another place where the fathers found a reference to the Trinity was the threefold mention of the spirit in Ps 51:12-14: «Create in me a steadfast spirit ... do not ... take Your holy spirit away from me ... let a vigorous spi-

rit sustain me» (NJPS). Medievals and fathers going back to Origen were pleased to find here an allusion to the trinitarian persons, in the order Son, Spirit, Father, for reasons having to do with the Greek and Latin translations.<sup>2</sup>

Last but, as we shall see, not least under the heading of transcendent messianic figures comes the enigmatic Son of man or «One like a human being» of Dan 7:13-14, a figure not yet explicitly messianic in Daniel but still in a context of world empires and/or kings. These verses are especially important for our theme both because of their being frequently cited explicitly (e.g., Matt 24:30; 26:66; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; Rev 1:7) and implicitly by the synoptic gospels and because these verses supply two central themes of the gospels and to a lesser extent of the rest of the New Testament, viz., the kingdom of God and the Son of man.

These four strands of the Old Testament remain within its pages quite separate. There is no impulse to unite them into a synthesis. Such an impulse only arises *post Christum*, in the ongoing early Christian effort to understand who Jesus Christ is. (There are however some initial steps toward such a synthesis or fusion of some of these concepts and themes in pre-Christian Jewish literature such as we meet it at Qumran or in 1 Enoch.) Thus there is in the Old Testament no clear affirmation of the triune Godhead. The Trinity is prepared, but not revealed. Israel remained monotheistic in the sense of holding to the unique personhood of God.

## II

So much for the older approach. In the past twenty years or so this subject has been allowed to fall into the shadows. But now, with a bold new effort on the part of Old Testament scholars to renew the understanding of the God of the Hebrew Bible in the light of ancient near eastern parallels and comparisons, and with strict attention also to the inner developments within the Old Testament itself, it might be an appropriate time to reopen the question.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in the last twenty-five years there has been a veritable revolution in the way that Old Testament scholarship understands the polytheistic religious background of Judaic monotheism. An example is the widespread modern explanation of the mysterious plurals in Genesis 1:26; 11:7; Exodus 15:11 as references by implication to the divine or heavenly council.<sup>4</sup> This concept of a heavenly assembly is rooted in some of the oldest traditions of the ancient near east: Mesopotamian, West Semitic (Old Syrian (Mari), Ugaritic, Phoenician, etc.), Greek (but not Egyptian). The concept of a council of divine beings sitting together with Yahweh, discussing and making decisions con-

<sup>2</sup> H.-C. Puech, «Origène et l'exégèse trinitaire du Psaume 50.12-14», in: *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne* (Mélanges Maurice Goguel), Neuchâtel-Paris 1950, 180-194.

cerning affairs of heaven and earth, is now recognized to be clearly present in the language and imagery of the Old Testament, for example, in Jer 23:18,22; Ps 29:1; 82:1; 89:5,8; Job 1:6; 2:1; 5:1; 15:8,15; 29:4; cf. 1Kgs 22:19-23. The concept is also present in Qumran literature: 1QH 15:14; 1QH 3:35-36; 5:21-22; 10:34-35. Female deities are also mentioned in the Old Testament. These include the Queen of Heaven (Jer 7:16-20; 44:15-30); Asherah (e. g., Judg 3:7; 6:25; 2Kgs 21:8; 23:4) and Astarte (1Kgs 11:5; 2Kgs 23:13).<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, the members of the divine council were eventually reduced to mere servants of Yahweh in the Old Testament, as ancient Israelite monotheistic beliefs intensified. Take, for example, Psalm 82. It begins: «God (*ʾelohim*) stands in the divine assembly (*ʿedhath-ʾel*); among the divine beings (*ʾelohim*), sons of the Most High (*beney ʿelyôn*), all of you; but you shall die as men do, fall like any prince» (vv. 6-7 NJPS). Here the Psalmist expresses his disillusionment in regard to the members of the divine council. He now realized that they are as mortal as men, not divine at all. (Note that this NJPS version brings out the sense of disappointment with its translation «I had taken you for...» (Literally the Hebrew reads, «I said: ‘you are gods.’» But «I said» in biblical Hebrew often stands for «I thought», here «I had thought»). Hence

<sup>3</sup> Out of the flood of literature, two recent works may be selected as representative and as summarizing (or at least listing) earlier literature: T. N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: the Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names*, Philadelphia 1988; M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, San Francisco 1990. Note also B. F. Batto, *Slaying The Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, KY 1992, and, on a literary level, J. A. Miles, *God: A Biography*, New York 1995; also the work ed. by Dietrich/Klopfenstein mentioned in the next note; most recently, K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P.W. van der Horst, ed., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, Leiden 1995. Among articles I have found helpful, these may be listed: Albrecht Alt, «The God of the Fathers», in his *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, Garden City NY 1968, 1-100 (orig. ed. 1929); F. M. Cross, «Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs», *HTR* 55 (1962) 225-259; O. Eissfeldt, «El and Yahweh», *JSS* 2 (1956) 25-37; John Day, «Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature», *JBL* 105, (1986) 385-408. Though dealing more with post-biblical Judaism, the compact work by L. W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, Philadelphia 1988, has helped clarify my thinking and introduces the idea of the Christian mutation of Jewish materials.

<sup>4</sup> F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Cambridge, Mass 1973, 177-190; E. T. Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, HSM 24; Missoula MT 1980, where earlier literature is cited. The same author has summarized his conclusions in *ABD* 2.214-217, s.v. «Divine Assembly»; J. H. Neyrey, ‘I Said «You Are Gods»: Psalm 82:6 and John 10’, *JBL* 108 (1989) 647-663. See now also the essays in: *Ein Gott allein?: JHWH-Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte*, edited by Walter Dietrich and Martin A. Klopfenstein, OBO 139, Freiburg-Schweiz 1994, esp. M. S. Smith, «Yahweh and other Deities in Ancient Israel: Observations on Old Problems and Recent Trends», 197-234; ThWAT, s.v. *sôd*, 5. 775-782 (H.-J. Fabry); *DDD* 391-348 (s. B. Parker).

<sup>5</sup> See J. Day, «Asherah», *JBL* 105 (1986) 385-408; *DDD* 183-195 (N. Wyatt).

the more idiomatic «I had taken you for».) The psalm ends with a verse which is normally translated «Arise, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are Your possession.» The word for God here is the same as in the first verse, *ʾelohim*, but there it is used a second time to refer to the divine council. Here at the end the word reverts to referring to the one God of Israel, hence the singular «Your» (Heb. *ʾattah*). So in a puzzling way polytheism is both accepted and rejected in this psalm. To be sure, it is necessary at all stages of the development of Judaic tradition to distinguish between the prophetic (or «Yahweh only») and polytheistic views on religious issues. Here both views are presented together, although monotheism has the last word.

In later interpretation the members of the divine council are understood as angels. For our purposes, what is important is that in these passages (and elsewhere) the God of Israel is not conceived as completely alone. He has heavenly beings to consult, to whom he may delegate tasks. This state of affairs was not only due to the influence of the surrounding culture but reflects earlier traditions of a once polytheistic Yahwism. We are still very far from the Christian trinity, but the presence of mythic theology in Israelite texts is a point to be retained for our subsequent argument.

An important issue here is the matter of levels of religious belief. For the late Morton Smith for example<sup>6</sup>, there was never only pure monotheistic belief in ancient Israel. During the monarchical period he discerns rather a «two party system». There was a Yahweh-only party represented by the prophets and the deuteronomistic literature. But there was also a heterogeneous «Yahweh plus other cults and gods» party, which included expressions of popular religion such as necromancy (1 Sam 28:3-25, Saul and the woman of Endor) and other death cult rituals (e. g., tithed commodities offered to the dead, cf. Deut 26:14), but also aspects of the royal cult.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, there exist expressions of popular religiosity in every higher religion which are disapproved of (to use no stronger language) by the theologically educated leaders of the religion. Instances of misunderstanding between the different levels are also not uncommon. Since this essay is intended to explain in part how one aspect of a higher religion (Christianity) developed out of another (Second Temple Judaism), it does not base itself on such traces of pre-Yahwistic pagan remains nor on the always more or less present expressions of popular religiosity. Rather, it seeks to look at instances of post-exilic, inner-Yahwistic develop-

<sup>6</sup> M. Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament*, New York 1971; B. Lang, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority*, Sheffield 1983

<sup>7</sup> E. g., T.J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (HSM 39); Atlanta 1989. On the other hand, see B. B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cults and Necromancy in Israelite Religion and Tradition* (FAT 7); Tübingen 1994, who argues that there was no ancestor veneration in pre-Hellenistic Levantine cultures. His thesis has not persuaded his colleagues.



ments, cases where pure Yahwism seems to have «let down its guard», that is, when the final redactors of the Hebrew Bible, presumably normative Yahwists all, allowed some discordant elements to slip into or to stay in the canonical text. It is also possible that these discordant elements were understood by them in a non-discordant way, yet the expressions easily lend themselves to discordant rereadings, e. g., when Yahweh twice refers to Moses as (a) god, *elohim* (Exod 4:16; 7:1), thus posing a problem for later pure Yahwists (see below).

The evaluation of divine agents in the Hebrew Bible has also come in for renewed scrutiny. These agents have been usefully classified into three main types: personified divine attributes such as Wisdom or the Word of God (*Logos*, *Memra*); exalted patriarchs, particularly Enoch and Moses; and principal angels, especially Michael.<sup>8</sup>

The first of these three types of divine agency will not detain us long since most of the relevant considerations are well known and do not drastically alter the picture of the predominance of Israelite monotheism. While it is true that the relevant biblical texts speak of the wisdom of God or the word of God as agents in creation and they are described as personal beings, we can distinguish between this *linguistic* usage and «the function of divine attributes in the conceptual world and religious life of the people who created the texts».<sup>9</sup> In other words, there is no evidence that ancient Israelites prayed or offered sacrifices to Lady Wisdom (despite her resemblance to the very popular goddess Isis) or to the divine *Logos* (despite Philo's strong language of the *Logos* as «the second God» (*ton deuteron theon*) (*Quaest. Gen.* 2.62). But it is worthwhile to take a second look at the *Memra*. At least four book-length studies of this translation phenomenon have appeared in recent decades, suggesting that perhaps George Foot Moore did not quite settle the matter back in 1922, as had long been thought to be the case.<sup>10</sup>

*Memra Yhwh* is a special Aramaic term for word of God (the ordinary Aramaic terms for word are *pitgama* and *milla*) which is found in the targums, Aramaic paraphrastic translations of the Hebrew Bible. Where the Hebrew

<sup>8</sup> Hurtado, *One God* (n. 3), 17-39. Hurtado's discussion of the *Memra* phenomenon is brief and perfunctory. It does not take into account the research of Domingo Muñoz-Leon, *Dios-Palabra. Memra en los Targumim del Pentateuco* (Institucion San Jeronimo 4), Granada 1974; idem, «Monoteismo biblico: Evolución de la idea y de la formulacion del monoteismo en la Biblia», *Semana Biblica Española* 28, Madrid 1971, 15-66; W.E. Aufrecht, *Surrogates for the Divine Name in the Palestinian Targums to Exodus*, Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Toronto 1979; R. Hayward, *Divine Names and Presence: The Memra*, Totowa 1981; and A. Chester, *Divine Revelation and Divine Titles in the Penta-teuchal Targumim* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 14) Tübingen 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Hurtado, *One God*, 47.

<sup>10</sup> G.F. Moore, «Intermediaries in Jewish Theology: *Memra*, *Shekinah*, *Metatron*», *HTR* 15, (1922) 41-85. The other monographs are listed in note 8.

text has God himself as the agent, the targums will often paraphrase the divine name with Memra Yhwh. The Memra thus seems to manifest God's power in the material world and in the human mind, acting as God's agent and as the mediator between God and humans. In these Aramaic translations the Memra serves to avoid anthropomorphisms, though the targumists do not make use of it in a universal, mechanical fashion. Sometimes they replace the sacred names with Memra, and sometimes they do not.

In his survey of earlier studies, Moore judged that previous Christian references to the Memra were determined by apologetic concerns (e. g., in the *Pugio Fidei* of Ramon Martí, 1280). Moore tries to distinguish between an intermediary agency (such as the Memra) and an intermediary being, although it is not clear that such a distinction can be sustained, since an agent is a being. Moore insists that Memra is a reverent circumlocution for God; it is a buffer word, not a buffer idea or buffer person. Since it is not found in the Midrashim or the two Talmuds or the Zohar, we must see it, Moore concludes, as only a phenomenon of translation, not as a creature of speculation. Before going on to the more recent studies, and granted the origins of the Memra usage to be as Moore states them, we may query whether, once the targum texts were in circulation, their peculiar use of Memra did not lead some people to hear the term in a hypostatized, personal way. This in turn could have nourished speculation, and led to such uses as we find in John's Prologue. Books and phrases sometimes take on a life of their own and have unintended consequences, or take on unintended connotations.

After surveying the recent studies and criticizing them, Andrew Chester comes to the following conclusions:

It is ... more plausible to see Memra (in form a substantival infinitive) as ... a translational and exegetical term, drawing on the various senses of the underlying verb *amar* and its related noun forms, with connotations such as 'utterance, speech, word, promise, command'. The evidence of its usage for 'voice' and 'mouth', for which it would be a quite natural interpretation, favours this view, and the impression O[nqelos] gives that Memra was in these cases originally used for both divine and human reference is certainly supported, for a relatively early stage, by the evidence of 11QTgJob.<sup>11</sup>

But while in Targum Onqelos the use of Memra may be a case of simple metonymy<sup>12</sup>, some of the later targums show a degree of theological development. For example, in Targum Neofiti 1 to Exod 12:42 the hymn to the four

<sup>11</sup> Chester, *Divine Revelation*, 308-9. The clearest of the two uses of Memar or Memra in 11QTgJob comes in Job 39:27 where the HT asks: «Does the eagle soar *at your command*», literally, mouth (*'al pîka*), and the Qumran targum has *'al memraka*. Does *pî* mean command here (so NJPS) or does *memar* mean mouth? The first option seems more probable.

<sup>12</sup> On metonymy, see P. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, Toronto 1977, 55-59.



nights of redemption is inserted. The fourth night, when the eschatological redemption takes place, is described as follows:

When the world reaches its end to be redeemed (or: dissolved): ... Moses will go up from the desert (and the king Messiah from on high). One will lead at the head of the flock and the other will lead at the head of the flock and his Word (*memra*) will lead between the two of them, and I and they will proceed together.<sup>13</sup>

Here the *Memra* of God acts as a person who leads the people to redemption and who walks between Moses and the Messiah. This usage makes of *Memra* more than a buffer word, a translation device or metonymy. Vinzenz Hamp sees this usage as a considerable development beyond the Word theology of the Old Testament, which denotes an aspect of the divine being.<sup>14</sup> Even if *Memra* is not a hypostasis, or only rarely so as in the passage quoted, at least in Neofiti and the Fragment Targums it takes on theological significance. To be sure, this development takes place after the last book of the Hebrew Bible had been written. How early or late is a matter of dispute, since our manuscripts of the targums (with the exception of the Qumran targums) are late, mostly medieval, Renaissance or even later. Chester concludes:

[*Memra*] is used to denote one range of aspects of the divine activity and character ... as he [God] manifests himself and is active in the world (including some ... themes, such as mercy, redemption and cultic activity...). It is not, however, theologically sophisticated; it simply portrays one main mode of God's activity, intelligible at a popular level and intended primarily as an interpretation of the biblical text.<sup>15</sup>

In Judaism, the *Memra* remains connected with the synagogue liturgy.<sup>16</sup> Its presence on the congregational level of Jewish practice provided a contribution to the material which served the Christian mutation when it was developing its Christology.

The second type of divine agent in the Hebrew Bible is the exalted patriarch: Adam, Seth, Enoch, Abraham, Jacob, and especially Moses. We will limit our discussion to the figure of Moses. Exod 4:16 reads: «you [Moses] shall be to him [Aaron] as God» (MT: *l'êlôhîm*). In Exod 7:1 Moses is even more exalted: «I [Yahweh] make you [Moses] God [*l'êlôhîm*] to Pharaoh.» Moreo-

<sup>13</sup> A. Diez Macho, *Ms Neophyti 1*, 5 vols., Madrid-Barcelona 1968-1978; Eng. transl. by M. Maher. For a detailed study of the entire hymn, see R. LeDéaut, *La Nuit Pascale*, *AnBib* 22; Rome 1963.

<sup>14</sup> V. Hamp, review of Muñoz-Leon, in *BZ* n.f. 21 (1977) 284-287.

<sup>15</sup> Chester, *Divine Revelation*, 313.

<sup>16</sup> On some of the possible Christological implications of the synagogue liturgy in recent Israeli discussion, see B.T. Viviano, «Hillel and Jesus on Prayer», in: *Hillel and Jesus*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, Minneapolis 1997, 427-457. It is only fair to note that Codex Neofiti I had not yet been rediscovered when G.F. Moore was writing.

ver, the particle *le-*, which functions as a comparative in 4:16 («*like*» God), to soften the radicalism of the statement, is not present in 7:1.

It is customary for commentators and translators to take these two statements «like God to Aaron» and «God to Pharaoh» as simply striking phrases which make Moses play the role of God, that is, to speak for him. The intention of the original author(s) is perhaps beyond recovery. Clearly the author(s) did not call Moses Yahweh (a name), only Elohim (a generic term). Moreover, the Septuagint, followed here by the Vulgate, is torn between minimizing the shocking nature of the phrases by paraphrasing them on the one hand, and translating them straight on the other. Thus at 4:16 the Septuagint reads: «and you shall be for him in things pertaining to God» (*ta pros ton theon*). But at 7:1 we find «Behold, I have made you a God (*theon*) to Pharaoh.»<sup>17</sup>

The targums tell a different story. They clearly sense the dangerous potential latent in the phrases and try to avert it. Onqelos on both occasions replaces *elohim* with *rab*, master or great one, lord.<sup>18</sup> Targum Neofiti paraphrases; God becomes «him who seeks instruction from before Yhwh», then «Behold, I have set you lord and prince for Pharaoh». Targum Pseudo-Jonathan first conflates Onqelos and (something like) Neofiti as follows: «the master (*rab*) who seeks instruction from before Yhwh». Then it goes off on its own: «Why do you fear? See, I have already made of you an (object of) fear for Pharaoh as if (you were) his god.» This last approach is continued by Umberto Cassuto who takes the phrases as ironic references to Egyptian polytheism.<sup>19</sup> These targumic reinterpretations are perhaps an indication that the Jews of the synagogues found both texts scandalous and troubling. Yet it is likely that at an earlier period Ben Sira was sufficiently influenced by the Exodus passages in question to describe Moses as «honored as God» (Sir 45:2, according to the reconstructed Hebrew, since there is a lacuna in the ms. at this point; only the last three letters of *elohim* are preserved). The Septuagint softens to: «He made him equal in glory to the holy ones» (angels). The Alexandrian Jewish commentator Philo (d.ca. A.D. 50) picked up these and other hints in the Pentateuch, e. g., Deut 33:1 (he read there «Moses, man and God» instead of «Moses, man of God») and made much of them, but in his own way.<sup>20</sup> Philo often calls Moses *theos* (god), and this has misled some into thinking that he had deified Moses. But it seems more probable that Philo understood this language allegorically and ethically. Moses becomes the divinely endowed supreme example of the religious life and the life of virtue as understood by Philo.

<sup>17</sup> D.C. Allison, *The New Moses*, Minneapolis 1993, 154-5; Hurtado, *One God*, 56-69, and the literature there cited.

<sup>18</sup> On *rab*, *rabboni*, *ribboni* in pre-rabbinic and rabbinic Aramaic, see B.T. Viviano, «Rabbouni and Mark 9:5», *RB* 97 (1990) 207-218.

<sup>19</sup> *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Jerusalem 1967, 89.

<sup>20</sup> *Sac* 9-10; *Mos* 1:58; *Mig* 81, 84, 169; *Det* 162; *Quod Omn. Prob.* 43-44; *Mut.* 129.

Philo exhorts his readers to be transformed as Moses was. (Later this kind of exhortation would contribute to the patristic doctrine of deification or *theōsis*; cf. 2 Pet 1:4). For our purposes the point is that the Hebrew and Greek text of the Pentateuch provided a basis for attributing divine honors to an earthly (though exalted) spiritual leader, a basis which could be developed by later Jews who were so minded. The result could in some cases not unfairly be described as a qualified rather than as an absolute, unqualified monotheism.

Let us at this point tack on another Pentateuchal passage as Philo read it. Gen 18:1-16 tells the story of Abraham meeting three strangers who promise him and Sarah a son. The language of the story in regard to the three strangers moves back and forth between singular and plural in a puzzling way. It is clear that God is somehow present in their mission. Philo's remarkable commentary on Genesis 18 is explicitly triadic, even if not trinitarian (*Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin*, 4:2-8, LCL ed., pp. 270-283). On the grounds that Genesis uses two words for God, *theos* and *kyrios*, Philo bases his view that God's essence or *ousia* acts through and is flanked by two chief ministering powers, the creative (*poētikē*) power and the kingly (*basilikē*) power. This then is his triad, which explains the three strangers in relation to God: «the single appearance appears as a triad, and the triad as a unity» (*Qu. et Sol.*, LCL, p. 271). Yet in the same context Philo goes on to interpret Moses' request in Exod 33:13 «Let me know your ways» (cf. the Septuagint: «reveal yourself to me that I may see you knowingly») as a request to go beyond a triadic vision of God with his two powers so as to attain to a vision of God in his undivided essence (*Qu. et Sol.*, LCL, p. 282). There is no doubt that Philo adhered to Jewish monotheism. But his triadic language was such as to render Jews uneasy in the new situation created by the rise of Christianity. It is not surprising that texts of his works continued to be copied by Christians but not by Jews. Philo's reflections on the trinity of the Godhead may be comparable to the earliest Christian trinitarian theologies, but they do not reach the hypostatic levels of Nicene orthodoxy as found in the fourth century.

Another type of divine agent is the chief angel. We have already seen that when early Jewish interpretation was confronted with something in the sacred text which posed a problem for pure or unqualified monotheism, it often resorted to angels to solve the difficulty, e. g., the *elohim* of the divine council were so interpreted. Indeed the angel of God (*mal'ak Yhwh*) may well have been the primary model of divine agency in post-exilic Judaism, from which Memra may have taken its inspiration. Of the many texts which could be discussed (e. g., Josh 5:13-15; Ezek 1:26-28; 8:2-4) we will select only two: Exod 23:20-22 and Daniel. But Daniel, with related Qumran texts, is so important to our argument that we will reserve treatment of it to a separate section.

Exodus 23:20-22 reads as follows:

<sup>20</sup>I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have made ready. <sup>21</sup>Pay heed to him and obey him. Do

not defy him, for he will not pardon your offenses, since my Name is in him;<sup>22</sup> but if you obey him and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes (NJPS).

This passage is the beginning of the homiletic (i. e., repetitious) epilogue (23:20-33) to the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22-23:33). A simple analysis notes at least four main facts. First, the angel functions as a guardian angel. But he is the guardian angel of the whole people, and thus a national guardian angel, not just one who guards an individual (cp. Matt 18:10). Like Michael in Daniel, he is the angel of the people of God. Secondly, our three verses contain four verbs which emphasize *obedience* to him as though he were God. Third, this angel is able to forgive sins. Finally, God's name is in him (*kî šemî beqirbô*). This means that God's external force, presence and power (the biblical sense of God's name) are at work in him, that is, he functions as God on earth. In Exod 14:19, the angel is associated with the cloud which also leads the people in the wilderness and which is also thought to be the locus of the divine presence.<sup>21</sup> We may further note that the passage is structured according to unconditional divine promise, warning, and conditional promise. The Talmudist E. E. Urbach notes that no Tannaitic exposition of these verses has come down to us. In the Amoraic interpretations there are two lines of exegesis. The first stresses the rule: wherever the angel appears the Shekinah appears. The other line takes the giving of the guardian angel as a punishment of the sin of worshipping the golden calf (based on Exod 32:34 and 33:15). God himself would have been their guardian had Israel not proved unworthy of this. This is then softened by saying that God stayed with them during the lifetime of Moses. Then the angel returned and was seen by Joshua (Josh 5:14). In this line of interpretation the angel is clearly distinct from God.<sup>22</sup>

Modern commentators sometimes say that the talk of an angel does «not imply a being distinct from God ... the angel of God is simply God's action.»<sup>23</sup> This may be so, but the language of the passage certainly suggests separate existence and activity, though to be sure in closest intimacy and «collaboration» with God. If one simply read the text, without any theological prophylactic, one would take the angel as a being in its own right, who serves the divine purpose as a grand vizier or an ambassador would serve a king. Even if one takes the opposite tack and stresses the identity of the angel and God, in a literary context which speaks of angelic action, such a combination can pose a threat to pure monotheism. Cassuto's line of interpretation is a sword which

<sup>21</sup> On the cloud traditions see esp. J. Luzárraga, *Las tradiciones de la nube en la Biblia y en el judaísmo primitivo* (AnBib 54), Rome 1973. On national guardian angels, see most recently J. Day, «Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan», in Dietrich and Klopfenstein, *Ein Gott allein?*, 181-196.

<sup>22</sup> Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages*, Jerusalem 1975, 137-8, based on Exod. Rab. in loco.

<sup>23</sup> Cassuto, *Exodus*, 305-306.

cuts both ways. To a trinitarian minded reader of the text it could lead to thoughts of unity of essence within a diversity of persons. It must be conceded that the text as it stands gives hostages to fortune. It contains a potential danger. An indirect witness to the danger is the line in the Passover haggada which is formulated against this and similar passages: «‘And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt’ (Deut 26:8): not by the hands of an angel, and not by the hands of a seraph, and not by the hands of a messenger (*šāliah*), but the Holy One, blessed be he, in his own glory and by himself.» Other passages which contradict this view are Exod 3:10; 12:23; Num 20:16; 1 Sam 12:8, which attribute the Exodus to Moses and Aaron and in part to an exterminating angel.<sup>24</sup> It is part of an old, inner-Jewish debate on the relative importance to be accorded angelology, and on whether or not God made use of mediators.<sup>25</sup>

### III

The title of this essay promised a study of the Trinity in the Old Testament, but so far we have only considered the divine council and some divine agents in the Hebrew Bible. By themselves these do not the Trinity make. In fact our title is too ambitious. A fully developed theology of the Christian Trinity does not occur until after the close of the Christian Bible. What we find in the New Testament are the bases of such a theology, bases which required centuries of debate, reflection and religious experience, particularly in a Hellenistic cultural milieu, before their adequate statement and conciliar definition. One of the most familiar gospel texts which has played a role in this process is the ending of Matthew’s gospel: «Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit» (Matt 28:19). Strictly speaking, this is not yet a trinitarian formula. But it is a triadic formula which contributed to the rise of trinitarian theology. The genesis of the present article arose in an attempt to understand how such a triadic formula could have arisen out of first century A.D. Judaism, including Jewish Christianity. Or was the triadic formula a late Hellenistic interpolation

<sup>24</sup> This is becoming again a lively topic of investigation. Margaret Barker represents an extreme position that ancient Israel all along had a single, coherent alternative to deuteronomistic monotheism. This doubtless claims too much. But that the picture was more complex than an ironclad monotheism from Moses on, or from the exile on, is probable. See her *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity*, London 1987; *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God*, London- Louisville 1992. For more moderate views see Hurtado, *One God*, 71-92, and the literature cited 155-160, esp. Ch. Rowland, «The Vision of the Risen Christ in Rev. i.13ff», *JTS* 31 (1980) 1-11, and J.E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of God* (WUNT 1/36), Tübingen 1985.

<sup>25</sup> On this pre-Christian inner-Jewish debate see M. Pesce, *Dio senza mediatori*, Brescia 1979, and my review, *JBL* 100 (1981) 645-646.



in the Greek text of Matthew? There is no serious manuscript evidence of this.

The best answer to the question of the Jewish origins of the triadic formula at the end of Matthew comes in a dissertation book by Jane Schaberg.<sup>26</sup> Her study leads us to the text of Daniel, chap. 7, and a parallel to it in First Enoch. In these sources, one canonical and of crucial importance for so much of early Christian theology, one extracanonical, she finds the Jewish roots of Matthew's triadic formula. If Matthew offers no more than a triadic formula about God, it will be obvious that the Old Testament cannot be asked to do more either. Thus the more adequate title for this article would be: triadic language about God in the Old Testament.

Schaberg summarized the Daniel scholarship of her time. Since then the magnificent Daniel commentary of J.J. Collins has appeared.<sup>27</sup> We will refer to it often. In passing, and before settling down to Daniel, we may mention an alternative view on the origins of the triadic formula at the end of Matthew, set forth by Luise Abramowski.<sup>28</sup> She tries, against Schaberg, to explain the three-member baptismal formula in Matthew as deriving from the Aaronic priestly blessing found in Num 6:22-27:

The Lord spoke to Moses: Speak to Aaron and his sons. Thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them: The Lord bless you and protect you! The Lord deal kindly and graciously with you! The Lord bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace! Thus they shall link My name with the people of Israel, and I will bless them.

Abramowski's argument runs roughly as follows: (1) Within the book of Numbers, the threefold priestly blessing follows the institution of the Nazarite vow, an devotional commitment she links to one aspect of the rite of baptism. (2) The blessing was used in the Temple and (so far as we know) in the synagogue service, as well as in the reception service for new members at Qumran (1QS 1:16-20; 2:1-4a), and so would have been familiar to the Jewish-Christian recipient of baptism. (3) The introduction to the blessing speaks of the priests pronouncing it, whereas the conclusion speaks of God blessing the people. The shift is important. (4) Crucial to her case is the placing or putting of God's *name* on the people. This then links up with baptism in the *name* of the Father, Son and Spirit. Even if one concludes that Schaberg better explains the personal content (i. e., the list of names) in the Matthean formula, one may concede that Abramowski contributes something to explain the origin of the name theology in the formula and also to its threefoldedness.

<sup>26</sup> The Father, the Son and Holy Spirit: The Triadic Phrase in Matthew 28 (SBLDS 61), Chico 1982; my review of it is in CBQ 46 (1984) 177-179.

<sup>27</sup> J.J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis 1993.

<sup>28</sup> «Die Entstehung der dreigliedrigen Taufformel — ein Versuch», ZTK 81 (1984) 417-446.



Returning now to Schaberg's thesis, we must first observe that Matt 28:18-20 derives many of its phrases from the Greek version of Daniel 7.<sup>29</sup> To be sure, this does not exclude other influences from the Old Testament (cf. the Septuagint of Haggai 1:13), and the pattern of Old Testament commissionings<sup>30</sup> and new Moses typology<sup>31</sup>. What Schaberg contributes is first of all to notice a pattern of Son of man, Father, angel(s) of the heavenly court, a pattern present in several New Testament passages (with slight variations): Luke 12:8-9; Rev 3:5; Mark 8:38 par; Matt 16:27 (cf. 25:34); Acts 7:55-56.<sup>32</sup> Her next step is to attribute this pattern to the influence of the pattern of the positive characters in Daniel 7: the Ancient of Days (vv. 9,13), one like a son of man (v. 14) and the thousands and myriads (of angels) in v. 10. (To these one might add the saints or holy ones of the Most High (vv. 18, 22, 25) and the people of the saints of the Most High (v. 27). These are sometimes taken as angels, sometimes as the people of God on earth.) Schaberg finds a roughly similar pattern to Daniel's in *1 Enoch* 14, where there is a throne vision which includes cherubim and holy ones, plus the Great Glory, but no Elect One or Son of man, only God's holy word, and in *1 Enoch* 71, where we find the Antecedent of Time (also called the Lord of the Spirits), the angel Michael, the sons of the holy angels and many other angels. Schaberg «found no certain pre-Christian association of the Spirit with one like a son of man. But the links between Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 11 lay the groundwork for that association, as does the mention of the Spirit in Dan 4:8-9. The inclusion of the Spirit in the triad may be a Christian innovation.»<sup>33</sup> The lack of a clear mention of the Spirit of God in the pre-Christian instances of this pattern weakens her case. On the other hand, there are in the texts an abundance of angels, flames, tongues of fire and holy ones. The peculiar move of Matthew in his triadic formula is to condense all of these diverse elements into a single figure which is then identified with the Spirit of God as found in the Old Testament. (In Isaiah we do find a Spirit which is one, the prophetic Spirit which rests upon the messiah (Isa 11:2; 61:1). Perhaps this usage has influenced Matthew's formula with the Spirit in the singular.) Matthew represents one stage beyond what we find in Rev 1:4-7: his God and Father, the seven spirits, Jesus Christ, and in Rev 5:6-7: the Lamb, the seven spirits, God.

<sup>29</sup> The most thorough early presentation of the case is found in W. Trilling, *Das wahre Israel* (SANT 10), Munich 1964<sup>3</sup>?, chap. 1, 21-51.

<sup>30</sup> B.J. Hubbard, *The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning* (SBLDS 19), Missoula 1974; J. Lange, *Das Erscheinen des Auferstandenen im Evangelium nach Matthäus* (FB 11), Würzburg 1973.

<sup>31</sup> Allison, *A New Moses*, 262-266.

<sup>32</sup> There are more such triads in Mark 13:32, Matt 13:36-43; John 1:51; Acts 1:6-11; 1 Thess 3:13; 4:13-18; 2 Thess 1:5-10; Rev 1:4-7; 5:6-7; 11:15-18. See Schaberg, *The Father*, 286.

<sup>33</sup> Schaberg, *The Father*, 287.

Summing up, we can say that scattered throughout the early strata of the New Testament there is a loose triadic pattern of Father, Son of man, angel(s), a pattern clearly derived from Daniel 7. Matthew then tightens this into a clear triadic formula at the end of his gospel, with explicit allusions to Daniel, but transforming the angel(s) reference to the holy Spirit. The Danielic theme of the subjection of the nations has been replaced by that of the making disciples of all nations. That the angel(s) have been transmuted into the holy Spirit suggests that here at least the Spirit is understood as a personal being (as in 1 Kgs 22.21).<sup>34</sup>

As a final step we may ask: what is the origin or ancient near eastern background of the Danielic pattern? Three such mythological backgrounds have been proposed: Iranian, Babylonian, and Canaanite. Understandably objections have been raised to the very idea of such a background.<sup>35</sup> Of the three backgrounds the Canaanite seems the most impressive, especially the cycle of myths found at Ugarit in 1929 associated with the god Baal. In the Canaanite pantheon there is a high god El, who is depicted as aged and relatively inactive, what scholars call a *deus otiosus*. Then there is the vigorous storm god Baal and his mortal enemy Yamm (sea, chaos, associated with death). Finally there is Baal's helper, the craftsman Kothar-wa-Hasis. In the story Yamm demands that El hand over Baal. Baal then does battle with Yamm and, with Kothar's help, kills him. During a pause in the fight, Kothar tells Baal:

Truly I say to you, O Prince Baal,  
I repeat [to you], A Rider of the clouds:  
Behold your enemy, Baal, behold,  
your enemy [Yamm] you will smite,  
behold, you will smite your foe.  
You will take your everlasting kingdom,  
your dominion forever and ever.<sup>36</sup>

The last stich is quite close to Dan 7:14, but dates from a thousand and more years before Daniel. Some of the other correspondences between the Canaanite poems and Daniel 7 may be mentioned. An entourage of clouds connotes divine status in ancient Israel, and is usually associated with a Yahweh theophany. Baal is often called Rider of the Clouds at Ugarit. El is called father of years, is described as aged, and acts as judge. In Daniel 7 he is referred to as the Ancient of Days, and executes judgment. In the Canaanite texts there are «sons of the Holy One» at the divine court. In Daniel they are called

<sup>34</sup> Schaberg, *The Father*, 327. Her final chapter contains several suggestions for a renewal of trinitarian systematic theology, as well as for Jewish-Christian dialogue.

<sup>35</sup> For a presentation of four objections and a response to each, see Collins, *Daniel*, 281-2.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted from Collins, *Daniel*, 287, who refers to CTA 2 (KTU 1.2). See now M. S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, Vol I (VTSup 55), Leiden 1994, 322, 336-337.

saints of the Most High. «No other material now extant provides as good an explanation of the configuration of imagery in Daniel's dream.»<sup>37</sup>

Yet there are some differences. In the myth there is one beast (Lotan or Litanu or Leviathan), in Daniel there are four, because Daniel accommodated the myth to the four kingdom scheme which has nothing to do with Ugarit. And in Daniel there is no battle in which Yamm is killed. Rather, the beast is executed in a judicial assembly.

The Son of man figure has been over the centuries understood as (1) a human being, usually the messiah, or (2) as a collective entity, the elect people of God, the saints of the Most High, or (3) a heavenly, transcendent, divine or angelic being. Collins prefers the third option, in this supported by the Ugaritic parallel, and sees the angelic Son of man as identical with Michael the archangel.<sup>38</sup> This last point seems to me improbable because in Dan 10:15-21 the Son of man seems to be quite distinct from Michael, who helps him in combat. On the main question, is the Son of man figure in Daniel a human messiah or a heavenly savior, I think a less sharp antithesis is appropriate. To be sure, the primary reference is clearly heavenly, since Daniel 7 provides a vision of the heavenly court. But the transcendent figure to whom all kingship is handed over by the Ancient of Days is precisely described as «one like a human being». Thus a textual basis is laid for an association between a heavenly divine or angelic savior figure and an earthly messianic human being. This association would become explicit in *1 Enoch* and the New Testament, as well as in much of later interpretation. So we see that major concepts of the Ugaritic myth of Baal enter the Hebrew scriptures in a stunning way in Daniel 7, just before the close of the Hebrew canon. (Perhaps their entrance was facilitated by Ps 89:6-8,20-30.) Yet in Daniel the one like a Son of man appears passive. He is given all power by the Ancient of Days. In this way the myth is both re-activated and tamed.

In the gospels the myth is transformed and realized. Jesus as the Son of man fights with death on the cross and is defeated. This shameful death breaks the mythic pattern. The cross makes the story real and historical. The resurrection of Jesus as lord represents his transhistorical, posthumous victory over death, a cosmic combat. The gospel version differs from Daniel's. In the gospels the Son of man has a name and a face, is active, engaged in mortal combat, and is only victorious in a metahistorical sense.

The paradox of the Hebrew Bible is that it closes in Daniel with two beliefs, the resurrection of the dead and a triad of divinities. These beliefs much of the Old Testament, especially the deuteronomistic redactors, has labored to expel. Should we then speak of the revenge of the myth at a time when polytheism was no longer considered a serious threat? Paganism, we have seen

<sup>37</sup> Collins, Daniel, 291.

<sup>38</sup> Collins, Daniel, 304-310.

(however sketchily), made its contribution to Israelite and Jewish religion both at the beginning and at the end of Hebrew biblical revelation. At this we may be scandalized. Or we may say that divine grace builds on human nature. It does not destroy nature, but purifies and elevates it.

Without some sympathy for apocalyptic thought, some of the Old Testament and almost all of the New becomes a closed book. Not for nothing has apocalyptic been called the mother of Christian theology. The Christian faith in the triune Godhead represents neither a return to unreconstructed paganism (thesis) nor a holding to a brittle unqualified monotheism such as may be found in some forms of Judaism and Islam (antithesis), but the triadic dialectical richness of Father, Son and Spirit in loving relation (synthesis).<sup>39</sup> The theology of the Nicene Creed, despite the use of some philosophical terminology, does not mean an abandonment of biblical faith in favor of Greek metaphysics, but rather attempts to provide a coherent, unified field theory of the complex and diverse biblical data.<sup>40</sup> This article has only presented a selection of the data which underwent the Christian mutation.

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<sup>39</sup> W.R. Schoedel, «A Neglected Motive for Second-Century Trinitarianism», *JTS* n.s. 31, 1980, 356-367: apologists like Athenagoras argued that Christianity was a virtuous mean between extremes: Judaism and pagan polytheism.

<sup>40</sup> N. Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles' Creed*, Notre Dame 1994; J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, London/San Francisco 1981; Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, New York 1992; H. Gunkel, *The Influence of the Holy Spirit*, Philadelphia 1979; S. Coakley, «Why Three? Some Further Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity», in S. Coakley and D. Pailin, ed., *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, Oxford 1993; D. Tracy, «The Paradox of the Many Faces of God in Mono-Theism», in his *On Naming the Present*, Maryknoll NY 1994, 27-35; and *Concilium*, vol. 177: Monotheism.