

People To Reach With Purity Of Speech

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INTRODUCTION

Alexander Campbell wrote an article entitled *Purity of Speech* (Campbell 1983:312). It proposes a means for reconciling Christians worldwide. Mr. Campbell did not write, however, that the application of his proposal would also make a way through the greatest theological barrier between Christians and Muslims – the doctrine of the Trinity.

Having proved for the speculative reader that speaking the same things might not merely be the effect of uniform thinking but also the cause of it, Mr. Campbell turns to the practical mind and asserts that speaking the same things is the only way to unite all divisions among Christians. He goes on to state that Christians will never speak the same things as long as they continue to:

- Employ terminology not found in the Bible.
- Ignore terminology found in the Bible.
- Transpose scriptural terms by removing them from their proper context (Campbell 1983).^[1]

Later he applies the principles of pure speech to one of the most important and divisive issues in all of Christian history -- the relation between Jesus Christ and his Father -- and shows how it would be impossible to perpetuate the divisions with strict adherence to these principles.

This article takes up where Campbell left off. With perhaps more exegetical support, it reveals how discussion about the relation between Jesus and God is often contaminated. It shows and how a pure speech would encourage meaningful dialogue between thoughtful Muslims and Christians.

EMPLOY ONLY BIBLICAL TERMINOLOGY

Terms like “Trinity,” “God the Son,” and “God incarnate” have only lead to unnecessary confusion. Muslims are confused because Christians claim that Jesus is God and the Son of God at the same time. The confusion is unnecessary because the proposition “Jesus is God” is not expressed in the Bible nor can it be justly inferred if "God" is to be understood in its common English usage.

θεος and God

Murray J. Harris, in *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus*, speaks to this issue in several ways. First, though he favors the majority of the English rendering for John 1:1 “The Word was God”, he qualifies his choice. Harris points out how closely the scholars who defend this translation paraphrase John 1:1. He concludes:

From this sample of paraphrases it is clear that in the translation “the Word was God” the term “God” is being used to denote his nature or essence and not his person. But in normal English usage “God” is a proper noun, referring to the person of the Father or corporately to the three persons of the Godhead. Moreover, “the Word was God” suggests that “the Word” and “God” are convertible terms, that the proposition is reciprocating. But the Word is neither the Father nor the Trinity. Therefore few will doubt that this time-honored translation needs careful exegesis, since it places a distinctive sense upon a common English word (Harris:68-69).

Secondly, Harris tells us of the limitations to the use of θεος in reference to Jesus Christ. Says he:

The application to Christ of the title θεος is exceedingly rare -- only seven certain, very probable, or probable instances out of a total of 1,315 NT uses of θεος....In the seven instances in which θεος refers to Jesus, the usage is usually (Rom. 9:5 being the only exception) accompanied by a statement in the immediate context that makes an explicit personal distinction between the Son and God the Father.^[21] That is, there is a remarkable Juxtaposition of statements that imply the substantial oneness of Son and Father

and statements that express a personal distinction between them (Harris 274-275).

Lastly, Harris speaks directly to the point in a section titled, “Jesus Is God as a theological formulation in English”. He writes:

Nowhere in the NT do we read that “Ο Ιησους εστιν θεος(O θεος)”... Certainly, if we use this proposition frequently and without qualification, we are neglecting the general NT reservation of the term θεος as a virtual proper name referring to the Father....Another possible difficulty about the unqualified assertion “Jesus is God” is linguistic. Probably under the influence of biblical usage, the word “God” in English is used principally as a proper noun identifying a person, not as a common noun designating a class...the “person” identified is generally the God of the Judeo-Christian monotheistic tradition, or God the Father of Jesus and of the Christian, or the Godhead (as traditionally understood in Christian theology to refer to three persons subsisting in one essence). Since, then, the word “God” may be used only to identify, not to describe, it cannot be used predicatively without suggesting equivalence or numerical identity but Jesus is neither the Father nor the Trinity. Unlike Greek (which has articular and anarticular states of the noun), English has no way of modifying a noun so that inherent qualities are emphasized; this is the difficulty with translating θεος ην ο λογος in John 1:1 by “the Word was God”...it is necessary to recognize that the meaning attached to “God” in this case, viz., “one who is by nature divine” is exceptional (Harris:296-297).^[3]

New Testament Diction and New Testament Thought

Harris has demonstrated conclusively that the proposition “Jesus is God” is not pure NT terminology. Nevertheless, he writes:

...before “Jesus is God” may be inferred from “the Word was God” one must assume or establish that in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel the Word is Jesus and that an ontological statement about a divine person is a timeless affirmation. That is, the theological proposition “Jesus is God” introduces an element of systematization which, although true to NT thought, goes beyond actual NT diction (Harris:298).

Unlike Harris, Campbell would mistrust such “systematization”, especially when it is required as a condition for Christian fellowship. What goes beyond actual NT diction, may very likely go beyond NT thought (Campbell 1980:103). In order to infer that “Jesus is God” (which is not NT

diction and would be removed from one's speech under Campbell's plea) one must establish that "the Word (in Jn 1:1) is Jesus" (another phrase not found in the NT).

In the beginning was...Jesus?

In order to establish that the "Word" of John 1:1 is Jesus, one must add the concept "person" to the term "Word" in John 1:1. Harris cites three scholars who hold that "the Word" was not interchangeable with Jesus of Nazareth, and that the "Word" was impersonal (Harris:58).^[4] He then takes the opposing view and states that the identification of the "Word" and Jesus of Nazareth is a necessary inference though he admits it is not explicitly stated as such. "For," Harris says, "[John] 1:18 makes the same three affirmations of Jesus Christ as 1:1 does of the Logos (viz, timeless existence, intimate relationship with God, and participation in deity) and the themes of the Prologue are developed in the body of the Gospel in reference to Jesus of Nazareth" (Harris:58-59). Let us consider John 1:18. "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is [emphasis mine]at the Father's side, has made him known" (Jn 1:18). One can see the Son's divinity and *present* intimate relationship with the Father as opposed to the word's *past* intimate relationship with the Father. Yet one searches in vain for Jesus' so called timeless existence in this verse. It is not there because the subject is not about the "word" as it was in the beginning with God. Rather, v. 18 is about the "divine Word" which, according to John 1:14 "became flesh" (a human person). He (the divine-word-having-become-flesh) was born in a specific time and place and for that reason is called, "the only Son who is divine" (Jn 1-18, translation mine)^[5] Harris adds that the "word" in the rest of the prologue is portrayed as personal (Harris:68-69). This is true, not, however, because the "word" was personal in the beginning with God, but because in the rest of the prologue the reference is from the standpoint of the word-having-become-flesh (see vv. 3-5,10-12) that is, of course, a human person.

With the exception of anthropomorphism as a literary device, the semantic component "person" is simply not included in the Bible's references to the "Wisdom of God" or "Power of God" (or any other divine attribute). In the same way, one should not make a person out of "the Word" in John 1:1. Simply put, one has no reason, according to the laws of language, to think that "the divine Word" was a person until one reads (in Jn 1:14) that it becomes a person. The Christology of the Prologue is defined in three stages. In John 1:1, one finds that from eternity the Word (the principle of thought and communication) was with God. It is divine; that is to say that God can express Himself. In verse 14 there is a marvelous advance. This "Word" from God "became flesh" (human). We find out that the glory of this event is like that of an only son from the father. In verse 18 the definition of Christ, the Son of God is completed. "The Word" is no longer mentioned because now it has become a human person. The term "Father" is now used for "God" and "Son" is employed for the "Word" which "became flesh". Though no one has ever seen God, one can still get to know Him because "the only Son who is divine has made Him known" (translation mine). God spoke to us of Himself. His word became human (a kind of translation) so we can understand Him. Jesus is that human, born with the characteristics of God Himself. It is in this sense that Jesus is God's Son.

The prologue in John carefully defines the meaning of "Son of God" for the rest of the book. The order is important. One must not read backwards and define "Word" by the "Son" passages

in John and thus unnaturally tack on the semantic component of personhood to the “Word” in John 1:1. Therefore it is not right to take passages such as John 17:5 and claim that Jesus was the word and so the Word was personal in the beginning with God. “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” (Jn 17:5). In this passage, and others like it, the Son (the Word as a person) must use personal pronouns because *he* is now a person. Jesus (the word made flesh) longs to be with the Father like *he*^[6] (the word) was before the incarnation. This is clearly another state -- that which had been carefully explained in the John’s Prologue.^[7]

The impersonal divine nature of the “Word” is taught explicitly in 1 John 1:1-4:

That which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched -- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 Jn 1:1-4)

Here, the neuter pronoun “that which” is used even though it refers to the masculine “Word of life”. The same author, speaking explicitly of the same subject goes out of his way to demonstrate that the *impersonal* “word of life”, which (not “whom”) was from the beginning with the Father, *appeared* to the apostles. That is, “the word became flesh” -- Jesus Christ, the Son who gives certain knowledge of the Father. It cannot be fairly proven that the “Word” in John 1:1 is Jesus and therefore the phrase “Jesus is God” is not a just systematization of NT thought unless “God” be understood in a rare sense for the English language.

If Christians employed only that terminology found in the Bible *as* it is found there according to normal language use, the terms “Jesus is God”, “Trinity”, “God incarnate”, “God the Son”, etc. would not be a stumbling block for Muslims who are presently the biggest evangelistic challenge for the holy ones of Christ.

IGNORE NO BIBLICAL TERMINOLOGY

A favorite hymn of the Anglophone Christian community is Charles Wesley’s *And Can It Be*. The chorus has been sung countless times to the Lord Jesus Christ:

Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou my God, should die for me?

How can such a chorus be written and sung by monotheistic people who believe Jesus and God to be different persons? The answer is this: Christians use the word “God” ambiguously. Most of the time it is used as a proper noun for the person whom Jesus called “Father”. It is sometimes used as an adjective to describe something of Jesus’ nature.

The unawareness of this ambiguity accounts for some of the problems in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Consider this real correspondence between two Christians. In it, the senses of "God" according the participants are labeled. The number in parenthesis is a label for the location in the text. The superscript letter on the left of the word "God" represents the sense Muslims give to the term. The superscript letter on the right represents the sense Christians give to it. The letter "p" represents the use of "God" as a proper noun -- identifying a person. The letter "a" represents the use of "God" as an adjective describing inherent qualities. The Brackets identify the participant. [M] stands for Muslim. [C1] represents the first Christian correspondent and [C2] for the second Christian correspondent.

My name is _____ and I am a missionary "wannabe". (1) God^p has opened the door for me to get signed on to a Muslim mailing list and be invited to defend the Gospel. I'm apologetically minded, but I'm having great difficulty explaining the Trinity to them. I knew this would happen around the Trinity, so I was trying to avoid it, but it's what they are most eager to attack. Their arguments generally run something like this: (2) [Muslim] Jesus is ^pGod^a?

[Christian] Yes

[M] Jesus is circumcised?

[C] Yes

(3) [M] The discarded foreskin is a piece of ^pGod^p

[C] No

[M] If Jesus had to fall on his face and beg and plead to ^pGod^p, how could he be (5) ^pGod^a?

[C2] Well...(6) God^a is:

[Diagram #1]

Note that the first Christian correspondent is unaware of the subtle semantic-grammatical changes in his use of the word "God" between #s 1&2, 2&3, 4&5. If he were conscious of them, he would see no difficulty in responding to the questions posed by his Muslim correspondents. If the Muslim correspondents were conscious of the ambiguity, they would see no contradiction

of reason on this point and consequently move on to the next relevant thesis. The second Christian correspondent attempted to clarify the teachings of the “Trinity”. He creates the ideal environment in which there is no ambiguity. But in the real world, most people, both Christian and Muslim, know that the top person of the diagram is most often called “God”. Perhaps the following diagram is a more accurate illustration of Christian speech *as it actually occurs* with the Muslim and Christian understanding of these Christian terms:

[Diagram #2]

God and divinity

In the face of this ambiguity and the problem it poses when communicating with Muslims, it behooves the Christian community to clarify the terms. I propose that we should continue to use “God” as a proper name when referring to the one Jesus called “Father”; we should use “divine” when referring to what is “of God” or “from above”.

Now for the point of this section: the major English translations have perpetuated this ambiguity by not making a word level distinction between the concepts of $\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ as a generic title and $\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ as a proper noun.^[8] The problem is not that of exegetical differences. Most Evangelical scholars would agree with Milligan and Moulton regarding the second $\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ of John 1:18 that “[the Son] is himself divine, not in a metaphorical sense, but possessing all the attributes of true and real divinity” (Harris:101). The difficulty lay in principles of translation and communication. For example, F.C. Burkitt paraphrases Thomas’s testimony of John 20:28 this way: “It is Jesus Himself, and now I recognize Him as divine” (Harris:101). Murray Harris calls this paraphrase “diluted” preferring the translation “my God” which he considers more forceful. Yet in his own discussion of the meaning of $\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ in this verse, he says:

Clearly, then, $\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ is a title, not a proper name...As used by a monotheistic Jew in reference to a person who was demonstrably human $\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ will denote oneness with the Father in being...In other words, Thomas’s cry expresses the substantial divinity of Jesus. Thomas has penetrated beyond the...appearance of the risen Jesus - - to its implication, viz., the deity of Christ. (Harris:101)

Is this not what Burkitt said in his paraphrase? Notice that Harris uses Burkitt's term which he claimed lacked force. Why? Because Harris must remove the ambiguity between the "God^p" and the "God^a" of his own preferred translation before he can explain Thomas's meaning clearly. Regardless of what Harris overtly says about "divine" being a "diluted" sense, he intuitively and unconsciously shows that clarity is more important than force in communication and translation.^[9] The true meaning is not lost in the major English translations. For the immediate context always forces the careful reader to distinguish the two current senses of the English word "God". Yet the rendering of "divine" would not merely be consistent with the meaning as shown by the immediate context but would also communicate clearly the distinction for those readers who are not so careful!

If translators would use the English word "divine" in the aforementioned passages and others like them, Christians who dialogue with Muslims would have a tool that would bring a real advance in their communication. The term "divine", in certain contexts, is the best English translation of θεος. It should not be ignored!

PRESERVE BIBLICAL TERMS IN THEIR PROPER CONTEXT

One cannot overstate the importance of Campbell's third principle of pure speech. Language as a whole or in any of its parts exists in context from which comes its meaning. If it is removed from its proper context, the meaning is altered. There are many different levels of context all of which effect the meaning of a given text. Two of these levels will be considered along with scripture relevant to the relation between Jesus and God. In each of these examples, I will point out how Christians may use scriptural terms but change their meanings by changing their contexts. The result of this transposing is that Muslims may rightly charge Christians with unintentional polytheism. This error can be avoided with pure speech.

The Immediate Context and the Genre of a Semantic Paragraph

It is said that Phil. 2:6-7 refers to Jesus in his "pre-existent state" as "the second person of the Trinity" or the "Eternal Son". The words "Eternal" and "Son" are clearly scriptural terms but they are never found together in the Bible. Each term has been removed from its own context, combined with the other term, and surrounded with a new context of the theologian's own making. Not only are these terms not found in Philippians, but the concept as well is foreign to it. Many interpreters fail to use the immediate context in choosing the proper genre of the semantic paragraph. Instead, another semantic genre is superimposed and the message is skewed. Commentators often ascribe a focus of time and space when explaining this passage. They say things like, "This passage bears reference to the pre-human existence of Jesus Christ 'with' the father". Yet, one searches the grammatical structure in vain for time-space sequence markers. Many readers superimpose a faulty reading of John 1 on Phil. 2:6-7 rather than use the immediate context and its surface grammatical structure to correctly define the genre of Phil. 2:1-11 itself.

Benefiting from the findings of cognitive science and especially from the contributions of George Lakoff, John C. Tuggy has given an interpretive tool that is rooted in innate human cognitive processes. He calls this tool, “Semantic Paragraph Patterns” and defines it as, “a set of semantic structures which communicators use to organize messages in a way that will accomplish the purpose of communication” (Tuggy 1992:46). He gives several cognitive processes that intersect into particular semantic paragraph patterns. One such process is, “the communicator’s intended effect on the audience”. There are three basic effects, one of which is intended in every communication: (1) to effect behavior (2) to effect ideas (3) to effect emotions. Another cognitive process is the “time and space sequentiality cognition”. There are two choices: (1) without temporal-spatial focus (2) with temporal-spatial focus. The third cognitive process is called, “deductive perception”. There are three perceptions: (1) solutionality (2) causality and (3) volitionality. Characteristic semantic paragraph patterns are located at each point where the cognitive processes intersect. Tuggy says:

These categorizations and patterns are not presented as water-tight concepts, but rather as prototypical concepts. There are fuzzy areas, extensions, and maybe gradations. However, with this view of semantic paragraph, we have a solid starting point. Since these patterns are grounded on our human cognitive ability, we conclude that they are basic to human communication and its interpretation (Tuggy:66).

Consider Phil. 2:5-11 with semantic paragraph patterns in mind. The discipline that such a tool provides helps to expose unconscious assumptions we may bring to the text. This text is embedded within a larger hortatory semantic paragraph pattern (a detailed discussion of how the two hortatory semantic paragraphs vv. 1-4 and vv 5-11, link to form one large one vv. 1-11 is beyond the scope of this paper).

5τουτο φρονειτε εν υμιν ο και εν Χριστω Ιησου 6 εως εν μορφη θεου υπαρχων 7 ο υχ αρπαγμα ο ηγησατο το ειναι ισα θεω 8 αλλα εαυτον εκενωσεν 9 μορφην δουλου λαβων εν ομοιωματι ανθρωπων γενομενος και σχηματι ευρεθεις ως 10 ανθρωπος 11 εταπεινωσεν εαυτον γενομενος υπηκοος μεχρι θανατου θανατου δε στα υρου 12 εδιο και ο θεος αυτον υπερυψωσεν και 13 εχαρισατο αυτω το ονομα το υπερ παν ονομα 14 ενα εν τω ονοματι Ιησου παν γονυ καμψη επουρανιων και 15 επιγειων και 16 καταχθονιων 17 και πασα γλωσσα εξομολογησεται οτι κυριος 18 Ιησους Χριστος ος εις δοξαν θεου πατρος

The text underlined=Appeal

The text not underlined=Basis

Verbs = bold print

Phil. 2:5-11 is an appeal-basis hortatory semantic paragraph. It is intended to effect behavior; it lacks time-space sequentiality; it has causality. Note the imperative verb that characterizes the appeal in v. 5 and the indicative aorist verbs marking the basis in vv. 6-11. There is no overt grammatical marker between the basis and appeal that suggests causality. It is implied from its relation to the larger hortatory paragraph (vv. 1-11). More precisely, it coheres with “the

heaven to Earth. The proof of the asyndeton's existence will be seen as the sentence boundaries are defined later.

6 ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπαρχῶν οὐχ ἀρπαγμον ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἰσα θεῷ Ἐ7 Ἐλλά] εαυτ
ὸν ἐκενώσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν ἐν ὁμοιωματι ἀνθρώπων γενομένος καὶ σχηματι εὐ
ρεθεις ὡς ἀνθρώπος Ἐ8 Ἐταπεινώσεν εαυτὸν γενομένος ὑπηκοὸς μεχρὶ θανάτου θάνατο
υ δε σταυρου

The text underline with a single line=Sentence #1

The text with no single underline=Sentence #2

The bold text=Active participial phrases

Words with dotted underline=Passive or Middle participles

The words that are double underlined=Aorist active verbs

[The word in brackets]=Contrastive conjunction

The boundaries of the sentences are evident. The first sentence (v. 6-7λαβὼν) is a contrastive parallelism manifested by a contrastive conjunction between two independent clauses. It starts by an active participial phrase that includes a prepositional phrase denoting deity and ends with, omitting “ἐν”, the same structure denoting servant hood. One must not assume that “servant hood” here means a loss of deity or greatness. Jesus himself teaches that servant hood is, rather, a test of greatness; “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mk. 9:35). God, the Father of our Lord Jesus seems to agree according to Phil. 2:9-11. The second sentence (v. 7ἐν-8) is distinguished from the first by it's passive and middle participles, it's own aorist active verb, and a change of focus from divinity to humanity. The punctuation is omitted so that the text could be examined purely by it's own grammatical structure.

Phil. 2:6-11 will fit beautifully in the total context of Jesus physical presence in Israel two millennia ago. In John 13:1-11 we find the Jesus of Phil. 2 “who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God [divinity] as something to be exploited but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave (NRSV). Jesus did this while in Jerusalem! We also learn from John 13 that, “The Father had put all things under his [Jesus'] power” (Jn 13:3). This phrase echoes the God of Phil 2 who, “exulted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name”. The Father did this, according to John before Jesus ascended or even died! In John 12:20-28, we see the Jesus of Phil 2 who, “being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross!” One must not assume that “obedience to death” means a loss of divinity for Jesus. He was “obedient to death” in Gathsemene before he died. Moreover the death of the word-made-flesh (Jesus) is part of what God wanted to say -- a portion of His speech. Jesus is simultaneously divine and human.

Therefore Phil 2:6 does not necessarily speak of the “personal pre-existence” of Jesus. It is not in an expository or a narrative paragraph. It is in a descriptive one. It is about Jesus' attitude and God's response. This third principle of pure speech is a safe-guard against juxtaposing Biblical terms which must result in a loss of Biblical meaning.

The Remote Context

Jane Schaberg, as she begins her dissertation on Matthew 28:19b, warns us of some complications that enter the discussion. One complication arises when one assumes that unity implies equality as some do when this verse is read “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30). This complication is understood and resolved when one is careful enough to look at the near context “The Father is greater than I” (Jn 14:28) and realize that, “Unity may be considered by some NT writers quite apart from the question of equality (Schaberg 1982:8). Another complication arises when one assumes that there was “an awareness on the part of the NT writers of the ‘problem’ of the relation of Jesus, God and Spirit” (Schaberg:8). Schaberg answers this complication by writing:

The flexibility of Jewish monotheism in the Greco-Roman period, however, indicates that we are in danger of formulating the ‘problem’ anachronistically. Furthermore, attempts to read NT material in terms of answers to such a problem may result in blocking our perceptions of more authentic origins of the material (Schaberg:8)

It then behooves the Christian to read the scriptures with regard to it’s own context. Consider Schaberg’s work of exposing for us the remote context of Matt. 28:19b.

Schaberg begins by classifying texts and defining terms. “Triadic” texts are those texts in which the figures of God, Jesus, and Spirit appear coordinately under whatever title. “Trinitarian” texts are those in which, it is said, one can detect personality of the “Spirit” therein and an indication of unity. It is said that these texts may have laid a foundation for the development of TRINITARIAN text -- not at all part of Biblical material. TRINITARIAN texts are often formed with philosophical terms not found in the NT and explicitly proclaim a tri-personal co-equal God (Schaberg 1982).

Schaberg, after rejecting the theory that triadic texts have slowly evolved from monadic ones and that Matt. 28:19b is a later insertion by Gentiles, explains the text’s origin as follows:

It is possible that a Jewish formula or thought pattern lies behind Matt. 28:19b, as behind several of the other Trinitarian and triadic texts...the pressure of a triadic Jewish pattern, along with the pressures of reflection on the “new life” of Jesus, would make it more likely that a Christian liturgical or blessing formula could take triadic form quickly and even at a comparatively pre-reflective stage. This would not require one to assume, as Kelly does, that the “conception of the threefold manifestation of the Godhead was embedded deeply in Christian thinking from the start”...One would assume, rather, that some other meaning and significance was intended and more obvious to the early framers of the tradition.

The triad of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit very likely is a development of the Danielic triad [Daniel 7], Ancient of Days, one like a son of man and angels. The particular titles in Matt. 28:19b are found together elsewhere in the NT only in Luke 10:21-22 (cf. Jn 3:34-35), which may also be an allusion to Dan. 7:14 LXX...Rev. 1:4-5 blesses the seven churches in epistolary style with grace and peace “from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead and the ruler of kings on Earth. Luke 9:26 speaks of the Son of Man coming “in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels (Schaberg:322).

Schaberg develops her proposal saying that the triadic phrase is a “shorthand for the eschatological theophony” of Dan. 7. According to Schaberg, the phrase brought the image of the heavenly court for those who were acquainted with the symbolic connection between the mountain and the throne. The Son has been presented at the throne of the Father. “Both the power of the heavenly world and the power that brings one into the heavenly world may be captured in the phrase ‘the Holy Spirit’”. She cannot determine whether the angels or the impersonal ἐξουσία (supernatural power) of Dan. 7 is symbolized as “the Holy Spirit”, though she leans toward the latter view. The answer to this question helps one to determine if this text may or may not be considered “Trinitarian” (Schaberg 1982).

Finally Dr. Schaberg classifies the triadic phrase:

While I do not find Matthew’s understanding of the triadic phrase in 28:19b to be “Trinitarian” in the sense in which I have defined this term, I can safely say that Matthew’s conception of God and of the Holy Spirit is centered in the revelation of and by Jesus of Nazareth. The conception of Jesus in this Gospel, on the other hand, is centered in the belief that his source and destiny are one: in God and through the Holy Spirit (Schaberg:322).

The OT and inter-testamental literature is an important source for discovering the remote context of a NT passage. Schaberg’s work is a good example of someone considering the remote context of Matt. 28:19b which influences the thoughts of its original readers. For many Christians who work among Muslims the triadic phrase is seen only through the anachronistic lense of a third century problem. It is evident how the principles of pure speech -- in particular, a consideration of the remote context -- would break down some of the barrier against productive Muslim-Christian communication.

PURE SPEECH AMONG MUSLIMS

An exhaustive treatment of all the texts that may be brought to bear on the relation between Jesus and God has not been attempted. Yet, Campbell's principles have been given as hints toward

correcting all the kinds of interpretive errors on this issue. Now the principles of pure speech shall be applied to teaching the Jesus way among Muslims. The doctrine of the Trinity may be the greatest theological barrier between Christians and Muslims. It is not taught explicitly in the scriptures. It is explicitly condemned in the Qur'an (Surah 5:73). This situation poses no problem for the Christian who adheres strictly to the principles of pure speech. He must cast off the language of Trinitarian theology. He must use the terminology of Jesus and the twelve. Once committed to pure speech, the Christian will find that he can present the Good News of Jesus without requiring the Muslim to change his or her concept of God's unity.

Consider, for example, the Muslim view of the relation between the Qur'an and Allah and the strict Biblical teaching of the relation between the Word and God. The term Qur'an is Arabic for "utterance". It is not unlike the Greek "λογος" for "word" or "speech". Just as "the Word was with God" (Jn 1:1), so also, it is said, that the Qur'an was with Allah. For Surah 27:6 says, "As to thee, the Qur'an is bestowed upon thee from the presence of One who is Wise and all-Knowing". Muslims believe that the Qur'an is divine because it is said to have come from Allah. John states, "the word was divine" (my translation) for the same reason. Christians who adhere strictly to pure speech may not insert personality to the word at this point; it is a divine attribute like the Qur'an is said to be for Muslims. The Christian of pure speech, therefore, does not contradict the Islamic understanding of Allah's unity. Both Muslim and Christians with purity of speech understand God to be one person with many attributes.

Now concerning Jesus, John says, "The Word was made flesh". Allah is said to have said, "Verily, We have made this Qur'an easy, in thy tongue, in order that they may give heed" (Surah 44:58). Are not both instances some kind of divine accommodation for communicating well with human beings? One is a human person (Jesus) who speaks a language (Aramaic).^[10] The other is a language (Arabic) spoken by a human person (Mohammed). Both then, are said to be divine revelation, albeit of differing forms. The idea of a personal incarnation is not outside of Islamic thought. In Surah 19:17 Allah is said to have sent an Angel to Mary and "he appeared before her as a man in all respects". In Surah 2:117 it reads, "To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: when He decreeth a matter, He saith to it 'be' and it is". The incarnation of the word neither violates the Islamic doctrine of unity nor is it inconceivable within the Qur'anic worldview.

If Alexander Campbell's principles have been applied fairly to this issue, a way of breaking down the great theological barrier is at hand. Perhaps now one can, with Biblical accuracy, explain to Muslims the relation between Jesus and God without a hint of Trinitarianism. Christians may explain the relation between Jesus and God by comparing it with the Islamic view of the relation between the Qur'an and Allah. For the relations are of the same kind. Both Jesus and the Qur'an are said to be divine (from God) but neither is God. To obey Jesus is to obey God. To disobey the Qur'an is, according to Muslims, to disobey Allah.

The Christian expression "Son of God" is a grave offense for Muslims. Surah 19:35 says, "It is not fitting to the majesty of Allah that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him! When He determines a matter, He only says to it 'be' and it is". Yet, the term "Son" is irreplaceable for those who would be pure in NT speech. How does one communicate to Muslims the relation between Jesus and God in these terms? Again one may use a concept already contained in the

Qur'an and which bears the same relation -- the "Mother of the book" (Surahs 3:7, 13:39, and 43:3-4). The last reference reads, "We have made it a Qur'an in Arabic that ye may be able to understand and learn wisdom. And verily, it is the Mother of the book, in Our presence, high in dignity, full of wisdom". 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali makes the following comment on this verse:

The Mother of the Book, the Foundation of Revelation, the Preserved Tablet, is the core or essence of Revelation, the original principle or fountainhead of Allah's Eternal and Universal Law. From this fountainhead are derived all streams of knowledge and wisdom, that flows through time and feed the intelligence of created minds. The Mother of the Book is in Allah's own presence, and its dignity and wisdom are more than all we can think of in the spiritual world (Abdullah 1992:1264).

There seems to be a triad here of Allah, the Mother of the Book, and the Qur'an. An implication of the idea, "Mother of the Book in Our [Allah's] presence" is that Allah himself is the Father of the Book. He is its source. In this sense it can be said that Allah has a "child" -- the Qur'an. This does not mean, of course, that Allah performed a sexual act and begat a book for a son. It merely means that the Qur'an is said to be from Allah; it is divine. In the same way, the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of Jesus are not at all a result of sexual relations between God and Mary. It means simply that Jesus is from God; Jesus is divine. The Bible and the Qur'an agree on the way Jesus was conceived. The angel says to Mary in Luke, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (1:35). Surah 21:91 says, "And remember her who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and we made her and her son a sign for all peoples". Both take the Spirit of God to mean His power -- His spoken command acting. The word that was with God in the beginning became flesh (a human person). So He willed; so it was! It profanes no Islamic ideal. It is in that sense that Jesus is the Son of God.

CONCLUSION

The plea for a pure speech is not something about which Christians who hold the divine authority of the Bible can rightly disagree. For what believer would intentionally choose their own terms over those sanctioned by Him who is True? Is there any follower who purposely ignores words authorized by the chief Shepherd? How can any holy one deliberately rip out of context teaching ordained by God? Therefore, it is assumed that once these principles are presented and considered there will be agreement on them.

Friend of truth, apply these principles more rigorously than ever. Theologies may, for now, differ, but what does that matter? No true doctrine can be threatened by using *only* Bible terms in their Biblical contexts. There is nothing to fear, only tainted speech to lose, and a mighty barrier, which cuts off a billion people from seriously considering God's Good News, to cross. Grace to you. And to the wise God be glory through Jesus Christ! Amen.

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NOTES

^[1] These principles assume that the best cultural-linguistic research has already been applied to the Biblical text in the original language and that the translation in the receptor language be as faithful as possible for that generation.

^[2] Unlike Harris but with KJV, LB, PME, RSV, TEV, NEB, this author understands "θεος" to refer to the Father in Romans 9:5. So, it is very significant that Harris notes it as the only exception to an important NT distinction.

^[3] I render John 1:1, “The word was divine” thus avoiding the confusion in English. I also believe “the word” to be impersonal. Therefore, I would correct Harris’ conclusion. What is often translated “God” in this case means “**that** which is by nature divine”.

^[4] J.A.T. Robinson, Schoonenburg, and Dunn are the scholars cited.

^[5] The anarticlar θεος signifies divine essence.

^[6] Here, the problem is illustrated in my text. “He” denotes person but I must use an impersonal pronoun. Yet it does not accord in gender with “Jesus”. The incarnation of the word is a unique event. The English language has no pronoun one can use to refer to oneself as a pre-person.

^[7] Jesus knows of that other state, perhaps not because he as himself remembered it, but because he as a person may have learned it from the Father (see Jn 5:20). This is speculation, however. I employ it only to show that Jesus’ statement need not be from memory and would not therefore prove personal pre-existence.

^[8] A distinction in the Greek is often made at the noun phrase level with the article. In these cases the distinction should be made at the same level or closest one possible. When this distinction lies in the immediate context only (as in Jn 20:28) a word level distinction in English is still advised to avoid confusion.

^[9] I see no reason why one cannot have both clarity and force. What may be lacking connotatively may be added graphically with bold print.

^[10] The divine word becomes a human person, not a divine person. This is how the divinity of Jesus is maintained while admitting only one divine person from all eternity -- God.

All English Biblical References are from the NIV unless otherwise noted

All Greek New Testament References are from the Third Edition of the UBS text edited by Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren.

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