

# "JEHOVAH-WITNESS TEACHING ON THE PERSON OF CHRIST"

by  
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Appendix D  
from  
*The Four Major Cults*  
(William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963)

In the preceding chapter the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses about the person of Christ have been set forth. In this appendix these teachings will be critically evaluated. It is important that we do this, since the confession of the full deity of Jesus Christ and of His equality with God the Father has always been one of the distinguishing marks of Christianity.

## A REVIVAL OF ARIANISM

A bit of historical orientation will first be in order. Essentially, the Jehovah-Witness view of the person of Christ is a revival of the Arian heresy of the fourth century A.D. Arius (who lived from approximately A.D. 280 to 336) and his followers (called Arians) taught that the Son, whom they also called the Logos or Word, had a beginning, that the term *beget* when applied to the generation of the Son meant to *make*, and that therefore the Son was not of the same substance as the Father but was a creature who had been called into existence by the Father.<sup>1</sup> The Arians taught that there was a time when God was alone and was not yet a Father.<sup>2</sup> Arius went on to ascribe to Christ only a subordinate, secondary, created divinity.<sup>3</sup> He asserted that such titles as *God* or *Son of God* when applied to Christ were mere courtesy titles: "'Even if He is called God,' wrote Arius, 'He is not God truly, but by participation in grace. . . . He too is called God in name only.'"<sup>4</sup> Up to this point, there is virtual identity between the teachings of Arius and those of present-day Jehovah's Witnesses on the person of Christ.

It should be borne in mind, however, that there are also differences between Arian teachings and those of the Watchtower. Among these differences the following may be mentioned: Arius and the Arians taught that Christ, the created being through whom God made the world, did in the course of time assume a human body, though this was a human body without a rational soul.<sup>5</sup> Thus Arius would not agree with Jehovah's Witnesses that Christ, who was a created angel, became a mere man and ceased to be an angel while he was on earth. Arius held that Christ continued to be the Logos during his stay on earth but assumed a human body and directed its activities; the Logos thus took the place of the human soul in the being which resulted from this union. Arius would therefore repudiate the discontinuity between Christ's pre-human and human stages which is implicit in Jehovah-Witness Christology. Further, Arius did not deny the personality of the Holy

1 J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam & Chas. Black, 1958), pp. 227-28.

2 Reinhold Seeberg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, trans. Chas. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), I, 203.

3 D. S. Schaff, "Arianism," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprinted 1960), I, 281.

4 Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 229. The quotation is from Athanasius' *Contra Arianos*, I, 6.

5 Kelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 281, 283.

Spirit. He taught that the Holy Spirit was an "hypostasis" or person, but that his essence was utterly unlike that of the Son. The later Arians amplified this thought so as to teach that the Holy Spirit was the noblest of the creatures produced by the Son at the Father's bidding.<sup>6</sup> While denying the deity of the Holy Spirit, therefore, the Arians did not deny His personality, as Jehovah's Witnesses do.<sup>7</sup>

On the basic question, however, of the equality of the Son to the Father, the Witnesses take the Arian position: the Son is not equal to the Father but was created by the Father at a point in time. As is well known, the church rejected the Arian position at the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. The Nicene Creed, drafted by this council and accepted universally by Christians today, made the following affirmation about the deity of Christ:

We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father . . . begotten not made, of one substance with the Father. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Specifically directed against the Arians was the closing statement:

But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, Before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is from a different . . . substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change -- these the Catholic [that is, universal] Church anathematizes.<sup>9</sup>

By assuming once again the Arian position on the person of Christ, Jehovah's Witnesses have separated themselves from historic Christianity. Since the Watchtower Christology is essentially Arian, it may be noted that one finds in the writings of Athanasius (295-373 A.D.), the arch-enemy of Arianism, an effective refutation of the teachings of the Witnesses about the person of Christ.<sup>10</sup> Note, for example, the following statement: "Those who call these men [the Arians] Christians are in great and grievous error, as neither having studied Scripture, nor understanding Christianity at all, and the faith which it contains."<sup>11</sup> He adds that to call the Arians Christians is equivalent to calling Caiaphas a Christian and to reckon Judas as still among the apostles.<sup>12</sup> Athanasius further comments that, though the Arians use Scriptural language, and frequently quote Scripture, their doctrine is thoroughly unscriptural<sup>13</sup> -- a statement which could with equal propriety be made about Jehovah's Witnesses today. At another place he accuses the Arians of harboring the same error as that of the Jews who crucified Jesus since the latter also refused to believe that Jesus was truly God, charging Him with blasphemy because He claimed to be equal with God.<sup>14</sup> Arians,

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6 *Ibid.*, pp. 255-56.

7 It could therefore be observed that, though Jehovah's Witnesses are basically Arian in their view of Christ and the Trinity, they are actually more heretical than the Arians were.

8 Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

9 *Ibid.*

10 A number of these works are to be found in Vol. IV of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series. Among the more important of these are *On the Incarnation of the Word*, and the *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, both of which are contained in Vol. IV. As one reads the latter work, one is struck again and again by the similarities between Arianism and Watchtower teachings.

11 *Four Discourses Against the Arians* (trans. by Cardinal Newman), Discourse I, Section 1, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), Second Series, IV, 306.

12 *Ibid.*, I, 2 (i.e., Discourse I, Section 2).

13 *Ibid.*, I, 8.

14 *Ibid.*, III, 27.

Athanasius alleges, are cloaking Judaism with the name of Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

As can be expected, many of the Scripture passages to which the ancient Arians appealed are also adduced by Jehovah's Witnesses today: passages such as Proverbs 8:22, Colossians 1:15, John 14:28, Mark 13:32, and so on. A large part of Discourse I, all of II, and most of III are occupied with the task of refuting the Arian interpretation of these passages. Though present-day Biblical scholars would not agree with all of Athanasius's exegeses, much of what he says in these Discourses is still valuable for us as we encounter Watchtower misinterpretations of these and kindred passages.

Appealing to John 1:3, which tells us that without the Word nothing was made, Athanasius asks, How then did the Word Himself come into being, if He was one of the "things that were made"? If, on the contrary, all things were made through the Word, the Son Himself cannot have been made, cannot be a mere created work.<sup>16</sup> Athanasius reveals the soteriological motive for his opposition to Arius when he says, "For if, being a creature, He [Christ] had become man, man had remained just what he was, not joined to God; for how had a work been joined to the Creator by a work?"<sup>17</sup> To the same effect is the following:

But this would not have come to pass [the blessings of our future life in glory], had the Word been a creature; for with a creature the devil, himself a creature, would have ever continued the battle, and man, being between the two, had been ever in peril of death, having none in whom and through whom he might be joined to God and delivered from all fear.<sup>18</sup>

Athanasius's point here is well taken: If Christ was only a creature, as the Arians asserted, what guarantee have we that He really conquered the devil, who is also a creature, and that He truly united us to God? How can a mere creature deliver us from the power of another creature? The same devastating criticism can be leveled against the Christology of the Watchtower.

#### CRITIQUE OF WATCHTOWER EXEGESIS

We proceed next to examine some of the more important Watchtower interpretations of Scripture passages bearing on the person of Christ. It will be remembered that the Witnesses claim to be guided only by the Word of God and not at all by the opinions of men. Let us see whether their use of Scripture in connection with the alleged creatureliness of Christ supports their claim.<sup>19</sup>

*Old Testament Passages.* Beginning with Old Testament passages, let us look first at a text to which Jehovah's Witnesses appeal as teaching that Christ was a created being, Proverbs 8:22. In *What Has Religion Done for Mankind?* this passage is quoted in Moffatt's translation, "The Eternal formed me first of his creation, first of all his works in days of old"; previous to this quotation the comment is made: "In the proverbs of wisdom he [Jehovah's only-begotten son] speaks of himself

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 28.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 71.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 67.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 70.

<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, no attempt will here be made to give an exhaustive survey of the Biblical evidence for the deity of Christ. The material which follows is an endeavor to refute the type of Biblical interpretation the Witnesses adduce to support their view of Christ.

as wisdom and calls attention to his being a creation of the eternal heavenly Father."<sup>20</sup>

It is interesting to observe that the ancient Arians also used this passage to support their views of the person of Christ, utilizing the Septuagint translation of the verse, "The Lord created me (*ektise*) . . ."<sup>21</sup> So much did the Arians make of this text, in fact, that Athanasius felt it necessary to devote the major part of his second Discourse against the Arians to an exposition of this passage.<sup>22</sup>

Though Proverbs 8:22 figured largely in the Christological controversies of the early centuries, most modern interpreters agree that the purpose of the author of Proverbs here was not to give a dogmatic description of the "origin" of the Second Person of the Trinity, but rather to set forth the value of wisdom as a guide to be followed by believers. In pursuit of this purpose, the author presents a poetic personification of wisdom. By this personified wisdom the statement is made, "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old."<sup>23</sup> The point of the passage is that wisdom is older than creation and therefore deserves to be followed by all. To use Proverbs 8:22 as ground for a denial of the eternity of the Son -- a doctrine clearly taught in the rest of Scripture -- is to use the passage in an unwarranted manner.<sup>24</sup>

Isaiah 9:6 is commonly understood by Christians to be one of the clearest Old Testament attestations to the deity of Jesus Christ found anywhere. In the *New World Translation* it reads as follows: "For there has been a child born to us, there has been a son given to us; and the princely rule will come to be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." It is acknowledged even by Jehovah's Witnesses that this passage predicts the coming Messiah. Yet the Witnesses evade the clear teaching of the passage when they say, "He [Jesus Christ] is a 'mighty God,' but not the Almighty God who is Jehovah (Isa. 9:6)."<sup>25</sup> The fact of the matter is, however, that the Hebrew expression here translated *Mighty God* ('*eel gibboor*) is also used in Isaiah 10:21, where the *New World Translation* has: "A mere remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God." It becomes clear from verse 20 of this chapter that the "Mighty God" to whom the remnant of Jacob is said to be about to return is none other than Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel. Yet precisely the same Hebrew expression, '*eel gibboor*, is used in Isaiah 10:21 and in Isaiah 9:6. If '*eel gibboor* in 10:21 means Jehovah, by what stretch of the imagination may the same phrase in 9:6 be interpreted to mean someone less than Jehovah?

In this connection it ought also to be observed that the Hebrew word '*eel* in Isaiah usually denotes Jehovah, the only true God; when it does not do so (in 44:10, 15, 17; 45:20; 46:6), it is used to describe an idol made by men's hands. Surely Isaiah did not intend to say that the coming Messiah would be an idol god! It ought also to be noted that the expression '*eel gibboor* is, in Old Testament literature, a traditional designation of Jehovah -- see Deuteronomy 10:17, Jeremiah 32:18, and Nehemiah 9:32.<sup>26</sup> We are forced to conclude that Jehovah's Witnesses have not listened to

20 P. 37. Cf. *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, p. 43, where a similar use is made of the passage.

21 Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

22 Discourse II, Sections 18-82.

23 ASV. A marginal note appended to the word *possessed* reads: "or formed." The Hebrew verb here used, *qanah*, may also be rendered *begat* (see C. F. Burney, "Christ as the ARCHEE of Creation," *Journal of Theological Studies*, XXVII [1926], 160-77).

24 Cf. Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on Proverbs, ad loc.*; W. H. Gispen, *De Spreuken Van Salomo* (Kampen: Kok, 1952), pp. 133-34; and Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Wisdom," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), p. 554.

25 *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, p. 47.

26 The only difference between these expressions and the one in Isa. 9:6 is the addition of the word *gadool* (meaning

Scripture here, but have simply imposed their preconceived view of Christ upon the Bible.

*New Testament Passages.* Probably the best-known New Testament passage to which the Witnesses appeal is John 1:1, which is translated in the 1961 edition of the *New World Translation* as follows: "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." Note that the word *God* is capitalized the first time it occurs in the text but not the second time, and that in the second instance it is preceded by the indefinite article. The impression this translation intends to convey is that the Word (Jesus Christ) is not God but *a god* -- not equal to Jehovah God but a subordinate deity.

By way of refutation, it should be observed, first, that Jehovah's Witnesses thus take a polytheistic position, affirming that there exists, besides Jehovah God, someone who is a lesser god. This position is, however, in direct conflict with Scripture, which affirms in Deuteronomy 4:35, "You have been shown so as to know that Jehovah is the [true] God; there is no other besides him" (NWT); and in 1 Corinthians 8:4, "We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one" (NWT). How, then, can the Witnesses affirm that Jesus Christ is *a god*? To be sure, the New Testament does occasionally speak of gods other than Jehovah, but then only in the sense of false gods. So, for example, in Acts 28:6 the term *a god (theon)* describes what the superstitious inhabitants of Malta thought Paul was after they had observed that the viper did not harm him.<sup>27</sup> And in Galatians 4:8 Paul observes, "Nevertheless, when you did not know God, then it was that you slaved for those who by nature are not gods (*theois*)" (NWT). Do the Watchtower theologians intend to teach that Jesus Christ is a god in one of the two senses just described? Yet the only times the New Testament speaks of gods (*theoi*) other than Jehovah is when it is describing false gods or idols.<sup>28</sup> By calling Jesus Christ *a god*, therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses are actually making themselves guilty of idolatry and polytheism.

In an appendix found on pages 773-77 of their *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (published in 1951), the Watchtower editors explain why they have rendered John 1:1 as they did. They make clear that when the word *theos* (the Greek word for God) first appears in this verse, it occurs with a definite article (*pros ton theon*), whereas when it appears the second time, it does not have the definite article (*kai theos een ho logos*). The editors go on to justify their translation, "and the Word was a god," by saying,

Careful translators recognize that the articular construction of the noun [that is, the construction in which a noun appears with the definite article] points to an identity, a personality, whereas an anarthrous construction [a construction in which a noun appears without a definite article] points to a quality about someone (p. 774).

In refutation, let it be emphatically stated that this observation is simply not true to fact. In the article on *theos* in the most recent Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, it is said that *theos* is used in the New Testament "quite predominantly of the true God, sometimes with,

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great), and of the definite article. In Isa. 10:21, however, the definite article is also missing; yet the reference is unmistakably to Jehovah. Cf. Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* on Isa. 9:6.

27 Cf. also Acts 14:11, where the multitude at Lystra is reported as saying about Paul and Barnabas, "The gods [*hoi theoi*] have . . . come down to us" (NWT).

28 It might be objected that in Jn. 10:34 and 35 the term gods (*theoi*) is applied to Old Testament judges. Yet surely the Witnesses do not intend to say that Christ is a god only in the sense in which these judges could be called gods since they affirm that Christ is superior to all other creatures.

sometimes without the article."<sup>29</sup> As a matter of fact, Jehovah's Witnesses do not follow the above-mentioned rule themselves in their *New World Translation*. In the very chapter in which John 1:1 is found, for example, the word *theos* occurs at least four other times without the definite article, and yet in each instance it is rendered *God*, not *a god*. In John 1:6 we read, in the *New World Translation*, "There arose a man that was sent forth as a representative of God; his name was John." Since the Greek has *para theou* (no definite article), the Witnesses, to be consistent with their observation about the function of the definite article, ought to translate: "sent from *a god*." Yet here they render the anarthrous *theos* by *God*. In verse 12 the expression *tekna theou* (again the anarthrous *theos*) is rendered "God's children," and in verse 13 the words *ek theou egenneetheesan* are translated "born . . . from God." Why not "children of *a god*," and born from *a god*? In the 18th verse we read: "No man has seen God at any time." But the Greek again has the anarthrous *theos*: *Theon oudeis heooraken*. Why do the Witnesses not translate, "No man hath seen *a god* at any time"? The above makes clear that Jehovah's Witnesses do not really believe their own statement about the articular and anarthrous construction of the noun since they do not follow this rule in their own translation. We are compelled to conclude that they translate John 1:1 as they do, not on the basis of careful grammatical study of the Bible, but on the basis of their own doctrinal presuppositions.

In the particular construction in which *theos* occurs in the last part of John 1:1, it functions as a predicate noun preceding the copulative verb *een*, meaning *was*. The authors of the appendix alluded to above contend that the absence of the article before the predicate noun in John 1:1 indicates that the predicate noun designates merely the class to which the subject is referred and excludes the idea that the Word is the same God as the God with whom he is said to be (pp. 774-75).

In reply, however, it should be observed that, according to a recognized Greek scholar,

A definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it precedes the verb. . . . The opening verse of John's Gospel contains one of the many passages where this rule suggests the translation of a predicate as a definite noun. . . . The absence of the article [before *theos*] does *not* make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it. The context makes no such demand in the Gospel of John, for this statement cannot be regarded as strange in the prologue of the gospel which reaches its climax in the confession of Thomas [John 20:28, "My Lord and my God"].<sup>30</sup>

In the light of Colwell's rule, a definite article is not needed before the second *theos* in John 1:1 in order to make it definite. As a matter of fact, the Witnesses themselves testify to the validity of Colwell's rule in their translation of John 19:21, which in the *New World Translation* reads as follows: "However, the chief priests of the Jews began to say to Pilate: 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews," but that he said, "I am King of the Jews" '." Though in the earlier part of the verse the word for king has the definite article (*ho basileus*), in the latter part the word occurs without the definite article (*basileus eimi toon Ioudaioon*). The construction here is quite parallel to that in

29 Wm. F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 357.

30 Ernest C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LII (1933), 13, 21.

John 1:1, since *basileus* is a predicate noun, preceding the copulative verb *eimi* (I am). In accordance with previous policy, therefore, the Watchtower translators should have rendered these words: "I am a king of the Jews." Quite inconsistently, however, they here consider the predicate noun definite, though it lacks the definite article: "I am King of the Jews." Why, then, did they not consider the predicate noun definite in John 1:1?

The answer is not difficult to find. Jehovah's Witnesses themselves tell us why they have adopted their rendering of John 1:1 on page 774 of the afore-mentioned appendix:

. . . It is presumptuous to say . . . that the sentence should therefore be translated "and the Word was God." That would mean that the Word was the God with whom the Word was said to be. This is unreasonable; for how can the Word be with the God and at the same time be that same God?<sup>31</sup>

It has thus become clear that the ultimate ground for the Witnesses' translation of this important passage is not the authority of Scripture, but their own rationalistic, anti-Trinitarian theology. What they are saying, in effect, is this: we refuse to accept as Scriptural what our minds cannot grasp!

At this time the reader's attention is called to what is perhaps the most scholarly refutation of Watchtower teachings on the person of Christ ever penned: *The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ*, by Bruce M. Metzger, Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary.<sup>32</sup> In this twenty-page article Professor Metzger adduces several Scripture passages which prove the full deity of Jesus Christ and then proceeds to attack the Jehovah-Witness translations and exegeses of a number of New Testament passages dealing with the person of Christ. Anyone desiring a competent evaluation of Watchtower exegetical methods should obtain a copy of Metzger's article.

Professor Metzger shows, for example, on pages 76-77 of this article that the Witnesses have without any warrant whatever inserted the word *other* four times into their translation of Colossians 1:15-17. The latter part of the 16th verse, for example, which in the American Standard Version reads as follows, "all things have been created through him, and unto him," has been translated by Jehovah's Witnesses as follows: "All other things have been created through him and for him." Since the word *other* is not found in the Greek text in any one of these places, Metzger concludes that the word has simply been inserted by the translators "in order to make the passage refer to Jesus as being on a par with other created things." We see again that the Witnesses have smuggled their own theology into their translations.<sup>33</sup>

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31 Trinitarians would reply that, though the relationship between the Father and the Son is not rationally explicable, it is nevertheless not contrary to reason. If the Triune God consists of three Persons in one Being, the Son can be both with God and God.

32 Originally published in the April, 1953, issue of *Theology Today*, this article has been reprinted in pamphlet form and may be obtained from the Theological Book Agency, Princeton, N.J., at 15 cents per copy, or eight copies for one dollar.

33 Whereas in the 1951 ed. of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* the word *other* was simply inserted into the text without any punctuation marks, in the revised ed. of 1961 brackets have been placed around the word *other* in these four instances. On p. 6 of the latter ed. we read, "Brackets enclose words inserted to complete or clarify the sense in the English text." Though the addition of brackets makes it clear that the word *other* is not found in the original, the retention of the word in the revised edition indicates that the interpretation underlying this mistranslation has not been repudiated.

On page 78 one will find a discussion of the Watchtower translation of Philippians 2:6, "Who [Christ], although he was existing in God's form, gave no consideration to a seizure, namely, that he should be equal to God." The impression given by this translation is that Christ was not equal to God and even scorned such an equality. Metzger proceeds to show that this translation rests upon a misunderstanding of the Greek.

Next Dr. Metzger indicates that the *New World Translation* obscures the clear attestation of two New Testament passages to the deity of Christ: Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 (p. 79). He cites Granville Sharp's rule, that when a Greek *kai* (and) "connects two nouns of the same case, if the article precedes the first noun and is not repeated before the second noun, the latter always refers to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun." On the basis of this principle of Greek grammar, Metzger contends that Titus 2:13 should be translated, "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ"; and that 2 Peter 1:1 should be rendered, "the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ."<sup>34</sup>

On pages 79-80 Metzger criticizes the *New World* rendering of Revelation 3:14, which makes the exalted Christ refer to himself as "the beginning of the creation by God." He points out that "by God" would have required the preposition *hupo*, whereas the Greek has the genitive case, *tou Theou*, which means *of God* and not *by God*. The passage, Metzger concludes, does not teach that Christ was created by God but rather that He is the origin or primary source of God's creation.

On pages 81-82 Metzger takes up passages which seem to teach a subordination of the person of the Son to the Father. He makes clear, for example, that John 14:28, "My Father is greater than I," does not intend to picture a permanent subordination of the Son to the Father, but rather describes Christ's condition while in the state of humiliation in contrast to the celestial glory which He was about to receive.

*Christ as the Son of God.* The most recent Jehovah-Witness publication in which their view of the person of Christ is set forth and defended is a 64-page booklet published in 1962, entitled "*The Word*" -- *Who Is He? According to John*. Though much that is found in this booklet simply repeats what had been taught in earlier publications, one or two points made here will require some attention. The authors claim that the title *Son of God*, ascribed to Christ by John the Baptist, Nathanael, John the apostle, Martha, and the Jews, implied that Christ was not the Second Person of the Trinity but a person inferior to God the Father (pp. 19-20; 24ff.). In proof of this contention the authors adduce Christ's discussion with the Jews who had taken up stones to stone him, recorded in John 10. Though Jesus here said, "I and the Father are one," the authors contend, he did not claim to be equal to the Father, but rather claimed to be less than God (pp. 125-26). Though the Old Testament spoke of certain judges as "gods" (verse 35 of John 10, referring to Ps. 82:6), Jesus, it is said, here only claimed to be the *Son* of God; hence the Jews were quite in error when they thought Christ was uttering blasphemy (pp. 27-28).

By way of refutation, it should first be pointed out that, according to John 5:18, the Jews sought to kill Jesus "because not only was he breaking the Sabbath but he was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God" (NWT). The Jews, therefore, did not understand the

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<sup>34</sup> It is significant to note that at both of these places the RSV, which some years ago was accused by certain conservative theologians of having liberal leanings, gives a clearer testimony to the deity of Christ than either the KJ or the ASV!



expression *Son of God* as Jehovah's Witnesses apparently do. For the latter, the term means someone inferior to the Father. By the Jews of Jesus' day, however, the term was interpreted as meaning full equality with the Father, and it was on account of this claim that they sought to kill him.<sup>35</sup>

This point becomes quite clear when we compare John 10:33 with 10:36. The former verse reads, "We [the Jews] are stoning you [Jesus], not for a fine work, but for blasphemy, even because you, although being a man, make yourself a god" (NWT).<sup>36</sup> The latter passage reads, "Do you say to me whom the Father sanctified and dispatched into the world, 'You blaspheme,' because I said, I am God's Son?" (NWT). Putting together these two verses (if we translate verse 33 as in the standard versions), we see that Christ's calling himself the Son of God was interpreted by the Jews as a claim to equality with the Father.

When Jesus was tried by Caiaphas, furthermore, He was asked, "By the living God I put you under oath to tell us whether you are the Christ the Son of God!" (Mt. 26:63, NWT). After Jesus had answered this question in the affirmative, the high priest is reported to have said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses?" (v. 65, NWT). Obviously, the high priest understood the expression *Son of God* as meaning full equality with the Father since he called Jesus' assumption of this title blasphemy. If Jesus meant by the term *Son of God* something less than equality with the Father, He would by His affirmative answer be guilty of uttering an untruth, since for the Sanhedrin this title meant such equality. Surely if Jesus did not intend His words to be understood as meaning what the high priest and the rest of the Sanhedrin thought they meant, He could have and should have corrected their understanding of these words.

When, after the trial before Caiaphas, Jesus appeared before Pilate, the Jews said to the governor, "We have a law, and according to the law he [Jesus] ought to die, because he made himself God's son" (Jn. 19:7, NWT).<sup>37</sup> Again it is crystal-clear that the Jews understood the expression *Son of God*, which Jesus acknowledged as descriptive of himself, as meaning nothing less than full equality with the Father. Is it likely, now, that present-day Jehovah's Witnesses know better what Jesus claimed to be when He called Himself the Son of God than the Jews who were His contemporaries?

*Christ as the Proper Object of Worship.* What do Jehovah's Witnesses do with what is perhaps the clearest direct affirmation of the deity of Christ in the New Testament, the words of Thomas to the risen Jesus, "My Lord and my God"? Four pages of "*The Word*" -- *Who is He? According to John* are devoted to an exposition of this passage (pp. 48-51). Before evaluating the interpretation of this text found in this booklet, however, we must first observe what the rest of the New Testament teaches about Christ as a proper object of worship.

The Greek word *proskuneoo*, usually translated worship, is used some sixty times in the New

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35 According to Lev. 24:16 one who blasphemed the name of Jehovah was to be put to death by stoning. Since, in the eyes of these Jews, Jesus was a mere man, his claim to equality with the Father was considered blasphemy by them -- a sin worthy of the death penalty.

36 Here the NWT is quite misleading. In the light of John 5:18, quoted above, what the Jews accused Jesus of was the claim of being equal to Jehovah God. Though the definite article is missing before *theon* in 10:33 (it occurs only in p66, *prima manus*), it is found in 5:18, where the reason why the Jews sought to kill Jesus is also stated: he made himself equal to God (*too theoo*). 10:33 should therefore be rendered as in the KJ, ASV, and RSV: "make yourself God."

37 Why in this instance the NWT does not capitalize the word *son*, whereas in Mt. 26:63, giving the high priest's question to Jesus, the word *son* is capitalized, we are not told.

Testament. It may occasionally designate the deference given by one man to another who is his superior, as in Matthew 18:26, where the RSV translates "imploring him." The word is used in Revelation 3:9 to describe the honor which will be rendered to the church at Philadelphia by those who were of the synagogue of Satan.<sup>38</sup>

The word *proskuneo* is, however, much more frequently used to describe the worship of God. It is so used in the following passages: Matthew 4:10, Luke 4:8, John 4:21-24, 1 Corinthians 14:25, Revelation 4:10, 7:11, 14:7, 19:4, 10, 22:9. Christ Himself, in fact, affirms with unmistakable clarity that worship in the sense of religious veneration may be offered to God alone. For when the devil asks Jesus to fall down and worship him (*proskuneo*), Jesus replies, "It is Jehovah your God you must worship (*proskuneo*), and it is to him alone you must render sacred service" (Mt. 4:10, NWT).<sup>39</sup> On the basis of these words of Jesus, therefore, it should be clear that, if Jesus Christ is not the same being as Jehovah, he may not be worshiped by men. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus Christ is not the same being as Jehovah. We should therefore expect to find the New Testament forbidding the worship of Christ. On the contrary, however, we find that in the New Testament the worship of Christ is not only permitted but praised.

By way of negation, we should observe that the worship of certain individuals other than Jehovah or Christ is specifically forbidden. As we just saw, Jesus refused to worship the devil. In the book of Revelation the worship of the beast -- an apocalyptic symbol of anti-Christian worldly power -- is considered the epitome of rebellion against God, punishable by everlasting torment (Rev. 14:9-11). In three specific instances in the New Testament, worship is offered to individuals only to be rejected by them. When Cornelius falls down to worship Peter, the latter declines to be so honored, saying, "I myself am also a man" (Acts 10:25-26, NWT). When John the Apostle falls down to worship the one who has been speaking to him, the latter says, "Be careful! Do not do that! All I am is a fellow slave of you and of your brothers who have the work of witnessing to Jesus. Worship God" (Rev. 19:10, NWT).<sup>40</sup> And when John again falls down in worship, this time before the feet of the angel that had been showing him the things he had seen, the angel says, "Be careful! Do not do that! All I am is a fellow slave of you and of your brothers who are prophets and of those who are observing the words of this scroll. Worship God" (Rev. 22:9, NWT). Note that in the last two passages it is explicitly asserted that John may not worship creatures but may worship only God!<sup>41</sup>

What, now, about Jesus Christ? Is there any indication in the New Testament that Christ prohibited people from worshiping him, as Peter did and as the angel did? Did Christ ever say to anyone: "Do not worship me, for I am only a creature. Worship God but do not worship me"?

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38 Lenski, however, is of the opinion that *proskuneo* here designates the worship of the exalted Christ in the presence of the Philadelphian church (*The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, p. 143).

39 Jesus is here quoting Deut. 6:13, where the Hebrew has *Yahweh Eloheykha*, Jehovah your God. In both the Matthew passage and the parallel passage in Luke (4:8), in fact, Christ is reported as having added a word which does not occur in the Hebrew: the word *alone* (NWT) or *only* (KJ, ASV, & RSV). Christ thus makes the command even more explicitly exclusive than it is in Deuteronomy.

40 Some commentators hold that the individual here spoken of is an angel, whereas others suggest that he was a fellow man. In either interpretation, he was only a creature; hence John was not permitted to worship him.

41 In each passage alluded to in the above paragraph, the Greek word for worship is *proskuneo*.

There is no such indication. On the contrary, we find numerous instances where people do worship Christ; in some of these the worship is commended or recognized as evidence of true faith, and in none of these is this worship forbidden.

Let us look at some of these instances. The leper described in Matthew 8:2 worshiped Jesus (ASV).<sup>42</sup> A ruler, identified by the other Synoptists as Jairus, is reported as worshiping Jesus (Matt. 9:18, ASV). After Jesus had walked on the water and had quieted the wind, the disciples are said to have worshiped him, saying, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Mt. 14:33, ASV).<sup>43</sup> The Canaanitish woman worshiped Jesus, saying, "Lord, help me" (Mt. 15:25, ASV). The man born blind, having been informed by Jesus that He was the Son of man, said, "Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him" (Jn. 9:35, 38, ASV).<sup>44</sup> After Jesus' resurrection, the women who ran from the empty tomb and the disciples on the mountain in Galilee are said to have worshiped Him (Mt. 28:9 and 17, ASV). In each of the above instances the same word is used which is used of the worship of God: *proskuneoo*. In each of the above instances Jesus willingly receives the worship rendered to Him, and in no case does He tell anyone not to worship Him. And yet this is the same Jesus who had said to Satan, "Thou shalt worship (*proskuneoo*) the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Mt. 4:10, ASV). And the same New Testament which clearly forbids the worship of a creature -- even of an angelic creature -- both permits and approves the worship of Jesus Christ. Surely here is clear proof of Christ's deity!

To all of this Jehovah's Witnesses might reply: the obeisance which was shown to Jesus by these various individuals was only a kind of respect shown to a superior creature, and does not imply that Jesus was God. How shall we answer this objection?

It will be granted that the word *proskuneoo* when used by New Testament writers does not always designate the adoration of God. As we have seen, it may occasionally be used of an act of respect paid to a creature. But it is clear from Jesus' own words, as recorded in Matthew 4:10, that when *proskuneoo* designates an act of religious veneration, it means *worship*, and that such worship as is described by this word may be offered *only to God*. And it will also be clear to anyone who takes the trouble to study the instances just enumerated that the act described in these passages by

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42 The NWT here renders the verb *proskuneoo* as *doing obeisance*, though in many of the passages previously discussed it rendered this verb with the word *worship*. On p. 9 of the 1951 ed. of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*, it is said, "To each major word [of the New Testament] we have assigned one meaning and have held to that meaning as far as the context permitted." In the case of the word *proskuneoo*, however, the translators of the NWT have not assigned the same meaning throughout; sometimes they render this word *worship*, and sometimes *do obeisance*. It will be granted, of course, that there are instances in the New Testament where *proskuneoo* does not mean worship in the full sense of the word (e.g., in Mt. 18:26, in Mk. 15:19, and probably in Rev. 3:9). But the question is whether Jehovah's Witnesses are warranted in using the weaker expression, *do obeisance*, in every instance where *proskuneoo* is used in connection with Jesus (except in Heb. 1:6, where even the NWT has *worship*). One suspects that it is not grammatical but theological considerations which have led them to translate the verb in this way.

43 Though the NWT again has *did obeisance* rather than *worship*, it is quite clear that the honor shown to Christ by the disciples at this time was not mere deference to a superior creature, but the worship of one recognized as equal to God. Earlier Matthew had recorded the words of the Father at Jesus' baptism: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (3:17). In the light of these earlier words, in the light of Jewish monotheism, and in the light of what was said about the Jewish understanding of the expression *Son of God*, surely nothing less could have been meant here than the worship of Christ as one who was God!

44 Though the ASV text here as *Son of God*, *Son of man* is found in the older mss., and is therefore the better reading. It is quite evident from the context, however, that what is denoted here by *proskuneoo* is not mere respect for a person in authority, but religious worship -- worship which is, in fact, an act of faith.

*proskuneo* was nothing less than religious veneration.<sup>45</sup>

It should further be noted that, according to Watchtower teaching, Jesus Christ while on earth was only a man, the exact equivalent of Adam before the fall.<sup>46</sup> When Peter told Cornelius not to worship him (Acts 10:25-26), the former gave as his reason for refusing this worship: "I myself am also a man" (NWT). Here the *New World Translation* renders *proskuneo* with *did obeisance*. If, now, Peter had to tell someone not to do obeisance to him because he was only a man, by what right could Jesus Christ, who according to Watchtower teachings was only a man, receive obeisance from people without rebuking them?

After Jesus' resurrection, so the Witnesses teach, he became a spirit-creature, higher in status than he had been when he lived on earth as a man, but still only a creature. The life he now enjoys is not the life of a divine Person with a human nature but the life of an exalted angel called Michael.<sup>47</sup> In Revelation 22:9, however, the angel who had been speaking to John told the latter not to fall down and worship him (*proskuneo*), but to worship (*proskuneo*) only God. If Christ after his resurrection was only an angel -- higher, to be sure, than the other angels, but less than God -- how could he accept the worship (*proskuneo*) of the women and the disciples without rebuking them?

All these instances in which Jesus was worshiped come to a climax in the adoration of Thomas recorded in John 20:28. When Thomas saw Jesus the week after he had expressed disbelief in Jesus' resurrection, he said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (NWT). If Jesus were not God, he should have rebuked Thomas at this point. Instead of rebuking him, however, Jesus praised Thomas, saying, "Because you have seen me have you believed? Happy are those who do not see and yet believe" (v. 29, NWT). Surely here is indisputable proof that Jesus recognized Himself to be God and not only permitted but encouraged believers to worship Him as such!

What, now, do Jehovah's Witnesses do with this verse? On one occasion a Witness who came to the author's door affirmed that when Thomas said, "My Lord," he was looking at Jesus, but that when he said, "My God," he was looking up to heaven and addressing the Father. As Professor Metzger has pointed out, however, the introductory words make this interpretation impossible: "Thomas said to him [that is, to Jesus]: 'My Lord and my God!'" (NWT).<sup>48</sup>

In "*The Word*" -- *Who is He? According to John* the Witnesses now grant that Thomas did say all of these words to Jesus. They go on to assert, however, that if Thomas had meant that Jesus was the only true God, Jesus would certainly have reprove him. Since Jesus did not reprove him, so they argue, Thomas could not have meant this (p. 50). What, then, did Thomas mean when he said to Jesus, "My God"? He meant what the Apostle John meant: that Jesus was the Son of God (20:31). John did not say that Jesus was *God the Son*; he only said that Jesus was the *Son of God*. By *Son of God* John meant a being who was not the Second Person of the Trinity but a created being inferior

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<sup>45</sup> Though this is not specifically stated in the instances of the leper and of Jairus, it will be remembered that both of these men prostrated themselves before Jesus because they believed that He could perform a miracle for them. Though this act may not yet have been an expression of true, saving faith at that moment, it was certainly an act of religious veneration in each case. One might counter by saying that the apostles, who were only human, also performed miracles. True, but people did not prostrate themselves before the apostles in worship. When one person began to do so, he was rebuked (Acts 10:25-26).

<sup>46</sup> See above, pp. 272-73, 275. [Hoekema is referring to the main part of his book.]

<sup>47</sup> See above, pp. 274-76.

<sup>48</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 71, n. 13.

to the Father (pp. 50-51).<sup>49</sup>

This interpretation, however, is a bold attempt to evade the clear teaching of the passage. In refutation of the Jehovah-Witness exegesis of John 20:28, I offer the following considerations:

(1) What can the expression "my God" possibly mean other than "my true God"? As we saw above, the New Testament recognizes no true God beside Jehovah God; any god other than Jehovah is for New Testament writers a false god or an idol. Thomas, being a Jew, was a strict monotheist; for him there was no God beside Jehovah. When he said, "my God," he could have meant nothing other than "my one and only true God."<sup>50</sup>

(2) The argument the Witnesses use to bolster their interpretation boomerangs against them. Here was a monotheistic Jew saying to Jesus: "My God!" The fact that Jesus did not rebuke Thomas but commended him for his faith proves decisively that Jesus was equal to the Father, that He was Himself very God! When thus understood, Jesus' willingness to be called God by Thomas is quite in harmony with the testimony of the rest of the Bible about Him, and with His willingness to permit men to worship Him.

(3) That the Jehovah-Witness understanding of the expression Son of God is erroneous, and that Son of God in John's Gospel can mean nothing less than full equality with the Father, has already been shown. There is therefore no contradiction whatever between Thomas' ascription of full deity to Jesus and John's statement, "These [things] have been written down that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. . ." (20:31, NWT).

The Jehovah-Witness denial of the deity of Christ must therefore be rejected by all true believers as a heresy which cuts the very heart out of the Bible. Athanasius put it well: "Jesus whom I know as my Redeemer cannot be less than God!"

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49 The same general interpretation of this passage, though in greatly condensed form, is found in *the Truth Shall Make You Free*, p. 266.

50 Though it is true that the definite article is found with *theos* in the Greek of this passage (*ho theos mou*, the god of me), we cannot attach decisive significance to its occurrence here, since the nominative used as a vocative very often takes the definite article as a Semitic idiom (C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*, pp. 116-117; cf. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, trans. R. W. Funk, Sec. 147 (3)). A. T. Robertson (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, p. 465) makes the same admission. Yet the latter also says, on p. 462, "When Thomas said, '*Ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou*' (Jn. 20:28), he gave Christ full acceptance of his deity and of the fact of his resurrection."

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