



Buzzard, Anthony.

Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian: A Call to Return to the Creed of Jesus

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Anthony Buzzard is the founder/director of Restoration Fellowship, co-editor of *A Journal from the Radical Reformation* as well as the *Focus on the Kingdom* magazine, and a retired professor of the Atlanta Bible College where he taught for 24 years. Anthony is also an unabashed Unitarian who views the doctrine of the Trinity as a false doctrine that has done much to harm Christianity over the centuries. I first became aware of him and his work more than 5 years ago after coming across the volume he co-authored with Charles F. Hunting entitled *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*. At the time I found myself less than impressed with the arguments presented in that work but I started to follow Buzzard's work more closely, first by frequenting his website, second by subscribing to his *Focus on the Kingdom* magazine, and finally by contacting him directly and requesting a review copy of his most recent volume, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian: A Call to Return to the Creed of Jesus*.

Buzzard's central thesis is quite straightforward and simple: the Father alone is God, Jesus is not now nor was he ever God, and the doctrines of the deity of Christ and the Trinity are nowhere taught in Scripture. In other words, he believes all the things that a Unitarian is supposed to believe, but in arguing for these things he has failed to convince me of his position. The bedrock of Buzzard's presentation is the Shema (Deut. 6:4) and Jesus' quotation of it in Mark 12:29. His contention is that the Shema bears witness to a God who is but one single person and that a Trinitarian interpretation of the passage is untenable (see e.g., 27-8 where Buzzard describes the Shema as "the Jewish unitary monotheistic creed," and claims that "[t]he Shema proclaimed that

God is one Person.”). Of course he focuses on the fact that the Shema says that God is ‘one’ (Heb. *echad*) and this cannot allow for a three-personed God. In my estimation Buzzard’s Unitarian presuppositions color his reading of this passage, which was never intended as a statement concerning how many Gods there were, or whether or not God was a single person, but rather it’s a declaration that Yahweh was Israel’s God alone. It was a call to faithfulness on the part of Israel to Yahweh over and against all of the gods of the nations, which becomes clear when one doesn’t read Deuteronomy 6:4 apart from its immediate context. If one accepts any interpretation of the Shema other than the one Buzzard proffers then they will not find the majority of this work terribly convincing.

I’d summarize Buzzard’s reasoning and arguments throughout the book as weak and forced at best. Another foundational verse for Buzzard is John 17:3 in which Jesus says that the Father is the “only true God.” For Buzzard this is the proverbial nail in the coffin, not allowing any possibility that Jesus could also be God. When he mentions the possibility of Jesus being called the “true God” in 1 John 5:20 he dismisses it by appealing selectively to certain commentaries that agree with him (of course none that do not) and claiming that if Jesus were called “the true God” it would “overthrow the Unitarian creed of Jesus.” (258) Of course if Buzzard’s reading of the Shema is wrong, and I believe that it is, then his conclusions do not follow. There’s also the matter of reading John 17:3 as if by Jesus affirming that the Father is the only true God that he was denying as much about himself. Such is not the case and more than a few apologists have pointed out that the manner in which Unitarians read this verse amounts to the logical fallacy of denying the antecedent.

There’s also Buzzard’s less than compelling argument concerning singular personal pronouns. In sum, he argues that singular personal pronouns in reference to God can only be understood to mean that God is a single person. But he wouldn’t follow this train of thought in the other directions it leads, e.g., that *masculine* pronouns refer to males, hence God must then be male. Nor does he recognize that singular pronouns can be used in reference to groups, e.g., Judges 1:2-3 where the entire tribe of Judah is in view yet is referred to by singular masculine pronouns.

The final verse to receive an extraordinary amount of attention is Psalm 110:1, which Buzzard argues can in no way indicate that the Messiah is divine. One of his major arguments is that the Hebrew *adoni* (not to be confused with *adonai*) never has reference to God but always means “someone who is a non-Deity superior.” (85) Buzzard cites some less than impressive arguments from various Trinitarian authors in which they assert that the second Lord of the psalm is clearly the second person of the Trinity, but he fails completely to interact with more serious scholarship on the matter. Bauckham gets a brief mention where Buzzard chides that he didn’t make any mention about the meaning of the Hebrew *adoni* and that “[o]ne would expect an analysis of the critically important title ‘lord’ for Jesus.” (181) But Bauckham’s major contention is that early

Christians read this passage in a way that no one else had in reference to the Messiah, namely that the enthroned king was participating in the unique divine sovereignty of the one God over all things. Buzzard seems to think that such is possible without the participant actually being God or to use Bauckham's phraseology, 'participating in the divine identity.' This is how he can say with a straight face that Jesus' "'equality' with his Father does not make him God." (50)

I found his argument against a Pauline Christological reading of the Shema in 1 Corinthians 8:6 to be ridiculous, showing once again the manner in which his Unitarian presuppositions skew his reading of the texts. His argument is that if Paul were somehow including Jesus in the Shema then God is no longer 'one Lord' but is now two. He mentions Bauckham again, but only to say that he's wrong. No interaction with Hengel, Hurtado, or any of a number of other scholars who have drawn the same conclusions. And that's the really sad thing about this volume, it boasts a decent bibliography, and when I originally received my copy I immediately went to the bibliography to see what works he had consulted. I was pleased to see the names of Bauckham and Hurtado, but unfortunately they only get sound bites in the text itself. Hurtado isn't interacted with at all and Bauckham minimally at best. Where he does interact with serious scholars, e.g., Murray Harris, his representation of their position is not entirely accurate, or to give Buzzard the benefit of the doubt, he draws faulty conclusions from their work (conclusions that they have not drawn themselves). To give but one example with regard to Harris; Harris claims that the words *elohim* and *theos* have reference to the Father and never the Trinity as whole, and also that it's inappropriate to render *ho theos* as 'divine essence,' yet he affirms a clear Trinitarianism in the NT. But Buzzard reads this and concludes, "This is astonishing. No New Testament writer ever once put in writing the concept of God as three!" (106) Harris would disagree with that as he's not arguing concepts but grammar!

I could continue to criticize Buzzard's handling of other important issues such as pre-existence and incarnation (he's one of the few people that doesn't see pre-existence anywhere in the NT, even in John's Gospel!) but that would make this review exponentially longer than it already is. Suffice it to say that I didn't find this book particularly well-argued. It was unnecessarily repetitive (at times annoyingly so) even if written in an easy-to-understand manner. There were some typographical errors such as the quotations of Harris' work on pp. 103-5. For some reason Harris' Greek and Hebrew characters were transliterated, and wrongly at that. E.g., *Ἰησους* is transliterated as *Yesous*. I've not seen an iota transliterated with Y in any Greek, Koine or Modern. Likewise, the h is dropped from the transliteration of *υιο* & *υιος*. I suspect that this might be the fault of the editor or at least the word processing software used because Buzzard uses Hebrew and Greek characters throughout the book with no problems. The good features of this work were the use of footnotes, the bibliography, and the Scripture and subject indices. But in the end I find it difficult to recommend this on any level other than to say it's always good to read what those who disagree with you think.