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## A Critical Examination of the Trinitarian Perspective in the Gospel of John Based on New Testament Commentaries

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### Abstract

Christians often appeal to the Gospel of John in discussions of the Trinity and maintain that this Gospel presents the divinity of Jesus. For this reason, the Gospel of John has long attracted the attention of researchers and scholars and has, seemingly, faced numerous challenges. A careful analysis of this Gospel based on the commentaries written on it by New Testament exegetes can clarify its position regarding the doctrine of monotheism or the doctrine of the Trinity and resolve existing ambiguities. Moreover, such a study may reveal the often-unheard voice of the minority monotheistic current within Christianity in contrast to the dominant Trinitarian perspective. The present study aims to examine the issue of the Trinity and monotheism through a commentary-based approach. The findings indicate that two categories of passages can be extracted from the Gospel of John. The first category consists of challenging passages from which the impression has been drawn that this Gospel emphasizes the divinity of Jesus Christ. These passages are critically examined and evaluated in light of existing biblical commentaries, demonstrating that such interpretations are open to

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challenge and reconsideration. The second category includes passages that clearly support monotheism and indicate that Jesus possesses a human nature rather than a divine one.

**Keywords:** Monotheism, Gospel of John, New Testament Exegesis, Christian Unitarians, Trinity.

### **Introduction**

Among researchers, it has long been argued that the Gospel of John differs significantly from the Synoptic Gospels. The Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus as a human being like other humans and do not attribute divinity to him. In contrast, the Gospel of John not only attributes divinity to Jesus but also presents him as God. Evidence for this claim is found in certain passages of the Gospel of John that appear to overshadow the concept of monotheism in Christianity and reinforce the claim of Jesus' divinity. The purpose of this study is to identify passages within this Gospel that reflect a monotheistic view of God and portray Jesus as a human being.

Although there has been considerable debate over whether the author of the Gospel of John was indeed John the Apostle, and it has been suggested that his beliefs were influenced by the ideas of Paul as well as those of ancient Greek and Roman thought, this study sets aside these debates. Instead, it first examines the controversial passages in the Gospel of John in order to determine whether they support the divinity of Jesus or affirm monotheism.

The Gospel of John can generally be divided into two sections. One section contains statements that appear to strengthen the notion of Jesus' divinity, while the other presents statements that stand in clear contrast to such claims, portraying Jesus as a prophet whose entire authority and mission derive from God. Accordingly, the study first addresses the first section of the Gospel of

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John, the challenging passages, and then proceeds to analyze the second section.

### **1. Challenging Passages in the Gospel of John**

In this section, passages from the Gospel of John that suggest the divinity of Jesus are examined. Christians have often relied on these passages as the basis for affirming Jesus' divinity.

#### **1.1. First Challenging Passage: "The Word Was God"**

Perhaps the most significant controversial passage in the Gospel of John is the verse: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1).

This passage appears to strengthen the notion of Jesus' divinity. However, when the phrase is examined in light of its correct translation, it becomes clear that it does not necessarily indicate the divinity of Jesus.

In fact, regarding the final expression in John 1:1, "The Word was God," it appears that a misunderstanding has occurred. In the original language of the New Testament, the two words translated as "God" (Greek: *Theos*) in this verse differ grammatically. The first occurrence appears with the definite article (*ho Theos*), while the second appears without the definite article (*Theos*). For many scholars, the anarthrous (indefinite) form of the second term is noteworthy. In reality, the second occurrence of *Theos* functions as a descriptive predicate rather than a definite identification. Therefore, the phrase can be understood to mean: "The Word was divine." Many other biblical scholars and translators have also reached this conclusion.

Another mistaken interpretation is to claim that, according to this passage, "The Word" is the Almighty God Himself. However, the expression "The Word was with God" indicates that the verse refers to two distinct persons. It is impossible for "The Word" both to be "With God" and at the same time to be the Almighty God. The context of subsequent verses confirms this point. For example, John 1:18 states: "No one has ever seen God," yet people did see "The Word," who is Jesus (John 1:14).

Moreover, if the phrase in question is misunderstood, it could imply the legitimacy of worshiping multiple gods. It should be noted that the Greek word *Theos*, translated into Persian as "God," often corresponds to the Hebrew terms *El* and *Elohim* in the Old Testament. These words, meaning "Mighty" or "Powerful," have been used for the Almighty God, for other gods, and even for human beings (Psalm 82:6; John 10:34). Since God created other beings through "The Word," it is appropriate that "The Word" be described as mighty (John 1:3). Referring to "The Word" as "A Mighty God" is also consistent with Isaiah 9:6, where it was prophesied that God's chosen one, the promised Messiah, would be called "Mighty God" (*El Gibbor*), not "God Almighty," which in Hebrew is *El Shaddai* (Genesis 17:1; 35:11; Exodus 6:3; Ezekiel 10:5).

Accordingly, the Bible does not teach the worship of multiple gods. Jesus himself said: "You must worship Jehovah your God, and serve only him." (Matthew 4:10) Likewise, 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 states: "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." ([JW.ORG](http://JW.ORG), John 1:1, "In the Beginning Was the Word")

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Furthermore, Greek grammar and the text of the Gospel of John strongly suggest that translations such as the New World Translation are correct and that "The Word" should not be rendered as "God" in the absolute sense. Nevertheless, since first-century Greek did not have an indefinite article (a) or (an), this issue raises questions for some readers. For this reason, examining Bible translations into languages spoken in the early centuries is of particular interest. One such language is Sahidic Coptic. Egyptians spoke Sahidic Coptic in the centuries following Jesus' earthly ministry, and the Sahidic dialect was its earliest literary form.

Regarding the earliest Coptic translations of the Bible, "The Anchor Bible Dictionary" notes that since the Septuagint and the Christian Greek Scriptures were translated into Coptic in the third century CE, the Coptic version was based on Greek manuscripts. The Sahidic Coptic text is significant for two reasons. First, as noted, it reflects an understanding of Scripture that predates the formal adoption of the doctrine of the Trinity. Second, Coptic grammar, in an important respect, is relatively close to English grammar. The earliest translations of the Christian Greek Scriptures were into Syriac, Latin, and Coptic. Syriac and Latin, like Greek of that time, lack an indefinite article, whereas Coptic does possess one.

In his work "Introduction to Sahidic Coptic," Thomas O. Lambdin states: "The use of the Coptic definite and indefinite articles corresponds closely to the use of articles in English." Therefore, the Coptic translation provides valuable evidence regarding how John 1:1 was understood at that time. The Sahidic Coptic translation uses an indefinite article with the word "God" in

the final clause of John 1:1. When rendered into modern English, it reads: "And the Word was a god." Evidently, those ancient translators understood that John 1:1 did not mean that Jesus should be identified as Almighty God ([JW.ORG](http://JW.ORG), "Was the Word "God" or "a god"?).

Thus, in light of the arguments presented, the phrase the "Word was God" cannot be translated as referring to "God" in the absolute sense; rather, the more accurate rendering would be the "Word was divine," "Godlike," or similar expressions.

The validity of the above analysis can also be examined by reviewing recognized Bible translations of John 1:1. A brief example is given below:

New World Translation (1950): "And the Word was a god." (John 1:1)

Translation: The New Testament Translation by James L. Tomanek: "And the Word was a god." (Tomanek, 1958, John 1:1)

The Emphatic Diaglott (Bilingual Interlinear) by Benjamin Wilson: "And a god was the Word." (Wilson, 1864, John 1:1)

The Improved Version of the New Testament: "And the Word was a god." (Belsham, 1808, John 1:1)

The American Translation: "And the Word was divine." (Smith & Goodspeed, 1935, John 1:1)

Gospel of John by Johannes Schneider: "And the Logos was of divine kind." (Schneider, 1978, John 1:1)

The New Testament by Ludwig Thimme: "And the Word was of a divine nature." (Thimme, 1966, John 1:1)

Gospel of John by Siegfried Schulz: "And the Word was a god (godlike)." (Schulz, 1983, John 1:1)

**1.2. Second Challenging Passage: "He Was in the Beginning with God"**

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How can the "Word" both be with God and also be God? Interestingly, some commentaries state that this passage implies a kind of distinction between God and the Word; they are differentiated from each other, just as a father is distinct from his son (Bible Society, 1877: 207; Hill and Thorsen, 2001: 420). Another commentary explains that the Greek preposition *pros*, translated as "With," conveys the meaning of "In the presence of" and "In relationship with," while also indicating distinction (Wäfler, 1990: 232).

Another interpretation states that the Word possesses a distinct personhood or hypostasis. He not only dwelt with God but was also himself God (MacDonald, 1998: 402). Yet another commentator argues that first, the hypostasis of the Son is distinct from that of the Father; and second, despite this distinction, there is complete unity and perfect agreement between them in all views, judgments, and actions. Therefore, whatever greatness or honor belongs to one also belongs to the other. For this reason, Christ said (John 10:30), "I and the Father are one." (Eddy, 1973: 3, 10)

Thus, the New Testament interpreters themselves acknowledge this distinction. Therefore, one may say: distinction entails multiplicity and difference; difference entails the absence of unity; the absence of unity entails duality or plurality, not monotheism. One of the peculiarities of Trinitarian theology is the claim that two distinct entities can at the same time be completely one. Hence, Trinitarian teachings cannot be described without contradiction.

The Unitarian Christian Andrews Norton also states that if, as Trinitarians claim, the "Logos" is a person, namely Christ, then the person who was "With

God" cannot himself be God, except in a metaphorical or figurative sense (Norton, 1880: 48-55, 66).

Furthermore, regarding the phrase "He was in the beginning with God," some Christian Unitarians hold that the word "Beginning" refers to the time when God brought the Word into existence and thereby began the creation. Then God created all other beings through the "Word." (John 1:2-3) Thus, Scripture says Jesus is the "Firstborn of all creation" and that "Through him all other things were created" (Colossians 1:15-16). Therefore, a mistaken interpretation of this verse would be to say that the "Word" has always existed. But the term "Beginning" cannot refer to God, since God has no beginning. Jehovah is "From eternity to eternity" (Psalm 90:1-2), whereas the "Word," that is Jesus Christ, had a beginning; he is the "Beginning of the creation of God" (Revelation 3:14) ([JW.ORG](http://JW.ORG), Was the Word "God" or "A god"?).

### **1.3. Third Challenging Passage: "The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us"**

Regarding this passage (John 1:14), some commentaries state that God became human in Christ. Although he was fully human like us, he was at the same time completely God (The Applied New Testament Commentary, 1995: 87; Hill and Thorsen, 2001: 422). Another commentary states that although Christ is God and eternal, he took on a human body. This is said to be the most fundamental reality, because it shows that the infinite became finite, the eternal entered time, the invisible became visible, and the one from the heavenly realm limited him to the material world. Yet, even when the Word became flesh, he did not cease to be God; rather, he was God who took on

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human flesh, meaning he appeared in human form but did not lose his divinity (MacArthur, 2007: 352).

The question is: 'Is it possible for God to become human?' If it is possible, 'How could it occur?' 'Would this not imply a change in the divine essence?' If the essence changes, then Jesus would no longer be God; and if the essence does not change, then 'What does the incarnation mean?' If God becomes fully human, he is no longer God; if he remains fully God, he is no longer human. Even if God wished to create a being who is both fully God and fully human at the same time, such a being is logically impossible, because no entity can possess the mutually exclusive attributes required for such a nature. Another commentary, attempting to explain how the "Word" became flesh without undergoing change, states that the Word is like gold placed in fire, it remains unchanged; or like bread in the Eucharist, which becomes the body of Christ while its outward properties remain. Likewise, the Word became flesh without changing (Ibn Ṣalībī, 1914: 2, 238).

However, these analogies are false comparisons. The Word, according to the claim, is immaterial, yet it supposedly became fully material flesh, a real transformation. In contrast, in the examples of gold and Eucharistic bread, the substances do not undergo an actual transformation into something else. Therefore, such explanations do not resolve the contradiction of the Word becoming flesh.

In critique of the above-mentioned claim, several passages in the Old Testament explicitly reject the idea that God could be human. For example:

"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind." (Numbers 23:19);

"...For I am God, not man; I am the Holy One among you..." (Hosea 11:9);

"The Egyptians are men and not God." (Isaiah 31:3).

Other Old Testament passages affirm strict monotheism by identifying God exclusively with "Yahweh," and regarding any god besides Yahweh as polytheism:

Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O! Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one."

Isaiah 45:5: "I am Yahweh, and there is no other; besides me there is no God."

See also Exodus 20:2-3; Psalm 83:18.

#### **1.4. The Fourth Challenging Passage: "I and the Father Are One"**

The statement in John 10:30 (I and the Father are one) cannot prove the divinity of Jesus, because just one verse earlier Jesus says, "The Father is greater than all" (John 10:29). In interpreting this passage, some commentators argue that the Son is equal with the Father in essence, power, and substance. Thus, the phrase "Greater than all" does not imply the Father's superiority to the Son in terms of divinity; rather, they say it refers merely to the Father being the cause of the Son's begetting, likened to light issuing from the sun (Ibn Ṣalībī, 1914: 2, 372).

However, it may be said in response:

- This statement (greater than all) includes Jesus himself;
- Jesus did not qualify or limit that statement in any way; he expressed it absolutely.
- All passages that indicate a mediatory role for Jesus toward God, for example, those showing that Jesus considers even his own life as given by God, demonstrate that Jesus is not identical with God.

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Further confirmation of this is seen in Jesus' own words to his disciples: "I am going to God, because God is greater than I." (John 14:28) In interpreting this verse, some commentators remark that one might ask: If Christ is equal to God, how could he say, "The Father is greater than I" In response, they claim that when Jesus came to earth, he relinquished some of the glory he shared with God from the beginning. He was equal with God, they say, but chose for a time to set aside this equality and take on human form. Thus, during his earthly life the Father was greater than he; but after his resurrection, God restored that glory to him (Hill & Thorsen, 2001: 507; Eddy, 1973: 2, 244).

In critique of this interpretation, one may ask: 'Is Christ's glory a material thing that he can set aside and place somewhere?' Moreover, according to this view, 'How is it that Jesus can abandon his own glory, yet requires the Father to restore it to him after his resurrection?' That is: "According to this explanation, Jesus, 'Who is supposedly equal with God, can transform himself into a human being, but in order to regain his divinity he needs God the Father?' Therefore, the correct interpretation of this passage is that Jesus genuinely considers God Almighty greater than himself, for he repeatedly describes himself in the Gospels as a prophet, servant, and messenger of God, not as God himself or equal to God. Furthermore, when Jesus considers the Holy Spirit greater than himself (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10), he must, a fortiori, consider God even greater."

Miller, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, argues that the reason Jesus claimed equality with God in power and authority while still representing the

Father as greater was that the Father is the source of all things. It was the Father who sent the Son into the world, and the Son was obedient to his will in all things (Miller, 1941: 327). In response, one may say: "If Jesus truly possessed divinity and were truly God, it would be meaningless for him to consider the Father greater than himself, unless one were to assume that Jesus was merely being polite or engaging in extreme humility."

*Ibn Ṣalībī* also maintains that because Jesus Christ was incarnate, whereas the Father was never incarnate, and because the cause of Christ's existence in this world was God Himself, Jesus said, "God is greater than I." (Ibn Ṣalībī, 1914: 2, 420) Thus the commentator acknowledges that in various respects God is greater than Jesus, an admission which contradicts their claim that they are one.

Another commentator argues that Jesus' statement was made in the context of his mission of "Incarnation and Atonement," and therefore it does not concern the value or rank of the Father. Hence, the contextual indicators that he mentions must be taken into account. He adds that nothing in Jesus' words suggests any imperfection in comparison with the Father. Rather, he says, Jesus refers to a necessary condition of incarnation; thus, Christ shows that the Father is the ultimate goal to whom he returns through humility and death (Wäfler, 1990: 286).

In critique of this interpretation, we note that the contextual indicators claimed by the commentator are not found in Jesus' words; instead, the context indicates the opposite. Jesus explicitly says, "I am going to God, for He is greater than I." Therefore, if Jesus had meant that God was greater than him only during his incarnation, he should have said, "I am going to God, with whom I am equal."

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In another interpretation of the verse "I and the Father are one," it is said that although the Father is never called the Son, nor the Son called the Father, nevertheless in their fundamental essence both are one; and at the same time, the Son did not come into existence after the Father, nor is the Son inferior to the Father. Rather, the Son is Lord and God, equal to the Father in power and glory, and deserving of the same worship and honor that belong only to God (Miller, 1941: 235; Ibn Ṣalībī, 1914: 2, 372).

In critique of this interpretation, we may ask: How can Christ consider God the source of his life (John 6:57), and yet not have come into existence after the Father, nor be subordinate to Him? If, therefore, Christ is of the same essence as God, did not come after the Father, and is not inferior to Him, then 'How can one claim that the Father and the Son are two distinct persons?' Based on the attributes mentioned, they would constitute one person, not two. The evidence supporting this argument is a very important passage in which Jesus himself clarifies that his own use of the title "God" for himself does not imply actual divinity or being truly God. After Jesus said, "I and the Father are one," the Jews picked up stones to stone him. Jesus asked them, "Why do you stone me?" They replied, "Because of blasphemy, for you, being a man, make yourself God." Jesus responded: "Is it not written in your Law (Psalm 82:6), "I said, "You are gods?" (John 10:30-36).

In these verses, Jesus refers to a passage from the Psalms to show that the Jews had misunderstood his claim to divinity. In that psalm, God says to the judges of Israel: "I said, you are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High." (Psalm 82:6)

Thus, Jesus intended to demonstrate that he, like the judges, may be metaphorically called "God" or "Son of God," not that he is literally God or the literal Son of God. For no one, neither Jews nor Christians, believes that the Israelite judges were truly divine, despite God calling them "Gods" and "Sons." Therefore, by citing this passage, Jesus implicitly acknowledges that he too is being called "God" or "Son of God" only in a figurative, honorific sense, just as the judges were, and hence they should not accuse him or stone him.

MacArthur holds that Jesus' intent was to show that the word "God" can in some contexts be used for beings other than the true God. Thus, if God can address certain individuals as "Gods" or "Sons of the Most High," why should the Jews object to Jesus calling himself the "Son of God?" (MacArthur, 2007: 408). Therefore, the commentator himself admits that this passage does not indicate the divinity of Jesus, and titles such as "God" and "Son of God" are general, honorific designations in the biblical tradition.

#### **1.5. The Fifth Challenging Passage: "My Lord and My God"**

In this passage of the Gospel of John, Jesus is addressed with two titles: "Lord" and "God." (John 20:28) The term "Lord" in the New Testament does not necessarily imply the divinity of Jesus, because the same Greek word is also used for people other than Jesus, and is translated as "Master," "Owner," or "Sir." (Tawfiqi, 2005: 173) Evidence for this is the story of the woman who addresses Jesus both as "Lord" and as "Son of David." (Matthew 15:22) This shows that the title "Lord" as applied to Jesus was figurative and honorific. Another proof that the title "Lord" does not imply divinity is that even Satan is addressed with this title in the New Testament; for in 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul refers to Satan as the "God of this world."

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Given the analysis of the challenging passages in the Gospel of John, we may conclude that John's Gospel does not establish the divinity of Jesus. Perhaps the most significant phrase, the "Word was God," was shown to have an entirely different proper meaning and does not prove Jesus' divinity.

### **2. Passages Affirming Monotheism in the Gospel of John**

In this section, passages from the Gospel of John will be examined that indicate John's Gospel, according to a monotheistic reading, presents a monotheistic view of Jesus and the doctrine of divine unity.

#### **2.1. First Affirmative Passage: "The Only True God"**

In the final days of his life, Jesus addresses God and says: "And this is eternal life: That they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3)

Here particular attention must be paid to the qualifier "True," because Jesus affirms that God is truly one. Furthermore, he goes on to describe himself as the one sent by God, not as one who is consubstantial with or equal to God. Therefore, the phrase "The only true God," together with Jesus' statement "Jesus Christ whom You have sent," conveys nothing other than that there is only one true God, and that Jesus Christ is His messenger and prophet.

Some commentators, however, argue that according to Christ, the only true God is God the Father, and from this they conclude that Jesus is not the Son of the true God. In reality, the mistake of such interpreters lies in overlooking that Christ's intention was to affirm the divinity of the Father in contrast to false gods. Thus, they say, Jesus was denying the real divinity of those false

gods and affirming that his Father is the true God, while also declaring: "I am your Son, sent by you, the God of the world, for the salvation of humankind," thereby explicitly affirming his unity with the Father (Ibn Ṣalībī, 1914: 2, 43-438; Eddy, 1973: 2, 272).

In response, it may be said that although Jesus certainly intended to negate false gods, the mistake in this interpretation lies in misunderstanding what is meant by "False Gods." If the passage is examined carefully, it becomes clear that Jesus is denying all false deities, and this general negation would also include Jesus himself if he were regarded as a god. In fact, the key point of this passage is that Jesus intended to say that the one true God sent him, just as He sent other prophets, to guide humankind.

MacDonald, commenting on this verse, states that Jesus' description of God as "The only true God," and his use of the word "Only," does not imply that Jesus himself is not the true God. Rather, the mere mention of Jesus' name alongside the name of God the Father as the shared source of eternal life signifies their equality (MacDonald, 1998: 1, 534).

According to this interpretation, the mere mention of any person or thing alongside the name of God would imply equality with God, yet even the commentator himself does not accept such implications.

## **2.2. Second Affirmative Passage: "I Am Going to My Father and Your Father, to My God and Your God"**

In this passage (John 20:17), Jesus acknowledges that he, like others, has a God, the same God as ordinary people. In interpreting this verse, it has been argued that God's fatherhood with respect to Jesus Christ differs from His fatherhood with respect to us: "Jesus is said to have been the Son of God from

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eternity, whereas we are merely adopted children of the Father rather than His real children." (MacDonald, 1998: 1, 552)

The best evidence against this interpretation is Jesus' own statement in the passage. When Jesus identifies his God as the same God as that of others and does not distinguish himself from them in this regard, interpretations contrary to this explicit statement amount to reasoning against the clear text and are therefore unacceptable. Another supporting passage is where Jesus tells the Jews: "My Father, who glorifies me, is the one you say is your God." (John 8:54) Thus, Jesus recognizes his God as the same God worshiped by the Jews.

#### **2.3. Third Affirmative Passage: Attributing Life, Knowledge, and Power to God**

In John 5:18-43, Jesus responds to Jews who accuse him of making himself equal with God. In this response, he attributes all of his qualities, including life, knowledge, and power, to the One who sent him. First, Jesus states that his life comes from God. Second, he describes himself both as the Son of God and the Son of Man; this, together with his affirmation that God is one, indicates that in his understanding the title "Son of God" does not imply divinity. Third, he ultimately refers to God as the "One God." If Jesus had claimed divinity for himself, he should have clarified this after affirming God's unity, perhaps by stating that this unity consists of three persons.

Some commentators argue that the phrase "Lack of power" in these passages can have several meanings, such as impossibility, lack of worthiness, weakness, or absence of will. In this context, however, they claim it means "Impossible." For example, just as sunlight cannot shine without being united

with the sun itself, and just as the intellect cannot reason without the soul, so the Son cannot act without the Father, nor can he do anything contrary to Him. This, they argue, is because the Father and the Son are one, and whatever one of them does, the other also does (Ibn Ṣalībī, 1914: 2, 304-305; Eddy, 1973: 3, 78-79).

However, this interpretation cannot be correct; because Jesus states that he does what he sees and hears from the Father. This implies that he receives his knowledge from the Father. Such a statement necessarily presupposes a real distinction between the Father and the Son; for if they were truly one in the sense claimed, Jesus would not say that he acts according to what the Father tells him or what he hears from Him.

Matthew Henry believes that Jesus Christ is a mediator who is obedient to the will of his Father. Christ was faithful to his Father's will in such a way that it was impossible for him to act independently; therefore, he took the Father's directives into consideration. No one can know the deeds of God, but the Son alone is the one who sees what the Father does. At the same time, however, he is equal with the Father in action, because whatever God does, the Son also does (Henry, 2002: 1, 607). This interpretation, in a sense, supports our view, since it entails a real duality between God and Jesus.

Evidence for attributing life to God is found in the verse: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father." (John 6:57) According to this verse, Jesus explicitly acknowledges that his life is from God and that he lives through God; that is, in reality, he is a "Creature" of God. However, in interpreting this verse it has been said that Christ has life through the Father, and just as God is the source of life for Christ, so Christ is the source of life for believers (Miller, 1941: 163). This statement likewise confirms our view.

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Yet in the commentary "*Durr al-Farīd*," it is stated that the life God granted to Christ was due to his incarnation and was in fact a worldly life, whereas in terms of his divinity and with respect to his deity, Jesus Christ is consubstantial with God and has no need of such life (Ibn Ṣalībī, 1914: 2, 327).

In critiquing this interpretation, we say: what necessity is there for God to grant Christ his worldly life and for him to become incarnate and live in this world through God? Since, according to Christian belief, Jesus has a distinct person within the Trinity, he himself could have granted worldly life to himself and would not have needed the Father's bestowal in this regard. Accordingly, under this interpretation, if the source of Jesus' life is God, then 'How can God and Jesus be one?'

Evidence for attributing knowledge to God can also be found in the verse: "I have told you what I heard from the Father." (John 8:38) This verse clearly states that Jesus saw and received truths from God. Such repeated references to "Seeing" and learning on the part of Jesus are entirely inconsistent with a status of divinity and deity. 'Can God be taught or receive instruction?'

However, in interpreting this verse it has been said that the expression "I have seen" indicates the perfection of Jesus Christ's knowledge, for he has eternally and continually possessed knowledge (Ibn Ṣalībī, 1914: 2, 351). Another commentator believes that since Christ has complete unity with God, the matters he conveys to people originate from his eternal state in which he was with God (Eddy, 1973: 145). Yet such interpretations of "Seeing" are not acceptable, because this kind of seeing implies learning and acquiring

knowledge. Otherwise, Jesus should have said, "What I knew, I saw," whereas he says, "What I saw, I came to know."

Another important piece of evidence supporting the above argument is Paul's belief concerning God: "He maintains that no one can give anything to God, since all things are from Him." (Romans 11:36) Therefore, in light of this statement and Paul's belief, Jesus Christ cannot be God, because in many of the passages from the Gospel of John mentioned above, Jesus acknowledges that he has nothing of himself and that all his attributes are from God Almighty.

Andrews Norton, the Unitarian Christian theologian, says regarding such passages: a being who asks something from God cannot be God (Norton, 1880: 65).

#### **2.4. The Fourth Affirmative Passage: "The One Sent by God (Prophet)"**

As is evident from several passages, Jesus presents himself in the Gospel of John as one sent by God (John 5:22; 3:17). We now turn to an analysis of this matter.

One of the most important pieces of evidence indicating the prophethood of Jesus in the Gospel of John is his attribution of the miracle of raising the dead to God. Thus, when Jesus intended to raise a dead man (Lazarus), he addressed God, saying: "Father, I thank You that You have heard me. I knew that You always hear me, but I said this for the sake of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent me." Then he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:1-44).

In interpreting these passages, it has been said that it is quite noteworthy that although Jesus claimed to be the resurrection and the life, he nevertheless performed none of his great works without the Father. Therefore, if we

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observe that Jesus was able to heal the sick, feed large crowds, calm the storm, and raise the dead, the reason for these actions was that he was one with God in all things (Miller, 1941: 257; Bible Society, 1877: 249-250). But this interpretation cannot be correct, because Jesus directly and through prayer asks God to help him raise Lazarus. Thus, Jesus does not say: "God and I together will raise this dead man because we are one." Rather, Jesus in this event considers himself only a mediator whose prayer God has answered.

Some commentators believe that Jesus did not actually need to pray, because he is one with God in essence, power, and authority. In order to guide us, however, and since the purpose of this guidance is to bring us to faith and to set an example for us, he prayed and asked God for Lazarus to be raised (Ibn Ṣalībī, 1914: 2, 384; MacArthur, 2007: 462). But Jesus says that the reason for his miracle was so that the people would know that he was sent by God. One of the primary signs of a prophet is performing miracles. Therefore, as Jesus himself states, his miracle was in line with his prophetic mission, and he did not intend to demonstrate how believers ought to pray.

Thus, in this passage, first, Martha, the sister of Lazarus, asks Jesus to intercede with God on behalf of her brother, and she does not directly tell Jesus to raise her brother. This means that Martha regarded Jesus as a prophet. Second, Jesus does not tell Martha that he himself is God and therefore has no need to ask God for Lazarus to be raised. Later, Jesus does not deny Martha's belief; instead, he thanks and praises God for accepting his prayer for the raising of Lazarus. Most importantly, Jesus says, "I performed this miracle so that you may believe that God has sent me." Such words can be

spoken only by a prophet, and they are further evidence of Jesus' humanity and prophethood in the Gospel of John.

For this reason, one commentary states that Christ refers to this miracle as an answer to his prayer and that prayer is the key to unlocking the treasures of divine power and grace. Therefore, by giving thanks to God, Christ confirmed that his prayer had been heard (Henry, 2002: 1, 684).

Another piece of evidence supporting the above argument is that Jesus, in many passages of the Gospel of John, identifies himself as the one sent by God (John 4:30-34; 6:28-29; 7:15-18; 3:34-35). Jesus told the people that "The One who sent me is true," and that he speaks to the world what he has heard from Him. "I speak only what the Father has taught me. The One who sent me is with me; He has not left me alone, because I always do what pleases Him." (John 8:26-29)

In interpreting such verses, some commentators have emphasized that Jesus' knowledge comes from God Almighty (MacArthur, 2007: 391-392; Eddy, 1973, 3, 118; Bible Society, 1877: 232; Henry, 2002: 1, 649). Unitarian Christians likewise mean that Jesus receives his teachings from God and possesses nothing independently of him. In fact, prophets obtain their knowledge from God in this very same manner. Therefore, Jesus was, through various means, seeking to demonstrate that he was a prophet, but unfortunately, Trinitarian Christians are not willing to accept this reality.

Another evidence for the above argument is the passage in which a Pharisee named Nicodemus, one of the leaders of the Jews, came to Jesus and said: "Teacher, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can perform the miracles you are doing unless God is with him." (John 3:2)

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Jesus also affirms the Pharisee's words and does not, for example, say: "No, I am God myself and have not come from God."

But in interpreting this passage, it has been said that since Christ did not wish to rebuke Nicodemus and did not intend to correct his statement implying Christ's need for God, he temporarily abandoned his divine status and expressed his words on a level consistent with Nicodemus's low and earthly understanding (Ibn Ṣalībī, 1914: 2, 268-269).

Another commentary says that although Nicodemus had great knowledge, he nevertheless failed to realize that Jesus was God manifested in the flesh. He was like many people of our time who consider Jesus a great man and a remarkable teacher (MacDonald, 1998: 1, 418).

In critique of such interpretations, it must be asked: "First, from where in these verses can such claims be inferred? From what part of this passage can it be deduced that Christ abandoned his divinity? Second, has God ever taken human form before, such that Nicodemus could even recognize such an extraordinary event? Furthermore, if Jesus were truly God incarnate, he should have communicated this important truth to Nicodemus, who was seeking clarity. Not only did Jesus fail to do so, but he also, in a way, affirmed Nicodemus's beliefs. Therefore, Nicodemus understands regarding Jesus was entirely correct."

Unitarian Christians, in critiquing such interpretations, say that the Disciples of Christ could only have regarded him as a human being, because outwardly he appeared as such; therefore they naturally believed him to be a man. His relatives and fellow townspeople likewise considered him nothing more than

a human. Thus they would say: "Is this not the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" Now imagine, even for a moment, how we would feel if someone with whom we had long associated as a human being suddenly declared to us that he was in fact God. Even if his character and deeds somehow prepared us to accept such a claim, the mind would still have to pass through disbelief, doubt, amazement, and astonishment before it could be convinced of such a reality. And once convinced, with what indescribable wonder would one be overwhelmed! With what complete prostration would one approach such a being and contemplate his existence!

If indeed a human being who lived among us on earth could perceive such intimate association with his Creator, then whenever the opportunity arose he would speak of this astonishing and extraordinary event. Yet the point is that we find no such reports among the disciples of Jesus Christ (Norton, 1880: 75-76).

Therefore, if he truly were God, 'Should not at least three of his disciples have made a direct reference to the most astonishing fact concerning his person?' Read the accounts of the conversations between the disciples and their master and judge whether they believed they were speaking with their God. This idea is one of the most incongruous notions ever to occur to the human mind. For example, consider the events and conversations that took place on the night before the crucifixion of our Savior, as reported by John. 'Did Judas believe that he was betraying his God?' 'When their master washed the feet of his apostles, did they believe, indeed, the question is so startling that it is difficult to express in simple words, Mthat this person washing their feet was God Himself?' 'Could they imagine that the one who, throughout his discourse,

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spoke only as one sent by God and who prayed and supplicated to God in their presence was himself the Almighty God?' 'Did they believe that he was the Creator of heaven and earth?' If so, 'When they abandoned him immediately after his arrest, whom did they abandon?' (Norton, 1880: 77-78) Some scholars also believe that we can say without doubt that Jesus was a prophet and a proclaimer of the promised kingdom (Guenebault, 1398: 535).

#### **2.5. The Fifth Affirmative Passage: "Seeking Salvation from God"**

Jesus asks God for deliverance: "Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour." (John 12:27)

It is noteworthy that the philosophy of Jesus' incarnation is said to be the salvation of humanity, yet surprisingly Jesus himself apparently appears more in need of salvation than others. In interpreting this passage it has been asked: how could Jesus, considering the difficult moments in which he was to bear our sins, ask his Father to save him from this mission? He could not pray in such a manner, for he came into the world precisely for this purpose, to sacrifice himself on the cross (MacDonald, 1998: 1, 507-508)

Interestingly, the commentator claims that such words would be unlikely to come from Jesus, who was incarnated for the atonement of sins, and therefore the intention of Jesus must be something else. However, such interpretations amount to reasoning against the explicit text, because Jesus clearly says, "Father, save me from this hour," meaning "God, save me." Accordingly, someone who openly acknowledges that he himself needs salvation, 'How can he play the role of the divine savior of humanity?' 'Is this not contradictory?'

Unitarian Christians also believe that the arguments of Trinitarians contradict the explicit and repeated statements of Jesus about himself in the Gospel of John. According to Trinitarian doctrine, the Son, the second person of the Trinity, was united with the human nature of Christ. Yet expressions such as "Christ spoke as a divine teacher" or "It was by the power of God that he performed his wondrous works" conflict with Trinitarian doctrine. Thus, the concept of the Trinity stands in direct contradiction to the statements and teachings of Christ.

Likewise, the passages referring to acts of healing performed by divine power, the divine knowledge that he discovered from God and attributes to the Father rather than to any other person, are all inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity. In this way, Jesus speaks of himself as the Son and always as a being completely dependent on the Father. Examples include passages where he acknowledges that his glory (John 8:54) and life (John 5:25) come from the Father. Many other passages in the Gospel of John, such as John 5:35; John 6:57; John 7:16-17; John 14:24; John 10:14; John 5:18; and John 12:49-50, also indicate that Jesus is nothing more than a human being, since he attributes all of his attributes (knowledge, power, and life) to God.

Therefore, Jesus' own statements about himself serve as a decisive criterion in the debates between Unitarian Christians and Trinitarians, and such passages can answer any other arguments in this discussion (Norton, 1880: 70-71). Therefore, according to the perspective of Unitarian Christians, such passages of the New Testament are, first, in contradiction with the doctrine of the Trinity, and second, they indicate the humanity of Jesus.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

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Based on the foregoing discussion, it becomes clear that the Gospel of John can be divided into two sections: "One that apparently contains statements suggesting the divinity of Jesus, and another consisting of passages that stand in direct opposition to that view. In the first section, it was shown that despite the interpretations offered by Christian commentators, the challenging passages of the Gospel of John, which seemingly imply the divinity of Jesus, are not capable of proving his divinity. Perhaps the most important phrase in this Gospel is the statement, "The Word was God," yet it was demonstrated that its actual meaning is different and does not imply the divinity of Jesus." In the second section, however, considering the numerous passages that on the one hand affirm monotheism and the oneness of God in the Gospel of John, and on the other hand present Jesus as a human being and a prophet who attributes all of his attributes and authority to God Almighty, it can be concluded that not only can the doctrine of the Trinity not be established from the Gospel of John, but rather what can be demonstrated clearly and without forced interpretation, contrary to the commonly held view about this Gospel, is monotheism and the oneness of God, not the Trinity. In this regard, the critique and interpretation of the Gospel of John by Unitarian Christians, as presented in this study, serves as an important piece of evidence and support that significantly contributes to clarifying and articulating the issue of monotheism in the Gospel of John.

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