THE TRINITY IN CREATION

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The New Testament makes it very clear that the God of the Bible is one God in three distinct persons. It also directly states that the pre-Incarnate Word (or second member of the Trinity) directly participated in every act of creation. Likewise, this doctrine can be supported from the text of Genesis 1. While the use of the plural noun Elohim *used throughout the Old Testament is inadequate to demonstrate it, the plural pronoun and plural predication used in Gen 1:26 does strongly suggest it—indeed demand it on the basis of NT revelation.*

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Introduction

There is no denying that the doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith. This is readily evidenced by the extensive development of this doctrine throughout church history. While the word "trinity" itself does not appear in Scripture, the sheer volume of work done to defend and articulate it in both councils and statements of faith affirm its importance to the Christian faith.[1]

The chief reason this doctrine is so staunchly defended is due to the fact that it is an absolutely essential testimony of the NT revelation. The Trinitarian formulas present it (cf. Matt 28:18–20). The indirect Trinitarian references affirm it (cf. Rom 15:16, 30). The inter-Trinitarian conversations demand it. Jesus' prayers are reduced to nonsensical musings apart from the doctrine of the Trinity (cf. John 17). The Father's audible affirmations of the Son during Jesus' earthly ministry collapse into

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[1] For an excellent and succinct survey of the development of the doctrine historically, see Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology: Three Volumes in One* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 1:251–57. For a more extensive discussion of the historical formulation of the doctrine, see John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 471–98. For a stellar defense of the historicity the doctrine of the Trinity, see Nathan Busenitz, "Did Constantine Invent the Doctrine of the Trinity?" *MSJ* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 217–42.

statements of heresy or lunacy apart from the doctrine of the Trinity (cf. Matt 3:17; 17:5; 2 Pet 1:17). This does not even begin to address the implications and theological assertions related to the deity of Christ and how they necessitate seeing a plurality of persons within the Godhead. So, from a NT perspective, it is essential to affirm the doctrine of the Trinity, which can be readily proven from the biblical text.

A significant truth conveyed in the NT is the direct involvement of the second member of the Trinity in the original act of creation. John says the Word was not only present but also active as a member of the Godhead during every act of creation (cf. John 1:1–3). This is the same Word that became flesh (John 1:14). Furthermore, Paul presents the Son as the one through whom and for whom all things were created (cf. Col 1:15–17). These texts present the second member of the Trinity as directly involved in the original acts of creation recorded in the OT.

The question to be addressed in this article is simply this: Is there biblical evidence to support the doctrine of the Trinity in the actual Genesis 1 narrative? This article will examine two primary arguments: (1) the use of the plural noun for God (cf. Gen 1:1, and throughout), and (2) the use of the plural pronouns in Gen 1:26.

The Use of the Plural Noun in Genesis 1:1

The first potential indication in the creation narrative that there is a plurality of persons within the Godhead is the use of the plural form *Elohim* to refer to the Creator in Gen 1:1 and throughout the rest of the narrative. This noun is used repeatedly throughout the OT in a plural form to refer to both a plurality of gods (esp. in reference to pagan deities) as well as to the God of Israel. But, does this grammatical practice clearly convey a plurality of persons within the Godhead in a way consistent with NT theological conclusions?

The normal way to tell the difference in most OT contexts is that *Elohim* is used in conjunction with singular verbs and predicators when it refers to the God of Israel—e.g., in Gen 1:1, "In the beginning *Elohim* (pl. form) created (3rd singular verb) the heavens and the earth." In comparison, one can see that when *Elohim* is used in reference to other gods conveying plurality, it is used with plural verbs and predicators—e.g., in 1 Kings 20:10, "May the gods (pl. form) do (3rd plural verb) so to me . . ." This practice is fairly consistent throughout the OT, though not without exceptions.[2] Nevertheless, the rule of thumb is that *Elohim* is used in its plural form consistently together with singular or plural predicators based upon whether it is being used to refer to the singular God of Israel or other gods (plural).[3]

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[2] There are a few instances in which a singular form of *Elohim* (*Eloah;* אֱלוֹהַ) is used to refer to Israel's God (cf. Deut 32:15, 17; Pss 18:32[Heb.]; 114:7; Hab 1:11; 3:3).

[3] It is worth pointing out that Cooper makes a good case based upon an initial investigation of many of the unique occurrences—particularly those exception cases where *Elohim* is used with a plural predicator and is at the same time referring to the God of Israel. He concludes accordingly that the plural form is therefore intended to be an early trinitarian revelation. His work is incomplete since his evidences are based largely upon the exception cases as a rule. However, his argumentation bears further investigation by scholars in order to consider the full merits of his evidence—esp. as it may inform the standard rules of predication. Cf. David L. Cooper, *The God of Israel* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1945)*,* esp. 24–43.

Now, the fact that there is a singular form used at all could be grounds for concluding that the OT writers, starting with Moses himself, intended to convey the idea of plurality of persons within the Godhead from the beginning. The use of the plural form as a standard practice, coupled with singular verbs and predicators, was adopted under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order to coincide ultimately with progressive revelation that was to follow. Some writers have taken this as grounds for concluding that the plural form of *Elohim*, in reference to God, allows for the beginnings of Trinitarian conclusions in the OT. For example, one writer put it this way, "[*Elohim* is] a term conveying both unity of the one God and yet allowing for a plurality of persons."[4]

The real question is, Does the use of the plural form of *Elohim* actually convey this sense of plurality within the Godhead doctrinally? Or, is this pressing the use of the plural form further than is grammatically and lexically defensible? To answer this, a brief examination of the various uses of the plural and singular forms will be conducted. The results of this exercise will greatly aid in forming a final conclusion.

Grammatical Considerations of the Plural Form

Plurality in BH[5] is normally conveyed through the use of a plural ending.[6] Most first-year seminarians know that these forms are the fairly standardized endings (ים or ות). These patterns are consistently followed and applied to masculine or feminine forms—though there are, naturally, exceptions.[7] Nevertheless, the standard practice in BH is to show plurality using these plural endings. Likewise, the absence of these endings typically conveys singularity.[8]

However, plurality can also be conveyed through the use of a singular form in BH in the case of certain words. These words are typically classified as collective singulars or singulars of species by Hebrew grammarians.[9] Collective singulars are found in basically two contexts: (1) When a noun by definition refers to a group;[10] (2) when a singular noun is used contextually to speak of a group or species.[11] Examples of the first case include words like "flock" (צֹאן) or "herd" (בָּקָר), which refer to a single entity that is made up of a plurality of individuals. Likewise, words like "bird" (עוֹף), "worm" (רִמָּה), and "tear" (דִּמְעָה) can either refer to a collective or a true

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[4] Jack B. Scott, "אֱלֹהִים," in *TWOT*, 1:470.

[5] Biblical Hebrew, hereafter written simply as BH.

[6] Or, in the case of certain words like those referring to body parts that normally occur in pairs—e.g., hands or eyes—the dual form is used. It still refers typically to more than one—i.e., two hands.

[7] E.g., the masculine noun for father (אָב) takes a feminine plural ending. The plurality of the term is still clearly distinguishable even with the seeming gender conflict with the choice of ending.

[8] For more on the morphology for the singular, plural and dual forms, see Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew,* trans. and rev. T. Muraoka, *Subsidia Biblica* 14/I–II (repr.; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2005), 266–71 (§89–90); hereafter, JM.

[9] Cf. JM 497–99 (§135); Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 113–16 (§7.2); hereafter, W&O.

[10] Cf. JM, 497–98 (§135b).

[11] Cf. JM, 498–99 (§135c).

singular depending upon the context in which the term appears. In the second case, words like "Adam" (אָדָם) and "man" (אִישׁ) are frequently used as a singular to refer contextually to a group or species even though a plural form exists. Linguistically, this is not an uncommon feature of certain words in a given language. In English, one might say, "I like fruit" or "Please give me a piece of fruit." In both cases, the singular form of the word fruit is used. However, the sense of singularity or plurality is conveyed not by the form itself, but by the context. The same thing likewise occurs with words like "people" or "fish." In fact, a plural ending is sometimes added to these normally collective singulars in certain contexts to convey the sense of a plurality of groups, types, or species.[12]

The key point to glean from all of this is that a singular or plural form of the word does not by itself always convey definitively a sense of plurality or singularity. In BH, there are a number of terms that occur in dual or plural forms that are essentially still individual entities or collectives. Grammarians identify several distinct classifications of these exceptions. The *plural of composition* is the classification applied to words that are conveyed in the plural when they refer to a collection of individuals, but in the singular when describing the species or natural state as a whole.[13] For example, "wheat" (חִטָּה) is used in the plural to refer to the collected kernels gathered up at harvest, but in the singular when it refers to the species. "Blood" (דָּם) is singular when it refers to it in its natural state still in the body. However, when it is spilled, it occurs as a plural (cf. Gen 4:10).[14] It is important to note that no change took place in the blood itself. The switch from singular to plural is merely a means to convey the removal of the blood from its normal location within the body in an individual's veins. There are other grammatical classifications worth noting as well. The *plural of extension* is used to describe terms that are always rendered in a plural form, seemingly due to the immense size or complexity of the referent of the noun itself. Examples include words like "heaven" (שָׁמַיִם) and "face" or "surface" (פָּנִים).

As has been shown, in many cases defining the intended meaning of plurality is not a simple matter of indicating a singularity or plurality of entities. At times, plural forms are used to convey anything from complexity to intensity. At other times, a change from the singular to the plural conveys anything from a change in context to the inclusion of a plurality of collectives. Some words are simply plural due to the nature of the word in BH.

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[12] There are a number of uses of the collective singular in the creation narrative itself. In Gen 1:20, "Let the waters swarm with a swarm (sg.) of living creature(s) (sg.)." One can observe the use of the singular for swarm (and for bird in the second part of the verse) to refer to a collection of creatures, as well as the use of the singular form for "living creatures" used to coincide with the grammatical form of the collective. Then, in Gen 1:21–22, the details of the account confirm plurals were in fact being conveyed through the use of these singular terms. The plural is used to refer to the sea monsters, and the "after their (pl.) kind" summarizes the effects of the creative act. Throughout the creation narrative, there are multiple uses of a singular noun form which refers to a plural referent.

[13] Cf. JM, 500 (§136b).

[14] Cf. W&O, 119–20 (§7.4.1b).

Contextual Considerations of the Plural Form

Many times the sense of plurality or singularity must be based upon contextual factors beyond the mere grammatical form. The most relevant classification to this discussion (i.e., of a plural form that is used to refer to a singular entity with no direct plural connotations derived from the form itself) is the *plural of majesty* (a.k.a., the *plural of excellence* or *honorific plural*).[15] This is best defined as an intensive use of the plural form in which a singular individual is "so thoroughly characterized by the qualities of the noun that a plural is used."[16] Or, put another way, writers use the plural form because it shows a heightened level of respect for the individual being referred to or addressed in the context. The key, as it relates to this article, is in how plurals of majesty are typically recognized. There are two primary ways grammarians identify a plural of majesty. First, is to note that the word, though it occurs in a plural form in a given context, is used in conjunction with singular syntax in the surrounding immediate context. Second, the word itself in this context speaks of or to an individual of significance or importance—or an individual that epitomizes a class.

The most common terms used as plurals of majesty are, in fact, *Elohim* and *Adonay.* Both are used in this way to show special reverence for the one addressed or referred to in the context. Many examples appear throughout the OT:

> Psalm 7:10 reads (אֱלֹהִים צַדִּיק)—i.e., "a just (sg.) God (pl.)."
> Genesis 1:1 has (בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים)—i.e., "God (pl.) created (3ʳᵈsg.)."

In each case, the plural noun is used with a singular predicator, identifying it as a plural of majesty. Two other examples are worth citing. In Deut 10:17, Moses writes, 'Yahweh, He (sg.) is God (pl.) of gods (pl.) and Lord (pl.) of lords (pl.).' Both lead plurals can be classified as majestic in this context. In 1 Kings 1:43, a majestic plural is used in reference to a human king, in many ways certifying the classification itself. In this passage, Jonathan addresses Adonijah saying, "Our Lord (pl.), David the king (sg.), he made (3ms) Solomon king."[17] This regular pattern used throughout the OT compels the interpreter to consider the use of the plural form *Elohim* in these kinds of conditions as a majestic plural unless there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary in a given context.

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[15] Cf. JM, 500–01 (§136d).

[16] W&O, 122–24 (§7.4.3).

[17] It is worth noting that Waltke and O'Connor include both the Behemoth from Job 40:15–16, and 19, as well as the generalization of the donkey as a species in Zech 9:9 in this broader classification on the basis of the latter rule (cf. W&O, 122 [§7.4.3a]). The Behemoth is classified this way because it epitomizes a creature beyond human control. The Zech 9:9 text literally says, "on a colt, the foal of a donkey (lit. donkeys)." See also JM, 502 (§136f)—they classify it as a plural of intensity, which is a classification distinct from the plural of majesty in their system. W&O put all intensives into the broad category of honorifics and the like. A case can be made for either system. Of primary importance is the recognition of the intensive plurals and their varying nuances and significances.

Conclusions Regarding the Plural Form

So, what answer can be given to the question posed earlier with regard to the use of the plural form of *Elohim* as it relates to the doctrine of the Trinity? A close examination of the use of *Elohim* in the context of Genesis 1 reveals the plural form is used in an honorific or majestic way to refer to the God of Israel and is therefore not proof of a plurality of persons within the Godhead. This conclusion is based upon the following evidences: (1) The plural form of *Elohim* is used throughout the Genesis 1 narrative to refer to the Creator God in conjunction with singular verbs.[18] This coincides with the normal rules for identifying a majestic plural. (2) The God of the Bible is an individual uniquely worthy of reverence due to His power and person that most especially merits the majestic plural form.

On these grounds, the plural form of *Elohim* is not, in itself, a clear indication of plurality within the Godhead. The best and most consistent way to understand the plural form in these cases is to take it as a majestic plural.[19] The plural form is used in Genesis 1 and throughout the OT to refer to the God of Israel (the Creator of Heaven and Earth) because it is an intensive way to acknowledge the absolute supremacy of the One True God. This does not mean that the plural form speaks against a plurality of persons within the Godhead.[20] It simply means that one cannot reason for the Trinity on the grammatical basis of this plural form alone.[21]

The Use of the Plural Pronoun in Genesis 1:26

While the plural form of *Elohim* has been shown to be an inadequate ground upon which to conclude that the Genesis 1 narrative gives an early indication of a plurality of persons within the Godhead, there is another grammatical issue worthy of consideration from a Trinitarian perspective. In Gen 1:26 there is a significant deviation from the syntactical pattern followed throughout the creation narrative. A statement of deliberation is made—seemingly within the Godhead itself.

There are several significant observations worth noting by way of introduction. For the first time, the pattern of divine fiat followed by divine evaluation is broken.

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[18] Cf. Gen 1:1, "God (pl.) created" (3ms); Gen 1:3, "then God (pl.) said" (3ms); Gen 1:4, "then God (pl.) saw . . . then God (pl.) separated" (3ms); Gen 1:5, "then God (pl.) called" (3ms); etc.

[19] Or, plural of majesty.

[20] There are over 2,500 occurrences of *Elohim* in its various forms throughout the OT. Heiser points out that on average, 3 out of every 5 times this morphologically plural noun is used, it is the subject of a grammatically singular predicator—Cf. Michael S. Heiser, "Should אלהים (ʾĔLŌHÎM) with Plural Predication Be Translated 'Gods'?" *Bible Translator* 61, no. 3 (July 2010): 123–36, esp. 123. That means there are a significant number of other cases worth investigating. Perhaps an exhaustive look at every occurrence by a doctoral student at some point would yield a more definitive answer—esp. as it relates to Cooper's argumentation.

[21] One could potentially make a case for the plural form coinciding with trinitarian doctrine on the basis of God being the author of language—including the confusion of languages (Gen 11). The argument could be that He constructed the majestic plural into the framework of the Hebrew language in order to ultimately coincide with progressive revelation. However, this is still not a conclusion that would be naturally drawn either from the text itself or from an OT saint's perspective—nor, for that matter, from a NT believer's perspective. The common understanding of the term *Elohim* with singular predication is to take it as some kind of intensive plural referring to a singular entity.

Prior to verse 26, God speaks; His expressed will is enacted; then He evaluates His creation as good. At this point, prior to the creation of man, a statement of deliberation precedes the act of creation. Next, the deliberation reveals that this creative act will be special. The creation of man is to be truly unique because man is to be created in the image and likeness of God. No other part of creation is so specifically or uniquely described. Most significantly, as it relates to this study, the consistent pattern of the plural form of *Elohim* is used with a singular verb—"then God (sg.) said (3ms)." But it is followed by the use of plural verb and plural pronouns that have God as their clear antecedent—"Let us make (3cp) man in our (pl.) image and according to our (pl.) likeness."[22] What is the significance of the use of this plural verb and pronoun? Does it convey a plurality of persons within the Godhead—even if the use of the majestic plural does not?

Due to the doctrinal implications of this issue, a number of solutions have been presented through the ages. For the sake of this discussion, seven primary views will be introduced.

The Mythical View

One possible solution is that the use of the plural is derived from an ancient polytheistic myth narrative that was used by the editor of the Genesis text during the course of its development. The existence of the plural in this verse is merely evidence of an inadequate effort on the part of the redactor(s) to remove all the pagan elements from the story. Skinner, for example, suggests that the significant differences in phraseology between these verses and the preceding sections "are sufficient to prove literary discontinuity of some kind."[23] In other words, this exegetical issue is actually a proof of literary dependence and redaction of some kind. Obviously, this view contradicts an evangelical view of inspiration and can thus be rejected.

The Majestic View

According to this view, God is addressing Himself in a way that is consistent with the plural of majesty—i.e., He is using the plural pronoun in order to maintain grammatical conformity with the majestic plural use of *Elohim.* Speiser holds to this view.[24] McKeown lists this as a possibility among several he poses as acceptable.[25]

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[22] It is also worth mentioning that this is not the only occurrence of this type of deliberative statement in the Genesis narrative (cf. Gen 3:22; 11:7–8; see also, Isa 6:8).

[23] John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis,* ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 35.

[24] E. A. Speiser, *Genesis,* AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 7.

[25] James McKeown, *Genesis,* THOTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 26.

The chief and convincing objection to this is the fact that plural predication accompanies the plural pronoun here in contrast to the consistent use of singular predication throughout for *Elohim*.[26]

The Deliberative View

This view is loosely referred to as the "royal we" view. God is addressing Himself by means of a plural of self–address or deliberation. Arnold describes it this way, "the verse does not refer to plural persons or beings involved in the act of human creation, but is a pregnant way of saying that God deliberated with himself about the creation of humankind."[27] The significance of the plural is to show that God actually takes a personal interest in the creation of man, rather than merely creating by divine fiat. I.e., instead of the typical pattern of "let there be . . . and it comes to pass" there is a statement of deliberation indicating that God will personally perform this act of creation. This view can be supported on the basis of the more detailed descriptive statement given in Gen 2:7. As such, this deliberative statement conveys both the uniqueness and significance of the creation of mankind in comparison to all the rest of creation.[28]

While the argumentation behind this view is stronger than most, there are still solid grounds for rejecting it. The chief objection to it is that there is no clear OT parallel that similarly used the plural form for this type of deliberation. Additionally, Joüon and Muraoka demonstrate that the plural of majesty or intensification is not used with verbs.[29] As such, this view is doubly suspect.[30]

The Rhetorical View

This is something of a variant on the rhetorical view above. However, instead of merely addressing Himself, God is including the earth which will be involved in a passive sense in the creation of man. The plural then refers to God directly and the earth in a rhetorical sense as the raw material from which man will be fashioned. Keiser attests to encountering this view occasionally, but does not cite a specific proponent.[31] This writer has yet to find one personally. In any case, the simple fact that creation itself is not actually involved in the act makes this suggestion dubious at

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[26] Bryan Murphy, "Genesis 1:1–2:3: A Textual and Exegetical Examination as an Objective Foundation for Apologetical and Theological Studies" (Sun Valley, CA: The Master's Seminary, Th.D. dissertation, 2008), 272–73.

[27] Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44.

[28] See also Keil's position in, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. by James Martin (repr.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:38–39.

[29] JM, 376 (§114e (1)). That is to say, the "Let us make" is all contained in the plural verb form itself in the Hebrew text. No appositional noun is supplied in a plural form in conjunction with a singular verb. This necessarily eliminates the conclusion that this is a kind of majestic plural.

[30] See also, Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 133.

[31] Thomas A. Keiser, "The Divine Plural: A Literary-Contextual Argument for Plurality in the Godhead," *JSOT* 34, no. 2 (2009): 131–46, esp. 132.

best. Furthermore, the earth is "passively" involved in the majority of creation and no need for deliberation like this was required. This view is, therefore, highly suspect.

The Angelic View

This is a fairly popular view, and it boasts a small majority of contemporary writers. It sees God as addressing the heavenly host or court that were present during creation week. This address can include anything from God merely involving the angelic host in the discussion about the creation of man to an actual tie to the ANE world views that included a pantheon of gods of various levels. Of those that limit the scope to God deliberating with the angelic host, a number of prominent contemporary scholars can be cited.[32] The most compelling argument to date is probably the one given by Walton.[33]

The greatest strength of the position is that there is biblical evidence of God interacting with the heavenly host of angels, including even Satan (cf. Job 1–2). Additionally, Job 38:4–7 indicates that the angels were present at some point during the actual creation week (esp. v. 7).

Nevertheless, this view should be rejected on the basis of the following objections: (1) There is no reference here, or elsewhere, to man being made in the image of angels (contra Delitzsch).[34] This alone makes "our image" very unlikely as a reference to anyone other than God Himself. If the "our image" is singularly referring to God, the "Let us make" must be equally limited to God. (2) There are no direct references to angels or the angelic host in the creation narrative (i.e., Gen 1:1–2:3; or even in 2:4–25). The nearest reference is in Gen 3:24 and it is too remote to be readily associated with the plurality and the context of 1:26 with any level of certainty. (3) The return in 1:27 to the grammatical pattern of *Elohim* coupled with a singular verb form, further compels one to the conclusion that God alone both acts and is addressed in the creation of man. The restatement in 2:7 further affirms God's singular involvement in man's creation. (4) Even outside the immediate context of the creation narrative, the Bible makes it clear that God consulted no one and involved no one in the acts of creation (cf. Isa 40:12–14).[35]

Based upon these considerations, it is necessary to reject the angelic view. A primary reason many seem compelled to look for a referent other than God in this case involves their lack of readiness to concede to it as an early reference to a plurality within the Godhead. However, the use of the plurals in this verse make it syntactically

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[32] E.g., Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 64–65; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 27–28; and Hamilton, *Genesis*, 132–34.

[33] John H. Walton, *Genesis,* NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 129–30.

[34] Franz Delitzsch, *A Commentary on Genesis,* trans. Sophia Taylor (repr.: Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 97–101.

[35] As additional secondary considerations, one might point to Isa 44:24, though the reference contextually speaks of the nation of Israel itself; and to Neh 9:6, which may suggest there was no angelic participation in creation.

necessary to understand this as God consulting Himself, given the lack of any other clear contextual antecedent.

The Plurality View

The grammatical and contextual challenges discussed above led many to conclude that the reference is in some way an early evidence of a duality or plurality within the Godhead. Barth, for example, understood it as part of an I-Thou relationship within the Godhead.[36] Clines ties it back to the reference to the Spirit of God in Gen 1:2.[37] A prevailing view today seems to be that though the expression contains what Christian readers may view as the initial glimmerings of a Trinitarian revelation, it is unlikely that a writer as committed to monotheism as the author of Genesis would have "written something that was ambiguous enough to give any room for polytheistic interpretations. On the other hand, Genesis refers to God's Spirit having a role in creation, and the idea of God addressing himself or his Spirit is not polytheistic, nor is it a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity . . . [and since none] of these explanations of the plural in Genesis 1:26 has gained overall approval . . . the matter must, for the moment, remain open."[38] In other words, it is acceptable to discuss the fact that it does very much seem to convey plurality. However, one must not be dogmatic and assert a Trinitarian position because there is no consensus and it seems to contradict OT Jewish monotheistic beliefs.

There are two objections to this conclusion. First, a proper NT theological belief is monotheistic and yet affirms a plurality of persons within the Godhead. Second, the grammar does call for plurality—and this can be dogmatically affirmed. The real question is, How should this plurality be understood—especially given the additional revelation provided by the NT?

The Trinitarian View

On the basis of the argumentation given above, the best answer seems to this writer to be that the plural pronoun is in fact a clear reference to a plurality of persons within the Godhead that later revelation will both confirm and define as a Trinity. The grammar demands a plurality to be involved in the actual creation of man. The context necessarily limits this to God. The rest of Scripture reveals a Trinity of persons within the Godhead.

Passages like John 1 reveal the presence of the Word in the act of creation. This later revelation confirms that a conversation took place between the Father and the Word, with the Spirit present and active throughout as well (cf. Gen 1:2). While the fullness of this may not have been comprehended by either Moses, the human author, or the original readers (the nation of Israel immediately following the Exodus), through inspiration, God intended to convey Trinitarian involvement in creation

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[36] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation,* trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight, in *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 60.

[37] David J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *TynBul* 16 (1967): 53–103, esp. 63–69.

[38] McKeown, *Genesis*, 26.

through the progress of revelation.[39] In point of fact, the Genesis 1 narrative conveys plurality. In progressive revelation, this is explained as three persons in one God. The clear emphasis throughout the OT on one God must be balanced from the beginning on the basis of this early "plurality of persons" revelation. Moses, in Genesis 1, wrote the first inspired revelatory expression conveying the truth about the plurality of persons within the Godhead. It is the rest of Scripture that confirms the reference to be Trinitarian.

Lest this cause undue concern on the basis that historically this was not fully understood or perceived from an OT perspective, let it be noted that even when coupled with countless miracles, signs and wonders, the disciples themselves were unable to comprehend the clear declarations of Jesus Himself regarding His crucifixion and resurrection until after He had opened their eyes (cf. Luke 24:44–47). But following this, they became ready proclaimers, not just of the truth of the resurrection, but also of the scriptural prophetic statements fulfilled by it. Genesis 1 reveals God as a single God with a plurality of persons within that Godhead. It calls for the rest of Scripture progressively to confirm that plurality as the Trinity.

Conclusion

So, is there biblical evidence to support the doctrine of the Trinity in the Genesis 1 narrative? As has been demonstrated, the plural form *Elohim* does not argue for an early Trinitarian revelation. The best way to understand this form in the Genesis narrative is to take it as a plural of majesty due to the consistent use of singular predicators. However, the plurals of Gen 1:26 coupled with the return to the consistent use of *Elohim* in conjunction with singular verbs does attest to a plurality of persons within the singular Godhead. Progressive revelation reveals this plurality as Trinitarian—namely, Father, Son, and Spirit.

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[39] Murphy, "Genesis 1:1–2:3," 275–77.