

The Current State of Affairs, Defining Who God Is

John Obelenus

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a historically, literary, and sociologically sensitive method for approaching the Jewish texts that talk about God. That method must do justice to evidence, not conclusions. Conclusions will not be covered in this paper. I intend to cover the main thrust of Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the God of Israel* along with certain points from Larry Hurtado's *How On Earth Did Jesus Become a God*. If Hurtado's work is easier to fit into our view of the one God, and in my opinion it is, then Bauckham's is a frontal assault.

Hurtado focuses on the significance of Jesus' inclusion in Christian devotion. Devotion, however, is slippery to pin down. Acts of reverence towards Jesus have been performed for other figures in the literature of Judaism. The argument tends to be one of degrees, that Jesus devotion was central to Christian devotion, an argument that is far from convincing towards showing that Jesus is wholly, or in part, the one God of Israel. However, Bauckham focuses on the ways in which Second Temple Judaism defined who the one true God is in the face of paganism and idolatry. These identifications are made in the face of idolatry in Christian literature as well. Bauckham's thesis is that the Christian literature included Jesus in the "identity of God" using the very same methods and techniques that Second Temple Judaism defended and defined who the one true God is.

I remain unconvinced by certain of Hurtado's and Bauckham's arguments¹. That being said, the main thrust of the argument when taken in the context of Second Temple Judaism is forceful. The main argument goes thus. First, Judaism defined God definitively in two ways; the sovereign one, and the creator. Second, all other pagan claims of deity were fought off on these grounds, as their god is neither sovereign, nor the creator. In most cases their god was declared to be impotent (not non-existent, though it did happen occasionally). Third, Jesus is included in "the identity of God" because he is argued in the texts to be sovereign and involved as creator when Christians faced pagan claims. Jesus is not assaulting the Jewish God to replace him (as a pagan god would be doing). Rather Jesus, with God's election, is involved in doing what God does according to the Jewish worldview.² We must account for the argument and evidence if our understanding is to remain viable. At this time there are no rebuttals for their best arguments, and I present those arguments hereafter. But first, how did I find myself in this position?

The most easily accessible, and therefore secure, definition of who God is must be Mk 12.28-34³. We have two individuals, representative of two different groups within Second Temple

¹ Those issues, by and large, are not discussed here in this paper.

² It is my view that the Nicene creed is using a more Hellenistic definition of who God is (ontology).

³ It is an absolute shame that Bauckham relegates this text to a footnote as just another example of an allusion to the Shema without handling it, while handling what seems to be much more questionable allusions to the Shema in Rom

Judaism. Between these many⁴ groups there were many points of agreement and disagreement. To have such a text that depicts two groups in agreement on the question of who God is is very important. Moreover, the text includes one of the most important symbols of Judaism, the Shema. The angle at which we are approaching the Shema here in Mark (or in Deuteronomy) is what matters. And that angle is Second Temple Judaism. The original meaning of the Shema, whether 'one' really means the number one, or whether this means the ancient Jews were polytheists who refused to give credence to other gods (a practice known as monolatry), does not matter one bit from this angle. What matters is that the Jewish people of the Second Temple period used the Shema to define who they believed the one true God is.

In our text, both representatives use the same symbol, the Shema, and agree on what it means. Neither the scribe, nor Jesus offer any deviations or mutations on the symbol. Because the symbol of the Shema is so widely attested, and two representatives are agreeing so precisely, this Jewish understanding of who God is both accessible and secure. Since no theologian would say that the Jewish understanding of God is the same as Christian understanding of God, finding Jesus to agree with the Jewish understanding seems to be an open and shut case. Or so I thought.

Having worked through the massive volumes of NT Wright on Christian origins I was very encouraged to find an epistemological, historical, and theological method recognized, developed, and executed. In brief it involves reading the literature within its natural context, and reading it appropriately as the writers intended.⁵ Just as you cannot change the rules of a sport when you lose, in fairness, we cannot throw out a method because we do not like the results. We must find fault with the method itself, or in the execution of the method. No other method I have come across excels in quite the same way, collecting all the data, giving a clear and simple line, and explaining other areas of immediate interest. In reading his work on Christian origins I was both surprised and encouraged by his historical reconstruction.⁶ Approximately twenty to fifty pages⁷ contained a positive reference to Jesus being God, or divine⁸, and none with sustained argument or force. Many more pages made the points we have been upholding for years concerning the mixing of categories and backward projection of later Christian usage onto the lips of Jesus being inappropriate.

Looking out on this landscape from our position seemed very convincing and powerful. One of the areas Wright's work on origins shines is outlining the ancient thought-world over and against our own ideals driven by the enlightenment and modernity. Bauckham enriches our understanding of the thought world of Second Temple Judaism on this issue of God's identity in primarily two ways. First, he clarifies the lack of value the enlightenment definition of monotheism has for us in applying to these texts. Second, he shows that the idea of functional representation as an explanation of Jesus' role is modern and unwarranted.

3.28 and John 10.30

4 At least six; Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes/Qumran John, and Jesus. Debate continues whether or not the Essenes are responsible for the sectarian writings found at Qumran.

5 Of course everyone attempts to do such a thing. However, this method was meticulously outlined and defended in his work. I've produced a small appendix as an introduction to it, as the rest of this paper is presumed on it.

6 For a review without reading all his volumes see *Jesus & The Restoration of Israel* ed. Newman, specifically Paul Eddy's contribution.

7 Approximately twenty to fifty out of approximately two thousand, just so you get a sense of the scale.

8 Wright notes that 'divine' is a slippery and unhelpful term to use.

Clarifying the Landscape

An important recent contribution to this whole area of debate has argued forcefully that not only is the term [monotheism] a peculiarly modern one, but that the set of ideas it evokes are characteristically Enlightenment ones, seducing us into reading the biblical writings in terms of a view of religion that belongs to the Enlightenment and is inappropriate to the texts. This claim provides a fruitful point of entry for us into the complex of 'problems of monotheism' with which we shall be concerned with this paper.⁹

Admittedly, Bauckham's scope is much wider going into the areas of philosophy and apologetics heading off the various hot topics of the "Monotheism is bad for you" ilk. His next five points, however, go a long way towards clarifying the Christian perspective against the common perception of what a 'monotheistic' god should look like (according to the Enlightenment definition and expectation.)¹⁰ As good as those five points are, we do not have space to contend with them here. The much more instructive, and to our position, damaging, is that:

The dominance of the distinction between 'functional' and 'ontic' [ontological] Christology has made it seem unproblematic to say that, for early Christology, Jesus exercises the 'functions' of divine lordship without being regarded as 'ontically' divine. In fact, such a distinction is highly problematic from the point of view of early Jewish monotheism. For this understanding of the unique divine identity, the unique sovereignty of God was not a mere 'function' which God could delegate to someone else. It was one of the key identifying characteristics of the unique divine identity, which distinguished the one God from all other reality. The unique divine sovereignty is a matter of *who God is...* The distinction commonly made between 'functional' and 'ontic' Christology has been, broadly, between early Christology in a Jewish context and patristic Christology which applied Greek philosophical categories of divine nature to Christ.... However this is to misconstrue Jewish monotheism in Hellenistic terms as though it were primarily concerned with *what divinity is* – divine nature – rather than with *who YHWH, the unique God, is* – divine identity.¹¹

The fact that later Christian thinkers went into the world of Hellenism to find expressions and solutions to their own issues is something we cannot change. But we do not have to repeat their move. We should not create the distinction of functional and ontological when approaching these Jewish texts. The writers of Second Temple Judaism do not have the appropriate thoughts or appropriate language to talk about metaphysical distinctions such as Hellenism has, along with our Enlightenment, modern, and post-modern thought-world. We cannot import this frame of reference backwards, even if it helps us in our case. We have to remain true to the method and treat the writers of the text with integrity.

⁹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, pg. 61

¹⁰ These five points are; one, understanding monolatry, two, including a devotional aspect towards the one God as opposed to a mental understanding, three, an ethics based on command and obedience not intellectual reasoning, four, a deconstruction of the history of religions approach, and finally fifth, understanding universality in response to election.

¹¹ Bauckham, pg. 30-1

Defining Who God Is

The modern version of the question is “what metaphysical characteristics must a being possess to rightly be termed 'god', or even 'God'?”. Bauckham is right to show the ancient question is more like “which one of these so-called deities is the real God, or a god?”. That modern question has no relevance when we are talking about our ancient sources. We must treat the source as they come to us, from their own time and culture. To find an answer to our question Bauckham goes to the most likely place to find an answer – the texts in which Second Temple writers are combating pagan god-claims.

To our question, 'In what did Second Temple Judaism consider the uniqueness of the one God to consist, what distinguished God as unique from all other reality, including being worshipped as gods by Gentiles?', the answer given again and again, in a wide variety of Second Temple Jewish literature, is that the only true God, YHWH, the God of Israel, is sole Creator of all things, and sole Ruler of all things.¹²

When the Jewish people needed to qualify who God is to themselves, or to pagans, they repeatedly used the themes of Creation and God's Sovereignty to back up their claims.¹³ We can see this consistent defending and defining of who God is in 1 Cor 8.6 as the previous verses and chapters are all dealing with idolatry. Right in the middle is a, specifically Christian, definition of who God is with clear allusion to the Shema. We will return to that text in due time. This method of determining who God is, along with dismissing the confusion created by importing modern thought into the text leads Bauckham to say: “God's rule over all things defines who God is: it cannot be delegated as a mere function to a creature”.¹⁴ It goes the same for creation as well.

We can also talk about how the Jewish writers of the Second Temple Period use the word God, or in hebrew *elohim*:

They did not think this terminology made such angelic beings semi-divine beings who straddled the otherwise clear distinction between the one God and all other reality, but simply that these words could be used for heavenly being created by and subject to the unique Creator and Lord YHWH. This is also true of the Qumran community where much more use of this scriptural terminology was made with reference to angels. For late Second Temple Judaism, it is not that occasional use of the word 'god' for angels qualifies monotheism, but simply that the issue in defining monotheism is not the use of the *word* 'god', but the understanding of the absolute uniqueness of YHWH.¹⁵

Whenever the issue of God has been discussed in recent times, both sides of the debate have

12 Bauckham pg. 9

13 Bauckham's full footnotes on the themes, first of Creation read thus: Isa 40.26, 28; 42.5, 44.24, 45.12, 18; 48.13, 51.16; Neh 9.6; Hos 13.4 LXX, 2 Macc. 1.24; Sir 43.33; Bel 5; Jub 12.3-5; Sib Or 3.20-35; 8.375-76; Sib Or frg 1.5-6; Sib Or frg 3; Sib Or frg 5; 2 En 47.3-4; 66.4; Apoc Ab 7.10; Ps-Sophocles; Jos Asen 12.1-2; T Job 2.3; second of Rulership thus: Dan 4.34-35; Bel 5; Add Esth 13.9-11; 16.18, 21; 3 Macc 2.2-3; 6.2; Wis 12.13; Sir 18.1-3, Sib Or 3.10, 19; Sib Or frg 1.7, 15, 17, 35; 1 En 9.5; 84.3; 2 En 33.7, 2 Bar 54.13 Josephus, A.J. 1.155-6

14 Bauckham pg. 184

15 Bauckham pg. 224

been guilty of playing to the wrong tune. By over-reading modern and Enlightenment themes into ancient language we have missed the intention of the writers. Now, since we have discarded the modern metaphysical approach instead picking up the approach used by the writers themselves, Bauckham has ceased attempts to find late Jewish parallels for the exaltation and veneration of intermediary figures as precursors for the Christian devotion of Jesus. In his view this approach is a red herring. Jews did venerate intermediary figures and dead heroes. There is no clear and agreed upon way, however, to draw a line in the sand regarding devotion to these figures whether human, alive or dead, or angelic figures, as signifying that they are in fact “divine”, whatever that slippery word may mean. Better not to try! Instead take cues from the very writers reacting to social and prophetic situations in the texts. This idea of defining who God is by sovereignty specifically leads us back to the Gospel proclamation of the early Church. First, however, we need to cover some ground about God-talk.

What To Do About Distinctions and the One God?

Bauckham makes one assertion that I commonly see made, that Old Testament texts do not talk about the “unitariness” of God.

The texts, in my view, are concerned for the unique identity of God, not for the unitariness of God, which became a facet of Jewish monotheism only later. In other words, there is no reason why there should not be real distinctions within the unique identity of God.¹⁶

There is no *a priori* reason to deny that God could not have distinctions. I also admit that unitariness is not the primary concern of the writer, be it Moses, or another.

The first commandment becomes a simple statement that Yahweh's power is absolute, not being distributed among other deities or limited by the will of the [divine] assembly. Israel's thinking was to be distinct from the nations around them. That is the very point of the prohibition. But the text can be misunderstood if the interpreter is not aware of what exactly is being rejected. The first commandment is not just promoting monolatry; it is getting at monotheism another way. Although it does not say explicitly that no other gods exist, it does remove them from the presence of Yahweh. If Yahweh does not share power, authority, or jurisdiction with them, they are not gods in any meaningful sense of the word¹⁷

In addition to the above argument there is another reason it cannot be the primary concern. The writer in his own context does not have to combat the metaphysical idea inherent in fitting a plurality into one 'who'. There are no religions in that time positing such a pluriform god known to the writer!¹⁸ However, this point goes both ways. Then the texts, in my view, can be taken in a unitary way. There is no language or cultural referent available to the writer to either deny or suggest a plurality. Therefore I find it overzealous to argue, on the basis of silence, that

¹⁶ Bauckham pg. 159

¹⁷ Walton *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* pg. 156

¹⁸ I know of no Babylonian, Egyptian, or Mesopotamian god which exhibits pluriformity as is later seen in Hellenism and other eastern religions. However, I admit that my knowledge in this area is limited.

the writer is not guarding unitariness. What other language could such a writer in his time and place use as, other than the word to start counting, to denote – at least some form – of unitariness? No better word I would think. There is no question that the primary evidence in favor of a unitary definition come from the later Talmudic and Mishnaic periods.¹⁹ But, we should expect such a reaction against the Christian development when Greek metaphysical though was being used to define who the God of Israel is by the Christians of that period. The rabbi's reacted against far less! But it does put a marker on the map for the typical Jewish response to pluriform hellenistic language. Bauckham goes on to say:

To say that the Wisdom of God and the Word of God are portrayed as intrinsic to the unique identity of God does not, in itself, decide the highly debated question of the extent to which their portrayal as personal agents is merely literary personification or real hypostatization... it is not because high-ranking angels are portrayed as personal agents that they should not be seen as intrinsic to the unique divine identity.²⁰

These 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' personalities of God is a point of debate. The idea that another being, angelic or otherwise, is necessary for the definition of the first being (i.e. intrinsic) remains to be proven. To plainly assert that the idea could not be false is not a strong argument. Bauckham's own argument – that the writers made it a point to make a distinction between God and everything else – sits on our side, as a bodily, willful, and very personal agent (incarnation or hypostatization notwithstanding) is precisely a distinction the writers consciously make when talking about both angels and Jesus.

On the other side of this argument lies what is intrinsic to God. Most view Lady Wisdom, God's Spirit, and Logos/Word as personifications of God, or better yet:

Language about supernatural agencies other than the one god has to do, rather, with the theological problem of how to hold together providence (with covenant as a special case of providence) and a belief in a transcendent god. Unless this god is to collapse back into being a mere absentee landlord, in which case providence and covenant go by the board, or unless he ceases to be in any meaningful sense transcendent, moving instead towards pantheism or paganism, one is bound to develop, and second-temple Jews did develop, ways of speaking about the divine action in the world which attempt to do justice to these different poles of belief. Thus it is language about angels, about the Shekinah or 'presence' of Israel's god, about Torah, about Wisdom, about the Logos – all of these make their appearances, not as mere fantasy or speculative metaphysics, but as varied (and not always equally successful) attempts to perform a necessary theological task.²¹

To talk about God creating the world with no other counselor but his own Wisdom is not to postulate an extrinsic or external Wisdom, a Wisdom other than God. Rather the writer is able to communicate in his own context both God's transcendence, the fact that he does not take part in the creation, and God's active involvement and sovereignty in the world – without tarnishing

19 NT Wright *The New Testament and the People of God (NTPG)* pg. 259

20 Bauckham pg. 159

21 NTPG pg. 258

either – is to say in the most emphatic language possible that YHWH is the only God. Therefore God's spirit, Wisdom, or Logos are all the ways in which the people of the ancient near East talked about God. During the Second Temple Period some (e.g. Philo) were attempting to use these literary personifications with Greek thought to postulate a true second being. I wonder whether or not Bauckham would find Philo's Logos as extrinsic or intrinsic to the identity of God, and what that might mean, as well as the two powers theology coming out of Daniel 7.

The authorial intent, as I argued, cannot say much supporting plurality, it lacks the language, and the language used is perhaps the best one suited for a unitary understanding. The interpretations within the Second Temple period branched out, some more than others, finding these concepts to apply to the Scriptures. Both Bauckham and NT Wright protest that a theology containing “two powers in heaven”, a person exalted to God's throne, or a person included in the identity of God does not assault monotheism. Under certain circumstances that can be very true. Bauckham admits that adding another God would destroy monotheism. When does adding to the identity of God start to become adding another God? Bauckham does not provide an answer to this question, which is unfortunate because it would create a truly falsifiable thesis.

Incarnation or hypostatization would create, in my view, an extrinsic person (e.g. Jesus) from an intrinsic part of God (e.g. the Logos). The begotten language in John 1 would seem to uphold this point, that the incarnation of God's intrinsic properties created a new person, Jesus. The intrinsic Logos remains unchanged, and Jesus enters the world. Yet part of God's absolute otherness include his eternal being, a this-worldly (that is non-transcendent) and created Jesus, in addition to being distinct from God in body, and will, must be extrinsic. This incarnation has not always existed, and therefore is not necessary (that is, intrinsic) for the identity of God. To end the argument there, however, is to ignore precisely what the rest of the New Testament does with Jesus.

The Gospel After Jesus

Unquestionably Jesus preached the Kingdom of God in his ministry. That preaching started with John the Baptist and continued into the early Church. The addition of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to the Gospel message adds material to the Gospel message that I, and perhaps we, have not fully grasped yet: “Jesus is Lord”²². I am persuaded that there is some subversive play going on with Jesus and Caesar, though the degree is up for debate.²³ Caesar claims to be the 'lord over all the world'. Paul would seem to say that Caesar is the parody of which Jesus is the reality, Jesus is the real “lord over all the world”. However, it seems there is more. Paul makes this move in the Roman world, but without leaving his Jewish influences. And Bauckham would have us look at the early Christian usage of Ps. 110 based on Jewish exegetical use in light of how they define who God is. We are right to recognize that

22 If NT Wright is correct that a specific theme of Jesus' ministry is the return of YHWH to Zion, with the clarion call being “say to Zion, 'Your God reigns'” from Is 52.7, then how exactly are we to relate that to the clear post-ascension Gospel message “Jesus is Lord”? I cannot help but see a clear relation there.

23 Seyoon Kim seems to be the most recent and prolific writer against, with Wright and Crossan in favor. This argument is separate from the overall New Perspective on Paul which is also under fierce debate, specifically by the Reformed movement.

Ps. 110 is the most referenced OT portion in the NT. The New Testament rests its understanding of who Jesus is based on its own interpretation of Ps 110. That interpretation is by definition different than the authorial intent. Of course, the authorial intent is important both in its own right, and as a launching pad for the understandings and interpretations about the Messiah held by Jews during the Second Temple period. Do not mistake for me casting it off, only bringing to the forefront theologic points found in the literature.

What then might “Jesus is Lord” mean for defining who God and Jesus are in light of Ps 110? We first have to go to other literature of the second temple period, specifically Enoch, with Bauckham's argument in mind:

The symbolic function of the unique divine throne is such that, if we find a figure distinguishable from God seated on God's throne itself, we should see that as one of Judaism's most potent theological means of including such a figure in the unique divine identity²⁴

If God is defined by his sovereignty, and the symbol of that sovereignty is his throne – what does it mean when another is on that throne? It cannot mean that another besides God is sovereign, especially when written by a Jewish writer protesting their pagan rulers. The very fact that they write is a protest against such an idea! Rather the fact that YHWH is God is reinforced, and somehow, includes whoever is on the throne in God's plan and identity. After all, God is the one who sits on the throne. I find this argument to be falsifiable, sound, and precise, qualities all good arguments need.

A good example we should all agree with:

All the heavens are your throne forever, and all the earth is your footstool for ever and for ever and ever. For you have made and you rule all things, and nothing is too difficult for you; Wisdom does not escape you, and it does not turn away from your throne, nor from your presence.²⁵

Wisdom is depicted on God's throne with him. Wisdom is intrinsic to who God is, it is of no threat to monotheism. Wisdom is part of the identity of God. Notice that we see both symbols – creation and sovereignty – in this text used to define who God is, and Wisdom as a separate figure is mentioned right there, with no threat to YHWH.

There are two examples in which Bauckham goes into detail; Moses' dream by Ezekiel the Tragedian, and Joseph's dream in Genesis. In the dream of Joseph, the heavenly bodies are worshipping Joseph²⁶. This is worship that is traditionally withheld for God alone. However, the point of the dream is not that Joseph is being included in the identity of God in any way whatsoever. Rather, the dream is figurative for Joseph's status among his brethren. The same goes for the second dream with Moses which is clearly typified off Joseph's dream. Moses is placed on the cosmic throne of God: but as a metaphor for his own earthly status with Israel. Bauckham argues that what we come to next in Enoch is precisely not this metaphor.

24 Bauckham pg. 165

25 Enoch 84.2-3

26 Gen 37.9

The Son of Man in Enoch is presented on God's throne:

And the Lord of Spirits placed the Elect one on the throne of glory. And he shall judge all the works of the holy above in the heaven, and in the balance shall their deeds be weighed²⁷

And the Lord of Spirits seated him on the throne of His glory, and the spirit of righteousness was poured out upon him, and the word of his mouth slays all the sinners, and all the unrighteous are destroyed from before his face.²⁸

The Son of Man in Enoch is depicted as the eschatological figure through which judgment will take place. This figure exercising God's sovereignty is placed, by God, on his throne – indicating, according to Bauckham, that he should be understood to be a part of the identity of God.

What Ezekiel the Tragedian attributes only figuratively to Moses, the *Parables of Enoch* attribute literally to the Son of Man, though only in the eschatological future. The contrast enables us to see that, in all other portrayals of exalted human and angelic figures, there is no question of participation in the unique divine identity: they fall unproblematically outside it. They execute God's will, but they do not participate in the divine sovereignty in the way which sitting on the divine throne signifies. They do not receive worship, which is often refused by them or forbidden. The Son of Man in the *Parables of Enoch* is the exception that proves the rule.²⁹

The Son of Man in Enoch receives worship on the throne as a result of his sovereignty. That worship is not just the respect due a king or authority figure, it is more. The worship is the correct response to God's throne and sovereignty. I find no fault in Bauckham's argument, and no fault in its execution on the text in Enoch.

When we look at the proclamation surrounding Jesus we must recognize it is not a metaphor for some earthly truth. He did not reign on any throne during his ministry that would make sense out of any metaphor.

Psalm 110:1, perhaps the most foundational text for the whole configuration, was a novel choice, evidence of the exegetical and theological (the two are inextricable) novelty of the earliest Christian movements. The explanation of its role in early Christology, contrasted with its absence from Second Temple Jewish literature, is that, for early Christians, it said about Jesus what no other Jews had wished to say about the Messiah or any other figure: that he had been exalted by God to participate now in the cosmic sovereignty unique to the divine identity.³⁰

It goes without question that Psalm 110 is a royal psalm of enthronement of the king of Israel.

27 Enoch 61.8

28 Enoch 62.2

29 Bauckham 171

30 Bauckham pg. 175

The Christian interpretation of this passage as it relates to understanding the present state of Jesus is stated explicitly elsewhere: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”.³¹ A passage about being “exalted to the right hand of God” when used to explain the historical event of Jesus' ascension, combined with other elements, God's sovereignty, create a strong picture and symbol. The point of that picture and symbol is exactly the same as in Enoch. It seem that the intention of the NT is to present Jesus exercising God's sovereignty on God's throne, thereby including him in the divine identity. With a little appropriate historical imagination:

It was Jesus' participation in the unique divine sovereignty already in the present that obliged early Christians to take his inclusion in the divine identity much more seriously than the Son of Man's in the Parables, both in including Jesus in other uniquely divine characteristics, such as creation, and in envisaging and practising [*sic*] the divine worship of Jesus.³²

No wonder Paul creates a definitive statement about who God is amidst pagan influence in 1Cor 8.6 in light of Jesus' present eschatological situation participating in God's divine sovereignty on His throne.

yet for us there is {but} one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we {exist} for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we {exist} through Him.

What, in light of the Shema, might this mean?

Yet we must also notice that the bold inclusion of Jesus here as the “one Lord” is expressed in a way that maintains a clear distinction between him and “the Father”. More specifically, this distinction involves a functional subordination of the “Lord” (Jesus) to the one God. God here is the creator-source of all things, and the one to whom all belong and for whom they exist, and the “one Lord, Jesus Christ” is then explicitly portrayed as the unique *agent* of divine purposes of creation and redemption.³³

If we've abandoned the functional and ontic categories, what we must conclude is that Jesus is subordinate, one is what one does in the ancient world.

My particular interest in the passage here is the thrust of the final lines, verses 9-11. In these lines, Jesus is portrayed as having received from God a uniquely exalted status, which is indicated both in the intensive form of the verb “highly exalted”...and in the following statement that God gave Jesus “the name that is above every name” (v.9). Moreover, the next lines adapt phrasing from Isaiah 45:23 to depict Jesus as being revered by every creature “in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (v.10). This is yet another astonishing example of how far early Christians went in expressing Jesus' high status. In particular, we have here a

31 Mt 28.18

32 Bauckham pg. 175

33 Hurtado *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* pg. 49

biblical passage that is among the most fervent expressions of God's uniqueness, adapted (and apparently interpreted) to affirm Jesus as supreme over all creation.³⁴

If Jesus receives these qualities then he does not innately hold them himself. That is precisely what the ascension would have us understand. Because of his faithful obedience he is exalted to a heavenly position. Both Hurtado and Bauckham hold that “the name above every name” is God's name, an exploration we cannot make in this limited space.

Paul has taken over all the words of this Greek version of the Shema, but rearranged them in such a way as to produce an affirmation of both one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ.³⁵

These verses are the NT Shema. What Paul has done is extremely new. No other Jewish group of the Second Temple period even came close to understanding the Shema in a new way. Most likely because no other group experienced God's activity in the world through their own leadership figures. There was no theological event for any other group to reflect on which would add new information to their already complex map of symbols, stories, and praxis.

The only possible way to understand Paul as maintaining monotheism is to understand him to be including Jesus in the identity of the one God affirmed in the Shema. But this is, in any case, clear from the fact that the term 'Lord' applied here to Jesus as the 'one Lord' is taken from the Shema itself. Paul is not adding to the one God of the Shema, a 'Lord' the Shema does not mention. He is identifying Jesus as the 'Lord' whom the Shema affirms to be one. In this unprecedented reformulation of the Shema, the unique identity of the one God *consists* of the one God, the Father, *and* the one Lord, his Messiah (who is implicitly regarded as the Son of the Father).³⁶

This is the most damaging claim. However, the fact that Paul has used all of the words of the Greek Shema I cannot disagree with it. There is no question the Shema is in use here. And there is no question that the text equates Jesus with the 'Lord' in the text. Bauckham moves further forward:

Of the Jewish ways of characterizing the divine uniqueness, the most unequivocal was by reference to creation. In the uniquely divine role of creating all things, it was, for Jewish monotheism, unthinkable that any being other than God could even assist God (Is 44:24, 4 Ezra 3:4, Josephus, C. Ap. 2.129) But, to Paul's unparalleled inclusion of Jesus in the Shema, he adds the equally unparalleled inclusion of Jesus in the creative activity of God.³⁷

The precise meaning of the litany of prepositions used in this text, and many other texts, might be beyond us at this point. One strike against putting them all into neat little divisions is that they are not uniform within the early Christian literature (even among the same author). They

34 Hurtado pg. 50

35 Bauckham pg. 101

36 *ibid*

37 Bauckham pg. 102

are also not uniform in other ancient god-talk of the period. We have to focus on the larger idea, the goal of the writer, what they want to communicate, rather than being caught up in the minutia. Let us not lose sight of the forest for the trees.

The fact that, in Romans 11:36, all three prepositions apply to God whereas, in 1 Corinthians 8:6, one of them applies to Christ, does not mean that they no longer all describe the Creator's relationship to the whole of creation. On the contrary, it means precisely that Christ is included in this relationship as the instrumental cause of creation.³⁸

We have to look at Jesus and creation more closely now. There is clear precedent for Jewish writers to 'include' a person in the identity of God (*Parables of Enoch*) based on their eschatological role in God's story. However, to move backwards, if that is indeed what is happening, to talk about the original creation is something altogether new. There would, understandably, be a desire to include Jesus – who is at the center of the Christian experience – in more aspects of the divine identity such as having unending (or eternal) life, and perhaps even a role in creation.

Jesus and Creation

Bauckham does well to consider the wider god-talk of the time as our anchoring point:

It is true that there are some non-Jewish Hellenistic parallels to the formulation which relates 'all things' (*ta panta*) to God by a variety of prepositions... The point of such formulae is that they describe God as the cause of all things, indicating the various types of causation (as standardly recognized in ancient philosophy) which are appropriate to God's relation to the world by means of the various prepositions: i.e. efficient causation (*ek*), instrumental causation (*dia* or *en*), and final causation (*eis*).³⁹

We can, therefore, be confident that Paul's formulation – 'from him and through him and to him [are] all things' – is neither original to Paul nor borrowed directly from non-Jewish sources, but was known to him as a Jewish description precisely of God's unique relationship to all other reality. That God is the instrumental cause (*dia*) as well as the agent of efficient cause (*ek*) of all things well expresses the Jewish monotheistic insistence that God used no one else to carry out his creative work, but accomplished it solely by means of his own Word and/or Wisdom.⁴⁰

When we talk about 'creation' we do not need to make such a hard and fast distinction (approaching deism) between Genesis and the New Creation. Jesus in the early Christian experience is the pinnacle example of the New Creation via resurrection, and through the Spirit he administers that New Creation to the rest of the Church. Both creation in Genesis and New Creation fall under this 'all things' that Paul references. We cannot expect the text to answer

38 Bauckham pg. 103

39 Bauckham pg. 214

40 Bauckham pg. 215

our questions or fit our categories, we must remain content with how far they go, and do not go. We should all agree on Jesus' role in New Creation in the Church, and that it is integral to salvation.

In this sense, salvation, as well as creation is envisaged, but in no less cosmic a sense and scope than in the case of creation. This point is missed when, in support of a soteriological rather than a creational reference in 1 Cor 8:6, it is claimed that Paul uses the phrase *ta de panta ek tou theou* either with reference to God's creative work (1 Cor 11:12) or with reference to God's salvific work (2 Cor. 5:18). In fact, 2 Cor 5:18 refers to God's work of salvation precisely as *new creation* (cf. 5:17). There is no evidence that, when Paul says *ta panta*, he means anything less than Jewish writers normally meant by this phrase: the whole of reality created by God, all things other than God their Creator.⁴¹

Paul's intent in writing then is to show that Jesus is intimately involved in what God is doing at their time (and our time) in history. Jesus is the head of God's New Creation project. How Paul does this is the interesting part. Jesus is responsible for, at least some, of 'all things'. What was previously all God's responsibility, some has fallen to Jesus due to his eschatological role in God's plan. Jesus is just as responsible for the current state of affairs in the world as God is. Because Jesus has been exalted to that position of authority and sovereignty. The tougher question is what is Paul's intention, if any, to talk about Genesis creation and Jesus. The only text which seems to go definitively in this direction is Hebrews 1:10.

If the prologue of John, read in light of this method, communicates that an intrinsic part of God, the Logos (which is a way to talk theologically about God being active in the world), comes into the world as Jesus, is this not a new way to talk theologically about God being active in the world – only now through Jesus? Moreover, what continuity exists between Jesus and the Logos? I argue that Jesus is extrinsic to God, since he is distinguishable and not eternal⁴². Therefore the continuity cannot be without bounds. The Logos remain unchanged, it remained as a part of God, or God's character⁴³, whereas Jesus was a part of this world, and is now a part of the next world, not transcendent, not eternal⁴⁴. Could it be appropriate to reference Jesus in Genesis creation when the referent is actually the Logos/Spirit/Wisdom? I would argue against it on the basis of intrinsic versus extrinsic and partial (forward, not backward) continuity.

Conclusions

What ought we make of this new landscape? If the question of 'Who is God' is answered by 'The One who is Creator and Sovereign' then it seems that Bauckham has a foothold for his argument since Paul uses the appropriate language of both his Jewish and pagan contemporaries to make his points. We are better with Bauckham's contributions to this study.

41 Bauckham pg. 216

42 Not eternal meaning had a beginning, has not always been.

43 Perhaps speaking about God's character is language better suited to intrinsic properties?

44 Jesus becomes 'eternal' as a result of his resurrection and ascension. Transcendence is merely a semantic point based on resurrection, are all resurrected people depicted as "not of this world"? Surely they have bodies as did Jesus. But again that transcendence would be conferred on him, not innately held.

His work raises the confidence with which we can analyze how Jews in the Second Temple Period defined and defended their God, even if it creates muddier waters while we sort it out.

As I previously stated, all of Bauckham's arguments are not agreeable, though I have tried to outline the main thrust of his thoughts and show inherent problems. I agree that the unitariness of YHWH is not the point of either the Shema, or the first commandment, however unitariness cannot be far off based on the diction of the authorial and editorial intent. Jesus flatly agrees with who the Jewish people understood God to be. Therefore any further development on that idea must remain within the Jewish worldview. And if the *Parables of Enoch* are any indication a human individual partaking uniquely in God's eschatological plan can, in some ways, be seen as participating in the identity of God.

It remains to once again tackle this problem of extrinsic and intrinsic. I argue that Jesus, as a new distinguishable development in the identity of God, and therefore is extrinsic. Logos and Wisdom were new theological developments to talk about God working in the world. However, none of them were distinguishable from God in any way, and it is often argued they are best understood as literary devices, not personifications. Therefore these elements are intrinsic to the identity of God. Jesus is far from a personification, but is actually a person with a distinct will and identity within this world. God, by definition, does not have an identity in this world as He is transcendent⁴⁵. As Jesus is not inherently eternal,⁴⁶ or sovereign – these elements are all conferred onto him – I cannot say that he is intrinsic, that is necessary, to the identity of God. Again, if the *Parable of Enoch* is the closest parallel, we have we seem to have surpassed it in the NT. That surpassing can be understood as Jesus' fundamental necessity to Christianity, which at the time of the authors is still a Jewish sect. Jesus' centrality *is* intrinsic to Christianity, or “Judaism according to Jesus”. The Son of Man character in the *Parables of Enoch* remains a literary character with no counterpart in history. Hence any Jewish development stopped or took a turn.

Understanding Jesus' role in creation is based on the kerygma of the Church: “Jesus is Lord”. Second Temple Judaism defined God through sovereignty as well, and if Jesus is sovereign,⁴⁷ then we have to address that. However, our modern view of “all things” does not correspond well with the ancient view. The ancient view is more nuanced and holistic – it addresses the ongoing maintenance and activity in the world (which Jesus is unquestionably involved in via the Spirit) – it does not only refer to Genesis creation, but both Genesis creation, New creation, and everything in between. Therefore, if Jesus is added to the identity of God (that is not the only person involved) and Jesus is included in the present ordering of the world, he need not be involved with Genesis creation, as God took care of that. I am not persuaded, based on the texts which follow the Jewish pattern of using creation and sovereignty, of any backwards projection of Jesus beyond his birth.⁴⁸ Only Heb 1:10 seems to reference Genesis creation with respect to Jesus, and that is up for debate.

45 Is this not the exact reason we are described as created in God's image? So that his image might be here in the world.

The same goes for Jesus being God's image where we all have failed.

46 John 1 notes his beginning as do Matthew and Mark unequivocally.

47 That is God conferring sovereignty to Jesus, which the NT indicates by using royal Psalms and imagery to Jesus' ascension and exalted role.

48 Bauckham makes an argument based on Phil 2 for pre-existence. However that would seem to then be the only one (based on my John 1 reading), and is still up for debate.

Considering all of this evidence it remains to be seen that any of this supports a Nicene reading. Bauckham trots out the standard argument that this evidence is the formation of some sort of proto-Nicene theology. While Nicea attempts to achieve the same goal, it does so through much different means. I remain skeptical that Nicea can be used as a theological formulation that can accurately portray both the historical evidence and Jewish theology behind what we see in the NT. Our understanding of Jesus and God can be further refined and developed using this socio-historical method. We must address the method presented by Bauckham and Hurtado directly and honestly.

Appendix – On Reading Scripture

Reading any literary piece is both a science and an art. It requires discipline, as well as creativity. Many of the principles here are applicable to any literature. That goes for holy texts as well. Here we're looking at the Christian Scriptures. You could easily use this for other religious texts (though for ahistorical works like Buddhism the historical method is far less important). When reading a contemporary novel you won't recognize that you're doing these methods - but you really are. On a side note these methods are also exactly why fantasy (Chronicles of Narnia, Lord of the Rings) and science-fiction (Battlestar Galactica) is such a ready medium for displaying moral and ethical dilemmas and dramas that challenge us in our life. In short, the method is threefold; history, worldview, and exegesis.

History

When reading texts about ancient religions in history we need an appropriate historical method. We have to recognize what we are reading was not written with our expectations in mind (When talking about fantasy and science-fiction, as above, our expectations are in mind). We have to start with history. We have to understand (as best we can) the social, cultural, political and religious climates we are dealing with. We do this by reading both insider, and outsider information: that is material written by people about themselves, and material written by others about the people we are studying. Both sides are incredibly valuable, especially when you consider the worldviews of both peoples (presuming they are different, and we're not talking about a purely sectarian thing). History involves the study of both individuals and people groups. It involves the study of their motivations and goals. This is not to say we are talking about psychology at all. It is a plain thing for a person to reveal their goal and motivation by their actions. Not to mention we have to apply that at the level of a whole (or part of a) cultural people. What is Israel's motivation? What is Rome's? To what end? All this requires both disciplines, to be understandable in their worldview, and creativity, to be imaginative enough when our authors don't write out all the steps taken for us. To presume that the writers' purpose was to lay out, for us, all their logic and steps like a math problem is just that, a presumption. We need to eliminate these common expectations of ours.

Worldview

There is famous CS Lewis quote (you might have seen it on Vineyard church advertisements):

“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

This is the epitome of a definition for 'worldview'. Worldview is assumed. It is the very context of how you look at the world. You look at the world “through” worldview. Worldview is affected by so many different things - even generations within the same country. To imagine that any biblical character has the same worldview as you is, to be kind, absurd. In the many ways I am like my father, I don't even have the same worldview as him, and he raised me.

There are four elements that make up worldview:

- Praxis (your practice)
- Symbols (icons)
- Stories
- Questions

These questions are further broken down:

- Who are we?
- Where are we?
- What is wrong?
- What is the solution?

The answers to these questions are informed, debated, and reformed by the previous praxis, symbols, and stories. Those are the raw materials of answering these questions. What we witness in the New Testament is the ‘debate’. We see Paul, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all using their natural resources; the symbols of the present day, (e.g. a coin with Caesar on it), the biblical stories they have known and reflected on (e.g. the Exodus and entering into rest from Hebrews, Jesus as Moses in the gospels), and their own praxis (e.g. the Last Supper as a Passover meal, transformed with new meaning) to answer these worldview questions. And the answers, based on their life experience with Jesus, and the resurrected Jesus, and the community are very different than any other Jewish sect. There are so many other peculiarities of worldview, and other specific questions related to the stories and history of Israel that have cropped up in Jewish writings. This is why the Dead Sea Scrolls were such an important find. It gave us so much more information about how the Jewish people of the Second Temple period used their stories, symbols, and practice, to come up with different - but all Jewish - ways to answer these questions.

Exegesis

When reading any literature we have to realize what genre we are reading. Within the Christian cannon there are several genres; mythological narrative, historical narrative, poetry and song, prophetic narrative, and apocalyptic narrative. The entire Bible is not historical narrative, and we cannot do justice to its writers and Inspirer to read it all the same way. Furthermore, the questions that are being answered by the writers are their own questions based on their own worldview. Since your worldview is different - your questions will not be directly found in the text. The Scriptures do not directly address the immediate questions of 21st century Western people. It could not possibly do so directly. The more and more we submit ourselves to the Christian worldview the New Testament puts forth (that is, to put down our cross of our own worldview) the more and more we will see answers to the right questions, as we make those questions our own.

Using These Three Elements

To use these three elements appropriately is the goal of study. To not lean on any one, at the

loss of another is hard to do, just as a stool requires at least three legs to stand. A comprehensive reading of the text in question needs to maximize for these things:

- Fitting all the data
- Simplicity of thought
- Sheds light on other areas

If you can't fit all the data into your approach and method, then a mistake has been made. If all the data fits, but there is no possible way my conclusions could have been reached by the historical figures (data beyond their knowledge, or language beyond their knowledge) in the way I've outlined, then a mistake has been made. If the results of the method do not shed light on any other un-illuminated areas, then something has been missed. The best way to accomplish this goal is by starting large and vague. Take the period of Second Temple Judaism up until Christianity. The interaction of NT in the wider world must also be considered in addition to Second Temple Judaism. The pagan religions and emperor worship were precisely what the NT writers had to combat in their communities. Examine their worldview and writings. Examine their various answers to the questions. After you've done that, you need to put down markers. A street sign, or city designation, is a marker. It means I've reached a location that everyone agrees upon is called a certain thing. In New York City you've got Uptown, Downtown, the Upper West side, Harlem, Alphabet city, Chinatown, the financial district, little Italy, Greenwich Village, and so on. Second Temple Judaism does not say "to get to your destination, take a left when you reach Harlem". It says "this is Harlem, this is what Harlem represents, and here are what people are saying about Harlem. Which way are you going to turn?". And "which way are you going to turn" is based on your worldview definition of the problem, and consequently, the solution.

Mark out fixed, but sufficiently vague, points. Take the history in the same manner. Mark out fixed, but sufficiently vague points about kings, client-rulers, their misdeeds, wars, and revolutions. Mark areas before and after the time period you're studying. Don't mark your time period! Put down verifiable data that must be started from, and must be met on the end. A good example that must be explained by any Christian origins study is this remarkable statement made:

"Eighty and six years have I now served Christ, and he has never done me the least wrong: How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"⁴⁹

Whatever your reconstruction of Jesus and early Christianity, you must explain this fixed point with it, loyalty to Jesus over Caesar in the face of death, and specifically in that manner - King and Savior. That is just one point, there are many others. A marker must be put down for the Talmud and Mishnah as well. However, these works are definitively later. Their worldview questions are radically different than Second Temple Judaism. "What is wrong?" include the destruction of the Temple which is the central symbol of their faith! The Talmud and Mishnah have a radically different problem, and therefore a radically different answer to "What is the solution?". They needed to find another way to worship YHWH, knowing they would not be able to do it in the Temple. That is not to say that all of what is written is not informative. Some of it does go back to Second Temple Judaism. That cannot be assumed, however.

49 Polycarp, 186AD, at his martyrdom

It is this very approach of entering the drama at the turn of the first century – calibrating our reasoning with the problems, arguments, symbols, and stories of Second Temple Judaism – that can yield some surprising results. As I am sure many of you know the Judaism of the Second Temple was marked by pluriformity. To put a long story short, Jesus agreed with certain Pharisees about certain problems and certain solutions. He also disagreed in areas. He agreed, and again disagreed with various sectarian literatures. He disagreed with the Sadducees mostly it seems. All of these inter-Judaism arguments can be plotted out through the various uses and reuses of Israel’s story, symbol, and praxis by each of the writers. We could do another small case study on the kings/client-rulers of Israel as we did on Polycarp above.

A fair bit of the political/religious actions by the Pharisees (and others) were aimed directly against their kings who they felt were basically “imposters”. They opposed the client-rulers of Rome (e.g. Herod) with the “No King but God” mantra. This is both a religious claim and a political claim that helps us understand what the people are doing, and what the king is doing. The kings, throughout the history are trying to appease/please the people that he might actually be considered God’s King (the revolutionary Messiah-claimants are doing the exact same thing in their own way). Meanwhile the kings have to do Rome’s bidding or they will be removed from their rule. They are between a rock and a hard place. It doesn’t help them that more than a few have some screws loose with wild ambition (Herod killing his brother so he could be king, etc). This impacts the gospels as well. In John you have the crowds saying “We have no King but Caesar” at Jesus’ crucifixion. John is saying that the crucifixion of Jesus is the ultimate dismissal of the rule of God as the true King in a very powerful and poignant way.

Conclusion

As it is said: “A text without a context is a pretext for anything”. Jesus’ context is unequivocally Second Temple Judaism! Most of the influential scholars of the last thirty or forty years have been moving forward with this critical historical method. They have dropped form criticism, redaction criticism, the history-of-religions approach. They have stopped looking at the smallest bits and quibbling about their historical veracity and instead turned towards the larger picture, moving in from both ends, treating Jesus and the early Church just as they would any other historical figure. It has been yielding clarity and results. I hope that we can all grow to understand and use this method for understanding the ancient and holy texts before us.