

YHWH, HIS SON AND HIS SPIRIT: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF GOD

Peter Nyende

Abstract

I articulate a biblical theology of God in outline in the hope of making a contribution to shape views of God amongst African Christians through the theological education of clergy. In the OT, YHWH, the God of Israel, is almighty and thus Lord. He is the only God and therefore referred to as the Most High, the true God, the living God, the Lord of Lords and King of kings, and the Lord of the earth. YHWH is also eternal, perfect in knowledge, of unmeasured wisdom, and merciful. This view of God is sustained in the NT. However, the nature of YHWH is implicitly elaborated as a trinity by virtue of YHWH having a Son and a Spirit who is also a person, which makes both divine persons. But YHWH's Son and Spirit do not become two Gods besides YHWH for they share his nature and are thus divine in unity with him, i.e., the divinity of YHWH is the divinity of his Son and Spirit. Furthermore, they are not two Gods besides him because they are united with him in his will, purposes, and motivations.

Key Words: African Christianity; Biblical theology; God; YHWH; God of Israel; Lord; Jesus; the Holy Spirit

Introduction

This paper is prompted by a worry of how African Christians view God and consequently the need to shape those views into ones that are in harmony with the Bible. For Christianity, God cannot be defined apart from Jesus; a situation that makes views of God in African Christianity often less than what can be supported by the New Testament. From my experience, for example, a significant number of African Christians

make no distinction between God and his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. This indiscrimination is manifest particularly in prayers. Prayers without any change of subject may first be addressed to God, then to Jesus, then back to God, then again to Jesus and so on. This same indiscrimination is seen in proclamations and conversations whereby God and Jesus are referred to, and taken as, one and the same even when a distinction is biblically imperative. Underlying this lack of distinction is a certain view of God's oneness. It is therefore not uncommon for me to hear in African Christians say that the trinity is God in three different forms: Father, Son, and Spirit; or even that it is same God wearing three different hats and acting accordingly just like a man without becoming a different person can be a father, a husband, and a brother. Both views of God have no biblical support.

Short of not differentiating God and Jesus, a sizable number of African Christians will view God exclusively as Jesus. Indeed, in some Christian circles in Africa, the mention of God (or God the Father, or God as Father) is virtually absent in favour of Jesus. Jesus is exclusively the focus of their faith, prayers, inspiration, mission, and future hopes. So, for example, they pray to him, they confess that they love him, that they have given their lives to him, that he is their saviour, he has transformed their lives, he has healed them, he walks and talks to them, that they live in hope of spending eternity with him in heaven etc. In some case as epitomised in the following popular song in Eastern Africa, Jesus, and not God, is taken as the heavenly Father:

"O Lord I am very very grateful
for all You have done for me
O Lord I am very very grateful
I say thank you my Lord
I have a Father who never ever fails me
(2x)
Jesus is my Father who will never ever fail me
Rock of ages
He will never ever fail."

Such christonomism may perhaps be supported psychologically by the feeling that Jesus can be appreciated as close, warm, and personal and one they can identify with in contradistinction to a

transcendent God. But a footlose view of God as Jesus too has no biblical support.

African Christians' views of God are therefore in need of shaping into biblical views of God. Biblical theology courses on God offered to those shepherding the African Christian congregations can go a long way to contributing to such a shaping of African Christian views of God. This is because pastors regularly teach and proclaim the Bible's content to many African Christians.

Biblical theology studies regard the Bible in some sense as a unity. Without such a perception biblical theology would have no basis. Biblical theological studies of the Bible, therefore, usually proceed either by seeking to determine what the message of the Bible is when its content is read as an integrated whole,¹ or by seeking to determine what the Bible's content says about a topic or theme of choice.² This article is an attempt to articulate a biblical theology of God following the latter procedure.

I offer this paper with two hopes. First, that it will provoke debate on the need of classes on God within the discipline of biblical studies in Africa's theological colleges and seminaries, and Africa's university

¹ See for example Stephen G. Dempster, *From Dominion to Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, (New Studies in Biblical Theology 15. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), Hays, D. J., Duvall, J. S., et al., *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2013); and Miles V. Van Pet, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 2016).

² See for example Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011); Pet J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways, 2012); and Craig Blomberg, *Christians in an Age of Wealth: A Biblical Theology of Stewardship*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

faculties of theology and/or religion. Secondly, I hope that my paper could in principle provide structure and content for teaching biblical studies classes on "God" akin to the way course textbooks do for the teaching of courses. I myself have used the structure and content of this paper to teach on the subject in my biblical studies classes in Africa. Needless to say that this paper is offered on the conviction that African biblical scholarship is meant to contribute in positively informing and theologically deepening Christianity in Africa by means of both supporting relevant biblical theological education and training, and offering the same to those who pastor African Christian congregations. In other words, Biblical scholarship must make its fruits available particularly on issues affecting the church and the lay faithful.

Before we proceed to my biblical theology of God, it is important we note here that the Bible does not contain sustained articulations (in narratives or other literary forms) for a singular audience in a given set of circumstances about God from which to draw a biblical theology of God. The numerous Bible references I give in articulating a biblical theology of God come from brief and often incidental proclamations, confessions, remarks, and phrases about God, from comments on God, and from labels and images of God. These Bible references are themselves drawn from various contexts and from various forms of narratives, occasional hymns of praise or thanksgiving, petitions, poems, prophetic oracles, sermons, pastoral letters, and paraenesis found in the Bible. Although I have not ignored the varied contexts of these references, I hardly discuss them in any detail due to constraints of space. For the same reasons I limit my Bible references on any matter about God under discussion to a maximum of three per Bible book even where there are more than three references present in a book. My article is therefore a biblical theology of God in outline.

We should also note here that there are relatively few biblical studies books³ that articulate a biblical theology of God from the whole Bible

³ See Ben Witherington III and Laura M. Ice, *The Shadow of the Almighty: Father, Son, and Spirit in Biblical Perspective*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); the first three chapters in Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology and Worship*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R

(or even from only the whole OT⁴ or the whole NT⁵). Although there is invariably considerable common ground between the content of my biblical theology of God in outline and these books, my paper is not a synthesis or repetition, albeit in summary, of what has already been said in those books. Rather, it has its own unique approach such as its use of history of religions scholarship as a starting point to discussing God in the OT, as well as unique insights, such as the argument for continuity of OT theology of God into the NT based on the use in the NT of labels for God that are found only in the OT and not in the Greco-Roman world of the NT. That said, my paper should serve to call attention to, and lead to more interaction with, these biblical studies books on God for the sake of supporting and offering biblical theological scholarship on God to those who pastor African Christian congregations. With this clear, we begin articulating a biblical theology of God in the OT for it is God as revealed in the OT who is further defined in the NT.

God in the OT

El, Elohim

Although the notion of God and Gods can be very complex, there is compelling support for the view that deities in human societies are believed to be 'humanlike, but nonhuman, beings'⁶ with immense

Publishing, 2004); and Markus Witte, *The Development of God in the Old Testament: Three Case Studies in Biblical Theology*, (Critical Studies of the Hebrew Bible, Warsaw, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2017).

4 See for example Aubrey R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961).

5 See for example Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, (London: SPCK, 1962); Jerome H. Neyrey, *Render to God: New Testament Understandings of the Divine*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), and Larry W. Hurtado, *God in the New Testament*, (Library of Biblical Theology, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010).

6 Term borrowed from Pyysiäinen (Ilkka Pyysiäinen, 'Buddhism, Religion, and the Concept of "God", ' *Numen* 50.2 (2003): 147-171.

powers.⁷ From this perspective, great potency is the defining nature of deities. These powers are seen, for example, in the belief that they created the world, that they sustain and/or govern it, and in natural phenomena such as the sky, sun, moon, rain, thunder, lightning, fire, storms, mountains, earthquakes, seas, and rivers with which they are associated or believed to control, or even believed to embody. For reasons of the powers that these beings possess and their effects on human beings and life, human beings revere them. They also tend to locate residences of deities, or construct them residences, in order to approach them, and appeal to them usually in threatening times or in times of joy.

This view of Gods is very helpful in making sense of the OT's references to *El* (or *Elohim*), the common noun for God and Gods in biblical Hebrew (e.g., Ex 34:14, Deut. 22:17-32, 1 Sam 28:13, Ps 81:9, Is 45:20).⁸ Great potency as a defining character of Gods is best exemplified in the OT when God tells Moses that he will be God to Pharaoh (Exod. 7:1) by which he means that Pharaoh will see works of great power where life and the earthly elements of wood, bugs, flies, hail, fire, animals, water, light and darkness etc. are controlled through Moses' pronouncements or actions thereby making him God to Pharaoh. It is also exemplified in the reference to

⁷ See for example Pyysiänen's article written from a historical perspective makes this very clear with the conclusion that Gods are about order and control (Ilkka Pyysiänen, 'God: A Brief History with a Cognitive Explanation of the Concept,' *Temenos* 41.1 (2005): 77-128), while Hundley's analyses of Hittite and Ancient Mesopotamian's Gods based on relevant literature has foremost potency as the criterion for determining what/who is a God (Michael B. Hundley, 'Here a God, There a God: An Examination of the Divine in Ancient Mesopotamia,' *Altorientalische Forschungen* 40.1 (2013): 68-107, and 'The God Collectors: Hittite Conceptions of the Divine,' *Altorientalische Forschungen* 41.2 (2014): 176-200. See also Marcel Detienne, who in regard to the first anthropologists pursuits of the study of the Gods of groups they were exploring observes 'never failed to recommend making an inventory of the various kinds of powers at large in a village or scattered the length and breadth of a Kingdom' ('Experimenting in the Field of Polytheism,' *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 7.1 (1999): 127.

⁸ For more on this, see Joel S. Burnett *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim* (SBLDS 183, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).

Egyptians being mere human beings and not God (Isa 31:3). Accordingly, Israel and neighbouring peoples have identified by name who (their) God is: YHWH for Israel (Exod. 6:7, Amos 4:13, Jer. 32:18 etc.), Baal for the Canaanites, Dagon for the Philistines (1 Sam 5:1-5), Molech for the Ammonites (1 Kgs 11:7), Ashtoreth for the Sidonians (1 Kgs 11:5), Milcom for the Ammonites (1 Kgs 11:5), Chemosh for the Moabs (1 Kgs 11:7), and Baalzebub for Ekron (2 King 1:2-4). The abodes of these Gods are also referred to in the OT (Mt Zion for YHWH, Dagon's house in 1 Sam 5:1, and Mt. Zaphon or "far North" for Baal Ps 48:2-3).⁹ This is our starting point in understanding God in the OT. Our next step is now to understand how Israel views and understand their God, YHWH, which includes a comparison with neighbouring Gods. To this we turn.

YHWH, the God of Israel and the only God

In the OT, the God of Israel, YHWH, is the creator (Gen 1-2, 2 Kgs 19:15, Job 38:1-5, Is 42:5, Ps 74:12-17, Ps 104:5-9) and sustains life (Ps 65:10, Ps 104:13-14, Ps 104:27-30). He rules over creation (Nahum 1:4-5, Ps 29:10, Ps 47:7-8, Ps 65:7-8) and over all peoples whom he also judges (Ps 11:4-7, Ps 103:19). We also see the potency of YHWH in other ways; for example, he delivers the people of Israel from Egypt with mighty works against Pharaoh and his people (Exod. 5-15), he provides food and water for the people in the wilderness (Exod. 16-17), he provides for Elijah and the widow in time of drought (1 Kings 17:8-16), and gives rain after years of famine (1 Kgs 18:41-46). The promises of YHWH through the prophet Moses point to his great power in guaranteeing Israel rain, great harvests and storages of crops, security and peace, lack of barrenness among her people and animals, a lack of sickness etc. if Israel lives in obedience to his laws (Lev. 26:3-13, Deut. 7:12-16, Deut. 28:1-12). For these reasons, YHWH is referred to as the almighty (*Shaddai* – Gen 28:3, Gen 48:3, Exod. 1:24, 6:3; Job 11:7, Ps 68:14, Isa 12:16) and by that

⁹ For more on this and on OT's deities generally see Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van Der Horst, eds. *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (2nd Edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

view embraced and referred to as Lord (*Adonai* – Gen 18:27, Deut.10.17, Ps 44.23, Isa 21.8) and King (*Melek* – Exod. 15.18, Isa 6.5, Jer. 10:10, Ps 9:7, 10:16, 11:4, 29:10, 47:2), i.e., as one who by virtue of his power rules and judges.

According to the OT, YHWH, the God of Israel, is actually the only God. From our discussion above, this means that YHWH alone has the immense powers associated with deities. That is, YHWH alone is the creator, sustainer of life, ruler of creation; he alone is almighty and not another or the other Gods. Consequently, he alone is Lord. Specifically, this is seen in the words of YHWH to Israel signifying his unique and exclusive status as the one and only (Deut. 4:35), and thus their loyalty and devotion only to him (Deut. 6:4¹⁰ Ps 86:10, Isa 64:4). We also find this exclusivity of YHWH as the only God in his dealing with Pharaoh in delivering Israel from his hands that Pharaoh may know that YHWH alone is God (Exod. 8:10, 9:13-14), in his defeat of Baal to show Israel that he is God and not Baal (1 Kgs 18:21), and in Dagan falling face down before the ark of YHWH the first day he is put together with the ark of YHWH, and falling down before the ark of YHWH the second with his head and hands cut off (1 Sam 1:1-5).

If YHWH is the only God, then other Gods are really not Gods but creations of those who revere them. Consequently YHWH in relationship to other Gods is referred to as the true God (2 Chron 15:3, Jer. 10.10), or the living God (Deut. 5:26, Josh 3:10, 1 Sam 17.36, Jer. 10:10, Hos 1.10, Ps 84.2, and Dan 6.20) which imply that the other Gods are false or non-existent (Deut. 32:17, 1 Kgs, Ps 86:10, 18.39, Isa 64:4). Falsity or the non-existence of other Gods is particularly the case in relationship to idols who are then portrayed as inanimate Gods (Deut. 4:28, Isa 40:18-26, Jer. 10:3-5, Ps 115:1-8). However, in the event that the existence of other Gods and thus lords (and kings) is presumed, YHWH is seen as unrivaled in power, i.e., the most powerful and thus referred to as the Most High (*Elyon* — Gen 14:19-20, Num 24:16, Deut. 32:8, 2 Sam 22:14, Ps 9:2, 21:7, 135:5; Isa 14:14, Lam 3:38, Dan 4:24, 5:18, 7:18), or as one above all

10 For more on this see Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of "Monotheism"*, (2nd Corrected Edition, Tübingen: Mohr Sieback, 2012).

Gods (Ps 95:3, 96:4, 97:9). In the same context of other Gods, he is also seen and referred to as the God of Gods and Lord of Lords (Deut. 10:17, Ps 93:5, Ps 136:2-3, Dan 11:36, and Dan 2:47) or King above all Gods (Ps 95:3), or still as alluded to earlier Lord of all the earth (Jos 3:11, Mic 4:13, Zech 4:14, Ps 97:5). In this regard, YHWH's immense powers as shown in his acts leads to his recognition by Jethro that he is the greatest God (Exod. 18:10-11), by the King of Babylon that he is the God of Gods (Dan 2:47), or by the same King and the King of Moab that he is the Most High (Dan 3:26, Num 24:16).¹¹

Beyond power, but related to it, are various characters attributed to YHWH in the Old Testament. YHWH is referred to as eternal (*ōlom* - Gen 21:33, Deut. 33:27, Isa 26:4, Isa 40:28, Hab. 1:12), as the eternal king (Jer. 10:10), as the one whose kingdom has no ending (Ps 145:13, Dan 4:3, Dan 4:34), and is seen in a vision as the 'ancient of days' (Dan 7:9). YHWH is everywhere (Ps 139:7-12) and for that reason he is also perfect in knowledge (Isa 28:29). He knows the thoughts and dreams of human beings (1 Kgs 8:39, Job 31:4, Prov 5:21, Ps 44:21, Ps 139:1-6, Dan 2:24-36) and is a witness (*ēd*) to conversations and goings-on between human beings (1 Sam 12:5, Jer. 42:5, Mic 1:2). His knowledge and understanding, i.e., his wisdom, is without measure (Ps 145:6) and by it he created the world and sustains it (Job 38-41, Ps 104:24, Ps 136:5, Ps 147:5, Prov 3:19-

¹¹Lynch and Borowitz's studies are a valuable discussion of the various portrayals of YHWH's monotheism found in the OT; see Matthew J. Lynch, 'Mapping Monotheism: Modes of Monotheistic Rhetoric in the Hebrew Bible,' *Vetus Testamentum* 64.1 (2014): 47-68., and Eugene B. Borowitz, *The Many Meanings of 'God is One'* (New York:Sh'ma, 1988). But we should note that these different presentations of the oneness of YHWH have provided fodder for those who argue for a development of monotheism in the OT; see for example Mark S. Smith and Patrick D. Miller, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, (The Biblical Resource Series, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); and John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, Sheffield" Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

20, Jer. 10:12, Jer.51:15). Moreover, wisdom is said to come from, or is given by, him (Gen. 41:39, 1 Kings 3:7-14). Against the backdrop of his Lordship YHWH speaks of himself as a merciful (*raham*) God (Exod. 34:6) and describes his throne in the tabernacle as a seat of mercy (Exod. 37:9). In numerous places YHWH is declared as merciful (Deut. 4:31, Ps 116:5, Ps 111:4) and praised for his mercies which endure forever (Neh. 9:31). YHWH's mercifulness is acknowledged by prophets (Jonah 4:2, Lam 3:22, Dan 9:9) as well as the Psalmists (Ps 86:15, Ps 103: 8, Ps 111:4, Ps 145:8). The prophets also encourage God's people to repent in the face of his coming judgement for the possibility of his mercies to change their fate (Jer.3:12-18, Amos 5:14-15, Joel 2:13-14).

YHWH's Spirit

According to the Old Testament YHWH, just as the case with human beings, has a Spirit (*ruach*), the Spirit of God. The wind (*ruach*), as experienced by human beings in the world around them is an invisible power or force bringing storms, scorching heat, freezing cold, warmth, and cool breeze, causing powerful waves and so on. This invisible power is under the control of YHWH. So, for example, the wind comes from YHWH's storehouses (Ps 135:7, Jer. 10:13), he gathers it in his fist (Prov. 30:4), he directs it (Num 11:13, Job 28:25, Ps 78:26, 135:7) for his purposes, he makes the wind blow over the earth to remove the floods (Gen. 8:1), and hurls it to cause a great tempest in the sea (Jonah 1:4).

Since breath (*ruach*) is a minute wind, the similarity between the two phenomena, i.e. invisibility and power, is captured in the common label *ruach* to identify both. However, YHWH's breath is not minute in power but more powerful than the wind and used in more ways by YHWH than the wind he also uses. Accordingly YHWH used his Spirit to create the world and uses his Spirit to give and sustain life (Gen. 2:7, 6:3; Job 26:13, 27:3, 34:14-15; Ps 33:6, 104:29-30; Isa 32:15). The power of YHWH's Spirit is not limited to creation, life, and nature, YHWH uses his Spirit to give his message through prophets to people (Num 11:25,29, 24:23; 1 Sam 10:6, 19:20, 19:23; Mic. 3:8, Joel 2:28), and uses his Spirit to enable people such as Judges (Judges 3:10,

6:34, 11:29), kings (1 Sam. 10:1, 2 23:1, 16:13; Isa 11:1-3, 61:1-3), and even workmen (Exod.31:1-3) to do his will.

YHWH's Spirit is also a person for he speaks to people (2 Sam 23.2, Ezek.2:2, Ezek. 3:24, Ezek. 11:5) and instructs them (Neh. 9:20) or is understood to speak to people (2Kings 22:24). He also grants them rest (Isa 63:14), lifts and sets them up (Ezek. 2:2, Ezek. 3:24, Ezek. 11:1), carries them (1 Kgs 18:12, 2 Kgs 2:16, Ezek. 8:3), leads (Ps 143:10), and is grieved (Isa 63:10). In this regard there are instances where YHWH's Spirit and YHWH are not differentiated or are portrayed as identical. The lack of differentiation is in either a very direct way (Isa 40:13-17, Ezek. 3:24-27), or indirectly through synonymous parallelism that identifies YHWH's Spirit with him (Isa 30:1) or the words of YHWH's Spirit as the words of YHWH (2 Sam 23:2-3), or YHWH's Spirit with YHWH's presence (Ps 139:7). So, to some extent we could conclude that YHWH's nature is, in so far as his Spirit is referred to interchangeably with him, indicative of his composite nature. However, this indication is within YHWH's exclusive status as the only God. But since the nature of his relationship with his Spirit as a person is not explicitly elaborated, there is nothing more that can be said in this regard in articulating an OT theology of God.

In the OT, then, generally speaking, YHWH, the God of Israel, is almighty as seen chiefly in his creating the world and sustaining it together with the life within it. In consequence, he is Lord. But YHWH is not just the God of Israel but the only God and for that reason he is referred to as the Most High, the true God, the living God, and the Lord of Lords and King of kings, and the Lord of the earth. YHWH is also eternal, perfect in knowledge, of unmeasured wisdom, and merciful. He works specially and commonly, through his Spirit who as a person is at times indistinguishable from YHWH himself.

God in the NT

YHWH, the God of Israel and the Only God

The OT theology of God as articulated above is sustained in the NT. In other words, it is YHWH, the God of Israel, who is referred to in the New Testament with the consequence that the view of God in the NT

is the same as in the OT. This continuity is manifest in the direct references to God as 'God of Israel' (Matt 15:31, Matt 22:32-33, Luke 1:68, Acts 3:13, 13:17, 22:14) or 'God of our Fathers' (Acts 5:20, 22:14, 24:14). It is seen in direct quotations of the OT in the New which refer to God by his name YHWH, translated as 'Lord' (*Kyrios* in the LXX – Matt 4:7, 10, 22,27, Luke 4:8, 4:12, Acts 2:34, 3:22, Rom 4:8, 9:28, Heb 7:20, 8:8). It is also seen in NT references to God, just as in OT, as YHWH, i.e. YHWH *Elohim*, 'Lord God' (*kyrios theos* in the LXX – Luke 1:16, 32, 16:8, Rev 1:8, 4:11, 18:8). It is seen in the reference to YHWH, just as in the OT, as almighty, i.e., *El Shaddai* or *Shaddai*, 'Lord God Almighty' (*kyrios theos pantokratōr* in the LXX – Rev 4:8, 11:17, 16:14).

There is more evidence of the continuation of the OT's theology of God in the NT. Just as in the OT, there is in the NT references to God as one or only God (John 5:44, Rom 3:30, 1 Cor 8:5, Eph 4:5, 1 Tim 2:5, 2 Tim 1:17, Jas 2:19, Jude 25). So relative to other Gods, YHWH, just as in the OT, is referred to in the NT as the 'Most High' (*upsistos* in LXX -Luke 1:32,34, 75, 2:14, 6:35, 8:28, Mark 5:7, Acts 7:48, 16:17, Heb 7:1), the 'Living God' (Matt 14:15, 16:16, 26:63; Acts 10:31, 14:15; 2 Cor 6:16, 2 Cor 3:3, 6, 21, 1 Thess. 1:9, 1 Tim 4:10, 1 Tim 3:15, Heb 2:12, Heb 10:13, Heb 12:22, Rev 7:2), the 'True God' (John 17:3, 1 Thess. 1:9, 1 John 5:2), the 'Lord of Lords' (1 Tim 6:15) and 'Lord of all the earth' (Matt 11:25, Acts 17:24, Rev 11:4). Such references—particularly 'Most High' and 'Almighty'—as marks of continuity in the NT of the OT's view of God are outstanding since there is an absence of parallel references to Greco-Roman Gods of the time to give perhaps rival accounts for these references in the NT. Greek Gods including, but not limited to, Zeus, Athena, Hermes, Samos, Serapis, Dionysus, Eleusis, Artemis or Cybele may be referred to as 'the Great' or "Great is (the god) NN"¹² (Acts 19:27-28), 'the Thunderer', 'Invincible', 'Lord' etc.¹³ but never as 'Most High' or 'Almighty', nor as the true or living God.

12 Henk. S. Versnel, *Coping with the Gods: Readings in Greek Theology*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 290.

13 More on references to Greco-Roman Gods can be found in the following: Versnel, *Coping with the Gods*, 289-296; Robert Grant, *Gods and*

The continuation of the view of God found in the OT into the NT is also seen in references to God as eternal (Rom 16:26, 1 Tim 6:16), perfect in knowledge (Matt 6:2-8, Luke 12:6-7, Acts 1:24, Rom 11:33, 2 Cor 12:3, 1 Heb 4:13) and as such a witness to all that goes on with human beings (Rom 1:9, 2 Cor 1:23, Phil. 1:8, 1 Thess. 2:5). He is of unmeasured wisdom (Rom 11:33, 16:29; Eph 3:10) so much so that God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom (1 Cor. 1:25). He, therefore, gives wisdom to human beings (2 Pet. 3:15) or can give those who ask for it (Jas. 3:17). He is also merciful (Luke 1.50, 6.36, Rom 16.24, 2 Cor 1.3, Eph 2.4, 1 Pet 1:3) with his mercies referred to as great (1 Pet 5:10), and his throne as the 'throne of grace' (*thronō tēs charitos* - Heb 4.16).

The sameness of the view of God between the OT and NT notwithstanding, the OT biblical theology of God undergoes a significant elaboration in the NT. This elaboration is that YHWH has a Son, and his invisible power, his Spirit, is definitely a person with significant implications on the appreciation of his nature, and his exclusive status as the only God. To this we now turn.

YHWH and his Son, Jesus

According to the Gospels (Matt 3:17, 16:16; Mark 1:1, 9:9, 15:39; Luke 1:32, 35), and also in the epistles (Rom 5:10, 1 Cor. 1:9, 2 Cor 1:19, Gal 1:16, Eph 4:13, Col 1:13, 1 Thess. 1:10, Heb 1:2, 1 John 1:7) YHWH, the God of Israel, has a Son who is Jesus. In consequence when YHWH is not referred to in the NT, generally, or in specific ways related to the OT, as 'God' or as 'the Lord', he is referred to as 'God the Father of... Jesus' or God and Father of... Jesus' (Rom 15:6, 2 Cor 11:31, Col 1:3, 1 Pet 1:3, cf. Rev 1:6). Jesus himself addresses YHWH as God or as his Father (Matt 11:27, 16:17, 18:10; Luke 24:49, John 5:17-18, 11:41, 15:10). Accordingly, God's Son shares his divinity, a status which makes him to be his 'carbon copy' (2 Cor 4:4, Col 1:15 and Heb 1:2), to share his Spirit (John 20:22, Acts 16: Rom 8:9, Gal 4:6, Phil 1:19, 1 Pet 1:11), and thus to draw from his invisible power (Matt 12:29, Luke 8:46, Phil

the One God: Christian Theology in the Greaco-Roman World, (London SPCK, 1986), 19-42; and Clay Lancaster, 'Greek and Hindu Gods,' *College Art Journal* 12.4 (1953): 335-342.

1:19). This makes Jesus not only divine but same as YHWH, a state of being that does not stop him from taking on, in humility, the form of a human being for the sake of the world's redemption (Phil 2:5-6). In other words, the nature of YHWH is the nature of his Son, what YHWH is his Son is; if YHWH is God, so is his Son, if YHWH is Lord so is his Son, if YHWH's power is his Spirit so is the Son's, if YHWH is merciful, so is his Son. This state of affairs helps one to make sense of the charge of blasphemy leveled at Jesus by the Jews because he claimed to be equal with God (John 5:18) or to be God (John 10:33-36) by claiming he was God's Son.

In the NT therefore, Jesus is signified as divine when he is repeatedly and consistently invoked, proclaimed, or referred to by the functional appellation for YHWH as ruler and judge in the OT, i.e., 'Lord' (*Kyrios*) — the Lord Jesus (Acts 11:17, Rom 1:7, 1 Cor 11:23, Gal 6:14, Col 3:17), our Lord Jesus (Rom 5:1, 1 Cor 1:2, 2 Cor 8:8, Eph 1:3, 1 Thess. 5:9, 1 Tim 6:14), the Lord (Acts 5:14, Rom 10:9, 1 Cor 7:22, 2 Cor 5:6, Phil 1:14, Heb 2:3), Lord (Matt 8:1, Mark 11:3, Luke 5:8, Acts 11:24, 1 Pet 3:15). His divinity is further signified by an even closer linkage to YHWH, the God of Israel, when he is referred to as 'Lord of Lords' (Rev 17:14, 19:16), when he is referred to by YHWH's name particularly in instances where the OT references that are applied to him are those where the God of Israel is mentioned by his name (Rom 10:13 [Joel 2:32], 1 Cor 1:31 [Jer. 9:23-24], 1 Cor 10:26 [Ps 24:1], 2 Cor 10:17 [Jer. 9:23-24]),¹⁴ and when he himself applies the name of the God of Israel to himself (Matt 7:21).¹⁵ Moreover, in four instances, Jesus' divinity is signified when he is, without qualification, referred to as God (John 20:28, Heb 1:8, 2 Pet 1:1, Titus 2:13)¹⁶. These

14For more on this see Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, 108-117. We do well to note here of considerable ambiguity in reference between Lord (YHWH) and Lord (*Adonai*) in the Greek NT because of the loss of signaling when the reference is to the Tetragram; see George Howard, 'The Tetragram and the New Testament,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96.1 (1977): 63-88.

15 For more of Lord as a Greek translation of YHWH *Adonai* see Jason A. Staples, "'Lord, Lord': Jesus as YHWH in Matthew and Luke," *New Testament Studies* 64 (2018): 1-19.

16And possibly Romans 9.5 if 'God who is over all be blessed forever' is with reference to the Lord Jesus and not an independent doxology in praise of God.

references are exceptional because in the NT 'God' without any qualification is reference to YHWH and not to YHWH's Son.

Concretely Jesus' divinity is seen in his power over nature (Mark 8:1-10, John 2:1-11) and particularly power over the sea (Matt 14:22-33, Mark 4:5-41) which only God the almighty has as we see in his creating the world through, in part, bounding the waters (Gen 1:9, Job 38:8-11, Ps 104:5-9, 33:7; Prov 8.29, Jer. 5.22), his controlling of the sea (Exod. 14.21, 15.10; Job 26.12, Ps 78.13, Isa 51.15, Jer. 31.35) and subduing it (Hab. 3:15). Jesus' divinity is also concretely seen in works which he does without calling on YHWH in prayer (Matt 8:14-16, 9:27-30, 12:9-13; Mark 1:40-42, 8:22-26, 7:1-13; Luke 4:31-35, 7:11-15; John 4:46-54, 5.1-9) for he draws from YHWH's power (Matt 12:29, 9:20-22) and does what YHWH does (John 5:17-21) by virtue of sharing in his nature.

According to the NT then, YHWH's divinity is not exclusive to him for he has shared it with another person, his Son, on account of which he is one with him (John 5:18, John 10:31-36, John 10:30, John 14:10) thereby having one God and not another God besides YHWH despite the existence of two divine persons. Indeed, the distinction between the divine persons is maintained throughout the NT which may imply a desire to preempt a confusion in distinguishing the divine persons. This distinction is seen in the exclusive use of 'God' (*Theos*), save for the five exceptions noted above, in reference to YHWH which distinguishes him from Jesus for whom the functional appellation for God, i.e., 'Lord' (*kyrios*), is used instead. This way of distinguishing between the two is brought into sharp relief when both the divine persons are referred to side by side as God for YHWH and Lord for Jesus (Acts 20:21, 22:8; Gal 1.3, Rom 5:1, 6:23, 1 Cor 1:9, Eph 1:3, 1 Thess. 3:11, James 1:1), and never as Lord (for YHWH) and God (for Jesus) nor as God (for YHWH) and God (for Jesus). Furthermore, reference that there is only one God and Lord in 1 Corinthians (8:6) and Ephesians (4:5-6) is in regard respectively to YHWH and Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is YHWH who has appointed his Son to be Lord (Phil 2:9-11). In a sense then YHWH is to be perceived chiefly in terms of great potency (creation and sustenance of life) and not confused with his Son who is to be perceived chiefly in terms of kingship (the executive functions of ruling and judging).

Other distinctions between the two divine persons are seen in YHWH referred to as God of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1:17) or as 'God and Father of Jesus Christ' (Col 1:3, John 5:7-18, 1 Peter 1:3, Rev 1.6), or as 'Father' (Matt 5:16, 6.9; Rom 1:7, 1 Cor 1:3, Phil 4.:20, 1 Thess. 3:11,13) or 'the Father' (Eph 2.18, 3.14; 2 Thess.1.2, 1 Tim 1.2, 1 Pet 1.1); whilst Jesus is referred to as the 'Son of God' (Matt 14:33, Mark 1:11, Luke 1:35, John 1:49, 2 Cor 1:19, 1 John 5:20, Rev 2:18), or 'his Son' (Gal 4:4, 1 Cor 1:9, 1 Thess. 1:10, Heb 11:17, 1 John 1:7), or as 'the Son' (Matt 11:27, John 5:26, Col 1:14, Heb 1:3, 1 John 2:23). The distinction between the two divine persons is also seen in God seated on the throne, and the Lord Jesus at his right hand (Rom 8:34, Eph 1:20, Col 3:1, Heb 1.:3, 8.:1, 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22). However, these distinctions are not a separation or divorce between YHWH and his Son nor does it compromise their oneness because, as already discussed, YHWH's shared divinity with his Son secures their oneness.

Although YHWH's Son is one with him by nature, he can potentially be another God besides him if not united with him in will, purposes, and motivations. In the NT it is clear that YHWH and his Son are united in will, purposes, and motivations for on the one hand YHWH's Son is Lord at his right hand (Rom 8:34, Eph 1:20, Col 3:1, Heb 1:3, 8:1, 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22) where YHWH has placed him (Acts 2.:34-36) so he governs and judges according to his will and pleasure. Jesus submits to YHWH who is his God (Matt 17:3, 20:17, 27:46; Col 1:3, 1 Pet 1:3, Rev 1:6), does the will of YHWH (Mark 14:36, John 5:25-29, 10:18, 17:3, 1 Cor 15:27-28, Gal 1:4, Heb 5:5-10), serves YHWH (Heb 2:17), does what he sees YHWH doing (John 5:19-21), and speaks what he has heard from YHWH (John 8:28, 17:8). The Son also loves the world just as YHWH does (John 15:12-13, Eph 5:1-2, 1 John 3:16). Furthermore, the Son, in the interest of the redemption, mediates between YHWH and the world (1 Tim 2:5) and along this line is YHWH's appointed High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:1-10), he is an advocate before YHWH (1 John 2:1), and he prays to YHWH for those who believe in him (Rom 8:34, Heb 7:25); all these he does as purposed by YHWH.

On the other hand, YHWH works through his Son albeit mostly in the context of his redemptive ends for the world in the following ways. He creates the world through his Son (John 1:1-2, I Cor 8.9, Col 1:16, Heb 1:2 and 2:10), shows his love for, and saves, the world through

his Son (John 3:16, Acts 4:12, Rom 5:8, 8:1, 8:39; Eph 1:7, 4:32, 5:20; Col 3:17, 1 John 4:14), forgives and reconciles the world to himself through his Son (Acts 10:43, 2 Cor 5:18, Col 1:20, Eph 2:16, Eph 4:32, Heb 9:26, 1 Pet 3:18), is approachable, accessible, and knowable by means of His Son (Luke 10:22, Rom 5:2, 5:10-11, Eph 2:18, 3:11-12; Heb 4:14-16, and 1 Tim 2:5-6). Through his Son, humans are able to relate to him (e.g. Heb 4:14-16, 1 Tim 2:5-6, 1 Pet 1:21), praise, thanks and petition him (Rom 1:8, 7:5; John 16:24, Heb 13:15). Through his Son, YHWH will judge the world (Acts 10:42, 17:31; John 5:2-23,27, 2 Cor 5:10), is exercising his kingship and will establish his kingdom fully (1 Cor 15:22-25). Through his Son's example (Matt 10:25, John 13:13-17, 1 Pet 2:21), men and women learn how they are to live in obedience to him.

YHWH and his Spirit, the Holy Spirit

The view of YHWH's Spirit as his invisible power, one which he also uses chiefly to give his message to his people and to empower them, and which at the same time is a person who on some occasions is the same as YHWH persists in the NT. But in the NT, YHWH's Spirit is referred to also as the Holy Spirit which is depicted as God's power either directly (Matt 12:28, Luke 1:35, 11:20, 24:49; Acts 1:8, Rom 15:13, Eph 3:16), or indirectly as a mighty wind (Acts 2.14), as God's finger (Luke 11:20) and by extension his hand (Luke 1:66, Acts 11:21, 4.30), and in talk related to power (1 Cor 2:2.4, Eph 3:16, 1 Thess. 1:5-6). The Holy Spirit is also depicted as God's power by reference to YHWH creating and giving life by his Spirit (John 3:6-8, 7:37-39; Rom 8:11, 2 Cor 3:6), and raising his Son from the dead by his Spirit (Rom 1:4, Rom 8:11, 1 Cor 6:14). In addition, as God's invisible power, and thus as an impersonal reality, we see in the NT different ways used to describe encounters, or prescribed encounters, with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can be poured (Acts 3:33, 10:45; Rom 5:5, Titus 3:6), can be given (Luke 11:13, Rom 5:5), can descend (Luke 3:22) or fall (Acts 8:16, 10:44) on someone, can be supplied (Gal 3:5), can be upon someone (Luke 2:25, Acts 1:8), someone can be full of it (Luke 1:15, 41; Acts 2:4, 4:8; Eph 5:18), can partake (*metochous*) of it (Heb 6:4), or one can be baptised with it (Matt 3:11, John 1:33).

Just as it is in the OT, the NT has it that YHWH gives his messages (and revelation) to people using his Spirit (John 3:34, 14:26; Luke 1:67, 2:26; Acts 1:16-20, 2:17-18, 10:19, Rom 8:15-17, 1 Cor 2:10,

Eph 3:5, 2 Tim 1:14, Hebrews 9:8, 1 Pet 1:10, 2 Pet 1:20-12, Rev 2:11). He empowers them by the same Spirit by granting them spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1-11, Heb. 2:4) and an enabling for godly living such as love, patience, kindness, peace etc. (Gal 5:22). But in addition to the OT, we also learn that YHWH shows his presence (John 14:15-24, Acts 7:55), sanctifies (1 Cor 6:11, Rom 15:16, 1 Pet 1:2), inspires joy (1 Thess. 1:6), comforts (Acts 9:31), gives joy (2 Thess. 1:6) grants boldness to preach (Acts 9:31), enables people to speak to God in languages unknown to them in his praise or for some other purposes (Acts 2:24, 10:46, 19:6; 1 Cor 14:3, 14:22) and to fellow humans in ways unprepared (Mark 13:11), and guarantees the inheritance which belongs to those in Christ (2 Cor 1:22, Eph 1:13-14, 4:30) by the Holy Spirit.

In regard to YHWH's Spirit as a person, the NT depicts in direct and more pronounced ways than the OT that YHWH's Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit is explicitly referred to and talked about as a person (John 14:16, 15:26, 16:7) who originates (*ekporuoetai*) from YHWH (John 15:26) and like YHWH is eternal (Heb 9:14). He has his own mind (Rom 8:27) and desires (Gal 5:17), helps those in Christ (Rom 8:26), comforts them (John 14:23, 16:4-7, Acts 9:31), sends out apostles (Acts 13:4), makes some overseers (Acts 20:28) leads those in Christ (Matt 4:1, John 16:13, Acts 8:39, Rom 8:14), speaks to people (Mark 13:11, Acts 13:2, 1 Tim 4:1, Rev 2:7, 3:6), teaches them (Luke 12:12, John 14:25, 1 Cor 2:13), entrusts one with the truth (2 Tim 1:14), forbids (Acts 16:6), and reveals God's will to people (1 Cor 2:10-13, Eph 3:5, Heb 9:8). Furthermore, as a person the Holy Spirit can be grieved (Eph 4:30) and lied to (Acts 5:3).

Since YHWH's Spirit is not only his invisible power but a person, he too, like YHWH's Son, shares in YHWH's divinity. The signification of his divinity in the NT is found in instances where YHWH and his Spirit are equated or portrayed as identical. The first of this equating is when the Holy Spirit is said to have spoken with reference to an OT quotation in instances where it was actually YHWH who spoke and not his Spirit (Acts 1:16, 28:25, Heb 3:7, 10:15-17). The second is where YHWH is lied to but the lie is said to be a lie given to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-4), and also where resistance to YHWH is said to be resistance to the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51) where those who are said to have resisted the Holy Spirit actually rebelled against the laws of YHWH and not of his Spirit. The third is where YHWH and his Spirit

are used interchangeably in relation to who resides in YHWH's temple which those in Christ are understood to be (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19; Eph 2:22). The fourth is when YHWH and his Spirit are spoken of interchangeably in relation to who raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 8:11, 1 Thess. 1:10). The fifth is the charge of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28-29, 12:32), which is a sin only applicable in relation to God. Lastly, the signification of the Holy Spirit as divine is seen when men and women who were moved by the Holy Spirit are not said to have spoken from the Holy Spirit but from YHWH (2 Pet 1:21).

According to the NT then, YHWH's divinity is not exclusive to him and his Son as earlier discussed, but is also shared by his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, on account of which he, with God's Son, is one with YHWH. In consequence we have three divine persons, YHWH, his Son and his Spirit, who are one and not two Gods besides YHWH, by virtue of YHWH's Son and Spirit sharing his divinity. Just like with his Son, YHWH's Spirit is also united with him in will, purposes, and motivations. As already seen he speaks for YHWH, he also speaks not of his own authority (or will) but what he hears from YHWH (John 16:13). He reveals what is in YHWH's mind (1 Cor 2:10-13) and serves YHWH and his Son as their invisible power since he is also the Spirit of YHWH's Son (John 20:22, Acts 16:7, Phil 1:19, 1 Pet 1:11, Rom 8:9, Gal 4:6, Philipians 1:19, 1 Pet 1:10-12). In line with YHWH's redemptive concerns, the Holy Spirit glorifies YHWH's Son (John 16:14), comes to walk (*paraklētos*) with the followers of YHWH's Son as his replacement after his departure (John 14:16), reminds them of his teachings (14:26), and bears him testimony (Acts 5:32, John 15:26, 1 John 5:8). He also enables people to recognise him as Lord and confess the same (1 Cor 12:3, 1 John 4:1-3).

Conclusion

In summary, in the OT, YHWH, the God of Israel, is almighty as seen chiefly in his creating the world and sustaining it together with the life within it. Thus, in consequence he is Lord. He is also the only God and for that reason referred to as the Most High, the true God, the living God, and the Lord of Lords and King of kings, and the Lord of the earth. Moreover, he is also eternal, perfect in knowledge, of unmeasured wisdom, and merciful. This view of God is sustained in

the NT. However, the nature of YHWH is implicitly elaborated as a trinity by virtue of YHWH having a Son and a Spirit who is also a person, which makes them both divine persons. But YHWH's Son and Spirit do not become two Gods besides YHWH for by sharing uniquely and profoundly in his nature they are divine in unity with him, i.e., the divinity of YHWH is the divinity of his Son and Spirit. Furthermore, they are not two Gods besides him because they are united with him in his will, purposes, and motivations which are chiefly seen in his redemptive ends for the world.

The implications for this biblical theology of God on how we relate to God are substantial and need to be discussed but are unfortunately beyond the remit of this article.