Let US Make Man, Does this Prove a Triune God?

Matthew Janzen, revised 2015

I talk a lot to people about who God[1] is. The majority of professing Christians believe that God is one *being* but exists in three distinct *persons*. They usually term such a belief by the name Trinity, or the Triune God. Some Christian apologists puts it like this: God is one *what* in three *who's*. One of the reasons most Trinitarians claim that God is three in one is found in Genesis 1:26. I recognize (for those students out there) that the scholarly community has somewhat ceased to use this verse in support of their Trinity, but this does not keep others (namely elders, pastors) from using such an argument. I can speak of this first hand for in the many discussions I have gotten into in the past several years, this is one of the most popular verses for the Trinitarian proponent.

I do not find odd someone reading more than one *person* or *being* into the plural pronoun "us" or "our." That I find normal. What I find odd is that they are using this text in favor of the Trinity, i.e. the "three in one God." The text doesn't say or imply, "Let us *three* make man," or even "Let *Me and the Son* make man." The text uses plural pronouns, and the most we can say based upon the text alone is that more than one person is in view.

I have made the argument before that a single person can use a plural pronoun and it makes sense. We all do it when we think or say to our self, "Let's see… what am I going to do today?" The word *let's* is a contraction for "let us." So I do not think a single person is out of view even with a plural pronoun. This being said, I do believe it is *more likely* that more than one person is in view when the word *us* is used. That would be the common use of the word *us*.

We use plural pronouns to denote more than one person. If I say, "They went to the park," it is obvious to the one I'm speaking to that *more than one person* went to the park. Even if I say, "They drove to the park," although one person is actually doing the driving, there is still more than one person in the car that is moving down the road. My point is that the most prominent use of a plural pronoun is that more than one person is in view. I could be referring to "two" people by the word "us" or I could be referring to "two hundred" people. It implies more than one.

What most Trinitarians do not stop and think about is this: if plural pronouns indicate that there is more than one person in view, then by the exact same reasoning *singular pronouns* would have to indicate the *only one person* is in view. This is simple yet overlooked by Trinitarians who use Genesis 1:26 in their favor. Let me illustrate and then give a Biblical example. I had stated before that the sentence, "*They* went to the park," implies more than one person went to the park. However, the sentence, "*He* went to the park," has to be speaking of one singular person going to the park. It might be true that others went with the "he" but for you to say that "*He* went to the park," means you are talking about a single individual. I have already (in this short paper) used singular

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[1] I prefer to use the title "Mighty One" or "Almighty" instead of the English word "God" when referencing Yahweh. However, in this paper, I've retained the culturally accepted title "God" for the Biblical Creator, in order to make this paper easier to follow.

pronouns as I type. Does this indicate that I am a single person? Why of course it does, and when God uses singular pronouns it surely indicates that He is a single person.

Now to the Biblical example; let me place Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 for you to see. I am going to put the singular pronouns in reference to God in **blue** and the plural pronouns in **red**. Please take note of the number of times each is used.

Ge 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
Ge 1:2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
Ge 1:3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
Ge 1:4 And God saw the light, that *it was* good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
Ge 1:5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness **he** called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.
Ge 1:6 ¶ And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.
Ge 1:7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which *were* above the firmament: and it was so.
Ge 1:8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.
Ge 1:9 ¶ And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry *land* appear: and it was so.
Ge 1:10 And God called the dry *land* Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called **he** Seas: and God saw that *it was* good.
Ge 1:11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.
Ge 1:12 And the earth brought forth grass, *and* herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed *was* in itself, after his kind: and God saw that *it was* good.
Ge 1:13 And the evening and the morning were the third day.
Ge 1:14 ¶ And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:
Ge 1:15 And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.
Ge 1:16 And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: **he** *made* the stars also.
Ge 1:17 And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,
Ge 1:18 And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that *it was* good.
Ge 1:19 And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.
Ge 1:20 ¶ And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.
Ge 1:21 And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that *it was* good.

Ge 1:22 And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

Ge 1:23 And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

Ge 1:24 ¶ And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

Ge 1:25 And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that *it was* good.

Ge 1:26 ¶ And God said, Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Ge 1:27 So God created man in **his** *own* image, in the image of God created **he** him; male and female created **he** them.

Ge 1:28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Ge 1:29 ¶ And God said, Behold, **I** have given you every herb bearing seed, which *is* upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which *is* the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

Ge 1:30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein *there is* life, *I have given* every green herb for meat: and it was so.

Ge 1:31 ¶ And God saw every thing that **he** had made, and, behold, *it was* very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Ge 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

Ge 2:2 And on the seventh day God ended **his** work which **he** had made; and **he** rested on the seventh day from all **his** work which **he** had made.

Ge 2:3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it **he** had rested from all **his** work which God created and made.

If we take a count we have 16 times God uses the singular pronoun in this text. We may diminish this to 14 times, seeing two of these times the singular pronoun is italicized indicating that the word does not appear in the Hebrew text from which the English is translated. We have 3 times where God uses a plural pronoun. So if we are taking a tally, we have 14 verses 3. If you continue reading the rest of the book of Genesis, God continues to use singular pronouns hundreds of times and only twice more (Genesis 3:22; 11:7) are plural pronouns used in the remainder of the entire book; so we are literally talking about *hundreds verses five*.

Remember, if a plural pronoun indicates more than one person is in view, then a singular pronoun indicates that only one person is in view. Do you believe God is one person or more than one person? Assuredly the hundreds of singular pronouns in Genesis prove that God is one single person rather than a multiplicity of persons.

If God is only one person then why does He use "us" and "our" in Genesis 1:26? Well think about this, could it be because He is talking to someone else? We know that God generally uses singular pronouns when speaking, so this means He is one person. When

God occasionally speaks by saying "us" or "our" He must be speaking to another person or being. Although it is not in the scope of this article, let me briefly say that the angelic, heavenly beings (like Michael and Gabriel) were at the creation (Job 38:7), and one of the four "us" texts in Scripture is clearly a reference to the angels (*seraphim*, Isaiah 6).

It seems to me that in Genesis 1, God was speaking to His angelic court, announcing the crowning act of the creation of adam to His heavenly host. This does not mean that the angels created man, for in Genesis 1:27 God uses the singular pronoun to describe His *active* creation of man. He was only *involving* his angels in this creation in verse 26.

This is an ancient interpretation of the text, and is even set forth by such prominent Bible translations today, such as the NIV and NET translations.[2]

I think it is time that Trinitarians recognize that a singular pronoun refers to a single person. They do not have a problem recognizing that plural pronouns refer to more than one person. I do not believe in the Trinity, but I do agree with the Trinitarian that the word "us" implies more than one person. If you are a Trinitarian reading this right now, do you agree that the word "I" or "he" implies a single person?

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[2] Most people are familiar with the NIV translation of the Bible, but many may not be familiar with the NET (New English Translation) of the Bible. You can find this translation online at the following url: www.net.bible.org. Here is the footnote this translation gives at Genesis 1:26 in reference to the plural pronouns used:

> "The plural form of the verb has been the subject of much discussion through the years, and not surprisingly several suggestions have been put forward. Many Christian theologians interpret it as an early hint of plurality within the Godhead, but this view imposes later trinitarian concepts on the ancient text. Some have suggested the plural verb indicates majesty, but the plural of majesty is not used with verbs. C. Westermann (*Genesis*, 1:145) argues for a plural of "deliberation" here, but his proposed examples of this use (2 Sam 24:14; Isa 6:8) do not actually support his theory. In 2 Sam 24:14 David uses the plural as representative of all Israel, and in Isa 6:8 the Lord speaks on behalf of his heavenly court. In its ancient Israelite context the plural is most naturally understood as referring to God and his heavenly court (see 1 Kgs 22:19-22; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Isa 6:1-8). (The most well-known members of this court are God's messengers, or angels. In Gen 3:5 the serpent may refer to this group as "gods/divine beings." See the note on the word "evil" in 3:5.) If this is the case, God invites the heavenly court to participate in the creation of humankind (perhaps in the role of offering praise, see Job 38:7), but he himself is the one who does the actual creative work (v. 27). Of course, this view does assume that the members of the heavenly court possess the divine "image" in some way. Since the image is closely associated with rulership, perhaps they share the divine image in that they, together with God and under his royal authority, are the executive authority over the world."