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N. Friedmann

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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The Mystery of the Trinity *

"I believe with sincere faith that the Creator—Blessed be His name!—is One and that there is no other unity such as He is." These words, confessed by Jews, form the second of the thirteen articles of faith drawn up by Maimonides for the purpose of combating the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. This article of faith is the chief basis of the obstinate opposition of present-day Jewry to the Christian religion. They assert that believing in a Triune God is the same as believing in polytheism, forbidden by God in the First Commandment. It is our purpose to refute this contention not only with the Old Testament Scriptures, but also with the writings of ancient teachers of Israel who lived in the first century after Christ.

Since this matter is of the greatest importance with regard to our eternal salvation, we shall begin by invoking divine guidance with the words of David: "Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me; for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day." Ps. 25:5.

Whenever a Jew confesses in the sixth of his articles of faith that the words of the Prophets are true, he admits that all articles of faith must be in agreement with the Torah, since only the Torah is the infallible truth. No man, not even the most learned rabbi, has the right to draw up articles of faith according to his own ideas, for the Torah declared that all men are liars (by nature). If someone should ask: Was not the Torah, too, written by men? our answer is: True, the writers of the Torah were men, but they were men whom God Himself selected and called to be the teachers

* This is the translation of an article written in 1938 by the now sainted Missionary N. Friedmann and published in his paper *She-erith Israel*. He himself made the translation, assisted by Prof. L. Heinrichsmeyer of Bronxville, N. Y.

of His people Israel. In order that these holy men might not err in their discourses and writings, God endowed them with His Holy Spirit, who directed their tongues and pens so that they spoke and wrote only that which the Holy Ghost "dictated" to them. This is attested by King David, the man after the heart of God, who states, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue." 2 Sam. 23:2. Since, therefore, Moses and the Prophets wrote the Old Testament Scripture as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, their words are as true as God Himself is true.

We shall now investigate what the Bible teaches concerning the nature of God. In the very first verse of the Bible Moses writes, "In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heaven and the earth." Whoever has studied Hebrew grammar knows that Elohim is a plural form. The singular of Elohim is El. If there were only one person in God, as Maimonides teaches, and as the orthodox Jews confess in their second article of faith, Moses would have written "Bereshit bara El." But since Moses, moved by the Holy Ghost, wrote, "Bereshit bara Elohim," he teaches us by means of the plural form that in God's essence there are several persons who took part in the creation of the world. God Himself speaks of Himself in the plural when about to create man, for He says, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." Gen. 1:26. If orthodox Jews object, "All our commentators explain that God took counsel with the angels and for that reason spoke in the plural," we reply: That is blasphemy, for Isaiah asks, "With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and showed to Him the way of understanding?" Is. 40:14. The Prophet Daniel testifies concerning God, "Wisdom and might are His; and He changeth the times and the seasons; He removeth kings and setteth up kings; He giveth wisdom unto the wise and knowledge to them that know understanding." Dan. 2:20, 21. Job the righteous says of God, "With Him is wisdom and strength; He hath counsel and understanding." Job 12:13.

On the basis of these passages of Holy Writ alone the orthodox Jew, who daily confesses that all words of the Prophets are true, should admit that the rabbinical interpreters who declare that God took counsel with the angels when about to create man are contradicting the Bible. But even if the passages cited above were not contained in the Bible, the rabbinical interpretation would have to be rejected, for according to their interpretation one would have to conclude that man was created not only after the likeness of God, but also after the likeness of the angels, while Gen. 1:27 clearly states, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him." If we accept the Biblical truth that man

was created in the image of God, we dare not think of angels in connection with the words "Let Us make man," but must conclude that since the plural is used, there is a pluralism in the essence of God. Fortunately there is an interpretation by very ancient rabbis which explains the words, "Let Us make man in Our image" in agreement with the Scriptures. Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, who lived soon after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, wrote two books which pious Jews consider as holy as the Bible itself. One of these is entitled *ha-Zohar ha-Kadosh (The Holy Light)*. The second bears the title *Tikne ha-Zohar* (commentary to the *Zohar*). In the latter book Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai interprets the words "Let Us make man" by saying, "To whom did the All-Highest say this? Answer: The All-Highest said this to Jehovah."

However, there are other passages in the Torah besides Gen. 1:26 in which God speaks of Himself in the plural. After the fall of our first parents God said, "Behold, the man is become as one of Us." Gen. 3:22. And when men said, "Let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name," God said, "Let Us go down and there confound their language." Gen. 11:7. In this verse both verbs, "Let Us go down" and "Let Us confound," which refer to God, are in the plural.

We read Gen. 20:13 that Abraham said to Abimelech, "When God caused me to wander from my father's house." The verb "caused to wander" is in the plural. Of Jacob we read Gen. 35:7, "And he built there an altar and called the place El-beth-el, because there God appeared unto him." The verb "appeared" is a plural form. From these passages of the Torah, written by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, we learn that our fathers Abraham and Jacob believed that there is more than one person in God's essence, since they spoke of Him in the plural. Still other passages in which God is spoken of in the plural could be adduced, but those cited may suffice.

We have thus seen from the Torah that there is more than one person in God's essence. Now the question arises as to the exact number of persons in the Godhead. Who can give us the correct answer to this important question? Certainly not "flesh and blood." Only the Holy Ghost, who speaks to us in the Sacred Scriptures, can do so.

In the second verse of the Bible, Moses writes, "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Who is the Spirit of God, the "Ruach Elohim"? Maimonides, the author of the "thirteen articles of faith," admits that the "Ruach Elohim" is the "Ruach ha-Kodesh," but he denies that He is a person, saying that the "Ruach Elohim" is only a power going forth from God. But we shall now see what Moses and the Prophets teach concerning

the "Ruach ha-Kodesh." Gen. 6:3 God says, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Striving is an act that can be predicated only of a personal, rational being, and not of a mere emanation. One realizes even more clearly that the "Ruach ha-Kodesh" or "Ruach Elohim" or "Ruach Jehovah" is no mere emanation or activity of God, as Maimonides asserts, if one considers the words of King David, recorded 2 Sam. 23:2, which read, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue." Obviously this "Ruach Jehovah" cannot be a mere power emanating from God, for a power without independent being cannot speak. The holy Prophet says Is. 63:10: "But they rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit." If the "Ruach ha-Kodesh" can be vexed, He must of necessity be a personal and rational being. The fact that the "Ruach Jehovah" is a distinct person is clearly indicated also in Is. 11:2, for there He is called "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Such qualities cannot be ascribed to a power or activity that has no independent being.

Moreover, the "Ruach ha-Kodesh" was not created by God. He is not one of the "ten creations" which, according to the Talmud (Treatise Chagiga, page 12 a), were created by God on the first day, for in the Old Testament Scriptures the name "God" and attributes applicable only to God are ascribed to Him. King David testifies 2 Sam. 23:2 that the "Spirit of the Lord" spake by him, and in the following verse he says of the same "Spirit of the Lord," "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me." Here King David calls the "Spirit of Jehovah" the "God of Israel." The Holy Ghost is not a creature. He is God.

The great rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, whom we have already mentioned, does not speak of the Holy Spirit as of a creature. In his *ha-Zohar ha-Kadosh* he explains the words of Gen. 1:2: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" with these words, "The Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the living God, and it is He that moved upon the face of the waters." And in his book *Tikne ha-Zohar* he says, "It is the Spirit of the Messiah, as has already been said. Yes, it is the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." This interpretation of Simeon ben Yohai is in agreement with the Torah.

The Old Testament Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit possesses divine attributes and performs divine works. In Ps. 139:7, 8 King David says, "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there." In

these verses King David describes the omniscience and the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit, attributes that no creatures, not even the angels of God possess. Hence the Holy Spirit must be true God.

Equally as plainly are divine works ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Job says, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life." Job 33:4. And King David declares, "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." Ps. 33:6. We learn from these passages that the Holy Spirit took part in the creation of the world. He is, therefore, not a creature, but God Himself.

Thus far we have seen from the Old Testament Scriptures that Elohim and Ruach ha-Kodesh are persons in the Godhead. There is, however, still another uncreated person that is God from eternity. Moses speaks of Him Gen. 1:3, where we read, "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light." And the Psalmist refers to Him, saying, Ps. 33:6, "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made." The "Word" implied in וַיִּאמֶר of Gen. 1:3 and mentioned in Ps. 33:6 was not a mere sound, but the "Word" that has existed from eternity, the "Word" which the ancient cabalistic writers and the Targumim call "Memra Jehovah."

In the first part of his book *ha-Zohar ha-Kadosh*, page 22, the great rabbi and cabalist Simeon ben Yohai gives a lengthy interpretation of the word "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." One sentence of this interpretation suffices for our purpose, for it proves that Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai believed that the "Memra Jehovah" is God Himself. He says, "The Father spoke through the Word: There shall be this and that, and it immediately was, as is written, 'And He said, Let there be light; and there was light.' וַיִּאמֶר, i. e., the 'Memra' said to Elohim, Let there be light."

The Targumim explain who this "Memra" is. But before stating what the Targumim have to say about the "Memra," it will be well to say something about the Targumim. Every Friday the orthodox Jew is required to read the lesson that the reader in the synagog reads on the Sabbath, reading the part from the Torah twice and the part from the Targum once. There are three Targumim to the Scriptures: Targum Onkelos, Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel, and Targum Jerushalmi. Onkelos, with the surname ha-Ger (proselyte), was by birth a Babylonian heathen who was converted to the God of Israel. The Talmud states in the Treatise Megillah, page 3: "Onkelos ha-Ger wrote the Targum to the Pentateuch, basing it on the tradition of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Jehosha." These two rabbis lived in the first century of the Christian era. The ancient rabbis tell us, too, that this Targum

was given to Moses orally on Mount Sinai, but was forgotten, and that Onkelos ha-Ger restored it to the people of Israel (Shasheleth ha-Kabala, page 20). Only the Pentateuch is treated in the Targum of Onkelos ha-Ger.

The Targum to the Prophets was written by Jonathan ben Uzziel. Of this Targum the Talmud says in the Treatise Megillah, page 3: "Jonathan ben Uzziel wrote the Targum to the Prophets according to the tradition of the Prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi," and in the Treatise Sukkah, page 28 a, the Talmud states: "Hillel the Elder had eighty disciples. Thirty of them deserved that the Shekinah should rest on them as it did on Moses, and thirty deserved that the sun should stand still for them, as it did for Joshua, the son of Nun. The greatest of these was Jonathan ben Uzziel." This rabbi Hillel the Elder lived a considerable number of years before the destruction of the second Temple. Jonathan ben Uzziel wrote his Targum thirty or forty years after that of Onkelos ha-Ger had been written. All learned Jews believe that Jonathan ben Uzziel was also the author of the Targum Jerushalmi.

It is written Gen. 1:27, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." The Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel paraphrases this passage thus: "And the Memra Jehovah created man in His image, in the image of Jehovah He created him."

We read Gen. 28:20, 21, "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God." The Targum Onkelos paraphrases, "And Jacob swore an oath saying, If the Memra Jehovah will be my support and protect me on this way that I am going and give me bread to eat and a garment to put on, then the Memra Jehovah shall be my God."

Moses says to the people of Israel, Deut. 26:17, "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in His ways, and to keep His statutes, and His Commandments, and His judgments, and to hearken unto His voice." The Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel explains, "This day you have made the Memra Jehovah rule over you to be your God, and the Memra Jehovah will rule over you in His own name, over a beloved chosen people, as He has spoken to you, that you should keep His Commandments."

The Targum Jerushalmi declares the Memra Jehovah to be the Giver of the Ten Commandments, for it transcribes the words "And God spake all these words" (Ex. 20:1) in this manner, "And the Memra Jehovah spoke all these glorious words." In Gen. 15:6 we read, "And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him

for righteousness." The Targum Onkelos transcribes, "He believed in the Memra Jehovah, and He counted it to him for righteousness."

According to the Targum Jerushalmi Abraham prayed in the name of the Memra Jehovah, for it comments on the words: "And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh; as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (Gen. 22:14) by saying, "Abraham served and prayed in the name of the Memra Jehovah and said, Thou art Jehovah, who sees, but cannot be seen." In Gen. 22:8 we are told that Abraham answered Isaac's question "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" by saying, "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering." The Targum Jerushalmi states that Abraham answered, "The Memra Jehovah will provide me with a lamb, and if not, you, my son, will be the burnt offering."

We read Num. 10:35, 36, "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel." The Targum Jerushalmi paraphrases this passage thus, "And it came to pass, when the ark was raised up, Moses stood with raised hand, prayed and said, Rise now, Memra Jehovah, in the power of Thy might, and let the enemies of Thy people be scattered, and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee. And when the ark rested, Moses raised up his hands in prayer and said, Return now, Memra Jehovah, from Thy mighty anger, and come to us in Thy kind mercy, and bless the ten thousands, and multiply the thousands of the children of Israel."

Moses says to the people of Israel, "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all His Commandments, which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth; and all these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God." (Deut. 28:1, 2.) In the Targum Onkelos this passage is transcribed, "And it will come to pass, if thou wilt accept the Memra Jehovah, thy God, to observe and to do according to His Commandments, which I command thee today, Jehovah, thy God, will make thee the highest over all nations of the earth, and all these blessings will come upon thee and cling to thee, if thou wilt accept the Memra Jehovah, thy God."

Thus we see that the very ancient teachers of Israel believed and taught that the Memra Jehovah is true God, just as the Ruach ha-Kodesh is true God, and that the Memra Jehovah is the divine Person of whom Moses says in the third verse of the Bible, "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light."

They rightly teach that three Persons took part in the creation of the world and that each of the Persons is true God from eternity. This does not mean, however, that these are three gods, but that there are three Persons in the Godhead. Of these three Persons none is the first, and none the last, but all are equal from eternity.

There is a great difference between the doctrine of Moses and the old teachers of Israel on the one hand and that of Maimonides on the other. In order to uphold his contention that the essence of God consists in a single person, Maimonides found it necessary to make a substitution in the case of a Biblical word. Moses says, Deut. 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one (אֱלֹהִים) Lord." Maimonides substituted יְהוָה for this אֱלֹהִים, and so the Jews now confess according to Maimonides' second article of faith, "I believe with sincere faith that the Creator—Blessed be His name—is יְהוָה." We shall now consider carefully the difference in meaning between the word אֱלֹהִים used in Deut. 6:4 and the word יְהוָה substituted by Maimonides. We find the numeral אֱלֹהִים used in the Bible principally in cases where several persons or things are combined into one, e. g., in Gen. 1:5, "And the evening and the morning were the first day" (אֵלֶּיּוֹם). Evening and morning are two different periods of the day, and these two periods of time are combined into one by the words אֵלֶּיּוֹם. In Gen. 2:24 we read, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh (בְּשַׂר אֶחָד)." Man and woman are two distinct persons, but by marriage they become בְּשַׂר אֶחָד. This Biblical use of אֱלֹהִים as denoting a combined unity can also be seen from Gen. 27:44. According to this passage Rebecca said to her son Jacob, "And tarry with him a few days (יָמִים אֶחָדִים), until thy brother's fury turn away." The combined days making up the time elapsing until Esau's fury will be appeased are designated by יָמִים אֶחָדִים. We read Gen. 29:20, "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days (יָמִים אֶחָדִים)." Here the seven years are represented as a unity, a short period of time. It is written Ezra 2:64, "The whole congregation together (כָּל־הַקְּהָלָה) was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore." The congregation of 42,360 people, of whom every one formed a part of the whole, is here said to be כָּל־הַקְּהָלָה. We find another example in Ezek. 37:17, "And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one (לְאֶחָדִים) in thy hand." Two pieces of wood are united into one, and the resulting union is described as אֶחָד. Thus we see that the Scriptures use אֱלֹהִים when speaking of several persons or things united into one.

On the other hand, the Scriptures employ the word יְהוָה only when an absolute singleness is to be denoted. A few examples: God says to Abraham Gen. 22:2, "Take now thy son, thine only son

(יְהוָה) Isaac." The word יְהוָה excludes all other sons. The same word is employed by the angel v. 12, "Seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son (יְהוָה), from Me." In Jer. 6:26 the holy Prophet says to his people Israel, "Wallow thyself in ashes; make the mourning as for an only son (יְהוָה)." And in Prov. 4:3 we read, "For I was my father's son, tender and only (יְהוָה) beloved in the sight of my mother." These passages prove that the Scriptures use the word יְהוָה only when speaking of an absolute oneness.

If Moses had intended to assert in Deut. 6:4 that there is but one person in the Godhead, he would assuredly have written, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is יְהוָה יְהוָה." But since he, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, wrote יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, he affirms that the three names of God appearing together in this verse—Jehovah, El, Jehovah—denote the three Persons of the Godhead and that these three are one (אֱלֹהֵינוּ), i. e., the Triune God.

And that is what is taught by Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, the revered teacher of Israel. In his book *ha-Zohar ha-Kadosh*, part 2, page 43, he states, "We have repeatedly said that the daily prayer relative to the unity which the Scripture teaches is, Hear, O Israel—Jehovah—then Elohenu—then again Jehovah—which together constitute a unity. Therefore God is called an אֱלֹהֵינוּ." In the next sentence he declares, "But there are three names mentioned here. How can three be one? Are they truly one because we say they are? Only by revelation of the Ruach ha-Kodesh can we understand it."

Realize, dear brethren of Israel, that the doctrine of the Triune God is not an invention of the Christians, as the present-day leaders of Israel declare, for it is taught not only in the Old Testament, but is also an ancient rabbinical doctrine. Moses and the Prophets clearly taught the doctrine of the Trinity, and the ancient rabbis accepted this doctrine, as we have shown from their writings.

Blessed are we in time and eternity if we believe in the Triune God, for then we have not only the Father who created us, but also the Son of God, the eternal Memra Jehovah, who in the fullness of time assumed our human nature in order to redeem us and all sinners from all sins by His sacrificial death and thus reconcile us to the holy and just God. Finally, we have also the third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost, who works and preserves faith in us by means of the Gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, and who bears witness with our spirit that we are redeemed children of God and therefore heirs of eternal life.

