



Analysis of Patristic Interpretation of the “Shema” in Deuteronomy 6:4-5



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ABSTRACT

The Patristic period stands as a pivotal era in the development of Christian doctrine, marked by profound theological and philosophical debates. Amidst these discussions, the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 retains its central importance for both Jewish and Christian faith traditions, offering insights into the nature of God. This paper explored the Patristic interpretation of the Shema, highlighting the perspectives of the Alexandrian and Antiochene Schools of thought. Key theological issues addressed include the monotheistic concept of God, the symbolic significance of Israel, the unity of God, and the Trinitarian debate. A historical approach was used where the views of selected theologians were explored within their socio-cultural and political settings. Drawing from African perspectives, the study reflected on the enduring relevance of these theological inquiries for contemporary society. Ultimately, the theological insights garnered from Patristic interpretations continue to inform and enrich modern theological discourse, bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary understanding.

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Publication History

Received: 11th June, 2024

Accepted: 20th August, 2024

Published online:

17th October, 2024

Keywords: *God, Patristic Era, Shema, Trinity*

INTRODUCTION

Deuteronomy 6:4 and by extension to verse 9 is known for its first word, the “Shema.” This passage has figured predominantly in both public and private worship settings of the Jews. This gives the Shema a place of pride in the history of Jewish culture and writing. The six-word creedal statement (sometimes referred to as a prayer) derives its name from the statement’s first Hebrew word, *שמע* (Shema), which is the command to “hear” is expanded to include all of Deuteronomy 6:4–9. Jews recite the Shema in the morning and the evening.”¹ This paper will focus on the Era of Patristic Interpretation of Deut. 6:4-5. It will begin with a brief overview of the Patristic Era and also engage some selected Patristic interpreters. Through an exploration of select Patristic interpreters, the study seeks to illuminate the enduring relevance of their reflections on the Shema within the broader context of Christian theology and spirituality. The paper will end with some reflection on the interpretations.

¹ Douglas S. Huffman and Jamie N. Hausherr, “*Shema, the*,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 112.

An Overview of the Patristic Era of Interpretation

The patristic era is the period between the end of the Apostolic Age (or the closing of the New Testament writings; that is, c. 100 A.D.) and the definitive Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.).² Several heresies/controversies surfaced between the Apostolic Age and the mid-5th century that prompted responses from individual Christian scholars.³ The 4th and 5th centuries in particular saw the flourishing of this Era when Christianity was in the process of establishing itself as the state church of the Roman Empire. The Didache, The Shepherd of Hermas, the letters of Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, and the Epistle of Barnabas are some of the writings where the interpretations of these Church Fathers can be read.

The history of interpretation during this Patristic Era was dominated by two main centers of Christian instruction known as the Alexandrian School and the Antiochene School. Though these two Schools shared the same basic Christian beliefs, their approach to Scripture interpretation was different. The Alexandrian school preceded the Antiochene. The Alexandrian is known for allegorical while the Antiochene is known for literal and historical approaches to the Scriptures.

The School of Alexandria was originally established by Clement to train Christian converts. This school was influenced by Greek philosophy and developed an allegorical approach to the Bible. Clement taught that Scripture has a twofold meaning; "Analogous to a human being, it has a body (literal) meaning as well as a soul (spiritual) meaning hidden behind the literal sense."⁴ Clement argued that the hidden, spiritual sense was more important than the literal meaning.⁵ Origen obtained this three-fold sense by expanding Clement's twofold body and soul view into body, soul, and spirit.⁶ In so doing, he added a third meaning to scripture which he referred to as the "moral" meaning, ethical instructions about the believer's relationship to others.⁷

The Antiochene school came up as a challenge to the Alexandrian school. Unlike the Alexandrian school, the Antiochene School lacked the hierarchy of authority and comprised merely a group who were united by their common theology and exegesis.⁸ Brilliant scholars from Antioch such as John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (A.D. 350-428) emphasized a literal and historical approach to the Scriptures. With this background of the Patristic Era, the article proceeds to address how some Church Fathers of the Patristic Era, interpreted Deut 6:4-5.

Patristic Interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35 – 110)⁹

Ignatius of Antioch, also known as Theophorus, meaning "The God-bearing," was an early Christian writer and served as the third bishop of Antioch. It is believed that he was a disciple of the Apostle John.¹⁰ While journeying to his martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius composed a series of letters that have been preserved. These letters cover various significant topics including ecclesiology, the sacraments, the role of bishops, and the Incarnation of Christ. His correspondence, particularly the letter addressed to the Romans, is frequently referenced as evidence of the universal scope of the Roman church.

One key aspect of Ignatius of Antioch's plain sense of interpreting the Shema concept in Deut 6:4-5 is the superiority of God. Ignatius emphasizes that no one should be inflated by their status, position, or wealth, nor should anyone be diminished by their humble circumstances or poverty. He underscores the importance of faith in God, hope in Christ, the anticipation of the blessings we await, and love for both God and our fellow human beings. And the Lord says, "This is life eternal, to know the only true God and

² See Matthew C. McMahon, *Historical Theology Made Easy* (N.p: Puritan Publications, 2013), 53.

³ Examples are Docetism, Arianism, and Nestorianism.

⁴ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr, *Introduction to biblical interpretation* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2004), 38.

⁵ Klein, et al, *Interpretation*, 38.

⁶ Klein, et al, *Interpretation*, 39.

⁷ Klein et al, *Interpretation*, 39.

⁸ Manlino Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*. trans. John A Hughes and ed. Anders Bergquist and Markus Bockmuehl (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 67.

⁹ The brief background of Clement of Alexandria and other Patristic fathers used are from the lectures of Dr. Lawson Stone at Asbury Theological Seminary (Fall 2023). Other supporting documents are referenced where necessary.

¹⁰ See "Ignatius" in *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, ed. Jerald Brauer (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) and also David Hugh Farmer, "Ignatius of Antioch" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Saints* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 742.

Jesus Christ whom He has sent.”¹¹ Ignatius's assertion emphasizes that attempting to solve a problem with the same level of ignorance or by introducing a new defect is ineffective. It questions the effectiveness of the law as a tool to overcome the devil's ignorance and conquer the strong man if the law itself is a product of ignorance and defect. It suggests that only someone with greater power than the strong man can defeat him, and not someone equal or inferior. The text draws attention to the ultimate power of the Word of God, as it proclaims in the law: “Listen, Israel, the LORD your God is the one and only true God;” “Love the LORD your God with all your heart;” and “Worship and serve Him alone.”

The second literal idea of Ignatius of Antioch on Deut 6:4-5 is based on the concept of the Trinity. The first is about true doctrine respecting God and Christ. The second is about the unity of the three divine persons. Ignatius refers to Moses by saying that for Moses, when he said, “the Lord thy God is one Lord,” and thus proclaimed that there was only one God,¹² For Ignatius, there is only one God and Father, not two or three. He is the only true God, and there is no other besides Him. As scripture says, “The Lord your God is one Lord.” We are all created by the same God and share one Father. Additionally, there is one Son, God the Word, who is called the only-begotten Son and is in the bosom of the Father. We also acknowledge one Lord, Jesus Christ.¹³

Ignatius's argument is the belief in the oneness of God, who is the only true God and Father. It asserts that there is no other God besides Him, and cites the scripture that declares, "The lord thy God is one lord." Additionally, the text affirms that all of us are created by one God, who is our Father. It further states that God has a son, who is the Word of God and the only-begotten son, and who is in the bosom of the Father. Finally, the text identifies this son as one Lord Jesus Christ. As recorded in the scripture, this affirms Moses' declaration that there was only one God by proclaiming, “the lord thy God is one Lord.”

Clement of Alexandria (C. 150 – 215)

Clement of Alexandria, a prominent writer from Alexandria, acknowledged the wisdom found in Greek philosophy and endeavored to reconcile it with Christian teachings. Consequently, his works delved into the intersection between Christian ideology and Greek philosophical concepts. He is well known for his opposition to Gnosticism, despite his use of some of its vocabulary. Additionally, he is credited with developing Christian Platonism which most scholars recognized as the progenitor of the notable tradition of Christian philosophical theology. Clement's teachings on salvation and divine judgment, as expressed in works like *Paedagogus* and *Stromata*, have led many to consider him one of the earliest Christian universalists.

Clement of Alexandria begins his literal interpretation of schema (Deut 6:4) with the assertion that “One God” is God who is the ultimate source of all things. His reference to Timaeus the Locrian work on Nature proves this assertion. Timaeus the Locrian, in the work on Nature, shall testify in the following words: “There is one first principle of all things unoriginated. For where it originated, it would be no longer the first principle; but the first principle would be that from which it originated.” For this true opinion was derived from what follows: “Hear,” it is said, “O Israel; the LORD thy God is one, and Him only shalt thou serve.”¹⁴

In expanding Timaeus the Locrian's idea, there exists a fundamental principle governing all uncreated things. The concept of a first principle is rooted in the idea that anything that is created cannot be considered the ultimate origin or foundation of existence. If something were to be created, it would no longer hold the status of being the first principle. In essence, it suggests that there must be a source of

¹¹ Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 89.

¹² Pseudo-Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Antiochians,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 110.

¹³ Pseudo-Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philippians,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 116.

¹⁴ Clement of Alexandria, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 2 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 471.

existence that is uncreated and eternal, from which all other things are derived. For Clement of Alexandria, this belief is supported by the following statement: "Listen, O Israel, the Lord your God is one, and Him alone shall you worship." This suggests that there is only one God, who is the ultimate source of all creation and existence. Therefore, anything that exists must have been derived from this ultimate source, which is uncreated and eternal.

Clement of Alexandria again, explains the term one God as the oneness of God possibly because he sees God as the only source of all things. In his exhortation to the heathen, he indicates that whence Moses, the man of God, dissuading from all idolatry, beautifully exclaims, "Hear, O Israel, the LORD thy God is one LORD; and thou shalt worship the LORD thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."¹⁵ Thus, this message underscores the importance of monotheism and the exclusive worship of God. Moses' unwavering stance on this issue highlights his deep understanding of the spiritual significance of this matter. This, therefore serves as a guiding light for those seeking a deeper connection with the divine and a more fulfilling spiritual life. In support of this assertion, Clement referred to the wise words of the blessed psalmist David, it behooves us all to seek instruction and avoid the wrath of the Lord, lest we be led astray from the path of righteousness. Those who put their trust in Him shall be blessed.

Based on the monotheistic view, Clement of Alexandria continues with his exhortation to the heathens in Verse 5. In this passage, he expresses the view that: as you mature, leave behind superstition and embrace the path of devotion. God sees you as pure-hearted individuals. Therefore, let the Athenian adhere to the laws of Solon, the Argive to those of Phoroneus, and the Spartan to those of Lycurgus. However, if you align yourself with God's people, your homeland is in heaven, and God is your ultimate authority. And law is "thou shalt love the Lord thy God."¹⁶ The emphasis here is the importance of abandoning superstition and embracing piety to be seen as innocent children in the eyes of God. It encourages people to follow the laws of their respective regions, such as Solon's laws in Athens, Phoroneus' laws in Argive, and Lycurgus' laws in Sparta. However, the text suggests that enrolling oneself as one of God's people will lead one to heaven, where God is the lawgiver. The laws of God include commands such as loving the Lord God with all one's heart and soul.

Tertullian (ca 160 – 255)

Tertullian embraced Christianity prior to 197 CE. He wrote extensively on apologetics, theology, controversies, and asceticism, emerging as a prominent figure in early Latin theological circles. In his later years, he embraced Montanism. Tertullian's linguistic innovation is evident in his introduction of new Latin terms, such as "Trinitas," to articulate emerging Greek theological concepts, notably the Divine Trinity. Additionally, he critiqued certain Christian doctrines as well. Tertullian's shema interpretation shows a spiritual sense rather than a literal one. His commentary of Deuteronomy 6:4 includes a distinct reference to the introduction of the Decalogue. He asserts that these words of God, as conveyed by Moses, hold significance for all those who are led by the Lord God of Israel away from a world plagued by superstition and the enslavement of humanity.¹⁷ These words from Tertullian indicate that the schema was not addressed literally to Israel alone, but also to the spiritual Israel. This spiritual Israel is the people of the Christian faith. In response to the Jews, Tertullian contends that it makes little sense to believe that God, the creator of the universe and humanity, who governs all nations, would only give a law through Moses to one particular people, rather than to all nations.¹⁸ Supporting this argument, Tertullian points out that in the law given to Adam, we can see the foundational principles that later became explicit in the laws given through Moses, such as loving the Lord with all one's heart and soul, and loving one's neighbor as oneself.¹⁹

¹⁵ Clement of Alexandria, "Exhortation to the Heathen," in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 2 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 195.

¹⁶ Clement of Alexandria, "Exhortation to the Heathen," 202.

¹⁷ Tertullian, "Scorpiace," in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 3 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 2.

¹⁸ Tertullian, "An Answer to the Jews," in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 3 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 152.

¹⁹ Tertullian, "An Answer to the Jews," 152.

But Tertullian interpretation of יהוה יהוה connotes literal sense. Literal sense because the Tertullian explanation is in line with the literal interpretation of Deut 6:4 by the Jews which affirms their allegiance to “one God.” This has the idea of eliminating idolatry worship. Tertullian continues his literal interpretation of “One God” from the perspective of the Trinity. Tertullian interpretation of “one God” in Deut 6:4 makes “the Son being one with the Father,” which is more of a Trinitarian view.²⁰

The concept of loving God with all your heart, soul, and might (Deut 6:5) is more of a figurative sense to Tertullian. In the Five Books against Marcion, Tertullian writes:

Furthermore, it is in this passage evident that they were not reproved concerning their God, but concerning a point of His instruction to them, when He prescribed to them figuratively the cleansing of their vessels, but really, the works of merciful dispositions. In like manner, He upbraids them for tithing paltry herbs,¹⁴ but at the same time “passing over hospitality and the love of God.” The vocation and the love of what God, but Him by whose law of tithes they used to offer their rue and mint? For the whole point of the rebuke lay in this, that they cared about small matters in His service of course, to whom they failed to exhibit their weightier duties when He commanded them: “Thou shalt love with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, the Lord thy God, who hath called thee out of Egypt.”²¹

Tertullian’s explanation of Deut 6:5 is done in a figurative sense to his allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Further in the five books against the maricon, Tertullian adds that the love of God and neighbor can be related to the law and grace. He does this from the perspective of circumcision. He argues as follows:

Furthermore, since both circumcision and uncircumcision were attributed to the same Deity, both lost their power in Christ, because of the excellency of faith—of that faith concerning which it had been written, “And in His name shall the Gentiles trust?”—of that faith “which,” he says “worketh by love.” By this saying, he also shows that the Creator is the source of that grace. For whether he speaks of the love which is due to God, or that which is due to one’s neighbor—in either case, the Creator’s grace is meant: for it is He who enjoins the first in these words, “Thou shalt love God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength;” and also the second in another passage: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”²²

Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 296 – 373)

Athanasius of Alexandria, a prominent theologian and Bishop of Alexandria in the 4th century gained renown for his staunch opposition to Arianism, notably at the First Council of Nicaea in 325. There, he contested the Arian belief in the distinctness of Christ from the Father. His steadfast opposition to Arianism led to his deposition, although he garnered significant support in the Western Church. It wasn't until after his death that his views were fully acknowledged at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

In his writings and letters, Athanasius delved into the doctrine of Scripture, raising questions about whether divine teachings left humanity without knowledge of God after abolishing pagan idolatry.²³ He argued that the Scriptures guided understanding God, citing passages like "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God," emphasizing the importance of devotion to God.²⁴

Athanasius countered Arian arguments in his discourses, asserting that Christ's divinity did not undermine the Father's supremacy as the sole God. He explained that the term "One" in Scripture referred

²⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, “Against the Heathen,” in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4 of A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 36.

²¹ Tertullian, “The Five Books against Marcion,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 3 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 394.

²² Tertullian, “The Five Books against Marcion,” 437.

²³ Athanasius of Alexandria, “Against the Heathen,” in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4 of A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 28.

²⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, “Against the Heathen,” 28.

to the exclusivity of the true God, not to a separation between the Father and the Son.²⁵ He addressed criticisms from Arians who questioned the Son's deity by clarifying the context of biblical passages.²⁶

Athanasius continues his discussions in his "Festal Letters," that the Shema also refers to knowing who God is. His conviction is that, when the Guide to the laws is unknown, one does not readily pass on to the observance of them. Moses adopted this method; for when he promulgated the words of the divine dispensation of laws, he first proclaimed the matters relating to the knowledge of God: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord.'²⁷ So in this context, Moses first introduces the concept of a divine being, and then educates the Israelites about the attributes and beliefs associated with Him, emphasizing the importance of faith in Him. With this foundation of knowledge, Moses discusses the practical matters related to pleasing God which are the commandments.

In his writings and correspondences addressed to the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia, Athanasius contends that those who deny the fatherhood of God resemble the Sadducees' offense and even those among the Greeks labeled as Atheists. He argues that such denial leads to rejecting the notion that creation is the direct result of God's craftsmanship. If terms like 'Father' and 'God' do not signify His very essence, but rather something else, it is inconceivable, impious, and profoundly unsettling to contemplate.²⁸ Athanasius believes that, phrases such as "I am that I am," "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth," and "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord,"²⁹ are natural for one to understand the very simple, blessed, and incomprehensible essence of God. Even though one cannot fully understand what God is, terms like "Father," "God," and "Almighty", point towards that very essence. Therefore, if one believes that the Son comes from God, then such a person will acknowledge that He comes from the very essence of the Father.

Ambrose of Milan (c. 337 – 397)

Ambrose of Milan hailed from a distinguished Roman noble lineage and rose to the position of provincial governor before the age of thirty. Following this, he assumed the role of bishop of Milan, where he skillfully mediated conflicts between the Nicene and Arian factions, earning acclaim for his diplomatic prowess. Notably, he staunchly defended Nicene's orthodoxy against Arianism and introduced fresh insights into the theory of atonement.³⁰

Ambrose discusses the concept of the Trinity by emphasizing the impossibility of serving two lords. He argues that since lordship is singular, there cannot be two lords. According to him, the Father dwells within the Son, and the Son within the Father, resulting in a unified Lord. In support of this assertion, he quoted the Shema, such, too, was the teaching of the Law: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord," that is, unchangeable, always abiding in the unity of power, always the same, and not altered by any accession or diminution. Therefore, Moses called Him One.³¹ Therefore for oneness in Godhead, the Law hath proved, which speaks of one God, as also the Apostle, by saying of Christ; "In Whom

²⁵ For Athanasius, Arian appeal to Scripture (considering the Biblical learning of Lucian and what we hear of the training of Aetius, to say nothing of the exegetical chair held by Arius at Alexandria) and their use must be pronounced meagre or (lacking) and superficial. In the O.T. they harped upon three texts, Deut. 6:4 (Monotheism), Ps. 45:8 (Adoptionism), and Prov. 8:22, LXX. (the Word a Creature). In the N.T. they appeal for Monotheism (in their sense) to Luke 18:19, John 17:3; The Son a Creature, Acts 2:36, 1 Cor. 1:24, Col. 1:15, Heb. 3:2; Adoptionism, Matt. 12:28; προκοπή, Luke 2:52; also Matt. 26:41, Phil. 2:6, sq., Heb. 1:4; The Son τρεπτός, &c., Mark 13:32, John 13:31, 11:34; inferior to the Father, John 14:4–8, Matt. 27:46, also 11:27 a, 26:39, 28:18, John 12:27, and 1 Cor. 15:28 (cf. pp. 407, sq.).

²⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, "Four Discourses against the Arians," in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. John Henry Newman and Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 397.

²⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, "Festal Letters," in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Henry Burgess and Jessie Smith Payne, vol. 4 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 533.

²⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, "Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia," in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. John Henry Newman and Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 469.

²⁹ Exodus 3:14, Genesis 1:1 and Deuteronomy 6:4 respectively

³⁰ Mara, Maria Grazia. "Ambrose of Milan." In *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*. Edited by Angelo Di Berardino (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 28-29.

³¹ Ambrose of Milan, "Three Books of St. Ambrose on the Holy Spirit," in *St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H. T. F. Duckworth, vol. 10 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1896), 150.

dwellleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:2).”³² He there argues that “let the Arians, if they can, make away with this kinship in nature and unity in work.”³³ For there is, God in God, but not two Gods; for it is written that there is one God,³⁴ and there is Lord in Lord, but not two Lords, forasmuch as it is likewise written: “Serve not two lords.”³⁵

Expanding on this point, it is argued that although the Spirit may be referred to as Lord, this does not imply the existence of three Lords. Just as the Father and the Son are both referred to as Lord in numerous passages of Scripture, it is because lordship is inherent in the divine nature, and the divine nature is inseparable from lordship. These aspects harmoniously converge within the Trinity, with no division among the Three Persons.³⁶

Ambrose interprets the Shema as a call to obedience to God. He emphasizes the importance of adhering to the Lord's ways, cautioning against straying from them, as doing so would inevitably lead to sin. He advises prudence in speech, suggesting that exercising restraint can help one avoid folly. The law says: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God.” It said not: “Speak,” but “Hear.” Eve fell because she said to the man what she had not heard from the Lord her God.³⁷ The first word from God says to thee: Hear! And if you hear, take heed to the ways of God.

Therefore, if one has fallen, such a person must quickly amend his or her way. For: “Wherein does a young man amend his way; except in taking heed to the word of the Lord?” Ambrose admonished people, especially the clergy in citing Deut 6:4, “Be silent therefore first of all, and hearken, that thou fail not in thy tongue.”³⁸

Ambrose suggests that the obedience to the command from God in Deut 6:4 is a prelude to the love detailed in Deut 6:5. He cites this passage in his writing concerning virgins, thus, we ought to stir up the love of the bride, for it is written: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.”³⁹ He links Deut 6:4 to verse 5 with a passage from Eze 21:14 that at bridal feasts we ought to adorn the hair at least with some ornaments of prayer, for it is written: “Smite the hands together, and strike with the foot.” Hence, it is fitting to shower roses upon those unbroken unions. In these fleeting marriages, the bride is welcomed with applause before she is entrusted with commands, to prevent harsh demands from harming her before love, nurtured by gentleness, takes root.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is virtuous to extend acts of kindness and fulfill obligations toward all humanity. However, the highest form of devotion is to offer to God the most valuable possession one possesses—namely, one's mind—for nothing surpasses it in value.

John Chrysostom (ca. 347 – 407)

John Chrysostom, a significant Early Church Father, held the position of archbishop of Constantinople. Renowned for his eloquent preaching and oratory skills, he vehemently condemned the misuse of authority by both religious and political figures. However, Chrysostom's legacy is tainted by eight of his sermons that significantly contributed to the propagation of Christian antisemitism. These diatribes, directed against Judaizers, were crafted during his tenure as a presbyter in Antioch. Regrettably, they were later exploited and misappropriated by the Nazis in their ideological persecution of the Jewish population.⁴¹ John Chrysostom in his homily on the Acts of Apostles describes how the Jews accept the shema in a plan sense and language. Citing Deut 6:4, he asks a question, how in particular should Jews, hearing as they

³² Ambrose of Milan, “Exposition of the Christian Faith,” in *St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H. T. F. Duckworth, vol. 10 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1896), 257.

³³ Ambrose of Milan, “Exposition of the Christian Faith,” 204.

³⁴ Isa 45:18, 1 Cor 8:4,6.

³⁵ Matt 6:24.

³⁶ Ambrose of Milan, “Three Books of St. Ambrose on the Holy Spirit,” 150.

³⁷ Ambrose of Milan, “On the Duties of the Clergy,” in *St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H. T. F. Duckworth, vol. 10 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1896), 2.

³⁸ Ambrose of Milan, “On the Duties of the Clergy,” 2.

³⁹ Ambrose of Milan, “Concerning Virgins,” in *St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H. T. F. Duckworth, vol. 10 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1896), 380.

⁴⁰ Ambrose of Milan, “Concerning Virgins,” 380.

⁴¹ Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Antisemitism: From Ancient Times To The Present Day*, (Oxford University Press: 2006), 48.

did every day of their lives, and having it ever sounded in their ears, “The Lord thy God is one Lord, and beside Him is none other” to accept new teachings when they were told that Jesus Christ was the same person God and equal with the Father? The question he asks in his homily shows how he appreciated the Jewish perception of the Shema. He further argues that Jesus’ disciples were even troubled and offended upon hearing the more profound doctrines. If even those who had been with Him for a long time and had seen so many wonders could not understand, how could one expect newly converted persons - who were once idol worshippers and had many evil ways - to immediately receive more profound doctrines about the divinity of Jesus Christ?⁴²

Similarly in his homily on the St. Johns gospel, Chrysostom opines that the author of John’s gospel declares that no humanity has ever seen God and that God is one. It is worth noting that other prophets have attested to this fact, with Moses repeatedly proclaiming that "The Lord thy God is one Lord" (Deut 6:4) and Isaiah stating that "Before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me" (Isa. 43:10).⁴³ From Chrysostom perspective, the passage from John's Gospel, which is under discussion, deals with the declaration of God. John asserts that God has declared that no human being can see Him at any time and that He is one. These two affirmations have been echoed by the prophets of old, with Moses repeatedly proclaiming that in the Shema "The Lord thy God is one Lord" (Deut 6:4). It is interesting to note that the declaration of God’s oneness is a recurring theme in the Bible, and it is a fundamental tenet of monotheism. The passage in question, therefore, reinforces the idea that God is one and that He is beyond human comprehension.

Again, Chrysostom quoted Deut 6:4 in the Matthean Homily addressing how early Jews maintained their standard knowledge of the true God and rejected all forms of idolatry. Since He (Jesus) had made mention of “the Lord” and “my Lord,” He recurs again to the law. And yet the law said nothing of this kind, but, “The Lord thy God is one Lord.”⁴⁴ Although the law did not specifically address this topic, stating only that "The Lord thy God is one Lord," He speaks in agreement with His Creator through these words. If He had disagreed, He would have contradicted the law, but instead, He commands respect for it, even when those who teach it are corrupt. His discourse concerns the people's way of life and morality, which were the primary reasons for their disbelief, due to their immoral behavior and desire for glory. Therefore, to improve His listeners' conduct and contribute to their salvation, He emphasizes the importance of not disregarding our teachers or rebelling against our priests.

Jesus continued to the second commandment after fulfilling the first and achieving self-denial, per the law. Although some argue it's the third commandment, as the first commandment is "The Lord your God is one Lord," not "Thou shalt not kill." So why didn't Jesus start with the first commandment? The reason is that starting there would have required expanding on it and including himself and his Father, which was not yet appropriate. Instead, he focused solely on practicing his moral teachings and persuading his audience of his divinity through miracles and teachings. Proclaiming from the outset, before taking any action or speaking any words, "You have heard it said to those of old, 'I am the Lord your God, there is no other besides me.' But I tell you, worship me as you would Him," would have been viewed by many as insane.⁴⁵

Augustine of Hippo (ca. 354 – 430)

Augustine of Hippo, revered as a Bishop, philosopher, and theologian, holds a distinguished place as one of the most influential Latin patristic writers. His conversion to Christianity occurred around 386, following which he returned to North Africa and assumed the bishopric of Hippo in 395. Throughout his

⁴² John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. Walker et al., vol. 11 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 2.

⁴³ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Gospel of St. John,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. G. T. Stupart, vol. 14 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 53.

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Gospel according to St. Matthew,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. George Prevost and M. B. Riddle, vol. 10 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 435–436.

⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, on the Gospel according to St. Matthew,” 115–116.

episcopacy, Augustine played pivotal roles in significant theological controversies, notably the Donatist dispute concerning the church and sacraments, as well as the Pelagian controversy regarding grace and sin, actively opposing heresies such as Pelagianism. Augustine's profound contributions extend to the shaping of the doctrine of the Trinity and the Christian interpretation of history. Among his extensive literary output stands the seminal work "Confessions." Moreover, Augustine authored "The City of God," wherein he defended Christianity against pagan criticisms and expounded on the concept of the Church as a spiritual entity, distinct from the earthly realm. His writings laid the groundwork for the medieval worldview, a perspective later solidified by Pope Gregory the Great.

One can identify both allegorical and literal interpretations of the Shema in the words of Siant Augustine. For him, the words "Hear, O Israel; the Lord thy God is one God" have reference to "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath." So that these people might put an end to these things wherever it received power to do so, this commandment was also laid upon the nation: "Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them; thou shalt not do after their works, but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images." Augustine further highlights that the ancient Israelites received this message directly from God through the voice of Moses, which served as a reminder of their covenant with God. This divine communication played a significant role in shaping the beliefs and practices of the Israelites and remains a crucial aspect of their history and religious tradition. For him, this also relates to Christians because the fulfillment of the law is in Christ.

Augustine in his harmony of the gospels also links Christians to Israel when he refers to the shema by citing Deut 6:4. He pens down the following words: "But who shall say that Christ and Christians have no connection with Israel, seeing that Israel was the grandson of Abraham, to whom first, as afterward to his son Isaac, and then to his grandson Israel himself, that promise was given, "In thy seed shall all nations be blessed"? That prediction we see now in its fulfillment in Christ."⁴⁶ Christ's fulfillment of these things proves his oneness with God. For Augustine, the idea behind this is for God to exterminate idolatry, a task that was entrusted to ancient Israel and is fulfilled through Jesus Christ. For that is his mission on earth. Augustine then moves the interpretation of the Shema to the oneness of God by referring to the Trinity.

What is said relatively in the Trinity is that certain attributes are specifically attributed to each Person within the Trinity, but these attributes are not self-referential; rather, they are expressed either in relation to one another or to creation. Thus, it is evident that such expressions are relational and do not pertain to the essence of each person independently.⁴⁷ To support his assertions, he suggests that while the Trinity is collectively referred to as one God, great, good, eternal, and omnipotent, each Person within the Trinity may also be designated individually as possessing attributes such as deity, magnitude, goodness, eternity, and omnipotence. However, the Trinity as a whole cannot be referred to as the Father in the same manner, except possibly metaphorically in relation to creation, particularly due to the concept of adoption of sons.⁴⁸ Therefore, what is written in the passage, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord," must not be interpreted to exclude the Son or the Holy Spirit. We rightfully refer to this one Lord as our Father, who regenerates us through His grace.

Thus, it was permissible, out of sheer necessity of language and logical inference, to speak of three persons, not because Scripture explicitly states it, but because Scripture does not oppose it; however, if we were to assert three Gods, Scripture would indeed be in contradiction, when it says, "Hear, O Israel; the Lord thy God is one God?"⁴⁹ This possibly led to his works on the harmony of the Old and New Testament indicating a transition from this unto this," that is, from the Jewish people unto the Gentile people. It is therefore not a surprise to see Augustine's commentary on Psalms 55:10-11 arguing that the

⁴⁶ Augustine of Hippo, "The Harmony of the Gospels," in *Saint Augustin: Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospels*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, vol. 6 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 93–94.

⁴⁷ Augustine of Hippo, "On the Trinity," in *St. Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Arthur West Haddan, vol. 3 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 93

⁴⁸ Augustine, "On the Trinity," 93.

⁴⁹ Augustine, "On the Trinity," 110.

commandments that the Jews received were good and just, making particular reference to the first commandment that is expressed in Deut 6:4.⁵⁰

Augustine contends that the concept of the Trinity and the number three holds significance in the realm of the intellect. This can be understood in light of the command to love God in a threefold manner: with the entirety of one's heart, soul, and mind.⁵¹ In his writings against the Manichaeans and the Donatists, Augustine asserts that the authority of the Old Testament aligns with the statements found in the gospel and the epistles. He underscores the unnecessary need to elaborate on the first statement, as it is widely recognized as a passage from the Mosaic law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."⁵² Augustine's teachings regarding loving God with the mind can be encapsulated as follows: The mind's love for God is manifested in its proper love for itself; if it does not love God, it can be considered to hate itself. Even a feeble and mistaken mind possesses strength in its ability to recall, comprehend, and cherish itself. Redirect it towards God so that it may experience blessings through remembering, comprehending, and loving Him.⁵³

Because philosophical ideas were very influential in the patristic Era, the subject of the soul, boy, and heart was a matter of philosophical inquiry. Scholars have debated the question of whether the soul is corporeal or incorporeal, mortal or immortal. Some have even contended that the soul is a part of the body, with various organs or substances serving as its seat of power. Similarly, the heart, the brain, and the blood have all been suggested as possible locations of the soul's power. Augustine argues that those who have regarded the soul as a kind of life force that animates all living things have typically argued for its immortality because life itself cannot be extinguished. Those who have viewed the soul as a corporeal entity, on the other hand, have tended to regard it as mortal, subject to the same decay and dissolution as the body itself. The question of the soul's nature and destiny remains one of the most enduring and difficult problems in philosophy and continues to inspire debate among scholars and thinkers in a variety of fields.⁵⁴

As long as any desire of the flesh remains, it must be controlled by self-restraint to truly love God with all of one's being. Although it is the flesh that is often blamed for lustful desires, it is the soul that is ultimately responsible for these carnal longings. Only in a state of perfection can one live without sin, free from the internal struggle between the desires of the flesh and the law of the mind. It is then that one can wholeheartedly love God with all of their being, fulfilling the first and most important commandment.⁵⁵ He means that no part of our life is to be unoccupied, and to afford room, as it were, for the wish to enjoy some other object, but that whatever else may suggest itself to us as an object worthy of love is to be borne into the same channel in which the whole current of our affection's flows.⁵⁶

Again, in Deut 6:5, Augustine argues the loving of God against the same as the reason for offenses. In his confessions, he writes:

Can it at any time or place be an unrighteous thing for a man to love God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind, and his neighbor as himself? Therefore, those offenses which be contrary to nature are everywhere and at all times to be held in detestation and punished; such were those of the Sodomites, which should all nations commit, they should all be held guilty of the same crime by the divine law, which hath not so made men that they should in that way abuse one another.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Augustine of Hippo, "Expositions on the Book of Psalms," in *Saint Augustin: Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 8 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 354.

⁵¹ Augustine, "Expositions on the Book of Psalms," 16.

⁵² Augustine of Hippo, "On the Morals of the Catholic Church," in *St. Augustin: The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Richard Stothert, vol. 4 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 45.

⁵³ Augustine, "On the Trinity," 192–193.

⁵⁴ See Augustine, "On the Trinity," 139.

⁵⁵ Augustine of Hippo, "A Treatise Concerning Man's Perfection in Righteousness," in *Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 5 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 165.

⁵⁶ Augustine of Hippo, "On Christian Doctrine," in *St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. F. Shaw, vol. 2 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 528.

⁵⁷ Augustine of Hippo, "The Confessions of St. Augustin," in *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin with a Sketch of His Life and Work*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. G. Pilkington, vol. 1 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 65.

From Augustine's perspective, though love is the greatest among the three (love, hope, and faith - 1 Cor 13:13), love is not to be superseded, but increased and fulfilled. Faith helps to see it contemplating in full vision, and hope is the expectation of acquiring in actual fruition what it once embraced.⁵⁸

In his *Treatise on Faith and the Creed*, Augustine asserts that with the divine generation and the human manifestation of our Lord being systematically explained and entrusted to faith, our Confession is further enriched. This conviction is essential for comprehending God, who is not lesser than the Father or the Son, but is equally divine and eternal.⁵⁹ This understanding of the Trinity as one God, as declared in the words, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God," emphasizes our obligation to love Him—the One God—with all our being.

Analysis and Implications/Reflections of the Patristic Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4-5

This aspect of the work will do analyses of the patristic interpretation of Deut 6:4-5 discussed above with implications and reflections. These implications and reflections will mostly be done from the African perspective and most examples will come from the Ghanaian experience.

Monotheism

Nathan MacDonald commenting on Deuteronomy and the meaning of Monotheism defines the term monotheism as rational denial of the existence of many deities and the intellectual ascent to only one God.⁶⁰ This argument does not imply the non-existence of other gods but rather of no importance. Ignatius and Chrysostom's idea of the superiority of God then supports this view. Their being of no importance means they are powerless, of no status, and must not be worshiped. This monotheistic connotation is clear in the shema and will therefore qualify it as such. Chrysostom argues that the text draws attention to the ultimate power of the Word of God, as it proclaims in the law. It can thus be contended that in monotheism, what holds significance is not merely the unity but the unparalleled singularity of God. Monotheism does not merely affirm one god in contrast to many gods but rather highlights God's incomparable might and supremacy.

The patristic interpretation of the shema discussed by the Church Fathers can be summarized as follows: monotheism refers to the conviction that there is only one God, or that God is a singular entity. This sets it apart from polytheism, which involves the worship of multiple gods, or atheism, which asserts that there is no deity, and agnosticism, which contends that the existence or non-existence of a god or gods cannot be definitively determined.

Scholars have long debated whether Africans, particularly the Akan people, adhere to monotheism or polytheism. John Mbiti suggests that the African understanding of God resembles the Judeo-Christian God, as portrayed in the Old Testament.⁶¹ Conversely, Yusufu Turaki contends that the traditional African perception of God is diverse, encompassing pantheistic, polytheistic, anthropomorphic, or supreme power interpretations.⁶² Benezet Bujo maintains that the Christian Gospel did not introduce a new notion of God but rather provided a fuller and clearer exposition of the same singular God already recognized by Africans.⁶³ Mbiti further asserts that while every African acknowledges one God, some African cosmologies incorporate additional divinities and spiritual entities, often closely linked to the supreme deity.⁶⁴

This brief overview of Africa therefore indicates that there are several implications for the concept of monotheism for the African Community. First, in monotheism God is supreme yet there is still the existence of other gods. This means that, despite the superiority of God, there is still the existence of other gods which one may easily fall prey to worship if care is not taken. Secondly, the existence of other gods

⁵⁸ Augustine, "A Treatise Concerning Man's Perfection in Righteousness," 165.

⁵⁹ Augustine of Hippo, "A Treatise on Faith and the Creed," in *St. Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, vol. 3 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 327.

⁶⁰ Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism*, FAT 2/1 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 5-58

⁶¹ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 29.

⁶² Yusufu Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa: A Christian Theological Method* (Cumbria: Langham Publishing, 2020), 12

⁶³ Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 18.

⁶⁴ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 29.

must not give room for idol worship. Again, God alone is the one to be worshipped. This must encourage Africans to desist from idol worship. Finally, it enables one to appreciate the superiority of God and give reverence to him.

Israel as Christians

The figurative interpretation used by Tertullian and Augustine in linking Israel may seem unique but very similar to most contemporary preachers in Africa especially Ghana. In Ghana, Christians believe that they are the seed of Abraham. Similar sentiments to Tertullian's argument that the law was given to Adam are echoed by Augustine, who suggests that there is a connection between Christ, Christians, and Israel. Augustine points to the promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, foreseeing that through Abraham's seed, all nations would be blessed. These ideas resonate with Paul's assertion that those who have faith are considered children of Abraham. Paul emphasizes that Scripture anticipated God's justification of the Gentiles through faith and proclaimed the gospel beforehand to Abraham, affirming that all nations would be blessed through him. Thus, those who have faith share in the blessings bestowed upon Abraham, the epitome of faith (cf. Gal. 3:7-9).

Reflecting on this ideology of Israel as Christians affirms the believed of most African Christians to be linked to the seed of Abraham. Such link between African Christians to Israel has as possibly increasing the Christian faith and community on the African continent. This evidence is seen in how Christianity has grown in the past centuries to now. Christianity in Africa has experienced huge numerical growth in the past and present centuries, moving from 9% Christian population in 1900 to nearly 50% Christian population in 2020.⁶⁵ The contextualization of the Christian faith done by Tertullian and Augustine is therefore a positive springboard to the development of Christianity in Africa. The works of these two fathers can be said to be stereologically Christological. The implication for Africa therefore means that Africans are also part of God's salvation plans. Hence, part of the soteriological concept of the salvation message of Christ.

Echad and Yachid

The translation of אֱחָד ; יָחִיד had echad or yachid is of scholarly debate. Ongoing debate leads many English translations to offer variations in margin notes. Most notably, the final word (אֱחָד , d cha e; "one") can be understood as an affirmation of monotheism and/or as a declaration of God's uniqueness.⁶⁶ The difficult Hebrew syntax of Deuteronomy 6:4 is variously rendered by English translations.⁶⁷ The origin of the Hebrew term *yachid*, meaning 'one,' can be traced back to its root *echad*, similar to deriving the English word 'only' from 'one.' The resemblance in spelling between *yachid* and *echad* further confirms their linguistic relationship. Essentially, the correlation between *yachid* and "only" parallels that of *echad* and 'one.' The survey of the Patristic interpretation shows that almost all the Church Fathers discussed raise concerns. These words are interplay here and mostly influenced the idea of the Trinity, which will be discussed subsequently.

Therefore, it seems that the Shema not only speaks of the uniqueness of God as the only God but also makes reference to the oneness that results from the unity of numerous persons.⁶⁸ So the idea of one God is present, but it still gives room for more multi-persons. It can therefore be argued that Deut 6:4 underlines both plurality and unity of the Godhead. The plurality is not in the context of polytheism. The words of Norman Geisler are therefore appropriate to use here. That is, the word *echad* "while not opposing monotheism... favors trinitarianism." Thus, Deut. 6:4 is not an anti-Trinitarian text."⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Isaac Boaheng, "A soteriological reflection on priestly Christology from an Akan perspective," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, Vol 9, No 1, (2023): 1–18.

⁶⁶ The idea of monotheism has been explained already under the monotheism theme; Huffman and Hausherr, "*Shema, the*," 742.

⁶⁷ See Huffman and Hausherr, "*The Shema*." Diverse translations include: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (ESV, HCSB, NIV, NKJV); Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord (KJV, RSV); Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is one (NASB, NET), Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is unique" (LEB), and Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord alone" (NLT, NRSV).

⁶⁸ W. Whidden, J. Moon, and J. W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships*. (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 33–34.

⁶⁹ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 66.

A reflection on this has a critical implication for both the religious and academic life of an African. As a continent, the plurality of gods is easy to come by. Misapplication of *yachid and echad* can pave the way for religious syncretism, not to mention polytheism which always predominate in the African culture. Those in the academia must therefore help produce scholarly and theological sound works that will prove the unity in diversity of one God.

The introduction of the concept of one God in three persons was initially viewed as conflicting with the monotheistic teachings found in Scripture. To prevent the emergence of a pluralistic approach to divinity, the notion of Monarchianism was developed. This belief posits that there is only one primordial power of God, with the Son and the Spirit existing as impersonal attributes within the divine essence, rather than distinct and divine individuals.

All the Church fathers in the Patristic Era discussed in this paper in one way or the other contribute to the idea of the Trinity. Ignatius wrote a series of letters which addressed the incarnation of Christ. Clement of Alexandria is also known for his opposition to Gnosticism. Tertullian can be remembered for coining the Latin term *Trinitas* concerning the Divine (Trinity). Tertullian also coined the term “persona” (“a mask”; “person”) to describe the different ways in which God has manifested himself to humans concerning redemption. Athanasius of Alexandria is also known for his argument against the Arian at the First Council of Nicaea (325) in which he argued against the Arianism view of Christ being distinct from the Father. It is believed that he was deposed on account of his opposition to Arianism. Ambrose of Milan was also a defender of Nicene orthodoxy against Arianism and St. Augustine made noteworthy contributions to the formation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

During the initial three centuries of the Church's existence, a succession of Christological disputes emerged, ultimately aiding the Church in solidifying its stance grounded in biblical teachings. Following a period marked by debates concerning the nature of God, particularly the identity of Christ, the Church affirmed, notably at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, the consubstantiality of the Son and the Father. The Council of Nicaea culminated in the formulation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Subsequent generations of Christians have contributed their interpretations and insights to further comprehend this enigmatic doctrine since the time of this council.

Apart from the Shema, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there is only one God.⁷⁰ From the diverse views of the interpretation in the Patristic Era, the Father’s divinity is not usually in dispute, but rather the Son and the Holy Spirit as divine persons. The Patristic argument was to affirm the Father, Son, and Spirit as one. Chrysostom has stated: “He said not before Abraham was, I was, but I am. As the Father uses this expression I AM, so also does Christ use it and this signified continuous being, irrespective of all time. The I AM is one of the strong and direct claims of Jesus about his deity (John 8:58). The expression, *ego eimi*, (first person singular, present active indicative, verb) shows a “state of being, not action.” In this verse, Jesus applies to himself the very name by which God revealed himself to the Jews through Moses (Ex 3:14).⁷¹ Similarly, the Holy Spirit possesses divine attributes including eternity (Heb 9:14), omniscience (1 Cor 2:10-12); omnipresence (Psa 139:7-10), omnipotence (Zech 4:6), truth (1 John 5:6), sovereignty (1 Cor 12:11). His deity is revealed in his names, including, the Spirit of God (Gen 1:2; 1 Cor 2:11), in his involvement in divine activities such as creation (Gen 1:2; Psa 104:30; Job 26:13), in his act of revelation.

First of all, the Trinity shows equality among the members of the Godhead. This is particularly relevant in Africa, where people come from diverse backgrounds and contexts. It reminds us to value the Triune nature of God and recognize the inherent worth in every human being, who is created in His likeness. This understanding should influence our relationships with the divine, with each other, and with the environment by acknowledging human unity and interdependence. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of all humanity, we embrace the communitarian ontology that underpins our unity and interdependence.

⁷⁰ Deut 6:4; cf. Mark 12:29; 1 Chron 17:20; 1 Cor 8:4-6; 10:19-20; 1 Tim 2:5; Rom 16:27; Gal 3:20; Eph 4:6, 1 Tim 1:17; 2:5; James 2:19; Jude 25, John 17:3; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 John 5:20-21.

⁷¹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 1999), 142

CONCLUSION

The Patristic era holds significant theological importance in the evolution of Christian doctrine. Numerous debates during this period revolved around both theological and philosophical matters. Despite the diversity of discussions, the Shema has retained its centrality and fundamental significance for both the Christian and Jewish faiths, offering a profound declaration about the nature of God. The interpretations have shown both two views of School that were predominant in the Patristic Era, namely the Alexandrian School and the Antiochene School. Major issues identified include the monotheistic concept of God as against Polytheism, the figurative view of Israel as the contemporary Christian community, the idea of the oneness of God, and the debate on the Trinity. The work ended with some reflections from the African perspective. The theological issues raised by the Patristic interpretations are still relevant to contemporary society. The enduring significance of passages such as the Shema highlights the continuity of certain foundational beliefs across Christian and Jewish traditions. As subsequent generations continue to grapple with these theological complexities, they contribute to the ongoing dialogue and development of Christian doctrine, enriching the spiritual heritage passed down through the ages. Through these endeavors, the Christian faith continues to evolve while remaining rooted in the timeless truths revealed in sacred texts and theological reflections.

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