

“You have heard it said”: script, counterscript
Exodus 20:2-3; Psalm 86:8-10; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 2:13-16; Revelation 7:9-12
From Henotheism to Monotheism, from tribal gods and tribalism to One God and one people¹²

There is a script in the world that says Jesus is the only way.

Afterall, Jesus says, “I am the way.”

This script argues that unless someone confesses the name of Jesus, they will be lost.

And being “lost” usually means *not* going to heaven; it means the person is destined for hell.

In this understanding, it doesn’t matter that the fruit of a person’s life is good,

if they don’t believe in Jesus,

in the end, they are lost.

This script recognizes there are many religions with many gods,

but insists that only Jesus,

only the God of Christianity

is the right God.

The Triune God of Christian faith, this understanding says,

is the true God, the most powerful God, the right God.

By implication, this script puts Jesus and Christianity into a competition with other religions and their gods. And by extension, other people.

In other words, we who are Christian are on one team

and everyone else is on the opposing team.

And when we’re in this kind of opposition, or competition,

what we internalize is that “we” are better than “they” are.

We are right. *They* are wrong.

And we get smug.

We may feel sorry for “those people” who haven’t yet seen the light and way of Jesus.

We’re sure glad we’re on the Jesus team.

This script says that we Christians are in a fight.

And God is on our side and in this fight with us.

We’re competing to get people onto our side so that our God will win.

This fight that we and God are in is a cosmic battle. And it remains to be seen who will win.

Will God win? Or will the bad gods win?

There’s a lot at stake in this script.

And we have to make sure we’re doing our part so that the scales end up in favor of the right God, of our God.

But the Gospel witness offers a counterscript.

In this Good News, there is no competition.

¹ Another script/counterscript heavily influence by James Alison.

From the view of the Resurrection Garden,
we are beginning to understand that God IS.
God cannot be defeated by evil. God IS.
Death isn't a threat to God. God Was.
God isn't concerned about being right or winning. God Will Be.
From the vantage point of the resurrection, the God we worship IS.
Eternally, God IS.
"One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ep 4:6).

But let's step back a bit and see how this script has been written through time.

In the ancient world, before cars and trains and airplanes could transport us around the globe, people stayed put in a particular place on Earth. They lived in the same place their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents lived.

This of course is what gives us our different ethnicities, or clans and tribes, nations.

So, if we can imagine ourselves in this ancient time for the next few minutes.
Imagine a world where generations of families have lived in the same place.
And because the only travel is by foot, for the most part, people spend their lives in this place, with the same people.
And through the generations, they've developed customs and everything that goes with it.
They have their own culture. And cult. Their own god, or gods.
The gods are specific to a particular people and culture,
specific to a particular land and place.

Because gods belong to particular peoples and places,
if you move from those people and that place,
you have to take your god with you.
Because in a neighboring place, there will a different god.
Remember the story of Rachel stealing her father's household gods?
The relationship between Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban, was at an all time low so God told Jacob to return to his ancestor's lands.
So when the family packed up to leave, Rachel took their gods (Gen 31).
In a new place, she needed them with her.

This is *henotheism*. The dictionary defines henotheism as the "adherence to one particular god out of several, especially by a family, tribe, or other group."

Of course, in the case of Laban's family, there were multiple gods, so also polytheism.
In henotheism, as I hope I've been able to explain!, there are people groups and each of these peoples, or tribes, have their own god.
There are other gods, but the particular group has chosen one god.

It is into this understanding, into this script,
that the counterscript of *monotheism* is written. Or, begins to be revealed.

Monotheism is one God.

It isn't choosing one god out of many, in monotheism, there is only One.

The God that the Hebrew people began to see revealed was not and is not in the same category as any other god.

In fact, the LORD God, YHWH, is not in a category with *anything* else.

God is singular.

We can begin to appreciate how new and strange this counterscript is for the Hebrew people.

This One God, whom they call LORD God, isn't limited to a people or place.

Nor can God be represented by an idol; God cannot be domesticated.

The One God cannot be confined or limited in any way.

YHWH God is in all places.

So when Abraham and Sarah traveled, they didn't have to pack up their god, because One God was with them...everywhere and anywhere.

We also get a sense of how hard it was for the Hebrew people to live into the counterscript, how hard it was to trust a God they couldn't see, that wasn't visible and tangible.

So when they made a golden calf to worship,

it was because they wanted God to be in their midst. They wanted to see their God.

So like all the other peoples and nations in the world around them, they made a representation, an idol.

This is the context of the story of God's people in the Bible.

Monotheism was completely new and strange.

The script of ethnic and tribal gods was so ingrained into the fabric of their being and living that it took time and practice and failure and more practice for the counterscript of One God to be written into them.

Perhaps one of the best practices for the new counterscript was their refusal to say God's name.

They understood that God was too great, too Unknowable, too Holy.

Saying God's name would be domesticating the greatness and Otherness of God.

It wasn't just the Hebrew people who were learning to live into the counterscript of One God.

A God who IS and who IS in all places.

We are *still* learning what it means for there to be only One God.

The Hebrew people may have worshiped only one God,

but in the stories we see signs that, for all practical purposes, they were henotheistic.

When they went to war, they assumed that their God was fighting with them and against other ethnicities and nations.

They understood the LORD God to be "their" god.

And what we sometimes see and hear in the stories
is that their one God behaved with the same vengeance and jealousy and rivalry as the other
gods.

But in the Resurrection Garden, we begin to glimpse what monotheism is.
Standing in the Resurrection Garden, especially when we look at the cross,
we begin to see the Oneness of God.

In his trial and execution, as we watch Jesus—Jesus who is God-with-us—
as we watch Jesus, he refuses to engage in the competition and rivalry.
He has no need to win.

In Jesus we see revealed the One God who doesn't need to be defended or protected.
We see the One God who is absolutely free of violence or vengeance.

The One God that Jesus reveals isn't bound by loyalty to one group of people over against
another.

Instead of allegiance to a people and a particular god,
Jesus' allegiance is to One God—
God who IS, Was, Will Be.
God who is love and forgiveness, mercy and grace.

When we get caught up arguing about Christianity and Jesus being the only way,
we're demonstrating an allegiance to being right, to winning.
We're choosing allegiance to the boundaries of ethnicities and nations, to political parties.
But when we stand in the Resurrection Garden, "a place fashioned and furnished by love,"³
our allegiance is transformed.

When we live from the Resurrection Garden,
our allegiance turns to the same love and forgiveness,
the same healing and justice,
the same mercy and grace that Jesus—the son of One God—embodied and practiced.

Living with our imagination shaped by resurrection,
we too get a glimpse of the vision that John describes in Revelation.
When we live with the counterscript of One God,
what we begin to imagine is that rather than humanity being separated by our differences—
divided by our different cultures and religions and gods and political parties—
what is possible is being *one* people.

As one people, as one humanity,
we'll still have our differences, *all* of our differences.
But at the throne of the One God,
those differences are no longer threatening or dividing.
Our differences are no longer a source of competition and rivalry and war with each other.

³ from *Transformed by Life*, Wild Goose Publications

At the throne of the One God we are free to let go of the idols and representations that we've been carrying with us from place to place.

At the throne of the One God and the Lamb,
our focus turns from judging different religions and different gods as good and bad, right or wrong.

At the throne of the Slaughtered Lamb,
our fear of others and
and our fear of all the things we don't understand are released...and healed.

At the throne of One God,
a throne that isn't confined to a particular people or a particular place,
as we are being formed into one humanity
our need to figure things out
is transformed by the Oneness of God,
a Oneness of Love and Beauty, of Giving and Forgiving, of Grace and Mercy.

Transformed by the One God,
liberated and healed at the throne of the Slaughtered Lamb,
we are being formed into communities of Love and Forgiveness,
communities of Grace and Hope,
communities of Justice and Healing.

And we who dwell in these communities—
whether we are at home and with "our" people or whether we are in an unknown places
with strangers—

we will *always* and *everywhere* be *in* the Resurrection Garden
of One God
who IS,
Who Was,
Who Will Be.

May we live—every day, every place—
in the Resurrection Garden,
at the throne of the Slaughtered Lamb and the One God.

Communion

Welcome *from Transformed by Life, Wild Goose Publications*

We stand in the resurrection garden of God –
a place suffused and shaped by love
and ripe with its potential;
and this is the table of the risen Jesus –
a place fashioned and furnished by love
and rich with its promises ...

So come –
whether you have seen and believed,
or are dubious and doubting still,
whether you confess confidently,
or with a fragile, fearful heart.
Come and share these gifts of grace,
encounter Christ,
and be healed by Love
and transformed by Life.

Words of Institution

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Prayer of Thanksgiving *from Transformed by Life, Wild Goose Publications*

**As we remember and rejoice,
send down Your Holy Spirit on us
and on these gifts of bread and wine,
that we may once again
encounter Love
and be transformed by Life.**

Invitation

If you are hungry for Living Bread and thirsty for the Cup of Life, you are welcome at this Table. Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Christ is our host.

Instructions

Receiving the elements

Song: Let us talents and tongues employ *STS 123*