

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## Was Jesus “A Mere Man”?

by F. Paul Haney

The following article we hope will be of special interest to any of our readers who have exited the Worldwide Church of God founded by Herbert Armstrong. It was the belief of that denomination that God is a family of two members. It was customary to hear Herbert Armstrong speak and write of “two Gods in the God family.” Our understanding now is that such language betrays an unveiled polytheism and paganism. God is One Person in the Bible and that One Person is the Father of Jesus Christ, His Son. We say with Paul “there is one God, the Father” (I Cor. 8:4-6), and with Jesus that the Father is “the only One who is truly God” (John 17:3). Jesus is the Lord *Messiah* (Luke 2:11), the Man Messiah Jesus (I Tim. 2:5) and certainly never in Scripture the One God.

The curious notion that Jesus was “a second God in the God Family” persists among some, even after they leave their former association. Our experience over the past 45 years suggests that many who *think* they have become “ex’s” are more attached to the apron strings of former mentors than they suspect. (This is true also of those who are attached to the idea that *water* baptism has no meaning for Christians now — a particularly striking example of a view held against almost everyone for 2000 years. This is not a complex question. Jesus was baptized. Jesus baptized. The Apostles baptized in water also throughout the Book of Acts. Jesus commanded baptism in water as the outward seal and sign of repentance. He commanded it until the end of the age — which has not yet occurred. Since we all believe in obeying the Lord Jesus (John 3:36), it follows that we will all desire to enter his church on his terms, one of which is baptism in water upon intelligent reception of the Gospel (see Acts 8:12, etc.).)

We much appreciate Paul Haney’s excellent plea for the abandonment of the notion that God consists of two members of a Divine Family. We believe that this view promotes in fact the God of the philosophers (whose influence was massive immediately after Bible times), and not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and of Jesus.

Paul Haney wrote in *The Journal* (edited by Dixon Cartwright): Let me respond to Jeff Maehr’s

letter in the June 30, 2002 issue of *The Journal* (“How can God die?”). In that letter Jeff produces the weak, yet recurrent “mere man” argument to “prove” that God did die — but somehow without really dying! Although the “mere man” pitch involves a rather obvious logical fallacy, probably most multi-god “Binitarian” believers do not realize it. Such a lame argument has really so little biblical justification that we may wonder why it is not immediately rejected.

To make matters worse, this proposal seems to have taken on legs and a life of its own. The argument as usually presented and framed is no more than a superficial straw man. It was apparently created long ago by PR debaters wanting to knock it down and grab a cheap victory while confusing people with fancy footwork. I reject the “mere man” argument as without merit in any sense. Jesus was no “mere” man. He was (and is) unique. Jesus is Lord, but Jesus was not (and is not) God or Yahweh.

Usually, the “mere man” argument goes like this: “A mere man cannot be a sacrifice for all men; only the life of God could atone for all of mankind’s sins.” This claim, however, is no more than human theory imposed on the Bible. A modicum of biblical research exposes the disputer’s error for what it is. Those who resort to this particular “straw man” fallacy sidestep the main issue of *who* deems any sacrifice sufficient to cover sins. It is God, not we, who decides what constitutes a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

In an attempt arbitrarily to limit the terms of the debate, some proponents of the “Jesus is God/Man” theory insist that either Jesus was God or he was a “mere” man. There is no middle ground with them. But I reject the limiting proposal they establish and reject the term “mere” as not being applicable to Jesus or the debate. Facts: Jesus was a man, but he was no “mere” man. He is matchless. Jesus was (and is) the only begotten Son of God. His father was Yahweh. His mother was Mary. Jesus was miraculously conceived and *begotten* (i.e. by the Father, Matt.

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1:20) without sin. He had a human lineage through Mary and was thus also the Son of David and thus the Messiah. Jesus, as the sinless Son of God, also the Son of Man, is worthy of our respect and worship as the Son of God. He is divine only in the sense that he is the exalted, uniquely begotten Son of God, and he sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He is to be praised for what he is, not for what people think or imagine he was. We must avoid at all costs constructing a Jesus of our own persuasions and church traditions, uncritically examined.

In addition, it must be admitted by thinking believers that Yahweh God, the Creator, the Father, can accept whatever sacrifice He deems sufficient to cover any number of sins for mankind, even for every person that has ever lived, or ever will live. God will have mercy and compassion by whatever means He wills, and we have nothing to say about it. God (not man) decided that certain animals would be acceptable as sin offerings for the whole land and nation of Israel, during the period of the Law. "And the priests killed them; and they presented their blood on the altar as a sin offering to make an atonement for all Israel, for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering be made for all Israel" (2 Chron. 29:24; cf. Lev. 4:20-21; 5:11-13). Although animals have lesser value than humans, God deemed their spilled blood adequate to cover all the sins for all the people at that time. As a result, the "mere man" argument fails miserably. Who are we to argue with God and exalt our speculations above His revelation about His dealings with us?

This "mere man" objection never quite seems to go anywhere, or go away in spite of its obvious weaknesses. Yahweh God has all power, and with God, all things are possible. It should be clear that *God deemed sufficient* the yearly blood sacrifices of lambs, bulls, and goats for the sins of an entire nation of people. God also deemed sufficient the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. This in itself causes the collapse of the "mere man" argument.

Nor does it require much research to discover that the man Jesus (Rom. 5:15) was one of, and the last in, a long line of blood sacrifices (Rom. 6:10; Heb. 10:10, 12, 14). This is hardly rocket science! The huge difference between bloody animal sacrifices and Jesus was that God authorized Jesus to be the final and sufficient blood sacrifice for all atonement from that point forward. By contrast, animal sacrifices were temporary and had to be repeated every year (Heb. 10:3). The key phrase here is "God deemed or authorized." The point is that neither the blood of

animals nor the blood of Christ in itself, by itself, took away sins. Only the acceptance by God of His chosen sacrifice removes sins. Had God not accepted animal sacrifices, they would have been worthless and a waste of time. Had the Father not accepted Jesus as the final sacrifice, his sacrifice would have been valueless also (Isa. 53:10; Matt. 3:17; Col. 1:19-23). Believers have redemption (forgiveness) "through" the blood of *Jesus*, not "by" the blood in itself (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). The sinless human "lamb" of God's choosing is fully adequate for this purpose.

According to polytheistic Binitarian doctrine, it was not God that died on the cross, anyway. They say Jesus was not God then, but was "fully" man. Thus it follows that the man Jesus who died on the cross was not God after all! By their own testimony, God did not die for the sins of all mankind as they insist He must.

The brand of Binitarianism supported by many WCOG's is the view of a relatively small group of people who contend that God is one, God is two, God is a family, God is a kingdom, and God is or will be millions and billions of God-beings. It is an unsound and bizarre doctrine. It is not biblical. In my opinion, it is irrational, self-contradictory, and evasive.

To illustrate our point consider the following dialogue between myself and Steven Collins from the Seattle conference as reported in *The Journal* of May 31, 2002, page 31, entitled, "Can God die?" (I added the explanatory bracketed parts.)

Paul Haney asked Mr. Collins about the concept of the loss of "divine life." "Was Christ God at the time that he died on the cross?" Mr. Haney asked. "It is said he tasted death," began Mr. Collins. "But do you believe he was divine God at the time he died?" Mr. Haney said his point was that one of the attributes of God, Yahweh, *elohim*, is His "infinite," that He has the attribute of infinity. "He does not die. I think the Bible is clear that God does not die. Yet you have God dying on the cross." "I have the human being Jesus Christ, into whom the divinity emptied Himself, dying," replied Mr. Collins. "If God was in His glorified state, He couldn't die."

"But," said Mr. Haney, "if Jesus was God preexistent, then this pre-Jesus God did, in fact, die, before He became Jesus in the womb." "Your point is?" asked Mr. Collins. "The attribute of infinite," said Mr. Haney, "cannot be hung up like an old coat on a rack. The Bible tells us there is no end, no beginning, for all time [for God] and that's the way that God was, or is. But here you have Christ dying twice. He died. And [the pre-Jesus] God died essentially because you said that there was one God

left [in heaven]. One of [those] two Gods died, lost His life, because [you say] He did not exist [on earth or in heaven] as a God, and [you say] He became Jesus the man. Jesus the man died the second death. Then he became infinite again. This does not compute.”

“It does to me,” said Mr. Collins. “I don’t see the problem. Remember, Christ said in his prayer, Restore the glory which I had with you.” Mr. Haney: “You say glory, but you interpret that to say eternal life.” [Jesus in fact did not say “*restore*, give *back* the glory, but *give* the glory. He was asking for the glory stored up with God from the beginning and promised for the Messiah — ed.]

Notice in the above dialogue Mr. Collins states, “If God was in His glorified state, He couldn’t die.” But Mr. Collins is trapped. He believes that the pre-Jesus God, a glorified eternal God-being, ceased being God and became a man. If a human stops functioning as a human, we call it death. If an eternal God stops functioning as an eternal God, the God dies, ceases to be, and goes out of existence. And this shows that Collins’ God is not, nor was He, “eternal” at all. Since Christ was not God, but a pre-Jesus God did exist, and that pre-Jesus God was not in heaven or on earth while Jesus the man walked around, it is inescapable: the pre-Jesus Binitarian God must have gone out of existence! He died!

One of the definitive attributes or qualities of an eternal God is that He has “infinity,” or the attribute of immortal life with no beginning or end (not finite). Apparently Mr. Collins agrees with this because he said himself that God cannot die. Yet, Steven Collins’ pre-Jesus glorified God had an end at the very same time he said that God cannot have an end.

Mr. Collins believes Jesus was totally a human being and that he died on the cross and that he was not then God. “I have the human being Jesus Christ...dying,” replied Mr. Steven Collins at the One God Conference in Seattle. This sounds a whole lot like Binitarians have a “mere” man dying on the cross; most certainly according to this testimony it was not God but a man dying that day.

So, according to this Binitarian testimony, God did not die on the cross. And consequently, according to the theory, God did not die for our sins! Collins further asserts that there were two Gods in heaven in the beginning. Apparently one of those Gods died, vanished, while the other remained alive, at home alone.

Collins: “A Binitarian realizes that God must be two rather than one because one of the two must

remain alive to be able to resurrect the other one,” (*The Journal*, June 30, “One Resurrects the Other,” p. 33).

Here Collins admits that one of the two Gods did in fact die; if one God remained alive, it is self-evident that the other one died. And he further implies that the God being resurrected was Jesus who had just died on the cross, who earlier, Collins said, was only a man, not God. While Collins admits that God cannot die, he virtually testifies to us that one of the Gods died. So, if I have this straight, Collins has Jesus the man dying on the cross, Jesus the God dying or vanishing prior to something entering Mary’s womb, after which it became a single cell without arms, legs or a brain, being born as Jesus the man, finally becoming Jesus the God once more.

So, which is it? Was a “divine God-life” given for all mankind or not? Binitarians will insist, “Yes!” but then hasten to add that the one who died and who was sacrificed for all mankind was not God, but fully a man. Such are the extreme complications which arise once the simple truth that God is one Person, the Father of the Lord Jesus, is abandoned. ✧

## An Old Testament Word Study: *Mashiach*

by Brian Wright

**W**e routinely speak of Jesus as the Messiah. What exactly are we saying when we use this title to describe him? The term *Messiah* is derived from the Hebrew root word *mashiach*. The verb is used when an object, an altar for example, was consecrated for a sacred purpose. The noun *mashiach* is used to describe a person consecrated for service to God.

According to Dr. James Smith,<sup>1</sup> the term *mashiach* occurs 39 times in the Hebrew Bible (more commonly referred to by Christians as the Old Testament). In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT Scriptures, the LXX) the Hebrew word *mashiach* is translated into the Greek word *christos*. From this of course we get our English word *Christ*. The terms *Mashiach* and *Christ* are, as we know, synonymous. They mean an “anointed one.”

The Hebrews believed that when God anointed a person, that person received a measure of the Holy Spirit. He became a vehicle of the activity of God in a special way. Prophets, priests and kings were anointed

<sup>1</sup> *What the Bible Teaches About the Promised Messiah*, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1993, 2.

for the sacred offices they held.<sup>2</sup> Thus the OT Scriptures speak of many “christs” or “anointed ones.”

We are accustomed to thinking of Jesus alone being the Christ. It is instructive to remember that many who preceded him were “christs” without being the (ultimate) Christ. The term *mashiach* appears as a designation of various persons in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup>

Saul – 12 times: I Sam. 12:3, 5; 24:6 (twice), 10; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; II Sam. 1:14, 16, 21.

Messiah to come – 9 times: I Sam. 2:10, 35; Ps. 2:2; 89:51; 132:10, 17; Dan. 9:25, 26; Hab. 3:13.

David – 6 times: II Sam. 19:21; 22:51; 23:1; Ps. 18:50; 20:6; 28:8.

Priest – 4 times: Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22.

Reigning king – 3 times: Lam. 4:20; Ps. 84:9; 89:38.

Patriarchs – twice: Ps. 105:15; I Chron. 16:22.

Solomon – once: II Chron. 6:42.

Prospective king – once: I Sam. 16:6.

Cyrus – once: Isa. 45:1.

These usages of the term *mashiach* demonstrate that persons so designated as anointed ones were individual human beings set apart for service to God. The term is used to identify a specially commissioned servant of God. There is no hint that “messiahs” were to be Deity! They were agents of the One God.

It is certainly true that Jesus is a far greater *mashiach* than others bearing this title before him. In *the* Christ the offices of prophet, priest and king are combined into one great office. Jesus was anointed by God above all his predecessors (Heb. 1:9). He is the great Israelite prophet referred to by Moses and like Moses (Deut. 18:15, 18; John 6:14). He is the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (Heb. 3:1). He is the Davidic king whom God has raised up to restore and reign over the Kingdom of God (Luke 1:32-35; John 1:49; Acts 1:6; Luke 19:11-12). He is the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16). He is the Anointed One, *the Messiah*, whom God promised and provided for our salvation (Acts 4:12). Jesus the Christ is also the virginally conceived and begotten, unique, sinless and now resurrected, immortal Son of God (see Matt. 1:20 — *begotten*,<sup>4</sup> and Luke 1:35).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Note that the Greek word is “begotten,” not just “conceived.” It is the activity of the Father begetting, bringing into existence the Son of God. The creeds of the Church contradicted this information when they spoke of the Son being begotten “before all worlds.”

To say however that Jesus *is* God Himself destroys his office as Messiah, the anointed one of God. There is only One God in the Bible and that One God is the Father of the anointed one, His Son.

Try reading the word “messiah” in all of the passages we have listed and see how illuminating that can be. And note how beautifully the description of him in Luke 2:11 fits: He is “the Lord Messiah.” He is also “the Messiah of the Lord” (Luke 2:26). And Elizabeth appropriately recognized Mary as “the mother of my Lord” (Luke 1:43), that is the Lord *Messiah*.

In the Bible there are two principal “lords.” There is the One Lord God, the Father of the Messiah, and the one Lord (Jesus) *Messiah* who is the human Lord Christ (Luke 2:11). You will find Paul teaching this basic creed in I Corinthians 8:4-6.

It is popular for churchgoers to argue that if the Father is the One God and the One Lord of the creed, then Jesus must also be God because he is called “one Lord” in I Corinthians 8:6. The fallacy in that argument is this: Jesus is not “lord” in the same sense as his Father. Psalm 110:1 provides the very distinction we need between two different lords. One is Yahweh, the Lord God, and the other is “my lord,” the Messiah. This second lord is called in Hebrew *adoni* (pronounced *adonee*).

That form of the word lord — *adoni* — never ever refers to God. It designates in all 195 occurrences one who is *not* God, but a human (occasionally angelic) superior. ✧

“Primarily the church is a society not of thinkers or workers or even of worshippers, but of believers. Hence we find that ‘believers’ or ‘they that believed’ is constantly used as a synonym for the members of the Christian society (Acts 2:44; 4:32; 5:14; 1 Tim. 4:12). Hence, too, the rite of baptism, which from the first was the condition of entrance into the apostolic church and the seal of membership in it, was recognized as preeminently the sacrament of faith and of confession (Acts 2:41; 8:12,36; Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 12:13). This church-founding and church-building faith, of which baptism was the seal, was much more than an act of intellectual assent. It was a personal laying hold of the personal Savior, the bond of a vital union between Christ and the believer which resulted in nothing less than a new creation (Rom. 6:4; 8:1, 2; 2 Cor. 5:17)” (J.C. Lambert, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*).

## Comments

“Thank you so much for the books and video tape. We previously purchased copies of *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and gave them away to others who are interested in this wonderful subject concerning the Lord Jesus as the Son of God — not God.” — *New Zealand*

## What's Wrong with Protestantism?

Roman Catholics have long chided their Protestant friends for tolerating as “the Church” a mass of differing denominations, all apparently unable to fellowship in harmony. This situation sounds distinctly unlike the sort of Church for which Jude the half-brother of Jesus pleaded: “I urge you, brethren, to contend earnestly for the faith once and for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). Paul’s ideal for the Church is exactly alike: “I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (I Cor 1:10). What Paul meant by the “same mind” is clear from his remarks a little later in the same letter: “The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:15, 16).

But do we, if as believers we are unable to demonstrate that we are thinking alike?

It may be that the desperation of this situation has driven some church leaders to smooth over the differences and claim that deep down we are all “with one accord.” Thus Billy Graham was asked by Larry King: “What do you think of the other churches...like Mormonism? Catholicism? Other faiths within the Christian concept?”

GRAHAM: Oh, I think I have a wonderful fellowship with all of them. For example...

KING: You’re comfortable with Salt Lake City? You’re comfortable with the Vatican?

GRAHAM: I am very comfortable with the Vatican. I have been to see the Pope several times. In fact the night — the day he was inaugurated, made Pope, I was preaching in his cathedral in Krakow. I was his guest and when he was over here in Columbia, SC, he invited me on the platform to speak with him. I would give one talk and he would give the other...

KING: You like this Pope?

GRAHAM: I like him very much. He and I agree on almost everything.

KING: Are you comfortable with Judaism?

GRAHAM: Very comfortable...In New York they have had me to the Rabbinical Council to talk with them...and Rabbi Tannenbaum, who was a great friend, gave me more advice and counsel and I depended on him constantly, theologically, spiritually and in every way.

KING: Mr. Graham, if you had 30 seconds during the halftime at the Super Bowl, what would you tell the audience?

GRAHAM: I would tell them to think about another game, the game of life, and to be sure they are on God’s side, that God loves them and God is interested in them, and they can pray to God, and He will answer their prayers.

While acknowledging the value of diplomacy in a public setting and the need for honor to whom honor is due, I wonder if this approach to the problem of church unity does any justice to the New Testament’s urgency that Truth must be preached at all costs.

It is a fact that one billion who claim to believe in Jesus Christ also believe that Mary his mother was bodily assumed to heaven and that she now sits in heaven as a co-mediatrix with the risen Son of God. Can Protestantism accept such a teaching? Is it comfortable with such a doctrine, officially endorsed by the Roman Catholics only since 1950 but woven into their tradition for some two thousand years? When a Roman Catholic, in the name of Jesus, subscribes to this belief, is he or she espousing anything other than perpetuated paganism? Is not the Queen of Heaven a figure of ancient idolatry severely condemned in the Bible as dangerous and sinful? Is not Mary in fact sleeping the sleep of the dead (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28, etc.). What possible connection could a system of theology, which includes veneration of a dead human being, have with the New Testament church and “the faith once delivered”?

Yet Protestants do not seem unduly perturbed about those billion human beings who appear to be without the knowledge of God, caught in paganism masquerading as true religion.

What about Judaism? It is a system of religion which denies that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the promised Messiah and deliverer. Is this a valid path to God with which New Testament Christians can feel comfortable, as Billy Graham says he is?

Paul’s model is politically and theologically outrageous by our standards. While acknowledging the zeal for God demonstrated by his unconverted Jewish friends he declared that they were “without knowledge” and in urgent need of salvation (Rom. 10:1-4). He hoped to save at least some of them by evangelizing them with the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Name of Jesus (see Acts 8:12; 28:23ff.). When Baptists today take Paul’s approach to Jews they are roundly condemned for narrow-minded bigotry and prejudice.

It may be that the divisions in the Protestant camp have paralyzed effectiveness to help the rest of the world. What if the foundations of the Reformation are skewed? What if Luther and Calvin achieved a partial reformation only, leaving important areas of theology untouched? What if the Reformation's failure to go far enough back — to the Bible — vitiates our ability to go forward as one united team?

There is a significant and learned school of thought, represented by distinguished scholars of various nationalities, which warns us that our "Christian" roots may be deep into philosophy, though we *think* that we are thinking like Christ. Paul warned, "Beware of philosophy" (Col. 2:8). One does not have to search far in the textbooks and encyclopedias or histories of doctrine to discover that from the second century the Church was invaded by alien Greek ways of thinking. "[After New Testament times] the great people of God's choice [the Jews] were soon the least adequately represented in the Catholic [universal] Church. That was a disaster to the Church itself. It meant that the Church as a whole failed to understand the Old Testament and that the Greek mind and the Roman mind in turn, came to dominate its outlook: *From that disaster the Church has never recovered either in doctrine or practice*" (Canon Goudge, *Collected Essays on Judaism*).

Hardly had the writings of the New Testament been completed when there occurred a mega-shift, often now lost to view because of its subtlety and complexity, by which the original foundations of the faith were replaced by the philosophy of Hellenism, more particularly by Gnostic ideas. Whence comes the idea, so relentlessly propagated by funeral sermon and obituary, that the dead have already achieved glory by being transported to heaven, there consciously to look down on us the survivors?

Protestants may complain at the cult of Mary, who is in heaven. But are they not part of the same system when they speak of "going to heaven when I die"? Daniel did not expect the dead to be anything but peacefully unconscious in the dust until the resurrection (Dan. 12:2). Paul's view was no different. He declared that if there is to be no resurrection when Jesus comes back, the dead *have perished* (I Cor. 15:17, 18). This is obviously not true if in fact he believed the dead had survived in full consciousness. Paul saw only two possible conditions for Christians right up to the time of the future resurrection. "Whether we are sleeping [dead] or awake, we shall live together with him" (not individually by going off to heaven at death, but being

ushered together into the coming Kingdom) (1 Thess. 5:10).

If we keep repeating that the dead are really not dead but alive in bliss in heaven as disembodied souls, are we not following the teachings of the Gnostics and the philosophers? A distinguished Cambridge NT scholar declares what many a New Testament expert would recognize, that "heaven in the Bible is nowhere the destination of the dying." But we keep on saying that "heaven is our home" and that our departed are there in glory. We think that half a verse torn from the writings of Paul ("Absent from the body and present with the Lord") justifies our philosophized version of the faith. But the context beginning with 2 Corinthians 4:14 shows that Paul is talking about getting our new body *at the future resurrection*. He has nothing to say about rewards in the sky *before* the resurrection at the last trumpet. He knew with Daniel, Job, Ecclesiastes and Jesus that the dead are asleep knowing nothing.

With our Platonized view of the destiny of man we sound, naturally enough, like Plato, not Jesus. But is anyone troubled enough to protest, as Protestants should? Can unity be expected without a return to Jesus' own theology of the nature of man and his destiny? "What communion has light with darkness?"

What about the doctrine of God and Jesus? Protestants continue to recite the creeds which emerged only after several centuries of disputation, mutual excommunications and banishings. (An account of this extraordinary development of doctrine can be read in Richard Rubenstein's *When Jesus Became God*.) Eventually, using the language of current philosophies, the Church declared that God was three "hypostases" (Persons) in one "ousia" (Being), and that the Son of God was "begotten before all ages." Is that what the Bible teaches?

Dr. Adam Clarke, the distinguished linguist and famed commentator on Scripture, was outraged that anyone could subscribe to the idea of the "eternal begetting of the Son." The combination of "eternal" and "beget" is a regrettable piece of theological church-speak without any discernible meaning, an abuse of the precious gift of words.

I agree with Adam Clarke that this notion of an eternal begetting of the Son is nonsense. He wrote: "With all due respect for those who differ, I must say that the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ is antiscritural and highly dangerous. This doctrine I reject for the following reasons: I have not been able to find any express declaration in the Scriptures concerning it...To say that the Son was begotten from all eternity is in my opinion absurd. And the phrase

‘eternal Son’ is a positive self-contradiction. ‘Eternity’ is that which has had no beginning, nor stands in any reference to time. ‘Son’ supposes time, generation, and father and time also antecedent to such generation. Therefore the conjunction of these two terms, ‘Son’ and ‘Eternity’ is absolutely impossible as they imply essentially different and opposite ideas” (*Commentary on Luke 1:35*).

Equally outspoken was the protest of the British poet, politician and theologian John Milton. Reflecting on the “orthodox” creeds of the Church he remarked: “It is wonderful with what futile subtleties or rather with what juggling artifices, certain individuals have endeavored to elude or obscure the plain meaning of these passages [of the Bible]...They hold that the Son is also coessential with the Father, and generated from all eternity...It is impossible to find a single text in all Scripture to prove the eternal generation of the Son” (*Milton on the Son of God and the Holy Spirit*, pp. 20, 4).

And yet millions of churchgoers meet weekly under the auspices of the dogma that the Son of God is an uncreated Person, in no way subordinate to his Father and “generated eternally.” This last phrase is the linchpin of the doctrine of the Trinity — without an eternally generated Son there is no Trinity. Yet it amounts to a formal contradiction. You cannot have a beginningless beginning. To generate is to bring into existence, to give a beginning to someone or something. An eternal generation or beginning is an impossibility.

“Eternal generation” is also in direct contradiction of Holy Scripture: Matthew records the angel telling Joseph (Matt. 1:20) that Mary’s son, the Son of God, was to be generated (begotten) in her. “That which is begotten in her (*gennethen*) is from the holy spirit.” This event happened in the days of Herod, in the days of Augustus Caesar, not in eternity. Jesus, says Luke, quoting Gabriel, is the Son of God precisely because of the miracle of creation wrought by God in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:35).

We trust that our readers will understand that the creedal formulas dating from the decisions of the Church Councils in 325 (Nicea) and 381 (Constantinople) and uniting nearly all (otherwise denominationally divided) churchgoers, Catholics and Protestants, rule supreme in the churches. Curiously, these creeds are almost never discussed, and their terms are seldom, if ever, preached on. But should anyone question them, they rapidly reappear as dicta which may not be questioned — on pain of heresy. Is

this a situation in which the Spirit of Jesus and of God can work to reform and teach?

A third cause for concern in Protestantism is the obvious absence of the Gospel as Jesus preached it. Jesus is reported by Luke to have declared his supreme purpose to be the preaching of the Gospel about the Kingdom of God. “I must preach the Kingdom of God to the other cities also: That is the reason I was commissioned.” And he kept on preaching in their synagogues” (Luke 4:43, 44). Today the churches have fallen silent when it comes to the phrase “Gospel of the Kingdom.” Loudly proclaimed is the notion that the Gospel concerns “the finished work of Christ.” Certainly the death and resurrection of Jesus are events of the past and they are essential to the Gospel. But is that the whole truth? Definitely not. The Gospel about the Kingdom is a summons in view of a yet *future event*, the coming of the Kingdom. The Message of Jesus — his saving Gospel — is summarized by Mark 1:14, 15; “Repent or perish.” “Repent and *believe the Gospel of the Kingdom.*” Repent because judgment is coming at the return of Jesus.

Can the Gospel be valid if it omits the most fundamental component of all, the Good News about the *coming* Kingdom? Dave Hunt writes, “The Gospel is all about what Christ has done. It says nothing about what Christ must yet do, because the work of our redemption is finished” (*Berean Call*, Jan., 1998). He seems to have overlooked the whole point of Jesus’ tireless Gospel mission in Galilee: “Jesus began with the eschatological [announcing the future] phrase: ‘The Kingdom of God is at hand.’ The Kingdom of God is at hand had the inseparable connotation, ‘Judgment is at hand’ (Mark 1:14, 15). Hence our Lord’s teaching about salvation *had primarily a future content*” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Salvation,” p. 2667, my emphasis).

Three major areas of doctrine demand urgent reform: the nature of man and our destiny, the Godhead and the relationship of God and His Son, and the content of the saving Gospel. If the Church could allow itself to consider that all may not be not well with “received doctrines,” a new biblical unity could be achieved. It is the old story: Jesus complained about the orthodoxy of his day. Tradition has overwhelmed truth. Are we better than those whom Jesus confronted in the first century?✧

**The annual Theological Conference at ABC will be Feb. 7-9, 2003. We expect participants from various countries. Interaction with truth-seekers. Instruction. Rich fellowship. Please mark your calendars.**