

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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What Must I Do to Be Saved?

by Victor Gluckin

Victor is currently a student at Atlanta Bible College and wrote the following for this semester's Basic Bible Doctrine class.

What must I do to be saved is the critical, foundational question in Christianity today. Yet many Christians are unable to articulate the Gospel¹ and when they do they give different and contradictory answers to this question. They also disagree with Jesus himself! Our nation is bombarded with evangelical tracts. They provide a succinct paragraph on the back page, telling the reader how to be assured of entrance "into heaven" at the moment of death. Focusing primarily on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, these tracts as well as their corresponding internet sites ask you to "accept the free gift of salvation and do nothing more," as requirements for eternal salvation. After a brief sinners prayer, they usually leave you with no further direction than "Congratulations and welcome to the family of God."²

This is the unfortunate reality of the Lord's church in the twenty-first century. Would Jesus recognize as authentic these popular messages claiming to be his very gospel message? Would Jesus help print these widely distributed tracts? Would Jesus be leading a "get saved" meeting on a particular night of the week? Did Jesus ever offer "heaven at death" to anyone?

Not only did Jesus and his followers preach a much fuller Gospel message than the one found in most of the churches today, they also demanded more of their new converts. Jesus himself announced his Gospel-mission statement as the model for Christian preaching. He said that he was sent for the very purpose of preaching **the Gospel of the "Kingdom of God"** (see Luke 4:43). He sent out his disciples to announce this very same message *even before they understood anything about his death and resurrection.*³ Years later we see Paul, with a clear understanding of all Jesus had done and was going to do, staying "two full years in his own rented quarters," and "was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered" (Acts

28:30-31). In the light of these clear and consistent definitions of the saving Gospel, it is amazing that the church's tracts never speak of this "Gospel about the Kingdom of God."

Unfortunately even when commentators and preachers have begun to see the importance of this Kingdom of God message, they dismiss it by telling us that it has been replaced by a "gospel of grace." They argue that the Kingdom Gospel was specifically for the Jews of Jesus' time,⁴ and not for us today! The testimony of Scripture loudly proclaims that this could not be so (Acts 20:24-25). The challenge facing modern Bereans is that of recapturing the Gospel words of Christ and making them our source for calling out sinners from this present evil age. After all, the sheep hear the genuine voice of Jesus (John 10:3-4, 16, 27).

Certainly the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ pays for the sin of mankind and grants us access to God and life in the coming age. Without it no one could look for entrance into God's Kingdom. But this work of Jesus on the cross alone does not constitute the *whole* gospel message. What is the point of accepting Jesus' sacrifice on the cross if we do not repent by obeying his Gospel command to *believe the Gospel of the Kingdom* (Mark 1:14, 15; 4:11, 12)?

God is restoring what He originally intended for the world, a time when all that is wrong with the present evil system will be made right and sin will be destroyed. This is the foundation of the salvation message of the Kingdom, to which all of Scripture testifies and which all of creation eagerly awaits. To obey Jesus, which is essential for salvation (Heb. 5:9), why not obey his first command: "Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom" (see Mark 1:14, 15)?✧

An excellent set of three DVDs on Conditional Immortality, the Kingdom of God, and the One God and the Messiah have been produced by Eddie Garrett of Sarasota, Florida. These DVDs can be used as an "electronic tract." For details please email Eddie at ekgarrett11@aol.com.

¹ *Christianity Today*, June 14th, 1999.

² www.getsaved.com/yes.htm

³ Cp. Luke 9:1-6 with Matt. 16:21-22 and John 20:9.

⁴ See *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, "Gospel."

Is it Really “Orthodox” to Believe That God Can Die? Or Has Christianity Gone Wrong?

A colleague of mine recalled an interesting moment during class discussion at a well-known theological college: “I remember one day in a theology class at Wheaton College the professor said, ‘Mary really is the mother of God, even though we as Protestants have not liked that term very well.’” The students were shocked at his admission, but he went on to explain that in a real sense Trinitarianism has to view Mary as the mother of one who was in essence and in fact a “person” of the “Godhead”!

The proposition “Jesus is God” appears to be the unquestioned watchword of most American churches. Any doubt about that amazing statement is likely to be greeted with suspicion that the questioner may have deviated from a belief absolutely vital for salvation. C.S. Lewis confronted all skeptics with his famous dictum that Jesus was “either mad, bad or God.” We shall see later that he unfortunately omitted from his multiple choice options the New Testament category for Jesus, namely “Messiah, *Son of God*.” That is who Jesus claimed he was (John 10:36), and insisted that his key executives in the propagation of the Gospel understood him to be (Matt. 16:16-18). In the same passage Matthew records that Jesus founded his church on the solid rock conviction that Jesus was the *Son of God*. He did not, of course, say “God the Son”!

Why, if Jesus is God, as the historic creeds have long claimed as dogma, would anyone have qualms about Mary being *God’s mother*? Roman Catholics who share with Protestants belief in the Trinity — that the One God exists as three Persons in one essence — have no such qualms. A Roman Catholic priest declared without flinching that “God one day came to Mary and said, ‘Mary, will you please be My mother?’”

In view of the upcoming season which celebrates the core of traditional Christianity — the Incarnation of the preexisting God the Son, second member of an eternal Triune God, as God-Man — how do you react to the following unpacking of that central doctrine from leading Protestant evangelicals? Charles Swindoll, chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, writes, “On December 25th shops shut their doors, families gather together and people all over the world remember the birth of Jesus of Nazareth...Many people assume that Jesus’ existence began like ours, in the womb of his mother. But is that true? Did life begin for him with that first breath of Judean air? Can a day in December truly mark the beginning of the

Son of God? Unlike us, Jesus existed before his birth, long before there was air to breathe...long before the world was born” (*Jesus: When God Became Man*, pp. 1-2).

Swindoll goes on to explain: “John the Baptist came into being at his birth — he had a birthday. *Jesus never came into being*; at his earthly birth he merely took on human form...Here’s an amazing thought: the baby that Mary held in her arms was holding the universe in place! The little newborn lips that cooed and cried once formed the dynamic words of creation. Those tiny clutching fists once flung stars into space and planets into orbit. That infant flesh so fair once housed the Almighty God...As an ordinary baby, God had come to earth...Do you see the child *and* the glory of the infant-God? What you are seeing is the Incarnation — God dressed in diapers...See the baby as John describes him ‘in the beginning’ ‘with God.’ Imagine him in the misty precreation past, thinking of you and planning your redemption. Visualize this same Jesus, who wove your body’s intricate patterns, *knitting a human garment for himself*...Long ago the Son of God dove headfirst into time and floated along with us for about 33 years...Imagine the Creator-God tightly wrapped in swaddling clothes” (pp. 3-8, emphasis added).

Dr. Swindoll then quotes Max Lucado who says of Jesus, “He left his home and entered the womb of a teenage girl...Angels watched as Mary changed God’s diaper. The universe watched with wonder as the Almighty learned to walk. Children played in the street with him” (p. 10).

Dr. Jim Packer is well known for his evangelical writings. In his widely read *Knowing God*, in a chapter on “God Incarnate,” he says of the doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation: “Here are two mysteries for the price of one — the plurality of the persons within the unity of God, and the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus. It is here, in the thing that happened at the first Christmas, that the profoundest and the most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie. ‘The Word was made flesh’ (John 1:14); God became man; the divine Son became a Jew, the Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. And there was no illusion or deception in this: the babyhood of the Son of God was a reality. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. *Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the incarnation*. This is the real stumbling block in Christianity. It is here that the Jews, Muslims, Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses...have come to grief...If he was truly God

the Son, it is much more startling that he should die than that he should rise again. **‘Tis mystery all! The immortal dies,**’ wrote [Charles] Wesley [in a famous hymn]...and if the immortal Son of God really did submit to taste death, it is not strange that such a death should have saving significance for a doomed race. Once we grant that Jesus was divine, it becomes unreasonable to find difficulty in any of this; it is all of a piece and hangs together completely. The Incarnation is in itself an unfathomable mystery, but it makes sense of everything else that the New Testament contains” (pp. 46, 47, emphasis added).

With the greatest respect for the sensibilities of our readers, we want to suggest that the above accounts of the pre-history and Incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God are severely mistaken. They are untrue to the Bible. The situation appears to us and many others in the history of Christianity to be akin to the story of the “Emperor’s New Clothes.” The fact that the emperor was naked was noticed by one small boy when the majority were tricked into thinking he was not. The mere fact of rehearsing, year after year, a story of “God being born as a baby” and the *immortal God* later *dying* on a cross does not make it true. Far from being a “mystery” it is rather obviously a mystification which results in a crucifixion of the fundamental Protestant principle that God has graciously *revealed His purposes to us in Scripture and, in order for His revelation to be successful He has spoken to us in language which conforms to the universally accepted meaning of words and of logic itself.* If that principle applies, then God cannot die. He is immortal (I Tim. 6:16).

To speak of Jesus as God and God dying is to dissolve the most basic understanding of the nature of Scripture as revelation to man. Surely we must plant ourselves on the famous maxim about how to read the Bible: “I hold it for a most infallible rule in expositions of sacred Scripture, that where a literal construction will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst. There is nothing more dangerous than this licentious and deluding art, which changes the meaning of words, as alchemy does or would do the substance of metals, makes of anything what it pleases, and brings in the end all truth to nothing” (Richard Hooker, 1554-1600).⁵

In confirmation of the wisdom of this approach to Scripture, we may say that if God has really intended to make His will known to us humans, it must follow that He has conveyed His truth to us in harmony with the well-known rules of language and meaning. As a

nineteenth-century theologian wrote: “If God’s words are given to us to understand, it follows that He must have employed language to convey the sense intended in agreement with the laws controlling all language...We are primarily to obtain the sense which the words [of the Bible] obviously embrace, making due allowance for the existence of figures of speech” (Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord and Savior*, Vol. 1, p. 47).

We must insist that if Christians are to love God with their hearts and minds, they should immediately abandon the impossible notion involved in believing and teaching that “the immortal God died.” The Bible does not expect us to believe sheer contradiction or encourage linguistic confusion. We fully grant that there are huge areas of information about God which we do not and cannot fathom, but we believe equally that what God *has revealed* to us is given in language which is not self-contradictory. This is the great truth of the so-called grammatical-historical method of getting at the meaning of the Bible. **God cannot lie and according to Scripture He cannot die** (I Tim. 6:16). This in itself requires that the Savior Jesus be a mortal man. Otherwise the Son of God *cannot have died* (Paul said *the Son did die*, Rom. 5:10) and there is no salvation and no death for our sins.

Protestants, however, are pledged to the idea that Jesus is God and that Jesus died. We propose that this is to utter words without meaning and to destroy the fabric of biblical revelation. Moreover, the teaching that the immortal God became a man and died is indeed the great stumbling block of Muslims and Jews — and for good cause. Jews know well that God cannot die, and they know that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God of Jesus himself is not Three Persons. Muslims are equally committed to belief that the immortal God is strictly One Person. Islam accepts Jesus as the Messiah, even virginally begotten, but not as the One God.

What Went Wrong?

What then has happened to cause millions of seekers after God to be so hopelessly divided over who God is? The story is a most fascinating drama, an epic struggle between truth and falsehood, often accompanied by murder, banishment and excommunication. The fruits of the centuries-long disputes over who God and Jesus are suggest that something has gone terribly awry. Something happened to disturb the very straightforward creedal statements of Jesus and the Apostles. Some drastic undermining of original Truth resulted in the tedious, complex, hair-splitting, drawn-out arguments over the definition of God and His Son. History attests to an

⁵ *The Ecclesiastical Polity and Other Works*, Vol. 2, p. 211.

appalling catalogue of disputes, name-calling, and demonizing, amongst men claiming to be followers of Jesus and his teachings. The story of the development of the Trinity is brilliantly documented in *When Jesus Became God* by Richard Rubenstein. *Out of the Flames* by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone describes the cruelty of Christian persecution of fellow believers. It documents the tragic judicial murder of the Spanish theologian Michael Servetus by the reformer John Calvin.

The trouble began in the second century, as historians of church history well know. The doctrine of the Trinity, which demands belief that Jesus is *fully God* and that his personal existence did *not* begin in the womb of his mother but in eternity, was made dogma at the Councils of Nicea (325 AD), Constantinople (381 AD) and Chalcedon (451 AD). It became the official and only permissible understanding about God and His Son. Dissenters and objectors were removed from the church. In later centuries they were burned at the stake (the last case of burning was in 1612) and executed. Others were labeled heretics and pronounced to be non-Christian. It is an amazing story of bigotry, hatred and murder. There is not a word in the New Testament about killing theological opponents (or enemies of any sort). Paul on one occasion excommunicated a habitual sex offender, but required that he be readmitted to the church on repentance.

Despite these clear facts, church officials, including the celebrated John Calvin, famous for his near-fatalist doctrine that God has predestined some from eternity to eternal torment, ordered the burning, execution, imprisonment or excommunication of hundreds of Bible-loving believers, because they would not and could not believe that God was more than one Person, the Father, or that Jesus, if he were Deity, could die.

Little known to the public is the fact that the early Christians did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, which is now claimed to be the only correct view of God, traceable in an unbroken line to the New Testament.

It is a well-documented fact that many of the church's "major doctrines" were not instituted until well after New Testament apostolic times. Christians in search of a vigorous biblical Christianity will find it refreshing to distinguish between what comes from Scripture and what many have unconsciously "canonized" from church tradition. The words of F.F. Bruce need to be treated as a prophetic testimony to this generation: "*Evangelical Protestants can be as much servants of tradition as Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox Christians; only they do not realize*

that it is 'tradition.' People who adhere to sola scriptura (as they believe) often adhere in fact to a traditional school of interpretation of sola scriptura" (from correspondence, June 13, 1981).

The early church continued persistently in *the Apostles' teaching* (Acts 2:42) as well as in fellowship. Christians need freedom to explore all doctrines in the light of Jesus' and the Apostles' teaching. At present it is often assumed that early church councils faithfully relayed the Bible's teachings. Many scholars know that this is not so.

Jewish Roots

To our friends in the various "Jewish Roots" movements we say: What sense is there in clinging to a doctrine of the Trinity which offends Jews and Muslims and which Jesus would not have believed? Mark 12:28ff shows Jesus to be in line with the cardinal tenet of Judaism: God is a single Person, the Father of Jesus. Psalm 110:1 says it clearly. The One God, Yahweh, speaks in an oracle about **ADONI**, positively not **ADONAI**! God does not speak to God. He speaks to the Lord Messiah (*adoni*, "my lord, the King Messiah."). **ADONI** is used only of superiors *other than God*. **ADONI** never refers to the One God, but always to human beings and occasionally to angels.

In Galatians 3:20 Paul said (according to the *Amplified Bible*) "God is [only] One Person." **There is no occurrence of the word "God" in the whole Bible which can be proved to mean "God in three Persons."** That is because the Bible writers had never heard of the Trinity and did not believe in it. Those espousing the Jewish roots of Jesus, an excellent way to get back to the Messiah of Israel, should avoid attaching themselves to Gentile distortions of the faith.⁶

The History of Dogma

Did the church councils necessarily grasp biblical truth accurately, when they defined the creeds for posterity? Many evangelicals unwittingly take on board the theology of those councils without examining all things carefully, as Paul admonished. We are convinced that evangelicals ought to be much more troubled than they are about the doctrines of God and Christ which tradition has handed on to them via the "Church Fathers" and the Roman Catholic Church.

⁶For some serious reading, see Martin Werner, *The Formation of Dogma*, Harper, 1957 (though he wrongly attributes "angel Christology" to Paul); J.A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, SCM Press, 1985; J. Kuschel, *Born before All Time? The Dispute over Christ's Origin*, Crossroad, 1992; James Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1996, 2nd ed. The latter sees that Paul did not believe in a preexisting Son of God.

We invite you to consider the following information about “orthodox Trinitarianism” and compare it with the Bible. Does the Jesus of the creeds of the church line up with the obviously human figure of the Bible? Many do not think he does.

Two orthodox evangelical Trinitarians wrote: “It is true that in Chalcedonian orthodoxy [the teaching of the council which defined the Person of Christ in 451 AD] God the Son united himself to a *personless human nature*.”⁷

This statement is an accurate description of the orthodox view of Jesus. It reflects the popular teaching we quoted from Chuck Swindoll earlier — that the Son of God had no beginning but simply entered the womb of Mary, came through her and “assumed impersonal human nature.” Let us unpack this extraordinary teaching a little further. A Trinitarian scholar writes:

“In Chalcedon and the theological development that flows from it, Jesus is called ‘man’ in the generic sense (human), but not ‘a man.’ He has a human nature, *but is not a human person*. The person in him is the second person of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus does *not have a human personal center*. This is how the Council gets around the possible problem of a split personality.”⁸

Another Trinitarian scholar was amazed at what he had learned as a student:

“During my theological formation I was well instructed in the traditional account of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. I distinctly remember being told that the Word of God, when he assumed human nature, assumed *impersonal humanity*: that Jesus Christ did not possess a human personality; that God became man in Jesus Christ, but that he did not become *a man*...Two **considerations have persuaded me that this traditional Christology is incredible**.”⁹

An orthodox theologian describes the view of Jesus which evangelical accept in the Trinity: “Now the doctrine of the Incarnation is that in Christ the place of a human personality is replaced by the Divine Personality of God the Son, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. Christ possesses a complete human nature *without a human personality*.”

⁷Norman Geisler and William Watkins, “The Incarnation and Logic: Their Compatibility Defended,” *Trinity Journal*, 1985, Vol. 6, p. 189.

⁸Thomas Hart, *To Know and Follow Jesus*, Paulist Press, 1984, p. 44.

⁹A.T. Hanson, *Grace and Truth: A Study in the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, SPCK, 1975, p. 1.

Uncreated and eternal Divine Personality replaces a created personality in Him.”¹⁰

An expert on Gnosticism (a pagan philosophy which threatened the early church) points to the problem presented by this extraordinary dehumanizing of Jesus in “orthodox” creeds”:

“Already Harnack was forced to say: ‘Who can maintain that the Church ever overcame the Gnostic doctrine of the two natures or the Valentinian [Gnostic] Docetism’ [the theory that Jesus only appeared to be a human being but really wasn’t — ‘man’ but not ‘a man’]. Even the later councils of the Church, which discussed the Christological problems in complicated, nowadays hardly intelligible definitions *did not manage to do this; the unity of the Church foundered precisely on this*.”¹¹

Note that this scholar admits the Church did not overcome Gnosticism in its definition of Jesus.

“Jesus Died” and “Jesus is God”?

God only has immortality (I Tim. 6:16). How, if Jesus is God, can he have died? An immortal Person cannot die. That is a flat contradiction. Does it honor God to speak in such contradictions? How can Jesus, if he is God, not know the time of his Second Coming (Mark 13:32)? God is omniscient. Jesus did not know everything. Therefore Jesus cannot be God, unless language has ceased to have any meaning. God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). But Jesus was tempted. If he was not fully human, his temptation was a charade. Did Jesus give up being God when he did not know when he would return? Did he give up being God when he died? How can God give up being God? That would mean that Jesus was not God when he was on earth.

Trinitarians argue that only God could be the Savior. But if Jesus, as God, could not die, how can he have saved us? Cannot God appoint a sinless man to be the Savior (Acts 17:31; 2:22: “a man approved by God”)?

All these complex questions are solved if Bible readers would observe some simple facts:

Thousands upon thousands of times in the Bible (someone has calculated over 11,000 times), God is described by personal pronouns in the *singular* (I, me, you, he, him). These pronouns in all languages describe *single persons*, not three persons. There are thus thousands of verses which tell us that the “only true God” (John 17:3; John 5:44, “the One who alone is God”) is One Person, not three.

¹⁰Leslie Simmonds, *What Think Ye of Christ?* p. 45.

¹¹Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, Harper and Row, 1983, p. 372.

There is no place in the New Testament (or Old) where the word “God” can be proved to mean “God-in-Three-Persons.” The word God, therefore, in the Bible never means the Trinitarian God. This would immediately suggest that the Trinitarian God is foreign to the Bible. The word “God” in the New Testament means the Father, except (for certain) in two passages where “God” refers to Jesus in a secondary sense (Heb. 1:8; John 20:28). If Jesus is as much entitled to be called God as his Father, why these extraordinary facts? The word “God” can be used of a man who reflects and represents the true God (see for example Ps. 82:6; Ex. 7:1).

Most Trinitarians rely heavily on one only of the four Gospels — John. They neglect not only the 77% of the Bible which is the Old Testament, but also most of the New Testament. Why did **all translations in English before the King James** render John 1:3: “All things were made by **IT**” (not **HIM**)? How do you know that Jesus was the *eternal Son* of God, when no verse of Scripture calls him that? What if the *Word* or *Wisdom* was with God (John 1:1) and was fully expressive of God and this Wisdom became embodied in the real human being, Jesus (John 1:14)? Jesus would then be a human being who is the perfect embodiment and expression of the wisdom and creative activity of God (“**the Word** became flesh,” not “**the Son** became flesh”).

If so, Luke’s statement would be exactly right. “*Because of the supernatural begetting of Jesus in the womb of Mary, Jesus is entitled to be called the Son of God*” (see Luke 1:35). Luke describes the supernatural coming-into-being of the Son of God, while Dr. Swindoll says that the Son had no beginning (quoted above). There is not a hint in Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts or Peter that Jesus preexisted his birth. He is according to Luke 1:35 the Son of God *because of his miraculous begetting*. Luke 1:35 was abandoned early in church history. A precious clue to the identity of Jesus was ditched. Luke 1:35 confirms the identity of the human Messiah predicted by the Old Testament. There is no indication in the Hebrew Bible that the Messiah *was already alive* before his birth in Bethlehem. God did not speak through a so-called preexisting Son in Old Testament times (Heb. 1:1-2).

Why does a leading Roman Catholic scholar admit that Luke 1: 35 (above) is an embarrassment to orthodox scholars? “Luke 1:35 has embarrassed many orthodox theologians, since in preexistence [Trinitarian] theology a conception by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb does *not* bring about the existence of God’s Son. Luke is seemingly unaware of such a

Christology; conception is causally related to divine Sonship for him”¹²

“Eternal Begetting”?

The Trinity relies on the idea of the Son having been “eternally begotten.” Does that make the slightest sense? How can someone who has no beginning be begotten? Why are there absolutely no verses which speak of Jesus being **begotten by the Father in eternity**? Why do all references to the begetting of Jesus refer to his conception and birth: Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20; Acts 13:33 (describing the beginning of his life, while v. 34 refers to his resurrection)? Without an eternal begetting of the Son, there can be no doctrine of the Trinity.

The famous Methodist expositor Adam Clark felt it necessary to say: “**The doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ is, in my opinion, antisciptural and highly dangerous. I have not been able to find any express declaration of it in the Scriptures.**”¹³

His complaint was against the incomprehensible language of one of the chief architects of the Trinity, Gregory of Nazianzen, who spoke of the Son as having a “beginningless beginning” (*Oration 36*).

Church History

Writers of standard encyclopedias tell us this fact about church history:

“Unitarianism [belief in the Father as the ‘only true God’ (John 17:3) and in Jesus as the Son and Messiah] as a theological movement began much earlier in history; indeed it antedated Trinitarianism by many decades. *Christianity derived from Judaism* and Judaism was strictly Unitarian. The road which led from Jerusalem to Nicea was scarcely a straight one. Fourth-century Trinitarianism *did not reflect accurately* early Christian teaching regarding the nature of God; it was, on the contrary, a deviation from this teaching.”¹⁴

How can the Trinity be traced back through the church fathers when the father of Latin Christianity was clearly not a Trinitarian? Tertullian wrote: “God has not always been the Father. For He could not have been the Father *previous to the Son*. There was a time when the Son did not exist.”¹⁵

This famous church father doesn’t sound like a Trinitarian. What about earlier church fathers of the second century? They are said by Trinitarians to provide a continuous Trinitarian tradition back to the Bible. But what did they really believe? A professor of church history explains:

¹² Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 291.

¹³ *Commentary* on Luke 1:35.

¹⁴ *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1956, Vol. 27, p. 294L.

¹⁵ *Against Hermogenes*, ch. 3.

“The Christian writers of the second and third centuries considered the Logos as the eternal reason of the Father [note: not the eternal *Son*], but as having at first no distinct existence from eternity; he [the Son of God] received this only when the Father generated him from within his own being and sent him to create the world and rule over the world. The act of generation then was not considered as an eternal and necessary life-act *but as one which had a beginning in time*, which meant that the Son was *not equal to the Father*, but *subordinate* to Him. Irenaeus, Justin, Hippolytus and Methodius share this view called Subordinationism.”¹⁶

This view is not that of official Trinitarianism as later established. Without the doctrine of the eternal, coequal Son, there is no orthodox Trinity.

The Creed of Israel, of Jesus and of Original Christianity

It seems to us incredible that Jesus, who recited the great creed of Israel (Mark 12:28ff) and was a Jew, could possibly have believed in the Trinity. There is no Trinity in the Old Testament (as scores of modern scholars admit¹⁷). Jesus confirms and perpetuates the creed of Israel which described God as One Person, the Father. He then defined himself as the Lord Messiah of Psalm 110:1 to whom the One Lord God spoke in an oracle about the future. The word *adoni* (my lord) is never a title of Deity (Mark 12:35ff).

No Jew could possibly have expected his Messiah to be God in the Trinitarian sense. In fact Moses had predicted the arrival of the Messiah by saying that God would not speak to the people directly, but through a person “*like Moses*” who would be raised up from among the people of Israel (Deut. 18:15-18; see Acts 13:33). To say that the Messiah is God Himself contradicts this prophecy, which announces that this person is **not God but a human prophet!** Both Peter and Stephen teach that it was fulfilled in the human Messiah (Acts 3:22; 7:37), who perfectly reflects the will and the words of his Father and who is the “visible image” of God, but not God Himself. Here is the biblical picture of the Messiah as described by the Hebrew Bible, the Bible of Jesus himself and confirmed by Paul: “To us [Christians] there is *One God, the Father* and one Lord Jesus *Messiah*” (see I Cor. 8:4-6).

Clearly, the One God is the Father and in close association is the one **Lord Messiah** (Luke 2:11).

¹⁶Michael Schmaus, *Dogma, God and His Christ*, Sheed and Ward, 1971, p. 216.

¹⁷See our article, “Does Everyone Believe in the Trinity?” at www.restorationfellowship.org

The Christian confession that Jesus approved is the belief that “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.” On that truth he promised to found his church (Matt. 16:18). John labels as “the liar” anyone who deviates from the confession that Jesus is the Messiah, or that he is “the Messiah, Son of God” (I John 2:22; John 20:31). He worked against the error that Jesus was something less than human. He advocated belief in the genuinely human Jesus (I John 4:2; II John 9). When churches teach that Jesus is “man” but not “a man,” would they have the approval of the Apostle John?

It is time for the Church to insist, with the Bible, on the creed which describes Jesus as “the man Messiah” (I Tim. 2:5) and stop condemning as heretics those who confirm belief in Jesus as the sinless Messiah and Son of God (Luke 1:35), God’s unique and virgin-born agent, but not actually God Himself.

A return to the creed of Israel and of Jesus, the Jew, will enable Jews today and Muslims to consider more sympathetically salvation through Jesus, the Christ, the “only name given under heaven by which we may be saved” (Acts 4:12). ✧

From Jürgen Moltman, *The Spirit of Life*, 2001, p. 89

“In the degree to which Christianity cut itself off from its Hebrew roots and acquired Hellenistic and Roman form, it:

- 1) Lost its eschatological hope
- 2) Gave up its apocalyptic solution for ‘this world’ of violence and death
- 3) Merged into late antiquity’s **Gnostic religion** of salvation, and:
- 4) ‘**Heaven**’ replaced the coming Kingdom
- 5) The redemption of the soul from the body replaced the spirit as the source of life
- 6) The immortality of the soul displaced the resurrection of the body
- 7) People hoped for the soul’s escape from the body.”

Comment: “The clarity with which you explained the Kingdom of God was so helpful in my own efforts to explain it to others.” — *Minnesota*