

“BEGOTTEN NOT MADE”?

Carlos Xavier benelohim@att.net

Crime scenes

Matthew 1:18

“The *origin* [*genesis*] of Jesus the Messiah was like this...” [TNIV]

- Matthew records the “origin” of Jesus Christ. Trinitarians who were uncomfortable with “*genesis*” (beginning, origin, birth) changed it to “*gennesis*” (“birth”).

Bart Erhman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*:

“In addition to claiming the earliest and best manuscript support, the reading *genesis* seems to cohere better with the preceding context. Matthew began his Gospel by detailing the ‘book of the *genesis*’ of Jesus Christ [i.e., his genealogical lineage; **1:1**], making it somewhat more likely that he would here [v.18] continue with a description of the *genesis* itself. And so the majority of textual scholars agree that *gennesis* represents a textual corruption, created perhaps out of deference to the following account of Jesus’ birth.¹

“At the same time, something more profound may be occurring here. Both *genesis* and *gennesis* can mean ‘birth,’ so that either one could be appropriate in the context. But unlike the corrupted reading, *genesis* can also mean ‘creation,’ ‘beginning’ and ‘origination.’ When one now asks why scribes might take umbrage at Matthew’s description of the *genesis* of Jesus Christ, the answer immediately suggests itself: the original text could well be taken to imply that this is the moment in which Jesus Christ comes into [existence]. In point of fact, there is nothing in Matthew’s narrative, either here or elsewhere throughout the Gospel, to suggest that he knew or subscribed to the notion that Christ had existed prior to his birth.

“Orthodox scribes found Matthew’s account useful nonetheless, particularly in conjunction with statements of the Fourth Gospel supporting the notion of Jesus’ existence with the Father prior to his appearance in the flesh. The orthodox doctrine, of course, represented a conflation of these early Christological views, so that Jesus was confessed to have become ‘incarnate [Gospel of John] through the virgin Mary [Gospels of Matthew and Luke].’ Anyone subscribing to this doctrine might well look askance at the implication that Matthew was here describing Jesus’ origination and might understandably have sought to clarify the text by substituting a word that ‘meant’ the same thing, but that was less likely to be misconstrued.”²

Luke 1.35: “*the child that will be born will be called holy, the Son of God.*” A number of witnesses emend this declaration to include a significant prepositional phrase: “*the child that will be born from you will be called holy . . .*”

“A different aspect of the Gnostic understanding of Jesus’ birth appears to be under attack in an orthodox corruption of the opening chapter of Luke...Scholars are virtually unanimous in considering this longer text secondary. Despite its support in Western, Caesarean, and secondary Alexandrian witnesses, it is not found in the earliest and best manuscripts, which demonstrate an even more remarkable range in terms of both geography and textual consanguinity...The shorter text is therefore more likely original.

“Why was the text changed? ...In point of fact, the longer text could prove to be significant for opponents of certain kinds of separationist Christology. Both Irenaeus and Tertullian took offense at the Valentinian claim that Christ (i.e., Jesus, the so-called ‘dispensational’ Christ of the Demiurge, upon whom the Christ from the Pleroma descended at baptism), did not come from Mary, but came through her ‘like

¹ Also Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, pg. 8.

² Bart Erhman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. 75-76.

water through a pipe' (Iren., *Adv. Haer.* I, 7, 2; Tert., dependent on Irenaeus, *Adv. Val.* 27). In this view, the 'dispensational' Christ used Mary as a simple conduit into the world, receiving nothing from her, least of all a physical human nature. In contrast to this, the heresiologists urged that Christ came from Mary, because otherwise he neither experienced a real human birth nor received a full human nature, without which he would be unable to bring salvation to those who are fully human (*Adv. Haer.* III, 22, 1—2). And so, in an explicit attack on the Valentinians, Irenaeus urges that:

It is the same thing to say that he [Christ] appeared merely to outward seeming and to affirm that he received nothing from Mary. For he would not have been one truly possessing flesh and blood by which he redeemed us, unless he summed up in himself the ancient formulation of Adam. Vain therefore are the disciples of Valentinus who put forth their opinions, in order that they may exclude the flesh from salvation, and cast aside what God has fashioned (*Adv. Haer.* V, 1,2).

“The importance of the *varia lectio* of **Luke 1:35** in such controversies, then, is that it supports the orthodox notion that Christ actually came from Mary. Tertullian appears to preserve an allusion to this very text. With characteristic verve he castigates Valentinians who deny that Christ assumed real flesh:

But to what shifts you resort, in your attempt to rob the syllable 'of' [Latin *ex*] of its proper force as a preposition, and to substitute another for it in a sense not found throughout the Holy Scriptures! You say that he was born through [Latin *per*] a virgin, not of [Latin *ex*] a virgin, and in a womb, not of a womb (*de carne Christi* 20).

“And so the corruption of **Luke 1:35** appears to reflect controversies over the Valentinian Christology, which both asserted a distinction between Jesus and the Christ and posited a Jesus who, as a direct creation of the Demiurge, did not assume complete humanity. An anonymous orthodox scribe of the second century inserted the phrase [*from you*], a phrase whose theological significance is cloaked by its innocent literary virtue: it provides a symmetrical balance for the angelic pronouncement to Mary while confuting the Christology of Valentinian Gnostics.”³

John 1.18: “*the unique/only-begotten Son*” changed to “*the unique/only-begotten God*”:

The variant reading of the Alexandrian tradition, which substitutes “God” for “Son,” represents an orthodox corruption of the text in which the complete deity of Christ is affirmed: “the unique God [*ho monogenes theos*] who is in the bosom of the Father, that one has made him known.”

“It must be acknowledged at the outset that the Alexandrian reading is more commonly preferred by textual critics, in no small measure because of its external support. Not only is it the reading of the great Alexandrian uncials (A B C), it is also attested by the earliest available witnesses, the Bodmer papyri 66 and 75, discovered in the middle of the present [20th] century...

“Here it must be emphasized that outside of the Alexandrian tradition, the reading *monogenes theos* has not fared well at all. Virtually every other representative of every other textual grouping — Western, Caesarean, Byzantine — attests *ho monogenes uios*. And the reading even occurs in several of the secondary Alexandrian witnesses (e.g., C3 Y 892 1241 Ath Alex). This is not simply a case of one reading supported by the earliest and best manuscripts and another supported by late and inferior ones, but of one reading found almost exclusively in the Alexandrian tradition and another found sporadically there and virtually everywhere else. And although the witnesses supporting *o monogenes uios* cannot individually match the antiquity of the Alexandrian papyri, there can be little doubt that this reading must also be dated at least to the time of their production. There is virtually no other way to explain its predominance in the Greek, Latin, and Syriac traditions, not to mention its occurrence in fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertullian, who were writing before our earliest surviving manuscripts were produced. Thus, both readings are ancient; one is fairly localized, the other is almost ubiquitous...

³ Ehrman, *Corruption*, p 139.

“It is on internal grounds that the real superiority of *o monogenes uios* shines forth. Not only does it conform with established Johannine usage, a point its opponents readily concede, but the Alexandrian variant, although perfectly amenable to scribes for theological reasons, is virtually impossible to understand within a Johannine context.”⁴

CHURCH CREEDAL CONFUSION

On “Spirit taking flesh”:

“The holy, pre-existent Spirit, that created every creature, God made to dwell in flesh, which He chose. This flesh, accordingly, in which the Holy Spirit dwelt, was nobly subject to that Spirit, walking religiously and chastely, in no respect defiling the Spirit; and accordingly, after living excellently and purely, and after laboring and co-operating with the Spirit, and having in everything acted vigorously and courageously along with the Holy Spirit, He assumed it as a partner with it. For this conduct of the flesh pleased Him, because it was not defiled on the earth while having the Holy Spirit.” Hermas, *Similitudes, Vision 6.5*.

“For just as, when John says, *The Word was made flesh*, John 1.14 we understand the Spirit also in the mention of the Word: so here, too, we acknowledge the Word likewise in the name of the Spirit. For both the Spirit is the substance of the Word, and the Word is the operation of the Spirit, and the two are one (and the same). Now John must mean One when he speaks of Him as having been made flesh...” Tertullian, *Praxeas*, Ch 26.

“The Word and Son of God is sent as the dispenser and master, who by all the prophets of old was announced as the enlightener and teacher of the human race. He is the power of God, He is the reason, He is His wisdom and glory; He enters into a virgin; being the holy Spirit, ‘With the co-operation of the Holy Spirit,’ is perhaps a more probable reading. He is endued with flesh; God is mingled with man. This is our God, this is Christ.” Cyprian, *Idol. Treatise 6*.

“The Holy Ghost, descending from above, hallowed the Virgin’s womb, and breathing therein (for the Spirit blows where it lists, John 3.8), mingled Himself with the fleshly nature of man, and annexed by force and might that foreign domain.” Hilary, *On Trinity*, 2.26.

“There is one only physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true Life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passable and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Ignatius, *Eph. 7:2*

“Fare ye well in the harmony of God, ye who have obtained the inseparable Spirit, who is Jesus Christ.” Ig. *Mag. 15.2*

“Christ the Lord who saved us, being first spirit, then became flesh.” *2 Clement 9.5*.

On “God taking flesh”:

“How can they be saved unless it was God who wrought out their salvation upon earth? Or how shall a human pass into God, unless God has first passed into a human?” Irenaeus, *Ag. Her. Bk. 4*.

“Not even when the Virgin bore Him did He suffer any change, nor by being in the body was [His glory] dulled...much less was the all-holy Word of God, Maker and Lord also of the sun, defiled by being made

⁴ *Ibid*, pp 78-79.

known in the body; on the contrary, being incorruptible, He quickened and cleansed the body also, which was in itself mortal.” Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 17.

“The Christian who combats polytheism has need of care lest in contending against Hellenism he should fall unconsciously into Judaism...Thus the mystery of the faith avoids equally the absurdity of Jewish monotheism, and that of heathen polytheism...From the Jewish doctrine, then, the unity of the Divine nature has been retained: from Hellenism the distinction into hypostases. The Jew convicted from Scripture.” Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, chapters 1-4.

SCHOLARLY QUOTES

“What follows in Mat 1.2-17 is in this heading called *biblos geneleos* of Jesus Christ, son of David, etc. The word *geneleos* is the genitive of the word with which every English reader is familiar, namely, genesis; capitalized Genesis when it refers to the Bible’s ‘book of beginnings.’ The entire expression *biblos geneleos* means, therefore, *record of beginning*, or of *origin* or *ancestry*” (W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 107).

“This is the challenge to incarnationists: unless some continuity between the Word and Jesus is being asserted, their doctrine is not a paradox but a mystification, not an apparent contradiction but apparent nonsense. As a belief it goes into inverted commas. In this respect I should not wish to go as far as John Hick in comparing the doctrine to a square circle, i.e. to transparent nonsense: but that it is apparent nonsense seems evident...What this means, and what grounds there can be for accepting it (other than reluctance to allow that the church has been in error) remain obscure...Our concern with Christology is a concern for truth. If St. Paul and St. John believed something that we cannot make sense of, that is sad...My impression is that these days the Chalcedonian definition discloses nothing except its defenders wish to be orthodox” (M. Goulder, “Paradox and Mystification,” *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued*, pp 51-59).

“The Son’s mission does not mean that the one sent existed as such before he was sent [Gal. 4.4]. In my view the mission may imply the creation of the man Jesus” (Rahner, Thusing, *A New Christology*).

“The representation of [God] becoming man is mythological, when the ‘human’ element is merely the clothing, the livery, of which the god makes use in order to draw attention to his presence here with us, while it is not the case that the human element acquires its supreme initiative and control over its own actions by the very fact of being assumed by God...The persistence of this idea [ought to make us realize that it] probably still lives on in the picture which countless Christians have of the ‘Incarnation,’ whether they believe it or not” (Rahner, “Current Problems in Christology,” in *Theological Investigations* 1, p. 156, n. 1).

“In Luke 1.35 the begetting is not quasi-sexual as if God takes the place of a male principle in mating with Mary. There is more of a connotation to creativity. Mary is not barren, and in her case the child does not come into existence because God cooperates with the husband’s generative action and removes the sterility. Rather, Mary is a virgin who has not known man, and therefore the child is totally God’s work—a new creation...And this double expression of God’s activity makes it clear that when the child is called ‘holy’ and ‘Son of God,’ these designations are true to what he is and to his origins” (Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, p.314-15).

“Christ is being identified here not with a pre-existent being but with the creative power and action of God...There is no indication that Jesus thought or spoke of himself as having pre-existed with God prior to his birth” (Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p. 254).

“We can have the humanity without the pre-existence and we can have the pre-existence without the humanity. There is absolutely no way of having both” (Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ*, p. 106).

“The earth is frequently referred to as the dwelling place of humanity in language that is paralleled in Jewish idiom: *coming into the world* (John 6.14; 9.39; 11.27; 18.37), *being in the world* (9.5a), *departing out of the world* (13.1; 16.28b)...the idiom itself is familiar Jewish terminology. *To come into the world* means merely to be born; *to be in the world* is to exist; and to depart from the world is to die [H. Sasse, TDNT 3:888; see also 1Jn. 4.1,17; 2Jn7; Heb 10.5; 1Tim 1.15]” (G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the NT*, 1993, p. 261).

For more visit: <http://1godhumanjesus.blogspot.com/>