

# Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 3 No. 12

Anthony Buzzard, editor

September, 2001

*This magazine has been coming to you at no cost. Wise stewardship demands that we inquire:*

## Do You Want to Continue to Receive *Focus on the Kingdom*?

If you haven't already, please return the postcard enclosed in the last issue (August) or e-mail us at [anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com](mailto:anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com) by **September 17, 2001**. If we *don't* hear from you, we will remove your name from our mailing list. **To our international readers:** we will continue to send you this magazine unless you let us know that you no longer want to receive it.

## The Origin of Jesus, the Son of God

In matters of church history and the development of major doctrines defining who Jesus is, readers cannot afford to be uninformed. Church experience for the great majority leaves them with almost no knowledge of how their church came to believe and teach as it currently does.

A critically important question is: When did Jesus, the Messiah, Son of God (Messiah and Son of God are virtually synonyms in the New Testament based on Ps. 2:2, Messiah = 2:7, My Son) come into existence?

A popular and longstanding answer is that my question is wrongly formulated. Jesus Christ had *no beginning*. He was "eternally generated." The doctrine of the "eternal generation of the Son" is standard in most churches (if your pastor has not preached on this, ask him politely to do so). The teaching amounts to a proposition which many of you will find baffling (and I think with good cause). It states that the Son of God was **generated eternally**, that it was a process entirely beyond comprehension, and that the Son, as well as the Father of course who did the begetting, *had no beginning in time*. This is the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity, to which all are supposed to conform.

One is tempted to think of the words of Lewis Carroll in *Through the Looking Glass*. "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less." In this doctrine of "eternal generation of the Son," you the pew-sitter are asked to believe

and confess that the Son had a beginningless beginning. Clear? The theory is, again, that the Son of God had *no beginning in time*. He was eternally generated.

This, we suggest, is a complete mystification. Its enigmatic quality perplexes you as an English speaker, because you are being invited to accept words in a sense which no dictionary will support. Look up, please, the word "generate" or "beget" and you will see that it means "to give existence to, to bring into being." Yet in theological terms the eternal begetting/generation of the Son means the Son *had no beginning*. Are you prepared to believe that some church dogma involves the use of words without meaning?

Christians are aware of the enormous power of the theory of evolution as a doctrine of "science" which contradicts divine revelation. But few seem inclined to reflect on the extent to which other dogmas can be equally without basis in Scripture. The power of deception on a grand scale is more obvious to us in relation to camps to which we do *not* belong. A large section of the world believes that celibacy is required of clergy. This is an evident contradiction of Paul in I Timothy 3, where he states that marriage is the normal condition of those presiding over the church. Another vast mass of human beings believe that Jesus was the Messiah, virginally conceived, but that he did not die on the cross. Judas, or perhaps Simon of Cyrene, died in his place. Yet another substantial group is convinced that God has several wives and that God was a man before He became God. What does this say about the fundamental beliefs of bodies of people ostensibly committed to the Bible?

Back to the question of the Son in the Christian faith. Without that doctrine of "**eternal generation**" there can be no Trinity in the orthodox sense. The Trinity has its major building block in the fact that the Son of God has been forever. All protests that eternal generation is not found in the Bible are likely to be shouted down vigorously as "heresy." Innocent believers have actually died (at the hands of the Church, using the strong arm of the law) for their dissent from the doctrine of "eternal generation." We are here not just discussing academic technicalities. These issues and arguments are backed or opposed by

powerful spiritual forces. The reader must discern who is on which side.

Let us make it plain that there is no such Person as an “eternal Son of God” in Scripture. If you will trace the prophecies, abundant in the Old Testament, in regard to the existence and appearance of *the* Son of God in the future (i.e., future to the OT prophecies) you will find the following facts:

1) God promised that the *future* Savior would be the offspring of the woman. This means of course that he was not alive or existing at the time of the prophecy (Gen. 3:15).

2) The Israelites were assured that they would not have to hear the alarming voice of God directly any more. God would graciously “produce for them [raise up] a prophet like Moses taken from among their brethren [fellow Israelites],” and anyone who would not listen and follow that prophet’s words would be cut off from the people (see Deut. 18:15-18). This most important indicator of who the Savior would be was expressly applied to Jesus by Peter and Stephen (Acts 3:22; 7:37).

3) In the time of David (roughly 1000 BC) a confirming promise of the *yet future Son of God* was given. The promise came through Nathan the prophet and it guaranteed this marvelous event: “I [God] will produce for you [raise up] a descendant who will come forth from you, and I will be a Father to him and he *will be My Son*.” God would further grant a permanent Kingdom to that future Son of God (II Sam. 7:12-17).

4) More information about that Son was provided by the all-important “Messianic” Psalm 2. We find here a description of the future Son of God (v. 7). God his Father would empower him for a final military triumph, as he seized power from a hostile world. God would even mock at the feeble attempts of world-summit conferences and confederations of angry nations who would try to resist the Messianic takeover of world government. The picture is one of the most dramatic revelations of the coming Kingdom. And the Kingdom of God was the main subject of **the Gospel** as Jesus and Paul announced it (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Luke 4:43; Mark 1:14, 15; Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

5) Psalm 110:1 supplied further thrilling detail about the status and function of the promised Son/Messiah. He would be the lord (small “l”<sup>1</sup> to represent the Hebrew *adoni*, which in the Hebrew always [195 times] indicates a *human*, not Deity-

Lord). That lord of David, also to be David’s descendant, would be exalted to the stupendous dignity of sitting at the right hand of his Father, Yahweh, pending the Son’s final conquest of the world. In that position at the right hand of God he would be a priest to intercede for those who recognized him as the Lord Messiah (Ps. 110:4). A whole New Testament book, Hebrews, is devoted to a commentary on Psalm 110:1-4, and Psalm 110:1, 4 are alluded to in the New Testament more frequently than any other Old Testament verse (some 35 times).

The facts above should convince the open-minded that the celebrated Son-of-God-to-be was to be born at a moment of future history. It would make a considerable nonsense of the whole account to maintain that that Son was already alive! The whole point about the distinguished Messianic Son is that the faithful among the Jews were *waiting for him to be born — from a descendant of David*. Genesis 49:10, Isaiah 7; 53:1-12 and Malachi 4:2 were additional promises of the Savior who did not yet exist but who would appear on the human scene in due course.

At the appointed time, after a marvelous appearance of Gabriel to Mary, the Son of God came into existence. He was produced, put on the human scene, just as Genesis 3:15, Deuteronomy 18:15-18 and II Samuel 7 had guaranteed. God’s promises do not fail and their terms are straightforward, delightfully free from the frightening complexity that some theological schemes managed to foist up on them in post-biblical times.

Gabriel’s commentary on the arrival of the promised Son of God is as lucid as it is concise (angels do not suffer from the verbosity of many of us!). Luke 1:35: “The holy spirit will come upon you, Mary, and *for that reason precisely (dio kai)* the holy one to be **begotten** will be the Son of God” (“be called the Son of God” is the equivalent of “*be* the Son of God” — cp. Matt. 5:9 with Luke 6:5).

All this is exactly as we should expect if we have been reading the Old Testament promises carefully. Finally, at a precise moment of human history, the Son of God has come into being, conceived and *begotten* (see Matt. 1:20: “begotten”) as the action of the Father. You will have to check the original Greek for the word here. It points to the activity of the Father as the one *begetting*, generating the Son in the womb of Mary. Just as He created Adam as the Son of God (Luke 3:38), so He now by divine fiat brings into being the Second Adam, the Son of God.

It should not be difficult to see how far all this is from the traditional dogma that the Son *never had a*

<sup>1</sup> See RV, RSV, NRSV, NEB.

*beginning*. Psalm 2:7 is a telling verse. It speaks of a definite time when God begat, generated, brought into being the Son. It is a desperate business trying to argue that the words “*Today*, I have become your Father; today I have generated you, given you being” mean in fact nothing of the sort! Amazing as it may seem, the councils of “the Church” achieved just such an astonishing tour de force. Augustine and earlier church fathers, steeped in the dogmas and creeds of their inherited tradition, and under the influence of an irrational element from neo-Platonism, declared that “today” really means “in eternity.” If you are blinking at this last statement, please proceed to a good theological dictionary and check the facts. Again, the precious words of Scripture basing the origin of the Son squarely in time, were dissolved into nothing with the acid of Gnostic Platonism. “Today,” it was taught, really means “in eternity.” The trick was done. With this misuse of language Jesus, the unique Son begotten in Mary under the power of the Father’s spirit, was turned into an eternal abstraction, far removed from the flesh and blood Jew whose *origin* (*genesis*, Matt. 1:18) was in the womb of his mother. Nothing less than this *human origin* will qualify him to be a member of the human race. God cannot be tempted, and God cannot die. God was not born, and God was not a baby. God has no mother. Jesus, on the other hand, died (Rev. 1:18 etc.), not part of him — a half-dead Jesus would not atone for sin. Jesus was tempted. Jesus was not in possession of all knowledge. As the Son of God, he did not know the time of his Second Coming (Matt. 24:36). The attempts to explain away that awkward fact are among the sorriest in the history of Bible exposition. Jesus did not know. He was not omniscient and thus he was not God. He was the Son of God, the Christ. On that great central Truth he promised to build his Church (Matt. 16:15-19, and constantly throughout the NT). This is the New Testament’s central creed.

In Old Testament times, the Son was a, or rather *the*, feature of future prophecy. Note the persistent future tenses: “Your [Eve’s] seed *will be* the Savior who will crush the Serpent/Devil.” “The Lord *will raise up* a prophet like Moses who will speak all My words” (Deut. 18). “Ask of Me [God says to the future Son] and *I will give* you the ends of the earth as your inheritance” (Ps. 2). “*I will raise up* your Son and *I will be* his Father and *he will be My Son*” (II Sam. 7). “A virgin *will conceive*” (Isa. 7:14).

On such evidence the idea that the Son thus predicted was *already alive and well* as the Son of God, without beginning, should be dropped, as a

confusing imposition on the divine story as told by the Bible. (It is typical of divine figures in all religious traditions that fantasy and mythology are later built around them, far beyond the facts.)

There is no eternal Son in the Bible. The distinguished Methodist scholar and commentator, Adam Clark, D.D., wrote wisely:

“The doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, is in my opinion, antiscritural and highly dangerous. I have not been able to find any express declaration of it in the Scriptures.”<sup>2</sup>

J.O. Buswell, Ph.D., former Dean of the Graduate School, Covenant College, St. Louis, MO, examined the issue of the begetting of the Son in the Bible and concluded with these words. He wrote as a Trinitarian:

**“The notion that the Son was begotten by the Father in eternity past, not as an event, but as an inexplicable relationship, has been accepted and carried along in the Christian theology since the fourth century...We have examined all the instances in which ‘begotten’ or ‘born’ or related words are applied to Christ, and we can say with confidence that the Bible has nothing whatsoever to say about ‘begetting’ as an eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.”<sup>3</sup>**

F.F. Bruce warned that evangelicals, while they claim the Bible as their sole source of authority, are often unwittingly just as enslaved to tradition as those whom they accuse of that same weakness:

“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).

An effective way to study this important issue regarding the identity of Jesus is to start with the Old Testament. What sort of picture is built up by the prophecies? Was the Son to be born to Israel as Prince of Peace really at the same time “*the Mighty God*”<sup>4</sup> of Israel, or was he “a mighty hero or divine hero reflecting the divine majesty” of his Father, the One God? (See the standard Lexicon of Biblical Hebrew by Brown, Driver and Briggs, p. 42.)

<sup>2</sup>Commentary on Luke 1:35.

<sup>3</sup>A *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, Zondervan, 1962, p. 110.

<sup>4</sup>The Hebrew does not say *the* Mighty God, but a mighty divine person. The word *el* (God) does not necessarily point to the One God of Israel. It can have a secondary meaning as human “gods.”

Was the baby to be born in Bethlehem, foreseen by the prophet Micah (5:2) eight hundred years before his birth, already alive as an uncreated “second member of a Trinity, fully God and without beginning”? Or was it rather that the origins of that coming Son/Messiah were revealed “from ancient times”? The KJV “from everlasting” (in Micah 5:2) is a mistranslation forcing on the reader the ideas of later dogma. Modern translations have happily corrected the misunderstanding perpetuated by the KJV. The Messiah’s origins, from the family of David, were known “from ancient days.” But Micah did not say that the Son was already in existence. Peter taught that the Messiah was “foreknown” from the beginning, that is, destined and foreordained, but not actually yet in existence (I Pet. 1:20, and note that Christians are also chosen in accordance with the foreknowledge of God, I Pet. 1:3). Paul likewise believed that Christ and Christians were chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). The Bible also teaches us to think of the crucifixion of Jesus as having happened before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8, NIV). All this points to God’s predetermined counsel. Jesus, the Son, is the final expression of God’s grand intention for the human race.

In the New Testament Jesus the Son of God is the “image of God.” The image is the visible reflection of the *invisible* God (John 1:18). It is little more than popular fiction to suppose that the Son of God was active and vocal in Old Testament times. Hebrews 1:1-2 should correct the notion that the Son was alive, active and speaking for God, long before he came into existence (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20). The fact is that “God spoke in the past in different ways and at different times in the prophets but *in these last days has spoken in a Son*” (Heb. 1:1, 2).

It is to contradict the New Testament to maintain that the Old Testament “angel of the Lord” was really the Son of God, mysteriously appearing in advance of his birth. The angel of the Lord was an angel (and Jesus was never an angel as Hebrews 1 makes very clear). The angel was certainly not identified as the Messiah. Stephen did not hint at any such idea in Acts 7:30, 35. His inspired testimony is to the effect that it was an angel who appeared to Moses. In Judges 16:13 the angel of the Lord refused worship in the form of sacrifice and is clearly distinguished from the Lord God.

Hebrews 1:1-2 lays out God’s timetable and confirms that He did not speak His ultimate word until He sent His ultimate messenger, agent and prophet,

His unique Son, the Messiah. Hebrews 1:1-2 is contradicted by the idea that God in fact spoke through the Son during the Old Testament period. Since God had not yet produced His Son, it was not the Son who said, “Let there be light.” It was Yahweh, the One God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who, unaccompanied (Isa. 44:24) spoke the Genesis creation into existence. It was God, not the Son Jesus, who rested from the work of creation (Heb. 4:4). The Son was reserved for the New Testament period. The Son is the historical climax of God’s speaking to the human race. To make the Son a spokesman before that time flies in the face of Hebrews 1:1-2.

As the *image* of God, Jesus is the visible manifestation of his Father. “God was *in* Christ” (it does not say God *was* Christ) reconciling the world to Himself (II Cor. 5:19). Jesus was in the *visible* “form of God” — a human being, sinless, virginally conceived, of whom it has to be said that “in seeing him you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). This does not of course mean that Jesus *is* the Father. He reflects the Father. He is the Father’s ultimate and final appeal to the world to hear and obey. The issues at stake are nothing less than our personal destiny — to be lost or saved.

Jesus is the second Adam destined in the future to be *the man* who arrives from heaven to raise the dead. “The Last Adam... the second man is the Lord from heaven” (I Cor. 15:45, 47). “From heaven we expect a Savior” (Phil. 3:20). How terribly confusing it would be to say that the second Adam really preceded the first Adam. Jesus is the final Adam. He comes into existence after the first Adam. That last Adam, Jesus, is the heavenly one who descends at the Second Coming from his heavenly session at the right hand of God, where he is currently the Man Messiah Jesus, in contrast to the One God, his Father (I Tim. 2:5).

In Colossians 1:15-18 Paul is describing that *human being* Jesus. He pins down the identity of his subject by introducing him: He is *the image* of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. It is important to remember that Jesus is the firstborn of the *New Creation*. Firstborn is the title of the Messiah par excellence. It derives from Psalm 89:26, 27; compare Psalm 80:17. The Messiah did not *precede* Adam literally. He is, however, the one for whom (*eis*) and because of whom (*en*) and through whom (*dia*, not *upo*, “by”) God created all authorities in heaven and on earth. In that hierarchy Jesus ranks ahead of all. Jesus was the occasion for the creation. The universe is his inheritance, and he achieves his status at the right hand of God by being the firstborn from

the dead (Col. 1:18) — the first to be brought back from death to indestructible life. Remember, then, that Paul is talking about Jesus, the visible image of God. This excludes immediately a Jesus who was invisible before his birth as a man. Such a theory — that there was a *pre-human person called Jesus* — is excluded from Paul's account. He is interested in the history and triumph of the image of God, the human being Jesus who was seen and touched. Paul knew nothing of a preexisting righteous angel who became a man — righteous angels are immortal (Luke 20:36), and Jesus died. The New Testament Savior is not a "God-Man" (a good Greek word is available, *theanthropos*, but it appears nowhere in the Bible). Nor is he an Angel-Man. The whole point of the identity of Jesus is missed if we do not accept him as the *Man* Messiah, Mediator between God and the human race (I Tim. 2:5).

An unfortunate mistranslation makes Colossians 1:15 difficult for the reader of many versions. The celebrated *Expositor's Greek New Testament* declares plainly, "The text does not say 'all things were made by him [the Son].'" The point is that the preposition "in" him has a flexible range of meanings. Turner's *Grammar of New Testament Greek* suggests "because of him." The meaning is that God created everything because of Jesus and through him and for him. The creation is for Jesus, since he is to inherit all things. But this one verse is much too shaky a basis on which to build a whole theory of Jesus as the actual executive of the Genesis creation. A pre-human Jesus cannot by definition be human. Matthew 1:18 speaks of his origin (*genesis*) as Son. An angel-Jesus contradicts entirely the first chapter of Hebrews which declares him superior to any form of angel. And there is not a word anywhere in the Bible about Jesus being **begotten as Son** before his conception in Mary.

The same vivid history of Jesus is given in Philippians 2:5-11. Once again we must approach this much-disputed passage with our understanding firmly grounded in Paul's presentation of his champion. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Messiah Jesus." There he is again: the *human* Messiah. We know what Paul means by "the Messiah Jesus." In 1 Timothy 2:5 he declares his creed with complete clarity: "There is one God and one Mediator between that One God and man — Messiah Jesus, himself Man." That phrase needs to be etched in our minds — the *Man* Messiah Jesus. So then in Philippians 2 Paul has more to say about the Man Messiah Jesus. We are to imitate his perfect style. Paul teaches us that "Though Messiah

was in the form of God,"<sup>5</sup> that is, the visible manifestation (*morphe* refers to something seen) of God his Father, he did not reckon his being *like* God something to be used for his own profit. He emptied himself of all privilege and all of his life took on the role of a servant. Paul never imagined here a pre-human existence followed by a transition into human life. He nowhere uses the verb "preexist" for Jesus, though the Greek work *prouparchein*, to preexist, is available to him. Paul is discussing *the visible, historical Jesus*. A decision by a non-human Person to become a man is hardly a model which makes sense to you. But the matchless behavior of the Servant Jesus depicted in the Gospels, as he battled with human stupidity and opposition (mostly, be it noted, from established religion), is put before us as the example for us in the same struggle.

The fullness of the deity dwelt in Jesus (Col. 2:9). "Fullness" is a "spirit word" in the New Testament. It points to the character and heart and mind of God as He transmits it to believers, and chiefly as He placed it in Jesus, who was begotten uniquely by the spirit and provided a unique portrait of the character of his Father. Paul does not expect Christians to be unable to follow their Master. He prays that "all the fullness of God" would be exemplified also in believers (Eph. 3:19). That does not mean, of course, that believers *are* God (heaven forbid!). But by the grace of God at work in them, they are to shine forth as lights in a dark world.

Bible students will find it illuminating to rethink their concept of who Jesus is. Start with the Old Testament and encompass that 75% of the Bible with its various promises of the distinguished Son of God to come. Then ponder this: Matthew and Luke deal in detail with the origin of the Son of God. They trace his ancestry to Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1) or right back to Adam (Luke 3). Matthew declares that the Father brought into existence His Son through Mary — "that which is begotten in you is from the holy spirit" (Matt. 1:20). This indeed was how the Son began. Luke then gives the causal basis for Jesus being the Son of God. It is because of the supernatural begetting effected in Mary (Luke 1:35). Acts 2:34-36 declares that Jesus achieved Messianic lordship and exaltation to the right hand of God by fulfilling the terms of Psalm 110:1. At that event the Messiah was confirmed as the lord of David, the lord Messiah in

<sup>5</sup> Note the improper rendering of the NIV, "being in very nature God." The text does not say that Jesus *was* God, but that he was "in the form of God."

the sense required by the famous Psalm 110:1, where the LORD (GOD) had announced this staggering event a thousand years earlier. The “my lord” of David is a title not of Deity (there is only one who is God) but of *superior humans at various levels*.<sup>6</sup> The Lord Jesus is that very lord appointed by God. He is the *adoni* (my lord) of David. *Adoni* appears 195 times in the Old Testament and always distinguishes those so named from God Himself who is called ADONAI (“the Lord God of all”).

Luke and Paul were traveling companions. Do we really imagine that they had two totally different ideas about the origin of the Son of God? Luke, in his two books, gives us a crystal clear description of the Son who originated as a conscious person in his mother’s womb. This of course makes Jesus a genuine human being. Did Paul introduce an entirely different concept by proposing that the Son of God had been alive (as an angel? Doing what?) before his birth?

If Paul really believed in a pre-human invisible Son of God, he must not have let Luke know this! But note this: The letters of Paul were complete at the time when, in all probability, Matthew, Mark and Luke were written. Why then did these writers say not a word about a so-called preexisting Son — especially in the light of the inspired letters of Paul which, it is claimed (wrongly, we think), tell of such a non-fully human, pre-human Messiah? Paul in fact spoke of the visible Son of God, the image of God. He did not imagine that Jesus had anything but a human origin — supernatural of course, yet as an event of some two thousand years ago, and as the offspring of a Jewish woman.

The notion that the Son of God is coequal and coeternal with the Father is a powerful idea. It has gathered its strength from centuries of indoctrination. But is it true? Is it not obvious, even to the casual reader of the New Testament, that the Son is not equal to the Father — that the Son is everywhere subordinate to the Father? Is it not merely a matter of understanding simple language that all sons are derived from their fathers, that no son is the same age as his father, and that to be **eternally generated** is pure contradiction and an abuse of the precious gift of language and meaning? “All New Testament Christology is subordinationist,” says scholar Dr. Howard Marshall (*Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LXX, no. 1, Jan. 1998, p. 76).

<sup>6</sup> Very occasionally an angel is addressed as *adoni*, but on no occasion is God given that title.

A revolution in Christian thinking about who God and Jesus are is long overdue. Its beginnings are found in the works of countless excellent scholars of the Bible and this magazine hopes to bring these insights to a wider public. As a striking example we offer the following quotation from Norman Kraus’ *Jesus Christ our Lord*.<sup>7</sup> He is commenting on John 1:1 and observes that John did not intend us to think that from the beginning the word was *a Person* (hypostasis), in other words, that John did not write “In the beginning was *Jesus, the Son*.” He then commends the excellent translation of J.B. Phillips: “At the beginning God expressed Himself.” He adds that the Living Bible “totally misses the point” when it renders the same words, “Before anything else existed, there was Christ.” We commend also the fine translation of John 1:1, 2 by English versions before the KJV. They read, “All things were made by IT,” not by *him*.

A simple way to understand John 1:1 brings John into harmony with Matthew and Luke, who have not a word to say about any Son existing before the birth of Jesus. John was reflecting on the activity of God through His word, His self-expression. God expressed Himself at the Genesis creation, and finally when the unique Son (John 1:14, 18) came into existence, God spoke His ultimate word in the historical Jesus. Jesus then is the revelation of the word of God. He is wisdom and word in person, but nevertheless a human person. Jesus is what the word, or expression, or promise of God became. But to alter John’s words to read “In the beginning was the Son” sows the seeds of the later terrible arguments and complexities related to how *two* Persons can be equally God! The Church groaned for centuries under the burden of trying to work out, in terms of Greek philosophy, the idea that God was two, and later three, coequal Persons in one Godhead. Since the decisions of the church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, Bible readers have been compelled, on pain of heresy, to subscribe to the heavily philosophized creedal statements developed in a period of three hundred years after the time of Jesus.

But the Bible cannot be forced into the extraordinary formula that God is one “what” (Essence) in three “who’s” (Persons). Even at the council of Nicea this definition was pronounced erroneous! At that time “essence” and “person” meant the same thing exactly and logic required that God could not be one “X” and three “X’s” in the same sense at the same time! Later it was decided to give

<sup>7</sup> Herald Press, 1987.

“essence” and “person” different meanings and God was then defined as one “essence” (*ousia*, in Greek).

But note here the shocking obscuration of the most fundamental facts of the Bible. In Scripture God is not one impersonal essence. God is never a “what.” He is a Person in the sense in which we understand that word. Moreover God reveals Himself and His identity by means of human language and He has graciously consented to speak of Himself as “I,” “Me,” and “Him.” These singular, personal pronouns ought to convey to the open-minded the fact that God is a “single Person,” certainly not three Persons.

Lest any of our readers should imagine that our discussion this month is at the level of theory and academics only, we suggest three points:

1) The present creedal statements of the Church effectively bar Muslims and Jews from even considering the claims of Christ for salvation.

2) A fierce and bloody history of killings and excommunications lies behind the discussion we are conducting.

3) Celebrated and dedicated Bible scholars from various camps have since the time of the Enlightenment (and earlier at the Reformation) protested the fearfully complex and philosophically-worded enigmas and mysteries of the Church’s post-biblical creeds.

All of the post-biblical conflict over conformity to a creed backed by ecclesiastical law was superfluous to the Bible which with transparent simplicity declares that “there is one God, the Father, and one lord Jesus Messiah” (I Cor. 8:4-6), the “my lord” of Psalm 110:1, so recognized by Elizabeth as “my lord” (Luke 1:43). Luke goes on to teach that he is the “lord Messiah” (Luke 2:11), and “the Messiah of the Lord [God]” (Luke 2:26). The New Testament presents him as the “Lord Jesus Messiah,” so defined, as Peter said, by Psalm 110:1: “God has made this Jesus both Lord and Messiah” (see Acts 2:34-36). He then went on to quote his authority, Psalm 110:1. Everyone knew that the second lord was *not God*, but the Man Messiah. Jesus had argued this also from the same Psalm (Matt. 22:42-45). Intelligent Bible reading requires that we know who God and Jesus are.

The study of this important issue of the identity of God and Jesus will be facilitated if one remembers that:

1) Elohim, the Old Testament word for God, *is not plural* in meaning. Though it has a plural ending, this does not in this case mean that more than one is God. There are numerous examples of Hebrew nouns with grammatical plural endings referring to a single

person. The idea that Elohim pointed to a plurality of Persons in the Godhead was not mooted until a thousand years after the New Testament period.

2) The word for “one” in Deuteronomy 6:4 defining who God is means strictly “one single.” God is said to be “one Lord” (cp. Mark 12:29ff.). This excludes any possibility of a second or third Person being God. Jesus quotes and affirms that central creed of Israel (Mark 12:29ff.). The word for “one” in Hebrew works like the English word “one.” It does not mean more than one! It means one and not two or more than two. “Echad,” one, is the numeral 1. “Eleven” in Hebrew is ten and one. “One” is correctly rendered, amongst 950 occurrences, as “a single,” “solitary,” “unique.” “Abraham was one [person]” (Isa. 51:2). An amazingly distorted argument has arisen in some quarters, to the effect that one really means more than one! The argument goes like this: Adam and Eve were “one flesh.” So one really means two. Thus God who is one could really be three!

The logical fallacy in this argument is as follows. In the sentence about Adam and Eve there are two human beings uniting as “one flesh.” They were not however “two fleshes.” One still means one, as it always does. It is of course true that the numeral adjective “one” can *modify* a collective noun like team or cluster. But we still have “one” team, which does not mean two or three teams. We still have “one” cluster and not two clusters. To argue that “echad” really *means* in itself “compound unity” is little better than saying that one means three in the phrase “one tripod,” or that one means a hundred if we speak of “one centipede.”

Denominations should aim to unite under the banner which Jesus proclaimed (in addition to his Gospel of the Kingdom): that God is One, in strict Biblical fashion. ✧

### Comments from Reply Cards

“I’m so glad to see that there is someone out there doing biblical research and coming up with answers that I’ve suspected all along.” — *New York*

“I look forward each month to your newsletter. I am not hearing this teaching from the pulpit.” — *Wisconsin*

“Your commentary on the soul and the gospel of the Kingdom and the monotheism of God are enlightening – to say the least.” — *Virginia*

“This is a blast of truth that I love getting every month.” — *Texas*