Focus on the Kingdom

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Answering an Objector

Archie Faul (*Journal: News of the Churches of God,* July 31, 2003) refers to "those other unitarians," by which he means those non-Trinitarians he disagrees with on the issue of the so-called **preexistence of Jesus**. First, I think it wise to point out that the **Socinian Christology** with which he differs (**Socinianism** is the teaching that the Son of God was generated in the womb of his mother and thus came into existence at that time) is not a new oddity popping up last year! It is an ancient and well supported minor tradition in Christian history. This form of anti-Trinitarianism, which states that Jesus came into existence in the womb of his mother as Son of God, follows the biblical Christology.

This view of the Son of God does not make the mistake of starting with isolated verses from John. It appeals *first* to Matthew and Luke and keeps its eye on the Old Testament portrait of the coming Messiah, and the *future* Son of God (2 Sam. 7:12-17; Ps. 2:7; 89:26-29; Deut. 18:15-18; Acts 3:22; 7:37, etc.). Not a word appears in the Old Testament about a Messiah who is already alive *before he is begotten*, and not a word appears in Matthew or Luke which would disturb that picture.

Furthermore Hebrews chapter 1 labors to express the idea that the Messiah is not an angel, and never was. In fact God *did not speak through His Son until New Testament times* (1:1-2). That, of course, is because the Son did not yet exist. Matthew and Luke teach us to believe in a Son of God who *first* comes into existence in Mary, in time, some two thousand years ago — not before.

Matthew in his first chapter discusses the "origin" of Jesus (note the Greek word *genesis* in the best MSS at Matt. 1:18). What Matthew describes is the *beginning* of the new creation, the new Genesis. He wants us to understand the *origin* of God's Son. It happened, according to the angel, when Mary became pregnant in such a way that "what is *begotten* [the action of the Father] in her is from the holy spirit" (Matt. 1:20). To beget means to bring into existence, to generate.

Luke's account is equally deliberate and unmistakable. Gabriel announces in Luke 1:35, "For this reason precisely (*dio kai*) the holy thing being *begotten* will be called the Son of God." There it is: The Son of God is defined for us. He is the Son of God *because of* the miracle in his mother's womb. Jesus is the Son of God based on a historical miracle — note the causal connection — the miracle performed by God in Mary. Gabriel as master theologian explained how, why and when Jesus is the Son of God.

Scholars of various denominations agree with the obvious fact that neither Matthew nor Luke describes the transformation of an *already existing Son of God* into a fetus, which is a vastly complicated notion requiring much elaboration. What both Matthew and Luke describe is the *coming into existence*, the genesis, of the Son of God. This is really not difficult. It becomes complex only if one decides to contradict these matchless accounts, using John to do so.

But John is as unitarian as his colleague Gospel writers. He believes that God is One Person, the Father of His Son, Jesus. The Father is the "only one who is truly God" (John 17:3), and Jesus denies flatly that he is God, claiming that he is the supreme example of one who *represents* and reflects his Father, the One God (John 10:30-36). He compares himself with the human judges of Israel who in a lesser way represented the One God.

When we come to John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am he," we must decide if we are going to contradict the Old Testament and Matthew's, Luke's, Acts and Peter's presentation of who Jesus is.

It is a basic rule of Bible study that the words of Scripture be read in their immediate context, their wider context (the whole Bible), and above all in their Jewish first-century context (it is very amateur to read words only in the light of 20th-century usage). Some background knowledge and skill is necessary here as well as the witness of the rest of the Bible. First it is wise to examine the several occurrences of the "I am" statements of John. The first occurrence is of particular significance. Jesus is talking to the lady at the well who reminds him that the Messiah is coming — not "God the Son," but the **Messiah**. Jesus then says: "I am, namely the one speaking to you" (John 4:26).

The art of translation requires that we make sense of the Greek in the target language, and so translators render this statement "I am **he**, the one who is speaking with you." The phrase "I am he" is the equivalent here

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and elsewhere of the Greek "I am." It is not a mistranslation to add the word "he." It is a correct translation to makes sense of the words in English.

Now take that information to John 8:58 and Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I am **he**." He has already stated repeatedly that he is the Messiah, and he never said he was God, which would have been absurd in view of his firm belief in the unitary monotheism of Judaism (Mark 12:28ff).

"Before Abraham was, I am **he** [the Messiah]." This is quite understandable as a reference to the fact that the whole world was created for the sake of the Messiah who embodies God's great plan of salvation. Not only, says Jesus, did Abraham look forward eagerly to the Messiah's coming day, but *even before Abraham was born*, Jesus was "the one, the Messiah." He was the reason for the whole creation. 1 Peter said the same thing in different words, "The lamb was foreknown before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20; cp Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rev. 13:8).

Let us bring in further witnesses to this view, which has the great merit of not contradicting the Christology of Matthew and Luke and the rest of the Bible: "That the absolute use of 'I am' need not have connotations of divinity is clear from its usage by the man born blind at John 9:9. Jesus' words, then, were not an unambiguous asseveration of divinity" (H.H. Rowden, *Christ the Lord*, p. 172).

Robert Young, LL.D (of the famous *Young's Concordance*) states that "'I am he' is a claim to be **the Messiah** and implies neither divinity *nor preexistence*: 'Before Abraham's coming, I am he,' that is, the promised Messiah. The simple phrase 'I am' is used by Jesus 15 times, and in every case (but the present, John 8:58) it is rendered in the Common Version 'I am **he**' or 'It is I.' See Matt. 14:27; Mk. 6:50; 14:62; Lk. 21:8; 22:70; 24:39; **John 4:26**; 6:20; 8:24, 28; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8" (*Young's Concise Commentary*, on John 8:58).

The British biblical theologian, Dr. J.A.T. Robinson of Cambridge, of whom F.F. Bruce said, "John Robinson's strength lies in NT scholarship, to which he brings a lively and well-informed mind not too much hampered by deference to currently accepted wisdom" (correspondence with the writer on March 13th, 1981), comments on John 8:58:

"The identification of Jesus' I am statements with the I am of Exodus I believe to be a misreading of the text. Of the 'I am' sayings in this Gospel [John], those with the predicate 'I am the bread of life,' 'the door,' 'the way,' 'the good shepherd,' etc. certainly **do not imply that the subject is God**. As Barrett rightly says, '***ego eimi'*** ['I am'] does not identify Jesus with God, but it does draw attention to him in the strongest possible terms. 'I am the one — the one you must look at, and listen to if you would know God'" (*Comm. on John*, p. 342). Of the "absolute" uses of *ego eimi*, the majority are simply establishing identification: "I am **he**." This is so of **4:26** (the Messiah you speak of); 6:20 (confirming Jesus' identity on the lake at night, exactly as in Mark 6:50, Matt. 14:27); 9:9 (on the lips not of Jesus but of the blind man) and 18:5-8, the "I am your man" at the arrest (cp. Acts 10:21), even though it evokes awe (not the reaction to blasphemy) in the arresting party.

"There is the same usage in the resurrection scene of Luke 24:39, 'it is I myself'…Three other occurrences, John 8:24, 28, 13:19, are, I believe, correctly rendered by the NEB 'I am what I am,' namely the truth of what really I am. They do not carry with them the implication that he is Yahweh (indeed in the latter two especially there is a contrast with the Father who sent him), but in contrast '**the Christ, the Son of God**'" (Cp. E.D. Freed, "*EGO EIMI* in John 8:24 in the Light of its Context and Jewish Messianic Belief," *JTS* 33, l982, pp. 163-167, who argues that the phrase is specifically Messianic).

"Barrett is unusually emphatic at this point. Referring to 8:28 he writes: 'It is simply intolerable that Jesus should be made to say, "I am God, the supreme God of the OT, and being God I do as I am told," and to 13:19, "I am God, and I am here because someone sent me."' J.A.T. Robinson continues: "That Jesus is arrogating to himself the **divine name** is nowhere stated or implied in this gospel. Even the Jews do not accuse him of this — only of calling God his own father, and thereby implying equality with God (or as H. Oldberg interprets this from rabbinic parallels, rebellious independence being 'as good as God,' 5:18). What they take to be the blasphemy of making himself 'a god' in 10:33 is again made clear to be a misunderstanding of Jesus calling himself 'God's Son'...The worst that can be said of him at the trial is that he claimed to be 'God's son'" (Robinson, *Priority of John*, pp. 385-387).

Perhaps Mr. Faul will agree that the "I am **he**" statements do not mean "I am God." I only invite him to weigh in the argument the massively important testimony of the Old Testament, Matthew 1:18-20, Luke 1:32-35 and to see if there is not a way of harmonizing John with the rest of the New Testament. The "rock which followed them" (1 Cor. 10:4) was not Jesus preexisting but an Old Testament *type* of the coming Christ. Paul said that, not I. In 1 Corinthians 10:11 he said that he had been talking "typically," "in types." Paul provides his own commentary.

What I have learned in the past 30 years since coming out of the Armstrong movement is that we were often handicapped by our amateur approach to the Bible, and a consequent lack of familiarity with the other possibilities in the question of who Jesus is, which is a very important one for us all. After all we were schooled to think that all scholars tended to be fools! But who were we, armed with the King James and a Strong's, to have such confidence?✧

Jesus, Son of God, not God the Son:
How Pious Fiction Replaced Biblical Fact

The churchgoing public seems rather little interested in the astonishing and tangled doctrinal arguments — stretching over some three and a half centuries — which conferred upon them their view of God as "Three Persons in one Essence."

This often cruelly enforced dogma has left behind it a trail of destruction, ex-communication and heresy hunting. All of this is out of harmony with the spirit of Jesus who never attempted to extirpate heretics. Rather, he pleaded with them, as did Paul, to believe the truth. John Calvin, however — and this the 450th anniversary of that terrible event — ordered a young Spanish theologian to be burned slowly at the stake. Why? Because Michael Servetus could not in conscience subscribe to the unbiblical notion that Jesus is "the Eternal Son of God." He firmly believed that Jesus was **the Son of the Eternal God**. That frightful and senseless act of brutality on the part of Calvin took place on Oct 27th, 1553. Celebrations in memorial of Servetus' heroic death are being held in several capital cities this year.

"Eternally begotten Son of God"? Whence came that amazing cog in the doctrinal machine which demanded the excommunication and even death of all those conscientious Bible students who questioned it? Those who do not know history are liable to repeat its errors. Surely that is why our educational system insists on teaching our children the growth of American civilization, its errors as well as its triumphs. But how many intelligent churchgoers have the slightest idea about the history of theology, and the doctrines under whose umbrella they assemble week by week? Why are not sermons preached to inform the people?

Our conviction is that exposure to the actual facts of the development of dogma might be painfully embarrassing. The facts are that the New Testament and the Old on which it is based subscribed to the classic view of God as unitary. God was known in the Hebrew Bible as One Person, so designated thousands of times by singular personal pronouns. As Dr. Leonard Hodgson, delivering the Croall Lectures at Oxford in 1950, noted: "The monotheism of Judaism was then, as it is still, unitarian" (i.e. God is a single Person, not three Persons). This is really an obvious fact available to all who will pick up the Old Testament anew and investigate this question. Deuteronomy 6:4 was the cardinal religious tenet of all who sought to love and serve the God of the universe, adoring him with all of their mind, soul and strength. Those words inculcated into the young and the old the foundational truth of all sound religion: "Hear, Listen, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." *Shema* (listen) *Yeesrael*, *Adonai* (the Lord) *Elohenu* (Our God), *Adonai echad* (is one Lord).

Not two Lords. Not three or more Lords, but One Lord. For this Jews and dissenting Christians have been persecuted cruelly by exponents of the later Trinitarian doctrine devised by the post-biblical "Church Fathers" over three and a half centuries.

For Jesus the Jew Deuteronomy 6:4 was his creed. When a young scribe seeking the Master's heart on that basic dogma inquired about the first and foremost command Jesus quotes that text (Mark 12:28ff), thus declaring the Christian creed which deviated not one iota from the unitarian creed of Israel.

But philosophically minded post-biblical Christians were not satisfied with that basic tenet of the faith. They were heavily influenced by that brand of Neo-Platonism which in the second century permeated the "sophisticated" (sometimes the equivalent of learnedly confused!) intellectual world of Greek thinking. Thus, in the philosophy popular at the time, the One God was far distant from the world He had created. What was needed was a link between heaven and earth. How could this be achieved? By positing the existence of a "second God" (the earliest Church Fathers actually used that dangerous phrase). That second God according to Justin Martyr, a Christian spokesman of the mid-second century, had been brought into existence by the One God, in pre-historic times, with a view to being the agent of the *first* creation. In other words the Logos was the subordinate Creator in Genesis 1.

The theological move was to have disastrous effects from which we have never recovered. **The "second God," the Logos, was said to be the Son of God in a pre-existence**. That pre-human, pre-historical Son was declared to be the One who, transforming himself into a fetus, engineering his *own* birth, emerged as a pseudo-human person, the Son of God. He was said to be born *through* Mary instead of (as Matthew says) *from* Mary (Matt. 1:16).

Once the Son of God was projected back behind his own birth — in itself a bizarre notion — the

complex problem of who exactly the Son was and is was posed. It turned out to be insoluble, and the interminable wrangles about how to solve it were finally silenced by order of the State under Emperor Constantine. It was decided that the Son of God was an "eternally generated" second member of a Triune Godhead. He had existed forever prior to his birth from Mary and had nevertheless been "begotten as Son," yet without beginning. The plain meaning of words, in and outside the Bible, was squelched in the interests of theological "sophistication" conforming to Greek philosophical patterns and terminology.

For a brilliant account of this astonishing conflict of ideas, our readers are encouraged to consult *When Jesus Became God* by Richard Rubenstein. All unprejudiced readers, we think, will be convinced that the development of that new non-Hebrew definition of God was a far cry from the noble simplicity of Jesus' unitary monotheistic creed (Mark 12:28ff; John 17:3, etc.).

The winners write the history. The so-called Athanasian creed, which promoted the non-biblical creed of God as three uncreated Persons forming one Divine Essence, was written into the constitution of the Church and so it is to this day. Dissenters to this remarkably complex notion of God have been ever since viewed with suspicion and as subversive to the core of religion.

Yet the careful reader of history and theology will soon learn that massively important figures have lent their immense talents to warning the public that they have been caught in a strange philosophical concept that God is Three and yet paradoxically One. Witness the efforts of Sir Isaac Newton, John Milton and John Locke and many others who expressed the strongest protest against the Church's loss of the first principle of sound religion — that God is One Person. (Often they had to write surreptitiously for fear of being publicly condemned by the Church.)

Would you be convinced by the following argument which is the main building block of Trinitarian theology?

It was the immensely industrious "Church Father" Origen (AD 185-254) who wrote into theology forever the idea that the Son of God did *not begin* in the womb of Mary as the product of a miraculous creative act of God, but had in fact existed as Son eternally.

How was this *tour de force* achieved? Quite simply by a devastating treatment of language, such that its obvious meaning was murdered. Faced with the immensely important Messianic text in Psalm 2:7 where the God of Israel had announced as a prophecy that His Son had been "begotten *today*," Origen merely waved his theological wand over those sublime, innocent words and wrote (please note the awful facts here!): "'You are My Son: Today I have begotten you.' — This is spoken to the Son by God **with Whom all time is today**, for there is no evening with God, as I consider, and there is no morning; nothing but time which stretches out, along with His unbeginning and unseen life. The day [in Psalm 2] is 'today' with Him in which the Son was begotten, and thus **the beginning of his birth [the Son's] is not found, as neither is the day of it**" (Origen, *Commentary on John*, Book 1, 32).

Clear? Confronted with the words "Today I have begotten you," Origen was in some embarrassment, because his development of Trinitarianism led to the notion that the Son was *eternally begotten*. The Bible, however, said "today." Origen was equal to the challenge. Simply assert dogmatically that when God who is eternal says "today" He cannot mean "today," but instead really means "in eternity." The trick was complete, and later layers of Trinitarian development were built on this amazing rejection of Scripture devised by the philosophically minded Origen.

Paul was not a Greek philosopher and neither was his Master Jesus. Paul quoted Psalm 2 in Acts 13:33 where he reminds his audience of the "today" in which the Son had been begotten. "God raised up His Son" — put him on the scene of history — in accordance with the wonderful prediction of Psalm 2:7. In the next verse he adds another proof-text to validate the later **resurrection** of Jesus from the dead. But in verse 33 Paul's concern is with the origin of the Son: "Today I have begotten you." And Paul did not think that "today" meant "eternity."

Paul's views were inscribed for posterity in the writings of his traveling companion Luke (who wrote more of the New Testament than any of the other writers). Detailing the **origin of the Son of God** he recorded the extraordinary visit of Gabriel to Mary. Gabriel provided the very theology of the Son of God which the Church later tragically discarded. "How," asks Mary, "will it be that I will have a son since I am not in a relationship with a husband?" To this very reasonable inquiry the angel replied, laying down the essential guidelines of Christian theology, "Holy spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. *For that reason precisely* (*dio kai*) the holy one to be begotten will be called the Son of God."

Via the tortuous arguments of church fathers, steeped in Greek philosophy, that beautiful teaching from God through the angel Gabriel was suppressed, and the fiction of a pre-historical and pre-human (and therefore essentially *non-human* Jesus) was promoted as biblical truth. First under Justin Martyr the Son was

turned into a pre-existing angel/Son (identified today by millions of earnest Jehovah's Witnesses as Michael the Archangel). Later under Origen and his successors the Son became the "eternally begotten Son." Psalm 2:7 and its quotation in the New Testament presents us with a biblical alternative. It is sufficient for the reader to decide. Did God, when He said "**today** I have become your Father" (Ps. 2:7), mean "today" or did He really mean "in eternity"? We suggest that the precious words of Scripture should never have been subjected to such drastic treatment, much less that the results of this assault on the language of revelation should be imposed by the Church on pain of heresy!

Try airing these important topics bearing on the persistent question, "Who really is Jesus" with friends and churchgoers. You may be surprised at the animus these issues can create. Sometimes a vigorous discussion and investigation is needed if we are to take shelter under the words of Truth given us by a gracious God. Luke 1:35 should be entirely sufficient as underpinning for the greatest of all questions, the identity and origin of Jesus as the Son of God, certainly not God the Son. There is only one God, not two or three (1 Cor. 8:4-6). Jesus is the virginally begotten Son, unique as the second Adam, the beginning of the New Creation of man, the Lord Messiah (Ps. 110:1; Luke 2:11). By rebirth, regeneration, under the power of Truth, we must experience our "divine begetting."

It is valuable to look up the various appearances of the word "born, begotten of God" in the epistles of John and see how that writer loved to proclaim Jesus as the Christ, the begotten Son of God (1 John 5:18, not KJV) and Christians as "having been begotten" by God (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18a; 18b speaks of Jesus).

A Caution

Certain modern paraphrased Bibles make it almost impossible to capture the information that the Son of God was begotten, brought into existence, in the womb of Mary two thousand years ago: For example the *Living New Testament* in John 1:1 takes enormous liberties: "Before anything else existed, there was Christ with God. He has always been alive and is Himself God. He created everything there is…" This is not at all what the text says! Readers should consult either a Greek interlinear or a sober rendering of the original such as the NASU. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God." John said nothing about the *Son of God* in the beginning. He spoke of the word or wisdom, God's grand design.

Even the capital letter on Word is illegitimate, since it does not appear in the original. Nor is it right to read "all things were made through *him*." That also is not required by the Greek original. John did not write "in the beginning was the **Son of God**, Jesus." He referred to Genesis as a preparation for announcing the **beginning of the Son** when the word, or mind, intelligence, plan of God, was embodied in the human Messiah (John 1:14), who, as Luke and Matthew had so well described, **came into existence** as the unique Son by the unique creative miracle in Mary.✧

Moses and Elijah in the Transfiguration

Is the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration, as recorded in Matthew 17:1-9, proof positive that those two men were alive, enjoying immortality and that they have thus continued alive in heaven to this day?

If this were an isolated passage of Scripture, it might lend strong support to that view. But it must be read in its context. It is tied immediately to verses 27 and 28 of the preceding chapter: "The Son of man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he will reward every man in accordance with his works. Truly I tell you, There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of man coming in his Kingdom."

"After six days [Luke: 'About eight days *after these words*') Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to a high mountain, and he was transfigured before them. His face was shining like the sun, and his garments were white as light."

A Preview

This scene was a preview of Christ appearing in the glory of his future kingdom, just as scenes from a coming movie are flashed on the screen for the viewers' information. It was prophecy, in picture. It was a scene plucked out of the far distant future. It has not happened yet. Christ has *not yet* appeared in glory with his angels; he has not yet raised the dead or conferred immortality on the living believers; he has not yet rewarded every disciple in accordance with his works. But the promise of his future coming to inaugurate the Kingdom is sure. "Behold, I am coming quickly; and my reward is with me, to give everyone according to his activity" (Rev. 22:12).

The transfiguration was intended to give Peter, James, and John (and us) a brief sketch of the glory of Christ's Second Coming, when they, as well as all believers (including Moses and Elijah), will rule on earth with Christ (Rev. 5:10). "When Christ, who is

our life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4). "Glory" is a synonym for the coming glorious Kingdom.

Peter later commented on this amazing episode. He had been a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also a partaker of the glory to be revealed (1 Pet. 5:1). That Kingdom was still future when Peter wrote this perhaps in 60 AD. It is still future today. But it will come at God's appointed time (Acts 17:31), and it will catch most of the world unaware (Luke 12:39, 40; I Thess. 5:2, 3).

Eyewitnesses of His Majesty

After the first terrifying moments, Peter knew that he was experiencing a brief picture of Christ's coming and Kingdom. Addressing all believers some 35 years later he said, "We have not followed cleverly devised myths, when we made known to you the power and coming [Parousia, Second Coming] of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty when we were with him in the holy mountain" (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

That the transfiguration was a *vision* which vanished away, and not an actual, concrete appearance of Moses and Elijah, is proved by Christ's words in Matthew 17:9: "As they came down from the mountain Jesus charged them, saying, 'Tell **the vision** [*orama*] to no one, until the Son of man has risen from the dead.'"

For the moment Moses and Elijah and all the faithful of all the ages are resting in the "sleep of death." The dead "know nothing" (Ecc. 9:5) and have no consciousness of events in history. The next *conscious* second after falling asleep in death the faithful will awake to immortality in the Kingdom of God destined to begin on earth worldwide when Jesus comes back (Dan. 12:2, 13) (Jeanette Reeves, *The Restitution Herald*, July 1971).✧

Thinking Clearly about Salvation

"The doctrine of salvation requires clear thinking," Mr. H.W. Armstrong wrote in a 1963 article, "Millions of People Do Not Know What Jesus Christ Really Was" reprinted in the *Journal* of July 31, 2003. But did Mr. Armstrong achieve clarity in his attempt to show the meaning of the atonement and who Jesus is?

The premise laid out by Armstrong is that a human Jesus could pay the death penalty for *only one* other human being. "No one *human* being could save mankind."

With this rather grandiose proposition, unsupported by Scripture, Mr. Armstrong seems to have contradicted Paul, who wrote: "There is One God, and one Mediator between God and man, *the man* Messiah Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

If God appoints a man, the uniquely begotten Son of God, to die for the sins of the world, it would be our wisdom to accept that fact on faith and not argue with it. A spotless lamb, Jesus, if God so ordains, is entirely sufficient for the task of saving the human race (1 Pet. 1:19, 20). God is the one to dictate who may or may not save mankind from death.

Armstrong wrote also, "God cannot die." "Therefore it was necessary for there to be one who was both human and divine." He followed this with the astonishing application of 1 Timothy 6:16 — actually a reference to the Father — to *Jesus*, who it is claimed "only has immortality." Armstrong then says that effective atonement for mankind required "*the life of God*, the life of the Creator."

Mr. Armstrong declared that Jesus was "translated into flesh and born of the Virgin Mary." Jesus was then, said Armstrong, "*God* made mortal human flesh." The result was that "he who *had been God* was changed into human flesh with all its weaknesses."

This is an amazing proposition! The immortal God gave up being immortal. What sort of God is that?

It is very clear that Mr. Armstrong has not solved the problem he poses. On the one hand the death of a human being, he says, is insufficient to save. On the other hand Jesus stopped being God when he became a man! So then the one who died (since God cannot die) was a man! On Mr. Armstrong's premises the death of Jesus was a gigantic failure, because the one who died (God cannot die) was not in fact, *at the time*, God but a human being! And one human being does not qualify, Armstrong had said, to atone for the sins of the world.

The Jesus described by Armstrong was both God and not God. He had been God, but was no longer God when he became a man. The one "who only has immortality" (Jesus, according to Mr. Armstrong) was able to give up immortality in order to die. In so doing the former God was no longer God. As a man he died. But *the whole point* of Mr. Armstrong's argument, laid out at the beginning, was that the death of a human being was inadequate!

The biblical solution which eluded Mr. Armstrong is that Jesus was a *begotten human being* (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35; I John 5:18b, not KJV; Ps. 2:7). Since the Son was *begotten* — meaning that he came into existence — he was not God. There is only one Eternal God, and that one God is said to be the Father, hundreds of times in the Bible.

The Creator God, Father of Jesus, ordained that His uniquely begotten, sinless Son achieve the purpose assigned to him, which was to preach the Kingdom of God and then to die on behalf of all of us. Once the Father is proclaimed as the One and only true God (John 17:3; I Cor. 8:4-6) and Jesus is seen as the *human, begotten* Son of the one God — *adoni*, "my [human] lord," not *Adonai* in Psalm 110:1 — there is no difficulty at all with his death, a death so valuable in the sight of God that it redeems us from our sins, provided of course that we obey the Son (John 3:36) by believing his Gospel of the Kingdom. Listening to God's amazing Son the common people marveled that God had given such authority to *men* (Matt. 9:8).✧

Comments

"After slowly digesting your book on the *Self-Inflicted Wound* in Christianity, I want to thank you for the wonderful insights. This book, plus other articles from your site, has given me a marvelous picture of our Heavenly Father and His Anointed One. The Scriptures are clear and simple, especially looking at them as they are, instead of looking at them via creeds or traditions of the churches. Thank you that our Heavenly Father has used you to do His work for His Kingdom!" — *Finland*

"I'm so grateful to you for writing that book on the Trinity, *Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*. You have no idea: It really opened up for me a new, magnificent world of truth. I will do all I can to make it possible for my friends in Italy to read it too and receive the blessings that come from knowing and understanding the truth about God and His Son." — *New Jersey*

"I have your book *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound* and have enjoyed it and used it as a constant reference. It has been a great help to me in my journey to find the truth." — *Oregon*

"I was an Evangelist of the Gospel of the Assemblies of God for 30 years here in the Philippines. However in July 2002 Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting conducted a seminar in Cebu City which emphasized the Kingdom of God, who is Jesus and other topics. My mind was open, especially to the teaching of monotheism, One God. Therefore I studied deeply about the Promise of the Kingdom, that we are going to inherit the land not 'go to heaven,' which I believed before because it was the teaching of the Trinitarians. Now I believe that 'inheriting heaven' is absolutely false. I would like to thank God for using Anthony Buzzard and his companion for spreading this teaching all over the world, that the people may understand the written word of God. We must study the Bible with extra care so that we may not be misled. I challenge those who believe the teaching of the Triune God and Three Persons to carefully search the Truth so that they may not be misled. Today I am not afraid to share and teach this insight, even if some will be surprised upon hearing it. Thank you and God bless you." — *Peter and Harold Guzmana may be contacted at Restoration Fellowship, Box 59, Cebu City 6000, PHILIPPINES*

"I heard your book mentioned on a radio program and I was unable to put it down. Everything began to make perfect sense. I have explored other authors and writers and they all added something. Now my favorite verse is John 17:3 (all of chapter 17 is good, but verse 3 nails it down). I went through the whole emotional trip of feeling betrayed by Christianity, lied to. Then I got over it. The truth is always a breath of fresh air. I can relax now, study and learn and believe. Thanks for all you do to help folks like myself. As to others, yes my entire family has joined me on the journey, as well as many others we speak to. Some are receptive and others not so much. I give them time." — *Oregon*

"We don't get tired of thanking you for your magnificent magazine. It is like candy to my soul. It fortifies it and enriches it spiritual-wise with divine word from God. Your materials are reaching us well. Do not worry if we're not writing you to notify you of this. We have been in difficulties such as floods and hunger since 1999, but God is great and to be praised because we are alive, some of us." — *Malawi*

Thirteenth Annual Theological Conference
April 23-25, 2004, McDonough, Georgia

Preparations are under way for our annual gathering of all who rejoice in the One God of Israel and in His Son, the Messiah. We are expecting increased numbers and are proposing to hold the meetings a few miles south of Atlanta Bible College in the new facilities recently built for Cornerstone Church of God. We are grateful to Pastor David Riley for making this fine building available. Visitors are expected from Austria, Australia and the UK, and we invite all those of you who kindly read *Focus on the Kingdom* each month.