

EDITORIAL

Churchmen of all stripes frequently complain about disunity among Christians. The current ecumenical movement seeks to find ways of neutralizing contemporary denominational divisions and contentions by finding elements of faith on which all believers in Christ can agree. The question is, Does such a version of faith, an irreducible minimum, reflect the “faith once delivered” of the New Testament documents?

If churchmen desire a common meeting point for differing denominations, why should they not consider with all seriousness the classic words of Gabriel delivered to Mary? When angels speak they are concise and logical. Each of their words must be carefully weighed and every ounce of information extracted. Replying to Mary’s very reasonable objection that she was as yet unmarried, Gabriel declared, “holy spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason indeed the holy child to be begotten will be called Son of God.”

It is the thesis of this Journal that this Christological statement be taken as the true basis for identifying who Jesus is, as well as a unifying, rallying point for all denominations. Why not? The message is simple and clear. The Son of God of Gabriel’s announcement is none other than a divinely created Son of God, coming into existence as son in his mother’s womb. All other claimants to divine Sonship and Messiahship may safely be discounted. A “Son of God” who is the *natural* son of Joseph could not, on the evidence of Gabriel, be the Messiah. Such a person would not answer to the Son who is son on the basis of a unique divine intervention in the biological chain. Equally false to Gabriel’s definition of the Son of God would be a son who preexisted his conception. Such a son could not possibly correspond to the Messiah presented by Gabriel, one whose existence is predicated on a creative act on the part of the Father. In preexistence Christology, the main plank of Trinitarianism, a conception/begetting in Mary’s womb does not bring about the existence of God’s Son. According to Gabriel it *does*.

No need for centuries of complex wrangling over words. All that is required is belief of the angelic communication: “For this reason precisely (*dio kai*) — the creative miracle of God through His divine power — the child will be Son of God.” For no other reason, for this reason only.

As the center of a new ecumenism this simple truth has the backing of those many scholars who know well that Luke and Matthew show no sign of believing in a pre-human eternal Son of God. Raymond Brown’s magisterial treatment of

the birth narratives in his *Birth of the Messiah* makes a major point of the fact that neither Matthew nor Luke believed in the Incarnation of a prehistoric Son.

Commenting on Luke 1:35, “therefore,” Raymond Brown says, “of the nine times *dio kai* occurs in the New Testament, three are in Luke/Acts. It involves a certain causality and Lyonnet (in his *L’Annonciation*, 61.6) points out that this has embarrassed many orthodox theologians since in preexistence Christology 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...And so I cannot follow those theologians who try to avoid the causal connotation in the ‘therefore’ which begins this line, by arguing that for Luke the conception of the child does not bring the Son of God into being.” Brown insists on Gabriel’s clear picture of Christ: “We are dealing with the begetting of God’s Son in the womb of Mary through God’s creative spirit.”¹

The Son of God, Messiah and Savior, is defined in precise theological terms by Gabriel, laying the foundation of the whole New Testament and fulfilling the promises of the Old. Christians should unite around the clear portrait of Jesus presented by Gabriel. Jesus is the Son of God on one basis only, his miraculous coming into existence in Mary’s womb.

The “divinity” of Jesus has no other foundation, and a Jesus who claims to be Son of God for any other reason should be rejected. A natural son of Joseph cannot qualify as the Messiah, nor can a person whose existence did not originate in his mother’s womb by a divine creative miracle.

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¹ *The Birth of the Messiah*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977, 291, 312.