

## EDITORIAL

# Jesus the Human Messiah

“Oh, so you think Jesus was just a man.” Biblical unitarians frequently meet with this initial reaction. Underlying the objection is the feeling that we have demoted Jesus Christ far below his biblical rank.

Biblical unitarians think of Jesus as the unique Son of God. We claim that this is precisely the confession of Peter, when, with emphatic approval of Jesus himself, he declared the Savior to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God (Matt. 16:16-18).

Trinitarians have been conditioned to believe that the addition of “Son of the Living God” lifts Peter’s declaration above the Messianic categories into the loftier realms of historic orthodoxy. They then claim to be espousing a “high Christology.” Unfortunately it is “higher” than the terms of the New Testament allow.

“Son of God” is the title which merely amplifies the description of Jesus as the Messiah. In the highly charged atmosphere of first-century Palestine Psalm 2 would provide a clear basis for identifying the Lord Messiah with God’s Son and His King. These are the terms of reference within which the identity of Jesus is to be understood. 2 Samuel 7:14 similarly points to the descendant of David as “My Son.” Son here designates the chosen King of the future. Again, there is no hint of God’s Son being the metaphysical eternal Son of Trinitarianism.

Peter’s confession echoes the phrase found in Hosea (1:10) who describes the time when Israel, or rather a remnant of Israel, will be finally entitled to be called “sons of the living God.” How appropriate that Jesus should represent that ideal Israel and bear its Messianic title “Son of the living God.” How appropriate that Christians, as companions of the Messiah, also bear the name “son of God” (Gal. 3:26). When Mark and Luke record the creed of Peter they do not even need to add the explanatory phrase “Son of God.” It is sufficient to say that Jesus is the Christ or the Christ of God (Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20), parallel to the Lord’s Anointed (Christ) and the Messianic King of Psalm 2.

“Son of God” and “Christ” are virtually synonymous ways of describing the promised King of Hebrew prophecy. Such language is common to Herod and his rabbinical advisors (Matt. 2:2-6), to the high priest and Jesus (Matt. 26:63,

64), as well as to John's early introduction of the Savior of the world as Christ/Son and King of Israel (John 1:34, 41, 49).

Stretching the confession of Peter to include the notion that Jesus was an eternal Person within the Being of the One God is anachronistic and lifts Jesus out of his Hebraic environment, where he remains the Jewish Savior, graciously offering salvation to the whole world.

The prophets of Israel looked for a descendant of King David to be the Messianic deliverer of Israel, who would bring peace and harmony to the earth. They were not expecting a heavenly being to descend and enter the womb of a woman. The Messiah would be a biological heir of David, though conceived in some wonderful way. The Messiah of Israel was never thought of as an apolitical figure. His reign would introduce an era of complete restoration, political and spiritual. The whole point of the Second Coming of Jesus is that it will produce a political upheaval, replacing the present world kingdoms with the revolutionary Messianic government of Jesus and the saints of all ages.

Under the umbrella of his central theme, the Kingdom of God, Jesus proclaimed his solidarity with the Hebraic dream and vision of "the age to come." That age will be introduced only by a cataclysm involving the Day of the Lord, the restoration of Jerusalem and a new Messianic world order. To that future the Gospel invites all who will believe and commit themselves to the Good News (Mark 1:14, 15). God speaks to the present from the future, exerting His creative activity in the "Word about the Kingdom" (Matt. 13:19), the intelligent reception of which launches the disciple into the Christian journey.

— *Anthony F. Buzzard*