

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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The Simplicity of the Biblical Creed of Jesus

It appears to us that the public gets a raw deal when they are asked to believe (on pain of heresy) that “there is One God,” and yet, puzzlingly, that there are really two or (most commonly) *three* who are God. This makes no sense to the pew-sitter as may be found out by gently probing his grasp of that mysterious belief. It is a fact that the ordinary churchgoer is told he *must* — at the risk of losing salvation — believe that God is three, and that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are all equally God. Without further unpacking, such a statement amounts to logical nonsense (as more sophisticated believers in the Triune God admit). Three “x”s cannot equal one “x.” At no time during your exercise of the precious gift of communication and speech did you say: “This is a car. This is a car. This is a car, but this is really one car.” To assert that “the Father is God, Jesus is God, the Holy Spirit is God, but there is only one God” carries no recognizable meaning. It posits nothing that the mind can grasp. It is an insult to ask people to believe it. God does not expect us to crucify logic in the interests of piety.

The Bible does not propose that God is three and yet one. Proponents of the ancient post-biblical creeds that God is three-in-one attempt to ease the tension by telling us that God is one “what” (essence) in “three who’s” (persons). In this way one “x” can be three “y”s and logical nonsense is avoided. But at what cost to the plain teachings of the Bible? At what cost, indeed, to common sense and the ordinary meaning of simple words?

The word “God” appears in Scripture multiple thousands of times. In no single case can you demonstrate that “God” means “God in three Persons.” The Triune God does not therefore get a mention in the Bible. He (they?) is (are?) alien to its pages. It is therefore a considerable blot on the history of the Church that noble students of the Bible have been killed by “orthodoxy” because they were not willing to subscribe to a view of God they did not find in the Bible. (The murder of Michael Servetus by reformer John Calvin is the classic case. Servetus

conscientiously objected to what he saw as an unscriptural dogma.)

The issue of who God is is really not difficult, provided one is prepared to abandon some traditional baggage and look squarely at what Scripture says.

Thousands upon thousands of times God or the LORD (Yahweh) appears under *singular* personal pronouns, “I” “Me,” “Him,” etc. The normal meaning of words is the medium of communication which God uses to inform us. It should be no problem to recognize that since God has a singular name Yahweh (6,700 times always followed by singular verbs) and since He is an “I” over and over again, He must be One singular Person. (This is what the singular personal pronoun in language is designed to communicate.)

God declares Himself to be *alone* in His unique class. He is solo — one undifferentiated, individual Divine Person. Here is how He used every known technique of language to convey that fact — a fact which is tragically blocked by traditional dogmas about His threeness.

No Jew has ever had the slightest difficulty in comprehending these statements about who God is:

“For this reason, Thou [singular personal pronoun] art great, O Lord God, for there is **none like Thee** and there is **no God besides Thee**” (II Sam. 7:22). “So that all the prophets of the earth may know that the LORD is God; **there is no one else**” (I Kings 8:60). “O LORD, there is **none like Thee**, neither is there any God besides Thee” (I Chron. 17:20). “Sabeans will make supplication to you, Surely God is with you, and **there is no other God**” (Isa. 45:14). “There is **none like Thee, O LORD**” (Jer. 10:6).

It would be a miracle of Scripture twisting to suggest that Paul thought otherwise. He uses exactly this Old Testament language about who that One God is, in an expressly credal statement: As distinct from pagans who believe that God is more than one, Paul declared in I Corinthians 8:4-6: “There is **no God but one**. For even if there are so-called gods whether in

In This Issue

The Seed of Indestructible Life.....5
John 1: A Preexisting Purpose Not Person.....7

heaven or on the earth, as indeed there are so-called gods and many lords, yet for us there is but **One God, the Father...**" He went on to speak of the one *Lord Messiah*, Jesus. But he defined the One God, as opposed to the many gods, as "**One God, the Father.**" With equal clarity he penned this creed in I Timothy 2:5: "There is **one God** and one mediator between God and man, *the man* Messiah Jesus." Here again, just as in I Corinthians 8:4-6 his definition of the One God is complete in the term *Father. Jesus is the man who mediates between that One God, the Father, and the human race. Paul's creed contains one God and one Man.*

If we were to combine the Old Testament and the New Testament information, allowing the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament, we would arrive at this proposition: "There is no other God besides One, no one else. There is no God beside Thee; there is no God but one; there is One God, **the Father.**"

Can any reader really assert that, after all, "there is One God in *three* Persons"? The Father, as we all know, is One Person. And He is the One God of the Bible in these verses. He is the One and only God of the Old Testament and the New.

We can tabulate the information further:

The God of the Bible is called "the one/only true God." All others who claim that title are false gods.

"As for many days, Israel was without **the true God** and without a teaching priest and without law" (II Chron. 15:3). "But the LORD is **the true God**" (Jer. 10:10).

Now how did Jesus, the pioneer of the Christian faith, read these verses? Who, according to him, is that one and only, true God?

"**Father**,... Life eternal consists in this: that they come to know **you, the only true God**" (John 17:1-3). He then went on to mention himself as distinct from that Only True God. Jesus called himself the *Messiah*. **John wrote his whole book with one great objective: to get us to believe that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of God" (20:31).**

Paul followed Jesus. "You turned to God from idols to serve **the living and true God**, and to wait for His Son from Heaven" (I Thess. 1:9, 10). Once again the category of One God is confined to the Father of Jesus. Jesus is excluded from that category. He is the *Son* of God, the man Messiah (I Tim. 2:5). I John 5:20, 21 similarly tells us that we are in union with the One True God, by being in union with His Son. As Henry Alford points out in his celebrated commentary, it would be amazing to think that I John 5:20, 21

meant anything different from John 17:3: The Father of Jesus is *the only true God*.

Indeed we can validly translate John 17:3 as follows: "You, Father, are **the only one who is truly God.**" Jesus said the same thing in John 5:44: He referred to the Father as "**the one who alone is God.**"

Do we really need an army of experts to tell us what these transparently clear creedal statements mean? Should we not be alarmed at any who would disturb the beautiful simplicity of Jesus' and Paul's creed? Jesus, by the way, celebrated and repeated his view of who God is, when he addressed the Father in prayer as "the one who alone is truly God" (John 17:3). Such a Savior should attract Jews, Muslims and Bible-searching Christians. For too long the post-biblical philosophical complexities and wranglings over "essence" and "hypostases," "what" and "who's" have made the Bible inaccessible to many.

The Old Testament view of God as a single individual continues as the backbone of New Testament Scripture. "There is none besides God" in the Old Testament becomes "None besides the Father" in the New Testament (I Cor. 8:4-6). The **only true God** is defined by Jesus in the New Testament as **his Father**, as distinct from himself as the Messiah (John 17:3).

No discussion of who God is should ever overlook the massively important oracle in Psalm 110:1. This verse is alluded to some 23 times in the New Testament. It is *the* Apostolic proof text *par excellence*. It addressed the all-important relationship of the One God to His Son, the Messiah.

"The LORD said to my [David's] lord: 'Sit at my right hand...'" Two separate and distinct individuals are presented here. There is not a hint of any complexity as found in the post-biblical discussions about God. The LORD in Psalm 110:1 is Yahweh and he speaks to another than Himself. That other is not God. If that other were God also, that would make *two* Gods and the Scripture would be broken. Polytheism in a subtle form would have intruded. Such is the ultimate theological disaster.

The meticulous copying of the Old Testament by generations of Jewish scribes ensured an accurate text of the Bible. The second lord in Psalm 110:1 is *adoni*, "my lord." "My lord" (misleadingly capitalized in some translations of the Bible, but happily not in the RV, RSV, NRSV) means a person who is not God. How do we know this? The Bible in the Old Testament carefully tells us, when the title Lord appears, whether the subject is God or man. When the Lord means God, the Hebrew word is *Adonai* (449 times). When the subject is not God, but man or occasionally an angel, the word is

adoni (195 times). The Messiah in Psalm 110:1 is in the *category of man*, not God (so Paul follows the Psalm exactly in I Tim. 2:5). Paul also speaks of “*One Lord Messiah*” (I Cor. 8:6). But let it never be forgotten that he has already concluded that “there is one God, the Father.”

Jesus is indeed the one Lord Messiah (see Luke 2:11). Believing that he is the Messiah, not that he is God, is the key to being successfully grounded in the faith. No wonder that Jesus was delighted when Peter acknowledged him as **the Messiah** (Matt. 16:16-18). Peter went on to quote Psalm 110:1 when he taught the public that Jesus is **Lord** (Acts 2:34-36). Jesus is *Lord in the sense provided by Psalm 110:1*. Peter’s inspired sermons are wonderfully clear and free of the much later struggles over God being three. The texts we started with are completely without ambiguity. Language has no other way of telling us that the Father of Jesus is the absolute sovereign of the universe, the only true God. There is only one God, and that One God is the Father of Jesus.

That is the biblical creed, and unity amongst the divided churches will be under way when this great truth is restored to worship and teaching. Widespread Christian re-attachment to the creed of Jesus, the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4, which he quoted and emphasized as the most important of all the commandments in Mark 12:28ff., will bring new life to the church. The Jewish roots of Jesus require that the central doctrine of God be reexamined in the light of Jesus’ Hebrew background.

With this one major point about Jesus’ and Paul’s monotheistic statements making **God the Father the One God and the Only God**, let us consider the evidence which is customarily mounted against this major point (above).

It is only by negating the plain language of John 17:3, I Corinthians 8:4-6 and I Timothy 2:5 that a Triune God can be promoted. In the interest of absolutely clarity we invite you to rehearse again the following New Testament statements: You, **Father**, are the **only one** who is truly God (John 17:3). There is **one God, the Father** (I Cor. 8:4-6). To the **Only God**, through Jesus Messiah (Jude 25).¹ There is **one God** and one mediator between that One God and man, the man Messiah Jesus (I Tim. 2:5). Why do you call me [Jesus] good? None is good except the One

¹ Note how the contrast is lost in the corrupted text from which the KJV is translated. “Through Jesus Christ our Lord” belongs in the true text and is restored by modern versions.

God. The Lord our **God is one Lord** (Mark 12:29, quoting Deut. 6:4). Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one (Gal 3:20). You believe that God is one: you do well. To the **only wise God**, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 16:27). The glory that comes from the **one who alone is God** (John 5:44). The Lord said to my lord (Ps. 110:1; Matt. 22:44, etc.)

It is beyond argument that in these passages God is deliberately distinguished from Jesus Christ. The evidence shows, says Arthur Wainwright in his detailed examination of *The Trinity in the New Testament*, “that God was regarded as one, and the One God was believed to be the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Statements of this nature hardly seem to provide fruitful ground for the growth of the Trinity.” He goes on to examine other verses which he claims “lead immediately to the Trinitarian problem” (pp. 41, 42).

It should be clear that the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus — the claim that he also is the True God — inevitably contradicts the obvious sense of the texts we have so far cited.

The statements we have cited are those which occur in passages which deliberately address the issue of who God is and who the Son is in relation to the Father. This **primary evidence** is the very evidence which our opponents tend to ignore almost entirely.

Thus, in a lengthy treatise on the Trinity, Robert Morey defends the doctrine that God is One. But he then quotes part only of Paul’s definition of who that one God is. Paul said, “There is one God, **the Father**.” Robert Morey stops Paul in mid-sentence and quotes only, “There is one God” (I Cor. 8:6) (*The Trinity: Evidence and Issues*, p. 65).

Astonishingly in the course of 587 pages he makes no reference at all to Psalm 110:1 which is the favorite proof text of the Apostles and quoted in a final conversation by Jesus (Matt. 22:41-46). In that Psalm, not only is Jesus not Yahweh, he is placed in the category of one who is *not God*, not *Adonai* (Lord God) but *adoni* (human master). Why is this telling evidence allowed no voice? The answer must be that it is impossible to reconcile it with the post-biblical creeds. It is the heart of the Jewish and New Testament understanding of God in relation to His Messiah, as is Psalm 2, where the begetting of the Son is in history (v. 7).

This contradicts another major building block in the post-biblical view of Jesus — that he was without beginning, “eternally begotten,” a phrase which has as little meaning as a “square circle” or a triangle with four sides. You cannot be begotten and yet have no beginning! Matthew knew of no such dogma. He

recorded the angel's message in regard to the origin of the Son of God, that "what is begotten in Mary is from the holy spirit" (Matt. 1:20). That is a begetting *in history*, not in eternity. The Bible has not one word to say about any begetting of the Son in eternity. Gabriel in Luke 1:35 similarly traces the origin of the Son — his begetting by the Father — to the miracle in the womb of his mother. That miracle is the *cause of* the title Son of God for Jesus. The angel has nothing to say about a Son of God already existing and passing *through* Mary into the world. Jesus, as the Son of God, originates *in* his mother (Matt. 1:20).

But notice this: By 150 AD some Christian writers had lost track of the simple biblical creed and began to speak of the Son of God as arranging his own conception and passing *through* Mary. With this fatal twist the historical human being who was Jesus began to fade from view. A pre-human Jesus is not a human Jesus, however much one may assert that he is "fully man." What most churchgoers do not know is that the official dogma about Jesus makes him (and we quote) "man" (possessing what was astonishingly called "impersonal human nature") but not "*a* man." John warned his readers about any attempt to undermine the human Messiah (I John 4:2; II John 7). Is someone who is "man" but not "*a* man" really a human person?

It is hard to see how a "half-dead" Jesus can qualify as the Savior who died for the sins of everyone. According to the official post-biblical dogmas of the Church, enshrined in the constitutions of nearly all churches, "Jesus *is* God." The Bible states that "only God has immortality" (I Tim. 6:16). Immortal persons cannot die. If Jesus is God he cannot by definition die. It is a desperate move to resort to the quibble that part of Jesus died only, the human part. A half-dead Jesus did not die. The whole New Testament point about Jesus is that he is the Messiah, the Son of God and the *second* Adam. Being man, he is mortal. In that capacity he can truly die. If he were God, a proposition excluded by the texts we have cited, he could not die. As second Adam he comes later than the first Adam. The creeds throw this fact into confusion by proposing that the Son *preceded* Adam in time. In fact Jesus is the last Adam (I Cor. 15:45).

The New Testament, fulfilling the Old Testament promises that the Messiah would be a descendant of David (II Sam. 7:14-16), the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) and one who is not Yahweh but His human and unique **prophet** (Deut. 18:15-18, see Acts 3:22; 7:37), presents our Savior as the man Messiah (I Tim. 2:5).

He is the perfect visible image of the invisible God. To have seen him is to have "seen" God. No one has actually seen God at any time (John 1:18). He is invisible. In Jesus we see the perfect reflection of the God of the universe, the Messiah's Father.

1325 occurrences of the word "God" designate the Father in the New Testament. On a very rare occasion the Messiah can receive a divine title as the representative of his Father, the One God. Human beings of supreme status are entitled sometimes to divine titles (Ps. 82:6 quoted in John 10:33-36).

A recent article in *US News and World Report* (April 16, 2001) refers to a view which in post-biblical times was called a "heresy." This was the belief that "only the Father was God." That view, espoused by a minority over the centuries, was advocated in Rome by one Theodotus, the tanner. He represented a view which rejected the idea that both the Father and the Son could be equally God. To call two Persons the one God would mean a fragmenting of God into two. Objectors to the creed which later prevailed as orthodoxy — and which was coercively imposed on dissenters even by use of the death penalty — claimed that "only the Father is God." Precisely. But that is exactly what Jesus had said: "You, Father, are the only one who is truly God" (John 17:3). Jesus rehearsed that most unifying of all beliefs in his final public prayer, truly "the Lord's prayer." What Jesus uttered as his creed was echoed by a minority of brave believers throughout the centuries. For their departure from the "orthodox" insistence that God was in fact "three," they sometimes paid with their lives.

Readers should consider carefully how far Jesus would be welcome in contemporary congregations with his very Jewish creed that "the Father is the only true God." It is rather shattering to think that the constitution of most churches would actually prevent Jesus from holding office. But then, Jesus would also not have been able to sign a pledge never to drink alcohol! He turned 120 gallons of water into fine wine. (Some have attempted an equal miracle by turning that wine into grape juice! Others declare with equal authority that the wine is actually the very blood of Jesus.)

At the root of our theological and ecclesiastical problems is the vice-like grip of tradition which makes the Bible hard to read. Recent surveys note that the public is less and less familiar with Scripture, and thus less and less in touch with the mind of the Messiah, the holy spirit (I Cor. 2:16; Acts 16:7). It took the comedian, Jay Leno, to bring this to our attention. When he asked his audience to name one of the Ten

Commandments, someone offered this: “God helps those who help themselves.” An observer of the Christian scene, a professor from Emory University, noted that the public does not engage the text of Scripture in a sustained way, though people know some isolated facts. They do not grasp the message of the Bible, because they are not reading it as a regular, life-long discipline — studying it. And they are not learning it apparently in church.

An essay provided by the new edition of the *Oxford Annotated Bible* observes that though the Bible is reputedly a bestseller, it resides in many homes as some sort of sacred relic. It is not consulted as the unique source of communication from the Creator to His wayward creatures. The Bible warns often that lip service and half-hearted attention to Jesus will suffice to save no one. The biblical offer of Jesus to show us the way to indestructible life is far less valued than the latest in Christian or other entertainment. Apparently we have not yet taken our mortality seriously enough to warrant a thorough examination of how immortality may be secured. Only Jesus had that secret. ✧

The Seed of Indestructible Life

Spring reminds us again that new life arises from seeds. Indeed we owe our very existence to the seed which contributed to our formation in the womb. The science of human reproduction has been studied exhaustively. But how much information is available when it comes to the question of the gaining of life for ever? Jesus was in the “immortality” business (his services were offered free), as were his Apostles. Together they conducted a tireless campaign. They were in fact inviting the public to adopt God’s program for the securing of life in perpetuity.

The search for the elixir of life has proven futile. Freezing a corpse with a view to unfreezing it in the future will yield nothing but disappointment. The teaching of Jesus, however, is guaranteed to succeed. Endowed with a unique grasp of the secret of the universe and of life itself, he set out to teach the way to perpetual existence. Here is how he did it.

He came with a **message**, a Gospel, an idea sown as **seed** in the mind of those intelligent enough to recognize that he was the purveyor of the priceless instruction which leads to indestructible life. Jesus’ formula for unending existence (to be gained in full only at the resurrection when Jesus comes back) was

not complex. “What you have to do,” he pleaded, raising his voice (Luke 8:8), “is listen to me! I am the possessor of the ultimate secret, God’s scheme for conferring immortality on mortal humans. Here is how the program works. You must believe what I say.” (For further information the entire illustration of **the seed**, the sower and the soils should be pondered. It is found in Matt. 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8). Jesus then laid out the process. He invited his audience to believe him in regard to the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:19). The Kingdom of God is the name, well understood in biblical times, for the utopian world which God has guaranteed will ultimately come to this earth. It is the Golden Age about which the Prophets of Israel sang constantly. It is the world in which “all wars will stop” (Isa. 2:4, NLT), in which even the violence of wild animals will be curbed. It will produce a drug-free, divorce-free society living in harmony and unspeakable joy.

To qualify for a place in that coming revolutionary government of God, the Kingdom of God, human beings must first believe that it is coming (Mark 1:14, 15). They must believe the words of Jesus — which is the meaning of the word “faith” — and then they must, with God’s assisting presence through His spirit, bring their lives into line with the requirements needed for entry into the Kingdom when it comes. The abandonment of all violence *now* is an essential part of the life-pattern to be adopted by would-be candidates for salvation in the coming Kingdom. The church must demonstrate in advance that human beings can coexist, even across national barriers, in unity and brotherhood.

The energy needed to embark on this immortality program is provided by the creative “word” or Message, the Message of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19; I Thess. 2:13), proclaimed and explained by Jesus. That word is in fact nothing less than a vitalizing seed (Luke 8:11) which with our cooperation and eager reception is sown in our hearts. That seed, being the very life of God Himself (I Pet. 1:21), generates in us the new life which is the germ of immortality. God actually imparts his own immunity from death to us mortals — by means of this seed/message/word of the Kingdom. Thus we become children of God, born again through the medium of the word of the Gospel of the Kingdom (James 1:18; John 3:5)

Before the flood a ghastly parody of this immortality program was attempted. Some of the “Sons of God” (angels, see the other occurrences of the same expression in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Dan. 3:25; Ps. 29:1; 89:6), acting at the instigation of the supremely wicked Angel, the Devil, cohabited with human females

(“daughters of men”), and mingled their “seed” with that of mankind to produce a hybrid race of terrifying and terrorizing giants (Gen. 6:1-6; Num. 13:33. See Jude 6 and II Pet. 2:4). These awful creatures are remembered as the heroes of classical Greek mythology.

This daring wickedness — a fearful interference with the Creator’s intentions — called forth the flood which destroyed all but eight persons. Severe limits were imposed on the capacity of man to survive. Far from attaining immortality, he was to last a mere 120 years (Gen. 6:3).

The immortality program of Jesus through his word/Gospel/seed seeks the reproduction of holy understanding and character fit for the attainment of life for ever. The process has nothing to do with the physical, the sexual, but it involves a radical process of rethinking, repentance, and a new birth. The vital, creative seed is the Gospel as Jesus preached it (Luke 8:11). That seed transmits the incorruptible life of God Himself (I Pet. 1:21-25) and plants within the believer something of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4; I John 3:8). Peter, remembering the parable of the sower and the seed links rebirth to the reception of the Gospel preached by the Master of the immortality Plan (I Pet. 1:25).

The Devil, ever intent on wrecking the divine enterprise, concentrates his efforts on the suppression of the information about the seed of immortality. Wherever that precious word is proclaimed, the Devil is poised to snatch the vitalizing seed from the grasp of human minds, “so that they may not believe it [the Kingdom Gospel, Matt. 13:19] and be saved” (Luke 8:12). Jesus’ remark here provides the most brilliant of all commentaries on reality as it truly is. The battle is on for the life or death of mankind. The battle is waged over the knowledge of the secret of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:11).

To be saved is to be rescued from the clutches of death and to acquire life in perpetuity as a co-regent in the Golden Age of the Kingdom to be inaugurated on a renewed earth when the Messiah returns. And his return “at the end of the age” (Matt. 13:39, 41; 24:3) will be for the purpose of harvesting the precious fruit which will have been born and come to maturity. Everything in the divine program depends on our intelligent reception and practice of that seed/word. The death of Jesus provides the forgiveness for our rebellion and failure to recognize the Divine Plan. Repentance is to turn from unbelief (John 16:9) and devote ourselves to the acquisition of life for ever. Truly Jesus “came to grant us an understanding so

that we may come to know God” (I John 5:20). With his shattering Truths about the Kingdom he “unravels” the works of the Devil and restores sanity and purpose to our distracted planet (I John 3:8).

Repentance in the New Testament means turning away from our own agendas to God’s agenda announced by His agent the Messiah. Faith is generated by the Messiah’s Message (Rom. 10:17). The call to faith was issued by Jesus with his all-encompassing appeal to us to “repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14, 15). Repentance and forgiveness depend on our intelligent acceptance of the Messiah’s Gospel. Shedding our blindness and ignorance in regard to the Divine Plan is the sign that we have returned to God and have been forgiven (Mark 4:11, 12). Since all have come short of the glory intended for Adam (Rom 3:23), it makes sense that we should now embrace the “glory/immortality Plan” offered us only in Messiah. He has exclusive rights to that information, being himself the only one who has yet successfully arrived at immortality. Others will follow in the resurrection at the last day of the present age — the time of the inauguration of the Kingdom. Then, not before, the sons and daughters of God will be revealed in glory (Rom. 8:18).

The Bible holds out no hope that the world will resolve its problems worldwide this side of the Second Coming of Jesus. But equally the Bible offers no prospect of disembodied bliss in some far-off heavenly country. With one voice the Bible looks for a renewing of *this planet* when the Kingdom of God takes office in Jerusalem, the future residence of the Messiah who will “reign and prosper and execute justice in the land” (Jer. 23:5).

Churches have long confused this issue by teaching its members to think of “heaven” as the goal of the believer. But heaven is nowhere the destination of the dying in Scripture. Rather, the faithful are promised an active role in the supervision of the new world to emerge at the return of the Messiah (I Cor. 6:2; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:1-6).

The complaint of Professor Glasson should be heard: “Prophet and psalmist had depicted an era of peace and justice in which men would beat their swords into ploughshares. Christianity has no right to abandon these visions of the future (Isa. 2; 11; Ps. 72) and many others of a similar type. **To say that these will be fulfilled in heaven is to abandon them.** Heaven is already a realm of grace and peace. To attach the Messianic promises to heaven is virtually to discard them” (T.F. Glasson, *Jesus and the End of the World*, p. 129, emphasis added). ✧

John 1: A Preexisting Purpose not Person

John 1:1-14 (paraphrased): “In the beginning was God’s utterance and this was with God, as His Plan, and it was expressive of God’s intention. All things were made with this Plan in mind and without that Promise nothing was made which was made. In this Plan there was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overwhelm it. There was a man commissioned by God. His name was John. He came as a witness to that light so that everyone should believe through him. He was not that light, but was sent as a witness to that light. That was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world and the world was made with him in mind and the world did not recognize him. He came to his own land, but his own people did not accept him. But whoever received him, he gave them power to become sons of God, those who believed in what he proclaimed. These were born, not by natural means but by the will of God. **So the Plan became a human person** and lived amongst us and we were able to see his glory, the glory of a unique Son from the Father, full of grace and Truth.”

In the above rendering we find no preexisting Son of God. The Son of God is the title of the human being Jesus. What preexisted was God’s utterance — His Plan and Promise. Thus a leading contemporary scholar comments, most helpfully: “The conclusion which seems to emerge [from our analysis of John 1:1-14] is that it is only with verse 14 that we can begin to speak of the *personal* Logos. The poem uses rather impersonal language (became flesh), but no Christian would fail to recognize here [v. 14] a reference to Jesus Christ — the Word became not flesh in general but Jesus Christ. Prior to verse 14 we are in the same realm as pre-Christian talk of Wisdom and Logos [Word], the same language and ideas that we find in the Wisdom tradition and in Philo, where, as we have seen, we are dealing with **personifications rather than persons**, personified actions of God rather than an individual divine being as such. The point is obscured by the fact that we have to translate the masculine Logos as ‘he’ throughout the poem. But if we translated *logos* as God’s utterance instead, it would become clearer that the poem did not necessarily intend Logos in vv.1-13 to be thought of as a personal divine being. In other words, the

revolutionary significance of v. 14 may well be that it marks *not only the transition in the thought of the poem from preexistence to incarnation, but also the transition from impersonal personification to actual person*” (James Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p. 243, italics his).

The point is a simple one: John speaks of God having a Plan from the beginning. That Plan was not yet His Son. His Son is what the Plan *became*. When Jesus was born the Plan became a real person, the Son of God by divine begetting (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20). Read in this fashion, there is no problem about turning God into *two*. *Only One Person existed from eternity and that was the Father*. Jesus, the Son of God, is the human embodiment and expression of all God’s promises from the beginning. He is, so to speak, Wisdom in person. On this understanding it was not that the Son of God decided to become a baby, but that God decided to create the unique last Adam, the sinless Messiah, virginally conceived. English translations before the King James (1611) did not put a capital W on Word (John 1:1), leading the reader to think of a Person. They wrote “word,” allowing us to think of God’s utterance. They also rendered verse 3 as “all things were made by IT” (the word), not by HIM.

Read in the manner we suggest, and as confirmed by Dr. Dunn, there is no need for any so-called Trinitarian problem. This problem, which caused confusion and bloodshed and antagonized Jews and Muslims, could never have arisen if the strict monotheism of John and Jesus (17:3; 5:44) had been maintained. The popular versions of the Bible which read “In the beginning was Christ” are thus misleading. Christ is the human Person, Jesus. There was no Son of God before the conception of Jesus. He is a genuinely human being and was thus capable of death, which God is not. ✧

Comments

Thank you for the book on the Kingdom of God and *What Happens When We Die?* I praise the Lord to know about his Plan for the Kingdom to come on earth. Every Christian should understand the Kingdom of God.—*Kuwait*

This note is to commend you for your excellent article “FAQ” last month. This should be effective in opening eyes to some translation problems in contemporary popular versions of the Bible. — *Virginia*

I have been searching for Truth for some time. I found your website very interesting — it was like rediscovering the joy of being a Christian. — *Scotland*