

Focus on the Kingdom

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Does Popular Christianity Make Any Sense?

Jesus the Son of God, who is the eternal God and immortal, died so that you who already have an "immortal soul" can gain immortality. If you do not accept the death of the immortal God, that God who is full of compassion and merciful will torture you in fire and brimstone forever and ever.

If you accept the death and resurrection of the Second Person of the Triune God, Jesus, you will at the moment you die not actually die, but continue living either in bliss in heaven (although Jesus said his followers will inherit the earth and reign as kings on earth) or be tortured forever in a fiery hell which now exists.

Jesus as Son of God was omniscient. Yet as Son of God, i.e., God, he declared that he was ignorant of certain facts which only his Father knew (Mark 13:32).

Love is the mark of the true Christian believers, but if any one disagrees that the One God of the Bible is really three Persons, he must be rejected as a heretic and should expect to burn in hellfire forever. In the past a leading Christian spokesman (John Calvin) anticipated that hell by having such a heretic (Michael Servetus) burned at the stake (in 1553).

The wicked will be judged and punished forever when Jesus returns, but the wicked dead are already being punished in hellfire, before Jesus comes back to judge and sentence them.

If you have difficulty believing that the eternal, omniscient, immortal God died or that he does not know certain facts (Mark 13:32) or that the all-merciful God intends to torment forever and ever many of his creatures, you may wish to seek a saner and sounder way of understanding the Bible.

Please inspect our website for what we think is a less confusing account of the Christian faith. ✧

Christians and the Law (Torah) Part 1

by Charles Hunting

Bringing the doctrine of the one God to the attention of believers is an essential element in the restoration of biblical faith. I am convinced, however, that we face an equal challenge in the matter of legalism — the confusion of the Old Testament Mosaic system with the freedom of the New Covenant taught by Jesus and Paul. The question is this: Can the

current semi-Mosaic systems being offered as New Testament faith be reconciled with the worldwide commission of the Church? Jesus announced the Christian mission in Luke 4:43, 44: "I must give the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also, for that is what I was sent to do. So he proclaimed the gospel in the synagogues of Judea." The same saving Gospel of the Kingdom was later directed by Jesus to all the nations (Matt. 28:19, 20). The urgency of the task had been underlined by the Messiah, who challenged a half-hearted disciple in Luke 9:60 to "go and announce the Kingdom of God everywhere."

A word about my personal experience. I came out of the Worldwide Church of God (the Armstrong movement) when I found out that top men at headquarters knew that Old Testament tithing laws were not incumbent on the New Testament Church. That study then led me to look at the whole subject of legalism. My mind went back to Mr. Rod Meredith's class in the epistles of Paul at Ambassador College. Why was Galatians postponed to the last day of the course, allowing only one hour for the lecture and no discussion? The fact is that under that Armstrong system many of us had unexpressed reservations about Paul's clarion cry for freedom. We simply could not deal with Paul's express language about the cessation, in some sense, of the Law, or Torah (Gal. 3:21-29). The Law had been added under Moses only until the coming of Jesus. Paul could hardly have made things clearer.

I was present when Mr. Armstrong exposed his uneasiness with Galatians. He told an assembly of ministers in the dining hall at Pasadena not to spend their time in the book of Galatians. It took me 15 years even to think of asking why this charter of freedom from Paul's pen presented an apparent threat to us.

I later found that any attempt to reassess the fundamental issue of the Worldwide theology regarding our view of the Law was a futile exercise. I turned in my credit cards and left, not because I was ill-treated but because I was strongly suspicious of our unfair treatment of major New Testament themes.

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Subsequently I have spent much time investigating this subject from Scripture, creedal statements and commentaries. I have never been in a situation where the Mosaic system of holy days or food laws affected me personally. But there are parts of the world where citizens would be risking life, loss of education, starvation of their children and possibly jail time for attempting to live by the semi-Mosaic system we espoused and imposed.

We had better be very sure of our ground before asking others to risk their lives for refusing to eat pork. Such demands may have been made of Jews under the Law of Moses in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, but did Paul make this demand of his Gentile converts?

The good news of a coming Kingdom, entrance into which required one to keep parts of a Levitical system in a world totally out of sync with it, was not good news at all, but could be a road to unnecessary and burdensome struggle and opposition. Not that adverse conditions induced by faithful obedience make a system wrong. I am simply asking you to consider whether in fact Paul would have in any way endorsed our partial Mosaic version of the faith.

There are a number of laws taught to Israel in the Mediterranean which are quite awkward for the rest of the world. I will mention only a few. Harvest-related festivals and holy days in the down-under world of Australia and South Africa do not fit at all with the seasons. They are backwards in southern climes. Spring festivals in the fall, Feast of Tabernacles in the spring. Israel's Levitical rites lose their meaning. Surely there is no need to elaborate.

What about the denial of the rather healthy seal meat and whale blubber diets to Eskimos? We have substituted the sugar-loaded, teeth-rotting Western diet, and the results have been disastrous. Are Eskimos bound to come under the food laws of Leviticus 11? And where are the instructions for the irregular sunsets in the extremes of latitudes? The prescribed days are well suited to the Mediterranean world. Even in the UK one may lose one's job for quitting at 4:30 on Friday evening. When I queried a high-ranking Worldwide minister on these and other problems, his reply was "tell those foreigners to move out." Maybe the Eskimo could move his canoe into the Hudson River and spear the mercury-contaminated "levitically clean" fish of that notoriously dirty river?

As for the holy day and Sabbath keepers of Saudi Arabia, their problem would be rather short-lived. They could be subject to the death penalty in parts of the Islamic world. Would the preaching of the Good

News to the Muslim world be enhanced by following Moses as well as Christ? Is God looking for a company of martyrs for the cause of Moses and the Old Covenant? None of these problems arose in Israel, since all the laws governing religion, agriculture, food, vacations, child-rearing, hygiene, education, judicial system, etc., were clearly defined and reasonable. The package was for a total way of life for a chosen nation. It was quite feasible for the family of Israel. But just how practical are those laws for the citizens of other climes in widely dissimilar circumstances?

Just how do we get the message of the Kingdom of God to people who are faced with hostile governments? Does their salvation depend on adherence to the semi-Mosaic system we advocated? Would our three tithes system really enhance the spreading of the gospel in India and other parts of the world where poverty acknowledges no boundaries? Remember, we ministers were not required to pay second or third tithes. "These tithes were *for* us Levites, not from us." What of the man in Malawi who is the only one of thousands known to us who holds down a job? Is he to tithe on the \$30 he makes a month teaching school? He is already paying for his bed on a mortgage.

A conference was held to consider what should be required of the Gentiles in reference to the Mosaic system. Acts 15:5 states that "Some of the Pharisaic party who had become believers came forward and declared, 'Those Gentiles must be circumcised and *told to keep the Law of Moses.*'"

The whole Mosaic system was waived. James declared the following in verses 28, 29: "It is the decision of the *Holy Spirit*, and our decision, to lay no further burden upon you [Gentiles] beyond these essentials: you are to abstain from meat that has been offered to idols, from blood, from anything that has been strangled, and from fornication. If you keep yourselves free from these things you will be doing well." It was obvious that these prohibitions were partly in deference to Jewish converts. An additional warning to the Gentiles on the endemic problem of fornication was specifically included.

Were the Gentile Christians thus deprived of the blessings of the Mosaic Torah? Hardly. Peter had said to his Jewish Christian opponents: "Why do you put God to the test, putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10).

Our agility in the WWCG to take these plain statements and obliterate them by obscuring their obvious meaning was marvelous. The standard of

conduct for Christian believers given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5, 6, 7) clearly stated the core beliefs for all converts, whether Jew or Gentile.

Jesus had come to fulfill or “fill with full meaning” the whole of the Old Testament (the “Law and the Prophets”). He had not come to reinforce *in the letter* the Old Testament covenant under Moses. If he had, then Paul would be plainly exposed as a false prophet. (This is the view taken by some who accept Jesus but not Paul — without realizing that such is an impossibility.) Certainly the Hebrew Bible has not lost any of its validity, but it is to be understood in the light of the New Covenant. For example, while *physical* circumcision was absolutely required of Jew and Gentile within the covenant (Gen. 17:9-14), Jesus, speaking through Paul, made it clear that circumcision is now to be understood in a non-physical, spiritual sense — of the heart, internally and not externally. That is a major revision of the letter of Old Testament Law (Torah).

That brings us to other biblical evidence. Paul says, “Remember then your former condition, Gentiles as you were by birth, and ‘the uncircumcised’ as you are called by those who call themselves ‘the circumcised’ because of a physical rite. You were at that time *excluded* from the community of Israel, strangers to God’s covenants and the promises that go with them. Yours was a world without hope and without God. Once you were far off, *but now you are in union with Christ Jesus through the shedding of Christ’s blood. For he himself is our peace.* Gentiles and Jews, he has made the two one, and in his own body of flesh and blood has broken down the barrier of enmity which separated them; [how?] *for he annulled the Law [the Torah] with its rules and regulations,*¹ so as to create out of the two a single new humanity in *himself* [not through Moses or the Levitical priesthood], thereby making peace. This was his purpose, to reconcile the two in a single body to God through the cross, by which he killed the enmity. *So he came and proclaimed the good news:* peace to you who are far off, and peace to those who are near; through him we both alike have access to the Father in the one spirit” (Eph. 2:11-18, REB).

Paul’s remarks address our initial question. I have written this out to save you the time of looking it up and will use the REB (Revised English Bible) translation throughout except where noted. Can we ignore the very plain statements in Paul’s letter?

¹ The Greek says: “the Torah of commandments in dogmas.”

The Temple veil was rent and access to God was no longer gained through the Levitical system but through God’s resurrected Son and the New Covenant teachings which he ratified with his death. “This cup is the New Covenant sealed by my blood” (Luke 22:20).

Consider the question of being estranged from “God’s covenants and the promises that go with them.” These covenants and promises had been made to Israel through Abraham, Moses and David. A major component of the Mosaic system was of course the priesthood given to Levi. Hebrews 8:6 is enlightening: “But in fact the ministry which Jesus has been given is superior to theirs [the Levites], for he is the mediator of a better covenant, established on better promises.” There are two *different* covenants, two different ministries involved — one instituted by God through Moses and a different one by the same God through Jesus.

The latter says, “The time has arrived; the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). The command to believe and obey the Gospel is quite clear, readily understandable, and available to the entire world. It is accessible to all in its simplicity, unhindered by any set of circumstances, legislative, geographic, or otherwise. It is a matter of the mind not a matter of physical ordinances. The rite of circumcision best illustrates the enormous change. Circumcision has not been abolished! But the physical is no longer required. It has given way to the spiritual. We must still all be circumcised in our hearts. “The real Jew is one who is inwardly a Jew, and his circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; he receives his commendation not from men but from God” (Rom. 2:29). Here, one of the lynch pins of the Old Covenant requirements is finished, but it has retained its meaning in a fulfilled sense. The Old Testament was, as in so many other cases, a shadow of the substance of the Christ who has now come. Shadows fail, but the full intention of the command remains.

The Day of Atonement: Legalism or Illegalism?

The first covenant commands a yearly fast day as a reminder of sin. It was annual because there was no lasting effect or freedom of conscience, which is a prerequisite for permanent and unhindered access to God. This can be achieved only through the sacrifice of Christ. This spiritual truth is declared by the writer of Hebrews. “The Law contains but a shadow of the good things to come, not the true picture” (10:1). The Day of Atonement is certainly “not a true picture” of the atonement we now enjoy on a continuing basis

through the Messiah's sacrifice. Hebrews continues: "With the same sacrifices offered year after year for all time, it can never bring the worshipers to perfection...First he says, 'Sacrifices and offerings...you do not desire or delight in,' although the Law prescribes them. Then he adds, 'Here I am: I have come to do your will.' *He thus abolishes the former* to establish the latter. And it is by the will of God that we have been consecrated, through the body of Jesus once for all" (10:1-10).

Who, on the basis of this teaching, can maintain that an abolition of Torah, in one sense, has not occurred? Did we not earlier read in Ephesians 2:15 that Jesus "abolished the Torah of commandments in dogmas"? If this is a new concept to you, please give it your serious attention.

I think I am not stepping out of line in wondering if what we do during the Day of Atonement might not be a denial of the effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice — and not just a harmless vestigial activity? And should this Old Covenant shadow be taught to the whole world as a part of the Kingdom of God message? I think not.

Hebrews 3, while pointing out the faithfulness of Moses in God's household, states of Christ: "he is faithful as a son, over the household. And we are that household, if only we are fearless and keep our hopes high" (3:6). "The 'today' of the next verse signals a fresh moment of history which is always conditioned by our response of obedience or disobedience, of faith or unbelief."² It is something for "now" with all its difficulties and something to be perfected in the future.

But what is the subject of this "today"? It is the entrance into God's "rest." This "rest" can be experienced even now by union with the person of Jesus. "But Jesus holds a perpetual priesthood because he remains forever; that is why he is able to save completely those who approach God through him, since he is always alive to plead on their behalf" (Heb. 7:24, 25).

Brushing cupboards and floors bare of leaven, removing the residue from a trip to McDonald's seem a bit short of the mark when we grasp what Christ's sacrifice has *already* done for us: "May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of an eternal covenant, make you perfect in all goodness" (Heb. 13:20, 21). This, and not our domestic cleaning activity, is the real solution when it comes to our sinful nature. It seems to me that Paul

would be highly agitated by a return to the shadow now that Christ has appeared as High Priest (Heb. 9:11). "One greater than the temple, and its institutions, remains with us" (Matt. 12:6).

Paul does not treat lightly this issue of mixing two systems and undermining the work of Christ with works which he does not require: "Your self-satisfaction ill becomes you. Have you never heard the saying, 'A little leaven leavens all the dough?' Get rid of the old leaven and then you will be a new batch of unleavened dough. *Indeed you already are*, [why and how?] because Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore let us be keeping the feast [note the present continuous verb, which does not point to a single annual observance], not with the old leaven of depravity and wickedness but only the unleavened bread which is sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:6-8). Note the spiritualizing of the literal bread.

The question is this: why should we return to Moses and the Levitical system for our instructions when Christ's sacrifice has already paid the price for our sins on a continuing basis and when the New Testament Church celebrated the Lord's Supper *not once a year* but "when you meet for this meal" (1 Cor. 11:33)? The celebration was "when you meet together in church," "when you meet as a congregation" (1 Cor. 11:18, 20)

Something seems terribly wrong with our adherence to a system that has been superseded by a new covenant under the Messiah. Moses was a magnificent servant of God, but he is dead. The Levitical priest has been replaced by a unique member of the tribe of Judah, not Levi!

As the writer of Hebrews said: with a change in the priesthood there is of necessity a change of the law, yes, a change of Torah! Jesus is our intercessor and High Priest at the right of the Father. It is not as though there are two names listed (Jesus and Moses) under heaven by which we can be saved. Just one! Our point is underlined by that fact that a new priest has risen:

"But a change of the priesthood must mean a change of law...For here is the testimony: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.' *The earlier rules are repealed as ineffective and useless*, since the Law brought nothing to perfection; and a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God" (Heb. 7:12-19).

The Cause of Spiritual Blindness

At the risk of belaboring the point, does not Paul warn us of spiritual blindness as a result of pursuing a Mosaic course of religious activity? We should note

² *Hebrews, Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 90.

that the Jews, who are precise about keeping the laws of Moses, holy days, etc. are still in the dark about the Messiah who has come. This prevents them from being dedicated witnesses to the return of that same Christ to establish the Kingdom! Paul, passionate exponent of Judaism though he had been, certainly seemed unenthusiastic about the writings of Moses, if they prevented his audience from advancing to the Messiah:

“In any case their minds have become closed, for that same veil is there to this very day when the lesson is read from the Old Covenant; and is never lifted, because *only* in Christ is it taken away. Indeed to this very day, every time the Law of Moses is read, a veil is over the mind of the hearer. But (as scripture says) ‘Whenever he turns to the Lord the veil is removed’” (2 Cor. 3:14-16).

Earlier verses in 2 Corinthians 3 thrill to the newness of spirit available under the New Covenant ministry of Jesus: “And as for you, it is plain that you are a letter that has come from Christ, given to us to deliver, a letter not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, written *not on stone tablets* but on the pages of the human heart” (3:3). The old covenant “ministry that brought death, and that was *engraved in written form on stone*” (3:7) is a shorthand description for the whole Mosaic system.

Sinai or Mt. Zion?

One is given a choice, either to accept the covenant made between God and ancient Israel under Moses and the Levitical priesthood, or the covenant between God and the present Israel of God under the Messiah. Paul talks of this in Galatians 6:15-16: “Circumcision is nothing;...the only thing that counts is a new creation. All who take this principle for their guide, peace and mercy be upon them, *the Israel of God!*” This covenant was made with Jesus and the priesthood of the order of Melchizedek.

Note the clearly stated contrast in Hebrews 12 between the New Covenant and the one made at Mt. Sinai. The writer starts his dissertation with the plain statement:

“*It is not* to the tangible, blazing fire of Sinai that you [Christians] have come, with its darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, its trumpet blast and oracular voice, which the people heard and begged to hear no more; for they could not bear the command, ‘If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.’ So appalling was the sight that Moses said, ‘I shudder with fear’” (12:18-21).

This is Mt. Sinai. This is where *you Christians have not come*, where the Law was given under the

Old Covenant that rules religious Israel to this very day. With this awesome exhibition God ushered in the Old Covenant. God’s voice shook the very ground on which they stood. The covenant was inaugurated with a fearsome display of power. But Israel soon forgot.

But you Christians, have you come to Mt. Sinai for your instructions?

“No, you have come to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to myriads of angels, to the full concourse and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all...and to Jesus the mediator of *a new covenant*...See that you do not refuse to hear the voice that speaks” (12:22-25).

Isn’t this the echo of a long-ago admonition given by Moses to Israel in Deuteronomy 18:15: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; it is to him *you must listen*.”

The writer of Hebrews does not leave us guessing at the implications of this scenario. He says, “By speaking of a new covenant, he has pronounced the *first one obsolete*; and anything that is becoming obsolete and growing old will shortly disappear” (Heb. 8:13). “The earlier rules are repealed as ineffective and useless, since the Law brought nothing to perfection; and a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God” (7:18, 19). “But a change in the priesthood must mean a *change of law*” (7:12).

To sum up, we ask the question: Is Mt. Sinai where we find our home for laws and direction? The writer describes them as obsolete, growing old, shortly to disappear, ineffective, useless. This is Mt. Sinai! Paul comments on this same theme in his letter to the Galatians:

“Tell me now, you that are so anxious to be under Law, will you not listen to what the Law says?...This is an allegory: the two women stand for two covenants. One covenant comes from Mt. Sinai; that is Hagar and her children born into slavery. Sinai is a mountain in Arabia and represents Jerusalem of today, for her children are in slavery [under the old Sinai covenant]. But the heavenly Jerusalem [Mt. Zion and the new covenant] is the free woman, she is our mother” (4:21-26).

One organization, in order to rescue their semi-Mosaic system, would have us believe that the expression “being under the law” means “being under the *penalty* of the law.” No Scripture is quoted to support this concept. One could ask whether those whom Paul was addressing in this passage were

people who were anxious to be *under the penalty of the law*? I would think not! ✧ (to be continued)

“They Have Taken Away My Lord”

How Churches Obstruct Belief in Jesus as Messiah

The tragic words of Mary Magdalene, as yet unaware of the resurrection of Jesus, in search of her beloved Messiah (John 20:13), crystallize the problem with “orthodox” definitions of who Jesus is. The New Testament’s rock confession is that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of God.” Messiah is his official title as King of the coming Kingdom. He is the anointed ruler of the house of David, destined to be installed as supreme monarch in a renewed world system. This will happen when he returns to this earth to effect that grand “restoration of all things about which the prophets spoke” (Acts 3:21). That coming Kingdom of David and of the Messiah is the subject of the Christian Gospel (Luke 4:43, etc.), along with the atoning death and the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 8:12). (For further details please request our books *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah* and *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven: The Forgotten Christianity of Jesus the Jew*, from 800-347-4261.)

Jesus is proclaimed in the New Testament (and in OT prophecies) as the *Son of God*. While “Messiah” is his royal designation, Son of God is the title which describes his unique relationship to the One God, his Father. Jesus is the only human being (apart from Adam and Eve) to have been fathered without a human father. Adam is likewise called the son of God as being directly created by God (Luke 3:38).

Longstanding and deeply entrenched ecclesiastical dogma has forced on Jesus a title he would not recognize and did not claim — “God the Son.” By this is meant (if one investigates the creeds of most of the denominations) that the Son, though begotten, is an *uncreated* being without a beginning, coequal and coessential with the One God, his Father. Dogma decrees that this Son be recognized as “eternally begotten.” This curious phrase, dating from the cogitations of the brilliant yet eccentric church father Origen (c. 185-254) is designed to imprint on the mind the notion that “Jesus is God” and that when he became man, he remained nevertheless fully God. The theory is that “God the Son,” second member of an eternal Trinity of three Persons, took to himself “a human nature” by entering the womb of Mary and being conceived as a baby. As the God-Man, 100% God and 100% man, he was nevertheless a single Person.

Such an individual would appear to be a duplex Person, two persons in one. Trinitarian theory

declares, however, that Jesus “was man,” but not “a man.” If he were really a human individual with a human ego, then he would have two egos, the preexisting divine Ego of God the Son, who had existed forever, plus the human ego derived from Mary. The “orthodox” position retreats from this difficulty by saying that “human nature,” not an individual human personality, was derived from Mary.

So where is the ego of Jesus, the center of his personality, located? Tradition mandates that the one ego of Jesus of Nazareth originates in the fact that as Son of God *he was without beginning*. His ego, in other words, is God the Son, who had no beginning, but is fully God.

If your head is spinning at what seems to many an abstruse and abstract account of the living person we know as Jesus, then ask in the right circles about “what your church believes.” You may be offered the above explanation, if your source knows the history of church dogma. The creed which produced the God-Man was worked out by clerics over many centuries, climaxing in the formula of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

We are convinced with many scholars over the ages that this ecclesiastical picture of who Jesus is is simply incredible. It is miles from the account of the man Messiah given in the Bible. Crucial to the traditional picture of Jesus is the idea that he is the “eternal Son of God,” i.e., that he was “eternally begotten.”

But as many have complained, “eternal begetting” is an impossible nonsense. To beget means to bring into existence and implies a time before such existence begins. “Eternal” is that which lies outside of time. One cannot logically be “eternally begotten,” any more than ice can be hot.

An investigation of the beautiful birth narratives of Luke and Matthew will convince us that those writers, who, like Luke, lived very close to those who knew Jesus, or knew him personally (Matthew), knew nothing at all of a Son of God who was “eternally begotten.” There is no higher authority than an angel dispatched from the Most High God Himself. Such was Gabriel who some 2000 years ago arrived in the virgin Mary’s house to inform her she was to have a baby before living with her husband-to-be, Joseph.

In contrast to those centuries in which the Christians wrangled over who Jesus is, Gabriel presented a theology of the Son of God in a few well-chosen, concise statements. First he assured Mary that she was to be the mother of *the Messiah* (certainly not as was later claimed “the mother of God”!).

Assembling a number of well-known Messianic promises from the Hebrew Bible, Gabriel let it be known with brilliant clarity that the son of Mary was to “be great and will be called the Son of the Most High [God], and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will reign as king over the house of Jacob forever, without end.” This is thrilling Jewish-Christian Messianism.

With this marvelous digest of Old Testament promises culled from 2 Samuel 7 and Psalms 2, 89, Gabriel outlined the career of the uniquely celebrated Son to be begotten in Mary (cp. Matt. 1:20: “that which is *begotten in you* is from the holy spirit”). Allowing for questions, Gabriel then responded to the very reasonable query on the part of Mary. How was this to be, since she was not yet living with a man?

Gabriel then uttered these extraordinary words: “Holy spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and *that is precisely why* the one begotten will be holy, the Son of God.”

If Christians are to maintain the purity of New Testament faith, they should ponder every syllable of this authoritative declaration of God through the angel. “Holy spirit” (no article in the Greek: the meaning is thus the creative power of God, as formerly in Genesis) will effect an amazing miracle in Mary, and what will be produced by this act of God is a person privileged to be called, i.e., to *be* the Son of God. “For this reason, in fact (*dio kai*), he will be called holy, the Son of God.”

The divine statement, along with the corroborative message given to Joseph in Matthew 1:20 should be sufficient to lay to rest the legendary and speculative teaching, so beloved of churchgoers, that the Son in fact did *not* begin to exist by that miraculous conception, but had in fact existed in eternal pre-history. That post-biblical story of Jesus appears as fictitious when compared with the lucid account of reality offered us graciously by God through Gabriel.

Elizabeth and Mary knew perfectly well who this astonishing child was. He was not God, but the *Son* of God! There was in their thinking only One God and that One God was the Father of Jesus. All sons, it would be understood, are derived from their fathers and cannot, while the laws of language prevail, be “coeternal” with their father — of the same age.

Following the annunciation of the begetting/conception of the baby Jesus, Mary departed immediately to share her extraordinary good news with her relative Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:39-45). Elizabeth added her word to the truth of who Jesus is when she spoke of Mary as “**the**

mother of my lord” (Luke 1:43). By “my lord” she referred, naturally enough for one who knew the Messianic promises, to the “**my lord**” of Psalm 110:1, the New Testament’s favorite proof-text. But she certainly did not mean to say “my God.” God cannot have a mother. God cannot be born or die. The Messiah, on the other hand, was destined to arise in an Israelite, Jewish family. He was destined to die.

How then did the amazing confusion of “**my Lord Messiah**” with “the Lord God” arise? Quite simply when church fathers no longer appreciated the Hebrew origins of Jesus and his place as the promised human Messiah, Son of God. Yes, *Son* of God, not in eternity but in time, some 2000 years ago, when Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John.

Jesus is Son of God *precisely because of* (*dio kai*) the miracle wrought by God in Mary (Luke 1:35), and for no other reason. Gabriel’s theology, being the theology of the New Testament and of God, needs no embellishment, no “tabloid” additions rendering the whole origin of the Son as a created being direct from the hand of God impossible. Gabriel’s teaching cuts through centuries of confused debate about the nature of the Messiah as Son.

According to Gabriel’s superb account the Son, the Savior is a unique, supernaturally begotten Son of God, parallel to Adam who was also God’s son by a direct creative act. Luke 1 and Matthew 1 present the majestic story of God’s new creation of human persons, beginning with His own beloved Son, His only begotten Son.

It is problematic to read the Bible without knowing that sons are begotten by their fathers, that to beget means to *bring into existence*, and that since the Son of God was **begotten** (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35; 1 John 5:18, not KJV), he did not always exist.

It is important to know also that “today” does not mean “eternally.” It was because a speculative, philosophizing church father pronounced by ecclesiastical fiat that “today” does indeed *not* mean “today” but “in eternity” that all the chaos over the “Son of God” arose. ✧

Comment

“Your book *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound* had a profound impact on me. I would like to share this truth with the people in the Czech Republic. Therefore I started to translate your book into the Czech language.”

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