

Focus on the Kingdom

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Power Under Authority

by Alex Hall

Leaders in the ancient world were far more dependent than rulers today on delegation. Though no one can be physically present in many places at once in order to conduct business in person, it is possible nowadays to pick up the phone, send an email or even make conference calls. Thanks to information technology, questions, answers, updates and decisions can travel enormous distances instantly.

Not so in times past. To control an organization back then, agents would be indispensable. Trusted individuals were needed who could be commissioned and dispatched to remote regions in order to conduct business on behalf of their lord.

Put yourself in the shoes of a king or merchant sending one of your servants out to negotiate a complex treaty or contract in a world where there was no way to maintain regular contact with them. Depending on how far they traveled, it could take days, weeks or even months for a message from them to get back to you. The lord wouldn't even know the outcome of the mission until long after the matter was already concluded.

As a consequence of this, in order to get things done with any degree of efficiency, the agent would have to be empowered with enough of his lord's authority to be able to make decisions "on the spot," there and then, in the event that something unforeseen should turn up. The relevant people, whether troops, finance officers or lower-ranking envoys, would have to cooperate with the agent's orders, as though it was the voice of the king himself speaking! Second-guessing was not an option.

This had an impact on the way people thought and, as a consequence, the language they used. The same principle of agency continues even today. Have you heard the newsreaders talk about Bush going to war with Saddam? Yet, in spite of the tough talk, Bush was tucked safely away in Washington and Saddam was hiding in a hole! They have never met in person. Instead, they sent other people's children to do the fighting on their behalf.

How important is all this to understanding the Scriptures? We can learn a valuable lesson from the most improbable of men — someone who Jesus commended for his great faith. He was, all things considered, most unlikely to gain any approval at all from the Jewish Messiah, being in the service of the occupying power and a Roman centurion at that! Yet Jesus declared this man's

faith to have no parallel, even in Israel. A compliment indeed!

He had appealed to Jesus to have his servant healed. Nothing unusual there. What seems to have delighted Jesus so much was the explanation he gave of the rationale which lay behind his request. "Lord," he said, "I am not worthy for you to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed." On what basis had he come to believe that the word of Jesus carried so much authority? He goes on to explain: "For **I also am a man under authority**, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave 'Do this!' and he does it" (Matt. 8:8-10).

If there was one thing this individual understood very well it was the principle of delegated authority. He simply took what he knew from his life experience and applied it to Jesus and the Lord marveled! The centurion was streets ahead of the religious authorities.

His great faith was based upon the fact that he recognized a parallel between his relationship to his emperor and Jesus' relationship to his God. Both he and Jesus were men whose authority was derived from their obedience to their overlord. Since they were pursuing their masters' and not their own agenda, they had been empowered to act in their stead. In other words, a person would be promoted to a place where they were in authority *over* others to the extent that they were *under* the authority of their own master. No one in his right mind would empower a man who could not be trusted to pursue his boss's agenda. The centurion clearly attributed Jesus' spiritual dynamic to his utter dedication to the Father's will.

Perhaps the centurion had also heard talk of how Jesus claimed to act in his Father's name, which in the ancient world meant exactly the same thing as conducting business as a sent agent (a *shaliach*). What we do know is that he saw in Jesus an authority from God with the power to tell sickness and demons to "Go!" and to summon the breath of life back into a lifeless corpse.

Faith in God seems always to have depended on identifying His true agents and obeying them accordingly. This is the only wise policy for us all.

It was Moses' concern before he presented himself to the elders of Israel in Exodus chapter 4 that they should understand that it was **Israel's God** who had sent him. Likewise Elijah in 1 Kings 18:36. Notice Jesus' words at the graveside of Lazarus in John 11:41-42. He prayed, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that

you always hear me, but because of the people standing around I said it, **so that they may believe that you sent me**” — that they may know and understand that I am your unique commissioned agent.

If you wanted to describe such a person in a Jewish way you would say that they had been “oiled.” Most people prefer the term “anointed” because it sounds more sophisticated and a lot less messy. But throughout the Hebrew Bible, whenever God set a person apart as an agent to fulfill a particular purpose, whether to rule His people as a king, intercede as a priest, or even be a patriarch like Abraham, he would be spoken of as an “anointed one” or messiah (see Ps. 105:15). As time progressed and Israel grew in the knowledge of God’s foreordained plan they came to anticipate someone who would be God’s ultimate agent, supremely empowered and supremely obedient. They referred to this individual, appropriately enough, as “**the Messiah.**”

N.T. Wright sums up their expectation: “It is clear that whenever the Messiah appears, and whoever he turns out to be, he will be the agent of Israel’s God. This must be clearly distinguished from any suggestion that he is in himself a transcendent figure, existing in some supernatural mode before making his appearance in space and time” (Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 320).

This is the beating heart of what it means to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and is therefore the fountainhead of New Testament faith. All our dealings with God and all God’s dealings with us are mediated through the one “authorized dealer” of spiritual things, the man approved of God, Jesus of Nazareth. The simplicity of our creed, as distinct from the hair-raising complexities of later Trinitarianism, which really destroy the agency principle, is worth repeating. May our children never forget that “There is one God, and one mediator between that God and man, the *man* Messiah Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). ✧

The First Verse of the Gospel of John by Jonathan Sjordal

“*In the beginning* was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John’s Hebrew listeners would not have missed the connection that John was making with those first three words — identical to the words that begin the book of Genesis.

In the New Testament, when you see the word “God,” it refers to God the Father. We have over a thousand instances of this in the New Testament. On two occasions only for certain “god” refers to Jesus (Heb. 1:8; John 20:28).

God = the Father

Applying this fact that God means the Father, the verse reads: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the Father, and the Word was the Father.”

Who or what is the Word? If the Word = Jesus, then it reads: “In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with the Father, and Jesus was the Father.” Jesus was the Father?!

If the Word = the Son, then it reads: “In the beginning was the Son, and the Son was with the Father, and the Son was the Father.” The Son was the Father?!

This is *confusion*. When you *assume* that the Word is a person (called Jesus, or the Son), the resulting contradiction (the Son was the Father) demonstrates that *such an assumption is false*. The word that John wrote about was just that: the spoken word of God the Father, who is known in the Hebrew Scriptures by name as YHWH the Creator. The word in John’s prologue is not a person, but rather the spoken word of the Creator, by which all was created. ✧

*We received this from Greg Deuble, author of They Never Told Me **This** in Church! which is now available in Koorong, the largest Christian bookstore chain in Australia, and on Amazon.com (also 800-347-4261):*

The other Sunday my mum’s congregation was handed a well-presented glossy magazine printed by Campus Crusade for Christ. It is called, “*The Da Vinci Code: A Companion Guide.*” One of the sections is a defense of the Deity of Christ, which of course the *Code* denies, making Jesus “simply a man.” The brochure’s very first paragraph on this issue is just amazing. Let me quote it in full:

“Did Jesus actually claim to be God? This seems to be incontrovertible, as almost everything Jesus said and did points in this direction. For example, consider the miracle of Jesus walking on water. Why not fly or turn himself into a pterodactyl? Here is the reason: ‘He [God] alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea’ (Job 9:8). This verse from the Old Testament would have been common knowledge to Jesus’ audience — God alone treads the seas. So when Jesus chooses to walk on water it is not simply a demonstration of power, but of divinity; this is an object lesson, not a carnival show. Conversely, if you are trying to avoid being given the label of ‘God,’ this is about the last thing you’d attempt to do.”

My eyes nearly popped out of their sockets when I read this nonsense! I even had a “sanctified” chuckle, to be sure. On this logic, am I also to conclude that Elijah must be divine, because the Old Testament says God rides in the skies on His chariot, and Elijah also flew through the sky?!

Editor: The truth about Jesus is that he was a human being with an origin, in company with all human beings, in the womb of his mother. Other Jesuses who are alive before they are born are really not human beings. The human

Jesus is under attack once we move his existence back into prehistory. If a person's true ego is created before his birth, then what is conceived in the womb of a mother is not really a human being. He or she would be a visitor from another world. Human beings do not begin like that. To be descended from David via Mary and to be begotten (= to be brought into existence) one must start with a conception or begetting in the womb.

Jews never expected the Messiah to be other than a member of the human race. It is a huge leap from the New Testament to the later concept that Jesus had a double beginning, once in eternity or just before Genesis, and another in the days of Augustus Caesar. Having a double beginning led eventually to centuries of dispute amongst believers and finally to the dogmas of the Church which exclude any who do not think that the Son of God is coequally God.

John's Gospel is used as the lever to support this amazing concept that more than one Person is God. If there is a God in heaven who does not become man and another God who becomes man, this is plainly not monotheism! The UPC (United Pentecostal Church) tries to avoid the "agony" of two Gods by saying that the Father and the Son are the same Person. This is obviously an impossible reading of the New Testament facts which over and over again speak of the Father and Son as two distinct individuals.

Trinitarians argue from John almost exclusively. This in itself suggests that something is wrong. The definition of God and Jesus should be found everywhere in the New Testament and in prophecy from the Old Testament. The Old Testament will support no doctrine of the Trinity. Jews were always and still are unitarians. Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, and Peter will not support the Trinity. John, it is hoped by Trinitarians, will. But only by editing what John wrote.

John did not say "In the beginning there was the Son of God who was with God and was himself God." If John had written that, he would have contradicted the Jesus whom he quotes as a unitarian: "You, Father," said Jesus, "are the only one who is God" (John 17:3). That of course means that Jesus whom God sent is not "the only true God."

What John wrote has been unfairly rewritten by translators to support the Trinity. John as we see from John 17:3 and 5:44 was no Trinitarian. He believed in unitary monotheism with the rest of the New Testament. John wrote "In the beginning was *the word*." The capital letter (Word) in your translation is very misleading, making you think that there are two persons there! The word was the word of God, not the *Son* of God. Only in verse 14 did that word or promise become a human person, when God brought about the generation of His unique Son by miracle in Mary. Jesus the Son is what the

word *became*, not the word as one-to-one equivalent. To speak of an eternal Son is to put before your mind two uncreated Gods. This is forbidden by the creed of Jesus in Mark 12:28-34 (quoting Deut. 6:4) but unfortunately encouraged by the creeds of the churches, who do not gather under the creed of Jesus. But why not?

If we stay with the Old Testament and the clear accounts of the historical origin of the Son of God, we maintain faith in the human Messiah. This has the enormous advantage not only of preventing us from contradicting the creed of Israel and of Jesus, but also of making sense of the idea that the Son of God died for us.

God cannot die. He is immortal (1 Tim. 6:16, etc.). So the propositions "The Son of God died" and "the Son of God *is* God" are nothing less than contradictory ideas held in a confused way by those who are compelled by the Church's creed. But the Bible does not ask us to crucify our intellects. There is lots about God we do *not* know but what is revealed in plain language we are supposed to believe. Saying "Jesus is God" and "Jesus died" forces us to speak nonsense, since the immortal cannot die (unless words cease to have meaning, which would be like saying that a dime is five cents). Wesley's hymn "'Tis mystery all: the immortal dies" shows the tragic results of a mind enslaved to post-biblical dogma and inadmissible use of language.

John's Gospel nowhere says that the Son arrived from a pre-historic life. He was superior (*protos mou* = "my superior") from the start to John the Baptist (1:15, 30). He was the Son of Man of Daniel's vision seen 600 years earlier (6:62). He had come down from heaven as all gifts from God do (James 1:17; 3:15). In fact his *flesh* came down from heaven (John 6:51). The Son was God's gift to the world. There is a mistranslation of the Greek in the NIV of John 13:3, 16:28 and 20:17 and the NASV in John 13:3. Jesus never said he was going *back* to heaven, an idea which destroys his status as a genuine human being and makes him a visitor from outer space. Jesus asked for the glory which he "had" with God (17:5) to be given him as a reward for his work. In the same context (17:22, 24) Jesus said that this same glory had already been given to you living in the 21st century — given, that is, by God (as Jesus prayed) around AD 30. It is glory in prospect and promise just as it is in John 17:5.

When Jesus said "I am he," and that he had that status before Abraham (John 8:58), he referred to his Messiahship, which Abraham had looked forward to. The "I am he" statements in John are based on the first occurrence of that statement in John 4:26 where "I am he" means "I am *the Messiah*." Jesus is certainly not saying "I am God" because he later said "The Father is the only one who is truly God." Jesus could also have said "Before Abraham was I was crucified" (Rev. 13:8) and no one

would have misunderstood that very Jewish way of speaking.

As for John 20:28 Thomas eventually realized what he could not grasp in 14:9 that God was in Jesus and that to understand Jesus was to understand God. Finally the light dawned and Thomas recognized Jesus as “my lord” the Messiah and in him he saw God. Thomas did not with one lurch destroy the creed of Israel and give us two who are God! John quickly reminded us that every word of what he had written was to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah, Son of God (20:31).

I am hearing from some that there are two Yahwehs in the Bible and perhaps three. This is enough to infuriate Jews and Muslims! It is time for the human race to settle on belief that there is One Yahweh and that Jesus never claimed to “be Yahweh” — for which he could have legitimately have been executed.

When Paul spoke of the creed, he was as unitarian as can be: “There is to us Christians one God, the Father” (I Cor. 8:6). Jesus of course is the one Lord Messiah, the “my lord” of Psalm 110:1. Unfortunately the editors of our versions have (in many cases, but not RSV, NRSV and NAB) been busy “improving” the text to make you believe that Jesus is also God. The “my lord” — not “Lord” — of Psalm 110:1 translates ADONI and that form of the word for Lord never once means GOD. It is the form (*adoni*) which deliberately tells you the one so designated is not God but a human (occasionally angelic) superior. *Adoni* in all of its 195 appearances is a non-Deity title. God the Father is *Adonai* and there is a chasm of difference between *adoni* and *Adonai*. Let God be God, and let the Son be the marvelous human Savior appointed to teach us and die for us. God appointed him to the task, and he has succeeded and will continue to succeed until the whole world confesses the God of Israel and the Messiah his Son (Zech. 14:9). ✧

The Faith of Abraham and the Popular Gospel

It is customary for evangelists to present the gospel as follows: Romans 10:9, 13: “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved...Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

On this basis people are invited to believe and then to have absolute assurance of salvation. But have they really heard the Gospel when no mention of *Jesus’ own preaching of the Gospel* is made?

A major thrust of the Abrahamic faith is to challenge this popular, reduced and therefore deceptive version of salvation (what a president of Atlanta Bible College referred to as a “guttled gospel” in 1982).

Our faith points out that in the parable of the sower reception of *Jesus’ own Gospel message about the Kingdom* is presented as the indispensable foundation for salvation. Thus in Luke 8:12, “When anyone hears the message [*of the Kingdom*, Luke 4:43; 5:1; Matt. 13:19], the devil comes and snatches away the message *so that they may not believe and be saved.*” This obviously makes acceptance of the Kingdom message the foundation of *salvation*. And the Devil evidently works hard to get rid of the Kingdom message. Later Paul warned that those who will not be accepted in the judgment are those who “did not open their minds to accept the love of the Truth in order to be *saved*” (2 Thess. 2:10). Jesus links salvation to the willing acceptance of his own Kingdom Gospel. Luke 8:12 and Acts 8:12 are blockbuster verses and deserve a place on our refrigerators as daily reminders.

In the book of Acts Luke says that Philip and Paul always presented the Kingdom as well as the things concerning Jesus to their potential converts: Acts 8:12, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 31. In this they were faithfully following Jesus’ own example of proclaiming the Kingdom of God as Gospel (Luke 4:43; Matt. 13:19).

Romans 10

In Romans 10, are we to believe that belief in Jesus’ Gospel Message about the Kingdom is now obsolete? Is it sufficient just to call on the Lord and believe in his death and resurrection? Would this also mean that baptism is unnecessary?

Romans 10 is all too easily misunderstood in such a way as to set it against the teaching of Jesus. We dare not pit passage against passage, much less Paul against Jesus. If we read carefully, however, in Romans 10 and elsewhere in Romans and Acts, we find that Paul always preached the same Gospel as Jesus.

Romans 10:14 reads “How can they believe in him *whom they have not heard [preaching]?*”¹ In other words one must hear *Christ preaching* in order to believe. This means that the risen Christ continues to proclaim the same Message of the Kingdom through the Apostles. This is what Jesus required in the great commission in Matthew 28:19, 20.

Paul refers in Romans 10:8 to the “message of faith which we are preaching.” Romans 16:25 defines Paul’s Gospel as the “preaching of Christ,” i.e., the same message as Christ preached, not just a message *about* Christ. In Romans 1:1 Paul describes the Gospel as the “Gospel of God,” i.e., God’s Message of salvation. When Jesus began to preach on earth he also proclaimed *the Gospel of God* (Mark 1:14, 15). There is only one Gospel of God and it is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

¹See for example the *International Critical Commentary on Romans* by Sanday and Headlam, on this verse.

In Romans 10:17 Paul concludes that “*faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Message of Messiah.*” Once again we see that it is the Messiah’s message of the Kingdom which must be understood and received by the convert. No wonder then that Paul summed up his whole ministry as “the proclamation of the Gospel about the Kingdom” (Acts 20:25). This Gospel of the Kingdom *is exactly the same* as the “Gospel of the grace of God” mentioned a verse earlier (Acts 20:24). Jesus’ preaching of the Word of *the Kingdom* (Matt. 13:19) is the basis of Paul’s own saving Gospel preaching.

The Gospel in the New Testament clearly goes back to the very words of Jesus. One has not preached the Gospel of Christ by talking only of the death and the resurrection of Jesus. The following verses make this quite clear and should be taken as prophetic warnings for our time:

1 Timothy 6:3: “If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree to the sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited...”

2 John 7-9: “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh...Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in *the teaching of Christ does not have God*. The one who abides in the teaching [of Christ] has both the Father and the Son.”

Hebrews 2:3: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was *first spoken through the Lord*, it was confirmed to us who heard” (cp. “God has in *these last days* spoken to us through a Son,” Heb. 1:2). (This means of course that God did *not* speak through His Son before that time. The Son had not yet come into existence.)

2 Timothy 1:10: “[*Jesus*] brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”

Acts 10:35, 36: “God accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news [Gospel] of peace through Jesus Christ. You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached.”

There can be no Christianity apart from the Gospel preaching of the historical Jesus. Christianity is founded on the teachings of Jesus. No less than 20 passages in the New Testament call the Gospel the Gospel *about the Kingdom of God*. It is “**this Gospel of the Kingdom** which must be preached to all the nations” before the end of the age and the return of Jesus can happen (Matt. 24:14).

Each of us can play a part in the propagation of that precious Gospel of the Kingdom about immortality and participation in the wonderful era of peace which Jesus will introduce when he comes back. Jesus’ Gospel of the

Kingdom is in fact the powerhouse seed of indestructible life. *The Da Vinci Code* fancifully calls the “source of the power of God on earth” the current living *physical* descendant of Jesus who was married to Mary Magdalene. Jesus has no physical descendants. Even if he did, they would have no value unless converted. The whole point of the New Testament is that we must become the spiritual family of Jesus via his seed message (Luke 8:11, 12) — sowing seeds means spreading the word of the Kingdom. ✧

Comments

“I have been reading *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven* and just love it. I am convinced it is really the truth. The whole Bible is starting to make sense to me finally.” — *Michigan*

“I have just finished your book entitled *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound*. In a word — marvelous! Stupendous! Terrific! The choice of term I leave to you. I have ordered an additional four copies for loaners.” — *Washington*

“Your monthly magazine *Focus on the Kingdom* is life-saving. Words cannot express how vital your research and ministry is to me and indeed Christianity. God bless you, sir!” — *Germany*

“Thank you to Restoration Fellowship for your dedication and hard work for the Kingdom Gospel. We appreciate all you are doing to help us understand the simplicity of the Bible’s teachings.” — *Colorado*

“I should very much like to sign up for the newsletter that you mentioned. I listen to your ‘Focus on the Kingdom’ radio teachings during the day as I work. I find your teaching style refreshing and effective; namely, that you repeatedly give the same locations of the essential truths regarding the Kingdom found in the Scriptures. Being a primary document kind of person, I appreciate that you cite your sources clearly.” — *California*

“I have been working in China temporarily and have been listening on the internet to the Kingdom messages. It has supplied me with a link to sanity in a chaotic world.” — *China*

Dan Mages in California recently debated a Trinitarian on the issue of the Trinity. The following letter shows that Dan’s gentle demeanor won him support.

“Hi, Dan. First, I want to say that I am really sorry that we had to leave early. I just didn’t think I could take the debate any more. And the reason why I couldn’t take the debate any more is not because of any theological issues but simply because I didn’t think I was going to be able to keep from screaming at your opponent. The man was being so rude and so ridiculous that I wanted to stand up and say, ‘Shut up!’ Problem is, I don’t think that would have been a good solution. Anyway, to put this in a nice light, I thought you did a brilliant job tonight. I was really

impressed by the way you argued, by your use of Scripture, by your knowledge of Scripture, and by the way that you didn't let your opponent's obviously demeaning posture phase you. Thank you for inviting us and allowing us to see where your passion is and what your theological stance on this issue is.

"As for the issue itself, it's a doozy. I'm not sure what I believe although I will admit that I probably have a more Trinitarian way of viewing things. But what I think is totally wrong that came from your opponent's mouth is that our very salvation depends on our belief in the doctrine of the Trinity. What a load of bull. The truth that I believe is that Jesus died for us as sinners but he also died for us because we simply are limited beings who cannot understand or reach God in His glory. Truth is, I don't know whether or not 'Jesus is God,' but I believe he now holds power and divine authority at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. Whatever he did, I believe that he did it for me because I can't comprehend things like God or doctrine in a way that I need to in order to reach God myself. Praise God for His grace!

"Anyway, thanks again and receive my commendation on behalf of all of the Greek [Greek class at Fuller Seminary] family who went. We think you won the debate hands down because of the way that you showed God's love and grace and were faithful to the Gospel. And also because you succeeded in your mission. You got me thinking and I am not intending on deciding tonight about the Trinity, but I am intending on contemplating it in the next few years; so there's one person." — *California*

"Just an update. Things are going rather well with my cousin. Although his official statement is he is a Trinitarian still, he told me he is being moved toward the One God only Arian doctrine. I told him what he is believing is the Gospel and that it is very pure to believe in the God of our fathers as One and only One. I quoted and reminded him of the *Shema* and his face became very flushed. He has always felt he somehow has dirtied the *Shema* by believing in a so-called One God who is also Triune. He is visibly moved. I have been reading to him from *They Never Told Me This in Church!* with great impact. He is studying your book *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound* with great heat. In his own words it has on more than one occasion made him very angry.

"It will take him some time to process much of the information he is reading and hearing, but I know him — he is a real student and will take it to the next level. We have in the past spoken of things that didn't seem to work as scriptural in regard to Trinity beliefs or other things regarding Hebrew world views. Our system didn't preclude the Trinity at the time. It just said that we held beliefs which it seemed could not be based on the

Scriptures. Church leaders were *eisegeting* [reading the Trinity into the Bible]. He used to take issue with the Genesis 1:26 reference to 'us' as a proof that GOD is three or Elohim as meaning GOD in the plural. I was truly grateful for the books you have sent, as they have answered his in-depth questions in great detail. When I read the Scriptures now I find a burning in my heart that is like the first time I read the Bible. I feel true again and not confused about doctrine issues that have perplexed me and I think many other would-be true students for centuries.

"I know why there has never been in the later centuries a larger following (because the Church often killed those who did not believe 'orthodoxy') but I believe that true thinkers in a largely free society now will be able to take this truth to heart and leave the deathly remains of Plato's church behind once and for all. It may appear like the Roman church is still alive and kicking but the vast responses to diatribes like *The Da Vinci Code* show to me that those who name Jesus as the Lord are searching for the authentic Jesus. There is coming a revealing of the True God of Jesus' own creed and a return to the proper understanding of the Gospel.

"It may not seem so, but I am convinced there is an awakening of truth in the earth. I suggest we buy up many of these books and send them to leading proponents of orthodoxy's denominations. I would also like to suggest having Bible studies on the authentic Jesus on college campuses, where thinkers will argue the points openly. This could cause a true shift and possibly a new reformation. I am not saying anything is easy nor will it go without a backlash from mainstream Christianity, but a visible thing causes a visible reaction. I wish we had sent these books to Dan Brown, for had he referred to them at all, even if I don't buy into all of his terrible unscriptural and unhistorical work, it would have caused folks to read the truth and find the God of Jesus. He does at least speak of Constantine's influence and his affirmation of the Trinity." — *California*

"I am a Muslim who will probably become a Christian. I believe that Jesus truly did die, and that he rose from the dead. The Qur'an does not say this; I am left with little choice." — *from email*

"I am in the middle of your new book, *The Amazing Aims and Claims of Jesus*, chapter 7, and am enjoying it immensely. I just might have to purchase a few more copies to share!" — *Indiana*

"What a great book — *They Never Told Me This in Church!* Thank you so much for publishing this. I can really relate to the author Greg Deuble, having myself once been in the Church of Christ before finding the biblical truth. I often disputed with the pastor about the Kingdom. What a job it must be to proofread and correct a text as long as that. Great daughter you have — your Sarah." — *Missouri*

“I am enjoying your books on the Trinity and Kingdom of God, and would love to find a time when our paths might cross. I do a bit of writing and occasional speaking on Biblical topics. Our beliefs are tracking quite closely, though I am persuaded that Jesus did have a pre-existence, and that his resurrection is permanently spiritual, to the divine nature. But I appreciate your bold advocacy of unitarianism, and would love to get to know you if the Lord opens the door.” — *Ohio*

“We were praying for openings to teach about the unity of God when the brother-in-law of one of the elders in the church, a pastor from California, visited and announced he no longer believed in the Trinity! We were able to give him your book as well as *When Jesus Became God*. He devoured both and sent them on to his son, who is a captain in the special forces in Iraq. His son in turn has been sharing what he has been reading with his company. He prays each day with his comrades; in that trying situation, prayer and the truth have been a real comfort. And then, I was at a business dinner with my husband when one of our dinner companions brought up the fact that after investigating topics brought up in *The Da Vinci Code* he had a question about whether Jesus was in fact God. I am sending him your book. So, God is moving in so many ways to reach individuals with the truth.” — *Pennsylvania*

The following letters might be useful in your local area:

A letter to the Atlanta Journal Constitution:

Dear Sir,

Recent discussion of the film *The Da Vinci Code* has been confused by certain unhistorical assertions about how Jesus came to be viewed as God, second member of the Trinity. It is as wrong to say that Constantine introduced the Deity of Jesus as it is to say that Jesus was viewed as God continuously from the New Testament onwards. The deification of Jesus was a process culminating in the creedal statements of the fourth century.

The earliest post-biblical Christian writers did not believe in the Trinity. They thought of the Son of God as created in time, before Genesis. They are more like the modern group we know as Jehovah’s Witnesses. It was only with Origen in the 3rd century that the notion of “the eternal begetting” of the Son was first introduced. But even the doctrine of the Trinity was not fully developed since Origen said that Jesus should be thought of as “God” but not “the one God.” Finally in the West Augustine allowed for no element of subordination of the Son to the Father, and including the Holy Spirit as the third member of the Triune God, the three were said to be

coequal. That creed remains on the books of most mainline churches.

The biblical fact is that Jesus recited the creed of Israel (Mark 12:28-34) and agreed there with a Jewish scribe that God was a single Person. Jesus never claimed to be God, but rather the Son of God, and the New Testament presents him as uniquely generated by miracle in Mary. Jesus’ generation in Mary is said by Luke 1:35 to be the only basis for Jesus’ status as Son of God. He alone had no human father.

Readers may want to consider this fact: Of the roughly 12 thousand occurrences of the words for God in the Bible (Old and New Testaments) not one of them can be shown to mean “God in three Persons.” This should alert us to the patent fact that the Trinity was a post-biblical doctrine which developed amidst much opposition from believers in God as a single Person. Church councils were also sometimes driven by political considerations. If “God” in the Bible never means “God in three Persons,” why do churches make so much of the Triune God as apparently the hallmark of correct belief, one which it is supposed Jesus would approve, although his creed was the creed of Israel. Everyone knows that that creed was always non-Trinitarian and remains so to this day.

Yours sincerely,

Anthony Buzzard, MA (Oxon.), MA Th

Shorter version:

Dear Sir,

Discussion of *The Da Vinci Code* has been confused by unhistorical assertions about how Jesus came to be viewed as God, second member of the Trinity.

The earliest post-biblical Christian writers were not Trinitarians. They thought of the Son of God as created in time, before Genesis.

Jesus recited the creed of Israel (Mark 12:28-34) and agreed there with a Jewish scribe that God was a single Person. Of the roughly 12,000 occurrences of the words for “God” in the Bible not one of them can be shown to mean “God in three Persons.” This should alert us to the fact that the Trinity was a post-biblical doctrine which developed amidst opposition from believers in God as a single Person. If “God” in the Bible never means “God in three Persons,” why do churches make so much of the Triune God as the hallmark of orthodoxy? Would Jesus approve, when his creed was the non-Trinitarian creed of Israel?

16th Theological Conference

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Suggestions on topics are welcome. Please send to
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