

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## Who Did Jesus Understand Himself to Be?

### A Clue from Psalm 82

by Alex Hall

It is, perhaps, an oversimplification to say that we Unitarians deny Jesus' "godhood." In addition to the benefit of establishing some common ground, it may also be more accurate to say that we agree that the title "God" does indeed occasionally apply to him. It is in the matter of how we define the term that the distinction between our beliefs and others' emerges.

One of the common texts cited in support of the assertion that Jesus is "God" is John 20:28. There an astonished Thomas, standing before the risen Jesus, confesses him as "my lord and my God." But what did he mean by this? Perhaps the best person to answer that question would be Jesus himself, who after all neither corrects Thomas nor appears in the least bit scandalized. The closest Jesus comes to giving us an explanation of what the term meant when applied to him is also found in John's gospel. This is unlikely to be a coincidence.

In John 10:33 Jesus is accused of "making himself God" (or "a god" — the Greek allows this also). Jesus' response is interesting. Rather than simply endorsing or refuting the accusation with a simple yes or no, he explains the sense in which he could rightly own the title. He does so by quoting Psalm 82.

In this text, God Almighty addresses a group of beings who are described in verse 1 as "mighty" and "gods." Verses 2 through 7 indicate that they are human judges. And it is verse 6 that Jesus applies to himself. With this usage of "god" in the Psalms Jesus carefully defines for us the sense in which the word "god" is appropriate for him.

We have here the key to Jesus' understanding of himself as someone *other than* God Almighty. The one God, the Almighty, in that Psalm addresses the judges. Jesus places himself in a very definite role. He sees himself as someone who has been raised up by that God to do what his fellow human judges had not done successfully — to succeed where they had failed, and bring God's justice to human society. He would vindicate the poor and needy, and deliver the afflicted from the hand of the wicked. This would make him another, more perfect and ultimate Moses, Gideon or David. In no way does the citation from Psalm 82:6 necessitate him being a part of the Godhead.

Even the capitalization of the "G" in John 10:33 is highly questionable, since the original Greek had no capitals. It is the work and bias of translators to read later views of Jesus' Deity back into John. There is a heavy burden of proof to be shifted before anyone should even suggest that first-century Palestinian Jews, such as Jesus' accusers, would imagine that the boundaries between God and man, Creator and creation could be crossed. Such thinking was alien to orthodox Jews, though present in some pagan traditions.

For those who seek honest dialogue and understanding about who our Messiah is, within the confines of the Bible, Jesus' own definition of the sense in which he is "god" is a good place to start. How absolutely illogical it would be to argue that Jesus was trying to say he was God (Almighty), when he draws a parallel between himself and other human (admittedly failed) judges of Israel. All Jesus had to say was "I am God" and settle the point forever. Rather he says "I am the Son of God" (John 10:36). This is a Messianic title from Psalm 2:7 and it is strongly linked to the begetting of the Son of God in Mary as expressly declared by Gabriel in that much neglected Luke 1:35 (which solves most of the Christological arguments with one stroke). Jesus is the Son of God by miracle, and no one in the Bible imagined that this meant he was God Himself. That latter idea would shatter the monotheism of the whole of Scripture. Two Persons who are both God makes two Gods as we all really know, according to the established rules of language. ✧

## Key of David

by Terry Anderson

It is quite understandable, considering the times in which we live, that we all seek security from known and potential challenges to our safety. War, terrorism, natural disasters, crime and disease bombard our senses daily both from the media and personal experience. It is a wonder that with this constant assault more people don't suffer psychological problems.

From time immemorial humanity has tried to escape the onslaught of disaster. Who would not want to be protected in times of severe threats to ourselves and our families just as God protected Israel, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? I am relatively sure that Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists (not meaning to leave out any religious group) all pray for protection and expect results. But professing Christians die every day from war, disease, accidents and many of them have relied on their God to protect and heal. Sometimes

they do escape disaster and sometimes they don't. In most instances there is no way to prove if God was involved or not. That is not to say that their faith is unfounded. It is a fact that God does not always answer prayers in the time or manner in which we think He should.

There are Christians who are undoubtedly zealous in their beliefs, have probably studied and prayed intensely and have come to believe in a doctrine of protection from latter-day trials and tribulation. Belief in end-time protection is expressed by millions as the pre-tribulation "rapture." Without going into too much detail, it proposes that Christ will return to the earth *twice* — once to take all the worthy Christians to heaven *prior* to the great tribulation and once to fight the nations of the world before establishing God's Kingdom on earth. There is no real evidence in the Bible to support it.

However, does that mean that the Bible nowhere promises protection from tribulation? What I am about to propose may or may not seem logical to you. I am not creating some new doctrine. I am simply trying to shed some light on a rather cryptic text. It makes sense to me and I hope it at least galvanizes you to further study. This matter of safety from tribulation comes out of my background in the Worldwide Church of God. We imagined a "place of safety," not "a pretrib rapture" off the earth. The place of safety during a 3 1/2 year period prior to Messiah's return was to be in some location on earth such as Petra, a rocky enclave outside modern-day Amman, Jordan. God, if He so desires, can protect anyone anywhere at any time. And there are indications that He will indeed do just that to a select group of Christians.

In chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation we find messages to the churches from Jesus. The message to the church at Philadelphia is relevant to our subject. Revelation 3:10 states that Jesus will "keep you [whoever that is] from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." Here is a very definite promise of protection for those who qualify — safety from last days' tribulation which will engulf the whole earth and bring unfathomable misery to billions of its inhabitants. Will believers of all sorts (1 1/2 billion) receive this protection or is it intended for a select subgroup of Christians? Let's examine the whole message to Philadelphia and see if it yields any clues as to what God's thinking was.

In verse 7 Jesus states that he is the one, the Messiah, who has the key of knowledge and understanding. He says he is "holy and true and has the **key of David**. He opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens." I believe that this reference to understanding is directly linked to the key of David phrase and has extremely important implications for Christians if they have hopes of fitting into these last days promises of protection. So

what exactly is this key of David that is used to open our understanding? Is it what David did? Or what he said? Or possibly who he was? Whatever it is it must relate to God's great plan for mankind, with special reference to the covenant made with David in 2 Samuel 7 which in turn relates to Jesus, the Messiah, the center of that plan. It is not called the key of Abraham or the key of Moses or the key of Job. It is the key of David with which we are concerned.

In the opening verse of the New Testament, Matthew 1:1, we read "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Many Christians read right over this critical introduction and miss the immense importance of this and the following 16 verses. Matthew and Luke chronicle the genealogy of the Messiah and establish the foundation of the whole New Testament by stating what John (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7) so carefully warned Christians to be fully aware of — that the Messiah came in the flesh. This means that the Messiah is truly a human person, the human descendant of David, Abraham and Adam. This is a vitally important truth leading to understanding the plan of God, without which it is easy to be diverted to channels leading to dead ends and wrong conclusions. All Israel looked for the descendant of David to sit upon the throne and be King over Israel, and Peter addressed this very issue in his sermon in Acts 2:29-35.

This leads naturally to what David said about the Messiah in the Psalms. Though not all the Psalms are attributed to David, Psalm 110 is, and it is a pivotal Scripture, quoted and referred to by Jesus and the NT more than any other. Why? Because it clarifies who the Messiah truly is. Is this the key of David, unlocking the door to the understanding of God's plan and His relationship to the Messiah, King of Israel? There has been a great deal written by Anthony Buzzard concerning this critical text so I will just refer you to those many articles and summarize the Psalm.

When we read "the Lord said to my lord..." David is telling us that the first Lord is YHVH, the Lord God, creator and eternal. The second lord is the King Messiah and not the Lord God. David knew this, and under inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote it (Yahweh and *adoni*, respectively) to let all those reading know that this is proof that Jesus is not God! What a critical piece of knowledge — possibly the key of David? Besides Psalm 110 there are other Messianic Psalms which are either directly attributed to David or could have been written by him. For instance, Psalm 2 is intensely Messianic, setting the stage for Messiah's return at a time when the nations are raging against God's claim to rulership over all the earth. But let us return to Revelation and the message to Philadelphia.

This key that Jesus possesses unlocks understanding (reveals mystery) and is linked to his lineage and identity in relationship to God the Father, and it is all linked to David,

i.e., who he was and what he was inspired to write. In Revelation 3:8 Jesus informs the church that he knows their works and has set before them an open door (opened with the key of David) that no one can shut, “for you have a *little* strength, have kept my word and have not denied my name.” My understanding of this is that whoever it is *does not* have the power and strength of major institutions behind them but nevertheless still works diligently to spread the message which Jesus preached, the Kingdom Gospel which he communicated to the apostles and their disciples.

Luke chapter 21 is Jesus’ instruction and warning about the end times and is a parallel prophecy to many of those in Revelation. After describing the cataclysmic events leading up to the end of the age, Jesus tells those gathered at the temple that they should “watch and pray always that they may be found worthy to escape all these things that will take place and stand before the son of man” (v. 36). This seems to confirm that some indeed will be protected from latter-day tribulation.

I am not presuming to set any time for this protection to occur. I am not saying that this will happen in 7, 30 or 300 years. What I am saying is that when the time comes, those who understand what the key of David refers to, and fit Christ’s definition of membership in his church, will be granted protection somewhere, somehow. This is not the pre-trib rapture as currently understood but more like Isaiah 26:20-21: “Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, the Lord comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.” This is more like a latter-day “Passover.”

The messages to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 certainly indicate a diversity of beliefs and levels of obedience and understanding. This may well describe the current diversity within denominational Christianity. Could it be that God intends, as with Israel (Ezek. 37:11; Rom. 11:25), to save a great percentage of Christians, but only a few will be spared the final tribulation to come upon the whole earth? I think the message to the Philadelphia church speaks to just that happening.

Each of us needs to be active and ready to pass on the message and give an answer for the hope that lies within us. That great hope is in God and His Messiah ruling the nations with the saints. I sincerely hope, because of the suffering of the multitudes, that God’s Kingdom comes sooner than we imagine. ✧

## Can the Same Single Line Begin at Two Different Points?

Anthony Buzzard, expanded from One God Conference, Atlanta, May, 2006

A very significant theological school has long protested the notion that one can *preexist oneself*. That school has asked its opponents to explain how such a thing is even imaginable. How can you *be* before you *are*!? I think that many students of the Bible have not thought this issue through, and it is the task of educators to invite reflection. It is reflection which is so significant that it will determine our view of who Jesus really is.

I maintain that the NT says, if one looks at the forest first, and not just certain isolated trees in John and Paul, that Jesus is the *human* Messiah promised by the Hebrew Scriptures. He is the Son of God promised for a time *future* to David (2 Sam. 7:14-16; note the future tenses). The son of David is raised up “after David” and thus does not exist before! If this is not the first premise of all Christology, we might as well discard Scripture as the foundation of our faith. Is it unreasonable to insist that David’s son, who is also to be God’s Son, is younger than David, his ancestor?

The *whole point* of the Messiah is that he is a member of the human race, not God Himself and not an angel. He is an expression of the One God — His image, yes, but still a member of the human race. The profound truth in all this is the amazing thing God has chosen to do with a *human being* begotten personally by Him. **It is the Devil who keeps saying “Jesus is too good to be man or ‘mere man.’”** The Devil is the inveterate enemy of the human race. He has been relentlessly opposed to mankind as the pinnacle of God’s great creation. But if God so decrees — and He has — a mediating *human being* can forgive sins and raise the dead, performing all sorts of miracles. He can do this, as Jesus did, as the One God’s human *agent and plenipotentiary*.

I think that there is a great danger that Scripture on this point about the *human* Messiah Jesus is discarded. As I hope to show, this is what in fact happens when “orthodox” scholars write whole books<sup>1</sup> to defend the ancient and classic Trinitarian idea that Jesus preexisted as the Son of God and then “assumed human nature” (the Incarnation, capital “I”). I maintain that one can only begin to get such a theory off the ground if 1) one forgets who it was God promised as Savior throughout the OT; 2) one ignores the primary and clear Christology of Matthew and Luke, who brilliantly develop their Christology on the basis of the expectations and promises of the Hebrew Bible, 3) one does not critically inspect the whole concept of personal preexistence, and 4) one is willing to speak of two Persons who are God — a subtle polytheism.

<sup>1</sup> McCready, *He Came Down from Heaven*, IVP, 2005.

Naturally enough I think that John and Paul did not overthrow the work of Matthew and Luke and thus agreed with them — and this they both say constantly — that Jesus *is the Messiah*. That is what the NT says plainly and constantly. That is their common confession, and it is chaotic for me to imagine that Paul disagreed with Luke, his companion, or that John who knew of the Synoptic gospels set out to contradict their clear teaching about the *origin* of the Son of God, the Messiah.

Yes, the *origin* of the Son as the Greek text has it in Matthew 1:18, the genesis of the Son, his beginning. Remember that according to mainstream churches the Son is not supposed to have a beginning at all. He has always existed! That is the umbrella teaching (the Trinity) under which some readers are gathering.

The same person cannot *begin* from two different points. Can the same single line begin at two points? The same person cannot be six months younger than his cousin (Jesus was six months younger than John the Baptist) and at the same time billions of years older. I think it impossible for the *son* of David, which Jesus *must be*, to be also the creator of David, or even the ancestor of David. Such mythology is not much less amazing than the fictions of *The Da Vinci Code*.

The notion that Jesus preexisted his own begetting in Mary (please think long and hard as to how this could be!) and was thus active and vocal during the OT period contradicts the plain statement in Hebrews 1:1-2 that God did *not* until the NT period speak through His Son. I don't know how language can more clearly *exclude* the Trinitarian idea that the Son was in fact active and speaking in the prophets, appearing visibly as an angel or as a man. Yet this contradiction of Hebrews 1 is the view of the earliest church fathers, as is well known. It became the foundation of later Trinitarianism.

Yes, the early church fathers and apologists plainly declare that it was the *preexisting Son* who spoke throughout the OT period, beginning by speaking to Adam. In so doing they are telling us that they were imagining a different, pre-human and therefore non-human Jesus. You just cannot preexist yourself. You cannot be pre-human and human without being two persons. A son cannot be begotten, i.e., come into existence, if he is *already* in existence. Oh, he might be “morphed” into an embryo, but that is a curiously pagan idea, much more akin to reincarnation.

Trinitarian scholar A.T. Hanson refers to the problem “which it seems so difficult to make sense of, a personal preexistence of Jesus Christ and a glorified humanity belonging to the risen Christ.” He candidly admits that “there is thus in the prologue to the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel nothing that demands a doctrine of a preexistent *person* called

Jesus Christ, only of the preexistent Word of God.”<sup>2</sup> Dr. Colin Brown is even more assertive on this point: “To read John 1:1 as though it said ‘In the beginning was *the Son*’ is patently wrong.” The same Dr. Colin Brown, seasoned systematician at Fuller Seminary, says correctly, “to be called Son of God in the Bible means you are *not* God.”<sup>3</sup>

Of Hebrews 1 Hanson says: “It is not even certain that the name *Son* is unhesitatingly applied by him to the preexistent state. Hebrews 1:2 could be rendered: ‘He has in these last days spoken to us in the mode of a Son,’ *which would imply that the Sonship only began at the incarnation.*” This gives away a great clue. The church fathers were mistaken in their claim that the Son of God spoke constantly in the OT period. Hebrews denies this. Hanson picks up on another important fact, and as a Trinitarian is puzzled by it: “The puzzling fact is that the synoptic gospels, which as publications are later than Paul and contemporary with Hebrews, do not exhibit any tendency to elaborate a doctrine of preexistence.” In other words, if the synoptics are offering the faith to the public in the later NT period, how come they say nothing at all about a pre-historic existence of Jesus as Son of God? How is it that they *exclude* a pre-human Jesus altogether? Hanson, I would think, is on the verge of giving up his Trinitarianism. He concedes that “the historical evidence that in fact Jesus of Nazareth was conscious of his Divinity and remembered his pre-incarnate state is totally insufficient.”<sup>4</sup>

I suggest that the whole theory of the Son existing as a conscious person before his birth is unwarranted and has led to a deluge of conflict and division in the faith, not to mention some martyrdoms and violent excommunications. Neither the angel Jesus nor the eternal Jesus is the Jesus of the Bible. There is no God the Son in the text of Scripture. But there is the uniquely begotten one Son of God, the human Messiah.

This whole concept of personal preexistence was an import from Greek thinking which invaded the Church by 150 AD. Adolf Harnack, the “prince” of church historians, was right that the entire orthodox dogmatic system is based on the false premise found in II Clement (9:5):<sup>5</sup> “Jesus Christ being *first* spirit became flesh.” This contradicts Paul flat in I Corinthians 15:46 where he says that the spirit Jesus was not before Adam, but the other way round. Adam came first, then the second Adam. Of the mistaken idea of II Clement Harnack rightly says: “This is the fundamental, theological and philosophical creed on which the whole Trinitarian speculations of the Church of the succeeding centuries are built and it is thus the root of the

<sup>2</sup> *The Image of the Invisible God*, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> *Ex Auditu*, 7, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> *The Image of the Invisible God*, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> II Clement is not a Bible book and its date is probably early in the second century.

orthodox system of dogmatics.” Those dogmatic decisions bind church members to this very day.

Let us 1) think about what we mean when we say “preexistence,” and 2) listen carefully to Matthew and Luke and see if they describe the assumption of human nature by an *already conscious Person living in heaven*.

Preexistence: Albert Reville, professor of the history of religion, wrote: “The fact is that the two ideas — preexistence and Virginal birth — cannot be reconciled. A Preexistent person who becomes man reduces himself, if you will, to the state of a human embryo; but he is not conceived by action exterior to himself in the womb of a woman. But *conception* is the point at which an individual is formed, who did not exist before, at least as an individual.”<sup>6</sup>

Scripture says that the Son of God was *conceived* (the mother’s part) and *begotten* (the action of the Father).

Listen to Professor Mackay on the extraordinary difficulty involved in preexistence as a concept at all: “It is best to begin with the problem of preexistence, not only because there are linguistic difficulties here, but because it leads directly into the main difficulties encountered in all Incarnational and Trinitarian theology. As soon as we recoil from the suggestion that something can preexist itself, we must wonder what exactly preexists what else, and in what sense it does so.

“It does not take a systematician of any extraordinary degree of perspicacity to notice how exegetes themselves are the unconscious victims in the course of their most professional work of quite dogmatic (that is, uncritical) systematic assumptions.”<sup>7</sup>

I think this is absolutely right. Prince of church history, Adolf Harnack, agrees: “The miraculous coming into being of Christ in the virgin through the holy spirit and real preexistence of Christ *mutually exclude each other*. Later, and in fact very soon, people were admittedly forced to think of them as compatible.”<sup>8</sup>

Pannenberg makes our point well: “Jesus’ virginal birth stands in irreconcilable contradiction to the Christology of the Incarnation of the preexistent Son of God...[According to the virgin birth] Jesus first became God’s Son through Mary’s conception. [Preexistence] is irreconcilable with this: that the divine Sonship as such was first established in time [as Matthew and Luke teach]. Sonship *cannot at the same time consist in preexistence and still have its origin only in the divine procreation* of Jesus in Mary...[Matthew and Luke] teach that from his birth onward Jesus has been God’s Son, because through his birth he is God’s

Son...Preexistence cannot be connected without contradiction conceptually with the original motif of the virgin birth...The contradiction of preexistence and Virgin Birth the patristic church apparently did not notice...How was such a transformation of the original faith in Christ possible? How did Jesus, exalted through the resurrection from the dead, become the preexistent divine being descending from heaven? This remains to the present a chief problem of the history of the primitive Christian tradition.”<sup>9</sup>

The problem is resolved by believing what Matthew and Luke have to say, and of course Acts and Peter, and then agreeing that Paul and John did not contradict them. The Son of God did not exist literally until he was supernaturally begotten in Mary. Luke 1:35 deserves to be shouted from the housetops. Pastors should be urged to give full-length expositions of this verse.

Virginal begetting, the supernatural coming into existence of the person Jesus, the Messiah, Son of God, is the unquestioned teaching of Matthew and Luke. It is a hopeless task to try to read a doctrine of Incarnation into them. This can only be done by destroying their testimony. Until recently the clear teaching of Matthew and Luke as having nothing to say about preexistence has been widely accepted. Now recently amazing efforts are being made to make Matthew and Luke believe in a preexisting Son.

Douglas McCready says that the Synoptics teach not directly but implicitly that Jesus preexisted as the eternal Son. He turns to Luke but in a section dedicated to discussing the title “Son of God” (several pages) fails to take any note of Luke 1:35.<sup>10</sup>

This is really an amazing phenomenon. That statement of Gabriel provides the Bible’s main key to the status of Jesus as Son of God. Few verses actually unpack themselves with the clarity of Luke 1:35. Few verses actually interpret themselves. But this one does. Gabriel and Luke here tell us exactly how, why, when and where the Son of God was begotten. They provide a *biblical definition of Son of God* as applicable to Jesus. It was “precisely for this reason” (*dio kai*), i.e. the creative miracle in Mary, that the “holy thing to be begotten is the Son of God.” Matthew is no less clear that the *genesis* (Matt. 1:18) of Jesus is found in the miraculous *begetting* which is to occur “in Mary” (1:20). To beget means in Greek and English to **cause to come into existence**. To come into existence means you are *not* in existence already. Language has no clearer way of telling us this. Matthew has rehearsed the word “beget” some 40 times in his first chapter. He has called the Messiah son of David and son of Abraham and then proceeds to tell us how the Son of God came into existence, was begotten, *in Mary* (1:20), not

<sup>6</sup> *History of the Dogma of Jesus Christ*, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> *Dogmengeschichte*, Vol. 1, p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> *Jesus, God and Man*, p. 143, 144, 150, 151.

<sup>10</sup> *He Came Down from Heaven*, 2005.

through Mary. It was the Gnostics who first said that Jesus came *through* Mary, preexisting himself in some mystical way. Orthodoxy, with its notion of a preexisting Son, is in fact harboring a subtle Gnostic tendency. Harnack recognized what has happened. He spoke of the “Gnostic leaven” which orthodoxy never got rid of.

It is the paradox of all paradoxes then that the Nicene Creed actually anathematizes any who say that “before he came into existence he was not in existence.” The creed therefore excommunicates Matthew and Luke — and Paul in Galatians 4:4 and John in I John 5:18 (not the KJV). Paul speaks of the Son as “coming into existence” from a woman. And John speaks of a point in time when the Son was begotten, i.e. *brought into existence* (*gennetheis*).

No wonder that the very candid and celebrated Roman Catholic commentator on the birth narratives, Raymond Brown, confesses that Luke 1:35 “has embarrassed many orthodox theologians since in preexistence Christology a conception by the holy spirit in Mary does *not* bring about the existence of God’s Son. Luke is seemingly unaware of such a Christology [he was no Trinitarian]. For Luke conception is causally linked to divine Sonship.”

Dunn is right with us on this point. Dunn incidentally has now given up belief in preexistence even in John’s Gospel. “Luke is more explicit than Matthew in his assertion of Jesus’ divine sonship from birth (1:32, 35). But here too it is sufficiently clear that it is a begetting, a becoming, which is in view, the coming into existence of one who will be called, and will in fact be the Son of God, *not the transition of a preexistent being to become the soul of a human baby*, or the metamorphosis of a divine being into a human fetus...Luke’s intention is clearly to describe the creative process of begetting...Similarly in Acts there is no sign of any Christology of preexistence.”<sup>11</sup> No Incarnation, according to Luke!

Godet is quite clearly in line with Luke: “By the word ‘therefore’ the angel alludes to his preceding words: he will be called the son of the Highest. We might paraphrase it: ‘And it is precisely for this reason that I said to you...’ We have then here, from the mouth of the angel himself, an authentic explanation of the term Son of God, in the former part of his message. After this explanation Mary could only understand the title in this sense: *a human being of whose existence God Himself is the immediate author*. It does not convey the idea of preexistence.”

Equally frank is Fitzmeyer, the commentator in the *Anchor Bible* on Luke. He puts his finger on the enormous change that came over the faith as early as the

mid-second century: Justin Martyr reads the account in Luke to mean that the preexisting Son, called the power of God and holy spirit, engineered his own conception in Mary. Preexisting himself he caused his own existence in Mary.<sup>12</sup> Justin was driven to this by his premise that the Son had been fully active in OT times, as a buffer between the world and the ineffable God the Father who did not directly deal with the world.

Note how clear Fitzmeyer is about what had happened by way of obstructing the plain sense of Luke 1:35 by Justin (150 AD): “Holy spirit is understood in the OT sense of God’s creative and active power present to human beings. *Later church tradition* made something *quite other* out of this verse. Justin wrote: ‘It is not right therefore to understand the Spirit and power of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first begotten of God’ (*Apology* 1:33). In this [Justin’s] interpretation the two expressions, spirit and power, are being understood of the Second Member of the Trinity. It was scarcely however before the 4th century that the Holy Spirit was understood as the third person...*There is no evidence here in the Lukan infancy narrative of Jesus’ preexistence or Incarnation*. Luke’s sole concern is to assert that the origin of God’s Messiah is the effect of His creative spirit on Mary.” (He says the elements of the Trinity but not the doctrine itself are found in Luke.)

The Christology of the Synoptics is a barrier to all speculation about a Jesus who does not originate in the womb of his mother. Thus the human Jesus is established and emerges as a credible model for human spirituality as well as the chosen instrument for human salvation as the lamb of God, so constituted by God Himself. God, rather than councils, should be allowed the freedom to choose what sort of Savior is adequate to the task. I thank Him that He graciously appointed a member of the human race as mediator, savior and judge. “Every High Priest is selected from among men” (Heb. 5:1), not from among angels, and certainly God cannot be a High Priest to Himself.

If the Savior has to be God, it is hard to see how the immortal God can die (when God declares that He is immortal, I Tim. 6:16) and how even a created preexisting holy angel, who also has immortality, can do the job. Only a human being who is mortal can die as Savior for the sins of the world. All the later complex divisions of the one Person Jesus into two, will not answer this point.

Moreover if Jesus as the Trinitarians officially say is “man” and not “a man,” who did Mary bear? It is really incredible to believe with orthodoxy that Mary bore “human nature” and not a newly existing son of David. Does the Hebrew Bible promise us “human nature” as the

<sup>11</sup> *Christology in the Making*, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Are there echoes of Semiramis here, whose Son preexisted as her husband, Nimrod?

descendant of David or the seed of Eve? Hardly. The Bible simply does not deal in such abstractions, and this fully justifies the remarks of Bart Ehrman and Geza Vermes that “The official line taken by Christianity... was not directly tied to the actual words and deeds of the historical Jesus.”<sup>13</sup> “Compared to the dynamic religion of Jesus, fully evolved Christianity seems to belong to another world.”<sup>14</sup>

“Polytheism entered the Church camouflaged.”<sup>15</sup> Harnack puts his finger on the whole problem that arose in Christology when Greek philosophical paradigms were brought in to explain the Bible: “The church opposed the gross docetism and the tearing apart of Jesus and the Christ. But did not the teaching of a heavenly Aeon, who was incarnated as the Savior, contain a remnant of the old Gnostic leaven? Does not ‘emanation of the Logos’ for the purpose of the creation of the world remind us of the emanation of Aeons [in Gnosticism]? Was not ditheism promoted when two or three divine Beings were prayed to?...A struggle began...which was the history of *the suppression of the historical Christ by the preexisting Christ in dogmatics*, that is to say the suppression of the real Christ by the fictitious Christ in dogmatics, the triumphant attempt to regiment the faith of the laity by means of a formula incomprehensible to the laity...and to put the mystery of the Person of Christ in the place of the Person himself. When the Logos Christology triumphed [i.e. the Son was read back on to the logos], the traditional view of the supreme deity as One Person and along with this every thought of the real and complete humanity of the Redeemer was in fact condemned as being intolerable in the Church. Its place was taken by the ‘nature’ of Christ which without ‘the person’ is simply a cipher.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus the precious son of David was turned into a cipher. Trinitarians were committed to the view, inevitable once the Son preexists, that Jesus was “man” but not “a man.” Who is willing to defend this view when in the future Jesus inspects what we have been teaching about him? Happily in our times voices of protest have arisen from many quarters (cited in our book *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound*). Notably J.A.T. Robinson of Cambridge who remarks, “John is as undeviating a witness as any in the NT to the unitary monotheism of Judaism.” And from Professor Caird of Oxford, who warns us to beware of any theory which tries to make the God of Judaism into more than one Person: “The Jews had believed only in the

preexistence of a personification. Wisdom was the personification, either of a divine attribute, or of a divine purpose, but never a person. Neither the fourth Gospel nor Hebrews speaks of the eternal Word or Wisdom of God in terms which compel us to regard it as a Person.” They knew this at Qumran also when they wrote “By God’s knowledge everything has been brought into being. And everything that is, God established by His purpose, and apart from Him nothing is done” (I QS XI.11). And Philo said of Moses, who preexisted in the plan of God according to Jews, that he was “by divine foreknowledge the logical embodiment of the Law” (*nomos empsychos*). No wonder then that John could think of Jesus as the embodiment of grace and truth — God’s expression.

Finally, this from Roman Catholic professor Roger Haight in his mammoth *Jesus Symbol of God*: “Once Logos is hypostatized [i.e. made to be a Person before the birth of Jesus] one has the problem of a second God.” That says it all. And if polytheism is a problem, we had better take note.

I remind you that no one reading the eight English translations before the KJV would have been misled into reading “All things were made through *him* [the Son].” They read “all things were made through *it* [the word].” Only under the influence of the Roman Catholic Rheims version did the English Protestant versions change the pronoun to introduce a preexisting *Son*.

To make sense of the God of Scripture we must return to that unitary God of Jesus, the Father who in Jesus’ words is “the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3), the God of Jesus as well as of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ✧

“Practical teaching without sound theology is as impoverished as sound theology without practical teaching. The New Testament doesn’t make the distinction between orthodoxy and orthopraxy [good practice] that we often do, nor is there any hint in the Scriptures, as far as I can see, that God will forgive bad behavior more readily than poor theology, or vice versa. We need to teach them both and teach them well.”  
— Steve Cook

## Comment

“I have rather accidentally received a copy of *The Doctrine of the Trinity* by Anthony Buzzard when searching for books to read at a thrift store. I read it, and it at times really upset me, but I kept reading. It made sense. I tried the texts I wanted to use to prove the falseness of it all but my head had already felt some of these things in my searches for authentic Christianity, and I could see clearly it was true. So now I am looking to ask more questions on some issues. I do believe I am a Christian and as authentic as I know how to be with the Truth I have been given by our God in His Word. I want to read more and learn more about where my traditional mindset has been deceived. I have upset my church by saying things they just would not believe were in the Scriptures. I need help to ground me further. Blessings be with you all.” — *California*

<sup>13</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*.

<sup>14</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus*.

<sup>15</sup> Prof. Friedrich Loofs, *History of Dogma*; Paul Schrödt, *The Problem of the Beginning of Dogma in Recent Theology*.

<sup>16</sup> Eng. trans., Vol. 3, Introduction, p. 10.