



If Only We Had Listened to Gabriel

by Anthony Buzzard

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy child will be called the Son of God" (Gabriel, Luke 1:35).

"Calling brings to expression what one is, so that it means no less than 'he will be.' Interchangeability of the two phrases is seen by comparing Matthew 5:9, 'they will be called sons of God' and Luke 6:35, 'you will be sons of the Most High.'"^[1]

In John 10:36 Jesus spoke of his own history: "God made him holy and sent him into the world." With this simple account our other gospels agree perfectly. The supernatural coming into existence of the Son of God constituted him a uniquely holy human being and thus Son of God in a matchless way. As Son of God, God's final agent, he was sent by his Father on the mission of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 4:43).

Hebrew prophecy had announced the birth of Messiah in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). God had raised him up, that is, put him on the scene of history and then sent him to deliver the Gospel to Israel (Acts 3:26). This verse should put to rest any suggestion that if God "sent" Jesus it must mean that Jesus was alive and conscious before his conception. Peter says that God first produced the Messiah and then sent him as His commissioned agent. The detail of just how Jesus, God's Son, came to be is the subject also of the united and detailed testimony of Matthew and Luke, who provide by far the longest accounts of the origin of the Son of God. Both writers intend to anchor the origin of the Son of God firmly in history.

Neither Matthew nor Luke presents us with a theological problem of vast proportions needing armies of theologians to provide an explanation. The biblical accounts describe the Son of God as the object of age-old Jewish promises — that a biological descendant of the royal house of David would appear as God's instrument for the salvation of Israel and the world. Commentators are so accustomed to thinking of the Son as eternal God Himself that they instinctively imagine that Luke and Matthew agree with them. A writer of a tract on "Who Is Jesus?" tells us that "Luke teaches that the origins of Jesus' *human life* were supernatural." He does not observe that Luke describes the origin of the Son of God himself. There is not the slightest hint that he is other than human originating from his mother. Our writer claims Christ was "to be confessed as Lord and God," but he gives no text from Luke or Acts in support of that amazing statement. He thinks that "Mary's son was called the Son of the Highest by the angel because that is who he was from eternity." But Luke and Gabriel say nothing of the sort. Quite to the contrary Gabriel links the miracle in Mary expressly to Jesus being the Son of God. The Son of God is entitled to that designation because God was his father by biological miracle (Luke 1:35). No other reason is supplied, and it is quite unnecessary to imagine any other origin for the Son of God.

It is a relief to turn to the far more scientific and factual accounts of Luke's view of Jesus found in the excellent article on "Power" in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. The author approaches his subject from the Old Testament background:

"There can be no disputing the link with the Old Testament and Jewish picture of the Messiah. Of the Old Testament Messiah Isaiah says that the spirit of counsel and strength rest on him (Isa. 11:2). Isaiah calls him 'a mighty hero' (9:6)." The dictionary happily corrects the complete mistranslation of standard versions which attempt to read Trinitarian theology into Isaiah and describe the Messiah as "the Mighty God," thus presenting us with the amazing concept of a second Almighty God! Isaiah was speaking of a descendant of David who was to be *el gibbor*, "mighty or divine hero."^[2] The dictionary points also to Micah's prediction of the human Messiah. "Micah compares him with a shepherd and says that he will tend his flock in the strength of the Lord his God." The Messiah will operate "in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God" (Micah 5:4). Such a portrait prevents any idea that the

Messiah will be God. He works in the power of one who is his God. The same Messianic agent of God is described in the royal Psalm 110:2: “The Lord [Yahweh] will send the rod of your royal strength out of Zion.” Corroboration of this regal picture of the supernaturally endowed Messiah is found in writings half a century before the birth of Jesus. Psalms of Solomon 17:24, 42-47 read:

“And may God gird him to defeat unrighteous rulers, to purify Jerusalem of the heathen who trample it to destruction...God has made him strong in the holy spirit and wise in counsel with power and righteousness. And the good pleasure of the Lord is with him in strength and he will not be weak. Strong is he in his works and mighty in the fear of God.” The dictionary observes that “in all these passages the picture is that of the King. The power granted to him is victorious power to defeat his enemies. It is the power confessed by the King of Israel: ‘For who is strong save the Lord...the mighty one who makes me strong with strength and makes me mighty with strength to battle’ (2 Sam. 22:32, 33, 40; cp. Ps. 18:32, 39). The king attributes his success in battle to the power which Yahweh has given him. Messiah is thought of as a king like this endowed with the strength of Yahweh.”

Luke is excited by the picture of the Messiah and he reports the prophetic power of Jesus demonstrated in his ministry: The two disciples who walked with the risen Jesus on the way to Emmaus know Jesus to be “a human prophet powerful in deed and in word” (Luke 24:19). The picture is that of a wonderful “new Moses.” Moses was likewise “mighty in his words and deeds” (Acts 7:22). What more does Luke tell us? “Jesus is unique in his existence. His existence is peculiarly determined by the power of God...This is an important feature in the Lukan infancy story...Luke describes the conception of Jesus as the miracle of the Virgin Birth...A divine miracle causes pregnancy...In the background stands the biblical conception of God who begets His Son by a verbal act which cannot be rationalized...For this reason the Son has a special name not borne by other men, namely ‘Son of God’...At the beginning of his existence a special and unique act of divine power gives him the title ‘Son of God’...The Messianic title Son of God is linked with the miracle of conception and birth.”^[3]

God has not left Himself without powerful witness both in the text of Scripture and in expert commentary. It must be obvious to any unprejudiced reader how far these sublime accounts are removed from the later paganized view of Jesus as an eternal Son of God, begotten in eternity, and entering the womb of his mother from a fully conscious existence as God, second member of the Trinity.

The Justification of Later Developments

Theological writings frequently tell us that the right definition of Jesus and his relationship to God was discovered only after centuries of painful intellectual struggle. The Bible however seems much more straightforward. It says nothing about a “mystery of the Trinity.” This came much later. *Post-biblical* writings invite us into a very different world of thought. J.S. Whale asks:

“How did the doctrine of the Trinity come to be formulated and why? What did it mean? As soon as the Church addressed itself to systematic doctrine it found itself wrestling with its fundamental axioms. I use the word ‘wrestling’ deliberately, because those axioms were on the face of them mutually incompatible...The first axiom was monotheism, the deep religious conviction that there is but one God, holy and transcendent, and that to worship anyone else is idolatry. To Israel, and to the New Israel of the Christian church, idolatry in all its forms was sin at its worst. ‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord’ (Deut. 6:4). ‘I am the Lord and there is none else, there is no God beside me’ (Isa. 45:5). Monotheism was the living heart of the religion of the Old Testament. It was and is the very marrow of Christian divinity...The systematic thought inevitably involved *a further definition of monotheism*, an elaboration of the unitary conception of the Godhead, not in terms of tritheism, but of Triunity...Christian thought, working with the data of the New Testament and *using Greek philosophy as its instrument*, constructed the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity...The popular view of the Trinity has often been a veiled tritheism [belief in three Gods].”^[4]

This account is typical of the voluminous material published to inform us how the Trinity came into being. Unable to face the awful possibility that the Church distorted the New Testament rather than explaining it accurately, our writer speaks in low-key words of “a further definition of monotheism,” an “elaboration of the unitary conception of the Godhead.” At least he recognizes that the creed of Jesus was

non-Trinitarian, but rather “unitary monotheism.” But does he deal fairly with the disaster which occurred when Jesus’ own creed was tampered with? Why is it admissible to redefine the simple creed of the Bible? God is one. He is not three. One will not become three without a major restructuring of God and thus of the universe. The New Testament contains not a word about any “wrestling” with how many Persons in the universe can be called the supreme God. There are indeed struggles over issues of the Mosaic law and its application in the New Testament. But no one amongst our apostolic writers ever broached the subject of a brand new definition of God, of monotheism. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New. No more needs to be said.

But the Gentile pagan mind did not want to submit itself to the Jewish creed of the Jewish founder of the Christian faith. The simplicity found in Jesus needed elaboration in terms of the philosophies of the Greek culture. Hence arose all the conflict over the identity of Jesus in relation to God.

Hence the church “wrestled,” wrestled itself in fact most unwisely out of the perceived straightjacket of biblical monotheism, the very doctrine which would have spared it so much subsequent agony and division.

Other authorities who comment on our topic are forthright about the facts, particularly if they are historians with less of a theological axe to grind. The 15th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in its article on “Trinity” says: “Neither the word Trinity, nor the explicit doctrine as such, appears in the New Testament, *nor did Jesus and his followers intend to contradict the Shema of the Old Testament: ‘The Lord our God is one Lord’*” (Deut. 6:4).^[5]

Dr. Marvin Wilson comments well on Jesus’ unmistakable confirmation of the creed of Israel:

“Of the 5,845 verses in the Pentateuch, ‘Hear O Israel’ sounds the historic keynote of all Judaism. This fundamental truth and leitmotif of God’s uniqueness prompts one to respond by fulfilling the fundamental obligation to love God. Accordingly when Jesus was asked about the most important commandment his reply did not contradict this central theme of Judaism (Mark 12:28-34; Matt. 22:34-40). With 613 individual statutes of the Torah from which to choose, Jesus cited the *shema*, including the command to love God, but also extended the definition of the first and great command to include love for one’s neighbor (Lev. 19:18)...Yahweh is the Supreme Being, wholly unlike all other things in the universe which have been created by him.” Wilson then mentions that “Some have seen complex unity.” He wisely makes no attempt to justify this attempt to read later theology back into the simple words of the Hebrew Bible. But he strangely seems unalarmed that the church he belongs to does not subscribe to the creed affirmed by Jesus himself.

Dr. Wilson provides excellent historical comment on the creed recited by Jesus. In *Our Father Abraham*, Marvin Wilson states: The *Shema* “is one of the most crucial Old Testament texts for the foundational teachings of *both Jesus and Judaism*.”^[6] But that foundational creed of Jesus is nowhere to be found on the books of mainline churches. For all of his good history and presentation of the facts, Professor Wilson seems unable to protest the Church’s — his own church’s — failure to uphold the creed of Jesus.

Unless, then, it can be shown that belief in three Persons who are God can be reconciled with the *Shema* affirmed by Jesus, Christians have the wrong creed. They have been mistaken for centuries. They have abandoned Jesus at a fundamental level (as well as keeping Jews and Muslims away from considering the claims of Jesus).

Let us do some further comparing. We have seen what creed Jesus established as the foundation of true religion: “the Lord our God is one Lord.” Now let us hear what Christians were supposed to recite as creed some 500 years after the time of Jesus.

From the Jew Jesus to a New Gentile Creed

Below is the so-called Athanasian creed. I will not quote it in full, but give you enough to show how it unpacks the summary statement that “God exists in three Persons.”

“Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic [universal] faith; which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity and Unity; neither

confounding the persons nor dividing the substance...The Father eternal, the Son eternal and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals but one eternal...So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord and the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet they are not three Lords but one Lord. For just as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so we are forbidden by the catholic religion to say there are three Gods or three Lords...and in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped. He who wants to be saved must so think of the Trinity.”

Note the heavy threats leveled at any who might question this amazing dogma. But could Jesus have possibly subscribed to that creed? Or would Jesus himself have fallen under the cruel anathemas of this “Christian” creed? The appalling possibility is that Jesus would have fled from association from this bizarre document, which presents the ordinary reader with rather obvious non-sense.

Jesus patently knew nothing about the creeds of Nicea or the so-called Athanasian creed. Jesus perfectly taught and carried out the will of his Father. Jesus’ own affirmation of the creed of Israel is testimony to the greatest fact of the universe: That there is a God, and that He is one divine Person. Could even the God of Jesus possibly believe in the Trinity?✧

^[1] Raymond Brown, *Birth Narratives*, p. 289.

^[2] *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 299.

^[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 299, 300.

^[4] *Christian Doctrine*, 1952, p. 112.

^[5] p. 126.

^[6] p. 122

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