

THE MYSTERY OF MYSTERIES

Many modern preachers and church goers are loaded down with the accumulation of baggage of half-truths, distortions, and plain, though well-meaning, false-hoods, gleaned from Bible colleges and Seminaries, Sunday school days, sermons, and half remembered Bible texts, as well as novels, plays and church papers, resulting in many fanatical and fervently believed doctrines having no basis in Scripture. Some of the most widely and passionately held doctrines are simply passed off as “mysteries we cannot understand but must be believed and accepted by faith.”

Greg S. Deuble, a former Church of Christ minister, in a compelling book entitled: *They Never Told Me This in Church*, states: “There is a consensus among many New Testament scholars that much of what the historical Jesus and his apostles taught has been submerged by an influx of post-biblical tradition. Subtle foreign influences, mostly from pagan Greek philosophy, which neither Jesus nor his first-century followers would recognize or endorse, have obscured the original Gospel as Jesus preached it. Most churchgoers accept without question, un-biblical traditions which they never seriously investigated.” The Apostle Peter wrote: “False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words” (II Peter 2:1, 2). Some time ago, commenting on another subject, we wrote: “It is with a certain amount of trepidation and ambivalence that we write these words. Yet for the sake of the truth we must stand against thousands of years of tradition, contradictions, most learned theologians, go against all accepted creeds of the church, contradict what we have been taught, risk being maligned, misunderstood, and misrepresented, but the only thing we ask is that if what we have to say is rejected, it will be rejected upon the basis of Scripture and not assumption.” We apply these words to this article.

THE MYSTERY OF THE HOLY TRINITY

High on the list of some prominent teachings held sacred by most churches that are not found in Scripture is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Definition of the Trinity: “In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, these three persons being truly distinct from one another. The persons are co-eternal and co-equal; all are uncreated and omnipotent.” From *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. XV. To not believe in the trinity is *not* to believe Christ is not divine. *Christ is divine, the divine Son of God.* God is often referred to as “the Triune God” described by the phrase “God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.” The problem with this is this description is not found in Scripture and Jesus never claimed to be God. Believers in the trinity will marshal a host of Bible

verses to disprove this, but nowhere will they find a definite verse that supports their claim. Is this an important subject, or are we just nitpicking? We heard an Elder in a local church say, “It makes no difference to me if there are three Gods (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) that just means I can praise them three times as much.” If this is not found in Scripture what is the origin of the doctrine? There is no record of a doctrine of the trinity taught or believed in the early church. Perhaps the reason for this is it is not in the Scriptures. Richard E. Rubenstein in *When Jesus Became God* states: “During the first three centuries after Jesus’ crucifixion, the idea that the Savior was separate from God and subordinate to Him was not particularly shocking. To patriarchal Romans, the very titles Father and Son implied a relationship of superiority and inferiority. Two of the most brilliant and influential of the Eastern Church Fathers, Origen and Dionysius of Alexandria, had taught that Jesus was inferior to God. And the idea of a hierarchy of power and glory in heaven matched what people saw on earth, as well as what they read in the Gospels.” The year is about 319. In a meeting of the presbyters (priests) in Alexander, the “Bishop” of Alexander, coincidentally named “Alexander” began to lecture on the theological mystery of the “Holy Trinity”. One of the presbyters by the name of Arius, a native of Libya, dropped a bombshell on Alexander’s meeting by announcing: “If the Father begat the Son, then he who was begotten had a beginning inexistence, and from this it follows there was a time when the Son was not.” Arius gained a following which was destined to shake not only the professing church but the entire Roman Empire and result in a conflict so fierce that intense persecutions from both sides gripped the entire civilized world. Most theological teachers today look upon any doctrine akin to Arius as heretical and blasphemous. This means that in most church circles today to not believe in the trinity is to deny that Jesus is divine and make him a mere man on the level of all other men. So as in Arius’ day anyone who is not a Trinitarian is also labeled heretical and blasphemous.

The quarreling and contentions among the two arguing sides which erupted into physical battles and persecutions came to the attention of Emperor Constantine, the first “Christian” emperor, who decided in the year 325 to put an end to the controversy by convening a council of Bishops. The small town of Nicaea was chosen and it was Constantine’s aim to not only put an end to the quarreling but to establish a standardized creed which would bring about some unity of faith in the church. According to Norman P. Tanner in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* “the council of 318 ‘Bishops’ opened on June 19th in the presence of the emperor, but it is uncertain who presided over the council. The aim of Constantine to present a creed that would foster unity of the faith did not work out as planned. From the beginning of the session of the developers of the creed there was much division over the statements of the creed. The Emperor Constantine had ordered the council of Nicaea to resolve the differences in theology on the Godhead. This council developed into a heated

battle that ended in victory for the Trinitarians. The Trinitarian position was strengthened by a new Nicene creed that was carefully worded to prohibit any belief that was not Trinitarian and to strengthen the Trinitarian conceptions. No other views were allowed. St. Augustine, a century later, developed this teaching into a doctrine of the Trinity, in which all three persons were separate personalities, all co-equal and co-eternal.” It is sad to see a belief held so sacred today by the majority of Christians was actually given birth by quarreling “Bishops,” a questionable creed and a Roman Emperor who knew little about the teaching of Scripture. Why do not those who believe the doctrine of the trinity based upon the Nicene creed also accept the doctrine of the first council of Ephesus which proclaimed the Virgin Mary was the “*Theotokos*” (God-bearer) or more commonly called “the Mother of God”? Or for that matter why not believe the conclusions of all the councils?

The common defense of the trinity is it cannot be explained or understood, but we are to believe it in spite of this. As Steve Berg stated in *Christianity Today*: “The trinity can’t be explained, it is mysterious, it can’t be understood, but that doesn’t make it untrue.” Deuteronomy 29:29 states: “the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of the law.” God’s word is a “revelation” and we are commanded many times in Scripture to know and understand the “mysteries” which have been revealed. We “have received the Spirit from God, that we might know the things freely given us by God” (I Cor. 2:12). If God has revealed Himself in His Son, to make it something mysterious, complicated, and unable to be understood is a contradiction of God’s revelation in Scripture. They can’t explain or understand it because it is a confusing doctrine based upon human creeds and not Scripture. A casual reading of Scripture should convict anyone of the absurdity of the trinity doctrine. Some examples: God is a God that “changes not” (Psalm 55:19, Mal. 3:6), and He is not a man (Num. 23:19, Job 9:32). Yet the trinity says, “God became a man.” God alone possess immortality (II Tim. 6:8). Yet, God died by crucifixion. God cannot be tempted with evil (James 1:13) Jesus was tempted many times. God knows everything (Omniscient) (Psalm 147:5; I John 3:20). However, Jesus *learned* obedience by the things he suffered (Heb. 5:8); When Jesus, at the age of 12, was found in the temple by his parents, “He was “sitting in the midst of the teachers, both *listening to them* and *asking them questions* (Luke 2:46). There is no mystery of the Holy Trinity because there is no record in Scripture of such a doctrine.

THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

We begin with the origin of the word *Incarnation*. Since the word is not found in Scripture we quote again from *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XV: “The Incarnation is the mystery and the dogma of the how the Word was made flesh. The word was adopted during the twelfth century from the French which in turn had taken over from the Latin *incarnate*. The Latin Fathers, from the fourth century, made use of the word which depends on John 1:14 “And the word was made flesh” which occurs in the Council of Nicaea. When the Word is said to have been incarnate, to have been made flesh, the divine goodness is better expressed whereby God emptied Himself was found bearing like a man. He took upon himself the nature of man, a nature capable of suffering, and

sickness and death.” Add to this the words from *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*: “The doctrine, which took classical shape under the influence of the controversies of the 4th-5th centuries, as formally defined at the Council of Chalcedon in 450. It was largely moulded by the adversity of tradition in the schools of Antioch and Alexandria...further refinements were added in the later medieval periods.”

Our definition of the incarnation is quite simple: It is the view that Jesus the son of God has existed from eternity as the “eternally generated son” whatever that means, and left Heaven and entered the womb of the virgin Mary and was born as a god-man.” We prefer Gabriel’s account as recorded in Luke 1:1-35: “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth to a virgin...whose name was Mary...and the angel said unto her ‘Behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus,’ and Mary said to the angel, ‘how can this be since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered and said unto her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the son of God.’” Gabriel’s words do not imply or in any way suggests the son to be born of Mary somehow existed consciously before his begetting.

“The holy child begotten in you will be called the son of God” (Luke 1:35) is simple enough to believe, but when trinitarians rewrite the biblical story to read in it an eternal son of God, the result is confusing and incoherent. To illustrate this fact we quote from some of the most popular and well-known writings of prestigious authors and leading clerics of our day. Dr. Charles Swindoll, chancellor of Dallas Theological seminary wrote in *When God Became a Man* “What you see in the incarnation—God dressed in diapers, the Creator God wrapped in swaddling clothes.” Dr. J. I. Packard, in his popular book *Knowing God* states: “The word was made flesh. God became a man. The divine son became a Jew; the Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless baby, unable to do more than lie, and stare, and wiggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to walk like any other child...” Quoting Charles Wesley, he continues, “Tis mystery all! The immortal dies!” Perhaps the most inane words ever written by a well-known, popular preacher, is in his book *God Came Near* by church of Christ preacher, Max Lucado who wrote: “He left his home and entered the womb of a teenage girl...Angels watched as Mary changed God’s diaper. The universe watched with wonder as the Almighty learned to walk. Children played in the street with him.” And the most ridiculous words: Mary asked the baby Jesus, “How long was your journey?”

Before Jesus was engaged in “bringing *many sons* into glory” (Heb. 2:10), only two men were described as “sons of God,” Adam (Luke 3:38); and Jesus (Luke 3:22; Matt.17:5). In the New Testament these two sons of God are critically compared (Romans 5:1-21 and I Corinthians 15:21,22; 45-49). In these contrasts the main point that stands out is that both men were perfectly human in every respect, therefore subject to temptation and error. When tempted Adam failed and his transgression brought sin upon all men. Jesus was tempted in all points as we are yet without sin (Heb. 4:15) and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (II Tim.1:10). Jesus’ humanity has been sacrificed upon the alter of deity. Incarnation—no mystery.