

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

by Allon Maxwell

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it". (John 1:1-5)

What does this mean?

Theologians have managed to complicate it beyond all logic, to say something like:

Jesus is called the Word. We may substitute the name "Jesus" in place of "Word" so that the passage now reads:

"Jesus already existed in the beginning. Jesus was with God in the beginning, and Jesus actually was God!"

This totally illogical foundation has then been used by the theologians to build a number of complicated and confusing dogmas concerning the nature of Jesus and His relationship to his Father. The Church has fought and divided amongst its opposing factions for most of its history about these theories (in many cases proving by their behaviour towards one another, that they were not really disciples!).

There are too many variations of these theories, and too much confusion in them, to attempt to explain the subtleties of them all adequately within the compass of one short paper. However, the following attempts to set down the heart of the main theories which still exist to some significant degree in the 20th century church.

1. THE TRINITY

This is THE MAJOR THEORY found in most of the creeds of the mainstream of today's church, e.g.:

- * the Athanasian Creed
- * the Nicene Creed

In these creeds Jesus is said to be one of three divine persons (the Father and the Holy Spirit are the other two) who together constitute one God.

However, the theologians also tell us that these three persons are not three **separate** persons!

"Person", THEY say, is not an adequate word! The theologically correct word is the Greek "*hypostasis*", for which they say the English "person" does not convey the real sense. In fact, they say, there is no direct translation into English! In language which I find quite confusing, the textbooks say that God is "**personal**" or "**supra personal**" (whatever that means!) **without being a person as we understand the word!**

(Nowhere in the New Testament is "*hypostasis*" used in any way which would even remotely justify this "clever" theological use of the word to describe the "**mystery**" of these three "**not really persons**" of the doctrine of the Trinity.)

We are told that these three persons (who are not really persons, but untranslatable "hypostases"!) are each equally:

- * God
- * glorious
- * eternal
- * uncreated
- * incomprehensible
- * almighty
- * Lord

Each person (who they say is not really a person!) must be acknowledged in his own right to be Lord and God, but at the same time it is **heresy** to say that there are three Lords or three Gods.

They also say that, although Jesus is co-eternal with His Father, he is at the same time begotten (but not made or created).

They insist that all three are to be worshipped as "*Unity in Trinity*" and "*Trinity in Unity*" (whatever that means!).

They say that Jesus has two natures, being both God and man at the same time; equal to his Father because He is God, and yet inferior because He is man.

Finally, they say we must all believe this contradictory gobbledygook to be saved!

To be honest enough to say that one does not understand it all, and therefore cannot rationally believe it, is (according to the Athanasian Creed) to be eternally lost.

It is all, say the theologians, a mystery to be taken in a blind leap of "FAITH".

It is significant that this confusing dogma, now required as essential to salvation, was not really put into words in its present form, until the 4th century. It is not found at all in the Old Testament, or in the teaching of the Apostles in the New Testament. Nor, in its present form was it known to any of the Church Fathers of the first three centuries.

The story of how it came to be adopted by the Church is one of politics, intrigue and bitter and murderous warfare amongst 4th century leaders. It is blot in the history of the Church. (This history is briefly described in Bible Digest No 12 - "*How the Doctrine of the Trinity Came to the Church*".)

2. ARIANISM

This is the "other side" of that 4th century controversy which led to the mainstream adoption of the doctrine of the Trinity. It takes its name from Arius who was the loser in the fight with Athanasius, the leader of the Trinitarian faction.

Arius taught that if Jesus really was the Son of God, then there must have been a time when there was a Father but no Son. Jesus, he said was therefore created at some time prior to the creation of the world existing as a separate person (a spirit being) prior to His birth as the son of Mary.

Although finally outlawed by the Council of Constantinople in AD381 and made punishable by death by the Emperor Justinian in the 6th century, Arianism persisted for several centuries as a significant doctrine in a section of the Church, especially in northern Europe. It was finally almost extinguished by warfare and politics, but has continued to surface in small pockets, from time to time.

Today, the only significant group to support it is the Jehovah's Witnesses, although one does occasionally find individuals in mainline churches who are (usually secretly) Arian rather than Trinitarian.

3. MONARCHIANISM

(Sometimes also called "Sabellianism", or "Jesus only")

This variation asserts that if Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God and the Father is God, then there are not three persons but **one person**, who plays **three different roles**, from time to time, as the occasion warrants!

This is, of course, even more incomprehensible, and illogical than the dogma of the Trinity.

It leads to the following totally impossible conflicts:

- * God, when he plays the role of Father, is not a man, yet when He plays the role of Jesus, is a man.
- * God, as Jesus, prays to and worships Himself as Father (the ultimate schizophrenic ego trip!)
- * God, as Jesus, sits at His own right hand as Father. (In two places at once! That is real role playing!)
- * Jesus, as a finite man, is somehow still everywhere present as an infinite Spirit.
- * Jesus, with His two natures, could be tempted in His human nature, but could not sin at all because of His second Divine nature! (Making his temptation and victory over sin into a total farce).
- * On the cross, only His human nature died, since His second Divine nature could not die. (Meaning in effect, that He has not paid the price for our sins after all!)

The theory is not widely held but does exist in several Pentecostal denominations of which the largest is the United Pentecostal Church. It is also found occasionally in individuals in mainline churches and in the complicated writings of some theologians who in trying to explain the Trinity, actually seem to come down on the side of Monarchianism.

(But then perhaps I didn't understand what they wrote, any more than they seemed to. It really was as incomprehensible as what they were trying to explain.)

THE PROBLEM WITH ALL THREE OF THE ABOVE THEORIES

There is one major problem with all three of these theories.

The scriptures are quite clear that Jesus is a **real man**, and that God **is not a man**. Although all three pay lip service in so many words, to the manhood of Jesus, they very effectively deny the reality.

- * No other man has ever been born with two natures.
- * No other man has ever had an eternal or infinite mind.
- * No other man ever existed before his birth as an infinite uncreated spirit being.

Simple logic says that if Jesus did have any of those advantages, then He **was not really a man!**

In fact, the three theories quoted above which do give Jesus those advantages, are nothing more or less than a modern form of the **old Gnostic heresy** described in John's first epistle. The Gnostics held that Jesus was a sort of lesser God or spirit being who came down from heaven and assumed the appearance of a man, without the reality.

It was because of this (they say) that he was able to live a sinless life, unaffected by the limitations of real humanity.

Further, they then went on to say that since Jesus was not really man, God did not really expect other men to be like Him, and therefore obedience was not really necessary. God, they said, was not concerned with what men did with their flesh. It was what they were in their spirits that counted for salvation!

Along with the dogma of the "God Man", this last point makes its cleverly disguised appearance in many of the false Gospels encountered in the modern Church. One regularly encounters such statements as "What you are is more important than what you do", or "Insistence on obedience to what God says is mere legalism", or "it is impossible for these fleshly bodies to obey or overcome sin".

THE FACT IS THAT JESUS WAS AND IS A REAL MAN

There are four essential differences which show that Jesus is different in nature to His Father (who is called the only true God in [John 17:3](#)). Those four things are:

1. God is NOT a man ([Numbers 23:19](#), [Hosea 11:9](#) & [1 Samuel 15:29](#))
Jesus IS a man ([Philippians 2:7](#) & [Hebrews 2:14](#))
2. God is a spirit ([John 4:24](#))
Jesus is NOT a spirit ([Luke 24:37-39](#))
3. God is NOT a son of man ([Numbers 23:19](#))
Jesus IS a son of man ([Luke 19:10](#) & [John 8:28](#))
4. God CANNOT be tempted ([James 1:13](#))
Jesus WAS tempted ([Hebrews 2:18](#) & [Hebrews 4:15](#) & [Luke 4:1-13](#))

HOW THEN DO WE UNDERSTAND WHAT JOHN WROTE?

We must start with the reality of the manhood of Jesus. If we keep that firmly in mind, the rest falls into place.

1. As Son, he cannot be co-eternal with His Father.
That would completely negate the meaning of Fatherhood and begetting and sonship.
2. If he pre-existed His birth, he is not really a man.
That would effectively make Him different to all other men.
3. As a man, He cannot be God in the same sense that His father is God, since God is not a man.
4. He is certainly NOT the same person as His Father.
That would defy all reason and logic. No man has ever been His own Father!

JESUS IS NOT ONLY "THE WORD", BUT ALSO "THE WORD MADE FLESH"

The Greek word "*logos*" which is translated "Word" in this passage, simply means "a spoken word", "a saying", "a communication", etc. According to *Liddell and Scott Greek Lexicon* it also means the inward thought which is expressed in the spoken word.

There are many other shades of meaning, but all derive in some sense from these primary definitions. By far the most common use of "*logos*" is in connection with the preaching of the Word of God. This spoken and written word communicates God's thoughts to us and reveals the plan by which Jesus has become Lord of all creation and our Savior.

"*Logos*" does not have the capital first letter given to "Word" in the English translation. It should properly be translated "word" (with a small "w").

Further, although in Greek "*logos*" is a masculine noun, this is no proof of personality. Many words which are neuter in English, are either masculine or feminine in Greek. For example, the word translated "beginning" is feminine.

No one would seriously claim that this means that "beginning" should be regarded as having a feminine personality!

In the same way it is quite improper to give "*logos*" a masculine personality, or make it into a proper name, as the theologians have done. If we paraphrase "*logos*" honestly in [John 1](#), it ought to say something like this:

1. *"In the beginning was the word"*.
In the beginning God spoke to reveal and bring into effect His inward thought or plan for the creation of the universe. God said and it was so.
2. *"The word was with God"*.
It was God who spoke, not someone else. The source of the inward thought or intention was with God (in the same sense that we would say, "The next move is with you").
3. *"The word was God"*.
The inward thought or intention revealed by what God said was about God and His plan to multiply Himself, by creating man in the image and likeness of God.

Of course, the man made in the image and likeness of God is the **man** Jesus. It is this man who is the main subject and fulfillment of every other PROPHETIC word spoken by God, to reveal His inward thought or intention about the birth of His Son "in the fullness of time". ([Galatians 4:4](#)).

4. *"The word became flesh"*.
This simply means that God's inward thought or intention about the man who would be made in His image, and likeness came to fulfillment when Jesus was born.

Before Jesus was born, there was only God's inward thought or plan for that to happen. It was prophesied. It was certain to happen. ([Isaiah 44:6-8 and 55:11](#))

After Jesus was born, the Word spoken about Him became a reality. The MAN was here at last, no longer just a plan on the drawing board, but the completed object of that plan.

WITHOUT HIM WAS NOT ANYTHING MADE ([John 1:3](#))

Jesus was the starting point of God's plan - the beginning of it.

Jesus was the goal of God's plan - the end of it.

Everything else that God said or did was directed to that central purpose, which was to create a human son in the image and likeness of the Father.

If Jesus was to exist and have dominion over all creation, then God first had to create the universe and the world on which He would exist and have that dominion.

If Jesus was to be The Son of Man, then there had first to be a human race from which He could trace His descent. God began this work by creating Adam and Eve.

If the birth of Jesus was to take place in "the fullness of time", then there had first to be a history of other men preceding that time.

If Jesus was to be the Savior of all other men, there first had to be a failure of all other men to create a situation from which they needed to be saved.

If Jesus was to be both Son of God and Son of Man, there had first to be a willing and suitable Virgin Mother.

If there was to be a resurrection from the dead for all men, in which Jesus was the first, then there had to be first a death for Jesus, in circumstances in which He could clearly be the first to conquer the grave.

These thoughts could be multiplied and expanded to demonstrate that Jesus is central to all history, the final expression of the Word that God spoke in the beginning which ultimately reveals to us what God himself is. The "Word that was God" is no longer just a word in God's mind, or spoken by God's mouth, but a real living person JESUS.

HOW COULD THE WORLD BE MADE BY THE WORD (JESUS) IF JESUS WAS NOT LITERALLY THERE?

GOD (the Father) spoke the world into existence ([Psalm 33:6](#) and [Psalm 148:5-6](#)).

The Word which was spoken to create the world was all a part of what God spoke to reveal His inward thought or intention to create Jesus. It was the same Word through which even Jesus Himself came into existence.

WHY THEN DID GOD SAY, "LET US MAKE MAN"?

Of course, the Hebrew word for "God" in Genesis chapter 1 is plural. However, this does not mean that the plurality includes JESUS.

Other parts of the Bible tell us that there were other beings present with God at creation. These were the ANGELS.

[Job 38:7](#) speaks of "*all the sons of God*" who shouted for joy when God laid the foundation of the earth.

[Psalm 8:5](#) speaks of "*the son of man made a little less than GOD*".

This verse uses the same plural Hebrew name for God as in Genesis 1. (Elohim).

A comparison with [Hebrews 2:7](#) shows clearly that the plural "God", and the "us", spoken of here and in Genesis, includes the angels. It is not inclusive of Jesus at all. He is the subject of the discussion between God and the angels.

DOESN'T THE BIBLE SAY ELSEWHERE THAT JESUS EXISTED BEFORE HE WAS BORN?

In the Old Testament there is not one reference that speaks of Jesus as a person then presently existing.

What we do have is many prophecies which speak of the future existence of the MAN who was to be born as Son of God. This happened when Jesus was born of His virgin mother. That was when His existence began.

References like [Isaiah 42:1](#) show how God sometimes speaks of future events in the present tense to express the certainty of their fulfillment (See also [Romans 4:17](#) A.V. which shows how God speaks of things which do not exist, as though they already did exist.)

In the New Testament there are several references, which when approached with the pre-conception that Jesus did pre-exist, have been misconstrued to support this.

However, if they are approached from the correct premise that Jesus is a man, and that men simply do not pre-exist, (for then they are not men!), a vastly different picture emerges. A few of these references are listed below.

1. John 1:15, - *"After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me"*.

This does not mean that Jesus existed before John. He was, in fact, conceived six months after John.

It does mean that Jesus ranks above John, not in time but by right of birth. The Greek verb translated "was" literally means "came into existence". The Greek word translated "before", can mean either "before in time" or "superior in rank".

Clearly, it is the second of these meanings which is intended here. The verse is saying that Jesus holds His superior rank, not by right of prior existence, but because He was born to it as Son of God.

2. John 8:58 - *"Before Abraham was, I am."*

Jesus is usually said to be claiming the divine name "I am" for Himself. This is supposed to show that He is God and therefore pre-existed.

However, a careful study of other uses of the words "I am" in John's Gospel, shows that they are used repeatedly by Jesus, without any suggestion at all that the divine name is meant.

In fact, the Greek grammar requires that in this verse, another word should be understood as implied after "am". In other places, where Jesus uses the words, the translators have recognised this by inserting the word "he". e.g., [John 8:24,28](#), *"I am He"*.

If this is also done in verse 58, as it ought to be, then we are left with the simple statement by Jesus that He is the one spoken of in the prophetic writings, long before Abraham's time.

3. John 8:56 - *"Abraham rejoiced to see my day."*

This statement by Jesus refers to the story (in [Genesis 17:15-17](#)) where God promised 99-year-old Abraham that his 89-year-old wife would conceive and bear a son. Abraham fell on his face before God, rejoicing in faith.

God's long-standing promise that the saviour of the world would be his descendant ([Genesis 12:3](#)) was about to begin its fulfillment, with the birth of Isaac.

4. John 17:5 - *"Glorify me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made"*.

God spoke in a similar way about Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 1:4-5](#))

The words spoken of Jesus do not imply pre-existence for Him any more than they do for Jeremiah. It is simply a statement that even before the foundation of the world, it was God's plan to glorify Jesus.

It does not mean that Jesus was present when the plan was made.

5. John 8:42 - *"I proceeded and came forth from God"*.

This is simply a statement in Jewish idiom, of the biological origin of Jesus. Every Jew "came forth" from his father's body. (see [Genesis 15:4](#) and [2 Samuel 7:12](#)).

In using this language, Jesus is expressing his claim for His divine origin and begetting.

The one essential difference in his case, of course, was that Jesus came forth from his Father's mouth as a spoken word which accomplished God's purpose through the miracle of the Virgin Birth.

6. John 8:42 - *"I came not of my own accord, but he sent me"*.

Jesus is not the only one who was sent by God.

Almost identical words are used about John the Baptist. *"There was a man sent from God"*. (John 1:6).

The same words are used of disciples to say that they are sent in exactly the same way that Jesus was. *"As the Father has sent me, even so I send you"*. (John 20:21).

These words when used about Jesus do not imply that He pre-existed in Heaven any more than they do for John the Baptist, or for us.

7. John 6:38 - *"I have come down from Heaven"*.

Again, the words are simply a statement of divine origin - not of personal pre-existence in heaven.

All Jesus is saying is that He is like the manna which God miraculously provided for Israel. (See [verses 31, 32, 51, and 58](#) of the same chapter).

8. John 8:38 - *"I speak of what I have seen with my Father"*.

Any man who knows what it is to spend time with God in the secret place, ought to know what this means. In the place of prayer, deep within our hearts and minds, heaven comes down to earth and a man communes with God until he is able to speak, not on his own authority, but as he is taught by God. (John 8:28).

9. Colossians 1:15 - *"The firstborn of all creation."*

In the Hebrew language, the word "firstborn" means more than simply "born first in time". It also means to be born as the first son of a father, the first of a family, who is by right of that birth, the legal heir to his father's estate.

The word when used about Jesus, describes Him as God's first and only begotten Son, the first born of God's family, taking rank and precedence over all others, as the heir of all creation.

He is first born in rank because of His divine begetting.

He is also in a special sense, first born in time, not because He pre-existed His human birth, but because He is the first to be raised from the dead. (Acts 13:33 *"This day have I begotten thee."*)

He was raised (or begotten) from the dead, both as the firstborn in time, and the firstborn in rank, of all God's "new creation". (Colossians 1:17-18).

CONCLUSION

Starting with an impossible theory about a "God-man" who existed eternally before he was born, the theologians went on to compound their mistake, using the techniques and language of Greek philosophy to produce the doctrine of the Trinity.

Along the way there have been many others (usually classed as "heretics") who, whilst rejecting the Trinitarian theology, have nevertheless started from the same impossible assumption that Jesus pre-existed his human birth. This has led to great confusion in the

minds of those who, as a result of this illogical foundation, find it virtually impossible to regard Jesus as really a man.

If, instead, we begin with the scriptural premise that Jesus really is a man, just like all other men, (with the sole exception of His virgin birth), there is no longer any "mystery" requiring us to abandon all logic.

In spite of His supernatural origin, and the miracle of His virgin birth, Jesus is not himself a supernatural being. He is just like us in every way. He is a man who makes God real to other men. He reveals what it will be like for us when God lives in us as He does in Jesus.

That IS Good News. If it is possible for one man to please God, then other men are left without excuse for their failure. Other men also, can become what God wants them to be. Under the Lordship of Jesus, the grace of God not only forgives the past, but also guarantees that our sinful carnal nature can be transformed, until we have become just like the man Jesus.