

TESTING FOR TRUTH — A CRITICAL QUESTION ABOUT YOUR CREED

by Anthony Buzzard

Every Christian is called to be a Truth-seeker. When he has found it he becomes an agent for Truth willing to communicate the Truth to others in a spirit of love and concern. So absolutely essential is the enthusiastic pursuit of Truth that Paul wrote these awful words:

“The coming of the wicked one is the work of Satan. It will be attended by all the powerful signs and miracles of the Lie, all the deception that sinfulness can impose on those doomed to destruction. Destroyed they shall be because **they did not open their minds to love of the Truth, so as to find salvation**” (II Thess. 2:9, 10, New English Bible).

In the mind of the Apostle a love for the Truth is equivalent to a love for the Christ who is the Truth and who spoke the Truth. But let us be most careful not to misunderstand Paul. A love for Jesus and God, his Father, means a whole-hearted love for **the Truth of all that Jesus taught**. It is all too easy for someone to say, “I love Jesus,” while failing to search out and love the Truth of the Message which he taught. When this happens professing to be a Christian becomes a hollow boast. We must, as Paul says, open our minds to love the Truth. This means giving up our own ideas, however cherished, and replacing them with Truth, as we learn it through God’s spirit from the Bible. We do not learn it all at once. We must grow in grace and knowledge (II Pet. 1:5, 3:18). We may not always be popular when we abandon old ideas and learn the Truth of Scripture.

How Error Works

It is of the essence of error that it parades as Truth. That is why the deceptive work of Satan is so successful. “The whole world lies in the Devil’s deceptive grip” (I John 5:19). Exponents of error, so Paul said, masquerade as angels of light (II Cor. 11:13,14). They preach “Jesus,” but it is a false Jesus, not the real Jesus of the Bible. They preach “the Gospel,” but it is a distorted gospel which omits vital saving information. They speak of “spirit” but it is a counterfeit of the holy spirit (II Cor. 11:4).

In view of this threatening environment in which the Church must continually see through the evil one’s tactics, does the Bible provide any tests for telling the difference between the fake and the genuine? Can we unmask the false versions of the faith propagated by the enemy? Can we detect the camouflage behind which error hides?

The Theological Test

John, the Apostle, instructs us to apply the theological test. This yard-stick is to measure our own understanding of the person of Jesus. Who is the real Jesus? The test is as follows:

“This is how you may recognize the spirit of God: Every spirit which acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in the flesh is from God, and every spirit which does not thus

acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (I John 4:2, II John 7).

What does it mean to recognize and acknowledge that Jesus has “come in the flesh?” Since the phrase “come in the flesh” is hardly one current in contemporary English, let us turn for help to *the Translator’s New Testament*, a fine document produced by thirty-five scholars, seventeen being New Testament specialists in universities and theological colleges and eighteen missionary linguists (published by the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1973).

Here is their rendering of II John 7:

“Many deceivers have gone into the world who do not accept that Jesus **came as a human being. Here is the deceiver and the antichrist.**”

How would this vital test apply today? Are there systems of theology existing in our time which deny that Jesus came as a human being?

The Official Definition of Jesus

According to the “official” definition of the person of Jesus, decided on at the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), and written into the creeds of nearly all denominations, Jesus is both *fully God and fully man*. Many who subscribe without question to this understanding of Jesus are unaware of the implications of this description. When we examine the meaning of the Chalcedonian definition more closely some very remarkable facts emerge.

In his recent book, *To Know and Follow Jesus* (pub. Paulist Press, 1984), the Roman Catholic theologian, Thomas Hart, is critical of the traditional understanding of Jesus enshrined in the creeds of mainstream Christianity by the Council of Chalcedon:

“The Chalcedonian formula [Jesus is fully God and fully man] makes genuine humanity impossible” (p. 46, emphasis added).

Hart explains:

“The conciliar definition says that Jesus is true man. But if there are two natures in Him [divine and human, ie., he is fully God and fully man], it is clear which will dominate. And Jesus becomes immediately very different from us. He is omniscient [all-knowing], omnipotent, and omnipresent.... This is far from ordinary human experience. Jesus is tempted but cannot sin because he is God. What kind of temptation is this? It has little in common with the kind of struggles we are familiar with” (p. 46).

Thomas Hart then describes the official view of Jesus further:

According to the Council of Chalcedon,

“Jesus is called ‘man’ in the generic sense, but not ‘a man.’ He has human nature, **but is not a human person**. The person in him is the second person of the Blessed Trinity. ***Jesus does not have a human personal center***. This is how the Council gets round the possible problem of split personality” (p. 44, emphasis added).

Is This Jesus Really a Human Being?

We want to stress the significant fact that the Jesus of the Church Council (and of the creeds of nearly all denominations calling themselves Christian), whose decision is taken as binding by millions of church-goers, “is not a human being,” “does not have a personal human center.” So says this Roman Catholic theologian. Lest anyone should be puzzled that the Jesus of the churches’ creed is not a human person, we can confirm that this is in fact the official teaching by quoting from a leading Protestant source:

“If we affirm that Jesus was **a human person**, we are driven into an impossible conception of double personality in the incarnate Son of God...” (Oliver Quick, D.D., *Doctrines of the Creed*, p. 178, emphasis added).

Dr. Quick obviously finds himself unable to affirm that Jesus was a human person. He then goes on to admit,

“If we deny that Jesus was a human person we deny by implication the completeness of his manhood” (*ibid.*).

But he and the Council *did* in fact deny that Jesus *was a human person*! Dr. Quick is not prepared to affirm that Jesus was a human person!

From these official statements about the person of Christ it appears that the Jesus of the churches — the Trinitarian Jesus — is not a human person. The churches are forced into this position because of their conviction that the person of Jesus is the eternal second member of the Trinity. Jesus for the churches is primarily God Himself who later puts on human nature.

When another theologian was first exposed, during his training, to this official Trinitarian Jesus he expressed his bewilderment as follows:

“During my theological formation I was well instructed in the traditional account of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. I distinctly remember being told that the Word of God when he assumed human nature, assumed impersonal humanity: that Jesus did not possess a human personality; that God became man in Jesus, **but that he did not become a man....** Two considerations have persuaded me that this traditional Christology is incredible” (*Grace and Truth*, A.T. Hanson, p. 1, emphasis added).

Because many of our readers will be unaware of the extraordinary definition of Jesus derived from the Church Councils, we add a further statement from a book entitled, *What Think Ye of Christ?* by Leslie Simmonds:

“Now the doctrine of the Incarnation [and therefore of the Trinity] is that in Christ the place of a human personality is replaced by the Divine Personality of God the Son, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. Christ possesses a complete human nature **without a human personality**. Uncreated and eternal Divine Personality replaces a created human personality in Him” (p. 45, emphasis added).

Is This Official Jesus the Jesus of the Bible?

These quotations demonstrate that the Jesus of the Council of Chalcedon, in whom all the major denominations believe, is not a human person. He became “man” but not “a man.” The Roman

Catholic writer we cited earlier is rightly unhappy with this official definition. Having pointed out that the Chalcedonian Jesus is not fully a human person, he insists:

“Jesus is one person. **Jesus is a human person. Both points are clear in the New Testament**” *To Know and Follow Jesus*, p. 64, emphasis added).

There appears to be a radical flaw in the churches’ understanding of the central figure of the faith. We must remember that the vital Truth-test we are to apply to any system of teaching has to do with the belief that the true Jesus is **a real human being** (I John 4:2, II John 7). But as Thomas Hart states clearly: “The Chalcedonian [Trinitarian] formula makes genuine humanity impossible” (*To Know and Follow Jesus*, p. 46). And on page 48 he admits: “The Chalcedonian formula has a meager basis in Scripture.”

Astonishingly, the God/Man of traditional belief is not a genuine human person. Could a person whose ego — his personal center — is fully God really be a human person, when the human part of him consists only of “impersonal human nature”? Could the promised descendant of David have lived before David and still be considered his descendant? Can a single person be 100% God and 100% man? Can God die? If Jesus is God, and God cannot die (I Tim 6:16), Jesus cannot have died!

And if Jesus is God he must be omniscient. Yet the Jesus of the Bible said he was not all-knowing. He did not know the day of his future coming (Mark 13:32).

Wise Words from Cambridge

The late Regius Professor of Theology at Cambridge was one of many who are critical of the Chalcedonian, Trinitarian definition of Jesus. He argued that if Jesus preexisted his human life as God, and was therefore *fully God*, then he could not also be fully human. This, as we have seen, is admitted by the writers quoted above. They confirm that a person who is not a human person cannot be fully man! The late professor at Cambridge, Geoffrey Lampe, describes the unfortunate and confusing implications of the traditional dogma that Jesus is God possessing “impersonal human nature”:

“The [Trinitarian] concept of the preexistent Son reduces the real, socially and culturally conditioned personality of Jesus to the metaphysical abstraction ‘human nature’.... According to this Christology, the ‘eternal Son’ assumes a timeless human nature... which owes nothing essential to geographical circumstances; it corresponds to nothing in the actual concrete world; **Jesus Christ has not, after all, come in the flesh**” (*God as Spirit*), p. 144, emphasis added).

Such a Jesus is not the real Jesus of the Bible (I John 4:2, II John 7). The Professor, ending a long and distinguished career of reflection on the person of Jesus, concluded that the Jesus of traditional Church theology could not be considered a real human personality, genuinely “come in the flesh.” The Jesus who is supposed to be fully God cannot by definition also be fully man. *The creeds thus deny to Jesus a human “personal center” or ego in the interests of maintaining that He is really God.* The metaphysical Jesus of the creeds does not therefore qualify as a human being. In the professor’s words, “he has not, after all, come in the flesh.” According to the Apostle John’s “Truth-test” (I John 4:2, II John 7) such a non-fully human Jesus must be regarded as antichristian!

Reading John's Language with Care

Neither sincerity nor majority opinions are safe guides to the Truth of the Bible. The spirit, or character, of every religious system must be examined before its teaching can be accepted. We are commanded to “test the spirits” (I John 4:1), that is, to test the teachers and teachings we are offered in the name of Christianity:

“Many false teachers have gone out into the world” (I John 4:2).

Interestingly, the word used by John to describe the appearance of the false teachers is a form of the word “come”; that is to say that they have “made their appearance in public.” The same verb “come” describes the appearance of Jesus: “He came as a human being” (I John 4:2, II John 7).

To “come as a human being” does not imply that one has existed before one’s birth. It is force of habit which makes readers of the Bible understand the word “come” *in that sense* when used of Jesus. It is often forgotten that John the Baptist also “came” (Mat. 11:14). He was, like Jesus, “sent” (John 1:6). The disciples, too, were sent into the world, just as Jesus was sent into the world (John 17:18): “As Thou hast sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” Moreover, the prophet — the Messiah — whom the Jews expected would “come into the world” (John 6:14; Deut 18:15-18) was the prophet destined to be born. Jesus, Himself, equated being born with “coming into the world” (John 18:37).

Jesus, a Real Human Being

John urges us to believe in a Jesus who is authentically a human being, not an angel who became man, nor an eternal Son of God who became a man. Throughout the New Testament we are exhorted to believe that Jesus is **the Christ**. The Church is to be founded on Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah (Mat. 16:16). John wrote his entire gospel to persuade us to believe that **“Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”** (John 20:31). The early church in Acts “kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus **as the Christ**” (Acts 5:42). Paul “proved that this Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 9:22, cp. Acts 17:3, 18:5, 18:28). It is the **“Man Messiah”** who is the one mediator between the One God and man (I Tim. 2:5). No wonder, then that the spirit of antichrist denies that Jesus is the Messiah. This is the arch-lie: “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?” (I John 2:22, 5:1).

It is crucially important to understand that the Messiah promised by the Old Testament was to be a real descendant of David (II Sam. 7:14). God would be the Father of this descendant, according to the promise, but the Messiah would be “the fruit of David’s body” (Psalm 132:11). There is no hint here or elsewhere in the Old Testament that God had been the Father of the Messiah *for all eternity*, much less that the Messiah was to be the uncreated member of an eternal Trinity. Rather, he was to be a “prophet like Moses” raised up from an Israelite family (see Deut. 18:15-18, Acts 3:22, 7:37). The traditional Jesus of the creeds is alien to this Biblical picture of the Messiah. (See also our article, “Luke 1:35: Systems in Conflict.”)

The real Jesus of history in whom Luke believed was the Son of God, not because He had been God from eternity but **because of his miraculous conception**. In Mary’s womb a real human person came into existence. Note the direct causal link between Jesus’ coming into being as the

Son of God and the miracle which happened to Mary:

“The holy spirit will come upon you [Mary] and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and **for that reason** the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

This Jesus is a genuinely human person, though supernaturally conceived. He is the descendant of David. If he were not he could not prove his claim to be the Messiah. If, however, this person is actually God, putting on “impersonal human nature,” why would his descent from David matter? Could one not receive “impersonal human nature” from a mother of any nationality? The theory that the person of Jesus is not that of Mary’s Son begotten by the Father in Mary (Matt. 1:18, 20), but that of a preexistent person surely destroys both the genuineness of Jesus’ humanity and his descent from David.

The Jesus of Trinitarian and Chalcedonian theology is officially not a human person — “man” but not “a man.” Such theological jargon, as many realize, is in desperate need of revision. The most important question of all is whether the Chalcedonian Jesus, in whom millions profess belief, qualifies as the one who came “as a human being” (I John 4:2). The difference in John’s mind between the real human Jesus and the one who only *appears* to be a man is the difference between light and dark, Christ and antichrist. One may profess to believe in Jesus as Messiah but negate this confession by denying that he is a fully human person. This the ancient creeds, so long hallowed by tradition, appear to do.

A theologian who discussed the history of belief in Jesus claimed that most of the so-called orthodox leaders of traditional Christianity were in fact Apollinarians. Apollinarius was convicted of the heresy of denying that Jesus was fully a human being (Dr. C.E Raven, *Apollinarianism*, cited by O.C. Quick in *Doctrines of the Creed*, p. 178). In other words “orthodoxy” has harbored a subtle form of a heresy which it condemned in others — that Jesus was not authentically human. Maurice Wiles, formerly Professor of Theology at Oxford University, was right when he said:

“The church has not usually in practice (whatever it may have claimed to be doing in theory) based its understanding of Christ exclusively on the witness of the New Testament” (*The Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, p. 55).

The following extraordinary admissions by prominent Trinitarian writers, experts on the creeds, should be carefully noted:

“In the debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Leonard Hodgson (*The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 1943, pp. 220,223) points out that ‘the unitarians [those who believe with the Bible that the Father only is the True God, John 17:3; 5:44; I Cor 8:4-6] as well as their opponents accepted the Bible as containing revelation given in the form of propositions, and concludes that ‘on the basis of argument which both sides held in common, ***the unitarians had the better case.***’ And yet for all that it was not the unitarians who won the day. **Christological doctrine has never in practice been derived simply by way of logical inference from the statements of Scripture**” (Maurice Wiles, *The Remaking Of Christian Doctrine*, p. 55, emphasis added).

Protestants who claim to derive their faith exclusively from the Bible should give careful attention to this remarkable statement!

John's Truth-test (I John 4:2, II John 7) is critically relevant to our times. Belief in Jesus as **the Christ**, a real human descendant of David is still the Biblical criterion for proof that one is drawing inspiration from the spirit of Truth. It remains as true as ever that the fundamental doctrinal test of the professing Christian has to do with his view of the person of Christ. The denial of the **humanity** of Jesus is the fatal flaw detected by the Johannine test. God's Son is the Son of Mary and of David. Of *sonship prior to His conception in history* the Bible has nothing to say. Such a notion is destructive of Jesus' genuine humanity and genuine descent from David. Jesus, the Jewish-Christian Messiah, needs urgently to be reinstated at the heart of Christian devotion. Belief in Him and in His Father, the only true God, leads to salvation (John 17:3).

Appendix to "Testing for Truth"

The following comment and historical note about the proceedings at the Council of Chalcedon, which decided that Jesus was fully God and man, comes from an unnamed author of *Jesus the Messiah* (London, 1982):

We are told that "at four great Councils against four great heresies, the Church promulgated her four great formulae on the existence of her Lord — truly, perfectly, indivisibly, distinctly — truly God, perfectly man, indivisibly God and man, distinctly God and man," (Farrar, *The Witness of History to Christ*). But this proves simply nothing, unless it be at the same time maintained that the Established Church of England is heretical when it declares, in its twenty-first Article respecting councils, "Forasmuch as they be assemblies of men, whereof all be not governed with spirit and word of God, they may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God."

To many learned, pious, and sincere Christians, quite as capable of interpreting the Scriptures as any of the Ecclesiastics assembled at those four or any other Councils, the words used by them, as cited above, are nothing more nor less blasphemous. Without going so far as the first Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, by whom the Nicene Fathers who settled the Symbol of Faith that still rules Christendom were declared to be "a set of demoniacs driven by evil furies or malignant passions," it may be well to show how their successors acted at the Council of Chalcedon, the fourth of the seven General Councils, and in numbers and in dignity far the most distinguished of them all, when the Nicene Creed was authoritatively modified. The following extraordinary scene is taken from the Report of the Council itself, as quoted by Dean Stanley in his *Lectures on the Eastern Church*:

The moment is that of the Imperial officers ordering that Theodoret, the excellent Bishop of Kars, well known as the commentator and ecclesiastical historian, should enter the assembly. And when the most reverend Bishop Theodoret entered, the most reverend the Bishops of Egypt, Illyria, and Palestine shouted out, "Mercy upon us! The faith is destroyed. The canons of the Church excommunicate him. Turn him out! Turn out the teacher of Nestorius!" On the other hand, the most reverend the Bishops of the East, of Thrace, of Pontus, and of Asia shouted out, "We were compelled [at the former Council] to subscribe our names to blank papers; we were scourged into submission. [A nice "orthodox" way of settling Articles of Religion!] Turn out the Manicheans; turn out the enemies of Flavian; turn out the adversaries of the faith!" Dioscurus, the most reverend Bishop of Alexandria, said, "Why is Cyril to be turned out? It is he whom Theodoret has condemned." The most reverend the Bishops of the East shouted out, "Turn out

the murderer Dioscurus! Who knows not the deeds of Dioscurus?..."

The most reverend the Bishops of Egypt, Illyria, and Palestine shouted out, "Long life to the Empress!" The most reverend the Bishops of the East shouted out, "Turn out the murderers!" The most reverend the Bishops of Egypt shouted out, "The Empress turned out Nestorius; long life to the Catholic Empress! The Orthodox Synod refuses to admit Theodoret." Theodoret being, however, admitted by the Imperial officers, and, taking his place, the most reverend Bishops of the East shouted out, "He is worthy, worthy!" The most reverend the Bishops of Egypt shouted out, "Don't call him bishop; he is no bishop. Turn out the fighter against God; turn out the Jew!" The most reverend the Bishops of the East shouted out, "The Orthodox for the Synod. Turn out the rebels; turn out the murderers!" The most reverend the Bishops of Egypt, "Turn out the enemy of God. Turn out the defamer of Christ. Long life to the Empress; long life to the Emperor; long life to the Catholic Emperor! Theodoret excommunicated Cyril. If we receive Theodoret, we excommunicate Cyril." At this point — and it was high time — the Imperial Commissioners who were present put a stop to the clamor, as being unworthy of a meeting of Christian Bishops.

And these are the most reverend Fathers of the Church who are imagined to have been competent to pronounce authoritatively on the nature of our Lord Jesus! At the present day would such as they be held to be qualified to instruct the veriest tyro in the rudiments of the Christian religion?