

your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there". This "rest" still has not been obtained, even today, as the writer to the Hebrews confirms: "For if Joshua [RV] had given them rest, then would He not afterward have spoken of another day . . . Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (4:8-11).

The rest not having been attained, Israel could not therefore use the words of Moses as an assurance that they would not fall into the hands of their enemies. In fact rather the reverse, for Moses also had said that if they failed to keep God's statutes and judgements they would be forcibly ejected from the land: "Ye shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (for all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) that the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you" (Lev. 18:26-28). The Canaanites that occupied the land before them defiled the land with their abominations, and therefore God commanded Israel to destroy them all. But now, in Micah's days, they themselves had defiled the land, and therefore they were to be spued out by means of the Assyrians: "because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction" (Mic. 2:10).

With great irony, Micah concludes this section of his prophecy by saying that "If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people" (v. 11). This was exactly what Israel desired: "Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isa. 30:10). God permitted this to happen because Israel was beyond reproof. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom. 1:28).

### Prophecies of future glory

This is a very depressing part of Micah's prophecy. But the prophecy of Micah is by no means all gloom and doom. He has much to say also about the glories of the age to come, for which we hope. In fact, one of the characteristic features of his prophecy is the very abrupt way in which he changes from speaking about impending judgement to foreseeing Israel's future glory. Almost in the same breath he turns from pronouncing judgement upon the disobedient to speak about the glorious future that God has in store for His people. We thus find that the remaining two verses of Micah 2 speak of Israel's future restoration in the Kingdom of God. This will be the focus of the next article.

(To be continued)

## Principles, Preaching and Problems

# The views of the Early Church Fathers on the Godhead

Malcolm Edwards

*A review of the writings of the early Church Fathers shows that they did not have a Trinitarian view of the Godhead. Consequently we can see that this false teaching was not developing until the end of the third century A.D.*

IT IS KNOWN that the Christian writings immediately following the apostolic era show no hint of the Trinity, even though some of them had varying ideas of a pre-existent Jesus as the Word (*Logos*). It is interesting to examine such writings from the standpoint of Unitarian Alvan

Lamson in his book *The Church of the First Three Centuries*, published as long ago as 1860.

He writes concerning the first three hundred years after apostolic times:

"That the inferiority of the Son was generally, if not uniformly, asserted by the ante-Nicene Fathers, has been admitted by several learned advocates of the doctrine of the Trinity". He quotes Trinitarian authorities Cudworth, Brucker, Petavius and others as examples of this admission.

Although in their understanding of the *Logos* some of those early writers believed in the pre-existence of Christ in one sense or other, it was certainly not in the Trinitarian understanding, as we shall see. For brevity, we shall confine our comments to the time from Clement of Rome to Origen, a period of some 160 years.

### **Clement of Rome**

Though the authenticity of Clement's writings is sometimes questioned, the style is very close to the apostolic model; they make no mention of the nature of Christ, nor does the writer ever call him God. One example is:

"Have we not one God and one Christ and one spirit of grace poured out upon us?"

Lamson comments: "The author is content to represent God as the fountain of all power and blessing, and Jesus Christ as His Son, sent by Him to be the saviour of men".

### **The Shepherd of Hermas**

In these writings by the brother of Pius, Bishop of Rome (ca. 140-54), God appears as "Supreme and infinite", and Jesus is referred to as "Lord of his people, having received all power from his Father".

In the following passage (which may not use our choice of language), regarding the birth of Christ by the Holy Spirit, the writer makes Christ subordinate to God:

"That Holy Spirit which was created first of all, God placed in a body, in which it should dwell, in a chosen body, as it pleased Him."

Note that the Holy Spirit is *created*, and not thought of as a person of the Godhead; and by inference Jesus also was a created person.

### **Ignatius**

The writings of Ignatius, says Lamson, "are of too uncertain authorship, and too hopelessly corrupt to justify the use of them in connection with our present inquiry". However, he quotes the authority Martini as saying that the divinity of the Son cannot be found in any of his writings.

### **Polycarp**

Lamson considered the *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* as "brief and mostly hortative", but adds: "Its testimony to the supremacy of the Father and subordination of the Son is clear and decisive". A sample passage is:

"Now the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he himself the everlasting high-

priest, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and truth."

There is not a hint of the Trinity in such quotations as these; and the lack of more profound comment on the substance of the Godhead by these writers is supportive of the fact that Christ in the Godhead was never an issue.

### **Justin Martyr**

Justin's understanding of the *Logos* is somewhat confusing, for it would appear from his earlier writings that he taught that Jesus was with the Father in person at Creation. However, in his *Second Apology* he plainly taught that Christ was "That reason" (*Logos*), which suggests he may never have believed in a literal pre-existence of Christ, but in Christ as a concept in the mind of God. Whatever was the case, Justin Martyr never taught that Jesus was co-equal and co-eternal with God. He spoke of God as "Lord of *that* Lord who appeared on earth".

### **Tertullian**

It is, of course, quite understandable that these early writers (like ourselves) pondered why Scripture occasionally terms Jesus 'God'. On this Lamson comments that Tertullian believed that the Son was entitled to be called God on the principle that "whatever is born of God is God". (We might add, 'of the God family'.) But that he believed the Son to be inferior to the Father is without question, since he spoke of God as "The head of Christ"; and wrote that "There was a time when the Son was not"; and that "Before all things God was alone".

### **Clement of Alexandria**

Of this particular Clement, Lamson comments: "We are astonished that anyone can read Clement with ordinary attention, and imagine for a single moment that he regarded the Son as numerically identical-one-with the Father".

He quotes a long passage from Clement's writings, in which is the following statement: "the Word by whom all things were made, who in the beginning, when he formed us, gave us life as our Maker, appearing as our teacher, has taught us to live well, in order that, hereafter as God, give us eternal life".

Lamson comments on this: "though Clement believed the Son to have existed before the world, and does not hesitate to bestow on him the title of God, he is far from ascribing to him supreme, underived divinity". He further explains that

Clement wrote also regarding ourselves that "We existed before the foundation of the world; existing first in God Himself, inasmuch as we were destined to exist"; and also that Clement "sometimes speaks of the Logos as: *an attribute, and calls the Son: a certain energy or operation of the Father*". Thus it would appear that Clement's belief in the pre-existence of Christ was much less literal than at first appears.

Lamson points out that, in spite of Clement's understanding of the *Logos*, there is no doubt about his belief in the inferiority of the Son to the Father. He writes, "Clement believed God and the Son to be numerically distinct"; and, "He calls the Son, or Logos, the *image of God*, as man is the *image of man*".

### Origen

Origen, who was very much a disciple of Clement, is another early writer who differentiated between the Son, as God, and God his Father. He speaks of "God the Logos" as being surpassed by "The God of the universe". Commenting on Hebrews 1:2, "... by whom also He made the worlds", he says that Paul meant to teach that "God made the ages by the Son". But he clearly understands the term "by" to mean "through", for he then explains: "If all things were made *through* the Logos, they were not made *by* him [i.e., as the primary cause]" but by a greater and better; and "who can that be but the Father?" he adds.

With Lamson's help it can be seen that most, if not all, of these early writers understood that the Word (*Logos*) that was with God at Creation was a divine *concept* within the mind of the Father, a concept of a Son who was yet to be born and through whom the world's salvation eventually would be achieved. It can, however, also be seen

how this understanding later developed into the Son being co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, and then to the Trinity and the Immaculate Conception.

### Conclusions

Lamson explains what we already know, that the Greek term *logos*, translated 'word' in the New Testament, came into Jewish thought from the Jewish Hellenistic philosopher Philo, who had adapted the concept from Greek thinking to mean divine reason, and, from Proverbs 8:22-31, applied it to the wisdom that was present with God at Creation. Since the wisdom of God cannot be separated from His spoken commands at Creation, it is easy to understand how it was used by the Apostle John of the Christ as a concept in the mind of God at Creation, later becoming man having our mortal nature, when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (Jno. 1:14).

Nor is it difficult to understand that the *logos* concept was seen by the same apostle in the terms of Psalm 33:6-9: "By the *word of the LORD* were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He *spake*, and it was done; He *commanded*, and it stood fast".

How uncomplicated it really is to understand such an assuring concept, devoid of any Trinitarian philosophy! And how impossible it is, with the illogical Trinitarian view of the Godhead, properly to understand and explain the wonder of the atonement in Christ Jesus!