

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

“In the Nick of Time”

Occasional Essays
and Other Stuff
for Christian
Students

Presented by the
President of

Central Baptist
Theological
Seminary of
Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season,
out of season;
reprove, rebuke, exhort
with all longsuffering
and doctrine.”

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The Da Vinci Code

Part Seven

“The Jesus of the New Testament”

Kevin T. Bauder

Using *The Da Vinci Code* as his mouthpiece, Dan Brown argues that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, that the two of them had children together, and that these facts completely subvert the traditional understanding of Jesus and orthodox Christianity. Brown's hypothesis raises two questions: (1) *did* Jesus marry? and (2) *could* Jesus marry? The first of these questions has already been answered with a clear *no*. What remains is to ask whether Jesus could have married and begotten children, or whether a married Jesus would undermine the Christian faith.

Most Christians are initially shocked by the strangeness of this question. A married Jesus—and especially a Jesus with children—is not a possibility that they have even considered. Nevertheless, the teachings of the New Testament provide the necessary information to be able to develop an answer. In order to understand that answer, however, we must take a brief detour. Before we can decide whether Jesus could have married, we must first discover what the New Testament teaches about Jesus.

The New Testament teaching about Jesus can be summed up in three propositions. First, Jesus Christ is one person. Second, Jesus Christ possesses a complete human nature. Third, Jesus Christ possesses a complete divine nature.

By insisting that Jesus Christ is one person, the New Testament writers are responding to Gnostic ideas. Gnosticism saw the Christ as a divine, spiritual being who mediated secret knowledge of Gnosis to some humans. Because they thought that matter was evil, Gnostics could not admit that the Christ ever took a human body. They thought that He either projected the illusion of a body (Docetism), or else that He came upon the human Jesus at the baptism, subsequently leaving Him before the crucifixion (Cerinthianism). Both Gnostic options distinguished the divine Christ from the human Jesus.

John responds to this Gnostic distinction in his epistles. He insists that Jesus and the Christ are one and the same person. Jesus Christ is come in the flesh; Jesus *is* the Christ (1 John 2:22; 2 John 7). To deny these truths is to mark one's self as a liar and antichrist. The willingness to confess them is one of the marks of God's Spirit as opposed to the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:2-3). The one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (1 John 5:1). John is plainly condemning a Gnostic understanding of Jesus in the clearest possible terms. The biblical view is that Jesus Christ is one and only one person.

The one person, Jesus Christ, possesses a complete divine nature. This is directly affirmed in John 1:1, which states that the Word (a name for Jesus) was God. The Jesus of the New Testament claimed divine names and attributes (John 8:58). He received worship (John 9:35-38). He is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact image of His person (Heb. 1:3). Paul calls Jesus "our great God and Savior" (Titus 2:13). Clearly, the Jesus of the New Testament is a fully divine person. He is God.

Equally clearly, the Jesus of the New Testament is human. He was the sort of person who could grow tired and hungry. He took a human nature in order to reverse the penalty of human sin (1 Cor. 15:21-22). His humanity was essential in order for Him to defeat the enemy of human beings (Heb. 2:15). In order to earn the right to save humans, Jesus had to submit in human obedience to the Father (Heb. 5:7-9). The humanity of Jesus Christ was not an illusion: it was real. The Jesus of the New Testament is a fully human person.

The Jesus of the New Testament is a single person with two natures. From eternity He was true God, possessing a complete divine nature. In His incarnation He added a complete human nature to His deity, becoming true man. As a theanthropic person—a God-man—the Jesus of the Bible is absolutely unique.

That very uniqueness has created huge questions for Christians. From the very beginning they have struggled to understand the relationship between the deity and humanity of Jesus. How can one person simultaneously be omnipotent and yet grow tired? How can He be omniscient at the very time when He confesses that He does not know the day or the hour of His own coming? How can He be omnipresent and yet localized in the manger, at the temple, or on the cross?

Christian theologians have answered these questions by attempting to state how the attributes of Jesus' natures relate to each nature and to the person. The language of this discussion is a bit technical, and there is some disagreement even among orthodox Christians. All agree that the properties or attributes of each nature communicate to (are true of) the person *according to that nature*. Beyond that, the majority of Christian theologians insist that the properties or attributes of

each nature *do not* communicate to the other nature.

In other words, the person Jesus Christ is omniscient according to the divine nature, but limited in knowledge according to the human nature. He is omnipotent according to the divine nature, but He could be weak according to the human nature. He is omnipresent according to the divine nature, but spatially local according to the human nature (the majority of Christians agree that the human body of Jesus is not omnipresent). Theologians have inferred that whatever is true of one nature must also be true of the person, but not necessarily of the other nature.

Incidentally, this is one reason that Jesus' mother Mary can properly be called *Theotokos*, "God-bearer." She is the mother of the person of Jesus and not merely of His human nature. The person of Jesus is theanthropic. Neither the person nor the divine nature of Jesus began with Mary, but she was the mother of the person nevertheless. To suggest otherwise is to run the risk of dividing the person in two, resulting in a human Jesus and a divine Christ who are joined rather like Siamese twins. That is the heresy of Nestorianism, and it represents a giant step back toward Gnosticism.

This discussion is intricate. The path between dividing the person and confusing the natures of Jesus is a very narrow one. Theologians have used technical terms and intricate concepts to build fences along both sides of that path. Those technicalities may sometimes seem distracting to those whose main interest is simply to worship Jesus Christ. The discussion, however, is necessary.

One reason that it is necessary is that it provides the categories for dealing with issues like the marriage of Jesus. Granted, Jesus did not marry. Nevertheless, Dan Brown's hypothesis in *The Da Vinci Code* forces us to ask whether He *could* have married, or whether a married Jesus would completely destroy Christianity as it now exists. Now that we have examined briefly the New Testament teachings about Jesus Christ, we are in a position to answer that question. ✘

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

Jesu, Highest Heaven's Completeness

Bernard Of Clairvaux (1091-1153)

Tr. Robert Campbell (1814-1868)

Jesu, highest heaven's completeness,
Name of music to the ear,
To the lips surpassing sweetness,
Wine the fainting heart to cheer.

Eating Thee, the soul may hunger,
Drinking, still athirst may be;
But for earthly food no longer,
Nor for any stream but Thee.

Jesu, all delight exceeding,
Only hope of heart distrest;
Weeping eyes and spirit mourning
Find in Thee a place of rest.

Stay, O Beauty untreated,
Ever ancient, ever new;
Banish deeds of darkness hated,
With Thy sweetness all bedew.

Jesu, fairest blossom springing
From a maiden ever pure,
May our lips Thy praise be singing
While eternal years endure. ✠

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