



## Tracts for Our Times

### *I Believe in One God*

A Short Commentary on the Creed: Parts 10-14

Tract 9

15 August  
2010

#### ***10: ...**(and in One Lord, Jesus Christ) the only begotten Son of God...*****

People at times in the past and today make the claim, 'Jesus never said he was the Son of God'.

If we look at the witness to Jesus Christ, if we look at the gospels, it is true that in this record such a title is always claimed for Jesus *by others*: whether it be by the gospel narrators, as at the beginning of Mark (1.1) or at many points in John (cf. 3.16; 20.31); by the angel Gabriel to Mary (Lk. 1.35); by demoniacs whom Jesus goes on to heal (Mt. 8.29); or by the Pharisees who seek to charge him with blasphemy (Jn. 10.33-39). Even the devil rebukes him with this title in his wilderness temptations (Mt. 4.1-6; Lk. 4.1-10).

The messianic title Jesus most often uses himself, referring to his ministry, is 'Son of Man'. We also hear the term 'Son of David'. Jesus's own words seem to circumvent the issue: not answering questions of his identity directly; speaking of himself in the third person. We feel like echoing the plea of the Jews in John's gospel: "*If you are the Christ, tell us plainly*" (Jn 10.24). Why is there this confusion?

Firstly, we know that, at that time, no coherent and agreed concept of the identity of the "Messiah" existed (though there were many ideas). This is seen in passages from John where the Jews argue over Jesus's identity: "*again the Jews were divided because of these words*" (10.19).

But secondly and most importantly, (notwithstanding these disparate ideas about the Messiah), Jesus cannot give the Jews an answer to satisfy them because he reveals an entirely unthought-of situation to the world: the nature of God. Regardless of what "Son of Man" or "Son of God" were taken to mean in first-century Palestine (or now for that matter) we believe Jesus is the Only Son of God in the new yet eternal meaning he reveals through the Incarnation.



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It is because of Jesus that we can affirm both the uniqueness of the One God and also believe in the Son of God. We learn that God is truly Father only because of the Son and by this God's love for the world (Jn. 3.16). Jesus taught us to call God our Father. He teaches us by his very being.

**II: ...(One Lord, Jesus Christ) born of the Father before all ages...**

When we think about Jesus, we probably think about a man who lived 2000 years ago somewhere in the Near East. We do of course think about this man in a very special way.

Nevertheless, Jesus appears to be a human being with flesh and bones who most of the time delighted in the company of his fellow men and shared his love with them. Apparently, he enjoyed good food. In the end, he died a terrible death. Like everybody's life, Jesus' life underwent a lot of changes and excitement and ceased at the end.

If we think about "God", we think differently. The first thing which is said about him is that he is the powerful creator of heaven and earth, and their unmoved first cause. God sustains everything which surrounds us, and is present in the innermost core of our hearts.

He is so big, so timeless and mysterious that we can hardly grasp him, not to speak about painting accurate pictures of him.

Now let us turn to this statement of the Creed. It states that Jesus and God are the same. A human being is also divine. God becomes a human being.

This sounds nonsensical! How can somebody be born and yet also be timeless, die and yet be eternal, be truly human and yet truly divine? Is that not as absurd as saying that a number, let us say the number 127 is a living creature? And that my neighbour's parrot Polly is a number?

From our point of view, Jesus was a man who was born around 2000 years ago. From God's point of view, nothing changed at all. It is not as if his Incarnation involved him changing his Divine state.

The thing that really changed was his creation - WE CHANGED! There is now something divine in every human being: "*acknowledge your dignity*", Pope Leo the Great says, the dignity humans now have because God has lived as one of us.

The Christian God is a God with a human face.

“ God became  
a human  
being! The  
Christian God is  
a God with  
a human  
face. ”

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## 12: ...*(One Lord, Jesus Christ) ...God from God ...*

We know that this section of the Creed is focused on the Son, the Lord, Jesus Christ, whom Christians profess to be both truly God (“God from God”) and truly man (born of Mary). We also are aware that while the first articles of the Creed articulate an understanding of God that might be arrived at from a reading of the Old Testament – *God as both Creator of heaven and earth and Father of Israel* – in this section, we have moved on to what Christians have been able to say about God by *reflecting upon the significance of the words and actions of Jesus Christ* recorded in the New Testament.

In the Gospel of John, the Pharisee, Nicodemus, describes Jesus as someone who has “*come from God as a teacher*” (John 3:2). In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus deepens this insight by disclosing himself as the Son of God sent by the Father as Saviour of the world. He tells Nicodemus, “*God sent his son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.*”

In other words, God the Father, the creator of the world, has such a depth of love for his creation, and in particular for humanity, that he sends his only-begotten son, through whom everything was created, to enter into and become part of the world as a human being so that it might be redeemed from within.

Jesus is disclosed in the New Testament as God’s closeness to us. Saint Matthew, in his account of the angel’s announcement to Joseph that a son, called Jesus, was to be born to Mary, quotes the words of the prophet Isaiah to refer to Jesus as *Emmanuel* or *God-with-us*. Pope Benedict XVI writes that Jesus is “*the real proximity of God coming to meet us, God’s mediation to us, and that precisely because he himself is God as man, in human form and nature, God-with-us (Emmanuel)*”.

“ Christ the  
Light of the  
World knocks on  
the door and stands  
waiting to be  
invited in. ”

## 13: ...*(Jesus Christ)...light from light ...*

The Creed states that Jesus is “*Light from Light*”. So how then should this affect the way we live? In the Gospel according to John, Jesus declares: “*I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*” (8:12).

What does this mean, and how are we to respond? In the Gospel, *light* is synonymous with *life*: so for Jesus to say that he is light is to say that he is a source of life and to follow Jesus is to walk in the light: to awaken to the reality of our Salvation which was won for us on the cross.

The revelation that God is *light* is an invitation which demands a response. It is an invitation to draw near to Jesus, to be close to him that we might discover what it is to

walk in this *light*. This invitation is beautifully expressed in the painting by Holman Hunt: *Christ, the Light of the world knocks on the door, and stands waiting to be invited in* (based on Revelation 3:20)

It is tempting to contrast light and darkness. But darkness is the absence of light, and it is by light that we see. If we walk without the light, we stumble through life, lacking vision. However, to walk in the light requires that we learn to *see Christ's love and live by it, so that we may be transformed by it.*

Later in John's Gospel, Jesus tells us how we are to live in this light, expressed clearly in the new Commandment: "*love one another; even as I have loved you*" (13:34). And this is something that we are called to do right here and right now. The invitation to walk with Christ is always open to us.

But why respond to Jesus? Who is this Jesus who claims to be the light of the world? The teaching that Jesus is "*Light from Light*" shows us that Jesus' authority comes from the fact that he is God made man. God himself wants nothing more than that we may come into relationship with him, sharing in the Divine life.

#### ***14: ... (One Lord, Jesus Christ)... true God from true God ...***

For some time after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, Christians struggled to understand fully the mystery of the Trinity. Even today we cannot say that we fully understand this great mystery—and indeed, we need not. To claim that we can understand it is to claim that we can penetrate the mystery of God—the eternal Father and Creator. What arrogance such a claim would be!

We can however make certain statements which, though they may invite us in to deeper reflection, remind us that at times we must simply stand back in awe at the mystery of God. That Jesus (and indeed the Holy Spirit) are "true God from true God" is one of these statements.

Jesus is not a "lesser" God. He is not a "created" God. He is not a "junior" or "apprentice" God. We do not get a "second best" God coming to dwell amongst us. We do not worship and adore a "pseudo-" God in the Blessed Sacrament. God did not send a "less important" God to offer his life on the cross.

Jesus is *true God from true God*. God himself, dwelt amongst us. God himself died on the cross for us. God himself offers his Body and Blood for our salvation. God is selfless and he calls us to imitate this.✠



*"The following Tracts were published with the object of contributing something towards the practical revival of doctrines held by the great divines of our faith."*

This was the intention of Cardinal Newman and his companions (known as the Oxford Tractarians) when they began publishing their *Tracts for the Times*.

The Port Elizabeth Oratory, faithful to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church and the spirit of Saint Philip Neri, hope to contribute something to the faith and understanding of the People of God in Port Elizabeth, conforming their hearts and minds ever more closely to the Person of Jesus Christ.