

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse - Sunday December 2nd 2007 John 1:1-9 In the beginning was the Word

Just when you think that religion is irrelevant and passé, American novelist Dan Brown writes a book about the secret history of Jesus, and it becomes an international bestseller. Debating the origins of Christianity has now become popular and lucrative. He argues that the claim by Christians that Jesus is the Son of God was not the original message but something imposed at the Council of Nicaea by the Church to gain political power. In other words, according to *The Da Vinci Code*, Jesus' divinity is the result of a vote. Which is exactly what Moslems and Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) believe.

Dan Brown should do some serious theological research because the claim for the divinity of Jesus, his pre-existence in the life of the Trinity, arises in the very earliest Christian preaching.

Chapter 1 of John goes back beyond John the Baptist, to the dawn of time when the Word already was. John is using the language of the street. The Word *logos* for Epicureans, Greeks and even Jews meant the organising centre of the world. In Judaism God has His Word, there in the beginning. In the Jewish confession of one God there is also this sense, although one God, He is not solitary. There is also His wisdom, His Law. John says that this Word is not so much a Principle, or a Centre, but is a Person. At the heart of everything there is the One through Whom God created all things. He was not only with God, but was God. The Council of Nicaea says 'there never was a time when he was not'.

JWs say that John is not saying the 'word was God', but simply a god, in the sense of a lesser god, on the basis that there is no definite article 'the' in front of God. But for Jews that is a pagan idea, and also if John had put 'the', he would be saying that Jesus is all there is to say about God, which he doesn't want to say either. So John puts it in the Greek, 'God the Word was'. That Jesus is in his very nature God, of the same substance.

So the Church in the 4th century did not fabricate something, but made explicit what is implicit in the New Testament, in the very earliest Christian preaching. The disciple Thomas exclaimed 'My Lord and My God!' If we do not nail this, we are vulnerable to every attack. If the one we sing about in the Christmas carols is not God, we have no hope, no revelation, only a nice set of rules, a religious club, an example of faith. But we would not have the Gospel, the revelation of God's love, and no rescue mission from darkness to light. We will have been proven to follow a delusion. In fact the deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God.

If it is true we have a message of hope, that the one who created the world, is the one who comes to save, to a manger, to a cross. We have a Word from God – the Word of God.

In the *Narnia* story 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', Aslan is slain, but the White Witch does not realise there is a deeper magic that stretches back to before time, which brings Aslan back from the dead. God is working his magic, He is healing the world, rescuing the world. Jesus is the Resurrection, and that first Easter is the first day of a new creation.

In *Narnia* it was always winter but never Christmas; which is as it is now for us – or if there is Christmas, it is cheap and tacky. As soon as the children go back to *Narnia* they notice that the curse has been broken, and the winter is thawing. For Christmas has arrived.