

## Timeline of CG7's Beliefs About Jesus

**1860 to 1917** — No clearly defined Christology. Many held a contra-trinitarian view (only the Father is God; Jesus is the Son of God, separate and distinct from God himself). In terms of the nature of Father and Son, many also held a contra-spiritual, corporal view (God and Son exist as physical/material beings who share as one in the plan of salvation, but not as one in divine makeup). Within these parameters, however, how the pioneer church would more fully define the *sonship* of Jesus was the subject of much debate. The primary question was did Jesus preexist his earthly birth, and, if so, in what sense. Opinions varied. A few said the Son preexisted in a full and real sense; others believed he preexisted in the mind and activity of God in the form of the spoken Word or Logos. Most, however, argued against the Son's preexistence, preferring an adoptionist explanation of how Jesus became the Son of God (i.e. God selected or adopted the person of Jesus to be his Son and Savior of the world, with the adoption occurring either at Jesus' birth, baptism, resurrection, or some combination thereof). Although some in the adoptionist camp maintained that Jesus was the natural son of Mary and Joseph, the majority held that Jesus became the begotten Son of God at his virgin birth.

**1917 to 1978** — Primarily through the influence of A.N. Dugger in the '20, '30s & '40s, the Church's contra-trinitarian view of Jesus' nature became more expressly Arian and anti-Catholic in tone. This was evidenced not so much by any official doctrinal statement, but more so in the overall teaching, preaching, and literature of the Church. Also, as Church teaching shifted in favor of Father and Son as spiritual beings, the corporal view of God, prevalent in the previous period, faded from the scene.

In **1949**, as part of the Salem-Stanberry Reunification, the joint ministerial body endorsed a new set of Articles of Belief. In addition to statements about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, it also included for the first time a statement on the "Pre-existence of Christ." This marked another shift in Church thinking — the end of the adoptionist views prevalent in the pioneer period. However, notice that the wording is sufficiently vague so as not to specify whether Christ preexisted as a being or only as God's Word or Thought. It could be (and was) interpreted either way.

*23. We believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was in the plan of salvation before the foundation of the world. He was the Word spoken of in John 1:1, 2, and His birth of the virgin Mary was in fulfillment of, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."*

[For the complete wording of the 1949 Godhead statements, see pages 477, 478, and 481 of *The Journey* by Robert Coulter.]

### **IMC — 1978 — Juarez, Mexico**

The inauguration of the International Ministerial Congress (IMC) and the adoption of its current, 12-point Statement of Faith, which has remained unchanged since its adoption. Its statement on "Jesus, the Son" reads in part:

*We believe in Jesus, the Messiah and Savior, only begotten Son of the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of a virgin. We affirm His preexistence, incarnation, sinless life . . . . [See p. 389 of *The Journey* for the full text.]*

**NAMC - 1982 — Boise, Idaho**

The North American Ministerial Council (NAMC) began holding informal discussions on Christology as its agenda allowed. No formal resolutions were presented, just various ministers presenting their opinions and interpretations of biblical texts. These were the first ministerial discussions of Christology since the adoption of the 1949 Articles of Belief.

**NAMC - 1986 — Glorieta, New Mexico**

As part of an overall revision and rearrangement of its doctrinal beliefs, the NAMC modified the statement on the “Pre-existence of Christ” to read in part:

*Jesus was present with God and was preeminent in Creation. He shared His Father’s “glory” before taking on the form of a man . . . .*

When compared to the previous 1949 statement, this statement more clearly indicates that Jesus preexisted as a personal being rather than merely in Word form.

**IMC — 1986 — Cuernavaca, Mexico**

Discussed the Godhead on an informal basis. No formal resolutions were presented.

**NAMC - 1988 — Tulsa, Oklahoma**

The NAMC adopted a resolution calling for a committee to study the Godhead (especially the pre-existence, divinity, and relationship of Christ with the Father) and that the study be presented at the next council session.

**NAMC - 1990 — Lansing, Michigan**

As called for by the 1988 session, the NAMC heard and discussed the committee’s study on the Godhead (i.e. the Deity of Christ). It voted to continue the discussion at the next council session.

**IMC — 1990 — Oaxtepec, Mexico**

The IMC also discussed the Deity of Christ and adopted a resolution calling for a continuation of the topic at the next congress session.

**NAMC - 1992 — Phoenix, Arizona**

As called for in 1990, the NAMC continued its discussion of the Deity of Christ. The following motion was offered, but defeated:

*Moved and seconded the following statement be substituted for Doctrinal Statements 2 and 23 appearing in the 1988 edition of the Doctrinal Beliefs Booklet:*

*God the Son*

*God the Son is co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father. Being truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Through Him all things were created, the nature of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is secured, and the judgment of the world is executed.*

Although the NAMC had been discussing the deity of Christ, informally and formally, for the past 10 years, the defeat of this motion demonstrated that many of the ministers were not ready to move from the contra-trinitarian and Arian roots the Church had laid down in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Throughout the Church's history, Jesus was the "Son of God," but it wasn't yet kosher to call him "God the Son."

#### **NAMC - 1994 — Colorado Springs, Colorado**

As part of another wholesale revision of the Doctrinal Beliefs Booklet, the NAMC considered and passed a proposal that, by combing several related doctrines, reduced the overall number of statements from 37 to 27. Included in this revision was a new statement on "Jesus Christ, the Son." It reads in part:

*Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. Before time began, He existed with the Father, shared the father's glory, and participated in creation. Voluntarily relinquishing the rights of His deity, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary and was born in Bethlehem. In full humanity, Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father's will . . . Jesus is Lord!*

Although this statement expresses the Son's eternal, preexistent, divine, and human aspects, these tenets were part of a package deal. They passed, not because the Council had been convinced by a thorough study of the concepts, but because they were line items briefly dealt with as part of a revision of the entire Doctrinal Beliefs Booklet, which was a rather long and laborious process that was exacerbated by the need to finish in the allotted time. Many in the Council were not satisfied with the results as future events would demonstrate.

#### **IMC — 1994 — Corpus Christi, Texas**

In keeping with the 1990 resolution calling for further discussion of the Deity of Christ at the 1994 IMC session, the Mexican Ministerial Council gave previous notice of its intent to present a study and resolution on this topic. The Mexican Council's representative presented the study, the thrust of which was that the wording "only begotten Son of the Father" in the 1978 IMC Statement of Faith should be interpreted to mean that the Father had created the Son. The study concluded with this brief motion:

*Be it resolved that we support the present belief that Jesus Christ was created by God in eternity.*

Several other individuals and national council representatives also made presentations. Finally, the president of the IMC surrendered the chair to the vice president in order to take part in the deliberations. He offered another study and motion as a substitute for the Mexican Council's proposal. The motion to substitute passed and the substitute motion also passed by the required two-thirds vote. That motion reads as follows:

*Whereas the Statement of Faith of the International Ministerial Congress declares in Section 3: "We believe in Jesus, the Messiah and Savior, only begotten Son of the Father . . . ,"*

*And whereas Section 3 does not state or imply that Jesus was "created by God,"*

*Be it resolved that the Congress interpret the phrase "only begotten Son of the Father" as follows:*

*The phrase “only begotten Son of the Father” reveals two complimentary truths about Jesus Christ: 1) His inherent nature, and 2) His position within the Godhead.*

*In regard to nature, the phrase indicates the full deity of Christ. Through “begettal,” the Son consists of the same nature, substance, or “stuff” as the Father. The term begotten, by definition, makes the Son divine because the One from whom He was begotten is divine. Since the Son is of the same divine substance as the Father, He is an equal member of the Godhead and shares with the Father the nature, attributes, and title of “God.”*

*In regard to position, the phrase “only begotten Son of the Father” also indicates the relationship of the Son to the Father. The term begotten, by definition, places the Son under the Father’s authority. The Son is begotten, while the Father alone is unbegotten. Because the Son acts only in accord with the Father, and not of Himself, He is subordinate to the Father in rank. However, the subordination of the Son does not make Him a separate or second “god.” By nature, the Son remains equal to the Father, sharing with Him the divine substance of the Godhead. Although the Father and Son differ in role and position, the equality in nature of Father and Son preserves the oneness of the Godhead.*

*Be it further resolved that the Congress distribute this resolution to each member conference or council with instructions that each conference or council in turn distribute a copy of this resolution to its ministers, pastors, and church workers.*

According to Robert Coulter, “After twelve years of informal discussion on a national and sometimes international level, the first formal decision on Christ’s deity was issued by the International Ministerial Congress in 1994. . . . It was the first time in its history that a segment of the Church officially declared Christ to be God in substance, attributes, and name. Further, it was understood that He shares the Godhead with His Father as one God. The fact that this decision occurred in the international congress was important because its interpretation became the theological norm for the worldwide membership of the Church. It prompted national ministerial bodies comprising the congress to study their Christology and challenged them to accept the deity of Christ” (*The Journey*, pp. 393-394).

#### **NAMC - 1996 — Beaver Creek, Colorado**

In the wake of the interpretation handed down by the 1994 IMC, the 1996 session of the NAMC sought to amend its own statement about Jesus once again, but not without some opposition. Recall that the Council had revised the entire belief booklet only two years prior (1994, Colorado Springs). The quickest, but not the best, fix was to insert a line to the recently revised statement on Jesus. The first proposal, in effect, said that Jesus was “equal in substance to the Father.” Sounding too trinitarian to some, the phrase “similar in substance to the Father” was suggested, but it never gained enough support to be put into a motion. Not to be undone, and as one last attempt to pull the Church from the brink of “trinitarianism,” a substitution was hastily offered: “[Jesus] is of the same substance as the Father.” When it was pointed out to the proposer of the substitution that “equal” and “same” were synonymous terms, that no real difference in meaning would be conveyed, the person remained convinced that he had found a way to strike a blow for the old Arian view. To him and a few others “same” meant “similar,” and that’s how they were going to interpret it. Ironically, an amendment that reinforced the full deity of Christ was proposed by someone who didn’t believe it. The 1996 statement, as amended, reads in part as follows:

*Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. He is of the same substance as the Father. Before time began, He existed with the Father, shared the Father's glory, and participated in creation. Voluntarily relinquishing the rights of His deity, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary and was born in Bethlehem. In full humanity, Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father's will . . . Jesus is Lord!*

### **2003 Backlash - Joplin, Missouri**

In 2003, the CG7 Joplin Church Board wrote an article, "Addressing Contradictions," in the *Ministerial Forum* of the NAMC. In the article the Joplin board and pastor took issue with the 1994 IMC and 1996 NAMC statements on the deity of Christ. They contended that the two statements contradicted other statements in the IMC and NAMC articles of faith, did not represent the traditional teaching of the Church, and had been illegally obtained according to parliamentary procedure. After many personal phone calls, emails, and letters of explanation, most of the Joplin board remained steadfast in their contentions. A few even left the Church over the matter. The whole affair served as a reminder that doctrinal change can be a painful endeavor.

### **NAMC - 2006 — Overland Park, Kansas**

According to Robert Coulter, the 2006 meeting of the NAMC offered another opportunity for the remaining "Arian members of the council" to present their position. But they were unable to articulate and to persuade the Council to adopt their Christological views. Instead, the Council adopted another complete reworking of its doctrinal statements. Following the pattern (and some of the wording) of the 1978 IMC Statement of Faith, this latest revision reduced the 27 doctrinal points of the 1994 revision down to 12 concise statements. Statement 2, entitled "The Deity," contains this statement about "Jesus The Son," which reads in part:

*Jesus Christ is God's one and only begotten Son. As begotten, not created, He shares the nature, names, and attributes of God with the Father. As Son, not Father, Jesus is subordinate to His Father in rank. From eternity, the Son was with the Father, shared the Father's glory as the pre-incarnate Word, and with Him created and sustains all things. Jesus the Christ (Messiah) was born of the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, thus uniting two natures—human and divine . . . Now it pleases the Father that the Son is preeminent in all things and receives our worship.*

(See pp. 379, 494, and 495 of *The Journey*.)

**Members of the Church, this is your most recent statement of belief on the deity of Christ.**

Postscript: Although this timeline appears as an anonymous document, it was composed by Jerry Griffin c. 2015 for a presentation requested by the Lodi, CA congregation on the history and doctrine of the Church of God (Seventh Day).