

Paul Thomas

The Second Man
The Lord from Heaven.

*A Critical Appraisal of Historical Christology
from Chalcedon to the Monothelite
Controversy (AD 681).*

PAUL THOMAS

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ISBN:

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Bishop Dr. Teklemariam Gezahagne, the Superintendent of the Apostolic Church International Fellowship. With wisdom, patience and love, he took the time to share the marvellous truths contained in the pages of this book. The Ethiopian eunuch went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in search of the truth and returned with the priceless name of Jesus. I, and many others, have travelled to Ethiopia and were infinitely enriched with the revelation of the heavenly origin of the blessed flesh and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Thanks are also due to the Apostolic Church International Fellowship, Norway, for their untiring support. This book coincides with the 10th anniversary since the founding of the ACIF, Norway. Paradoxically, it was the issue of the origin of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ which saw the need to establish a new church. In conceiving of this book a while ago, I was unaware of the approaching anniversary which will be celebrated this December, 2011. I am both very pleased and humbled to say that we have steadfastly kept the profession of faith without wavering.

Revelation 2:25 *But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.*

Paul Thomas, London, UK,
October, 2011

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Introduction

What is the origin of the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ? Is Jesus the Son of God or the Son of Mary? How are we to understand phrases such as “seed of the woman”, “seed of Abraham” and “seed of David”? Is it important to establish the origin of the flesh of Jesus at all? These are some of the questions this book considers in light of the Bible. Although some Christians do not believe it is important to grapple with such questions, even a liberal theologian like John Hick states that the “incarnation makes Christianity unique among world religions. This is so because Christianity is founded by God Himself in person” (Hick 1985, 34). I quite agree with Hick. A question which follows from this is: If God founded Christianity in person, and the main vehicle through which He achieved this is His body, then what is the origin and nature of this body?

Today, the prevailing view in the Christian denominational world is that Jesus entered the world with a human flesh assumed from Mary. Those who hold this view contend that it was necessary for Christ to assume human flesh in order for Him to qualify as our “kinsman redeemer”. However, upon closer examination of the Biblical evidence, we find no support for such a reading. In part, this book aims to explore a number of similar readings believed to support the

contention that Jesus assumed a human flesh. However, the overriding objective is to convincingly argue for the Scriptural position that Jesus came into this world with a flesh which had its source in the Word of God – heavenly flesh.

John 1:14 And 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.

The central thesis of this book is: did God robe Himself in earthly human flesh or did He come in His own heavenly flesh? The belief that Christ's flesh is heavenly will be shown to be a bedrock teaching in the Bible. Conversely, to believe that Jesus assumed human flesh - having its origin in the lowly dust - leaves one with a distorted view of the identity of the One True God in Christ and, sadly, a diminished view of His resplendent glory. It will be argued that a wrong understanding of the Word made flesh (John 1:14) doctrine (Christology) impacts negatively on a series of other foundational doctrines in the Bible among which are baptism in Jesus name and the Lord's Supper.

The eminent German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred by the Nazis, once said:

What is bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today (Bonhoeffer 1971, 279).

Similar questions have propelled the need to write this book. It is such “incessant botherings” which lead us to more profound truths concerning the only wise God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, in whom is hid all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. In the *Right Hand of the Lord: Literal or Metaphorical?* (2011), I invoked Isaiah 34:16 to challenge the reader to suspend his/her preconceptions and examine the contents of this book with a critical, but judicious and open spirit. I find no better verse to invoke, once again, before we commence this journey:

Isaiah 34:16 *Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them.*

CHAPTER ONE

The first Adam – a figure of Christ

Genesis 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Man is a spirit-being. God fashioned a dust-body to serve as a vessel to contain the spirit which He blew into us. The name *Adam* means “red earth”. Thus the first Adam was created a being with a dual heritage: his spirit was from God while his body was of the earth. The woman also shared in the same biological origin as Adam. When God created the first couple, He called them both Adam – or red earth.

Genesis 5:2 Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.

The above is important because some people mistakenly presume that because Jesus did not have a human father, He somehow evaded the sin of Adam. The Scripture makes it clear that women (including Mary) have no separate existence of their own, which means that there was no way Jesus would have avoided the sin of Adam

although, as is claimed, He assumed human flesh from Mary alone. One Scripture that confirms the inseparable link between men and women is I Corinthians 11:8:

***1 Corinthians 11:8** For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man.*

This book contends that the virgin birth makes redundant the argument for a human Christ. God chose a virgin precisely to ensure a rupture in the natural order of human procreation so that the entire act – from start to finish – was a sovereign act of the divine alone.

Coming back to the creation of Adam, are we to believe that humans were destined to live with a body made from the earth forever? Did God intend for mankind to live eternally with a dust-body in the Garden of Eden? Leave aside the fact that God, in His omniscience, knew that the first humans would sin and be expelled from Eden. Imagine with me, if you will, that they had never sinned. Would they have lived happily ever after in the Garden of Eden? Actually, the Bible has something to say about this.

***Romans 5:14** Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.*

In stating that Adam is “...*the figure of him that was to come*”, the apostle Paul teaches us that Adam was not the real image of God. Adam was a figure or an imperfect model foreshadowing the coming of the second Adam – Jesus Christ. We ought to be very thankful that Adam was not the ultimate fulfilment of the creative act of God. Who would want to be confined to this earthly body with all its flaws, temptations and limitations? Keep in mind that even before the Fall, our first parents were susceptible to enticement, temptation and deception. So even if Adam and Eve had not sinned, their creation was far from the perfect, heavenly, incorruptible and sinless beings that God had envisioned for the future. This would only become possible through putting on the body of God Himself (Jesus Christ) which will be discussed later.

The effects of sin on the body of Adam

Not only was the first Adam but a figure or a shadow of Christ before the Fall, but the effects of the Fall make it theologically impossible for Jesus to assume a body from the descendants of Adam. Hence we are, in essence, looking at two challenges which militate against a human body for Jesus: one that the pre-Fall body of Adam was a mere figure, and, two, that the hereditary nature of sin taints every single individual of the human species. The Scriptures confirm this over and over again:

Job 25:4 *How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?*

Job 25:5 *Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight.*

Job 25:6 *How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?*

Bildad the Shuhite's description above of the human condition is deflating. All who are born of women are unclean in the sight of God. All it takes to become unclean is to be born. Let us be clear about one thing: it was God who declared that the day Adam would eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die (Genesis 2:17). The fact that *all* humans die simply means that we have inherited the sin of our federal father Adam. Paul reiterates this:

Rom 3:23 *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

Romans 5:12 *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:*

The reason I labour this point is because some people believe that Jesus had to become a human being exactly like us in order to save us. I have often asked them how it was possible for the Lord to avoid the corruptible sinful nature of Adam to which they replied that the Lord somehow worked a miracle and circumvented the sin. Now they, regrettably, do not make any attempt to back up such a serious allegation with any Scripture, yet this spurious claim is taught as a pivotal doctrine in their churches.

At this juncture I only focus on the fact that the effects of the inherited sin makes it impossible for Jesus to mingle with the biological make-up of humanity. The whole human gene pool is spiritually contaminated by the sin of Adam. However, it will be clearly established later that Jesus Himself denied any biological relations with the progeny of Adam. He claimed to be from above and not of this world (John 8:23,24).

As I will often make mention of Oneness Christians in this book, I will briefly consider their understanding of the Godhead. Oneness Christians uphold the biblical doctrine of the One True God manifested in flesh (I Timothy 3:16), and reject the doctrine of the Trinity. They believe that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are titles and modes of the same One God. Where we part ways is in their understanding of the manner in which God was manifested in flesh. They hold to the mainstream erroneous view that God assumed flesh from Mary as it was necessary for Him to become a genuine human being like us in every way.

Oneness adherents have basically continued in the error of the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) which I will elaborate on later. Most theologians, however, agree that Chalcedon gendered more questions rather than solve the ones raised.

However, Chalcedon only asserts that Jesus is truly God and truly human, it does not explain how this is possible. But this – Hick claims – makes it an unintelligible and meaningless utterance (Schmidt-Leukel 2006, 115).

The problem is this: How is the classical Christological tradition to be continued in our era? The hallmark of that tradition - "truly divine, truly human" formula - has become a sore point (Wildman 2007, 302).

The reader will notice that I refrain from using the word “incarnation” in this book. There is a good reason for doing so. Look up any book on systematic theology and you will notice that incarnation refers to the manner in which “the second member of the Trinity” assumed flesh from Mary. This phrase is completely alien to the biblical doctrine of the Godhead. There is no “second member of the Trinity”. Christological debates of the third and fourth centuries revolved around this false premise. As such, it is quite puzzling that Oneness believers, who deny such phraseology (second member of the Trinity), nevertheless embrace the mistaken belief that Jesus derived His humanity from Mary – a product of the Trinitarian Council of Chalcedon (AD 451).

Could Jesus have been tempted with sin?

Oneness Christians maintain that Jesus could have been tempted and even sin. The quote below is a case in point:

This is also related to His “sinlessness”. Some have questioned his genuine humanity because of His “sinlessness”. Some have denied His capability of sinning (in other words, questioning

His human will, His human spirit and human emotions, His flesh and blood body) (Chalfant).

The problem with the above is that Chalfant recognizes only one category of flesh – those who can trace their lineage back to Adam. Once he operates with this narrow definition of mankind, it follows logically that all who are born of this lineage must be capable of sinning or else their humanity is void. This is the classic reductionist fallacy: it runs the risk of denying God’s sovereignty in begetting a completely new lineage of which Jesus was the firstborn.

Romans 8:29 *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

Furthermore, this position would require God to share in the fallen state of humans. On the contrary, God already revealed to the prophet Isaiah that He could not find any one from the lineage of Adam which is why *His own arm brought salvation unto Him.*

Isaiah 59:16 *And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.*

Isaiah 63:5 *And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me.*

Chalfant believes that Jesus is the One and only God. How does he then reconcile this belief with the Scripture below?

James 1:13 *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:*

The fundamental mistake committed by Chalfant and others of this school of thought is their inability to conceive of another lineage of man which has its source in God Himself. This is precisely what the apostle Paul expounded to the Corinthian church.

1Cor 15:45 *And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*

1Cor 15:46 *Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.*

1Cor 15:47 *The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.*

Oneness, and other theologians, believe that Adam's human nature before the Fall was identical with the Lord's "human nature". In the words of one theologian:

The grace in which human nature was originally created meant that before the Fall Adam's human nature, like that of Christ, was free from every temptation "from within". The impossibility, in the cases of Adam and of Jesus, of human nature being tempted "from within" results from the uniquely graced character of these two human natures. In these two cases, grace worked to ensure that human nature could not "turn against itself", so to speak (Riches 2011, 14).

The flaw with such reasoning is that it not only has no biblical foundation but overlooks the fact that God never intended for born-again believers to be trapped in an adamic body forever. Again, as previously stated, Adam was a *figure* or shadow of Christ. Rather

than put Jesus and Adam's "human nature" on par with each other, the apostle Paul demonstrates a qualitative difference between the two:

1Corinthians 15:47 *The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.*

1Corinthians 15:49 *And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*

In the narrative of the Gospels, the Lord never sought any affinity or kinship with Adam. His statements could only be understood as attempts to distance Himself from any such ties with the lineage of Adam.

John 8:23 *And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.*

The uniqueness of Christ's birth

We must ponder the question I raised earlier again: why was Jesus born of a virgin? Perhaps, someone may be tempted to say that it was a fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. There is a problem with this line of reasoning. How many people really knew that Mary was a virgin? The Bible records that Joseph was told to marry Mary in order to conceal the awkwardness and shame of the situation. In fact, he married her so that no one would ask questions about the circumstances of her pregnancy. In other words, it was all hushed up. So why then was the Lord born of a virgin if this was not public knowledge? Simply because this was the best way to avoid any

genetic linkage or intermingling with the human race. Actually, the Bible is quite explicit with regards to the origin of the flesh of Jesus.

Luke 1:35 *And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

Why would God resort to such a drastic step? Why could He not settle for a human specimen? Clearly, this is because of the universally corrupt and sinful condition of all humans. Had the Lord received any genetic contribution from Mary, He would necessarily have been contaminated with the acted and inherited sin which has always been a hallmark of the human condition. But as Luke 1:35 states, the baby to be born was referred to as *that holy thing*. This has not been said of any other child in the entire Bible. One cannot but notice that God was doing something entirely new with the birth of Jesus. It was so unique that He began preparing the children of Israel to expect this momentous event several centuries before it came to pass.

Micah 5:2 *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

Bethlehem was an obscure village among the thousands of Judah but rose to great prominence because Jesus was born there. Christ

may have had a humble birth but His origin was from everlasting. The question which arises here is: which part or aspect of Jesus was from everlasting – His Spirit alone or His flesh too? Many Christians restrict the Lord’s everlasting origin to His Spirit alone, believing His flesh to have originated with Mary. This would, in essence, make the Lord partially everlasting – the eternal Spirit of God dwelling in a human body derived or assumed from the race of Adam. This would make Him a demi-god not unlike the half-human gods of Greek mythology. It goes without saying that this is not the Jesus we know from the hallowed pages of the New Testament.

The blood is the life of the flesh

I vividly remember a conversation I had with a Pastor years ago. This man did not believe that the Lord’s flesh was heavenly, so I asked him a specific question: “If you had met Jesus, in the days of His ministry in Israel, what aspect of His being would you worship – His flesh, Spirit, or both (the whole man)?” After some hesitation, he answered, “I would worship the Spirit in the flesh, and not the flesh.” Gauging from his facial expression, I could see that he was quite surprised by this pronouncement. It dawned on him that he had not put much serious thought into the issue. I asked this question because I felt that it might bring to the surface the theologically impoverished understanding Oneness Christians have of the Word made flesh doctrine. I proceeded to open the Scriptures to the

following verse and demonstrate to this Pastor that the blood of Jesus is referred to as the blood of God:

Act 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Upon a closer examination of this text, the good Pastor responded, “I believe the blood of Jesus is the blood of God, but His flesh is derived from Mary”. It was my turn to be surprised. In the space of a few minutes, he had modified his position: the blood was heavenly, but not the flesh. Obviously, I pointed out many of the Scriptures which have been used in this book to show that the flesh of Jesus – like His blood – is of heavenly origin but to no avail. I explained that the blood is the life of the flesh, and not the other way round as all Bible students know:

Leviticus 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

Does God have blood? Yes, according to Acts 20:28. Where did He get this blood from? The answer is equally simple – from His own life-source. God is the source of all life everywhere. Without Him there is no life:

John 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not an thing made that was made

John 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

In order to grasp the blessed truth of the heavenly origin of the flesh and blood of Jesus, it is crucial to understand that God is the author of life. He was not dependent on human life, which He created from the dust, to manifest Himself in a body. Rather, God manifested Himself through His own life – His blood and flesh in order to save us. Why, then, have many in the Christian world, ever since the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), misunderstood this bedrock teaching of the Word of God? In my humble opinion (I myself was led astray with this teaching for many years), this is because most people have been indoctrinated over many years to believe that there can only be one type of flesh of man – human flesh.

I pray that the contents of this book will destabilize this indoctrination. Why will God come in His own blood but not His own heavenly flesh? Remember that Jesus is the Lamb of God. In the Old Testament, the Lamb was supposed to be without blemish, spot or wrinkle before it was selected to be eaten during the Passover. It was to be examined by the members of the household meticulously for 4 days before it was declared free of all defects and fit for consumption.

Exodus 12:5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats:

This raises a legitimate question: as the Lamb of God without blemish, how would Jesus have avoided the blemish of the inherited

sin of the human gene pool? It is not enough to say, as many Oneness Christians do, that God worked a miracle to circumvent this. Where is the Scriptural evidence for this? The Bible does say that Jesus was without sin (Hebrews 4:15), *but nowhere does it say that God worked a miracle to expunge the inherited sin of Adam.* This would be an interpolation (to insert erroneous material into a text). Actually, we are told very explicitly by the Lord Himself why He was and is without any sin, but are we prepared to hear?

John 8:23 *And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.*

It was because Jesus (Spirit, flesh and blood of God) was a completely heavenly being that He avoided the sin of corrupt and fallen humanity. We know that Herod, Pilate, the High Priest, the Pharisees and Sadducees all examined Jesus to find fault in Him, but they found no fault in Him. He was fit to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. All hail the name of Jesus! This was the testimony of Pilate:

John 19:4 *Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.*

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is one of the most profound and powerful sacraments of the church. It was solemnly instituted by the Lord Himself and continues to be observed by Christians everywhere. Let us first take note of the Lord's exact words:

***Mathew 26:26** And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.*

The body of the Lord is the most precious gift to humanity. In the Lord's Supper, we are commanded to eat His body because, by doing so, we partake of the divine nature inherent in Jesus. His life becomes infused in us and we live in Him through this act of eating His body. So far so good. But how do Christians square all of this with their fundamental belief that Jesus' body was human in every way like ours, except for sin, as they often stress? Can a human earthly body impart eternal life into our decaying bodies? The answer is simply no. A dying man does not ask for another dying man to revive him. In fact, the Old Testament plainly forbids the eating of human flesh and blood. When Jesus openly commanded the Jews to eat His flesh and drink His blood, His strange words stirred a great commotion among them:

***John 6:52** The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*

It is because Jesus' flesh and blood are of a heavenly order that He can legitimately make such a bold claim. Unfortunately, His audience at the time, and many today, are still perplexed and asking the question "Mana?" which means "What is this?" when we talk about the doctrine of the flesh of Jesus. You will recall the children of Israel said this of the bread which God sent them to eat for 40 years in the Wilderness of Sinai. Like the veil of Moses which hid the mysteries of God, there is a veil preventing them from plainly grasping the saving heavenly flesh of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We pray fervently that the rays of God's revelation will help them see beyond the veil.

In the Tabernacle and subsequent Temple there was a thick veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. No one except the High Priest could enter into the Holiest place, and only once a year. Everyone knew, however, that beyond this veil lay the majestic *shekinah* glory of God between the cherubims atop the Mercy Seat, where the blood offering was poured. At Calvary, Jesus tore apart the veil for all to look directly into the Holy of Holies. I am convinced that without correctly perceiving the heavenly flesh and blood of our Lord, a Christian will only have partial access to the revelation of the Kingdom of God. Such was the importance the Lord attached to His heavenly origin that he repeated this more than once in John chapter 6:

John 6:33 *For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.*

John 6:50 *This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.*

John 6:51 *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

We must not miss the clear import of the words of Jesus. Three vital components can be detected in His words above:

- He is the bread of life.
- This bread came down from heaven.
- This bread which came down from heaven is His flesh.

The conclusion is that Jesus' flesh is from heaven, and not of the earth. Keep in mind that the Lord's Supper was instituted before Jesus faced the Cross and resurrected. This is of significance because Oneness and other Christians contend that the Lord's flesh *changed* after the resurrection. If this is true, then why would Jesus offer us His flesh and blood before the resurrection – a body which was not “glorified” yet? In the Lord's Supper, the Lord said, “Take, eat...” (Matthew 26:26). It was in the present tense and not a command to be observed after the resurrection.

A “glorified” body after the resurrection?

Oneness Christians maintain that Jesus had a body which was “glorified” after the resurrection. I use inverted commas because this

term is used diffusely and without any serious attempt at providing solid Scriptural evidence. When pressed, the best they can do is quote the following verse:

John 7:39 *(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)*

In their view, the phrase ...*Jesus was not yet glorified* is taken to mean His body underwent a change. When asked to specify what kind of changes, they have often referred to the instance where the Lord appeared out of thin air in the room, although the doors were shut to greet the astounded apostles (John 20:19). Let us explore this position. To begin with, John 7:39 does not utter a word about the *body* of our Lord. The context is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which was fulfilled in Acts 2. That Jesus was not yet glorified refers to the fact that He had not yet overcome the forces of sin, the Devil and death at the Cross.

Actually, the whole premise of the argument is *non sequitur*. Why should the outpouring of the Holy Spirit be dependent upon the body of Jesus undergoing a change? Was Jesus not begotten with a glorified body already from the first moment the Word was made flesh? John attests to this truth:

John 1:14 *And 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.*

According to John, when the Word was made flesh (i.e. way before the resurrection), they beheld His glory. John compared Jesus' glory to that of the Father – full of grace and truth. Now, needless to say, if Jesus' glory was the glory of the Father, in what sense does He need to be “glorified”? We often say in church, “Let us glorify God”. This has nothing to do with God transmutating in some manner due to our praises. From the moment Jesus was born, He was always God, not only at that instant in time, but from eternity. What does God Himself say about His susceptibility to change?

Malachi 3:6 *For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

Hebrews 13:8 *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.*

Strong's G1392 has *doxazō* which is the Greek word translated “glorified”. A list of possible meanings is provided:

- 1) to think, suppose, be of opinion*
- 2) to praise, extol, magnify, celebrate*
- 3) to honour, do honour to, hold in honour*
- 4) to make glorious, adorn with lustre, clothe with splendour*
- a) to impart glory to something, render it excellent*
- b) to make renowned, render illustrious (Strong 1995).*
- 1) to cause the dignity and worth of some person or thing to become manifest and acknowledged (Strong 1995).*

Obviously, none of these meanings can be extrapolated to refer to the body of our Lord. What is of particular concern, in my view, is that the Oneness perception of the body of our Lord, sadly, takes away from the glory of His being. I do not say this lightly, and am

aware that many are doing this inadvertently. However, some of their theologians, make no attempt to conceal a truncated view of the glory of the body of our Lord. Take a look at the statements below (emphasis mine):

*Before His resurrection, Jesus had the same kind of body (flesh and blood) that we have - capable of suffering, death, and decay and **not able to inherit eternal life without a change** (Bernard 2001).*

*In short, the Bible reveals that **the humanity of Christ had to qualify for exaltation and glorification**, which occurred by His death, resurrection, and ascension (UPCI 2003)*

Bernard concludes that Jesus *could not inherit eternal life without a change*. If this is true, why then does Jesus boldly declare *before* the resurrection:

John 14:6 *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Are we to infer that Jesus was speaking as the Father, which excluded His body? This would present a fragmented Jesus part God and part an ordinary mortal with a need for a Saviour Himself. The truth is that Jesus is *the life* Himself (John 14:6); He does not need to inherit eternal life. John also confirmed that Jesus is the author of life:

John 1:4 *In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*

1John 1:1 *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;*

Furthermore, that Jesus actually *could* inherit eternal life before the resurrection is plainly evident in the fact that He could simultaneously be on earth and in heaven. Only a heavenly body can enter heaven – a body which is no longer constrained by the debilitating effects of sin and corruption, as the apostle Paul declares (I Corinthians 15:50). If Christ could enter heaven prior to the Cross, it should mean that He was in possession of an incorruptible heavenly body all along. What does Jesus have to say about this?

John 3:13 *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.*

It would be an irreconcilable contradiction to hold that Jesus is the author and giver of eternal life while simultaneously unable to inherit eternal life without undergoing a change in the nature of His flesh. The UPCI position paper on the humanity of Jesus is equally disheartening. They assert that Jesus had to *qualify for exaltation and glorification*. A barrage of questions queue up to interrogate this assertion: why then did the angels worship Him at His birth? What was the nature of the glory which gave Jesus the liberty to forgive sins? How did He “qualify” to shine radiantly like the noonday sun on the summit of the high mountain (Matthew 17). As I stated earlier, this Oneness position is untenable. It is a denigration of the

immutable glory and honour of the great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

The Bible declares plainly that Adam was a *figure* of him who was to come, which is Christ. A figure is but a mere shadow and not the true substance. A shadow has never been useful to anyone, neither does it mutate into the substance. It vanishes with the appearance of the first rays of the sun leaving only the substance behind. Human flesh is but a shadow of Christ who is the substance, the true image of God. When all is said and done, the sun of righteousness will rise on our adamic bodies returning it to the dust. Only the body of Jesus will remain. We must put on this glorious body if we wish to live on eternally.

CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

In this chapter I will consider a list of objections raised against the Word made flesh doctrine. It is not uncommon for many to adhere to a literal reading of the genealogies mentioned in Matthew 1 & Luke 3. They suppose that since the list traces Jesus' lineage through Mary back to Adam, He is a human in every sense of the word, except sin. In particular, many Christians believe that phrases such as “the seed of the woman”, “seed of Abraham” and the “seed of David” undergird the belief that Jesus had a body of the lineage of Adam.

This chapter will seek to show the grave deficiencies inherent in a literal understanding of the genealogies and “seed of...” titles applied to Christ. In 2003, while on a six-month missionary trip to Nairobi, Kenya, we held a 3 day seminar to teach on the subject of the origin of the flesh of Jesus. I remember that many of the questions raised by Pastors who held a Chalcedonian Christology revolved around the “seed of...” titles. At the end of the seminar, we rejoiced when these same Pastors received the soul-blessing revelation of the Word made flesh doctrine. Much of the content reproduced here is material which was used then. Again, I also acknowledge the contribution of

Bishop Teklemariam Gezahagne without whom I myself perhaps would still have languished with an impoverished understanding.

The genealogies of Matthew 1 & Luke 3

As mentioned in the introduction, the two genealogies outlined in the New Testament are central to the debate about the origin of the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the estimation of most Bible-readers, these are straightforward accounts of the lineage of the Lord. Why else would Matthew and Luke meticulously note down the names of the ancestors of the Lord, according to them. After all, Matthew begins his account with the words:

Mathew 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

For those unfamiliar with the Jewish reckoning of pedigree (ancestral line), it is easy to see why they take the list literally. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes crystal clear that Matthew did not intend the reader to take the genealogy literally. The point was to demonstrate that Jesus did come out of a line which could be traced back to David and Abraham, but this did not imply a physical, biological shared ancestry. Firstly, women feature in this genealogy. In fact, to claim that Jesus was a legal ancestor of David based on Mary's familial ties to the house of David reveals a poor grasp of Jewish and biblical customs. Moses declared that only those who

could validate their pedigree from their father's side could be numbered among the children of Israel.

Numbers 1:18 *And they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month, and they declared their pedigrees after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, by their polls.*

Now, as every Bible believer knows, Joseph was not the biological father of our Lord. Yet Matthew mentions, “And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ” (Matthew 1:16). In fact, the entire genealogical list in Matthew 1 & Luke 3 is built on this assumption. How can this be reconciled with what we have just read in Numbers 1:18? The Jews were quite stringent in implementing the dictates of Numbers 1:18. We read in the Bible that some priests were dismissed from the service in the days of Nehemiah because their ancestry could not be corroborated.

Nehemiah 7:64 *These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood.*

If Christ cannot claim Joseph as his biological father, then the integrity of the entire ancestral list in the two Gospels is in jeopardy. There can only be one other way out of this conundrum – the list was not meant to be taken literally. Indeed, this is precisely what Luke intends when he states:

Luke 3:23 *And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,*

By injecting *as was supposed* in the text, Luke was issuing a disclaimer to the effect that Joseph was not the father of Jesus. It logically follows from this that the genealogical odyssey he embarked upon was to be understood in legal terms – not biological. Since Joseph did marry Mary and accept the baby as his own, this conferred legal rights upon the Lord. Jesus was the son of David through legal adoption, but not physical descent.

The curse on Jechonias

As already mentioned, the genealogy in Matthew 1 & Luke 3 are not intended to be taken literally as there are a number of discrepancies which cannot be easily harmonised with the rest of Scripture. Beside the problem of tracing Jesus' ancestry through a woman, Mary, there is a curse on one apparent "ancestor" of Jesus in Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 22:28 *Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not?*

Jeremiah 22:29 *O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD.*

Jeremiah 22:30 *Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.*

Notice that Jechoniah (Coniah, Jechoniah & Jechonias all refer to the same individual) was pronounced under a solemn curse and condemned to be *childless*. None of his seed would sit on the throne of David. Yet, curiously, Jechoniah features in the two genealogical accounts in Matthew and Luke as the “forefather” of Jesus.

Matthew 1:11 *And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:*

Matthew 1:12 *And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel;*

No doubt this discrepancy requires some explanation. Bible commentators such as the erudite Matthew Henry acknowledge that Jechoniah could not have had any children at all. He speculates that the seven children Jechoniah is alleged to have had in I Chronicles 3:17 were all adopted sons born to him in the Babylonian captivity. Henry concludes, “Whether he had children begotten, or only adopted, thus far he was childless that none of his seed ruled as kings in Judah.” (Matthew Henry).

All this leaves anyone who believes in a literal reading of the genealogies of Matthew 1 & Luke 3 in a very difficult position. I only labour the point of the genealogies because Christians who believe in a human descent of Christ from Adam often cite these lineages as evidence. On the contrary, the two lists do not even agree with each other. There are as many attempts to reconcile the differences as there are scholars and arm-chair theologians. One thing is clear – the names diverge between David and Joseph.

It does appear that Luke reckons the genealogy through Joseph's father whereas Matthew begins with Joseph's maternal grandfather. Either way, these lists have raised more questions, particularly among unbelievers, rather than provide any "evidence" for Jesus' physical descent through Adam.

In brief, the genealogies are a cul-de-sac. Why would Christians seek to "prove" Christ's humanity by citing genealogies which begin with Joseph when they simultaneously acknowledge that he was not the paternal father of Jesus?

Seed of the woman

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

It is commonly held that Jesus is the "seed of the woman" which no doubt is true. However, many Christians presuppose the "seed of the woman" to be a literal physical descendant of the woman. One objection to such a position is the lack of consistency in applying the same interpretation to the "seed of the serpent" in the same sentence of Genesis 3:15. Can the Devil generate physical seed of his own? The answer is no. For instance, when the Lord referred to the Devil as the Father of some of the Pharisees (John 8:44), we would all agree that this was applied in a metaphorical sense. Jesus can only be

the “seed of the woman” in a metaphorical sense and not a literal one.

Significantly, the apostle Paul stresses that “seed” refers to one person alone – Jesus Christ. The connotation is that Jesus is a unique seed promised to various biblical individuals through whom redemption will be effectuated.

Galatians 3:16 *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*

As the promised Word Seed, then, Jesus had no physical connection with Eve or Mary. It would be misleading, even heretical, to look for Jesus’ origin in the mortal and dust-bound constitution of the human race. Let us keep in mind that God had pronounced a dreadful curse upon the entire line of Adam.

Genesis 3:19 *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*

Jesus was not taken from the dust which means that He *cannot* return to the dust. We are talking about a genuinely heavenly being – the Son of God. His origin and source is God Himself. In every sense – body, soul and Spirit – Jesus is the “image of God” (Colossians 1:15). There is Scriptural evidence to support the fact that Jesus had a flesh not subject to the decomposing effects common to all members of the race of Adam.

Act 13:33 *God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*

Act 13:35 *Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

Act 13:37 *But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.*

Notice that the apostle Paul draws a link between Jesus, the Son of God, and the fact that He saw no corruption. Paul contrasts this by comparing Christ's death and resurrection with David, who as his Jewish audience were aware, died and was subject to the disintegrating effects of death. Put another way, because Jesus had a body which emanated directly from God, it was impervious to the earthbound elements active in the process of decomposition. This was one body which the bacteria and worms stayed away from because it is the body of God Himself. In fact, God robed Himself with this unique divine body to plague death itself.

Hosea 13:14 *I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.*

Let me introduce another objection often raised in support of what I refer to the "Son of Mary" position. By that I mean those who maintain Jesus had a human flesh of the same substance and origin as ours. The adherents of this teaching often quote Galatians 4:4 in support of their interpretation.

Galatians 4:4 *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,*

They emphasize that “made of a woman” can only mean that Jesus was a genuine human being sharing in the genetic make-up of the woman. There is a simple straightforward answer to this. No other English translation uses “made of..” for the Greek *ginomai* which is translated “born of..”. Born of a woman approximates the original because what does it mean to say that Jesus was “made under the law”? In his book, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Bart D. Ehrman, exposes how the dominant Christian faction of the time blatantly changed certain texts in the Bible to align with their Christology (study of the nature of Christ). Significantly, one of the texts they tampered with was Galatians 4:4 (Ehrman 1996) in order to make it say that Jesus was of the race of Adam. What we need is Christians who have the audacity to refuse to submit to the traditional dogmatic church rule when it clashes with the testimony of Scripture (Bockmuehl 1980, 30).

I will consider one more point before concluding this section. We often speak of the “seed of the woman” almost unconsciously oblivious to the fact that women do not have seed but egg. The man provides the seed or sperm which fertilizes with the woman’s egg producing a zygote and a nine month gestation period. We often speak of “the seed of the woman” as if it is a self-contained, pre-packaged, child-bearing unit. For a bona fide human child to be

born, a male and female parent, with each gamete contributing 23 chromosomes, is essential. Only the male has the ability to produce sperm (seed) because he has the Y-chromosome which the female lacks. In an article reminiscent of a Jekyll and Hyde experiment, (*Are male eggs and female sperm on the horizon?* (2008)¹), we are told that scientists are now attempting to develop technologies that enable men to produce eggs and females sperm. Fortunately, they conclude:

Nevertheless, some biologists feel that the obstacles to making female sperm are huge. "I think it will take far more than 10 years," says Robin Lovell-Badge of the National Institute for Medical Research in London (Ibid.).

The point is clear, though – woman do not have seed. This begs the question: who's seed is Jesus then? The answer can only be that Christ is the seed of God, the Son of God alone. God alone is capable of reproducing after His own kind. He has no need of other agents to contribute anything as He is the author of life. He creates out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and can also generate from His own being as He did with His own flesh. Interestingly, God looked down upon His own lifeless body on the Cross and called it His own body:

Isaiah 26:19 *Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for*

¹ Aldhouse, P. (2008). Are male eggs and female sperm on the horizon? *New Scientist*. <http://www.geneticsandsociety.org/article.php?id=3904> Retrieved 24.08.2011.

thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead (emphasis mine).

Someone might be tempted at this point (as many have done) to inquire “is this all really necessary?” “Surely, the origin of the flesh of Christ is not a matter of salvation”. On the contrary, what one believes with regards to the origin of the body of our Lord has direct and vital bearing on the plan of salvation. The quotation below captures the above (soteriology is the theological study of salvation as effected by Jesus).

Because Christology is so closely tied to soteriology, there is good reason to suspect that the one cannot be reconstructed in isolation from the other (George W. Stroup 1976, 58).

Therefore we conclude that “seed of the woman” is a profound prophetic title encapsulating the divine origin of Jesus in every way. In Jeremiah 31:22 God prophesizes that He would do a new thing upon the earth – a woman would surround a man.

Jeremiah 31:22 *How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.*

What does the above actually refer to? How was it understood by Bible commentators in the days of say Matthew Henry?

Many good interpreters understand this new thing created in that land to be the incarnation of Christ, which God had an eye

to in bringing them back to that land, and which had sometimes been given them for a sign, Isaiah. 7:14; 9:6. A woman, the virgin Mary, enclosed in her womb the Mighty One (Matthew Henry, online commentary on Jeremiah 31:22).

It is not a “new thing” for a woman to compass/surround a man as in the womb for all men have been conceived in this fashion, What is utterly novel and jaw-dropping is that this would happen through a virgin with no male intervention. As Henry states, “A woman, the virgin Mary, enclosed in her womb the Mighty One”. Clearly, God would not need a woman to contribute to the process of conceiving the Mighty One.

Much of the obfuscation we have encountered so far can easily be dealt with if we are willing to concede that God is able to reproduce a “new” kind after His own kind. Even the celebrated church father, Augustine, conceded that it was possible for God to take a man from elsewhere who had his origin not in the flesh but the Spirit, only to fall into the same error as the architects behind Chalcedon:

God could of course have taken a man to himself from somewhere else . . . not from the race of that Adam who had implicated the human race in his own sin. . . But God judged it better to take a man to himself from the very race that had been conquered, in order through him to conquer the enemy of the human race; to take one however whose conception from a virgin was inaugurated by the spirit not the flesh, by faith not lust (Augustine 1991).

Seed of Abraham

Few have paused to consider why the Lord is called the seed of only a few select individuals in the Bible. Why is Jesus not called the “seed of Solomon” for instance? Or why not “seed of Cosam?” (Luke 3:28). If Jesus is the biological descendant of all those mentioned in the genealogies of Matthew 1 & Luke 3, then one could randomly select anyone from the list. Those to whom I pose this question often fall silent or look puzzled, and rightly so. The appellation “seed of...” is only biblically valid if it is applied to the woman, Abraham and David. This select list itself contains vital clues about the revelation of Christ’s heavenly flesh and ministry. Let me now address the “seed of Abraham”.

***Galatians 3:16** Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*

The verse above makes it plain that “seed of Abraham” is the *promise* given to Abraham concerning the coming of Christ. This has nothing to do with physical seed as Abraham’s righteousness was attributed to him on account of his *faith* in the coming of this seed – Jesus. The appellation “seed” has a beautiful meaning which we should take heed not to miss out on in our passion to defend our Christological positions. Why is Jesus called “seed”? A seed aptly captures many aspects of the Lord. The seed (Word) was already in

existence before the Fall. A seed can lie dormant for a long period of time but suddenly sprout to life when the conditions are right. Christ was the promised Word Seed who, just like some seeds which are carried along with the waves of the sea, was spiritually carried along in this chosen line of Abraham's descendants only to sprout to life in Mary's womb (fullness of time Galatians 4:4) and emerge with salvation.

As the "Seed", Jesus did not need life or biological material from any human, but, rather, could give life to us. This is precisely the point the apostle Paul stresses:

***1Corinthians 15:45** And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*

***1Corinthians 15:45** So it is written: The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit (New International Version).*

This takes us back to the point I made earlier: we must accept that *God is His own seed*. To deny that Jesus came in a new, heavenly body is to deny that God has life-giving seed of His own. We often refer to Abraham as the father of many nations. Indeed, Abraham's great faith was the catalyst which the "Seed" (Christ) capitalized upon to kick-start the birthing process. In other words, Jesus is the seed which acted upon the faith of Abraham to produce children as innumerable as the stars of the sky and the sand grains of the desert. Abraham provided the faith, so to speak, but Jesus birthed the actual children. No wonder Abraham longed for the day of Jesus.

John 8:56 *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*

Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Jesus because the Lord would birth children in His own image fulfilling the Scripture below:

Romans 8:29 *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

Thus Christ is the seed of Abraham because He, as the life-giving Word Seed, fathers countless children in His own image. Abraham himself is dependent on Christ as the seed who effectuates the new birth in him. Jesus is the seed of the new order of individuals who shall enter the Kingdom of God. Of all “seeds” mentioned in the Bible, only Jesus is the incorruptible Word Seed.

1Peter 1:23 *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

The reason this appellation is not applicable to the aforementioned Solomon or Cosam is because there was nothing noteworthy in their lives which would attach Christ in a special way as the seed. For the woman, it was the promised seed of hope in the darkest hour of humanity. For Abraham, God renewed His promised seed because of his extraordinary faith and, as we shall see, for David, it was a token acknowledgement of his great love for God, and desire to build God

a house which moved God to associate him with the promise of the Word seed.

There is another and more profound way in which Jesus is the seed of Abraham. It has to do with the covenant of circumcision which finds its equivalent in the New Testament covenant of baptism in Jesus name.

Seed of Abraham, circumcision & baptism

Genesis 17:10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

Before Abraham could appropriate the “seed of Abraham” i.e. Christ’s saving nature, he was first commanded to eliminate and discard the body or “seed” of Adam. We must choose whether we wish to remain the children of Adam – with the inherited corruption of soul, spirit and body – or the children of God. This, in essence, is at the core of the whole Bible. It can also be portrayed as the “tale of two Adams”: one from the dust and the other from heaven.

The elimination and discarding of the body of Adam was symbolized in the act of cutting off (circumcision) the foreskin. I would like to make two observations on this issue. Firstly, it appears there is a very good reason why God chose the foreskin to symbolize the removal of the body of Adam. This part of the male anatomy is

where the “seed of Adam” is passed on from generation to generation. Submitting to circumcision was a way of acknowledging that we are sadly passing on the seed of corruption and death. There is a strange paradox here: the seed of Adam gives life to a newborn baby but, simultaneously, also transmits the seed of spiritual and physical death. However, underlying this seemingly pessimistic message was the more optimistic message that we surrender to circumcision in the belief that one day the Messiah will come and give us a new, heavenly body. Before life comes death, before the resurrection comes the grave, before joy there is sorrow and before the second Adam comes the first Adam.

***Psalm 30:5** For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*

The second observation is this: remember that circumcision was never intended to be a pleasant experience. We can only imagine the many hours and perhaps days of agony endured by a little eight-day old infant. Grown adults, too, felt the excruciating distress both physically and emotionally. Their very manhood and egos took a brief beating for a few days. Keep in mind that the surgical tools used in those days were crude and nothing like the medical tools and conditions of today. There is an episode recorded in the Bible where Zipporah, Moses’ wife, performed a circumcision in what can only be few seconds or minutes with a sharp stone:

Exodus 4:25 *Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.*

These two observations: the cutting off of the foreskin, and the bruising experience of circumcision, have beautiful spiritual meaning. We read in the New Testament that the act of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the commandment to circumcise given to Abraham.

Colossians 2:11 *In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:*

Colossians 2:12 *Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.*

Now we understand that circumcision in the OT is actually a shadow of the true act of baptism where Christ Himself steps into the watery grave and removes the entire body of Adam – not just the foreskin. Jesus did not and could not undergo a change in his body because His flesh and blood are of heavenly origin. He is the prototype which all those who hope to be saved must become. This is why the Lord tells the sceptical apostles after the resurrection: “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.” (Luke 24:39).

Before I reflect on the significance of the bruising in circumcision, it is crucial to understand in what way Jesus is the “seed of Abraham” with regards to circumcision. Earlier I indicated that Jesus, and not

Abraham, was the father of many nations in the sense that He gave birth to innumerable individuals born-again in His own image. Abraham was the patriarch to whom the covenant of circumcision was first given. As with all things in the Kingdom of God, in order for the “seed” of God to become activated, there was the need for a man of tremendous faith. Faith is like the lubricating oil in an engine without which the whole machinery would come to a standstill. In the pages of the Bible, God has richly rewarded faith and sharply rebuked disbelief.

***Hebrews 11:6** But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

God found such a man in Abraham and gave him the covenant of circumcision. As I stated previously, circumcision is fulfilled in the act of baptism by faith in the name of Jesus. In baptism, Jesus Himself performs the removal of the body of Adam. It is here, in the water, that Abraham and Jesus meet. It is in the watery grave that we become the children of Abraham by faith, and the children of Jesus through a genuine legal, spiritual new birth. Jesus becomes the “seed of Abraham” in the sense that He has the power to beget new sons. The old covenant is replaced by the new covenant here in the very waters of baptism. Abraham’s faith brought Jesus to us. Now we become the children of Abraham through baptism in Jesus’ name. The apostle Paul knew this very well:

Galatians 3:27 *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

Galatians 3:29 *And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Contrary to what many Christians preach today, we only become the children of Abraham through baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and not by raising one's hand and repeating the sinner's prayer. It would have been very easy and convenient for Abraham to have raised a hand and repeated a pre-packaged prayer, rather than submit to the bruising experience of circumcision. This brings me to the second observation and its meaning.

There is a solemn message in the pain endured during circumcision. The bruising inflicted represents an attack on the adamic nature with all its rebelliousness and corruption. There is no polite way to say this: God hates the adamic nature. It can never, and has never been subject to the Spirit of God. It must be bruised and destroyed in the watery grave of baptism. God does not ask for humans to reform, He commands humans to die in the waters of baptism. He seeks a complete overhaul – a new creature.

Romans 8:7 *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*

Romans 8:8 *So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Circumcision, which is New Testament baptism, must be entered into only with considerable thought and seriousness. In the days of ancient Israel, we would not expect any man to undergo

circumcision without some prior preparation. Circumcision rendered a man inactive and in a state of reflection for some time. Ministers should be careful to discern whether potential candidates for baptism are thoroughly prepared. Compared to circumcision, baptism in water is far more convenient, but should be just as solemn.

Romans 6:6 *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*

What all the above points to is the biblical truth that God wants us to put on a new body in salvation – the body of Jesus Christ Himself. It is this teaching which is central to the Word made flesh (John 1:14) doctrine. I will explore this topic next.

Partakers of the divine nature

2 Peter 1:4 *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

How can we become partakers of the divine nature? The answer is to be born again of the water and the Spirit (John 3:5). Water is the agent which strips us off the “seed of Adam” and clothes us with the heavenly bodily garments of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:27). Water is the agent which transports us from this world to the next, spiritually speaking. Of paramount importance, with reference to the

Word made flesh doctrine, is the fact that God was manifested in flesh (heavenly flesh) in order to clothe us with this heavenly body with which we can have access to heaven. The place where we “put on” this heavenly body is the waters of baptism. Why does the Bible command people to be baptised in the water in Jesus name? Simply because the water is where Christ circumcises the body and nature of Adam and gives us His incorruptible flesh. It was for this reason that the Ethiopian eunuch replied:

Act 8:37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Note that the Ethiopian eunuch upon sighting water asked the question, “...See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Apparently, there is something which can hinder us from being baptized in Jesus name. That something is the belief that Christ is the *Son* of God. I stress “Son” because it draws attention to the significance of the body of God. In other words, if one does not believe that Jesus is the *flesh and blood of God*, then baptism profits nothing. I do not apologize for declaring that those who do not believe that the body of our Lord is heavenly – Word made flesh – have misunderstood the whole point of God manifesting Himself in flesh (His own flesh and blood).

This will require a study of a few Scriptures to drive home this truth. Oneness proponents cannot explain how God could have mingled

with adamic flesh and avoid the contamination of sin. Furthermore, they believe that Jesus assumed a body which could not inherit eternal life without undergoing a change, as we have seen (e.g. Bernard). Based on such statements, culled from their literature, it becomes clear that their fallacious understanding leads them to actually believe that a human, tainted with all the frailties and shortcomings of the fallen human nature came to save us. They often proclaim that God had to become like us in order to save us. This is the unbiblical belief that underpins the whole edifice of Oneness Christology. Unfortunately, it has been repeated long enough to be accepted as a cornerstone biblical teaching. What saith the Lord, however? God saw no man of the adamic race.

*Isaiah 59:16 And he saw that **there was no man**, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.*

Isaiah leaves us in no doubt as to what transpired. God saw no man. This clearly speaks of the line of Adam because it is followed by *therefore his own arm*. In brief, God discounted the line of Adam and introduced His own arm – namely, Jesus Christ. How did Jesus understand the origin of His body? The apostle John employs a very revealing term in His Gospel:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he **gave his only begotten Son**, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The Greek for “only begotten Son” is *monogenēs* (Strong's G3439). There is a powerful revelation couched in this phrase. Thayer's Lexicon describes it as “single of its kind, only”. He goes on to state,

Used of Christ, it denotes the only son of God or one who in the sense in which he himself is the son of God has no brethren².

In other words, Christ had no equivalent in His Sonship and begetting. One way to elucidate this is to hark back to the creation account in Genesis where God commands all living beings to reproduce after their own kind.

Genesis 1:24 And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

Just as all living creatures reproduced after their own kind, God Himself reproduced after His own kind. This is the connotation of *monogenēs* – single of its kind, only. It is altogether wrong of Oneness theologians to claim that it was necessary for God to manifest Himself in human (read adamic) flesh in order to empathize with us. Pardon my crudeness in asking: Does one have to become a

² www.BlueletterBible.org (Online) Thayer's Lexicon.
<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G3439&t=KJV>
(accessed 25.08.2011).

dog to empathize with a dog? Conversely, I have often heard of incredible, heart-warming stories of animals saving humans. The plain truth is that God does not need to come in human, fallen flesh to empathize with our pain and sorrows. He is the omniscient (all-knowing) God, and to suggest otherwise is to question His omniscience. In fact, He didn't need to even put on any kind of flesh for Him to feel the pain of His people, Israel.

***Exodus 3:7** And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; **for I know their sorrows;**
Isaiah 63:9 **In all their affliction he was afflicted,** and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.*

Furthermore, the demand that Christ had to become just like us in order to save us adds a new criterion to salvation: it assumes that the right “dose” of empathy plays a vital role in redeeming us. Salvation is not dependent upon the degree to which Jesus empathized with us. There is no salvation through “adequate empathy”. This has parallels with the Catholic idea of praying to Mary because, as they claim, she, as a mother, can empathize effectively with us, and plead with her Son to come to our aid. All this ignores the fact that God made mothers to be what they are: He is the master-empathizer. God *conceived* of this idea of creating a mother with all the noble attributes which we heap on her (however, even mothers run out of love and patience, at times), which means that His love, mercy,

kindness and empathy is unfathomable and infinite. So to boisterously claim that God had to become like us in order to share our suffering is to suggest erroneously that if God comes in a heavenly flesh and blood He cannot share our suffering. This is an unwarranted assumption. If God could empathize with the children of Israel (see Exodus 3:7 & Isaiah 63:9... *In all their affliction he was afflicted*) even before He came in any flesh, then surely He could empathize with us in His own heavenly body.

What is indispensable is the elements of flesh and blood for salvation, and not arguments about whether or not God can save us without become a clone or duplicate of Adam. At this juncture, I will consider a verse which many Oneness Christians employ to support their claim:

Hebrews 2:17 *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.*

They key word in the verse above is “wherefore”. This suggests that the context of Hebrews 2:17 must be traced to a point earlier in Hebrews chapter 2. We find the subject matter in verse 14.

Hebrews 2:14 *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;*

In the verse above we observe the crux of the issue: that Christ had to come in *flesh and blood* because this would enable Him to partake of death through which He would destroy the Devil. The Bible affirms that Christ came in flesh and blood, but nowhere in these verses does it say anything about the *origin* of Christ's flesh. A Bible reader who has come as far as Hebrews chapter 2, should by then have come across numerous Scriptures expounding on the heavenly flesh and blood of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1: 18; Luke 1:35; John 1;1, 14; I John 8:23; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 15:47; Phil 3:21 etc). Yes, Jesus came as a man, and not a ghost or phantom (I Timothy 2:15). Yes, He partook of flesh and blood in order to die. But none of this touches on the subject of this book – *what is the origin of the body of our Lord?*

Let us not leave hold of the profound biblical truth that God was manifested in His own flesh and blood so that we shall have the privilege of partaking in His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Those who claim that God assumed our human flesh are basically reversing what God did. They are asserting that God had to partake of our human condition. We must make a choice – the two positions are not complementary or reconcilable simply because what is at stake is Jesus' identity as the incorruptible Word made flesh. Before, I conclude this chapter, I will turn to the subject of Christ as the “seed of David”.

Seed of David

2 Timothy 2:8 *Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:*

As previously stated, the Lord Jesus Christ is only referred to as the “seed of...” with regards to a select few individuals in the Bible. One of them was King David. Again, as already discussed, God granted this exclusive privilege to be associated with His Word Seed to these select individuals because there was something outstanding about their lives which highlighted certain aspects of the ministry of Christ. In the case of David, it was the promise of an eternal royal lineage.

2 Samuel 7:12 *And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.*

2 Samuel 7:13 *He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.*

Some critics point to ...*out of thy bowels*...(2 Sam 7:12) to argue that Christ indeed shared “genes”, if you will, with David. But this would be to shoot oneself in the foot as all Christians agree that Joseph was not the natural father of the Lord. In what sense, then, is Christ the seed of David? The answer is in an adopted and legal sense alone.

Even theologians, who champion Chalcedon, concede this important point.

The naming of Jesus commanded in v.21 [Matthew 1:21] and carried out in v. 25 was the means by which, according to Jewish custom, Joseph took Jesus as his true adopted son. Once Matthew's fellow-Jews could be persuaded to believe in this claim about Joseph's ancestry, they would not have a problem with the fact that Jesus was an adopted rather than a natural son. He too could be regarded as a true son of Abraham and son of David (Stevenson and Wright 2010, 41)

One can genuinely wonder why Christians tenaciously persist in the blunder of “humanizing” Jesus despite their readiness to acknowledge that He could only be the son of David in an adopted and hence legal sense alone. Why can't we let God be God and cease from our attempts to “make God in our own image?” I interrogate this obsession with “humanizing” Jesus because many have, in their zeal to defend the indefensible, invented doctrines which clearly are heretical. For example, in exploring the adolescence of the Lord (Luke 2:41-52), the idle speculation of the theologians below leads them to the conclusion that Jesus rebelled against Mary and Joseph.

Jesus' genuine humanity is revealed here in his conflict with his parents. It is fascinating that Luke has not suppressed this conflict, contrary to any idealistic notion of the child Jesus giving his family a trouble-free time. Jesus apparently didn't tell Mary and Joseph that he was staying behind (“typical teenager” do I hear parents saying?); when they found him, he answered in what most parents today might regard as an

unbearably precocious manner, blandly ignoring their anxiety (Stevenson and Wright 2010, 61).

What did the Lord Himself believe about His so-called Davidic physical ancestry? In the famous exchange with the Pharisees, He questioned their understanding of the much-used title “son of David”.

Matthew 22:42 *Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.*

Obviously, the Lord knew that there was a misconception about the manner in which the people understood this title, hence the question. A first step in dispelling fallacies is to question taken-for-granted beliefs. Today, too, we encounter this unquestioned linkage of Jesus with human ancestry.

Matthew 22:43 *He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,*

Matthew 22:44 *The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?*

Matthew 22:45 *If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?*

It is crystal clear that the Lord was attacking this universal belief that the Messiah would be the physical descendant of David. In other words, how could David be the ancestor of someone whom he refers to as “my Lord”? I have heard of people worshipping or venerating their ancestors but never their descendants (for obvious reasons) as David does. Some years back, while on a brief missionary trip to

Ghana, I was first exposed to the persistence of what the Ghanaian anthropologist and Catholic priest, Peter Sarpong refers to as “ancestor veneration” (Sarpong 1974). The tradition of venerating ancestors by, among others, pouring out libations, is commonly practiced. In the case of David, he was supernaturally inspired to worship the Messiah who would one day become his “son” through the agency of legal adoption. The Lord was basically telling the Pharisees that they have got it all wrong: rather than stress that the Messiah is the son of David, they ought to stress the Lordship of the Messiah over David. What was the denouement of this exchange?

Matthew 22:46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

I have often wondered why the Pharisees never engaged the Lord again after this particular discussion. Could it be that the shock of discovering that their whole messianic theology was flawed was too much to bear? That the son of what they perceived to be a carpenter could so incisively shred to pieces their Christology was perhaps the reason they avoided him studiously after this. This is unfortunate, though. My prayer is that present-day theologians, who champion the nonsensical theological relics from Chalcedon, will humbly consider the testimony of the Lord regarding His origin.

Vonelle R. Kelly, an advocate of the UPC school of Christology, wrote a booklet entitled *Another Jesus: The Fallacy of the Doctrine*

of the *Heavenly Flesh* (2004). In no uncertain terms she levels the charge of idolatry against the heavenly flesh proponents, hence the title *Another Jesus*. Curiously, the book, no more than 40 odd pages, has a preface, foreword and “about the author” sections to laud the accomplishments of this obscure author. How does a 40 page book have about 10 pages dedicated to the task of sanctioning and valorising the author? The booklet essentially regurgitates familiar UPC counter-arguments against the heavenly flesh doctrine. The UPC academic and theological discourse is one notorious for its strict “North-Korea” like regime of internal self-referencing with David Bernard invariably sprinkled in to provide some ballast and authentication for the insulated UPC audience.

Kelly’s booklet is based on her Master thesis – an arena where student aspiration and supervisor acquiescence converge to promote a culture bordering on “Guru veneration”. It basically works something like this: obscure or mediocre academics, whatever their department or line of specialization, recruit certain “promising” students to supervise. The grateful and indebted student feels a burden to repay this favour by becoming a “clone” of her supervisor. The obscure academic takes immense pleasure from seeing his name feature in a published article or two (the academic maxim “publish or perish?”). The student, in return, has his or her ego massaged in that these supervisors and faculty staff act like a “cloud of witnesses” praising the virtues of the student at every available opportunity.

It wouldn't be fair to take a sledgehammer to ...a Master thesis so I will address a point or two from Kelly's (2004) booklet. For Kelly, Romans 1:3 is repeatedly cited as definitive proof buttressing the claim that Jesus was biologically of the seed of David.

Romans 1:3 *Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;*

Regarding this verse she quotes Seagraves who describes Romans 1:3 as “a precise statement concerning the biological connection of Jesus with David” (Kelly 2004, 18). In addition, a further comment on Romans 1:3 is attributed to Seagraves in the footnotes: “That is, so far as the flesh of Jesus is concerned, it was made out of the seed of David. Mary was, of course, the seed, or descendant, of David.” (Ibid).

Perhaps Kelly and Seagraves may not have heard about the contention surrounding this particular translation of Romans 1:3 that they throw around with such zest. A good place to begin is with the aforementioned book *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* by one of the world's foremost textual critics, Bart D. Ehrman (1993). It probably would disturb (and rightly so) the self-induced smugness of Kelly and Seagraves to hear that the original text *does not say what they claim*. Rather, according to Ehrman, Romans 1:3 along with Galatians 4:4 was changed by the “orthodox”

scribes who wanted the text to align unambiguously with their version of Christology – a Christology which Kelly and Seagraves champion – to silence so-called “heretics” who were not convinced that Jesus was a human like us in every sense of the word.

In reality the text says nothing of Christ being “born” as one finds in most translations. A total anomaly is the King James Version, 1611, which has “made of the seed...”(The King James Version has the distinction of being the only English translation that I could find with the very odd “made of...”). Let me the give the last word on this topic to Erhman.

Given the orthodox assumption that “having come from the seed of David” must refer to Jesus’ own birth - an event not actually described by Paul – one is not taken aback to find the text of Romans 1:3 changed as early as the second century, as attested by the citations of Origen, and periodically throughout the history of its transmission (61 syr^{pal}, Byz^{mss} OL^{mss acc to Aug}). As was the case with Galatians 4:4, the change was a matter of the substitution of a word in the versions and of a few simple letters in Greek, so that now the text speaks not of Christ ‘coming from the seed of David’ but of his “being born of the seed of David” (Erhman 1993, 239).*

This is consonant with Bishop Gezahagne’s contention that the Greek word *ginomai* ought to be translated “come out of...”. When Erhman’s book first caught my attention many years ago, I braced myself not knowing what to expect. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that a number of the texts that the early scribes fiddled

with were precisely the same ones that the UPC and other defenders of the “human Jesus” used as “evidence” for their position. Ehrman, by the way, is not a “heavenly flesh” proponent as far as I am aware. On the contrary, he is currently an agnostic.

In conclusion, to reiterate my earlier point, Jesus is the seed of David not in any physical sense but as a royal titular honour bestowed upon him. This honour was extended to David in recognition of his exemplary role as the model king of Israel. Like Christ, David was born in Bethlehem, an obscure backwater of Israel. Like Christ, David’s beginnings were very humble, but he soon ascended the throne of Israel buoyed by the grace of God. Like Christ, many challenged David’s claim to the throne and sought to kill him. Note that it was to be a king that Christ was born. “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me’” (New International Version). However tainted and imperfect David’s kingship was he nevertheless was a figure foreshadowing the advent of the ultimate King of Kings and Lord of Lords – Jesus Christ.

***Jeremiah 23:5** Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.*

Jeremiah 23:6 *In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

So it is the kingship or royal title that is at the core of “seed of David” just as it was the covenant of circumcision which corresponds to baptism in Jesus name which is at the core of the title “seed of Abraham”. What is required is a balanced Christological approach which does justice to both – that Christ is the adopted and legal son of David, and that He is also the God, the Creator of David. This two-fold Christological understanding is captured in the words of the Lord Himself.

Revelation 22:16 *I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.*

CHAPTER THREE

In this chapter two interrelated objections to the “Word made flesh”³ doctrine will be considered. The first is the claim that Jesus is our “kinsman redeemer”. Proponents of this understanding assert that it was necessary for Christ to be a human in every respect because only a blood relative (kinsman) can redeem humanity. They maintain that if Christ was not a genuine human being, He would not be qualified to redeem us. The second objection pertains to the belief that the title “Son of man”, which Jesus used on several occasions to refer to Himself, “proves” His human ties with us.

Kinsman redeemer

Is Jesus a blood relative of the human race? Did He perceive His physiological origin in such terms? The truth is that one would be hard-pressed to find a single utterance from the mouth of our Lord which undergirds such an understanding. On the contrary, there are several utterances which indicate a distancing of Himself from any attempts to shoehorn Him into a such a shared ancestry with humanity. For instance:

³ Some label our Christology as the “heavenly flesh” doctrine. Although this is often said facetiously, we believe the underlying theology is commensurate with a biblical Christology. However, we prefer to use the term “Word made flesh” because this highlights its biblical grounding (John 1:1,14).

John 8:23 *And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.*

John 6:51 *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

It is a strange paradox to claim blood relations with someone who declares unequivocally, “I am **not** of this world” (John 8:23). In fact, a careful perusal of Christ’s understanding of His origin reveals a disconnect between what He says and what mainstream Christianity – especially the Chalcedonian declaration – professes. We would do well to remember that God *created* humans from the dust of the earth. This implies an unbridgeable rupture between the Creator and the created order. It is precisely for this reason that one cannot say that Jesus was created for that would assign a different origin altogether to His being – one which would negate His consubstantiality⁴ (of the same being) with the Father. So how did the Lord perceive His own origin? He identified in every way with the Father as the scripture below bears out:

John 16:28 *I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.*

⁴ The early church fathers claimed that Christ was consubstantial with the Father in His divinity but not His humanity which they believed was consubstantial with humans. This position is not biblical. Christ was consubstantial with the Father in His divinity and physiology.

It is clear that the Lord attributed and equated His *entire* being (Spirit, flesh and blood) to the Father. It is biblically untenable to attempt to carve up or fragment Christ's being with the aim of assigning one part to a heavenly origin and another to an earthly. The Lord always spoke as one integrated being not susceptible to fragmentation. This can be witnessed in the myriad "I am" statements (John 6:35; John 8:12; John 9:5 etc).

Isn't it curious that nowhere in the statements of the Lord do we register any attempt to express a shared humanity with us? Bible writers, agonizing over the frailty of the human condition, often spoke of their humble origins from the dust, but Christ distanced Himself rather from the race of Adam with regards to His origin. David, for example, declares:

Psalm 103:14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

What does kinsman redeemer pertain to?

One of the main errors committed by those who contend that Jesus had to be fully human like us because He had to be our kinsman redeemer is their misapplication of the functions of a kinsman redeemer. To begin with, we do not find the term kinsman redeemer in the Bible at all neither do we find any statement that stipulates that Jesus had to be our kinsman redeemer in order to save us. Type

in “kinsman redeemer” into any Bible software program or online search engine (King James Version) and the words “kinsman” and “redeemer” *never occur together*. What we find is that “kinsman” alone occurs 13 times while “redeemer” alone occurs 18 times. This is instructive because we often hear the claim made boldly, even from the pulpit, that Jesus had to be our kinsman redeemer without any biblical warrant. Regrettably, this is a case of teaching for doctrine the tradition of men (Mark 7:8; Colossians 2:8). The problem which such a coupling of two terms, used in different contexts, is that this conflation fosters a necessary nexus to the effect that a potential redeemer must also share in our humanity.

In shedding some much needed light on this topic, we will need to engage in a biblical study of the scriptures which adjudicate on the meaning of the term and parameters of its application. It will emerge quite convincingly that the legal ramifications within which the Bible situates the term does *not extend at all to making atonement for salvation when pertaining to human interactions*. Interestingly, both words – kinsman and redeemer – are translated from the same Hebrew word *ga'al* (Strong’s Hebrew 1350) in most cases. Table 3.0 highlights some of the contexts in which the word is applied. One can note that only God can redeem individuals from death, a fact which all Christians would accept.

Table 3.0

Human relations	With regards to God
In marriage <i>Deuteronomy 25:5-10</i>	Individuals from death <i>Psalm 130:8; Hosea 13:14</i>
Redeem from slavery <i>Leviticus 25:47-49</i>	Israel from bondage <i>Exodus 6:6</i>
Buy back land <i>Leviticus 25:25</i>	Israel from exile <i>2 Samuel 7:23</i>
Exact revenge <i>Numbers 35:12-19</i>	

Again, note that nowhere do we find any scriptural injunction which demands that God must become a human blood relative if He is to save us. This is an interpolation. On the contrary, as Bishop Teklemariam Gezahagne explains:

Christ cannot be the kinsman of uncircumcised human beings. Until the earthly Adamic nature is removed by means of baptism, Christ cannot be their kinsman... Christ cannot be kinsman even for the Jew who is naturally circumcised until he experiences New Testament circumcision (Gezahagne 2007, 36).

The above statement upholds the Pauline demarcation of the heavenly man from the earthly man, “The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven (I Corinthians 15:47). The two Adams have two different origins which cannot be coalesced because the one emanates from God Himself, while the

other is a product of created material - dust. They never converge but run parallel to each other with the Adamic man doomed to the eternal flames of hell without undergoing the process of rebirth (John 3:5). Between the two Adams is water –the agent through which the descendants of the first Adam can remove their dust-bodies. In this water, the last Adam, Jesus, steps in to perform the circumcision and clothe the recipient of His grace with His heavenly body.

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

The necessity of a sinless Redeemer

In an article entitled *Creation and the Virgin Birth*, the late founder of the Institution for Creation Research, Dr Henry Morris, raises precisely the kind of questions that Dr Gezahagne and this book pose. Rather than kowtow to the prevailing theological Christology, riddled with myriad inconsistencies, Morris frames the statement of the problem well:

But even this doesn't resolve the dilemma completely, for how could His [Jesus] body be of flesh (carbon, hydrogen, amino acids, proteins, etc.), received by the normal process of reproduction of the flesh of his parents, without also receiving their genetic inheritance, which is exactly what makes it sinful flesh? "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). "Man that is born of a

woman is of few days, and full of trouble ... Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" (Job 14:4) (Morris n.d.)

Morris astutely observes the paradox in claiming that the Lord came as a full-fledged human being without interrogating how the Lord, as the perfect Lamb of God, circumvented the spiritual contamination of the entire human gene pool. He goes on to state:

Not only is there the problem of inherent sin, but also of inherent physical defects. Over many generations, the human population has experienced great numbers of genetic mutations, and these defective physical factors have been incorporated into the common genetic pool, affecting in some degree every infant ever born (Morris n.d.).

Morris is to be complimented in that he does not settle for the temptation of quietly conforming to the prevalent views inherited from Chalcedon. In this article, he boldly postulates that Christ took nothing in terms of biological material from Mary or Joseph, but rather, God planted a “unique Seed” in the woman’s womb.

Therefore, even though He was nurtured in Mary's womb for nine months and born without her ever knowing a man, it was also necessary for all this to have been preceded by supernatural intervention, to prevent His receiving any actual genetic inheritance through her. The body growing in Mary's womb must have been specially created in full perfection, and placed there by the Holy Spirit, in order for it to be free of inherent sin damage. Christ would still be "made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3), because His body was nurtured and born of Mary, who was herself of the seed of

David. He would still be the Son of Man, sharing all universal human experience from conception to death, except sin. He is truly "the seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15), His body formed neither of the seed of the man nor the egg of the woman, but grown from a unique Seed planted in the woman's body by God Himself (Morris n.d.).

We couldn't agree more with Morris. This is the plain testimony of the Scriptures. To assert that Christ had to first become a human like us by mingling with our genes and DNA is to invite the Lord to share in our corruption by virtue of the effects of sin on the human gene pool. One thing gene mapping has established is that we are all pre-disposed to some disease or the other passed down to us from a long line of ancestors who were all unsuspectingly carrying the defect in their bodies. We all dread the question, "Do you have a history of heart (or some other) disease in your family?" This is why some unscrupulous insurance companies desire to map every potential customer's genome before they buy a life insurance. The human gene pool is like one gigantic blood bank that has been contaminated.

The website, *The Daily Scan*, which specializes in all matters related to the human genome and research in cancer, among others, commented on the pros and cons of sequencing every individual's genome. They asked the question: "What if health insurance companies started rejecting people on the basis of pre-existing genetic conditions?" However, a Dr Dave responded:

Everyone is at multiple high risk for some dreaded diseases or disorders - as Steve Quake revealed with his own genome. Once insurance companies realize they need to reject everyone to eliminate the high risks, will they go out of business and go away? No such luck (The Daily Scan 2010).

Those who repeatedly state that God worked a miracle prior to the conception of the Lord in the womb of Mary contradict the explanation forwarded by the angel Gabriel to Mary:

Luke 1:35 *And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

The Holy Ghost is declared to be the progenitor of this *holy thing*. Clearly, the connotation is one of the emergence of a completely new flesh – a heavenly man who will beget sons in His own image (Romans 8:29). Jeremiah was told by God that a new thing would be done on the earth; a woman would surround or encompass a man (Jeremiah 31:22).

Eikōn and homoiōma

One very instructive way of determining whether the body of our Lord was consubstantial with God or with humanity is to compare two Greek words: *eikōn* and *homoiōma*. *Eikōn* (Strong's Greek 1504) is translated *image* in English. For instance:

Colossians 1:15 *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:*

I have often wondered, “Was not Adam and countless other individuals born before Jesus?” In what sense, then, is the Lord the *first-born of every creature*? The answer lies in the meaning of *eikōn*. The word means “taken from the same source”. Christ not only resembles God, but is drawn from the prototype which is God Himself. Now, since God *never* had a flesh before, when He robed Himself in flesh, it follows that this flesh is the *firstborn of every creature*. Firstborn of every creature because this event is *sui generis* – a cosmic first. We recall from the creation account how God commanded every creature to reproduce after its own kind. It follows that when God begat, He could only reproduce after *His own* kind.

Genesis 1:24 *And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.*

Eikōn can be usefully compared to the word *homoiōma* (Strong's Greek 3667). Inspired by the word of the Lord, the apostle Paul

selected this word to indicate that the flesh of our Lord resembled that of humans but was by no means derived from the same source.

Paul states:

Romans 8:3 *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*

The word *likeness* above has been translated *homoiōma*.

Significantly, some theologians, who believe that Christ came in a fallen flesh (yet not touched by sin), seem to be uncomfortable with the clear implications of Romans 8:3. For instance, Revd Dr Calvin T. Samuel, a Methodist Tutor in New Testament at Surgeon's College, London, writes (emphasis mine):

*The Greek word used here, homoiōma usually denotes likeness, copy, or form, indicating less than a full identity. **Might this suggest that Jesus is only like sinful flesh but not quite the same?** I think not. Paul does not imply a docetic Christ, who only appears to share our sinful humanity but actually does not; rather, Paul understands incarnation in terms of one who actually shares our sinful flesh (Stevenson and Wright 2010, 121).*

Note Dr Samuel's acknowledgement that *homoiōma* indicates "less than full identity". Indeed, Jesus' identification with humans does not extend to sharing our frail and dust constitution. It is evident that these theologians do not feel it incumbent to accept the clear meaning of Scripture, but take the liberty to pigeonhole the Word of

God into their presuppositions. Dr Samuel clearly understands the plain sense of Romans 8:13, something which he spells out explicitly himself. Rather, it is the fact that he cannot get himself to agree with the meaning because this would fly in the face of his theology – what he refers to as *sarx hamartias* (sinful flesh). Mark Twain once said, “Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they don’t understand, but for me, I have always noticed that the passages that bother me are the ones I do understand”. The above, however, is a case where one is so bothered by what one understands that an immediate attempt is made to invent a re-interpretation.

The Hebrew and Greek scholar, Spiros Zodhiates, aptly showed the difference between *eikōn* and *homoiōma*. In fact, it is significant that he chose to compare the two by contrasting their meanings. He states:

...eikōn sometimes may be used as synonymous with homoiōma and both may refer to the earthly copies and resemblance of the archetypal things in the heaven. However, there is a distinction: eikōn always assumes a prototype, that which is not merely resembles but from which it is drawn...however, while in homoiōma and homoiōsis there is a resemblance, it by no means follows that it is derived from what it resembles.
(Zodhiates 1984, 1685)

Following Zodhiates (1986), the main difference between the two words is the degree of identification. Christ is always referred to as the *image* of God while He comes in the *likeness* of humanity. Here a Bible student cannot help but recall the story of the brass serpent in

the wilderness of Sinai (Numbers 21). Why didn't God command Moses to place one of the fiery snakes on the pole? Why a brass serpent? The difference in the material composition is not irrelevant. The cure prescribed by God had to necessarily belong to a different order. Christ is God's remedy for mankind's fatal condition. The serpent raised on the pole may have borne a resemblance to the venomous serpents sliding on the desert floor, but there was a world of difference in their material make-up. Christ's body may have borne a resemblance to that of all humans but it did not originate with Adam.

John 3:14 *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:*

Another objection that militates against the concept of the kinsman redeemer is the fact that salvation is the domain of God alone, and not a human kinsman. As was shown in Table 3, the function of human kinsmen was limited to issues such as marriage, land, debt and slavery. God alone arbitrates over the domain of salvation. Indeed, as has been reiterated often in this book, it was for this reason that God was manifest in flesh (I Timothy 3:16) because a heavenly man, untainted by humanity, was now needed. The biblical testimony confirms the above:

Psalm 49:6 *They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches;*

Psalm 49:7 *None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him*

Psalm 49:8 *(For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:)*

Psalm 49:9 *That he should still live forever, and not see corruption.*

With regards to Psalm 49:8, the NIV states, “*the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough*”. The Scriptures above substantiate the argument that a human kinsman’s role, though effective with reference to debt, land, slavery etc, is useless when confronted with the priceless cost of redeeming a soul. Indeed, the Psalmist mocks the rich who, in their arrogance, believe their wealth is omniscient.

In the last section of this chapter I will consider the view that Jesus’ use of the title “Son of man” supports the understanding that He perceived Himself as a full-fledged human being like any other.

The Son of man

The Lord employed the title “Son of man” as a self-designation over 40 times in the New Testament. The first thing to do is determine the way this title was used in other parts of the Bible before we invest the Lord’s usage with any meaning. What emerges, after a careful study of the Old Testament, are very different applications of this

title which makes it quite difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the sense in which the Lord designated Himself as the Son of man.

Numbers 23:19 *God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?*

Psalm 8:4 *What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

Job 25:6 *How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?*

Daniel 7:13 *I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.*

In Numbers 23:19 God rejects the title “Son of man” because He does not grieve or lament (*nacham*) as a human (son of man) does. If this is true, and Jesus is God, in what sense can He be called the “Son of man?” Job 25:6 depicts the “Son of man” as a “worm” which is hardly flattering at all, and problematic when applied to Jesus. Daniel saw one *like* the Son of man as opposed to an angel or some other figure. This is purely descriptive and cannot be taken to mean this person had a human nature like ours as some do. Objectively speaking, the title is actually open to debate and discussion. The influential Reformed theologian, Louis Berkhof, concedes this point:

It is hard to determine why Jesus preferred this name [Son of man] as a self-designation. Formerly the name was generally regarded as a cryptic title, by the use of which Jesus intended to

veil rather than to reveal His Messiahship. This explanation was discarded when more attention was paid to the eschatological element in the Gospels, and to the use of the name in the apocalyptic literature of the Jews ((Berkhof 2003, 313).

Following Berkhof (2003), two interpretations are outlined: that Christ used this title to veil His Messiahship and, two, that the title is eschatological (the study of last things e.g. death, judgement, heaven and hell). Doubtless there are many other contending interpretations, but to categorically invoke the Lord's usage of this title to "corroborate" His humanity is plainly wide of the mark. The paucity in finding Scriptures to bolster such a view sadly exposes a dyed-in-the-wool mentality among some Christians determined to uphold a dearly held Christological view.

To begin with, every association of God with the word "man" does not automatically make Him a human being like us. The Scripture below is a case in point:

Exodus 15:3 *The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name.*

God said this of Himself in relation to His assault and destruction of the forces of Pharaoh. He engaged in this war without having a body, but as the omnipresent Spirit that He has always been. Could it be that Jesus, perhaps, was identifying with God as precisely such a "man"? This is Bishop Gezahagne's stance. Either way, of significance is Jesus' question to the apostles:

Matthew 16:13 *When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*

This question relegates the title “Son of man” to a secondary order. If Christ asks the question, “*Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*”, then we would frankly be wasting our time debating the meaning of Son of man. Peter is to be commended in that He did not seek to catalogue the opinion of diverse authorities and scholars, but sought the opinion or revelation of God Himself. The answer should settle the debate:

Matthew 16:16 *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

In brief, the Son of man is the Son of God - a title which supersedes and supplants every other man-made opinion of Christ from then on. Again, we can only wonder at the tenacity of the adherents of Chalcedon to search hard for a Jesus who conforms to their predetermined idea of a human kinsman redeemer complete with a fallen human nature. To their mind, only such a human Jesus will suffice – they will not countenance any other. One can only wonder if there exists a psychological need for “humanizing” Jesus – a need not borne out by Scripture, but rooted in what psychologists call “kin altruism”. A study conducted by researchers at Stanford University indicates that electoral voters tend to vote for those candidates with whom they share some facial similarity. They talk about the human

tendency to emotionally favour those who are closely related to them, which social psychologists refer to as “kin altruism”.

Humans certainly behave as though motivated by kin altruism. People treat their kin preferentially in a variety of contexts from wartime emergencies to mundane situations (Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994; Shavit, Fischer, & Koresh, 1994; Wells, 1987). Furthermore, humans discriminate in favour of similar-looking others in trust games (DeBruine, 2002) and in adoption decisions (DeBruine, 2004). Based on these findings, it appears plausible that humans are genetically predisposed to favour similar-looking people, including those who seek elective office (Bailenson, Iyengar and Yee n.d.).

We see some of this apparently genetically-conditioned inclination towards “kin altruism” in the way pictures, paintings and portraits of Christ are indigenized. I once saw a T-shirt with a Black “Rastafari Jesus” hanging on a Cross in Shepherds’ Bush, London, UK. When asked whether Jesus was black, the vendor was adamant that this was so. I thought about the ubiquitous Catholic pictures of the Caucasian blue-eyed Jesus sporting shoulder-length blonde hair and a dramatic bleeding heart clearly visible and staring piously into heaven which I used to encounter in the houses of my school teachers back in an Anglo-Indian boarding school in India. Perhaps it is in the interstices of these felt psychological needs that one might discover the human need to make “God in our own human image” rather than accept that He came into this world with His own heavenly flesh and blood without taking one iota of flesh or blood from the race of Adam.

CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter traces the roots of the fully man, fully God Christology which crystallized at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). A study of the events that led to this Council, I believe, will help us better understand why and where the church erred with reference to the body of our Lord. If this formulation is so important why did it take so long to see the light of day? All along it is essential to keep in mind that the creed of Chalcedon had never settled the issue of what theologians call the incarnation, but has given rise to a plethora of new questions. As the church historian Diarmaid MacCulloch puts it:

After much ill-tempered debate on such matters, the outcome of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 was dictated by political circumstances and did not carry the whole Christian world with it (MacCulloch 2009, 8).

Nestorius

Nestorius (386-451) was appointed Archbishop of Constantinople in 428. If the Christological controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries can be perceived as a struggle between the Eastern churches vs. the Western, then Nestorius was embedded in the Western school of theology also known as the Antiochene school. The doctrine of how the two natures in Christ were related to each other was called *communicatio idiomatum* (Latin for communication of properties). A

major difference between Antioch and Alexandria was that the former endeavoured to balance the two natures without dividing them or uniting them at the expense of the particular characteristics of each nature. On the other hand, Cyril and other Alexandrian theologians, inclined more towards only one nature (the divine) in Christ. The latter is called monophysitism or miaphysitism (one sole nature) in Christological debates.

Nestorius felt that the Eastern churches (Alexandrian school) engaged too much in allegorism – words were taken to mean something completely different from the sense intended by verbal language. Nestorius, and others of the Antiochene school, were more inclined towards a literal-historical tradition of exegesis (Greer 2009). Let us take an example from the New Testament:

Philippians 2:6 *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:*

Philippians 2:7 *But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

For Nestorius, it was vital to distinguish and safeguard the two subjects in the verses above or what in Greek is called *prosopon* – the self-manifestation of an individual. As such, Nestorius detected two *prosopons* in Philippians 2:6,7: the divine *prosopon* who is in the “form of God” and the human *prosopon* who is in the “form of a servant”. According to him, the two were to always be kept apart as there can be no hypostatic union between them as claimed by Cyril,

a notable Alexandrian theologian. The Word of God (Logos) cannot undergo any change and is always divine, whereas the human *prosopon* is passible (can suffer) and dies. Immersed in Greek thought, Nestorius could not believe that the divine nature of Christ could suffer. To his mind, it was important to postulate two clearly discernible *prosopons* in Christ without mixing or impacting on each other, although subsisting in the one person of Christ. It was this extreme focus on the two separate natures that left Nestorius vulnerable to accusations of heresy.

For instance, Nestorius objected to the use of the phrase *Theotokos* to describe Mary as the “Mother of God”. Because of his separation between the divine and human natures, Nestorius maintained that Mary could only give birth to the human nature alone, so she should rather be called *Christotokos* (mother of Christ). Nestorius’ polemic was aimed at the Alexandrian school of Christology. There men like Cyril of Alexandria (376-444) emphasised the union of the two natures in Christ (*hypostasis*) to such a degree that Nestorius feared the distinction was blurred. With regards to *Theotokos*,

He was in effect saying that the title could only be used if one simultaneously balanced it by calling Mary Anthropotokos, Bearer of a Human, and he insinuated that those who over-praised Mary were reviving the worship of a mother-goddess (MacCulloch 2009, 225).

He was finally condemned as a heretic at the Councils of Ephesus (431) which was repeated at Chalcedon (451) because of the

perception that Nestorius' Christ had "a dual personality and did not constitute a real union, but only a juxtaposition of natures" (Whitelaw 1897).

One criticism levelled at Nestorius is relevant to this study's critique of the Oneness Christology espoused by, among others, the United Pentecostal Church International. For years, the standard Oneness response to the question, "Whom did Jesus pray to?" was that "the human nature prayed to the divine nature". Among others, Trinitarian theologians attacked this position successfully, showing the discrepancy of one nature praying to another (see, among others, Slick⁵). Indeed, the Oneness assumption smacks of Nestorianism where two separate persons (divine and human) are posited in Christ. However, even Nestorius did not make the absurd assertion that one nature (read person) prayed to the other. Although referring to Nestorius, the criticism below is just as applicable to the UPC position:

Nowhere in Scripture do we have an indication that the human nature of Christ, for example, is an independent person, deciding to do something contrary to the divine nature of Christ. Nowhere do we have an indication of the human and divine natures talking to each other or struggling within Christ, any such thing. Rather, we have a consistent picture of a single

⁵ Slick, M. *Who did Jesus Pray to?* <http://carm.org/religious-movements/oneness-pentecostal/who-did-jesus-pray>. Retrieved 21.09.11.

person acting in wholeness and unity. Jesus always speaks as “I,” not “we,”... (Grudem 1994, 555).

Curiously, Jason Dulles, another UPC theologian, repudiates the Oneness understanding of “one nature prayed to another”. He prefers the idea that Jesus prayed as a result of the “genuineness of His human nature”⁶. In other words, Jesus prayed because the assumption of human nature found Him constrained by the limitations common to humanity. In what is an open contradiction of the likes of David Bernard (Supt. of the UPCI), Dulle states:

We do not understand this as meaning that the divine nature of Christ prayed to the Father, because then we have God praying to Himself. This is not the portrayal of Scripture, and would make no sense. This may sound Nestorian, but there are certain things which can be said of one nature which cannot be said of the other (Ibid).

However one twists and turns it, these Oneness theologians cannot escape the accusation that talk of “one nature in Christ praying to another” leaves them susceptible to the charge of Nestorianism, as Dulles himself notes.

What does the Bible say with reference to Nestorius and the so-called “orthodox” position which condemned his teachings? To begin with, the whole premise of the Christological controversy is

⁶ Dulle, J. *If Jesus Was the Father, Why Would He Pray to the Father?* <http://www.onenesspentecostal.com/howjesusprayiffather.htm> Retrieved 21.09.11.

defective because both, Nestorius and his opponents like Cyril, espoused a belief in a pre-existent God the Son assuming human nature through Mary. Because the premise is fallacious, all that follows is but a quixotic exercise where windmills are mistaken for giants. Oneness theologians vociferously attack the Council of Nicea (325) & Constantinople (381) for canonizing the doctrine of the Trinity, and rightly so. How is it, then, that they are quiet with regards to Chalcedon which relied heavily on the Trinitarian conceptualization of Jesus as the “Second member of the Trinity?” How does one uncritically engage in a discussion where there is a tacit consensus that the distinct second member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, assumed human nature?

Having voiced this vital objection, we must consider the biblical position on the issue of Nestorianism. Does the Bible operate with the understanding of one or two natures in Christ?

Hebrews 1:3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Of paramount importance in the verse above is the reference to Christ as the “image of His *person*”. He is not a separate person from God or one person with two natures in a hypostatic union as Chalcedon later declared. Such language is not found in the Bible. The Greek word translated *person* (Hebrews 1:3) is *hypostasis*

(Strong's G5287) which means "the substantial quality, nature, of a person or thing". As mentioned previously, Jesus is derived (image) from the source which is God in every way. This extends to His flesh and not His Spirit alone. The Bible further declares that God was manifest in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16) and not that God assumed human nature.

Again, as I have previously discussed, it is the taken-for-granted belief among theologians that Christ must have had a completely human nature like ours which lies at the root of the error. For instance, Gregory of Nazianzus once remarked, "What Christ has not assumed, he has not healed; but what has been united with God is saved"⁷ Significantly, many who regurgitate this citation do not pause to ask whether it is grounded in the Scriptures or not. This is a case of elevating the authority of the so-called church "Fathers" above that of the Bible.

Gregory makes a necessary nexus between God and human flesh which has its origin in the dust. He claims that God had to unite Himself with these dust-creatures called humans or there can be no healing or salvation for them. This doctrine is actually diametrically opposed to the Bible which states unambiguously that there is no hope, restoration or salvation for human flesh which is of the dust:

⁷ *Epistola* 101.7 (PG, 37, 181).

Genesis 3:19 *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*

1Corinthians 15:50 *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.*

The assertion that salvation is predicated upon the assumption of dust-flesh is Gregory's invention. Why would God unite Himself with that which is sin-sick, frail, feeble, mortal, corrupt and condemned? Besides, if Christ saves only that which He assumes, then what happens to the rest of creation which, according to Paul, is groaning and waiting for redemption? It would not be sufficient, then, if one follows Gregory, to claim that Christ's assumption of human flesh alone is adequate for all other creatures. Sticking to Gregory's maxim, Christ would have to assume the flesh of all creatures – an obnoxious thought.

Romans 8:22 *For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*

Romans 8:23 *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*

Contra Gregory, all that was needed for the redemption of fallen humanity was sinless flesh and blood which was fulfilled when the Word made flesh (John 1:14) was crucified for us.

It is also significant to note that whereas the Scriptures declare that Jesus is the express image of the Person (*hypostasis*) of God, we are told that we will partake of the divine nature (*physis*) of God.

2 Peter Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The distinction is not trivial. Jesus is identical with the Person of God, but born-again believers will share, not in the Person (*hypostasis*) of God, but in the divine nature (*physis*). In other words, we will share in the properties and characteristics of the divine nature of Christ without in any way sharing in His deity or Personhood. This paints a beautiful picture of the mission of Christ. He did not come for us to speculate endlessly about the number of natures in His being and the intricacies of their interactions, but for us to partake of His divine nature through the agency of the new birth.

Just as the star of Bethlehem journeyed from the East but stopped above the manger of Christ, Christians would do well to resist the temptation of going beyond the testimony of the Scriptures. Sadly, however, as the case of Nestorius demonstrates, many who reject the plain testimony of the Bible, will be stranded on the shore of speculation.

Besides Nestorius, the Christological views of two other key figures will be considered before I explore the Council of Chalcedon itself.

Apollinaris' truncated Christology

Another Christological view which exercised many before Nestorius was that of Apollinaris. Appointed Bishop in AD 361, Apollinaris taught that Christ was indeed one person with a human body but devoid of a human spirit and mind. The Logos (divine nature of the Son of God) took the place of Christ's mind and spirit. The statement below aptly captures the Christological position of Apollinaris:

Christ was only "in the likeness of man", and so, by the strict canons of Apollinaris's logic, not man actually... Secondly, the human soul was not the sort of thing with which the divine nous [soul] could have anything to do, both because of the fundamental difference between the two in their nature and function, and morally, because the human soul, as the governing element in man, is the seat of all his vile passions and affections (Bates 1961, 142,143).

To begin with, there is no doubt that Apollinaris held that Christ had a human body. By this we understand that His flesh was of the race of Adam biologically. However, Apollinaris somehow believed that the divine Logos stepped in and animated the human body assumed from Mary. One is left with a human shell bereft of a human mind and soul indwelt by the pre-existent God the Son (Logos).

The UPC theologian, William Chalfant, in his article entitled, *A Critique of Teklemariam's "Bible Writer's Theology"*, states "But the Christological model of Apollinaris bears some similarities to that of Brother Teklemariam"⁸. One can genuinely wonder if Chalfant has read *Bible Writer's Theology* at all. Bishop Teklemariam does *not* believe that God the pre-existent Son assumed a human body through Mary – something which Apollinaris believed. Secondly, Bishop Teklemariam nowhere holds that the divine Logos (remember this is God the pre-existent Son) replaced the human soul and mind in the "human" body assumed from Mary, again, a tenet that Apollinaris held. Chalfant's critique is a classical case of building up a straw man, completely alien to the theological universe of Bishop Teklemariam, and then striking him down. Chalfant does a disservice to the ethics of scholarly debate by associating Bishop Teklemariam's Christology with that of Apollinaris when they bear no resemblance whatsoever.

And what is Chalfant's Christological position? The UPCI actually adhere to a Christological position which is unique to their Oneness theology. They reject the notion of God the pre-existent Son which automatically invites the stamp of heresy by the majority of the so-called mainstream Christian world. After this it really doesn't matter what they say about the "incarnation" because they no longer are

⁸ William Chalfant. *A Critique of Teklemariam's "Bible Writer's" Theology*. <http://www.gloriouschurch.com/html/Review-of-Bible-Writers-Theology.asp>. Retrieved 21.09.11.

taken seriously by the Trinitarians, for example, who constitute the majority of Christendom. I say majority not because the majority are right by default, but because Chalfant, by invoking the names of heretics from the pages of history, seems to forget that his own views fare no better when seen through the lens of the “majority”. It is not uncommon for some today to recruit one “authority” or the other from church history and appeal to the “tradition”.

The UPCI claim to believe in one indivisible God who manifested Himself in a complete human being assumed from Mary. Obviously, this is not what the architects of Chalcedon had in mind. For them, and most of the denominational world today, the discussions revolved around how God the Son (not the Father or the Holy Ghost) assumed flesh in Mary. Although the UPCI postulate a strict monotheism, they nevertheless stray away from it in joining the denominational world and asserting two natures in Christ – something which they nor the Chalcedonians can find in the Scriptures. As previously mentioned, their rather novel teaching that the human nature prayed to the divine nature in Christ exposes the incoherence of their Christology, which has been the subject of much criticism by Trinitarians. For instance, it has been rightly pointed out to Oneness theologians that persons pray and not natures. A look at the difference between a “person” and a “nature” will drive home the point:

The term “nature” denotes the sum-total of all the essential qualities of a thing, that which makes it what it is. A nature is a

substance possessed in common, with all the essential qualities of such a substance. The term “person” denotes a complete substance, endowed with reason, and, consequently, a responsible subject of its actions (Berkhof 2003, 321).

By way of “evidence” Chalfant states, “both Apollinaris and Brother Teklemariam restrict the use of the word “flesh” in John 1:14” (Ibid). To his mind, there can only be one kind of flesh - a complete human being like us. He goes on to say, “Both the Greek *sarx* and the Hebrew *basar* (or *besar*) can mean either “the substance of the body” (flesh) or “man” and “mankind” (e.g., “all flesh”, or “no flesh”).” (Ibid). By inserting “can mean...” Chalfant leaves open the alternative that the context determines usage – a prudent principle in hermeneutics. Two scriptural texts demonstrate that “flesh” (*sarx*) can also be used to specifically delineate the physical aspect alone:

2 Corinthians 7:1 *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

1 Peter 3:18 *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:*

At the heart of this debate is a failure to adequately grapple with what really constitutes for a human being. Chalfant and others throw around the term as if there is a happy consensus with regards to the definition of human. What does it mean to be a human being? The field of anthropology abounds with vigorous debates about the

concept of humans and humanity. The noted Oxford theologian, Richard Swinburne, dedicates a whole article to this question. Swinburne goes through a list of various stereotypic criteria and finds that the notion of humanity is quite diffuse. Some of the issues he raises are:

- Whether individuals who orient themselves not through sensory perceptions but other bodily processes would qualify as humans.
- Could there be humans without moral awareness?
- As in the case of Jesus, could a person who had no desire to commit an immoral act be human?

Swinburne's answer to the above is: "Once again, our criteria for humanity yield no clear answer. But there is plenty of scope for different explications of what it is to be human" (Swinburne 1989). Although Swinburne ultimately supports the view of Chalcedon, he astutely destabilizes any smug assumption that there is an undisputed scholarly consensus on the meaning of the taken-for-granted phrase "human being".

Think about it for a moment - imagine if you as a Christian witnessed to someone who had never heard of Jesus before. You state that Jesus was not born like other human beings but received genes only from a woman (parthogenesis). You go on to explain that all humans *qua* humans share in the fallen state because of the sin of Adam, but this does not apply to Jesus. On the basis of these two statements we shouldn't be surprised if our imaginary friend begins

to conceive of Jesus as some kind of a “superman” rather than your average human being. Swinburne continues to further interrogate our taken-for-granted approach to what it means to be human.

If we make an ovum in a laboratory, synthesize its genes from inorganic material and fertilize it with a similar synthesized sperm cell, implant it in a tissue culture and grow the embryo in an artificial environment, the resulting being wouldn't be human—even if the genes involved are qualitatively similar in chemical make-up to human genes. To be human you have to belong to the human race. Once again, whether our criteria of humanity involve a historical criterion seems to me unclear. If they do, the further question arises how thoroughly that criterion has to be satisfied—if an individual's genes come only from his mother (parthenogenesis), can that individual still be a man? (Swinburne 1989).

Let no one imagine that this study directly or indirectly espouses a Docetic or Gnostic view (that Jesus only seemed to have a body). The Bible unequivocally declares that God was manifested in the *flesh* (I Timothy 3:16). Jesus urged His apostles *to handle* Him and verify that He had flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). He is called the “*man* Christ Jesus” (I Timothy 2:5). Our contention is that God was manifested in a body which had its source in the Word (John 1:14) and the eternal Spirit (Luke 1:35) and did not mingle with humanity understood as the biological race descended from Adam. What kind of human being declares,

John 8:23 *And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.*

Clearly, while some are eager to “humanize” Jesus as a ditto member of our species, He did not reciprocate the enthusiasm.

Eutyches and mono/miaphysitism.

The Eastern Alexandrian church, as mentioned earlier, maintained that there was only one dominant nature in Christ after the incarnation – the divine nature. The overarching focus is on the mystical and speculative in contrast to the western tradition where method and text was central. Eutyches (378-454) was the leader of a monastery in Constantinople. Compared to Nestorius, Eutyches’ Christological view was on the other extreme end of the spectrum.

*He denied that the human nature and divine nature in Christ remained fully human and fully divine. He held rather that the human nature of Christ was taken up and absorbed into the divine nature, so that both natures were changed somewhat and absorbed and **a third kind of nature resulted** (Grudem 1994, 556).*

The analogy of a drop of wine in a glass or bucket of water is often forwarded to visualize the position of Eutyches. The water represents the divine God the pre-existent Son, while the drop of wine symbolizes the assumed human nature from Mary. Just as the drop of wine is swallowed up and diluted by the glass of water, the human nature assumed is swallowed up to such a degree that we must speak in terms of one dominant divine nature. This Christology is referred

to as monophysitism. However, the Eastern churches resent this characterization because it gives the incorrect impression that they deny the existence of a human nature in Christ. They would rather be called “Orthodox” but also settle for *miaphysitism* (one nature), a term often used by Cyril of Alexandria and connoting a composite rather than indivisible “one”. (MacCulloch 2009, 227,228).

How does Eutyches’ Christology fare in light of the testimony of Scriptures? As with Nestorius and Apollinaris, the whole edifice is defect on account of the unbiblical premise – how did God the pre-existent Son manifest Himself in human flesh? This is similar to two Arians (or their modern-day descendants Jehovah’s Witnesses) debating pointlessly whether Jesus was *created* just prior to the creation of the world or at an earlier point. Jesus was not created but begotten. One needs to be aware of the origin of the doctrine of the eternally begotten Son to better grasp the false premise of the early Christological debates.

According to Berkhof (2003, 93), the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son (also called “filiation”) was subject to some debate. Central to the debate was whether the act of eternally generating the Son was an act of free will on the part of the Father or not. Origen, the main advocate behind this speculation favoured a filiation that was dependent on the free will of the Father. Others such as Athanasius argued that this would undermine the co-equality of the Son making His existence contingent on the free will of the

Father. Finally, it was agreed that “The generation of the Son must be regarded as a necessary and perfectly natural act of God” (Berkhof 2003, 93). The impenetrability of this doctrine is manifest in the fact that the generation of the Son (process of giving birth to the Son) was an act that never started and never finished.

This does not mean, however, that it is an act that was completed in the far distant past, but rather that it is a timeless act, the act of an eternal present, an act always continuing and yet never completed (Berkhof 2003, 93).

For the uninitiated the above is as illuminating as Churchill’s characterization of Russia as “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma”. How did this “riddle” see the light of day? The Arian heresy was indirectly responsible. Arius and his acolytes believed that there was a time when the Son was not. Origen responded with the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son which has no biblical foundation whatsoever. Given this wildly speculative background, our contention is that none of the protagonists involved in the early Christological debates were even close to the Scriptural text of the Bible.

In short, the Bible does not give us the liberty to speculate on how much “humanity” God the Son assumed through Mary. The Bible declares that the *blood of Jesus is the blood of God*. This means that Jesus’ blood was not “human” assumed through Mary or we would be compelled to say that Mary’s blood is also divine and find ourselves bestowing the honour of *Theotokos* on her.

Acts 20:28 *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased **with his own blood.***

It follows logically from the above that if Jesus' blood is the blood of God, then His flesh must also be that of God alone. It is for this reason that we can worship Christ as the One true God without differentiating between His Spirit, flesh and blood. I once asked a Pastor whether he would have worshipped the flesh of Christ before the resurrection to which he replied no. This is because he believed in a dual Christ with two disparate origins – His Spirit from God and His flesh and blood from Mary. I responded that God commanded the angels to worship the first-begotten (read “flesh”) which means the flesh of Christ was also worshipped (Hebrews 1:6). I also pointed him to Acts 20:28. To my surprise, he instantly revised his position and replied that the blood was from God but not the flesh.

The Christological debates outlined so far were far from being the harmless musings of a few mendicants. The ecclesiastical heads in conjunction with the political movers and shakers of the day felt that the stability of their empire was at stake. With the likes of Attila the Hun knocking on the door of Rome (Pope Leo I was sent to appease him), they decided to call an ecumenical Council in Chalcedon (AD 451). This is explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Introduction

However, Chalcedon only asserts that Jesus is truly God and truly human, it does not explain how this is possible. But this – Hick claims – makes it an unintelligible and meaningless utterance (Schmidt-Leukel 2006, 115).

THE SYMBOL OF CHALCEDON (A.D . 451)

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself

*has taught us, and the Creed of the Holy Fathers has handed down to us.*⁹

The above is the final formulation of the doctrine of the person and nature of Christ hammered out by 370 Bishops attending the Council of Chalcedon (a city in Modern-day Turkey). The Bishops also passed 28 canons (church laws adopted by ecclesiastical authorities) dealing with issues of church administration. There is a need to unravel not only the meaning of the above creed but to gain some insight into the background of key players like Pope Leo I. The Chalcedonian Creed is also sometimes referred to as the Tome (a large scholarly work) of Pope Leo I. Unless one is a Roman Catholic, some may be taken aback to discover that a Pope actually formulated the “dual nature” doctrine that they defer to. There is no doubt that the Pope was intent on cementing the supremacy of the See (a Bishop’s domain of authority) of Rome. For example, Leo I refused to ratify the 28th canon of Chalcedon because it sought to equate the honour and prestige of the See of Constantinople with that of Rome.

Leo I – the master tactician

Long before Leo became Pope in AD 440, his deep interest in the Christological controversy in the East led him to commission a theologian called John Cassian to prepare a *florilegium* (compilation

⁹ Classic Christology. *Princeton Theological Seminary* (1951).

of writings from various church fathers) against Nestorius in the year AD 430. Cassian, with the blessings of Leo, passionately defended the title *Theotokos* (Mother of God) applied to Mary. Cassian's basic argument was that, "If we can say that Christ was born of the Virgin, then we must also say that God was born of her" (Barclift 1997).

Already we perceive the not so subtle Mariolatry inherent in the Christology of Leo. The Bible does not say that God was born, but that God was manifested in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16). The apostle John makes it explicit that the physical aspect of Christ which they "looked upon" and "handled" was not something derived from Mary but was from "the beginning" (I John 1:1). Mary could not give birth to God which would question His status as the "I AM", but rather carried the flesh of God for nine months. It baffles me that Catholics venerate Mary - even praying to her to intercede on their behalf - when Jesus called her "woman" not once, but twice.

John 2:4 *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.*

John 19:26 *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!*

The fact is that before he became Pope, Leo used the term *Theotokos* and other terms with little regard for biblical grounding or precision. Intriguingly, he later avoided using the term *Theotokos* because of the use the Eastern church would make of it. Leo also confused the manner in which the terms *homo* and *humanus* were applied.

Augustine differentiated between the two much in the same way we differentiate between “nature” and “person”. *Humanus* was normally used to apply to the general nature of humanity while *homo* referred to the concrete individual much the same way “person” does.

The tone of Leo's insights and the language he used to express them shifted and acquired greater precision over time in his letters and sermons in direct response to the dynamics of the christological controversy in the East, of which Leo's Tome made him a part. This development is most evident in three areas: his avoidance of the "Mother of God" title for the Virgin Mary after initially using it early in his pontificate; his use of the terms homo and humanus, which Leo learned to distinguish later in his pontificate; and his adoption of the Antiochene homo assumptus formula late in his pontificate to emphasize the fullness of Christ's human nature (Barclift 1997, 221).

All this suggests that Leo, far from being a competent theologian, was more of an opportunist who coaxed and cajoled his way into Chalcedon. The contents of his Tome was basically cherry-picked from various sources, and he constantly engaged in the process of refining his Christology by playing a “wait and see” game with the theologians of the East. When his terminology came under scrutiny and was questioned, he would respond that it was the language barrier (he wrote in Latin while the Eastern church was Greek speaking) which was to blame.

After Pope Leo's orthodoxy came into question in the East among the monks and theologians affiliated with Alexandria, the pope probably with Prosper's help - began to fine-tune his

vocabulary in order to prove his orthodoxy while simultaneously seeking to preserve his position as a mediating influence between the theologians of Alexandria and Antioch (Barclift 1997, 238)

It is an indictment on the Bishops assembled at Chalcedon that they shouted “It is Peter who says this through Leo. This is what we all of us believe. This is the faith of the Apostles. Leo and Cyril teach the same thing”. I do not need to labour the point that Peter said no such thing through Leo, neither did the apostles believe such nonsense. How could the apostles speak such things through the mouth Leo who, as I have just shown, fumbled and groped his way around theologically? As I mentioned earlier, when Jesus asked the apostles the question, “...But whom say ye that I am? (Matthew 16:15), Peter’s revelation did not include words like “human being” “two natures” or “God the pre-existent Son”. Let all theologians pay attention to what he said:

Mathew 16:16 *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Had Peter spoken through Leo, this is what he would have said. Incidentally, dead people like Peter do not speak through the mouths of living people which says something about the theology of those Bishops at Chalcedon. Moreover, I wonder how Oneness theologians would respond to Chalcedon’s declaration... *born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood...* If they deny that Mary can be called the *Mother of God*, then perhaps they

should explain to us which parts of Chalcedon they consent to and which they reject, rather than give the false impression that their Christology is commensurate with Chalcedon.

To be acknowledged in two natures?

Chalcedon declares that Christ is to be acknowledged in two natures. A formidable argument against this statement is that the word “nature” is used uncritically and without qualification for *both* the “human” and “divine” aspects of Christ. In other words, Leo’s Tome does not even seem to discern that the word “nature” cannot indifferently apply to two very dissimilar aspects (one human and the other divine). Is one to really uncritically assume that the readers of Leo’s Tome had the *same* understanding of what “nature” meant when applied to the human and divine dimensions of Christ?

One theologian who warned that this lack of clarification would lead to much confusion was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Speaking about Schleiermacher’s misgivings about the word “nature” in the Chalcedonian formula, Stroup (1976) states:

Schleiermacher's assessment of the traditional formulas was both an accurate historical judgment and a prophetic statement about how the formulas would fare in nineteenth and twentieth century theology (George W. Stroup 1976, 55).

Theology is a discipline which approaches its understanding of the human being from the perspective of the Fall. In other words, one

condition for membership in the human family is to share in the consequences of the Fall – we are all sinners (Romans 3:23). Now, since all theologians agree that Jesus did not share in our sinful condition, it begs the question: how, then, can He be called a genuine human being like one of us? Let us say we (sinful and bonafide humans) decide to bend the rules and extend to Jesus the title of “human being”. Should it not logically follow that this designation should be accompanied by some sort of debate about the “nature” of Christ’s “new humanity” without sin? It is with reference to this point that Chalcedon fails singularly.

Is there, therefore, no such thing as human nature? Does the Chalcedonian formula by mentioning explicitly 'human nature' point to nothing concrete and real? Of course, the answer can only be that there is a human nature, but this is not enough to indicate what the proper approach to man is. For the question is not whether or not there is such a thing as 'human nature' but whether it is possible to approach man via his 'nature' or 'ousia' itself (Zizoulas 1975).

So we conclude that “human nature”, whatever it might be, is positively not something easily grasped or approximated as Leo’s Tome would have us believe. The anthropologist, Branislow Malinowski, famously quipped that humans are “the most elusive of materials” (Malinowski 1961, 11).

A disclaimer is in order before I proceed. It is not my desire at all to explore the sometimes less than reverential discussion of the identity

of our precious Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Like many, who would rather not go beyond the Star of Bethlehem, I, too, shudder to engage in what borders on the blasphemous. I only brave these stormy and precarious theological waters with the intent of challenging those who hold such views to reconsider and discard these man-made concoctions. As the apostle admonishes:

Ephesians 5:11 *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*

Ephesians 5:12 *For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.*

Ephesians 5:13 *But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.*

Armed with this proviso, let me proceed with the utmost fear and trembling. Allow me to illustrate the difficulty of assuming that the readers of the Chalcedonian formulas will come to similar conclusions in relation to the word “nature”. Take, if you will, the question of how many consciousnesses were in Jesus. Two respected theologians, Thomas Morris (1986, 1987) and Richard Swinburne (1989, 1994) believe that Jesus had two consciousnesses – a human and divine consciousness. They posited that the human consciousness was contained in the divine one. They have called their model the “two-minds” or “divided minds” model (Bayne 2001, 125).

Incredibly, Morris (1986), despite admitting that it may be “impossible for any mere human being to have more than one mind,

or range of consciousness”, yet doesn’t hesitate to borrow from the notoriously thorny world of psychopathologies (e.g. dissociative identity disorder (formerly multiple personality disorder), hypnosis, and commissurotomy (surgical incision on certain brain nerves to treat psychiatric disorders) to suggest that these disorders “might function as partial models of the structure of Christ’s consciousness” (Bayne 2001, 128). This is clearly the legacy of Chalcedon which has opened a Pandora’s box of every sort of impious speculation into the “nature” of the Lord. What do other theologians think of this “two-minds” model? Fortunately, it didn’t seem to travel far.

I conclude therefore that the theory of two consciousnesses, though it may seem far the most promising way of defending traditional Christology, will not prove adequate in the long run. Some other way must be found to explain how God and man met in Jesus Christ (Hanson 1984, 483).

In short, the formula “to be acknowledged in two natures” really means nothing because we do not have a clue about what a human nature is leave alone a divine one – neither did the formulas provide any guidelines in relation to their meaning. One is reminded of Bassanio’s description of Gratiano’s loquacious nonsense in the *The Merchant of Venice* when attempting to find any meaning of substance in Pope Leo’s Tome.

*Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice. His reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff—you shall seek all day ere you find them, and when you have them they are not worth the search.*¹⁰

Canonizing the uncanonizable.

...it would be a mistake of equal proportion to canonize the formulas of Nicaea and Chalcedon as eternally valid interpretations of what 'God was in Christ' means" (George W. Stroup 1976, 53).

One can legitimately wonder why the Bishops at Chalcedon felt the need to assemble together in such a high-handed manner to canonize a formulation while completely ignoring the language of the Bible in relation to Christology. Jesus made it abundantly clear that the Holy Spirit would reveal the full truth to them which they would share with the church.

Luke 10:16 *He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.*

John 16:13 *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*

¹⁰ Shakespeare, W. *The Merchant of Venice*. Act 1, Scene 1.

It appears, sadly, that the so-called church fathers entertained the unwarranted notion that they had been invested with apostolic authority which gave them the right to “better” the revelation given to the apostles by inventing new words. This is not an idle assertion on my part, but is amply confirmed by others:

But by the fourth century Athanasius could hardly point to a unified and consistent tradition. In fact much of his difficulty arose precisely because he was an innovator who claimed that his innovations were absolutely necessary if the Church's faith was to be rescued from a theology which would surely destroy it. Similarly Augustine, writing against the Donatists, had to grant that the Donatists had Cyprian on their side. Nevertheless he argued that, by innovating and changing, he was more faithful to the Church's tradition than they (Wilken 1965).

The audacity of these “church fathers” to believe that they had to “invent” new words in order to rescue the church’s faith beggars belief. It is this kind of philosophy which has been described as a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by the means of language. I have often heard Trinitarians retort that the apostles did not actually fully understand the revelation of the Triune God. In their mind, this doctrine was there all along from the beginning, but was slowly revealed incrementally to the church fathers. This kind of sophistry is a poor attempt at concealing what can only be called a *coup d’état* of apostolic authority.

The danger inherent in such a line of reasoning is clearly evident in that others, even today, can claim to have a special “hotline” of revelation to heaven which prior generations were not privy to or failed to understand. If Athanasius, Augustine and Pope Leo I could innovate new terms and formulations to “better” or “complete” the message of the apostles, why not the charismatic preacher Benny Hinn who stated:

*God the Father, ladies and gentleman, is a person and He is a triune being by Himself, separate from the Son and the Holy Ghost... See, God the Father is a person, God the Son is a person, God the Holy Ghost is a person; but each one of them is a triune being by himself. If I can shock you and maybe I should, **there's nine of them!** What did you say? Let me explain. God the Father, ladies and gentlemen, is a person with his own personal spirit, with his own personal soul and his own personal spirit body. You say, I never heard that! Well, you think you are in church to hear things you heard for the last fifty years?"*
Orlando Christian Centre Broadcast, 13 Oct. 1990.¹¹

Returning to the formula of Chalcedon, we see another blatant invention which comes with a stark contradiction. Pope Leo’s Tome states that the Lord is to be acknowledged in two natures which are supposedly united *unchangeably (immutabiliter)*. Let me break this down systematically. Firstly, remember that they are talking about the two supposed natures of Christ – one human and one divine. These two natures, they insist, must be acknowledged as

¹¹ Audio recording available at this link: <http://www.faith-theology.com/2010/02/theology-fail-benny-hinn-on-trinity.html> Retrieved 23.09.11

unchangeable. The formula even reiterates this point by stating...*the property of each nature being preserved*...So far so good! Next, let us zero in on the human nature. They insist again that the human nature assumed was fully human just like yours and mine. When we apply this understanding to the word *unchangeable*, a paradox emerges.

If the natures are unchangeable, why then do they declare that Christ's body *changed* after the resurrection? What did His human nature change into? As long as Chalcedon's formula did not attach any time-limit or qualification of any sort to the word *unchangeable* and its corollary *the property of each nature being preserved*, this critique remains valid. What does the Bible have to say about the God who was manifested in flesh?

Hebrew 13:8 *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.*

Luke 24:39 *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.*

God does not undergo any changes. He declares Himself to be immutable, "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). As I mentioned earlier, God could not find anyone (i.e. a human being) therefore His *own arm brought salvation to Him* (Isaiah 63:5). The child that was born was

called “that *holy thing*” (Luke 1:35) and not the son of Mary. Take a careful look at the verse below:

Hebrew 10:19 *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,*

Hebrew 10:20 *By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;*

What gives us the boldness to enter into the holiest place? The blood of Jesus *by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.*

This is crystal clear: it is not the diffuse and ludicrous formulation of Pope Leo I which gives us access to the holiest, but the flesh of Jesus which the writer of Hebrews calls *a new and living way*. Now, you will hopefully agree with me that human flesh and blood can hardly be called a “new and living way”. What is new about this flesh is that it is God’s own flesh; it is His own arm and is unprecedented in the history of the universe. It is called the “only begotten Son” of God (John 3:16).

John 3:16 refers to the Son as the “only begotten” of God (*monogenes*). This can only be referring to the flesh as the Spirit in Christ cannot be begotten. In other words, the flesh of Jesus is the only kind of flesh begotten of the Father. God has never before, in the history of the world, ever begotten a body like that of Christ’s. No wonder the Scripture says:

Psalm 2:7 *I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.*

Bishop Teklemariam makes a clear-cut distinction between the flesh of Adam (human beings) and that of our beloved Lord:

These biblical truths compel us to emphasize that the flesh of Christ in which God the Father was manifested, has nothing in common with earthly Adamic or angelic nature. It is the Word of the only God who became flesh (Gezahagne 2007, 18).

Before I conclude this chapter, where certain specific formulations of the Chalcedonian Creed have been put under the spotlight, one more observation must be considered with reference to the phrase *truly perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man*. A close appraisal of this declaration actually implies that Christ was a new type of being – a “third type”.

If God Himself is a complete being (i.e. an independent individual) and the humanity of Jesus is also understood as a *perfect manhood* (i.e. complete with a body, spirit, soul and mind), then we have two independent persons collaborating to mysteriously form a new “third type of man”. The Bishops initially set out to “settle” the heresies which were floating around since the time of the Docetists and Apollinaris, but their deliberations resulted in the creation of a new fictitious Jesus who never really existed. As Stroup (1976) observes:

Rather than offering a description of Jesus as the Christ that is free from the taint of either Docetism or ebionitism, Chalcedon represents only a "paper solution"; it suggests either that Jesus Christ as fully human and fully divine is some "third type" of creature or that the inevitable result of the "two natures" model is an implicit denial of Jesus' full humanity (George W. Stroup 1976, 56).

In the Old Testament, the Lord told Moses that He would rain down bread from heaven. Although God shared with Moses that this edible substance was bread, the children of Israel looked at it curiously and called it *manna* – literally translated “What is this?”

Exodus 16:15 *And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.*

Those who intransigently adhere to the discredited Christology of Chalcedon are still looking at Jesus today and asking “Manna? What is this? Where is His flesh from?” At the end of this book, I have included a sermon that I preached some time ago on the flesh of Jesus with the title “Manna?” Perhaps the sermon may be the catalyst that drives home the message about Christ’s heavenly flesh.

In conclusion, we have an unambiguous choice before us today in relation to the Christological controversies which continue to bedevil the church in the 21st century. We can either listen to what the Scriptures tell us about the origin of the flesh of Christ – that it is the

Word made flesh, or we can, like the children of Israel, continue to puzzle over it and call it *manna* (what is it?), completely ignoring the words of Moses. Significantly, the children of Israel ate something they did not understand. Many Christians are also partaking of the flesh and blood of the Lord without understanding what they are eating. The apostle Paul warned the Corinthian church not only to show the utmost care in partaking of the Lord's Supper, but to discern the body of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

The Greek word translated discern is *diakrinō* (Strong's G 1252) with a list of synonyms which includes: *to separate, make a distinction, discriminate, to prefer, to try, decide, to determine, give judgment, decide a dispute*. I pray that you the reader will make a distinction and decide that Jesus' flesh is of the Word, not humanity.

CHAPTER SIX

Introduction

The last chapter critically explored certain aspects of the Christological controversies of the 4th and 5th century AD. This chapter returns to one of the objections raised against the Word made flesh doctrine (often dubbed the “heavenly” flesh doctrine).

- If Jesus is the One true God, why did He have to pray, and to whom did He pray?

There are three views that attempt to explain the prayers of Jesus to the Father. The first view is the traditional Trinitarian view which contends that since a person prays, Jesus as the second person of the Trinity prayed to God the Father who is the first person of the Trinity. This view teaches that one person in the Godhead prayed to another. The second view is that of the Oneness theologians who maintain that the human nature of Jesus prayed to the divine nature within Him. In this school of thought, the proponents teach that there is only one person in the Godhead, but when God was manifested in the flesh, the “incarnation” produced a dual nature within Jesus. One nature was fully human and the other fully God. They teach that the

human nature prayed to the divine to solicit help. The third view, which I believe is the correct biblical view, is that of the One God interpretation. This view states that Jesus did not pray to another person outside of Himself or for His own needs or weaknesses. Rather, He prayed *for* fallen humanity. He had come for this very purpose: to be our intercessor. In other words, His prayers were on behalf of helpless, depraved humanity. He was playing the role of High Priest for us and was our advocate.

A brief analysis of the three positions

After having briefly introduced the varying views, let us take a closer look at each one.

One person praying to another view

The first objection raised against this view is that it contradicts all Scriptures in the Bible that declare that God is numerically One. Here are a few examples: Deut 6:4; Deut 32:39; Isaiah 43:10; Isaiah 44:8; Zech 14:8; Mal 2:10; John 1:1,14; Mark 12:29,32; Rom 9:5; I Tim 2:5; I Tim 3:16; James 2:19 & I John 5:20. In the light of these overwhelmingly One God scriptures, it would be inconsistent with the testimony of God Himself to state that One God called Jesus is praying to another God called the Father in a Triune Godhead.

The doctrine of the Trinity, as outlined in the Athanasian Creed, states that the three persons are co-equal, co-eternal and

consubstantial. This begs the question: How can Jesus be said to be co-equal with the Father if He has to pray to Him? Wouldn't His praying imply that He is inferior to God the Father?

It must be pointed out that this view only developed after the doctrine of the Trinity was fully formulated by the church fathers at Nicea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381). The Trinitarian creed raises a welter of questions: Why did Jesus pray to the Father only and not to the Holy Spirit? Why does He say in John 16:26

John 16:26 At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:

Why does He all of a sudden no longer pray to the Father at that day? A first order of business is to briefly elaborate on the One God position which we believe is commensurate with the Bible.

Establishing the identity of Jesus.

Before I proceed, let me establish a few bedrock biblical facts upon which the subsequent arguments made are premised. God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4) and this implies - not a composite or compound one as the doctrine of the Trinity states - but an indivisible one. The Jews inferred from Deuteronomy 6:4 that God is *he* (Mark 12:32). Even Jesus Himself referred to God as *he* in relation to the creation (Matthew 19:4). So there is One God in a strict monotheistic sense

and not a quasi-monotheistic one as the doctrine of the Trinity (which is essentially a form of crypto-polytheism) declares.

This One God of the Old Testament Himself, and not His pre-existent Son (no such thing as “eternal generation of the Son”), was manifest in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16). God is Word and Spirit (John 1:1, John 4:24); His Word is intrinsic to His being just as your word is an inseparable part of you. His Word was made flesh (John 1:14) and the life of this flesh is the Father Himself (Spirit and Father refer to the same One God). There is sufficient evidence for this:

John 14:10 *Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.*
John 6:57 *As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.*

On the basis of the scriptural evidence thus far we acknowledge Jesus to be none other than the One and only Jehovah of the Old Testament who now indwells a body begotten of His own Word. This rules out any contribution from humanity. When we say Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are speaking about Jesus because in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). With this truth firmly established, let us approach the subject at hand.

Why did Jesus pray?

Jesus prayed for us and His prayers were addressed back to Him since He is the One true God is the short and simple answer. The Word was made flesh not only because blood was necessary for God to atone for our sins, but, in addition, God saw that we were hopelessly weak and there was none to intercede or pray for us. Isaiah repeats this twice.

***Isaiah 59:16** And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.*

***Isaiah 63:5** And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me.*

God furnished us with two concrete reasons for His subsequent manifestation in His own flesh and blood. These two elements, which we can isolate from Isaiah 59:16 are the following:

- I. There was *no man*. This means there was no human being qualified to step in and act in the role of redeemer.
- II. God wondered that there was no intercessor.

The Christian world often expends much energy on the first point, and rightly so. For without God manifesting Himself in flesh and blood, there would have been no way to make propitiation (appeasement for the curse of the Law) for our sins. It is the second

point which has not been fully understood in churches and congregations. The fact is that God was manifested in the flesh to also serve as our *intercessor*. Let us never forget that.

Remember the High Priest in the Old Testament? He had a crucial role to play on behalf of the children of Israel. Not only did he take the blood of lambs and bulls into the Holy of Holies, but, just as important, was his role in interceding for the people.

***Numbers 16:46** And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun.*

***Numbers 16:47** And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people.*

Incense represents prayer. It was the prayer of Aaron which saved the children of Israel from certain death. Similarly, Jesus came into this world to pray for us and on our behalf. Note that Aaron was not the one in danger from the wrath of God, yet Moses commanded him to make haste, light the incense and run through the immense crowd perishing in the wilderness for their sins. Jesus, too, was not praying or agonizing for His own sins or His weaknesses as many Christians proclaim, but He was performing the role of our High Priest, our Advocate:

1John 2:1 *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:*

Intriguingly, the word translated advocate can also mean “one who pleads another's cause with one, an intercessor” (*paraklētos*). While on earth, and in heaven too, Jesus pleads our cause. What perhaps confuses many who read the Bible is the language Christ adopts while praying for us. For instance,

Mark 14:35 *And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.*

Mark 14:36 *And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.*

Many conclude that the Lord was caught in the throes of an existential struggle. They infer that because He was a human being like you and me, He began to falter under the building pressure. Seven hundred years ago, Isaiah prophesied that many would misinterpret the intercessions of the Lord on our behalf.

Isaiah 53:4 *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:*

Isaiah 53:5 *But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.*

The above verses are crucial to unlock what was going on in Gethsemane and the other prayers of Jesus. Not only did Jesus intercede for us, He also *bore* our griefs, *carried* our sorrows, was *wounded* for our transgressions, was *bruised and chastised* - all for our redemption and salvation. Now here is the profoundly tragic part of all this sacrifice – the last part of verse 5 says... *yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted*. What a miss of monumental proportions! Isaiah enumerated all that Christ had done for us only to conclude that despite all that, we misunderstood His mission; we deduced that God was afflicting Him for other reasons.

With the above in mind, let us look at the prayers of Jesus in Gethsemane. Understand that the moment the Lord began to feel the pangs of sorrow, the prophecy of Isaiah 53: 4 & 5 became operational. Why would Christ feel sorrow for Himself? Sorrow is integral to sin and the fallen condition. As the sinless Lamb of God, these negative emotions were alien to Christ. What is happening is that *the sins of humanity were imputed to Him*.

Matthew 26:38 *Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.*

This was no temporary change of mood that ordinary humans experience resulting from some bad news or bad weather. Rather, as the federal covenantal representative of the human race, Jesus was now formally beginning the process of redemption.

When Jesus said, “Not as I will...”(Matthew 26:39), He was identifying Himself with humanity – He officially verbalized His embodiment as the representative of humanity vicariously. This vicarious representation did not begin at Gethsemane, though. From the moment the Word was made flesh, the process of collective representation was triggered. Even the fact that He was growing up rather quietly and away from the limelight was part of this process of redemption in that He suffered humiliation.

It was the servant-life of the Lord of Hosts, the life of the Sinless One in daily association with sinners, the life of the Holy One in a sin-cursed world. The way of obedience was for Him at the same time a way of suffering. He suffered from the repeated assaults of Satan, from the hatred and unbelief of His own people, and from the persecution of His enemies. Since He trod the wine-press alone, His loneliness must have been oppressive, and His responsibility crushing (Berkhof 2003, 337).

This humiliation is tangible in a paradox: whereas God has always been accustomed to issuing commandments as the Sovereign of the universe and all creation - leave alone submit to anyone - Jesus as a boy growing up in a Jewish milieu had to submit to Mary and Joseph, the elders and Rabbis and every man-made law that regulated His society. This is what the writer of Hebrews was highlighting:

Hebrews 5:8 *Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;*

Based on the analysis so far, we conclude that the Lord was actually not praying for Himself at all, but for humanity. When He said “Not as I will” or “Not my will”, Christ adopted humanity’s “I” and “My”, fought against it and subdued it through His intercessory prayers for us. Significantly, Irenaeus of Lyon (AD 125-202), explained Christ’s prayers in a very similar manner. His theory is called “recapitulation”.

He has therefore, in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam, and trampled upon his head, as thou canst perceive in Genesis that God said to the serpent, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; He shall be on the watch for thy head, and thou on the watch for His heel.” For from that time, He who should be born of a woman, [namely] from the virgin, after the likeness of Adam, was preached as keeping watch for the head of the serpent (Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses, V, XXI, 1).

God was on the “watch” in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17-19) as Irenaeus declares. The Word was made flesh, groaned, agonized and prayed, not for Himself, as some Oneness theologians believe, but exclusively for fallen humanity. We must never take leave of Isaiah’s declaration that all His sufferings, grief, sorrow, chastisement and every other form of buffeting the Lord experienced was not for Himself. The fact that God put on flesh is in itself a “lowering or state of humiliation” which was effected for us alone and not for Himself.

Irenaeus of Lyon stated that every act of Christ can only be understood in light of recapitulating the mistakes of Adam. Adam failed in his duty and responsibility to keep his side of the covenant with God. The consequence of his disobedience had far-reaching effects that encompassed the whole of humanity. This is because Adam was the federal head of the human race. Christ is called the second Adam by the apostle Paul:

1Corinthians 15:45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

If capitulate means to accept defeat, then recapitulate is to be understood as “undoing” the defeat. If the first Adam showed solidarity with us in sin and disobedience, the second Adam showed solidarity with us in obedience and righteousness through His actions.

What does Jesus grew in wisdom mean?

Luke 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Many are convinced, on the basis of the scripture above, that Jesus’ human nature is alluded to which “increased” in wisdom. According to them, since the divine nature cannot “increase” in wisdom, this must refer to the human nature in Christ. To begin with, this implies

that the so-called “human nature” of Jesus started out with nothing by way of mental content - like the *tabula rasa* (Latin for blank slate or erased slate) of John Locke. This would mean that there were two “entities” in Christ – the perfectly wise God and the perfectly ignorant “human” entity. The ignorant entity, according to this theory, was playing catch up with the perfectly wise one. We are not told to what degree the human entity attained wisdom in comparison to the divine one. Secondly, this theory clearly favours the nurture theory as opposed to nature. In other words, they maintain that Jesus’ knowledge was incrementally gained through the vicissitudes of daily life without deriving any advantage from nature (what we would call genetic inheritance).

Needless to say, this position, despite its popularity, is untenable. The biblical usage of wisdom (Strong’s Gk 4678 *sophia*) is very broad indeed.

1) wisdom, broad and full of intelligence; used of the knowledge of very diverse matters

a) the wisdom which belongs to men

1) spec. the varied knowledge of things human and divine, acquired by acuteness and experience, and summed up in maxims and proverbs

2) the science and learning

3) the act of interpreting dreams and always giving the sagest advice

4) the intelligence evinced in discovering the meaning of some mysterious number or vision

5) skill in the management of affairs

- 6) devout and proper prudence in intercourse with men not disciples of Christ, skill and discretion in imparting Christian truth*
- 7) the knowledge and practice of the requisites for godly and upright living*
- b) supreme intelligence, such as belongs to God*
 - 1) to Christ*
 - 2) the wisdom of God as evinced in forming and executing counsels in the formation and government of the world and the scriptures.¹²*

The list above captures many aspects of wisdom which was common in the Greco-Roman world. In the days of Luke, who was Greco-Syrian, Greeks often distinguished between three or four types of wisdom. In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, *sophia* is equated with contemplative and theoretical reasoning about universal truths. *Epistēmē*, from which we get epistemology (a branch of the philosophy of science meaning a theory of knowledge), is often subsumed under *sophia*.

This wisdom is distinguished from another type of wisdom called *phronesis*. *Phronesis* differs from *sophia* in that it emphasizes the ability to not only think rationally about universal truths, but to consciously make choices that promote a good life in practical situations. In other words, while *sophia* is abstract wisdom, *phronesis* is the contextualized practical application of that abstract

¹² Blueletter Bible

<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G4678&t=KJV>
Retrieved 11.10.11

wisdom on a daily basis. Aristotle thought *phronesis* was fundamental in political decisions. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle lamented the fact that the youth were accomplished in geometry and mathematics but lacked true wisdom which required both *sophia* and *phronesis*. To his mind, *phronesis* required time and maturation. It was intimately connected with experience of diverse life situations.

There is another wisdom called *techne*. This is simply technical know-how or skill. It is concerned with the mechanics of process. For example, a carpenter teaches his son to measure and saw which the son duly imitates and masters.

Keep in mind that all these were aspects of wisdom. Dare we say that Jesus grew in *sophia* understood as a reflection on universal truths? He is the way, the truth and the life Himself (John 14:6) which would make it redundant for him to grow in that kind of wisdom. What about practical everyday wisdom – *phronesis*? Well, if by this Luke means that God negotiated new experiences through His flesh, then a case can be made for that. After all, it was not a common everyday experience for God in flesh to obey His own creation (e.g. Mary and Joseph). In this sense, He did grow in experience. Finally, whether Jesus “learnt” the trade of carpentry in the sense of *techne* becomes an issue open to debate. Did God, the supreme architect, really submit a part of Himself (the mysterious human nature) to a genuine apprenticeship involving a real learning experience? This brief analysis raises a host of questions with

regards to the widespread interpretation of the precise manner in which Jesus “increased in wisdom”. Given such nuances of “wisdom” it is pretentious to claim that Luke was speaking of the human nature of Christ.

Recapitulation and atonement

When Adam blatantly disobeyed God, he undermined and jeopardized the whole foundation of divine order. As the federal head of not only the human family but the whole of the creation order on this earth, which he was to exercise wise dominion over, Adam’s disobedience dismayed God and the holy angels. The nature of our walk with God is something that angels “look into”:

1Corinthians 11:10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.

God could not let this breach of divine authority be overlooked. His zeal for His own standards of righteousness had to be upheld. What did He do? The unspeakable wonder is that He robed Himself in flesh and entered the world to succeed where Adam had failed. The paradox is astounding: God who provides for all human needs, allowed Himself to be provided for; God who clothes our nakedness, submitted Himself voluntarily to be clothed; He who knew all things, sat meekly at the feet of finite and fallible minds to “learn from them”; He who holds the fate of nations in His hands,

submitted to the Roman yoke of foreign oppression. The list goes on and on.

Why did He do all this? This was not an exercise in mindless self-flagellation. He did it because of His unfathomable love for you and me. Every other explanation, no matter how theologically erudite or articulate, fails. Indeed, God so loved the world...(John 3:16).

***Romans 5:8** But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Why did Jesus obey and submit Himself to the order of man? Because in so doing He was restoring or recapitulating His own order. Now He was assuming humanity's "I" as His own "I". So the work of atonement (reconciliation between God and man through Christ's shed blood and ministry) did not begin in the Garden of Gethsemane, but much earlier. When Jesus obeyed Mary and Joseph, through Him we obey our parents (a very solemn commandment Exodus 20:12); when He obeyed his teachers and elders, we obeyed through Him; when He submitted to persecution and buffeting, we submitted through Him. Above all, through His obedience and submission, we become righteous.

The last statement is crucial to understanding "Not my will...(Luke 22:42). Ultimately, Jesus did not come to restore a right order between us and our relationship with the world alone, although its importance should not be diminished. He came to restore and heal

our relationship with Him. Before there were parents, children, friends, politicians or such a thing as society in general, there was Adam and God alone. God is zealous for this relationship to be restored. This is why He submitted and *prayed* often – even through the night

Luke 6:12 *And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*

He prayed because we could not pray. Remember that He assumed humanity's "I". In other words, whenever we observe Jesus sighing, praying, crying or agonizing, let us understand that He is performing the role of intercessor on our behalf. He is God; why should He struggle with His own will to obey Himself? God is not conflicted like we humans between the will of the flesh and the will of the Spirit. Oneness theologians are wrong to assert that Jesus prayed because He was a human and human nature is weak. Natures do not pray – persons pray. As Dulles indicated, they are still propounding Nestorianism, a belief in two persons in the one Jesus. This can only be a quasi-monotheism.

Someone may object to the statement, "He prayed because we could not pray". Let me elaborate by soliciting a Scripture verse:

Romans 8:26 *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

Let us scrutinize this verse. Paul is saying that the Spirit helps our weaknesses because we do not know what to pray for. So the Spirit itself prays for us. Now, here is the \$ 64,000 question: Who is the Spirit praying to? The answer should be equally straightforward – to God Himself (who is the same Spirit). However, we don't formulate it in this manner because of the awkwardness of the statement. But technically this is really what is happening. If one can comprehend this, it should not be a problem at all to accept that Jesus' prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane (and throughout His life) were not for Himself but for humanity. With moanings and groanings He made intercession for us.

Irenaeus of Lyon subsumed all the sufferings of Christ under the framework of recapitulating Adam's sin. Several of these can be demonstrated:

- i. God cursed the earth with thorns and thistles. Jesus willingly appropriated this curse upon Himself literally in the form of a crown of thorns (Genesis 3:18; John 19:2).
- ii. The sweat on Adam's face was to remind him of the curse. During the passion week, when the work of atonement was about to reach a climax, Jesus' brow filled with great drops of sweat (Genesis 3:19; Luke 22:44).
- iii. We can only imagine the utter despair Adam felt when he was expelled from the presence of God. Jesus re-enacted this utter despair with the heart-rending cry "...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Genesis 3:23,24; Mark 15:34).

- iv. There is a place of eternal darkness reserved for sinners. Our precious Lord experienced darkness on the Cross to spare us being cast into outer darkness (Matthew 25:30).
- v. Hell is a place of excruciating and unquenchable thirst. He who is the eternal well of life, thirsted on the Cross so we do not have to experience the thirst of the rich man in hell (John 19:28).

These are some of the examples that underscore Christ's vicarious role as our intercessor. Following Isaiah 59:16 & 63:5, God saw no man and no *intercessor*. This is why He alone as the sinless Lamb of God had to perform this role. It is not a case of the second member of the Trinity praying to the first member of the Trinity which diminishes the glory of God who declares, "...and I will not give my glory unto another (Isaiah 48:11), neither is it the equally fallacious contention that one nature prayed to another, but God praying for us through the medium of His own flesh.

Isaiah 53:12 ...and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 63:3 I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me...

We need to thank the Lord for this extraordinary love and sacrifice. Isaiah begins the powerful chapter of the "Suffering Servant" with the words, "Who has believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (Isaiah 53:1). There is a tone of sad indignation secreted into one of the most majestic prophetic revelations of the

Old Testament because many have not believed this report, or misinterpreted Christ's intercessions and sufferings. The truth is all Jesus did was not for Himself, but for you and me. We are all like Peter, desperately in need of Jesus' prayers.

*Luke 22:32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not:
and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*

I will conclude this chapter with the beautiful and apt words of the hymn "Who am I?"¹³

*When I think of how He came so far from glory
Came to dwell among the lowly such as I
To suffer shame and such disgrace
On Mount Calvary take my place
Then I ask myself this question
Who am I?*

*Who am I that the King would bleed and die for
Who am I that He would pray not my will, Thy Lord
The answer I may never know
Why He ever loved me so
But to that old rugged cross He'd go
For who am I?*

*When I'm reminded of His words
I'll leave Him never
If you'll be true I'll give to you life forever
Oh I wonder what I could have done
To deserve God's only Son
To fight my battles until they're won*

¹³ To the best of my knowledge, the copyright has expired and the hymn is now in the Public domain.

For who am I?

*Who am I that The King would bleed and die for
Who am I that He would pray not my will, Thy Lord
The answer I may never know
Why He ever loved me so
But to that old rugged cross He'd go
For who am I?
But to an old rugged cross He'd go for, who am I?*

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Sinless Heavenly Man

This chapter will concern itself with another Christological offshoot which has struggled to garner unanimous consensus among denominational theologians, especially in the last couple of centuries (Crisp 2007). I have briefly explored this subject in chapter 1:2, but this chapter takes a different approach and focus. To be blunt, this is an issue which those who hold to a human body and nature for Christ wrestle with. Having concluded that the flesh of the Lord is of earthly origin, it follows logically that they further must accept some form of fallibility for this flesh. For those of a One-God persuasion, who do not adhere to a human flesh for Christ (i.e. of the dust), the debate is *non sequitur*. To explore and fill the lacuna between these two positions, we will need a statement of the problem under investigation:

- Hypothetically, could Jesus have sinned? And if the answer is no, would it not imply that His humanity was a charade? This must be addressed in conjunction with Hebrews 2:17 & Hebrews 4:15.

To help us unpack the above we will need to canvass two contending positions which stem from Chalcedon. What this means is that they

are both rooted in Chalcedon but have come to diverging conclusions in relation to whether Christ was sinless or not.

Sinlessness vs. impeccability

Two main views dominate the theological horizon with regards to the issue of Christ's ability to sin or not: the sinlessness view and the impeccability view. Perhaps it is salutary to begin with the impeccability view as this was the default position throughout church history until a couple of centuries ago. The church fathers, the scholastics (e.g. Anselm, Abelard, Scotus, Thomas Aquinas) and the reformers generally held to the impeccability view leading one theologian to state, "It has been the almost unanimous view of classical Christology that Christ was not merely without sin, though he might have sinned, but that he was incapable of sin" (Crisp 2007, 168).

Briefly defined, and as understood by the Scholastics, the impeccability view (*from Latin - non posse peccare*) asserts that Christ could not sin or that He was incapable of sinning. It is vital to distinguish the basis for this conclusion from the biblical One God view that also sees Christ as impeccable. The school of impeccability (i.e. those who espouse the Trinity doctrine), unfortunately, persist in adhering to the creed of Chalcedon where Christ was reinvented as one person with two natures in a mystical hypostatic union. Obviously, this stance is flawed as it has no

biblical grounding. Nevertheless, it is of some interest to this study to note that one school of thought, albeit with an erroneous Christological premise, rejects any suggestion that Christ could hypothetically sin. We share their conclusion but not the premise. The statement below, from a Trinitarian theologian, epitomizes the impeccable view:

... I wish to take issue with the notion that, during his earthly ministry, Christ was merely sinless, rather than impeccable. It seems to me that only the traditional view, that Christ is impeccable, makes sense. The alternative suggested by these and other like-minded theologians who advocate the sinlessness view, though stemming from a laudable desire to affirm the full humanity of Christ, requires a much more radical revision of the doctrine of God as well as of classical Christology than such theologians may be willing to allow (Crisp 2007, 170).

Before we flesh out more substantive elements of the impeccable stance, we need to understand the other view – the sinlessness view. Simply put, this perspective contends that Christ *could* sin but did not. In contrast to the impeccability view the sinless view does not deny that Jesus could sin although He did not. This understanding is driven by a concern to safeguard the integrity of the “humanity” of Jesus. There was a fear that denying the Lord the natural propensity to sin – which is integral to all human beings – risked courting the Docetist heresy in which Christ appeared to be a human but, in actual fact, was not. Regrettably, once again, we must recognize that this fear is the outcome of a zealous belief in the true “humanity” of Jesus – something which I have argued in chapter 5 is unbiblical.

One staunch proponent of the sinlessness view is the Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge. Hodge's objection to an impeccable Christ derives from his a priori assumption that one predicate or condition for being a man is to be tempted.

If He was a true man He must have been capable of sinning...Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect, and He cannot sympathize with his people (Hodge 1960, 457).

“If He was a true man...” This, in a nutshell, is the crux of the problem. This statement assumes a universal and undisputed conception of what it means to be “a true man”. It is this supposition which I believe misleads and obfuscates the entire discussion by pretending to be an explanatory monism, a *grand récit*. It has become *de rigueur* for theologians to state that Jesus had a sinless humanity similar to the one that Adam possessed before the Fall without presenting one shred of biblical evidence to support such a bold and pivotal postulation. From this unfounded assumption a series of conjectures are further spun without subjecting the original thesis to a rigorous test. Take the statement below as a case in point:

The grace in which human nature was originally created meant that before the Fall Adam's human nature, like that of Christ, was free from every temptation 'from within'. The impossibility, in the cases of Adam and of Jesus, of human nature being tempted 'from within' results from the uniquely graced character of these two human natures. In these two cases, grace

worked to ensure that human nature could not 'turn against itself', so to speak (Riches 2011, 14).

Riches (2011) seems unburdened by the need to give some scriptural evidence to back up the very sweeping and unfounded claims in assuming that Christ possessed a flesh similar to that of Adam before the Fall. It borders on the hypocritical to state that Christ could sin because that is the true essence of humanity while ignoring the fact that this same yardstick should also be applied to Christ's birth: can Christ be human if He did not get male chromosomes from Joseph? Either apply the whole spectrum of indices that apply to all humans or abort the discussion completely and acknowledge Christ to be the second man from heaven, as the Bible declares (I Corinthians 15:47).

I find it absurd that theologians like Hodge would happily disregard the virgin birth as if this does not qualify as an anomaly while protesting profusely at the mention of Christ's impeccability on the grounds that all humans must experience temptation. Regretfully, this eclectic and completely arbitrary exercise runs through the writing of the majority who embrace the sinlessness view. Actually the term "sinlessness" appears to be a misnomer because they do believe that Christ *could* sin, although they are careful to say that He didn't.

Temptation and the sinlessness view

What is the driving force behind this concern with Jesus' ability to sin? Clearly, the biblical portrayal of Christ as someone who weeps, hungers, thirsts and wearies has helped shape the sinlessness doctrine. For instance, the American Baptist theologian, Millard Erickson, comments on Hebrews 4: 15 in this manner:

The thrust of the passage is that he is able to intercede for us because he has completely identified with us; this seems to imply that his temptation included not only the whole range of sin, but the real possibility of sinning... There are conditions under which he [Christ] could have sinned, but that it was certain those conditions would not be fulfilled. Thus Jesus really could have decided to cast himself from the temple pinnacle, but it was certain that he would not (Erickson 1991, 562, 563).

Invariably, Hebrews 4:15 is one passage which often becomes the epicentre of the debate on whether Christ could err or not.

Hebrews 4:15 *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

We will need to examine this verse to ascertain whether this is proof positive that Christ could sin. Take, for instance, the phrase *touched with the feeling*. Proponents of the sinlessness view infer that the phrase demonstrates Christ's physical identification and solidarity with our temptations, which He ultimately resisted. Interestingly, the

word translated *touched with the feeling* in English comes from the Greek word *sympatheō* (G4834). The same word, which occurs only twice in the New Testament, is translated *compassion* in Hebrews 10:34.

Hebrews 10:34 *For ye had **compassion** of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.*

Now, no one would want to argue that the audience addressed in Hebrews 10:34 were also experiencing the same bonds as the writer of Hebrews. All that the phrase *sympatheō* implies is a shared *feeling* of compassion or sympathy. To extrapolate from this and contend that Jesus actually experienced our temptations and the “pull” of sin is to go beyond the mandate of Hebrews 4:15. In other words, it is true that Jesus sympathized with our infirmities but this does not extend to an actual indulgence or sharing of those infirmities. I can sympathize with an alcoholic struggling with his addiction without experiencing or knowing anything about the power of that addiction. My sympathy arises from my concern for the poor man’s seemingly futile battle with the bottle – an oppressive lifestyle which grinds him down slowly. However, on my part, I would be oblivious to the “pull” exerted by the bottle. It is, I believe, in this sense that Christ sympathized with us; with the difference being His power to deliver those who embrace His claim to be the Deliverer.

It is important to remind the reader that the whole discussion is actually a bit misleading. Where in the Bible does it state explicitly that Jesus had to experience our temptations for our redemption to be valid? As stated previously, redemption and salvation is contingent on the blood of a sinless man – the Word made flesh. Our salvation is not contingent on the right dosage of emotional sympathy on the part of the Lord, but the blood of God Himself which is efficacious:

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Returning to Hebrews 4:15 the last part states: *but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*. Tempted is from the Greek *peirazō* which in this context means to try someone with the intention of enticing to sin or in some malicious way. Does this “prove” that Christ was tempted in such a manner that He felt the “tug” and “pull” of sin like we do? Are we actually insinuating that the Lord struggled with some perverse thoughts which were threatening to compromise His moral fortitude? God forbid! But that is precisely what is inferred from the careless application of such a word to Christ without qualification. The untenableness of such a hermeneutic will become self-evident when we compare other Scriptures with Hebrews 4:15. The same word *peirazō* from Hebrews 4:15 is used to refer to the children of Israel tempting God.

Hebrews 3:8 *Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:*

Hebrews 3:9 *When your fathers **tempted** me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.*

Now, I assume no one will be willing to contend that Jehovah felt the “pull” or “tug” to sin in the wilderness of Sinai. Jehovah had no flesh or blood to speak of at that time. Even Trinitarians must concede that their pre-existent God the Son did not yet assume any human nature in the Old Testament, this being before the Word was made flesh (John 1:14) or what they prefer to call the “incarnation”. To set the record straight, One God theologians do not favour this term because it has been historically employed to refer to the Trinitarian process of God the Son assuming human flesh and nature through Mary, which is unbiblical. You will recall that the children of Israel were complaining and murmuring all the while, and, scandalously, wished to build an idol and return to Egypt. This is how they *tempted* God. Again, no Christian would want to entertain the idea that Jehovah was *tempted* to yield to such demands.

Consistency, then, demands that we apply the same hermeneutics to Hebrews 4:15. So what does being tempted really entail and how was Christ tempted? As all good theologians are in the habit of doing, it is prudent to differentiate between two sources of temptation – external and internal. External temptations to entice into sin have their source in the Devil. Significantly, the same word used for *tempted* with regards to Jesus in Hebrew 4:15 is applied to

Satan in Matthew 4:3. Satan himself is called *peirazō* which is translated *tempter* in Matt 4:3.

Matthew 4:3 *And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*

The word itself and the source of the word are collapsed together. Temptation comes from Satan and Satan is temptation personified. This can be easily seen in the pages of the Holy Scriptures; Satan is never mentioned or features without temptation being present in some form or the other. The Garden of Eden, the narrative of Job and the temptation of Christ in Matthew 4 are a few examples. The main point in all this is not that Satan tempts – a fact which seems to be intrinsic to his corrupt nature – but that this temptation is an external source which says nothing about whether Jesus had a human nature like ours or not. No one can stop Satan from tempting anyone – including God. What is at the heart of our discussion is that Satan’s attempts at tempting Jesus ended in abject failure. His temptations simply bounced off Jesus harmlessly.

Take a closer look at Matthew 4 and you cannot fail to perceive that the apparent showdown between Jesus and Satan was actually a one-sided contest, a walkover. Jesus never hesitated to respond immediately and firmly to every perverse utterance of Satan. Satan received a proper verbal lashing, and like a defeated dog with his tail between his crooked legs, he beat a hasty retreat. Why couldn’t the

words of Satan have any impact on Jesus? Simply because Jesus is God in every sense of the word and God *cannot* be tempted.

James 1:13 *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:*

Remember that *tempted* is once again from the Greek *peirazō*. Crisp (2007) has this to say about the temptations of Jesus and James 1:13.

Another traditional way of distinguishing different sorts of temptations differentiates between external and internal temptations, on the basis of James 1: 12–15. This passage explains that those who are tempted are not tempted by God. They are enticed by their own desires. Christ cannot tempt himself because he is divine, and God tempts no one – presumably, not even himself. Nor can he be tempted by his own desires for the same reason. Only things external to him can provide avenues of temptation (e.g. the Devil) (Crisp 2007, 178).

In contrast, James shows that humans have their source of temptation from *within* their own sinful natures. This brings us to the second source of temptation – the internal. In fact, one aspect that confirms our humanity is the effects of the Fall which is observable in every human. “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). It is this shortcoming which was alien to Christ. As the perfect and sinless man from heaven (I Corinthians 15:47), He was a genuine stranger to the nature and effects of sin with its internal temptations.

For purposes of illustration we can visualize the fallen nature and its internal temptations in the following manner: let us say there is a pathway with minus marked on the left side and plus on the right. This pathway represents the journey of life which a human child will undertake. The viewers will see that as the child grows, he will mysteriously lean towards the minus marked on the left side of the pathway while covering ground steadily. It is as if there is an invisible magnetic force pulling him helplessly in that direction.

Another example, cited by some theologians, to elucidate the internal source of human temptations is the temptation to eat chocolate. Let us say that Jane loves chocolates although she knows that the high-calories can pose a health risk to her already compromised health. Now she succumbs to the temptation to eat more chocolates but she can hardly blame this on the Devil. Crisp (2007, 171) comments: “I need no external tempter to be tempted to eat the whole bar of chocolate. This is what theologians mean when they speak of ‘Jane being tempted by her own sinful nature.’” One objection to this analogy, however, is that submitting to the temptation of eating a few chocolates may not be considered “sinful” in the theological sense of the word (unless one is talking about the sin of gluttony (Romans 16:18)).

The above examples, though, highlight, albeit feebly, some of the internal sources of temptation common to the human condition. The

issue of internal temptation was put into sharp relief by Jesus Himself:

Matthew 15:17 *Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?*

Matthew 15:18 *But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.*

Matthew 15:19 *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*

Matthew 15:20 *These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.*

In other words, as long as whatever the Devil throws at us is not allowed to internalize and become merge with our desires and convictions, we have not succumbed to temptation. We can, once again, in no way infer “the ability to sin” from the fact that the Devil unleashed a barrage of temptations against the Lord. Again, it is only when one entertains the predetermined idea that Christ was a human being like us that we encounter a host of problems.

In fact, this is one reason we deny that Jesus assumed a complete human nature as the architects behind Chalcedon decreed. The word *human* is not a biblical term. According to the *The Online Etymology Dictionary* (a study of the history of words), one of the sources of the word *human* is:

probably related to homo (gen. hominis) "man," and to humus "earth,"¹⁴

Needless to say, Jesus is not a *humus-man*. Nowhere does the Bible give us the liberty to make such a proclamation. He is the heavenly man with a body prepared not of the material of this cursed, decaying and transient world. It is God the Father (a biblical term) who begat and prepared this body of His own Word Seed.

Hebrews 10:5 *Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, **but a body hast thou prepared me:***

1Peter 1:23 *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

¹⁴ Online Etymology Dictionary.

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=human> Retrieved 28.09.11.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Monothelite Controversy

This chapter concerns itself with the issue of how many wills existed in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the 4th century AD the issue of the Trinity took centre stage followed by the issue of how many natures existed in Christ in the 5th century AD. By the 7th century AD a new controversy had gripped the church threatening to undermine the unity of the empire. Initially, some argued that since only one divine nature dominated in Christ, He exercised one will at all times during His ministry. This was soon to be challenged. Monothelism is the term used to refer to the belief that Christ had only one will whereas dyothelism, which was sanctioned as the “orthodox” position, denotes the belief that Christ had two wills in Him.

Many denominational Christians wrongly assume that many of their core doctrinal beliefs are firmly grounded in the New Testament. They are blissfully unaware of the surreptitious role played by power-hungry Popes, Bishops and prelates of every stripe. Far from honouring the high office they had been called to, their furtive engagements finds parallels in the cloak and dagger world of secret services like the KGB. Prelates manipulated behind the scenes to wed religious and political power. After the Council of

Constantinople (381), for example, the Emperor Theodosius I, under whose auspices the doctrine of the Trinity became official state religion, threatened to confiscate the property of Bishops who refused to submit to his newly endorsed state religion. Paradoxically, the church, which suffered much persecution under Roman emperors like Diocletian and Decius, itself became the new oppressor. It has often been said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely (Henry Kissinger famously described power as the ultimate aphrodisiac). This axiom has reared its ugly head in the annals of church history again and again. This chapter brings to the surface many unsavoury acts and events which today's church may be tempted to conceal, but must confront head on. The Lord was reticent about yoking ecclesiastical authority with political power. It was failure to adhere to this principle which makes for the unpleasant reading in this chapter.

Matthew 22:21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

This chapter proceeds under the conviction that there was and is only one will in Christ. Although the monothelites are right in arguing for one will in Christ, it will be shown that their Trinitarian premise is unbiblical. Above all, this chapter will seek to demonstrate that the so-called "orthodox" two will stance (dyothelitism) is an error which can trace its roots back to Chalcedon (451 AD).

Monenergism: compromising Chalcedon

Contrary to what many modern-day Christians may think, there was a fall-out from the Council of Chalcedon, especially among the Christians of the East (Armenia, Egypt, Syria, Ethiopia and others) who refused to recognize its canons. These Christians believed that there was only one dominant divine nature in Jesus and only one corresponding divine will. By the beginning of the 7th century the Byzantine empire was now buffeted by the shah of Persia who conquered some its territory. The astute shah exploited the prevailing animosity and granted recognition to any Christian who rejected allegiance to Chalcedon and by extension the Byzantine empire. The Emperor of Byzantine, Heraclius (610-641), could ill afford to turn a blind eye. Not only were the Persians a constant source of threat but the rise of Islam with its highly motivated army was a mortal threat to Constantinople. Heraclius decided that the stability of his empire superseded the debate over the number of wills in Jesus.

*The religious authorities in Byzantium were alarmed, and quickly put together a christological compromise, that accepted with Chalcedon that there were two natures in one person in Christ, but insisted that the one person was manifest in a 'single divine-human ('theandric') activity (or 'energy': in Greek *energeia*)'. With this new religious settlement, Herakleios was able to reconcile the divided Christians in Armenia and Syria after his triumph over the Persians. 633 saw a tremendous ecumenical advance with the reconciliation of the Christians of Egypt negotiated on the basis of monenergism (as this doctrine*

is called) by the new Patriarch of Alexandria and Augustal Prefect of Egypt, Kyros (Louth 1998, 103).

So now, rather than defending the “orthodox” dual natures doctrine of Chalcedon, the authorities at Constantinople hastily concocted a new “middle path” acceptable to all parties all in the hope of averting disunity and fragmentation. The new doctrinal kid on the block this time was called *monenergism* – one energy or activity in Christ.

Not only are we left to wonder about the precise dynamics behind the “divine-human activity (monenergism)” in Christ, but the fact that religious authorities were willing to compromise when it was in their best interest to do so should be cause for great concern. These doctrines were amendable, modifiable and even discardable. In light of this unsavoury fact how may we ask can the contemporary church invest so much authority and confidence in the pronouncements made by such shady characters also known as “church fathers?”

Obviously, the hardliners in the west, particularly Rome, who were unhappy with the compromise struck to reach out to the obdurate monophysites of the east, began to rock the boat. The curtain was about to go up on another squalid episode which has marred the reputation of the so-called church in this turbulent era. An emperor, two popes and a monk would do their dirty laundry in public.

The first Lateran Council AD 649

In AD 649 an ambitious monk named Maximus the Confessor (an almost martyr for the Christian faith) along with the pope of the day, Theodore I, agreed to convene a council to condemn what they perceived as the heresy of monothelitism which was now perpetuated under the disguise of monenergism. You will recall that the popes of Rome have always considered themselves the custodians of the legacy of the ecumenical councils such as Nicea, Chalcedon and Constantinople. They were of the opinion that the eastern churches, who denied that Christ's dual natures necessitated two wills, were guilty of breaching the doctrinal integrity of the Chalcedonian creed.

Intriguingly, they did not take the trouble of corresponding with the emperor who traditionally was given the honour of convening ecumenical councils. As will be seen, this deliberate oversight came back to haunt them later. Some historians perceive this as a watershed moment where the church of Rome felt strong enough to flex its muscles co-opting a unique authority for itself. Emperor Constans II had actually issued a *Typos* in 648 in which he banned any discussion of matters pertaining to whether Christ had one will and one energy, or two energies and two wills. In the eyes of the emperor, not only were the pope and Maximus in breach of his *Typos*, but had crossed a line by convening a council without his approval.

Just prior to the council, Pope Theodore I died. His successor, Pope Martin I was eager to proceed with the council which was called the first Lateran Council (AD 649). With 105 Bishops attending, 20 canons were passed based mainly on Maximus' exposition of two wills in Christ. However, within four years, Emperor Constans II summoned Maximus and Pope Martin I to Constantinople where they were tried. Pope Martin was tortured to such a degree that he later died from this treatment in the Crimea where he had been exiled. Maximus' tongue and right hand were chopped off for failing to recant (Louth 1998, 100).

This was a dramatic reversal of fortunes for the proponents of Chalcedon at this stage. The groundswell of support encapsulated in the chants of "Peter speaks through Pope Leo" in Chalcedon now gave way to a new milieu antithetical to that era and culminating in the death of a pope. Whereas one pope became an instant hero at Chalcedon, another became a villain at Constantinople. One wonders why there was this obsession with conformity and regulation. It has often been observed that when the church yokes itself with the state for ulterior purposes, it is always the church which is undermined and gradually suffers at the hands of the secular powers.

Triumph of dyothelitism

In 680/681, the grandson of Constans II, Constantine IV, ascended the throne. He successfully subdued the Islamic threat against his empire but soon turned his attention to the growing discontent with monothelitism which flared up again destabilizing the Byzantine empire. In response to the emperor's suggestion, candidates assembled in Constantinople from every quarter of the empire marking this as the third council of Constantinople and the sixth ecumenical council.

Emperor Constantine IV participated and presided over the first eleven sessions himself. Those present concurred in their view that "Peter spoke through Pope Agatho". It was once again decreed that there were two wills and two energies in Christ. The doctrine of monothelitism (one will) and one energy (monenergism) were declared anathema. Once again the western church celebrated while the eastern church felt snubbed.

In summary, what we witness with reference to the historical debate about the number of wills in Jesus is another high-stakes drama with the usual ingredients such as scheming clergy, east vs. west divide, vengeful emperors, popes with inflated egos, physical torture and

anathemas. How contemporary Christians can look to these dubious characters for doctrinal or any other guidelines beggars belief.

What says the Word?

We need to hear what the Scriptures have to say about this cacophony of noises. Was there only one will in Christ or two? Why did the church under the auspices of Constans II (648) declare one will and one energy in Christ initially? Significantly, the two main views concerning the number of wills in Christ were propounded by Maximus the Confessor (dyothelite) and his opponents, the monothelites. Maximus contended, rather curiously, that both the wills in Christ were inherent in His humanity. He felt that Christ's two wills in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He seemed to experience some consternation, cannot be ascribed to Christ's divine will as that would suggest a God who was afraid.

...if both petitions must be ascribed to the same will, and if they cannot be applied to the divine will without suggesting that God was afraid of death, then the only other option is to ascribe both petitions to Christ's human will – which is precisely Maximus' position (McFarland 2005, 425).

What is one to make of such an opinion? It appears that Maximus' position of two humans wills in Christ is heretical even by the standards of Chalcedon which posits one will for the divine nature and one for the human – which is precisely what the monothelites

stated, albeit without separating the two wills. As discussed in the last chapter, Christ's "I" was an *intercessory* "I" intentionally uttered in the role of the second Adam from heaven. It would be an error of biblical proportions to assume that Christ was afraid on account of the natural weakness of His so-called human nature. Nothing of what He did was for Himself or meaningless. Every word, every action, every sigh, every struggle and every moment He was actively engaging in the task of reconciling mankind back to Himself through His struggles.

2 Corinthians 5:19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

What has been a source of some confusion for Christians has been Jesus' statement, "...not my will, but thine, be done...(Luke 22:42). From this the school of dyothelitism, which takes pride in calling itself "orthodox", adduced that Christ had two wills. Not only is the appellation "orthodox" hubris but the very premise of their reasoning is flawed. It is common to hear some individuals say something similar while praying without this connoting a human will with another accompanying will belonging to a different nature. This would be absurd. Some humans can juggle two antithetical views simultaneously in their minds without suffering from schizophrenia. In other words, this is done all the time and yet no one would dare to suggest that such individuals actually possess two natures within

their one personality. We might call them double-minded persons – a condition James criticises, yet their integrity as normal unitary beings is unquestioned.

James 1:8 *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

As I argued previously, we were included in the “I” of Adam when he first lusted after godhood and reached out for the fruit. I do not believe Adam’s will to sin came about as a bolt out of the blue, but faced some resistance from his God-anointed conscience. Sin, especially in that age of innocence, was a new and very hazardous endeavour and must have gone through some filtering process:

James 1:13 *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:*

James 1:14 *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

James 1:15 *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

It was this process of succumbing to sin which Jesus was reversing in the Garden of Gethsemane, and all His life on this earth. The great sweat drops pouring from the Lord’s face bore witness to the colossal collective rebellion of the will of humanity against the Father. He adopted our “I” and engaged in the battle which we were not able to wage against sin and the Devil. Thus the wills that Jesus refers to are those of God and humanity. It was in the flesh of Christ that the Father inexorably subdued our rebellious will.

1Timothy 2:5 *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;*

Once again the very premise for this whole discussion is suspect. Are we to surmise each time someone says, “Not my will, but thine..” that there exists *two natures* in such a person? What about the apostle Paul who appeared to struggle between two desires or wills? Are we to conclude that he has two natures?

Philippians 1:23 *For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:*
Philippians 1:24 *Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*

The key word to keep in mind when discussing the issue of how many wills in Christ is the *role* that He plays. A lawyer in a court of law identifies to such a degree with his client that the lawyer often mentions his client in a collective “we”. When Paul states, for instance, that the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26), this actually means that the Spirit prays for us *as if the Spirit itself is the one in need of prayers*, without this being the case at all. The Spirit is not groaning for itself, but for us. Similarly, the Lord Jesus was not praying or agonizing for Himself, but for us. To fail to understand this is to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah. We can be guilty of misconstruing the Lord’s prayers on our behalf.

Isaiah 53:4 *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.*

A dehellenization of Christianity

There is a fundamental flaw that runs like a deep crack through the edifice of modern Christianity (i.e. the type embedded in the 7 ecumenical councils). It is the cavalier way in which adherents of Chalcedon (then and now) forget that it was a parochial Hellenistic invention of philosophical words such as *physis*, *hypostasis* and *homoousia* which were recruited from pagans and given “exclusive interpretive rights” over all theological issues. For example, how did the church allow a theologically illiterate, semi-pagan emperor like Constantine to inject a Hellenistic concept such as *homoousios* in the creed of Nicea?

Gamberini (2011) critiques the taken-for-granted normative perception of concepts such as *nature*, *person*, and *homoousia*. He draws attention to the Hellenistic strain of philosophy which underpins these words – a philosophical tradition which is not shared with Asian Christology, for example. Not satisfied with the Eurocentric focus of western Christology, Gamberini (2011), who shares in Rahner’s criticism of the modern concept of person, revisits and reformulates the term “person” using the Hindu

Advaita Vedanta, which has inspired many theologians in their reconstruction of christology and trinitarian theology (among them Aloysius Pieris and Raimon Panikkar) (Gamberini 2011, 263).

It was this insight which led theologians like Adolf Harnack to suggest a “‘dehellenization’ of Christianity and so drop, for example, the traditional concepts of *ousia* and *hypostasis* with the theological insights that are embodied in these categories”

Can a theology embedded in an Aristotelian-Thomistic discourse claim universality or validity given that the categories of *physis*, *ousia* and *homoousia* find no resonance in other cultures? We are in danger of inventing a stifling dichotomy which is not even based on the Bible. The dilemma is captured in the question below.

The theologian Raimon Panikkar has formulated the real issue in this way: ‘Does one need to be spiritually semitic and intellectually western in order to be a Christian?’

If the answer is no, then perhaps we need to pay attention to Harnack. In my humble opinion, it is not just a matter of revisiting and reformulating the Hellenistic terms and concepts that form the bulwark of modern Christianity. What is needed is a complete overhaul of the Aristotelian-Thomistic trajectory and an unconditional return to the Word of God. Tertullian may have said,

“What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?” but he and countless others down the centuries have paid homage to Athens.

Hosea 6:1 *Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.*

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

Long before this present earth, animals, sea creatures and humans were formed, God had predetermined that a *new man*, born in His own image, would reside in heaven with Him forever. This new man would not be earthbound – for dust must return to dust – but of a heavenly nature and thus heaven-bound.

***Ephesians 1:4** According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*

***Ephesians 1:5** Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,*

This new man would not just appear out of thin air *ex nihilo*. God was the progenitor of this new race of man; God conceived of this idea from eternity and He manifested Himself in this new flesh in a truly unprecedented act. God knew long before the onset of depravity in the days of Noah that humankind was a doomed species. Flesh and blood indeed cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; neither does corruption inherit incorruption (I Corinthians 15:50). The good news is that God does not wait for tragedy to strike but is always many steps ahead. Noah prepared an ark to save his family from the fury of the waters; God also prepared a new body of His

own incorruptible Word Seed (I Peter 1:23) to save the human race from certain annihilation.

Hebrews 10:20 *By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;*

In other words, Christ's flesh is the *new and living way* – the ark through which we are transported from this world to the next. It is for this reason that we eat the Lord's flesh and blood represented by the bread and wine during what is called the *Passover*. Jesus' flesh and blood is the bridge that makes the crossing possible. Had the Lord assumed human flesh and blood from Mary, the law would have forbidden the eating and drinking of his human blood.

Thankfully, the testimony of the Bible makes it clear that Christ's flesh was of heavenly origin.

John 8:23 *And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.*

John 3:31 *He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.*

Where was God when the Word was made flesh (John 1:14)? God never left the flesh but manifested Himself through the flesh which now became His permanent abode or tabernacle. It was through the flesh that He fellowshiped with us, taught us, loved us, warned us and redeemed us. The Father is now so fused and enmeshed with His

flesh that it would be pointless to speak about the Father, Son or Holy Spirit alone, just as it would be absurd to address your spirit, soul or flesh alone. We make sense of individuals not by subjecting their tripartite constitution to a rigorous dissection, but by a holistic approach in which a human is perceived as an integrated “I” never mind the postmodern objections of Jacques Derrida who questions the subjectivity of the “I” and calls for the death of the subject in his deconstruction process.

Anyone reading the Bible without the influence of Chalcedon-inspired theologians can plainly see that Christ is a heavenly man who speaks as one integrated person and having one will. As has been argued, He could not sin precisely because He is a heavenly being whose very constitution makes Him incapable of entertaining any sin.

John 8:46 *Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?*

The failure of theologians to give us a convincing answer for the virgin birth serves to confirm the thesis of this book that God all along meticulously circumvented the sin-tainted human gene pool as pointed out by the late Dr Henry Morris. Neither have they given us any convincing response to why Jesus twice called Mary “woman”.

By failing to accept Jesus as a heavenly man (the Word made flesh), the so-called church fathers made theological shipwreck. They

invested greater confidence in the Hellenistic philosophy of the age, especially Neo-Platonism, and uncritically transplanted Greek words into the theological debates of the day. Rather than accept Christ's compelling claims to be the second man from heaven, clerics manipulated and anathematized each other with the aim of "humanizing" Jesus. Thankfully, we live in an age and era where the power of the clergy no longer strikes fear in anyone in this part of the world; no emperor "approved" councils can be summoned hastily to denounce the contents of this book and its writer as a heretic (with possible exile to some remote island). The sun has long set on the "Holy Office" with its Inquisitors militantly crusading in the name of the Lord.

My concern, at the end of this book, is twofold. Firstly, I, like anyone who loves the Lord Jesus and worships Him in Spirit and truth, desire to strive for the truth which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). Even those who do not concur with the Christology outlined in this book will agree with me that the laissez-faire Christianity in which "anything goes" is a blight on the truth. I am reminded of the German churches during the Nazi holocaust whose nonchalance was a blot on their integrity (except for a few brave dissenting voices like that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich and Karl Barth) (Stott 2006). We must by all means continue to strive for the truth as we understand it. As Martin Luther so forcefully said before The Diet of Worms in 1521:

I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen (Martin Luther).

However, I am equally concerned with the clamorous manner in which Christians, particularly those who are convinced that they have the licence to call themselves “orthodox”, engage in Christological debates. Books have been torn in churches and burnt in a bonfire style conflagration to ostensibly express disdain for “false” doctrine. It is incumbent upon us to identify and upend such spaces of belligerent contact which serve as incubators for a subversive mythification of the “Other”. Whatever happened to:

1Peter 3:15 *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:*

Sermon on manna

MANNA?

Exodus 16:15 And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.

One can sympathize with the bewildered Israelites who puzzled over the bread from heaven. For the first time in the history of man, food, which normally is associated with the produce of the land, suddenly rains down from heaven upon them. One source reckons that God rained down enough manna to feed 2 million people in the Wilderness of Sinai.¹⁵ Never before had such huge numbers of people been fed under the open sky with no kitchens, cooks or utensils present. What is obviously a logistical nightmare for man is not hard for Him who is called Jehovah-Jireh. They had never seen or tasted anything like this before. After much deliberation over this mysterious new item which was to form a regular part of their diet for the next 40 years, they decided upon the not very subtle *manna* which is Hebrew for “what is it?”

¹⁵ Kantor, Mattis. *The Jewish Time Line Encyclopedia*. Jason Aronson Inc., 1989, 1992.

It is significant that Moses declared, “This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat”. Whereas the children of Israel had resigned themselves to ignorance, we detect a different tone in the statement of Moses – he did not wish them to remain ignorant of the origin of the bread. We can delineate two important points from the declaration of Moses: firstly, that this was bread from heaven and, secondly, God is the Provider of this bread. God is not glorified if we remain ignorant of these two vital facts. To please God we need to walk with Him in reverence, but knowledge also. However, despite this, the name *manna* (Hebrew *man*) somehow won the day and stuck.

Why was it important for Moses to reveal the source of the bread? Simply because it pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ, and failure to understand the Old Testament type inevitably has an impact on one’s appreciation of the identity of the Lord. There are several parallels but let me begin with the circumstances that heralded the coming of the manna. After that, I will compare this with the birth of our Lord.

Exodus 16:14 *And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground.*

It is highly significant that the bread had its source in the dew which is described in terms of descending and ascending in a conscious manner with purposive action. No doubt the dew symbolizes the Spirit of Jehovah. Psalm 133:3, for example, compares the anointing oil running down the skirts of Aaron to the dew of Hermon and Zion. Dew has often been employed as a symbol for the Holy Spirit. In a similar vein, we are told by the physician Luke that the Holy Spirit would overshadow the womb of Mary and beget that *holy thing which shall be called the Son of God*.

***Luke 1:35** And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

The bread had its origin in the Spirit of God. So, too, did the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was apt therefore that the apostle John dedicated the entire 6th chapter of his Gospel to a debate between the Jews and the Lord revolving around this subject. There is an undeniable parallel between the manna episode and John 6 in the New Testament. In John 6 the same conversation seems to unfold with bread as the subject matter. The Jews pointed to the miracle of the manna in the desert and challenged Jesus to perform a similar miracle if they were to take His claims seriously. Jesus' answer puzzled the Israelites once again.

John 6:41 *The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven.*

John 6:51 *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

Jesus points to the heavenly origin of the manna and claims the same for Himself. Lest someone be tempted to spiritualize the whole issue and thus diminish the heavenly origin of Jesus' flesh, Jesus Himself states, *the bread that I will give is **my flesh**, which I will give for the life of the world* (John 6:51). The impact of His words was clearly understood by the Jews, but, sadly, rejected. Let no one be in any doubt that Jesus was claiming a heavenly origin for His flesh. After all, the manna, which He compares His flesh with was a real event in history, and so too is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). What was a colossal stumbling block for His audience was the fact that they believed Jesus to be the son of Mary and Joseph. In other words, they clearly perceived the Lord to be claiming another lineage – one that stemmed directly from God Himself, something they were not prepared to accept. The issue of the parentage of Jesus was a lightning rod issue which culminated in the refusal of some of His disciples to follow Him anymore.

John 6:42 *And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?*

John 6:66 *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

Sadly, many walk with Jesus today still asking the question posed by the children of Israel, “Manna?” They hold up a magnifying glass to Jesus and conclude strange things about Him. Some say that He is the second member of the Trinity; others that He had a dual nature which He assumed from Mary; still others that He was tempted and could sin and some that He had two wills in Him. What they forget is that Jesus’ body is the fulfilment of the unleavened bread mentioned in the Old Testament. The human gene pool is contaminated with the leaven of sin which was passed down from Adam. Only Christ’s flesh has no leaven of the race of Adam. This is why Jesus took the bread – on the same day of the unleavened bread – broke it and declared it to be His own body.

Luke 22:7 *Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed.*

Luke 22:19 *And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.*

Those who reject the heavenly flesh doctrine have discounted Jesus’ own testimony of Himself, namely that He is God manifest in the flesh and has His source (whole being) in the Father. His flesh is a heavenly flesh which is why we can eat His flesh and drink His blood in the Lord’s Supper.

John 8:23 *And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.*

John 6:62 *What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?*

John 6:53 *Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*

Those who oppose the heavenly flesh doctrine often state that heavenly flesh could not empathize or die for us. Just because the flesh is celestial does not mean that it was not passible (suffer) or could not empathize with us. Despite its heavenly origins the *manna* was still edible. We do not know what ingredients God employed in preparing the manna in heaven, but that did not stop the Israelites from consuming it. Whatever the nature of the “celestial flour” that God used - if any - it seemed to work well with the human digestive system. After all, heaven is the source of all earthly blessings. We are expected to understand the machinations of earthly things in order to grasp heavenly things as the Lord said: “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?”(John 3:12).

Again the children of Israel had to all rise up early and gather the manna from the ground. I assume that kneeling would have been the most convenient way to gather the small round pieces of heavenly bread. This must have been quite humbling. The manna represented

the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus. Anyone desiring to come to Jesus must also humble himself and kneel in repentance and worship. All are equal before the Lord. All must seek their daily bread from Him every day. “Give us this day our daily bread”.

There is one more parallel I need to highlight. Who would not want to sample heavenly food? Of the manna, the Bible says, “Man did eat angels’ food: he sent them meat to the full” (Psalm 78:25). It would be fitting to imagine that bread from heaven would look extraordinarily pleasant to the eyes and palate. However, the anticlimax is palpable in the reaction of the Israelites. The manna did not look attractive or taste particularly pleasant. Similarly, there was nothing especially appealing in the body of our Lord. Isaiah says of Him:

Isaiah 53:2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

Like the manna, the Lord was unassuming and lowly. Nevertheless, this should not take away from the heavenly origin of the manna or the Lord. Some Christians, having read in the New Testament that Jesus became weary, thirsty, sighed, cried and slept concluded that His body was not heavenly, but human with flesh assumed from Mary. Like the Israelites they enjoy the benefits derived from the

heavenly bread, but seem to have no clue what they are eating. If we believe that the Word was made flesh (John 1:14), and that the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Jesus (Colossians 2:9), we will not need to say “Manna?” again.

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