

The Talmid



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 3

MARCH 1, 2012

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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THE INCARNATION OF GOD THE SON

As you begin to read this article I want to indicate that I have written it from a very personal perspective. Normally in a technical document a good writer would not use personal pronouns to any major extent. A technical document is not a conversation that we are having with someone, but rather a formal explanation of truth and doctrine. And generally the personal side is not always technically appropriate. But I have foregone that approach in this article for the Talmid. And the reason is simply because the doctrine of the

Incarnation has become the most life transforming doctrine that I have ever studied. The impact this doctrine has had on my personal life is far more than I could ever describe. And in developing the content, I found it impossible to keep my feelings and my emotions from surfacing. So, in the end I simply chose to wear my emotions on my sleeve and to speak about this doctrine in a more informal way that allowed me a greater vehicle of expression. I thank you in advance for your understanding.

One of the purposes of this article is to try and place the doctrine of the Incarnation into a larger perspective than is generally given to it. Too often the doctrine of the Incarnation is only seen as a “Christmas” doctrine, as a story that we tell year after year in our churches. We perform cantatas and have candlelight services. We go caroling and take gifts to shut-ins. It is a doctrine for which many songs have been written and sung over the ages. We decorate our churches and bring in poinsettias and reefs. But because of all of the religious and celebratory aspects placed on the time of year, very often the virgin birth and the deeper meaning and significance associated with it is often overlooked, and unfortunately not fully understood. The doctrine of the Incarnation is without any question one of the most profound of all doctrines for in it we

are given a picture of the **sacrifice** of God the Son in a way that is beyond our natural abilities to even comprehend. But when understood, this doctrine has the potential of impacting a person's life as much as any doctrine in Scripture.

To begin with, we cannot just simply ignore the virgin birth and all of its ramifications simply because we rehearse the Christmas story year and year after year. In some ways our familiarity with a topic often clouds our real perception of something. We find ourselves hearing the story "again" and we unwittingly "tune it out". If we just read **Matthew 1:18-25**, it is all there – a simple story of birth and a virgin and a confused husband. And in the end it simply says that **"she...brought forth her first-born Son. And he called His name Jesus."** Obviously, the magnitude of what has just happened is hidden in the simplicity of the text and we leave the passage without much ado. John Walvoord says this about this section of Scripture,

"The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central fact of Christianity, upon it the whole superstructure of Christian theology depends."

I agree with that statement wholeheartedly, but unfortunately it would be difficult to discern that truth by just simply reading the passage. Everything in the Christian faith revolves around the doctrine of the virgin birth. Without the virgin birth there would be no Christianity, no salvation, and no hope. The whole essence of redemption depends on the fact that Jesus is **God in human flesh**, and that is something made clear in the virgin birth. If Jesus had had a human father, then the Bible could not be trusted because the Bible claims that He did not. And if Jesus was simply born of human parents like we were, then there is no way to describe His supernatural life – which in reality is the authentication of His deity.

The problem that we often have with the virgin birth is that the miracle is so extraordinary that we become insensitive to the wonder of what actually happened. But **Matthew 1:18** is absolutely clear as to what happened. There can be no doubt and no question as to what is stated.

18Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was

found with child of the Holy Spirit.

And to support the issue even more, **v20** states this,

...for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

It simply cannot be stated any clearer than that – **she was found with child of the Holy Spirit and that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.** The issue is really very simple. If Jesus had not had human parents, then He would never have been a man and therefore not truly able to identify with those He came to save. But on the other hand, if Jesus had actually had two human parents in His birth, then He would not have been God or divine, and He could not have avoided the contamination of Adam's sin. So He had to be human and yet divine at the same time - and that is exactly what He was. He was born of a sinner (Mary) and yet He was sinless because He was equally born of God (the Holy Spirit). John MacArthur explained it this way when he said that *"deity canceled humanity's curse"*. I like that.

What is important here is that we have to see the Incarnation not as just an event, but as one of the great and magnificent foundations of God's plan of salvation. There had to be someone who could make a divine sacrifice and a human sacrifice at the same time. God the Son had to be able to identify with sinful humanity and yet retain His deity and "Godness".

Over a period of time in contemplating the absolute wonder of the Incarnation, I have come to an understanding of something that is so remarkable that I simply do not know how to put it into perspective. And it has to do with two simple statements that I made in a seminary class that I was teaching on Romans. I was teaching out of **Romans 3** and I made the simple statement that at the cross that God the Father did two things: He **placed our sins on Christ** and He **placed His wrath on Christ**. Now, those are two very unpretentious statements. There was nothing in either one of them that should have caused any consternation or concern for anyone. They were theologically correct. But what began to trouble me was the issue of exactly how did that happen, and how was Christ actually able to absorb and bear those things? All of the sins of men and all of the wrath of God against those sins is of such a magnitude that it is humanly impossible to describe.

Where would one begin? How could we ever understand the enormity of taking on the sins of mankind and then having them placed on a Person? And then to actually bear the merited and accrued punishment for that sin – the actual wrath of God itself, how did that happen? How could Christ in His mere human flesh ever absorb such things? I was deeply troubled by what I did not understand. There was something in those two simple statements that eluded me, that concerned me, and that spiritually challenged me at the deepest level of my understanding. There was something so unique about Christ in His death that I feared I had never understood – and I was humbled by my ignorance.

It so happened, however, that in the sovereignty of God that I was listening to some messages on the person of Christ by Wayne Grudem, and in one of those messages he made this simple statement. He said, and I paraphrase, that the pouring out of our sin on Christ and the pouring out of God's wrath on Christ was poured out on the **divine nature** of Christ. I was stunned! I was left utterly speechless! In that simple statement, God shook me to the very core of my existence. I was overwhelmed and overcome to the point of tears, and in my inner man I knew that there was a divine truth in that statement that was more than my feeble mind and heart could embrace. And for days and days I sensed the drawing of God into that truth as never before.

The embedded truth in this doctrine that shook the very core of my being is that **the divine nature of God the Son was the object of God's wrath, as well as the repository of our sins**. In reality, the divine nature of Christ is the only part of His being, either His divine nature or His human nature, which could actually endure and survive the outpouring of God's wrath and the outpouring of all of our sin on Him. If we could somehow add up the entire accumulated and deserved wrath that we would have endured in eternity if we had been lost and not saved, and then pour all of that out on Christ, **ONLY HIS DIVINE NATURE COULD HAVE ENDURED THAT**. His humanness, His human-

ity, His flesh would simply have been annihilated and utterly consumed with such monumental punishment being poured out on Him. In His humanness He could never have absorbed such a degree of suffering. It would have been humanly impossible. And that is exactly why the Incarnation is so critical. It is because His incarnation maintained His divine nature, and that divine nature was the only element in all of eternity that could absorb and endure the pain and punishment that He endured. Please appreciate that I am not in any way diminishing the death of Christ on the cross. Paul said in **Galatians 6:14**,

14But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

To the contrary, I am elevating the cross beyond measure. It was a brutal, vicious, and inhumane death. It was a cruel and undeserved death, a death that defies a proper narrative. But most of the time we only see it as a physical death and a spiritual separation from God the Father - which it was. And in so doing we miss the part of His divine nature being the object of God's wrath as well. We think it was only His humanity that was suffering, but it was more. It was both His humanity and His divine nature that were suffering. For all intents and purposes, we can only relate to the physical suffering. At the peak of our understanding it would be virtually impossible to know what Christ suffered in His divine nature. In essence, the death of Christ was so much greater in magnitude than I personally ever understood it to be – and for that I am deeply ashamed.

What happened at the cross was so much more than Jesus Christ simply dying. In His divine nature and in His human nature He actually became the object of the holy wrath of God – and both parts of His God-Man nature suffered as cannot be explained. His Man part suffered the cruelest of all deaths, but His God part suffered in a way that will never be understood. And if we do not understand the magnitude of the suffering that took place in His divine nature and in His divine essence, then in reality we have diminished the cross. His

humanity, even though He suffered the most horrific of deaths, could never have endured what God did to His divine nature. And that makes His sacrifice even that much greater. What He suffered was far, far more than we could ever even imagine. I have been stunned and dazed and staggered by this! And in my feeble comprehension of such a divine truth, I even more fully realize what took place at the virgin birth and why there even had to be a virgin birth. God the Son had to be able to identify with us in a human way, but at the same time He had to remain far above us so that He could actually suffer becoming sin for us in ways that we will never perceive. **“He who knew no sin became sin for us.”** Those three hours of darkness on the cross were so much more that we could ever understand or even explain – but it could not have happened without the virgin birth. There had to be the divine nature at the cross to absorb the totality of God’s judgment on sin. It had to be there to take on the sin that was poured out, and to take on the wrath of God that was beyond our ability to even understand. It would be the greatest of all pride for us to think that we could understand the magnitude, the enormity, and the immensity of what it meant for the God-Man to become sin and to literally have the accrued sin of man poured out on His divine being.

God the Son and Christ as the God-Man had never been contaminated with sin. He was eternally pure. He was in the most intimate realms of fellowship with God the Father that could be imagined. There was the deepest and the most cherished relationship of love and affection and of caring between the Father and the Son. There had never been a harsh word or an angry look, but only the most precious of all relationships. The unity and the caring were without explanation. So, for the One who knew no sin and the One who had obeyed the will of the Father perfectly – for Him to now become the object of the greatest outpouring of wrath ever by the One He loved the deepest is more than can be explained. Here they were in an eternal moment that betrayed comprehension. Here Christ was sub-

mitting His total being – not just His humanity, but His total being to the Father for the outpouring of wrath and the outpouring of sin on Him so that He could suffer what we deserved. And only His divine nature could endure what became His by the very virtue of His perfect and sinless deity. And for some period of time unknown to any man, there was the enormous outpouring of eternal wrath, eternal punishment, and eternal judgment by God the Father on the One that He loved the most.

The eternal magnitude of the judgment placed on Christ the sinless sacrifice cannot be understood by human and finite creatures. The God-Man Christ Jesus had to die, but the divine nature, God the Son, also had to be present to take on the eternal punishment and judgment that God the Father was to pour out – and only the divine nature could endure that and survive. This is an amazing thing, and it has so elevated my feeble understanding of the greatness, the magnitude, and the enormity of Christ and his death on the cross that I stand humbled in His presence.

Obviously, the doctrine of the virgin birth is a very critical aspect of the Christian faith. If we were to summarize the biblical teaching about the person of Christ, it would of necessity have to be divided into two distinct parts. The first part would deal with His pre-incarnate state, and the second part would deal with His actual Incarnation and thereafter. So, the pre-incarnate state would deal with God the Son before the virgin birth, and the second part would deal with Jesus Christ during and after the Incarnation.

So what actually divides these two distinct parts is what we refer to as the virgin birth of Christ, or in theological terms, what we know as the Incarnation. The term Incarnation deals specifically with that event in which God the Son became the God-Man through a virgin birth. Obviously that is a very simple statement, but it has enormous implications and is not something that is easy to grasp – God becoming a man. But we simply cannot underestimate the utter importance of this event because it is crucial to our understanding of theology and doctrine, and ultimately to the doctrine of

salvation. If there had been no Incarnation and no virgin birth, then there could have been no salvation.

When people talk about the Incarnation, it is generally expressed by saying that God became man. But in reality, that is not accurate simply because it may give the wrong impression of what actually took place. It is **not** that God was now a man, or that God was no longer God and He was now a man. That would be a very unscriptural perspective on what actually happened. And no matter what kind of “technical” definition we give to this whole subject, it is still surrounded with an element of divine mystery. What we know and affirm is that God the Son has **never** stopped being God in any sense. He is, was, and always will be God – omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. So, more specifically, and this is the better way of stating it, **the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, was made flesh and appeared as a man.** The doctrine of the Incarnation says that God the Son actually came in the flesh. He was still fully God, but He outwardly manifested Himself in the form of a man. It was a real incarnation, a time when Christ actually and truly took on a human nature and became Jesus Christ the God-Man. To state it another way, God the Son was not Jesus Christ before the Incarnation. He became Jesus Christ and Christ the Messiah at the virgin birth. **John 1:14** puts it this way,

14And the Word became 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.

So, the Incarnation was that supernatural and divine act of God whereby the eternal second member of the Triune God took on Himself a human nature – something He did not previously have, but something that He will retain forever. If He had simply had human parents – a human father and a human mother – then He would not have been able to retain His deity. But because He did not have a

human father, He was able to retain His divine nature, while at the same time being born of a woman which allowed Him to have a human nature as well.

What happened at the virgin birth and with the Incarnation is that the glory of God the Son was veiled, hidden, and not seen. He looked like each of us. If you had seen Him in the manger or working with Joseph as a carpenter or walking in Galilee with His disciples or as a prisoner before Herod, you certainly would not have thought that He was the eternal God and Creator of all things. You would never have seen Him that way. His glory, His Godness, His deity, and His divine being was hidden and veiled. **Philippians 2:7-8** describes it this way,

...and coming in the likeness of men. 8And being found in appearance as a man....

The implications of this doctrine are so far-reaching, so mysterious in nature, and so divinely important that we can never do it justice. And to make the task even more daunting, there are only four distinct passages in the New Testament that theologically deal with the actual Incarnation. So, we cannot just make a few theological statements and be done with the issue – not at all. **Everything** that we believe about our salvation and about our future as Christians is founded on the doctrine of the Incarnation. So, the implications are enormous – what Christ became and what He now is, and what He will be like in the future. And to make all of this even more difficult and challenging is the fact that we have clouded all of it with our embellishment of the Christmas story. All we normally see at Christmas is a baby in a manger, some shepherds in a field, some angels making an announcement, and some magi bringing this little baby some gifts – not to mention the commercial side of the holidays.

So, from the time that we were little children, and with all of the expectations that the Christmas season brings, we simply have unknowingly obscured and masked this great doctrine. In some way, all of the Christmas festivities have hidden this great truth from us – and it makes it even more difficult for those of us

who are pastors to impress upon our people the incredible truth that is in the doctrine of the Incarnation. And to add to that, the Incarnation was a one-time event. It only happened once, and has never happened since, and will never happen in the future – and it happened solely to God the Son. So, we have no realistic benchmark by which to measure the eternal magnitude and relevance of the event. Just to picture God the Son as a baby in a manger is more than a modest misunderstanding of the greatness and indescribable significance of the actual sacrifice that He was making by becoming the God-Man. At best, we are far outside of the realm of natural human reason and understanding and far removed from things that we can fully comprehend and even appreciate.

The incredible truth that we are dealing with is that the second member of the Trinity, God the Son, gave up being God as He formerly was in order to save us, and **He will be that way forever**. That second statement is the part that has literally crushed my heart in the past – the enormity, the magnitude, the vast extent of what Christ actually gave up to save us. God the Son became the God-Man, and He will forever more and always be the God-Man. This doctrine of the Incarnation and the virgin birth brings to light what He personally has given up in eternity. It is not that He just died and then went back to being God the Son as He had always been – not at all, never in a million years. And because the sacrifice was an **eternal sacrifice** that He made in order to save us, the magnitude of His sacrifice far surpasses just His dying on a cross, but extends into eternity and therefore cannot be measured.

Right now at the right hand of God is the God-Man Christ Jesus. He is not there as He was prior to His incarnation. And even though He is still fully God, and has all of the attributes of His eternally being God the Son, there is something else – and it is a mystery. Before the Incarnation, He was with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit as God the Son. That was His place in the Trinity, the

place of His deity. But today, right now, He is there as a Lamb that was slain, as our Great High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us, and as the One who will forever be the God-Man who sacrificed everything to be a ransom for our sins. We cannot overemphasize the magnitude of this great doctrine.

And to further describe the immensity of this event, God the Son knew that He was going to make this ultimate of all sacrifices before the foundation of the world. He made the decision in eternity past before time or man was even created, before the world even existed. **1 Peter 1:20** declares,

²⁰**He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you**

When the Trinity determined to create life as we know it, Jesus Christ knew full well what it would cost Him as God the Son. God the Father knew, God the Holy Spirit knew, and God the Son knew. The sacrifice and the surrendering of Himself for what was going to be required of Him was more than could even be imagined – and yet He willingly and gladly accepted it. **Hebrews 12:2** says,

²**looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

In order to give us everything, it would personally and eternally cost Him everything. What He voluntarily chose to surrender, to forfeit, and to give up is more than our mind can even conceive. This is difficult. This has mystery to it that must simply be accepted by faith. Here is the essence of what took place at the Incarnation and at the virgin birth. What God the Son willingly chose to do was **to restrict and to limit** the use of His divine attributes – **forever**. I do not know how to say it exactly, but what actually happened is that God the Son forever gave up being God as He was previously. How does one say that or explain it?

How can we understand what God the Son willingly chose to do?

For God the Son to become the God-Man was such an incredible diminishing of who He was as divine, incomprehensible Deity that it is hard to even express what happened. This was God in all of His divinity and deity forever becoming something else and willfully choosing to remain in the lesser state forever. It would be like you or me becoming a cat and being willing to remain and live and function as a cat forever. Could you imagine doing that, or even worse, could you imagine asking your son to do that? Now, I know that is a terrible example, but in essence that is what happened. The eternal God became like us **forever** – and that was an incredible lessening and lowering and diminishing of His deity. But having said all of that, **His incarnation is the very thing that makes what He did the most incredible event of all of eternity and creation. It is what makes Him to be the most exalted and glorious being of all eternity.** Nothing could have been more humbling and more unbecoming than for God the Son to forgo His deity forever so that we could be saved. We know that He is and always will be fully God. I know that, you know that. But as a part of His divine incarnation, He willingly chose not to exercise those divine attributes forever unless directed so by His Father. **I Corinthians 15:28** declares this eternal subjection when it says,

²⁸Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

In essence, He gave up being God as He previously was. That is so astonishing that it causes me to just want to fall down on my face and worship and worship Christ! The magnitude of His **eternal** sacrifice is inconceivable.

We know that God the Son possessed and has always possessed equality with God. But in the vir-

gin birth He voluntarily and willingly chose **not** to hold on to that equality. **Philippians 2:6** says,

⁶who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

The New American Standard Bible says this,

⁶who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.

The New International Version and the English Standard Version say virtually the same thing. The Amplified Bible adds the word **retained** to **grasped**.

⁶Who, although being essentially one with God and in the form of God [possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God, God], did not think this equality with God was a thing to be eagerly grasped or retained.

He chose not to cling to His favored position as the divine Son of God, the second person of the Godhead. He could have said, “I am God, and I am not giving any of this up for anyone. I am going to hold on to what is rightfully mine.” But He did not say that at all. To the contrary, He said the opposite. **He did not see His position in the Godhead as a prized possession to be used for Himself, but as the very instrument and means by which He could become our Saviour.** That is one of the most sublime and transcendent statements that I have ever written. It is one of the most exalted truths that we could ever understand, and it so magnifies the person of Christ that it causes me to want to weep and fall down before God in absolute brokenness and surrender.

We all know and affirm that Jesus Christ is still fully God in every sense of the word. We know that and we fully affirm that. He will always be God – fully divine, fully omnipotent, fully omniscient, and fully omnipresent. He was all of those things in His pre-incarnate state before the virgin birth, in His humanity as our Saviour, and in His eternal state as our King of Kings

and Lord of Lords. **Hebrews 1:3** says that He “**upholds all things by the Word of His power**”. The word “**upholds**” is in the present active tense which simply means that He is always upholding everything. The Interlinear Bible actually translates the word as “**sustaining**”. Right now, Christ Jesus the God-Man is upholding and sustaining all things by His divine being and His divine power.

In other words, God the Son is not only the **Creator** of the universe (**John 1:3**), but He is also the **Sustainer** of the universe – and He always has been and always will be. He was fully God in the Incarnation, He was fully God as the Christ, He was fully God in His death, and He is fully God now in His high priestly role before the Father. He has never ceased to be fully God. When He was in the womb of Mary, He was still fully God and upholding all things by the Word of His power. When He was on the cross and dying, He was still fully God and upholding all things by the Word of His power. When He was in the grave, He was still fully God and upholding all things by the Word of His power. While He is at the right hand of God the Father as our Great High Priest, He is still fully God and upholding all things by the Word of His power. And when He returns in the clouds of heaven and leads us into the Millennium and into the eternal state, He will always and forever be fully God and upholding all things by the Word of His power.

He is God and will forever be God. **But He has voluntarily chosen not to exercise those divine attributes unless directed by the Father.** He has willingly and gladly chosen to **FOREVERMORE function** as the God-Man and in a state of utter dependence on His Father. And it is in His humanness that He has identified with us and is now sitting at the right hand of God the Father. And to deepen and widen the magnitude of these events before us, we must understand that all members of the Trinity were involved in this in some way. Can you imagine what it would be like for you to ask your son to make the greatest sacrifice that anyone could ever make – one that would severely impact

their life for eternity? God the Father knew exactly what the cost would be and what His Son would eternally give up. I do not know what to say or how to say it. Everytime that I think about this doctrine, I am overwhelmed at how much God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit love me. For the Triune God to knowingly choose to do what they did so that we might forever be with them – it humbles me as no other doctrine. We who deserved nothing have been given everything, but at the expense of the eternal sacrifice of God the Son.

In my terribly feeble and limited understanding of these events, this doctrine of the Incarnation is the most exalting and God honoring doctrine that I have ever studied. It exalts Christ, honors Christ, extols Christ, and glorifies Christ as no other doctrine can. And it should cause us to worship Him and adore Him more than we ever have. The doctrine is not about Christmas trees and opening gifts and singing carols. This is about God the Son, this is about an eternal sacrifice with ramifications and implications and consequences beyond words or understanding. This is the most Christ honoring doctrine of eternity. And the magnitude of His sacrifice for us who did not deserve anything but death and wrath and judgment and the Lake of Fire is more than my feeble mind can comprehend or appreciate. I have never been to heaven, I have never been God, I have never been omnipotent, or omniscient, or omnipresent, or immutable, or holy and without any measure of sin or sinfulness in my life. To the contrary, I am sinful, defiled, unholy, unrighteous, and proud. So, I have no clue as to what Christ has done – none at all. I can only bow down in humble reverence at the throne of God and the feet of Christ.

In some ways, all of this gives such a deeper meaning and significance to the verse in **John 15:13** which says,

13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

Jesus was literally giving up his life as God to become like us – forever. And that could only happen

through a virgin birth. If God, just for us, was willing to give of Himself and all of His privileges and His unlimited power, and ultimately His possessions, should not the same thing characterize our lives as well. He was willing to sacrifice everything for us, and too often we are not willing to give Him hardly anything at all. We desperately cling to our time, our possessions, and our rights. We find reasons to not read our Bibles, reasons why we continue to live for ourselves and our personal goals, and reasons why our personal priorities in life are more important than our priorities towards Christ. We want it all, we want to keep all of His blessings – and we literally miss out on His life. Jesus said these words in [Matthew 16:25](#),

²⁵For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

This is without question the supreme act of giving your life away. The cross was simply the earthly culmination of this great sacrifice that was already decided in eternity past and will fully and completely extend into eternity future. This was the ultimate of all sacrifices, and only God the Son could have done it. And He did it in the Incarnation. [Romans 11:33](#) aptly places it all into perspective when it declares,

³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.



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THE MOTIVE OF THE INCARNATION

I can remember in seminary my New Testament doctrine professor asking the following question: **Would there have been an incarnation *without the fall*?** This question propelled me into a series of other questions with a hunger to pursue the answer to this question. Since the theme of this month's issue of *The Talmid* is the "**Incarnation**" we shall pursue the answer together. What follows is a presentation that I made in that class in 1991. In our discussion of the person of Christ we must point out that, in the study of Christ and his salvation, it is impossible to separate his *person* from his *work*. There is such an inseparable connection between his *person* and *work* that any separation causes us to go astray with respect to both his *person* and his *work*. For he manifests himself in his work as the Mediator between God and men ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)), so that even the slightest abstract notions of his work and of the valuable influences and impulses proceeding from Jesus of Nazareth immediately derogate from the real essence of his work. **"For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"** ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)).

Moreover, an isolated consideration of his person "as such" is impossible and illegitimate, because he can be

fully known only in connection with his holy work.

When we do differentiate between Christ's person and his work, then we are likely to misunderstand either or both of them. Scripture often does speak of his person and answers the question who he is, and it does deal with the nature of his work, but it is always one and the same message it brings us. To mention Christ's name is to point to his work, and to mention the blessing of his work is, if it be well, to deal with the work of him of whom the Church in adoration confesses: *vere Deus, vere homo* "Truly God, Truly Man".

Towards the end of our study of the person of Christ we could remind ourselves of the unity and harmony expressed in Christ's own words, "**These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world**" ([John 16:33](#)). These words apparently do not refer to a *general* idea of peace, happiness or bliss, but to the peace *in Him*, viz., and such a peace as is contained and founded only *in Him*. It is a peace which would depart from us and become unrecognizable just as soon as it is isolated from his person. This peace can be known only in communion with his person, the communion which Calvin called the *mystica communication* (**intimate communion between Christ and his members**), or, of which the Form for the Lord's Supper says, that we seek our life apart from ourselves in Jesus Christ, who fills us with his blessing. And in the prayer before the celebration of the Lord's supper it is mentioned that we, with true confidence, give ourselves up unto Jesus Christ, "in order that our burdened and contrite hearts, through the power of the Holy Spirit, may be nourished and refreshed with his true body and blood, *yea with him*, true God and man, the only heavenly bread." "**This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever**" ([John 6:58](#)).

In human relationships it is possible—out of ingratitude—to isolate the gift from the giver and still enjoy it, and there are also "**unknown**" givers who remain in the background. But Christ is not such an unknown giver. He gives himself, and therefore his gift is never an isolated richness. Every gift would

lose its richness and vivifying power when isolated and considered apart from his person. The objective of preaching Christ may never be a neutral happiness, or general immortality, or anything else which might appear desirable outside of Christ. No more than the object may be an abstract ontological interest in Christ's person, may his work, his Word, his influence, as such, be the source of any truly Christian faith. Preaching Christ must always be centered around **His work**, and **His work**.

Many may consider the preceding remarks self-evident, yet the history of the Church and of theology has unmistakably proven that we are confronted here with very important questions, which at various times have played an important role in the consideration of the Christ-message. Moreover, we see that these questions, when wrongly answered, cause shadows to descend upon the Church. The general problem here, as we shall call it, is "**the motive of the incarnation.**" That is, we want to know the connection between the incarnation of the Son of God and the sum total of God's acts of salvation. Does the incarnation originate in and is it motivated by the lost condition of mankind, or would it also have occurred if there had not been a fall of mankind, or, at least, would it have been conceivable and possible?

In the latter case the deliverance from guilt and destruction would have been a *secondary motive*, which historically—because of the fact of the fall—must indeed be considered very important, but which nevertheless would not be the deepest or *primary motive*. Thus the inquiry concerning the motive of the incarnation takes on this special form: **Would there have been an incarnation without the fall?** Upon hearing this question we might be inclined *a priori* to call it merely speculative and thus dismiss it; yet the fact remains that this question, "**incarnation, even without sin?**" has often been answered in the affirmative. This simple and probably surprising fact already compels us to a closer examination, since it naturally brings up immediately the question concerning the significance of the work of Christ. We may even say that by answering this question we approach a far-reaching conclusion regarding the work of Christ.

When the above question is answered in the affirmative there is every reason to examine the motives for such an answer, for the issue at stake is not the fact of

the incarnation of the Word, *but its primary motivation*. According to this view the great mystery, “**God manifest in the flesh,**” may absolutely not be made dependent on the fact of the *fall*. The miracle of the incarnation simply cannot be a mere *response* to an act of human apostasy! Would rebellion have the “**power**” to “**cause**” this unique act of Christ’s emptying himself? Such dependence—even though it be associated with the unity of God’s decree—is considered incommensurate with the stupendous reality of Christmas. True, the incarnation is *historically* connected with deliverance, but from this it may not be concluded, it is asserted, that there would have been no incarnation without the fall.

Once this idea of “**incarnation even without a fall**” is accepted, it soon follows that a special meaning is ascribed to the incarnation as such. This incarnation becomes the subject, without immediately connecting it with Christ’s suffering and his obedience unto death. The connection between incarnation and cross is recognized as a historical fact, but it is a “**connection**” in a condition which developed later, viz., of man’s lost condition and guilt. Apart from this it is possible to concentrate one’s attention specifically on the incarnation of the Word, which, for that purpose, is often referred to as Christ’s “**becoming man.**” It is obvious that this preference of some people for the expression “**becoming man**” instead of “**becoming flesh**” has something to do with the fact that “**becoming flesh**” reminds us of *fallen* mankind while “**becoming man**” allows for a coming of Christ, a *unio personalis*, without necessarily having the shadows of sin and guilt descend on it. [*unio personalis*: **Hypostatic union** (from the Greek: ὑπόστασις, {“[h]upostasis”}, “hypostasis”, *sediment, foundation* or *substance*) is a technical term in *Christian theology* employed in mainstream *Christology* to describe the union of two natures, human and God, in Jesus Christ.]

As a result the connection between incarnation and cross becomes much looser, and reflection on the incarnation reveals a specific trend. **Kuyper** has pointed out that this idea of “**incarnation even without a fall**” has always been considered heretical in the history of the Church. Even though it showed up here and there—sometimes hesitantly, then again positively—in dogmatic thinking, it re-

mained a border-opinion in the Christian Church and **Kuyper** was of the opinion that the Church intuitively felt that this meant a deviation from the confession concerning Christ, even though the essence of the incarnation was not denied.

Guided by this intuition, the Church refused to accept the idea that this view would result in a deeper insight into the mystery of the incarnation. In addition, those theologians who entertained this idea were not of the sort to inspire confidence that the confession would be kept pure. We are thinking of such people as **Oslander**, **Socinus**, and several *Vermittlungstheologen* (mediation-theologians) of the nineteenth century¹, the majority of whom were of the opinion that Christ would have become man even if there had not been sin and guilt. This opinion, to be sure, could not be proven by specific scriptural statements, but it was pointed out that the fact of the incarnation, the *idea* that God had become man, contained a thought which as such must be considered and worked out. It is the idea of the connection between God and man (or the divine and the human) which as such was of great import.² Moreover, it was sometimes pointed out that the incarnation had already been incorporated in the eternal decree, so that the historic correlation between incarnation and cross might not be projected back into eternity in order to conclude that the incarnation was “**motivated**” exclusively by the fall. Some were of the opinion that the Church had overemphasized the connection between the incarnation and the need for deliverance, a connection which some times has been called a *hamartiologic* (sin) or *hamartiocentric* (Christianity is all about sin and salvation) conception, to which they vigorously objected.³

It was asserted that thus Christ was considered solely as the restorer of what sin had ruined. God’s acting through Christ, it was alleged, was no more than a divine reaction; and the divine initiative, God’s personal acting, on the basis of his own motives, was put in the background. God acted only because man, in rebellion, had acted first. Thus God’s action in the incarnation does not sovereignly precede all human action, but follows it. It was no longer an *aprioristic* (based upon a priori principles) acting of God. That is why it is called a *hamartiocentric* (Christianity is all about sin and salvation) conception of history and Christology, over against which the idea and the possibility of an “**incarnation**” even without a fall is placed. It is be-

lieved that the idea of the incarnation as such can be treated and considered as something meaningful without immediately endangering the reconciliation through the cross. The incarnation as such has its own motive without immediately connecting it with the motive of redemption and restoration.

All this presses the urgent question whether such an *antihamartiocentric* conception within the Church may be considered legitimate, or whether we are dealing here with a *speculation* which obscures rather than clarifies the dogmatic perspectives in Christology.

Before we attempt to answer this question in the light of Holy Scripture we wish first of all to point out that this idea of **“incarnation even without sin”** is frequently found in certain theological and philosophical connections far removed from the ancient confession of the Church. This was especially the case in the nineteenth century, during which the speculative philosophy of **Hegel** strongly dominated theology and specifically Christology. This philosophy strongly **accentuated** *the idea of God’s becoming man, far more than the Word becoming flesh*, and the incarnation was explained as the gradual unification of God and man by a gradual process of evolution. Orthodox Christology was sharply attacked because of its mythical elements (the real incarnation of the Word in the historic Jesus of Nazareth) since it arbitrarily limited the unity of God and man to Jesus Christ.⁴ It is obvious that in this line of thinking the idea of incarnation-even-without-sin (or rather, becoming-one, even without sin) found ready acceptance and was vigorously defended.

Several nineteenth-century theologians show clear traces of this idea. The idea of becoming-man (or: becoming-one) as such becomes an object of reflection. **Martensen**, for instance, is of the opinion that the object of history, regardless of sin, is the **“idea of the world-completion,”** viz. **“that humankind will be united with God,”** so that he concludes, “In this sense we say that, even if sin had not entered in, Christ still would have come.”⁵ **Martensen** argues that Christ has metaphysical significance and **“so his coming cannot be determined by sin only.”**⁶

Van Oosterzee, too, defends the idea of **“incarnation even without sin.”** Those who disagree, he says, consider Christ solely as the Lamb of reconciliation, so that the sacrifice would not have been necessary if there had not been sin. **Van Oosterzee**, however, is of the opinion that Christ was not only the Mediator of reconciliation, but “it is no less true that He at the same time is the highest revelation of the invisible Godhead and that originally man was destined to be like unto God.”⁷ Even without sin man would have had to be lifted up to higher perfection. “And why would we not be allowed to believe that the means which the highest Love would have employed to this end would have included the sending of his Son in human flesh?” He, too, argues that the incarnation cannot be an “incidental” reaction. “An incident so amazing as the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, the Lord, can hardly be only the result of a phenomenon not absolutely necessary, viz., sin.”⁸ God’s plan to gather all together in his Son does not originate at the time of the fall but from eternity (*ibid.*, p. 86). According to **Van Oosterzee** this idea would have been more generally accepted “if it had not been protected and recommended by Pelagian and Socinianistic theologians even though it has not the least connection with their reprehensible heresies.”⁹

These examples make it sufficiently clear that the idea of **“incarnation even without sin”** is opposed to the exclusive-soteriologic motive of the incarnation.¹⁰ Attention is called to Christ’s mediatorship or his universal and cosmic significance, and this significance is regarded as limited and threatened if considered on the basis of the soteriological motive. Even the doctrine of God’s image and the way of man to perfection are brought up in the argument from which, too, is concluded that the Son of God would have become man even if the world had not fallen.

Long before the nineteenth century, however, similar ideas had appeared in Christian theology. We find them, for instance, already in **Duns Scotus** and the **Scotists**, in contrast to the **Thomists**, who, like their teacher, reject the idea of an “incarnation even without sin.” **Thomas**, indeed, had considered the problem, but answered the question “incarnation even without sin?” in the negative, basing this on the *patres* (on the Father), but also, as **Kreling** states, “simply on Holy Scripture.”¹¹

The **Scotists** accused the **Thomists** of not suffi-

ciently honoring Paul's word, which depicts Christ as the firstborn of the entire creation, by whom all things are created ([Col. 1:16](#)). **“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.”** [Colossians 1:16 \(NASB\)](#) The **Scotists** called attention to the fact that Christ is the head of angels and that the entire creation points to Christ,¹² and they accused the **Thomists** of degrading Christ, “making him the means of man's deliverance, a means to an end” (Kreling, *Studia Cath.*, 1939, pp. 90ff.). **Kreling** points out that **Thomas** certainly realized the import of such Scripture passages but that he did not conclude an “incarnation even without sin” from them. Neither, apparently, did the argument that Christ thus was degraded to a “means to an end” impress him. From the cosmic significance of Christ it cannot in the least be concluded that he would have become flesh even without the fall.

The words of Scripture concerning this cosmic significance do not appear isolated but in immediate connection with the certainty and the fullness of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. According to **Thomas** one may not isolate one element of the way of salvation from the sum total in order to turn the incarnation, on the basis of the predestination, into an absolute, necessary idea that would be independent of the fall. There is a remarkable similarity in **Thomas**'s, **Calvin**'s, and **Kuyper**'s defenses; they all surrender to the superior power of Scripture.

Calvin came across this idea of the “incarnation even without sin” in **Osiander**.¹³ **Calvin**'s sharp attack is very remarkable, the more so since he unconditionally confessed the predestination and apparently refused to draw a line from this divine initiative to the ideas of **Osiander**, and he could not at all accept the separation of the incarnation as an “**idea**” from the historical connection among God's acts of salvation. It is **Calvin**, who had such a keen insight into God's *aprioristic* (which truly is not just an activity “out of reaction”) activity who rejected **Osiander**'s idea as an unjustified speculation. He emphatically pointed out that the essential “ **motive**” of the incarnation was the deliverance from sin and death, and he was convinced that Scripture clearly indicated that. He points out that Christ himself has

declared the reason for his coming and asks the question why, then, Christ is not called the *first* Adam, but the *second*. Because he is the theologian of election, **Calvin**'s thinking is unconditionally historical, and he avoids all speculation when he points out that Paul places the fall between the first and second Adam. The entire Scripture exclaims that Christ has been clothed with our flesh in order to become a Savior. To think up another reason or motive shows exceeding rashness, according to **Calvin**. Never has the Mediator been promised without the shedding of blood, and all the apostles unanimously agreed about the purpose of his coming.

It is not necessary to examine all the connections in which this idea of “incarnation even without sin” has functioned in the course of history. But the preceding examples prove sufficiently that the object of all this variation is always the same splitting of the motive of Christ's coming into the world, by separating this coming from the exclusively-soteriological framework. Thus it is impossible to avoid a dualistic motivation: one for the *historic reality* which entered in (the fall), and for a *hypothetical situation*, which nevertheless would also have called for the fact of the incarnation. It must not in the least surprise us, therefore, that later on the idea of the incarnation “**as such**” was disconnected from the connections in which it appeared in **Scotistic theology** and thus became the first stage of the deification of man in **Osiander**, and stronger yet, in nineteenth-century speculative reflection.

The development of nineteenth-century theology and its “**mankind-Christology**” makes us realize even more how much it was the duty of the Church at that time to be on her guard against all kinds of speculation, because this idea of “incarnation even without sin” took on such proportions that the actuality of the incarnation of the Word was hardly mentioned any more.

When studying this question we are inevitably reminded of all those passages of Scripture which so clearly deal with the immediate connection between Christ's coming in the incarnation of the Word and the salvation from our sin and lost condition. It is true, the angels laud the miracle of Christmas itself, and it is indeed the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning *Immanuel* ([Isaiah 7:14](#)), but *this* “**God with us**” has nothing to do with the speculative theology of God and man becoming one *in general*. Never is a marvelous event *as*

such the subject of a doxology by either men or angels, as though they consider it a **cosmic theanthropic** (embodying deity in a human form) **mystery**. The salvation of God in his Son does not allow for any speculation. Neither can the incarnation be isolated from the further career of Christ. When considering the incarnation, that is to say, **the Word becoming flesh**, it is impossible—in the light of the scriptural connections—to speak first of Christ’s *cosmic* significance, ontology, and the anthropologic “elevation” of human nature to this unification; rather, the reality of Immanuel must be seen as the fulfillment of the prophecy of salvation, and full attention must fall on God’s Son descending and the heavens’ rending.

The message of the incarnation is never a thing by itself; it preaches not the *elevatio* of human nature but its **deliverance** and **restoration** by him whom the Father had sent. Already in the Gospels we see the shadows descend upon the pathway of the Babe of Bethlehem, concerning which Simeon prophesies even while the joy about the Messiah, who had just come, still fills his heart (**Luke 2:34**). From the very beginning it is evident that Immanuel’s coming is historically decreed and that it does not merely have a “general” meaning which can be described as a **“unity between God and man.”** The Divine object is peace and good will when the fullness of time has come. Just as soon as Messiah is born opposition arises. This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against (**Luke 2:34**). We nowhere find this Christmas event presented as a thing by itself, as an Immanuel-idea, but we read of the signs of poverty, by which the shepherds will know him (**Luke 2:12**). The entire gospel message clearly preaches the object of his coming. No matter how variegated this object may be designated, it is always presented in connection with the salvation of God.

His coming is **soteriological** (doctrine of salvation), or, if the word were not so overcharged already, we could say **anthropocentric** (humans as the central element of the universe). Man is the center in this coming, not of course in an **anthropocentric** sense as opposed to a **theocentric** (God as the central element of the universe) sense, (the song of the angels!), but nevertheless man is a real, actual center

(cf. **Tit. 3:8**). Thus we learn from the message of Scripture that Christ came to give his soul, his life, a ransom for many (**Matt. 20:28**; cf. **John 12:27**); not to be ministered unto, but to minister (**Mark 10:45**); to destroy the works of the devil (**1 John 3:8**; cf. **Gal. 4:4**; **Rom. 8:3**); and to do the will of God (**Heb. 10:7**; cf. **Ps. 40**). He came to save sinners (**1 Tim. 1:15**), to seek that which was lost (**Luke 19:10**), to call sinners to repentance (**Mark 2:17**), and to bear witness unto the truth (**John 18:37**). His being sent and his coming are unto **salvation** and **deliverance**.

Nowhere is mentioned a **“meaning”** of his coming as such, nor an **“idea”** of the incarnation apart from this salvation; there is no mention of an Immanuel apart from Isaiah’s prophecy of salvation, nor of an event by itself which would justify the speculative argument: “incarnation even without sin.” There simply is no **cosmological** (is an **argument** for the existence of a **First Cause** to the universe, and by extension is often used as an argument for the existence of God), **anthropological** (the scientific study of the origin, the behavior, and the physical, social, and cultural development of humans), or **theanthropological** (the scientific study of the origin, the behavior, and the physical, social, and cultural development of God) problem whatsoever. It is true that with respect to the fullness of time, and **eschatologically** (study of the end times), the point at issue is God’s dwelling with men (cf. **John 1:14** and **Rev. 21:3**), but that is the dwelling of the true God, the Covenant God, and the God of salvation. The Bible is obviously not at all afraid to depict God’s act as a holy acting **in reaction**, viz., **against** man’s guilt and lost condition.

The biblical message is so historical in character that the historical viewpoint of the destroying work of Satan and mankind **precedes** the redemptive work of Christ, which is also historical, and God’s response to the fall is a deed of supreme reaction, **“I will put enmity”** (**Gen. 3:15**)! True, Christ’s redemptive work is not merely an incidental reaction in the midst of the course of history, and Scripture does bring up unfathomable depths and unlimited perspectives in connection with God’s decree,¹⁴ but that does not change the fact that Christ’s coming and his work may never be separated from the motive of his coming, which had been fixed within the scope of history and time, and which is **reaction** against rebellion and guilt.

His coming is truly curing and saving. It is a coming

in and with the peace which surpasses all understanding, and even the naming of the Messiah expresses this motive, “**Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins**” ([Matt. 1:21](#)). This Jesus had been expected, his coming had been prophesied, and he had come as the Messiah, the Anointed; who could, for a moment, take this anointing in an abstract sense and disconnect it from his historical filling of his office? It is, therefore, impossible to separate his birth from his cross or even to imagine these being separated, or to speak of an incarnation as such, which should have significance apart from guilt.

The mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now made manifest ([Rom. 16:25](#)) is designated as “**God manifest in the flesh,**” but is described *in* history: “**justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory**” ([1 Tim. 3:16](#)).

We need not be surprised that this speculation concerning the “incarnation even without sin” places the cross more or less in the shadows. The twofold motive of Christ’s coming makes these shadows inevitable. Once the connection between incarnation and redemption has been severed, be it only *in abstracto* and **hypothetically**, then it cannot be reconstructed afterwards. The *idea* of the incarnation must simply continue to fascinate the mind and cause one ultimately to accept the elevation of man by means of this *unio*. The dominating aspect of the incarnation thus becomes the ascension of man rather than the *kenosis*, the descent of the Son of God into the depths of the flesh, which is presented to us as the act of mercy which finds its completion in death, even the death of the cross ([Phil. 2:8](#)).

On the basis of the confession of the Church, her confession of guilt and her doxology, the criticism which alleges that she has been too much influenced by “*hamartio-centric*” thought simply fails to impress us any longer. For the divine enmity expressed the promise to the woman by which the Bible opens the windows to the history of reconciliation, shows how serious the living and holy God considers the historic rebellion,¹⁵ which he places in the “**center**” of his reconciliatory action. Christ’s coming, is in-

deed a divine response, not to a suppliant asking—He is found of them that sought him not ([Isa. 65:1](#))—but to the guilt of a rebellious heart, and history may never be considered relative on the basis of God’s decree. It is exactly the historical relationship between fall and redemption which God’s revelation reveals unto us. What has the “thinking away” of sin to do with this ([Martensen, p. 209](#))? That which has been critically called the *hamartio-centric* conception of history is nothing but the recognition of the reality of the historic reconciliation. This criticism is a misjudgment of the connection between guilt and redemption and severs the historical relationship between Christ’s coming and man’s guilt.¹⁶

It goes without saying that to accept the inseparable connection between Christ’s coming and our salvation is entirely in harmony with the age-old confession of the Church, as we find this expressed in the **Nicean Confession**, which states that *he descended for our sakes*. This silences all speculation, and the Church has respected this viewpoint, both in her dogma and no less in her hymns.¹⁷ No one can very well raise the objection that the point at issue is the motive, which, after the actual entrance of sin, was indeed connected with his coming. For the Church never knew of any other motive, neither hypothetical nor as secondary motive, besides this motive of Christ’s coming unto salvation. She saw the incarnation in historical unity with the cross. **Kreling** mentions that Catholic theology has frequently been accused of having become mired in the incarnation doctrine. This accusation is incorrect, according to him. We may leave this statement for what it is, but we welcome his assertion that incarnation and redemption may never be separated, as so often happened in Eastern theology.¹⁸ The incarnation is not an isolated phase of the way of salvation, followed by a second and new phase, viz., the cross. The hymn of the silent and holy night reaches its full depth at the prospect of the salvation of the millions, and after this joyful prospect it returns again to the stable in Bethlehem (**Dutch version of Silent Night**). The way of the Church, therefore, is that of faith, which directs itself to the message of the entire way of the incarnated Word, the Messiah, in his coming and in the complete fulfillment of his one, holy office. Let the Church be on her guard at the border of the mystery now manifested. For speculation—any speculation—falsifies the *tone* of the gospel, the tone which resounds *guilt* and *grace* from beginning to end. Immanuel’s coming is integral to the prospect of salvation;

this is entirely different from saying that Christ **first became man**, then **secondly became flesh** and brought salvation. The Church confesses in the same breath that he was born of the Virgin Mary and suffered.

There is no other “**elevation**” of man possible than through **reconciliation and restoration**. It is the restoration of the imitation, which, according to Paul, is only feasible against the background of reconciliation in its self-denial and humiliation (**Phil. 2:5ff**), “**Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.**” Immediately our attention is called to the transition from the form of God into the form of a servant to the poverty of the cross. His service is manifest in the world in this kind of coming and with this goal in mind. Through this transition from glory to poverty and forsakenness the debt is paid, demonry broken, and the way opened to the throne of grace. His coming is not our elevation but the **communion** with him, “**Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God**” (**Rev. 21:3**). Here the purpose of Christ’s coming shines in eschatological glory and the “ **motive**” of the incarnation in its reality becomes once more fully evident. Even in the book of visions, the book of time and eternity, the sharp contours of history are still not erased: “**Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing**” (**Rev. 5:12**).

1. Cf. A. Kuyper, *De Vleeswording des Woords*, 1887, p. 28. Kuyper speaks of “the strange, objectionable thesis” which he had found in Origen, Tertullian, Duns Scotus, and others (p. 28) and adds that more than once the attempt has been made to ascribe the same idea to others, as, for instance, Augustine, Thomas, and the Reformed theologian Zanchius, which, according to Kuyper, was possible only by “untrue quotations” (p. 30). Kuyper speaks also of a contra-scriptural and pantheistic error and considers the question, “incarnation, even without sin” a *senseless, useless, foolish* speculation (p. 10) because Scripture “does not know of any other incarnation but the one *for sinners*” (p. 10).

2. Althaus writes that “the entire history of Christian thinking is concerned with the question whether the incarnation of Christ would not be necessary, apart from sin.” In our opinion this generalizing statement is too strong. Althaus, *Theol. Aufs.*, II (1935), 51.

3. The expression “hamartiocentric” is especially used by H. W. Schmidt (Althaus, p. 52).

4. That which the Church considered “once-and-for-all” had to be taken as general. According to Strauss this is the key of Christology. See, among others, J. A. Dorner, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Lehre von der Person Christi*, 1853, II, 1118ff. This matches the well-known expression of Strauss, “To pour its entire fullness into (just) *one* object would not be the way at all in which the Idea would be realized.” Here humanity is made God-become-man (Dorner, p. 1119).

5. H. Martensen, *Die Chr. Dogmatik*, 1897, pp. 208–211.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 209; cf., “Must we accept, then, that the most glorious thing in the world could only have been occasioned by sin, so that, if there had not been sin, there would not have been a place in humanity for the glory of the only-begotten?” (p. 209). We must, “even when we disregard sin,” ask the question, “who is the complete God-man in this realm?” Martensen bases his ideas on Eph. 1:10ff. and Col. 1:15ff., which mention Christ’s cosmic significance (p. 210). Cf. on Martensen, e.g., E. Günther, *Die Entwicklung der Lehre von der Person Christi im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 1911, pp. 232ff. We find similar ideas especially in Dorner. Cf. Günther, *op. cit.*, p. 237. “That he agrees with the central idea of the speculative Mediation-Theory is evidenced by his conviction of the necessity of the God-man, regardless of the fact of the fall and the work of redemption.” As to Dorner himself, see Dorner, II, 1259 (who refers to Col. 1:15–17). The same motive is to be found in Liebner, who wants to transcend the exclusive hamartiologicsoteriologic (sin and salvation) to the “*theanthropologic*” (God only) motive (Dorner, II, 1245). It is remarkable to find the idea in Liebner that already creation is to be considered “*Christologically*.” In the 19th Century the idea was even voiced that if Adam had not fallen the incarnation would still have proceeded (Dorner, II, 1247). The idea that the incarnation of God is given with the *idea* of mankind was quite widespread in the 19th century.

7. J. J. van Oosterzee, *Christologie*, III (1861), 85.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 86. The stubborn attempt to point out the basis for this idea in Scripture is evident when he quotes Paul's statement as proof, "that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:46, 47; cf. the distorted reasoning in connection with this word: *ibid.*, p. 86).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 89. Van Oosterzee mentions Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Osiander as champions of this idea. The latter wrote in 1550, "an filius Dei fuerit incarnandus, si peccatum non introivisset in mundum." Further; Liebner, and in the Netherlands: J. J. de Roy. It is remarkable that Van Oosterzee concludes his discussion of this problem with these words, "But why should we any longer lose ourselves in the inquiry concerning a deduced possibility or impossibility. Sin has entered the world..." (*ibid.*, p. 90).

10. We further mention J. H. Gunning, *Blikken in de Openbaring*, III (1868), 133, who writes, "Jesus is the fulfillment of man; He is the Man, the chosen One *par excellence*. The relationship between the Son and mankind is eternal. He would have become man also if sin had not come in between, and that would only have materialized in the course of time, in human history, what He, in essence, has been from eternity. The great marvel of Bethlehem is only this, that he became *flesh*, and partook of our *weakness* resulting from sin. His becoming man, therefore, had been decreed from eternity." Cf. also Vol. I, 316ff. for the general background which shows that Gunning has been influenced by such motives as are to be found in Duns Scotus; although it is my opinion that specific 19th-century influences cannot be denied. It would be very interesting to examine the backgrounds of the "Christologie" motives in the doctrine of creation with Duns Scotus, Gunning, and Barth.

11. P. Kreling, "Het Motief der Menswording," *Studia Catholica*, 1939, p. 90. Thomas deals with the problem in his *Summa Theologica III*, 1, 3. (Utrum si homo non peccasset, Deus incarnatus fuisset). He considers several arguments (that human nature after sin is receptive to the grace of the

communion with God and therefore it would have been so also outside of the fall; that the predestination is from eternity and therefore it was necessary, even before sin, that God's Son became man "ad hoc quod Dei praedestinatio impleretur"). However, over against this he places the words of Luke 19:10 and 1 Tim. 1:15, because we cannot know anything of the things which proceed "ex sola Dei voluntate nisi quatenus in Sacra Scriptura traduntur." And because Scripture everywhere (*ubique*) points out the "ratio incarnationes ex peccato primi hominis" it is more proper (*convenientius*) to say, that God appointed the work of the incarnation "in remedium contra peccatum," so that "peccato non existente, incarnatio non fuisset." Neither is Thomas convinced by the argument on the basis of the *praedestinatio*, because "praedestinavit opus incarnationis in remedium humani peccati." Concerning these questions see also P. Kreling, *Incarnatie en Verlossing*, Het Schild, XXIX ed., p. 76; further Zacharias, *Het Geheim van de Menswording in Oosten en Westen*, Het Schild, XXIX ed., p. 125, and my *Conflict With Rome*, "Incarnatie en Katholicisme"; and *Dict. Theol. Cath. VII*, 2, s.v. *Incarnation*, pp. 1480ff.

12. In my opinion it cannot be denied that to a certain extent Duns Scotus' ideas occupy a separate place in the frequently rather strange connections in which the idea of the "incarnation, even without sin" comes up in the course of history (especially with Osiander and the Mediation Theology). The issue with Scotus is the dogmatic problem in connection with the predestination of Christ. If God, in the predestination of Christ, first of all decreed Christ's utmost glory, then this election must have *preceded* that of other men and certainly the foreknowledge of the fall, so that it can no longer be said that sin is presupposed by the incarnation. There would not have been *redemptio*, "nisi homo peccasset, sed non propter solam istam causam videtur Deus praedestinasse illam animam ad tantam gloriam." We see, therefore, that the issue with Duns Scotus is the order in the *praescientia Dei*, which is the same kind of problem as was at stake later on in the controversy, between supralapsarianism (the view "prior to the fall" that the election and reprobation of individual persons occurs in the decrees of God as logically prior to the decrees for creation and the fall)- and infralapsarianism (the view that in order of God's decrees, God decreed to permit the fall of humanity into sin before decreeing to save some of humanity "the elect"). Duns considers it absurd to suppose that God had sooner foreseen the fall of Adam than

predestined Christ to glory. Concerning the entire problem see Duns Scotus, *Sententiae*, Lib. III, VII, Qu. 3, and on him, P. Kreling, "Het Motief der Menswording," *Stud. Cath.*, 1939.

13. Calvin, *Institutes*, II, XII, 5ff.; cf. W. J. Aalders, *De Incarnatie*, 1933, pp. 178, 179.

14. Eph. 1:4 (Has he not chosen us in him before the foundation of the world?); 1 Pet. 1:20. God's "reaction" does not preclude that this divine act of salvation primarily originates in God's good pleasure and that this good pleasure would not in a human, casual sense be dependent on human decisions and thus lose its aprioristic character. That is why Paul can say that God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), but to conclude from this that history and man's decisions are irrelevant would be changing the relationship between divine and human acts according to a merely human scheme of rational synthesis.

15. We are referring to the expression, "o felix culpa," frequently ascribed to Augustine, and which refers to Adam's sin, by which Jesus Christ was revealed as the Reconciler in the way of deliverance: "O felix culpa quae tantum et talem meruit habere redemptorem." Quick is of the opinion that "those who think it wrong to utter it, have not understood the fullness of the gospel" (O. C. Quick, *Doctrines of the Creed*, 1949, p. 211), which, in my opinion, is an incorrect verdict, because it is fully well possible to confess the greatness of the *Redemptor* and the *redemptio*, without considering the "felix culpa" an acceptable expression in that connection. Thomas quotes this expression together with Rom. 5:20 (But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound), but Paul does not express the "felix culpa." On the matter of ascribing this expression to Augustine, cf. A. Sizoo, "Felix culpa," *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 1944. Thomas quotes from the "benedictio cerei paschalis." Cf. the footnote in the Thomas edition Marietti, 1939, Rome: "habetur in ordine romano sine nomine, sed Ambrosio tribuitur eius compositio" (with Thomas, *Summa Theol.* III, Qu. 1, art. IV).

16. Paul Althaus writes in connection with his own theology that he is attempting to liberate theology "from the scheme of hamartiocentric theol-

ogy" (*Theol. Aufsätze*, II, [1935], 53) without falling into the idealistic conception of history, which does not attach any *essential* significance to the historic facts with respect to the salvation of man, because these have only symbolic or illustrative significance. It is quite evident, however, that Althaus' attempt to *transcend* the hamartiocentric viewpoint is closely connected with his critical viewpoint with respect to the historical character of the fall. There does not appear to be a "tertium" between the "hamartiocentric" and the "idealistic" conception. One may object to the expression "hamartiocentric" since sin can hardly be called the "center," but the *fact* it indicates may not embarrass us. That which the history of criticism of the "hamartiocentric" has produced is in many respects so startling that we may discard this criticism with an easy conscience.

17. Cf. J. K. Mozley, *Christologie und Soteriologie*, in *Mysterium Christi*; *Christol. Studien britischer und deutscher Theologen*, 1931, pp. 209–236, esp. p. 218; and D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ*, An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement, 1948, pp. 157ff.

18. Cf., e.g., S. Zankow, *Das orthodoxe Christentum des Ostens*, 1928, who says that the Eastern church, since its earliest days, has been more concerned with the being and person of the God-Man than with soteriology" (p. 47). Cf. also Zankow, *Die orthodoxe Kirche des Ostens in oekumenischer Sicht*, 1946, p. 33.



The Talmid is published by:

*West Los Angeles
Living Word Christian Center*

6520 Arizona Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90045 USA
(310) 645-2522 or (310) 665-0137

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