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JESUS CHRIST: A STORY CONTINUED

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"I'm only human!" How often is this phrase used to describe our human quirks and deficiencies? Amongst our tools of explanation for moral failure, this one is as used and cherished as our most well-worn hammer or screwdriver. This one answer seems to perform equally well for both problems; one explains sin, the other explains finitude. Why do we use this moribund phrase to explain not only our naturally human finitude, tendencies and propensities, but also our moral and ethical deficiencies? Is depravity native to humanity? Is the progress of sanctification and redemption a lessening, or an increase of humanity? Our answer is crucial and emanates from our doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ.

If humanity is something we need to grow away from, is it really good that Jesus was a man? And was His humanity real? These questions are as old as revelation, and our misunderstandings and heresies are as old as the questions. The deity of Christ is unquestionable for many of us—and it has been defended bravely in this century. The humanity of our Lord, I fear, is more often grudgingly accepted than vigorously confessed. Mentally, we know and accept orthodoxy, but our hymns, attitudes, subculture and ideals reveal a theology in need of radical correction. Post-Reformation orthodoxy has held its confessions concerning the doctrine of Christ disjointedly from its worldview and body of theology. We have failed to wed the doctrine of the person of

Christ to an incarnational theology.

A theological description of Jesus Christ is a necessary part of the church's work as she formulates biblical doctrine and resists heresy, but if she forgets that she came to know Jesus Christ through the proclamation of His story, she will soon stray in her life of worship. With the need for modern and Western accuracy, it is difficult to remember at times that Jesus Christ is taught and proclaimed in the Bible as the continuation of the Adam narrative. We often forget that orthodoxy depends as heavily upon the ongoing life of the narrative as it does upon a systematization of its truths. Indeed, history reveals that communities which embrace their confessions apart from the narrative which formed them, soon lose the truth of the confession itself.

The most public of the early controversies are commonly called the "Trinitarian Debates." At the center of these debates was the exact nature of the relationship between Jesus and God the Father.



**HISTORICAL ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE JESUS CHRIST
INSTILL RESPECT FOR CAUTION
AS WELL AS FOR CERTAINTY**

God's revelation in Christ created the Christian church. However, as the church began to digest and process this Christian revelation, disagreements naturally arose. The

most public of the early controversies are commonly called the "Trinitarian Debates." At the center of these debates was the exact nature of the relationship between Jesus and God the Father. These debates are foreign territory to much of current Christianity, yet familiarity with them is fundamental to Christian thought.

Arius, presbyter and preacher in Alexandria, reacted against a sermon preached by his bishop, Alexander, c.318, titled "The Great Mystery of the Trinity in Unity." Claiming that Christ was created by God, Arius maintained the divinity of Christ by virtue of His obedience and faithfulness. He explained Jesus as being of a different (*heteros*) essence than the Father and hence, not deity proper. The popular belief of the deity of Jesus Christ he rejected as polytheism.

After bitter debate and condemnation of his views by a synod, Arius left for Nicomedia and the bishopric of his friend, Eusebius. At the orders of Emperor Constantine, who wished to have unanimity in the new religion of his empire, a council was called to settle this debate. Having entertained the compromise phrase that Jesus was of similar (*homoi*) essence as the Father for a little while, the council opted for the more rigorous statement that He was of the same essence (*homoousias*), or substance, as the Father, although a different person, or personality. The Nicene Council and its famous creed stipulated that biblical orthodox Christianity should worship Jesus as "coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial with the Father."¹

As is often the case, the document signed by the clerics had very little immediate impact on the faith of the church. During most of the fourth century, the person and deity of Christ continued to be debated. Many bishops sided with Arius, and it is estimated that at times more than half of confessing Christendom professed allegiance to his views. Thanks to the continued work of men such as Ambrose of Milan, Apollinarius and Athanasius, the tide slowly turned.

The Church had always confessed Jesus Christ as both the man from Nazareth and the Son of God from all eternity, yet now it did so with greater awareness of its need and responsibility to work out its doctrine with linguistic precision and biblical accuracy. The church then began to apply the necessary work of systematic theology to the nature(s) of this amazing God/Man they called Lord and Savior.

We must always be careful to draw the necessary line of distinction between God's Word and man's word, between revelation and theology. Theology is man's response to God's self-revelation. Man is called to respond, and converted man cannot help but answer the call of the Word of God. But mankind, and particularly orthodox mankind, forgets repeatedly and chronically to distinguish between God's Word to him and his answer to this Word. The result is often an overly zealous addiction to our conclusions.

Most heresies originate when people yield to the temptation of oversimplifying that which is by nature a mystery.



All of this was true of our spiritual forefathers as well in their endeavor to do theological work in their life of worship. While studying their history, it is ever our temptation to condemn as non-Christian the men and women who held and promoted the ideas later condemned as unorthodox. Mercifully, by God's grace we rarely understand the full implications of our own thoughts, and are never con-

sistent enough to be formed completely by the teachings we espouse. Therefore, we must be cautious about our totalitarian conclusions concerning the individuals who promoted the doctrines condemned as erroneous. While the meanings of words are rather fixed, their associations and nuances can effect quite a variety of responses. Moreover, these debates happened through people no less political than ourselves.

Most heresies originate when people yield to the temptation of oversimplifying that which is by nature a mystery. After Nicea, the new problem of the relationship of the natures was confronted in two basic manners. Theologians associated with Alexandria tended to emphasize our Lord's deity at the expense of His humanity, while those associated with Antioch, the other major theological center, tended to emphasize His humanity at the expense of His deity. Apollinarius, having argued and worked well during the Trinitarian Debates, developed one such simplified view of Jesus. Following contemporary Greek anthropology, he taught that Jesus, like all men, was body, soul and spirit. The spirit element in Jesus, however, was replaced with the *logos*. The *logos* actively dominated the more passive soul and body of Jesus—thus making Him no longer a true human being. He became rather a significantly divergent form of humanity—and certainly not “like us in every manner.” This view, too, was condemned. Most of the simplicities were either of a “half and half” variety or of the one element being swallowed up by the other.

Apollinarius, opposed by Gregory of Nazianzus, Diodorus, and others, was so vigorous in his defense of the deity of Christ that His humanity became virtually absent. These Eastern theologians stressed the human nature of Jesus and His earthly life far more than did the Alexandrians. A typical explanation which began to be developed was that the *logos* united with the human element in a moral, but not an

essential, union. Others went on to say that the one will of Jesus united the two natures. Germane to our topic is the fact that the spirituality of Jesus was disconnected from His humanity. In fact, His spirituality came to be juxtaposed against his humanity.

Nestorius (381-452) was charged with seeking a different type of simplicity—a radical division in natures. A well-respected monk who became patriarch at Constantinople, Nestorius felt bound to correct the popular description of Mary he considered inappropriate: *theotokos*, or “God-bearer.” We might compare it today to “Mother of God.” He preferred *Christotokos*, or “Christ-bearer”—definitely a more precise phrase, but not helpful in elucidating the issues at hand. Mary, he claimed, was the mother of only the human side of Christ. His explanation of the problem was, in effect, a Christ of two persons, although he did deny this for the rest of his life. At best, however, the human and divine sides of Christ were joined in a mechanical, rather than organic, relationship.

The argument, like many of our theological and ecclesiastical disagreements, was highly personal and political in nature. Cyril of Alexandria, believing (rightly) that the human and divine natures were separate and distinct, yet one in the *logos*, bitterly opposed Nestorius in Alexandria’s struggle for priority over against Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome. Cyril appealed to the emperor and his wife for a general council which convened at Ephesus in 431 (The Third Ecumenical Council). When Cyril arrived a few days before Nestorius, he began the council early, during which he reviewed and condemned Nestorius’ position in one day’s session. Nestorius was deposed and exiled to Egypt upon arrival. The friends of Nestorius then in turn deposed and imprisoned Cyril, who was quickly released by the emperor.

This debate, too, is surrounded with the pathos and

humor of human ambition and manipulation. It is a pity there was not any further conversation, for there is good reason to believe that Nestorius would have signed an orthodox creed later penned by John of Antioch for this purpose; Nestorius, however, did not survive long enough to read it. The crime of refusing to hear one another sympathetically has been one of our greater sins in church history. The Nestorian church sent missionaries as far as China within one hundred years and still exists in several Eastern and Middle Eastern nations. Cyril, nevertheless, was correct in maintaining that our Lord could not be divided into two persons, one divine and the other human.

Cyril’s successor, Dioscorus, had the lethal misfortune of being less intelligent, yet far more ambitious than his mentor. After destroying the rapprochement and compromise from John of Antioch and supporting Eutychus, who was charged with another heresy of simplicity, he brought about what was later known as the infamous Robber Council² of 449. The Christ of Eutychus had but one nature after the incarnation. In Dioscorus’ defense of Eutychus, he sealed Alexandria’s separation from Rome and Constantinople, and formed the monophysite (one nature) church known until today as the Coptic Church of northern Africa.

In the providence of God, a fourth ecumenical council, the famous Council of Chalcedon (451), was called to rectify the damage done two years earlier and to address the pertinent issues at hand concerning the doctrine of Christ. Rejecting both heresies of simplicity, they attempted to confess revealed truth without denying the mystery of Christ’s person. While the third council refuted the error of separating the natures of Christ (Nestorius), the fourth combated the error of unifying the natures into one (Eutychus), and its conclusions, like the Athanasian Creed, are accepted in substance by all historically Reformation churches:

Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his God-head, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of the Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-Begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.³

Post-Reformation Christianity has adamantly maintained historic orthodoxy concerning the person of Christ; yet its spiritual ideals and practice force reconsideration. Moreover, it has become too convinced that it has spoken the final word.



The debates concerning the nature and will of Christ occupied yet three more councils, but the creed from Chalcedon set the standard. Yet, as with all confessions, they are man's response to the Word of God and are therefore not the final word on this topic. Thought and debate are not hereby concluded, nor should the historical reality of words on paper lead us to conclude that all faith in every parish pew and pulpit is orthodox and biblical. This brief overview illustrates for us the dangerous temptation of simplicity: the creation of a Jesus Christ capable of final human definition.

POST-REFORMATION CHRISTIANITY TENDS TO MINIMIZE THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

Being fickle as well as finite, we often confuse our assent to that which we read with that which we believe—especially if our assent is knowing, deliberate and powerful. Post-Reformation Christianity has adamantly maintained historic orthodoxy concerning the person of Christ; yet its spiritual ideals and practice force reconsideration. Moreover, it has become too convinced that it *has* spoken the final word.

I do not believe, however, that our problem is the same as that of our early forefathers. Our difficulty is not with the relationships of natures (we rarely think about that!) nor with the humanity of our Lord *per se*. Our problem is more akin to the ancient and modern Gnostics, who have a problem with creation in general and humanity in particular. This surfaces not only when we postulate and apply the humanity of Christ, but also when the goodness of creation or the true humanity of the Scriptures is maintained. For example, if we discuss the development of humanity beneath the heading "The Pursuit of Spirituality," the raised eyebrows would confirm our suspicions. Our difficulties with the humanity of Christ are closer than first

cousins to the fact that we cannot, in full faith, conviction and joy, sing "This is my Father's world, I rest me in the thought . . ." Our "spiritual lives" are something distinctly different from our "regular lives." This is true, not only of liberalism, but also, and more obviously so, of evangelical pietism and fundamentalism.

In the Middle Ages the town's religious parades, the public houses, and kitchen table talk were far more indicative of actual and accepted theology than the results of local synods or the productions of the monasteries. So today, neither seminary life nor the well-loved books lining our shelves are necessarily the thermometer of our God and worldviews. Rather, our music, hymns, worship services, architecture, church life, finances, best-sellers, taboos, "spiritual things," and food preferences reveal our practical theology.

Pietism and fundamentalism have always been both the salvation and stagnation of vital Christianity. They promote, restore and revitalize the fallen zeal, fervency and convictions of the Christian life and consciousness, yet at the same time impose such boundaries that very little territory remains for the exploits of that rescued life. They are primarily defensive in nature and tend to be extremely suspicious of whatever may be considered "the outside." Involvement with this world or with those who think differently serves only to open the floodgates of corruption by those against whom the truth is being defended.

Philip Lee, in his challenging book, *Against the Protestant Gnostics*, makes the point that post-Reformation Christianity, both liberal and conservative, has evolved an alarmingly gnostic theology and practice. Again, our thoughts concerning the person of Jesus Christ have had a direct bearing upon producing this theology of life, the world and redemption.

Salvation is often described and experienced as an

escape from the pressing reality of this dark world. Lee quotes Sarah Edwards as an example of how far spirituality had migrated from the robust, earthly fight of Calvin and Luther:

My soul seemed to be gone out of me to God and Christ in heaven, and to have very little relation to my body. God and Christ were so present to me, and so near to me, that I seemed removed from myself [T]he glory of God seemed to be all, and in all, and to swallow up every wish and desire of the heart.⁴

Salvation becomes an escape to something far better than "earthly reality." Dr. Lloyd-Jones claims repeatedly that Christianity must never look to this world "because this is a doomed world, a sinful world. But there is another world . . . that is the world to hold on to. It is a part of the Christian's exercise, to lay a firm hold on the world to come."⁵ Again, after properly condemning worldliness, and calling the Christian to purity, Lloyd-Jones states: "As Christians we do not really belong to this world; we are 'strangers and pilgrims' in it."⁶ He illustrates the connection between spirituality, Christology and creation by using John's specific use of "world" to say of Jesus, "Though he had come into the world he never belonged to it, he was not of it. He was a stranger here." Later in the same sermon, he applies this: "We have to realize that this world in which we are living is not really our world. As Christians we live in it, and we must take our part in it. But we must not get excited about it; our biggest ambition must not be World Reform."⁷ While I can appreciate his call to holiness, such lack of distinction between the Johanne use of "world" as Satan's realm and the Pauline Genesis creation is confusing. It also promotes a view of spirituality in which it becomes very difficult to confess the humanity of Christ.

In this way of thinking and believing, salvation describes primarily an inner experience of the soul; the idea of a surrender or act of the will replaces salvation as an act of God. It is an encounter with God that takes place in the "inner sanctum" of the individual heart. The extraordinary emphasis and anthropocentric obsession surrounding the experience of the soul is surprisingly pronounced in the tradition of Calvinistic pietism. Hence the extreme distaste one often finds not only for history in general, but also for biblical history. Salvation has migrated from the result of the mighty deeds of God in history to an experience of the individual, disembodied soul. Lee explores the roots of this private individualism:

Rather than God entering into covenant with His people Israel or with His redeemed Church and the individual participating in covenant insofar as he is related to Israel or the Church, under this new form of Calvinism, the individual makes a covenant with God directly in a one-on-one relationship. The influence on North American Protestantism of the theological shift has been enormous.⁸

In this vein, salvation becomes an experience quite disconnected from anything quite so mundane and obviously human as the Christian church. It is held up as a very "spiritual" condition by many to be above any meaningful relationship with such a fallacious body; their relationship with Jesus far supersedes any such earthly connections! Much of the grief experienced (and at times caused!) in pastoral ministry results from a "flesh" (properly understood)-denying view of the church. The primary usefulness of a Christian congregation is considered to be its ability to provide the individual believer with some of the necessary tools in his/her private walk with God. Good teaching and a readily available network of support for personal difficul-

ties are a must for the modern church. This self-centered function of God's church is a far cry from the biblical picture in which we are a single body, the flock of Christ and members bound by covenantal blood to one another.

Many aspects of ordinary life in this world are considered "unspiritual" by this mindset. John Wesley warns parents against allowing children the "pleasures of tasting" because pleasure in eating leads to lust and unlicensed sensuality of all descriptions.⁹ Jonathan Edwards speaks of the mortification of the flesh as mandating that he must "never expect or desire any worldly ease or pleasure."¹⁰ Cotton Mather, who prays for forgiveness for his involvement in the procreation of his children, describes natural human functions, and abhors himself as a "mean and vile thing." Thinking that he is confessing his sinfulness, he is actually lamenting his humanity.¹¹

Such tragic confusions affected sexuality as well. Post-Reformation Christianity has been so obsessed with sexuality (either in denouncing all things sexual or provocative, or recently, the glut of books and seminars celebrating it) that virtually no one can merely accept sexuality as something normal and basic to ordinary life. Human sexuality competes with the spiritual life. George Whitefield pens his desire to avoid marriage "for fear of breaking his intimate relationship with Christ." He writes: "I want a gracious woman that is dead to everything but Jesus . . . [H]e daily grants me fresh tokens of his love, and assures me that he will not permit me to fall by the hands of a woman." This suspicion of women and fear of their destructive powers remains quite alive among evangelical males today.¹² The great tragedy is that human nature has become hopelessly confused with twisted and fallen human nature. Once this confusion is accepted, a biblical doctrine of Christ becomes virtually impossible in popular theology.

Revivalism today reveals its distrust of humanity and

this world through its message of salvation as our rescue from the burning debris of this world. Our rescue can be accomplished only by a new birth, after which we must bide our time in this God-forsaken globe of misery, pain and sin. The completion of this redemption takes place in an existence, personality, world and life completely different from this present one. Christian hope comes to mean that we will "get rid of this old body and finally be truly spiritual."

In Revivalism, the biblical word "flesh" was universally understood as the wickedness and evil of physical reality. Sin used this creation to such an extent that all things physical were reviled as "fleshly." Similarly, the physical and performing arts have always been so severely denounced or ignored; they "correctly perceived these as making a connection between the human spirit and the human body. This connection American evangelicalism was increasingly reluctant to admit."¹³ This also explains why the elements of the sacraments have been reduced from "real symbols" to "mere symbols."

The role of Christianity after the Industrial Revolution is biblically appalling. For many business owners, the exercise of faith was a separate issue from the overworked, animal lives of factory and mine workers.



The early Gnostics accepted a basic dualism because of their platonic heritage; we are prone to accept it because our world is either evil or unimportant. The theology of the incarnation was and is the answer to both. For the neoplatonic gnostic, reality transcended the physical world as "Forms"; for too much of current Christianity, reality lies in a supra-earthly, disembodied spirituality. For the apostle John, reality is defined and displayed by Jesus of Nazareth. For St. Paul, the most spiritual human being is the firstborn of this creation.

Humanity's religious schizophrenia also reveals itself in the frequent division between faith and socioeconomic life. The role of Christianity after the Industrial Revolution is biblically appalling. For many business owners, the exercise of faith was a separate issue from the overworked, animal lives of factory and mine workers. The sovereign God Himself would take care of them through his "unseen hand." Religion was a private affair. Even today, with the tremendously active Christian social and political movements, the main motive is the isolation of the self, or family, in a safe, clean environment where we may live our laundered lives safely distant from filth, human debris and the discomforts of human misery elsewhere on the globe.

The real humanity of the Scriptures and the humanity of Jesus Christ are each necessary elements of the same discussion. Very rarely, and then only with a wonderful inconsistency, will an individual embrace one while rejecting the others. Our theological mistake lies in equating all things natural and human as wicked and sinful. Our view of the Fall and of total, or pervasive, depravity must never view this world as an evil place where persons *qua* humanity are considered evil. God has cursed a world which He thought very good; rather than denouncing it as evil, He came as a man to redeem it by pouring out His blood. Humanity, the human body, human actions, human loves and human

delights have been twisted by the evil one, not condemned by God. While reprinting our manuals of historic orthodoxy, the church questions these very doctrines through her tendencies toward a docetic Christology and a gnostic worldview.

Equating conservatism with orthodoxy is like comparing apples and oranges; they are two different conversations.



LIBERALISM HAS INADVERTENTLY LENT A HELPING HAND TO ORTHODOXY

Unsurprisingly, we tend to equate our own positions with orthodoxy. Yet this is as foolish as equating orthodoxy with the Word of God. Evangelicals equate conservatism with orthodoxy and liberalism with heresy. And there are aspects in which this is warranted. Equating conservatism with orthodoxy is like comparing apples and oranges; they are two different conversations. Conservatism debates liberalism; orthodoxy does battle with unorthodoxy. Conservatism has at times needed rather violent reminders about its pursuit of orthodoxy. Liberalism has been far more public about its departure from orthodoxy. Yet liberalism has played a helpful role in promoting and restoring orthodoxy to the church.

Even through its wrong-headed Social Gospel and Liberation Theology, liberalism has forced the hand of conser-

vatism and coerced it to reconsider its self-centered spirituality and the suburban ghetto. We have been forced to recognize that we do have neighbors, some of whom lie bruised, battered and stinking on the side of the road without a penny to offer for our help. We have been forced to acknowledge that the Son of Man does not create a shard-encrusted wall, keeping at bay rock 'n' roll, R-rated films, and bikinis; instead He opens the doors of our lives as centers of hospitality and redemption. We begin to question whether some of the credit card, cell phone, cable TV, big house, new car, and dinners-out money could perhaps better be used by the Christian church to send a missionary tradesman for the provision of jobs and education in the third world or inner city. One wonders whether perhaps (God forbid!) the Democrats or the ACLU might have a small point—albeit ever so twisted!

Liberalism has asked us whether or not the Word made flesh approves of the self-indulgent lifestyle of middle America. But it also asks us whether or not God in the flesh allows us to treat His world with a “do not taste, do not touch” worldview. May we denigrate and decry human pleasure, ambition, imagination and creativity as such? Was the humanity of Jesus a necessary evil to accomplish salvation, or is He crowned with the glory of God as the Son of Man?

We have been forced to answer the question: Who was Jesus? The separation of the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith was certainly not a liberal innovation; Bultmann merely completed what seventeenth- and eighteenth-century orthodoxy began through its complete lack of interest in this question. Post-Reformation pietism planted the seeds of devotion solely to the “Christ of faith”; these seeds have matured as weeds in the garden. After maintaining that history and the world were unimportant for so long, the church has now had to come to grips with the fact that her Lord was a man in history who had lived in this world,

currently reigns over this world and is coming to complete His redemption of this world. After idealizing those who thought otherwise, the church is now forced to wonder whether the world does, or should, "grow strangely dim" when we come face-to-face with Jesus Christ. Evangelicals such as N.T. Wright, who are attempting to deal with these questions, live under the continual suspicion from the far side of orthodoxy.

As liberals flirt with unorthodoxy, conservatives have been forced to rethink the exact nature of orthodoxy and have asked whether or not American individualistic conservatism is indeed a synonym of orthodoxy. The exclusively inner experience of salvation, the consumer-style church membership, and the rejection of all tradition and reverence are being questioned because of this new challenge.

Even in the "battle for the Bible," a legitimate and needed debate, we are beginning to recognize that the Scriptures are a human document and that the Word of God has come not only to men but through men. In the words of Bonhoeffer, "... the Word of God and the word of man are joined in Holy Scripture; but they are joined in such a way that God himself says where his Word is, and he says it through the word of man."¹⁴ The denigration of the humanity of the Scriptures to "protect" their divine origin, infallibility and inerrancy, is just as acceptable as the heretical solution of Apollinarius in his efforts to defend the deity of Christ.

Conservative evangelicalism is dealing with these issues; Donald Bloesch insightfully comments on the link between these two doctrines:

Later Protestant scholasticism not only veered in the direction of a monophysite doctrine of Scripture but also of a monophysite doctrine of Christ. The humanity of Christ was swallowed up in his divinity. There was a tendency to deny

or to downplay the fact that Jesus experienced real temptations or that he was drastically limited in his knowledge of the world and history. The official confessions guarded against monophysitism and the major theologians were alert to this danger, but the danger was nevertheless real. The Bible has a real humanity as do Jesus Christ and his church, the mystical body of Christ. We cannot posit within history a pure, distilled Word of God, free from all human traces.¹⁵

He continues to claim that Arthur Bring states the true position of Luther by saying, "Just as Christ was a man with an earthly mother, and lived in a specific time and place, in a concrete environment colored by its time, so also God gave his Word in the Bible in a specific language in the milieu of a particular time."¹⁶ The fact that such speech makes us uncomfortable indicates not only that we have *de facto* left our fathers and their confessions, but that we have work to do.

That the Bible contains a palpably human and therefore culturally conditioned element does not make it any less the Word of God. It is precisely because its word is fully incarnate in history concrete and specific, that it is the Word of God. The Word of God is not a timeless idea but a historical word with power.¹⁷

Liberalism's disregard of the divinity of the Scriptures calls evangelical Protestantism to assert the truth of God's written Word, but not to deny, minimize, ignore, or flee from its humanity. Evangelicals increasingly are responding to this truth and proclaiming the true humanity of the Scriptures and the verity of the world as they rediscover Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Has not also the unfounded and misguided ecumenism of liberalism caused some of conservatism to rethink the appalling history of separatism in Protes-

tantism? Usually, the phrase "Come out from among them" is quoted (with a great sense of justification) as the height of spirituality by one group of Christians toward another as they cleave and dismember the body of Christ. This is but a further application of Gnostic dualism. Evangelicals now, despite loud cries of protest, are exploring all possible avenues of confessing faith together with the rest of God's flock. Even if we have only a renewed interest in those of other traditions, and exercise this interest with a new charity, we have progressed.

While retaining questions and a few deep reservations about "narrative theology" as such, none would deny the extensive use of narrative in the Bible. Indeed, most of biblical revelation comes to us in the form of narrative. Yet in the work of theology, narrative is deemed largely inadequate and is certainly viewed with deep suspicion by post-Reformation rationalism.



**PAUL'S CONTINUATION OF THE ADAM NARRATIVE
WONDERFULLY STATES THE TRUTH WHILE
RESPECTING THE MYSTERY OF THE WORD**

While retaining questions and a few deep reservations

about "narrative theology" as such, none would deny the extensive use of narrative in the Bible. Indeed, most of biblical revelation comes to us in the form of narrative. Yet in the work of theology, narrative is deemed largely inadequate and is certainly viewed with deep suspicion by post-Reformation rationalism. It questions our renewed thirst for propositional, rational and systematic statements of truth. Thus the claim of Gary Dorien:

The notion that Christianity is true primarily as true story is hardly new to Christian orthodoxy, but it is certainly new to modern evangelicalism. That Christian truth is therefore polyphonic and multivalent is also a new theme for evangelicalism, though not for orthodoxy.¹⁸

Indeed, as necessary as confessions and systematic theology are (and this field, too, is being neglected), they are inadequate by themselves; they must be accompanied by the retelling of the story of God's redemption. Humans are complicated enough to entertain deep inconsistencies. The children of the Reformation are also cursed and blessed by this phenomenon. We deny Gnosticism and a docetic Christ in our confessions, yet in our worship we promote a spiritual ideal which exalts a purely individual, inner encounter with "the glories of Jesus Christ." We confess our faith concerning the "communion of saints" as the body of Christ, yet practice the Lord's Supper as a private experience. If we were willing to listen to criticism, we would have to admit that we who hold to a Reformation orthodoxy have in many ways questioned, if not denied, the humanity of the Word.

The Epistles of St. Paul are wonderfully corrective of such theological tendencies and inconsistencies. Paul does some of his deepest theological work concerning the person of Jesus Christ through invoking the Adam narrative.

Adam the man. Adam—dust pushed together by the fingers of God. Adam—appellate judge of the beasts. Adam, who embraced his wife. Adam, source of our genes. Adam, who fell to pride and desired to become “as God.” Adam, through whose sin death was brought into the world. When Paul speaks of Adam, even in propositional terms, he assumes the narrative of Genesis, the narrative of the reader’s own history.

Paul writes of Jesus Christ, not with the disconnected manner of attributes, but by continuing a well-known story. Jesus is best described as the Second Adam. Even the heady statements of Colossians 1 read in a narrative manner and are relayed as the events of the creation and incarnation. Jesus Christ is God, but He is the God of this world. He is a man, but as a “man of this world” and as the main character of this world’s human story.

Systematics have a necessary place in the life of the church; in fact, if they are neglected, the confusion and mediocrity of most cheap buffets will soon be evident. But systematic theology must always be accompanied by biblical theology, and more particularly, the narrative of redemptive history—for scholasticism is far more comfortable with rational arguments than with biblical narrative. The redemption of humanity should be stated as the redemption of the descendants of Adam, and this redemption comes through a person as pivotal and seminal in human history as Adam was. Schleiermacher’s inner faith well represents the circumventing of faith in the God who is known first as a man’s God in history. Barth aptly states:

In the mirror of this humanity of Jesus Christ the humanity of God enclosed in His deity reveals itself. Thus God is as He is. Thus He affirms man. Thus He is concerned about him. Thus He stands up for him. The God of Schleiermacher can-

not show mercy. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob can and does.¹⁹

Doctrinally, great differences with Schleiermacher may be expressed by other children of the Reformation, but the foundations and results are curiously similar. Mercy, when experienced, is purely and exclusively from the God who speaks within, rather than from the God who has acted in the history of Jesus Christ.

Paul expresses redemption as a real *intrusion* into our history, but he propels us much further and demands that we understand redemption as the *continuation and reenactment of our own particular history*. In the telling, believing and retelling of this story, the gospel is proclaimed and Jesus Christ reveals Himself. When the believing community receives the story first *for us* and then *for me*, its practice is amended.

The “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” of Romans 5:1, so treasured by believers, becomes far less individual and private, without becoming any less personal or powerful when understood as the restoration of the peace lost by Adam, “who is a type of Him who was to come” (Rom. 5:14). Our peace results from the justification pronounced through “one act of righteousness,” undoing the one act of transgression’s consequent death and condemnation. Paul teaches on original sin, justification, and righteousness within the Adam narrative and its continuation. The human dilemma of guilt, death and condemnation are resolved, not first of all through a decision, a prayer, or a powerful sermon, but through the understanding of a story. “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19).

So also, in 1 Corinthians 15, death and resurrection are

taught in relationship to the person of Jesus Christ—the Second Adam! As in Romans 5, the reader is made to understand the truth, not through a disconnected statement, but by viewing himself as a participant within the narrative: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). Jesus Christ may be understood only when we understand Him as the continuation of Adam’s narrative, our narrative. If the believer’s knowledge is not rooted within this particular narrative, he will embrace deviant knowledge, not only of himself, but also of Jesus Christ, the Scriptures, the Church and the world.

I affirm the creeds, confessions and systematic theology. I am concerned, however, that so many who share this affirmation continue to reveal a docetic Christology in their views of worship, spirituality, the Bible, the world and the body of Christ. Inadvertently, the anthropocentric rationalism of Descartes has come to exert as powerful an influence over the worship, theology and life of the children of the Reformation as did Calvin’s sovereignty and Luther’s justification. The separation of this mixture of oil and water was inevitable the moment the frenetic activity of scholastic emulsifiers began to decrease. We forget that scholasticism led not only to Socinianism, but also to the pietism which has proved unable to deal with humanity, worship a human Savior, or to embrace the Father’s world. Our name is Adam, and our theology must be earthy if we are to confess the New Adam according to His revelation.

Deuteronomy 26:5-9 offers a glimpse at a desperately needed answer. In the offering of the First Fruits, the farmer is commanded to offer a confession before his prayer: “My father was a wandering Aramean. . . .” Von Rad draws attention to this in his introduction to *Genesis*:

There can be no doubt that this is how men really spoke in ancient times, and we see that within cultic framework it was

customary, among other things to recite a short form of the sacred history as a confession. For what we find here is a kind of credo, not a personal prayer of thanksgiving.

There is no divinely addressed Thou. Rather, the speaker recapitulates the great, sacred facts that constitute the community. He abstains from all individual concerns and in this moment identifies himself completely with the community; that is, he makes a confession of faith.²⁰

Here the confession becomes something radically different than “true statements about. . . .” The confession of faith is rather the confession of history, the history of God’s words and actions and deeds. Something more than a moment of silent prayer is needed to the unseen God and Giver of the harvest. Spirituality and humanity are expressed through an act of confession—a confession by an individual who identifies himself as a member of a nation created by God in history. This is a radically different notion from that of the individual stating his true doctrines or a detached gratitude. The only individual matter stated here is that “I am one of them.” With this background of Hebrew confession, the creeds are seen in a whole new light. In our creeds and confessions, the history of Jesus Christ is confessed—the stunning and melodic history of which I am made a part and in which I am included.

CONCLUSION

The results of this kind of confession can never be produced by a propositional, rational theology alone. Christian history since the Reformation is more than abundant proof of that. For this reason we have coined the term “dead orthodoxy.” It will not do for us to deny its existence or possibility of existence. Heartfelt amens are continually uttered concerning the doctrine of Christ by those who think of Jesus Christ as an unearthly presence, this world as an evil place and who never invest a moment into the lives

of other people. "Christ, our Second Adam," respects mystery while maintaining truth; it changes the way we think and live in a way that hypostatic union was never intended to accomplish.

Explanations of the text are a God-given responsibility and privilege to the church; they define orthodox truth and they guard against heresy. Yet, in her desire for assurance and solidity, the church soon prefers her better-defined and organized texts to the strange, mysterious, troublesome and unfinished story of the Bible's text and history. The appalling result of doing so, is that her Redeemer begins to resemble more the muscular Hercules or mythical sons of Zeus than the Second Adam—our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Notes

1. *The Nicene Creed* from the Synod at Nice in 325 A.D. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 14, "The Seven Ecumenical Councils," (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendriksen Publishers, 1994), 2.
2. Known as the "Robber Council" because the orthodox men were condemned and Eutychus was vindicated as proclaiming the truth about Jesus' one nature.
3. Henry Bettenson, Ed. *Documents of the Christian Church*, Second Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 52.
4. Philip Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 116.
5. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 87.
6. *Ibid.*, 70.
7. *Ibid.*, 259, 262.
8. *Ibid.*, 76.
9. *Ibid.*, 118.

10. *Ibid.*, 131.
11. *Ibid.*, 131.
12. *Ibid.*, 137.
13. *Ibid.*, 132.
14. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, trans. by Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 314.
15. Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 69.
16. Ragner Bring, *How God Speaks to Us* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 26.
17. Bloesch, 71.
18. Gary Dorien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Westminster Press, 1998), 209.
19. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968), 51.
20. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* rev. ed. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1972), 14.