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Is "Truly Man, Truly God" Truly Coherent?

An Assessment of Several Answers

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring, 1995

Running Head: INCARNATION

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This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation in the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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Abstract

Critics have repeatedly charged that the orthodox formulation of the orthodox doctrine of the incarnation is logically incoherent. Several conservative writers have responded in various ways. Norman Geisler predicateds logically incompatible attributes of Christ to his two natures. Millard Erickson relies on his version of the kenosis strategy. Thomas Morris formulates a two-minds model. Ronald Leigh steps out of the boundaries of orthodoxy and suggest a one-natured Christ. All of these views appear to suffer from various inadequacies. The best formulation of the incarnation doctrine is that of Kierkegaard's Absolute Paradox.

Is "Truly man, Truly God" Trul Coherent?

Orthodoxy throughout the ages has consistently affirmed both the complete humanity of Christ as well as his complete divinity. The early Church councils through a process both complex and arduous hammered out phrases contemporary theologians thought most consistent with the biblical record as well as prevailing categories of thought for that day. Nicaea stated "We believe. . . in one Lord Jesus Christ. . . true God of true God. . . begotten but not made, of one substance with the Father" (Bettenson, 1963, p. 35). 125 years later Chalcedon reaffirmed these same propositions and expanded the idea in significant ways. In subsequent theology down to the present, these creeds have constituted the basic orthodox position concerning the identity of Christ.

As difficult it was to state the above propositions, making sense of them has proved even more laborious. It has been said, somewhat tongue in cheek perhaps, that no orthodox doctrine of the incarnation exists, and every attempt to establish one has been condemned as heresy. The problems of yesterday have changed drastically, but the challenge has not. In this century the debate over christology has flared anew, on several different levels. One of the most oft heard accusations revolves around the coherency of the orthodox interpretation , or lack of it.

Critics claim that the notion of Jesus as fully God as well as fully man is absurd and nonsensical. It is common fare among contemporary theologains to dismiss the idea of divine incarnation as incoherent. The charge is usually formed by a series of allegations beginning with the actual word *incoherent* and followed by a number of synonyms. For instance, a theologian might say that the idea of a man having both a nature fully divine and fully human is incoherent, irrational, nonsensical, absurd, and logically impossible. John Hick, one of the most outspoken critics of the traditional doctrine of the incarnation, wrote

> [The statement that Jesus was God incarnate] can hardly be literal, factual statement, since after nearly two thousand years of Christian reflection no factual content has been discerned in it. . . For the reason why it has never been possible to state a literal meaning for the idea of incarnation is simply that it has no literal meaning (1980, p.74).

In response to this attack, several philosophers have stepped forward to defend the doctrine of the incarnation, and often they have taken different approaches to the problem. Most of these are attempting to work within the Chalcedon formula, yet this is not always the case. In the following analysis, we are going examine and evaluate the work of five different authors in three categories. The

first category is coherency. These philosophers and theologians attempt to present various formulations of the incarnation which meet two crucial criteria. First, it must be a logically sound defense, otherwise it is no defense at all. Second, it must be compatible with the traditional christology of the church, specifically as it is drawn out in the Chalcedonian creed. The writers inculded under this category are Norman Geisler, Millard J. Erickson, and Thomans V. Morris. Because Erickson offers a type of kenotic christology, we will examine kenoticism breifly before turning to Erickson's exact formulation.

The second category is reformulation. The sole representative presented in this paper is Ronald Leigh. Leigh attempts to do justice to the biblical record, yet does not see Chalcedon as adequate. He believes we must reorder the doctrine of the incarnation on grounds both biblical and rational.

The final category is paradox. Again, we have only one representative, namely Soren Kierkegaard, yet under this heading we could likely place a large part of the theologians, if not most, in the tradition of the church who have called the reality of the incarnation a divine mystery. However, Kierkegaard's treatment is quite unique, and he will be the focus of our study.

Coherency

Norman L. Geisler

Although a very prolific writer, Norman Geisler has not given as much attention to the logical compatibility of the incarnation as other areas of conservative Christian concerns. However, we will consider his formulation because of his importance as an evangelical apologist.

Before looking at his defense of the incarnation proper, it will be beneficial to examine how Geisler responds to any denial of the law of non-contradiction in our theology or philosophy. A perfect example is his strong and immediate reaction to John V. Dahms, who boldly declared that an "absolute and unconditional commitment to the law of contradiction [among evangelicals] is quite surprising" (1978, p. 370). Dahms argues for the existence of logical contradictions within Scripture as well as other areas (pp. 370-374). He goes on to say that

> what we have called contradictions in Christian doctrine are often referred to as paradoxes. . . [meaning that] If we only had the knowledge that God has we would perceive that no logical contradiction is involved. But if so, how is it known that in the light of God's knowledge that there is no logical contradiction: Only on the assumption that no logical contradiction is universally applicable (p. 375).

Dahms argues that an a priori commitment to the law of non-contradiction is not valid, and only by assuming it can we call paradoxes merely *apparent contradictions*. Although Geisler is not always fair in his treatment of Dahms, he stresses the point that merely to say that the law of non-contradiction does not apply to God is a "logical (i.e. non-contradictory) statement about God. Hence it is self-defeating" (1979, p. 58).

Attempting to circumvent this criticism, Dahms develops his own epistomology. Using Chalcedon as his springboard, he proposes a *Trinitarian epistomology* in which "rational propositions, empirical observation, and aesthetic appreciation are all involved in correct understanding" (1979, p. 377). Dahms does not deny logic categorically, but attempts to limit it to the sphere of the nominal, or being, whereas the verbal or becoming is not bound by the norms of logic.

In response to this attempt Geisler vigorously accuses Dahms of special pleading; "why should we grant this special exception from inconsistency, and not every non-Christian who wishes to beg the same exceptions from contradictions in his view" (1979, p. 153). Indicative of Geisler's antipathy toward such an epistomological suggestion as Dahms makes are his criticisms which at times almost fall to the personal level.

Clearly then it is important for Geisler to be able to deflect the charge of logical inconsistency as it is leveled at the incarnation, and in particular the formulation of Chalcedon. He sees only three options available to evangelicals if the doctrine has no more logical foundation than the idea of a square circle: 1) give up the faith, 2) reconstruct the doctrine of the incarnation, or 3) abandon the noncontradictoriness of reality (Geisler & Watkins, 1985, p. 185).

Geisler's task would appear to be most difficult, especially considering his list of attributes predicated to Christ. As to his humanity he posses finitude, contingency, ontological dependence, mutability, spatiality, temporality, and complexity. However, as to his deity, Christ possess all the logical complements or opposites of these qualities; infinitude, necessity, ontological independence, immutability, nonspatiality, eternality, and simplicity (1988, p. 308, and Geisler & Watkins, 1985 p. 188).

Certain definitions are important to Geisler's strategy. Attempting to explicate the meaning of Chalcedon, the words <u>ousia</u> and <u>persona</u> are extremely important, although it is not certain Geisler gives them the same meaning the Fathers intended. <u>Ousia</u> or nature "denotes the qualities, attributes, or properties of a thing which are

necessary to it" (Geisler & Watkins, 1985, p. 189). Nature is the set of characteristics without which a thing could not possibly be what it is, its *essence* or its *objectivity.*

The person (persona) of a thing cannot be confused with the nature. This aspect of a thing is the "willing and intending non-objective center in a nature, the subjective center of relational activity subsisting or cohering in an objective essence" (Geisler & Watkins, 1985, p. 190).

What Chalcedon affirms is two natures in one person, and for Geisler it is crucial that we not equate the two natures with the one person, nor the one person with the two natures. Christ's person cannot be separated from his natures, but it must be distinguished to avoid incoherency (Geisler & Watkins, 1985, p. 191).

Having thus defined the terms critical to the Chalcedonian creed, Geisler turns toward the charge of logical contradiction. The accusation states that it is a violation of the law of noncontradiction to affirm that any being possessed both the attributes of (for example) infitude and finitude at the same time. However, this falls short on two accounts. First, it is not enough to claim that affirming A and non-A at the same time is a contradiction. A contradiction is manifest only when A and non-A are affirmed in the same time **and in the same sense or respect** (Geisler & Watkins, 1985, p. 192). Second, the word

being must be clarified. It is not certain whether it refers to *nature* or *person.* Chalcedon, however, does not affirm contradictory attributes to one person at the same time and in the same sense.

> Christ is both infinite in one nature and finite in **another** nature at the same time. And because infinitude and finitude are predicated of two different natures that are united in one person yet without mixture or confusion, no contradiction is involved (p. 193).

Therefore, by arguing that Chalcedon predicates the contradictory attributes to different natures, Geisler hopes to overturn the charge of logical incoherence. As long as the natures are kept "without confusion, mixture, or division," the statement applying these two natures to one person in non-contradictory (p. 195). He concludes:

> It would be contradictory to affirm that there is only one nature in Christ which possesses mutually exclusive attributes (such as created and uncreated, changeable and unchangeable). But this contradiction is avoided when we affirm that there are **two** different natures in this one person. This is a mystery but not a contradiction (Geisler, 1988, p. 311).

Although Geisler has made some useful clarifications, one wonders if his solution has really done anything about the

problem. He is obviously right to say that it is self-contradictory to affirm attributes of a nature as well as their logical complements, and appears to be correct in claiming that Chalcedon does not do this. However, an individual comprised of both a person and a nature must exemplify that set of properties which constitutes its nature, and if it has two natures, it must exemplify both sets of attributes. It does not seem possible for an individual to have one or more sets of attributes without exemplifying those attributes. If an individual entity is both fully God and fully man, it must possess all the attributes essential to that classification. Therefore this entity must exemplify both attributes essential to divinity and attributes essential to humanity, and as we have already seen Geisler defines these two sets of attributes as logical complements of the other.

Geisler responds to this charge by saying each attribute is not attributed to the same entity, namely Christ, at the same time **and in the same sense.** What he means by this is that each contradictory attribute is attributed to a different nature, not the same person. However, we may merely repeat our charge. Christ must exemplify all his essential attributes regardless of whether they subsist in two distinct natures or no. This results in a Christ who exemplifies two (or more) properties which are

logically contradictory. It is not contradictory to affirm that Christ had two natures with two sets of attributes. Yet it is still every bit as problematic to say that Christ exemplified infinitdue and finitude regardless of what nature they are predicated to.

The entire attempt is more an exercise in semantics than a formidable defense of the incarnation.

Kenosis and Millard J. Erickson

In dealing with the incarnational problem we are examining, the kenotic theories have a long and well-known history in the past two hundred years. The touch-stone of kenoticism is the christological hymn of Phillipians 2:6-11, especially verse seven, which speaks of Christ *emptying himself*. Basic to this idea is that in becoming human, the Second Person of the Trinity divested himself of certain divine qualities which would have excluded Christ from genuine humanity. However, in explaining what this involves, kenotic theologians have produced a variety of answers.

Peter T. Forsyth offered a good representative kenotic theology. Some formulations of kenosis involved the surrender of several divine attributes, usually those such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. This invited the very serious question of whether such an individual could be counted as truly God. In response, Forsyth claimed

that Christ did not loose his divine attributes, but they withdrew from actual qualities to potential qualities. He states that "potentiality is only actuality powerfully condensed" (1909, p. 303). He goes on to explain

> Here we have not so much the renunciation of attributes, nor their conscious possession and concealment, as the retraction of their mode of being from actual to potential. . . The attributes of God, like omniscience, are not destroyed when they are reduced to a potentiality. They are only concentrated (p. 308).

These attributes became actual again over time, and this process culminated at the cross and the resurrection (Wells, 1984, p. 137).

This type of construction is of course open to the theist, but there may be good reasons for rejecting it. Morris finds kenoticism in general inadequate for those who desire to maintain an exalted view of the divine attributes, i.e. for those standing in the Anselmian or Thomistic tradition. Two reasons support this hesitation. First, on a basic understanding of the divine attributes, "it requires a view of the modalities of those attributes which seems unsatisfactory" (1986, p. 93). For example, many theologians would claim that God is not only omnipotent, but he is **necessarily** omnipotent. It cannot be the case that

God just happens to be omnipotent (or exemplify any other attribute in such a manner), he must be **essentially** omnipotent. "No individual can temporarily give up a property he has essentially" (p. 94). Kenosis cannot handle this modally exalted view of deity.

The second reason for rejecting kenosis is that "on the same condition it necessitates abandoning any substantive, metaphysical ascription of immutability to God" (Morris, 1986, p. 93). Morris stresses that this is true not only for a more extreme statement of immutability but even for a more moderate one. The interpretation of this attribute ascirbed by Morris is

> a property, or modality, of the exemplification of all those attributes constitutive of deity, kind-essential for divinity. In brief, any individual who has a constitutive attribute of deity can never have begun to have it, and can never cease to have it. He has it, rather, immutably (p. 97).

To get around this, kenotic theologians would have to make ingenious maneuvers which would push the bounds of credibility to their limit. Morris sees kenoticism as a possibility, but an unnecessary and undersirable one.

It may appear that the christology of Forsyth noted above avoids these criticism on the grounds that the Logos does not surrender his attributes. Rather, they become

compacted from actuality to potentiality. However, we may wonder if having an attribute potentially means anything other than having the potential to exemplify an attribute one does not currently have.

In his book The Word Became Flesh (1991), Erickson attempts to use a modified formulation of the kenotic christology to bring at least a feasible degree of logical consistency to the incarnation. Erickson is sensitive to the criticisms of Thomas Morris related to the kenotic strategy. In order to circumvent these weaknesses, Erickson proposes a kenosis of addition, by which he means that the incarnation involved not a loss of divine characteristics, but the appropriation of human ones.

> Rather than suggest that God gave up certain attributes of divinity. . . I prefer to emphasize that what he did in the incarnation was to add something to each nature, namely, the attributes of the other nature. . . He still had divine attributes, but they were exercised in connection with the humanity which he had assumed (p. 555).

What Christ surrendered in the Phillipians passage was not his attributes but his glory. His humiliation consists of what he took on rather than gave up. This observation follows the text of verse seven very closely, and therefore has much to commend it.

Before discussing how this relates to the various attributes specifically, Erickson first makes some important qualifications. He asks us to distinguish between deity in abstraction and humanity in abstraction on the one hand, and deity in incarnation and humanity in incarnation on the other. Neither of the two natures is essentially altered by fact of the incarnation, but each affects the other in a reciprocal relation. "We are suggesting that the two sets of qualitites which the one subject or self, Jesus, possessed functioned together in such a way that the manifestation of each now was different from the manifestation of either one alone" (1991, p. 556).

In conjunction with this distinction, Erickson further proposes a differentiation between active and latent attributes. How is the divine nature affected by the human in the incarnation? Most significantly, several qualities active in abstract deity become latent in incarnated deity. "God's knowledge of all things may have been limited in actual exercise by his consciousness' being related to a human personality and particularly to a human brain" (1991, p. 556).

From this basis, Erickson begins to explicate how various divine properties could be predicated to Christ along with properties normally thought of as contradictory. His first attempt deals with omniscience and is particularly

interesting. The infinte range of divine knowledge possessed by Christ was located in his unconscious. We may know many things without thinking about them at any given time, yet recall them from our subconscious with effort, sometimes very little and at other times only after much exertion. In a similar manner the full knowledge of all truth remained located in Christ's unconscious, yet he was permitted access to this not by exerting his own will but only as permitted by the Father.

Likewise, Jesus possessed full omnipotence, yet only had this ability latently. "He possessed and exercised it in connection with the presence of a fully human nature" (1991, p. 560). Like omniscience, the exertion of this attribute remained the complete purogative of the Father. Erickson speculates that Jesus was probably not aware of having this attribute during most of his life.

The attribute of omnipresence is an obvious problem for any model of the incarnation. This quality Erickson defines as "not limited to any particular place and time" (p. 561). If he means this as opposed to "being everywhere all the time," then the definition has the advantage of not limiting God to being everywhere; it gives him the freedom to be at one particular place. It is not explicitly clear that this is what he means, however. In another place, Erickson affirms that God is everywhere (Christian Theology, 1983,

p. 273), but he does not state where God is necessarily everywhere, which would seem to limit God to the state of being everywhere. Erickson ends the discussion simply be saying omnipresence was a capacity Christ chose not to exert for a period of time.

Erickson then attempts to deal with concerns the temptation of Christ, a well known and well worked-over difficulty. Erickson concludes that in order to remain faithful to the biblical record, we must conclude that Jesus could indeed have sinned. How does this affect his deity, for God cannot sin, nor even be tempted (James 1:13)? Erickson proposes that on the very brink of the decision to sin, the Second Person of the Trinity would have withdrawn from the human nature, and the incarnation would be thus dissolved.

Erickson's final discussion relates to the death of Jesus on the cross. How can it be that God should die? The solution lies in rejecting the traditional body/soul duality in favor of contingent monism. This view of human nature sees an individual human as capable of existing in either a physical and material state, or a non-physical and immaterial state. "Death" is the term used to describe the transition from the material to immaterial state, but humans in a sense do not really die according to contingent monism (1991, p. 565). Therefore the divine Logos did not die on

the cross, but transferred from one form of existence to another.

Erickson's presentation certainly goes much farther than Geisler's and has many strengths to commend it. Rather than simply ascribe the divine attributes to the divine nature and the human attributes to the human nature and considering the work done, Erickson actually attempts to draw out how the two natures might be related.

Yet it does not appear that his solution is fully satisfactory. He begins by avoiding the problem of claiming God gave up any of his properties in becoming incarnate, and thus does justice to the modality of divine attributes. However, in spelling out exactly how this is possible, he runs into several difficulties. He does not cover all the range of divine attributes which could propose difficulties, such as immutability, eternality, and necessity. These last two he mentions in connection with the death of Jesus, yet he does not handle them explicitly. The qualities of immutability and eternality very often are given different meanings in different theologies. Erickson does not discuss how he views these attributes. Is immutability the quality of complete changlessness and passionlessness in the Godhead? Or is it less strong, as Morris suggested above. Does eternality imply total timelessness, or an everlasting God who does experience time? How Erickson answers these

questions, and more importantly, how they are related to the incarnation, are never discussed. This does not defeat Erickson's model, but does suggest areas which are in need of further exploration.

The problem with locating the nexus of Christ's omniscience in the subconscious of Jesus centers around the fact that we do not have a clear understanding yet of how the subconscious works and what it involves. Furthermore, it is highly questionable that a human subconscious, especially if it is located in a human brain, could in any sense contain or house an infinite amount of information.

We could also question Erickson's statement concerning omnipotence that Christ probably did not know he possessed this attribute for most of his life. In the same context, he claims it is undoubtable that he engaged in the activities and games of a normal boy. Likewise, it is even more certain that he had thorough training in the Hebrew Scriptures. If Jesus had an awareness that he was God, he certainly did not fail to realize that he possessed the capabilities attributed to him in the Old Testament, and omnipotence, or at the very least near omnipotence (if the term means anything), is definitely one of those characteristics. Does it make any sense to say that Jesus knew he possessed this attribute, yet was incapable of exercising it at any time, as Erickson seems to indicate?

This would appear to be an important question. In what sense, then, is Christ omnipotent.

We should further note that Erickson in his discussion on the temptation seems to imply a distinct conflict between the human and divine wills. Could the one person Jesus have willed something in accordance with his human will yet contrary to his divine? If there was any such conflict, would not the divine will override the human?

Finally, Erickson's answer to Christ's death appears significantly unbiblical. It appears on this view that nothing every really dies. This does not seem to accord well with the Scriptures in general which affirms that the penalty for man's sin is death, physical as well as spiritual. More to the issue, Christ himself did not truly die. What then becomes of his atoning sacrifice? What sense can be made of his resurrection and his victory over death? Again, these seem to be serious questions Erickson leaves unansered.

Thomas V. Morris

The Incoherency Charge

Apparently the charge has been repeated so often and with such authority that few see the need to actually spell out what it actually is in the doctrine of incarnation which falls prey to these accusations, and it is difficult to find any extended argument demonstrating the incoherency of

divine incarnation. Because of this lack of real substantive argumentation, Morris attempts to provide it for the critics himself. The thought that seems to lie behind most of these extreme criticisms is not only the necessary falsehood of the incarnation claim but also a belief that this claim is *a priori* false. That is, no person could possibly "both understand it and at the same time be in the state of either believing it or even wondering whether it is true" (1986, p. 22).

Every category or kind has a certain set of characteristics an individual needs to be placed within that kind. These are kind-essential characteristics. Without these characteristics, an object is excluded from membership it that particular kind. There is a certain set of properties traditionally thought to be essential characteristics of divinity. That is, no individual could be divine without possessing the full range of these properties. These properties are normally conceived of as including omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, eternality, immutability, and necessity. Since it is essential to emulate this set of properties to be God, and becuase it is essential to emulate the logical complements of these properties to be human, it is incoherent that Jesus could be both fully (truly) God and fully (truly) human.

The Logic of God Incarnate

The most comprehensive defense of the two-nature Chalcedonian model in recent years comes from Thomas V. Morris in his book The Logic of God Incarnate (1986). In this exhaustive treatment, he presents a formidable line of argumentation, attempting to justify the orthodox interpretation.

The indiscernibility principle. In relation to he incarnation, Morris tries to retain the validity of the indiscernibility principle as it governs identity statements. The indiscernibility principle states that "a necessary condition for identity is complete commonality of properties. . . Further, if it is impossible that some object a share all properties in common with some object b, it is impossible that a be identical with b" (1986, p. 17). The claim made by orthodoxy that Jesus is God the Son is an identity statement and therefore falls under the principle of indiscernibility. Taken up front on face value, this certainly appears to be an insurmountable problem, given the categories God and man are traditionally conceived. But Morris makes some very important distinctions which he hopes will pave the way for a coherent christology.

Crucial distinctions. Morris' first distinction involves what it means to have kind-essential and what it means to have kind-common properties. A common property is a property all members of a kind simply happen to have, but

do not need in order to be included in membership of that kind. A kind-essential property, on the other hand, is a property an individual **must** have in order to be included in membership of that kind. For instance, living on the planet earth is a kindcommon property of all humans. However, it would be conceivable for an individual to live on Mars and still be human. This is not the case for kind-essential properties. Possessing a human nature (however that nature is defined) is essential for inclusion in the class of human beings. Any individual without a human nature cannot be so classified.

Having made this important distinction, Morris claims that the Christian theologian is perfectly justified in spelling out what it means to be human, and what essential properties are necessary for inclusion as a human, with the doctrine of the incarnation already in mind. Morris writes

> But it is a perfectly proper procedure (some would even say - rightly, I think - mandatory) for the Christian philosopher or theologian to develop his idea of human nature, his conception of what the essential human properties are, with certain presuppositions or controls derived from his doctrine of God and his belief in the reality of the Incarnation (1986, p. 64).

Therefore all properties of humanity which are logical complements of essentail properties of divinity, such as contingency, temporality, et. al., are said to be **common** properties of humanity, not **essential**. This distinction allows Morris ascribe to Jesus the full range of essential human properties without concluding that Jesus exemplified both a attribute and its logical complement.

This lead us to the second distinction. Morris differentiates between what it means to be **merely** human and what it means to be **fully** human. It is this latter category, that of being fully human, to which, Morris is quick to point out, Jesus belongs according to the Chalcedonian formulation. He writes, "An individual is merely human just in case it has all the properties requisite for being fully human. . . and also some limitation properties as well" (1986, p. 65). These limitations are not essential but common properties of humanity.

In order to make this more clear, Morris utilizes the following illustration. A diamond, an alligator, and a human are all physical. The diamond has all the properties essential to being a physical object (mass, spatiotemporal location, etc.) This diamond is fully physical. The alligator is fully physical as well, but it is not merely physical. It is also animate. The human is both fully

physical and fully animate as well. Yet it is not merely animate, for it possess the capacity for rational thought, creativity, and aesthetics. The human then "belongs to a higher ontological level by virtue of being human. And if. . . he belongs to no ontological level higher than that of humanity, he is merely human as well as being fully human" (1986, p. 66).

In making these distinction, Morris has come a long way in rebutting the incoherence charge. The logical impossibilities seem to be clearing up:

> Properties as those of possibly coming into existence, coming to be at some time, being a contingent creation, and being such as to possibly cease to exist are, although common human properties, not essential to being human. They, or some of them, may be essential to being **merely** human, but they can be held, in all epistemic and metaphysical propriety, not to be essential to being **fully** human, to exemplifying the kind-essence of humanity (1986, p. 67).

We can say then that Jesus was fully human, becuase he possessed all the attributes required for inclusion in the category of humanity **and** because he also belonged to a higher ontological level. Human beings <u>simpliciter</u> belong in the classification of being merely human, as the diamond is merely physical without being animate. Thus it is

possible for an individual to exemplify all the essential attributes of both divinity and humanity without exemplifying any properties and their logical compliments.

However, there is yet much work to be done. In Morris' own words, these distinctions can imply an "utterly fantastic figure of Christ" (1986, p. 70). We are left at this point with a Christ who was eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, incorporeal, immutable, and impassible (p. 73). Clearly this is not only undesirable but grossly missaligned with the biblical record.

A two-minded Christ. Morris spends some time arguing that the Anselmian conception of divinity is the same God as the Yahweh of Judeo-Christian theology. This is important for him because he wants to maintain the possibility of an exalted concept of deity such as the Anselmian can still be reconciled with the notion of incarnation.

> The Anselmian conception of God is that of a greatest possible, or maximally perfect, being. On this conception, God is thought of as exemplifying necessarily a maximally perfect set of compossible great-making properties. . . Traditionally, the Anselmian description has been understood to entail that God is, among other things, omnipotent, immutable, eternal, and impeccable as well as omniscient (1986, p. 76).

Morris goes on to argue that this *a priori* notion of God can be reconciled with the empirical data of the biblical record. What is more important for our purposes is how Morris explicates the relation of Jesus to these attributes.

Morris calls his own incarnational christology a two-minds view. In the person of Christ there co-inhabited two distinct ranges of consciousness.

> There is first what we can call the eternal mind of God the Son with its distinctively divine consciousness, whatever that might be like, encompassing the full scope of omniscience. And in addition there is a distinctly earthly consciousness that came into existence and grew and developed as the boy Jesus grew and developed. . . The earthly range of consciousness, and self-consciousness, was thoroughly human, Jewish, and first century Palestinian in nature (1986, p. 103).

The divine Logos encompassed the human mind. It had complete and immediate access to everything therein. By contrast, the human mind only had only that access into the divine permitted it by the Logos.

Morris sees this view as a large gain over kenoticism, for it is "not by virtue of what he gave up, but in virtue of what he took on, that [Christ] humbled himself" (1986, p. 104). God the Son did not divest himself of any metaphysical properties; he took on all of our sufferings,

trials, and frustrations an exclusively divine existence would be immune from.

The tempation of Jesus. Morris engages in a lengthy discussion of God's goodness and defends its necessity on intuitive grounds. He is cautious here, for Morris is hesitant to make the appeal to intuition. However, he says, "Against this backdrop of general doubt about the status of many metaphysical intuitions, however, I believe the Anselmian theist to be justified in marking out at least a few intuitions about metaphysical matters as trustworthy" (1986, p. 134). Among these is the necessity of God's goodness. Morris argues that this can be inferred from the general Anselmian intuitions concerning the nature of God.

What relevance this has for our discussion of the divine incarnation is not readily apparent at first, but becomes very clear with respect to the temptation of Christ. The clear biblical account pictures a Christ to suffered under real temptation, and this is crucial for our soteriology. If Christ is God the Son, and God the Son is God, and God the is **necessarily** good, it is inconceivable that Christ could have sinned, and therefore he could not have been tempted in any real way. Theists have even been accused of holding contradictory beliefs concerning the modal status of God's goodness and the possibility of Jesus' temptation in any substantive sense of the idea.

Morris makes another distinction, and it is here that, in this author's opinion, Morris' presentation of the two-nature view sounds most convincing, for not only does it present a feasible and coherent model of the incarnation, but it also goes a long way in clearing up a debate in Christendom as long standing as the sovereignty/free-will issue. The logical or metaphysical possibility of sinning is not required for actual temptation, but only the **epistemic** possibility (1986, p. 147). If Jones is tempted to lie to his boss, that temptation is in every sense real, regardless of the fact that, unbeknownst to Jones, his boss died an hour earlier.

> Jesus could be tempted to sin just in case it was epistemically possible for him that he sin. If at the times of his reported temptations, the full accessible belief-set of his earthly mind did not rule out the possibility of his sinning, he could be genuinely tempted, in that range of consciousness, to sin (p. 148).

Yet it is still not feasible how it could be the case that Jesus had the epistemic possbility to sin without the metaphysical possibility.

Here is where Morris employs his two-minds model. The human range of consciousness only apprehended of his divine nature that which the eternal mind of the Logos permitted.

There were obviously at least a few things about which Christ was ignorant. If the human mind was not aware that he was necessarily good, that is, if this item of information was withheld by the Logos, then temptation occurred every bit as real as our own.

Morris completes his discussion by arguing that a two-minds view does not necessarily lead into a two-person form of heresy such as Nestorianism. He argues that although Jesus Christ had two distinct ranges of consciousness, there exists only one "center of causal and cognitive powers" (1986, p. 162). Thus only one person, yet with two distinct minds, is present in the person of Christ.

It is by this dual employment of fine but important distinctions and a two-minds view of the person of Christ that Morris hopes to role back the serious charge of logical impossibility leveled at the orthodox interpretation of incarnation. It is most impressive, and one critic even goes so far as to call it "brilliant and sophisticated" (Durrant, 1988, p. 127). Now the emphasis will shift from mere presentation to an analysis and critique.

Assessing and Critiquing Morris

Does Morris accomplish his rather lofty task? We will turn to some criticisms offered by his fellow philosophers and assess the value of these attempted rebuttals. The most notable discussions come from Michael Durrant and John Hick,

each making their own contributions. Finally, we will close both this section and this paper with an evaluation my this author.

Michael Durrant's qualitative distinctions. Durrant's objection to Morris centers around the second distinction he makes, that of being merely human as opposed to being fully human. Durrant argues that Morris makes an illicit conflagration of "not being fully physical" and "being merely physical" as each is distinguished "being fully physical" (1988, p. 124). Not fully physical/fully physical is a quantitative distinction indicating whether or not the object has all the properties essential to being physical. However, fully physical/merely physical is a qualitative distinction dealing with the ontological status of the object. This illicit conflagration is carried over into Morris' crucial fully human/merely human distinction.

John Hick's **Disputed Questions**. Hick's attempted refutation is much more thorough than Durrant's, and approaches Morris' demonstration at several points. Hick's first question is whether Morris' idea of ontological progression really allows for higher level beings to become incarnate in lower ones (1993, pp. 61-62). Could, using the examples of Morris, a human soul become incarnate in a crocodile. Hick objects:

> Of course, given the existing laws of nature such a thing is empirically, or causally, impossible. It would require the crocodile to have a brain of the size and complexity found only at the human level of evolution. . . And in the case of an incarnation of God as a human being there would be analogous contrary-to-natural-law difficulties. How could a finite human brain receive, process and retain the infinitely extensive information possessed by omniscience? How could a finite human physique be able to exert infinite power? (p. 62).

It should be noted that both these questions but especially the first can be easily settled by an appeal to Morris' two-mind model. To be sure, Hick has not arrived at that point yet, but when he does, he does not do Morris the courtesy of pointing out the fact that he provides these answers and merely lets the objection stand. Further, Morris is not as yet dealing with the incarnation proper; the purpose of the ontological progression is the establishment of the fully x/merely x distinction.

Hick goes on to say that "the incarnation of a higher kind as a lower kind would inevitably break the ordinary mould of the lower kind" (1993, p. 64). A man emulating in him the essential characteristics of divinity would certainly be recognized as something far greater than being

merely human. And, unfortunately, nobody contemporary with Jesus, not even his disciples, considered him to be any more than just that. To support this incredible claim, Hick quotes one of his favorite Bible verses, Acts 2:22: Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved by God who did by him many wonders and miracles. Clearly a man incarnated in Morris' sense would have been a "walking miracle; and the historical evidence indicates that Jesus was not this" (p. 65).

What Hick is apparently trying to do up to this point is not discredit Morris' incarnational model, but demonstrate the difficulties he must overcome in arguing how the divine and human attributes could be composite (1993, p. 66). In the second phase of his essay, Hick attempts to bear down even harder in his critique.

First, he suggests that the discussion given by Morris concerning the way in which the two minds access one another does not receive adequate attention. "The nature of the limited access of the human to the divine mind postulated here needs to be specified more fully. I can see two rather different ways of spelling it out" (1993, p. 70). The first explanation sees Jesus as having become enlightened to the surrounding awareness of another consciousness, God the Son; an I-Thou sort of consciousness. This accords rather well with the Synoptic gospel record, Hick admits, except that "the encompassing divine presence of which he was so vividly

aware was not the second person of a Trinity but simply God, known as Abba, father" (p. 70). What we have then, especially when we consider the fact that Jesus' relationship with the father involved a volitional aspect in addition to a mere cognitive, is a figure who was **inspired** by God. That is, Jesus, along with Moses, Jeremiah, Muhammad, and a host of others in history, "is overwhelmingly conscious of God's presence, speaks to God, hears God's voice. . . is aware of God's will" (p. 70) and so on. Thus we have a Jesus separated from us by mere degree. Clearly this is not what Morris intends.

The second way the two minds might be related, Hick proposes, involves not interaction between the human and divine but unity with the divine (1993, p. 71). This view, in contrast with the previous, is, according to Hick, consonant with the fourth gospel. However, at the root, it is subject to the same criticism. Jesus in John's gospel believes his unity was with the Father God, not God the Son, second person of the Trinity. Furthermore, Hick asserts that such an individual as pictured in the forth gospel could not possibly share in our human condition, even if he is counted as "fully human" (p. 71).

Some of the difficulty of disputing with Hick at this point rests in the fact that his above conclusions rest on the challengable grounds of histoircal criticism and Hick's

own "inspirational christology." To take him to task on either of these issues would be far beyond the scope of this paper. Up front, we would have to grant Hick that no fully developed concept of the Trinity appears in the gospels, or for that matter, in all of the Bible, at least not to the extent reflected at Nicea. However, it is true further that three distinct entities are spoken of as though each one were deity, and from this, as well as an orthodox belief in the inspiration of Scriptures, that we construct the doctrine of the Trinity, and from this doctrine we identify Jesus with God the Son. Further defense and analysis cannot be done here.

As for Hick's inspirational christology, we can only point to the fact that this view accords very poorly with the actual New Testament record and does not take into account much of the significance of Jesus' activity, such as forgiving sins. Nor does it adequately explain the attitude of his own disciples toward him. While Hick's own christology may answer many questions on the surface, his own complete argument for it (presented in chapter 3 of Disputed Questions) rests on the assertion that neither did Jesus nor any of his disciples claim he was divine in the sense claimed by the subsequent doctrine of the church. Such a claim may be challenged on several grounds, but it is

enough here to note that such a view must be rejected by anyone wishing to remain faithful to orthodoxy.

Hick's next objection focuses on the two wills of Christ, especially as it relates to the temptation. Morris argues for an "asymmetric accessing relation between the two minds." Hick is emphatic that this is not enough in itself, but Morris supplies an additional relation, a unity "of personal cognitive and causal powers" (Morris, 1986, pp. 161-162). However, in order to avoid monotheletism, Morris affirms a human will for Christ. It cannot be the case that whatever Jesus willed was what God the Son willed. Morris' position, in Hick's words, is that "Jesus was humanly free, including being free to sin, but that if he had in fact tried to sin the divine will would have intervened to stop him" (1993, p. 74). Hick merely responds by saying that

> this proposal fails when we realize that it entails that we do not, and cannot, know whether Jesus ever had the beginning of an intention to sin that activated a divine overruling that prevented him from proceeding (p. 75).

Hick means that we cannot know how far Christ's human mind ever went in succumbing to temptation **empirically**, as he makes clear with the phrase immediately following the above quote, "So far as human observation can tell. . ." However, even granting that Morris' model is empirically unverifiable

at this point, how does that render it false? The entire idea of an incarnation cannot be determined by historical verification so important to Hick. Hick could of clarified his position in the first paragraph of his essay by stating, "This proposal [that God became incarnate in man] fails when we realize that it cannot be known by human observation at all. So far as human observation can tell, he was only another Jew living in Palestine during the first century."

Hick further argues that, given Morris' framework, even assuming the traditional claim that Christ never could have performed a sinful action, we still cannot know "whether this was so because he never even began to intend a sinful act, or because he did so intend (perhaps many times) but the intention was always overruled by his divine nature" (1993, p. 75). However, any traditional concept of sin is not at all limited to **acts**. Bad motives and intents are consistently categorized as sin in both the biblical record and Christian thought ever since. Hick would have realized had he read more closely, that Morris realizes this. Decisions (intents) as well as deeds are equally considered to be sin (Morris, p. 152).

Hick's concluding objection seems to possesses a degree of potency. He suggests that Morris' presentation gives us a Jesus with both a human will and a human mind of his own. He is God incarnate

> . . .not in the sense that the personal will that was encountered by all who met Jesus was the will of God the Son operation on earth, but in the sense that God singled him out for special treatment - namely by not allowing him to go wrong. It follows that if God, in addition to being omnisciently aware of the contents of someone else's mind, were also to prevent her from making any wrong choices, that person would be another instance of God (1993, pp. 75 - 76).

Hick is apparently accusing Morris' construction of reducing the humanity of Jesus to a state no different from any other human. It will do no good to respond by pointing out that Christ possess in addition to his human will and human mind the full array of kind-essential properties for divinity, for according to Morris all these properties have been predicated soley to the divine mind. It is Hick's point that in doing so, on Morris' framework, the incarnation was merely an instance of God preserving an ordinary human from sinning. And now, he asks, "has not the heart of the Chalcedonian conception been missed out. . ?" (p. 76).

In spite of this final objection, it appears that Hick's evaluation and dismissal of Morris' model does not do it full justice. Hick has been claiming for years that any attempt to give literal content to the idea of the incarnation is bound to result in heresy. He repeats that

same claim in the introduction to this essay and in fact posits as his thesis how Morris' effort is merely another example of that claim (1993, p. 58). While we all have our own agendas and axes to grind, it would appear that Hick's presuppositions have led him to give Morris' argument less credibility than it deserves.

Two final criticisms. It must be admitted by any reviewer that Morris certainly has presented a formidable case. He is a very careful thinker and is especially sensitive in advance to any objections and shortcomings his presentation might be subject to. However, Durrant's well-argued criticism could prove fatal to his model. In addition, this author would like to submit two final concerns.

The first involves Morris' habit of disregarding accepted metaphysical principles *ipso facto* which would topple his model. The first of these arises in his reply to Leigh (cf. below). Morris has proposed that Christ possesses only one individual nature, yet two kind natures. The danger lies in the fact that many philosophers maintain that a necessary component of an object's individual nature is its kind nature. However, Christian theists, Morris among them, have traditionally wanted to affirm that Christ possessed the kind nature of humanity, but he possessed it only contingently, not necessarily. Therefore Morris

denies the metaphysical principle that a kind nature is a necessary component of an object's individual nature; Christ did not possess his human kind-nature essentially. Before we move on to the next example, we should note that Morris denies this same type of move to Leigh, as will be seen in our next discussion (Natures, 1984, pp. 42 - 43).

A further example involves the origins of biological kinds Most philosophers hold that a certain type of origin is essential in the inclusion of a certain type or kind. If all members of kind A have a certain origin B, then B is an essential characteristic for inclusion in A. This could present a real difficulty in the case of the virgin birth. If the principle holds, then Christ obviously could not have become incarnate. Morris evades the issue by merely denying this principle on the basis of creation _ex nihilo_ (1986, p. 68). Adam and his descendants are of the same kind, yet they certainly do not have similar origins.

Morris believes that he or any theologian is "completely justified in employing his core theological convictions as a check and constraint on his metaphysical theorizing" (Natures, 1984, p. 42). However, it appears that these maneuvers have little more legitimacy than the move many theologians are ready to make, much to the outrage of the philosophers, into the arena of mystery. John Hick, in one of his more sensible critiques, pointed out that, "It

is possible to make such rulings; although of course they are arbitrary and such that other are under no obligation to accept them" (1993, p. 63).

The second criticism this writer holds towards Morris although this could probably be better phrased a reservation than a criticism - concerns the resutant Christ we encounter in the two-minds view? Is Christ a schizophrenic? Morris even uses the analogy of schizophrenia to illustrate his model. How did a Jesus on earth with both a human nature and a human mind walk on the water, or feed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. Was this the work of the divine mind or the human? Can the two minds be so distinguished and yet inseparable, that we can say which act was performed by the human Jesus, and which act by the divine Christ? These appear to be legitimate questions which Morris leaves unaddressed. Until a feasible reply is given, a complete acceptance of his incarnational formula, while innovative and brilliant, would not be wise.

Reformulation: Ronald Leigh

The second appraoch taken to defend the idea of a divine incarnation differs from the previous ones discussed so far in a very important respect. The theologians and philosophers so far examined have all sought to defend the integrity of the formulation of the incarnation as laid down

in the Council of Chalcedon. Ronald Leigh on the other hand joins with the critics in rejecting such a view as incoherent. However, unlike most of these critics, he is very much concerned to remain faithful to the biblical record attesting to Jesus' full humanity and full deity. Leigh hopes to show that a one-natured God-man model not only stands on the firm ground of logical consistency but does justice to the text of Scriptures.

Leigh begins by pointing out the fact that no individual can have more than one nature. He defines "nature" as "the set of essential characteristics (qualities or attributes) of any given individual or class of individuals" (1982, p. 125). Whatever essential characteristics any given thing has, then, is its nature. Quite obviously, then, and individual cannot have two natures. He writes

> Suppose that nearly all individuals have been classified according to their characteristics. Then a unique individual is found whose one set of characteristics includes characteristics from two previously established classifications. Even in such a case it would not be appropriate to say that that unique individual has two natures (p. 125).

Rather such a unique individual would still have only one nature, and that nature includes characteristics also included in other natures.

According to Leigh, the problem arises when attempting to describe the individual in question as having mutually exclusive attributes. When this occurs, we ought to critically examine the accuracy of the description. For Leigh, the move to antinomy offers no solution at all, but merely an unwanted and unwarranted evasion which is both contrary to evangelical apologetics and biblical data. We ought therefore to interpret the ontological status of Jesus as having one nature, a nature which includes both all the attributes essential to humanity and all the attributes essential to deity (1983, p. 56). As an analogy, Leigh suggests that of a chair-desk. A chair-desk has all the properties essential to being a chair, and all the properties essential to being a desk.

> [E]ven though the chair desk has only one nature, it is truly a chair and at the same time is truly a desk. Furthermore, the chair desk is properly included in the classification "chairs" even though it is not exactly identical to all other chairs, and is properly included in the classification "desks" even though it is not exactly identical to all other desks. (1982, p. 132)

Leigh is careful to ennuciate that although, in both the case of Christ and the chair desk, a third classification is formed, this is one of **inclusion**, not **exclusion**. In other words, the third classification is not a genuine tertium quid because it qualifies for both previously established classifications (p. 132).

The incarnation is possible because of a real similarity existing between God and man, reflected in the doctrine of the image of God. "Many theologians treat the set of human characteristics and the set of divine characteristics as disjoint sets [cf. Norman Geisler above] when they are really overlapping sets" (1983, p. 56). There are real differences between Christ and the Father and between Christ and fallen man, but these are all **non-essential** differences. There is also a real similarity between all three, namely the image of God, or the personal aspect of our natures. Leigh contends that the doctrine of the image of God has been missing far too much from most christological discussion. Leigh describes the person as the "non-material, self-conscious, rational, emotive, and volitional soul or spirit of man" (1982, p. 133). This aspect of our beings we have in common with the Father and also Christ.

Yet it is here that the most obvious weakness of Leigh's model is apparent. He is forced to concede that

certain attributes traditionally thought to belong to Christ in at least some sense do not, for instance omniscience and omnipotence. The problem is that many theologians have wanted to claim that not only are these properties of God, but they are necessary properties, that is, any individual without them would not classify for divinity. Leigh suggests that Jesus is nearly omniscient and nearly omnipotent, but does not seem too certain, for in both articles he attributes these to Jesus with a question mark after each one. Apparently he is not quite sure what to do with these attributes.

However, this is not necessarily a serious objection in itself for two reasons. First, it points out an area in Leigh's model that needs work, not that defeats it. Second, while claiming that qualities such as necessary omnipotence and necessary omniscience are not essential to divinity may be a problem for some theologians and philosophers, it is not for Leigh. He claims that such attributes come from importing a priori concepts into the nature of man and divinity without first consulting the biblical record. He claims that to accurately describe the characteristics of Jesus "we must base our description on the explicit New Testament statements of the characteristics of Jesus rather than on the assumed content of the concept 'God'" (1982, p. 136).

But there are other more threatening objections that can be brought against Leigh's presentation. In the first place, his criticism is invalid that an individual cannot have more than one nature on the grounds that it fails to distinguish between a kind-nature and an individual-nature. Thomas Morris points out that, "No individual has more that one individualnature. But of course it does not follow from this that no individual has more that one kind-nature" (1986, p. 40).

Morris does admit that individual-natures are exemplified essentially. However, he denies on Christological grounds the claim that kind-natures are an essential sub-set of individual-natures and replaces it with the claim that only **typical** members of a kind (in the sense of common or average) must posses a kind-nature as an essential aspect of their individual-nature. Morris does hold that least one kind-nature is essential to an individual. Therefore any individual with more than one kind-nature must possess only one kind-nature essentially; the other he may posses contingently (1984, p. 44).

On Leigh's view, Christ is a typical member of the class *Incarnality*, and he therefore must possess his kind-nature essentially. Yet Christ's human attributes he possess only contingently. In short, Christ must possess as part of his essential nature characteristics he has only

contingently (Morris, 1984, p. 42). And of course this leads to the kind of contradiction Leigh wants to avoid. He responds by denying that the notion of a *typical member* has any real meaning, and therefore Morris has manufactured this objection (1984, p. 45). However, denial does not appear to have any real substance other than the fact that it defeats Leigh's own view.

A further objection to Leigh rests on Trinitarian grounds. He denies the property of omniscience, and possibly others as well, to not only Christ but also the Holy Spirit (1982, p. 136, n. 31). This make a radical difference between the various members of the Trinity. As Millard J. Erickson points out

> Now, to be sure, there are some differences which distinguish the three members of the Trinity as separate persons. Usually, however, these differences are seen as involving function rather than power. . . it is highly questionable whether, given such an understanding of the Trinity, we could say that the three are of the same essence (1991, p. 538).

Having already rejected a major creed of Christendom in its claims of Christ, Leigh may be willing to go further and deny the traditional formulation of the Trinity as three persons with one divine essence. This deviation ought to sound a clear warning to evangelicals. The further he

strays from historical orthodoxy, the more cautious we ought to be in following him without explicit Scriptual grounding.

Praradox: Soren Kierkegaard

We now turn to our final model of the incarnation. The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, who made massive contributions to the philosophy of religion as well as other areas, offers numerous relevant insights into the Christian dogma under question. In the following discussion we will find that Kierkegaard's answer to the problem is far more adequate than those presented already.

The Absolute Paradox

Among the many distinctives throughout Kierkegaard's thought, one of the most unique is his response to the problem of the God-man. While the other thinkers we have been considering have been busy attempting to resolve the tension of the Chalcedon formula, Kierkegaard embraces it. While Morris, Geisler, et. al., try to untangle the complex theological and philosophical implications of "very God of very God" and the rest of the creed so that in the end we have no irrevocable objections, Kierkegaard merely affirms the reality of the knot and goes no further in that direction.

Yet Kierkegaard does much more than just acknowledge the problem of the incarnation. He places it - not just God incarnate but the problem of God incarnate - at the very

center of the Christian faith. It is the "Absolute Paradox." He writes

> What, then, is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, etc., has come into existence exactly as an individual human being (1992, p. 210).

This may seem straightforward enough, but Kierkegaard had a way of forging new categories and meanings. It is important to read him carefully in order to understand exactly what he meant when he spoke of the Absolute Paradox.

It is the paraoxical drive of reason, as with all passions, to will its own annihilation (Kierkegaard, 1985, pp. 38-39). One commentator wrote, "All the strivings of dialectic are designed to reach a conclusion wherein such striving shall no longer be necessary" (Croxall, 1948, pp. 118-119). The ideal end of reason is to "get to the bottom of things, at which point there will no longer be any need for further understanding. However, reason in its passion eventually arrives at a dimension into which it cannot penetrate, and therefore its goal of self-destruction can never be realized. "This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 37). This unknown area into which the reason cannot probe Kierkegaard calls <u>the god</u>

(p. 39). In equating the god with the realm of the unknown, he affirms its complete transcendence. Kierkegaard recoiled against the immanent God of Hegel, who claimed the mind of God is the mind of man and vise versa. All of history is the unfolding of the mind of god, according to Hegel. However, for Keirkegaard, the chasm between the unknown and the understanding is so absolute - the "absolute difference" - that even to label it as such does not get us very far, for reason cannot absolutely negate itself and arrive at an understanding of what lies in the unknown (p. 45). Understanding, in trying to grasp the difference, confuses it with itself. Therefore it cannot know either the difference or the god through its own dialectical passion.

> At this point we seem to stand at a paradox. Just to come to know that the god is the different, man needs the god and then comes to know that the god is absolutely different from him. But if the god is to be absolutely different from a human being, this can have its basis not in that which man owes to the god. . . but. . . in that which he himself has committed. What, then, is the difference? Indeed, what else but sin (p. 47).

This sin absolutely separates the human from the god, and this separation can only be learned if the god teaches it himself. What should move the god to do this? Certainly

not need, but then what else if not sheer love (p. 24)? And yet there is unbearable sorrow in this, the sort of sorrow that is "the result not of the lovers' being unable to have each other but of their being able to understand each other" (p. 25). How can there be a true reciprocal relation of communication and understanding between the god and man when they are so quantitatively different? The god must appear not only as teacher, then, but also in equality.

> Thus the paradox becomes even more terrible, or the same paradox has the duplexity by which it manifests itself as the absolute - negatively, by bringing into prominence the absolute difference of sin and, positively, by wanting to annul this absolute difference in the absolute equality (p. 47).

At this point it is obvious where Kierkegaard wants to go with his thought project, or re-construction of Christianity. The god appears to us as teacher in absolute equality that he may abolish the absolute difference.

In what manner or form does the god appear to us? How can the absolutely different communicate? Is it possible for the qualitative, infinite difference between the god and man to be bridged? Kierkegaard replies that the god appears among us incognito, "an incognito impenetrable to the most intimate observation" (1946, p. 388). God could not communicate himself directly, but only indirectly. With

witticism only possible for Kierkegaard, he says, "Look, there he stands - the god. Where? There. Can you not see him? He is the god, and yet he has no place where he can lay his head. . ." (1985, p. 32). The implications of this will become apparent in the next section. What is important here is Kierkegaard's claim that direct communication from the god is nonexistent if not impossible.

Indirect communication is important because the goal of the god is to teach Truth. By this, Kierkegaard means subjective truth, that is a passionate response of the will as opposed to objective, abstract truth, which involves only the intellect. **"An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth**, the highest truth there is for an **existing** person" (1992, p. 203, emphasis his).

Faith in the God-man

Another factor in Kierkegaard which distinguishes him from our other authors is his intense concern for the existing individual. The entire thought-project of Fragments centers around the eternal happiness of the individual. The questions of faith in the Absolute Paradox is crucially bound up in the question of the Paradox itself. It is in this discussion that Kierkegaard's view of the relation of history to both faith and the incarnation will surface.

Because in Christ God appeared incognito, it is impossible to historically discern the identity of the two. To the question, "Can one learn from history anything about Christ?" Kierkegaard answers with an uncharacteristically direct, "No" (1946, p. 388). To the related question, "Can one prove from history that Christ was God?" the response is equally unequivocal and equally negative (p. 389). It is impossible to prove a contradiction, all the more so when it is as foolish a contradiction as the idea that "a definite individual man is God" (p. 389).

If the divinity of Christ cannot be demonstrated, how can it be known? Simply by faith. And when we see what Kierkegaard means by faith, we will understand why he so easily dismissed historical evidence.

What human beings need is the Truth, according to Kierkegaard, and this Truth is not to be found in the teaching of Christ, but in Christ himself. However, not only do we need the Truth, we need also the condition for receiving it. To say that we posses this condition takes us back to the Socratic/ Hegelian immanence Kierkegaard so strongly wanted to do away with. According to Socrates and Hegel, (though not in the same sense) the truth is something inherent within man.

On the Hegelian account. . . Jesus may have been the first person to recognize man's essential oneness with

> God, but once this truth was recognized, it is essentially true of all human beings. Man's divinity is being concretely actualized though history. But this is an expression of the principle of immanence (Evans, 1983, p. 26).

The teacher provides merely the occasion for recollecting that which was intrinsic to the learner all the time.

However, if we stand in untruth, and the truth is not in us, we need to receive both the condition for the Truth and the Truth itself. Not only do we need Christ, but we need the ability to receive Him. This is a timeless encounter with the Transcendent God called the moment. In the moment, God grants the condition and the Truth.

Kierkegaard describes the moment as the point at which the "understanding and the paradox happily encounter each other in the moment when the understanding steps aside and the paradox gives itself, and the third something . . . in which this occurs. . . is that happy passion. . . We shall call it faith" (1985, p. 59). This happy passion is the condition for the Truth, for embracing the paradox.

We see then that faith is a passionate response by the individual to God as God confronts him in the moment. As we have already said, faith is something given by God to the individual, something that occurs eternally in time. Faith

is no mere resolution of the will, though that is certainly involved, but a work of the divine in the existing human.

Because this is not a temporal phenomenon, the believers of every age receive their faith directly from God. This is the foundation of Kierkegaard's doctrine of contemporaneousness. Faith is not handed down one generation to the next. God gives it directly to believers of all ages. The first hand follower of Christ, the disciple who actually witnessed the miracles, the teachings, and the resurrection, has no advantage over any subsequent follower; all must receive the condition from God with whom, because he is eternal, they are all contemporaneous. The occasion for belief for the contemporary is the immediate contemporaneity, the occasion for the later follower is the report of the contemporary, but in both cases the believer receives the condition from the god (1985, p. 104).

This idea is extremely important, and crucial to the entire idea of being a Christian at all. Robert Bretall wrote in the introduction to Training in Christianity, "Christianity is: to become contemporary with Christ in His suffering and humiliation" (1946, p. 372). This involves the possibility of offense, or a negative response, which we will discuss in the following section.

All of this may seem to have the result of completely undermining the historical. So extreme is his position that it led Kierkegaard to make the famous claim:

> Even if the contemporary generation had not left anything behind except these words, 'We have believed that in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died' - this is more than enough (1985, p. 104).

Kierkegaard's extreme emphasis on the non-temporality of faith might lead us to wonder why an incarnation at all. One critic asked if in the end the incarnation was not superfluous altogether. "Since it is not possible to base eternal happiness upon historical knowledge anyway I see little reason - except some unexplained ontological supposition at work in Kierkegaard to suppose that such a point of departure really must be historical" (Levine, p. 173).

There are two possible responses to this objection. The first concerns the necessary objectivity of the incarnation. Unless we are going to revert back to a purely subjective, arbitrary religion, another kind of pagan immanence, we need a definite objective intrusion of God into history, even if this intrusion can only be known by faith. "The objectivity of the historical is required in

order to get 'the God outside yourself'" (Evans, 1990, p. 472). Without the historical incarnation, we would be left with a confusion of the absolute difference with our understanding, and have no knowledge of the paradox at all. "In the realm of fantastical fabrication, paganism has been adequately luxuriant" (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 45). The historical record is largely, if not completely, irrelevant because the object of faith is Teacher, not the teaching. The scrap of paper with more than enough on it to serve as the occasion for faith is a testimony not to the teaching, but to the Teacher. It is enough because we do not need historical information about Christ, but we do need a historical incarnation.

Second, and perhaps more to the issue of eternal happiness which Levine addresses, we need to remember that for Kierkegaard, salvation is being in Truth, not objective, abstract truth, but subjective, existential truth. But in order to teach this, the god had to become as we, that he might provide the opportunity for both faith and offense, thereby, in the former case, producing subjective truth in the life of the believer.

> But one cannot have become a Christian without having already come to Him in His estate of humiliation - without having come to Him, who is the sign of offense and the object of faith. In no other wise does He

> exist on earth, for it was only thus that He existed. That He shall come in glory is to be expected, but it can be expected and believed only by one who has attached himself and continues to hold fast to Him as He actually existed (1946, p. 387).

We need a teacher like us if we are to become like the god, and therefore we need a god in time.

Offense and Irrationality

When one encounters the Absolute Paradox, Kierkegaard would allow only two responses: faith or offense. We have already discussed the former. Its alternative is offense. The offense is encountered in several areas. For instance, that the god should appear among us in time, incognito, in a state of suffering and humiliation is an offense to our desire for comfort and security.

However, our purpose here is to look at the offense as it is related to our understanding. If the understanding is not set aside when the paradox is encountered, "then the relation is unhappy, and the understanding's unhappy love. . . we could more specifically term **offense**" (1985, p. 49). The understanding cannot accept the paradox; if it will not concede its boundaries it will become indignant to the suggestion that it has them. "Of course, those who, whether speculative philosophers of others, want to take everything

on reason, find the Paradox an offense; and so they will not make the leap of faith" (Croxall, 1948, p. 122).

There are several related reasons why this should be the case. Primarily, the paradox, by definition, confronts us with a category, that our rationality cannot comprehend. Evans commented, "The paradox reveals itself negatively to reason as the limit by involving reason in contradictions when it attempts to understand it" (1983, p. 225). How far Kierkegaard intends to push this is a question we will suspend momentarily. At the very least he believes that what we have encountered in the God-man is a reality no amount of analysis or speculation will yield any coherent content. "The offense remains outside the paradox, and the basis for that is: because it is absurd" (1985, p. 52). And is it not the nature reaction of the intellect to disregard what it cannot define, analyze, and systematize?

Another reason why the understanding should respond negatively to the paradox, if we take this one step further, is the impossibility of historical proof. Not only can the **what** of the paradox not be comprehended, the **that** cannot be definitively shown through historical investigation. It can only be appropriated by faith. Again reason is by passed, and again it is offended. To the proposition that it would be actually possible, Kierkegaard responds

> Is it possible to conceive of a more foolish contradiction than that of wanting to PROVE (no matter for the present purpose whether it be from history or from anything else in the wide world one wants to **prove** it) that a definite individual man is God? That an individual man is God, declares himself to be God, is indeed the "offense," par excellence. But what is the offense, the offensive thing? What is at variance with (human) reason. And such a thing as that one would attempt to prove!. . . One can "prove" only that it is at variance with reason (1946, p. 389).

Here again we see Kierkegaard's devaluation of the historical and rational in favor of faith.

One final reason can be given for reason's reluctance to be bounded by the paradox, one which is the most subtle and most foundational, often underlying other objections. It must be remembered that the absolute difference between God and man is sin, and this is the fundamental reality separating the two, rather than any rational capacity. Man is intrinsically in untruth; this is a category into which he is placed. The penultimate basis of the offense is not rational or intellectual but moral. We do not accept it because we realize its demands are far too high for us; reason steps in to excuse our refusal to obey the divine directive. "[M]y, your, conviction (the personal) is

decisive. One can deal with reasons half jokingly: Well, if you insist on reasons I don't mind giving you some; do you want 3 or 5 or 7, how many do you want" (Kierkegaard, 1960, p. 164). This is an obvious implication of Kierkegaard's doctrine of the subjectivity of truth, yet it is of crucial validity. At the core does not lie any kind of "esoteric metaphysical puzzles. We have trouble believing because we are selfish and we have trouble comprehending an action which is pure unselfishness" (Evans, 1989, p. 360).

It might appear that Kierkegaard has completely severed any rationality whatsoever from religious life and faith. He certainly did not do much to counteract that accusation. That conclusion could easily be drawn from what we have already mentioned. Further statements are not uncommon in Kierkegaard; "How, then, does the learner become a believer or a follower? When the understanding is discharged and he receives the condition" (1985, p. 64), or "All this world-historical to-do and arguments and proofs of the truth of Christianity must be discarded; the only proof there is, is Faith" (1960, p. 163). All of this has led many thinkers to picture Kierkegaard as "attempting to save religious belief by locating it in an enclave which is marked 'off limits' to reason" (Evans, 1989, p. 355). Francis Schaeffer's well-

known diagram displayed non-reason, faith, and optimism *upstairs*, while reason and pessimism couched *downstairs*.

However, it may be fruitful to re-examine this contention. It cannot be denied that Kierkegaard wanted to place definite boundaries around reason (Croxall, 1948, p. 119). The Hegelian idealism en vogue in his day submerged both God and the individual exister beneath its expansive system. Kierkegaard strongly wanted to curb this near deification of rationality and place the emphasis back on the needs of human beings.

The crux lies at whether or not he thinks the incarnation is in fact a logical or formal contradiction in the sense that we use the term today. When we examine closely both Kierkegaard's writing and his intent, we begin to see how interpreters as we have discussed above may be mistaken.

In the first place *paradox, absurd,* and *contradiction* are terms used by Kierkegaard which had different connotations than what current philosophy means when it refers to a logical or formal contradiction (Evans, 1989, p. 350).

Further, one of Kierkegaard's polemical pillars from which he launched his anti-Hegelian attacks was the law of non-contradiction (Evans, 1989, p. 351). There are real either/or choices which cannot be dialectically synthesized

into a mediating alternative of both/and. According to Hegel, contradictory propositions could be assimilated in a process of dialectics: thesis and antithesis assimilated into synthesis. Kierkegaard developed a hatred for this mediation, and attacked it even in the title of his book Either/Or. "Either/or," a does not equal non-a; Kierkegaard cannot be the rampant irrationalist he is sometimes accused of when he so strongly employs the law of non-contradiction in his polemic.

We may also wonder in what sense the incarnation is a paradox. What about it earned that title in Kierkegaard's eyes? Some commentators have been as emphatic as to say, "God's revelation in Christ is a 'fact' that refutes itself; it is a fact that cannot be a fact, and as an impossible fact, it is yet a fact" (Zuidema, 1980, p. 34). Others have so softened down the offense that it is lost altogether; "Is it not rather the paradox of love stooping to lowliness and rejection" (Brown, 1955, p. 70). A middle road seems best here. The incarnation cannot be a self-refuting event, yet it can occur in direct opposition to anything we could have thought possible apart from it actually happening. Theists often applaud the Greeks for their idea of god arrived at apart from revelation. Yet at best such a god was an impersonal, impassible, unmoved eternality completely incapable of passion, let alone action in time. The

incarnation contradicts not itself but our predetermined ideas of what God and man should be.

C. S. Evans agrees with us on this point, although he stresses the moral aspect:

> The absolute paradox is that a person who is a particular, temporal individual and who therefore outwardly resembles other temporal individuals is nevertheless the full, complete realization of the eternal moral reality that provides the standard for all the rest of existence. . . It is this assertion that Climacus regards as "the strangest possible proposal" (1983, p. 228).

Finally, Kierkegaard seems to believe that understanding has a definite though subservient role to play in faith, which is not contrary to it. "Yet the offense has one advantage: it points up the difference more clearly, for in that happy passion. . . the difference is in fact on good terms with the understanding" (1985, p. 54). For the believer, no such impossibility exists, because for him the incarnation **has happened.** If one considers the incarnation to be logically impossible *a priori*, then that one will certainly see Kierkegaard as an irrationalist. However, if one is already committed to the fact of the incarnation, and does not see this as necessarily conflicting with reason, then one may accept Kierkegaard as

something quite other than an anti-intellectual fideist. As Evans sums up, "Perhaps the best way of answering the question. . . depends on what one means by reason" (1989, p. 361).

If our hypothesis is correct, and Kierkegaard was not, strictly speaking an irrationalist, how does he differ from the view of Norman Geisler? Both see the incarnation as something beyond reason, with which reason is not necessarily in conflict. Or for that matter, Thomas Morris, who, to be sure, does not try to **prove** the incarnation at all, but rather attempts to show how the idea of God incarnate involves no logical contradiction.

Kierkegaard would, most likely, view the attempts of these men as aborhent, perhaps even damaging to the faith rather than aiding it. Both thinkers are attempting to accommodate the claims of Christ, particularly his claim to divinity, to fashionable categories of thought. Their efforts focus on making an extremely difficult idea palatable to speculative philosophy and its rational categories. This method is completely antithetical to Kierkegaard, who his whole life re-worked Christianity to make it harder. When these men do admit that their is some factor at least in the incarnation which eludes or confounds reason, it is almost an embarrassment. They have attempted to dismiss the offense and make Christianity fasionable.

> Human apprehension generally is very busy trying to understand, to understand more and more, but if, at the same time, it would take pains to understand itself, it simply has to establish the Paradox. **The Paradox is not a concession, but a category** (1960, p. 158, emphasis mine).

By contrast, Morris begins his book with the quotation, "I know nothing so contemptible as a mere paradox" (G. K. Chesterton). Kierkegaard would have us proclaim what others would explain and, in the attempt, kill.

Conclusions

Kierkegaard's re-creation of Christianity has much to commend it. However, there are certain areas in which he fails to do justice to the biblical text or our experience of reality. In regard to the former, Kierkegaard in large measure renders the entire Old Testament irrelevant (to say nothing of the New) and therefore negates the prepatory work of God found so crucial by both Jesus and the apostles. Faith in the Absolute Paradox comes to the existing individual neither in history or by means of historical investigation. One commentator asked, "What becomes. . . of the long preparatio evangelica in the history of Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament" (Brown, 1965, p. 62). The rejection of Christ was not, in a sense, supposed to happen, for the Jews had a long tradition of God

working with them (or in spite of them) in time. Kierkegaard takes the revelation of God in Jesus Christ very seriously, but ironically his ideas about it lead to a depreciation of God's prior revelation.

The second criticism concerns Kierkegaard's formulation of the doctrine of original sin, which he calls the absolute difference. Much has been said this century, notably by existential thinkers, about the "other-ness" of man in the world, his feeling of being thrown into a universe in which he is vaguely aware that something is fundamentally wrong with not only himself but also the order (or lack thereof) of things in general. This near universal malcontent offers an excellent existential meeting point between the gospel and modern man, for it appears to be just what the Christian doctrines of total depravity and original sin say should be the case. Yet as we have seen, Kierkegaard will not allow this. The understanding cannot absolutely negate itself to comprehend the absolute difference, and any knowledge of the difference must come from the God himself in the moment. Anything else is another form of immanence so strongly repudiated by Kierkegaard.

However, even allowing for the shortcomings mentioned above, Kierkegaard has given us a "model," if we may so term it, of the incarnation much preferable to the others mentioned. The first consideration is obvious: We have

already critiqued the previous presentations and determined them to be lacking in adequate support. On this point Kierkegaard wins by default.

Positively, Kierkegaard's formulation has two great strengths. In the first place, it preserves the transcendent nature of the Christian faith (Evans, 1983, p. 240). Religion in general and Christianity is particular has been increasingly seen as the activity of man, with no divine origin. This was every bit as true in Kierkegaard's day as it is in ours. Because man is in untruth, the truth must be brought to him from a source transcending himself, namely, the god. Christianity is not something that has arisen in man, but comes to him.

But beyond this, Kierkegaard offers, contrary to the above philosophers, not merely a view but a challenge. Kierkegaard emphasizes a distinctly biblical note in declaring the paradox: the necessity of choosing to be for or against the god. The ontological and metaphisical prerequisites do not need to be thought out by human rationality, the God has appeared here among us. The time is not for speculation but **action**. "The highest of all is not to understand the highest but to act upon it" (1946, p. 281). And who, after all, is convinced by these fine philosophical distinctions? Only those who claim to be already committed, those who respond to the paradox with

both faith and offense, and seek to dissolve the tension by explaining away the very foundation of what they believe. In the end, they have dismissed the offense, at least to their own minds, yet they have dismissed their faith as well. Kierkegaard reminds us that we are dealing with something that transcends our categories of thought; something that must come down to us because we cannot rise up to it; something that above all issues a challenge and calls us forth to commitment.

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