THEOLOGY III: THE PERSON OF CHRIST

- FULLY GOD
  - “CHRISTOLOGY FROM ABOVE”

- FULLY MAN
  - “CHRISTOLOGY FROM BELOW”

Unless otherwise specified, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version of the Holy Bible.
STARTING POINT

- **CHRISTOLOGY FROM BELOW?**
  - “HUMANLY SPEAKING” -- THE PERSPECTIVE MOST FAMILIAR TO US
  - DEPICTS HIM AS HE WAS ORIGINALLY EXPERIENCED (BY MOST)
  - SEE 1 JOHN 1, LUKE 2

- **CHRISTOLOGY FROM ABOVE?**
  - NT STARTING POINT
  - DEPICTS HIM AS *HE* ORIGINALLY WAS
  - SEE JOHN 1, HEB. 1, GAL. 1:16, ACTS 9:3, 2 COR. 8:9, PHI. 2:5-11, MARK 1, MATT. 1, LUKE 1
THE VIRGIN BIRTH

■ TO OBSERVERS
  – PERFECTLY NORMAL
    ▪ MARY WAS NOT *SEMPER VIRGO* – MATT. 1:25

■ THE CONCEPTION WAS OF DIVINE AGENCY
  – MATT. 1:18, 20
  – LUKE 1:35

■ FORETOLD
  – ISAIAH 7:14 and MATTHEW 1:22-23
    ▪ An example of prophetic double fulfillment
PROBLEMS WITH THE VIRGIN BIRTH

- SOME THEOLOGIANS SEE IT AS ADDED TO THE ORIGINAL *KERYGMA*
  - SOLUTION: BIBLICAL INERRANCY

- "PRESENTS TWO CONCEPTS OF DIVINE SONSHIP"
  - SON BECAUSE HE WAS MESSIAH?
    - **LUKE 1:32**, to quote the angel Gabriel
  - SON BECAUSE HE WAS VIRGIN BORN?
    - **LUKE 1:35**, to quote the angel Gabriel
  - SOLUTION: NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE
PROBLEMS WITH THE VIRGIN BIRTH

“THE REST OF THE NT IS SILENT”

- ALLUSIONS TO VB – JOHN 1:14, GAL. 4:4, ROM. 1:3, PHIL. 2:7-8

- SOLUTIONS
  1. VB NOT DENIED ANYWHERE
  2. THE ONLY ACCOUNTS OF JESUS’ INFANCY IN THE BIBLE ATTEST TO IT
  3. JOHN IS SILENT ABOUT A LOT OF JESUS’ LIFE
  4. JOHN CORRECTED ERRORS: JOHN 21:23
  5. PAUL SAID LITTLE ABOUT JESUS’ LIFE
WHY THE VB IS IMPORTANT

1. AS A SIGN
   - OF DIVINE SONSHIP: UNIQUE ENTRY, UNIQUE EXIT*
   - OF HUMAN LOSTNESS: REDEEMER MUST COME FROM ABOVE
   - OF A NEW BEGINNING VIA DIVINE INTRUSION, THE “SECOND ADAM” (1 COR. 15:45-47)**

2. SHOWS THAT SALVATION COMES ONLY FROM THE LORD: JONAH 2:9, GAL. 4:4-5 ***

3. MAKES POSSIBLE THE UNITING OF DEITY AND HUMANITY IN ONE PERSON****

4. MAKES POSSIBLE CHRIST’S TRUE HUMANITY WITHOUT INHERITED SIN: LUKE 1:35
   - A SINLESS HUMANITY IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT A MIRACLE
   - IT HELPS US UNDERSTAND HOW CHRIST CAN STAND OUTSIDE THE GUILT OF MAN
WHAT IF JESUS HAD NOT BEEN BORN OF A VIRGIN?

1. THE HERESY OF ADOPTIONISM WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO AVOID*
   – BUT CHRIST’S HUMAN NATURE NEVER EXISTED FOR ONE MOMENT AS ANYTHING BUT THE HUMANITY OF GOD

2. JESUS WOULD BE THE PRODUCT OF TWO FATHERS
   – BUT SEE LUKE 3:23

3. THE INCARNATION WOULD HAVE BEEN A MATTER OF MERELY HUMAN INITIATIVE
   – BUT SEE JOHN 3:6 & 1:13 & ROMANS 8:29
POSITIVE ROLES IN VB

- **THE HOLY SPIRIT’S ROLE**
  - **LUKE 1:35** (SEE GEN. 1:2, AND THE “CLOUD” PRESENCE OF EX. 24:15, LUKE 9:34, ACTS 1:9, & 1 THES. 4:17)

- **MARY’S ROLE**
  - HER ‘EAR’ “THE BODILY ORGAN OF THE MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION” (**LUKE 1:38**)
  - JESUS WAS THE FRUIT OF HER WOMB (**LUKE 1:42**)
  - SHE CARED FOR AND NURTURED JESUS (SEE **LUKE 2:48-51**, ALONG WITH THE ABSENCE OF MENTION OF JOSEPH DURING JESUS’ MINISTRY: **MARK 6:3** & **JOHN 19:25-27**)

- **JOSEPH’S ACCEPTANCE**: **MATT. 1:24-25**
THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

- CLEARLY AFFIRMED IN CHURCH CREEDS
  - NICENE (325 & 381 A.D.)*
  - CHALCEDONIAN (451 A.D.)**
  - ATHANASIAN (4th-5th centuries A.D.)**

- TAUGHT BY JOHN
  - JOHN 1:1-3 COMPARED TO JOHN 1:14
  - JOHN 8:58
  - REV. 1:8
  - JOHN 17:5
  - ALTHOUGH JOHN IN HIS GOSPEL HAD AN INTEREST IN THEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION, THIS DIDN'T NULLIFY HIS ALLEGIANCE TO THE FACTS
THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

TAUGHT IN HEBREWS

- 1:2-3 — THROUGH WHOM HE MADE THE UNIVERSE
- 2:9 — FOR A LITTLE WHILE WAS MADE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS
- 7:3 — MELCHIZEDEK MADE LIKE THE SON OF GOD
THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

TAUGHT BY PAUL

- **GAL. 4:4** – GOD’S SON *BEFORE* HIS MISSION
- **ROMANS 8:3 & 32** – GOD *SENT* HIS OWN SON ... DIDN’T SPARE HIS OWN SON
- **2 COR. 8:9** – THOUGH *HE WAS RICH*, FOR YOUR SAKES HE BECAME POOR
- **COL. 1:15-20** – *BEFORE* ALL THINGS
THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

TAUGHT IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

– THE USE OF THE TERM LORD
  ▪ MARK 1:2-3
    – SEE MAL. 3:1 AND ISA. 40:3, THEN MATT. 11:10
– THE KINGDOM OF GOD ANNOUNCEMENT
  ▪ MARK 1:15
– THE SON OF MAN TITLE USED BY JESUS OF HIMSELF
  ▪ MARK 10:45 AND LUKE 19:10
    – SEE DANIEL 7:13-14
– JESUS WAS AWARE OF HIS LOW SURROUNDINGS
  ▪ MATT. 8:20 REMARKABLE THAT HE OF ALL PEOPLE SHOULD BE HOMELESS
– THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS
  ▪ MATT. 21:33-46*
SUPPORT FOR SPARSE MENTION OF PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

- THE POST-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST – HE AROSE FROM THE DEAD!
- THE DEITY OF CHRIST PRESUPPOSES HIS PRE-EXISTENCE
Some understate it

- “Merely means he existed in the mind of God”
  - Foreordination does not preclude pre-existence
- “He existed ‘in the loins of Adam’”
  - \textbf{John 17:5} – Sharing glory with the Father as primordial hydrogen?
- “If he is human, how could he pre-exist his human existence?”
  - Was Jesus a mere man, or a true man?
  - \textbf{John 14:9, 10:30, Heb. 1:1-2} – He must \textit{exist} in unity with the Father to \textit{reveal} in unity with the Father
MORE PROBLEMS, AND ANSWERS

“A pre-existent Christ is a distant Christ, unable to mediate between humans and God”

- If the Son is not pre-existent, Christ’s kinship with the Father is based solely on his earthly life’s shared experiences with God
- To be the Son is to be equal with God (John 5:18): one and the same in essence
MORE PROBLEMS, AND ANSWERS

■ “Pre-existence weakens the doctrine of the Incarnation,” making Jesus an “invader from outer space.”
  – The Incarnation is impossible without the pre-existence (John 1:14, Heb. 2:14)

■ “Pre-existence insulates Jesus from all cultural & social conditioning”
  – Learned obedience (Heb. 5:8)
  – Suffered and was tempted (Heb. 2:18, 4:15)
  – Experience molded his personality (Heb. 12:2)
THE SONSHIP OF CHRIST

**MONOGENES** – [John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, 1 John 4:9]

- The only one of his kind
  - Uniquely loved: [Matt. 3:16-17, Col. 1:13, John 6:27](#)
    (see [Song of Solomon 8:6](#))
  - Uniquely chosen: [1 Peter 2:4, Luke 9:35](#)
  - Uniquely bonded with the Father: [Romans 8:3 & 32, John 5:17, 23, 10:15, 30, 38](#)
  - Uniquely non-created: [John 6:46, 50, John 17:1 & 5](#)
- Not “only begotten”*
  - Eternally a son, not an adopted son
Arianism

- The erroneous doctrine that denies the full deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.
  - Arius taught that God the Son was at one point created by God the Father, and that before that time the Son did not exist, nor did the Holy Spirit, but the Father only.
  - Arians depended heavily on texts that called Christ God’s “only begotten” Son
Nicene Council

- Therefore the Nicene Creed in 325 affirmed that Christ was "begotten, not made":

- We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (ὁµοούσιον) with the Father..
SUBORDINATE, YET EQUAL

- Authority received from the Father: John 8:28, 5:19, 10:18, 14:28, 31 Jesus was subordinate in the form of a servant

- Equal in the form of God: John 13:3, 5:18, Phil. 2:9

- The Son of God became the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53) then the Hyper-Exalted Savior (Rev. 5:6-13)

- The purpose of the subordinationist passages: MacLeod p. 78*
THE SON in Hebrews

Heb. 1:3 - “The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being”

- Radiance: Does the Son
  - reflect God’s glory, as a mirror?
  - radiate God’s glory, as a source?*

- Representation: Does the Son exactly represent
  - God’s person?
  - God’s essence?**

- John 14:9
- Beware of the heresy of modalism
THE SON in *Hebrews*

- Did Jesus *become* the Christ? - *Heb. 1:2, 1:4, 1:13, 6:20*
  - When God spoke through Christ, he spoke through one who was already a son
  - The Incarnation dispels adoptionism*
    - As a human creature, Christ becomes heir and forerunner for his people
    - Man is what the eternal God could become!
  - *Hebrews* describes Christ’s humanity uniquely**
The Humanity of Christ (1)

- **Virgin Birth**
  - Shows that salvation ultimately must come from the God
  - Made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person
  - Made possible Christ’s true humanity without inherited sin

- **Human Weaknesses and Limitations**
  - Jesus had a human body
  - Jesus had a human mind
  - Jesus had a human soul and human emotions
  - People near Jesus saw him only as a man
The Humanity of Christ (2)

- **Sinlessness**

- **Could Jesus have sinned?**
  - “Peccability” = Jesus was able not to sin
  - “Impeccability” = Jesus was not able to sin

- **Why was Jesus’ full humanity necessary?**
  - For representative obedience
  - To be a substitute sacrifice
  - To be the one Mediator between God and man
  - To fulfill God’s original purpose for man to rule over creation
  - To be our example and pattern in life
  - To be the pattern for our redeemed body
  - To sympathize as a high priest
  - Jesus will be a man forever
The Deity of Christ (1)

- Direct Scriptural Claims
  - The word *God (Theos)* used of Christ
  - The word *Lord (Kyrios)* used of Christ
  - Other strong claims to deity

- Evidence that Jesus Possessed Attributes of Deity
  - Omnipotence
  - Eternity
  - Omniscience
  - Omnipresence
  - Sovereignty
  - Immortality
  - Worthy of worship
The Deity of Christ (2)

- Did Jesus Give Up Some of His Divine Attributes While on Earth?
- Conclusion: Jesus Is Fully Divine
- Is the Doctrine of the Incarnation “Unintelligible” Today?
- Why Was Jesus’ Deity Necessary?
The Jesus of History

- Gotthold Lessing’s “ugly broad ditch of history”
  - “Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason”
  - Is it true that one cannot get from the contingent truths of history to the timeless truths of religion?
  - The Incarnation demonstrates that we can know about the transcendent through ordinary contingent means, and that we must.

- Two facts
  - The early church believed Jesus Christ to be divine
  - Jesus saw himself as divine
Rudolf Bultmann’s Plea for Demythology

- “The Gospels (especially John) convey a false impression of who Jesus really was”
- “The Jesus of history was a rabbi”
- “The Christ of faith is an invention of the early church”
- “The supernatural events surrounding the life of Jesus are useful myths”
- “The natural events of the life of Jesus are legends, incapable of corroboration”
Answering Bultmann

- The credulity, to the point of universal stupidity, of the NT believers is not evident
- Chronological snobbery is unwarranted
- Historical skepticism is incoherent
  - Ignores the witnesses of the day
  - Makes progress through science impossible
  - The fallacy of fallibilism
  - Self-referential incoherence
The Scandal of God Crucified

WHY WAS THE EARLY CHURCH NOT LIKELY TO HAVE INVENTED THE "MYTH" OF JESUS?
The Gospels Hold Up Under Scrutiny

- Stringent Historical Criteria support our confidence in their reliability
  - Dissimilarity
  - Non-intentionality
  - Multiple attestation
  - Coherence
A Limit of Historical Scholarship

- Lessing’s Ditch: Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason
  - Understanding Christ is never a matter of mere human reasoning ability
  - Faith is required
  - Faith is possible because of the giving of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:12, John 15:26)
    - The Spirit’s witness to humanity is ultimate
    - The Spirit’s working in fallen humans is essential
Who Jesus Wasn’t

- Harnack -- One who merely points us to the Father
- Mackey – One who merely calls us to a faith like his own
- Schweitzer – One who failed to bring all history to a close, and sacrificed himself instead as a revolutionary
The Christological Trilemma

- Jesus was either
  1. A fraud deceiving mankind, or
  2. Self-deceived and deluded, or
  3. Divine

- Any credible account of Christianity’s origins must explain the rise of Jesus-worship
Misconceptions of Christ’s Natures

- Christ is truly and perfectly God, and truly and perfectly man, but what is the relation between these two natures? Heresies developed.
  - Apollinarianism (4th century)
  - Nestorianism (5th century)
  - Monophysitism (5th century)
Apollinarianism*

- Christ had a human body, but not a human mind or spirit

- **Heb. 2:14-18** – necessarily totally human!
Nestorianism*

- There were two separate persons in Christ: a human person and a divine person

- John 14:23, etc., demonstrate that Christ lived as one person and saw himself as one person
Monophysitism*

- Christ had only one nature, a sort of hybrid of the human and the divine:
  - If we put a drop of ink in a glass of water: the mixture resulting is neither pure ink nor pure water, but some kind of third substance, a mixture of the two in which both the ink and the water are changed.
The Chalcedonian Council

- A large church council convened in 451 A.D.* in Chalcedon (in modern-day Turkey)
- From this meeting it was concluded that Scripture teaches that Christ has two natures (human and divine) that are unified in one person.
The Chalcedonian Definition

- Against Apollinarianism – “truly man, of a reasonable soul and body ... consubstantial with the Father ... consubstantial with us ...”
- Against Nestorianism – “not parted or divided into two persons”
- Against Monophysitism – “acknowledged in two natures ... the property of each nature being preserved”
Implications of Chalcedon

- One nature does some things that the other nature does not do
  - Two wills, two centers of consciousness
  - Group activities: provide examples
- Anything either nature does, the person of Christ does
- Only Chacedonian Christology Explains Specific Biblical Texts on Christ’s Deity and Humanity
- “Remaining what he was, he became what he was not” – Grudem
**Hypostatic Union:** the union of the two natures (Divine and human) in the person of Jesus.

**Jesus as God**
- He is worshiped ([Matt. 2:2,11; 14:33](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt.2%3A2%2C11%3B%2014%3A33&version=ESV)).
- He is prayed to ([Acts 7:59](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts.7%3A59&version=ESV)).
- He is sinless ([1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Pet.%202%3A22%3B%20Heb.%204%3A15&version=ESV)).
- He knows all things ([John 21:17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John.21%3A17&version=ESV)).
- He gives eternal life ([John 10:28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John.10%3A28&version=ESV)).

**Jesus as man**
- He worshiped the Father (John 17).
- He prayed to the Father (John 17).
- He was tempted ([Matt. 4:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt.4%3A1&version=ESV)).
- He died ([Rom. 5:8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom.5%3A8&version=ESV)).
Other Heresies on the Person of Christ

- Docetism (1st century A.D.)
- Ebionism (ca. 180 A.D.)
- Kenotic Theory, a.k.a Kenosis Theory (1853-1910)
- Bultmann’s Christ-Event Theology (1941)
Docetism

Docetism is the view that Jesus was God, but not human. Docetists essentially taught that Jesus only appeared to be human, but He in fact was not. Docetism contradicts many Scriptures, with John 1:14 and 1 John 4:1-3 being the most clear refutations of Docetism.
Ebionism is the view that Jesus was fully human, but not divine. Ebionites denied the deity of Christ. Ebionism viewed Jesus as a normal human being who was simply empowered by God. Ebionism is rejected by a multitude of Scriptures (John 1:1, 14; 8:58; 10:30; 20:28; Philippians 2:6; Hebrews 1:8).
Kenotic Theory

Interpreting Philippians 2:5-7, the kenotic theory asserts that Christ gave up some of his attributes while he was on earth as a man

- Seeks to account for difficulties
  1. “How could Jesus’ humanity be significant, if he retained all his attributes as God?”
  2. “How could Jesus’ attitude to the OT be correct, since we now know that Moses didn’t author all the Torah (Mt. 8:4, 19:7, etc.), Isaiah didn’t author all of Isaiah (Mt. 13:14, Mark 7:6, etc.), Daniel didn’t author all Daniel (Mt. 24:15)?”
Responses to the Kenotic Theory

- It’s origin is rooted in, or at least in reaction to, a rationalistic worldview that rejects Biblical inerrancy and Biblical believing.

- Phil. 2:7 doesn’t say Christ
  - “emptied himself of some powers”
  - “emptied himself of divine attributes”

- The context of Phil. 2:7 does say Christ
  - “took the very nature of a servant” (see 2:8)
Responses to the Kenotic Theory

- Paul’s purpose in the section is to form an attitude in the Philippians -- 2:4
  – Not to urge them to give up any of their essential attributes or abilities

- What was happening to the rest of the world during the period of the Lord’s earthly life?

- Chalcedon contradicts the Kenotic Theory

- Continuity between the pre-existent and Incarnate Son is threatened – the amnesia problem

- A sign of the times*
Responses to the Kenotic Theory

- The Christ of faith is sacrificed to the Jesus of history (again!)
  - No divine attributes, no divine prerogatives, no divine consciousness – Mk. 4:41, Mt. 11:28, John 1:14
  - Jesus clearly saw himself while on Earth, as divine
  - Jesus portrayed himself as divine
  - Jesus was worshipped on Earth as divine

- There is a true kenosis* (group activity)
Bultmann’s “Christ-Event Theology”

– What counts isn’t faith in some mythical events in history, but rather believing the gospel proclamation (kerygma) of Jesus and of the early church

  ▪ Demythologize the message by stripping it of elements of 1st century “mythological world picture” that could alienate modern people

– A response: Bultmann poses a false dichotomy

  ▪ Sheer rationalism: faith based only on evidence
  ▪ Sheer irrationalism: faith with no basis in evidence
John Hick’s *The Myth of God Incarnate*

- There is a tendency to exalt the founder of a religion
- This is common among world religions
  - The “son of God” became “God the Son” at Nicea
- A response
  - Even if the Incarnation as a doctrine has a history of development, the Resurrection does not
John Hick’s myth of Christian uniqueness

– Exclusivism is rejected
– Pluralism is endorsed
– Responses
  ▪ Exclusivism doesn’t require a belief that Christians have a monopoly on the truth
  ▪ *All* religions make mutually exclusive truth claims
  ▪ Pluralism itself is exclusivist
More Modern Distortions of the Person of Christ

- Anglican Unitarianism
  - John A.T. Robinson, and others
- Oscar Cullmann’s Functional Christology
- Process Philosophy’s Insistence on Immanence
- See Macleod’s responses: pp. 241-261
One More: Liberation Theology

“Christ as Liberator”*

- Responses
  - Christians aren’t moving towards liberation; they are starting from liberation (Col. 1:13)
  - Christ’s example is impossible in some ways to follow
  - He (not you, or I or we) is the Great Liberator
    - Matt. 28:18
    - Matt. 11:29
    - Mark 1:15
The Impeccability of Christ

- Scripture teaches that
  - Jesus Christ never sinned -- 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5, Heb. 4:15, 7:26, etc.
  - Jesus Christ was tempted – Luke 4:2, Heb. 2:18, etc.
  - God cannot be tempted with evil – James 1:13

- If Jesus was fully God as well as fully man, how could he be tempted with evil?
Did Jesus have a fallen human nature?

- If yes, how could he be a lamb without blemish?
- If no, how could he be fully human?
- Group activity: Answer Edward Irving’s argument that if Christ did not have a fallen human nature, he could never have been tempted.
Able to Sin?

- Unfallen Adam, the “First Adam,” was able not to sin.
- Fallen Adam was not able to not sin (totally depraved), and we are not able to not sin (see Romans 3:9-18, Isa. 64:6, and Eph. 2:3).
- Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, was able not to sin.
- The view from the balcony: He was not able to sin.
- The view from the road: He derived no advantage from this.
  - Mk. 14:33-34, Mt. 4:4, Mk. 14:35