

Christ's human nature: an alternate view

The science of salvation will be the study of the redeemed through all eternity. Here is a glimpse of what that study will be like.

There is an alternate understanding to the two viewpoints of the human, incarnate nature of Christ championed by Drs. Douglass and Gulley. This view could provide a bridge between those positions and resolve a number of problems that arise in each of them. I can only outline the third viewpoint here.

We may use as a point of departure a quotation from *The Great Controversy*, page 477: "Through Jesus the fallen sons of Adam become 'sons of God.' 'Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren' (Heb. 2:11)."

Here Ellen White equates the "sons of God" with those who "are sanctified," and who, additionally, are called the brethren of Him "that sanctifieth"—Jesus. Paul refers to "those sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2, RSV).

It is a particular group—those who are being "sanctified"—who are referred to as Christ's brethren. Who are these people?

Romans 6:22 tells us: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life" (RSV). No proof is required to state that those "set free from sin" are those who have been regenerated, born again. It is, then, those born-again ones, those being sanctified, whom Christ is not ashamed

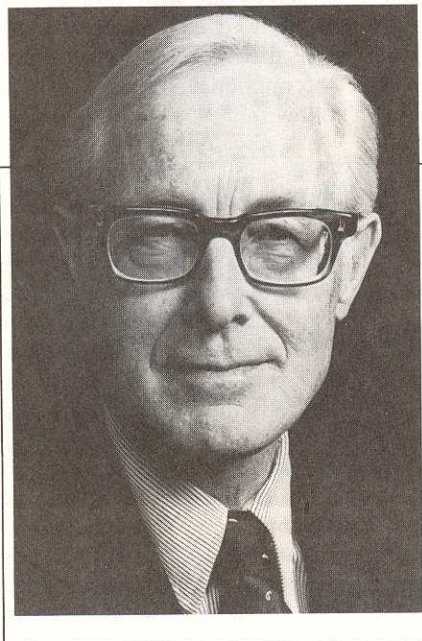
to call His brethren—and no others. "It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants" (Rom. 9:8, R.S.V.; cf. chap. 8:29; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 77, 78). The unregenerate are not "sons of God" but are "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3; cf. John 8:44). And there is no third category.

But we read in Hebrews 2:17 that Jesus was "made like his brethren [the born-again, sanctified ones] in every respect." I suggest it is not doing harm to syntax to make this connection, and furthermore, we are simply applying the rule of first mention. This is merely the common-sense assumption that a stated or implied meaning given a word the first time it is used in a passage is the meaning to be maintained throughout the passage, unless otherwise indicated.

In light of the foregoing we may conclude that there was something important about the incarnate nature of Christ that was like born-again people but unlike unregenerate people. I suggest that in this idea is a concept that could bring together the two viewpoints discussed in *MINISTRY*.

Only the framework can be presented here; thus misunderstandings are possible. I have discussed the concept at some length in my book *Was Jesus Really Like Us?*¹

In discussing how Jesus would be "like his brethren in every respect," we must add "except for sin." For the regenerate are linked with the unregenerate in that



Thomas A. Davis, former book editor at the *Review and Herald Publishing Association*, though in retirement, gives seminars entitled "How to Be a Victorious Christian."

“all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23).

The likeness between Christ and His “brethren” can be understood only as we realize the radical change experienced by the person who has been born again (2 Cor. 5:17). With the new-birth experience one becomes a “partaker of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). “In Christ divinity and humanity were united, and the only way in which man may be an overcomer is through becoming a partaker of the divine nature. . . . Divinity and humanity are blended in him who has the spirit of Christ.”² This commonness with Jesus “none but His loved ones know.”

“[The true Christian] is a living representative of the truth which he professes. Of these true-hearted followers, Jesus declares that He is not ashamed to call them brethren.”³

Blending is a mystery

Regarding the blending of the human and divine in Jesus, Ellen White comments, “It can never be explained. Man must wonder and be silent. And yet man is privileged to be a partaker of the divine nature, *and in this way he can to some degree enter into the mystery.*”⁴ I would suggest there is seed for some profound contemplation in this statement.

Let us press home the similarity between the attitude and experience of

the regenerated individual and the Great Exemplar, Jesus. The following quotation describes the truly born-again person: “The new birth is an experience which brings a total renunciation of self and a willing abandonment to God, permitting the Holy Spirit to pervade fully and direct completely the life. It brings an attitude of heart and mind in which God’s way is happily sought and contentedly followed, of the individual’s own volition as well as from a sense of loving obligation. In it is experienced a shunning and increasing abhorrence of sin in every known aspect. In the born-again person there is a recognition that full dependency on God is vital for sustained and complete victory.

“It is an experience in which . . . humanity and divinity have met in an individual.”⁵

Now, I suggest that this quotation be reread, but that where a noun or pronoun is used referring to the individual, one referring to Jesus be substituted. The comparability of the “mind” and heart of the regenerated person and Jesus will become apparent.

This brings me to my main emphasis. To develop my thesis, I stated, some paragraphs back, that “there was something important about the incarnate nature of Christ that was like born-again people.” Now I give it the proper

perspective by rewording it thus: There is something about born-again people that is like the incarnate Christ. This, I believe, is the better viewpoint, rather than the more common one—one that is sometimes given short shrift—that Jesus was “born born-again.” (It might be observed that the difference here is in perspective.)⁶

Jesus, then, became man with a fully human nature (while also being fully God). Thus, of the flesh, He had the weaknesses of humanity, torn by temptations as we are, with the possibility of sinning. But in that condition He had an unfallen mind, heart, and will, and was totally and continually attuned to the Father and directed by the Holy Spirit. In this way He was like the unfallen Adam. And it is at this point that, I believe, the regenerate and Jesus meet on common ground.

“In Christ dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily. This is why, although He was tempted in all points like as we are, He stood before the world, from His first entrance into it, untainted by corruption, though surrounded by it. Are we not also to become partakers of that fullness, and is it not thus, and thus only, that we can overcome as He overcame?”⁷

The Saviour “came to the world to display the glory of God, that man might

be uplifted by its restoring power. God was manifested in Him that He might be manifested in them [His disciples]. Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.”⁸

The Christian, then, has “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Being born again (1 Peter 1:23), he has the spiritual intent of Christ. Or, as the *Expositor’s Greek Testament* puts it, “Christ lives and thinks” in the born-again person.⁹ The regenerated individual sees things from Christ’s viewpoint, not the world’s. He “unites his weakness to Christ’s strength, his emptiness to Christ’s fullness, his frailty to Christ’s enduring might. Then he has the mind of Christ.”¹⁰

In that spiritual milieu the born-again person has died with Christ (Col. 3:3), and the life he lives as a Christian is by virtue of the indwelling Christ (Gal. 2:20); the Spirit that dwelt in Christ dwells in him (Rom. 8:9); he knows himself to be not of this world, as Christ was not of the world (John 17:16); like Christ, his desire is to do the will of the Father (chap. 4:34); like his Master, he recognizes that in his humanity he can do nothing of himself (chap. 5:19). Other parallels could be drawn.

It is highly significant that Ellen White writes that at conversion “the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; *we live His life*. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteous-

ness.”¹¹

We must never, not by the slightest hint, appear to detract from the total deity of Jesus Christ. He is always God, always divine.

But—and here we are involved in an insoluble mystery—we must also never detract from the total humanity of Christ. Our salvation depends on His divinity. That being fundamental, it also depends on His humanity. And in that humanity He was a true human being, living, wrestling, trusting, overcoming, as, in His strength, His “brethren” may overcome.

¹ Thomas A. Davis, *Was Jesus Really Like Us?* (Hagerstown, Md: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985.)

² Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1955), p. 24.