

The Incarnation: NOT Heaven's Backup Plan

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Did God decide to incarnate in the Person of His Son because, if He were to choose to do anything about the "problem of sin", becoming Man was, as it were, forced upon Him? Was the incarnation part of Plan B that God hoped He might be able to avoid? Though we all would agree, as the song says, "It was love that sent the Savior to this world of sin and woe.", did God choose a path that He otherwise would not have, had Adam not sinned, or would He have chosen incarnation anyway?

Ultimately, this is the question I am raising: Is the incarnation to be understood as divine action taken out of circumstantial necessity, or is becoming human intrinsic to the nature of God apart from any other consideration? If the latter is so, then the redemptive element in the incarnation is a matter of God choosing to be what He is, that is, Deity inclusive of True Humanness, a Divine Humanness that, in its eternal and aeonian unfolding, includes vulnerability to what it cannot be, but which, for a season, it must bear.

Many years ago I was suddenly arrested by the realization that the mystery of godliness (Godlikeness), namely God manifested in the flesh, was most certainly not something He did contrary to His nature (that notion would be theological idiocy). The profundity of the truth that God, with uttermost delight, acted out what He was by the incarnation, and that His redemptive passion was to be understood within the larger context of His passion to embody Himself, hit me like the proverbial "ton of bricks."

The truth of the Son of God, enduring the cross for the joy set before Him, took on deeper meaning for me. I began to understand that our Humanity has its Primal Origin in Divinity, and I began to "feel" God's excitement at the prospect of drawing forth out from His depths the Humanness of His Son (a Humanness birthed out of divine DNA) and our True Humanness in Him.

In the earliest centuries when the first creedal statements of institutional Christianity were being hammered out in the crucible of

very heated disagreement regarding the essential nature of the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the side that won, that is, whose views became accepted as the standard by which orthodoxy was to be defined, I must say, had some sublime insights, but I must also say that they included in their system of theology some very fundamentally erroneous concepts of the nature of God and man.

Because, out of their determination not to be found in complicity with certain pagan concepts, they threw the baby out with the bath water. Specifically, it seems obvious, that in formulating the doctrine of creation "ex nihilo" (out of nothing), rather than take care to show what a fine line there was between the philosophy of Pantheism and the biblical presentation of God as transcendent, yet immanent in all of creation, they came to the conclusion that creation must not be understood as having a truly divine constitution, for that they felt, would be yielding ground to Pantheism.

Their intentions were noble, in a sense, for they did not want God to be confused with that which He created. They did not want to be found giving theological support to the worship of created things. They wanted there to be a very clear distinction between who Deity is and what Deity makes. And, as is often the case, when men are caught up in reactionary zeal, nonsense produces a counter nonsense.

Think with me for a moment how utterly illogical is the orthodox notion of God creating everything out of nothing. Rather than getting into a long and involved explanation about the sublime relationship between who God is and what God makes, let me just point out that Christian orthodoxy insists that God created all things. Things did not create themselves, things owe their existence to the thought, will, purpose and act of a sovereign Creator. In short, before anything came into existence, there was only God, God alone.

Think now; where would God have found this "nothing" out of which to create all things if there was only Himself in the beginning.

"Nothing"

is a philosophical invention, a vain imagination. I became aware years ago of a childish picture in my mind of the pre-creation scene. I realized that I thought of God as all alone out in the midst of infinite,

empty space before He created all things. Then, amused at myself, I came to my senses and realized that there was no empty space, no nothing co-existing with God.

There was only God, and if we are to conceive of God creating out of something, that something had to be Himself, because He was all there was.

And so we have Paul's majestic affirmation (and I quote from the translation of Greek scholar and friend, Jonathan Mitchell), "Because, from out of the midst of Him, and through the midst of Him, and into the midst of Him is the whole." Jonathan does, I should say, offer some options for the very end of the verse, options for describing all things, other than "the whole." But the meaning is clear, the whole kit and caboodle, the whole shebang originated from out of the midst of God, proceeds through His midst and continues into His midst.

Now why did I get into all this since our subject is the incarnation? For this reason: The orthodox position came to insist upon the Son of God having two distinct natures, yet both perfectly united in the His One Person. Those early church fathers felt it necessary to conceive of human nature as utterly distinct from the divine nature, though brought together in perfect union in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This perspective has been very determinative in our understanding of the incarnation.

The present conventional view of the incarnation is very consistent with creation "ex nihilo", for in that scenario, man along with all things, was created out of nothing, and God decided to get involved for purposes of fixing the mess He had on His hands, by embodying Himself, not from "out from the midst of Him(self)", but incarnating in a body made out of nothing.

My feeling is that most Christians get from this the impression of God, on one hand, being willing to do this because of His love, but on the other hand, doing so with an element of disgust and revulsion. A sort of, "I'll do this because I love you, but, ewww, I don't like this transition from pure Spirit to flesh at all, but your sin has made it necessary, so I'll do it."

Having thus far approached this in a kind of rhetorical-question way, I want to now make it clear that I'm solidly on the side of seeing the incarnation as being such a delightfully fulfilling unfolding of His Being, that God, in the Person of His Son, was willing to endure whatever misrepresentation that came with the imposter-persona that had attached itself to His true Humanness.

The point is, that while proceeding with His eternal purpose of becoming in time, what He is in eternal Reality, namely, the God, whose Being, at its core, includes glorious Humanness, while proceeding with that purpose, He also redeemed us from the imposter who, for a season, imprisoned our true identity.

This is consistent with a golden thread that runs through all of scripture, and that is that we are first the sons of God, and out of that reality, we are shaped by Him. The Primal Origin of our Being is God's Being. We are not something made out of nothing and then made to be something down the road. We are the fruit of His loins and from that we are made to be the work of His hands. You are really born of God, beloved. You are the extension of His Being through divine impregnation, conception and birth.

Do you see the subtle devaluation of humanness in the orthodox position?

They rail on against the evolutionist who traces our ancestry back to a common ancestor of man and ape, and back further than that to a simple cell that washed up on some beach billions of years ago, while they trace our ancestry back to nothing.

The truth is that we were in the divine Seed, dear ones, just as Levi was in the loins of Abraham, to come forth as sons of God after the order of the sonship of the only begotten of the Father.

The One Son came from that One Seed, and we were included in Him, to come forth as sons in His image. Be deeply assured at the value of your Humanness, for it's worth accrues from God Himself, and be assured of His justification of that Humanness by His blood. We certainly need to take a fresh look at every "cardinal teaching" and discern what impurities have been added to them by vain imagination that extols the virtue of God while demeaning that which is the apple of His eye.

