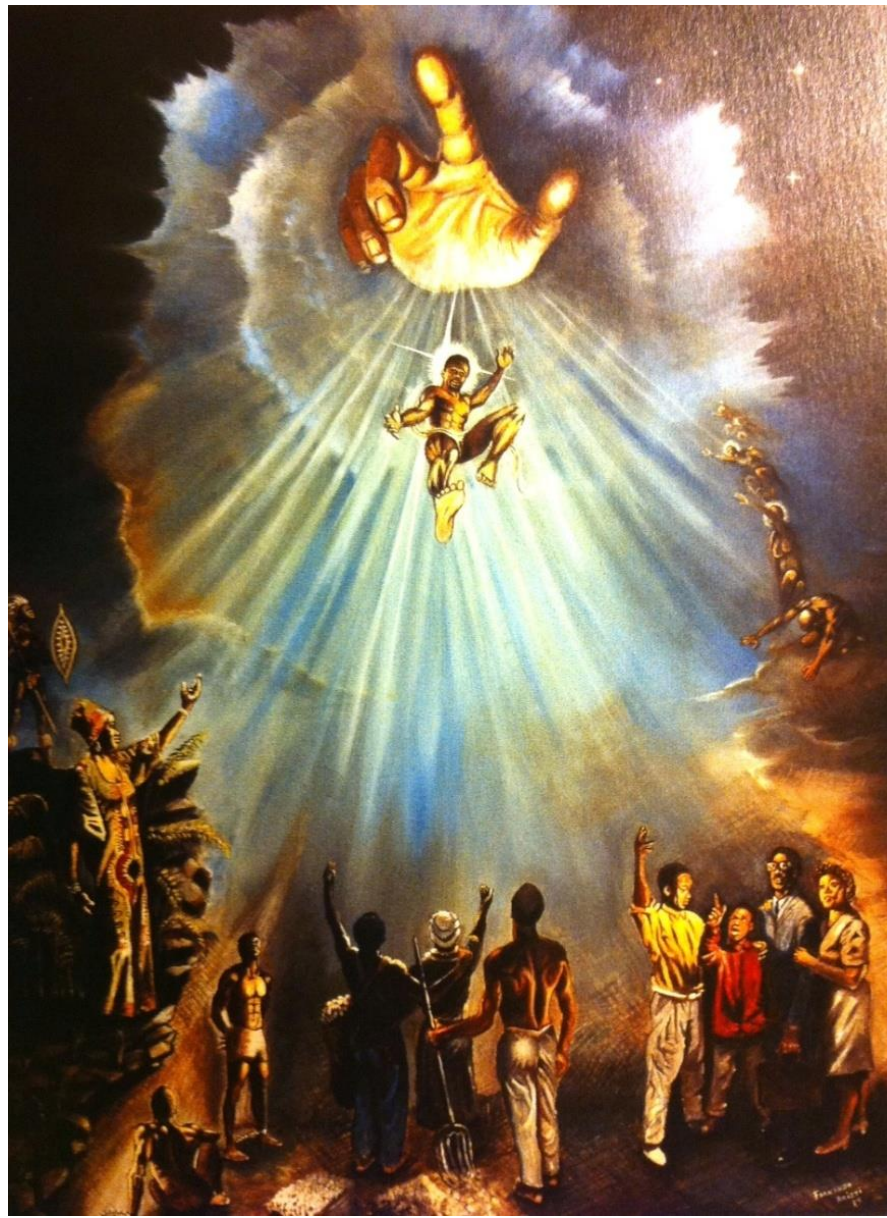


Incarnation



Fernando Arizti, Mexico/USA , *Incarnation*

Biblical And Creedal Tradition

- Biblical Considerations
 - Passages that speak of God becoming human John 1.14; Phil 2.7; Col. 2.9
 - Passages that speak of the humanity of Jesus
 - Gal. 4.4; Romans 8.3; Hebrews 4.15
 - Passages regarding God becoming sin (link between incarnation and atonement)
 - II Cor. 5.21; Rom 8.3

Chalcedon

- Chalcedon
 - Key elements in the orthodox formulations
 - Two natures, divine and human, exist together in one person
 - Union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ is a unique union
 - Personal and ontological
 - An irreversible union that cannot be replicated
 - Free and full cooperation of the two natures without conflict and confusion
 - The difference between orthodox formulations and mythologies (cf. Christopher Hitchens YouTube video)

After Chalcedon

- Historical Developments After Chalcedon
 - Reformation debate between Lutherans and Reformed Theologies
 - Lutheran
 - Reformed
 - Kenotic Christologies

Reflections on Kenoticism

- it seems like there could be an orthodox and heretical form of **kenoticism**:
 - **it is possible to maintain that Christ emptied himself of his divine power but not of his divine nature;**
 - **his power was always available to him but he did not choose to draw upon it**
- yet, the danger of Kenoticism is that, **while it upholds the true humanity of Jesus, it does not affirm his deity;**
 - **rather than affirming that Jesus is both God and man, it seems to say that Jesus is first God and then man (and then possibly God again as Christ?)**

Classical Liberalism

- Schleiermacher
 - Christ is not a divine being who assumed human nature but a prophetic figure who realizes the divine nature which is present in all of us
 - Christ as perfected human nature
 - Christ is not the only mediator and Christianity is not the final religion
- Ritschl
 - Focuses on the ethical dimension of Jesus
 - Jesus was one with God in his obedience to the Father's will

Reflections on Classical Liberalism

- **This shares the problems of Classical Liberalism in general:**
 - **Dismissal of key biblical traditions**
 - **denial of transcendence and eschatology**
 - **an accommodation of the picture of Jesus into the confines of a semi-secular philosophy**

Contemporary Views

- Bishop J.A.T. Robinson
 - We really do see in Jesus God, but there are other faces of God in other religions (i.e. Jesus is not considered a unique hypostasis).
- Pluralistic Theologies
 - See, for example, John Hick, and Stanley Samartha
 - Main features
 - Incarnation of Jesus is not exclusive of other incarnations of religious figures
 - Incarnation is best understood as a myth or metaphor
 - Incarnation of Jesus is normative for Christians only

Reflections on Pluralists

- **scriptural basis very weak**
- **the identity of Christian faith too easily left behind**
- **it becomes an exercise in speculative theology**

Towards a Theology of Incarnation: An Evangelical Perspective

- A Reaffirmation of Orthodox Christology
 - Grenz's issues with "incarnational Christology" of Chalcedon include:
 - It resembles too closely the mythological stories of incarnations of gods
 - It is too dependent on Greek terminology (e.g. substance, *hypostasis*)
 - It borders on Docetism. Grenz feels that the humanity of Jesus tends to be compromised as the incarnate life is depicted in terms of the eternal Son hidden in a human body
 - Most importantly for Grenz is the danger of separating the *Logos* from the Jesus of Nazareth
 - Grenz's solution
 - Start "From Below" with the historical Jesus instead of starting from the point of reading texts like Phil.2 or John 1 as a historical descent of pre-existing divine Logos

Reflections on Grenz

- While Grenz's "from below" approach is commendable, **there needs to be a balance between from above and from below**
- his fears of the Chalcedonian formula are exaggerated; **with Bloesch, VMK has less reservations about the Chalcedonian formulations**
 - **acknowledging parallels to mythologies is not necessarily a problem since differences are greater (the historical Jesus; cross; resurrection)**
 - **the use of Greek terminology is another way of contextualizing the Gospel and as such helpful; yet, its limitations need to be acknowledged**
- **However, with Grenz, the threat of pluralism needs to be taken seriously**

Evangelical Perspectives: Reasons for the Incarnation

1. Need for reconciliation
 - An “emergency” plan
2. Incarnation in the mind of God from eternity
 - Stresses the holistic nature of the incarnation
 - Human necessity is not the *only* or even *primary* reason for the incarnation
 - See, for example, Moltmann
 - Connects creation and new creation

Tendency in Protestant, especially Reformed thought, to subordinate the incarnation to the atonement

Evangelical Perspectives on the Incarnation

- Permanent Incarnation
 - Christ continues to exist as “incarnate”
 - Does not necessarily mean a “change” in God that compromises His deity, but rather God’s own choice from eternity to be united with humanity (created in His image)
 - A question arises as to whether we can speak of the pre-existence of Jesus’ human nature (alongside with the divine nature)

Evangelical Perspectives on the Incarnation: Self-Emptying

- Self-Emptying and the Question of “two natures” (divine and human)
 - The criterion for true humanity is Jesus as the image of god
 - Self-emptying has to do with Jesus’ voluntary acceptance of finitude
 - Becoming human does not diminish deity but establishes true humanity
 - Being truly human means being limited (over and against God’s infinitude)
 - Millard Erickson: *kenosis* by addition
 - Divine attributes exercised in connection with the particular humanity he assumed
 - Importance of Spirit Christology
 - Jesus made himself dependent on the Spirit
 - The self-emptying means that Jesus was reliant on the Spirit. The son did not make use of the divine attributes independently but experienced what it really meant to be truly human

Pre-Existence

Pre-Existence in the Christian Tradition

- Affirmed since apostolic times
- A related question is whether preexistence relates to Jesus' humanity
- Two meanings of the term “preexistence”
 - Real or personal preexistence
 - “The one who became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth truly and personally existed as the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity before his incarnation”
 - Douglas McCready, *He Came Down from Heaven*, 15.
 - Ideal Preexistence
 - Christ existed in God's mind prior to the incarnation; not a personal preexistence
 - For example, Adolf von Harnack: Preexistence means the consciousness Jesus had of being united with his Father in will and action

- Patristic Theology

- Agreed on preexistence

- Origin: the human soul of Jesus was inseparably united with the eternal Word, as iron is penetrated by fire

- Athanasius (see Council of Nicea)

- *Contra Arius* who stated that there was a time when the Son was not

- Arius thought of Jesus as the highest of all creatures, but still created

- Athanasius' response closely linked to soteriology

- Only God can save

- Also argues that the Father could not have been the Father without the Son; thus the Son exists from eternity alongside the Father

Preexistence and Christ's Human Nature

- Conservative Christians have typically rejected this idea, but some this is changing with some evangelical scholars
- Radical Reformers affirmed the preexistence of the humanity of Jesus
- Barth
 - The incarnation happened in eternity before all time and its occurrence in time is a transition from concealment to publicity
 - Humanity is thus latent in God
- Bloesch
 - Along with Barth holds to the preexistent humanity of Jesus Christ
 - Affirming preexistent humanity means that the incarnation was not an absolute beginning and yet it was something new

Towards an Evangelical View of Preexistence

- Stanley Grenz
 - Preexistence of Jesus means that Jesus belongs to God's eternity; this human being is eternal deity

Main Affirmations: Terminology

- It is best to speak of real or personal preexistence

Main Affirmations:

Preexistence and Biblical Studies

- **Dunn and others are right in that the NT evidence in itself is not absolutely conclusive: while at the face value many passages seem to teach preexistence, the exact meaning of many of the passages is fluid**
 - **Therefore, preexistence in the final analysis is a systematic topic: there are significant reasons to go with the face value meaning of the texts**
 - **Especially in light of the fact that all biblical scholars agree that NT seems to teach preexistence; even Dunn agrees that John does teach preexistence**
- **One of Dunn's fallacies is that he believes that NT authors before John thought of Jesus only in terms of functional Christology and therefore were not interested at all in the topic of preexistence (an ontological idea)**
 - **While it is true much of NT Christology is functional, ontology can not be totally separated from the function; there is a mutually conditioning relationship between the two**

Main Affirmations: Preexistence and mythical understanding:

- **Because of secular modernist presuppositions, mythical and pluralist views say too little of Jesus and fail to affirm his uniqueness**
- **It ends up being ambiguous and generic: J. Mcquarrie:**
 - **“God’s metaphorical ‘sending’ of his metaphorical ‘son’ can be understood in ways that do not imply pre-existence, once we accept that the language is metaphorical and not literal.”**

Main Affirmations:

Preexistence and True Humanity:

- **divinity and humanity are different but not incompatible**
 - **Human person has been created in the image of God and Jesus is the true – and so far the only – image of God**

Real preexistence and systematic topics: Deity

- **It belongs to the nature of god/deity not to have beginning or end**
 - **Preexistence as such does not require divinity (e.g., ideas can “preexist”) but deity requires preexistence**
- **Those who replace real or personal preexistence for ideal or mythical, either deny the deity of Christ or end up being adoptionistic in their view of the deity**

Real Preexistence:

Incarnation and Resurrection

- Traditional doctrine of incarnation only makes sense if the one who assumed human flesh existed prior to that moment
- Resurrection as the Father's confirmation of Jesus' claims to divine sonship only makes sense if the one who issued such claims did exist prior to incarnation and resurrection as the divine *Logos*

Real Preexistence:

Atonement and Salvation

- **In order to be able to save us, Christ has to be one with God from eternity: only God is able to save**

Real Preexistence:

Trinity

- Only a traditional view of incarnation and preexistence makes possible the belief in Trinity
 - Schleiermacher is a good example: having defined incarnation and preexistence in a mythical or ideal way, he did not really know what to do with the Trinity
- The counterpart to God the Father needs to be divine; therefore, the Son (and the Spirit) must have existed from the beginning

Real Preexistence:

Uniqueness of Jesus

- **Pluralists are right in saying that preexistence implies the uniqueness of Christ among all savior figures**
- **I will respond to challenges of religious pluralism in the section on the theology of religions**

Human Nature and Preexistence

- **According to VMK:**
 - Both the affirmation and denial of the preexistence of Jesus' humanity are in keeping with Evangelical faith and traditional Christianity
 - He finds idea of the preexistence of humanity appealing and compelling as long as it is not understood in terms of "his flesh coming down from heaven" nor in terms of blurring the significance and "newness" of incarnation
 - This is the legitimate concern of Evangelicals such as D. McCready
 - The only major difficulty is that the preexistence of humanity may be interpreted in a way that separates Jesus' humanity too radically from our humanity
 - On the other hand, his humanity is different in that there is a union between divine and human, and that his is sinless humanity