



The
Humiliation
of Christ



Introduction

On many occasions throughout my life, I have cited Malcolm Muggeridge's profound and eloquent observation about the Incarnation from his book, *Jesus: The Man Who Lives*: "The coming of Jesus into the world is the most stupendous event in human history." Of the Incarnation, he assures us that the opening words of the Fourth Gospel is "a passage surely among the greatest ever to be written at any time or by any hand": "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:1,14). "Without the Incarnation," he affirms, "there would be no story at all."



Introduction

Jewish philosopher and lover of Christ, Simone Weil, also reminds us: “We cannot take a step toward the heavens. God crosses the universe and comes to us.” God became Man. For those who cannot accept the clear teaching of the Bible on Jesus’ Incarnation, or Muggeridge’s and Weil’s powerful insights, could it be that they have internalized Pascal’s own personal feelings - before he became a Christian - and now admit that “the eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with dread”? What other options do they have if the Incarnation never happened? After his two-hour encounter with Christ on November 23, 1654, Pascal understood the gospel: “The Incarnation shows man the greatness of his wretchedness through the greatness of the remedy required.”



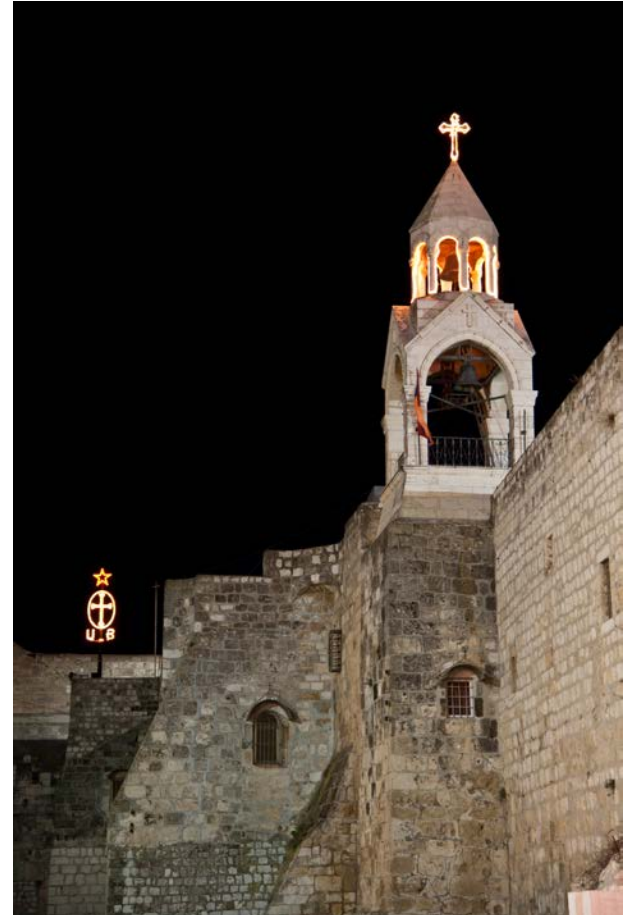
Introduction

Throughout history, theological error in Christology has arisen because of carelessness in the area of simple truths. The main purpose of Christology is to form a true conception of the historical person of Jesus Christ. *The Ligonier Statement on Christology: The Word Made Flesh* offered this confession in *Article 1*: “We affirm that Jesus Christ is the incarnation in history of the eternal Word, or Logos, the second person of the Holy Trinity. We deny that Jesus was a mere man or a fictional creation of the early Christian church.”

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us acknowledge that, “without boldness, both in faith and in thought, it is impossible to rise to the grandeur of the truth of Christ (A.B. Bruce).

Our Journey Begins in Bethlehem

“And it came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room in the inn” (Luke 2:6-7).



The Church of the Nativity
Bethlehem



The *Locus Classicus* for the Incarnation

- The phrase *locus classicus* is from the Latin and means a “classical location or source.”
- Latin scholar Eugene Ehrlich (*Amo, Amas, Amat and More*) states that the *locus classicus* “is a passage commonly cited to explain or illustrate a subject.”
- *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “a passage regarded as the original or best known occurrence of a quotation, saying, theme, etc., or the principal authority on a subject.”
- **The principle passage - the *locus classicus* - in the Bible on the humiliation of Christ is Philippians 2:5-8.**

Christ's Humiliation: The *Locus Classicus*

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:5-8, NASV).



The Message

“Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human*! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death – and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion” (Phil. 2:5-8, *The Message*).

“The whole earthly history
of our Savior is the result
and evolution of a sublime
act of self-humiliation.”

- A.B. Bruce





Which View Do You Hold?

1. Jesus assumed a humanity which was only a kind of “husk,” a semi-transparent tent, where the Deity lives and “through which His glory, only slightly dimmed, shines with dazzling brightness.”
2. By emptying Himself, the Son of God did not remain as He had been in His divine nature, but at the very least underwent a concealment of His glory.
3. Jesus’ divine nature was deprived of power and stripped of its metaphysical attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.
4. Jesus emptied Himself of His divine attributes and, in this act of self-denial, became an example for all Christians and prepared Him to be our Redeemer.

Examining the Four Views

1. Jesus assumed a humanity which was only a kind of “husk,” a semi-transparent tent, where the Deity lives and “through which His glory, only slightly dimmed, shines with dazzling brightness.” This error is called ***Docetism***. The name comes from the Greek word which means “to seem, think, or appear.”
2. By emptying Himself, the Son of God did not remain as He had been in His divine nature, but at the very least underwent a concealment of His glory. This error is called ***occultation*** (hiding, concealment).

Examining the Four Views

3. Jesus' divine nature was deprived of power and stripped of its metaphysical attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. This error is called ***depotentialiation*** (deprive of power or potency).
4. Jesus emptied Himself of His divine attributes and, in this act of self-denial, became an example for all Christians and prepared Him to be our Redeemer. "***Example of Christ***" theory (exemplary humility).



Westminster Confession

“The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon him man’s nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man” (Chapter 8 – *Of Christ the Mediator*).

Westminster Catechism: Question 27

Q. Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

A. Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.



Westminster Assembly

1643-1653

Philippians 2: The Context

- “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”
- Paul is writing to the church at Philippi and exhorting them to have the mind of Christ as opposed to the mind of self-seekers.
- The Apostle has in view, not only the Incarnate Son of God, but the exalted Lord in his pre-existence.
- The mind or moral disposition he is illustrating is that of the eternal Son of God.
- Paul’s exhortation is that we are to have the same mind dwelling in us that Christ had, so that we might humbly do acts of self-denial.

The Form (Morphe) of God

1. “...who, although he existed in the *form* of God” (Phil. 2:6).
2. The Greek word is used only twice in the New Testament - in our text and in Mark 16:12 - “And after that, He appeared in a different **form** to two of them, while they were walking along on their way to the country.”
3. Definition of *morphe*: form, outward appearance, shape.
4. The phrase “form of God” can be understood only in the light of its context. Paul writes: “Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped...” (vs. 6).

The Form (Morphe) of God

5. “Equality with God” is exegetical (explanatory) of “in the form of God.”
6. The order in the Greek text is as follows:
 - “He existed in the form of God.”
 - “He did not regard it as *a thing to be grasped*.”
 - “To be equal with God.”
7. “He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped” stands in the foreground of the text to catch the readers eye (it is the principle idea Paul is expressing).

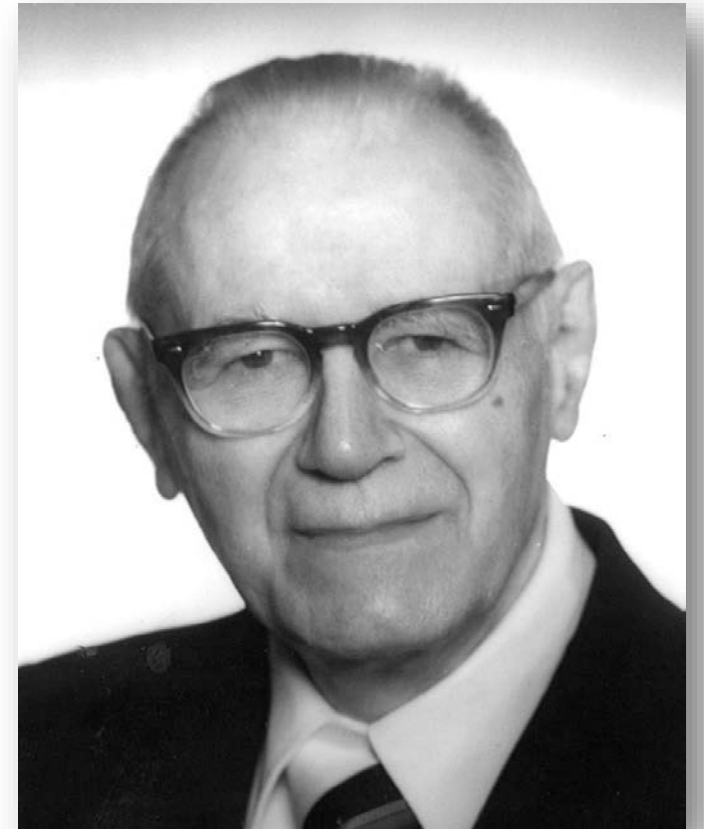


The Form (Morphe) of God

8. “To be equal with God,” then, as the final phrase of the verse, “shows that it simply repeats the idea already expressed by the words ‘in the form of God.’”
9. Since the two phrases are equivalent, no meaning can be assigned to either that would allow for a different interpretation of the other.
10. Paul coins the phrase “form of God” in antithesis to “form of man.”
11. The appearance assumed by the Incarnate Lord, the image of humiliation and obedient submission, stands in the sharpest contrast to his former appearance, the form (*morphe*) of God.
12. It is the image of divine, sovereign majesty.

William Hendriksen

“In these given contexts, *morphe* or *form* refers to the inner, essential, and abiding nature of a person or thing, while *schema* or *fashion* points to his or its external, accidental, and fleeting bearing or appearance.”



William Hendriksen

1900-1982



The Form of God

“The form of God means here his majesty. For as a man is known by the appearance of his form, so the majesty which shines forth in God is his figure. Or if you prefer a more apt similitude, the form of a king is the equipage (apparel, ceremonious display) and magnificence which shows him to be king, his sceptre, his crown, his robe, his attendants, his judgment-throne, and other emblems of royalty. The form of a consul was his purple-bordered toga, his ivory chair, his lictors with rods and hatchets. Christ, then, before the creation of the world, was in the form of God, because from the beginning He had His glory with the Father, as He says in John 17:5” (John Calvin).



Glory

“The ‘form of God’ in which the pre-existent Christ was is simply the divine *doxa* (glory).”

Kittel’s Theological Dictionary

“And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I ever had with Thee before the world was” (John 17:5).

Lord of Glory

“Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature, a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the **Lord of glory**” (1 Cor. 2:6-8).

Jesus' First Great Act

- Jesus emptied Himself, “the first great act by which the mind of the Son of God was revealed” (A.B. Bruce).
- The Greek word, *kenosis*, means “to make empty.”
- In the New Testament, this meaning is only used of Christ and is found in our text – Philippians 2:7.
- The tense of the verb indicates that Jesus voluntarily emptied Himself.

The Nature of the Kenosis

- The first reference (*He emptied Himself*) is to Jesus' pre-existent state; He had a "firm determination not to hold fast and selfishly cling to equality of state with God" (A.B. Bruce).
- The second reference (*He humbled Himself*) is to Christ's human history, His humiliation as a man.



He Emptied Himself

“What is meant is that the heavenly Christ did not selfishly exploit His divine form and mode of being, but by His own decision emptied Himself of it or laid it by, taking the form of a servant by becoming man. The subject of *kenosis* is not the incarnate but the pre-existent Lord. There is a strong sense of the unity of His person. The essence remains, the mode of being changes – a genuine sacrifice” (Gerhard Kittel).

He Emptied Himself

- **He gave up His riches** – “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (II Cor. 8:9).
- **He gave up His heavenly glory.** “Glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I ever had with Thee before the world was” (John 17:5).
- **He gave up the exercise of His own authority.** “I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:30).
- **He gave up his favorable relation to the law** – “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor. 5:21).

He Emptied Himself

- “Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart’ (Ps. 40:7-8).
- “Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, “Behold, I have come to do your will, O God...”’” (Heb. 10:5-7).



Is Such Condescension Possible?

“I refuse to accept an idea of God which makes such condescension impossible or meaningless; nor am I able to regard that as the absolutely Highest which cannot stoop down from its altitude. The glory of God consists not simply in being high, but in that He, the highest and greatest, can humble Himself in love to be the lowest and least.”

- A.B. Bruce

He Humbled Himself

- The Son of God took human nature that He might live in the form of a servant.
- The “form of a servant” is the greatest possible contrast to the “form of God.”
- Servanthood was Jesus’ characteristic feature.
- Jesus was a servant in every conceivable way.
- The whole history of Jesus can be summed up as a life of humility and humiliation.

How He Humbled Himself

- He was born in a lowly manger.
- He grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. He was perfectly obedient.
- He learned a trade.
- He was, at times, hungry, thirsty, weary, and sleepy.
- He washed the disciples feet.
- He experienced pain and suffering.
- He was tempted.
- He experienced shame.

How He Humbled Himself

- He was accursed, enduring the agony of crucifixion.
- He endured the wrath of God, i.e., He descended into hell (“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”).
- He died and was buried.

The Purpose of His Descent

“According to the full teaching of the Word of God, Jesus descended from the peak of glory to this lowly position in order that He might raise us from our lowly position to His glory.”



Dr. James Montgomery Boice

1938-2000