

# A Historical overview and Theological evaluation of the necessity of the impeccability of Christ

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Arts* in Dogmatics at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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May 2015

## Acknowledgments:

1. This is thus far the hardest undertaking of my academic life and were it not for the Lord's help it would not have been possible. Spiritual platitudes aside, His motivation and continuous insight through His Word has driven me daily at my desk. The task had to be completed and I had to dig deep and were it not for His resources there would be nothing to dig for. All glory to God!
2. My heartfelt thanks to the friends at the NWU faculty that have contributed immensely to my completing this project. Your friendliness, advice and positive comments at your offices, in passing on the staircase and sometimes on the streets have thrown me many a life-line of strength. All glory to God for your help.
3. A special thanks to Professor Callie Coetzee who not only encouraged me but sometimes scolded me on to this goal. His patience was definitely tried and he has done a great work for me. As a test to his longsuffering he read and reread every word I wrote. I cannot imagine the headache he must have had to endure through all of that. I will forever be grateful for what he has done. All glory to God for his efforts!
4. I would be remiss not to thank Hester Lombard at the Theological Library for all her endeavours. She is a valuable asset to have in projects like this. Would to God that I could have her as a full time aid in writing. She was always ready to source anything I asked for and not to mention renewing my books, even to her frustration. All glory to God for your work in the library!
5. Not many pastors have been blessed with the congregation that I have and I am always conscious of the fact that I do not deserve the good people of Calvary Baptist Church, Sunnyridge. I thank you for your prayers and support all the way through. Your ministry to me far exceeds that of mine to you. All glory to God for your love and care!
6. Notwithstanding the efforts of all concerned my wife was the one always by my side egging me on. She sits through my grumblings and pity-parties. Many were the times that I wanted to quit but she is no quitter and would therefore not let me feed on such dissuasion. She is indeed the veritable pillar in my life. All glory to God for her!
7. My three children (Chloe, Chelsea and Jemuel) are the jewels in my crown. They may not be a quiver full but they certainly are a handful. I give them a shout out (as the youngsters today would say). They add spice to my life and in their own weird way added to my pressure to complete this task. All glory to God for you!

Edward Kanniah

September 2014

## **Abstract**

The following study seeks to investigate the impeccability of Christ from a historical/theological position. Two camps emerge on either side of the debate: Those who hold to the *posse non peccare* view which is to say, ability not to sin, otherwise known as the peccability view and those who hold to the *non posse peccare* view which is to say inability to sin, otherwise known as the impeccability view. While both camps affirm the sinless perfection of Christ they oppose each other in whether as fully human He could have sinned if He wanted to. It boils down to a case of 'could have but did not' or 'did not because He could not have'. It is the view of this thesis that the *non posse peccare* view squares with both historical and biblical theology.

We argue in chapter two by surveying Church councils up to the present time pertinent to this theme to prove that the history of this issue matters in that it establishes the relationship between Christology and history and by inference a major impact upon many outcomes in Church history. Our aim was to prove that this historical error goes a long way in distorting the gospel message. In chapter three we survey and evaluate the position from a peccability viewpoint while, at the same time, entering and notarising our points of departure. We have there highlighted the arguments peccability theologians utilise to defend their view and have criticised such from our Dispensational theology. In chapter four we then assess and acknowledge the argument for impeccability by proving the necessity of it for the exoneration of His Person and gospel. In the summit of chapter five we have surveyed the field of Scripture to have the final say on this issue and concluded in favour of impeccability.

## **Key Words:**

Christology, impeccability, peccability, gospel, fallen, unfallen, humanity

## Opsomming

Die volgende studie poog om die onfeilbaarheid van Christus vanuit `n historiese / teologiese posisie te ondersoek. Twee kampe ontstaan aan weerskante van die debat: Diegene wat vashou aan die *posse non peccare* siening waarmee bedoel word, die vermoë om nie te sondig nie, andersins bekend as die feilbaarheidsbeskouing. Terwyl beide kampe die sondelose volmaaktheid van Christus bevestig, neem hulle stelling in teen mekaar. Hulle argumenteer of Christus as volwaardige mens kon gesondig het. Dit kom neer op 'n geval van 'kon maar het nie' of 'het nie omdat hy nie kon sondig nie'. ' Dit is die siening van hierdie tesis dat die *none posse peccare* gesigspunt strook met beide die historiese en Bybelse teologie.

Ons argumenteer in hoofstuk twee deur `n oorsig te doen van kerkkonsilies tot op die huidige tydlik met betrekking tot hierdie tema om te bewys dat die geskiedenis van hierdie kwessie saak maak, wat daarin geleë is dat dit die verhouding tussen Christologie en geskiedenis vestig, waarvan afgelei kan word dat dit `n groot impak gehad het op baie uitkomst in die kerkgeskiedenis. Ons doel was om te bewys dat hierdie historiese dwaling baie daartoe bygedra het om die evangelieboodskap te verdraai. In hoofstuk drie gee ons `n oorsig en evaluasie van die posisie vanuit `n onfeilbaarheidsoogpunt, terwyl ons terselfdertyd ons uitgangspunte stel en bekragtig. Wat ons daar beklemtoon het, is die argumente wat die feilbaarheidsteoloë gebruik om hul opvatting te verdedig en ons het dit dan ook vanuit ons bedelingsteologie gekritiseer. Op die hoogste vlak in hoofstuk vier het ons 'n oorsig gegee van die finale woord wat die Heilige Skrif oor hierdie saak sprak en ons slotsom is ten gunste van onfeilbaarheid.

## Table of Contents:

### Chapter One: The Importance of the Debate

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Background.....	1
1.2. Problem Statement.....	1
1.3. Central Research Question.....	5
2. Aims and Objectives.....	6
2.1. Aim.....	6
2.2. Objective.....	6
3. Central Theoretical Argument.....	6
4. Methodology.....	6

### Chapter Two: The History of the Debate

1. Introduction.....	8
2. Why the History of this issue matters.....	8
3. The Relationship between Christology and Anthropology.....	10
4. Christology in Classical Church History.....	12
4.1. The doctrine of Christ before the Reformation.....	12
4.1.1. Up to the Council of Chalcedon.....	13
4.1.1.1. Those who sacrificed His Deity to His Humanity.....	13
4.1.1.2. Those who sacrificed His Humanity to His Deity.....	14
4.1.1.3. Those who confused the relation of His two natures and coexistence.....	16
4.1.2. The Decision taken by the Council to Chalcedon.....	20
4.1.3. After the Council of Chalcedon.....	20
4.2. The Doctrine of Christ during the Reformation.....	22
4.3. The Doctrine of Christ after the Reformation.....	23
4.3.1. A new View on the Two natures.....	23
5. Christology in Contemporary Church History.....	25
5.1. Naturalism.....	25
5.2. Form Criticism.....	26
5.3. The Quest for the Historical Jesus.....	26
5.3.1. Demystifying the Mystery of Christ.....	26
5.3.2. The Jewish Problem.....	27
5.3.3. The Apotheosis hypothesis or godlike theory.....	28
5.3.4. The Ventriloquism hypothesis or projection theory.....	28
5.3.5. The Gentile Question.....	28
6. Conclusion.....	29

## Chapter Three: The Arguments for Peccability

1. Introduction.....	30
2. The Empathy of Peccability.....	31
3. Peccability based on His Humanity.....	32
3.1. The Difference between His Humanness and Fallenness.....	35
3.1.1. His Body and Our Body.....	37
3.1.2. His Bearing of Our Guilt.....	37
3.2. The Difference between flesh and 'the flesh'.....	38
3.3. The Difference between Suffering and Sinning.....	39
3.4. The Difference between Limited and Unlimited Perception.....	39
3.4.1. Limited in Knowledge.....	40
4. Peccability Based on His Testimony.....	41
4.1. Was Christ Good?.....	41
4.2. Did He Repent?.....	42
4.3. Was His Baptism like Ours?.....	42
4.4. How did He learn Obedience?.....	43
5. Peccability Based on His Temptability.....	44
5.1. The Sin Nature.....	47
5.2. Eradicationism.....	49
6. Conclusion.....	49

## Chapter 4: The Arguments for Impeccability

1. Introduction.....	50
2. His Deity.....	50
2.1. Impeccability Based on His Omniscience.....	51
2.2. Impeccability Based on His Immutability.....	52
2.3. Impeccability based on His Quality.....	59
2.3.1. He is Light.....	58
2.3.2. He is Righteous.....	59
2.3.3. He is Judge.....	59
2.3.4. He is Good.....	59
2.3.5. He is Gracious.....	60
2.3.6. He is Glorious.....	61
2.3.7. He is Love.....	61
2.4. Impeccability Based on His Equality.....	61
2.4.1. His Oneness.....	62
2.4.2. His Two Natures (cf. also 4.3.1. chapter 2).....	63
2.4.3. His Sending of the Spirit .....	66

2.5. Impeccability Based on His Authority.....	67
2.5.1. The Logos (cf. also 4.1.1. chapter 5).....	67
2.5.2. Who can forgive sins but God?.....	68
2.5.3. The Subject of Old Testament Prophecy.....	68
2.5.3.1. Prophecy in Obscure Language.....	69
2.5.3.2. Prophecy in Figurative Language.....	69
2.5.3.3. The Future regarded as Past or Present.....	70
2.5.3.4. The Horizontal and not the Vertical Prophecy.....	70
2.5.3.5. The Mediate and Immediate Application.....	70
2.6. Impeccability Based on His Majesty.....	70
2.7. Impeccability Comparable to His Impassibility.....	71
2.8. Impeccability based on His Resurrection.....	71
3. His Ministry.....	72
3.1. Impeccability Based on His Sufferings.....	72
3.2. Impeccability Based on His Miracles.....	73
3.2.1. The Miracle of Healing Blindness.....	74
3.3. Impeccability Based on His Headship of the Church.....	74
4. Conclusion.....	74

Chapter Five: The Evidence of Scripture and the interpretation of that evidence.

1. Introduction.....	76
2. In Defence of a Scriptural Defence.....	78
3. The Synoptics.....	80
3.1. The Immaculate Conception (Luke 1:26-38).....	80
3.2. The Baptism of Christ (Matt. 3:13-17, Mk. 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22 & Jn. 1:29-34).....	82
3.3. The Temptation of Christ (Matt. 4:1-11).....	90
4. The Johannine Gospel.....	93
4.1. The Deity of Christ (John 1:1).....	93
4.1.1. An Overview of the Prologue of the Gospel of John.....	94
4.1.2. His Relationship with His Father.....	99
4.1.3. His Relationship with His world.....	99
4.1.4. His relationship with His man.....	99
4.1.5. His Relationship to the Satanic Realm.....	100
4.2. The Incarnation of Christ (John 1:14, 7:18, 8:46, & 14:30).....	101
5. The Pauline Epistles.....	102
5.1. The Submission of Christ (1 Cor. 15:27-28).....	102
5.2. The Sin Offering of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).....	102
5.3. The Kenosis (Phil. 2:5-11).....	103

5.3.1. From Form to Fashion.....	106
5.3.2. Equality and Robbery.....	108
5.3.3. No Reputation.....	109
6. His High Priestly Purity.....	112
6.1. Hebrews 2:14.....	113
6.2. Hebrews 4:15.....	114
6.3. Hebrews 5:7-8.....	115
6.4. Hebrews 7:26.....	116
6.5. Hebrews 9:14.....	116
6.6. Hebrews 10:5 & 20.....	116
7. The General Epistles.....	116
7.1. 1 Peter 1:19.....	116
7.2. 1 Peter 2:21-25.....	117
7.3. 1 Peter 3:18.....	117
8. Conclusion.....	117
 Chapter 6: Summary & Conclusion.....	 118
 Further Research.....	 121
 Bibliography.....	 122

## **Chapter 1: Background & Formulation of Problem**

### **1 Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background**

The message of the gospel as defined in the Scriptures is the only hope for mankind. This conviction marks everyone that enters upon the New Covenant relationship with Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>, leave alone those who later enter still further upon the pastoral ministry. However, as one grows to understand the Saviour in a more meaningful way one becomes aware of the differences of views regarding His Person and sinless perfection. It is a verifiable fact that every major religion in this world has some view of Christ and for the most part that view would be one of respect at best (Cassidy, 2005:79). The quandary grew and intensified over the years as it became apparent to the writer that not only were there differences in views outside Christianity regarding this most important issue, but differences also became more apparent from within Christianity (this kind of statement requires some form of qualification especially in the area of literature review where you are able to substantiate this truth claim from two or three sources. These were observable not only to fellow Christians but also to non-Christians (Geisler and Rhodes, 2008: 93).

The problem in mind reached its zenith when upon research (it would have been proper to really strengthen your case by engaging in a kind of literature review regarding the point that you are trying to make) it became evident that little concern hovered over Christendom concerning this problem.<sup>2</sup> That is to say that most people didn't seem concerned that Christ would have to be sinless in his humanity as He is in His deity in order to be our vicarious substitute. Further it became patently obvious that the subtlety that went beyond this was that while most agreed that He was sinless in His deity they allowed for the possibility of sin in His humanity. That if He was truly human then that humanity was susceptible to sin. This we will explain more fully in the next section.

#### **1.2 Problem Statement**

To engage in a vocation that was designed for the manifestation of God's Son as the Saviour of the world without due content and without consideration for His person in all his uniqueness and sinlessness violates that work. Incumbent upon the thinking of the average Christian is the consideration of the Person of Christ. Indeed the scriptures themselves by virtue of our Lord's own question demand of us a reckoning of this very issue in every age and every generation (cf. Matt. 22:42). Exposition of scripture will always lead to the knowledge of Christ. That is its purpose and design. Indeed our Lord verified this in Luke 24:27. True preaching then has Christ at its heart.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 3:6

<sup>2</sup> The literature in view is previewed in chapters 2-4

However, even true preachers have points of departure. Up until the nineteenth century there was none that would have argued against the sinless perfection of Christ (Macleod, 1998:222). There are those who hold to the “able not to sin” (*posse non peccare*) view. This view is called the peccability position. Then there are those who hold to the “not able to sin” (*non posse peccare*) view. This view is called the impeccability position. Such is the divide as clearly as we know how to state it. The former hold the humanity of Christ; the temptability of Christ and the free will of Christ to be conclusive in terms of showing their position as valid while the latter hold the Deity of Christ; the Decrees of God and the Divine attributes of Christ to be irrefutable evidence for their position (Canham, 2000:93-114).

It should not be thought strange that aside from every field of Dogmatics we have found through much conversation that most serious points of departure in terms of true gospel preaching has been on this point. For example according to Karl Barth (quoted by Macleod, 1998:223),

“there must be no weakening or obscuring of the saving truth that the nature which God assumed in Christ is identical with our nature as we see it in the light of the Fall. If it were otherwise, how could Christ really be like us? What concern could we have with Him? We stand before God characterised by the Fall. God’s Son not only assumed our nature but He entered the concrete form of our nature, under which we stand before God as men damned and lost.”

It does not seem to matter to Barth that nowhere in the Bible is it stated that His nature was *identical* to ours. The apostle in Romans 8:23 used the phrase ‘in the likeness of sinful man’ (Bible 1997). However need we add that *likeness* is not exactness or ‘the concrete form of our nature’ (as Barth puts it)?<sup>3</sup> It is also of no moment to Barth that if Christ was identical in nature to ours and we stand characterised by the Fall then it naturally follows that He too stands *characterised by the Fall*. This form of Barthian reasoning is subtle rather than blatant. From this observation it is not unreasonable then to conclude that the uniqueness that is Jesus Christ has been a deliberation without due content. That is to say that most of what we in mainline evangelical Churches have assumed has to a large extent been a limited knowledge of Him.

Nothing proves this more than when Church history is surveyed on this particular theme.<sup>4</sup> That Christ is a dominant figure in human history is denied by no one. Aside from the fact that His impeccability was never the primary concern of the early Church (Berkhof, 1998:315) it is also a historical fact that most of the Church councils did convene due to an uncertainty come heresy related to His Person. One such historical example took place in the fourth century. The famous Athanasius took the Egyptian Arius to task for the insertion of literally one letter (iota) into a word that was meant exclusively to describe Christ. The question was whether Christ was of the “same nature” with God (*homoousios*) or of a “similar nature” with God (*homoiousios*)? The insertion of

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<sup>3</sup> A thorough exegesis of this statement is reserved for chapter 5 of this dissertation. (Refer also point 5.4 under Methodology)

<sup>4</sup> Chapter two is dedicated to this analysis and is given in more detail.

this one iota made the difference between orthodoxy and heresy.<sup>5</sup> The main purpose of Nicea (325) was to prove without equivocation that Jesus Christ was both God and Man or to put it in that local vernacular, the God-man. This was also later affirmed in the Council of Constantinople in 381 (Grudem, 2007:244). To embrace one side of Him to the exclusion of the other distorts the gospel in that redemption could only be accomplished if a perfect sinless sacrifice paid the price through the shedding of blood and this could only be done if the God-man did it.

We have come to this subject to show that there are consequences in embracing the peccability view and serious eternal ones at that. We also wish to demonstrate historically that Christians, unbeknown to them, when slighting the perfect sinlessness of Christ in his unfallen human nature are defrocking Him of his right as co-equal with the Father. It is to show that this thinking whether blatantly or inadvertently is dispensing with Christ as God. Herein lies the gap. The gospel is only the gospel if Christ as man was impeccable in terms of possessing an unfallen human nature. The issue of whether Christ was fallen in His human nature has only recently since the nineteenth century come to the fore. The prevailing view was virtually unanimous as reflected in Church confessions up to that point (Macleod, 1998:222). He has to be flawless in nature as He was faultless in character. In an effort to understand this further, we need to understand what sin is.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 14 asks and answers this question. "What is sin? Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God (1 John 3:4)." (*The Westminster shorter catechism*: 1996). Amazingly in the preceding question with regard to our first parents it states, "Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by *sinning against God* (Gen. 3:6–8, 13, Eccl. 7:29)" [*Emphasis mine*]. We are happy to accept that sin by this definition is that which is *against God*. Therefore if Christ in His human nature could sin (i.e. be against God) that very propensity would negate his right as the vicarious Son. It seems reasonable to conclude that God would not allow his Son, with a proclivity to sin, to endure the horrors of the Cross for that proclivity would have eventually manifested itself. It would have most certainly manifested itself in the Temptation. Temptability in no way implies susceptibility. That is an assumption that neither Matthew nor Luke affirms. This in no way detracts from the force of the Temptation, but it is an exegetical problem when we attempt to suggest that Christ *resisted* temptation when neither gospel writer affirms this.

His Father would not in any measure allow his Son to take that (His human flesh) which inheres with the probability to be against Him. It is clear from scripture that though He had human flesh, this was a *prepared body*' [*emphasis mine*] (Heb. 10:5). He cannot at the same time possess the proclivity to be both against God and with God and still qualify as the vicariate. Further we wish to

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<sup>5</sup> While we admit that this could also serve as an illustration of the importance of grammar in history yet the point of this example is to show the necessity of clarity on this issue so that error is avoided.

point out as quoted above that our first parents *fell from the estate wherein they were created*. This is no doubt their official *fallenness*, if you please. If it is accepted that Christ could sin then it must be accepted that He was, while in His flesh, in a potential state of fallenness, which according to the 17<sup>th</sup> question of the said catechism would have brought Him to a potential state of *sin and misery*. To think that the eternal Son of God was this close to that estate of sin in his intrinsic person and humanity, which includes his character, is absurd and totally lacking in qualification. The Calcedonian Creed says explicitly that Jesus was “perfect both in deity and in humanness” and that He was “like us in all respects, sin only excepted (Geisler and Rhodes, 2008: 93)

We draw again upon the Westminster Confession for a final nail in the coffin. Question 22 states, “Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, (Heb. 2:14,16, Heb. 10:5) and a reasonable soul, (Matt. 26:38) being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, (Luke 1:27,31,35,42, Gal. 4:4) yet without sin (Heb. 4:15, Heb. 7:26)” (*The Westminster shorter catechism*: 1996). It must be observed that according to this catechism He was *yet without sin* even from the virgin womb and not just from his sinless life as Barth erroneously points out above. His sinless perfection in His humanity begins at conception right the way through gestation and into birth. That is to say that His human sinlessness predates His birth. Gabriel testifies to this by referencing the foetus as ‘that holy One’ (Luke 1:35) (Bible: 1997).

Post-modern sensitivities seem to cloud the value of His Person at best and render Him offensive at worst. The postmodernist finds His Righteousness to be an offence leave alone an affront because such an attribute is an absolute, which their minds cannot digest. We wish to assert with force that this cannot be ‘gospel.’ For all that we know of what He has done is because of who He is. Anything short of His uniqueness renders all His work, from gestation to glory, obsolete. That is why it behoves us to focus a little deeper on Him because nothing so vilifies His Person and His relation to His Father as His *Impeccability* in His unfallen humanity. There are many who have argued for the improbability of this precious truth and they have done so to the violation of the gospel. The Rhema Church for example under the leadership of Ray Macaulay believes that Christ was sinless and most would think that he is an authentic gospel preacher because of that affirmation. However, sanctified judgement pursues the issue rather than leaves or retreats from it at its base and shallow level. Howerter (1997) explains that though he [Macaulay] accepts that Christ was sinless, he believes that on the Cross Christ became sinful for the very purpose of dying. In other words Christ knew no sin because He chose not to sin but on the Cross He had no choice but to be sinful. This fiendish subtlety impugns the majesty of God’s only Son and consequently goes beyond that to insult his Holiness Himself. The choice of Christ not to sin was inherent in the improbability that He had such a disposition. To suggest that His humanity had the propensity to sin is as serious as if to suggest that the original autographs had the probability of

error. The latter dismantles the inerrant seamlessness of the scriptures while the former deconstructs the intrinsic sinlessness of His person

If *impeccability* has to be evaluated from a theological point of view then the *peccability* group have it all to do to prove that His Oneness with His Father was intermittent. The 'peccability' camp state that Christ must have had the propensity to sin if He was truly a man and anything less would imply that He could not have been a man (Sproul, 1996:34). The Christadelphians believe that Jesus had a sin nature and that this sin nature is in exactness with every human (Geisler and Rhodes, 2008: 94). This is not unlike Barth quoted above. They quote 2 Cor. 5:2 "being made sin for us" as proof that He was not sinless when He died. Their majority claim is that He would have to possess a sin nature in order to be genuinely tempted (Geisler and Rhodes, 2008: 95). On the other hand the *impeccability* camp insist on His improbability to sin, judging that such a likelihood would inadvertently imply the Father's ability to sin as well because they are One (Chafer, 1993, Vol. 5: 78).

Having stated it thus we acknowledge many notable works that defend and reflect the above issue with consummate skill (e.g. Chafer, 1993; Berkhof, 1998; Grudem, 2007; Ryrie, 1986, Walvoord, 2008 & Shedd, (Alan W. Gomes, ed.) 2003). However, we wish that the following submission would add to the overall picture in terms of summarising the issue and more definitively in terms of clarifying the issue. Our aim is to downplay the thoughts of many who surmise that this issue is one of hair splitting theological gamesmanship and by so doing we wish to warn of impending consequences of a false gospel. We wish to evaluate scripturally the issue of His impeccability from a Reformed tradition. The arguments both for and against will be assessed and evaluated. The scriptural evidences that seem to support both opposing views will with equal force be weighed and counted.

### **1.3 Central Research Question**

Is the view that Christ could have sinned commensurate with the saving efficacy of the gospel as understood from a Reformed Theological perspective?

The specific questions to be addressed are as follows:

- How do the peccability theologians state and defend their view as necessary to a proper understanding of the gospel?
- How do the impeccability theologians state and defend their view as necessary to a proper understanding of the gospel?
- In light of Reformed theology, how should one evaluate the issue of the impeccability of Christ as necessary to a proper understanding of the gospel?

## **2 AIMS & OBJECTIVES**

### **2.1 Aim**

The aim of this study is to critically evaluate from a Reformed theological perspective the Christology of Christian thought in regard to the impeccability of Christ. The goal is to show that to impugn the legitimacy of Christ's sinless perfection in his humanity is to censure His Hypostatic union, for as the God-man He is One with His Father; and it follows that what is affected in the one is affected in the other.

### **2.2 Objectives**

The specific objectives of this study in order to reach the aim are:

1. To examine the issue of *impeccability* and *peccability* from a historical vantage point in an effort to prove that each view either distorts the gospel or exonerates it.
2. To prove that the possibility of sin in Christ departs from a Scriptural understanding of His Person.
3. To demonstrate that the impeccability of Christ is necessary for a Reformed understanding of the Gospel.

## **3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT**

The *impeccability* of Christ is tantamount to preaching a right gospel and any view beside this is scripturally unsound according to a Reformed understanding of the Scripture.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

This dogmatic study is approached from a Reformed tradition. To answer the research outcomes the following methods become necessary:

1. To survey and evaluate Church history with a view to collect all data relative to this theme and then evaluate it in light of the 'Central Research Question.'
2. To study and evaluate the arguments of the peccability group. An analysis of their literature is done to determine and evaluate viewpoints in the past and the present (e.g. Erikson, 1998; Sproul, 1996; Hodge, 1997 et al.).
3. To study and evaluate the arguments of the impeccability group; an analysis of their literature is done to determine and evaluate viewpoints in the past and the present (e.g. Chafer, 1993; Berkhof, 1998; Grudem, 2007; Ryrie, 1986, Walvoord, 2008 & Shedd, (Alan W. Gomes, ed.) 2003 et al.).
4. To establish the evidence of Scripture regarding the different facets of impeccability; the applicable parts of Scripture are identified and exegesis is done with special emphasis on the Immaculate Conception (Luke 1:26-38); the Temptation of Christ (Matthew 4:1-11) and the Kenosis (Phil. 2:5-11). This will also include related and equally crucial texts such as 2

Cor. 5:21, Heb. 4:15 & Heb. 10:5 et al. The method according to which exegesis is done is the grammatico-historical literal method (Reymond, 1998:23).

SCHMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN POINTS 2, 3, AND 5

<b>Problem Statement</b>	<b>Aims and Objectives</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
1. Why the historicity of this theme is directly related to the preaching of the gospel message.	To examine the issue of <i>impeccability</i> and <i>peccability</i> from a historical vantage point in an effort to prove that the gospel is distorted by the latter view.	To survey Church history with a view to collect all data relative to this theme and then evaluate it in light of point 4.	That a proper understanding of this theme prevents a false view of Christ and consequently a false gospel.
2. What are the arguments of the peccability group and how should we evaluate their view?	To study and evaluate the arguments and conclusions of the peccability theologians.	To analyse literature from within this assemblage so as to determine viewpoints from the past and present.	That Christ could have sinned if He chose to and the fact that He did not means that He remained sinless.
3. What are the arguments of the impeccability group and how should we evaluate their view?	To study and evaluate the arguments and conclusions of the impeccability theologians.	To analyse literature from within this camp so as to determine viewpoints from the past and present.	That Christ in His humanity was not only free from conditional sin but from volitional sin as well.
4. How should one evaluate from a scriptural point of view the issue of the impeccability of Christ?	The aim here is to make a theological and ethical evaluation of the issue of the impeccability of Christ	This methodology is from a Reformed tradition.	That a proper understanding of the Reformed tradition with its relevant scriptures will admit to the impeccability of Christ

## Chapter 2: The History of the Debate

### 1. Introduction

It was said of Leonardo da Vinci that when he contemplated the depiction of Christ's face on his fresco of the Lord's Supper that he first gave himself to prayer and meditation. Yet upon beginning his expression of the face of Christ his hands did tremble (Sanders, 1956: 6). It is with that degree of trepidation that we enter upon the following treatment. Handling matters pertaining to Christ is akin to lifting the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. The character of Jesus is an unspoken conviction to the world. Arthur Pink (2005:80) adds that "like his robe, his character was without seam, *woven from the top throughout*" [*emphasis his*]. He had obviously borrowed the analogy from Ullman (n.d.:35) who observed regarding His moral life that it was, "no patched and piecemeal product, but a tissue woven of one material throughout - an inseparable, undivided whole." Is it sensible then for someone of opposite quality in character to handle such a theme as this? Our only reprieve is this: the more closely His life is analysed the more completely His sinless perfection shines forth (Sanders, 1956:79).

Our aim in this chapter is to set forth the history of the debate in relation to its current application in terms of gospel preaching. The historical view of this chapter will be fairly large in its scope as we deem necessary to properly depict the impact of our current theme within this framework. The attempt is to make things clear, not perfect. To see things clearly is not to see things perfectly as that would make us God. The approach of this chapter is to set the tone for what follows.<sup>6</sup> Though we would be surveying the historicity of the subject we dare not survey it as the typical historian whose concern is also socio-political. Our concern is to perform a function relative to the needs of this study. The Christological perspective of history inspires confidence that apparent contradictions such as the Incarnation can be considered a reality without presuming to know too much. Wright (2010) adds, "History isn't enough by itself. Reformation theologian Philip Melancthon [said]: It isn't enough to know that Jesus is the Saviour; I must know that he is the Saviour *for me*. History cannot tell me that but it can reconstruct the framework within which it makes sense."<sup>7</sup> These pages will attempt to *reconstruct the framework* in the hope that this issue *makes sense*.

### 2. Why the History of this Issue matters.

There are many Jesuses presented to us for consideration. If for no other reason this is why the history of this issue matters. Warfield (1950:280) points out:

"There is the dogmatic Christ which the great Christian community has worshipped through the ages with no other thought than that He was assuredly the Jesus Christ of

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<sup>6</sup> i.e. the evaluation of both the peccability and the impeccability groups and the resultant affect upon the gospel message.

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis his.

the Biblical record. And there is this Jesus Christ of the biblical record which the scientific study of the Bible has split up into several mutually inconsistent personalities. And there is the “historical Jesus” which biblical criticism has hardly and with much variety of interpretation extracted from the presuppositions of the biblical records...The dogmatic Christ, we are told, has evaporated into a myth; the biblical Jesus Christ has been disintegrated into the tesserae out of which its mosaic was formed; the “historical Jesus,” itself the product of doubt, remains a doubtful and fluctuating figure. *If we are to continue to be Christians, must we not at least seek for our Christianity a less unstable basis?*”

Our quest is to “*seek for our Christianity a less unstable basis.*” That Christ be considered biblically goes without saying; yet the historicity of the debate itself does not allow us to go on without saying. The consideration of His person is the ultimate consideration. He had on two occasions brought up this question, first to his disciples (Matt. 16:13) and later to the Pharisees (Matt. 22:41-46). He had left Himself open to scrutiny and since the earliest centuries of the Christian movement, heretics directed their most dangerous attacks upon the church’s understanding, or lack of it, of who Jesus is. Mohler (2009:4) rightly concludes that “Christianity stands or falls on the affirmation that Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God.”<sup>8</sup> Scrutiny has now become critique thanks to the Liberal movement which has its roots in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and as Frame (2002: 477-478) points out, “denies the possibility of propositional revelation – revelation in which God reveals words and sentences that agree with reality.” We are already handicapped in that we see through a glass darkly, yet now we see even more darkly because the picture itself has been tainted. It still remains an intense consideration for both those who serve and follow Him and for those who oppose and hate Him. Reymond (1998:583) is correct to pose the timeless question, “Does a right view of him [Him] necessarily entail the ascription to him [Him] of inherent, intrinsic, ontological deity?” It is the view of this study that it certainly does. In support of this view Chafer (1993:6) affirms that “the absolute, dogmatic declaration that Christ is God is the basic premise in all logic respecting the Person & work of Christ.” Armed with this premise we believe we can overthrow any subterfuge concerning God’s eternal and sinless Son.

We would further like to acknowledge that theology is in progress or process. Frame (1987:313) argues this well when he writes, “Theology progresses by revolution (or cataclysm), as well as by accumulation. Origen’s paradigm was replaced by Augustine’s, which was replaced by the Aristotelian Christianity of Aquinas, which was overthrown by the Reformation paradigm, which has largely been supplanted (I trust not irreversibly!) by different forms of modernism.” Having observed that, we are aware that much will be revealed and replaced in years to come.

The impeccability of Christ was never a concern to the early Church (Berkhof, 1998: 315). They accepted it without question. It was a normal part of their theology in that it was a “universal

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<sup>8</sup> Due to the sensitive nature of this subject our only disagreement with Mohler would be on the word order of our Lord’s theanthropic person. We would have preferred it if he wrote ‘fully God and fully man.’

conviction” (Osterhaven, 1987:1018). He further observes, “Even heretics in the early centuries and during the later period of rationalism (1650-1920), who attacked the orthodox Christology of Nicaea and Chalcedon, left this teaching alone.” Pelagianism, semi-pelagianism, Nestorianism, Arianism *et al*, were questions related to the understanding, or lack of it, of Christ’s deity with His humanity (refer chart on page 14). They couldn’t reconcile the two, so they embraced one side to the exclusion of the other but there is no record of questioning His impeccability. This seems only to have occurred more recently when issues surrounding the discoveries from the Jesus seminar arose (Edwards, 2005:26).<sup>9</sup> It seems also to have arisen when our only source of information (the Bible) regarding Him began to be questioned (Berkhof, 1998: 315).<sup>10</sup> We are to study Christianity’s history in order to learn from it and what we learn we apply to the present, which in turn must be projected into the future (Warfield: 1950:507).

It is the aim of this chapter to establish the relationship between Christology and history and then show how it pans out in Church history. As this will be the lion’s share of the chapter we have further broken up this history into two sections, i.e., Before the Reformation and after the Reformation, using the Council of Chalcedon as a reference point. Along with this task comes the painstaking work of gathering material from all fields of Dogmatics. For example, His deity is a treatment under the banner of Theology proper, His Incarnation is a subject related to Soteriology and so forth (Reymond, 1998:583). The different *loci* make collation difficult, but not impossible.

### **3. The Relationship between Christology and Anthropology.**

Christology is the good news to the bad news of anthropology. Where man is seen as a failure in himself, it is Christ who breaks upon that darkness with his beams of perfect brightness. What directs our attention to the sinfulness of man by so much, highlights the sinlessness of Christ. What reveals man for his impotency and imperfectness reveals Christ all the more for His potency and perfectness; and thus the relationship, which exists between these two, makes Christology a historical subject. Where fallen men gather to consider the Christ incarnate, there will then of necessity be at that table the crumbs of wholesome doctrine amidst much that falls to the dogs. We can scarcely think of any historical Church council that has not deliberated some aspect of our Lord’s life and work. This we will consider below but we must here elaborate more on the relationship between anthropology and Christology as this is a vital cog in this dissertation.

Referring to man’s Fall, Berkhof (1998:305) states that through his ‘wilful transgression’ He was ‘transformed into a sinner.’ We find this to be an intriguing choice of words for ‘transformation’ indicates that man was passive, in that something was done to him. It seems to indicate that his Fall was through his own will and choice; yet the resultant outcome in him was through some

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<sup>9</sup> More on this in 4.3 below

<sup>10</sup> We have given treatment to the various forms of criticism that largely contributed to this problem in chapter five.

external force. Berkhof supplies no scriptural evidence for his choice of words, but I am sympathetic to his logic as his attempt is to quantify the heinous nature of sin so that Christ's brightness may expose the nature of sin all the more. From His exalted and privileged state of vicegerent in Creation He 'despoiled his true humanity' (Berkhof, 1998:305). Christ is the answer to man's sin and He is the bridge to the chasm, as it were. He is the fulfilment of the Law, which otherwise served to guide, us but now can only condemn us. Its purpose was to find fruition in fulfilment, but only found frustration from a lack of righteousness in its benefactors. It is in this sense that Christology answers to anthropology for He alone fulfilled all the Law.

Can we go so far and state that the issue of impeccability is the litmus test as to whether the Church is in 'downgrade'?<sup>11</sup> That she is and has been in theological collapse is disputed by no one in the know. Edwards (2005:4) cites George Barna's research as proof of this. He observes, that "among the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Methodist Church indicates that only one third of all their members believe in the Reformed doctrine of Justification by faith, the infallibility of the Scriptures and not surprisingly that Jesus was sinless." We are hard pressed to imagine how the other two thirds survive as members with their alternate views. Granted this shows the trends in America, but we believe it to be a good indicator of the theological waters in South Africa. Jesus is more popular today than previously when we were more conservative in our culture. The more culture seems insistent on distancing themselves from Him, paradoxically the more they seem to discuss Him. As a figure of history He is discussed in nearly every religion even as far afield as Atheism (Blanchard, 2001:555). Scarcely can a discussion on morality and ethics end without His name and teaching surfacing somewhere in the debate (Blanchard, 2001:567). The freedom of speech issue has broadened the idea of a personal and living God to be all inclusive to the extent that it exists now as a concept or idea relative to the one processing the concept. Consequently religious authority has moved away from creeds and traditions and people have assumed it themselves (Edwards, 2005:3). This was the master plan at the garden when Eve entertained Satan's reasoning. He was in effect trying to move the authoritative voice away from God to self.

The theological currents of the third millennium are becoming increasingly difficult to navigate. We have a subjective backdrop of two thousand years of Christological history, yet still remain inconclusive at best regarding His person, or totally confused at worst. In support of this assessment Reymond (1998: 57) points out that, "The pervasive supernaturalism which the New Testament ascribes to both his [His] person and his [His] work is regularly explained away as fraudulent mythology."<sup>12</sup> We had hoped that all this history would have cleared the undergrowth,

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<sup>11</sup> This phrase was first coined by Charles Spurgeon in 1887 when he accused his denomination (the Baptist Union) of entertaining liberal theological ideas that stemmed from modernism. He subsequently resigned his congregation from the Union (MacArthur, 1996:192).

<sup>12</sup> The Jesus seminar is a case in point which Reymond also alludes to and this is discussed in 4.3 below.

but rather we have found that it has produced a dizzying maze as opposed to a sober method of this most precious consideration.

#### 4. Christology in Classical Church History.

Dividing up Church history with a view to assess this cardinal truth is somewhat of a mammoth task. It is not the main function of this study to do that, but we concede that it is necessary for the overview. We therefore prefer for practical reasons to accept such a division given to us by Louis Berkhof, which we have found makes for a useful survey. He divides Christological history into two sections: the doctrine of Christ before the Reformation and after the Reformation (Berkhof, 1998:305-311). By this he accepts the Reformation as the defining point not only in Church history but also Christological history. Although this is in accordance with our approach we must stress by way of reminder that our approach focuses on the issue of impeccability/ peccability. We have borrowed the lenses, so to speak, in order to survey church history for this purpose only. It will also be noticed that Chalcedon is the defining Council to which we refer. Cook (1981:12) is correct to conclude that Chalcedon “has set the parameters”. He also argues that, “Chalcedon...has remained the touchstone of Christological orthodoxy down to the present day. One may seek to interpret Chalcedon, but one cannot ignore it and remain in continuity with Christian self-understanding.”

A synopsis of the Ecumenical Councils relative to its conclusions (Cook, 1981:129)

<b>Council</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
Nicea (325)	The fullness of Divinity
Constantinople 1 (381)	The Fullness of humanity
Ephesus (431)	The unity of His person ('one and the same')
Chalcedon (451)	The inviolable distinction and the inseparable unity of the humanity and the divinity.

One can see why Chalcedon gives as an affirmation of our faith, but too much in the way of understanding.

#### 4.1. The Doctrine of Christ before the Reformation

In an article in Christianity Today Mark Noll (2011) points out:

“The great relevance of the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian definition is to affirm that Jesus Christ was fully human and fully divine<sup>13</sup> in one integrated person. But we know from moral and ethical reasoning that God and humans are different. God is the Creator, and humans are the creatures. There’s a huge gap between humanity and divinity. Yet Christianity says that in Christ, that gap doesn’t exist. The lengthy debate leading up to Nicaea and Chalcedon was over how to state that what can’t be together really was together.”

<sup>13</sup> As mentioned we prefer that His divinity is asserted prior to His humanity as this is in accordance with scripture, but we have to allow it for now.

Noll agrees that from a human point of view these two natures cannot be together, but the brute fact is that they were contrary to human understanding. A thing is not true only if science affirms it. The main issue writes Noll was 'how to state' this issue. Even under this umbrella Berkhof (1998:305-308) further divides the issue up using the Council of Chalcedon as a reference point.

#### **4.1.1. Up to the Council of Chalcedon**

The early Church accepted this matter of the two natures of Christ as normal (Berkhof, 1998:305) and it was only as controversy arose did they contemplate this issue more seriously (Reymond, 1998:584).

##### **4.1.1.1 Those who sacrificed His Deity to His Humanity**

Heretofore the debates were strongly Trinitarian but from now on it becomes more specifically Christological. From now till Chalcedon the "problem of the incarnation" (Berkhof, 1949:105) is what will occupy the Church.

1. Early Judaism was monotheistic and naturally this emphasis seeped back into the Church's understanding of Christ. The apostolic fathers are a case in point here as their main function was not to move to definition but to restatement of the apostles' thought (Reymond, 1998:584).
2. The Ebionites who were also monotheists naturally denied the Lord's deity. Their name means "poor ones" but it would seem that this poverty showed itself more in their Christology than in their community. They accepted that Christ became the Messiah at his baptism when the Spirit of God came upon Him. Walter (1987b:339) resourcing Eusebius observes that Ebionites did accept the Virgin birth, but rejected the pre-existence of Christ; but Berkhof (1949:48) disagrees, claiming that both the divinity and the Virgin<sup>14</sup> birth was not accepted by them. This could be due to the fact that they accepted the Jewish Torah as their legal guide (Edwards, 2005:190). To them He was exclusively human who lived as an example of someone who justified the law to His disciples (Horton, 2011:470). Cullman (1959:189) provides a brief summation of their theological history by pointing out that they, "settled across the Jordan after the fall of Jerusalem, and [remained] isolated from the general development of the ancient church, became reactionary and distorted, on the one hand falling into a rigid legalism, and on the other hand laying itself open to syncretistic and Gnostic tendencies."
3. The Alogi, a group of heretics from Asia Minor (AD170) (Cross and Livingstone, 2005: 45), also viewed Jesus as a man only and consequently rejected all of John's epistles mainly because of his explanation on the Logos. Accordingly the defenders of the Johannine literature dubbed them Alogi –from the alpha negative prefix 'A', which means that they

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<sup>14</sup> I have chosen to capitalise 'Virgin' because it is one of the five points of Fundamentalism. This would be same as one of the Five points of Calvinism which is now accepted as critical categories.

were against the Logos. They accepted that He was miraculously virgin born; yet ironically, like their Ebionite counterparts above, they only accepted His messianic status from the point of His baptism for it was there, they claim, the Christ Spirit descended upon Him imbuing Him with miraculous powers (Berkhof, 1998:306). One could even suggest that this is a preview of what later came to be called 'Adoptionism' propounded by Felix the Bishop of Urgella (refer 4.1.3.3 below –pg. 13).

4. Paul of Samosata, the bishop of Antioch (260AD) and Theodotus of Byzantium (1210 AD) were representatives of the Dynamic Monarchians who although separated by a thousand years believed similarly to the Alogi. Such was the prevalence of this view! They distinguished between Jesus and the Logos. Jesus was just a normal man born of Joseph and Mary and the Logos was the divine reason. It was Paul of Samosata who taught that the Logos was of the same substance as the Father (Van de Beek, 2002?:37). While Jesus was personal, the Logos was impersonal. They also claimed that the Logos took residence in Jesus at His baptism. The motive of the Monarchians was to protect monotheism from the increasing advances of the Trinitarian concept of God (Blaising, 1987:727). The Trinitarian concept of God was at its infant stage of explanation and was consequently thought to be three gods (pluralism). They viewed this as an attack on the wholeness or oneness of God and insisted that the *Theos* be restricted in its usage to God alone (Blaising, 1987:727). Paul of Samosata was more prominent than his counterpart. He taught that he believed the Logos was *homoousios* (same) with the Father but that this sameness meant that He was indistinct in the Godhead (Berkhof, 1949:82). However, because He existed in God it is not incorrect to think of Him as God but given the Logos was not a person He was classed as an impersonal power operative in the *man* Jesus. Jesus was gradually deified (Berkhof, 1949:82). In this he (Paul of Samosata) was the forerunner of the Socinians who in turn were the forerunners of the Unitarians (Horton, 2011:627).

Berkhof (1998:306) points out that while there were “some who sacrificed the deity to the humanity of Christ (as above); there were others who reversed the order.” To these we now turn for a brief overview.

#### **4.1.1.2. Those who sacrificed His Humanity to His Deity**

In the following five points it will be seen that “essence” played an enormous role in the debates. Warfield (1950:486) informs that the word was introduced into the scheme of things by Cicero who introduced it from the Latin language and he defined it as “the whole of that by which a thing is, and is what it is.”

1. The Gnostics were exponents of dualism in which they believed that all matter was evil and therefore opposed to the Spirit. Humanity falls into this category and is therefore evil.

Consequently they vehemently rejected the idea that God could house Himself in evil matter; so for them the Incarnation was an impossibility. If Christ was consubstantial (of the same substance) with the Father He could not have retained that in the flesh. Many of them could only account for the mystery of the Christ by explaining as all their forebears did that God descended upon the man at His baptism<sup>15</sup>. For God to descend upon a man is not uncommon in Greek mythology and for that reason was readily accepted. They go on to claim that this God Spirit left before His crucifixion as a Spirit cannot die. Bochart (1987:447) points out that this view was also termed 'Adoptionism' and a small segment, even unbeknown to them, subscribed to the Docetic view that, at best, understood His body to have been a phantasm.

2. Monotheism was an important tenet in the Old Testament and had also become a vanguard in early Church theology. While affirming the deity of Christ they were careful not to impugn this cherished doctrine (Sproul, 1997:79). As history proves, no amount of confessing and cherishing will keep the Church from error and thus emerged what is called Monarchianism.<sup>16</sup> It is the belief that there is only one chief or singular ruler and it is none else but God. The prefix *mono* indicates one and the suffix *arche* indicates chief ruler. That is how they were named! It was Tertullian who gave them this name (Berkhof, 1949:81). The first type of this view surfaced as 'Modalistic Monarchianism' and sought to protect His deity by denying His humanity. There were no distinction of persons in God and Christ was a one-time manifestation of that God. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Roman presbyter and heretic Sabellius was a key exponent of this view (Laney, 1992:38). He is credited with founding Modalism (Horton, 2011:279). Although Sabellius agreed that He had the same essence as His Father (consubstantiation) he went on to explain that in His mode of existence He was in fact lower (Incarnation). He used the illustration of a sun's ray being the expression of the sun in essence yet totally distinct from it in mode. Blaising (1987:727) articulates, "Sabellius taught the existence of a divine monad (which he named *Huiopator*), which by a process of expansion projected itself successively in revelation as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These were three different modes revealing the same divine person." In the west this was called Patripassianism since it held that the Father Himself had become incarnate in Christ and therefore also suffered in and with Him (Berkhof, 1949:82). He was to be refuted and branded a heretic at the Council of Antioch in 268.
3. Modalistic Monarchianism at least maintained the divinity of Christ but after it died 'Dynamic Monarchianism' emerged from its ashes. It was 'dynamic' in that it involved a kind of movement or change' (Sproul, 1997:82). The main interest here was to protect the unity of

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<sup>15</sup> Due to the recurrence of Christ's baptism as making Jesus the Christ among such groups mentioned as the Ebionites, the Alogi, the Dynamic Monarchians and the Gnostics, a separate section under chapter five will be dedicated to the exposition of this section out of the gospels. Given this point of reference for many heretical conclusions regarding His Person we feel justified by this decision.

<sup>16</sup> Refer also 4.1.1.1.4 above.

God.<sup>17</sup> In this view Jesus was not eternal but became God by His adoption. 'Became' is the operative word here! Its chief proponent was a heretic called Arius.

4. The Anti-Gnostic and Alexandrian fathers defended the deity of Christ so vociferously that they inadvertently subordinated Him to the Father. Clement argued that the real Logos of God is distinguished from the Son-Logos who appeared in the flesh and that the real Logos mediates the divine revelation by His incarnation in Christ (Berkhof, 1937: 76). This could explain why in later years his student Origen insisted on the distinction of the two natures of Christ but unfortunately went on to exclaim that the Logos deified His human nature by His resurrection and ascension. While trying to escape one error they ran into another one. It seems the old Greek idiom 'between Scylla and Charybdis' is true for them, for in an effort to avoid the one danger they got caught in the other. Tertullian fell into this headlong and even Origen was so bold as to state that He was subordinate *as to essence* and this became a stepping stone for Arius (Berkhof, 1998:306).
5. Arianism (a theological teaching attributed to Arius a presbyter of Alexander 250 – 336) distinguished Christ from the Logos. He was very much a Monarchian at heart and asserted that Christ is a superhuman creature in that He is the first of God's creatures and though He is not God yet is He more than man. He was generated<sup>18</sup> by the Father which is akin to saying that He was created (Berkhof, 1949:88). We do well to remember that up until Athanasius this was the majority option in the Church (Galli, 2011). Athanasius responded to him with an apologetic on the consubstantiation of Father and Son. He posited that they were of the same essence (*homoousios*). Semi-Arianism responded later with a move from dissimilar to similar (*homoiousios*) essence in a move to discard the tag of heresy as Athanasius was clearly finding audience. This did not avail however, as the synod of Antioch in February 325<sup>19</sup> together with the Council of Nicea who met later that year on 20<sup>th</sup> May under Emperor Constantine also declared it a heresy (Walter, 1987:75).

If there was no real human will in Christ there could be no real probation, temptation and no real advance in His manhood. It is clear that His human will coexisted with His divine will in such a way, albeit mysterious, that there was no separation of wills.

#### **4.1.1.3. Those who confused the relation of His two natures and their coexistence.**

1. Apollinarius explained that the body, soul and spirit of man as existing in this trichotomy becomes the existence of the average man; however in the case of the Christ the Logos replaced His spirit (*pneuma*), which is the seat of sin. In other words for Jesus it was body,

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<sup>17</sup> In this they were very close to the Ebionite heresy mentioned above in 4.1.1.1.2 and probably even the obscure sect called the Alogi mentioned in 4.1.1.1.3 above.

<sup>18</sup> 'Generation' was what Origen also taught.

<sup>19</sup> It is also noteworthy that Arius was anathematized exactly a year before this in March 324 by a provincial synod called together by his own Bishop Alexander (Walter, 1987:74. (*In Elwell, W., ed. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. 74p.*)

soul and Logos. Although Apollinarius meant well in attempting to free Christ from the peccability to sin, this was clearly not the way to do it. He did not deny the human body of Jesus but went on to teach that He did not have a human mind or spirit (Harris, 2011:78). In Christ there are two natures and each nature retains its distinctiveness. This was condemned at the Synod of Alexandria in 362 and they went further to assert the existence of His human soul (Berkhof, 1949:107). Though he legitimately and valiantly tried to secure the unity of the person of Christ and His sinlessness with His deity he unfortunately did so at the expense of His humanity. Berkhof, (1949:107) explains that He “sought to safeguard the sinlessness of Christ by substituting the Logos for the human *pneuma*.” He also taught that the free will resided in the rational soul and if Jesus had this then it stands to reason that He must also possess a free will to sin (Walter, 1987:68)<sup>20</sup>. The Council of Constantinople condemned this view in 381 (Walter, 1987:68).

2. Gregory of Nyssa (Basil of Ancyra’s younger brother and one of Apollinaris’ opponents), was one of three who become famous as the Cappodocian trio. In terms of Trinitarian theology they played an “enormous” role in the formulations (Horton, 2011:475). Gregory claimed that the flesh of Christ was transformed and lost all its original properties by union with the divine (Berkhof, 1949:107). This is another classic case of confusing His two natures and one could even argue the placement of this view in the former category above as sacrificing His humanity to His deity.
3. The School of Antioch from where Christians first got their name (Acts 11:26) was a rival to the Alexandrian school of Egypt in the fourth century. Its chief advocates at the time were John Chrysostom (347AD -407AD) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (350AD-428AD). The latter was a good theological representative of the school of Antioch and stressed the manhood of Christ and the indwelling of the Logos as a moral indwelling. For him, how God indwelt Christ and how God indwells us is comparatively only a matter of degree. Berkhof (1998:307) notes, “They saw in Christ a man side by side with God, in alliance with God, sharing the purpose of God, but not one with Him in the oneness of a single personal life.” He was a two person Mediator. Although it was Theodore who refused to acknowledge the term *Theotokos* it was his student named Nestorius who himself later mentored a man called Anastasius who it is said, “vehemently denounced the widespread use of the term *Theotokos* (God–bearer) to describe the Virgin Mary. Simply because although she is said to be “the mother of my Lord” (Lk. 1:43) she is never called the mother of God. That is to say Mary mothered the humanity of Jesus but not His deity (Hamrick & Dean, 2009:11). When this brought howls of protest, Nestorius reiterated the presbyter’s contention that “Mary was but a woman, and it is impossible that God should be born of a woman.” Convinced that the reality of Christ’s human nature had been challenged, Nestorius pointed out that Mary was also *anthropotokos* (man–bearer), but his preferred

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<sup>20</sup> This is at the heart of the peccability argument as will be seen in chapter 4

word was *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer) (Douglas and Comfort, 1992:502). In reference to Mary the school of Alexandria coined the term *Theotokos*, from where the phrase 'Mother of God' comes from, but it was (the school of) Nestorius who responded by coining another term *theophorus* –possessor of the Godhead (Berkhof, 1949:109) which he felt made better sense. In other words Christ is worshipped as God not because He is God but because He has God in Him. He held that the Logos indwelt Jesus morally rather than essentially (Horton, 2011:474). Nestorianism tried to correct the Antiochan view of Theodore (the dual personality in Christ), who made a proper distinction of His deity and humanity (refer above); however, he (Nestorius) did not conceive of these (deity and humanity) to form a real unity and to constitute a single person. Nestorius was convinced that Christ was made up of two separate persons (Harris, 2011:78). Unlike Monophysitism which confused the two natures Nestorianism separated them. While Nestorius opposed Theodore it was Cyril (370AD -444AD) the Alexandrian who opposed Nestorius. Cyril strongly denounced his view and was successful in deposing Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus in 431. According to him it was not the human nature that assumed the Logos but the Logos who assumed the human nature with a view to redeeming it (Berkhof, 1949:109). His view thus made the Logos the dominant feature and therefore inadvertently underplayed His humanity (Horton, 2011:474). He stressed the Person of Christ, but this person resulted from a 'mutual communication' of both attributes. Though he strongly emphasised the unity of the person of Christ he was thus seen to deny the two natures of Christ. Hot on the heels of that debacle came the Eutychian heresy.

4. While Nestorius' crime was the division of the two natures, Eutyches' crime was the confusion of the two natures. Eutyches had a 'strong anti-Nestorian bias' (Berkhof, 1949:110) who taught a heretical form of Monophysitism, namely that after the Incarnation there was only one nature in Christ and that nature was not 'consubstantial with us' but His humanity was assimilated into His divinity (Horton, 2011:474). He is admittedly difficult to define at the best of times because he is 'unbalanced and lacking in conviction' (Berkhof, 1949:110). He maintained either the one extreme of the absorption of the human nature in the divine, or the other extreme of the fusion of the two natures, resulting in a sort of *tertium quid* (Berkhof, 1949:111). The Eutychian position was condemned at the Council of Chalcedon (Cross and Livingston, 2005:1111) but before this Nestorius attended the Council of Constantinople and was initially condemned there.
5. The Monophysites were the vestigial remains of the adherents of Cyril and Eutyches (Berkhof, 1949:112). Naturally, as their name suggests, they denied His two natures and preferred to see His new nature as *composite*. As they saw it, two natures infer two persons and that would be Nestorianism all over again. Although they initially appealed to Nestorius for their view based on his claim for the divine-human nature in Christ this did not mean that Nestorius believed in one Person, as time proved. Consequently, they were split

into various factions and Berkhof (1949:113) lists their separate views which we will reproduce here because it is pertinent to our theme. He states:

“There were the *Theopaschitists*, who emphasized the fact that God suffered; the *Phthartolatrists*, who came nearest to the formulation of Chalcedon, and stressed the fact that the human nature of Christ was, like ours, capable of suffering, and were therefore said to worship that which is corruptible; and the *Aphthartodocetists*, who represented just the opposite view, namely, that the human nature of Christ was not consubstantial with ours, but was endowed with divine attributes, and therefore sinless, imperishable, and incorruptible.”

The following three charts are not only composite in that it eliminates all the side issues, but also allows a clear view historically of the main players.

### The Heresies viewed historically in terms of Councils:

#### Christological Councils (Sproul, 1997:83)

	Council of Antioch	Council of Nicea	Council of Chalcedon
<b>Year</b>	267	325	451
<b>Heretical theologian</b>	Sabellius	Arius	Nestorius, Eutyches
<b>Heretical theology</b>	Modalistic Monarchianism	Dynamic Monarchianism	Monophysite Christology
<b>Council's decision</b>	Jesus is <i>homoiousios</i> with the Father.	Jesus is <i>homoiousios</i> <sup>21</sup> with the Father.	Jesus is truly man & truly God. His two natures are not mixed, confused, separated, or divided.

### The Council's Viewed separately in terms of Heresies:

#### Ecumenical Councils (Horton, 2011:476)

Nicea	325	Formal statement on the Trinity
Constantinople I	381	Rejection of Apollinarianism, Monophysitism (also known as Eutychianism), and Nestorianism
Chalcedon	451	Consolidation of “one person in two natures”
Constantinople III	681	Monothelitism condemned; two intelligences and wills: one human, one divine, united in one person

### The Heresies viewed separately:

#### Christological Heresies Spectrum (Horton, 2011:475)

Denying Christ's Divinity	Ebionitism Subordinationism Adoptionism Arianism/Semi-Arianism
Denying Christ's Humanity	Docetism/ Gnosticism

<sup>21</sup> Either Sproul or his publishers have made a serious mistake with the printing of this word. The letter ‘i’ in the word *homoiousios* should not be there for that would mean that this council admitted to the Christ having two natures which they clearly did not. The Council at Antioch did accept it with limited understanding of its repercussions. In fact Nicea denounced this view and branded it heresy. At best it should have read “Jesus is not *homoiousios* with the Father. *Homoiousios* means ‘of similar nature.’ *Homoousios* means of the same nature. Either the letter ‘i’ must be removed or the word ‘not’ must be inserted.

	Apollinarianism Monothelitism
Confusing the Two Natures	Monophysitism/ Eutychianism
Dividing the Two Natures	Nestorianism

Much of the stress of His two natures seems always to be on what was stressed first. If they began at His humanity, even with a view to explain His deity later, they ended up spending more time on His humanity, thus overstating His humanity in relation to His deity and vice versa.

Reymond (1998:546 footnote) helpfully points that, “At the ecumenical councils in the fourth and fifth centuries, the church had to oppose later docetic tendencies appearing in the forms of Apollinarianism, Eutychianism, and monophysitism, all deriving from the catechetical school of Alexandria.” Frame (1987:232) observes that “most classic formulations of doctrine have been set forth by way of contrast to some heresy: creation *ex nihilo* against Gnosticism, the doctrine of scriptural canonicity against Marcion<sup>22</sup>, the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity against Sabellianism and Arianism, the Chalcedonian Christology against Eutychian and Nestorian positions, the Reformation confessions against Romanism and sectarianism.” Notwithstanding we turn our attention now to the Council of Chalcedon to determine the second half of our Christological assessment.

#### 4.1.2. The Decision taken by the Council of Chalcedon

Chalcedon convened in 451 to settle matters concerning the Person of Christ. Chalcedon put together one final statement summarising and affirming His conception in Mary but still retained the title ‘Mother of God’ for her ‘according to the manhood’ (Berkhof, 1949:111). This was done to affirm, not only His conception but more importantly His consubstantiation with the Father and His consubstantiation with us as well. His two natures were accepted and established with equal force and thus proclaimed truly (perfect) God and truly (perfect) man. No one nature suffered any injury resulting from the other nature but the properties of each were thoroughly preserved so that the two distinct natures did not equal to persons but one Person.

#### 4.1.3. After the Council of Chalcedon

1. Leontius of Byzantium (? - 543) is regarded as “the ablest defender of Chalcedonian theology (Berkhof, 1949:113). Subsequent to Chalcedon there were Christological confusions that arose from its insufficient statements which Leontius put paid to by proffering a new term called *enupostasias* (Berkhof, 1998:307). He pointed out that the human nature of Christ was not impersonal but in-personal, having its personal subsistence in the person of the Son of God. In his efforts to rescue the human nature from a confused morass, he inadvertently reduced its ‘*subsistence*.’

<sup>22</sup> Marcion was a second Gnostic teacher who couldn’t (or refused to) reconcile the Creator God of the Old Testament and the Redeemer God of the New Testament setting a historical prelude to the later Nestorian heresy.

2. John of Damascus (676 – 749) argued that there was a ‘communication’ of the divine and human natures and because of this communication the human nature became deified. The Logos assumed human nature and not the other way around. Thus making the Logos active and the human nature passive. It was the Logos that secured the unity of the two natures (Berkhof, 1949:115). Christ’s human nature became a deified human nature as a result of this *communication*. He calls this process ‘circumincession’ (Berkhof, 1998:307). The human nature took on divine attributes; so it became correct to say ‘God suffered in the flesh’ (Berkhof, 1949:115). As processes go, we cannot help but wonder how long this took. He admits that the two natures are one but that the human nature is always subject to the divine. We cannot see here how if they are one, that one is subject to the other. There is in this a futile attempt to harmonise subjection and oneness.
3. Felix the bishop of Urgella (? – 818) took the view known as ‘adoptionism.’ It is the false view that Christ was a normal man until His baptism at which point the Father ‘adopted Him as His Son’. As to Christ’s divine nature He was begotten as Son of God but as to His human nature He was a Son of God by adoption. Naturally He was Son of God, but in terms of His human nature He had to be adopted into Sonship. In a strange sense Christ had to be re-born spiritually for that adoption to take place. Berkhof (1949:115) observes that His natural birth took place in Bethlehem and His spiritual birth took place at His baptism and consummated at His Resurrection. This view was condemned by the Synod of Frankfurt in 794A.D. (Berkhof, 1998:308).
4. The Middle-Ages were largely quiet regarding this issue, but certain voices were heard above the silence. The Roman Catholic Church retained a fairly strong view on the full humanity of Christ but they were not strong enough to quell the voice of Peter the Lombard (Petrus Lombardus, 1100-1160). He was audacious in many of his claims such as marriage does not have to be consummated to be perfect. He also asserted that when one shares God’s love with one’s neighbour, that love *is* literally God to such a degree that one is taken up into the Trinity. Nevertheless no claim was as impudent as his assertion that in respect of His humanity Christ was nothing at all (Berkhof, 1998:308).
5. It is perhaps safe to say that Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) was the theologian of the medieval period. His respect was so huge that unlike any person before or after him his philosophy came to be known by his first name, Thomism (Sproul, 2000:65). However even he was delinquent with his Christology when he attempted to explain that the logos only became composite at the incarnation. He went on to explain that the human nature’s union with the divine nature fused to such a degree that the human nature was hindered at arriving at an independent personality. In fact he went even further to state that of Christ’s two wills the human will is always subject to the divine will (Berkhof, 1949:118). By this union Christ’s body obtained a special dignity and thus became an object of worship and also as a result of this union His body was sustained in its relationship to God in that it

could withstand death. In terms of His divine knowledge it was 'infused' but in terms of his human knowledge it was 'acquired' and grew as He grew. His human will had to be subject to the divine will for 'causality belongs to the divine will' (Berkhof, 1998:308). Aquinas described the two natures as being *fused* yet his explanation is more *confused* than anything else. This term *infused* admits to a process and falls into the same category of error as the above-mentioned one committed by John of Damascus.

Cook (1981:127) asserts that the language of Chalcedon has its origins in the Logos speculations, but its predecessor, the Nicene Creed does not use the term Logos. Aside from this obvious difference, Nicea and Chalcedon set the bar for historic Christological concerns so much so that "any denial of what has become known as Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology is, by definition, condemned as heresy" (Mohler, 2009:4). Notwithstanding, such condemnation served little to deter rising thinkers who themselves spared no effort in assaulting His person.

#### **4.2. The Doctrine of Christ during the Reformation.**

The period of theological history known as the Reformation is justifiably credited with a return to biblical exegesis. Guthrie (1981:21) rightly concludes that prior to this there was little or no interest in biblical theology. The focus was more on Dogmatics and tradition as exemplified at Trent. Unlike the 'forced exegesis' (Guthrie, 1981: 22) of the medieval scholars the Reformers argued for the plain meaning of scripture. Notwithstanding, even in this most notable and noble effort of theirs the issue of Christ's impeccability never came up. This is largely due to the fact that the Reformers reacted to the Catholic Church and also this issue was never debated in Roman Catholic circles. While Christological concerns were at the heart of the Reformation, not much was added to the doctrine of the Person of Christ during this period regarding the issue of Impeccability. Martin Luther held firmly to the doctrine of the two natures but his doctrine of consubstantiation marred what was an otherwise Christological morsel, in that he was lead by his own inescapable deduction that the human nature of Christ is omnipresent (Berkhof, 1949:119).

Subsequent to this the Christological debates were empire wide, but mostly in reaction to the thorn in the flesh theology of Arius (Walter, 1987b:74). However, much was brought to light which was heretofore buried by the Roman Church, most especially theories of and relating to the Atonement. While the Reformation is regarded as the crucible for Protestant Theology and faith it is by and large silent in terms of the issue discussed in this study. This is not to suggest that Christological matters were of no concern; it is just that the matter of His Impeccability was not discussed during this time. Berkhof (1998:308) informs that "The Church retained a strong grasp on the full humanity of Christ." Whatever the phrase *strong grasp* may indicate it certainly seems to communicate that so far as we know impeccability was not an issue. So we pass over this time

not as a period of history irrelevant to the gospel, but as one that showed little debate over the Impeccability of Jesus Christ.

### **4.3. The Doctrine of Christ after the Reformation**

The council of Chalcedon set the standard for the issues regarding Christology and consequently both the Roman Catholic Churches and the Protestant Churches were subdued on this point. However, Luther's doctrine that the physical essence of Christ is communicated to the emblems in the Lord's Supper gave rise to the distinctively Lutheran view that each of Christ's natures permeates the other. This he called *perichoresis* – co-inherence (Fahlbusch & Bromily, 1999-2003:864). Luther argued that the eternal attributes of God such as his omnipotence, omniscience and his omnipresence were communicated to the human nature at the point of the Incarnation. Luther could not give a sufficient explanation of Jesus' obvious limitations as a man. This fusion of the two divine natures harks back to Eutychian. Reformed theology allows for the fusion of the two natures but not as the human nature is swallowed up in the divine. It teaches that both natures can be found in the person of Christ so as to make one unique and mysterious Person (Berkhof, 1998:309). That there is unity in the Person of Christ is not denied, but that his unity obliterates his incarnation is denied. We concede that His two natures are joined but we cannot concede that the humanity is swallowed up in His deity.

Since there is this inextricable link between anthropology and Christology (as shown in point 1) the early nineteenth century evidenced it by the search for the historical Jesus (Berkhof, 1998:309). However, by this time the stress was more anthropological than Christological. The world needed a superman and the historical debate of the two natures gave way for the 'divine man.'

#### **4.3.1. A New View on the Two Natures.**

1. Leading this new school of thought was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834). Unlike the past where the divine inhabited the human (e.g. Aquinas above) he proposed that Christ's human nature was elevated to ideal perfection. He was convinced that Christ was sinless. He went on to assert that this "realises to the full the destiny of man in His character of sinless perfection" (Berkhof, 1998:309). He based this on the conclusion that there was no hereditary influence in Him that gave Him any sinful tendencies. Unfortunately his view never rose higher than the human level. Regarding Christ's transcendent dignity (Berkhof, 1949:123) explains that he claimed this finds its explanation in a special presence of God in Him and His supreme God-consciousness. As a representative of the human race he is able to confer perfection onto those who exercise a "living faith". For Schleiermacher this gave man great hope: based on the elevation of Christ's human nature to that of the divine, one day we too will be brought to this ideal of the 'divine man.' This can hardly be categorised as philosophical thought; more accurately

it is rather wishful thinking. This is the philosophy of the Renaissance where ‘man’ the ideal, or evolving ideal was the centre of the world.

2. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was considered the most “acute” (Brown, 1987:599), philosopher of all time. He reckoned that Christ was perfect only as an ideal in His humanity. He claims that this perfection was “ethical” (Berkhof, 1949:123). Jesus was the most eminent preacher and pioneer and if His teachings were grasped appointed it could lead to salvation without a personal relationship to Him. This I suppose he would call ‘ethical salvation’.
3. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 -1831) was a pantheist and saw the word becoming flesh as a vehicle for God to become incarnate in humanity. The Incarnation was a culminating point of God’s gradual self-unfolding in history (Berkhof, 1949:123). It was to be God’s way of expressing His oneness with man. Pantheism allows for immanence (within the universe) (Geisler, 1989: 173) and this panders to the expectancy of man.
4. Albert Ritschl (1822 – 1889) began with the work of Christ rather than with the person of Christ. Berkhof (1998:310) informs us that “he rules out the pre-existence, the incarnation, and the virgin birth of Christ since this finds no point of contact in the believing consciousness of the Christian community.” He thus concludes that it is His teaching and example which is His works and that redeems man.

The below chart (Walton, 1986:14-16) helps in looking at this historical problem with simplicity.

<b>Heresy</b>	<b>Major Proponents</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Major Opponent<sup>23</sup></b>
Arianism	Arius Eudoxius Eunomius	Christ is the first created being	Athanasius
Semi-Arianism	Eusebius of Nicomedia Basil of Ancyra Gregory of Laodicea	Christ is of similar essence with the Father but is subordinate to Him.	
Monarchianism	Theodotus of Byzantium Paul of Samosata	Jesus became Christ at His baptism, was adopted by the Father after his death <sup>24</sup> .	Hippolytus
Apollinarianism	Apollinarius	Christ had no human spirit. The Logos replaced it.	Gregory of Nazianzus
Nestorianism	Nestorius	The Logos indwelt the person of Jesus, making Christ a God-bearing man rather than the God-man. Affirmed merely mechanical rather than organic union of the person of Christ.	Cyril of Alexandria
Eutychianism	Eutyches	The human nature of Christ was absorbed by the Logos.	
Monophysitism	Severus Julian of Halicarnassus	Christ had one nature (unwilling to accept impersonal human nature of Christ)	Leo I of Rome

<sup>23</sup> I have taken the liberty of adding this column for the sake of a broader picture.

<sup>24</sup> Some posit that He was adopted at His baptism as explained by Grudem (2007:1235)

	Stephanus of Alexandria		
Monothelitism	Theodore of Arabia Sergius Cyrus of Alexandria	Christ had no human will, just the one divine will.	Sophronius

In an effort to appreciate this most crucial doctrine, Warfield (2005:250) summarises as follows: Not only is the doctrine of the “Two-natures” the synthesis of the entire body of Christological data embodied in the pages of the New Testament; and not only is it the teaching of all the writers of the New Testament severally; but the New Testament provides no material whatever for inferring that a different view was ever held by the Christian community. The entire Christian tradition, from the beginning, whatever that may be worth, is a tradition of a two-natured Jesus, that is to say, of an incarnated God. Of a one-natured Jesus, Christian tradition knows nothing, and supplies no materials from which it may be inferred.

## 5. Christology in Contemporary Church History

James Edwards (2005:9) divides recent history up into three categories or what he calls *quests*. This division suits our analyses!

### 5.1. Naturalism

This first quest stemmed from Enlightenment rationalism. The Enlightenment is a period in history that fathered modernism. It gave rise to the autonomy of thought as the superior law in reaction to the traditional authorities of the past, like the Pope and Kings and Queens and creeds and so forth. This modernism gave rise to the absolute authority of scientific research (naturalism) and that nothing is verifiable unless proven naturally; consequently then this naturalism excluded the supernatural, which in effect excluded God. This was not only dovetailed by the Industrial revolution but it produced an intellectual revolution as well. When previously doubt was frowned upon as an insult to intelligence, it was now smiled upon as an intellectual pursuit. It was from a premise of doubt that all investigation took place. Naturalism was the new government and revelation was ousted (Geisler, 1989:153). Consequently naturalism, which purported to make science the new law, birthed a theological deformity known as Deism. Deism acknowledged God as Creator, but in the same breath affirmed that natural laws rule the universe as God disenfranchised Himself as benefactor (Grudem, 2007:1239). So although God survived this refurbishment, He was redefined. This was also true of Christ. His birth did not subscribe to natural laws and was therefore viewed with suspicion. The conclusion drawn was that while Jesus was natural, Christ was supernatural, and thus was the divide. Christ could not have been immaculately conceived, performed unparalleled miracles and Resurrected leave alone offered a salvation by grace through faith if He was not supernatural. However the natural Jesus was

foreign to these extraordinary feats. His job was just to teach and be a good example or as Edwards (2005:15) states, an “itinerant humanitarian.”

## **5.2. Form Criticism<sup>25</sup>**

This quest resulted in the famous ‘quest for the historical Jesus.’<sup>26</sup> It was an attempt to uncover the earliest oral traditions free from the bias of the synoptic narrators. They attempted to lift the veneer of Matthew, Mark and Luke who it is supposed ‘mythologized’ a Jesus who for them became a cult figure.<sup>27</sup> Form critics tell us that the synoptics do not tell us who Jesus is, but what the early church believed Him to be. Guthrie (1981:24) argues that Form criticism through Rudolph Bultmann has produced “a sceptical attitude ... towards the historical Jesus.”

While the first quest (naturalism) was European and largely confined to Western Europe the second quest (form criticism) was primarily German. The third quest jumped continents, as it were and was by and large confined to America. The chief concern of this quest, writes Edwards (2005:20), “is the attempt to understand the historical Jesus through the lenses of the social sciences, cross-cultural anthropology, and the ideology of liberation.” While the first two quests sought to separate Jesus from his Jewish background thus making His New Testament verification indistinct, the third quest seeks to restrict Him to His Jewish background, thus making Him universally ineffective.

## **5.3. The Quest for the Historical Jesus**

This quest gave birth to the infamous Jesus seminar that began in 1985 and continued subsequently to determine the veracity of words and deeds of Jesus in the gospels by means of the ballot vote. This think tank of scholars has by and large determined authenticity by general consensus and they have even included the Gnostic gospel of Thomas as containing more verifiable information than the synoptic writers. The results of the voting in this seminar show that eighty two percent of the words attributed to Jesus were not spoken by Him (Edwards, 2005:26).

### **5.3.1. Demystifying the Mystery of Christ<sup>28</sup>**

The effort of this committee was centred more around demystifying the written texts of the synoptics rather than the Person of Christ Himself. However, we wish to remind the reader as stated above that all the scriptures speak of Him (John 5:39) and any effort to affect the one will invariably affect the other. The quest for the historical Jesus got under way two hundred years ago

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<sup>25</sup> Although sectioned here as a category in history, it is also a hermeneutical practice. We have therefore included more notes on this in chapter five where we undertake to assess scripture relevant to our theme.

<sup>26</sup> We shall say more about this in 3.3 below.

<sup>27</sup> This de-mythologizing was mostly confined around Mark as his was the earliest gospel written.

<sup>28</sup> The following four points hark back to the time of the early church and may seem to be chronologically outside the parameters of what we have suggested as an outline for this survey. However, the reader is reminded that it does fall under the banner of the “Jesus Seminar” which only took place in 1985.

(Dunn, 2005:12) and perhaps more than any other enquiry has been the bane of modern evangelicalism. The literary culture of the last two centuries has formed the eye glass from which to view Jesus who was largely in an oral culture in Palestine. The quest itself began as a reaction to the Chalcedonian Creed, which stated regarding Christ, “perfect in God head and perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man” (Dunn, 2005:16). European culture stained glassed Him so above humanity that it become almost insufferable to think of Him as a mere man. If He was “the fullness of the Godhead” (Col. 2:9) how then could He be “tempted as we are” (Heb. 4:15), was the perplexing question. The Christ of Europe was colourful and exalted while the Jesus of Palestine walked around in slippers and slept under trees. As caricatures go the Christ of Europe was more refined and dignified while the Christ of Palestine was more like a hippie with open toed sandals and long hair. In Palestine sight was needed to understand Jesus while in Europe faith was what was believed to unlock His mystery. Thus became the divide known as the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history. The Christ of faith clouded the Jesus of history so that He became indistinguishable and thus began the crusade to rescue Him from the dogma of creeds. The layers of colour that distorted the original were to be removed like paint stripping (Dunn, 2005:34). It was an effort to work back to the original Jesus of Palestine with warts and all.

### **5.3.2. The Jewish Problem**

Regarding the Jesus of history it became blasphemous to refer to Him as Lord, for the Jews were governed by the Mosaic *shema* that allowed no meanderings in reference to Jehovah. The first century Christians were compelled, by virtue of what they believed, to refer to Him as Lord, yet the Old Testament scriptures reserved that title exclusively for Jehovah. The scandal intensified as Christianity grew outside the theological parameters of the Temple domain, which some estimate to be at least one hundred mile radius (Edwards, 2005:47). That Christ received the title Lord which was unambiguously Jehovah’s title, brought on them the unnecessary nomenclature of polytheists (Edwards, 2005:50). They were believed to worship one who was second to God but Christians asserted that He was one with God (Col. 1:15). For the first century Jews the Messiah was expected to be a human, but Jewish Christians came to understand Him as divine. When the first missionaries took the gospel beyond Jerusalem, indeed to the uttermost parts of the world, it was falsely believed that they upgraded and updated Jesus with a personality that the current Greco-Roman world would favour. The first century Jews accused them of ‘apotheosizing’ (refer 3.3.3) (Edwards, 2005:52) Jesus to accommodate a culture that would associate with the idea of a superhuman like Hercules, Dionysus etc. The accusation was that the world needed a larger than life hero and the Jesus of Palestine who was ignominiously killed did not foot the bill and thus had to be made culturally relevant. That a human can be elevated was not unheard of in their culture and Jesus took his number in their queue. So while the original effort of the apostles was to elevate Jesus to deity, it caved in at Jerusalem, but found commodious setting in Greek culture. However, scholarly criticism continues to assert that Christians apotheosize Jesus as the Greeks

had done to their heroes. Their majority claim shouts down at the minority. Notwithstanding, as Edwards (2005: 54) correctly points out, "it remains an abstraction of research."

### **5.3.3. The Apotheosis hypothesis or godlike theory**

This theory infers that Jesus did not consider Himself to be God nor did his followers consider Him to be. His deification *developed* as the century grew. Edwards (2005:52) points to a probable reason for this apotheosizing. It is that this god-like status may be somewhat attractive to the Hellenistic mind. The proclamation that Jesus is Lord is an invention of the New Testament writers rather than an actual historical fact. This view, at best, allows Jesus to be an outstanding human figure and we are back to where all heresy brings us to the reduction of Christ to a mere man.

### **5.3.4. The Ventriloquism hypothesis or projection theory**

This is the supposition that the early church projected its own words and themes into the gospels just like a ventriloquist would project his voice onto his puppet. It is the assumption that the later ideals respecting a deliverer were projected back into the past setting as a base for the invention called Jesus (Warfield, 1950:19). It is the accusation from radical scepticism that much of what we read has been imposed by first century believers. This argument is weak because if anything it would be the other way around as Edwards (2005:62) points out "if this was the case, the gospels would tell us something about the early church, but we would learn little if anything about the historical Jesus." He goes on to inform that if the early church did project its own forms of speech into the gospel narratives then we would find uses of parables outside the New Testament. Instead one would search in vain for parables in the book of Acts, Epistles or early Christian literature. The first three gospels alone record no less than sixty parables of Jesus. Another factor is His use of the term 'Son of man', which He uses eighty one times. Aside from the one reference in Acts 7:56 and the other two in Rev. 1:13 & 14:14 one is hard pressed to find it anywhere in the writings of the early church (Edward,2005:62). Added to this is the usage of the term 'kingdom of God' (kingdom of heaven). Jesus uses it eighty five times in the synoptics and it is only used five times in the rest of the New Testament and then vanishes from Church history. If early Christians *projected* Him onto these pages we call the gospels why then are these not found anywhere else? This theory does not even rise to the dignity of being called a theory.

### **5.3.5 The Gentile question**

While the deity of Jesus was a struggle to the Jews, the humanity of Jesus was a struggle to the Greeks (Horton, 2011:471). It was like stating that God (spirit) became trapped in matter (evil). This was why it was foolishness to them (1 Cor. 1:23).

This view asks the question whether Gentiles could ever be saved. It was a consideration of the first church council (Acts 15) (Edwards, 2005:64) and does not appear as a problem in the gospels.

If projection was in vogue we would have read of it there. The Apostle Paul's vocabulary was distinctively different from Jesus. When writing to the Gentiles he used words like justification, sanctification, reconciliation etc. While acknowledging the fact that Jesus taught on these issues, we also acknowledge that legally speaking He did not use these words. If projection was in view we would have seen these words used frequently.

## **6. Conclusion**

God has predestined us 'to be conformed to the image of His Son' (Rom. 8:29). This is the final standard for the Christian and his ultimate reality. We look forward with excitement at such a prospect. However, where is the excitement in looking forward to becoming like someone who is peccable? How do I look forward to becoming like someone who could have sinned if He wanted to? That is not too dissimilar from what I am now. We asked in the opening paragraph regarding the sensibility of the nature of an investigation that seeks to query the possibility of sin in the Son of God in His Incarnation. We are glad that thus far regarding Church history we have seen that such a deliberation was not unique. It is inescapable that Christ be the centre of all things local to our restricted minds. Warfield is correct to summarise, "Every true religion lives not because of 'accidental truths of history', but because of 'eternal truths of reason.'" While the truths of history has served us well, we cannot go any further unless we harness the truths of reason and the next two chapters hopefully would serve this purpose.

We have shown that delinquent views regarding His sinless nature have far reaching consequences most especially in terms of gospel preaching, i.e., to present a Christ that alone can save but is peccable is no gospel at all. The Church was on a quest to harmonise His humanity and deity and that is what we have tried to record above. They were found defending His humanity to the exclusion of His deity and then found defending His deity at the expense of His humanity and when they found some means to harmonise His two natures they fused it so indistinctly that they robbed Him of His separate natures. From Apollinaris to Arius the pendulum swung to either extreme; therefore Berkhof (1949:106) correctly observes, "All the Christological heresies that arose in the early church originated in the failure to combine all these elements in the doctrinal statement of the truth." The sweeping overview of Church history that we have provided above is evidence of this fact. If the history of this issue proves anything, it proves the consistency of confusion. Notwithstanding, we also agree with Frame (2002:763) that historical schools of thought are useful categories for analysis, but poor guides for thought because one cannot resolve issues of truth by historical description; attempts to do that are called "genetic fallacies." Therefore we will now proceed in the next chapter to assess arguments for His peccability so as to display fairness in this evaluation and to further prove the overall claim of this study.

## Chapter 3: The Arguments for Peccability

### 1. Introduction

There have been notable attempts in the past to desupernaturalize Jesus; but to rid Him of the miraculous is to rid Him of His person. As Warfield (1950:19) points out, He “is the greatest miracle of them all.” It is no secret that people have a fascination with the Person of Jesus as “someone dressed up in robes borrowed from philosophy” (Dunn, 2005: 11) or a blonde-haired blue-eyed hippie from the Middle-east. The huge interest and reaction worldwide to the movies ‘*The Passion of the Christ*’ and ‘*The Da Vinci code*’ prove this fact. Even lesser movies like *Evan Almighty* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* tend to haul in box office cash substantiating this claim. Guthrie (2010:14) points out that “The Library of Congress says more than seventeen thousand books exist about Jesus.” This enigmatic Middle-Eastern man has successfully captured the attention of people for over two millennia. In response to the question “Who is this man?” Guthrie (2010:14) enumerates eight views identified by the majority segments in society.

- Modern Jews, who mostly reject Him as Messiah, nonetheless often see Him as a Torah-observant Jewish reformer who stirred up trouble and was the unfortunate victim of a political witch-hunt.
- Doubters of the orthodox Christian message, such as Bart Ehrman and Marcus Borg, allow that Jesus was a great (albeit misunderstood) human teacher who never intended to be worshipped.
- Political or religious revolutionaries see Jesus as a kindred spirit who was seeking to liberate the poor from injustice.
- According to scholar Stephen Prothero in his book ‘*Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know-and Doesn’t*’ (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), “Buddhists revere him as a bodhisattva, Hindus as an avatar of God.”
- The unknown author of the Gnostic Gospel of Judas presents Jesus as an essentially spiritual being who longed to escape this corrupt earth.
- Novelist Dan Brown presents Jesus as a misunderstood feminist who was husband of Mary Magdalene.
- Muslims see Jesus as a great prophet who will come again (but not as the Son of God).
- Christians see Jesus as Immanuel, God with us. In this vein, the Nicene Creed of the fourth century calls him “the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, Very God of very God.”

Warfield (1950:206) reminds us that there are four varieties of Christology, the Trinitarian, the Kenotic, the Messianic, and the Prophetic. The first two allow for a God-man, the first in fact and the second in theory. The second two give us merely a man Jesus. The absolute assertion that Christ is God formed the core of early Christian dogma and was formulated in a time of barely

fifteen years of Christ's death (Van de Beek, 2002?:133, footnote 117). However, as the Church grew, matured dogma needed to be stated in more scientific and succinct terms. The study of the historical Jesus really started in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Berkhof, 1949:121). Up until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Christology was theocentric but as a new Christological period was ushered in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the point of view became more anthropocentric. The contemplation of sin in man is hard enough, but its presence, or lack thereof, in the Son of God is admittedly "the most difficult one of all in Christology" (Van de Beek, 2002?: 41). He later adds (2002?:155) that "Theology is not about theoretical possibilities, but about reality" and none more so, we must add, than the reality of the person of Jesus Christ.

We will not consider the peccability of Christ as a *theoretical possibility* but only in terms of the reality of the Person in relation to His Father. Notwithstanding we pursue this chapter with a view to assess fairly the view called 'Peccability.' It is the view that though Jesus did not sin He could have considering He was incarnated in human flesh, which is susceptible to sin. This is called *potuit non peccare* (ability not to sin). The discussion of this issue has been around for a very long time (Wong, 1997:128). However, as a primer to this assessment we will first address the issue of whether Jesus considered himself God, and if this is so we must then assess the probability of His temptation.

## **2. The Empathy of Peccability**

Christology is never a problem argues Cook (1981:141) unless one seeks to predicate and posit both the humanity and divinity of this one person. This is where the language of the ancient church is crucial, and concerning language he further adds (1981:202): "The origin and goal of all Christological language, whether it be historical, mythical, or metaphysical, is Jesus." Admittedly this is at the heart of the battle as has been shown in chapter two. The science of Christology is a human effort to bring expression to the mystery of Jesus and as we have seen by the survey offered in chapter two, this mystery is scientifically beyond expression. Notwithstanding, there is something inherently appealing in a peccable saviour (Anon, 1996). It is that we then have one who is similar instead of superior to us. This is the Arian heresy all over again. We have one who can defeat sin and that encourages us to the same end. The Buddhist Scholar Machida (1999:84) argues regarding the passage in John 8:3-8 where Jesus silently wrote on the ground before handling the incident regarding the woman taken in adultery. He concludes that Jesus' "silent gesture" was Him "revealing an awareness within himself of the same evil nature as the woman's". In that He sympathised with her was proof of his sinfulness not sacredness. This may be of immense comfort to many that if Jesus can overcome sin then we too can do the same. If anything a peccable saviour seems more approachable than an impeccable one. However what appeals to a fallen nature cannot be license to reconstitute the Son of God for the purposes of empathy. He is the God-man and nothing should be more appealing than that! Sanders (2009: 15) astutely

observes: “Most errors have their rise in a defective view of the person of Christ, and this in turn is reflected in an inadequate or erroneous view of the nature of His work.” The famous Sceptic David Hume once said, “If He [Jesus] has human interests, He must also have human weaknesses. And the chief of those weaknesses would be, a complete disregard for inferior creatures” (Thomas & Thomas, 1947:160-161). For Hume, the measure of a person’s weakness makes for his inferiority. Thus applied to Christ he would conclude that He is inferior as His weakness suggests. How very lamentable is this reasoning, or lack of it. However, it is expected that sceptics like Hume reason thus. In this sense “the ogres of unbelief storm the citadel of truth” (Thomas & Thomas, 1947:161). R. C. Sproul (2000:11) reminds us that “Foundational thinking cares about the difference between truth and falsehood because it cares about good and evil. The ancient maxim probably from the mouth of Socrates still applies: “The unexamined life is not worth living.”” With this in mind we proceed to ‘care about the differences between truth and falsehood.’ We accept that it is foundational and consequently crucial and offer the following chapter to prove that there is a difference with a Christ that could have sinned and one that could not have sinned.

Church history has been seen to view the two natures of Christ as the reduction of His divinity to His humanity as reflected in Arius, or the division of His divinity from His humanity as in Nestorius or the confusion of the two totally in one as in Eutychus. A harmony was seldom in vogue. Christ has come to *judge, save and reign*. Horton (2011:453) is correct to conclude that “he does this as divine and human.”

Classical Church history was largely wrapped around Chalcedon as was shown in the previous chapter, but even with that Christological dogmas set in stone the split with the Alexandrian brand of Christianity emerged. Van de Beek (2002?:90) points out that Cyril and his team separated to convene two decades later at Ephesus (431). This Church split weakened the Church considerably and the advent of Islam through the Ottoman Empire was fast becoming a reality. The division of the Church laid the tracks for the locomotive of Islam to steam into Europe unhindered. The ‘Islamization<sup>29</sup> of Europe’ (Pryce-Jones, 2004) brought a new consideration of Christ which dominated the halls of academia, making the present evaluation even more serious.

Of what nature is God’s revelation in Jesus Christ? This is the question we have answered above. We will now move our assessment further into His humanity.

### **3. Peccability Based on His Humanity**

The humanity of Jesus is the greatest wonder of the world. To a large degree it is inexplicable and bewildering yet profoundly simple. However we do not believe it wise nor expedient to attempt to

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<sup>29</sup> Sometimes spelled ‘Islamicization’, but it is the same thing.

understand His humanity apart from His deity, for the latter preceded the former. Warfield (1950:19) is quoted in full for the perspective he offers. Regarding His Incarnation he writes:

“It is the portrait not of a merely human life, though it includes the delineation of a complete and a completely human life. It is the portrayal of a human episode in the divine life. It is, therefore, not merely connected with supernatural occurrences, nor merely colored by supernatural features, nor merely set in a supernatural atmosphere: the supernatural is its very substance, the elimination of which would be the evaporation of the whole.”

As an *episode in the divine life* it was not without its problems and in terms of the history of this problem Reymond (1998:546) points out:

“Jesus’ true humanness was questioned early on in the Christian era by the Gnostic sects (and later by the Manichees), who taught that his body was not real but merely phantasmal... This view, opposed by the apostles (see 1 John 4:2; 5:6) and by the apostolic father Ignatius in particular, has come to be called “docetism,” from the Greek verb *δοκέω*, *dokeō*, meaning “to seem.” At the ecumenical councils in the fourth and fifth centuries, the church had to oppose later docetic tendencies appearing in the forms of Apollinarianism, Eutychianism, and monophysitism, all deriving from the catechetical school of Alexandria.”

Commenting on Gal. 4:4 Warfield (1950:45) adds, “There is no suggestion that on becoming man and subject to law, He ceased to be the Son of God or lost anything intimated by that high designation.” While it does not belong to the definition of God to become human, God becomes human to accentuate humanity. Edwards (2005:114) explains, “The divine characteristics of Jesus are often muted in order to give full weight to his human solidarity.” The theology of Karl Barth never allowed for unfallen human nature (Horton, 2011:182). Barth was convinced that although the Son assumed human nature and did not commit any sins this nature was inherently sinful. He has no basis for saying this, as Horton (2011:182) rightly points out, “there is no correlation in Scripture between Jesus’ humanity – including weakness, suffering, and temptation – and sin. Sinfulness is accidental rather than essential to human nature.” To this is added the view of Evans & Coder (1998:57) who claim:

“There is not a note in the great organ of our humanity which, when touched, does not find a sympathetic vibration in the mighty range and scope of our Lord’s being, saving, of course, the jarring discord of sin. But sin was not an integral part of *un* fallen human nature. We speak of natural depravity, but, in reality, sin is *un* natural. God made Adam perfect and without sin. Since Adam’s fall, however, men are ‘born in sin’ (Ps. 51:5).”

The human nature of Jesus is not denied in the following pages but we must be careful not to assert that it has its own finality in distinction from the Logos. The old argument of similarity (in Christ) and dissimilarity (in God) (Sproul, 2000:76) when compared to us rides the ancient wave of Arianism and more specifically Arius’ teaching on *homoiousios*. If He were a human like all other humans then He would not be able to save them. We are in concord with Van de Beek (2002?:60) when he asserts rather boldly: “Without the union with the Logos, the human nature of Jesus would be a pure abstraction” or as he later pointed out a “theoretical possibility” (2002?:155). This means

that when we speak about Jesus in his humanity on His own apart from His deity we have crossed the line, so to speak. The gospels do not mention nor infer that His divinity swallowed up His humanity and neither do the epistles. 1 Tim. 6:15-16 declares that He is “the blessed and only potentate, the king of kings and Lord of lords.” This is a categorical assertion of who He is as not only transcendent, but according to this language, indistinguishable. The apostle Paul goes on to state that He “alone has immortality” (1 Tim. 6:16) and this is what He has. Then he writes that He is “dwelling in unapproachable light” and because of this He has a limited audience and therefore man cannot see Him. Consequently “honour and everlasting power” are ascribed to Him. Sentiments such as these not only make God and Christ indistinguishable but they serve to reinforce the indivisibility of His two natures. It is not to be reduced (Arius), divided (Nestorius), or confused (Eutychus).

It seems that people are more reticent to speak of His humanity than they are of His deity and Cullman (1959:93) laments this view. He writes:

“I cannot share the timorousness of many theologians who do not venture to speak of the ‘moral perfection’ of Jesus because they fear that this would automatically mean falling back into the liberal view of the life of Jesus...the author of Hebrews, as perhaps no other early Christian theologian, had the courage to speak of the man Jesus in shockingly human terms – although at the same time he emphasized perhaps more strongly than any other the deity of the Son.”

As pointed out in our introduction clearly everyone has some theory about who He is. The subtraction of Christ from the conception of God is the confusion of all. This was the error of Karl Barth. For Barth it was not just another society that was needed but an entirely different theology. Van de Beek (2002?:16, footnote 19) argues that he was clear enough to present the reality of Jesus but only obscurely presented His humanity and an obscure humanity reflects a hint of Docetism.

It is accepted that the epistle to the Hebrews understands the humanity of Jesus in a more comprehensive way than the gospels or any other early Christian writing (Cullman, 1959:94). Yet Milne (1982:125) points out that virtually all students of the gospels narratives are in agreement with the humanity of Jesus. The gospels begin with His human genealogy (Matt. 1:1-16 & Lk. 3:23-38). One could argue over His conception, but His gestation and delivery was certainly not out of the ordinary (Matt. 1:25; Lk. 2:7 & Gal. 4:4). His growing up years and adolescence was normal too (Lk. 2:40-52; Heb. 5:8). The following points will unpack the question of His humanity within the context of His deity. In his commentary on Hosea Charles Lee Feinberg (1990:56) recites:

“We are told that Napoleon the Great on the Island of St. Helena said to General Bertrand, ‘I tell you, Bertrand, I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man... Everything about him [Him] amazes me. His spirit overawes me, and his [His] will confounds me. There is no possible comparison between him [Him] and any other

being in the world. He is truly a being by himself [Himself]... His birth, and the history of his [His] life, the profoundness of his [His] doctrine... his [His] gospel... his [His] empire, his [His] march across the ages - all this is to me a wonder, an insoluble mystery.”

Given this secular humanist’s acknowledgment in his beatific meditation, as accounted for by Feinberg, it is hard to see peccability as a reasonable alternative. Peccability is not normal for Him. Even as a Man He is set apart like no man. We will see that despite the great scandal of His humanity (Cullman, 1959:98) the New Testament texts that most robustly emphasize His deity also emphasize His humanity. It is also germane to the present inquiry to bring to light the difference between His humanness and our fallenness and the difference between His body and our body.

### **3.1. The Difference between His Humanness and Fallenness**

Peccability should not be discussed based on His humanity alone but should be seen as contiguous with His divinity. Van de Beek (2002?:228) states that “Jesus is the ideal human being, as intended by God. He is the person God had always envisioned.” It is not denied that He is the ideal human, who is to be apart from sin, but we need to be careful not to assume from this that we can be exactly like Him for though He was one of us He was not exactly like us in fallenness. Warfield (1950:67) asserts, “Nothing that is human is alien to Him except sin...He recognises the evil of those about Him, but never identifies Himself with it.” To this Cook (1981:191) adds that “Jesus is God’s Word because in his personal identity he *is* the truth about the human condition.” The Spirit of God does not give us the *essence* of the Tri-une God, but only the capacity to commune and intimately relate to God forever. Sproul (2000:157) quoting Soren Kierkegaard informs us that, “there is a movement from a person’s essential condition to his existential condition”. This movement is described in the theology of the Fall. Sin cuts a person off from his essential humanity and plunges him into his current condition –estrangement from God.” It is true that sin cuts off one’s essential humanity but it is not true that this is what occurred with Christ’s humanity. The theology of the Fall does not call for such an extreme conclusion. Assumption theology has been the bane of biblical theology! We recall Feuerbach’s axiom that “all theology is anthropology” (Sproul, 2000:138). As pointed out in the previous chapter<sup>30</sup> there is an indelible link between Christology and anthropology. In the same context we must concede here that the study of God will imply the study of man for it is through Him we understand ourselves and in that sense we can endorse Feuerbach’s sentiment. Given that the ideal is to be like Jesus, it is in that sense that Van de Beek (2002?:81) is correct to state that “Christology becomes the measure for anthropology” and still later he posits it as the “hitching post for anthropology” (Van de Beek: 2002?:228). However, to the extreme that God is created in the image of man is not a view we take to help us understand the incarnation, for the incarnation is not a reduction of God but a revelation to man or as Cook (1981:170) puts it: “The concept of the incarnation is the indivisibility

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<sup>30</sup> Refer point 3

of this man Jesus with the eternal essence of God.” Barth taught peccability assuming from Galatians 4:4 that “born under the law” automatically implies “born under the *curses* of the law”. However as Horton (2011:469) accurately points out, “having been born “under the law” in no way entails having been born under its condemnation.”

According to Reformed Theology all that humanity entails is ‘Total Depravity’ and this is certainly not true of Jesus. Van de Beek (2002?:27) concludes, ‘God bears the entire humanity *and all that it entails*’ [*emphasis mine*]. The addition “and all that it entails” therefore becomes unnecessary. In explaining Augustine’s view on this issue, Berkhof (1949:138) summarises that man was created with the ability not to sin (*posse non peccare*) and would have eventually passed to the state of inability to sin (*non posse peccare*), but because he sinned he thus entered the state of inability not to sin (*non posse non peccare*). The operative clue here is the word ‘created’ which Jesus wasn’t; therefore Augustine’s explanation cannot be transferred onto Jesus.

The main thrust of apostolic preaching is to prove that “Jesus ... is the Christ” (Acts 17:3) (Bible: 1997). His divinity is inextricably linked to His humanity and such fusion is beyond the scope of any scientific distinction. Luke informs us in this verse that the apostles explained and demonstrated from the scriptures “that the Christ (divine nature) had to suffer and rise again from the dead (human nature).’ The very words of Luke inform us that they acknowledged the harmony of these two natures and respected the mystery of it. In reference to the mystery of Jesus’ personality the twentieth century Scottish preacher James Stewart wrote: “He was a startling coalescence of contraries” (Zacharias, 2010:27). In the same context, the apostolic message indicates that such union formed the premise of the gospel. Therefore to strip it of this element is to rob the gospel of its vital statistic and as a result of this, apostolic preaching reaped multitudes of the elect harvest as documented by Luke in Acts. Moreover Warfield (1950:58) observes, “Luke places his gospel by the side of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the prominence it gives to the human development of the Divine being whose life on earth it is depicting and to the range of temptation to which He was subjected.”

The association of the natural with the supernatural served as a stumbling block to the Athenians for they could not conceive of the logic of Paul’s presentation when he spoke of a natural man (Jesus) achieving, by a volitional act, a supernatural accomplishment (the Resurrection). The chasm was too large to bridge and thus for them this was a “strange thing” (Acts 17: 20). Paul later attempted to bridge this gap with his subsequent sermon (vs. 23-29). The divine nature cannot be ‘shaped’ (17:29) because God is Spirit. However, this does not mean that He cannot dwell as the Incarnation proves.

The humanity of Jesus was to demonstrate the authenticity of his incarnation and not the weakness of divinity in Him (Guthrie, 2010:60). The gospels never seek to hide the obvious difficulties with His humanity (cf. Mk. 5:30, 8:5, 23, 9:16, 21, 10:36, 10:51, 15:34, Lk. 2:49, 8:45, Jn. 11:34, 18:34). It is a fallacy to suppose that His humanity implies His peccability (Anon, 1996) just because this is legitimately so for us. We are not the prototype of His person. We must remember that He was first God before He took on the form of human flesh (Phil. 2:7-8). Clement of Alexandria claimed that Christ only used food, not because He needed it, but simply to guard against a denial of His humanity and that He was incapable of emotions of joy and grief (Berkhof, 1949: 77). Clement's comment proves why the distinction of His body and ours is crucial to the understanding of this subject.

### **3.1.1. His Body and our Body**

In the distinctively Christian notion of the incarnation of Christ (Cook, 1981:119) we find a harmony between "the lowliness of God's greatness and the greatness of God's lowliness" (Willard, 1999). His blinding majesty, which usually leads to death for the naked eye (Ex. 33:20), is made amenable for us because He clothed Himself in the humility of our humanity (Horton, 2011:593). The completeness of His identification with us is nowhere questioned, but despite this completeness His flesh is not only different from ours but noticeably above ours as well (Warfield, 1950:50). Moreover, Warfield (1950:139) goes on to argue that the human nature of Jesus was not "generic" or general but specific and individual. This is clearly evidenced from a study of His emotions which was unique to His personality. We find this to be pertinent to our theme in that when the generic nature of His humanity is asserted then peccability is easily melded into that personality but when the uniqueness is affirmed the restrictions upon such a view is severely curtailed.

### **3.1.2. His Bearing of our Guilt**

The idea of bearing someone else's guilt does not square with the responsibility and consequences of sin. This issue has been in the theological warzone for some time (Van de Beek, 2002?:86). Does soteriology teach that Jesus bears our entire being including our guilt? The doctrine of the Atonement implies a sinless substitute for a sinful people (Matt. 26:28, 2 Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:3, Heb. 9:28, 1 Pet. 2:24, & 3:18). This is because the atonement is grounded in the united determination of the Tri-une God and a proclivity to sin in the one implies disunity in the other. With a devotional undertone Dietrich Bonhoeffer (2011) expresses the following:

*"He can enter into the communication of their [man's] guilt...Out of His selfless love, out of His sinless nature, Jesus enters into the guilt of human beings. He takes it upon Himself. A sinless nature and guilt bearing are bound together in Him indissolubly. As the sinless one Jesus takes this guilt upon Himself and under the burden of this guilt He shows that He is the sinless One." [emphases mine]*

His impeccability is asserted four times in this snippet and its association to guilt bearing is undeniable. It is not denied that He became “a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13) but this curse was clearly for the sins of the people. To put it another way, He was not cursed because He became a man but because as a man He bore sin (Warfield, 1950:144).

### 3.2. The Difference between flesh and ‘the flesh’.

Menno Simons argued that Christ took on what he termed “celestial flesh” (Horton, 2011:471) –no doubt wanting to preserve His divinity. He went on to argue that Mary functioned only as a channel. It is not denied that Jesus had flesh for this is what he tangibly displayed to his disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24:39). What is denied is that because He had flesh it follows that He had ‘the flesh’. At the fall, as recorded in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sinned against God and because they did this they added a principle of havoc to their life that was not initially there (*posse non peccare* – ability not to sin). God had made them body, soul and spirit (1 Thess. 4:23 & Heb. 4:12) (Lloyd-Jones, 1995:40)<sup>31</sup> and they existed superbly like that. But now that they abandoned God’s will for their own they added to their nature something the New Testament writers like to call, “the flesh”. The Fall accounts for the loss of man’s standing before God, but it also records what man gained as a result of his choice. Prior to this they had flesh and blood, but they did not have ‘the flesh’. This was a new addition, so to speak. The New Testament writers never speak positively of this. Jesus had flesh and blood too but He did not have ‘the flesh’ which is the principle of the self-will (Kelly, n.d.:67). It is never said that ‘the flesh’ has the potential to sin; it is accepted that ‘the flesh’ is sinful. Paul declared this rather emphatically when he cried: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells (Rom. 7:18). Moreover the tension between ‘the flesh’ and the Spirit is notoriously and irreconcilably legend (cf. Gal. 5:17). These are just samples of the New Testament’s view on this entity. Jesus always went about His Father’s business. He always did His Father’s will. It is not my flesh and blood that makes me to transgress the law it is the flesh in me that does that. Jesus had flesh but He did not have ‘the flesh’. According to Paul in Rom. 8:3 God did not send his Son in “the flesh”, but “in the *likeness of sinful flesh*” [emphasis mine]. As Warfield (1950:144) makes clear, “He assumed the flesh of unfallen man” (cf. also Evans & Coder, 1998:57). “The Flesh” is always commensurate with sin and for that reason alone cannot be associated with Christ. Paul has written clearly in Rom. 8:3 that God “condemned sin in the flesh” and not in His flesh. Although His flesh and blood was real it was in the *likeness of sinful flesh* and not in sinful flesh.

With his usual pithy style Tertullian said “Sin is not material but natural” (Van de Beek, 2002?:43). We do well to remember that the individual in question though possessing a human nature was

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<sup>31</sup> The tri-partite nature of man will always be an ongoing debate as some theologians only acknowledge two parts, but go on to suggest that the latter, the non-material is in two parts, i.e. soul and spirit (Lloyd-Jones, 1993:155). The reader is left to fend for himself on this terrain as we are not attempting to solve that issue here. Our view is stated in the paragraph itself and is, as far as we are concerned, pertinent to the argument itself.

also 'very God'. This is affirmed by Cyril (Van de Beek 2002?:53) who states that He, "became flesh without ceasing to be what he was." So as natural as this body was it was unlike any other natural person. For man, sin of the flesh is a natural consequence and a result of the sinful flesh but for Christ, who clearly did not possess 'the flesh', sin is unnatural because He had no 'sinful flesh' but just flesh and therefore sin was not a natural consequence. Therefore we conclude that flesh does not necessarily have to contain sin for it to be real.

### **3.3. The Difference Between Suffering and Sinning**

At the height of Jesus' sufferings He uttered the words "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (Mk. 15:34). While Soho Machida (1999:81), the Buddhist Scholar, admits that Jesus is "the most sacred object of Christian faith" he also exclaims that the degree of the suffering as expressed in Mark 15:34 is the key in showing him up as a sinful human being. He confesses that Jesus did not commit any "specific sin" (1999:82) and therefore deserves high admiration but not excessive mystification because He too like us was burdened with "Original Sin". Machida's argument is that because Original Sin is at the core of human existence and Jesus was human, it follows that He was under this "burden". His conclusion is, "If Jesus were completely transcendent, He would not have had to "suffer many things: (Mk. 8:31-33) (1999:82). Berkhof (1949:181) observes that Peter the Lombard incorrectly assumed that Christ merited for Himself freedom from suffering by his pious life, but this merit did not keep Him from suffering and death for He entered into it voluntarily and this He did not for Himself but for sinners. If there was a tendency towards peccability then He would have entered into it dutifully (not voluntarily) because He would have been aware of this precarious proclivity within Himself. Summarising Irenaeus, Van de Beek (2002?:73) states that "The Son suffers the experience of the disobedience of the world even without the incarnation. The incarnation means that he [He] begins to bear *our* suffering." Van de Beek along with Irenaeus attempts to rescue this issue of suffering by not reducing it to just the incarnation. Granted the brunt of suffering was carried in the Incarnation, but the fact of suffering existed along with sin.

### **3.4. The Difference Between Limited and Unlimited Perception**

The gospel writers record the human limitations of Jesus without apology as if to infer that such limitation, as per our understanding of limitations, do not for them pose a quandary as to His impeccability. They state that He was hungry (Matt. 21:18); He was tired (Jn. 4:6); He was thirsty (Matt. 11:19); and finally He succumbed to human death. They go on to record that He was a man full of emotion. He exhibited joy (Lk. 10:21); sorrow (Matt. 26:37); love (Jn. 11:5); compassion (Matt. 9:36); astonishment (Lk. 7:9) and anger (Mk. 3:5). He wept as a man would (Lk. 19:41). It was John Calvin (2010:228) who stated categorically:

"Certainly those who imagine that the Son of God was exempt from human passions do not truly and sincerely acknowledge him to be a man. And when it is even said that the divine power of Christ rested and was concealed for a time, that by his sufferings he might discharge all that belonged to the Redeemer, this was so far from being

absurd, that in no other way could the mystery of our salvation have been accomplished.”

We are happy at this juncture to conclude with Calvin that human limitations do not account for peccability and to insinuate that it does is to be ‘absurd’.

### 3.4.1. Limited in Knowledge

There is admittedly a difficulty to explain with certainty why there are an equal amount of verses that show His intuitive perception compared with those who do not. However, here again, the writers of the gospels do not apologise for this. There are passages where Jesus clearly displays ignorance not only of people’s intentions and situations (Mk. 5:30; 6:38, 9:21) but also of future events (Mk. 13:32). Apologetically we must at this point add that ignorance does necessarily equate to error. Milne (1982:126) explains as follows:

“Human thought, experience and perception form one unbroken continuum. It is impossible therefore to think of Jesus as mistaken at some fundamental point in his convictions, or deliberately teaching as truth the erroneous views of his age, and yet cling to the notion that he can act nonetheless as our morally impeccable representative and sin-bearer.”

If Jesus was *mistaken* in any one of these three areas of the continuum (thought, experience, and perception) then it would cease to be a continuum, at least for Him anyway, and this would invariably hinder His representation of us as our sin-bearer.

Thomas Aquinas divided Christ’s human knowledge into two categories. He referred to them as *scientia infusa* and *scientia acquisita* respectively (Berkhof, 1949:118).

- *scientia infusa* (infused or innate knowledge) means that He can know all things that revelation makes known to man and He can know it perfectly albeit creaturely. In other words, it had certain parameters.
- *scientia acquisita* (acquired or attained knowledge) means that He knew all that could be known through His intellectual faculties. It seems that though an infusion from without (revelation) and an acquisition from within (intellect) He did not possess omniscience in His humanity because as Berkhof (1949:118) sums up, “there was no communication of attributes between the natures in the abstract.” In other words, the finite cannot comprehend the infinite or as the Reformed adage goes, *finitum non capax infiniti* (Berkouwer, 1954:288). There is a limitedness in His Person in terms of His human nature, but not in terms of His divine nature. The attributes of both deity and humanity are predicated in one Person and this is what Chalcedon affirmed (Horton, 2011:479).

The fact that Jesus was growing in wisdom (Lk. 3:52) does not contribute to the argument of peccability. An article for Liberty University (Anon, 1996) quotes Sahl in defence of this view. He

objects that “if it is possible that the Lord Jesus Christ could succumb to or be deceived by sin, then one must also conclude that it is possible for Him to have given inaccurate information about eternal things when He was growing in wisdom and stature and favour with God and man”. As you can see such a view is preposterous and would certainly impugn our righteous Lord. Horton (2011:478) correctly concludes as follows: “As God he remains transcendent, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and eternal, while as human he remains finite, limited in soul and body, and spatio-temporally circumscribed.”

We have shown above that in terms of His humanity peccability is a precarious point and we turn now to His own testimony.

#### **4. Peccability Based on His Testimony**

Although to be dealt with at length in chapter 5 of this dissertation, we must, at this juncture, acknowledge that there are scriptures used to further the argument of Christ’s peccability. These scriptures, as will be seen are on the surface quite convincing yet upon reflection they do not at all serve this view.

##### **4.1. Was Christ Good?**

Machida (1999:87) posits, “There is a dark side to God’s sacredness, which is typically observed in Yahweh, a wrathful and jealous God. Jesus, who is, after all, directly descended from the lineage of Yahweh exhibits traces of his fierce personality (cf. Matt. 21:12-13)”. He concludes that Jesus’ “violent act” in the temple was proof that he was not sacred. This degree of hostility, with the cursing of the fig tree to boot, evinces His “evil nature” (1999:87-88). The Lord’s response to a rich young ruler has been used by G. C. Berkouwer to further the view of peccability. According to Berkouwer (1954:242) these words as stated by Jesus in Lk. 18:19 / Mk. 10:18 and a similar one in Matt. 19:17 infer that He “did not proceed from his absolute sinlessness or holiness, but rather places himself in the rank of sinful human beings.” The point of our Lord’s response according to Jamieson, Fausset & Brown (e-sword, 2000-2012) was to raise the young man’s conception of who He was. In an effort to clarify this often misunderstood text they explain as follows:

“Unless therefore we are to ascribe captiousness to our Lord, He could have had but one object - *to raise the youth’s ideas of Himself*, as not to be classed merely with other “good masters,” and declining to receive this title *apart from* the “One” who is essentially and only “good.” This indeed is but distantly hinted; but unless this is seen in *the background* of our Lord’s words, nothing worthy of Him can be made out of them. (Hence, *Socinianism*, instead of having any support here, is only baffled by it).”

The epithet ‘good Master’ was not usually applied to a Rabbi (Edersheim, 1896:339) and Jesus had to make sure that the young man thought more of Him than as just an average Rabbi in spite of the flattering epithet or else He could not save him. Given that no one is called a Rabbi by this predicate it is all the more clear why Jesus questioned the term ‘good’. To put it another way, the

young man did not call Jesus the only good master but as a good master He is evidently a good one among many good masters around. Therefore there is no contrast between Jesus and God in this text (Warfield, 1950:156) and to assume such is to return to Arian theology. Warfield (1950:166) is quick to remind us that the stress is on 'good' and not on the enclitic 'me'. In any event Jesus is not questioning His view of Himself but the young man's view of Him. What is contrasted is the youngster's concept of 'good' and God's expectation as laid out in the Law, which is good. To put it rather crudely, his understanding of good was bad. Warfield (1950:1740) summarises as follows, "This declaration... is no evidence against the sinlessness of Jesus; rather, it is the true expression of the distance which human consciousness –even the sinless consciousness of being human –recognizes between itself and the absolute perfection of God."

#### **4.2. Did He repent?**

The reference here is to the baptism of Christ at the Jordan by his cousin John (Matt. 3:15)<sup>32</sup>. It is alleged that because He had to convince John to baptise Him and that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, this can only mean that Jesus had to repent. All this is assumption theology at its best for the text in Matthew suggests none of this. Berkouwer's (1954:245) argument is that because He was already 'born under the law' (Gal. 4:4) and circumcised according to the law and presented in the Temple as per the law it is not unbecoming to think of Him as subjecting Himself to this law as laid down by John. There is a difference between the Mosaic Law and the Judaic Law (Anon, 1996). Furthermore it must also be remembered that John's 'law' was not a Mosaic law but a requirement for Israel to prepare to meet their expected Messiah. For Jesus to submit to this 'law' is to suggest that He too must prepare to meet His expected Messiah which, as can be seen, is ludicrous. Matthew records clearly that it was 'allowed or permitted' as the text clearly reads and implies a special dispensation, so to speak and therefore no repentance was recorded because none was needed. Arndt, Danker & Bauer (2000:157) suggest the meaning of the word "allowed" or "permitted" is, "*let it be so, let it go*".

#### **4.3. Was His Baptism like ours?**

As pointed out above, the reason for Christ's baptism was significantly different for the average Jew in attendance at the Jordan. Repentance is the antecedent to faith (Mark 1:5) but in our Lord's case He did not need "faith", He did not need to "believe". He was the Son of God, which Mark sets out to prove in the apology of His gospel. Wong (1997:131) implies that given the issue of John's baptism, being one of repentance, it is likely that Jesus, by virtue of His submission to it, became sinless (*non posse peccare*) after the baptism. But this is only plausible if He confessed His sin which is nowhere recorded for us to assume. Wong (1997:137) also goes on to conclude that the issue of His "sinfulness through the implication of His baptism did exist among Christians

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<sup>32</sup> Although this receives further treatment in chapter 5 it is dealt with here relative to the supposed defence of peccability.

at the time of the gospel redactions.” This also exists among Christians today, but that does not mean that there is credibility to that view albeit popular. The account in Luke’s gospel (3:21) clearly portrays that His baptism was after the peoples, which is to say that there was a difference.

Regarding confession of sin Macleod Campbell’s theory of vicarious repentance will help to see the potential error lurking within the peccability position. His view, as pointed out by Berkhof, (1949:203) is that the work of Christ consisted in the vicarious confession of sins in behalf of man. His explanation is that the suffering and death of Christ entered sympathetically into the Father’s condemnation of sin and the Father accepted it as a perfect confession of our sins. If Christ entered into any confession whatsoever albeit sympathetically He would be constituted a sinner and would at that moment be bereft of any vicariousness. It is only impeccability that answers to the Campbellian heresy! Conversely it will not do to suggest as Schleiermacher does, when stating his view on the Atonement of Christ, that He had a unique sinless perfection but only in so far as He was the ideal man in terms of His “unbroken union with God” (Berkhof, 1949:198). That is to say, His sinlessness was due to His obedience which is an open possibility for all men. To Schleiermacher He was an exemplar!

#### **4.4. How did He learn Obedience?**

Hebrews is not so much interested in Jesus becoming man as in his being man. It, like the gospels, does not track the process and progress of His physical growth but acknowledges the fact of it. Hebrew 5:7-8 says that Jesus ‘learned’ obedience which could imply to some readers that there was in Him at one time a principle contrary to obedience but this only “presupposes an inner human development” (Cullman, 1959:97). This issue of Him learning this is directly related to His humanity because it is connected to His ‘suffering’. Furthermore the context here relates this learning, so to speak, to His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane where He is seen to be at odds with His Father’s will. However the learning mentioned here is to be understood as Christ ‘accepting’ His Father’s will (Anon, 1996) which He did whilst in prayer in the Garden (Matt. 26:39 & 42). Berkouwer (1954:248) attempts to rescue the confusion by explaining that the ‘learning’ in question only means that Christ “*saw His work ever more clearly*”, and proceeded to do it. There is no ethical improvement or development insinuated by this word learning. According to Van de Beek (2002?:59) Emperor Justinian could not reconcile whether obedience belonged to God and he had harsh words of criticism against the forefather Origen because of this.

Moreover the issue of ‘learning obedience’ tends towards subordinationism, the idea that the Son is lower in rank of being than the Father. However, as Van de Beek (2002?:72) clarifies, “obedience is just as divine as power”. The Father and Son are One; therefore the Son’s obedience is an extension of the Father’s will through the Son’s incarnation and consequently a manifestation of His power. This is called the “*topos*” by Buddhist scholars, where the divine

intersects with the human (Machida, 1999:84) or more specifically where the spirit and flesh, light and darkness, divine and human, good and evil, intersect (1999:86). Cook (1981:175) asserts that “the proclamation of Jesus’ obedience even unto death (kerygma) is the indispensable basis for affirming his divinity (doxology)” which, it seems to me, presupposes His impeccability. Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite preferred this approach, but Origen rejected it (Van de Beek:2002?:70). Communion is the essence of the relationship of the Tri-unity and obedience as a factor must reside within this relationship and therefore cannot speak of superior and/or inferior but equality. His communion with His Father was unbroken and thus His obedience to the Father’s will was nothing but perfect (Scott, 2011:1)

## **5. Peccability Based on His Temptability**

As will be discussed in a larger degree in chapter five the issue of His temptability is pertinent to this end of the discussion and therefore a few comments are justified here.<sup>33</sup> As pointed out in Heb. 4:15 He “was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.” We agree with Cullman (1959:93) when he concludes that though, “He lived under the very same human conditions as we, he was the one human being without sin.” That is to say that living under the same conditions does not make one conditionally the same. The writer of Hebrews is replete with laudatory tones when it comes to the work of Christ, especially in His high priestly role (2:17, 12:2) and these expressions are there to prove an exalted humanity, not a common humanity. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1994:257-258) has stated with verity that, “No one has ever been tempted in this world by the devil as the Son of God was tempted.” He is referring to the degree of the temptation rather than the kind. The reason for this as Cullman (1959:95) points out, is that “they were messianic temptations which could be imposed only upon Christ,” and added to this were “the temptations presented by Jesus’ opponents in doctrinal debates (Mk. 8:33; 12:15; John 8:1 ff)”. This means that when we are assessing His temptation we should be careful not to draw too many comparisons with ours as this was not only an unprecedented event but also an unparalleled one. The idea of contrasts between the failure of the first Adam and the success of the last Adam seems to be what lies behind the synoptic reports (Cullman, 1959:164). Classical theology teaches that when Christ was incarnate, He became the new Adam (Sproul, 1996:34).

Having said that, we also offer the following with a view to clear any doubts regarding what is called the “Last Adam” and the “Second Man”. Although extensive in citation and properly belonging to the field of Soteriology, we believe it to be crucial to understanding the nature of the Person in question and His completed work. Watchman Nee (2006) explains as follows:

“In 1 Corinthians 15:45 & 47 two remarkable names or titles are used of the Lord Jesus. He is spoken of there as the “Last Adam” and He is spoken of there too as the “Second Man”. Scripture doesn’t refer to Him as the “Second Adam” but as the “Last

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<sup>33</sup> It must also be pointed out that the fact that Christ’s Temptation is dealt with under this point and further with a larger view in chapter five indicates the importance of this issue.

Adam”, nor does it refer to Him as the “Last Man” but as the “Second Man”. The distinction is to be noted for it enshrines a truth of great value. As the “Last Adam” Christ is the sum total of humanity and as the “Second Man” He is the Head of a new race. So we have here two unions. The one relating to His death and the other to His resurrection. In the first place His union with the race as the “Last Adam” began historically at Bethlehem and ended at the Cross and the tomb. In it He gathered up into Himself all that was in Adam and took it to judgement and death. In the second place our union with Him as the “Second Man” begins in Resurrection and ends in eternity, which is to say, it never ends....When therefore the Lord Jesus was crucified on the Cross He was crucified as the “Last Adam”...as the “Last Adam” He wipes out the old race; as the “Second Man” He brings in the new race. It is in His resurrection that He stands forth as the “Second Man”...We died in Him as the “Last Adam”, we live in Him as the “Second Man”.

Peccability therefore cannot inhere in One who has ended something old and began something new as that would logically infer that the new isn't so new after all. Berkhof (1949:108) states that according to Theodore of Mopsuestia Christ came out of the Temptation victorious but struggled with human passions and was in conflict while in it. This would imply that the satanic persuasion was besieging Him in some way. His victory, however, was based on two essential factors, viz., His sinless birth and the union of His manhood with the divine Logos. Added to this Cullmann (1959:123) has also argued that Jesus Himself considered this political conception of His work of salvation an especially great temptation and indicates how attractive it must have been to Him. Then he goes on to conclude that “A man is only tempted by something to which he feels drawn” and this does concur with what James tells us in 1:14. However, while this is true of men in general we counter this by reminding the reader that He is not just a man but the God-man as church history has fought to have included since Chalcedon, and secondly there is nothing in the text that asserts Jesus' looking for the things that Satan offered Him in the temptation. Quite the contrary: the text reads in Luke 4:5 that Jesus was “taken...up on a high mountain.” He did not go there on His own.

Moreover, there is a fundamental problem with Theodore's and Cullmann's argument and it is that there is an assumption here that His Temptation though an official event is reduced to just that particular episode. The assumption is that Christ never dealt with any form of temptation after or before that official event. Though an element of the gospels, the synoptics never let Him be tempted beyond the wilderness and Gethsemane, but it is the epistle to the Hebrews, as Cullmann observes (1959:94) that presupposes more occasions for His temptation. This is done not to increase the probability of peccability but, on the contrary, to confirm His impeccability. Robinson (cited by Van de Beek, 2002?:45) is extreme and unnecessary when he observes that Jesus “must have experienced the sexuality of Mary's touch when she washed His feet with her tears and dried it with her hair” (cf. Lk. 7:38). It is not enough to suggest that Jesus did not give in to the temptation, as if to rescue the person after drowning him. Cullman (1959:94) goes on to conclude: “Unless he [He] was really tempted, the claim that Jesus was without sin is fundamentally

meaningless... we can really assert in the strictest sense the sinlessness of one who was *attracted by temptations* exactly as we are" [*emphasis mine*]. I cannot agree with Cullman that there was any attraction, for nothing in the language indicates that.<sup>34</sup> The very tension experienced between the right and the wrong is an indication of indwelling sin. The battle is the result of the Fall. This convicts Jesus of sin which no one can do (cf. Jn. 8:46).<sup>35</sup> Bunyan (2007:118) shoots at this notion by describing the Prince of princes sojourn in Vanity Fair as a reference to Christ's incarnation on earth and His Temptation. In Pilgrim's Progress, Beelzebub tempts Him with the cities wares with a view, "that he might, *if possible*, allure that blessed One to cheapen and buy some of his vanities." The possibility according to Bunyan for the blessed One to 'buy some of his vanities' was not there. He concludes with a refreshing dogmatism that the blessed One, "*had no mind to the merchandise*, and therefore left the town *without laying out so much as one farthing upon these vanities*" [*emphasis mine*]. His temptation is not His temptability because He has "*no mind to the merchandise*". The fact that He was tempted in no way proves His ability to sin.

Origen insisted that Christ can bear temptation until the end and this is largely due to the fact that He excels in sinless choices<sup>36</sup>. Van de Beek (2002?:43) explains that, unlike us, He can do this because He perseveres. However if impeccability relies on perseverance only, then the daily life of Christ is a gamble. Van de Beek (2002?:43) helpfully points out that Luther used the word "endure" to explain this resolve in Christ.

The apostle James (1:13-14) states that "God cannot be tempted by evil" (the effect). It does not follow that Satan will not tempt His Son (the cause). Satan's at[tempt] could have been the cause, but because it did not follow in the effect, i.e., that Christ was "drawn away and enticed" (Bible, 1997), it failed. The cause did not bring about the desired affect not because there was anything wrong with the cause (the Temptation) but because He was impeccable. Satan's failure did not equate to any lack in the temptation but rather to the success of the Christ. The term "drawn away" is a hunting term and the term "enticed" is a fishing term. This is what James means in the previous verse (13) when he makes clear that "God cannot be tempted [drawn away or enticed] by evil". God cannot be predated upon! He is emphasizing the impossibility of God to be drawn away by desires and enticed. This is only true of man as James points out in verse 14 because the heart of man is wicked and deceitful above all (Jer. 17:9). God's "own desires" are not temptations but are the result of His perfect and holy will. It does not "entice" Him but glorifies Him! O while we agree that Jesus was tempted we disagree that He was *drawn away by His own desires and enticed* (Jackson, 2014:20).

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<sup>34</sup> Please refer to chapter 5, 1.3

<sup>35</sup> This is argued at greater length in chapter 5

<sup>36</sup> Refer 5.1 below

In an attempt to harmonise both possibilities of can and can't John Frame (2002:134) argues that He was physically and mentally able to sin but morally not able. Regarding the Temptation he writes, "He could struggle against physical obstacles, so why not against mental and spiritual ones as well." In answer to Frame's hypothesis we respond by stating that the struggle in the mind implies the consideration, to some extent, of the seed thought. There is nothing in the text to infer that Jesus gave it some thought, so to speak. Jesus did not have to entertain Satan's options to know the reality and force of temptation. The text nowhere intimates this! God is incapable of being tempted by evil (Jas. 1:13), that is, to be drawn away into evil. However, if it was true that His Son housed a covert proclivity to sin, then being tempted by it, so as to be drawn away into it, would be something that the Devil would have capitalised on. As Frame (2002:131) correctly observes, "An evil nature aggravates guilt, rather than mitigating it." Satan's defeat as recorded in the Scripture clearly suggests that as with God so with Christ – He could not be tempted by evil in the sense that He could not be drawn away by it. The entire incident was to prove His impeccability not His temptability. As Peter Jackson (2014:20) insists, it "did not come from within for He did not inherit a depraved nature from Adam." In addition, and in light of this issue, we would argue that Christ exhibited complete powers over the demonic kingdom and in that sense had bound the 'strong man' (Mark 3:27). As Brevard Childs (cited by Horton, 2011:333) points out, "His conquering of the demons demonstrated His control as creator." His Temptation as orchestrated By God demonstrated the same. Therefore, as creator, it follows that He can in no human way be peccable even when He has the audacious Beelzebub at His heels.

Moreover the apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians uses the phrase "tempt Christ" (1 Cor. 10:9) as in the sense of "provoke the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:22). According to the apostle to "provoke the Lord" in this sense is an impossibility for we are not stronger than He and for that matter neither is the Devil. Therefore to "tempt" Him or to "provoke" Him is not to lure Him into licentiousness or to get Him to explore the possibility of immorality or idolatry. If, however, He had the proclivity in Him this weakness would have been exploited by His arch fiend. It is quite clear that Satan has no hold on Him for His nature did not conform to the degradation of sin. Having proved this, we shall now explore the sin nature.

### **5.1. The Sin Nature**

At this point a definition might be useful. We refer to Stott (2006:ch. 7) who, with his usual economy of words, defines sins as "fundamentally the exaltation of self over God." We do not find that Jesus exalted His self over his Father. On the contrary, what we do find is His determination to do His Father's will at all costs. Sproul (1996:34) argues that though Christ, like Adam, was born peccable (i.e., temptable), He was not born with original sin. The logic seems inescapable, i.e., if Adam sinned without having original sin then Christ could have too. Sproul concludes with a question:

“Could Jesus have sinned if He had wanted to? Absolutely. Of course, he didn’t want to. So if you ask it a different way, could Jesus sin if he didn’t want to? No, he couldn’t sin if he didn’t want to any more than God could sin because God doesn’t want to sin. Wanting to sin is a prerequisite for sinning.”

With the utmost of respect Dr. Sproul has not solved the problem, but in our estimation has confused it because wanting to sin is not only a prerequisite to sin it is also a sin itself which he then goes on to state that Jesus could have wanted to sin.

Berkhof (1949:177) explains Athanasius’ position on the Atonement which is very insightful. He explicates that for Athanasius the debt of sin had to be paid and it had to be paid by one of the human race for there the sin was contracted with the only exception being that it had to be “a man without sin”. The word “without” is very revealing because it implies His impeccability. Even the writer of Hebrews affirms this by stating “separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26). He could not be “separate” if He was peccable, housing an inert and covert tendency to sin. Moreover He offered up “Himself” (7:27) and if a possibility to sin resided in “Himself” then it stands to reason that it would also be part of the offering and sacrifice. This would naturally be unacceptable to God. Sin, whether in an inert, subtle, dormant and inactive state is still sin. Peccability is sin and such a Person could not “appear to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26) if He had it in Himself. Comparatively speaking, the writer of Hebrews (10:3) points out the difference between the mundane Tabernacle and Temple sacrifices as opposed to the one of Christ. In the former was a “reminder” and thus in the latter there cannot be any such reminder. It stands to reason that if He was peccable the ‘reminder’ that the writer of Hebrews talks about would inhere in His sacrifice and thus defeat the nature of His sacrifice because the “reminder” implies a repeat every year (Arndt, Danker, & Bauer, 2000: 68) and thus suggests incompleteness.

Origen claimed that “the sinlessness of Christ is not a matter of nature, but a real choice” (Berkhof, 1949:43 footnote 145). This is the classic peccability view that His nature was not impeccable but in terms of His choice/s He certainly was. This view fails to realise that a fallen nature will always lead to a failed choice, especially where sin is operating.<sup>37</sup> It is weak to suggest that what He lacked in the former (nature) was made up in the latter (choice) especially considering that the nature is superior to choice and choice itself results from the nature. This is an anacoluthic (it does not follow) statement and is typical of peccability theologians. Cullman (1959:9) is correct to point out that “Christology is the doctrine of an ‘event’, not the doctrine of natures.”

Edward Irving, a noted peccability scholar, claimed that Christ inherited a human nature, mortal and corrupt as it was in Adam after the Fall (Macleod, 1998:222). According to Berkhof (1949:203)

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<sup>37</sup> We are not talking about the average human responding to the grace of God in salvation. This sovereign grace presides over and within to facilitate the sinners choice yet not at the expense of his faculties and consciousness.

who summarises his position, it was a nature with its inborn corruption and predisposition to moral evil but thankfully He was able to keep His corrupt human nature from manifesting itself in any actual or personal sin. Irving also went further to claim that by such obedience He gradually purified His human nature through His sufferings and death and consequently achieved oneness with God again. There is no propitiation and men are saved by becoming members of Christ's new humanity. Although Irving uses the term *predisposition* he actually means disposition which according to COED (2004) means, "a person's inherent qualities of mind and character". Thomas Aquinas has written concerning the meaning of a disposition. He summarizes his view as follows, "a disposition ... is halfway between a capacity and an action, between pure potentiality and full potentiality" (Horton, 2011: 609). If this is true, then Christ was halfway between two opposing states, i.e., between peccability and impeccability. This begs a new question. Is He born this way or does He gravitate from one alternate to the other? Ullmann (n.d.:21) argues that everything that a man does comes from his whole nature and from this we have to conclude that no part of our Lord's nature was corrupt even in a peccable way.

## **5.2. Eradicationism**

Concerning Edward Irving's view summarised above we submit this final point. There exists the notion that the Adamic nature (the sin nature) can be eradicated by a second work of grace (Anon, 2006:13). In the case of Christ this would account for a gradual purification of his nature. Any teaching of the eradication of the old sinful nature is unscriptural (Romans 6:13; 8:11-13; 12:1-3; Gal 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:10; Peter 1:14-16; 2 Peter 1:3-8; 1 John 3:5-9). In concurrence with our conclusion Lewis Chafer (1993:97) scolds and warns that "It is highly unscriptural and equally unreasonable to contend that the sin nature is thus deposed."

## **6. Conclusion**

Thus far we have seen that the person of Jesus can only be understood as a whole (Cook, 1981:168). The Nestorian effort to separate parts of His person for study, though sincere, is too severe and will always lead to dire consequences. Sin is vivid and deviant, whether in its subtle forms or in its overt and blatant manifestations. Therefore sinful tendencies are just as sinful as sinful acts because sinful tendencies are in harmony with sinful thoughts (Matt. 5:28) and are as one as sinful acts. This is why it is ludicrous to propose the peccability of Jesus. Witherington (2011:68) asserts that to posit the inventive idea of the sinfulness of Jesus is "not even consonant with the Bible." In fact he goes on to assert that "these sorts of ideas and assumptions reflect a lack of good theological training of the mind." James R. Edwards (2005:118) insists that "One of the conclusions of modern linguistics is that the value of a claim is strengthened when its opposite can be denied." The value of our claim in this dissertation is asserted and strengthened in the next chapter and denied in this one.

## **Chapter 4: Arguments for Impeccability**

### **1. Introduction**

B.B. Warfield (1968:165) observes, “He would be a bold man, indeed, who would affirm that the incarnation of the Holy One in sinful flesh presents no difficulties to his thoughts.” The “particularity of the incarnation” (Edwards, 2005: 230) forces us to admit to this, but we will not concede without a response, as we believe that difficulty is not impossibility. The law of non contradiction, which was penned by the philosopher Aristotle and which he referred to as the ‘chief principle’ of logic, states that something cannot be what it is and not be what it is at the same time and in the same sense (Sproul, 2000:22). Sproul (2000:58) further points out that this law was treasured by Augustine who argued that ‘it cannot be disputed’. Therefore lest we violate that absolute principle we cannot accept that Christ can be both peccable and impeccable at the same time. We are not here trying to present a Christ that is foreign to the New Testament. Mark Galli (2006) writes, “we each harbor a subconscious image of Christ as King that actually makes it harder, not easier, to honor and obey him [Him].” It is not that the images themselves are superfluous but rather they seem to represent only the socially preferred side of Him. Doornik *et al.* (1960:95) calls this “the tasteless plaster casts, the insipid engravings”, in which He is represented as a kind and mild figure. This image needs to be re-aligned to the actual teaching of the scriptures. A world such as ours that is riddled with evil and sin finds it irreconcilable that one can touch a leper and not be defiled.

Having stated the views and conclusions of the peccability group above, we now proceed with the following.

The view we take on this issue relates directly to our knowledge of God, the nature of Jesus, Biblical inerrancy and most especially Jesus’ victory over sin (Hunt, 2004). In this chapter we are not arguing whether we think Christ was impeccable, but rather we wish to assert that He is while amassing the evidence to prove it. In the first section below comprising of five sub-sections a purview is offered of His Deity to support Impeccability. In the second section we then survey His ministry which brings us back to earth, as it were, and here we have two sub-sections to bolster our conviction.

### **2. His Deity**

Thus far we have proved by admission that the complexity of our Lord’s unique personality is unfathomable. Warfield (1950:70) is correct to summarise, “We can never hope to comprehend how the infinite God and a finite humanity can be united in a single person; and it is very easy to go fatally astray in attempting to explain the interactions in the unitary person of natures so diverse from one another.” The explanation that goes by the nomenclature peccability is that which has

gone *fatally astray*. Hence, the need for the Council of Chalcedon in 451 to provide a creed for the Church, so she does not stray into this fatality. Frame (2002: 348) reminds us that “One of the most remarkable proofs of the deity of Christ is that the New Testament uses his name just as the Old Testament uses the name *Yahweh*.” However, that Christ is God is not the dispute for this thesis. All are agreed on this point. Edwin Blum (1985:283) reminds us that Christ is mentioned as Son of God thirty nine times in the gospel of John alone. The early church never debated the deity of Christ (Harris, 2011:81) and was quick to condemn those who did. It is noticeable that when Satan pitched his foulish schemes on to our first parents, he closed with the words “you shall be like God” (Gen. 3:5). These or similar words are noticeably absent when he confronted Christ, the second Adam, for he knew full well that He was God and that that line would self-destruct.

Frame (2002:675) has argued that sinlessness is more a quality of His human nature than of His divine. His primary purpose was to be the perfect and spotless Lamb of God. The slightest hint of a tendency of peccability in God would render Him obsolete as a perfect sacrifice (Scott, 2011:243). That Jesus was worshipped as God can be disputed by no one who refer to themselves as Christians. He accepted worship from the angels (Heb. 1:6), wise men (Matt. 2:11), a leper (Matt. 8:2), a ruler (Matt. 9:18), a blind man (John 9:38), an anonymous woman (Matt. 15:25), Mary Magdalene (Matt. 28:9), the disciples (Matt. 29:17) and Thomas (John 20:28) (Rhodes, 2006:106), and these are just what we know about. Not only did He receive it and condone it, but He also encouraged it. This emerges as a syllogism. Only God can be worshipped (Ex. 34:14) because only God is sinless - Jesus is worshipped and therefore Jesus is sinless. It seems inconceivable to conclude that if He (Jesus) knew that He could have sinned to knowingly equate Himself with God in this act. Such an equation would necessarily assume this proclivity in God as well.<sup>38</sup> He would, by such an act, implicate Jehovah as being prone to sin as well.

Louis Berkhof (1949:90) cites Seeberg as affirming, “Only if Christ is God, in the full sense of the word and without qualification, had God entered humanity, and only then [can we] have fellowship with God, the forgiveness of sins, the truth of God, and immortality been certainly brought to man”. This is why this issue matters incontrovertibly so.

## **2.1. Impeccability based on His Omniscience**

It could be that when we attempt to assess the Divine we fail to take off the lenses of sin and thus view everything as contaminated. It may be that we are not able in this life to take off these lenses, but that does not mean that all is as jaundiced as we see it. We are told that ‘seeing is believing,’ but we should be careful to accept that as the ability to see everything as it should be seen. It is refreshing to behold One who is free from sin when everything we look at is anything but. Our Lord lived and touched everything that was contaminated and fallen yet He remained free from sin in the

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<sup>38</sup> Chapter 6 deals with His Oneness and more on this will be said there.

fullest sense. The Gospels freely admit of Him partaking and associating with sinners, yet He remained sinless. Those disciples of His, later wrote of this fact. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21 “For He [God] made *Him* [Christ] *who knew no sin* to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”<sup>39</sup> (Bible, 1997). The writer of Hebrews appends in Hebrews 4:15 “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, *yet without sin*” and later in, Hebrews 7:26 “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*, and has become higher than the heavens.” Not to be left out, Peter notes in 1 Peter 2:22 “Who *committed no sin*, nor was deceit found in His mouth.” John who was very close to the Lord adds in 1 John 3:5 “And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and *in Him there is no sin.*”<sup>40</sup> Jesus as the High Priest brings humanity to its perfection and as the crowning work in this role Cullman (1959:92) adds, “he is the realization of the perfect man.” Arthur Pink (n.d.) colourfully observes, “Just as the rays of the sun shine upon a stagnant pool without being sullied thereby, so Christ was unaffected by the iniquity which surrounded Him.”

The omniscience of Christ is crucial to the current debate, for sin appeals to ignorance (Anon, 1996). God knew that Adam would sin and this is stated unapologetically in Rom. 8:20-21. This further testifies to God’s full knowledge of Adam’s proclivity to sin but in either exact terminology or similar sentiments He nowhere affirms this of His “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45).

## **2.2. Impeccability based on His Immutability**

The immutability of God is hardly an irrelevant speculation (Horton, 2011:236) considering that there is a Hypostatic Union between them. This doctrine has always been a problem when considering the incarnation (Berkhof, 2003:323). The classic text on this issue is directly taken from Malachi 3:6 “For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” The unchangeableness of God is presented as an argument against the sinfulness of Israel (Man). The changeableness (sinfulness) of man is contrasted with the unchangeableness (sinlessness) of God. This is a classic case where the context sets the contrast and then invariably the content. Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, taught that God could only create the world with Christ, so He first created or generated Him so that He could facilitate His plan of creation (Berkhof, 1949:88) and for this reason Christ was mutable. However for Christ to be peccable would imply an ability to change which goes against the grain of what immutability actually is (Anon, 1996). The writer of Hebrews with only two verses dismisses this as inadmissible (cf. Heb. 1:12 & 13:8).

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<sup>39</sup> The exegesis of this is provided in chapter 5

<sup>40</sup> We have given exegetical treatment to these passages in chapter five.

Notwithstanding, to further substantiate His immutability we offer perusal of the seven proofs of the Pre-incarnate Christ to prove that He is immutable. The obvious nature of this reply shows that the answer lies in the question. To prove His eternal co-existence with His Father is paramount to the subscription of the Tri-une God. If Christ were God then He would naturally do what God does or did and the contrary would manifest itself.

a) Christ is Eternal: John 1:1 says that the Word was in the beginning and not the beginning in the Word. If it is said that 'in the morning there was Edward' there is nothing in that statement to assume that I didn't exist before the morning.

b) Christ as Creator: Col. 1:16-17 declares this inarguable fact. Verse 15 of this section places Him on equal status and standing with God, in that He alone enjoys all the properties of fully manifesting all of God in all areas and aspects. (e.g. Creation; Redemption: Justification; etc.), and then with the same breath the above two verses credit Him with Creation.

c) Christ is a Party to the Old Covenant: The fact of the existence of such a covenant is confirmed by Ethan in Psalm 89:3. The tenor of the Psalm is one of rejoicing and relishing in the foundation of the Covenant, which Ethan exemplifies as His 'Faithfulness' no less than six times. John 10:18 and Luke 22:29 intimates a pre-incarnate arrangement between the Father and the Son, which assumes a Covenant and John 17:4, announces its completion.

d) Christ is the Old Testament anticipation of Messiah, which is that of Jehovah: The Old Testament usage of Messiah is frequently declared to be Jehovah. Deut.30: 3 houses the first mention of the Second Coming of Christ, but it is here written of Jehovah /Elohim. He cannot return if He has not been here before. Jer. 33:14-17 says that the Lord is to continue in David's throne. Yahweh is here styled 'the Lord' and He is to occupy that throne and end it, as it were, in the sense that there will be no other after Him. Of this it is only prophesied of Christ (Cf. Dan.7: 14 & Lk.1: 31-35). How can this be unless they are one?

e) Christ is the Old Testament Angel of Jehovah: He is a Deputy: messenger or sent One as He expressly referred to Himself in John 17:18. Another striking piece of evidence is that the Angel of Jehovah never appears in the New Testament. The only logical conclusion to this is because He already is there as incarnate. Gen.16:7-13 refers to the 'Angel' as 'The Lord/ Jehovah.' This same Angel stops Abraham from killing Isaac in Gen.22 and there calls Himself Lord. He also takes it upon Himself to invoke blessing. This is outside the realm and authority of any ordinary angel.

f) The Indirect Biblical Implications: Heb.2: 14 "He partook of flesh and blood"<sup>41</sup> which implies that He existed prior to this form. Phil.2: 8 "He was found in fashion as a man" which implies that He was predisposed to a superior fashionable status before being found this way. Jn.8: 23 "I am from above" which points to a location above the realm of the Earth, which is here below. Jn.17: 4 "I am not of this world" serves to downplay His local address and promote His other worldliness.

g) Direct Biblical Assertions: John 6:33; 38; 41; 42; 50; 51& 62 are the sevenfold declarations of His descent for the sin of man, referring also to His point of origin. Jn.8: 58 declares, "Before

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<sup>41</sup> Dealt with in greater detail in chapter five.

Abraham was I Am” and of this Chafer (1993:323) points out that Faustus Socinus (and others of his ilk) manufactured evidence to write it as “before Abraham became Abraham, I was predetermined by God.” The ‘I Am’ expresses essential existence with no reference to beginning. The above paraphrase is the result of spiritual harlotry. John17: 5 makes it clear that He existed before the creation of the world and shared the Glory with the Father. This conversation was not from an outside source, it was the result of a direct conversation with His Father. If He was just a man, how then did He enjoy this glory, even before creation and how then did He know that He would get it as soon as He ascends? Indeed if He was just a man, how did He know that He would ascend in the first place?

Chafer (1993:6) asserts that, “The absolute, dogmatic declaration that Christ is God is the basic premise in all logic respecting the Person and work Christ.” We offered above seven Old Testament proofs that Christ is pre-incarnate, but now we wish to supplement this offering with more Old Testament scriptures proving His eternal Deity.<sup>42</sup> It is abundantly clear from the context of these Old Testament verses that Yahweh is in view, yet Peter never apologises for this juxtaposition of the two. In Jn. 5: 23 we have a special request by Christ. He states, “All men should honour the Son *even* as they honour the Father.” Regarding the “even as” in this verse, Radl (1990: 226) explains its usage as serving a direct comparison between an important event and person, and more specifically, concerning its usage in John, it describes the agreement between Father and Son. Christ emphatically declares that not only is honour equally His as much as it is the Father’s, but the quality and quantity of it must be the same as well. This would not be possible unless they are one. For did God not say “My glory I will not give to another” (cf. Is.42: 8 & 48:11). If the Son is ‘another’ then His words in Jn.5: 23 are blasphemous.

- a) Psalms 9:7-8 conveys the concept of the Judgement of Yahweh, here in these texts styled ‘The Lord.’ The idea of judgement from Yahweh is not a new concept to the Jew. They were well acquainted with it. In fact, so acquainted were they with it that whereas others were frightened by this fact of judgement, they were praising God for it (vs.1-2). There is no confusion of the fact that this is God Almighty because He is soliciting and receiving praise. He is sitting on His Throne (cf. Rev.4) and His eternity is attested to in vs.7. Col.1: 15 “He is the *image* of the invisible God...” Here image does not imply look-alike. In essence and truth God is invisible and a representation of that would logically be invisible too. The term must not be understood in any restrictive sense either (i.e. The Incarnation), for flanked on either side of this verse is the aspect of Redeemer and Creator. The term must therefore be taken as meaning, “all that God is, is in Christ” (Anon, 1956:343). He is

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<sup>42</sup> The startling use by New Testament writers of verses that were written by Old Testament writers referring directly to Yahweh is significant. They licence themselves to quote these verses when referring to Christ. A good example is 1 Pet.2: 6-8 which he quotes from Isaiah 28:16, Ps.118: 22 & Is.8: 14 respectively when discussing the believer’s privileges through Jesus Christ.

the manifestation of God in His whole Person and not in any particular part. Even in John the Baptist's mind He equated Christ with Yahweh, for he took as his reference point Isaiah 40:3 speaking of the 'way of the Lord' (Yahweh) and 'Highway for our God' (Elohim).

- b) Isaiah too equates Him with God and as God. In Ch.9:6 of his book he writes of the "Child" that is to be born (which clearly refers to the birth of Christ) and with the same breath addresses Him as "the mighty God, the Everlasting Father" (Constance, 2001:45). We do concede that the verse intimates a change of dispensation, but not as regards to the Person.

The Arian assumption, which contends that Christ pre-existed, but was a creation of God and therefore not equal with God, is as specious as they come. Any or all of the above arguments can quickly dismiss this. Mormonism, which argues that Lucifer and Christ were eternal brothers before the one fell (Geisler & Rhodes, 1997:256) has to be one of its bastard children together with the Jehovah's Witnesses. Mormonism goes even further to teach that Jesus was the first Spirit child of God the Father and Lucifer was the second Spirit child (Wall, 2014:21)

When John wrote that the "Word became flesh" (Jn. 1:14) he was not detailing procedure as is clearly evident from the total absence of any details relating to it. It simply declares the Product. It is not explaining the act as much as it is expressing the fact. The import of this declaration is on what had happened and not on how it happened (Berkhof, 2003:321). The mysterious concept of Him who is eternal, being restricted to time is a mind boggling enigma without the aid of details to amplify that enigma. That which is Ethereal and Absolute becomes tangible & conditioned. One reason why John deliberately avoids description of procedure of this blessed event, may be that he would not like people to get caught up in the idea that this 'procedure' warranted 'the Word' to lay aside His divinity. The procedure explained would have implied transformation from one being to another. This is not a trap that John wanted to walk into. I am quite confident that he could've walked out of it, but think of all the confusion it would've caused. That which is immortal becoming mortal, that which is eternal becoming finite is enough to suffocate our finite ability to think. He who existed outside of time had to age in flesh and to reduce to ink that which is transient is a human improbability. This is a concept that remains a challenge to any writer and John does well to avoid it.

B. B. Warfield (1950:54) writes of this term 'Word became flesh' - "the term *flesh* is not one of substance as we are accustomed to thinking, but one of personality. *Flesh* is an appropriate designation for humanity in its entirety, with the implications of dependence and weakness. That the experiences of human beings would be His, is intimated in 'became flesh', but not that His experiences would be communicated to us. John could have said 'the Word became man', but he elects to word it like this so that the language shows what it is to be a man. It is one thing to be a

man, but man is flesh and nothing more.” The phrase “and dwelt among us” is the proof of His ability to reside, which assumes that His becoming flesh was successful and fully complete to the requirements of flesh.<sup>43</sup> This phrase does not imply singularity of state from one to another. Indeed its complexity lies in its duplexity.<sup>44</sup>

It is to the significance of the occurrence, rather than to the actual occurrence to which the mind's eye is naturally drawn. Yet notwithstanding, the mind's eye is bereft of ability to fully taste of its sweetness. That the Person of the Godhead three should become one of the human family is enough to fill one's heart with solemnity for all eternity. His own inability to share in His own creation would embarrass His own omnipotence. If He couldn't become a man, it would show His limitedness. On the other hand just because He became a man does not show His finiteness. To be able to be flesh, which is sinful, and yet not be tainted by it, is again His omnipotence in view. Not to be able to do that is to concede to limitedness.

It is one thing to say that He was sinless, but it is quite another to say that He is 'impeccable.' This is the vital difference between the first Adam and the last Adam. Anon (1996) summarising Berkouwer has posited that as the last Adam He must of necessity possess the self-same inclination as of the first Adam. As Pink (n.d.) aptly puts it, “Christ was not only able to overcome temptation, but He was unable to be overcome by it.”<sup>45</sup> Furthermore as the God-man He is immutable. The writer of Hebrews (13:8) makes it clear that He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Angels are created sinless but fell and this was the case with Adam too. Therefore we say that sinlessness does not preclude you from falling, impeccability does. One could argue that the flesh of Christ was created, but it must be borne in mind that His flesh was not on probation (Pink n.d.) as were the flesh of others. From the moment of His conception His humanity was taken into union with His deity.<sup>46</sup> An added fact is that Christ is said quite explicitly to be immutable even while aging in His flesh. In John 5:19–21 He Himself points to this fact concerning His Incarnational ministry by saying, “For whatever He (Father) does, the Son *also does in like manner*...For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, *even* so the Son gives life to whom He will.” This kind of sovereign omnipotence cannot yield to sin. It would be a contradiction in terms if it could. There is a significant difference in being tempted and being temptable. If as Heb. 13:8 affirms that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” then it must follow that as He was in eternal glory so was He in incarnational glory. The two states are not opposites but operationally different. If it was impossible for Him to sin before the incarnation it was equally impossible for Him to sin during His incarnation (Martin, 2010).

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<sup>43</sup> We remind the reader again that it is not the requirement of flesh to be sinful as that is a consequence of the Fall.

<sup>44</sup> Refer 2.4.2 below for a further explanation of this comment regarding His two natures.

<sup>45</sup> The issue of His Temptation is discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

<sup>46</sup> We argue this point further and in greater detail in chapter five under the section dealing with the Virgin birth.

### 2.3. Impeccability based on His Quality

According to the Christian system, the Cross whereupon Jesus died is its central truth. It is at once a profound mystery and a glorious revelation. It is a mystery in that it reveals the heart of God in the greatest expression of love and a revelation in that it meets and answers to the greatest need of man, viz., forgiveness of sin. The fact that "God is love" does not mean that He overlooks sin, for if He did He would be devoid of conscience. Warfield (1950:386) expresses it best when he asserts, "It is the distinguishing characteristic of Christianity, after all, not that it preaches a God of love, but that it preaches a God of conscience." A mystery is a symbol that can't simply be articulated rationally. The Jesuit Michael L. Cook (1981:7) quotes Avery Dulles as verifying that "Unlike historical or abstract truth, mystery cannot be described or positively defined. It can only be evoked." When He spoke of His death upon the Cross it became, to many, a stumbling-block and an impasse because of the inexplicable mystery of its effect. This is corroborated in Peter's offense at His determination to go to Jerusalem to die (Matt. 16:21-22). As a confirmation of this fact the above disciple thought it would be a defeat of His purposes (Matt. 16: 22).

In his famous Pentecost sermon Peter declares the sinlessness of Jesus (Acts 2:22-23). The very next day in Solomon's portico he followed up that sermon and preached again and enhanced that very same theme (3:14-15). In the Pentecost sermon He was proven externally to be the Son of God by His "miracles; wonders and signs" (2:22). In the next sermon Christ was proven by his inward purity and perfection of character. In defence of His own sinless perfection He was able to say in John 8:29 "I always do those things that please Him." There is not a single person in history that can make that claim. In John 8:46 "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" There was no one then nor now that can charge Him with anything. Twice the Father had said that His Son pleases Him (Matt. 3:17 & 17:5). Here we have His own testimony and the testimony of His Father. The testimony of the apostles was equally clear. Peter called Him "the Holy One and the Just" (Acts 3:14). He later wrote, "He did/ committed no sin" (1 Peter 2:22). John writes, "in Him there is no sin" (1 Jn. 3:5) and it is important to notice that John has His *manifestation* in view, which we would call the Incarnation, which Edwards (2005:229) insists is the most unique and essential characteristic of Christianity". It was while He was Incarnate that 'in Him there is no sin' applies. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:2 He "knew no sin." Aside from the testimony of the apostles the scriptures also provide testimonies from impartial witnesses. Pilate's wife said to him "Have nothing to do with that just Man" (Matthew 27:19). The criminal crucified next to him said, "This Man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41). The Roman centurion who oversaw the proceedings of the crucifixion event exclaimed, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!" (Luke 23:47). William Kelly (n.d., 198) observes, "He was so perfectly transparent, that not one thing in Him deflected from the truth...there was no object but God before His soul." It is inconceivable to think that a proclivity to peccability could lie dormant and never surface at all during His Incarnation.

As if that were not enough, the testimony of evil men was just the same. Pilate said three times, “I find no fault in Him” (Jn. 18:38, 19:4, 6). The betrayer Judas who was conscious of his guilt and overcome thereby, cried out, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4). According to Arndt, Danker & Bauer (2000: 24) the word “innocent” means ‘guiltless’. We would like to add one more from the most unlikely source of testimonies. Demons were not without a word on this subject too. In Mark 1:24 they cried “I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” Mark 1:34 says of Jesus that “He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.” Through possessing a man at Gadara they cried out saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God?” (Matthew 8:29). In Acts 16:17 again through possession a demon cries out against the apostles saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” The gospels show that Jesus revealed His divine origin gradually (Doornik, Jelsma & Lisdonk, 1960:88) and as we shall see, this was a well-intentioned strategy given His many facets. Frame (2002:474) reminds us that, “As with the persons of the Trinity, God’s attributes are both identified with him [Him] and distinguished from him [Him] in Scripture” and goes on to affirm later (page 675) that “Scripture epitomizes Jesus’ ethical qualities by telling us that He is sinless (John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5).” We proceed to highlight the following in view of that distinguishing factor.

### **2.3.1. He is the Light**

The Christian is expected to “walk in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7) and not to become the light. That would be sinless perfection (Chafer, 1993, Vol. 6: 239). Edwards (2005:94) informs us that in most religions the essential attribute of God is light, but in Christianity Christ is the Light (Jn. 8:12, 9:5, Rev. 21:23) and therefore sinlessly perfect. In most religions the essential attribute of their god is light (Edwards, 2005:94); however the Buddhist logic insists that where there is light there must be a shadow cast. This shadow, reckons Machida (1999:84), is what “comes from the heart” referencing Mark 7:20-23. He attempts from this reference to argue that if Jesus were human with a human ‘heart’ then this must also be true of Him. The element of evil must be purged from the human consciousness as was with the case of the Buddha. He concludes, “There is no assumption that the Buddha was pure and immaculate from the moment of birth. In other words, *evil was an important element in the transformation of a human being called Sakyamuni into the Blessed One, the Buddha*” (1999:83). In contradistinction Christian theology insists that in this He is not indistinct from His Father (Frame, 2002:675) of whom it is written that He is covered with light (Ps. 104:2) and dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16). David M. Levy (2013:36) points out that “throughout Scripture, light symbolizes God’s purity, holiness, virtue, morality, truth, character, and glory.” “Thus light”, he concludes “best defines and describes God’s true nature” (2013:36) which we would take the liberty to add also best defines His Son. We are not trying to reduce Jesus to a symbol albeit a timeless truth. We are as Cook (1981:21) states, “indissolubly connecting with the embodiment of a great truth in a particular person.” Edwards (2005:109)

points out, "Throughout John Jesus is likened to light which...is a metaphor for God." When John uses this metaphor for Jesus he is ascribing to him authority in the unlimited sphere of influence that otherwise would only be attributed to God. Edwards (2005:196) goes on to conclude, "Light...is a cosmic image. It cannot be divided or constrained, just as Jesus, cannot be divided or constrained, but rather is "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36)."

### **2.3.2. He is Righteous**

When Jesus came to John the Baptist to be Baptised He knew that John's purpose for baptising was "the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel" (Acts 13:24). However Jesus made it clear to His cousin that when it came to Him the purpose needed to be altered and the Lord spelled it out for Him, i.e., "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 4:15). Although the Lord used the word "us" in this verse He was referring the mass of this responsibility of righteousness to Himself. He refers to His Son (Heb. 1:8-9), as a lover of righteousness (Ps. 45:7), who wields "a sceptre of righteousness" (Ps. 45:6) for His Kingdom. The picture is vivid that righteousness has to do with judgement and judgement to come was also a main theme of all John's sermons and only one "Man" who could be altogether righteous could judge (Acts 17:31). Paul goes on to affirm in this verse that the Resurrection gave assurance to this very thing. Therefore His righteousness quantifies His impeccability and as Cook (1981:21) concludes, "Belongs ineradicably to our historical consciousness and cannot be dispensed with" and we would like to add, nor should He be trifled with.

### **2.3.3. He is Judge**

Nothing so affirms His indistinction in holiness from His Father as does this issue. Van de Beek (2002?: 129) argues that it cannot be the case that even the tiniest bit of distance remains between the judgement of the Father and the Son. It has been Tertullian's argument that any 'gap' would evoke the issue of polytheism. Moreover, considering the magnitude of the responsibility of the judgement committed to Him (Jn. 5:22) it is inconceivable to think of the outcome if there is in Him a tendency towards potential sin, for one small mistake would undo His Father's will. On the contrary, He shares His Father's infinite attributes (Beet, n.d.:404).

### **2.3.4. He is Good**

In defending God's righteous judgement (refer above) the apostle Paul argues this point out on the hinge of God's recognisable goodness (Rom. 2:4). The righteous judgment of God rests on the fact that you are led to repentance because it is his goodness that leads you there, but like the proverbial horse to water it will not force you to drink. Therefore failure to repent is a slap in the face of His goodness which is what makes His righteous judgement so righteous. The point being that if God's goodness has the capability of bringing people to a state of forgiveness and purity then it follows that the One through whom it is working (Jesus Christ) share in that quality.

This is reflected in the synoptic writers who include the story of the Rich young ruler and Jesus' question to him, "why do you call Me good" (Matt. 19:17, Mk. 10:18 & Lk. 18:19). It is clear from this question that the Lord wanted this young man to think of the Law in toto, for all the Law quantifies Him (Lk. 24: 27 & Jn. 5:39). It is possible that He was contrasting His human goodness with that of His Father, but more specifically, as Warfield (1950:172) points out, Jesus did not deny His essential goodness when He asked "why do you call me good?" He did not say "I am not good" but "why do *you* address me as such?" He was adjusting His question to the questioner. This is a prelude to the consideration that He put to the Pharisees in Matthew 22:42 "What do you think about the Christ?" He was not trying to remind the young man of the distinction that exists between His Father and creation (Job 4:18, 15:15 & 25:5) for this would be the ancient Arian position. On the contrary, He was trying to get the young man to see that all His goodness is of the Father for it is clear that the young man only saw Him as a good Rabbi. The question, 'why do you call me good?' is only there to incite the inquirer to a deeper consideration of the matter, for the young ruler did not think of Him a part of the Godhead. This is why the title 'good' was inappropriate, but not inaccurate. It is also pertinent to note that Jesus uses the word 'God' not 'Father,' for as Warfield (1950:181) points out, a father begets but 'God' is a compound Trinitarian expression. He goes on to explain, "Goodness is in the nature of God, and in the nature of God is also the Son of God, and therefore what is predicated is not predicated of the Singularity but of the Unity" (1950:182). For further clarification we must note that it is not that He has sourced His good from God as a demi-god would, but that His goodness is in God because He and His father are One (Warfield, 1950:173).

That Jesus by a Freudian slip ascribed sinfulness to Himself is absurd and goes against the grain of all the other statements He made about Himself thus far in his ministry and the many more to come. The truth of the matter is that Jesus was not giving instruction concerning His own person, but was emphasizing again that the only way to understand Him is to do so from the reverent vantage point of His Father's perspective.

### **2.3.5. He is Gracious**

In his article entitled "Life in the Full" published on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2001, Dallas Willard (2001) has appropriately pointed out that "Grace is not opposed to effort (which is action), but to earning (which is attitude)." According to Titus 2:11 grace is an event in that it is personified in Christ (Horton, 2011:268). If Jesus personifies grace, and He does, just as much as He personifies God's goodness, then grace must quantify His Person. Therefore if it is true that peccability inheres in the Son of God then it is also true that fallibility inheres in the grace of God and if the latter is true then no man could ever be saved.

### **2.3.6. He is Glorious**

We are told that the ministry of condemnation is glorious (2 Cor. 3:9) in the sense that it warned me of my sin and its eternal consequences, but the ministry of righteousness, which is the ministry of the Spirit, exceeds much more in glory and therefore testifies to impeccability because glory is the absence of death (Jn. 11:4) and it is also the absence of evil (Jn. 13:31). His glory is not manifest where evil is resident, even if in a dormant state. He is called “the Lord of glory” in 1 Cor. 2:8 & James 2:1. Frame (2002:593) points out that He is the “fulfilment of the tabernacle and the temple” which houses His Father’s presence and in either of these two structures God would not so much as allow any vestige of sin to enter until provision was made. The message was clear: sinlessness was the norm.

### **2.3.7. He is Love**

While the apostle John attributes this quality to the Father (Jn. 3:16 & 1 Jn. 4:8, 16) we have no reason to doubt that this is equally true of the Son. It is true that God is love (1 Jn. 4:7 & 16) and love is of God (1 John 4:7), but it is not true that love is God. William Kelly (n.d., 200) observes, “Love is the active energy of His holy nature.” His *active energy* is nowhere better demonstrated than in the giving of His Son (Rom. 5:8). In John’s argument in 1 John 4:12-16 “the love that God has for us” (vs. 16) is the same as the Son that God has for us (vs. 14-15). In other words, God’s love is God’s Son.

## **2.4. Impeccability based on His Equality<sup>47</sup>**

What we think about Christ will invariably help or hinder our thoughts about God. Van de Beek (2002?:61) correctly points out that “our thinking about the Trinity has its origin in our thinking about Christ.” He goes on to inform that Tertullian claims that the subjection of Christ is precisely what indicates His unity and equality with the Father (Van de Beek, 2002?:128). His subjection is in the fact that He does His Father’s will as does the Holy Spirit. He is not arranging His own world as a prodigal would do. The apostle Paul points out that He is arranging His Father’s world (1 Cor. 15:28) and every line of Paul’s teaching about Christ assumes His divinity (Beet, n.d.:408). That Christ is His equal is Paul’s line of reasoning throughout his writings, Phil. 2:6 is a classic case in point. His responsibility is the measure of His ability! When Jesus told His listeners that “before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58) they knew exactly what He was saying and the mere fact that they immediately responded by picking up stones to stone is a clear indication of that fact. Harris (2011:81) is correct to interpret this as His claim to “equality with the eternal God.” Beet (n.d.:409) concludes with sublime wisdom, “Our only alternative is to believe either that a complicated tissue of delusions without parallel among the errors of mankind has saved the world or to believe that with God in eternity is One who shares to the full, by derivation from Him, and with unreserved devotion to Him, whatever He has and is, the Eternal Son of an Eternal Father.”

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<sup>47</sup> A larger treatment of this is reserved for chapter five where the scripture references receive treatment.

### 2.4.1. His Oneness

The understanding of Jesus' identity especially, as is the case in this study, with His humanity is that He is wrapped up in what Cook (1981:168) calls "the unity with God." The use of the term "one" to describe God is to explain, as Edwards (2005:180) points out, that God is a unified nature. The New Testament affirms Jesus' power (*exousia*) and in that it does so it also affirms that this uniqueness is to be explained in His oneness (Edwards, 2005:95). In John 10:30 Jesus ended a teaching session with the words "I and *My* Father are one" and in response to this 'the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.'" This is John's way of telling us that they understood perfectly what He said. Blanchard (2001:570) points out that the word 'one' is not masculine but neuter meaning that Jesus was not claiming to be one in Person with God, but one in essence or nature. While it is true that the nature of humanity had been changed since the entrance of sin, the nature of God never did (Scott, 2011:236). It is clearly unity of nature and relation, not person (cf. also Jn. 17:11 & 22) (Beet, n.d.:405). This is why we do not agree with Cullman (1959:9) when he writes that "Christology is the doctrine of an 'event', not the doctrine of natures." We affirm that in its irreducible minimum it is not less than that, but in His own claim it is eternally more; or as Cook (1981:100) points out that "the basis or ground of our speaking of His unity with God, can only be known through the revelation of his life as a *whole* [emphasis his]. This "tensive unity" as described by Cook is to be maintained by us. When Isaiah came face to face with the thrice holy God he fell down and exclaimed, "Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). When the apostle John came face to face with the glorified Christ his response was much the same. He wrote, "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead" (Rev. 1:17). Compare this to Jesus who when He saw visions of his Father while in the days of his incarnation (Mark 9:1-8) never uttered words like these. He is never "undone" in front of His Father because He is one with Him. He is never "as dead" before His Father because He is life.

Notwithstanding our Lord's bold statement in John 10:30 we cannot forget that He also pointed out in John 14:28 that His Father is greater than He. Let us not forget the context in which He uttered these words. The Father is "greater" in the sense that Christ (His Son) is coming to Him and not Him to His Son. Christ is announcing to his disciples that He is leaving earth for heaven and not the Father leaving heaven for earth.

Historically our Lord's oneness or unity with His Father is expressed in the word *Homoousios*. Paul of Samosota, the Bishop of Antioch in 260 AD worked hard to protect the humanity of Jesus from being sacrificed to His deity. He defended the *homoousios* (same) of the Logos. He did, however, push it too far in explaining that because the Logos existed in God from all eternity He is

therefore indistinct from Him.<sup>48</sup> He could be identified as God for this reason, but also for this reason could not be thought of being any more than an impersonal force operative in the *man* Jesus (Berkhof, 1949:82). In the defence of the oneness of God he went too far to explain that the unity of God implied the oneness of nature. The term “oneness of essence” was insisted upon by Athanasius (Berkhof, 1949:90) who knew that the doctrine of the Trinity was frowned upon not because it was not a biblical doctrine but because it was not defined biblically. Tertullian also explained the reasonableness of plurality within one God by using metaphors from nature (Van de Beek: 2002?:62). By the use of metaphors Tertullian was not so naïve as to assume that the Trinity can be proven from nature for if it could it would also be equal to it. He was making a point to his opponents that thinking in terms of oneness does not preclude a person from acknowledging variety within that oneness, like the sun and its rays or the tree and its roots. This was a defence of the dignity of the Trinitarian argument and not the Trinity itself. Spurgeon observes:

“The entire person of Jesus is but as one gem, and his life is all along but one impression of the seal. He is altogether complete; not only in his several parts, but as a gracious all-glorious whole. His character is not a mass of fair colours mixed confusedly, nor a heap of precious stones laid carelessly one upon another; he [He] is a picture of beauty and a breastplate of glory. In him [Him], all the “things of good repute” are in their proper places, and assist in adorning each other. Not one feature in his glorious person attracts attention at the expense of others; but he is perfectly and altogether lovely.” (Spurgeon, 2006: Morning June 21)

The incomprehensibility of His divine compound adds to His mystery which in turn fuels His majesty.<sup>49</sup> His oneness is indivisible but not indistinguishable from His Father. He is indivisible enough not to be seen apart from His Father but not indistinguishable enough to be confused with Him. Thus by Paul’s accounting and construction His nature is the same. Further to Paul’s assessment we must observe that Paul nowhere compares Christ with other men, not even as superior to them (Beet, n.d.:402).

#### **2.4.2. His Two Natures**<sup>50</sup>

Edwards (2005:100) reminds us that “The debate over the relationship between the divine and human natures in Jesus is apt to strike many people today as proof that He was neither.” By this Edwards highlights that the inability for the church to decide upon this issue could lead outsiders to assume this. Although convened and cemented in 451 at Chalcedon, intellectual autonomy crept in as a virus. They preferred rather to exercise autonomy from God instead of accepting the authority of God. Frame (2010:21) explains as follows:

“The adoption of intellectual autonomy as a theological principle was certainly at least as important as the church’s adoption of the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity in 381<sup>51</sup>, or the doctrine of the two natures of Christ in 451. Yet without any council, without any significant debate, much of the church during the period of 1650 to the present came to

<sup>48</sup> Refer chapter 2, 4.1.1.1.4 for a fuller discussion

<sup>49</sup> Regarding oneness the apostle Paul has written somewhat of a Magna Carta in Ephesians 4:4-6.

<sup>50</sup> Refer also chapter 2, 4.3.1

<sup>51</sup> He is referring to its formal acceptance at Constantinople

adopt the principle of intellectual autonomy in place of the authority of God's personal words."

This precious truth was so fixed in the minds of the early Christians that practically nothing could dislodge it until the rise of Socinianism (Warfield, 1950:215). It is a tenet of Orthodoxy that the Son of God has two natures, divine and human (Frame, 2002:497). As a fundamental tenet the study of His two natures has rightly been called the "High doctrine" of the Church (Lloyd-Jones, 1995:98). The Church, even if unable to explain it, has, notwithstanding always consistently confessed it (Warfield, 1950:215), but as Cullman (1959:235) points out, "the question of the two natures is a Greek rather than a biblical one". Notwithstanding, the New Testament was written in Greek and has its influence in that language. Nicea solved the problem of His relationship to His Father, but subsequent to that, or we should say, consequent to that there arose the problem of His relationship to Himself (Pugh, 2011). This Nicea did not solve! Cullman (1959:162) reminds us that "The idea of 'natures' was completely foreign to Him" in that He never explained it nor apologised for it. Furthermore we are reminded by Cook (1981:140) that the New Testament does not seek to make a distinction between His two natures. We agree that the New Testament acknowledges it. The New Testament only distinguishes between His earthly life and His glorified life. Cook (1981:168) also points out that Jesus' person can only be understood as a whole. The scientific nature of these studies demand a dissection yet with that comes fair danger. We also need to be guarded against the error of thinking of Christ's natures as a fusion of two natures. This is the ancient Eutychian or Monophysite problem as discussed in chapter 2. The historical errors surrounding these are profound. Warfield (1950:238) emphasizes, "There is no Christian literature in existence which does not base itself, as upon an already firmly laid foundation, on the doctrine of the Two Natures. So far as Christian literature can bear testimony, there never has been any other doctrine recognised in the church." Therefore we are ready to conclude that this doctrine did not create the faith, but only reflects it and expresses it.

Each nature is preserved in its entirety as the eternal Son who assumed ("taking" Phil. 2:7)<sup>52</sup> our humanity. The contrast of the divine nature (incorruptible, unchangeable, indivisible, incapable of suffering, immortal) with the human nature (transitory, changeable, divisible, capable of suffering, mortal) is not a quandary but a mystery. In an effort to explain this most complex of all issues for the human mind, Reymond (1998:546) states, "Without ceasing to be all that he [He] was and is as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the eternal Son of God took into union with himself [Himself] in the one divine Person that which he [He] had not possessed before—even a full complex of human attributes—and became fully and truly man for us men and for our salvation. Jesus of Nazareth was and is that God-man." Although Reymond points out that He 'took into union...a full

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<sup>52</sup> Discussed at length in chapter 5. Point 3.3.

complex of human attributes,' he did clear the way for this comment by prefacing that He did this 'without ceasing to be all that He was and is as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

It is true as Saucy (1972:20-21) states, "The eternal purpose of God becomes clear in the historical person of Christ" but it is evidently not the case that His historical person becomes clearer as this purpose pans out in the life of the church. Horton (2011:468) is correct to conclude that "sinfulness is accidental rather than essential to our nature". It came about as a result of our Fall and not as a result of our creation. Therefore it is incorrect to assume peccability in Him who has been sent to reverse the effects of the Fall. The discussion of the two natures is not a 'metaphysical abstraction' (Cook, 1981:190) but a historical one. The discussion of the 'natures' of Christ is not a Jewish discussion, or for that matter, a scriptural one. It is, as Cullman (1959:4) points out, a discussion that emanated from the borrowed vocabulary of Greek terminology. The word 'natures' was only used to combat the heretics (Berkhof, 2003:321). Romans 9:5 confirms Christ's flesh in terms of His human genealogy but with equal force it also affirms, in doxological fashion, that He is "the eternally blessed God." While Chalcedon codified the two natures, it was inadequate in that it failed to make indubitably clear that the Person of Christ was made of two distinct natures *yet it was one indissoluble nature* [emphasis mine] so that people would not think of Him as being a double natured individual, so to speak. It is unfortunate that the Church has never really gone beyond the formulation of Chalcedon (Berkhof, 2003:321). Unfortunately, as Warfield (1950:189) highlights, the Chalcedonian "settlement" remains authoritative to this day and the difficulty of conceiving two distinct natures united in a single person is no longer a tenant but a landlord. This is the none other than Socinianism! This flies in the face of personhood. Regarding the Council of Chalcedon Van de Beek (2002?:90-91) points out that "It was too superficial to look to the words only, and to neglect their deeper meaning: i.e. that some people taught that Christ had one single nature. Citing Chalcedon on this, Horton (2011:478) clarifies as follows: "the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons." That was self-evident for the Alexandrians."

The chief concern in this assessment is in distinguishing between Christ's human and divine natures, all the while realizing that the two natures exist in perfect unity. Sproul (2000:68) suggests that there is a distinction between distinction and separation and strongly advises "that to separate them is to commit the Nestorian heresy." Nestorianism propounded the fact of His two natures, but unfortunately could not reconcile two natures equalling one Person. For them two natures equal two persons (Berkhof, 1949:109). We do not deny that the Logos assumed human nature in its entirety, but such assumption must not remove aught from His intrinsic and absolute deity. Moreover, since the whole sinner was redeemed it follows that our whole nature was assumed. This view was embraced as far back as the Three Cappadocians and Hilary of Poitiers

(Berkhof, 1949:107). Human nature is always limited, but in the case of Christ the divine nature was willing to accommodate what the human nature could bear. His divinity did not consume it any more than the fire of God consumed the burning bush. The two comes together in one single nature manifested in Christ (Van de Beek, 2002?:92). In Acts 20:28 we have a strange reference to the “blood of God,” but this phrase can only be understood in the unity of His person. It is essential that our Redeemer be the God-man. He has to be man because it was man who sinned and therefore man must pay the penalty of sin and He has to be God because only God can save from sin (Berkhof, 2003, 319).

It must be noted that none of the major figures leading up to Chalcedon or from it were opposed to the doctrine of the two natured Christ because it formed the common basis of all their arguments. As pointed out by Warfield (1950:213) their differences concerned the integrity or quality of the two natures united in one person. All things considered, we acknowledge His incarnation to be an incomprehensible mystery (Berkhof, 2003:321). Whether we discuss the Pauline corpus or the Mosaic collection, we are stunned. Whether we attempt to observe the universe or His future Kingdom, we are confounded. Nascent Christianity is oblique without the incarnate God. Every book of the New Testament, although profoundly unique in its expression of doctrine, is threaded together by this needle of truth (Warfield, 1950:218).

In an effort to supplement this most valued doctrine we, do well to remind ourselves of the apparent contrarities. He is a man and yet God, He partakes of flesh and blood and yet is eternal and unchangeable, He upholds all things by the word of His power and is at the same time subject to unspeakable human cruelty and death. We must choose between a two-natured Christ and a simply mythical Christ (Warfield, 1950:256). These are our only two alternatives! However, Christ is not two persons – a man who could sin and [a] God who could not. In that in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9), it is unthinkable that He possessed the capability to sin (Martin, 2010).

#### **2.4.3. His Sending of the Spirit**

It was Tertullian who insisted that the Spirit operated through the Son and still later Western tradition held that the Spirit not only came from the Father but from the Son as well (Van de Beek, 2002?:66). This is called the Filioque! It comes from the Latin meaning “and of the Son” Philosophically, the idea of sending is a descending one and thus implies hierarchy (Van de Beek, 2002?:70). To put it another way, the one sent seems a little inferior to the one sending because the one sent is responsible to and accountable to the sending one. The issue of the eternal generation is consistent with the nature of the Holy Spirit because He testifies of Christ (Jn. 15:26). However, thankfully we are not reliant on philosophy to formulate our views. The Scriptures are replete with evidences of the Spirit’s equality and deity.

## 2.5 Impeccability based on His Authority

Through one of his characters called Hopeful, Bunyan has referred to Him as “a Man that never had sinned” and a few lines later through his protagonist Christian as “He never committed sin” (Bunyan, 2007:187-188). Although Bunyan had written an apologetic account of the Christian faith, we understand that he could not state the impeccability of Christ through his allegory. Having said that, he no doubt implies it because in this discussion between Hopeful and Christian, Christ’s authority is final in the matter pertaining to salvation. Hopeful expresses with finality, “Yes, and he told me it was the Lord Jesus Christ that dwelleth on the right hand of the Most High (Heb. 10:12)”. The term “Lord” is Paul’s favourite expression for Christ and this is not surprising seeing that it is His inter-Trinitarian name (Warfield, 1950:225). It is a term of dignity and function (Phil. 2:10-11).

### 2.5.1. The Logos

It is a false assumption that the Johannine gospel is dominated by the term *Logos*. In fact, aside from the prologue this term appears nowhere else in the gospel. Cullman points out (1959:249) that the term “Son of man” occurs more frequently in John. Warfield (1950:64) asserts that this “is His favourite self-designation. Derived from Dan. vii. 13, 14, it intimates on every occasion of its employment Our Lord’s consciousness of being a supramundane being” as opposed to “Son of God” which is a metaphysical designation (Warfield, 1950:77) denoting equality with God (1950:85), which is to say, it implies His heavenly pre-existence, His incarnation, and His future glory. Furthermore, it also emphasizes His incomparable and unique relation to God (Beet, n.d.:402). Such being cannot be said to be peccable!

Notwithstanding, it is significant that although this word *Logos*, being a common Greek word, appears at least 330 times in the New Testament (e-Sword Lexicon, 200-2012) as a title it appears nowhere else but in John. Moreover, as frame (2010:48) adds, “There is no contradiction between thinking of the word as a divine attribute and thinking of *Word* as the name of the eternal Son of God.” It is true that the *Logos* became flesh (Jn. 1:14) and John leaves no doubt that this eternal *Logos* is His master Jesus in the flesh (Beet, n.d.:404). However, it is not true that this flesh was of such a nature that shrouded His glory. In fact it made it more conspicuous as John wrote “and we beheld His glory”, this glory that if not for the “flesh” would not have been beheld by us. The *Logos* is said to have “become” *ginomai*, flesh which has the idea of accepting the outcome of that which is done (e-Sword Lexicon, 200-2012) and is used this way severally in the New Testament (Matt. 1:22, 5:18, 1 Cor. 15:45, 2 Pet. 2:1, *et al*). In Phil. 2:7 Paul uses another word *lambano* which is translated “taken” and conveys the idea of receiving that which is prepared (cf. Heb. 10:5 – a body You have prepared for Me). It is used this way in many New Testament texts (Mt. 25:24, Mk. 12:40, Lk. 11:10, Jn. 4:36, Acts 26:18, Rom. 5:17 *et al*). It is true that the Word (*Logos*) is one with the Father and has now become one with His flesh in the Incarnation but it is not true as Cook

(1981:150-151) suggests that this Logos has no creative power.<sup>53</sup> He later concludes that this becoming flesh is the Creator “so completely involved and identified with His creation” (1981:151). This is pantheism and we do not see this in any text relative to this issue. The combination of Word and Flesh was not for this purpose. The purpose was for the Atonement of sin!

Authority is not lost in this translation, so to speak, as a positive filling is not a negative emptying. What was laid aside (Jn. 13:4) was not what was lost. The laying aside for the purposes of the incarnation was as Cook (1981:148) states, “a logical necessity.” God is not competing within the two natures but fulfilling.

### **2.5.2. Who can forgive sins?**

For the first two centuries of Christianity it was unanimous that Christ was God (Van de Beek, 2002?:110). In his seven letters Ignatius the bishop of Antioch refers to Jesus as God fourteen times and Frame (2002:671) concludes from this that this usage “seems well established in the postapostolic generation.” However, as these centuries drew to a close it became academically fashionable to separate Christ from God. It was not in question that God could forgive sins, but when Christ and God were separated, alla Nestorianism, then the ability to forgive sins was God’s alone. Christ had lost this right, it seemed. However, when we read the gospels we do not see Christ having any complexes about His equality with His Father and audaciously forgave those who sought it (Mk. 2:5). Forgiveness of sins according to Jewish tradition is the exclusive prerogative of God (Ex.34:6-7, Ps. 103:3, Is. 43:25, Mic. 7:18). Nowhere did Jesus exhibit this more profoundly than when He forgave sins (Edwards, 2005:81).

### **2.5.3. The Subject of Old Testament Prophecy**

This section is offered to prove that the central Personage of prophecy is none other than the impeccable Jesus Christ for, as scripture affirms, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). The aged apostle Peter speaks of a “more sure prophetic word” or “the prophetic word confirmed” (NKJV). The link is rather obvious: the impeccability of the Word is apropos to the impeccability of the Son who confirmed it. Confirming this link between impeccability and prophecy, Zacharias (2012:262) explains regarding the writers of Scripture:

“from highly different backgrounds [they] nevertheless paint a similar picture of the Word of God who became flesh and dwelled among us, whose pure and impeccable life accompanied his teaching, ... he [He] was the fulfillment of the prophetic voices from Moses to Malachi, who, over more than a thousand years, predicted his coming, his death, and his resurrection.”

Concerning the nature of prophecy, Walter Kaiser (1996:72) instructs, “Prophecy may be unconditionally fulfilled, conditionally fulfilled or sequentially fulfilled. All three types are commonly

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. John 1:3

used by the prophets and are accompanied by textual indicators that aid the reader and interpreter in distinguishing them.” This is sage advice concerning the Person of Christ for by His own testimony the Scriptures concern Him (Lk. 24:27). Frame (2002:470) points out that “The Old Testament announces the coming of Christ to redeem his people. The Gospels narrate the fulfillment of that announcement. The rest of the New Testament interprets that event and announces further events to come.” Doornik *et al.* (1960:83) adds to the argument by claiming that, “No other spiritual leader can claim an age long introduction by means of prophecies, so that a chosen section of mankind was watching over His coming, generation after generation, and was able to recognize Him immediately at His advent.” It was the hope of Israel in Jesus’ generation that prophecy concerning the Messiah would be concentrated, as Cullman (1959:22) points out, “in the one true Prophet who makes an end of all false prophecy.” It is obviously clear that false prophecy has not ceased; therefore it would be incorrect to suggest the fulfillment of it in Jesus, at least not in His incarnation (first advent) but in His return (Second Advent). Among the other aspects of prophecy such as the prediction of future events, Frame (2002:487) informs us that Prophets also interpret history, exhort to repentance and faithfulness, and proclaim God’s standards and promises. It is the interpretation of history (chapter 2) that affects our immediate future and thus constitutes a prophetic element.

The nature of prophecy is sensitive and must be approached with caution and therefore the following five points serve as lampposts on a precarious path.

#### **2.5.3.1. Prophecy in Obscure Language**

This is the most popular of all messianic type prophecies. Most prophecies are frequently given in this form such as only Spirit led believers will discern. As Paul says “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God etc.” (1Cor.2:14). Most of God’s programme is privy to only those that are His and not to all and sundry to make sport of.

#### **2.5.3.2. Prophecy in Figurative Language**

This too is frequent and purposely styled figurative. It serves to deprive the general crowd of curious enquiry and its true spiritual content much like the Parables of which our Lord had said that ‘it was not given to *them* to understand’<sup>54</sup> The style in figure is to hide uncertainty and not to bring it about. It is only a communication tool for clarity as most illustrative figures are. (e.g. Is.11:1 ‘rod’ ‘branch’ ‘roots’ etc.)

#### **2.5.3.3. The Future regarded as Past or Present**

All messianic prophecy is usually stated in the past tense (e.g. Is.53). It is viewed as an event already past. A. B. Davidson’s: Hebrew Syntax (1902:62) points out that “The perfect tense is very

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<sup>54</sup> Cf.Mt.13: 11.

common in the elevated language of the prophets, whose faith and imagination so vividly project before them the event or scene which they predict that it appears already realised. It is part of the purpose of God, and therefore, to the clear eyes of the prophet, already as good as accomplished.” The idea of this method is designed for the reader to conceive of the event as certain of completion.

#### **2.5.3.4. The Horizontal prophecy and not the Vertical**

That prophecy which the scripture is pleased to reveal is for the benefit of order in our understanding.<sup>55</sup> This does not mean that all that there is to be revealed is revealed. Much of what is termed ‘intermediary steps’ between great events is left excluded. ‘Transitions’ as they are otherwise known as, seem to occupy prominence as far as prophecy is concerned. Great periods of time usually separate great prophecies of time’ (cf. Is.6: 1-2 & Lk.4: 18-19).

#### **2.5.3.5. The Mediate and Immediate application**

It must also be stated apart from the above findings that prophecy for the most part has also a near and far fulfilment. A classic example is in Is.7:14 which states, “....a virgin shall conceive and bear a son...” This was fulfilled through Isaiah’s wife (near) and later through Mary the mother of our Lord (far). Dallas Willard (1999) eloquently reminds us:

“At a certain point in history this Word, this visible language, the upholding order of the universe, came to us through the womb of Mary. He was in the world and the world came into being through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to what was His own and His people did not accept Him. The redemptive entry of God upon the human scene was no intrusion into foreign territory; it was a move into His own. It was a focussing of that divine thought which is the order of all creation into the finite form of one human personality.”

### **2.6. Impeccability based on His Majesty**

That He is “a divine and supernatural personality” (Doornik *et al.*, 1960:94) is testified to by all of His followers who were prepared to go to the death for Him. The followers of Christ came to salvation because they contemplated His impeccability. The account of His transfiguration puts this into perspective for it was there that they really saw who He was<sup>56</sup>. To support this inference Horton (2011:461) concludes that “In addition to the annunciation and baptism, the transfiguration also provides a narrative account of the relation of the Son to the Father and the Spirit.” That is to say, they were given a view of the continuity between Father and Son, not in rank but in essence. Warfield (1950:78) states, “The maxim rules that whatever the father is, that the son is also.” If there was discontinuity, i.e., the proclivity within His flesh to falter, it would have been most apparent in that setting. The overwhelming attraction of such majesty is not a trifling experience as is clearly proven by Peter’s recollection of the event (2 Pet. 1:17).

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<sup>55</sup> This is certainly not to exclude the fact that its other purpose is to demonstrate and prove its inspiration.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Matt. 17:1-8, Mk. 9:1-8 & Lk. 9:27-36.

## 2.7. Impeccability comparable to Impassability

The *Impassibility* of God is another one of His incommunicable attributes. It means “immunity to suffering” (Horton, 2011:242). It is not that God has no emotion or is impervious to human suffering (Ex. 3:7). It is that He does not respond to this human bane the same way we do because He is above it (transcendent). His impassibility cannot mean that He is impervious to human suffering any more than an invincible army cannot be attacked. In the same vein Jesus’ impeccability cannot mean that He is not subject to real temptation and in the same logic cannot also imply that subjection also proves susceptibility.

## 2.8. Impeccability Based on His Resurrection

The case for the Resurrection also contributes largely to the impeccability of Christ in that as Doornik *et al.* (1960:90) points out that Jesus never spoke about His passion without at the same time referring to His Resurrection. It is not a “new consciousness in humankind” (Machida, 1999:86) but a literal event confirming and affirming His deity (Rom. 1:4). It is clear that He did not want people to think of Him as just a man who wishes to die, but as the God-man who is destined to die. The hyphen is not there to, as Warfield (1950:88) explains, “merge them one in the other but [only to] join the two together.” It entails among other things the sinlessness of Christ for it was, as Sproul (2000:114) asserts, based on His character that the New Testament argues that it was impossible for death to hold Him.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the homage paid to Him by the apostles proved that they acknowledged their Master as the Lord of life and if their belief was false then they were in error as to His nature (Beet, n.d.:409).

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central point of history upon which all eschatology depends and based on the gospels whose primary purpose according to Cook (1981:31) “is to proclaim Jesus as Christ and Lord *in the light of His resurrection*” [emphasis mine] makes it a primary Christological concern. To this Cullman (1959:49) adds that, “The New Testament regards the historical Christ and his work as the central event, the midpoint of time.” That is to say that it all revolves around His Incarnational work chief of which is His Resurrection. When we add the powerful declaration by Paul in Rom. 1:4 we find in this assertion the celebration of the glory of Christ (Warfield, 1950:82). We cannot, as some do, entertain the untenable notion that Jesus received His divinity only as a consequence of His resurrection (Cook, 1981:168). The Resurrection confirms and affirms that which is already true by confession that He is “The Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16). Van de Beek (2002?:136) controversially asserts that, “whether he ever committed sin we cannot determine historically” and then proceeds immediately to rescue the drowning child by concluding, “It can only be a theological conclusion based upon his resurrection by God.” Granted we cannot know everything that Jesus said and taught (John 20:3-31) and this

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<sup>57</sup> This is all the more strange a comment coming from someone who subscribes to ‘peccability.’

is to imply that not everything said and taught and did by Him was recorded by the disciples or anyone else for that matter; so history itself is not a witness to this doctrine. Cook (1981:2) is correct to advise that, “To think theologically is to think historically.” Everything that was recorded is historical and testifies to His sinlessness and history cannot prove otherwise. The only power possible to revoke the power of death is the power of God (Edwards, 2005:85).

### **3. His Ministry**

It is not an overstatement to suggest that the work of Jesus Christ cannot be separated from His Person (Cullman, 1959:234). Stott (2006) with redemptive eloquence states, “If there was a paradox in His person it is not surprising that there should be one in His work.” To this adds Cullman (1959:3) who observes that “The New Testament hardly ever speaks of the person of Christ without at the same time speaking of his work.” This is made clear when one reads the prologue of John. The ‘Logos’ is immediately associated with “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (Jn. 1:3).

#### **3.1. Impeccability based on His Sufferings.**

We have argued above that Christ is God. We will argue here that the fullness of His deity does not diminish ought from the fullness of His humanity. It is foreign to Judaism that the Messiah must suffer (Culman, 1959:58) yet it was the argument of Jonathan Edwards as quoted by (Jeffery, Ovey & Sach, 2007:266) in his famous essay on *Original Sin*, that “the heinousness of a crime is determined not only by the nature of the action, but also by the dignity and worth of the person offended.” In this essay Edwards was defending the death of Christ against the view that a punishment and death comprising of just a few hours can never measure against the everlasting punishment due the wicked. If everlasting punishment is due to the sinner then only everlasting punishment in the substitute will suffice. To use the crisp logic of Edwards as quoted by Jeffery, Ovey & Sach, (2007: 267) the answer follows succinctly that “Just as the heinousness of a sin is determined in part by the dignity of the person sinned against, so also the severity of a punishment is determined in part by the dignity of the one being punished”. Therefore the ‘*dignity of the one being punished*’ is not a sustainable argument if He was peccable. He is the one in whom “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead *bodily*’ (Col. 2:9, *emphasis mine*).

Moreover, concerning His sufferings it is safe to conclude, given the account in John’s gospel, that His baptism, among other things, also inaugurated this official necessity. The Baptist is clearly on record as stating at this event, “Behold! The Lamb of God *who takes away the sin of the world!* [Emphasis mine]. Therefore this proves that His vicarious death which presupposes His impeccability and His impeccability in turn also earns Him the right to suffer vicariously. Added to this is the New Testament proximity of the concepts of righteousness and suffering (2 Thess. 1:5 &

1 Pet. 3:14). It is in this sense that His right to suffer implies His intrinsic righteousness.<sup>58</sup> It is this same Peter who wanted nothing to do with His death who began preaching the relationship and the necessity of His suffering and righteousness (Acts 3:11-18). Cullman (1959:74) reminds us that it was “the same apostle, who according to 1 Cor. 15:5 was later the first to see the risen Christ, was also the first after this experience to proclaim in the light of the resurrection the necessity of the suffering and death of Jesus.”

### 3.2. Impeccability based on His Miracles.

There are about forty miracles recorded in the gospels and they are as Warfield (1950:31) states, “only as specimens, and as such they represent all classes.” Concerning His miracles, Doornik, *et al.* (1960:93) explain as follows:

“Taken in conjunction with the prophecies<sup>59</sup>, with the inspired teaching of Christ Himself<sup>60</sup>, and with the utterly spiritual character of His personality, they form a chain of indisputable evidence[s] that here once more God intervened supernaturally in the history of mankind by sending His own Son” and it would “be even more strange if such a Person had not possessed a supernatural power placing Him altogether above nature.”

That Jesus is mystical is not denied for all the combined grey matter in the world is inadequate to comprehend fully such a majestic Person, but that He is mythical because of this is outlandish. Bultmann’s (1958:16) assumption is unscientific when he writes, “Modern men take it for granted that the course of nature and of history, like their own inner life and their practical life, is nowhere interrupted by the intervention of supernatural powers.” This is an unscientific observation simply because it is not provable and Bultmann nowhere provides proof for this comment. He would have to talk to every modern man to ascertain whether ‘supernatural powers’ were indeed absent from their lives. Aside from this obvious impossibility Bultmann would also have to know empirically what “supernatural powers” are in order to discount them. He is taking his understanding of “supernatural powers” from the recorded events of the gospel writers who were eye witnesses, something that is not within his own so-called research. He goes on to assert that these “mythologies” were widespread which is probably why Luke wrote his account (cf. Luke 1:1-4). To reduce the supernatural to myths is a naturalist presupposition. This is typically done by “a child of the Enlightenment” (Horton, 2011:175). Notwithstanding, Jesus’ mastery over sickness and death is usually coupled with His ability to forgive sins (Doornik *et al.* 1960:83) and this authority is never relinquished by Him.<sup>61</sup> Sinfulness belongs to human nature and the worldwide Flood of Noah has proved this (Frame, 2002:281). The works of Christ in terms of his miracles as Frame argues (2002:282) “are redemptive-historical...and is a declaration of [his] covenant lordship, *contra peccatum*, rather than *contra naturam*.” That is to suggest that His works are rather against sin

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<sup>58</sup> Refer 2.3.2 above

<sup>59</sup> Refer 2.5.3 above

<sup>60</sup> Refer chapter 3, point 4 and 2.5 above

<sup>61</sup> Refer 2.5.2 above

than against nature. “The peculiarity of a miracle” suggests Doornik *et al.* (1960:91) “is that it cannot be explained by the existing laws of nature.” This is to concur with His unique nature as well. Therefore to see His humanity as only human is to see it only with the lenses of “the existing laws of nature”. Surely this cannot be the correct approach given that we are dealing with One who can walk on water. His is “a divine and supernatural personality” (Doornik *et al.* 1960:94).

Moreover, the relationship of Christ’s miracles to his impeccability is seen when Peter mouthed that marvelous confession in Luke 5:8. He confesses, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” This came after he witnessed the miraculous draught of fish. The power of the Holy One to perform and control the creatures gave witness to the fact the He was God the creator, and the first thing to emerge from this is Peter’s sin. The condition was totally absent from the One before him. There is no incompatibility between His power to perform miracles and His nature, although this was questioned before (Jn. 9:16) (Ullmann, n.d., 44).

### **3.2.1. The Miracle of Healing Blindness**

As unique as His impeccable nature is, so is His work of healing blindness. It was unprecedented in that no healing of blindness is recorded before Jesus nor after Him. Chafer (1993, Vol. 6: 282) emphasizes that, “Christ came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (8:3). He took the place of vital union with the sinner (6:5, 10–11); but did not become a sinner, or partake of the sin nature (Heb. 4:15; 7:26)”

### **3.3. Impeccability Based on His Headship of the Church**

The age-long prophecies that preceded Him<sup>62</sup> are complemented only by the 2000 year old Church that proclaims and exonerates Him. The new creation called the Church is a primary feature of this age. Harris (2004:29) highlights the much forgotten fact that, “Through His Church, spread out around the world, Jesus is glorifying Himself and extending His reign in ways that no single person, congregation, or denomination could do alone.” Such an act of glorification cannot be committed by and thus reduced to an impeccable being. His Father has put all under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all to the church (Eph. 1:22). In His Father’s eyes He does not possess such a nature as to impugn His Father’s glory.

## **4. Conclusion**

It is necessary that Christ be a sinless person. Bonhoeffer (2011) has pointed out that “It is not the task of theology to solve the mystery of Christ” and that has not been the effort in the above pages. We have made it clear that if Christ is not impeccable then His vicarious sacrifice is not acceptable. Throughout the Old Testament God always demanded a perfect sacrifice for sin and atonement. Lev. 6:25-30 makes it unquestionably clear that the sacrifice had to be holy because God is holy and thus the criterion for selecting among the flocks was set in stone, so to speak. They had to

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<sup>62</sup> Refer 2.5.3 above

choose the best from among their flock, that which was without spot or blemish. It seems an understatement to say that it was necessary for Christ to be sinless, yea impeccable, because He was dying for our sins. If He was sinful in that He had the proclivity to sin then that would imply the presence of a sin nature and He would necessarily need blood to be shed for Himself first. The absurdity of this reasoning, as we have shown, is that He would have had to die for His own sin first, be resurrected and then return to die for the sin of the world.

Every facet of His life displays the billboard of impeccability. Every work and word has this as the underlying premise and the overarching principle. Impeccability is the most manifest quality of His majesty and Person as depicted in the Scripture and we shall dedicate the next chapter to this.

## Chapter 5: The Evidence of Scripture and the interpretation of that evidence.

### 1. Introduction

B. B. Warfield (1917:239) agrees with our view when he writes, “Our conviction of the deity of Christ rests not alone on the scriptural passages which assert it, but also on His entire impression on the world; or perhaps thus: Our conviction rests not more on the scriptural assertions than upon His entire manifestation.” We are in hearty agreement with Warfield, but seek to approach this chapter exclusively from a scriptural basis as His ‘entire manifestation’ has been displayed in previous chapters. Regarding the prominent theme of the scriptures we also agree with Horton (2011:203) that Scripture’s “content is Christ”. We further believe that if we apply the golden rule of interpretation to a passage then not only will the content be Christ but also that Christ will be the content. LaHaye (2009:14) records for us this rule, “When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary, literal meaning, unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise.”

In chapter two we have presented the matter historically and in chapter three and four we have presented the issue polemically but in this chapter our singular goal is to defend the issue exegetically.

There can be no criticism of Christ without criticism of scripture because it is there that we meet this figure. Where Christ is criticized it follows that scripture is criticized (Frame, 2010:563). We have found it necessary to include here a brief summary of the basic forms of interpretation as anticipated in chapter two. As pointed out there from Berkhof (1998:315) we discovered that it was at the rise of biblical criticism (both in its higher and lower forms) that this issue received its scalding attention. The basic forms of criticism are listed below in summary, for all were at some point used in this discipline of interpreting Christ’s nature as peccable. A view which this study does not take!

1. Form criticism<sup>63</sup> unleashed a barrage of assaults against the Son of God. Its attempt was to go behind the written sources themselves to uncover the gospel stories in its unembellished state (Dunn, 2005:19). Historical and literary criticism combines to produce this type. This discipline begins with the premise that a text, or portion of a text has a history of its own, originally circulated orally and later committed to writing. The reconstruction of this process is a sub genre of this discipline known as ‘tradition history’. The critic focuses on smaller units within the book of study rather than the whole itself (e.g. the different types of Psalms). The ultimate goal is to correlate it to a particular ‘life setting’. Though profitable when used as the above suggests, it becomes dangerous in the

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<sup>63</sup> So crucial is this issue to this debate that it is also mentioned in chapter 2 (4.2).

hands of the liberal (e.g. Wellhausen, Graff, etc.). The danger in this method lies in the seeing of the part aside from the whole. Too much attention to detail may lead to a case of not seeing the wood for the trees.

2. Higher Criticism concerns itself with the genuineness of the text as opposed to its sister method known as 'lower criticism' which concerns itself with authenticity. In so doing it tries to ascertain the date; style; structure; literary form; historicity; sources and authorship. The value of the document as a whole is considered and not words and parts as in lower criticism. Three main categories involve itself in this method. a) dates need to be scientifically ascertained to verify culture and tradition, b) events will have to be verified either archeologically or historically, or both, and c) the history of the said event has to be reconstructed and explained. The early nineteenth century produced men who assaulted the inspired text with a Documentary Hypothesis of the Pentateuch. Wolf (1991:19) notes that some men like Julius Wellhausen who embraced Higher Criticism and took it even higher, posited the idea of a 'hexateuch' in that he adds the book of Joshua to the list of five making it six. He goes on to point out that still others, like Martin Noth, posits the concept of a 'tetrateuch' because by his estimation these Mosaic writings should have ended at Numbers (Wolf, 1991:19). He continued his re-dating of the scriptures in an effort to demythologize the sacred texts and when that was done it became inevitable that the next step was to assault the Lord Himself, which is what questioning His impeccability is. Dave Breese (1990:96) concludes that "this defection from the orthodox view of scripture was the evisceration of Christianity." It is a fact that when the inerrancy of scripture is attacked it is inevitable that the impeccability of Christ will be next on the chopping block, for the scriptures, when searched, do speak of Him<sup>64</sup>. Higher criticism emphasizes the 'Jesus of History' not the 'Christ of faith' (Lloyd-Jones, 1995:275). The basis of Higher Criticism is an anti-supernatural and rationalistic premise (Horton, 2011:177).
3. Textual Criticism is when the original wording of the author's intention is scrutinised and recovered. Modern manuscripts are easy to check given the technology, but even this cannot protect completely against misprints. We begin to appreciate the difficulty all the more when we consider that they copied by hand using various forms such as dictation; transcription *et al.* The problem of textual variations has to be verified and reconciled to the best possible original wording or form of the text. According to Achtemeier *et al.* (1985:130) "Sometimes textual criticism is referred to as 'lower criticism,' as opposed to other fields of inquiry concerning the text that are called 'higher criticism.' It is 'lower' not because it is less important but because it is foundational to other forms of inquiry."
4. Source Criticism concerns itself with the historical circumstances in which a text was written but as Cook (1981:29) points out, "it was limited to the documents at hand." It aims to try

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. John 5:39. Unless otherwise stated all scripture references are from the Thompson chain-reference study bible/ Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1982

and find the sources that the biblical writers used. The history of a text is being determined by the date of its composition, which in some cases are explicit (Is.1:1; 6:1; Jer.1:1-3) and in other cases are implicit. The implicit cases are reliant upon external sources such as archaeology or non-biblical writings from the same period. One should be careful however that the archaeological finds and non-biblical writings don't force a conclusion that the Bible is subjected to these studies. God's Word is always accurate. Achtemeier (1985:130) is wrong to assume that Daniel describes events in Israel's history when they are clearly prophetic. His view on pseudonymous and composite writing's is only an assumption. He offers no proof for his views! In the 20<sup>th</sup> century source criticism has spent much of its time trying to figure out the dissimilarities between the synoptics. Source criticism has sometimes been referred to as literary criticism and we will consider that next.

5. Literary Criticism as a discipline concerns itself with a completed work. The text is alone in its defence and survival and must account for itself within itself. No external sources are brought to bear in its analysis. Word studies come into play here, which includes disciplines such as lexicography<sup>65</sup>; philology<sup>66</sup>; syntax<sup>67</sup>; inflection<sup>68</sup> and accidence<sup>69</sup>. The judgement of a text is considered according to its style or sophistication, or lack thereof. Various forms of genre and sub-genre have to be considered (poetry; narrative, wisdom; apocalypse, etc.) if the true meaning is to be ascertained. The mood of the text must convey what emotions the audience were under at the time. The unity of the text determines whether it was written by one author or more at various times.
6. Redaction Criticism was the outcome of the improper use of Form criticism. The task of this critic is to assess and analyse individual instances where an alleged edit has occurred. They have however gone a step too far in taking it upon themselves to do the editing themselves. In this sense Achtemeier (1985:133) is wrong in crediting this discipline as being 'fruitful.' It is limited to sources available for checking and is consequently handicapped in making dogmatic conclusions, yet it does.
7. Canonical Criticism is a new-born hybrid of earlier methods. It concerns itself less with parts and more with the finished product. The canonical approach seeks to distinguish Israel and the church. At least, it ought to. Though the writings may apply to both communities of faith (Israel or the Church), a particular writing will not apply to both of them at the same time. The 'acquired status' spoken of by Achtemeier (1985:133) is not to the exclusion of generic principles that inhere in a particular text. This form of criticism does not protect against the abuse of the dispensational structure of the Bible. Achtemeier is a case in point! It does, however, allow a particular book to be studied in the context of its

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<sup>65</sup> Compiling of dictionary in the author's culture and language.

<sup>66</sup> The science of a language considered historically and comparatively.

<sup>67</sup> Grammatical arrangement of words.

<sup>68</sup> Grammatical expression relating to change in pitch of voice or modification of word.

<sup>69</sup> Dealing with variable parts of words.

position in the scriptures. One has to ask the question, why is it in that particular place in the Bible?

These are not only variant forms of interpretation but rather deviant forms of interpretation. They have done more harm than good, but ironically their scholarly approach has done a lot to help in proving the accuracy of the Bible.

## **2. In Defence of a Scriptural Defence**

Ravi Zacharias (2012:91) astutely and correctly observes, “When one begins with a problematic induction, through an inescapable seduction, there is an inevitable reduction and ultimately a false deduction.” This we have found with the peccability premise as outlined in chapter 3 and countered in chapter 4. We take for our perspective Ullmann’s (n.d.:1) view that “sinlessness is not used merely in the negative sense of an absence of antagonism to the Divine law, but in its essentially positive meaning of actual conformity to the will of God.” The approach to any study concerning Christ must have the scriptures as its premise. Sproul (2000:61) adds, “Revelation yields information that one cannot gain by unaided reason, but never information that is opposed to the laws of reason.” Added to this Warfield (1950:6) concludes, “Christianity was from its beginnings a literary religion” and with that in mind it is hard to conceive of the Biblical truth as not having the final say in matters of faith. We agree with Frame (2010:7) when he concludes, “We can learn from the history of doctrine and from contemporary theologians, [but] the final answers to our questions must come from the Word of God itself.”

Frame (2002:682) further points out that it is the common teaching of the New Testament that Jesus was sinless.<sup>70</sup> The Bible shows us a Christ from above<sup>71</sup>, which has to be then the launch pad for a successive study concerning His person. The scriptures speak of Him<sup>72</sup> and it has a view that originates from above. To establish the evidence of Scripture on the different facets of impeccability, the applicable parts of Scripture are identified and exegesis is done with special emphasis on the Immaculate Conception (Luke 1:26-38); the Temptation of Christ (Matthew 4:1-11) and the Kenosis (Phil. 2:5-11). This will also include related and equally crucial texts such as Rom. 8:3, 2 Cor. 5:21, Heb. 2:9; 4:15 & 10:5. We have included a section on His baptism below because four major heresies refer to this event as a reference to the fact that He only became the Messiah at that point (the Ebionites, The Alogi, Paul of Samosota and the Gnostics)<sup>73</sup>. Every section below is offered in dispute of the argument for peccability.

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<sup>70</sup> Although he does not use the impeccable.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. John 1:1

<sup>72</sup> Cf. John 5:39

<sup>73</sup> We have rendered a brief treatment to these views in chapter two, but have sought to give the exposition here as the purpose of this chapter allows.

### 3. The Synoptics

The synoptic writers were convinced of the impeccability of Christ (Cullman, 1959:93) for they constantly tried to equate His deity with His “power to forgive sins”.<sup>74</sup> Moreover they always sought to portray the dual nature of the completeness of His humanity and the unity of His person (Warfield, 1950:58). In this section we will survey three most important events crucial to this argument.

#### 3. 1. The Immaculate Conception (Luke 1:26–38)<sup>75</sup>

Though Luke was never an eye-witness to the following event, his impeccable collation of historical facts set him apart from his contemporaries and qualifies him for this project. Regarding Luke Warfield (1959:9) observes, “He had the will and capacity to make good use of his abounding opportunities for exact information”. As a native of Antioch his knowledge of the life of Christ was derived and indirect rather than contrived and direct, and therefore complimented Paul’s ministry and missionary effort.

Can any statement regarding Christianity be complete without mentioning the Virgin birth of Christ? Dallas Willard (1999) observes:

“It is hard to believe that someone who manifests a transcendent life could still be human. One of the most serious and severe doctrinal struggles in the early church was over the question whether Jesus was authentically human. A primary function of the doctrine of the Virgin birth was to secure the fact that Jesus did have a human body since He was literally “born of a woman.””

Notwithstanding this assertion some in Church history, especially the Ebionites, affirmed the virgin conception, but denied the Son’s pre-incarnate existence (Horton, 2011:470, footnote 47). Strictly speaking it was not the birth of Christ that is at the heart of the Church’s controversy, but the conception of Christ (Van de Beek: 2002?: 148). It was ‘the early church’ (Berkhof, 1949:108) who put forward the concept describing Mary as *Theotokos* –God-bearer, from where the phrase ‘Mother of God’ comes. If it is not necessary that a man believes in the Virgin birth to be saved then why is it a cardinal truth? According to Van de Beek (2002?: 151) in a footnote drawing from C. J. den Heyer, Berkhof regrets that the God-man of the Virgin birth was ever placed in the Creed. He reckons that although it is “a new act of creation by God” it is nonetheless “hardly relevant (and non-historical)”.

Supernaturalism is the key note of the Christian faith. The New Testament opens with the Incarnation which is the quintessence of the supernatural. Aside from His supernatural birth His pre-existence is in itself a testimony to His supernaturalness (Warfield, 1968:163). The phrase

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Matt. 9:6, Mark. 2:7, 10, Luke 5:21, 5:24.

<sup>75</sup> As the layout of this chapter shows, I have worked with the New Testament texts as it appears in the New Testament. However, I made this the only exception due to the obvious fact that His birth preceded everything on earth.

'virgin-birth' can sometimes be misleading as biologically there is no such thing. Conceptual virginity has been endorsed by the creedal church but perpetual virginity, the belief that Mary stayed a virgin till her death belongs more to Mariology than Christology (Van de Beek, 2002?: 154). It may help to understand that Jesus was born normally. The uniqueness of this event, as Blanchard (2001:563) points out, "is not how he [He] *left* his [His] mother's womb, but how he [He] *entered* it". The physician Luke explains in a little more detail when he writes of two particular phrases, viz., 'come upon you' and 'overshadow' you<sup>76</sup>. The phrase 'come upon you' is used of Old Testament saints of whom Mary was one. The Spirit came upon individuals to achieve something and left again but the individuals were still under the covenant that God made with them. Usually when this happened some extraordinary feat was accomplished. For example, in the case of Samson there were some unbelievable physical performances of strength and in the case of Daniel or Ezekiel it concerned prophetic utterances, *et al.* In Acts 2 at Pentecost this changed and He now indwells us. The Spirit of the Lord came upon her and that's what made all this possible. This word is used for attacking an enemy, for diseases, calamities and sleep. It signifies an overtaking with little resistance. When the Holy Spirit came upon someone the job got done. Every time the Holy Spirit came upon someone we read of the feat being accomplished. While today He indwells us and we resist Him.

The next phrase 'overshadow' is a little more complex. There is no Old Testament equivalent for this although the concept is not foreign to the Old Testament, which is what makes it all the more difficult. Regarding this phrase the Online Bible Greek Lexicon (1982) reads:

"to throw a shadow upon, to envelop in a shadow, to overshadow - from a vaporous cloud that casts a shadow the word is transferred to a shining cloud surrounding and enveloping persons with brightness. Used of the Holy Spirit exerting creative energy upon the womb of the Virgin Mary and impregnating it (a use of the word which seems to have been drawn from the familiar Old Testament idea of a cloud as symbolizing the immediate presence and power of God.)"

It appears three times in the New Testament. First in our text, then at the Transfiguration of Christ<sup>77</sup> and then in Acts 5:15 regarding Peter's shadow. At the Transfiguration it had to do with Christ's heavenly glory and with Peter it had to do with his shadow healing people. It is observable from this that all three times it had to do with Jews - first a woman, then three men and finally a multitude. There seems to be progression here. What it signifies is that it starts off small and grows to immense proportions. The very term indicates that it happens from the top down and not from down up. It is quite different to any sexual act. Swindoll (1993) says, "The Holy sperm traversed up the fallopian tube." He has quite an imagination, but imagination will not help to explain this miracle. I have a hard enough time understanding it on a natural level leave alone on a supernatural plane. It seems better to say that this process occurred by incubation rather than

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. Lk.1: 35

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Matt.17:5; Mk.9:7 & Lk. 9:34

inception.<sup>78</sup> We are not told *how* this happened but merely the fact that it did. Sometimes details will not always prove or disprove a fact, especially regarding the way God works.

We understand that great care should prevail in any undertaking of Jesus' sinlessness for there is not in any single individual full knowledge of all related issues (Reymond, 1998:551). We are also careful not to relate that the virgin conception is the finality of His sinlessness for that would not predate sinlessness in His person but begin it at His incarnation. It was neither Isaiah's<sup>79</sup> nor Matthew's<sup>80</sup> nor Luke's<sup>81</sup> intention when prophesying and reporting the incident to convey that idea. It is interesting to note that all Isaiah's prophecies present the coming Messiah in contradistinction to those whom He is coming for. Peter Colon (2012: 18) notes this distinction when he writes, "So many of Isaiah's prophecies focus on mankind's sinfulness and the coming divine Redeemer." That being the case, *mankind's sinfulness* is depicted as both conditional and volitional and the Redeemer, although one of them, is portrayed as the antithesis to them. Therefore in Isaiah's scheme of things, the Redeemer as revealed initially in the Incarnation, is both conditionally and volitionally impeccable as opposed to the people whom He is to Redeem who themselves are accurately portrayed as conditionally peccable.

The virgin birth is the predicate for His deity, albeit human, and not necessarily His sinlessness. Cullman (1959:191) puts things into perspective by writing, "Jesus was born of a virgin just as Adam was formed out of virginal earth (virginal because it had not rained). The fall of Adam came from the disobedience of a virgin, Eve; the redeeming work of Jesus came to pass through the obedience of a virgin, Mary." However with the same we would be remiss if we fail to acknowledge that such a thing as the Virgin Birth must account secondarily if not primarily for His sinlessness for God cannot sin.

### **3.2. The Baptism of Christ: Matt.3: 13-17/ Mk. 1:9-11/ Lk.3:21-22/ Jn.1:29-34**

The baptism of Jesus has been the subject of much spilt ink. About as many views are around as there are commentators. This is no mean attempt to try and solve the debate but merely to add to the existing views of the contextually sound theologians.

When a subject is mentioned by all three of the synoptic writers we do well to consider it of extreme importance, but when all four evangelists mention it, then it increases in scope and application. Concerning this Dockery (1992:57) writes, "The baptism of Jesus at the hands of John the Baptist is explained in some detail in Matthew 3: 13-17, briefly recounted in Mark 1: 9-11, mentioned in Luke 3:21-22, and implied in John 1:29-34." We prefer to take Matthew's account as

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<sup>78</sup> We offer this view cautiously seeing that the miraculous cannot be explained with natural terminology.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. 7:14

<sup>80</sup> Cf. 1:20

<sup>81</sup> Cf. 1:35

a basis for this evaluation since his commitment to chronology makes contextual analysis much easier,<sup>82</sup> notwithstanding, that no decent assessment of this grand theme can be considered complete without the perspectives of the other evangelists. In the case of the fourth gospel Jesus and John worked simultaneously and independently and as far as we read this account, it is the only interaction between them. In the case of the synoptics, however, Cullman (1959:32) points out, that it is equally and strangely clear that Jesus only began His ministry after John the Baptist was arrested. The tension (not contradiction) lies in the fact that Jesus did not want His ministry confused with John's. Their purposes were distinct as we shall attempt to prove here. Matthew opens up his account with the words "Then came Jesus"<sup>83</sup> and from the moment we read these words, John and his ministry start taking a back seat to the driving force of what the Christ was to offer. The torch is now handed over. The predecessor gives way to the successor. The forerunner gives way to the finisher.<sup>84</sup>

This is the Coronation service of King Jesus. He has been in obscurity for 30 years.<sup>85</sup> Now He's coming to start His ministry, and dare we say monarchy. Jesus' arrival on the scene commands attention and all eyes are focused on Him. This sort of attention is no problem to Him, as it seemed to epitomise His ministry. After His baptism we read that "the heavens were opened".<sup>86</sup> The heavens were opened to Ezekiel<sup>87</sup>; the heavens were opened to Stephen<sup>88</sup>, they were also opened to John<sup>89</sup>, but all of these instances drew attention to that which came out of that revealed glory, whereas on this occasion nothing distracted from Him who was 'the Lamb', save the Voice that complimented Him.<sup>90</sup>

The section in question is one of the most glorious proofs of the Tri-unity of God as all three individuals are depicted together.<sup>91</sup> The Father delights in the Son, the Son is basking in the Father's glory, and the Holy Spirit is that inextricable link that descends from God and lights upon Him.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. 'Then' 3:18/ 4:1 etc. This does not mean that the others do not use this word, but as will be seen, Matthew provides a better flow in his narrative.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Matt.3:13

<sup>84</sup> 'Finisher' does not mean someone who cancels out the previous ministry; on the contrary it means someone who completes it. A good example is in a relay race.

<sup>85</sup> Luke 3:23 records His age at baptism which some assert is a deliberate detail by Luke to vindicate His priestly office. This detail is viewed against Num.4: 3, which declares that a male child was not eligible for the priesthood until he turned 30 years of age but how, much weight this line of reason carries is uncertain because when we get to Num.8: 24 God drops the age limit to 25 years. It seemed to have stayed that way for quite a while until David changed it in 1Chron. 23:24-27 to 20 years. This drop in age limit for the priesthood could be due to a shortage of Levites for the ministry.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Matt.3:16

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Ezekiel 1:1

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Acts 7:56

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Rev.4:1/19:11

<sup>90</sup> For a fuller treatment on this, refer Lenski. R.C.H The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel: Augsburg Publishing House: p.130

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Matt.3:16.

<sup>92</sup> This marvellous passage reveals truths like the eternal Sonship of Christ, the Tri-unity of God and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and a full or even partial treatment of these themes will not be afforded space in this essay as they will not

Our perusal begs a question, and that is, did Jesus need to get baptised? The answer as we shall see is a resounding No! According to Davidson *et al.* (1968:777) "His baptism was a step that had to be taken in order to accomplish the whole of God's righteous purpose." The need was not so much in Jesus as it was in John.<sup>93</sup> John was physically preventing Him. "Prevent" is an action word and indicates earnest force. It is only used in the New Testament and Lenski (1964:122) points out that it is an action begun but uninterrupted. John was a wilderness recluse and therefore rough and strong. Jesus could have uttered one Word and made him like putty, but He did not. Why? Because John's argument was legitimate. The only thing is that he was being a bit presumptuous in thinking that Jesus was making a mistake. Matthew Henry (1976:1212) says "John's modesty thinks this an honour too great for him to receive." Nevertheless, preventing Christ is always a sin no matter how modest the heart. Peter is a good illustration of one who tried the very same thing in the upper room when Jesus wanted to wash his feet.<sup>94</sup> John, like Peter, needed to understand that he could have no part with Him, if he did not condescend to Him.

Jesus couldn't push against him anymore and had to speak and when Jesus speaks all resistance crumbles. The word 'permit/allow /suffer'<sup>95</sup> tell us that what Jesus was doing was voluntary and not mandatory. Jesus also tells John that it is only for 'now'. This begs the question, 'why now?' Matthew Henry (1976:1212) asks and answers beautifully. "Christ is *now* in a state of humiliation. He is not only *found in fashion as a man*, but is *made in the likeness of sinful flesh*, and thus He *was made sin for us*, though He *knew no sin*." The scope of their ministry is universally extensive, as is indicated by the word "all", but 'the what' of it can only be realised if the present cannot be handled, which is why the 'now' is in the imperative. It is only now that Jesus can be found in that 'likeness and form' and soon His glory must follow. Therefore that which applies to the now must be timeously applied or else forfeited.

At this point John and Jesus seem to be on similar wavelengths. Jesus agrees that if He were in John's shoes (or sandals), He would probably try and stop Him too, but for the sake of 'fulfilling all righteousness'<sup>96</sup>, He reacts to John's prevention. Christ accepted his rebuttal, but not his refusal. Chafer (1993, Vol. 5:62) is quick to point out that, "according to the Mosaic Law which God Himself decreed and which the people were taught to honour, every priest must be ordained and Christ, being a Priest, was allowed no exception in the matter of ordination. His compliance with the divinely established law constituted the fulfilling of all righteousness." According to Dockery

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help, or hinder, the point of my argument. I simply want to show the purpose of His actual baptism and not the results or effects of it. Please refer to the bibliography for sources on these subjects.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Matt.3:14.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. John 13:6-8

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Matt.3:15

<sup>96</sup> The need seemed resigned to the fulfilment of the law which is what the colloquial expression "fulfil all righteousness" implies. It may also have something to do with the priestly purification laws due to His age being mentioned (+- 30 yrs). These probabilities are offered for consideration and do not form part of the overall thesis.

(1992:57) “righteousness in Matthew’s’ gospel refers to those who are upright and law-abiding, obedient and faithful to God’s commandments.” Accepting Dockery’s definition, we must conclude then that Jesus had to reverse the Adamic failure and made this the central function of His ministry. The failure of Adam in living according to his created righteousness constituted the lost future of his progeny

John’s argument goes like this: the prerequisite for me to baptise anybody is that they must confess their sins<sup>97</sup> and show evidence of repentance.<sup>98</sup> As far as John is concerned, in order for Jesus to get baptised by him, He would first have to confess His sins and then repent and display evidence of such a change, which would bring Him under the scrutinising eye of the Baptist. To John that was unthinkable! He was brought up to know that his cousin was sinless. His godly mother Elizabeth would’ve explained everything to him about his unique cousin. Even she addressed Him as Lord before He was born.<sup>99</sup> How could He come to a baptism of repentance that precipitated a confession of sin? Barclay (n.d.: 133) suggests that it was John’s “astonishment that there should be even the appearance of confession” that made him “hinder” the Lord. For all intents and purposes he could not baptise Jesus for he was the sinner, not Jesus.

MacArthur (1993) states that in the Greek the personal pronouns are emphatic, ‘I need to be baptised by **You**, and are **You** coming to **Me**?’ These emphases of ‘I’, ‘You’, ‘You’, and ‘me’ highlights the contrast between the two. The differences go beyond the surface. John – sinful / Jesus – sinless. The polar opposites of the two main characters are what is emphasised.

Then John allowed Him! John had nothing left to resist Him with, for now he was momentarily settled in his mind that this must come to pass. Perhaps John knew that if he baptised Jesus it would signify the end of his ministry and the dawn of a new one.<sup>100</sup> There is another two groups that John didn’t want to baptise, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.<sup>101</sup> They didn’t want to repent while Jesus didn’t have to.

It is both necessary and important to understand that John’s baptism was not Christian baptism, which was yet to be instituted (MacArthur, 1996: 22). Baptism was not an unusual procedure in Palestine as Jews used this method to initiate Gentiles into Judaism. The truth is that Jesus loved John very much and referred to him as the greatest prophet there ever was,<sup>102</sup> bar Himself. All

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. Matt.3:6

<sup>98</sup> Matt.3: 8. The evidence in question is usually seen in day to day life. A new ethos & code of conduct govern a spiritually regenerated person. (Refer Luke 3:11-14) Incidentally this infers a time gap for this evidence to manifest itself, not unlike the present day period of time between salvation & baptism. This significance is given even more weight when we see the distance Jesus walked to get to John. +- 100km

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Lk.2:43

<sup>100</sup> In fact there is a hint of this in Luke 3:21.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Matt.3:7.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Matt.11:2-18/ Luke 7:28

this can be a tad flattering at a superficial level, but knowing Jesus and the type of person He was (is), He must have meant something deeper when He referred to John as the greatest. In the Matthew and Luke accounts of Jesus' testimony of John there is the deliberate mention of the sum and substance of John's sermons, that of 'the Kingdom of heaven'. John's baptism was for sinners only, which is why the need for repentance is paramount, but the purpose of John's baptism is "...that Messiah/Christ should be revealed *to Israel*, therefore (that is why) I come baptising with water".<sup>103</sup> John's baptism of Christ existed in the main to reveal Messiah to Israel, not the world. Chafer (1993, Vol. 5:61) elaborates:

"Christ's early ministry was wholly confined to the nation Israel (cf. Matt.10: 6; 15:24; Rom.5: 8), and that the whole reality of the cross is entered and consummated only when He has been rejected by that nation. It is clear that the cross recognises the need of the whole world as well as Israel (Jn.3:16; Heb.2: 9; 1 Jn.2: 2)...what Christ did in baptism was of necessity related to His Israelitish ministry and concerns what to Israel was the fulfilling of all righteousness."

Coupled with this significant and only reason for John's baptism, is his wilderness sermons, the sum and substance of which is 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'.<sup>104</sup> All who wanted to be part of this kingdom had to be baptised into this whole new order, whether Jew or not. Entrance into the kingdom could only be by 'confession of sins' and "fruits worthy of repentance'. Only upon such evidences can this initiation rite be administered (which implies a period of time for this proof). Dockery (1992:57) warns, "We must not necessarily conclude that John was seeking to convert people into a messianic community. Rather, John was concerned with bringing about a messianic consciousness within the parameters of genuine repentance." Even John himself wasn't always sure of his cousin's Messianic right, as his confusion clearly evidenced itself while he was in jail.<sup>105</sup>

To the Jew the word 'kingdom'<sup>106</sup> would immediately conjure up only one image and that is the image of a literal messianic kingdom delineated by the prophets.<sup>107</sup> They would have no other concept of it apart from its literalness. If Messiah was to be a literal ruler, then it stands to reason that this kingdom of His has to be literal.

The argument for the baptism of Christ is not so much centred on procedure as it is on purpose. If we concede that Christ succumbed to John's baptism, it becomes necessary to find the purpose of John's baptism. John F. Walvoord's (1974:31) extensive comment is worthy of note:

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. John1:31

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Matt.3:2

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Matt.11:3

<sup>106</sup> The phrase 'kingdom of heaven' and 'kingdom of God' has enjoyed much comparison and has yielded much fruit, but whether we compare the "of heaven" or the "of God" part, is not really of moment to this study, for we are more concerned with the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish comprehension rather than the 21<sup>st</sup> century evangelical comprehension, and from their perspective the word "kingdom" stands out in either of the statements.

<sup>107</sup> cf. Isa.11:1-6/ 12:1-6/ 24:22-27:13/ 35:1-10/ 52:1-55:13/ 59:20-66:24/ Jer.23:3-8/ 31:1-40/ 32:37-41/ 33:1-26/ Ezek.34:11-31/ 36:32-38/ 37:1-28/ 40:1-48:35/ Dan.2:44-45/ 7:14/ Hos.3:4-5/ 13:9-14:9/ Joel 2:28-3:21/ Amos 9:11-15/ Zeph.3:14-20/ Zech. 8:1-23/ 14:9-21.

“The more important question than the mode of baptism, however, is the meaning of the baptism of John. It is clearly not Christian baptism<sup>108</sup>, as it does not signify initiation into the body of Christ; neither is it symbolic of a work of the Holy Spirit, as John himself refers to it as the work of Christ. It is rather a religious rite, signifying their confession of sins and commitment to a new holy life, such as was proper for Jews in the old dispensation.”

The preamble to this baptism of Christ is set against the backdrop of the threefold baptism mentioned by John. Walvoord (1974:32) argues that this sets the context for Christ’s baptism: ‘1) the baptism of John – repentance; 2) baptism of the Holy Spirit – initiated by Christ and, 3) baptism with fire.’

For Jesus this was for his Messianic office. Jesus was identifying Himself with the believing remnant of Jews. Dockery (1992:56) points out, “Up to this point baptism was used for Gentiles to disidentify themselves as Gentiles and identify themselves with believing Israel and be initiated into the nation.” The term for this procedure would be ‘proselytising.’ But John was baptising Jews, which intimates that he was suggesting that they were as Gentiles, i.e. ‘dogs’<sup>109</sup> and ‘aliens’.<sup>110</sup> When water was used it was not a means of cleansing, but rather a ceremonial sign that there had been cleansing. To the Jew water is further a sign of chaotic powers (Van de Beek, 2002?:146) and therefore to be submerged as Jesus was and to be raised above and out of it as head of humanity He had thus carried the judgement of God and fulfilled all righteousness. The purpose of this baptism then is to identify those who have repented and fulfilled the conditions for citizenship in the kingdom, so that when the Messiah establishes His kingdom, the people are ready.

There is more than one school of thought as to what kind of a kingdom Jesus came to offer to people. Some say that His disciples and even the Jews had a political and even a carnal kingdom in mind and that Jesus had to correct them (Ponsonby, 2008: 46). Those who take this view usually say that the kind of kingdom that Jesus came to establish was actually in the hearts of men, and that because He had accomplished this we in the Church are that kingdom. This is known as the Amillennial view! Dr. Terry Hulbert’s (1993) view sheds enormous light on this issue and for that reason is quoted in full:

“It is true that the disciples expected a political kingdom and it is also true that release from Rome was an expectation, but neither Jesus nor His disciples ever defined what they meant by the ‘kingdom of heaven’. The obvious reason for this was that everyone knew what they meant and precise definition was never needed. However, the literal physical kingdom has to have as its subject’s cleansed people, which was what was signified by this baptism. This baptism, or any other for that matter, did not cleanse people; it only signified that there was a cleansing. So the sense of this then is that there was a spiritual dimension to the physical kingdom and a physical dimension to the spiritual kingdom. They are mutually exclusive!”

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<sup>108</sup> I agree with Walvoord on this point as Acts 19:1-2 clearly evidences the distinction between the two.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Matt.15:27

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Eph.2:2

You could never get into the physical kingdom and enjoy the benefits of it without being cleansed spiritually. It is in this sense that the two are compatible. It can't only be a physical kingdom, for that would be ignoring the spiritual dimension, nor can it only be a spiritual kingdom, for that would be ignoring the physical dimension. Merrill Tenney (1961:146) explains further that:

“Matthew alone uses the phrase, “the kingdom of heaven” thirty three times. Five times he speaks of the “kingdom of God” (6:33, 12:28, 19:24, 21:31, 21:43). The other synoptics use the latter term in many passages where Matthew employs “kingdom of heaven.” While Jesus asserted unmistakably that His kingdom would have an ultimate material manifestation (8:11, 13: 40-43), He also made plain that it has a present spiritual existence (4:17, 12:28).”

Also it is worthy of note that John's message is saturated with expressive comments associated with judgement. With phrases like 'axe being laid to the root of the tree'<sup>111</sup> and the use of 'the winnowing fan and the unquenchable fire'<sup>112</sup>, are terrifying figures of judgement. Hulbert (1993) unapologetically insists that this refers to the Tribulation period, which makes perfect sense if one considers that this serves in John's messages as the preamble to entering the kingdom. This seems to accord perfectly with the dispensational view of the Tribulation preceding the Millennium kingdom.

Baptism for the believer has to do with testimony and the identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. There is no intrinsic similarity between Christ's baptism and believer's baptism, as Christ wasn't identifying with His own death, burial and resurrection because that didn't happen yet. Perhaps the loudest exponent of this view has to be Chafer, who maintains that because Christ didn't have to conform to the rules of John's baptism (repentance etc.), therefore He did not have to conform to its mode either. He writes:

“There is no direct relation existing between the baptism of Christ and the baptism of the believer. A very wide difference also obtains between what is styled *John's* baptism and the baptism of the Messiah by John. Though Christ was baptised by John, it was not John's usual baptism, which was one of repentance and unto the remission of sins. As a preparation for the Messiah, a baptism designed for sinners could not be required. As intimated before, all attempts to identify the Messiah with the sins of the people in His baptism are in danger of dishonouring the Lord of Glory, and without Biblical support.<sup>113</sup> The penitence of a sinner is in no way the fulfilling of all righteousness” (1993, Vol. 5:63).

Chafer does not say that the mode of Christian baptism is to be determined by Christ's baptism. He clearly distinguishes the two. In his estimation of things, the fact that Christ was not immersed does not mean that believers are not to be. He further explains:

“It is clear that John's baptism was not Christian baptism or else the Apostle would not have re-baptized the twelve disciples of John - the only instance in the New Testament of re-baptizing (Acts 19:4-5). It is even more clear that Christ's' baptism as

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<sup>111</sup> Cf. Matt. 3:10

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Matt. 3:12

<sup>113</sup> Chafer is incorrect to say that his opponents 'are without Biblical support' on their views. Because every alternative view has 'Biblical support', it is only subject to a variance in interpretation which is not usually accurate.

accomplished by John is not Christian baptism, and the oft-repeated injunction to 'follow Christ in baptism' is both unfounded and misleading" (1993, Vol. 5:64).

Will not different significances impose different procedures? It has been generally agreed by all and sundry that Christ's baptism was largely due to his Priestly as well as His Prophetic office. The priestly office of the old order had as its procedure for its induction, the sprinkling of water and the anointing with oil.<sup>114</sup> There could never be an immersion or submersion of anyone because there was not enough volume of water to accommodate such an undertaking in the wilderness. It must also be remembered that Christ could never enter His priestly office contrary to the requirements of the Mosaic Law, for that would not constitute 'fulfilling all righteousness.' If the Old Testament prophets were to be sprinkled with water and anointed with oil, Christ's baptism with water and anointing by the Holy Spirit must of necessity be its corollary.

Chafer's fear of the immersion view is clearly evidenced in his almost non-existent employment of the term. If he is to be consistent, that Christ's baptism by John and believer's baptism are distinct, both in their respective significances and procedure, then he must concede to immersion as the only other proper procedure for the believer, which he nowhere does. His dogmatic assertion goes like this: "Apart from every consideration of the mode by which Christ was baptized, it is certain His was not Christian baptism. Assuming that Christian baptism represents crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection, there could be no meaning in Christ enacting that which later He would accomplish in substance" (Chafer, 1993, Vol. 5:70). It is strange to me that Chafer's view of believer's baptism is built on an assumption, yet his view on Christ's baptism is built on what he calls 'Biblical support.' It is true that the basis for an argument for immersion is built on the interpretations of prepositions (into, unto, out of, from, etc.); to this I concede. However, his seemingly alternative persuasion is also not built on anything more than the discounting of the same.

To conclude, we sum up the context as follows: that Christ's baptism by John must be understood in the light of His forerunner, who announced the immanent kingdom, of which only the Messiah could rule over. Added to this, the purpose of John's baptism was only to reveal this Messiah,<sup>115</sup> which he confirmed to be Christ. Furthermore, the victory over 'the god of this world' in the next chapter (Matt. 4), clearly signifies the absence of his influence in this kingdom (Rev.20:7). Following on from this are the next three chapters (Matt.5-7) which delineate the principles for daily living in this kingdom.

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. Num.8:5-26

<sup>115</sup> Cf. John 1:31

It necessarily follows that His baptism has very little to do, if anything, with believer's baptism. It must also be remembered that the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove<sup>116</sup>, after His baptism, but for the believer it is definitely before. However, Christians are not excluded from the kingdom, for they are to reign with Him.<sup>117</sup> Our involvement in the kingdom does then intimate a certain association with this Christ, which association does not extend into the realms of what is applied to Him officially,<sup>118</sup> e.g. the cross was designed for Him officially and literally, but for us, spiritually and morally.

The fact that His post resurrection command instructs us to baptise in 'the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>119</sup> and that these three are clearly seen in this text,<sup>120</sup> even to the jaundiced eye, does not make the association any greater. The reason for that is that the Tri-unity of God can be seen in other areas (e.g. Creation) and that doesn't involve us. Added to this is the Father's testimony of His pleasurable Son.<sup>121</sup> This testimony can also be heard at His Transfiguration. The Transfiguration prefigures His Second Advent for the kingdom rule, and at that point, the Church is already enjoying favourable conditions of His presence (to put it mildly).

If as R. S. Rayburn (1987:118) insultingly asserts that "the immersionist depopulates the Church of most of its membership and most of its finest sons and daughters", then we must concur that this 'depopulation' will account for nothing but the bastard children of easy believism. We will heartily be subject to this scandal for God's glory. Unlike Rayburn we will not refer to the Church as 'it' nor for that matter to anybody as a 'son' or 'daughter' who will not conform to the biblical way.

### **3.3. The Temptation of Christ: Matthew 4:1-11**

The relationship of Christ to sin is indeed precarious for a theologian to toy with. If we push Him too far forward so as to make Him identify with our sin we are in danger of making Him a sinner thus blaspheming the Son of God. On the other hand, if we remove Him too far outside the association of sin we render Him obsolete in terms of bearing our sin and thus impugn His vicarious sacrifice. Notwithstanding, the issue of whether or not the Lord Jesus could have sinned goes hand-in-hand with the issue of his Temptation (Martin, 2010). Thus the attempt to avoid Scylla becomes the act of sailing into Charybdis. Chafer (1993, Vol. 2:52) points out, "It also penetrates into the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ...As Son of God with his Deity in view, the outcome could not be otherwise; as a man with His humanity in view, the victory is measureless and forms a pattern for all the saints of God in all the ages". It cannot be denied that

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<sup>116</sup> The dove was no more literal than that He was a literal Lamb.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Rev.3:21/5:20

<sup>118</sup> For though we are with Him yet are we not like Him.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Matt.28:19

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Matt.3:16-17

<sup>121</sup> The phrase 'this is My beloved Son' seems to be a formula phrase appearing at His baptism (Messianic and priestly office), and at His Transfiguration (prophetic office) and is affirmed in Psalms 2:7 to be at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent (kingly office). And these three tied together have kingdom significance, which precludes the Church.

the temptation involves suffering, for such a denial would go against Hebrews 2:18. It is however denied that suffering involves sin, for the Scripture nowhere admits of that. We confess that suffering is the result of being part of a fallen world and having a fallen nature, but it is not good theological ethics to push this conclusion to the Person of the Son of God. While He was part of this fallen world it is assumption at best to conclude that He Himself was fallen. Regarding the starting point for this assessment, Martin (2010) cautions not to begin with personal experiences and “reason back to Christ.” We need to add that this is not the only place where temptation for Christ can be seen. Luke makes it clear the Devil only departed from Him until an *opportune time*<sup>122</sup>. So it is clear that the Devil took advantage of every opportunity. It is also clear that the Lord’s earthly ministry was littered by trials and this proves that the Devil was hot on his heels, as it were.<sup>123</sup> Throughout His sojourn He had to “suffer many things”<sup>124</sup> and the Gospel writers do not even intimate that He potentially sinned in any things. If anything the main point of this section is to prove that He was the Son of God and equal to God. In our Lord’s response to Satan in all three temptations<sup>125</sup> his divinity is emphasized from His own lips. He used texts from Deuteronomy which refer directly to Jehovah and applied it to Himself. R. A. Torrey (1907:21) insists that this section proves His sinless suffering aside from anything else.

It is in the nature of sin to make any degree of tendency to sin a reality. That is to say that if there resides a tendency to sin then the outcome will inevitably be sin. A tendency will always at some point become a reality because a tendency is a reality. The proclivity to sin admits of the presence of the nature of sin. The proclivity to sin is sin in its dormant form. The proclivity itself is the result of the Fall. If a person possesses the susceptibility to sin he possesses sin’s nature and it is in the nature of sin to sin. That a person will sin is never a doubt if there is the tendency, proclivity and susceptibility and therefore because Christ was tempted it does not follow that He was considering the temptation. That is to say that although Satan was genuinely hurling his fiery darts at the Lord it does not follow that Christ was considering the attractiveness of those propositions. If a person were to insult another it would be true to say that they were receiving the insult. Although the hurtful words were insulting it may have been to the one receiving the insult the proverbial ‘water off the duck’s back.’ This is equally true of advice and counsel as well. You may give it legitimately, but it does not follow that it was received legitimately. Similarly we read in Matt. 4:11 that ‘Satan left Him.’ This is the result of Christ’s command to him to do so in verse 10 when He said “away with you”. The Majority text has it as “Get behind Me.” Although Satan obeyed the Lord of the universe it would be a misnomer to suggest that Satan was obedient. That our Lord was tempted was not in question, but to imply that the Temptation was an attraction to His impeccable mind is a stupendous fall from Biblical truth.

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Luke 4:13

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Luke 16:23 & 22:28

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Matt. 16:21

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Matt. 4: 4, 7, 10

Roy Zuck (1997:65) provides an illustration that cements the issue from God's point of view. He recalls, "In the early days of railroading a railroad bridge was built in the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania. Some people didn't think they could rely on the bridge. So the engineers put a mile-long string of locomotives on the bridge and let them sit there. This was not a test to see if the bridge would hold up because the engineers knew that before they built it. It was a demonstration, not a test. So it was with the temptation of Christ." Furthermore it is also argued that a person who cannot sin cannot be tempted. This is the same as to reason that an army that is undefeatable cannot be attacked. What Satan was doing here was done by humans all throughout the Lord's ministry as well.<sup>126</sup> It does not follow that He was as susceptible there as here. It also does not follow as the above Old Testament verses indicate that God was susceptible to sin by being tempted by men. The temptation that Satan attacked Christ with appealed to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life<sup>127</sup>; at least these are the categories into which they fall.

This incident does not portray Christ's Temptability at all but is rather a demonstration of His impeccability. It is to show that Satan's temptation of the God-man was as ineffective as a lighted match into the ocean. The incarnation was not a manifestation of supposed and alleged weaknesses. It was rather a demonstration of the Glory of God. Like in the case of the Egyptian plagues He allowed it to show forth His power such was the case with this incident. In the gospel of Matthew this order is highlighted. Christ was declared well-pleasing to his Father<sup>128</sup> in that He, innately and essentially was impeccable, and then He went into the wilderness.<sup>129</sup> He did not wait for His Son to come out of the Temptation and then declare His complete satisfaction. It was not the Father putting Christ through this test to confirm His Son's impeccability; it was Satan's attempt at disproving it after the Father had publically declared it. He was not experimenting to see if Christ was peccable; he was demonstrating that He was impeccable (Martin, 2010).

Chafer (1993, Vol. 6: 256) explains, "Acting in independence (of God); and such disobedience is the very essence of sin. It was the same disobedience that Satan prompted in the lives of the first man and the first woman. It was the same disobedience that Satan sought to excite in the humanity of Christ by and through the threefold temptation in the wilderness...As in the case of the first Adam there was no inherent evil in the thing proposed, so in the case of the Last Adam the things suggested were not in themselves evil."

Further to this it should be noted that most of the uses for the word temptation in the Bible refer to external temptations not internal ones (Martin, 2010). That is to say, tests and trials that a person

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. Matt. 22:18 [KJV] cf. also Ex. 17:2, Deut. 6:16 & Mal. 3:15)

<sup>127</sup> CF. 1 John 2:16

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Matt. 3:17

<sup>129</sup> Matt. 4:1

is put through by others. Therefore all temptations are not internal. External temptation is only effective if it has an internal counterpart who will respond to it. In our case this is abundantly evident, but not so in our Lord. Our Lord was clear in his Sermon on the Mount teaching that the desire (internal) of another woman is equal to the act (external) of the said sin.<sup>130</sup> Therefore according to Christ the inner yearning is sourced in sin of which He could not have any part. This is what He meant when he said “The ruler of this world is coming, and *he has nothing in Me*” [emphasis mine].<sup>131</sup> Jesus Christ was a real man but that does not mean He was a fallen man.

#### **4. The Johannine Gospel**

Jesus’ self-consciousness of his person and his mission is nowhere expressed more vociferously than in the Gospel of John. Edwards (2005:93) writes, “John’s Gospel preserves more numerous and explicit testimonies to Jesus’ self-understanding than does the rest of the New Testament combined...the fourth Gospel shouts from the rooftops what elsewhere in the New Testament is whispered in the ear.” It is this writer’s purpose to show a divine man and that is the reason for the prologue and because of this purpose he is more didactic in form (Warfield, 1950:51). John is not abashed to render a portrait of unqualified power on the one hand relative to His deity and on the other he is not dismayed to submit His sinless human nature and this Warfield (1950:57) calls “a duplex life”. Cullman (1959:106) points out that with the exception of Hebrews, no other New Testament writing emphasizes the sinlessness of Jesus as strongly as the Johannine literature. John quotes Jesus as saying, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?”<sup>132</sup>; “In Him there is no sin”<sup>133</sup>; and “He who does right is righteous, as He is righteous.”<sup>134</sup> Though “Synoptical traits” (Warfield, 1950:13) are discoverable in John, he does provide “an unexceptional line of testimony” (Warfield, 1950:13) of the “faint foreshadowing of the enfleshment of God (Edwards, 2005:115).

##### **4.1. The Deity of Christ: John 1:1**

It is alleged by the Jesus seminar<sup>135</sup> that not one saying in the Gospel of John can with certainty be ascribed to Him. Edwards (2005:26) quotes from R. W. Funk’s book “the Five Gospels” as saying, “The fourth Gospel is alien to the real Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth.” We will prove here the fallacy of this comment.

##### **4.1.1. An Overview of the Prologue of the Gospel of John.**

The Gospel of John has prompted more eulogies than any of its compatriots. Its claim to fame is that it provides the most complete explanation in the New Testament about the divinity of Jesus

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<sup>130</sup> Cf. Matt. 5:27

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Jn. 14:30.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. 8:46

<sup>133</sup> Cf. 1 John 3:5

<sup>134</sup> Cf. 1 John 3:7

<sup>135</sup> Refer chapter one.

(Schroeder, 2010:21). Comments regarding its themes and outlines are few and far between. R. V. G. Tasker (1975:8) comments as follows:

“Eulogies for it has been the envy of many worthy dead men. Such is the exalted respect afforded to it that men like Dr. A. T. Robertson has referred to it as “The supreme literary work of the world” and Dr. H. R. Reynolds commented, that it is “the most wonderful of all the biblical writings.” Origen in his commentary on John writes: “The gospels are the first fruits of all writings, and the gospel of John is the first fruit of the gospels, and no one can receive its meaning who has not himself lain back on Jesus’ breast.”<sup>136</sup>

Even if these comments seem at first to be exaggerated, few would dare to argue the contrary, for there is something that separates John from his peers. It may be his extreme age at the point of writing this gospel. The others wrote their gospels relatively close to the lifetime of Jesus, while John waited for almost 63 years. A man can change quite a bit in 63 years and certainly think through many an issue in great detail. It’s been well over 60 years since he lay on Jesus’ breast. This would account for some serious mulling and mental organising and thus writing only in the late 80s or early 90s (House, 1981:94).

When writing a biography, many will elect to start with a famous person’s life tale from the point of their birth, with consequential inferences to the parents. The gospel of Matthew is a case in point. Others will probably start at the turn of events that catapulted the person to fame making tributary remarks to key figures and influences. The gospel of Mark serves to illustrate this approach. Still others will opt to go to the person’s ancestry and review the patriarchs and matriarchs making a show of his thoroughbred bloodline. This was certainly Luke’s approach in the gospel of Luke. From a biographical point of view, the gospels can be seen as four different views of the same account. There have been several attempts to synchronise the four gospels into one story. The famous crime writer Freeman Wills Croft who wrote the book ‘The four Gospels in one Story’ is a case in point (Churchill, 1950:53). He attempted such a feat for the sake of easy analysis and study. For a modern day equivalent this would be like taking four different pictures from different angles of the same person and superimposing it into one photograph. While all this sounds exciting, it must be remembered that the Gospels must not be thought of as four different photographs but four different portraits, and every portrait has its own character and cannot be melded or superimposed into another image.

Mark writing first, and accumulating much of his material from Peter accounts for only three years of Christ’s ministry, and depicts Him as the ‘Son of Man’, with His servanthood in view. Matthew writing next, accounts for all of His life since birth, going all the way back to the venerable

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<sup>136</sup> Origen’s comment that ‘the gospels are the first fruits of all writings’ cannot be taken literally just as much as the next line suggests that ‘the gospel of John is the first fruits of the Gospels.’ These are not chronologically accurate statements and were never intended by him to be so. He was one of the founding fathers of the allegorical method of interpretation and this serves as a typical example of his type of exposition. This quotation is cited merely to highlight the high view of this gospel even from this school of thought.

Abraham, depicting Him as the 'King of the Jews', with His Messiahship in view. Luke, who appears third on the list writing to a predominantly Gentile audience, depicts Him as the 'Saviour of the world' and connects Him all the way back to Adam highlighting His humanity. John's concern however, goes way above the surface of his fellows. While Mark begins his account at the baptism of Christ and hurriedly moves into His ministry, Matthew is at pains to show off His pedigree, linking Him to Abraham and David, and goes back to the point of His physical birth. Luke does one better than Mark and Matthew by accounting for His earthly lineage right up to Adam himself.<sup>137</sup> John on the other hand goes further than all his peers do. He goes back to the 'beginning'. The human mind cannot go beyond that. It is the furthest point of reference for anyone with a brain.

The phrase 'In the beginning' is not a point of reference for 'the Word,' as vs. 2 clearly inverts the sentence construction of this opening line, proving also that 'the Word' is not a point of reference for 'the beginning'. The two cancel each other out, as neither has a beginning. Rather, in order for it to make sense, it must refer to a point of reference outside the scope of the reader's reading. John is here trying to highlight His Eternality, in that He has no beginning and no end, and will later try to show us that He wishes to communicate this to us in everlasting life. His Deity is very much under attack at the point of this writing and could be why John omits the account of His birth. John stresses this as perfunctory to an appropriate understanding of His nature, because later He will die for the sin of the world. It is not logical that Deity should die; therefore it is at this point that one can lose sight of His personality and the aged seer makes no mistake to adorn his doctrine with this theme. "...the Word was with (face to face) God." He was literally face to face - a mutual reflection of identikits. They were distinct from yet one with each other.

For the purpose of his communiqué, he chooses to describe Christ to his audience as 'the Word'. It will avail us nothing if we at this point do not proceed to investigate the reason for this. Dwight Pentecost (1978:34), in his monumental work on Prophecy comments as follows: "It is recognized without question that words form the medium of communication and thought." Still later in his explanation of figurative language, he cites Angus-Green, who writes as follows:

"It is necessary of the human intellect that facts connected with the human mind, or with spiritual truth, must be clothed in language borrowed from material things. To words exclusively spiritual or abstract we can attach no definite conception. And God is pleased to condescend to our necessity. He leads us to new knowledge by means of what is already known. He reveals Himself in terms previously unfamiliar" (Pentecost, 1978:39).

This begs the question as to why John did not write 'Jesus' instead of 'Word'? The reason is quite logical! The name Jesus was only given to Him at His birth in Bethlehem. It was given to Him to describe what He was to do on earth. i.e., the redemption of sinners (Matt. 1:21). Extra biblical

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<sup>137</sup> This feat though unparalleled in his day is rather typical of his profession as a historian. (Although we do know that he was a medical doctor too).

sources shed light on this enigma (Pawson, 1993). About six hundred years before this book was written in this same town called Ephesus<sup>138</sup>, a man called Heraclitus lived. Heraclitus tried to be observant of everything in his community. His tendency to produce questions that provoke thought made him somewhat of a philosopher procuring the respect of his peers. As he looked out of his window one day, a thought flew into his head regarding the changing environment that he lived in. Everything was in a state of flux. He then coined the Greek term *Panta rhei*, "All things are flowing" (Sproul, 2000:20). How different everything was to his childhood days and how different everything will be long after he departs. Musing on this supposed lack of purpose, he posed the question. "Is there any purpose to life? Is there any meaning, pattern or logic (logos)?"

This is the historical and social culture into which John was writing. A culture saturated with the sophistry of Greek philosophy, and Roman legalism to boot. Today we are still suffering from the Heraclitus syndrome in our search for logic (logos). This we find in all our sciences such as biology, psychology, cosmology, astrology, *ad infinite ad nauseam*. These are all symptoms of this diagnosis. The pandemic is too widespread and knows no cure. It has even found its way into the study of the Bible.

Philo, a Jewish historian, who wrote closer to John's time, studied the writings of Heraclitus, but was at the same time extremely familiar with the Jewish scriptures. He amalgamated the two forming his own hermeneutic. Pawson (1993) helpfully points out that his reasoning went like this: "If God *said* let there be light, He obviously audibly and verbally expressed it and had not resigned it to thought only." Philo's conclusion is that God created this world by his *word*.<sup>139</sup> It is into this climate of verbiage that the apostle feels around to best communicate his inspired idea of deity incarnate.

John is the only one in the entire Bible that calls Him by this title. In reference to the above line of reasoning that Philo calls for, it must be said that as far as God is concerned, what He says constitutes what He does, which further confirms who He is. Tasker (1975:41) quotes Emerson of old, succinctly remarking, "Words and deeds are quite indifferent modes of the divine energy. Words are also actions, and actions are also a kind of words." The Word is often personified as actively achieving that which God tells it to.<sup>140</sup> Laney (1992:37) points out "That this concept also appears in the Apocrypha (Ec'us. 1:1-20; 24:1-22; Wisdom 9:1) and the Jewish Targums (paraphrastic translations of portions of the Old Testament into Aramaic), where the Aramaic term *memra* ("word") is substituted for the divine name of God."

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<sup>138</sup> Situated in Asia Minor, now modern day Turkey. Ephesus is very much in ruins attracting biblically excited tourists only and consequently increasing the revenue to this poverty-stricken area.

<sup>139</sup> I am not able to ascertain whether Philo means Christ or an anthropomorphic statement by God.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Ps.107:20/ 147:18/ Is.55:11/ Jer.1:4-9. The reader is referred to the above commentary by Tasker for a fuller treatment of this theme.

A word is an expression that makes a connection and links a speaker to a hearer. In this same way John is trying to connect men to Jesus, who is the link to God.<sup>141</sup> What was once stuck in erudition and consequent confusion is now simplified and made tangible in Jesus, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”<sup>142</sup> Tenney’s notes are worthy of duplication:

“The Prologue (1:1-18) begins by using the term *word* to introduce the person of Christ. This term differs from those used in the other Gospels, for it does not connote any particular religious background. *Christ* is Jewish; *Lord* is Gentile; *Jesus* is human; *Word* or *Logos* is philosophical. John thus makes the subject of his Gospel a universal figure, the incarnation of the eternal Reason who is God, who came from God, and who reveals God as a son reveals a father. He is to be apprehended by those who receive Him (1:12), and the conflict between those who receive Him and those who do not is likened to the conflict between light and darkness” (Tenney, 1961:193).

Just as much as the prologue was purposefully worded to countermand the influence of the well-respected Heraclitus, the epilogue too was written in due fashion to counter-attack the vicious errors of men like Cerinthus. Cerinthus overtly taught against Christ’s deity and incarnation.

Metcalf (2011) points this out:

“He taught that Jesus was a man who at His baptism was empowered by the "Christ" which guided Him in His earthly ministry. Then mere moments before the death of Jesus on the cross, the "Christ" left Him, leaving a mere mortal man to die. Cerinthus took mysticism and Christian doctrine and mixed them together in an attempt to destroy biblical doctrine.”

Denying His equality with God and His adoption of human nature, Irenaeus, who had been a disciple of Polycarp, who, in turn, had been a disciple of the apostle John, writes in his infamous work, “John seeks by the proclamation of the Gospel to remove the error which Cerinthus was trying to spread” (Anon., 1968:1035). The writer goes on to say that, “According to Cerinthus ... at baptism the *Christ* in the form of a dove had descended on Jesus, but this same *Christ* had left him again on the eve of his (Jesus’) suffering. Hence it was not really Christ who suffered and died and rose again but Jesus” (Anon., 1968:1035). This heresy so troubled the fairly new Christians of the day that many had their faith sorely checked. It did not seem to strike them that if the descent was in the form of a dove what was the departure of the *Christ* in the form of? Furthermore, that the synoptics clearly state that the descent of the dove was the Holy Spirit, is not even considered by Cerinthus. That is why the faith motif is so carefully developed in John’s gospel and brought to full consummation by the time we get to the end of his book.<sup>143</sup> It also accounts for John’s other motif, i.e. Christ’s claim to be equal with God. Combating Heraclitus and Cerinthus though chief at the point of conception was in actual fact subsidiary at the point of consummation as regards to the

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<sup>141</sup> In referring to Jesus as the *link* to God, I do not seek to minimise His role in the Atonement. Christ can by no means be seen as just a link. To fully ascribe to Him His deserved glory one must think of Him as the whole *chain*. This concept must only be accepted in light of all I said before and will be restricted to this study. It does not reflect on my Christology.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Jn.1: 14

<sup>143</sup> Cf. John 20:30-31

purpose for this Gospel. Faith and the support and strengthening of it were high on John's scheme of things. For this to be truly appreciated, the purpose statement seen in chapter 20:30-31 is only the concluding remarks of the actual purpose already described and defined at the very outset of and throughout his writing. The prologue showed who He was *and* what He brought into this world (life and light) and the epilogue showed who He was *by* what He had brought into this world (signs and wonders).

Cerinthus also laid stress on the rite of circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath. Pawson (1993) states, "He also taught that angels created the world, one of whom had given Israel their Law which was not perfect. His version, or rather perversion, of the creation account led John to write in the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of his prologue: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (Jn. 1:3)".

In this Gospel not only is His Person a quintessential feature but also His personal side, as far as relationship goes. Jesus is usually seen in one to one confrontations with people, e.g. Nicodemus, Woman at the well of Samaria, Martha, Disciples, etc. Christ tries to emphasise by this the relational aspect to understanding and *knowing* Him. The words *WORD* and *SON* both reinforce this idea, the former adding 'with God' (vs.1) and the latter adding '*in the bosom of the Father*'.<sup>144</sup> As 'Word' and 'Son' are linked in this expression, so too are 'Light and Life' (vs.4) and 'grace and truth' (vs.14). The presence of these couples evidences the relational aspect of God. 1) His relationship with His Father; 2) His relationship with His world; 3) His relationship with His 'man', and 4) His relationship to the satanic realm (Laney, 1992:36-39). We shall review each of these four very briefly.

#### **4.1.2. His Relationship with His Father.**

Instead of a genealogy that shows relationship to preceding fathers, John's so-called genealogy is noticeably absent. The reason for this is very clear. In the light of his audience and context he has to be very careful not to show God as having any earthly descent. Instead he summarises with the genius of his pen and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the 'Word' is in direct relation to and with the Father and in perfect co-existence with Him. And that is His 'genealogy.'

Mathew Henry (1976:1506) words it in his usual well-rounded style, "The world was *from* the beginning, but the Word was *in* the beginning. The Word had a being before the world had a

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<sup>144</sup> Although this latter phrase is found in vs.18 and the initial prologue is to be found from vs.1-5. It may be argued that this use does not constitute part of the prologue and consequently should not form part of this overview. However, it must be noted that the actual prologue seems interrupted at the point of vs.5 to introduce John the Baptist's witness, which constitutes vs.6-13. He then picks up the thought again from vs.14-18, which I believe to be part of the prologue until further evidence to the contrary is presented to me. If vs.1-5 & 14-18 are read simultaneously it will make perfect sense, and so too with vs.6-13 & 19-28. Vs.6-13 are parenthetically sandwiched because of its commentary on the concept of Light introduced in the preceding verses. It must be carefully observed that the design of this chapter was not meant to be chronological but logical, for *logos* was the operative word.

beginning” (*Italics his*). His being *with God* indicates His *Position* to God and His *being God/ with God* indicates His *Person* as God. Taking this truth together we can only logically conclude that though He is distinct from God, yet is He totally equal to Him, as he Himself asserts in John 10:30. This speaks of a kind of relationship that cannot be duplicated or fully comprehended. Yet the tenor of the book is a mass clarion call to engage in this kind of relationship with Him by faith. The verb “was” in the opening verse indicates both an indistinguishable union with God and a distinguishable existence from God (Warfield, 1950:53). He was not just coeternal and coequal but God Himself.

#### **4.1.3. His Relationship with His world: 1:3**

That He spoke everything into existence cannot be denied by the sane mind for the first chapter of the Holy Bible so affirms<sup>145</sup>. Having thus created it, He chooses now to relate to it in whatsoever manner He pleases. As sovereign He exercises His right to multiply and water or burn and destroy. Man seems very much a part of which way this goes. As the author and founder of this world, He is the same as the ‘Author and Finisher’ of our faith<sup>146</sup>. As He chooses to make this His footstool<sup>147</sup> so He expects us to make His feet our pedestal. As Gulley and LeBlanc (1989) wrote rather conclusively, ‘Down at His feet is the most high place.’

#### **4.1.4. His Relationship with His man: 1:4**

Life was that which was imparted to man in the Garden when he became a ‘living soul’<sup>148</sup>, and as the Genesis account states, it was God alone who breathed; so it is substantiated here that it is God alone who imparts this life. All of man (generic) is given this *life* from and by God. Does He not say in response to Satan “*Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*”?<sup>149</sup> Not only is He the Life of men but He is also the Light of them. To what good is a gardener if he plants and does not water? To what good is a bricklayer if he lays bricks and does not cement them? So too with God, not only does He animate them, He also illuminates them. Laney (1992:39) points out that, “The term *light* is used metaphorically in John to refer to the illumination from God that penetrates spiritual darkness to bring spiritual light. Jesus is the light personified<sup>150</sup> and is a source of spiritual light to mankind.”

#### **4.1.5. His Relationship to the Satanic Realm: 1:5**

As soon as the concept of light is introduced, another concept is brought in as a contrast. It is the *darkness* concept. It is here referred to in a general way, as John has no time to develop this theme. The fact that he feels comfortable with just a mention of this theme and no explanatory

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<sup>145</sup> Ps. 33:6, Jer. 10:12-13

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Heb. 12:2

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Acts 7:49

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Gen. 2:7

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Matt.4:4

<sup>150</sup> Cf. John 8:12, 9:5

comment could suggest that his audience had a decent understanding of this theme. We understand this *darkness* to be the realm of the evil world because of this context. Also we undertake to examine the other contrasting use of this concept in this gospel.<sup>151</sup> According to Genesis 1:2-3 darkness was on earth before light was. It was God who separated the two making them antithetical. It is so stated here that “the light shines in the darkness” (vs.5a), which would intimate that the darkness was around first, and then that “the darkness did not comprehend/overcome it” (vs.5b), which would further indicate a total separation. The encouraging factor is that the spiritual conflict that is resident in this verse also proves that the darkness can in no way overcome the light. Darkness will one day enjoy total separation, but in the meantime they will have to give way. This world is in darkness, alienated from the life and light of God. They scarce can comprehend the glorious light of the gospel, for “the god of this world has blinded their eyes.”<sup>152</sup> However, where darkness abounds, light doth much more abound for light always shines in darkness.<sup>153</sup> The Satanic population are believers indeed, but not unto salvation, for though they will one day own Him as Lord;<sup>154</sup> it is nowhere stated that they will own Him as Saviour. The only relation He has to them is as Sovereign and not as Saviour and this will be so till He ushers in the end of the age.

For John the beginning is the end. Inasmuch as the beginning has no point of determination, so is the end. For Christ the transcendent One is “all and in all”, “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End”.<sup>155</sup> When John closes this book he makes reference to the fact that not all the books in the world would contain Jesus’ *things* if they were to be written<sup>156</sup> but the prologue certainly does cover his entire ministry in summation as is delineated above.

#### **4.2. The Incarnation of Christ: John 1:14**

Concerning this verse Warfield (1950:55) has observed as follows, “The language is colored [coloured] by reminiscences from the Tabernacle” and being as it is the design of God alone we scarce can believe that it would be inherently sinful. It is very evident that John allows his own personal Christological convictions to play freely in his gospel (Cullman, 1959:184). The use of the term Logos is evidence of this for it is directly out of his Greco-Roman culture and this is what sets him apart from the Synoptics.<sup>157</sup> The Bible’s claim, and it must ever be ours, is that the incarnation of the Son of God is a unique event in history (Lloyd-Jones, 1995:96). In other words, it is not repeatable. Warfield (1950:54) writes of this term ‘Word became flesh’, “the terms he employs here are not terms of substance, but of personality.” *Flesh* is an appropriate designation for

<sup>151</sup> Cf. John 12:35-36

<sup>152</sup> Cf. 2 Cor.4: 4

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Gen.1: 4/Jn.1: 5

<sup>154</sup> Refer Phil.2: 10-11. The phrase *under the earth* refers to the Satanic realm, the dwellers in darkness. Refer also Rev.5:13

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Rev.1:8

<sup>156</sup> Cf.21:25

<sup>157</sup> We do not mean by this that his gospel does not fit the overall picture in terms of a harmony.

humanity in its entirety, with the implications of dependence and weakness. That the experiences of human beings would be His is intimated in the term 'became flesh', but not that His experiences would be communicated to us nor are we privy to the exact nature of how He became man. John could have said 'the Word became man', but he elects to word it like this so that the language shows what it is to be a man. It is one thing to be a man, but man is flesh and nothing more. The expression *became* admittedly can predicate change, at least this is the way it reads at first, but it does not have to be always this way. Horton (2011:468) reminds us that the term *egneto* [became] does not entail any change in the essence of the Son. The eternal Son *assumed* our flesh as Chalcedon affirms, but the change is from *asarkos* (not incarnate) to *ensarkos* (incarnate) (Horton, 2011:238). The change is not in the deity itself but in what the deity has added. Moreover it is affirmed that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory", but this is also to affirm His impeccability for if this flesh which we viewed, housing the glory of God, had any inkling of fallenness in it or any notion of a tendency to sin this glory would have been veiled somewhat (Saucy, 1972:84). Peter witnessed "His Glory"<sup>158</sup> on the Mount of Transfiguration and noticed nothing remotely associated with peccability. In fact his only response was to memorialise Jesus along with Moses and Elijah.<sup>159</sup> Even through his inane response he proved the peccability of Christ. It is not written in this verse that the Word came in flesh but that he "became", which goes to show not just a continuity of existence from one frame of reference to another as the former would indicate but a completeness of existence for the purpose of redemption (Warfield, 1950:54). It is not that the flesh foiled the expanse of the divinity; it is rather that the divinity magnified the flesh. Warfield (1950:352) goes on to assert as is in keeping with this chapter that the exact nature of the redemption was not made an issue for scientific research in the early Church. The reason was that their vantage point, the New Testament, was abundantly clear on this issue. We had to wait till the eleventh century for Anselm to get his hands on this issue. Furthermore Scott (2008:31) adds that the early church fathers were often more occupied with Christology than with eschatology.

When considering John 14:30<sup>160</sup> as an addendum to the above point we do well to remember that as concerning our Lord, "the ruler of this world"... "has nothing in" Him. If there was something in Him to be had, like for instance, the proclivity to sin, Satan would have something to take advantage of. In an effort to advance this point Warfield (1950:61) points out, "Only one human characteristic was alien to Him: He was without sin." This reasoning is not new to men who know God. The ancient sage Elihu also declared regarding God, "Who has assigned Him His way, or who has said, 'You have done wrong?'"<sup>161</sup> Thus there is no place in the sanctified human mind to find for a category that equates the Son of God with peccability.

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. Luke 9:32

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Lk. 9:33

<sup>160</sup> Cf. also 8:46

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Job 36:23

## **5. The Pauline Epistles**

The attempt to separate Paul's doctrines from Christ is a failed effort, but an energetic one nonetheless and it is therefore not unreasonable to conclude that John's gospel bridges the gap between Christ and Paul (Warfield, 1950:231). However this is to admit that such a "gap" exists which the early Church including Paul did not see. The apostle Paul is unique among Church theologians simply because he is "the most didactic" (Warfield, 1950:38). Cullman (1959:166) reminds us that, "The most developed early Christian Christology is found in the writings of Paul." He goes on to state that Paul's "whole theology and Christology is so completely embedded in eschatology" (1959:166). To this is added Warfield's (1950:6) opinion that, "The person of Jesus fills the whole horizon of his thought, and gathers to itself all his religious emotions." With great confidence we then offer the following in defence of our dissertation.

### **5.1. The Submission of Christ: 1 Corinthians 15:27-28**

The submission of Christ is in no way a reflection or indication of his inferiority. This is a false conclusion drawn from a minority of texts, chief of which is this one (Van de Beek, 2002?:128). It is clear that though all things are put in subjection under the Father, this does not include the one who put all things under His Father. Van de Beek (2002?:25) points out that historically this was initially put forward by Marcellus of Ancyra who opposed the Nicene phrase *homoousios*.

### **5.2. The Sin-offering of Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:21**

As "sinless in himself [Himself]" (Horton, 2011:621) He became sin. If there was a peccability potentiality for and to sin then the sin of the world would have activated and actioned this innate human tendency. His sinlessness is not linked to His keeping of the law as this is not mentioned here, which was the way a Jew understood sinlessness (Horton, 2011:638). The phrase "who (Christ) knew no sin" stands antithetical to the noun "we" who obviously do know sin. He is so far opposite to our nature that the impossibility of Him being anything like us ironically works so that we might be made like Him. Van de Beek (2002?:87) observes that even Augustine points out that the words "made...sin for us" is to be interpreted as "made a sin offering for us". It is an added benefit to compliment this with what Paul has recorded in Galatians 3:13. He became God's curse not as the cursed one but as the curse itself (Van de Beek, 2002?:167). The curse had to be removed, which it was, but if He was the curse then He would have been removed and that would make no sense. So Christ became the curse as He became sin but that in no way implies sinfulness or any inert tendencies of the same. It is probable that Paul had Isaiah 53 on His mind when writing this verse as the chapter following clearly contains a quote from Is. 49 (Cullman, 1959:76).

In summary we conclude as does Warfield (1950:7) when he writes concerning Paul's approach to the matter and solemnity of his Messiah, "His lowly estate is dwelt upon, and the high traits of His personal character manifested in His lowliness are lightly sketched in, justifying not merely the negative declaration that "He knew no sin," but his positive presentation as the model of all perfection." However, before we leave the great apostle Paul's unequalled ability to sketch the mission and ministry of Christ we offer one more vital purview.

### **5.3. The Kenosis: Philippians 2:5–11**

This is a section in the Bible that is arguably one of Paul's finest works. Macleod (1998:24) argues that Paul's Christology is "most clearly" seen in this section. In the original language it is actually a song or hymn and was used as a hymn by the early church (Van de Beek, 2002?:131). A poem if you please. Some have argued that the language of these verses is of such a lofty style that Paul did not write it, but has in fact taken over a psalm from the early Church (Cullman, 1959:179). That is ludicrous because we know that he can write poetry. He wrote that marvellous section in Rom. 8:35-39 about who can separate us from the love of God. He also wrote that fabulous section in 1 Cor.13 about love. Cook (1981: 118-119) points out that this hymn highlights a three storied universe containing heaven, earth and the underworld and also contains five phases of existence for Christ, pre-existence, becoming incarnate, incarnate life, re-ascension, and exaltation. The hymn goes from ascent to descent and from exaltation to condescension (Schweizer, 1972:81). This section is rhythmic and takes a full circle from pre-existence to exaltation to humility back to exaltation and pre-existence. Schweizer (1972:87) is correct to observe that "this is the only New Testament text to link the descent and ascent of Christ in this fashion."<sup>162</sup> The same cyclic and rhythmic style is seen in a short verse of his in 2 Cor.8:9 "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." Another unique feature of this text is pointed out by Cullman (1959:174) who states that, "This text, which is extremely rich Christologically, unites three concepts: 'Son of Man', 'Servant of God', and Kyrios" so that, he goes on to conclude, "In these few verses we actually possess a complete Christology in condensed form (1959:179-180).

It is important to note right at the outset that this doctrine of the kenosis arose in the middle of the nineteenth century as a raging controversy (Warfield, 1950:200) and as a result of a hermeneutical deficiency thus misrepresenting this passage (Sproul, 1996:31). It is therefore relatively a newcomer on the scene (Warfield, 1950:373),<sup>163</sup> the effects of which are still with us today! The emptying was not His divinity, but rather His equality, as we shall try to show. We admit that there was a sense in which the emptying was due to the descension. In that He descended Warfield

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<sup>162</sup> We would like to add that the phrase "in this fashion" is Schweizer's point. The reader is not to exclude Paul's other unique use of linking these two together in Ephesians 4:8-10

<sup>163</sup> It was Warfield's hope that this newbie would "pass out of notice with that century". How sad that it has not and yet for his sake I am glad he is not around to witness its dominance in theology.

(1950:61) explains, “A glory had been left behind which was yet to be returned to, and His sojourn on earth was therefore to that extent an obscuration of His proper glory. There was a sense, then, in which, because He had “descended,” He was no longer equal with the Father.” The only emptying, as Sproul (1996:32) caustically points out, is the emptying of the minds of theologians who would purport such a thing. His equality with His Father in terms of power and glory was what He emptied. He laid aside the prerogatives and privileges of glory. He laid aside the insignia of His eternal glory (Lloyd-Jones, 1995:105). The text does state that “He made Himself of no reputation”, not of ‘no deity’. Kenoticists, as they are called, speak of Christ as “depotentiating” (Berkhof, 1949:125) Himself. In his Systematic Theology Berkhof (2003:310) goes on to explain that Kenoticists take this term to mean that Christ literally became a man by reducing (depotentiating) Himself either wholly or in part and then grew in wisdom and stature until He became God again. The kenotic argument is that the idea of the Son of God in becoming man, “extinguished His deity” or to put it another way, His human nature is just “shrunken deity” (Warfield, 1950:193). As we pointed out in chapter two, this was yet another historical effort to emphasize His manhood at the expense of His Godhood. The difference between Kenoticism and Socinianism is that Socinianism took away our divine Christ and Kenoticism takes away our very God (Warfield, 1950:194).

Their teaching assumes that whatever He divested Himself of for the purposes of the Incarnation, He Incarnately increased in wisdom and power until He assumed a fully functional divinity. He left something behind so that He could become human but after successfully becoming one He then gradually began accumulating His divinity so that He again could become divine (Warfield, 1950:201), except this time retaining His humanity. Interpreting the phrase “emptying Himself” Kenotic Christologists argue that the Son had to have given up His divine prerogatives including His divine nature (Horton, 2011:480). Surprising, while the Son thought it not robbery to be equal with God they thought it not robbery to “empty” Him of His divinity. If the incarnation is the result of prophecy then the kenosis is a matter of prophecy too, seeing it is related to the incarnation. It is better to see the emptying as a fulfilling rather than a losing of something and while admitting of limitations, it is a much more positive expression of His divinity rather than a curtailment of it (Cook, 1981:148).

We are not short on passages telling us what Jesus did. This however is the only passage that tells us how He thought. This section is written with very little manoeuvrability. The apostle does not allow too much imagination into the details. The overarching question here is how Jesus thought about becoming a human - becoming a complete man yet still being God.

Paul refers to this 'one mind' in vs.5<sup>164</sup>, which he recommends to be 'in you.' If an item of value is priced too highly, one might not be inclined to purchase it. However, if you knew that it belonged to some famous celebrity, then the probability of getting the price would be higher. This is the genius of Paul. He is trying to 'sell', if you please, the concept of this mind and as his closing line he says, 'it is also in Christ Jesus.' Things would seldom be bought if it were not first worn by this or that celebrity. Yet, strangely enough, having the mind of Christ does not at all seem attractive a proposition to the Christian. The irony is that we as believers by virtue of our position in Christ<sup>165</sup> already have this mind, but like the indwelling permanent Holy Spirit we do not appropriate His power. We don't use this mind like those who do not possess the acumen to use 80% of their cell phone, yet they possess all of it.

This mind is not the actual 'mind' of Christ. If we had that we would be omniscient as well as other things with Him. It is here meant as a bent or inclination or disposition. It is part of your new creation faculty.<sup>166</sup> The best word to help in the understanding of this word is the word 'mindful' and it is used in Christ's rebuke of Satan through Peter. He said "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offence to Me, for you are not *mindful* of the things of God'.<sup>167</sup> Let this 'understanding' be in you, or to put it another way, 'be mindful' of this. We are not to imitate or ape His mind like those who need the WWJD<sup>168</sup> bands. That is for acting only not for thinking. We have it by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We have the ability to think as Christ does, yet of course, not on the same plane as He does. The great gulf fixed between His mind and ours is spoken of in Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." The distance then was immeasurable but now in this dispensation it is closed because of Christ. He has brought God near to us by virtue of this mind.

The first 'in' in vs. 5 should really be 'among.' We must keep in mind that when it comes to this section the context is unity with each other; that is why the word among is preferable. Therein lay the paradox of the Christian life. A son is aware that after his father's death he can physically take possession of all his books. In that sense it is his and he can use it whenever he wants, yet he must officially take ownership after his father's death. Christianity is like that. Become what you are. You are sanctified therefore be sanctified, you are saved therefore be saved, you have His mind therefore let this mind be in you.

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. Also Phil. 1:27; 2:2

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Phil. 1:1; 4:21

<sup>166</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Matt. 16:23

<sup>168</sup> This stands for 'What Would Jesus Do' and is worn by young people more as a fashion accessory.

Of the thirty very important words of this text I have chosen five to emphasise: form, equality, robbery, no reputation (kenosis) and fashioned / appearance. We believe these words and terminologies will suffice and will help to unlock the passage under consideration. As we proceed, it will be helpful to keep in mind that “He did not lay the Godhead aside, but He did lay the signs of the Godhead aside” (Lloyd-Jones, 1992:123).

### **5.3.1. From Form to Fashion:**

Have you ever thought what it would be like to be a rat or cockroach or spider or wild dog? In the absence of much needed rain a tremendous amount of stress is placed on the predators. The predating competition becomes so intense that every form of food is consumed. That, in and of itself, is not unusual, but when it resorts to cannibalism among a certain species that is unusual. When a lion finds one of its own kind from another pride it would eat it and so would a hyena and leopard etc. How would we help these creatures understand their plight and predicament? This can only be done by becoming one of them and then communicating the problem to them. Notwithstanding, one would need to become one of them and still retain one’s original nature. In other words, you need to take their ‘fashion’ but retain your ‘form.’ You would become a hyena and look as ugly as it does and smell as bad and yet retain all your human faculties. You would steal food and be a vagabond in the animal world but you would be able to think as an educated human and process thoughts as a human and retain a perspective far superior to all your hyena family. They would look at you with disdain and laugh at you as they do. They would mock you when you tell them that this lifestyle of theirs is despicable. They would eventually try and kill you because you do not fit their kind.

The form is the nature while the fashion is the figure. Frame (2002:221) helpfully defines *form* as “that element of a substance that determines what qualities it will have.” The expression is what is called a “philosophico-popular mode of speech” and applies to the essential attributes rather than how it looks on the outside (Warfield, 1950:223). In other words, Paul has chosen an expression commonly used in his day. This raises the next question and that is, “what is substance?” He defines substance as “the being that *has* the essence” and earlier he defines *essence* as: something that belongs to a thing thus giving it its feature; thus “essence is more or less equivalent to *nature* (Frame, 2002:220). However, Warfield (1950:483) warns that *essence* is a “metaphysical doctrine propounded by...pragmatic philosophers”. He however agrees that *essence* is something of “permanent value” (Warfield, 1950:486). They argue that *essence* is not what the thing is, but what it is not. To this Zacharias (2012:139) advises that when experts have to explain something by what it is not rather than what is, that is evidence that they do not understand it. This seems to have come full circle as our heading suggests. The former refers to the spiritual and eternal and the latter to the physical and temporal.

Form is *morphe* and appearance is *schemati*. They all saw the fashion, touched Him and ate with Him, washed His feet and even leaned on His chest. Even Pilate said ‘Behold the man.’ Thomas went ahead of all that and declared His ‘form’ after touching his fashion. He said, “My Lord and my God”.<sup>169</sup> Form never changes, but fashion does change. Form determines function (Edwards, 2005:180) and if that is given to change then it follows that so will function. Cook (1981:119) points out that the *schemati* leaves room for the idea that more than merely a man is here. One’s form from the previous week never changed, but one’s fashion does. Who I am on the inside is still the same but my clothes have changed. In that sense I am different yet still the same. This is what we mean when we assert that His ‘form of God’ never changed but His ‘fashion’ did. The prophet Malachi wrote a few centuries before, “For I am the Lord, I change not”.<sup>170</sup> Change does not characterise the Godhead. The hymn writer wrote, “Change and decay in all around I see, Oh thou who changest not abide with me” (Osbeck, 1990:130). The Psalmist (102:27) was able to assert ‘But you Lord are the same, Your years will have no end.’ Regarding the Lord Jesus the writer of Hebrews (13:8) emphatically declared, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever.” James 1:17 says that, “there is neither variableness nor shadow of turning.” God is immutable! We cannot stress that enough. But then what of the change? This brings us to the next set of words.

The word ‘form’ or *morphe* is different to the word ‘image’ or *eikon*. Cullman (1959:176) is not correct to assume as correct that the word *morphe* corresponds to the Hebrew *tselem* which though used as ‘image’ can also mean ‘phantom’ or ‘illusion’ (Online Lexicon 2010). This would take us back to Docetism. Furthermore he also posits that the use of this *morphe* in verse 6 “does not refer to Jesus’ divine ‘nature’”. However, Paul has argued here that Jesus has two natures, the ‘form of God’ / ‘equal with God’ (vs. 6) and the ‘form of a bondservant’ / ‘likeness of men’ (vs. 7). This complies with the historic affirmation (Nicea and Chalcedon) of His two natures. Frame (2002:670) points out that the NIV translates *en morphe theou hyparchon* as being in the very nature of God. It would be helpful to keep the advice of Guthrie in mind when he advises, “With the words ‘form’ and ‘likeness,’ the author, Paul, is not giving Jesus an escape clause from being human... [he] is emphasizing his humanity.” Regarding the term “form” Warfield (1950:39) summarises very clearly and is thus quoted in full when he writes:

“Form is a term which expresses the sum of those characterizing qualities which make a thing the precise thing that it is. Thus, the “form” of a sword (in this case mostly matters of external configuration) is all that makes a given piece of metal specifically a sword, rather than, say, a spade. And “the form of God” is the sum of the characteristics which make the being we call “God,” specifically God, rather than some other being – an angel, say, or a man. When our Lord is said to be in “the form of God,” therefore, He is declared, in the most express manner possible, to be all that God is, to possess the whole fullness of attributes which make God God.”

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<sup>169</sup> Cf. Jn. 20:28

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Mal. 3:6

Thus the expression throws all emphasis upon who He is intrinsically as God. It is not that in His sanctified effort to become man He lost His divinity; it is that as God He also became man.

### 5.3.2. Equality and Robbery.

Equality is an 'each' thing and robbery is a pride thing. Where there is robbery there can be no equality and vice versa. The problem with the word "robbery" is that it seems, on the surface, to intimate that Christ snatched it from God and that He didn't think this a bad thing to do. So then by implication He actually is not equal, but like the 'form of a bondservant', which He 'took', this He took beforehand. But is this true?

While 'robbery' is usually an action, this is a noun! It refers not to the action but the thing taken. And the thing taken was *Equality*. One needs to keep in mind that because this is a poem or a hymn of Paul's, he employs a poetic license as it were to dispense his didactic liberties for the purpose of grabbing attention and captivating the audience. He is not saying that Christ is a robber nor for that matter is he saying that Christ isn't a robber. He is saying that though Christ was equal with God He didn't think that it detracted from God in any way to have an equal in Christ. He didn't steal equality from God; He had equality with God, or as Warfield (1950:38) points out, He did not "look greedily" on His condition.

This stands in contradistinction to Adam. There they were tempted to be like God (Gen. 3:5) and they fell into that temptation. Here there was no temptation. Cullman (1959:178) explains that "The Heavenly Man did not commit this 'robbery' and therefore remained faithful. There was no stealing into God as it were. In the case of Adam he reached out to take it, but in the case of our Lord He let it go. They were not and wanted to be, while He was and left it.

Paul is not afraid to use the term robbery because it was not unusual for people to think themselves equal with God. There was a prevailing god-complex in his culture as Emperor Worship proved (Hendriksen and Kistemaker, 1995: 28). Such thinking is robbery. It robs God of his unique status as God. The moment people think themselves equal to God it is only to dispense of Him and the first thing to be attacked is his Creatorship.<sup>171</sup>

Equality here is that which refers to the inward not outward. It refers to the riches, power, authority and glory etc. His mode of existence was the form, which never changed or ever will change but His manner of existence, which was the appearance, did change. Paul writes in Gal 4:19 "My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is *formed* in you!" [*emphasis mine*]. He means, until you look like Christ or until Christ is revealed in you.

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<sup>171</sup> Cf. Isaiah 40:18; 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, 22; 46:5, 9

### 5.3.3. No Reputation

In verse 6 He was pre-incarnate and now in verse 7 He is incarnate. This is perhaps the most controversial word (kenosis) in this section on which volumes were written. How did Christ 'empty' Himself? Charles Wesley wrote a magnificent hymn titled 'And can it be' (Osbeck, 1990:51). In one stanza we find the words 'emptied Himself of all but love.' This view is clearly portrayed in this hymn. Kenoticists vary in their view from semi-kenosis or half emptying to something to the effect that He laid aside His Godhead (Berkhof, 2003:327). Could this be true? We need to distinguish between whether He emptied Himself of the form of God or the equality with God. There is a distinction between laying aside the Godhead and laying aside the signs of the Godhead (Lloyd-Jones, 1992: 123) and this is where the confusion comes from. This is a relatively new idea, only about 150 years old. They call it the Kenotic theory. We don't believe that to be true. If He laid aside His godhead then He is susceptible to human error and we have no recourse to hold His words as inerrant. He left the equality part not the form part. He left His position not His nature. When a man enjoys the privilege as that of the owner of the company because he happened to be highly qualified, and when he leaves that company, he is still qualified but only loses the position in that company.

They have missed the point totally. That is why dictionaries must never define biblical terms. The writer is very weary when 'the Oxford English dictionary' is used to define biblical terms. The answer is actually right under our noses, in the sense that it is in the text. But first let us see how this was used by Paul in other places. In Rom. 4:14 it is translated as "*made void*", in 1 Cor. 1:17 it is translated as "*none effect*", in 1 Cor. 9:15 it is translated as "*void*" and in 2 Cor. 9:3 it is translated as "*vain*". The point being this, you cannot rob a statement of the fact of its existence but you can rob it of its significance.

He did not cease to be God because He did not leave His form. If it read "who, being equal with God, did not consider it robbery to be in the form of God but, made Himself of no reputation" then our opponents would have an argument to say that He ceased to be God. The 'but' of verse 7 is a conjunction (a joining word) joining the last point of the previous statement to the first point of the forthcoming one.

Regarding His alleged emptying of Himself, Cook (1981:119) points out that He did this freely, i.e., without compunction or coercion. The exchange was done willingly and consciously. This begs the question as to how He did this. We respond, by *taking* the form of a bondservant. This emptying was done by taking and that was the humiliation. Strictly speaking one cannot empty by taking (Warfield, 1950:42) but the taking was that of humiliation. The mystery around this explanation of Paul accounts for its glory. The emptying process was actually the taking on of something and further this 'taking' is not an exchange but an addition. As Reymond (199:546

footnote 1) points out, “The Incarnation should be viewed as an act of addition and not an act of subtraction.” His humility was to be part of humanity. It cannot be that He emptied Himself of Himself for He was always “God manifested in the flesh”.<sup>172</sup> Not only that, but the text tells us something further, i.e., ‘coming in the likeness of men.’ Likeness is not exactness! Though He was a normal man He was not an average man, for He was without sin. The main decision was to come as the writer of Hebrews 10:7 tells us by quoting from Psalm 40:7–8 “Behold, I come...to do Your will, O my God.” The taking the form or nature of a servant was the requirements or accoutrements to facilitate this endeavour. Now many fail to see that Christ actually illustrated this at the Last Supper. In John 13:3-4 there was a laying aside and a taking up of one type of cloth for another and both served two different functions - His garment and His apron. In those days the average person didn’t have a wardrobe full of choices. The clothes he had were usually just the clothes on his back. They would change the loincloth regularly for obvious reasons. The robe that they wore was a full covered robe given the climate and conditions and this in a sense characterised an individual. The apron on the other hand was just put on for a specific purpose, as the servants would do and taken off again. The garment represented who you are while the apron represented what you did for that period of time. And by virtue of having that apron He was able to wash the disciple’s feet and comparing that to our text, by virtue of Him taking the form of a servant He was able to die for the sin of man.

A bondservant does not have a reputation. No one says, do you know the home of such and such a bondservant. They know the owner. They visit the owner. No one pays attention to the bondservant. He just serves and retreats to an adjacent room until called for. That is why when they ‘found’ (vs.8) as it were, Him in appearance as a man, they didn’t say, “wait a minute, I know you, you’re the Son of God.” Nobody said that. When they found Him as a man, to them He was no more than that. Incidentally, the concept of servanthood was not new to our Lord. He was referred to as the Servant of Jehovah<sup>173</sup> and He was always, as He once put it, ‘going about My Father’s business’.<sup>174</sup>

He first thought about it and then did it. Thinking must always come before action. He did this to Himself. God did not force Him. This equality made this effort of His voluntary and He was the only person who chose to be born. The humbling of our Lord is associated with His humanity not His deity. The Authorised Version and the revised version has it as “He emptied Himself”. This is such an unfortunate mistranslation of the Greek verb from which the term comes (Warfield, 1950:193). ‘He humbled Himself’ (vs.8) appears after the phrase ‘as a man.’ It does not appear at the end of vs.6, because there equality was in view and this concept of humility would have blurred

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<sup>172</sup> Cf. 1 Tim. 3:16

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Zech.3:8

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Lk. 2:49

it. The same applies to obedience. It only appears in the verse referring to His humanity (vs.8), not His deity (vs.6). Hebrews 5:8 reads “Though He was a Son yet learned He obedience.” He never had this with His Father, because obedience was never an issue because they were always on the same wavelength. He was One with His Father. Obedience really is only naturalised against the backdrop of disobedience.

He was in the form of God and was equal with God. He retained the form and left the equality and took on another form, that of a servant. This is what it means to make oneself of no reputation. Here you are God in both form and fashion and now still God but only in form but not in fashion. You are now a human servant in form and fashion. This has to be stated with equal force lest any suggest that He was not fully human. If that were the case then His death would not be vicarious. He had to die that horrific death that even the Romans would not allow their citizens to go through nor would they allow a monarch to go through because under Roman Law no king can be executed on a cross (Scott, 2011:85). What vs. 8 is saying is that it was not just to die – for that could infer natural causes - but the way He had to die. The cross was not designed to scare vampires away (apparently garlic will do that as well); it was the dread of every one in those days. It is inconceivable that people can wear them around their necks in gold. We are aware that it has become a symbol of victory for us Christians, but that is still no reason to turn it into a fashion statement. Though a symbol of victory it is one that drives me to my knees every time I have to think about it. To think of how my saviour hung in that moribund state in extreme physical pain, emotional turmoil and spiritual loneliness as He saw His Father turn His face from Him. He hung and suffered there while we make sport of it here. We can see that the kenotic theory admits of an “emanationist scheme” (Horton, 2011:692) where the energy more than the essence is valued and thus “it is made clear”, as Warfield (1950:7) points out, “there underlies Paul’s letters a complete portrait of Jesus and a full outline of His career, but that this portrait and this outline are the universal possession of Christians.”

Notwithstanding that His emptying was in fact an addition we must also acknowledge that something was left behind, so to speak. Beet (n.d.:406) concludes that He, “by a definite act, gave up the full exercise of His divine powers.”

## **6. His High Priestly Purity**

Of all the Christological views the High Priest concept describes most fully and adequately the New Testament understanding of Jesus (Cullman, 1959:104). Not only is it crystallized most thoroughly in Hebrews, but it is also concentrated most contiguously in Hebrews. Aside from the development of the concept of eternal Priesthood the writer of Hebrews is concerned with the sinlessness of Jesus if this role is to be meaningful. He is also aware of earlier and contemporary writers who assert this position (Cullman, 1959:93). The Hebrew epistle is concerned with the perpetuity of

Christ's priesthood and the eternal efficacy of His work (Jeffrey, Ovey and Sach, 2007:267). However the writer does not pursue this concern at the expense of the tremendous contrast that is weaved into the very fabric of the his argument and that is that the Lord of the highest heaven (Heb. 1:2-13) is reduced to ignominious shame as sacrifice on the Cross (Van de Beek, 2002?:166). It is also clear that this writer is absorbed and centred on the theme of the impeccability of Christ for he mentions it eight times.<sup>175</sup> These are major themes in Hebrews.<sup>176</sup> It was written to provide the evidence of Jesus Christ's divinity (Levy; 2012: 36). The humanness of Christ is a theme replete through its pages, but the writer makes sure that whatever he goes on to say about His sufferings, is said against the backdrop that Christ is God's Son and the Creator (Macleod, 1998:23). These verses in Hebrews are of special interest and not without its mark on the debate. They complement each other and aid in the overall understanding of the dilemma. It will be seen that they serve to substantiate the necessity of the impeccability of Christ.

Hebrews is the defence of the superiority of the Lord in all things. The writer is hard pressed to validate this as it is central to his thesis whereupon he proceeds to prove that Son is superior to the Old Testament prophets<sup>177</sup>, to the angels<sup>178</sup>, to Moses<sup>179</sup>, to Joshua<sup>180</sup> *et al.* The national cult has ended, yet in a nationalistic sense it has not<sup>181</sup>. The apostle Paul has made his thesis clear that the requirements of the law have been fulfilled in Christ, yet in Hebrews we still find the practice of the Law. The selection of priests seems still to be in vogue.<sup>182</sup> The giving of tithes is received at the Temple.<sup>183</sup> The writer impresses His superiority as the only High Priest able to do the job to its necessary completion.<sup>184</sup>

It is established then that His superiority is of such a value that He can have no equal in all creation and yet we are told that He took 'flesh and blood.'<sup>185</sup> This, by natural deduction, implies that He existed prior to this form. Philippians 2: 8 reads, "He was *found* in fashion as a man" which implies that He was predisposed to a superior fashionable status before being *found* this way. To this agrees the apostle John when he writes of our Lord in Jn.8: 23 who said, "I am from above." This only points to a location above the realm of the Earth. In Jn.17: 4 He says, "I am not of this world" and this serves to downplay His local address and promote His other worldliness –His heavenly origin. Regarding Hebrews 2:9 even the German liberal scholar Eduard Schweizer (1972:179),

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. 2:14, 4:15, 5:7-8, 7:27, 9:14, 10:5 & 20.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. 7:23-28 & 9:11-15

<sup>177</sup> Cf. 1:1

<sup>178</sup> Cf. 1:4-14

<sup>179</sup> Cf. 3:1-6

<sup>180</sup> Cf. 4:8-13

<sup>181</sup> Hebrews 7:8 seems to imply that the Temple was not yet destroyed but for all intents and purposes it was defunct.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. 5:1

<sup>183</sup> Cf. 7:8

<sup>184</sup> Cf. 7:20-28

<sup>185</sup> Cf. 2:14

while noting that the incarnation is “self-abasement” is, with the same pen, hard pressed to admit that it speaks of “the coming into the world of God himself [Himself].”

### 6.1. Hebrews 2:14

This verse is found in a context that demands that we backtrack to verse 9 for some clarity. The purpose for His humanity stated there is “for the suffering of death” and that is what the phrase “made Him a little lower than the angels” suggests. It serves in this verse to be a parallel expression indicating the necessity of this form of being as angels do not suffer this way and in this sense He is a “little lower.” Death is not their allotment and therefore the issues of Redemption have bypassed them and in that sense they have no “aid” (vs. 16). It does not serve to indicate that He was in His incarnation lower than angels in rank or type. This is why it couples with verse 14 where it reads, “flesh and blood.” His “flesh and blood” was for the purposes of suffering not sinning. Partaking of flesh and blood is not the same as partaking of sinful nature (Horton, 2011:469). He was born “under the law” (Gal. 4:4) and not under the *curse* of the law. He was “made like His Brethren”, which are the ‘children’ of verse 14, to be merciful to them (vs. 17) and not to be morally associated to them. Granted He “shared in the same” (vs. 14) and was *made like* them “in all things” (vs. 17) but this concerns His “flesh and blood” and the purpose of this was “to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (vs. 17). He was “made like His brethren” to be able to show them mercy and faithfulness as their high priest - and as their High Priest He made propitiation for their sins. The text in verse 18 aptly points out that He “suffered, being tempted.” It does not state that He sinned, being tempted.<sup>186</sup>

Therefore it is honest to admit that Hebrews 2:14 does not refer to sinless perfection directly but it is dishonest to suggest that it does not imply it. The purpose according to verses 14 and 15 is firstly to *incapacitate* the Devil regarding his power over death and then to *emancipate* ‘the children’, who are the seed of Abraham mentioned in verse 17, regarding their fear of death. The thrust of verse 18 indicates that Christ understands suffering through temptation and not through fallenness. To understand it through fallenness would disqualify Him from destroying the devil (vs. 14), releasing those in bondage (vs. 15), giving aid to the seed of Abraham (vs. 16 & 18) and showing mercy and faithfulness in His High Priestly duty (vs. 17). In short, if fallenness were innate in His Person by virtue of His humanity then there would be no Atonement perfected. Thus there are far reaching implications to suggest that in His humanity he must have possessed the proclivity to sin to which the writer of Hebrews does not subscribe.

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<sup>186</sup> By this comment I do not forget that the peccability camp do not suggest that Christ sinned but that He could have being fully human. However the point of my dissertation proves that ‘could have’ in terms human will always lead to ‘did.’

## 6.2. Hebrews 4:15

That the writer here uses the term “weakness” admits of his concession that Christ’s temptation is “not good” (Cullman, 1959:94), so to speak. The writer has thus far added to Christ’s superiority by equating Him with the eternal God, so much so, that at this point of his thesis it is hard to distinguish clearly whom he is talking about. He cites Old Testament verses that were distinctly written of Jehovah and applies them directly to Christ and at the point of chapter 4:13 reminds us that this God is omniscient and promises us this *rest*. Based on His omniscience the writer concludes as to matters of His High Priesthood in verse 14 and states as he does that He was “in all points tempted as we are.” Therefore we would be remiss if we attempted to understand this verse without understanding it under the umbrella of His omniscience, for that is the context. The context of the book itself is that the writer, from the get go, attempts to show the superiority of Christ above everything created and His pre-eminence in being the “express image of His glory.” The writer has not ceased to emphasise that here; he is still doing that in every line. Therefore when we look upon this verse with the writer’s emphasis we look to the words “without sin” as being the main port of call, not the words “tempted like as we are.” The point of the text is the exception clause “yet without sin” and not the preceding words. We do not agree with Van de Beek (2002?: 44) that the temptation was “to give up”. That is too human a view on this issue and makes Him only a moral example which takes us back to the view of Schleiermacher and Ritschl<sup>187</sup>. That this temptation took place is not denied, but what is denied is that it was with sin and that is why the writer asserts as he inserts “*without sin*”.

This phrase has bothered theologians for a long time (Van de Beek, 2002?: 41). This phrase *without sin* refers to what was exposed as a result of the temptation. To put it another way, God orchestrated the entire episode to show this brute fact. Though He was tempted *like* as we are it, does not follow that He was tempted *as* we are. More specifically the phrase informs that the temptations had nothing to do with sin and not that Satan didn’t intend sin by it (Martin, 2010). The argument of association is weak because someone may associate with my lying or I may encounter a fellow murderer, but these will not help to get rid of my guilt. Neither will the argument of understanding as Van de Beek (2002?:46) correctly observes, “understanding alone does not redeem guilt.” Moreover the arguments from association and understanding weaken further when we consider that Jesus was not aged or female or cripple or sick of some dreaded disease.

Cullman (1959:95) points out that the phrase “in all points tempted as we are” refers not only to form but also to content. The simile speaks for itself. The likeness itself is a distinction. The sympathy with us that follows from Him then is based on His omniscience. Not only that, but we cannot ignore chapter 2:17-18 which helps us understand that His *sympathizing* is Him showing us His propitiation based mercy and faithfulness. This is why we can ‘come boldly...to obtain mercy

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<sup>187</sup> Refer chapter 2, 3.3.1 & 3.3.1.4 & chapter 3, 1.6.

and grace” (vs. 16). His sympathy was with our weakness as fallen creatures not with our sin nature. This is not in the text. In that we are unable to “aid” ourselves due to the weakness of possessing a fallen nature, He on the other hand is able to “aid” us because He does not possess one. If He did He would not be able to aid us. The temptation was so that He could sympathize; not so that He can identify. This is also why He is referred to as High Priest, i.e., one who stands in behalf of his people. If it is argued that the high priestly role in Exodus was for the purposes of *identification*, then we must respond by reminding the reader that the overall theme of the book of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ in all things most especially in that aspect. He is able to *sympathize* not identify or associate. We are assured of His full humanity in texts like these, “in all the mundane, glorious, and impolite aspects of the human existence” (Harris, 2011:84) but with the same we are equally assured that He was “yet with sin”. It was this latter fact that made it possible for Him to pay for our sin. John Blanchard (2001:568) insightfully comments that:

“The Bible ... declares that although ‘tempted in every way, just as we are’ he was ‘without sin’. The evidence for this comes from his enemies, his followers (including Saul of Tarsus, who once led a personal crusade to destroy Jesus’ early followers, but was eventually persuaded that he ‘had no sin’) and his inner circle of friends who, after scrutinizing him at close quarters for three years, came to the conclusion that he was ‘righteous’ and ‘without blemish or defect’ and that he ‘committed no sin’”.

### **6.3. Hebrew 5:7-8**

The expression “days of His flesh” no doubt harks back to Gethsemane (Cullman, 1959:96) and this is reinforced by the addendum “prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears.” However the problem here is the assumption that because “He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” He therefore learned obedience only from the point of His suffering (Anon, 1996). Notwithstanding, this is not what the writer is suggesting, for if he was then it has to follow, as per the next verse (vs. 9), that His perfection only commenced once He completed suffering as well and that would collapse the book completely as the opening verses of the book clearly insist that He was “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.”<sup>188</sup> The principle of learning is restricted to the time of flesh and blood which refers to the incarnation of Jesus. He was experiencing something He never had before, because He never was in flesh and blood before.

### **6.4. Hebrews 7:26**

As our High Priest He is said to be “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners”. His flesh and blood made Him human, but not sinfully so. He was not separate from humans but separate from sinners. The distinction is resounding, leave alone clear.

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<sup>188</sup> Cf. 1:3

## **6.5. Hebrews 9:14**

The operative phrase in this verse is “without spot”. The performance of offerings was a priestly activity and it went further to make sure that the animal offerings were spotless<sup>189</sup>. The inspection was intense and not taken lightly. Here we have a self-offering, as it were. Christ deemed Himself perfect and there were no objections from his Father.

## **6.6. Hebrews 10:5 & 20**

It is clear from these two texts that His body was prepared by none other than His Father, which is to say that such a body although fully human was not sinfully human and thus incomparably unique. If His body was like that of fallen man then the peccability theologian will have to answer why He did not catch a cold or flu or endure a headache or running tummy. It is also patently obvious as per the flow of this chapter that this body shed blood (vs. 19) and has thus become for us “a new and living way”. Although well intentioned Lloyd-Jones (1993:107) only confuses matters when he writes regarding His body, “There was need for a cleansing process. He had not a sinful human nature. The human nature was cleansed for Him, it was perfect.” If it was cleansed for Him does it not follow that it was not cleansed at some prior stage in its existence. Prepared does not mean cleansed.

## **7. The General Epistles**

It is not surprising that Peter is most notable and vocal in this category. His proximity to the Son of God could not have left him without an observation and unswerving conviction on this. He was convicted by what he saw in Christ. When he witnessed His control of the creation even while in flesh and blood, Peter could only exclaim one thing and that is, “depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”.<sup>190</sup> The disparity of sinfulness and sinlessness stood and evidenced itself in a distinct polarity.

### **7.1. 1 Peter 1:19**

The sacrificial lamb without blemish is the main thought here as has been highlighted above in the Hebrews verses (Cullman, 1959:94).<sup>191</sup> Therefore vicariousness means sinlessness.

### **7.2. 1 Peter 2:21-25**

In this text Peter points out that Jesus showed a confidence in committing Himself to His Father for the judgment of sin as a vicarious sacrifice. The degree of the commitment proves that there was no peccable part for His Father to deal with or make contention of.

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<sup>189</sup> Cf. Ex. 12:5

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Lk. 5:8

<sup>191</sup> especially 9:14

### 7.3. 1 Peter 3:18

Peter's contrast between 'flesh' and 'Spirit' is somewhat reminiscent of Paul (Warfield, 1950:51). Notwithstanding, it is these two elements, so to speak, that constitute His person. It is obvious that He could not be put to death in the Spirit and it is equally obvious that His flesh could not be raised other than by the Spirit and therefore the union between His flesh and the Spirit is conclusive as to His sacred and unique person<sup>192</sup>.

## 8. Conclusion

If Christological concerns are historical concerns then they must be scriptural ones. Frame (2010:248) points out, "It is not unheard of that many will try to build an elaborate doctrinal construction on a single obscure text." Such is the effort of the Mormons basing their heresy on 1 Cor. 15:29. We have used many verses littered all over the New Testament to verify one important doctrine. The assessment above is given with the full confidence that the Scriptures trump any opinion, no matter how well researched, of the Son of God. He is considered to be "great in the sight of the Lord"<sup>193</sup> and not 'great in the eyes of the world'; so the assessment of His impeccability will be taken from His Word only. To attack Christianity on the issue of the impeccability of its founder is to attack the divinity of His work and Person and consequently to destabilise the Christian faith (Ullmann, n.d.:7). He goes on to assert (n.d.:9):

"Of such critical importance is the question of the sinless holiness of Christ. It is a question of the very existence or non-existence of Christianity itself. If there are no certain grounds for affirming the sinlessness of Jesus, the moral basis of Christianity is itself insecure. If, on the contrary, the faith in His sinless perfection is proved to be well founded, it becomes at the same time a firm foundation-stone for the whole edifice of the Christians faith."

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<sup>192</sup> Rom. 1:4

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Lk. 1:15

## Chapter 6: Summary & Conclusion

We have considered “One whose moral constitution was of the most peculiar kind (Cullman, n.d.:71); therefore it requires an approach peculiar to Him. The subject of impeccability, and more specifically, the impeccability of Christ is a unique consideration of Christianity (Ullman, n.d.:2). The Incarnation must be seen as the conclusion to Christology, in that the Father and the Holy Spirit had no part in flesh and blood (Miley, 1896:17) and yet it is because of this that the matter is never fully understood. Cullman (1959:248) argues that it is a “paradox that the Father and Son are at once one and yet distinct – a paradox which the later Christian theologians could not explain because they attempted to do so by speculative philosophical means.” To this Cook (1981: 137) states that “Christology is second-order language about God” and by this he means that the only way we can know what is unknowable (God) is by His Son whom we know to be Christ.

In chapter two we had to prove the relationship of history to theology. To this end we thus outlined the historic problem of Christ’s two natures tended towards two basic extremes - the Nestorian heresy of dividing His two natures and the Eutychian heresy of confusing His two natures<sup>194</sup>. This invariably swung the Church back and forth into a pendulum of confusion. As Horton (2011:480) points out, “whether by a Nestorian route (separating the two natures) or by a Monophysite path (confusing the natures), the arrival point was always the same: a denial of Christ’s divinity.” That this is unacceptable, goes without saying.

The following two chapters were intended to prove the relationship of Christology to anthropology and more specifically its relationship to hamartiology.

Chapter three assessed the then consequent problem of peccability, which assumed the historical problem of either a confusion or a division of His natures. We pointed out that this conclusion was not reasonable from a consideration of biblical facts and misrepresented the nature of the sinless Son of God. With the same we were careful to point out that men who espouse this alternative view were not in any way devious or malicious, but misinformed - and therefore misaligned the human nature of His flesh and blood with His divine nature.

This is what then made chapter four so crucial, in that it laid out the unity of His two natures so as to see, and not prove, the improbability of His peccability. The chapter harnessed as it galvanised the indubitable fact that to consider His person without the consideration of His divinity is not to consider Him as He would want.

We then drafted out the final authority on the issue from scripture in chapter five to serve as a weight that scripture nowhere admits of Christ’s peccability, but always affirms His impeccability.

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<sup>194</sup> Also referred to as Monophysitism

This chapter proved that when it comes to matters of theology, especially the impeccability of Christ, we dare not think “beyond what is written”<sup>195</sup> Frame (2010:248) adds to our argument and justification of the form and flow of chapter six when he writes, “The doctrines of the Christian faith are never derived from a single text. Rather, each doctrine is based on many texts, drawn together to form *a consistent pattern of teaching*” [emphasis mine]. If it is argued that this is nothing but redundancy, we respond by saying that this rather “lavish redundancy (Frame, 2010:251) is in actuality “eloquent redundancy” (Frame, 2010:256) and therefore “highly redundant in a good way” (Frame, 2010:248).

The mainstay of this fact was a display demonstrated at His temptation. We argued that if anything the temptation was to prove that He was impeccable rather than that He was temptable. The temptation of Christ is not denied in this argument, but rather affirmed on His grounds not ours. That he was tempted from Satan’s perspective is clearly portrayed in scripture, but that Christ considered the temptation as attractive or viable is denied. As is the case with any of us, Satan has this factor called ‘the flesh’ to aim at which was clearly absent in the Son of God.

The above has demonstrated ubiquitously that Jesus could not have sinned. We state the following affirmations with the view to another syllogism:

Premise one: God is all-knowing (Matt. 11:21), God is all-powerful (Heb. 4:15), God is present everywhere (Ps. 139:7-12), God is holy (1 John 1:5), God is eternal (Ps. 90:2), God is truth (John 14:6), God is just (Acts 17:31), God is love (Eph. 2:4-5).<sup>196</sup>

Premise two: Jesus is God (John 10:30); therefore,

Conclusion: Jesus is all of the above.

To insinuate the possibility of peccability in Him based on these facts is to denigrate the Father of His true worth. We can only caution such a view. We agree with Cook (1981:8) who concludes that, “The primacy of Jesus [is] the basic frame of reference for doing Christology.”

Noll (2011) exclaims that, “John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1 all make the same statement: It’s not just that the Lord God in some general sense created everything, but that *Christ* created everything. We also have the amazing statement in Colossians 1 that all things hold together in Jesus.” He goes on to assert that, “The Christian religion begins with two things happening at once. The human Jesus and the divine God both offer the Word of Life. And it’s not two people offering the Word of Life, its one person.” This ‘doubleness’, so to speak, defines the most important thing in all existence, how God revealed Himself most fully to humankind.” The unity of the Person of Jesus Christ is a well affirmed Reformed doctrine (Horton, 2011:477).

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<sup>195</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 4:6

<sup>196</sup> This first premise is comprised of various principles, all of which serve to make one basic point as stated in premise two.

Frame (2010: 230) argues that Theology is the application of Scripture to all of human life, which is why the matter, as argued in this thesis, also strikes at the heart of true discipleship. In other words, how do you disciple a person for a deeper walk with Christ when that person has never been properly introduced to Him? This is nothing but foundational to Christian conversion and as the Psalmist says in 11:3, “if the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do?” (Bible, 1997).

The satanic ploy of this age is not to keep people from the Church, but to allow them to remain confused within it (Lloyd-Jones, 1994:134) and to allow them to enter it on false pretences. Equally is it his ploy not to keep people from the gospel but from its *light*, as the apostle Paul informs us (2 Cor. 4:4). His ploy is not to prevent the spread of the gospel, but to pervert its contents and without the Christ of scripture the gospel has no content. The intent here is to expose this subterfuge and to show that what is dubbed gospel is no gospel at all. We have also shown that to depart from the doctrine of *non posse peccare* is to embrace “a piece of Satan’s sophistry” (Taylor, n.d.:44). The following is a chart<sup>197</sup> to highlight the differences in these Latin expressions:

		Adam as created	Fallen humanity	Latin Term
1.	The ability to sin	Yes	Yes	posse peccare
2.	The ability not to sin	Yes	No	posse non peccare
3.	The inability not to sin	No	Yes	non posse non peccare
4.	The inability to sin	No	No	non posse peccare

The fourth point above is the defence of this thesis in relation to Christ. Ullmann (n.d.:3) points out that “The office of theology is scientifically to arrange and expound, according to their internal connection and perfect organization, those matters of Christian belief which have been previously established and determined.” We hope to have achieved that end here.

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<sup>197</sup> The following chart is adapted from R. C. Sproul’s book “The Consequences of Ideas,” pg. 63

### **Further Research:**

1. More research needs to be done in regard to the Old Testament revelation of Incarnational Impeccability. Admittedly this would fall into the category of prophecy which was briefly treated in this thesis in chapter 4 but still more concentrated research is needed.
2. The issue of impeccability to be assessed from within the study of His titles and names. Although we have alluded to His attributes in chapter 4 of this study, we had no more space for such a perusal.
3. Although very briefly alluded to, a study of the two natures on a level where the solution becomes more visible is needed.
4. A Pneumatological perspective is needed to further this issue for it is on the backdrop of His filling with the Spirit that He went on to His Temptation, which filling, unlike for us, is given to Him without measure.
5. Our treatment did not address the self-consciousness of Jesus. All Christians are agreed that Jesus is God but the question is posed, 'Did Jesus know who He was or did He arrive at that realisation at a certain point, for example, His Baptism, His temptation etc.?'
6. A critique of peccability from the Liberalist view. Although addressed by Warfield: *Recent Christological Speculations* (1950:250ff) more concentrated analysis is needed, perhaps using Warfield as a stepping stone. Paul Wernle reckons that Wellhausen, Wrede, & Schweitzer "must not be taken too seriously" (Warfield, 1950:283). I disagree as I believe their flotsam and jetsam have infiltrated and infected the Church and are washed up on the beach of theology and must be dispensed with.

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