

# What Human Nature Did Jesus Take? Unfallen

*What Greek terms underlie the key words and phrases in the discussion? What was Christ's primary mission? What limits does His primary mission impose on the human nature He took in the Incarnation? By Benjamin Rand*

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Seventh-day Adventist theology presents two alternative views concerning the human nature of Jesus Christ. Christ had a sinful human nature because He had a sinful mother like the rest of us, or He had a sinless human nature because, unlike the rest of us, He had God for His Father.<sup>1</sup> The first view stresses His identity with man; the second focuses on His uniqueness as man. Some try to bridge the two by saying Jesus had a sinful physical nature but His human birth was like our new birth—born of the Spirit. They say that Jesus began in Bethlehem, where we begin when born again. Others suggest that the parallel breaks down under investigation. They believe that Jesus was both sinful and sinless in human nature, sinful only in that He took sin-weakened physical nature but sinless in that He never became sin in birth.

Are we simply left to take our pick? Does it really matter which view we choose? Is this merely academic hair splitting, with no practical meaning? I believe we must understand Christ's human nature to really appreciate what He endured, how He alone can be our Saviour, how He can be our example, our utter need of His substitution all the way to the kingdom, and our urgent need of a Christ-centered, not man-centered, outlook. These practical implications will become obvious as we explore the Biblical evidence.

First, a broad overview. 1. We will confine ourselves to the Biblical data, acting from the premise that all doctrinal truth issues out of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> 2. We will come to grips with the linguistic and theological meaning of the Greek words *sarx*, *hamartia*, *isos*, *homoiōma*, *monogenēs*, and *prōtotokos*. 3. Allowing scripture to interpret scripture, we will penetrate to the real meaning of Christ's humanity as "the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16) and "the seed of David" (Rom. 1:3). We will note the harmony between these passages and the Greek terms we studied. 4.

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We will then take a look at Christ's mission to save man. Throughout the investigation we will document the overwhelming Biblical evidence that Jesus did in fact take a sinless human nature at birth (spiritually) while possessing a similar physical nature to others of His day. 5. This will force upon us the question Does He really understand us, then? Or, put other ways, is He a remote extraterrestrial being who had an unfair advantage over us? Was He really tempted in all points as we are? Can He really be a sympathetic high priest? If Christological discussion is to be fruitful and faith-building, it must first clearly define terms in a way that is either informed by or true to Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

## The Word became flesh

The Bible says, "The Word [Christ] was made flesh" (John 1:14). What does the Greek word for "flesh" mean? Does it tell us whether Christ's human nature was sinful or sinless? *Sarx* appears 151 times in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> Arndt and Gingrich's *A Greek-English Lexicon* gives it eight meanings: (1) the material covering a body [1 Cor. 15:39]; (2) the body itself as a substance [chap. 6: 16]; (3) "a man of flesh and blood" [John 1:14]; (4) "human or mortal nature, earthly descent" [Rom. 4: 1]; (5) "corporeality, physical limitation(s), life here on earth" [Col. 1:24]; (6) "the external or outward side of life" [2 Cor. 11:18]; (7) "the willing instrument of sin" [Rom. 7:18]; and (8) the source of sexuality [John 1:13]. Only one of these (number 7) has to do with sin. Therefore *sarx does not necessarily mean "sinful."*<sup>5</sup>

In Greek, the usual word for "sin" is *hamartia*<sup>6</sup> and not *sarx*. Schweitzer's theological dictionary notes that *sarx* may designate an earthly sphere (see 1 Cor. 1:27), not necessarily "sinful and hostile to God, but simply. . . limited and provisional."<sup>7</sup> It also says *sarx* may mean an object of trust (see Rom. 2:28). Here "what is sinful is not the *sarx*, but confidence in it."<sup>8</sup> Schweitzer concludes, "Where

*sarx* is understood in a full theological sense, as in Galatians 5:24, it denotes the being of man which is determined, not by his physical substance, but by his relation to God.<sup>9</sup>

Does God becoming flesh merely mean He received a human body? Christ said of His incarnation, “ ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me’ ” (Heb. 10:5, N.I.V.). In agreement Paul wrote, “He appeared in a body” (1 Tim. 3:16, N.I.V.). The Greek word for “body” is *sōma*, yet the word “body” (N.I.V.) in 1 Timothy 3:16 is not *sōma* but *sarx*. It merely means “enfleshment,” not “sinful.”

How, then, do we understand these words: God sent His “Son in the *likeness* of sinful flesh, and...condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3)? First, consider what Paul could have said. He might have written, (1) God sent His Son in sinful flesh or (2) in the likeness of flesh. The first would mean His flesh was sinful, and the second would say that He only appeared to be in the flesh but was really some extraterrestrial being (cf. 1 John 4:1-3, a text misunderstood by some).<sup>10</sup>

Paul said neither. He focused on Christ coming in the *likeness* of sinful flesh. The key word is “likeness.” Two Greek words are translated “like” in English: *isos*, meaning “same,” as in Acts 11:17, where “God gave them the like [same, *isos*] gift,” and *homoioōma*, used in Romans 8:3, meaning “similar” (because human), but not “same” (because not sinful). Scripture is consistent on this point. Thus Philippians 2:7 says of Jesus that He “was made in the likeness [*homoioōma*] of men.”<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 2:17 says, “He had to be made like (*homoioō*) his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest” (N.I.V.).

Do these Greek words and these passages suggest that Jesus was only *similar* to other humans in having a sin-affected *physical* human body, but not the *same* as other humans, for He alone was sinless in His *spiritual* relationship with God? Ellen White thought so.<sup>12</sup> The Biblical evidence we have looked at so far supports such a conclusion.

### Why only similar, not the same?

From this Biblical material come two principles that guide us in our quest. The first is: *Who* Jesus Christ is determined the extent of His identity with our human nature. In other words, He was more than Mary’s baby. He was God. In becoming man He did not cease to be God.<sup>13</sup> This means that His eternal unbroken relationship with God was not

shattered by His becoming human. The Incarnation was not just another human birth. It was God spanning the chasm gouged by sin, and within His very being forming the bridge from God to man. God creatively worked on the planet again, as in Eden. Whether using dust of the ground or Mary’s womb, the life came from Him. Both constituted miracles never known before or repeated since. The sheer Godness of these events must not be lost in superficial comparisons with other humans. All others have two human parents. But not Adam and Christ. Man comes into the world in one of three ways: creation, birth, or Incarnation.

The second principle is: Christ’s mission must determine the extent of His identity with our humanity. To be our Saviour, Jesus must become one with us. But He could not go beyond the requirements of His mission, He could not become a sinner (in nature or act) Himself. As in the sacrificial system, Christ’s mission could be accomplished only by a Lamb without spot or blemish or any such thing.

### The original sin

In this discussion we must take seriously the devastating nature of sin. Every baby is self-centered before knowing what constitutes sin. How was Baby Jesus different if born with a sinful nature?

The Bible gives two definitions of *sin*, one in terms of behavior, one in terms of relationship. Thus “sin is the transgression of the law [lawlessness]” (1 John 3:4), and “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Both of these were present in the original sin in Eden. Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command not to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree (Gen. 3:2-6), and they doubted God’s word. He has said, “Don’t eat it or you will die.” Eve thought it looked good for food and desirable for gaining wisdom. So they took the plunge and ate. Why? *Doubting* God led to *disobeying* Him. To doubt someone is a cessation of trust or faith in him—a broken relationship. The tempter caused them to believe him and their senses more than God. Out of this broken relationship he caused them to break God’s commandment. The original sin was first a broken relationship. To define *sin* merely as “lawbreaking or wrong acts” is looking only at its outer manifestation. At its root, sin is a broken relationship between the sinner and God.<sup>14</sup>

Christ came to the world to restore the relationship, not to continue in the separation. Thus He came *similar* to us (as a human, physically speaking) but not the *same* as us (in broken relationship

with God, spiritually speaking). Immanuel, or “God with us,” means He crossed the abyss between God and man, He annihilated the estrangement by coming from God’s side to ours. But He established the connection once more only because throughout the Incarnation He remained in unbroken relationship with God—He remained sinless spiritually.

Romans 5:12-14 is considered “one of the most difficult places of scripture,”<sup>15</sup> and “the details of the exegesis of Romans 5:12-21 are disputed,”<sup>16</sup> but I believe the analogy between Adam and Christ is the clearest found in the Bible. Lenski is right in stating: “It is so vital because it goes to the bottom of both sin and deliverance from sin. All else that is said in the Scriptures regarding either or both rests on what is here revealed as the absolute bottom.”<sup>17</sup> Note what it says: “Therefore, ...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. . . .Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:12-19, N.I.V.).

Note the thrice-repeated parallels between the two Adams. Death, or condemnation, does not pass on to each person only because of his own sin. It does that, too. But in a more profound sense, death passes on to every man because of Adam’s sin, or broken relationship with God. (That Adam’s sin affects all the race is mentioned five times in verses 15-19.) It simply isn’t true that sin isn’t present until the person’s first act of sin. Men are born sinners. “Death reigned” (verse 14) from Adam’s sin. Babies die before knowingly sinning. Severed from the Life-giver, death, not guilt, passed on from Adam to the race.<sup>18</sup> This is why Christ came to restore the connection, to bring eternal life. The parallelism in Romans 5:12-14 is crucial to its meaning. “As *sin* ends in *death*, so *righteousness* in *life*.”<sup>19</sup> If Adam’s one sin is the fount of death for all men, and was so the moment it was committed before any men were born,<sup>20</sup> then Christ’s sinlessness is the fount of all righteousness. He was *similar* to us, as born within human physical limitations, but not the *same* as us, because not born a sinner in a broken relationship with God.

The Biblical fact that sin is passed on from Adam to each baby born (not Adam’s guilt, but

death, the result of his sin) means that *sin* cannot be defined merely as “act.”<sup>21</sup> That is too superficial a definition. Though sin includes wrong choices, and therefore acts, and even thoughts (see Matt. 5:28), it also includes nature.<sup>22</sup> If we were not born sinners, then we would not need a Saviour until our first act or thought of sin. Such an idea does terrible disservice to the tragic consequences of sin and to the mission of Christ, as the only Saviour for every human (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). It also means that if Jesus came with a sinful nature but resisted, then perhaps someone else will do the same, and that person would not need Jesus to save him. We must understand that both aspects of sin’s effect—corporate death and personal guilt—necessitate a Saviour. We need Jesus as substitute for all of our life, and not just from the first time we knowingly rebel.

### Sinners at birth

Every human, save Christ, is born a sinner. David said, “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5, N.I.V.). Yet David could also say about God, “You brought me out of the womb” (Ps. 22:9, N.I.V.). “For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Ps. 139:13, R.S.V.). Are these contradictory? Was David born a sinner or not? They speak of two sides of a truth, both equally Biblical. Whereas the first speaks of David’s status as a sinner at birth, the others tell of God’s saving love to him in that state.

Then, how do we interpret the text “ ‘The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son’ ” (Eze. 18:20, R.S.V.)? The Bible also says, “ ‘Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me’ ” (Ex. 20:5, R.S.V.; cf. chap. 34:7; Num. 14:18; 1 Kings 21:29). Are these also contradictory? Again, they constitute two sides of a truth, both Biblical. The first says one’s behavior results in either life or death, whereas the second states a person’s sin affects his posterity, too. This is why the Bible affirms, “Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward” (Ps. 58:3, N.I.V.).

“Rebel from birth” (Isa. 48:8, N. I.V. ) and “filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15) again look at two sides, both the human status at birth as well as God’s mercy to one in that state. By contrast Jesus was not only filled with the Holy Spirit from birth but, unlike anyone else,

was born of the Holy Spirit. Unlike others He was also God. Does this mean He has an Immaculate Conception?

Catholic theology since Augustine believes everyone is born with original sin.<sup>23</sup> That is, each comes into the world with the guilt of Adam's sin, for everyone was seminally present in Adam, and therefore shares in his guilt. Thus, similarly, Jesus would come into the world with the guilt of original sin. To get around this predicament, Catholic theology invented the Immaculate Conception. This doctrine postulates that Mary was born without the taint of sin. But if God could perform such a salvific act for one human, why not for all? This would have saved Christ all the anguish of becoming human. Besides, if Mary became immaculate without Christ, this calls Christ's mission into question.

The Bible knows nothing of an Immaculate Conception, but proclaims a miraculous conception. Jesus was unique. It was out of His uniqueness as God that His birth was sinless. At this point Catholic theology overlooks *who* Jesus was. It is not necessary to find in Mary the reason for Christ's uniqueness. That uniqueness issues out of His own selfhood as God. We now turn to the Biblical data concerning His uniqueness.

### Jesus as unique man

Jesus was unlike other humans in the center of His consciousness. This determined all else. No other human lived before his birth and made a decision to be born to please the Father. Christ's consciousness was always Godward. He came to do His Father's will (Heb. 10:9), glorified Him throughout life, and finished the work He gave Him to do (John 17:4). No other baby, child, or adult has lived in such utter selflessness for God and man. Both His sinless acts and sinless spiritual nature issued out of His unbroken Godward orientation. His union with God determined the extent of His union with man.

The Greek word *monogenēs*, translated "only begotten" in the King James Version, actually means "one of a kind." *Monogenēs* comes from *monos*, "one," and *genos*, "kind" or "type." *Monogenēs* must not be confused with *monogennaō*, which derives from *monos*, "one," and *gennaō*, "begotten." *Monogennaō* means "only begotten."

*Monogenēs* is used nine times in the Greek New Testament, five times of Jesus (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). Its use in the other four references throws light on what the word means when used

of Jesus. First, the dead son of the widow of Nain was all she had (Luke 7:12). Second, Jairus may have had sons, but it was his only daughter who died (chap. 8:42). Third, and the demoniac was the only son of his father in this condition (chap. 9:38). In these three passages *monogenēs* doesn't mean "only begotten," but "only one of its kind." This fact is even clearer in the fourth example, Hebrews 11:17. There Isaac is called *monogenēs* when, in fact, he was the secondborn (Ishmael being Abraham's first). Nevertheless he was one of a kind, unique, as he alone was the son of promise.

When used of Jesus, *monogenēs* always has this one of a kind, unique, connotation. He was *the* Son of promise—unique in mission and birth as well as in His life. His unique birth consisted not only in how He was born (without human father) but in what nature He was born (without human sin).

He was one of a kind in that He was the only man who was also God. He was the only man who was born by the Spirit, without a human father. He was the only man who existed eternally as God before becoming also man, and thus was uniquely independent of parents for life. And He was the only man who was *similar* but not the *same* as other humans.

His uniqueness issued from *who* He was. *Who* He was made His birth different from that of all other humans. Possessing the sin-weakened physical humanity of His time, He came with an eternal and sinless relationship with God. Attention to Christ as *monogenēs* would have saved many from pantheism (Kellogg, Jones, Waggoner) and the holy flesh movement (Donnell, Indiana Conference).<sup>24</sup>

The Bible requires that Jesus' uniqueness be our starting point in Christology. He is not just another man, but God become man. "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14, N.I.V.). This manward movement is the context from which to unfold the meaning of the God-man. Some neglect this, choosing rather to begin with the final generation and their postprobationary demonstration. They reason that if that generation will no longer do sinful acts while still having sinful natures, then Christ must have been sinless in a sinful nature too. For will that final generation do better than Christ? This is eschatological Christology, or a reading back from the future into Christ's human nature. It allows reality outside of Christ to inform us about Christ. But Christ, and not eschatology, should be the starting point. We need a Christological eschatology rather than an eschatological Christology.

The theological mistakes of Schweitzer and Barth should warn and guide us here. Both Schweitzer and Barth (in his early writing) began with eschatology and read back into Christology, with devastating results. Schweitzer's Jesus ended up as a deluded man,<sup>25</sup> and Barth's Christ as a "wholly other" God<sup>26</sup>—two opposite overemphases, neither doing justice to Jesus Christ.

Christological thought needs to begin with Christ's uniqueness as Son of God rather than with His similarity to humans as Son of man. Further, epistemologically, we cannot move from the human to the divine, but we can from the divine to the human. In determining the human nature of the man Jesus, *monogenēs* must be the starting point and center of Christology.

*Prōtotokos*, or "firstborn," is used of Jesus seven times (see esp. Heb. 1:6; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Rev. 1:5). "Firstborn" refers not so much to time but to importance. As in Hebrew culture the firstborn received the family privileges, so Jesus, the "firstborn" among men, won back all the privileges man lost through the Fall. Thus "only begotten" and "firstborn" are not to be interpreted literally when applied to Jesus. Rather, they imply that He was one of a kind, unique. His mission was to become the new Adam, the new firstborn, or head, of the race. This qualified Him to be our representative, high priest, and intercessor in the great controversy.

Jesus is our example in life, *but not in birth*. If He is our example in birth, maybe some other human could achieve a perfect life and not need the Saviour. This thought lies at the heart of Friedrich Schleiermacher's theology. He believed that Jesus was only quantitatively and not qualitatively different from other humans. Was He not born like everyone else? Was it not the fuller consciousness of God's presence and His feeling of absolute dependence upon God that made Him different from others? Yet someone will come in the future who will transcend Him.<sup>27</sup> Such thinking warns us that it is dangerous to miss the full Biblical distinction between Christ's birth and that of all other humans.

Karl Barth's theology also contains problems concerning Christ's nature at birth.<sup>28</sup> Although he believed Jesus to be truly God, he didn't allow the Biblical consequences of that to control his understanding of the Incarnation. He claimed that the baby Jesus was born with sinful flesh.<sup>29</sup> The only way Barth could get around the consequences of this was to say that Christ assumed this sinful flesh

within His divine nature in such a way that temptations and sin were an impossibility.<sup>30</sup>

The Biblical data leads in the opposite direction of Schleiermacher's and Barth's thinking. The man Jesus is unique. He is our substitute in life. He covers our imperfect characters with His perfect human character. His character is our robe of righteousness, the wedding garment without which we cannot enter the kingdom. He is our substitute in death. He died to pay the price of sin in our place so we can have eternal life. But He is also our substitute in birth. He was born sinless to meet our first need of Him as Saviour, when we are born sinners.

The Bible places no salvific value on our first birth. In fact, it clearly states, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Only the man Jesus didn't need the new birth. That puts Him in a class by Himself.

### **Christ from Abrahamic, Davidic line<sup>31</sup>**

From the Biblical data studied thus far, what can we conclude the following expressions mean: "He took on him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16) and "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3; cf. John 7:42; 2 Tim. 2:8)? Do these passages declare that Jesus took a sinful nature issuing from Abraham and David? In the light of the broad Biblical context, these texts are not considering the *nature* but the *mission* of Christ. They are not concerned with the type of flesh in which He was born (sinless or sinful). Rather, they maintain that, as a Jew (Heb. 2:16) and as their real king (Rom. 1:3), Jesus came as the fulfillment of the covenant. God called Abraham out to form a people through whom He could bless all nations (Gen. 22:18). Similarly, Jesus came through Mary to save the nations (Matt. 1:18, 21; cf. John 3:16). Mission and not nature is the context.

Israel, in the Old Testament period, and Christian Jews, in New Testament days, looked back to Abraham as the "father" of God's church in its first form (see Isa. 51:2; Rom. 4:12; and James 2:21 and their contexts). So Matthew, writing to Jews, begins Jesus' genealogy with Abraham (Matt. 1:1). And the author of Hebrews, also writing to Jews, says Jesus "took on him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). That Jesus is placed in the line of the Abrahamic covenant does not negate His actualizing the very purpose of that covenantal line by becoming the second Adam. In fact, the same book that mentions Christ's connection with David also presents Him as the second Adam (see Rom. 5:12-21).

Does substitution include becoming exactly like us in birth? Could Jesus really save us if He did not actually become one of us in sinful nature? Did He really come down into the pit where we are in order to pull us out? Down in the pit He took hold of real human flesh only to the extent that His union with the Father remained unaffected. In other words, He could not be sinful in nature, for by definition such a nature is the result of separation from God. Union with God and sinful spiritual nature are as far removed from each other as are heaven and hell. To say that He became identified with us but remained loyal to God is to misunderstand the terrible nature of sin. *Sin means separation from God.* Either Jesus maintained an unbroken relationship with the Father or He let go and plunged into our estrangement.

Jesus was both our substitute and example, and in that order. There is a priority of substitute over example as there is of God over man and Saviour over saved. This is important to note. Christology must never begin with example and hope to do justice to His substitution. It must take the path that leads from substitution to example. We need His substitution all along the line: We need His eternal divinity, His sinless birth, His sinless life, His perfect death, His resurrection, His high priestly intercession, and His second return. We also need Him as a man to exemplify total dependence upon God.

The fact that He was born sinless in no way suggests that law-keeping isn't important to the rest of us who are born sinners. *It is not true that belief in Christ's sinless nature means no one else can or should even try to keep the law. Jesus is not our substitute so that we can live as we please.*

### Tempted like us

We have seen that the Biblical data presents a unique human Jesus who couldn't have had a sinful nature. The question presses, Does He really understand us, then? Or is He a remote being who had an unfair advantage over us? Can He really be a sympathetic high priest? In short, was He really tempted in all points as we are?

Our Christology affects our understanding of Christ's temptations. For hundreds of years classical Christology considered that Jesus lived on earth as God. He had powers that are not natively available to other men. Little wonder that temptation was considered no ordeal for Him. Although Anselm (1033-1109) was the first significant scholar to focus on Christ living on earth as a man (he wrote

*Cur Deus Homo*), others subsequently continued to overlook the reality of His ordeal. Thus Calvin's belief that Jesus remained on heaven's throne while living on earth (*extra Calvinisticum*), Luther's commingling of the divine and human natures (*communicatio idiomatum*), and Barth's enfolding of the assumed humanity within an impregnable divinity (*ganz anderer*) all made Christ's temptations unreal and His sinning impossible. E. J. Waggoner, like Barth, believed that Jesus took sinful flesh but couldn't sin because He was divine.<sup>32</sup> What good is a sinful nature like ours if He had a divine nature unlike ours? The one cancels out the other, removing the reality of temptation from Him.

By contrast, the Bible states He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). "In all points" doesn't mean the same temptations (plural), but the same temptation (singular). For example, Jesus was never tempted to watch TV, smoke pot, or break the speed limit. But He was tempted to cease His dependence upon God. Satan employed different *means* for the same *end*. For the thrust of all temptation is to break one's relationship with God.

Christ's temptations were greater than ours, for only the One who never gave in could feel their full force.<sup>33</sup> B. F. Westcott expressed it this way: "Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin, which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain."<sup>34</sup>

But does "in all points" include "in the same way"?<sup>35</sup> James writes, "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed" (James 1:14, N.I.V.). Evil propensities (a leaning to sin) are acquired in two ways: through sinning and through being born a sinner. Christ did neither. He was born "that holy thing" (Luke 1:35), and Satan found in Him no evil at all (see John 14:30). "Being in all points tempted like as we are" must be understood in the light of the Biblical data already considered. It indicates that He, as a unique human, was tempted in all points like us. Again, temptation basically involves Satan's attempt to break one's relationship with God.

It is unthinkable that Jesus would plunge into separation from His Father in the very act of coming to do His will. The two are mutually exclusive. His uniqueness in birth is no cause to cry out, "Foul play—You didn't really become one of us, You had it easier than us! Who couldn't resist temptations if

he had a sinless nature like Yours!” How else could it be? Any supposed advantage that Jesus had was not for Himself. His saving mission determined the extent of His identity with us.

Yet saying this brings us to a paradox. His remaining unlike us did not give Him an advantage; it was actually disadvantageous to Him. For if the thrust of temptation is to get one to rely upon himself rather than God, who would have the greater temptation, Jesus, who had His own divinity to rely upon, or we, who have nothing comparable?

Christ’s disadvantage in temptation issued out of His uniqueness. And in this uniqueness rests our salvation. Only Jesus felt the full force of satanic hatred, for Satan’s controversy is against Christ and not any other human. All hell broke loose against this dependent man Jesus; and besides, Jesus could not get forgiveness if He were overpowered. Imagine the pressure when every moment, every act held such consequences for Himself and the whole world!

If Jesus must be sinful flesh to understand our struggles from experience, then how could He empathize with the dregs of the race? How could He save the generation plunged two thousand years further down into genetic degeneration? If His taking our sinful nature was prerequisite to His being tempted like us, then He should have come contemporary with the last man born. Yet, even if Jesus were a last-generation person, His contemporaries would still be more degraded because of their own sinning. If sinful nature is a necessary element of being tempted like us, then Christ wasn’t tempted like our generation and those degraded through personal sin. But if His uniqueness made His temptation greater, then He didn’t need our fallen nature to be tempted like us.

Not until His death did He, “who knew no sin,” become “sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). Never before that moment did sin bring a separation from His Father, which caused Him to cry out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat. 27:46). The man Jesus became sin for us in *mission* at death and not in *nature* at birth.

### Doxology

Theology is a human quest to understand God’s self-revelation. Christology is the center and heart of theology, for Jesus Christ is the greatest revelation of God to man. He is also the best revelation of authentic man to man. Jesus Christ was unique not only as God with us but as man with us. He was

sinless divinity united with sin-weakened human flesh, but He was equally sinless in both natures. He was God with us, but He lived as man with us in a complete self-emptying (see Phil. 2:7). While remaining God, He laid aside the use of His divine attributes, living as authentic man totally dependent upon His Father in heaven.

O wonder, ye inhabitants of the far-flung cosmos! Be amazed, ye angels in heaven! O worship Him, ye sinners on earth! For what other human, born of woman, can match this One in nature and deed? Who else gave up so much for so few? Who else became limited to one human body when He existed everywhere before? Who else chose to remain so limited forever? Who else plunged into sin’s inoperative, terminal cancer to bring radical healing and not become infected Himself? Who else could become a human physician while distancing himself from the human plague?

How could Jesus be my example in all these? How could I copy Him? How could I be eternal, be God, be sinless in birth, sinless as a baby, and sinless throughout life? How could I overcome all He overcame? And when He finally overcame Satan by His death at Calvary—which has cosmic and salvific consequences—how could I follow? Yes, I long to be like Him, but I admit that He is forever unique. With Peter I confess, “‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’” (Luke 5:8, N.I.V.). Yet He in mercy says, “Come unto me” (Matt. 11:28). He draws me by His uniqueness. I desperately need that which makes Him different from me.

Christianity is not just to be like Him. Christianity is life in Him. We are righteous only *in Christ*, never in ourselves. The good news is more than “Copy me.” It is always first and foremost “Cling to me,” “Abide in me” (John 15:4), “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), and “You are accepted in the Beloved” (see Eph. 1:6).

True Christology ends, not in debate, but in grateful worship and joyful obedience. By beholding Him we not only praise Him but become like Him (see 2 Cor. 3:18). To see His love for us, His unique love as a unique man, galvanizes us; we yearn more to be filled with Him than to be like Him. This focus is crucial. It is on Him and His works, and away from ourselves and our works. We do not just follow, we fellowship. It is not just rules, but relationship. Not just a practice, but a Person. For Christianity is Christ through and through. Out of this communion comes a marvelous wonder—we become like the One we admire the most! It is

a natural by-product of longing to have Him dwell within. Christology climaxes in the exclamation “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20). Only in this dependent union can Jesus be our model man—never in His nature at birth.

1 See E. C. Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (Berne, Switzerland: Peter Lang Pub., Inc. 1984), for a comparative evaluation of the Christology of H. E. Douglass, E. Heppenstall, E. J. Waggoner, and E. G. White. Those focusing on Christ’s sinful nature include (alphabetically): T. A. Davis, *Was Jesus Really Like Us?* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1979); H. E. Douglass and Leo Van Dolson, *Jesus: The Benchmark of Humanity* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1977). Those focusing on Christ’s sinless nature include (alphabetically): N. R. Gulley, *Christ Our Substitute* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1982); E. Heppenstall, *The Man Who Is God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1977); H. K. LaRondelle, *Christ Our Salvation* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1980). Classical Christology has three major overemphases, Jesus as (1) too divine, the leading view for hundreds of years, seen in the Athanasian-Calvin *extra Calvinisticum*, in which Christ’s divinity remained on heaven’s throne while His humanity lived on earth; (2) too human, Arians; or (3) a divine-human mix, such as Luther’s *communicatio idiomatum*. The two main views in Adventism consider each other’s Christology as making Jesus either too divine or too human. This has obvious influence on how He is considered as our example in overcoming temptations.

2 For a study in the Ellen G. White corpus, see Norman R. Gulley, “Behold the Man,” *Adventist Review*, June 30, 1983. There is a serious need for a theological and hermeneutical study of Ellen White’s writings in general, and her Christology in particular. Further research also needs to be done to see whether Ellen White’s endorsement of Jones and Waggoner’s theology was particularly supportive of their new emphasis, away from man to Christ, and not necessarily an endorsement of every detail of their Christology, such as the human nature of Jesus. (See Age Rendalen, “The Nature and Extent of Ellen White’s Endorsement of Waggoner and Jones” [research paper, Andrews University Library, 1978].) The fact that the Christology of Jones and Waggoner became ever more pantheistic also needs to be kept in mind. Pantheism is an overidentification of God with creation, which could be considered the logical conclusion of trying to make the man Jesus, in nature, altogether like other men. Ellen White’s use of the term “sinful nature,” and its synonyms, needs to be defined in the context of its use in her time, as well as within the historical context of each manuscript, letter, or article occurrence. Compilations drawn from a multiplicity of sources usually fail to give proper place to historical background. It is obvious that many doctoral dissertations could be helpful here. One fact is sure: The study of Christology must begin with the Biblical data. Then one can go on to read the Ellen White corpus. Ellen White never intended that the reverse procedure be followed, nor is it true to the Seventh-day Adventist presupposition that the Bible is the basis of all Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.

3 Definition of terms is crucial in this discussion. From the Biblical data to be considered, we will note: 1. Christ was unique as man (similar, not identical). Therefore, I define His human nature as at most sin-affected physically but absolutely sinless spiritually. He was the height of a man of His time; He became tired and hungry and felt pain. But spiritually He maintained an unbroken communion with God as had the pre-Fall Adam. 2. His birth by the Spirit was unique. It cannot be compared to our new birth by the Spirit, for we sinned prior to our new birth, whereas He was holy before His birth. Our new birth comes out of the context of the corruptible. His birth came within the context of the holy. 3. The doctrine of sin (harmartiology) lies behind the debate on the nature of Christ (Christology). Sin when understood as a broken relationship makes impossible a sinful nature for Jesus at birth. For there could be no greater demonstration of union with God than to go to the extent Christ did to do the Father’s will (Heb. 10:7-9). Both schools of Christology within the Seventh-day Adventist Church

need to use terms such as *flesh, sin, same, similar, unique, Immaculate Conception, original sin, seed of Abraham, and seed of David* as they are used by Biblical writers or as explained in this article. If this were done, then true communication between them would be established (they would be speaking about the same things), and many of the differences between them would dissipate.

4 *Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (London: S. Bagster and Sons, 1903), pp. 680, 681.

5 Reinhold Niebuhr incorrectly believed *sarx*, in Paul, to be the “principle of sin” (*The Nature and Destiny of Man* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1949], p. 152).

6 *Hamartia* and its cognates are found 174 times in the New Testament, more than fifty times in Paul’s writings. *Adikia* is a more specialized, legal word, which means “not righteous” (opposite to “righteousness,” *dikaio sunē*). *Paraptōma* comes from *parapiptō*, “to fall down beside.” See ed., Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), vol. 7, p. 573. For general information on *hamartia* and its uses, see Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 308-311; W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (London: Oliphants, 1946), vol. 4, pp. 32-34.

7 G. W. Bromiley, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 126. For full article see pages 124-144.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

10 1 John 4:1-3 does not speak about which kind of human nature (sinful or sinless) Jesus took, but human nature itself. Gnostics, and later, Docetists, believed that He did not really become human, but merely appeared as human. This passage labels such a denial of His genuine humanity as antichrist.

11 Here similarity doesn’t mean a being other than human (extraterrestrial). Rather, as a human He was only similar to all other humans.

12 “In taking upon Himself man’s nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin. He was subject to the infirmities and weaknesses by which man is encompassed. . . . He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are. And yet He ‘knew no sin.’ . . . We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ.”—E. G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, June 9, 1898 (cited in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1131). “He was to take His position at the head of humanity by taking the nature but not the sinfulness of man.”—E. G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, May 19, 1901 (cited in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 912).

13 He preserved His divinity throughout the Incarnation. It was quiescent within the self-chosen limitations of the kenosis (Phil. 2:6-8).

14 “The Old Testament’s view of sin is the negative reverse side of the idea of the covenant, and hence is often expressed in legal terms.”—*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, p. 578. “*Hamartia* is always used in the New Testament of man’s sin, which is ultimately directed against God.”—*Ibid.*, p. 579. “In the fourth Gospel *hamartia* designates. . . a particular sinful deed, a state, or even a power which thrusts man, and the world taken as a whole, away from God.”—S. Lyonnet and L. Sabarin, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study*, vol. 48 of *Analecta Biblica* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press), p. 39.

15 R. Govett, *Govett on Romans* (Florida: Conley and Schoettle Pub. Co., 1981), p. 134.

16 E. F. Harrison, ed., *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p. 488.

17 R.C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of Romans* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945), p. 366.

18 John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), vol. 1, p. 183. Read also pp. 178-209 on “The Analogy.”

19 Govett, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

20 Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

21 Several Greek words end in *ma* in Romans 5. The *ma* ending signifies “result.” Two of these words are *fall* and *grace*, and compare the results of Adam’s sin with Christ’s salvation. Both results passed onto the human race from these two Adams equally irrespective of man’s works, which is the central theme of Paul’s Epistle.

22 There are eleven words in the Hebrew that connote different nuances of sin (see footnote 23).

23 For a detailed study on sin, see G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), and Piet Schoonenberg, S. J., *Man and Sin: A Theological View* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965). And on Catholic "original sin" see R. C. Broderick, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub. Co., 1976), p. 440; *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 486-489; George Vandervelde, *Original Sin: "Two Major Trends in Contemporary Roman Catholic Reinterpretation"* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982); and John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

24 Both pantheism and the holy flesh movement failed to give proper place to Jesus as *monogenēs*. Pantheism overidentified God with man, removing the possibility of uniqueness. The holy flesh movement so focused on becoming like the sinless Jesus that again His uniqueness was not given proper place.

25 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1954), pp. 254, 358, 368ff.

26 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1969), vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 50; vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 63; *The Humanity of God* (London: Collins, 1961), pp. 44ff.

27 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928).

28 "What God is in His revelation, He is antecedently, and eternally in His own inner-Trinitarian Being" is the basic "revelation" presupposition behind Barth's theology. In this context his *logos ensarkos*, following enhypostatic Christology, considers that the humanity of Jesus has existence only in the eternal divinity of Christ. This comes close at times to presenting an eternal humanity of Jesus. (See *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt. 2, pp. 484ff., 493.) He also suggests that Jesus is not one man (*homo*) but mankind (*humanun*) (*ibid.*, vol. 4, pt. 2, pp. 48ff.).

29 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 191; vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 51; vol. 4, pt. 1, pp. 69, 88, 90, 93-95, 98, 100, 203.

30 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 158ff., 191; vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 51.

31 The Gospels reveal the covenantal context in which Jesus and His contemporaries lived. Abraham was the father of the faithful children of Israel, who looked for the Messiah to come as the "son of David," or from the Davidic line. Mary's song recognizes this (Luke 1:55) as does Zechariah's. He mentioned that salvation had come to the house of David (verse 69), for God had remembered His covenant with Abraham (verse 73). The blind cried out to Jesus as "son of David" (Matt. 9:27; 12:22, 23; 20:30ff.; Mark 10:46, 47). Teachers of the law called Him "Son of David" (Mark 12:35). During His triumphal entrance to Jerusalem, the throng cried out hosannas to the "son of David" (Matt. 21:9). Christ called the crippled woman "daughter of Abraham" (Luke 13:16). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar was carried to Abraham's side after death (chap. 16:22), and eternal life is pictured by Christ as participation in the kingdom feast with Abraham (Matt. 8:11). While the Jews claimed Abraham as their father (John 8:33-39), Jesus went beyond this covenantal line, stating, "Before Abraham was, I am" (verse 58). Two things must be kept in balance: Jesus went beyond this covenantal line, stating, "Before Abraham was, I am" (verse 58). Two things must be kept in balance: Jesus is said to be from Abraham only because He was the promised Messiah, bringing to fulfillment all the covenantal promises. And Jesus is said to be before Abraham because antecedently and eternally He is God.

32 E. J. Waggoner, in *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 21, 1889; cf. *Christ and His Righteousness* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Co., 1890), p. 28ff.

33 F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1974), pp. 87ff.

34 Quoted in *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 88.

35 Dietrich Bonhoeffer apparently thought so. See *Temptation* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p.16.