

Like One of Us

The Incarnation of the Word

But a body Thou hast prepared Me. Heb. 10: 5

The completion of the Old Testament did not finish the work that the Holy Spirit undertook for the whole Church. The Scripture may be the instrument whereby to act upon the consciousness of the sinner and to open his eyes to the beauty of the divine life, but it can not impart that life to the Church. Hence it is followed by another work of the Holy Spirit, viz., the *preparation of the body of Christ*.

The well-known words of Psalm 40:6, 7: "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; *mine ears Thou hast pierced*; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me," are rendered by St. Paul: "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, *but a body Thou hast prepared me*; in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings Thou hast no pleasure: lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me." (Heb. 10:5) We do not discuss how the words, "Mine ears hast Thou pierced," can mean also, "A body Thou hast prepared me." For our present purpose it is immaterial whether one says with Junius: "The ear is a member of the body; by the piercing of the ear hearing becomes possible; and only by the hearing does the body become an instrument of obedience"; or with another: "As the body of the slave became an instrument of obedience by the piercing of the ear, so did the body of Christ become an instrument of obedience by the conception of the Holy Spirit"; or finally: "As the Israelite became a servant by having his ear pierced, so has the Eternal Son adopted the form of a servant by becoming partaker of our flesh and blood." St. Paul's infallible exposition of Psalm 40:7 does not raise any serious objection to any of these renderings. It suffices our present purpose if it be only acknowledged that, according to Hebrews 10:5, the Church must confess *that there was a preparation of the body of Christ*.

This being conceded and taken in connection with what the Gospel relates concerning the conception, it can not be denied that in the preparing of the body of the Lord there is a peculiar work of the Holy Spirit. For the angel said to Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). And again: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 1:20). Both passages, apart from their proper meanings, evidently seek to produce the impression that the conception and birth of Jesus are extraordinary; that they did not occur after the will of man, but result from an operation of the Holy Spirit.

Like all other outgoing works of God, the preparation of the body of Christ is a divine work common to the three Persons.

It is erroneous to say that the Holy Spirit is the Creator of the body of Jesus, or, as some have expressed it, "That the Holy Spirit was the Father of Christ, according to His human nature."

Such representations must be rejected, since they destroy the confession of the Holy Trinity. This confession can not be maintained when any of the outgoing works of God are represented as not common to the three Persons.

We wish to emphasize, therefore, that not the Holy Spirit alone, but the Triune God, prepared the body of the Mediator. The Father and even the Son cooperated in this divine act.

However, as we have seen in Creation and Providence, in this cooperation the work of each Person bears its own distinctive mark. From the Father, of whom are all things, proceeded the material of the body of Christ, the creation of the human soul, and of all His gifts and powers, together with the whole plan of the Incarnation. From the Son, who is the wisdom of the Father, disposing and arranging all things in Creation, proceeded the holy disposition and arrangement with reference to the Incarnation. And as the correlated acts of the Father and the Son in Creation and Providence receive animation and perfection through the Holy Spirit, so there is in the Incarnation a peculiar act of the Holy Spirit through which the acts of Father and Son in this mystery receive completion and manifestation. Therefore it is said in Heb. 10:7 of the Triune God: "A body Thou hast prepared Me"; while it is also declared that that which is conceived in Mary is of the Holy Ghost.

This, however, may not be explained in the ordinary sense. It might be said that there is nothing wonderful in this, for Job declares (Job 33:4), "The Spirit of the Lord hath given me life," and of Christ we read that He was born of Mary, being conceived by the Holy Ghost. These two cover the same ground. Both instances connect the birth of a child with an act of the Holy Spirit. While, as regards the birth of Christ, we do not deny this ordinary act of the Holy Spirit, which is essential to the quickening of all life, especially that of a human being, yet we do deny that the conception by the Holy Spirit was the ordinary act. The ancient confession, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His Only-Begotten Son our Lord, who *was conceived by the Holy Ghost*," refers to a divine miracle and a deep mystery, in which the work of the Holy Spirit must be glorified.

Accordingly a complete analysis of this work is impossible. If not, it would cease to be a miracle. Wherefore let us look into this matter only with deepest reverence, and not advance theories contrary to the Word of God. What God has been pleased to reveal we know; what His Word only hints we can know only in faint outlines; and what is advanced outside of the Word is only the effort of a meddling spirit or unhallowed curiosity.

In this work of the Holy Spirit two things must be distinguished:

First, the creation of the human nature of Jesus.

Secondly, His separation from sinners.

On the first point, the Scripture teaches that no man ever could claim paternal connection with Jesus. Joseph appears and acts as the stepfather of Christ; but of a fellowship of life and origin between him and Jesus the Scripture never speaks. Indeed, Joseph's neighbours regarded Jesus as the Son of the carpenter, but the Scripture always treats this as an error. St. John, declaring that the children of God are born not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God, undoubtedly borrowed this glorious description of our higher birth from the extraordinary act of God which scintillates in the conception and birth of Christ. The fact that Mary was called a virgin; that Joseph was troubled at the discovery of his bride's condition; that he intended secretly to leave her, and that an angel appeared to him in a dream—in a word, the

whole Gospel narrative, as well as the unbroken tradition of the Church, allows no other confession than that the conception and birth of Christ were of Mary the virgin, but not of Joseph her betrothed husband.

Excluding the man, the Scripture thrice puts the Holy Spirit in the foreground as the Author of the conception. St. Matthew says (Matt. 1:18): "When Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child by the Holy Ghost." And again, in verse 20: "For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." Lastly, Luke says (Luke 1:35): "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." These clear statements do not receive full recognition unless it be plainly confessed that the conception of the germ of a human nature in the womb of the virgin was an act of the Holy Spirit.

It is not expedient nor lawful to enter more deeply into this matter. How human life originates after conception, whether the embryo immediately contains a human person or, whether he is created therein afterward, and other similar questions, must remain unanswered, perhaps forever. We may advance theories, but Omnipotent God allows no man to discover His workings in hidden laboratories of His creative power. Wherefore all that may be said according to Scripture is contained in the following four particulars:

First, in the conception of Christ not a new being was called into life as in all other cases, but One who had existed from eternity, and who then entered into vital relation with the human nature. The Scripture clearly reveals this. Christ existed from before the foundation of the world. His goings forth were of old, from the days of *eternity*. He took upon Himself the form of a servant. Even though the biologist should discover the mystery of the human birth, it could not reveal anything regarding the conception of the Mediator.

Second, it is not the conception of a human *person*, but of a human nature. Where a new being is conceived, a human person comes into existence. But when the Person of the Son, who was with the Father from eternity, partakes of our flesh and blood, He adopts our human nature in the unity of His Person, thus becoming a true man; but it is not the creation of a *new* person. The Scripture clearly shows this. In Christ appears but one *ego*, being in the same Person at once the Son of God and the Son of man.

Third, from this it follows not that a *new* flesh was created in Mary as the Mennonites used to teach, but that the fruit in Mary's womb, from which Jesus was born, was taken from and nourished with her own blood—the very blood which through her parents she had received from *fallen Adam*.

Last, the Mediator born of Mary not only partook of our flesh and blood, such as it existed in Adam and as we have inherited it from Adam, but He was born a true man, thinking, willing, and feeling like other men, susceptible to all the human emotions and sensations that cause the countless thrills and throbs of human life.

And yet He was separate from sinners. Of this we speak in the next article.

Let this suffice for the fact of the conception, from which fact we derive the precious comfort: "*That it covers in the sight of God my sin and guilt wherein I was conceived and brought forth*" (Heidelberg Catechism, quest. 36).

Guiltless and Without Sin

For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. Heb. 7:26

Throughout the ages the Church has confessed that Christ took upon Himself real human nature from the virgin Mary, not as it was before the fall, but such as it had become, *by and after* the fall.

This is clearly stated in Hebrews 2:14, 17: "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part of the same . . . Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." It was even such a partaking of our nature as would make Him feel Satan's goad, for there follows: "In that He Himself hath suffered, *being tempted*, He is able to succor them that are tempted." Upon the authority of the divine Word we can not doubt then that the Son of God became man in our fallen nature. It is our misery, by virtue of the inherited guilt of Adam, that we can not live and act but as partakers of the flesh and blood corrupted by the fall. And since we as children are partakers of flesh and blood, so is He also become partaker of the same. Hence it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the Son of God, walking among men, bore the same nature in which we spend our lives; that His flesh had the same origin as our flesh; that the blood which ran through His veins is the same as our blood, and came to Him as well as to us from the same fountain in Adam. We must feel, and dare confess, that in Gethsemane our Saviour agonized in our flesh and blood; that it was our flesh and blood that were nailed to the cross. The "blood of reconciliation" is taken from the very blood which thirsts after reconciliation.

With equal assurance, however, bowing to the authority of the Scripture, we confess that this intimate union of the Son of God with the fallen human nature does not imply the least participation of our sin and guilt. In the same epistle in which the apostle sets forth distinctly the fellowship of Jesus with the human flesh and blood, he bears equally clear testimony to the fact of His sinlessness, so that every misunderstanding may be obviated. As by virtue of our conception and birth we are *unholy, guilty, and defiled, one with sinners*, and therefore burdened with the *condemnation of hell*, so is the Mediator conceived and born *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, made higher than the heavens*. And with equal emphasis the apostle declares that sin did not enter into His temptations, for, although tempted in all things, like as we are, yet He was ever without sin.

Therefore the mystery of the Incarnation lies in the apparent contradiction of Christ's union with our fallen nature, which on the one hand is so intimate as to make Him susceptible to its temptations, while on the other hand He is completely cut off from all fellowship with its sin. The confession which weakens or eliminates either of these factors must, when logically developed, degenerate into serious heresy. By saying, "The Mediator is conceived and born in our nature, as it was before the fall," we sever the fellowship between Him and us; and by allowing that He had the least personal part of our guilt and sin, we sever His fellowship with the *divine nature*.

Does the Scripture not teach then that the Mediator was made sin and bore the curse for us, and "as a worm and no man" suffered deepest distress?

We answer: Yea, verily, without this we could have no redemption. But in all this He acted as our Substitute. His own personality was not in the least affected by it. His burdening Himself with our sins was a High-Priestly act, performed vicariously. He was made *sin*, but never a *sinner*. Sinner means one who is *personally* affected by sin; Christ's person never was. He never had any

fellowship with sin other than that of love and compassion, to bear it as our High Priest and Substitute. Yet, though He was exceedingly sorrowful even unto death, though He was sorely tempted so that He cried out, "Let this cup pass from Me," in the center of His personal being He remained absolutely free from the least contact with sin.

A close examination of the way by which we become partakers of sin will shed more light on this subject.

Every individual sin is not of our own begetting only, but a participation in the common sin, the one mighty sin of the whole race against which the anger of God is kindled. Not only do we partake of this sin by an act of the will as we grow up; it was ours already in the cradle, in our mother's womb – yea, even in our conception. "Conceived and born in sin" is the awful confession which the Church of God's redeemed can never deny.

For this reason the Church has always laid such stress upon the doctrine of inherited guilt, as declared by St. Paul in Romans 5. Our inherited guilt does not spring from inherited *sin*; on the contrary, we are conceived and born in sin *because* we stand in *inherited guilt*. Adam's guilt is imputed to all that were in his loins. Adam lived and fell as our natural and federal head. Our moral life stands in root-relation to his moral life. We were *in* him. He carried us in himself. His state determined our state. Hence by the righteous judgment of God his guilt was imputed to all his posterity, for as much as, by the will of man, they should successively be born of his loins. By virtue of this inherited guilt we are conceived in sin and born in the participation of sin.

God is our Creator, and from His hands we came forth pure and undefiled. To teach otherwise is to make Him the Author of individual sin, and to destroy the sense of guilt in the soul. Hence sin, especially original sin, does not originate in our *creation* by the hand of God, but by our *vital relation* with the sinful race. Our person does not proceed from our parents. This is in direct conflict with the indivisibility of spirit, with the Word of God, and its confession that God is *our* Creator, "who has also made *me*."

However, all creation is not the same. There is mediate and immediate creation. God created light by immediate creation, but grass and herbs mediately, for they spring from the ground. The same difference exists between the creation of Adam and that of his posterity. The creation of Adam was immediate: not of his body, which was taken from the dust, but of his person, the human being called Adam. His posterity, however, is a mediate creation, for every conception is made to depend upon the will of man. Hence while we come from the hand of God pure and undefiled, we become at the same time partakers of the inherited and imputed guilt of Adam; and by virtue of this inherited guilt, through our conception and birth, God brings us into fellowship with the sin of the race. How this is brought about is an unfathomable mystery but this is a fact, that we become partakers of the sin of the race by generation, which begins with conception and ends with birth.

And now, with reference to the Person of Christ, everything depends upon the question whether the original guilt of Adam was imputed also to the man Jesus Christ.

If so, then, like all other men, Christ was conceived and born in sin by *virtue of this original guilt*. Where imputed original guilt is, there must be sinful defilement. But, on the other hand, where it is not, sinful defilement cannot be; hence He that is called holy and harmless must be undefiled. Adam's guilt was not imputed to the man Jesus Christ. If it were, then He was also conceived and born in sin; then He did not suffer vicariously, but for Himself personally; then there can be no blood of reconciliation. If the original guilt of Adam was imputed to the man Jesus Christ, then by

virtue of His sinful conception and birth He was also subject to death and condemnation, and He could not have received life but by *regeneration*. Then it also follows that either this Man is Himself in need of a Mediator, or that we, like Him, can enter into life without a Go-between.

But this whole representation is without foundation, and is to be rejected without qualification. The whole Scripture opposes it. Adam's guilt is imputed to his posterity. But Christ is not a descendant of Adam. He existed before Adam. He was not born passively as we, but Himself took upon Him the human flesh. He does not stand under Adam as His head, but is Himself a new Head, having others under Him, of whom He saith: "Behold Me and the children whom Thou hast given Me" (Heb. 2:13). True, Luke 3: 23, 28 contains the genealogy of Joseph, which closes with the words, "The son of Adam, the son of God"; but the Evangelist adds emphatically, "as was supposed"; hence Jesus was not the son of Joseph. And in Matthew His genealogy stops at Abraham. Although on Pentecost St. Peter says that David knew that God would raise up Christ out of the fruit of his loins, yet he adds this limitation, "according to the flesh." Moreover, realizing that the Son did not assume a human person, but the human nature, so that His Ego is that of the Person of the Son of God, it necessarily follows that Jesus cannot be a descendant of Adam; hence the imputation of Adam's guilt to Christ would annihilate the divine Person. Such imputation is utterly out of the question. To Him nothing is imputed. The sins He bore He took upon Himself voluntarily, vicariously, as our High Priest and Mediator.

The Holy Spirit in the Mystery of the Incarnation

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory. John 1:14

There is one more question in the treatment of this subject: What was the extraordinary operation of the Holy Spirit that enabled the Son of God to assume our fallen nature without being defiled by sin?

Although we concede it to be unlawful to pry into that behind the veil which God does not freely open to us, yet we may seek the meaning of the words that embody the mystery; and this we intend to do in the discussion of this question.

The Incarnation of Christ, with reference to His sinlessness, is connected with the being of sin, the character of original sin, the relation between body and soul, regeneration, and the working of the Holy Spirit in believers. Hence it is necessary for a clear understanding to have a correct view of the relation of Christ's human nature to these important matters.

Sin is not a spiritual bacillus hiding in the blood of the mother and received into the veins of the child. Sin is not material and tangible; its nature is moral and spiritual, belonging to the invisible things whose results we can perceive but whose real being escapes detection. Wherefore in opposition to Manicheism and kindred heresies, the Church has always confessed that sin is not a material substance in our flesh and blood, but that it consists in the loss of the original righteousness in which Adam and Eve bloomed and prospered in Paradise. Nor do believers differ on this point, for all acknowledge that sin is the loss of original righteousness.

However, tracing the next step in the course of sin, we meet a serious difference between the Church of Rome and our own. The former teaches that Adam came forth perfect from the hand of his Maker, even before he was endowed with original righteousness. This implies that the human nature is finished without original righteousness, which is put on him like a robe or ornament. As our present nature is complete without dress or ornament, which are needed only to appear respectable in the world, so was the human nature, according to Rome, complete and

perfect in itself without righteousness, which serves only as dress and jewel. But the Reformed churches have always opposed this view, maintaining that original righteousness is an essential part of the human nature; hence that the human nature in Adam was not complete without it; that it was not merely added to Adam's nature, but that Adam was created in the possession of it as the direct manifestation of his life.

If Adam's nature was perfect before he possessed original righteousness, it follows that it remains perfect after the loss of it; in which case we describe sin simply as "*caerentia iustitix origirialis*;" i.e., the want of original righteousness. This used to be expressed thus: Is original righteousness a natural or supernatural good? If natural, then its loss caused the human nature to be wholly corrupt; if supernatural, then its loss might take away the glory and honor of that nature, but as a human nature it retained nearly all of its original power.

Bellarminus said that desire, disease, conflict, etc., naturally belong to human nature; and original righteousness was a golden bridle laid upon this nature, to check and control this desire, disease, conflict, etc. Hence when the golden bridle was lost, disease, desire, conflict, and death broke loose from restraint (tom. iv., chap. v., col. 15, 17, 18). Thomas Aquinas, to whom Calvin was greatly indebted, and whom the present Pope has earnestly commended to his priests, had a more correct view. This is evident from his definition of sin. If disease, desire, etc., existed in man when he came from the hand of God, and only supernatural grace can restrain them, then sin is merely the loss of original righteousness, hence purely negative. But if original righteousness belongs to human nature and was not simply added to it supernaturally, then sin is twofold: first, the loss of original righteousness; second, the ruin and corruption of *human nature* itself, disorganising and disjointing it. Thomas Aquinas acknowledges this last aspect, for he teaches (*Summa Theologiæ*, prima secundæ, ix., sect. 2, art. 1) that sin is not only *deprivation* and loss, but also a state of corruption, wherein must be distinguished the lack of what ought to be present, i.e., original righteousness, and the presence of what ought to be absent, viz., an abnormal derangement of the parts and powers of the soul.

Our fathers held almost the same view. They judged that sin is not material, but the loss of original righteousness. But since original righteousness belongs to the sound human nature, the loss did not leave that nature intact, but damaged, disjointed, and corrupted it.

To illustrate: A beautiful geranium that adorned the window was killed by the frost. Leaves and flowers withered, leaving only a mass of mildew and decay. What was the cause? Merely the loss of the sun's light and heat. But that was enough; for these belong to the nature of the plant, and are essential to its life and beauty. Deprived of them it remains not what it is, but its nature loses its soundness, and this causes decay, mildew, and poisonous gases, which soon destroy it. So of human nature: In Paradise Adam was like the blooming plant, flourishing in the warmth and brightness of the Lord's presence. By sin he fled from that presence. The result was not merely the loss of light and heat, but since these were essential to his nature, that nature languished, drooped, and withered. The mildew of corruption formed upon it; and the positive process of dissolution was begun, to end only in eternal death.

Facts and history prove even now that the human body has weakened since the days of the Reformation; that bad habits of a certain character sometimes pass from father to child even where the early death of the former precludes propagation by education and example. Hence the difference between Adam, body and soul, before the fall and his descendants after the fall is not merely the loss of the Sun of Righteousness, which by nature shines no longer upon them, but the damage caused by this loss to the human nature, in body and soul, which thereby are weakened, diseased, corrupted, and thrown out of balance.

This corrupt nature passes from the father to the child, as the Confession of Faith expresses it in article xv: "That original sin is a corruption of the whole nature, and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected in their mother's womb, and which produces in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof."

However, the relation between a person and his ego must be taken into account. The disordered condition of our flesh and blood inclines and incites to sin, a fact that has been observed in the victims of certain terrible diseases as their effect. But this could not result in sin if there were no personal ego to allow itself to be excited. Again, though the unbalanced powers of the soul which cause the darkening of the understanding, the blunting of the sensibilities, and the weakening of the will arouse the passions, yet even this could not result in sin if no personal ego were affected by this working. Hence sin puts its own mark upon this corruption only when the personal ego turns away from God, and in that disordered soul and diseased body stands condemned before Him.

If according to established law the unclean brings forth the unclean, and if God has made our birth to depend upon generation by sinful men, it must follow that by nature we are born—first, without original righteousness; secondly, with an impaired body; thirdly, with a soul out of harmony with itself; lastly, with a personal ego which is turned away from God.

All of which would apply to the Person of the Mediator if, like one of us, He had been born a human person by the will of man and not of God. But since He was not born a human person, but took our human nature upon Himself, and was conceived not by the will of man, but by an operation of the Holy Spirit, there could not be in Him an ego turned away from God, nor could the weakness of His human nature for a moment be a sinful weakness. Or to put it in the concrete: Although there was in that fallen nature something to incite Him to desire, yet it never became desire. There is a difference between the temptations and conflicts of Jesus and those of ourselves; while our ego and nature desire against God, His holy Ego opposed the incitement of His adopted nature and was never overcome.

Hence the proper work of the Holy Spirit consisted in this:

First, the creation not of a new person, but of a human nature, which the Son assumed into union with His divine nature in one Person.

Second, that the divine-human Ego of the Mediator, who, according to His human nature, also possessed spiritual life, was kept from the inward defilement which by virtue of our birth affected our ego and personality.

Hence regeneration, which affects not our nature but our person, is out of the question with reference to Christ. But what Christ needed was the gifts of the Holy Ghost to enable His weakened nature, in increasing measure, to be His instrument in the working out of His holy design; and finally to transform His weakened nature not by regeneration, but by resurrection into a glorious nature, divested of the last trace of weakness and prepared to unfold its highest glory.

Taken from *The Work of the Holy Spirit*.



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[Incarnation, Abraham Kuyper](#)