

IN SEARCH
OF THE
ONE TRUE
CHRIST

RESOLVING ADVENTISM'S
GORDIAN KNOT



by
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Preface by Dennis Priebe, Amazing Facts Revivalist

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PREFACE

Why another book about the human nature of Christ? Haven't we covered every aspect of His nature that is necessary for us to know? Well, perhaps not. This book endeavors to tie together some loose threads that have not really been solved yet.

First, this subject is never just about the nature of Christ. The issue is much larger. It is about the whole plan of salvation, the gospel, righteousness by faith, and the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Differing views about Christ's human nature radically change our conclusions about how God is solving the problem of sin and rebellion in the universe.

Second, this book addresses the underlying issue in the ongoing debate—the nature of man. When Adam and Eve sinned, everything changed. Suffering and death began, man's nature changed so that rebellion was as natural as breathing, condemnation and annihilation were man's only future, and earth was cut off from heaven. Except for one thing—Christ stepped into the picture. And everything changed again. Mankind received a second chance, annihilation was not inevitable, and most importantly, God placed “enmity” toward Satan in man's nature. Man would not be a helpless slave of Satan, but would have an innate desire to resist him.

Third, this book pulls together statements by Ellen White that seem to support opposite conclusions, and shows how they fit together perfectly if loose ends are properly tied off. Inspired statements have a way of harmonizing if we dig down beneath the surface.

Fourth, the appendix collection of pioneer writings are valuable resources in this study.

This is a significant contribution to a better understanding of God's great plan of salvation.

Dennis Priebe
Amazing Facts Revivalist



INTRODUCTION

TRUTH, THE full truth, and nothing but the truth is essential in these last days for the everlasting gospel to be effective in our personal lives and for the carrying of earth's final warning to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” John 14:6 (All Scripture references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted).

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:32.

We are told that error is never harmless:

“Error is never harmless. It never sanctifies, but always brings confusion and dissension. It is always dangerous. The enemy has great power over minds that are not thoroughly fortified by prayer and established in Bible truth.” *Testimonies*, vol. 5, 292.

We must believe all truth, and truth must be linked only with truth:

“Truth must stand in its own order, linked only with truth. Unbelief disturbs the balance of the system of truth, and tends to destroy the whole.” *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 7, 189.

The purpose of this book is to arrive at the greatest truth possible regarding Christ's human nature. This will be achieved when we can define His nature in such a manner that all of the inspired statements regarding it find their appropriate harmonious place.

TWO CHRISTS

This book is about the human nature of Christ. Specifically about the moral or spiritual inheritance through His mother Mary—whether He took man’s nature like that of Adam before the Fall (prelapsarian) or like after the Fall (postlapsarian). These two seemingly, mutually-exclusive, versions of Christ have been a very controversial subject in Adventism for some sixty plus years (May 2015). Many have grown weary of the subject, and some have concluded that “it doesn’t really matter.”

However, we are told that we make many mistakes when we have incorrect views of Christ’s human nature:

“Christ’s overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, *we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord*. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity.” *Our High Calling*, 48. All emphases are supplied unless otherwise noted.

Though the following quote is regarding God, it is also applicable to Christ our Saviour:

“No outward shrines may be visible, there may be no image for the eye to rest upon, yet we may be practicing idolatry. It is as easy to make an idol of cherished ideas or objects as to fashion gods of wood or stone. *Thousands have a false conception of God and His attributes. They are as verily serving a false god as were the servants of Baal*. Are we worshiping the true God as He is revealed in His Word, in Christ, in nature, or are we adoring some philosophical idol enshrined in His place?” *Testimonies*, vol. 5, 173.

When we give erroneous attributes to Christ, we are defining another Christ and ultimately another gospel.

Paul considered the preaching of another gospel among the believers of Galatia to be a serious problem with serious consequences to the perpetrators:

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:6–8.

MANY GOSPELS

If indeed all Adventists clung to the understanding of the everlasting gospel as including victory over all temptation through the transforming and enabling power of the Holy Spirit, then, as to whether Jesus had Adam’s pre-Fall nature or his post-Fall nature would not be so crucial. But, in reality, those who believe and promote Jesus as coming with man’s pre-Fall nature have tended to associate with it different versions of the gospel. Some are so bold as to claim that since Jesus was not like us, He is not our Example, but our Substitute only. His life of victory is a substitute for our inability to achieve full victory in this life, even with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Some go so far as to claim that to even attempt full victory over sin in this life, even with the Holy Spirit, is legalism.

In 1994, Martin Weber, then an associate editor of *Ministry* magazine, published a book entitled *Who Has the Truth*. In it he explored, in quite a detailed manner, five different versions of the gospel being preached by five persuasive and well-known Adventist ministers.

Clearly, all of the gospels being preached among us cannot be the truth. Only Satan’s theology allows for the continuation of a plurality of belief. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, clarified that truth allows for only “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Ephesians 4:5.

Our prophetess confirms the seriousness of pluralism in beliefs:

“The position that it is of no consequence what men believe is one of Satan’s most successful deceptions. He knows that the truth, received in the love of it, sanctifies the soul of the receiver; therefore he is constantly seeking to substitute false theories, fables, another gospel. From the beginning the servants of God have contended against false teachers, not merely as vicious men, but as inculcators of falsehoods that were fatal to the soul. Elijah, Jeremiah, Paul, firmly and fearlessly opposed those who were turning men from the Word of God. That liberality which regards a correct religious faith as unimportant found no favor with these holy defenders of the truth.” *The Great Controversy*, 520.

True Christians will measure up to the following:

“Although possessing different temperaments and dispositions, they will see eye to eye in all matters of religious belief. They will speak the same things; they will have the same judgment; they will be one in Christ Jesus.” *Lift Him Up*, 309.

Over the years, we have approached this subject with the assumption that the two positions are direct opposites and thus mutually exclusive. We have therefore entered into our discussions, debates, and published materials with the bias that the position opposite from mine is not truth but error and those holding tenaciously to the opposite position are clearly teaching error—a false gospel.

HARMONY AT OUR GRASP

The current writer believes that the kernel for the solution of actually harmonizing the two seemingly opposite positions on Christ’s humanity was provided to us, but unappreciated, in 1979 by Thomas A. Davis:

“The thesis we are advancing in this book is that Jesus

had a human nature that was indeed totally human, but also totally sinless. But His human nature, although *fully* human, was not like that of most men. It may most closely be likened to that of the person who has been born again. Such a person still has a fallen nature, of course” (*Was Jesus Really Like Us*, 51). (emphasis in the original.)

It is the purpose of this present book to develop more fully the concept of our new birth experience as a springboard to provide a framework of Christ’s nature that embraces all of the Scripture and Spirit of Prophecy statements on His humanity—the one true Christ. It will be found that both positions—pre-Fall and post-Fall—contain essential components to the complete picture.

Spiritual truth is arrived at by harmonizing all of the inspired statements on a given subject. Through that method we have arrived at our commonly held beliefs—Saturday sacredness, state of the dead, second coming of Christ, etc. This can also be true regarding Christ’s humanity—regarding the true Christ. Knowing the complete attributes of the true Christ will add strength and credibility to the true gospel. We can then lay down our disputes among us and unite in promoting the “one Lord, one faith, and one baptism” so essential to the finishing of the Lord’s work in our hearts and on the earth.

Vernon Sparks
June, 2015



CHAPTER 4
ADVENTISM'S IMMACULATE
CONCEPTION

AS NOTED earlier, researchers have documented some 400 inspired statements on Christ's human nature by the Lord's messenger. We want to evaluate them as two groups—Group A: Pre-Fall supportive; Group B: Post-Fall supportive.

Group A: Although this group of statements are interpreted to support the position of Christ's human nature as unfallen, or sinless, there is no statement that says it directly. This is a comparatively small group—many students not acknowledging that it is as large as portrayed in chapter 2 above. But for the sake of this book's discussion we will accept the above list as essentially complete and valid.

Group B has some forty statements that directly say that Christ took man's fallen and/or sinful nature.

Unfortunately, many have concluded that the testimony of Jesus—the Spirit of Prophecy—contradicts itself and that the Group B statements must be error. At the minimum, they say that there is “a tension” between the two groups of statements. They may not openly use the terms “contradictory” and “error,” but that is how they relate to them.

For some 60 years now, prominent leaders and teachers among us have been promoting the belief that Christ had man's unfallen human nature and not the full nature of the seed of David through Mary. They have referred to it with the theological term “prelapsarian.”

Prelapsarian, according to *Webster's New International*

Dictionary of the English Language, 1913 edition, means “Characteristic of, or pertaining to, the time or state before the fall of man.” Postlapsarian, would mean: characteristic of, or pertaining to, the time or state after the fall of man.” We have tended to accept the terminology as being properly applied.

But, what many of us have not recognized, and seemingly few have tried to explain to general Adventism, is the implication and true significance of the prelapsarian position. Whenever we believe or say that Jesus did not have some aspect of normal human inheritance from Mary, specifically the sinful tendencies, we have knowingly, or unknowingly, bought into the belief concept of immaculate conception.

Dennis Priebe is one who has tried to open our eyes:

“Protestants have historically rejected the doctrine of the immaculate conception on the basis that it is not found in Scripture. But today many Adventists teach that in the womb of Mary a special miracle was performed so that no sinful tendencies or drives would be passed from Mary to Jesus. We as a church profess to repudiate the doctrine of the immaculate conception, but at the most critical point we fall back on its explanation for Jesus’ birth. While we reject Mary’s sinlessness, and we reject the teaching that Mary passed nothing on to Jesus through heredity, we eagerly accept a partial blockage of the hereditary line when it comes to desires and tendencies. This is simply a modified and more subtle version of the immaculate conception. Are we really sure that we are out of the Church of Rome? Our current teaching is a direct descendant in the theological line of the immaculate conception.”
Dennis Priebe, *The Human Nature of Christ—Revisited*, <http://www.dennispriebe.com/new/node/27>.

The phrase “immaculate conception” is most commonly applied to the Catholic doctrine that Mary herself, the mother of Jesus, was born without any inherited

guilt or tendency to sin, and that she committed no sin throughout her lifetime. The Catholic Catechism puts it in these words:

“Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, ‘full of grace’ through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

“The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.’ . . .

“By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.” http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P1K.HTM#J6.

The term “original sin” is defined by the Modern Catholic Dictionary, <http://www.therealpresence.org/cgi-bin/getdefinition.pl>, as:

“ORIGINAL SIN. Either the sin committed by Adam as the head of the human race, or the sin he passed onto his posterity with which every human being, with the certain exception of Christ and his Mother, is conceived and born. The sin of Adam is called originating original sin (*originale originans*); that of his descendants is originated original sin (*originale originatum*). Adam’s sin was personal and grave, and it affected human nature. It was personal because he freely committed it; it was grave because God imposed a serious obligation; and it affected the whole human race by depriving his progeny of the supernatural life and preternatural gifts they would have possessed on entering the world had Adam not sinned. . . .”

In other words, all descendants of fallen Adam, except those born immaculately, receive guilt from Adam’s personal sin.

Adventism's understanding of sin is that there is no guilt punishable by the second death lake of fire, until, after the age of accountability, one chooses to go against God's known will. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." James 4:17. Though we inherit the tendencies to sin, we are not born guilty, nor born sinners.

Because Catholic doctrine believes in original sin—natural descendants of fallen Adam are guilty sinners at birth—they developed the doctrine of Immaculate Conception in order that Jesus would not be born guilty nor a sinner in need of a Saviour. They teach that the blockage of the guilt and sinful tendencies by the Holy Spirit was between Mary and her parents. Adventism's version places the blockage between Mary and Jesus—one generation later.

Also, because of its belief in original sin, the Catholic church adopted the practice of infant baptism, believing that it cleanses from the inherited guilt of Adam.

Unfortunately, many of our people who have embraced the pre-Fall (prelapsarian) position of Christ's humanity, in order to remove from Him of having sinful tendencies, have also embraced the doctrine of original sin that all are born guilty. To block Adam's guilt from Jesus, they see a second reason for Him to have an immaculate conception (see the earlier reference to Norman Gully's articles in the *Adventist Review*). I am not aware of any Seventh-day Adventists yet acknowledging the need for infant baptism; which is a logical conclusion if original sin was really true.

Thus we have seen that many of our people have allowed the Group A references to lead them to embrace two Catholic promoted beliefs which were foreign to Adventism prior to the 1950s. Rather than searching high and low for how to arrive at truth by harmonizing all of the inspired references, we have rushed into solutions

borrowed from theology schools of the world which directly reject the clear statements of Group B of Christ having the post-Fall (postlapsarian) sinful nature. Whenever confronted with seemingly contradictory, inspired statements it would be wise to acknowledge our inability to harmonize them, and remain with the position of the pioneers on the side of the majority of the clear statements. We need to be willing, by faith, to freely use the terminology of the Testimony of Jesus that He had our fallen, sinful nature. Until we can, by enlightenment of our human reason, harmonize all truth, we need to avoid the promotion of deviant doctrines that depart from, and contradict, our established beliefs:

“When men come in who would move one pin or pillar from the foundation which God has established by His Holy Spirit, let the aged men who were pioneers in our work speak plainly, and let those who are dead speak also, by the reprinting of their articles in our periodicals. Gather up the rays of divine light that God has given as He has led His people on step by step in the way of truth. This truth will stand the test of time and trial.” Ellen G. White, Ms 62, 1905. *The Retirement Years*, 21.

Note: Comments by our pioneers regarding the Catholic doctrine of Immaculate Conception, scattered throughout this publication, may not be fully applicable to Adventism’s version. However, the consequences to Christ’s humanity—His nearness to fallen man and the gospel—is similar between the two versions.

PIONEER TESTIMONIES

E. J. Waggoner clearly pointed out what the prelapsarian position is comparable to:

“Do you not see that the idea that the flesh of Jesus was not like ours (because we know ours is sinful) necessarily involves the idea of the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary? Mind you, in

him was no sin, but the mystery of God manifest in the flesh, the marvel of the ages, the wonder of the angels, that thing which even now they desire to understand, and which they can form no just idea of, only as they are taught it by the church, is the perfect manifestation of the life of God in its spotless purity in the midst of sinful flesh. [Congregation: Amen!] O, that is a marvel, is it not?

“Suppose we start with the idea for a moment that Jesus was so separate from us, that is, so different from us that he did not have in his flesh anything to contend with. It was sinless flesh. Then, of course, you see how the Roman Catholic dogma of the immaculate conception necessarily follows.” E. J. Waggoner, *General Conference Bulletin*, April 22, 1901.

A. T. Jones spoke disparagingly about the doctrine of immaculate conception:

“In these days of the general acceptance of Catholicism as Christianity, and the compromises with the Catholic Church, and apologies for her, it is well that we should study such things as this, that we may know for ourselves what is their real effect upon the doctrine of Christ, and what their consequences_in those who accept the dogma. The first consequence of it is to make the Virgin Mary, if not actually divine, then the nearest to it of any creature in the universe, and this, too, in her human nature. . . .” A. T. Jones, *American Sentinel*, June 7, 1894.

“. . . whoever accepts the immaculate conception of Mary, by the same act surrenders the Christ of the New Testament. If Mary was without sinful tendencies then Christ is without human sympathy, not being as the Scriptures declare he is, “touched with the feeling of our infirmities;” nor could he, in that case, have been ‘tempted like as we are.’ Surely he who accepts this doctrine must with it adopt the sad lament, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.’ ”

A. T. Jones, *American Sentinel*, September 20, 1894.

“But if He (Christ) comes no nearer to us than in a sinless nature, that is a long way off, because I need somebody that is nearer to me than that. I need someone to help me who knows something about sinful nature, for that is the nature that I have, and such the Lord did take. He became one of us.” A. T. Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, February 24, 1895.

“Therefore and finally, as certainly as in his human nature, Jesus Christ is one with us, and as certainly as God with him is God with us, so certainly the nature of the Virgin Mary was just like that of all the rest of us, and so certainly the dogma of the immaculate conception is an absolute falsehood.” A. T. Jones, *Signs of the Times*, November 5, 1896.

One of the purposes of this book is to clarify that the Holy Spirit did not prevent the inheritance by Christ of the sinful tendencies of His ancestors, but because of Christ’s continual surrendering of His will, the Holy Spirit prevented those tendencies from becoming active in His higher powers and character.

And if a way can be described to harmonize Group A and Group B statements as being indeed applicable to one human Being, Christ Jesus, then there is no longer need to flee back to doctrines of the Dark Ages. Then there is hope for bringing unity among us, and having a clearer understanding of the proper attributes of the One True Christ and of His one true gospel.

