



2 Cor. 3:18

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Thoughts on Christ's Divinity

David Clayton

Every now and then questions arise concerning the nature of Christ in the incarnation. In particular, the question of whether or not He was fully possessed of divine power while He was fully a human being keeps surfacing. Even among those who fully agree on the truth about God and His Son, there are often queries concerning the reality of the death of Christ. Since it is believed that Jesus possessed all divine power while He was here, the logical conclusion is that He did not completely die on Calvary and furthermore, that He had the power to, and did indeed raise Himself from the dead after His crucifixion.



central doctrine of Catholic faith. Upon it are based all the other teachings of the church" (Handbook for Today's Catholic - p.16)

In this article we have endeavoured to examine this issue of whether or not Christ possessed divine power in Himself. We hope that the points presented will appeal to reason and logic. What we have endeavoured to do in this article is to be consistent with Bible truth.

THE MAKEUP OF RATIONAL BEINGS

Every rational being in the universe is made up of body and spirit. This includes even spirit beings although in their case the bodily part is described as a "spiritual body." (1 Cor. 15:44) When Jesus came to this earth He was also made up of two parts, body and spirit. The body was of this earth. This was "made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3). He was "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). His declaration was "a body hast thou prepared me (Heb. 10:5)." But on the spiritual side, who was He? This spirit which united with the body to become the man Jesus Christ, where did it come from?

It was the same identical spirit, the same identical person who had been with the Father from the days of eternity. It was the same identical person who had been known in heaven as Michael. He left His body behind, He left His glory behind with that heav-

enly form and instead adopted a dwelling of clay.

CHRIST'S INCARNATION

Let us consider something here: When that spirit was first united with a human body, Jesus was at that moment just a little speck of protoplasm inside of Mary's belly. Was that everything there was of Jesus or was there something more? Was there some part of Jesus which was not encapsulated in that tiny embryo? No, there was nothing more. The word of God says, "The Word was made flesh..."

At that moment, what kind of knowledge or power did Jesus have? Did He have the self-awareness as a fetus to know who He was? Did He then possess the power of God the Almighty? Does divine power include divine awareness? How were all these present in Jesus when He was a baby? Remember that these powers include omniscience, omnipresence as well as omnipotence.

What about after He was born? Did He know then as an infant of two days old that He was a divine being? Was He aware then of all the tremendous issues at stake in His incarnation? Was He even then omnipresent and omni-

Truth is a consistent chain with every part linked to the other. I learned that many years ago and I have found it to be an inflexible rule. It is always true. Whenever our ideas are not in line with truth then we find that when we try to harmonize these ideas with what is already established, there is a break in logic, a break in harmony. The inevitable result is that we have to readjust our beliefs in everything in order to make this new idea fit. This is what happened when the Catholic Church adopted the doctrine of the Trinity. Over the centuries they have followed through on the logic required by that first false idea and the inevitable result is the confused mass of false and meaningless doctrines which are characteristic of that system today.

"The mystery of the trinity is the

Also in this issue:

Ivan's Visit	3
Be a Berean	9
Zimbabwe Report	10
A Prayerful Malfunction	11

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Open Face is dedicated to the promotion of the truths committed to the Advent movement, as believed and taught by the early Adventist pioneers. In particular to the restoration of those truths which have been cast down to the ground and trampled underfoot by the papacy, and adopted by her daughters.

Our purpose is to motivate our readers to commit themselves wholly to the task of personal preparation for the coming of the Lord, and to the taking of the final warning message to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.

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scient? If He was, where did this knowledge and power reside? When He showed the ignorance of a baby, when He cried, when He was hungry, was it an act? Was He two different persons in one body, or was He one person with two different minds or was He one complete individual living one genuine life on one plane, the product of the uniting of a divine spirit with a body of flesh?

Ellen White states that Jesus did not begin to realize who He was until He went to the temple at the age of twelve. Before that, what had happened to His knowledge? In fact, even at twelve after this trip to the temple, He did not "know" His identity in the sense that He now remembered, or in the sense that He was suddenly able to access endless knowledge. If there was some other plane in which He existed where He could do these things, then it would mean that He was not one person, but two persons in one. No, He began to understand that His life was linked with the sacrifices, it was more a revelation given Him by God than a growing ability to access some powers within Himself. If we conclude that there was some other side of Jesus where He was

always omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient etc. then we make Him into a person with two different existences, with two different minds; in actual fact, we would be talking of two different persons rather than one.

FAULTY ASSUMPTION

I think many of us have made an assumption that is not necessarily true. We have assumed that divinity is equated with divine power; with omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience etc. Can there be divinity without these attributes? I am persuaded that the answer is yes.

When we say that Jesus was fully human what do we mean? We mean that He had the nature of humanity. In His natural mental and physical makeup He was just like every other human being. He had nothing which we cannot have in terms of His capabilities. The Bible emphasizes this when it tells us that He was "made flesh." This point is emphasized by John when he tells us that an antichrist is one who denies that Jesus came in the flesh, or in other words, one who declares that Jesus was more than a human being. Yet, how could He be fully human if He was fully divine? Does not His divinity make Him *more* than human? This is an interesting question. The answer is, no, He was not more than human, and yet, this can only be understood when we understand the nature of His divinity.

FULL DIVINITY

The question is, how then could He be fully divine (if all He had was the abilities of humanity)? There is one attribute (not ability) which Jesus possessed which is the real mark of divinity and paradoxically, while this attribute made Jesus fully divine, it did not contradict the fact that he was fully human, possessing only human abilities. What was this attribute? What was this quality which declared Jesus' full divinity and set Him apart from every other creature in the universe? It was the quality of a character, which was perfectly good. Jesus said, "*there is*

none good but one, that is God." (Matt. 19:17)

"Full divinity," did not have to do with the powers that Jesus possessed, it had to do with the pure, holy nature which He possessed which is the property of divinity alone. A human being may have no legs, may be blind, may be deaf and dumb, but this does not make him less than human. It is the nature which he possesses which makes him a human, even if he has lost some of his abilities. Who would say that he was not "fully human?" In the same way, the loss of His power would not have made Jesus less than fully divine because His nature (character) was the nature of God. As Ellen White says, "*a divine spirit dwelt in a temple of flesh.*" (YI Dec. 20, 1900).

What is the main emphasis or the main proof of the New Testament in establishing that Jesus was the Son of God? Was it the highlighting of His miraculous works? To be sure there were some instances when a few persons saw His miracles as an evidence of His divinity, but this was faulty reasoning on their part. If the performance of miracles is an evidence of divinity then this would mean that Moses, Elijah, Elisha and many of the prophets were also divine (even Satan himself!). Jesus declared that He could do nothing of Himself, but that the Father dwelling in Him was the One who did the works. (John 5:30; 14:10)

But what was the mark of Jesus' divinity which is emphasized in the New Testament? "*We beheld His glory (what was this glory), the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.*" (John 1:14) Was this glory His power? No, it was His character of pure spotless, selfless love. This is the glory which they saw. "*We see the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ.*" (2 Cor. 4:6). "*The people who dwelt in darkness saw a great light (Isa. 9:2),*" but it was the light of pure holy character which they saw, not the demonstration of almighty power. This was the divinity of Jesus with which

Continued on page 4

Ivan's Visit

This hurricane was dubbed, "Ivan The Terrible" by the international weather news media and true to its title Ivan really proved to be a terrible and terrifying hurricane which bombarded Jamaica on September 11, 2004.

Ivan first visited and devastated the tiny island of Grenada destroying 90 percent of the houses. At that time it was a category three hurricane but by the time it had gotten close to Jamaica, it had developed into a category five hurricane, with wind speeds of 160 m.p.h. At this point many people began to realize that Hurricane Ivan was indeed a threat to Jamaica, and skeptics were wising up to the reality of the situation and preparing by stocking up on supplies to last them through the impending disaster.

Just before reaching Jamaica, Ivan was downgraded from a category five to a category four hurricane with wind speeds of 145 m.p.h and also slowed its forward momentum considerably. It seemed to be taking its leisurely time in getting to its target.

On land many people were wondering what was happening because it had been believed that the island would have been hit by that time, or at least that everybody would have been experiencing a lot of heavy showers, and strong winds, whereas in some parishes especially in the hilly regions there had been little or no rain. Some ignorant folks even thought that we would not be affected by this hurricane, in spite of all the evidences to the contrary. Their optimism was short-lived. Ivan arrived on the evening of Friday September 10 and paid us a visit which we will not forget in a hurry.

Many people had been sending up fervent prayers that God would protect their houses and their lives, as well as the lives of families, friends, brethren and neighbours. When the strong winds and the heavy onslaught of rain started, even more prayers went up to our Heavenly Father, since everyone knew that there were a lot of weak and flood prone areas in Jamaica which might give way under this massive barrage of wind and rain.

Up to this point Ivan had been moving at a forward speed of 13 miles Per hour, which was very slow for a hurricane. Suddenly, something very strange occurred. Before the eye of Ivan could make a direct hit on Jamaica, it slowed down to a forward speed of five miles per hour and appeared to wobble a bit above the sea. Then it took off along the south coast and accelerated

its speed, while remaining 30 miles from land. This was obviously divine intervention and was a direct response and answer to all the prayers that had gone up from God's people everywhere.

However, in spite of the fact that the island was spared a direct hit from the eye of the hurricane, there were places especially along the southern side of the country that suffered severely from the battering gusts of wind and the furious rainfall.

I live in one of the southerly parishes, Manchester, and so experienced firsthand the full fury of the hurricane.

Firstly, the rain started coming in torrents in the evening, then by nightfall, the wind started to come in great gusts, which battered trees, roofs and electrical wires. At about midnight of the 10th of September, the winds of Ivan were beginning to sound, and seemed like the end of the world. The screaming of the wind was comparable to the high pitched shriek which a jet plane makes when it is about to take off.

This was accompanied by pounding sounds as though someone were using a battering ram, trying to tear the house tops to shreds. Intermingled with these sounds was the beating of rain pounding on the pavement, roofs and trees. I lay in my bed and prayed that the roof would not disappear from above my head. From the sounds which I heard all night I expected at any moment to see it take off.

This does not even begin to describe the terrifying experience that the citizens of Jamaica underwent on this occasion. It was with great relief that we received the news that the eye of Ivan had passed and was on its way elsewhere. Even with this passing, there were still heavy showers of rain and some gusts of wind, but we knew that the worst was behind us and that was the most important thing, right then and there.

Sadly, after the passing of Ivan there were reports of people being found dead (17 to be exact), and there was a lot of extensive damage done to many areas especially in rural parishes. It would also be many days before electricity and water would be restored. In any event, we thanked our heavenly Father for preserving our lives, and we realize that these disasters are an inevitable consequence of our presence in a sin-cursed earth. We expect these disasters to grow more frequent and more terrible as we approach the end of the world.

Let us keep ever faithful, walking with the Lord, so that we may not be troubled or worried about these things which are happening and concerning the many others which are still to come.

Marie Peart



Thoughts on Christ's Divinity

Continued from page 2

He **could not** part, this pure, holy character which was His true nature, His true divine identity.

When Jesus came to this earth, He left His memories behind, He left His glorious body behind, He left His almighty powers behind, (DA - 336) but He did not leave His pure holy nature behind. This is what set Him apart from all others and qualified Him to represent God in the earth. This is what gave Him the right to be called, "Immanuel, God with us."

Jesus came here to demonstrate what the **character** of God is really like, not the power. This was one of the most important aspects of His mission here. The whole point of Him becoming a human being, of Him accepting the limitations of humanity, was that He could show us what the character of God is really like. When you take away His powers from God and put Him in a place where His life is threatened, He is despised, scorned and rejected, how will He react? Is He really and truly good, or is it just a pretense that He puts on (as Lucifer has charged)? Jesus came to answer that question and he could not answer it as God almighty, He had to answer it as God with all the limitations of humanity. This issue was really the most important issue in Jesus' incarnation.

The truth is, if Jesus had possessed in Himself almighty power, the whole demonstration would have been invalidated. When Jesus cried "*My God my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" We understand that He was bewildered, He was uncertain, He did not see the future or even fully understand the circumstances of the present. This was real and we believe it. But if

Jesus possessed inherent omniscience, knowing all things, then what was the meaning of this bitter cry? Was it reality or a carefully orchestrated act? How can the demonstration be valid if there was the potential for deception? How could God set up a demonstration to prove something and then leave one factor in place which calls the whole demonstration into question?

DID DIVINITY DIE?

Jesus possessed divinity in two ways. First of all, He was Himself possessed of a divine spirit. The person, Jesus Christ was in His spirit (not in His body) the same identical divine person who had been called Michael in heaven. Though He had laid His glory and power aside, yet He was the same divine person. His identity was not in His power, but in the fact of who He was.

Secondly, Jesus possessed the Holy Spirit of His Father which dwelt in Him and gave Him the power to perform the mighty works of God (Acts 10:38; John 14:10).

Now when Jesus died, we are told that "divinity did not die." {1SM 301}. What does this mean? Is this saying that the divine holy spirit (the spirit of the Father) did not die, or is it saying that Christ's own divine spirit did not die? Before we answer this question let us be certain that we know clearly what we are talking about. We must first get some ideas clear in our minds.

WHAT IS DEATH?

The bible speaks about two deaths, the first death and the second death and they are two different experiences. The second death is total extermination, it is the end of existence. In the second death both body and soul (spirit) are destroyed forever (Matt. 10:28) The first death, however is not the end. In this death, something is preserved, something survives (in an unconscious state of course). The body is destroyed, but the spirit is preserved in an unconscious state. It is immobile and unconscious but it is not

really dead and this is why the first death is described in the Bible as a sleep. Therefore, when a person dies the first death we may truly say that such a person is not really dead.

Which of these deaths did Jesus die? I have heard many say that He died the second death, but did He? No, He did not. He suffered the pangs of the second death, He suffered the horrors of the second death and as He contemplated the prospect of eternal death, it was the second death that Jesus faced. What I mean is, He thought that He was going to die the second death and mentally, He did suffer the second death. However, the actual experience of the second death is total extinction. There is no coming back from that experience and that is not the experience which Jesus passed through. Jesus actually died the **first death**, although He suffered the pain of the **second death**.

So when Jesus died His body ceased to function. It was dead. What about His Spirit? His Spirit did not die but slept. Ellen White says:

"The spirit of Jesus slept in the tomb with his body, and did not wing its way to Heaven, there to maintain a separate existence, and to look down upon the mourning disciples embalming the body from which it had taken flight. All that comprised the life and intelligence of Jesus remained with his body in the sepulcher..." {3SP 203.2}

So, did divinity die? No, it did not because the divine spirit of Christ did not die, but slept. But let us consider what we are talking about: This is the same exact thing which happens when any other person dies. Again Ellen White says:

"Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. The spirit, the

character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character. God in His own time will call forth the dead, giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live. The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect. It lives again bearing the same individuality of features, so that friend will recognize friend. There is no law of God in nature which shows that God gives back the same identical particles of matter which composed the body before death. God shall give the righteous dead a body that will please Him.” {Mar 301.1}

The body dies and the spirit sleeps. Shall we say then that when a person dies he is not really dead? Well, whatever we say of Jesus when he died we have to say the same thing of every other person who dies the first death because the experience is the same.

WHAT IS DIVINITY?

Ellen White says, “*divinity did not die?*” But the question is, what did she mean by this? What is divinity? Is divinity something separate from the Person Jesus? If the divine part did not die, then is this divine part some separate entity from Christ? If divinity did not die, then can we say that a part of Jesus did not die, and if this was true, then is it not reasonable to say that Jesus was not really dead? If we say His humanity only died, what do we mean? That His body only died, but that another part of Him did not die? Are we then making Christ into two separate parts instead of a single individual united being?

When we say, “the divinity of Christ,” are we speaking of some impersonal, indefinable attribute which is separate and apart from the intelligence and life of Christ, or are we speaking of the spirit of Christ? That spirit slept when

Christ died. It did not maintain conscious active existence. But is this not what the first death is? The body separates from the spirit and this separation is what we call death. We do not specify that this part is alive while this part is dead, we rightly say that the person is dead and we define that death as a state where the body ceases to function and begins to decay, while the spirit separates from the body and enters a state of immobile unconscious sleep. When a spirit has no body, the body has died (James 2:26), and the spirit enters a sleeping state, is it then alive or dead? Is not this whole process what we call death? Should we seek to make a difference with Christ’s death and our death when the process that Christ went through in death was exactly the same?

Nobody has ever died in any other way. This is exactly the death which Jesus died. There was no difference, so the death He died was just as complete as any that any person has ever known. If someone makes an issue of the fact that His divine spirit did not die, then we must also make an issue of the fact that when a person dies, his human spirit does not die.

Jesus did not die in segments. He was not separated into components with part dying and part remaining alive. It was Christ that died, the whole person. Not a piece of Him.

When Ellen White stated that divinity did not die, did she mean that Christ’s spirit did not cease to exist, but only slept? This is one possible explanation and it would not contradict the truth that Christ did fully die in the only way in which it is possible for any human being to die at the moment. However, there is another possible meaning to her words.

While Jesus was here, He was filled with the spirit, the power or the life of God, by the holy spirit. (John 14:10; Acts 10:38). This life of the Father was united to Christ. Both were united in one person in the same way that Paul says, “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” (1 Cor. 6:17) This divine

life or power of the Father obviously did not and could not die when Christ died. Was this the divinity to which Ellen White referred?

There is still another possibility to consider: Look at the following statement:

“Christ became one flesh with us, in order that we might become one spirit with Him. It is by virtue of this union that we are to come forth from the grave,—not merely as a manifestation of the power of Christ, but because, through faith, His life has become ours. Those who see Christ in His true character, and receive Him into the heart, have everlasting life. It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal.” {DA 388.1}

Do you see what this statement suggests? The resurrection is not so much the impartation of life to a person by the power of Christ. Rather, it is Christ calling His life back to Himself. The only reason why Christians arise in the resurrection is because their lives have become united with the life of Christ. When He calls back His life to Himself, then they are resurrected because they are a part of the life of Christ. In this sense, Christians also do not die. In this sense, it may be said of them when they die that they do not truly die and that they cannot die because divinity cannot die. (John 11:26)

All of these possibilities should be considered when we look at what Ellen White said. All of them would fit to some extent. One thing is certain and it is that the Bible teaches that the Son of God died for our sins. It also teaches that if He did not die then our sins are not truly forgiven. When I consider all this, then I am compelled to believe that when Ellen White made those statements she must have had one of the ideas outlined above in her mind.

DIVINITY FLASHED THROUGH HUMANITY

Mention is often made of the statement

of Ellen White that “divinity flashed through humanity.” Some of us have taken it to mean that there was at such moments a display of supernatural power, some blaze of physical glory which compelled the people to see that He possessed supernatural power, but I disagree. The question is, what did she really mean by this. Look at the following statement carefully and consider what the phrase means here in this context.

*No one, looking upon the childlike countenance, **shining with animation**, could say that Christ was just like other children. He was God in human flesh. When urged by his companions to do wrong, **divinity flashed through humanity**, and he refused decidedly. In a moment he distinguished between right and wrong, and placed sin in the light of God’s commands, holding up the law as a mirror which reflected light upon wrong. It was this keen discrimination between right and wrong that often provoked Christ’s brothers to anger. (The Youth’s Instructor- 09-08-98)*

What was it that flashed through and how did it flash through? The result of this divinity flashing through humanity was that he immediately was able to distinguish between right and wrong. This gives us a clue as to what Ellen White really means when she uses this phrase. It was the manifestation of a pure holy character which shone through on His face. Those in His presence were overwhelmed with a sense of being in the presence of infinite purity. Divine purity was what shone through and convicted His hearers. It was not the manifestation of divine power, but of divine character. Look again at the following quotation:

*“Christ drove the dishonest traffickers from the temple courts with **heaven’s authority flashing from his face**. His voice spoke to the conscience and soul with the power of God.*

*“Take these things hence,” he said; “it is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.” As priests and rulers looked upon the face of Christ, terror took possession of them; for **divinity was flashing through humanity**. This was evidence that they had not looked for. They understood the meaning of his words, and, amazed and terrified, they fled from the humble, travel-stained Nazarene, as if he had been surrounded by an avenging army of heavenly beings. . . .” {RH, February 13, 1900}*

Here again we see that what was flashing from His face was divine **authority** not divine power. His voice spoke “with the power of God.” But this does not mean that there was a display or the sound of a supernatural voice. It means that as He spoke there was the authority, the command, the convicting of the conscience which comes from divinity.

Though Jesus had left divine power behind, He still retained divine **authority**. As the Son of God He still had the authority to command angels, to rebuke the forces of nature, to access the power of the holy spirit. However, authority is not the same as inherent power.

DID CHRIST PERFORM MIRACLES BY HIS OWN POWER?

*Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but **the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works**. (John 14:10)*

*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for **God was with him**. (Acts 10:38)*

*All the miracles of Christ performed for the afflicted and suffering were, **by the power of God**, through the ministration of angels. . . .All the blessings from God to man are through the ministration of holy angels. {2SP 67.2}*

*When Jesus was awakened to meet the storm, He was in perfect peace. There was no trace of fear in word or look, for no fear was in His heart. But **He rested not in the possession of almighty power**. It was not as the “Master of earth and sea and sky” that He reposed in quiet. **That power He had laid down**, and He says, “I can of Mine own self do nothing.” John 5:30. He trusted in the Father’s might. It was in faith—faith in God’s love and care—that Jesus rested, and the power of that word which stilled the storm was **the power of God**. {DA 336.1}*

*Every miracle wrought by Christ convinced some of his true character. Had a man in the common walks of life done the same works that Christ did, all would have declared that he was **working by the power of God**. But there were those who did not receive the light of heaven, and they set themselves more determinedly against this evidence. {RH, July 12, 1898 par. 4}*

*Every miracle that Christ performed was a **sign of His divinity**. He was doing the very work that had been foretold of the Messiah; but to the Pharisees these works of mercy were a positive offense. The Jewish leaders looked with heartless indifference on human suffering. In many cases their selfishness and oppression had caused the affliction that Christ relieved. Thus His miracles were to them a reproach. {DA 406.4}*

In spite of the plain statements in Scripture that Jesus never did, and could not have called upon personal divine power while He was in the flesh, the idea persists that Jesus must have had such power and that He did at times utilize it in ways which were unmistakable. Perhaps the most popular “proof” in support of this idea is the fact that Jesus from time to time knew what was passing through the minds of other men. This apparently was one of the things which amazed Nathanael and convicted Him that Jesus was the Messiah.

*“....Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.”
(John 1:48)*

But does this, and similar incidents prove that Jesus was exercising His own divine power? When Jesus read men’s thoughts and “saw” things which happened in another place, was He doing anything different than Elisha did (2 Kings 5:25,26; 2 Kings 6:5,32)? These references show that Elisha knew what was going on in the minds of other people even when they were many miles away. Does this mean that he had divine power in himself, or does it indicate that God was showing these things to him? In the case of Elisha we know that God revealed these things to Him. It could not have been otherwise. What then makes us believe that in Jesus’ case it had to be by His own power?

If He was then operating on divine power, how did He shut it off? How did He selectively turn on His divine attributes (powers)? When He read people’s minds and saw things happen in another place we say, “He must have been exercising His divinity at that time.” If this was true, how can we be sure that He was not also (silently) exercising the same divinity when He was tempted or facing suffering and death? How can we be sure that He was not secretly breaking the rules?

COULD JESUS TURN HIS DIVINE POWERS ON AND OFF AT WILL?

Can a person be omnipresent and yet not be present in all places? Can a person be omniscient and yet not know all things? Can a person be immortal and yet die? Was Jesus omnipresent while He was dead? And yet according to the theory of “full divinity,” omnipresence is one of the essential qualities of divinity. Also omniscience; how could He be omniscient, Knowing all things, and yet knowing nothing as He slept in unconscious death?

JOHN 10:17,18

Another “proof” which is often used to show that Jesus had divine power in Himself while He was here, is John 10:17,18. These verses read as follows.

(John 10:17,18) Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. (18) No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Here, it is claimed, Jesus declared that He had the ability to, and would raise Himself from the dead by His own power

If Jesus had claimed that He would raise Himself from the dead, He would have been in direct contradiction of Himself, for He said, “I can of mine own self do nothing.” (John 5:30) He would also have contradicted at least 30 verses in the New Testament which say that He was raised from the dead by His Father.

Let us carefully consider the verses in question: The Greek word that was translated “I might take,” is the word *lambano*. It may be translated as “to take,” but may also be properly translated as: “to receive, to gain, to get, to obtain, to get back.” The same Greek word was used in verse 18, but there,

it was translated “received.” Jesus said, “*This commandment have I received of my Father.*” In this case it would have been ridiculous to translate the word as “take.” Christ would have been saying, “*This commandment have I taken of my Father.*” So the translators sensibly translated the word as “received.” However, what about in verse 17? Did Christ in that verse mean that He would “take” His life or did He mean that He would “receive” it again?

Christ laid down His life that He might receive it (not take it) again. Christ could not, and did not, raise Himself from the dead, or else He wouldn’t have been dead to begin with.

Christ is quoted as saying, “I have **power** to take it again.” But here also we see how a faulty translation can completely change the sense of a particular verse. The word “power,” in the New Testament is often translated from one of two Greek words. They are the words, **exousia**, and **dunamis**. Although they are both translated as “power,” yet the meanings are very different, and the difference is significant. **Exousia** means authority and it means the power of authority. **Dunamis** on the other hand is the word from which we get the word “dynamite,” and it means actual power in the sense of having the actual force and energy represented by the word “power.” The word which Christ used here, is actually the word, **exousia** and this makes it clear that He was not speaking of having the actual power in Himself, but rather of having the authority, or the permission or the instructions from God as to what He was to do. Christ had the authority, or permission, to lay down His life so that He could receive it again from His Father.

Let’s read the verses again with a more consistent translation of the words:

“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might receive it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have au-

thority to lay it down, and I have authority to receive it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

Now the verse is consistent with the rest of Scripture.

Let us examine the verse from another angle. When Jesus said, “I lay down my life,” what did He mean? Did He mean that He was about to commit suicide? Did Jesus kill Himself? Was He **actively involved** in His own death? Absolutely not!! So what did He mean when He said, “I lay down my life?” What He meant was that it was He who chose to place Himself in the circumstances where men could put Him to death. He did not have to go to Jerusalem, He did not have to submit to the treatment which they meted out to Him. He could have prayed to His Father and would immediately have received twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:53), but He did not do any of these things. He chose to submit to the circumstances which led up to His death, but He did not kill Himself.

In the very next phrase Jesus says, “that I might receive (or “take”) it again.” Now we need to be consistent. Jesus said, “I lay down my life...I take it again.” Logically we should apply the same rules in interpreting both sides of that statement. In the same way that He laid it down, He would also “take,” or receive it again. Since it was not He who killed Himself, we understand that what He meant was that He would place Himself in the circumstances where He would lose His life. In the same way, when He says He would take or receive it again, He did not mean that He would actively take His life, but rather that He had the authority to receive His life again and to resume His existence.

THE GREAT ISSUES IN THE INCARNATION

It is important that we understand the main issues in the incarnation of Jesus. If we understand these, then it helps us to have a more accurate concept of

the nature of Christ in the incarnation.

There is a perception that Jesus’ main mission in this world was to be an example to us. Therefore it is believed that one of His great temptations was the temptation to use some power which was not available to us, to deliver Himself from temptation. It is believed that one of the main issues in the controversy is the issue of whether or not man can live without committing sin and that Jesus came to prove that this is possible, so if He had used His power to help Himself in this respect it would have proved that man cannot live above sin without supernatural help.

Let me ask you, is it possible for sinful man to live above sin without supernatural help? Does it not take a miracle of God to enable us to live above sin? If Jesus lived above sin without supernatural help, what does it prove as far as I am concerned? He may have done it, but none of us ever can. Jesus had by nature a pure holy character which is only good. We do not. This is a secondary issue. The greater questions concern the issues which began in heaven even before man was created.

Some suggest that a major issue was that Jesus was tempted to use His own divine power to defend Himself. Why would He need to do this? According to His own words, His Father would have done this if He had asked Him.

The reasoning is that the Father would never have performed such actions at Jesus’ request since He could not have been tempted to do things which may have prevented the plan of salvation from being accomplished. This seems to be solid reasoning but it does not harmonize with Scripture. In Matthew when Jesus was taken captive by the mob, Peter sprang to His defense and cut off the ear of the high Priest’s servant. Jesus rebuked Peter and spoke the following words:

Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

(Mat 26:53)

I don’t know what Peter thought of the question or how he would have answered it, but how would we answer it? Would His Father have sent the angels or not? What is the obvious meaning of Jesus’ words? Evidently, He was saying that if it was His request, His Father would have fulfilled it!! I cannot understand the passage in any other way. The plan of salvation was worked out between the Father and the Son, but it was the Son who volunteered to go. The Father did not compel, or even make the request that He should go. In fact, according to Sister White, Jesus had to persuade His Father in order to get Him to agree, for God did not give up His Son without a struggle (Early Writings pp. 126, 127)!! Since it was Jesus who volunteered to go, it was His right to change His mind and evidently, if He had done this His Father would have respected this decision and worked with Him in restoring Him to His former exalted position, leaving man to his fate.

Of course, such a thing would not have happened because Jesus’ character is the character of God and in that character there is only love and mercy. If Jesus had given in to the temptation to deliver Himself, then it would mean that God is not really a person who is selfless, who loves others better than Himself. There would have been a flaw in God’s character. But since there was no such flaw, then Jesus would not have made such a choice.

What were the great issues in the incarnation of Christ? These issues were:

- (a) God was answering the question of what kind of person He really was. He was answering this for human beings primarily but also for the entire universe. Why did He need to do this in human form? Because He could not do it in divine form. While He possessed divine glory and divine powers, He was too far above His creatures for them to understand Him or to see what He was really like. He had

Continued on page 12

There is a woeful lack of critical thinking in the world in general and in the nation and church in particular. Notice that I didn't say there was lack of knowledge. As we all know, we live in an age where there is an abundance of information wherever you turn. You don't even have to turn AROUND, just turn ON your computer. If you don't have a college education or even a library card, all you need is the Internet.

So then, what do we do with the information that we have? Notice that the word critical in the first sentence of this article is closely associated with the word critique. To critique something means to compare it to an established pattern. That pattern can be about conduct, shape or size. What is our pattern as believers?

The Bible writer and apostle Paul was blessed with a deep and penetrating insight into the things of God. He was renowned throughout the region as a great writer and communicator of the gospel of Christ. The Bible also speaks of the Bereans. These Bereans however, were a group of believers who did not merely accept what Paul said just because it was Paul who said it. They took Paul to task by examining what he asserted and comparing it to scripture. They said in essence, "that was great Paul, thanks for coming, but we need to double-check this." How did God regard their attitude? The writer of the book of Acts refers to them as being, NOBLE! (Acts 17:11) Paul also emphasized the point further when he said, "follow me as I follow Christ". This is a lesson that is lost on many of us.

Too many Seventh-day Adventists have a propensity to look down our noses at individuals in other denominations as, "my bishop says," "my pastor says," "my reverend says," or even "my priest says," types of people. Unfortunately, we are quickly adopting the same type of mentality. More and more of us are hiding behind the words of our ministers to mask our own lack of understanding. We feel and believe that because we have "the truth" as a denomination we can safely 'cruise' as individuals. We accept,

uncritically, whatever comes from the pulpit, the quarterly, and the conference. Truth however, does not ORIGINATE in any of these places. Those three examples should be CONDUITS of the truth but not the SOURCE of it. God says,

"my doctrine shall fall as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew" (Deut. 32:2).

This is THE standard of truth and doctrine. What God says is truth.

"Thy word is truth" (Psalm 119:142).

We are often spiritually and mentally LAZY and so fall into a snare. Christ warned,

"If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch". (Matt. 15:14)

Critical thinking needs to be employed when it comes to weighing what God's word says to each of us. No one renders a verdict in a court of law without being privy to the evidence. That is the responsibility which comes with be-

ing a juror. Likewise, no one sits on a jury and then allows someone outside of the jury to form the verdict. We are to be a jury of one where our spiritual understanding is concerned.

God will not ask any of us in the Day of Judgment if we believed what our pastors, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts believed. He will ask us how did we weigh the truth available to us. If someone were to ask you what you wanted to eat at a restaurant, would you leave that decision in the hands of another? Is your salvation less important than satisfying your appetite?

So in a nutshell, what do I hope to leave you with after reading this article?

Learn to weigh your decisions based on what you understand for yourself. And learn to be honest about what information and evidence you really have in your grasp before you make that decision.

Finally, we should remember that ignorance is not a license to sin. An uninformed choice is as bad as letting someone else decide for you. Go to God, get informed, pray earnestly, and then make an honest decision from your heart and mind. This is a principle that needs to permeate our lives in politics, in diet, in behavior, and most importantly, in matters of the spirit and the conscience. Be A Berean. May God Bless You.



Be

A

Berean

Greg Forde

Zimbabwe Report

Vusa Ncube

The aim of this report is to give you a glimpse of what took place during our camp meeting for 2004. It started on the 24th of August in the evening with everybody present in a joyful mood at the prospect of hearing the Lord speak to them. The camp site was already prepared, and the number of campers had risen compared to last year. Last year we were about 76 but this time we were about 124.

Brother Ephraim Ngwenya welcomed all the brethren on the first evening of the meeting introducing the campers to the theme of the meeting and also the theme song. The theme was, *'CHRIST'S COMING DELAYED WHY?'*

The singing was wonderful and inspiring. After the first meeting we could feel a total unity in spirit. I believe nothing short of the spirit of God could have brought such sweet harmony.

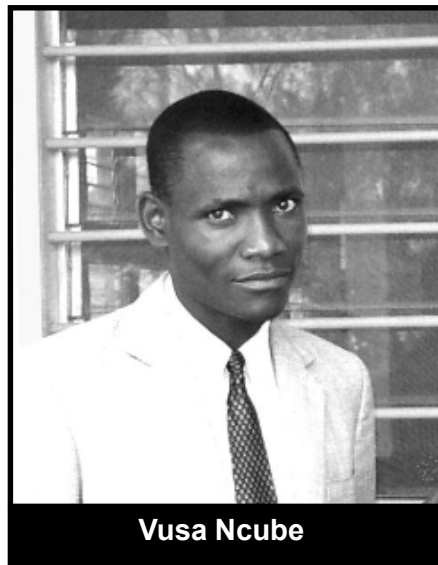
The following morning brother Vusa Ncube led the congregation in the morning manna service which gave the congregation a challenge on the necessity of being born again. After a break, there was a presentation by bro. Ngwenya who talked much on the three angels of Rev.14, but focused particularly on the first angel which had the everlasting gospel to preach to those on earth. The subject was studied in light of God's love and generated a lot of interest. As the days went on, the congregation was blessed on a daily basis and gained a clear understanding of the significance of the message in Rev. 14.

Bro. Vusa also led the congregation on the study of what the gospel is. His main emphasis was that the gospel is the good news of God's unlimited love extended to believing sinners. In other words it is the way in which God accepts and justifies a penitent sinner. The texts explored most were 1Cor.15:45 and Romans 5. These texts deal with

the two Adams. The good news is that as all people die because of the first Adam who disobeyed, so all people who believe are justified because of the second Adam [Jesus] who obeyed.

Bro. Ngwenya also conducted a lesson on family life giving a challenge to parents to take their duty to educate their children, seriously, because what the church is, is determined by what families are. This was followed by a lesson by bro. Vusa which focused on the good part that Mary chose as she sat at the feet of Jesus and heard his words, as compared to her sister Martha who chose to be busy with the minor things.

As we welcomed the Sabbath hours bro. Caleb Moyo presented a lesson which compared the Pharisees of old and those of today. The congregation was encouraged not to follow their way as it was condemned by Jesus.



Vusa Ncube

On Sabbath the congregation had swelled, with a number of visitors from around the vicinity of the campsite. The then Sabbath school superintendent, sister Patriture Vundla [Vusa's wife] welcomed the Sabbath school members, directing the congregation to the greatest love of God as recorded in

Luke 15, speaking of the prodigal son and the way he was received back home; a representation of the way God receives all repentant sinners.

The Sabbath school lesson was conducted by bro. Ngwenya whose lesson was based on the Lord's supper. The subject of this lesson was motivated by the fact that we were going to partake of this service for the first time since we were disfellowshipped from the mainline S.D.A. church. The whole congregation was blessed as they were looking forward to the hour when they would be celebrating their deliverance from sin through Christ.

Brother Vusa took the main service and his focus was the righteousness of God that comes through faith, which is not of the law (Phil. 3:9). We then broke for lunch.

After lunch we went for a baptism which was conducted by bro. Vusa at a river about 3 km from the campsite. Five people were baptized, praise be to God.

After the baptism we drove back and found that everything was ready as far as the communion service preparations were concerned. It was dark by the time we got started and bro. Ngwenya and bro. Vusa shared the duties as they conducted the service.

In participating in this service I vividly remembered the Lord in the upper room with his disciples and as a result the service had more impact on my soul than it had ever had before in my Christian experience. We thanked God for blessing us during the meeting

We ask that you all pray for the work in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole. We also thank all who have been tirelessly supporting the work in Zimbabwe financially. May God bless you.



A Prayerful Malfunction

I have travelled a lot during the last seven years and during that time I have by the grace of God only missed my flight once, and on that occasion, I actually got home earlier than I would have arrived if I had not missed my flight. However, I have been impressed over and over that God takes care of me and not only takes care of every detail of my life, but also responds to prayer in very marked ways. Recently I attended a campmeeting where I had the following experience.

At the end of this campmeeting I left for home at four o'clock in the morning, on Tuesday, September 7th. Brother, Gordon Ballentine offered to take me to the airport which was about a half an hour away. On the way we had good discussion. When we got to the airport, Gordon suggested that I should check in and then rejoin him in the car so we could talk for a few more minutes since we had time on our hands and he suggested that it was not a very busy airport. So I did this, keeping an eye on my watch and when there were about twenty minutes left we said goodbye and I headed back inside so I could pass through the security checkpoint and get on the plane.

When I got inside and went up to the area where the security check was to take place, I could not believe my eyes. There was a line of more than a hundred people. The line was so long that it went through several rooms, went to the end then doubled up and came back all the way almost to the beginning. I was horrified and knew that I could never get through the security gates in time to make my plane. After standing there for about ten minutes and just moving a few feet, I decided to run to the lady who was in charge of checking the tickets and the passports as the people passed by and I explained to her that my plane was about to leave any moment and I was going to miss it and I asked her if she could allow me to go through to the front of the line. She just said that there

were other people in the line who were scheduled to be on my flight and I would just have to rejoin the line, so I did.

After a few minutes I heard the boarding announcement for the flight. I stood there anxiously as we moved along inch by inch. After a few moments, I heard the announcement that this was the final call for passengers on that flight to board. There was a lady standing some distance behind me and I saw her rushing past to speak to the same lady that I had spoken to, so I ran along behind her. She explained that she was scheduled to be on that flight and she was going to miss it and asked the lady if she could be allowed to go through. The lady gave her the same answer she had given me: "there are others in the line who are on the same flight and you just have to rejoin the line." So the both of us went back and retook our place in the line.

At that moment I started to pray. I prayed a few times and each time I prayed the anxiety became a little less, and I thought, "I've been a little foolish in waiting so long to go through the security check but I've put it before God and it is in His hands." The truth is, I really did not want to have any delays, especially since I was going home and I had several connecting flights which were close to each other. I knew that if I missed one flight, I probably would not get home that day. Anyway, finally I got to the front of the line and feverishly passed through the security checkpoint, then dashed to the boarding gate. The man standing there said "Which flight are you on?" I thrust my ticket at him, he took a look at it passed it through the machine and handed it back to me and I went tearing down the ramp.

I was the only person on the ramp. Everybody else apparently had already gotten on to the plane. As I sprinted down the ramp there was a maintenance man there and he said "Hey! Slow down, slow down! You're going

to make it." I flashed him a smile and thanked him and slowed down a little but I didn't slow down too much until I was finally in the plane. I made it to my seat, gasped a few words of thanks to God and shortly thereafter the door closed.

As I was settling into the seat and beginning to relax I heard the voice of the captain on the intercom, "Well folks, we're a couple of minutes late. For some reason our computers just started to malfunction and we could not seem to get them to work so we had to shut down the system, wait about five minutes and restart it and now everything is o.k.". I lifted my heart to God. The captain did not know why the computers had malfunctioned but I had a pretty good idea. The door closed and the plane moved away from the ramp. I thought of the other lady who had been in the line behind me, she had missed the plane. Perhaps she had not thought of praying.

OPTIMISM

Talk happiness. The world is sad enough
Without your woes. No path is wholly
rough;
Look for the places that are smooth and
clear,
And speak of those to the weary ear
Of Earth, so hurt by one continuous strain
Of human discontent and grief and pain.

Talk faith. The world is better off without
Your uttered ignorance and morbid doubt.
If you have faith in God, or man, or self,
Say so. If not, push back upon the shelf
Of silence all your thoughts, till faith shall
come;
No one will grieve because your lips are
dumb

Talk health. The dreary, never-changing
tale
Of mortal maladies is worn and stale.
You cannot charm, or interest, or please
By harping on that minor chord, disease.
Say you are well, or all is well with you,
And God shall hear your words and make
them true.

Ells Wheeler Wilcox

Christ's Divinity

Continued from page 8

to come down to man's level in order to be seen and understood as He really was. This was one of the most important reasons for the incarnation. Yet, if Christ secretly possessed divine powers, powers which He could access at will, then there is no way we humans can be sure that what we saw in Him is really the true character of God. It would be so easy to fool us, it would be so easy to make us believe He loves us because He suffered for us, when He did not really suffer, but only put on a divine act. In fact, there are many people and even humans today who believe this is what really happened because they believe that He had in Himself this divine power.

(b) The second important reason was

that Jesus had to die for our sins. This was the price required by justice and the plan of salvation could not have been accomplished without the death of God's Son. Again, the question of the reality of His death is brought into question because of this perception that He possessed divine power in Himself. We have to say a piece of Him died while a piece did not die. We have to redefine our concept of death to make it fit this idea.

(c) The third important reason was that He came to be one of us so that He could be our representative, our High Priest. Yet, this office demanded that He should be exactly like us. One who was made like unto His brethren. (Heb. 2:17). One who was in all points tempted like as we are. But how could this

be if He had a secret weapon in His armoury, (even if He only used it at times and never for Himself). How can we come to grips with the idea that He was just like us, a fitting representative who understands and feels with us, when we know that He was not really just like us?

These are the important issues in the incarnation. We need to examine the principles involved very carefully. It is only as we understand these issues and understand how our teachings impact upon them that we will be able to come to the right conclusions concerning the incarnation of Christ and the work which He accomplished while He was here.



Open Face

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