

THE PERSON OF CHRIST
Part IV: The Modern Church

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I. INTRODUCTION.

As has been previously described concerning the doctrine of Trinitarianism, so also the doctrine of the Person of Christ was formulated in the Ancient Church period. Medieval and Reformation thinkers did not advance these Christology, although in the fringes of the Reformation Period a harbinger of change became evident in the teachings of Servetus and resultant movements such as Socinianism and Unitarianism. It seems correct to say that if one has a misconception of the preincarnate Christ, the error will proceed to the incarnate Christ!

The focus of this lesson shall be to gain an understanding of how the Modern Era understands the incarnate Person of Christ.

N.B. The setting for this study, that is the nature of the Enlightenment, has already been delineated (Lesson 4) and reiterated (Lesson 9). The student should review this important issue! The point to be seen is that the philosophic shift (as postulated by Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Kant) forged a reorientation of theology. The mind was set free from the necessity of dependency, sin, and revelation for an inward quest for truth, either on the mind or intuition.

N.N.B.B. To orient to what occurs, a section from Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, citing Dutch Reformed theologian, G. C. Berkouwer is enlightening.

G. C. Berkouwer introduces his discussion on the person of Christ by a long chapter on the subject “The Crisis in the Doctrine of the Two Natures.” He finds a serious defection from the early church doctrine of the person of Christ in the nineteenth century at the hands of Schleiermacher and Ritschl. [Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, 21-25.] This arose out of a background of Socinianism. The defection was furthered by Harnack, Nietzsche, Hegel, Straus, and the kenosis theory of Thomasius.

This decline from orthodoxy ultimately led to the theories of Bultmann who is evaluated by Berkouwer in these words:

What in the dogma of the church are regarded as God’s acts in history are devaluated by Bultmann to the status of a religious fancy. Theology can sink no farther. The witness of the Scriptures and the dogma found on them are pushed aside and the cross is made into the irrational fact of a decision in which man comes to know himself.

Berkouwer concludes with a challenge about the personal relevance of the question:

To testify that the crisis of the doctrine of the two natures is not merely a theoretical matter but a religious crisis.

II. THE PERSON OF CHRIST AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY GERMAN THEOLOGIANS.

A. Fredrick Schleiermacher (1768–1834).

1. **Schleiermacher and Religion.** As stated previously Schleiermacher was influenced by Kant and anticipates the turning to subjective experience as the beginning point of theology; by this, he thought he was preserving Christianity from its two primary obstacles: Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment. He affirmed faith as deduced from inward feeling (faith not from the Bible, but in the Bible as it derives authority from faith). Thus, religion to Schleiermacher is “the feeling of absolute dependence” on God—the stress is not upon God but upon human consciousness, a god-consciousness most perfectly displayed by Christ.
2. **Schleiermacher and the Person of Christ.** In brief Schleiermacher asserted the “divinity of Christ” and stressed that he was the “ideal of humanity” in that He possessed true god-consciousness. Mackintosh wrote (*Thoughts*. II, 385): “The Redeemer, then, is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature, but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him.”

N.B. The degree to which one is god-conscious is the degree to which he/she is sinless since sin is a lack of god-consciousness. In this non-constitutional sense Christ was sinless!

Schleiermacher wrote (*Christian Faith*. II, 388-89): “So that from the beginning He must have been free from every influence from earlier generations which disseminated sin and disturbed the inner God-consciousness, and He can only be understood as an original act of human nature, i.e., as an act of human nature as not affected by sin. The beginning of His life was also a new implanting of the God-consciousness which creates receptivity in human nature; hence this content and that manner of origin are in such a close relation that they mutually condition and explain each other. That new implanting came to be through the beginning of His life, and therefore that beginning must have transcended every detrimental influence of His immediate circle; and because it was such an original and sin-free act of nature, a filling of His nature with God-consciousness became possible as its result.”

N.B. Christ’s god-consciousness came upon him from natural birth, a sort of dynamic monarchianism if you understand his “feeling” for or of God to be His only godness!

Schleiermacher speaks of the divine and human nature in Christ as historically set forth in the creeds with distain, the product of “heathen” influence though possibly of unconscious origin. He said (*Christian Faith*. II, 393): “For in polytheism, which represents the Godhead as no less split up and divided than finite existence appears to us, the word ‘nature’ has certainly the same meaning in the expression divine nature as it has elsewhere. The fact ought to have a warning, that the heathen sages themselves had already risen above this imperfect representation of God, and said of Him that He was to be thought of as beyond all existence and being.”

The union of the “two” natures, god-consciousness and humanity, is resultantly but one human Jesus with an elevated consciousness of God (*Christian Faith*. II, 392): “For how can divine and human be thus brought together under any single conception, as if they could both be more exact determinations, coordinated to each other, of one and the same universal? Indeed, even divine spirit and human spirit could not without confusion be brought together in this way. But the word ‘nature’ is particularly ill-adapted for such a common use, even if we leave Latin and Greek etymology completely out of account and simply take our stand on our own use of the word. For in one sense we actually oppose God and nature to one another, and hence in this sense cannot attribute a nature to

God. Nature in this sense is for us the summary of all finite existence, or, as in the opposition of nature and history, the summary of all that is corporeal, and that goes back to what is elementary, in its various and discrete phenomena, in which all that we do describe is mutually conditioned. Over against this divided and conditioned we set God as the unconditioned and the absolutely simple.”

N.B. Schleiermacher rejects the concept of two natures for a human Jesus who has become overpowered and dominated by “a feeling of godness.” This “feeling” for God makes the person of Christ “supernatural.” It is what is meant by the “virgin birth.” The birth was natural, but supernatural in that it was sinless (i.e., not lacking in god-feeling). He wrote (*Christian Faith*. II, 405): “Since, therefore, there is no doctrine or tradition of a continuous series of mothers who were conceived, and who remained, without sin, the absence of the male share in the begetting of the Redeemer is in both connexions inadequate; and consequently the assumption of a Virgin Birth is superfluous. Consequently everything rests upon the higher influence which, as a creative divine activity, could alter both the paternal and the maternal influence in such a way that all ground for sinfulness was removed, and this although procreation was perfectly natural—as indeed only this creative divine activity could avail to give completeness to the natural imperfection of the child who was begotten. The general idea of a supernatural conception remains, therefore, essential and necessary, if the specific pre-eminence of the Redeemer is to remain undiminished. But the more precise definition of this supernatural conception as one in which there was no male activity has no connexion of any kind with the essential elements in the peculiar dignity of the Redeemer; and hence, in and by itself, is no constituent part of Christian doctrine. Whoever accepts this definition, therefore, accepts it only on the ground of the narratives involving it contained in the New Testament writings; hence belief in it, like belief in many matters of fact which have just as little necessary connexion with the dignity and the work of the Redeemer, belongs solely to the doctrine of Scripture; and everyone has to reach a decision about it by the proper application of those principles of criticism and interpretation which approve themselves to Him. But anyone who accepts a supernatural conception in our sense of the term can hardly, at least, find any reason in the supernatural element which they contain for denying the historical character of these narratives, or for departing from the literal interpretation of them. Similarly anyone who cannot accept them as literally and historically true is still quite free to hold to the doctrine proper of the supernatural conception. But if it is superfluous to set up a

doctrine of the Virgin Birth proper, it is also inadvisable to do so, for this involves one all too easily in investigations of a purely scientific character which lie quite outside our sphere.”

Finally and in summary, Schleiermacher wrote (*Christian Faith*. II, 423-24): “Now if this is in general the sufficiently clear result of an examination of Scripture, our Dogmatic can not only easily dispense with the whole arsenal of particular statements which have been set forth under various rubrics as proving the being of God in Christ, but put them aside all the more readily that they give no help in presenting the subject in the best way, but rather hide what is important and certain under what is untrustworthy. For what is the use of ascribing divine titles to Christ, if He Himself calls attention to an improper use of the word ‘God’ [John 10:34-36]? but appellations which express the unity of the divine and the human in so definite and unambiguous a way as the later ‘God-man’ do not occur in Scripture; all the predicates which can be cited in this connexion are more or less uncertain in meaning. So, too, as far as the divine attributes are concerned, it is natural that, since Christ is always spoken of as a man, only such attributes are ascribed to Christ in such a way that it must remain doubtful whether they do not mean that He is active cause only in so far as He is final cause. Finally, in the Resurrection and the Last Judgment, Christ is everywhere distinguished from God, for He appears only as a deputy with full powers, and hence His power is represented as resting in the Father, just as the appointment proceeds from the Father originally. Exactly the same is true of the sending of the Spirit, which Christ ascribes, now to Himself, now to the Father, who sends it all at His request. So that without those great supreme testimonies all these details would have little effect.”

N.B. Thus, Schleiermacher has a two-natured Christ which in reality is one. His humanness is swallowed in godness. Godness is not actual, but implanted at his “supernatural” birth. In reality, his Christ is a god-intoxicated man; an example for men to follow!

B. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72).

A passing comment will likely be sufficient to grasp this “anti-theologian’s” concept of Christ. As Feuerbach projected himself into infinity, he objectified the reality of God. The extension of his thought was the idealized Christ; that is, in our idea of Christ we encounter this projection of ourselves as God. Of Christ he wrote (*The Essence of Christianity*): “The consciousness of the species. We are all supposed to be one in Christ. Christ is the consciousness of our unity. Therefore, whoever loves man for the sake of man, whoever rises to the love of the species, to the universal love adequate to the nature of the species, is a Christian; he is Christ himself.”

N.B. Hence, the incarnation is the mystery of the love of God to man, which really is the love of man for himself. The resurrection of Christ is “the fulfilled longing of man for an immediate certainty of his continued personal existence after death.”

PARENTHESIS: Theodore Christlieb has caught the theological mind of his age when he wrote (*Modern Doubt*, 341): “The spirit of our age, weary— and that not without good reason—of mere speculation, is in every department asking for realities and facts. The study of dogma has had to yield to that of history. Men no longer look to authoritative statements of Church doctrines . . . but to his historical investigations of the Gospel narratives and of primeval Christianity for an answer to the question, Who was and is Jesus Christ.”

C. Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89).

The nineteenth century had a Christ who was human, but one who witnessed to the power of God in his life. Christ, as a man, was our “window into the ways of God.” His claim to deity, however expressed, was not native or eternal but extrinsic. Ritschl, and the entire Ritschlian School, follows in the same views. Christ is Christ because he most perfectly cooperated with God in bring forth God’s purpose, the kingdom of God on earth.

1. Christ is a unique person from an internal viewpoint to Ritschl; that is, he most consistently aligned with God’s purpose, His vocation. Christ, as a man, had marvelous insight into the ways of God; thus, he became the elevated one. He wrote (*Reconciliation*, 436): “His estimate of Himself betrays, it is true, a sort of sliding scale in the way he describes His own relation to God, not only in John, but also in the other Gospels; yet amid this variety of presentation, describing Himself at one time as a mere ambassador who has seen and heard God and executes His commands, and at another time as the son of God Who pursues God’s work and in His own person exercises God’s lordship over men for the ends of the Kingdom of God, Jesus attributes to His life as a whole, in the unity which for His own consciousness it possesses, the worth of being the instrument of the complete self-revelation of God. This is the purely religious type of self-judgment. But the unique feature of the case is, that there is not a trace of evidence to show that Jesus exempts any one relation of His own spiritual life and activity from the standard in question. For even when He expresses Himself in terms of independent human purpose, that purpose is at least adjusted to the ultimate Divine end for men which He is seeking to promote. The difference, namely, does not present itself to his consciousness in the form of a contrast, as in the case of Paul, who says on the one hand that Christ lives in him, and on the other that he lives a

natural life, but in the faith of Christ (Gal. 2:20). And thus John, in seeking to realize the impression made on his own mind of the worth of Christ's life as a whole, was in a position to construct a new formula, which implies more than that Christ was an instrument of Divine revelation. His faith in the Divine worth of Christ expresses itself in this judgment with regard to Him—that the Divine revelation is a human person.”

Christ's relationship to godness is functional or economic, to use the century's term for it, not ontological! He then said: “Since, now, as the founder of the kingdom of God in the world, or as the bearer of God's moral authority over men, He is the unique one in comparison with all those who have received from Him a similar purpose, thus is He that power in the world in whose self-end God primordially makes His own eternal self-end effective and evident—whose entire work in His calling thus forms the material of the complete revelation of God present in Him, or in whom the Word of God is a human person.”

Swing analyzes Ritschl as follows (*Theology of Albrecht Ritschl*, 98): “In other words, the Ritschlian argument is this—and it is not often surpassed in apologetic literature: There is one kingdom of God for which God has made the world. Jesus Christ, as the conscious founder of this kingdom in the world, is the one person to whom God looks, and to whom the members of this community look as head of this kingdom. Thrown upon the cosmic background of physical forces, He becomes the revealer of the purpose and character of the supramundane spiritual God, for the one divine purpose of making men free and independent of the world. Between God's self-end and Christ's self-end, there is a solidaric unity, by which men are to discover their own true self-end, and be won into its accomplishment through fellowship.”

2. The origin of the Christ-man, which Ritschl conceives as a unity of purpose, not being, is uncertain and unknowable. He wrote (*Reconciliation*, 451-52): “The origin of the Person of Christ—how His Person attained the form in which it presents itself to our ethical and religious apprehension—is not a subject for theological inquiry, because the problem transcends all inquiry. What ecclesiastical tradition offers us in this connection is obscure in itself, and therefore is not fitted to make anything clear. As Bearer of the perfect revelation, Christ is given us that we may believe on Him. When we do believe on Him, we find Him to be the Revealer of God. But the correlation of Christ with God His Father is not a scientific explanation. And as a theologian one ought to know that the fruitless clutching after such explanations only serves to obscure the recognition of Christ as the perfect revelation of God.”

3. Christ is the Christ because we trust what he is doing, not who he is. Swing wrote (*Theology of Albrecht Ritschl*, 99): “We worship Jesus, not because we see in Him a control over cosmic forces, but because in Him we see all the same ethical and moral self-end which belongs to God.”

4. Of Christ’s eternal relationship to the Father, Ritschl asserts that something is “real,” but “our scientific explanations are limited in all such problems.” The eternal Godhead of Christ is only in the mind of God and only “apparent” or “seemingly” so to us. He wrote (*Reconciliation*, 471): “Under this condition, the view expounded above—that the eternally-beloved Son of God, on the ground of the like content of His personal will, and of the uniqueness of the relation He holds to the community of the Kingdom of God and to the world, is to be conceived under the attribute of Godhead—accords with the traditional theology. Of course our time-conditioned view of things cannot get rid of the antithesis between God’s eternal decree and the realization of the same in the empirical phenomena of time, just as our conception of the community of the Kingdom of God is bound up with the antithesis between the calling in time and the choosing before the foundation of the world. At the same time we must premise that this relation does not mean for God that there is in Him any want or need; rather is His self-sufficiency everlastingly satisfied in what to us, in the long series of preparatory stages, looks like the expression of want. For this reason the eternal Godhead of the son, in the sense here described, is perfectly intelligible only as object of the Divine mind and will, that is, only for God Himself. But if at the same time we discount, in the case of God, the interval between purpose and accomplishment, then we get the formula that Christ exists for God eternally as that which He appears to us under the limitations of time. but only for God, since for us, as preexistent, Christ is hidden.”

Again, he wrote in summary (*Reconciliation*, 469-70): “On the contrary, it is implied that, as Founder and Lord of the Kingdom of God, Christ is as much the object of God’s eternal knowledge and will as is the moral unification of mankind, which is made possible through Him, and whose prototype He is; or rather, that, not only in time but in the eternity of the Divine knowledge and will, Christ precedes His community. Of course, to this statement a certain qualification must be added. For whatever belonged to the natural and generic limitations of Christ, more especially His individual natural endowments and His Jewish nationality, cannot be taken as the object of the eternal will of God, since these things are by their very nature bound up with the world, consequently can be fore-ordered, even by God, only through a volition in time. But Christ, we know, reduced the significance of these limitations to mere means toward His own spiritual life, in particular toward the apprehension of His own religious fellowship with God, and the carrying out of the vocation He had

embraced. Sharing the religious and moral customs of the Jews, he yet knows Himself, as the son of God, exalted above them; in discharging the duties of His vocation toward His countrymen, He knows His work destined to be fruitful, at the same time that He distinctly foresees its fruitlessness among the Jews; in His own life-conduct, that universal human morality of which the Kingdom of God shall be the perfect realization so markedly preponderates, that we fail to notice in Him those traces of individual temperament which are wont to count for something even in the most perfect of men. Yet Christ's life was not a mere abstract presentation of universal human morality; for He gave the whole world wealth of personal devotion to the universal content of His vocation. Rather is He Himself the prototype of that life of love and elevation above worldly motive, which forms the distinguishing characteristic of the Kingdom of God; and this as the deliberate result of His vocation to be the Founder of that Kingdom, not in any mere application of the principle of the Kingdom to the separate details of human life, which is the source from which other men derive their ethical vocations. If, therefore, the Kingdom of God as the correlate of the divine self-end is the eternal object of the love of God, this is so because Christ as the prototype and inspiring force of that union of the many in one, in other words, as the Head and Lord of that Kingdom, is the eternal object of the love of God, so that in this special form the Kingdom of God is present eternally to the Divine knowledge and will, while its individual members are objects of the knowledge of God in time."

N.B. Thus, the Christ of Ritschl, the Ritschlians, and the nineteenth century was human, yet once elevated by virtue of his personal piety and vocation to receive the title "Son of God", a title signifying unity in vocation, not essence!

PARENTHESIS: An outgrowth of Ritschl's teachings on the kingdom was that of Adolph von Harnack and Wilhelm Hermann. This extension of Ritschl sought to find revelation history (man gaining insight into himself!) and developed the "Kernel," the essence of Christianity (i.e., the truth of the Bible covered over with Hellenism and Mythology). To Harnack, Christ was not unique as to his person, but in that he exemplified the principles of the Kingdom (Son of God = knowledge of God, divinity = filial vocation). He stressed the religion of Jesus (what he lived and taught) not the religion about Jesus. The religion of Jesus and his "disciples of progress" was an ethical, moral kingdom.

N.B. This same line of thought (i.e., existentialism, the Kerygma) is clearly evident in Rudolph Bultmann (1884–1976), who attempted to demythologize the Bible.

N.B. The "History of Religions School" was lead by Wilhelm Bousett (1865–1920), who wrote the influential *Kyrios Christos* in 1913. The school, more radical than the Ritschlian, taught that the New Testament was the product of syncretism. The

historical Jesus is perceived as a “creative miracle” in the midst of his ancient environment. The essence of Christianity is that which is the unifying kernel or commonality of all religions; it is not unique.

III. THE PERSON OF CHRIST AND KARL BARTH.

The positive influence of Barth has been alluded to previously relative to the doctrine of the Scriptures and Theology Proper. In both areas, and to varying degrees, Barth caused German theology to swing back toward the conservative spectrum. The question before us is how did Barth conceive of Christ on earth. Quite obviously with his view of the preincarnate Christ, his view of the Christ-man will be radically different from his immediate predecessors. In brief Barth wrote (*Dogmatics*. 1.2, 132): “We understand this statement as the answer to the question: Who is Jesus Christ; and we understand it as a description of the central New Testament statement, John 1:14: ‘The Word was made flesh.’ Therefore this New Testament verse must guide us in our discussion of the dogmatic statement that Jesus Christ is very God and very man.”

A. Barth and the Human Christ

Barth is abundantly clear that Christ, the eternal one, became flesh and dwelt among men. He wrote (*Dogmatics*. 1.2, 147): “That the Word was made ‘flesh’ means first and generally that He became man, true and real man, participating in the same human essence and existence, the same human nature and form, the same historicity that we have. God’s revelation to us takes place in such a way that everything ascribable to man, his creaturely existence as an individually unique unity of body and soul in the time between birth and death, can now be predicated of God’s eternal Son as well. According to the witness of the Evangelists and apostles everything miraculous about His being as a man derives its meaning and force from the fact that it concerns the true man Jesus Christ as a man like ourselves. This is true especially in the Easter story, the *evangelium quadraginta dierum*, as the supreme event of revelation. It is true of the sign of His birth of the Virgin at the beginning, and the sign of the empty tomb at the end of His historical existence. It is true of the signs and wonders already manifested between this beginning and end, which proclaim the Kingdom of God in its relation to the event of Easter. What in fact makes revelation, revelation, and miracle, miracle, is that the Word of God did actually become a real man and that therefore the life of this real man was the object and theater of the acts of God, the light of revelation entering the world.”

And again (1.2, 149): “The Word became flesh means primarily and of itself, then, that the Word became participant in human nature and existence. Human essence and existence became Him. Now since this cannot be real except in the concrete reality of one man, it must at once be said that He became a man. But precisely this concrete reality of a man, this man, is itself the work of the Word,

not His presupposition. It is not (in the adoptionist sense) as if first of all there had been a man there, and then the Son of God, and as the presupposition of His work, was simply the potentiality of being in the flesh, being as a man. This is the possibility of every man. And here—for the individuality and uniqueness of human existence belong to the concept of human essence and existence—it is the one specific possibility of the first son of Mary. The Word appropriated this possibility to Himself as His own, and He realized it as such when He became Jesus. In so doing He did not cease to be what He was before, but He became what He was not before, a man, this man.”

B. Barth and the God-man

Barth conceives of Christ in the Orthodox form of the Chalcedonian creed. Christ is at once God and man in unity of a single person. He wrote (*Dogmatics*. 1.2, 160-61): “If we paraphrase the statement ‘the Word became flesh by ‘the Word assumed flesh,’ we guard against the misinterpretation already mentioned, that in the incarnation the Word ceases to be entirely Himself and equal to Himself, i.e., in the full sense of Word of God. God cannot cease to be God. The incarnation is inconceivable, but it is not absurd, and it must not be explained as an absurdity. The inconceivable fact in it is that without ceasing to be God the Word of God is among us in such a way that He takes over human being, which is His creature, into His own being and to that extent makes it His own being. As His own predicate along with His original predicate of divinity, He takes over human being into unity with Himself. And it is by the paraphrase, ‘the Word assumed flesh’ that in the incarnation, by means of a union of divine and human being and nature, a third is supposed to arise. Jesus Christ as the Mediator between God and man is not a third, midway between the two. In that case God has at once ceased to be God and likewise, He is not a man like us. But Jesus is the Mediator, the God-Man, in such a way that He is God and Man. This ‘and’ is the inconceivable act of the ‘becoming’ in the incarnation. It is not the act of the human being and nature. How can it be capable of such an act? Nor it is the act either of the divine being and nature as such. It is not the divine nature that acts where God acts. but it is the triune God in His divine nature, One in the three modes of existence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, too, in this assumption of human being by the eternal Word. He, the eternal Word, in virtue of His own will and power as well as in virtue of the will and power of Father and Holy Spirit, becomes flesh. The unity into which the human nature is assumed is thus unity with the Word, and only to that extent—because this Word is the eternal Word—the union of the human with the divine nature. But the eternal Word is with the Father and the Holy Spirit the unchangeable God Himself and so incapable of any change or admixture. Unity with Him, the ‘becoming’ of the Word, cannot therefore mean the origination of a third between Word and flesh, but only the assumption of the flesh by the Word.”

PARENTHESIS:

1. **Barth and Impeccability.** He wrote (*Dogmatics*. I.2, 156): “That God sent His own son *en homoiomati sarkos hamartias* is at once explained in Romans 8:3 by *peri hamartias*, i.e., for sin, in matters of sin and so not in order to do sin Himself; and then the main clause unambiguously declares that *katekrinen (ho theos) ten hamartian en ti sarki*. That is, in the likeness of flesh (unholy flesh, marked by sin), there happens the unlike, the new and helpful thing, that sin is condemned by not being committed, by being omitted, by full obedience now being found in the very place where otherwise sin necessarily and irresistibly takes place. The meaning of the incarnation is that now in the flesh that is not done which all flesh does. ‘He hath made him to be sin for us’ (2 Cor. 5:21) does not mean that He made Him a man who also sins again—what could that signify ‘for us’?—but that He put Him in the position of a sinner by way of exchange (*katallasson*), in the sense of the Old Testament sin-offering). But whom did He put in that position? *ton my hunonta hamartian*. Because this man who knew no sin is ‘made to be sin.’ This ‘making’ signifies the act of a divine offering *peri hamartias*, *huper hymon*, judgment upon sin, its removal.”

2. **Barth and the Virgin Birth.** Barth affirms the virgin birth in a chapter called “The miracle of Christmas.” He inseparably links as historic events the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection (*Dogmatics*. 1. 2, 182): “Now it is no accident that for us the Virgin Birth is paralleled by the miracle of which the Easter witness speaks, the miracle of the empty tomb. These two miracles belong together. They constitute, as it were, a single sign, the special function of which, compared with other signs and wonders of the New Testament witness, is to describe and mark out the existence of Jesus Christ, amid the many other existences in human history, as that human historical existence in which God is Himself, God is alone, God is directly the Subject, the temporal reality of which is not only called forth, created, conditioned and supported by the eternal reality of God, but is identical with it. The Virgin Birth at the opening and the empty tomb at the close of Jesus’ life bear witness that this life is a fact marked off in the first instance, not by our understanding or our interpretation, but by itself. Marked off in regard to its origin: it is free of the arbitrariness which underlies all our existences. And marked off in regard to its goal: it is victorious over the death to which we are all liable. Only within these limits is it what it is and is it correctly understood, as the mystery of the revelation of God. It is to that mystery that these limits point—he who ignores them or wishes them away must see to it that he is not thinking of something quite different from this.”

After a lengthy defense of the phrase “conceived by the Holy Spirit” he concluded (*Dogmatics*. 1.2, 202): “Here, as so often, it is not true that such statements by early dogmatists are the products of an idle and irrelevant scholastic cleverness. Rather is it the case that in these statements an attempt is made at a spiritual understanding of the spiritual; and no one who at this particular point takes the

trouble seriously to think himself into the task set him will deny that in the decisive issue this was the right line to take. In conclusion, let us remember that it is particularly this positive factor in the miracle, expressed in the *conceptus de Spiritu sancto*, that belongs to the sign of the miracle of Christmas which the dogma aims at stressing. Noetically, i.e., for us to whom this sign is given, who have to recognize it in and by this sign, the fact that Jesus Christ is the son of God come in the flesh stands or falls with the truth of the *conceptio de Spiritu sancto*. But it could not be said that ontically, in itself, the mystery of Christmas stands or falls with this dogma. The man Jesus of Nazareth is not the true son of God because He was conceived by the Holy spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. On the contrary, because He is the true Son of God and because this is an inconceivable mystery intended to be acknowledged as such, therefore He is conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. and because He is thus conceived and born, He has to be recognized and acknowledged as the One He is and in the mystery in which He is the One He is.”

N.B. Again, Barth reveals himself to be remarkably orthodox concerning our Lord; indeed, his chapters on Christ are particularly devotion—cf. God with Us (*Dogmatics*. 4.1, 13). Christ is not the “man” with “feeling” for God and God’s kingdom plans; He is the incarnate God, the God-man. We leave Barth (with hesitation) by quoting a remarkable paragraph (*Dogmatics*. 1. 2, 158): “This is the revelation of God in Christ. For where man admits his lost state and lives entirely by God’s mercy—which no man did, but only the God-Man Jesus Christ has done—God Himself is manifest. And by that God reconciled the world to Himself. For where man claims no right for himself, but concedes all rights to God alone—which no man did, but only the God-Man Jesus Christ has done—the world is drawn out of its enmity toward God and reconciled to God.”

IV. THE PERSON OF CHRIST AND THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN THEOLOGAINS.

The German theology of the nineteenth century has been reproduced in the United States in Classic Liberalism (1890–1930) and Neo-Liberalism (1930–60) with little, if any, change in Christology. This section will therefore focus on the Person of Christ in the “Radical Theologies” of the 1960s which are a product of post-Bultmannianism. Bultmann’s thought was not popular in the U.S. until after his death, then only in radical forms.

A. Tillich and “The Theology of Being”

Paul Tillich (1886–1965) referred to “Jesus as the Christ,” but rejected the term “Jesus Christ”; he prefers to think of the “anointed one,” who became Christ. He rejects the term “divine nature” when applied to Christ; for Christ, unlike God, is

not beyond essence and existence. He simply redefines theological terms to create a god-adopted man. McKelway wrote (*Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*, 165-66): “In the place of asserting the unity of divine and human natures in Christ, Tillich prefers the assertion that in him ‘the eternal unity of god and man has become historical reality.’ He is the ‘re-established unity between God and man.’ The concept ‘the divine nature’ in him is replaced by the concept of ‘eternal God-man-unity.’ This way of expressing the matter, Tillich argues, replaces a static essence with a dynamic relationship. And instead of ‘human nature,’ we must speak of the Christ as ‘essential man.’ ‘It is essential man who represents not only man to man but God to man; for essential man . . . represents the original image of God embodied in man.’”

Tillich believes that ‘abstract definitions of the nature of this unity are . . . impossible.’ However, he understands that two concepts are given in the New Testament which point toward a correct interpretation of it. The first is ‘adoption,’ which is already evident in his phrase ‘Jesus as the Christ,’ and the second is ‘incarnation.’ The concept of adoption is necessary, Tillich maintains because, if the eternal unity of God and man is actualized in existence, it can be so only through an act of finite freedom. God chooses to ‘adopt’ the man Jesus as the Christ, and Jesus chooses to accept his adoption through obedience. However, this free choice is not contingent—it is destined; and this unity actualized in Jesus as the Christ is the finite—it is eternal. Therefore, it is also necessary to speak of the incarnation. But if this word is used (and Tillich is doubtful about its usefulness), it must be kept clear that it is an expression of the eternal character of the relationship found in this man. It seeks to ‘express the paradox that he who transcends the universe appears in it and under its conditions.’”

The assertion is that the term “God-man is a nonsensical statement because it cannot mean what it says (“a mythology of metamorphosis”). McKelway wrote (*Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*, 168): “Tillich has not said, nor will he say with the ‘incarnational’ Christologies of Nicaea and Chalcedon, that Jesus was ‘truly God and truly Man.’ No, it is the adoptionist position to which he holds with greater consistency. God chose Jesus, Jesus became the Christ.”

B. Whitehead and “Process Theology”

Process Theology, which finds its philosophic roots in Alfred N. Whitehead’s belief that reality is creativity, becoming. This wave was carried into the theological realm by Charles Hartshorne. Process Theology places stress on Jesus’ uniqueness, but in such a way to reject historic Orthodoxy. Christ has a unique relationship to God. According to Norman Pittenger (*The Last Things*, 12): [It is] not [a] mechanical union in which the godhead and manhood, or God and that man, are stuck together in some less than personal manner. It is to be conceived after the analogy of personal union such as we know in, say, human marriage I realize that this analogy is Antiochene . . . in its tendency as well

as in its suggestion of the mode of relationship. Nonetheless it does express admirably the reality in view: that the union of God and man in Jesus is more like what we know of personal relationship . . . than it is like anything else.”

Christ is a mere man who was given a “subjective aim,” that is to realize himself. Christ has union with men by virtue of the accomplishment of the “aim.” Pittenger notes (*“The Last Things”*, 119): “Let us not ask whether or not Jesus was sinless. Let us ask if we have sufficient material in the gospels to assure us that in them was remembered and reported by the primitive Christian Church there was an outgoing active, and creative goodness.”

Using Ritschlian terms, Pittenger wrote (*“The Last Things”*, 124): “The greatest single factor in determining that speciality is the way in which, with a high degree of awareness of what was going on, the man Jesus as the center of the event accepted his vocation, made his decision and his subsequent decision, and set about fulfilling the aim which was his own.”

N.B. Again, this is a return to the Jesus of the nineteenth century!

V. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to delineate the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century concept of the person of our Christ. The Germans of the previous century retreated into an “adoptionistic” posture as had the “Radical Theologians” of America. Christ is merely a god-intoxicated, and hence elevated, ideal of the temporal and eschatological hopes (“feelings”) of the theologian and philosopher. He is a man who has achieved and the example of the hopes of a struggling humanity. Karl Barth is a gasp of rarified theological air in the interim betwixt the centuries defending Chalcedon, a sinless God-man, and an objective Virgin Birth. Modern theologians have lost the Christ of the Bible by misappropriating and misapplying the rationalistic hermeneutic of the post-Kantian world.