

A Review of Bible Writers' Theology by Teklemariam

by William Chalfant

This paper is presented to refute the divine flesh doctrine presented in Teklemariam's book, Bible Writer's Theology.

*"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifested in the flesh...." 1 Timothy 3:16*

Introductory Note:

The book *Bible Writers' Theology* by Teklemariam Gezahagne came to my notice when I received a copy in the mail. I had read Brother Teklemariam's first work, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, some years ago and was impressed with the author's zeal and love for the Lord Jesus Christ. I was also impressed with his knowledge of the Scriptures. One cannot be but awed by the tremendous accomplishments of this man in the reports of great revival coming out of the ancient land of Ethiopia. Certainly Psalms 68:31 has come to pass, that "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." What a great role Brother Teklemariam Gezahagne has played in the fulfilling of that prophecy!

A Synopsis of the Book, *Bible Writers' Theology*:

Teklemariam's book contains ten chapters, which cover the following areas of study: 1. The Necessity of Biblical Theology; 2. Existence of God; 3. Bibliology; 4. The Oneness of God; 5. Anthropology-The Origin of Man; 6. Angelology; 7. Christology; 8. Soteriology; 9. Ecclesiology-The Church; and 10. Eschatology.

The scope of this book is very broad and represents a tremendous amount of study. It is sprinkled with hundreds of scriptures and other quotations and references. Since it is impossible to do justice in reviewing such a large study without narrowing the scope of the inquiry, in this review it is my intention to concentrate on two areas: Christology and the Oneness of God.

A Look at Christology and the Oneness of God:

It was Rufus Jones who observed that no one “could deal profoundly with the problem of Christ’s nature without being regarded a heretic from one side or the other” (*The Church’s Debt To Heretics*, 1924). This is a concern that should be seriously considered. We are told in the Scriptures that “God...manifest in the flesh” is a great mystery, and indeed, anyone who tackles this “great mystery” runs the risk of being misunderstood. It is my belief that some of what Brother Teklemariam has written is going to be misunderstood and misconstrued. For my part, I sincerely wish to avoid misconstruing what this talented man has said in my review of his book. If I have done so in any way, I offer my deepest apologies and wish for the record to be set straight forthwith.

Let me begin by saying that Brother Teklemariam’s approach has left the strong impression that he does not consider the Lord’s humanity to be genuine—at least in the sense that Jesus was a full fledged member of the Adamic race. Without a doubt, he has rejected the teaching that Mary contributed anything to the Incarnation or that Jesus is biologically descended from Adam, Abraham, and David through Mary.

What is the evidence that Brother Teklemariam does not accept the genuine humanity of the Lord? We will examine some of the statements made in *Bible Writers’ Theology* to demonstrate why we would come to such a conclusion.

The View of Teklemariam Has Similarities to the Christological Model of Apollinaris:

In his book *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Philip Schaff stated that the ancient trinitarian teacher Apollinaris of Laodicea (310-390 AD) had a fear of teaching a “double personality” for Christ and so “fell into the error of a partial denial of His true humanity.” Even though Apollinaris was a trinitarian and therefore espoused the incarnation of a second divine Person, his error concerning the humanity of Christ is uncannily mirrored in the Christology of Brother Teklemariam.

Schaff notes that Apollinaris “wished to secure an organic unity of the true incarnation.” He did this, however, “at the expense of the most important constituent of man.” Apollinaris attributed to the man Jesus a human body (*soma*), and a human soul (*psuche*), but he believed that Christ did not have a human spirit (*pneuma*). Instead, Apollinaris said that the divine Logos replaced the human spirit in Christ.

It was Schaff’s view that the Christology of Apollinaris approached the idea of a

theos sarkophorus (a “God-bearing flesh”). The Antiochenes, such as Nestorius (c.381-451 AD), who was a little later, held to an *anthropos theophorus* (a “God-bearing man”). Unfortunately, Nestorius, saddled with the trinitarian view, also held to the incarnation of a second divine Person instead of God the Father. But the Christological model of Apollinaris bears similarities to that of Brother Teklemariam. We will see why.

Both Apollinaris and Teklemariam Restrict the Use of the Word “Flesh” in John 1:14:

Apollinaris appealed to John 1:14, which states that “the Word was made flesh.” He argued that the Bible did not say that the “Word was made spirit.” By this argument, Apollinaris was contending that the man Jesus did not have a human spirit, since the Scriptures do not specifically state that the “Word was made spirit,” but rather that “the Word was made flesh (*sarx*).” Both the Greek *sarx* and the Hebrew *basar* (or *besar*) can mean either “the substance of the body,” “man,” or “mankind” (e.g. “all flesh,” “no flesh”).

David said in Psalms 56:4, “I will not fear what flesh (*basar*) can do unto me.” In Daniel 2:11, the Chaldeans are reported to have answered king Nebuchadnezzar, “There is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh (*basar*).” Jesus used the word “flesh” (*sarx*) in the same manner in Matthew 24:22, “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh (*sarx*) be saved.” It is obvious in John 1:14 that “flesh” can refer to the entire man rather than merely “the substance of the body.” What John was telling us was not that the Word had become a body, but that the Word had become man.

Those trinitarians who opposed the view of Apollinaris in the fourth century were quick to point out that he was restricting the use of the term *sarx* in John 1:14 in order to deprive the Jesus of his Christological model of a human spirit. But if we take away the human spirit from Jesus we also take away His humanity. A man is not a genuine human being unless he possesses a genuine human spirit.

Both Apollinaris and Teklemariam Believe They Are Defending the Divinity of Christ by Denying His Genuine Humanity:

Apollinaris thought he was defending the divinity of Christ by excluding from Him an integral part of genuine humanity. It is noteworthy that Brother

Teklemariam feels the same way. In his *Bible Writers' Theology*, Teklemariam states:

However, according to the human reasoning of some, Jesus is an ordinary man of earthly flesh and blood with His own independent human spirit. Considering such an explanation, the oneness of God would actually be two persons: the Father, who has an independent personality, and Christ, with His own independent personality (p.120).

Nowhere does the Bible teach that Christ is a **separate** divine or a **separate** human person from the person of God the Father. And if Christ can have flesh and blood, why can He not also have a human spirit and a human soul? Jesus Christ is said to be the “express image of his (God the Father’s) person (Hebrews 1:3). The Greek word for “person” is normally *prosopon*, but in this verse the word used is *hypostasis*, which means “being,” “underlying reality,” or “subsistence.”

In two other passages (2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15), Christ is referred to as “the image of (the invisible) God.” Jesus Christ is God Himself manifest in the flesh (which is a full and genuine human being). The man Christ Jesus, as the image of the invisible God, is no more a separate person than a man’s image in a mirror would be a separate person from the man. This is the mystery of the Incarnation.

In Brother Teklemariam’s statement above, the words “an ordinary man” describe the position, as he would have it, of those who hold that Jesus possessed a genuine human spirit, which, according to Brother Teklemariam, would be “His own independent human spirit.” It is not necessary, however, to conclude that Jesus was simply an “ordinary man of earthly flesh and blood” from the fact that He had a genuine human spirit. No “ordinary man” has ever been born of a virgin. No “ordinary man” has ever been God Himself manifest in the flesh. It is, therefore, an erroneous conclusion that since Christ had a genuine human spirit, He must therefore be an “ordinary” man.

The Word “Independent” must Be Carefully Qualified in Describing the Man Jesus:

In describing the man Jesus, the word “independent” must be carefully qualified. Brother Teklemariam indicates that it makes Jesus a “separate person” from God the Father. But it is clearly evident, for example, that Jesus possessed a human will, since He yielded that will (*thelema*) in the Garden of Gethsemane to the Spirit (God the Father). He said, “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Certainly His human will was ever yielded to the will of the Spirit,

but this verse shows that he indeed possessed a human will other than the will of God.

The independence of the man Jesus is seen by virtue of His genuine humanity, but His humanity is completely subservient to, and submitted to, the Spirit. Yet for any genuine sacrifice to be acceptable to God, the victim, like Isaac, had to be willing. Jesus said of His human life, “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself...This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:18).

Jesus said, “I do always those things that please him (the Father)” (John 8:29). But 11 verses later, He said to the Jews, “But now ye seek to kill me, a man (*anthropos*) that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God” (John 8:40). The Greek word *anthropos* means a male human being, a man. Jesus was a genuine member of the human family. Although His flesh was holy (Luke 1:35), He did not possess “divine” flesh during the “days of His flesh.” Else how could he have been a proper sacrifice?

Brother Teklemariam writes, “The Bible says, ‘God was manifested in the flesh.’ It does not say God was manifested in an independent man” (p.121).

Again, this statement is very reminiscent of the position of Apollinaris, which was that the word “flesh” in John 1:14 means “the substance of the body” and not a “whole man.” This is a key point. Brother Teklemariam has misinterpreted John 1:14 to mean only “the substance of the body,” in a very restricted use of the word “flesh” (*sarx*). But it was a complete human baby that God conceived in the womb of Mary; not just a body.

There Are Similarities to the Arian Viewpoint of a Separate Pre-existent “Word-image” in Teklemariam’s View of the Word (Logos):

Teklemariam seems to hold that the Word had a personal, pre-existent subsistence with the Father, which is actually a form of Arianism. He writes:

The Word of God that came from heaven became flesh leaving His richness. His glorious existence within the Father, and being the Word of life, was changed to be man for the sake of us all. Not only did he become man, but He was born in poor circumstances and lived a poor life... (p.105).

The phrase “His glorious existence within the Father, and being the Word of life” indicates that Brother Teklemariam believes the Word had an a **personal, pre-**

existent subsistence **with** the Father, since He says, “His glorious existence **within** the Father.” This seems to uphold the incorrect trinitarian interpretation of John 17:5. He then says, “being the Word of life, was **changed** to be a man,” indicating that a separate Person was actually “changed to be a man” in the process of the Incarnation. It is true that in other places in his book Brother Teklemariam denies that he believes the Word to be a separate Person from the Father. Unfortunately his terminology is, at the least, confusing.

There are other examples of this type of an Arian-like viewpoint of a pre-existent personal “Word-Image.” For example:

This scripture (John 17:3) openly declares to us that there is only one true God and His Son, the Word that became flesh, being the express image of His person (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:2-3). The Bible clearly teaches us that the Word of God which was from the beginning with God was made flesh. Through the incarnation, the Father became Emmanuel. God is now, spirit, blood and flesh, or we can say, He is now God-man (Matthew 1:20-23; Luke 1:34.35; 1 Timothy 3.16).

I am personally uncomfortable with the term “God-man” (*theandrotos*), since it has a trinitarian sound to it (although I know that many teachers use it in the correct sense in their interpretation of the Incarnation). But it nevertheless has the flavor of a “mixing” of humanity and divinity that seems to “disrespect” the divinity of the Lord, and the inviolability of the Spirit. “God-man” would be like “half-God and half-man,” which is an unacceptable concept in describing the Incarnation.

Teklemariam comes close to Arianizing, when he writes, “God from the beginning has His own Word as His invisible image” (p.123). Here he identifies a personified being, pre-existing as God the Father, yet nevertheless still differentiated from God the Father. In my opinion, this differentiation could lead to misunderstandings about the strict monotheism in the Word of God. This is how the Logos became the platform upon which the trinitarian teaching was launched.

Teklemariam maintains that this Word-Image (the Word of God) “walked in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8). Moses, according to Brother Teklemariam, “thought that God was known only by His voice” (Deut. 4:12-23) (p. 123).

Teklemariam then quotes Hebrews 1:2-3 in support of this Word-Image theory: “...by whom also He made the worlds.” He is here assuming that the Word was a pre-existent Image **before** the Word was made flesh. This is fraught with

dangerous overtones in that the concept of a pre-existent Word-Image smacks of Arianism, since Arius taught that Christ existed before the ages as a Creator, a “second god.” Now Brother Teklemariam would undoubtedly reject any suggestion of such thinking or such conclusions, but the idea of a pre-existing Word-Image inevitably leads to such thinking. This thinking appears repeatedly in *Bible Writers’ Theology*: For example, Brother Teklemariam writes:

In Philippians 2:5-9, the Apostle Paul was not speaking about God the Father nor yet about the so-called “God the Son.” In writing to the church at Philippi, he revealed that “the Word that became flesh” was equal to (the same as) the Father before it became flesh. He was the Word of God from eternity (Micah 5:2-4), but when the Word of God (the offspring of God) was made flesh in the womb of Mary and was born as the Son of God, only then did God become Immanuel (p.124).

The Correct Interpretation of Philippians 2.5-9 Does Not Demonstrate a Pre-existent “Personalized” Word “Equal” with God the Father:

A proper interpretation of Philippians 2:5-9 will demonstrate that Paul was not expressing a “kenotic” theory at all (i.e. a divine Person emptying himself of His divine prerogatives up in heaven and coming down in an incarnation), but rather, Paul was revealing the depth of the humility of God Almighty, who was already manifest in the flesh. It is vitally important to note that Philippians 2:5-9 covers the “days of his flesh,” not some pre-existent period of glory.

Paul starts off in verse 5 exhorting, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” This is clearly speaking of Jesus in His “incarnate state,” “the days of his flesh.” Paul is not describing some second divine Person up in heaven getting ready to become incarnated! It is Christ, born of Mary already, who had “the mind of God.”

Philippians 2:6 makes it even clearer. “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” Here the phrase *morphe theou* (“form of God”) cannot be speaking of some pre-existent condition, but to the actual incarnated state itself. John 5:18 clearly explains this passage. In this verse, the Jews were angry with the man Jesus “because he had not only broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.” Equality with God is predicated on the incarnation state, the Son’s claim that God was His Father. As the image of God, born of a virgin, Jesus of Nazareth was “in the form of God” (*morphe theou*).

Vine's Dictionary makes much of the fact that the Greek word *isos* is in the neuter plural and should be translated “on an equality with God”(p. 205). But the context of the entire passage must override the idiosyncratic grammar of one word.

In the context of the Incarnation itself (and not from a pre-existent heavenly sphere), Philippians 2:7 is easily understood. “But made himself of no reputation.” He “emptied Himself” here upon the earth for our sakes and “took upon him the form of a servant.” Isn’t it odd that those who espouse the kenotic theory wish to make the word *morphe* (“form”) in verse 6 to have a higher meaning than the very same word in verse 7? W. E. Vine waxes eloquent concerning the noun *morphe* in Philippians 2:6, quoting Gifford as saying:

Thus in the passage before us *morphe theou* is the divine nature actually and inseparably subsisting in the Person of Christ...for the interpretation of the ‘form of God’ it is sufficient to say that...it includes the whole nature and essence of Deity, and is inseparable from them (sic), since they (sic) could have no actual existence without it...it does not include in itself anything ‘accidental’ or separable, such as particular modes of manifestation, or conditions of glory and majesty....

One can readily see that no such claims are made for the very same noun (*morphe*) used in the very next verse 7 (*morphen doulou*). Nor are any such claims concerning the broad, original meanings of the noun *morphe* made about its use concerning Christ in Mark 16:12, where the risen Christ appears to His disciples “in another form” (*en hetera morphe*). It is clear that the word has no such esoteric meanings as “nature” or “essence” as some have proposed in order to make their point.

This extreme divergence of application seems only “appropriate” if one accepts the kenotic theory of a separate, pre-existent divine Being, emptying Himself of His divine prerogatives in heaven, and then coming down into the sphere of the Incarnation as a human being. On the other hand, if Paul is speaking only of what Christ did for us within the sphere of the Incarnation, then this passage makes sense. Then we realize the truth that God never laid aside any divine prerogatives in heaven, although He purposely exercised them in a limited sense within the context of the incarnate state. All the while He walked the earth on human feet, He continued to be God in heaven—omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent.

If verse 5, which says “this mind...which was also in Christ Jesus” (a reference to His humanity by placing the title of “Christ” first) immediately places us in the sphere of the Incarnation, then verse 6, which says “who thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” is likewise speaking of the Incarnation, as we saw in John 5:18. It follows then that such phrases as “made himself of no reputation,” “took

upon him the form of a servant,” and “was made in the likeness of men” are all within the sphere of the Incarnation, not a transition from the heavenly sphere to the sphere of the Incarnation.

The Jesus in Philippians 2:5-9 Is Exalted by God and Is Therefore the Man Christ Jesus:

We know that such phrases as “the death of the cross” refer to the incarnate state. And then verse 9 makes sense when it says, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.” The glorification of the man Christ Jesus attests to His humanity and to the sphere of the Incarnation. It has no reference to any heavenly “emptying” but rather, He “emptied Himself” right here on earth for our sakes. He gave everything He had for us. It is the humanity of Christ (the man Christ Jesus) which is exalted.

Therefore, Brother Teklemariam’s statement concerning Philippians 2:5-9 that Paul “revealed that ‘the Word that became flesh’ was equal to (the same as) the Father before it became flesh” simply follows the defunct kenotic theory, with the variation that he interprets “equal to” to mean “the same as.” However, as one can see, if you give any credence to a pre-incarnational “emptying” of a divine Being who is equal to God, then you give life to the possibility of a second divine Person. This is the trinitarian error.

On the other hand, one who is “God manifest in the flesh” would not think it robbery to be “equal with God.” For anyone else to think so would be the same as the rebellion of Lucifer. The only place where we can see that God manifested Himself in another nature is the Incarnation. This is the only place where “equality” would not be thought to be robbery. Hebrew 2:16 states, “For verily he took not on (him the nature of) angels; but he took on (him) the seed of Abraham”.

Teklemariam Incorrectly Calls the Word the Offspring of God. This Could Be Misinterpreted as Being an Arian Teaching:

In the above quote by Brother Teklemariam, he also spoke of the time when “the Word of God (the offspring of God) was made flesh in the womb of Mary.” One hopes that Teklemariam means that the baby born of Mary is “the offspring of God,” the actual Incarnation. However, his use of the phrase “the offspring of God” could be interpreted to indicate a pre-existent Word, which was the

“offspring of God.” This would undeniably comport with the teaching of the second century trinitarian apologists such as Justin, Athenagoras, and Irenaeus.

He Plainly Holds to a Pre-existent Word-image:

Teklemariam gets even plainer concerning his view of a pre-existent Word-Image when he states:

Let us remember that from eternity, the Word of God was the invisible image and form of God. From everlasting, God has Word and Spirit (breath of life) in His nature. Furthermore, whenever God acts, He breathes Spirit and emanates Word (Psalm 33:5-6) (p.127).

This is plain. Brother Teklemariam understands the Word to be the “invisible image and form of God” from “eternity.” He does not understand only the visible man Christ as the image of the invisible God, but rather the pre-existent Word is the “invisible image and form of God” from “eternity.” This goes profoundly beyond the Scriptures. In fact, it has the unmistakable taste of Arianism, coming uncomfortably close to formulating a second divine Person, all the while insisting that the Word is God.

This teaching presents an “invisible image” which later became “visible” at the Incarnation. Teklemariam states, “When the invisible ‘person’ of God was made flesh, He became a Son but still remained the God of Israel” (p.117). And, “Before the great God was made flesh, he was the angel ‘person’ of God, not Son.” An “angel person” of God? In this manner, Brother Teklemariam comes extraordinarily close to creating a second pre-existent divine Person contrary to the strict monotheism of the Bible.

This Idea of a Pre-existent Personified “Word-image” Also Causes a Misinterpretation of Genesis 1 and 2:

This pre-existent “Word-Image” produces a serious philosophical “misunderstanding” of the Genesis 1:26-27 account of how man was created in the “image and likeness” of God. The perilous thing about this theory of a pre-existing “image” is that, when carried to its full conclusion, it is the actual ground and seed of the trinity doctrine. Following such teachers as Philo, the trinitarian philosophers postulated the Logos as the “image of God.” But the New Testament teaches that the man Jesus is the “image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; and Hebrews 1:2-3). Jesus said, “He that seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Teklemariam believes that there is a difference in the “creation” of man in Genesis 1:27 and the “making” of man in Genesis 2:7. He writes:

Genesis 1:27 clearly teaches us that God created the future spiritual Adam in His spiritual image (*tselem*) by predestination (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4-11). Accordingly, in Genesis 2:7 we see God creating the outer man from the dust of the ground in His likeness (*demuth*), which is not the same as “image” in the Hebrew translation. ‘Tselem’ speaks of the spiritual likeness while ‘Demuth’ speaks of the appearance likeness. ‘Demuth’ or “likeness” limits man from the divine nature (p.135).

This interpretation is not born out in the Scriptures. If Genesis 1:27 refers to the “future spiritual Adam,” assuming that Brother Teklemariam means the new creation of those who have received the New Birth through “predestination,” then why does Genesis 1:27 say that they (“male and female”) were created in “his own image”? God instructs these very same creatures to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (fill) the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). Is it not true that the same man and woman created in Genesis 1:27 are described in Genesis 2:7 and 2:22? 1 Thessalonians 5:23 tells us that man possesses “spirit, soul, and body”.

Both the “outward man” (the “tabernacle,” as Peter says) and the “inward man” (as Paul says) are created in the image of God. In other words, the entire man. God is a Spirit (John 4:24). But He knew that He would one day appear in the flesh as the man, Christ Jesus. The first Adam was a type and shadow of the Great Adam who was to come, Jesus Christ.

The Origin of Christ’s Flesh:

Brother Teklemariam is very adamant about his belief that the flesh of Jesus Christ was in no way derived from the virgin Mary, writing:

If Christ is the same with the Father, we dare not say that the Son of God was the flesh of Mary, for it was the Word of God that was active in creation. Can we say that the Word that became flesh is the Father? (p.124)

It seems as though Brother Teklemariam is determined to systematically negate all traces of the Lord’s genuine humanity. His efforts center around a three theories which he holds to tenaciously:

1. That Christ derived nothing from the virgin Mary. She was apparently only a “surrogate mother” or an “incubator.” In fact, according to Brother

Teklemariam, Christ did not even consider her to be His mother (p.130).

2. That Christ is neither the actual seed of David or Abraham and that all such references to “seed” (starting with the prophecy in Genesis 3:15) are merely “figurative” (p.108).
3. That Christ has never been (even in the days of His flesh) “a little lower than the angels.”

Let’s examine these theories.

Is the Virgin Mary “Dry Ground”?

Isaiah 53:2 states, “For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground.” Brother Teklemariam maintains that since Mary is described as “dry ground,” that means she is “biologically dry ground,” from which “seed by itself cannot produce life” (p.136). But no apostle or New Testament writer ever compared the youthful and righteous virgin Mary to “dry ground.” Clearly the “dry ground” represented Judaism, which had not heard prophetically from God for 400 years.

Gabriel told Mary, “Thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women...Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son” (Luke 1:28, 31). When the pregnant Mary came into the presence of Elizabeth, this woman, full of the Holy Ghost, said, “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Luke 1:42). This is not a Catholic saying; it is the Word of God.

Should we say “the fruit of dry ground.” Even if we were to call this young teenager “dry ground,” could we say that the “root out of dry ground” took nothing from the ground in which it grew up? Elizabeth calls Jesus “the fruit of (Mary’s) womb.” This is under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

According to Teklemariam, Mary represents the Church, which by itself cannot produce life. He writes, “Mary is a type of the church; she is representative of the body of Christ by giving birth to Christ” (p.136). However, it is more likely that Mary is a type of Israel, since Christ Himself gave birth to the New Testament church, of which Mary became a part. Revelation 12:5 shows that it is “Israel” which gave birth to the Man-child. If the Man-child represents Jesus, who is to rule the nations with a “rod of iron” and has been caught up to God and to His throne (Acts 1:11), then the Church did not produce Jesus! Jesus is rather the One who produced the Church.

What Kind of Flesh Did Jesus Have?

Teklemariam states, “No one can prove the biological relationship of Christ with Mary’s flesh and blood” (p.123). In another place, he asserts, “God will not mingle his holy divine nature with sinful humanity” (p.129). But I am reminded of a scripture which says, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). Now I do not mean to imply by this that there was any “mingling” of the two natures. He “partook” of flesh and blood, and He “took upon him the seed of Abraham.” The Bible does not say “mingled” the two natures.

And so the very purpose of the Incarnation is brought into question. We must therefore ask: If the biological “link” to Mary is broken, and if God did not really enter into the human family (there being no “biological link”), then do we really have a proper substitute for Adam and a genuine sacrifice for the sins of man? Are we to believe that a “divine man” gave His life on the cross? This is the doctrine of the docetists of the second century, who taught that Jesus was not a genuine human being. If Jesus is not genuinely human, then we are faced with docetism, a doctrine that eventually leads to the conclusion that Jesus did not really suffer and die (as a genuine human being would).

The Baby Born of Mary Is Called a “Holy Thing” in the Scriptures, Indicating a Genuine Human Being:

Let us examine Luke 1:35: “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing (*hagion*) which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

Teklemariam translates this passage differently by saying, “Therefore, also, that **Holy One** who is to be born shall be called the Son of God.” However, the Greek text of Stephens (1550 AD) uses the noun *hagion*, which is in the neuter gender and must be translated “holy thing” (as it is in the Authorized Version). Some may ask, so what’s the difference? It is this: *hagion* lends itself to the humanity of Christ. Moreover, the word “holy” can be used of a human being or the phrase “Holy One” can also be used of either a human being or the Spirit of God. It was not the Spirit, however, who was born of the teenage virgin, but rather a genuine human being. That is why the angel qualified the word *hagion*, saying, “That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” Mary did not give birth to the Word, but to a breathing human baby. It is that human baby which is called by the angel “the Son of God.”

Ancient Catholic Writers Struggled over the Interpretation of the Incarnation:

Trinitarian Catholic writers struggled for several centuries to explain the Incarnation. Of course, they never departed from their fatal initial error of incorrectly assuming that another (second) divine Person was incarnated in the man Jesus. Epiphanius (315-403 AD), bishop of Salamis, had this to say about the Incarnation:

“(He) was made man, that is to say a perfect man, receiving a soul, and body and intellect, and all that made up a man, but taking flesh unto himself into one holy entity...was perfectly made man, for the Word was made flesh; neither did He experience any change, nor did he convert His divine nature into the nature of man, but united it to His one holy perfection and divinity” (*The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. Eerdmans, 1983)

Notice that Epiphanius was not allowing the Word to be used in the sense of God speaking the baby into existence in the womb of the virgin, but rather in the sense of a pre-existent divine Person, who united “the nature of man” to “His one holy perfection and divinity.” With Brother Teklemariam’s doctrine, however, there is this difference: The Word is considered a divine Person, but rather than “uniting” the nature of man to His “one holy perfection and divinity,” the Word is somehow changed or converted into holy flesh, without any contribution from the virgin.

Nestorius (381-451 AD), another early Catholic theologian who served as the bishop of Constantinople, did not see a real union of the two natures in Christ. To him, there was only a “moral” union between the Word and the human. He considered Jesus to be a “mere human being in whom the Son of God was present as in a house.” There was a *synatheia* (“conjunction”) of the two natures, but not a real *henosis* (“union”), an *enoikesis* (“indwelling”) of the man Jesus by the Word. While Nestorius believed that Christ was “morally” one Person, he believed that in reality there were “two persons” and that a “strict distinction” had to be made between the two (persons).

Nestorius believed therefore that Mary was not *theotokos* (“the mother of God”), but only the mother of the man Jesus. It was not “the Son of God” (whom he held to be the second divine Person) or the Logos (Word) who died on the cross, but rather the man Jesus.

Nestorius’ great opponent, Bishop Cyril of Alexander (d.444 AD), rejected the idea that the Word “united a (human) person to Himself, but that (instead) the Word was made flesh.” But unlike Brother Teklemariam, he held that Hebrews

2:14 (which states that God partook of flesh and blood) means that there was a real union of the two natures in the virgin Mary at the moment of Incarnation.

Teklemariam would apparently reply that the Word was actually made (divine) flesh, and that Hebrews 2:14 only refers in general to the partaking of flesh and blood. It does not, he would apparently argue, mean that the Lord actually partook of the specific flesh and blood of the virgin, but rather only generally “partook” of flesh and blood by becoming flesh (John 1.14).

Cyril, however, maintained that to reject the “union” of the two natures would produce “two Sons” (since trinitarians uphold a pre-existent divine Son also). There would be a divine Son, begotten from eternity, and a human Son, born in time, born of Mary. Since there are two genuine natures (unique deity and genuine humanity) involved, there must be a genuine union of the two natures. Both sides rejected a *krasis* (“mixing”) of the two natures. One side asserted that a true incarnation (“enfleshment”) could not have taken place without a real *henosis* (a mysterious “union” of the two natures), while the other side said a *henosis* was out of the question (although they allowed a “moral” *henosis*), saying that only a *synatheia* (“conjunction”) could have taken place. This would permit an *enoikesis* or an “indwelling” of the Son of God (the “second divine Person”) in the man Jesus, as a man “dwells in a house.”

Cyril believed this union of the Logos (the Word) and the human being took place in the womb of the virgin at conception. He wrote, “He was not first born a common man of the holy virgin, and then the Logos (the Word) came down and entered into Him.”

While Cyril believed in an indescribable union of the Logos (Word) with the flesh in the womb of the virgin, Nestorius believed that such a union would denigrate the pure humanity of Christ. He believed that the Logos, which he incorrectly held to be the second divine Person of the Trinity, indwelt the man Jesus, and that a loose union (which he preferred to call a “conjunction”) developed so that the two could be seen as one Person. The Logos “assumed” the flesh, but the man retained his own human personality. This was the teaching of the school of Antioch, heavily influenced by Theodore of Mopsuestia and, even earlier, to some degree by Paul of Samosata.

The trinitarians struggled with the mechanics of the Incarnation. Cyril, when confronted by the charge of “mixing” (advocating a *krasis* of the Word and the flesh), retracted his position, explaining that he meant a “union of natures” in Christ. By doing this, he cleared himself from charges of Apollinarianism.

Eutyches, like Brother Teklemariam, Claimed That the Flesh Conceived by the Virgin Was Not of Her Nature:

In the fifth century, an abbot in Constantinople caused such a stir that a council was convened at Chalcedon in 451 AD. The abbot, Eutyches, claimed that the flesh which the virgin conceived was not of her nature. A position which in some aspects is identical to that of Brother Teklemariam. Bishop Leo of Rome countered this proposition by stating:

It was the Holy Ghost which gave fecundity (fertility) to the virgin...It was from a body that a real body was derived...the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...in that flesh which He assumed from a human being, and which He animated with the spirit of rational life...He united the inviolable nature (divine) to the passible (human)...(He was) whole in what was His (the divine nature), whole in what was ours (human nature) (*Letter To Flavian, The Seven Ecumenical Councils*).

Eutyches was also condemned because he held that the Son pre-existed with both divine and human natures *before* the Incarnation (apparently in the divine foreknowledge of God). He insisted, however, that the Son later had only one nature and that the flesh born of the virgin was not of Mary's nature. The Catholics, on the other hand, maintained that Christ received human nature from Mary and divine nature because He was the second Person in the Trinity. They held that the two natures were not confused in the Incarnation, although they were united.

Brother Teklemariam also effectively denies the genuine human nature of Christ when he states: Christ was not a partaker of Mary's nature or blood. We must remember that Christ came to change her and all believers into His nature, not He to be changed to their nature (p.137).

He then lists four scriptures, which I wish to examine so that we might be fair to his argument. The scriptures listed in support of the above statement are: (1) Ephesians 5:30; (2) 2 Peter 1:1-4; (3) Romans 9:4-5; and (4) 1 Corinthians 15:39-50.

Teklemariam Apparently Confuses the Post-resurrection (Glorified) Flesh of Christ with His Pre-resurrection Mortal Flesh:

1. Ephesians 5:30 says, "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." This, of course, is referring to the glorified Christ (after the resurrection) and so has little reference to the "days of his flesh."

2. The significant phrase in 2 Peter 1:1-4 is, “partakers of the divine nature” (vv.4). Again, this is referring to the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the divine nature being that of Christ who is God. “Divine nature” refers to His deity and in no way takes away from His genuine humanity.
3. Romans 9:4-5 speaks of the Israelites, “of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.” This passage is a contrast between the deity of Christ (“God blessed forever”) and the humanity, which was derived from Israel by virtue of His conception in Mary, a direct descendent of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

All Flesh Is Not the Same Flesh—teklemariam Wants to Use this to Show That Christ Had Divine Flesh (Even in His Mortal State):

1 Corinthians 15:39-50. This passage seems to be central to Brother Teklemariam’s beliefs about the humanity of Christ. The initial thought by Paul is that “all flesh is not the same flesh.” By way of explanation he contrasts “celestial bodies” and “terrestrial bodies.” The conclusion by Brother Teklemariam seems to be that Christ did not have genuine human flesh (as a part of the human family through the Incarnation). But again, Paul brings up pre-resurrection flesh and post-resurrection flesh.

This is an extremely significant point which Teklemariam seems to miss. The man Jesus was glorified in the resurrection. It is almost as if Teklemariam wants to believe that there was no difference in the pre-resurrection, mortal body of Jesus and His glorified, post-resurrection, immortal body.

The four passages he uses for proof of his contention that Christ was not a partaker of Mary’s nature (that He did not have a genuine human nature) do not prove his point at all. Brother Teklemariam states that “the Word became genuine heavenly Man in the womb of Mary” (p.137). I might add that a “genuine heavenly Man” could not die, though a genuine mortal man could. This unfortunately has the very strong flavor of docetism, the gnostic teaching that Jesus did not have real mortal flesh such as we have.

Teklemariam Attacks the Validity and the Inspiration of Luke by Rejecting the Genealogy of Luke (And by Implication That of Matthew):

I do not know whether or not this was his intent, but Teklemariam has nevertheless attacked the inspiration of the Scriptures and the veracity of Luke by stating, “It is clear that to Luke, the long genealogy connecting Christ to Adam, was no more than prevailing Jewish tradition of his day” (p.139). In truth, no such thing is clear. In fact, why would Luke have bothered to provide the genealogy of Christ if he had not believed it to be important? The reason is that he understood the necessity of the sacrifice for sins being a real man. The genealogy verifies that the man Jesus was an actual descendent of Adam, *ben Adam*, the Son of Man.

Teklemariam’s reason for rejecting this seems to be twofold: (1) Luke uses the phrase “as was supposed” in Luke 3:23 (“Jesus...being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli...”). But Luke was not casting doubt upon the genealogy by using the phrase “as was supposed.” He was simply recognizing the virgin birth (Joseph was not Jesus’ actual father), though he was considered (or at least legally recognized) as such by the Jews. This does nothing to detract from the validity of the genealogy. When this genealogy is compared with the genealogy of recorded by Matthew in Matthew 1:1-16, we see that two different genealogies are given. The first is Joseph’s ancestry. In Matthew 1:16 we see that Jacob is the father of Joseph, and that the descent from King David is through Solomon. In Luke 3:23, Joseph is said to be the son of Heli or Eli, and that this line of descent from King David is through David’s son Nathan. This second genealogy is that of the Lord’s other legal parent, Mary.

Teklemariam’s second reason for rejecting the genealogies of Jesus is that they are, in his words, “No more than prevailing Jewish tradition of (Luke’s) day.” But isn’t the book of Luke inspired scripture. In fact, isn’t “all scripture given by inspiration of God...” (2 Timothy 3:16). To reject the genealogies simply because he believes they are “prevailing Jewish tradition” and not inspired of God is treading on dangerous ground.

Again, the real reason for the genealogies is that they demonstrate clearly that Jesus was a bonafide member of the Adamic family, born the Son of both God and man. If we call into question the status of Jesus as a true descendant of Adam, then of necessity we will have to call into question the genealogies.

By tracing the line of Joseph through Solomon to David, Matthew was clearly establishing the right of Jesus as a legally adopted son of Joseph to the throne of David. Luke, on the other hand, by giving the genealogy of Mary, was establishing a “blood” line to David, Abraham, and ultimately to Adam.

Teklemariam States That the Term “Seed” as it Applies to Jesus Is Used Only in a Figurative Sense:

To disavow the true humanity of Christ (as a member of the Adamic race, albeit without the fallen nature), it is necessary for Brother Teklemariam to remove any biological descent of Christ from Adam, Abraham, or David. He must explain away the plain terminology of the scriptures which speak of Jesus as “the seed of Abraham” (Galatians 3:16-17; Hebrews 2:16), and “the Son of David” (Acts 2:30).

First, Brother Teklemariam interprets Galatians 3:15-16 to mean that since the Gentiles, who were not Abraham’s biological seed but rather a “promised seed,” then neither is Jesus Abraham’s biological seed, but rather merely a “promised seed.”

Paul Acknowledged That Jesus Is the Biological “Seed” of Abraham:

The fallacy of this argument is evident for several reasons: (1) Isaac, although a “promised seed,” was nevertheless a biological seed as well; and (2) Paul’s reason for the access of the Gentiles into the status of the “promised seed” is because of the righteousness of Jesus, a biological seed of Abraham, who inherited the promises made to “Abraham and his seed.” It is well to remember that Jesus was a circumcised Jew (although some Gentiles tend to forget that).

Paul was reasoning that Jesus was the biological seed of Abraham to whom the promise was made (Galatians 3:19). He wrote, “To Abraham and his seed were the promises made” (Galatians 3:16). Isaac was the “child of promise,” and God told Abraham, “He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir” (Genesis 15:4). It was not good enough for one “born in my house” (Genesis 15:3). It had to be someone who would come out of Abraham’s “own bowels.” When the blood line is destroyed, then the entire fabric of the promises of God are ripped apart.

This is why the Bible says, “For verily he took not on (him the nature of) angels; but he took on (him) the seed of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16). The first phrase in this verse does not use the Greek noun “nature” (*phusis*). Apparently the translators added this noun because they knew that the noun “seed” (*sperma*) was used in apposition in the connective clause, and they did not wish to say “the seed of angels.” The author was demonstrating that Jesus was made a “little lower than the angels” and that, as to His humanity, He was descended directly from Abraham.

This passage from Hebrews 2:16 plainly states that the holy God Himself took on Him the “seed of Abraham.” This truth is inescapable. It does not say that He “stood in” as the “seed of Abraham.” It does not say that He manifested Himself vicariously as “the seed of Abraham.” It plainly and unequivocally states that He “took on him the seed of Abraham.” Hebrews 2:14, just two verses above, says, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same....” In the Incarnation, God Himself partook of real human flesh and blood. The word “seed” can be used in a general sense as “offspring” or “issue” (see Matthew 22:24).

Vine’s Dictionary says that the word translated “likewise” in the above passage is *paraplesios*, which “expresses the true humanity of Christ in partaking of flesh and blood.”

Teklemariam Rejects the Fact That Jesus Is the Biological “Son of David”:

He writes, “David is not the natural father or the biological father of Christ” (p.181). And what is Brother Teklemariam’s reasoning for this statement, which denies any biological linkage to King David? “Christ is the root of David meaning the creator of David and the Savior of David” (p.181). He also says, “Jesus...was born from the line of David to fulfill the promise in 1 Chronicles 28:4” (p.182). This is a clear contradiction: If the man Jesus is not descended biologically from King David then He cannot be “born from the line of David.” Brother Teklemariam needs to clarify his position.

Under the anointing of the Holy Ghost, Peter stated quite clearly that the man Jesus indeed descended biologically from King David. Quoting from Psalms 132:11, Peter declared on the Day of Pentecost:

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of **the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh**, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne (Acts 2:30).

It cannot get much plainer than that. Jesus is called the Son of David because He is “of the fruit of (David’s) loins, according to the flesh.” Furthermore, the reason Jesus had the legal right to the throne of David (which is an earthly throne) was precisely because He was “the fruit of (David’s) loins.” And how could He have been “of the fruit of (David’s) loins” if not through the seed of Mary?

Teklemariam Also Rejects the Plain Meaning of Hebrews 2:9, Insisting That the Word “Elohim” Ought to Be Substituted for “Angels”:

Since Hebrews 2:9 is referring to Psalms 8:5, Brother Teklemariam refers to the Hebrew word *elohim* (literally “gods”), which is translated “angels.” He then maintains that Jesus was never lower than the “angels” stating instead that “the Word of God was made a little lower than Elohim to be the Lamb of God” (p.141).

Unfortunately, the translation of Psalms 8:5 seems to be much in dispute. For example, the *Revised Standard Version* has it, “For thou hast made him but little lower than God” with a footnote stating “or angels, Hebrew *elohim*.” The William F. Beck *American Translation* says, “You make him do without God for a little while” with a footnote stating, “Conjectural. The Hebrew may be a musical notation.” And the *New American Bible* (a Catholic version) says, “You have made him a little less than the angels.” In a lengthy footnote, the NAB states, “In Hebrew, *elohim*, which is the ordinary word for ‘God’, or ‘the gods’; hence, some translate, ‘a little less than godlike’...But the ancient versions generally understood the term as referring to the heavenly spirits.”

We know also that the word *elohim* is also used of judges. For example, the witch of Endor, when she saw the shade of Samuel ascending up out of the earth, referred to *elohim* (“gods,” 1 Samuel 28:13).

But the real deciding factor on the interpretation of this must come from the New Testament. The writer of Hebrews is quite clear in Hebrews 2:9 that he is referring to “angels,” since under divine inspiration he translated *elohim* by the Greek word *aggelos*, the common word for “angels.” Furthermore, the context shows that he is comparing the superior qualities of Jesus to angels. However, when it comes to the “days of His flesh” (the Incarnation), the writer is insistent that the man Jesus was “made a lower than the angels” for the purpose of “suffering death.”

Why would Teklemariam take the obscure interpretation of Psalms 8:5 and attempt to refute the clear meaning of Hebrews 2:9? It can only be because the writer of Hebrews is stressing so unequivocally the genuine humanity of Christ. To be made “a little lower than the angels” is to be made a genuine human being, it is the Word being made flesh.

While on earth in the flesh, Jesus demonstrated His need of angels when He was ministered to by them following His 40 day fast and temptation by Satan (Matthew 4:11). Also, the man Jesus told His followers as He was being arrested, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give

me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). But He was made, as the writer of Hebrews says, “a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death.”

Teklemariam Struggles with Galatians 4:4:

This very simple passage, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,” becomes a difficult explanation for Brother Teklemariam. He becomes mired up in attempting to explain the phrase “made under the law.” Does this mean, he asks, “that the Son was ‘made’ out of a part of the law”? With this very poor logic, he then turns to the phrase “made of a woman.” It is obvious here that we should understand that Jesus was born during the period or dispensation which we call “the Law.” His birth was accomplished during that period. He was made “under the law” or “according to the law” so that He could be a lawful Redeemer (“a lamb without spot or blemish”). He was circumcised the eighth day in accordance with the Law.

After attempting to topple many other references to the genuine humanity of Christ (some coming from Paul himself), Brother Teklemariam dismisses Galatians 4:4 with a statement that “it is not biblical to build faith upon one witness of a scripture” (p.183).

He admits that Jesus was born during the time when the Law of Moses was in effect, writing, “He was also without doubt, born of Mary” (p.183). But he nevertheless insists that Jesus cannot be “the son of the curse of the Law”; Jesus cannot be “of the sin of the woman,” quoting Psalms 51:5 and Job 25.4-6. None of this, of course, would matter if God called clean that which He took from the woman. Brother Teklemariam seems to forget that the Holy Ghost “overshadowed” Mary and that the “power of the Highest” came upon her. The angel told her, “Therefore, that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1.35).

God is able to cleanse and to sanctify. Mary was living a holy and a sanctified life. She was a pure virgin. Let us give some credit to the grace and power of God to do as He pleases.

Finally, the discussion finally goes to the verb *ginomai*. I am not a Greek scholar, but I suspect the reason why the translators chose the English verb “made” is the fact that they had John 1:14 in mind, where the same verb *ginomai* was used. In John 1:14 it seems imperative that it be translated “was made flesh.” It would be awkward to say that the Word was born flesh. Many newer versions translate John 1:14 “the Word became flesh” Galatians 4:4 “born of a woman.”

Vine's Dictionary gives the preferred translation as “to become,” but notes that *ginomai* is sometimes “translated by the passive voice of the verb to make,” thus tacitly endorsing the translation of Galatians 4:4 as it is in the Authorized Version. He also recognizes the translation of *ginomai* as “born” in the newer versions. The bottom line is this: The phrase “made of a woman” in Galatians 4:4 is systematically congruent with the phrase “made flesh” in John 1:14.

A Brief Summary:

Teklemariam Gezahagne, while he is an excellent writer and a fine scholar, ought to re-examine his treatment of the humanity of Christ and the Oneness of God. The Lord Jesus possesses two natures: His eternal divinity, which shall be justly and gloriously exalted above everything in creation, and His genuine humanity, which He assumed for our salvation.

Perhaps more than any other, the writer of Hebrews exulted in the great mercy that He has bestowed upon us through the Incarnation, writing: Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows (Hebrews 1.9). The “fellows” of this passage are fellow members of the human race. He became one of us that we might become like Him. What Brother Teklemariam has done is exalt the divinity of Christ at the expense of His genuine humanity.

If Jesus Christ is not God Almighty (God the Father), then He is not able to save us. On the other hand, if Jesus of Nazareth is not the true Son of Mary and a genuine human being, descended from David and Abraham, then He cannot be our Redeemer and our sacrifice for sins. To deny His wonderful divinity (as God the Father) is to rob Him of His rightful glory. On the other hand, to deny His genuine humanity is to rob us of our blood sacrifice, who hung in our place on the old rugged cross.

If He is not one of us, then we do not have a true Mediator. 1 Timothy 2:5 states, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man (*anthropos*) Christ Jesus.” If He was not both true *anthropos* and true *Theos*, then our faith is in vain. But it is not in vain, because He is the God who, as a man, stood in my place.

It is my humble prayer that Brother Teklemariam will look again at the Scriptures which clearly identify the genuine humanity of our Savior, Jesus Christ. What is so glorious and thrilling is that He walked among us, a genuine man among men. The “seed” of the woman bruised the head of the serpent. It was a promise made

to Adam and Eve, our ancestral parents, that one day one of us would face the devil and overcome him at Calvary. God did not tell Adam and Eve that it would be He Himself who robed Himself in flesh by means of the Incarnation. But imagine their joy and their surprise when they found out who it was! The same One who walked with them in the Garden, knelt in the Garden thousands of years later, and said, "Not my will but thine be done."

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