

Sharing Life, Sharing Faith

Discussion #9

I. The Nature(s) of Christ

..regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God.

(Romans 1:3-4)

A. God is One God in Three Persons. His nature is Triune.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the **name** of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
(Matthew 28:18-20)

The Greek word, ὄνομα, (*onoma*) is the **singular** form of the word that is translated "name". This is significant!

This formula, appearing only here in all the Gospel, acts at the very least to underscore the unique filial relationship that Jesus has with God, his Father. For it is, with the Holy Spirit, in their **singular** name that Baptism is to be administered during the time after the Gospel's story ends.¹ (Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs)

From the Nicene Creed

(We believe) in our Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all the ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father, through whom all things were made.²

From the Athanasian Creed:

This, however, is the catholic faith: that we worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance.

The Father is Eternal, the Son is Eternal, and the Holy Spirit is eternal - yet there are not three eternal beings but one who is eternal, just as there are not three uncreated or unlimited beings, but one who is uncreated and unlimited.

Thus, the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God - and yet there are not three gods but one God.³

B. The "Hypostatic Union" - Jesus is God incarnate, fully God and fully man.

The word "hypostasis" is from the Greek word, ὑποστασις meaning "substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality (in contrast to what merely seems to be)"⁴

The Council of Chalcedon, in 451 AD, clarified the doctrine of the Two Natures in Christ. The human nature of Christ is the fact that He is truly man; the divine nature,

that He is truly God. Who is Jesus Christ? He is truly God and He is truly man. This, and nothing else, is confessed by the doctrine of the Two Natures.⁵ (**Hermann Sasse**)

This is a very difficult, (actually impossible), concept to fully understand with our human minds, as we read in the Book of Concord:

Christ is and remains for all eternity God and human being in one inseparable person, which is the highest mystery after the mystery of the Holy Trinity... In this mystery lie our only comfort, life, and salvation.⁶ (**Formula of Concord, Epitome VIII**)

1. From the Athanasian Creed

He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages, and a human being, born from the substance of his mother in this age. He is perfect God and a perfect human being, composed of a rational soul and human flesh. He is equal to the Father with respect to his divinity, less than the Father with respect to his humanity.

Although He is God and a human being, nevertheless He is not two but one Christ. However, He is one not by the changing of the divinity in the flesh but by the taking up on the humanity in God. Indeed, He is one not by a confusion of substance but by a unity of person.⁷

2. From the Decree of Chalcedon

He is one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without division, without separation. The difference between the natures is in no way denied by the union; rather, the characteristics of each nature are preserved and both come together into one person and one hypostasis. We do not confess a Son divided and torn into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten and God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, even as already the prophets spoke of Him, as He Himself has taught us, and as the creed of the fathers has handed on to us.⁸

3. Martin Chemnitz has this to say about the Two Natures in Christ:

In the case of heated iron (for this example the entire ancient church has used to describe the personal union of the two natures in the person of Christ) the intimate union of the two natures of the fire and the iron takes place through interpenetration. The fire, to be sure, does not take on the properties of the iron, so that it becomes black and cold. Nor is there an abolition of the properties of the iron, for it remains a solid body, and in this union or communion the iron retains essentially also its natural blackness and coldness (although under the heating they do not appear); and when the fire is separated from the hot iron we see that it has not lost them by abolition. For the blackness and coldness are not added again to the iron from without, but the iron, when it is separated from the fire, then shows that it has retained its own nature properties even under the heating, and it has retained them unimpaired.⁹

In other words, the two natures in Christ can be likened to iron and fire. The two things are inseparable while remaining distinct. According to Martin Chemnitz,¹⁰ the following seven items are descriptions of what the Nature in Christ is **NOT**:

- a. **NOT** Two persons without communication of attributes (Nestorius)
- b. **NOT** One nature turned into the other (Eutyches)
- c. **NOT** A commingling or transmutation between two natures (Eutyches)
- d. **NOT** Like "body and soul" where the human does not exist with only one (in other words, each nature is whole and complete in itself).
- e. The divine nature shows in Jesus, **NOT** like in Moses. Moses was by participation, Jesus has the nature of divine glory.
- f. Union is **NOT** through destruction of one nature, conversion, or fusion.
- g. It is **NOT** "heaping up", one on top of the other, or proximity, side by side.
- h. It is **NOT** a spiritual union where two separate things are joined by a "third spirit" such as happens when the people of God are "one".

C. **Christological Heresies** - See also the handout, **"False Views of the Person of Christ"** for visual descriptions.

1. **Nestorianism**

The heresy held that there is no communion of natures in the person of Christ. Mary is not the mother of God, but only the mother of Christ, and that according to His human nature Christ is in effect the Son of God only by adoption.¹¹ **(Lutheran Cyclopedia)**

If we leave out statements about Him as true God, we have the Jesus of the liberals - the "demythologized" Christ. The unity of the Redeemer's person, which Nestorianism could not find, is achieved by the theology of modern Protestantism. It does this by setting aside the allegedly philosophical concept of "nature" - although it appears in the New Testament, 2 Peter 1:4 - and with it also the concept of the divine nature, and makes Jesus a mere man.¹² **(Hermann Sasse)**

Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. **(II Peter 1:4)**

2. **Monophysitism**

The view that there is only one nature in Christ, namely the divine nature, or there is only one compounded nature of Christ. Much of Palestine was carried away by the movement, and later, in the fifth century, Eutychianism found its roots in Monophysitism. Monophysitism was condemned by the Council of Chalcedon which declared that there are two natures in Christ, divine and human.¹³ **(Lutheran Cyclopedia)**

It teaches that the human nature was absorbed by the divine....like a drop of milk in the ocean. It can no longer understand the praying of Jesus. Gethsemane and being forsaken by God on the cross lose their meaning. The flesh of the Incarnate One is no longer truly flesh.¹⁴ (**Hermann Sasse**)

3. Eutychianism

A fifth century heresy taking its name from Eutyches, who asserted that there were two natures in Christ before, but only one nature after, the incarnation. In opposition to Nestorianism, Eutyches taught that the human nature in Christ was absorbed, swallowed up, by the divine nature; thus his doctrine was an expression of Monophysitism.¹⁵ (**Lutheran Cyclopedia**)

D. What does the doctrine of the Two Natures in Christ mean to us?

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (**I Peter 2:24**)

If Jesus were not fully man, the perfect observance of the law would not have any significance for us. If He were not fully God, His suffering, death, and resurrection would only be that of a man and would confer no saving power to us.

If Christ was only human he could not have born the wrath of God for the world's sins. He needed the Divine nature to do this. How can man come to God if God does not come to man? If Christ were all God, he could not be a mediator for us. A mediator must be like both parties. God by himself could not feel death, and man by himself could not have prevailed over it, but because of the double essence man receives it and God conquers it.¹⁶ (**Martin Chemnitz**)

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."
(**Matthew 26:39**)

It is the human will of Jesus that speaks here (Matthew 26:39). The agony suffered in Gethsemane will always bear an element of mystery for us because of the mystery involved in the union of Christ's two natures. For one thing, we have no conception of what sin, curse, wrath, death meant for the holy human nature of Jesus. Because he was sinless, he should not die; and yet, because he was sinless and holy, he willed to die for our sin. The death of Jesus was far different from that of the courageous martyrs; they died after Jesus' death had removed their sin and guilt, the sting had been removed from their death through Christ's death, but Jesus died under sin and its curse, the sting of death tortured him with all its damnable power.¹⁷

We must note the difference between Jesus' experience in Gethsemane and that on Golgotha. In the garden Jesus has a God who hears and strengthens him; on the cross this God has turned wholly away from him. During those three black hours Jesus was made sin for us, was made a curse for us, and thus God turned completely away from him. In the garden Jesus wrestled with himself and brought himself to do the Father's will; on the cross he wrestles with God and simply endures. Jesus thirsts for God, but God has removed himself. It is not the Son that has left the Father, but the Father the Son.¹⁸

What is involved in the fact that God forsook or abandoned Jesus during those three awful hours no man can really know. The nearest we can hope to come toward

penetrating this mystery is to think of Jesus as being covered with the world's sin and curse and that, when God saw Jesus thus, he turned away from him. The Son of God bore our sin and its curse in his human nature, this nature supported by the divine.¹⁹

(Robert Lenski)

II. Native American Belief and Practice

Native American religious practice is difficult to describe. For one thing, each tribe has its own unique beliefs and practices. For another thing, many tribes hold their practices to be sacred, and do not share them with the outside world. Many times ceremonies are closed to all but tribal members.

On the other hand, there are many basic beliefs and practices that many tribes hold in common. Most tribes have some version of the “creation story” which involves people emerging through several previous worlds, which they must leave due to dangers, floods, etc., making this world either the “fourth-” or “fifth-world”. Various legends of hero-gods accompany this creation myth.

Native Americans are also somewhat unique in another way. While each tribe has its own traditional religion, the individual members of those tribes have a wide variety of beliefs, encompassing all the religions of the world, including Christianity. Most often, there is a combination of beliefs, such as the Native American Church, which combines traditional ceremonies, peyote-stimulated “vision quests”, and Christian beliefs.

Recent Anglo interest in tribal customs has led to a better understanding of these practices in the general community. Unfortunately, much of it has then made its way into the “cafeteria-style design-your-own-religion” of our post-modern culture, where people pick and choose whatever they want to believe from all the religions to which they are exposed.

It is beyond the scope of this class to discuss all the individual tribal groups, so we will concentrate primarily, but briefly, on the tribes who are in our close proximity, the ones we are most likely to contact in our vocations.

A. Navajo

Navajo people are thought to be related to the northern plains tribes, primarily due to oral history and the fact that their language has Athabascan roots. The Navajo reservation is the largest in the country, with a strong internal government in place. Navajo's live communally on the land, and can build homes and graze stock where-ever they choose. They live semi-nomadic lives, grazing their sheep in different areas depending on the season. As a rule, Navajo's live in isolation, shunning cities and villages, although there are some small “modern” communities on the reservation, generally clustered around the local “Chapter House”, the local center of government and services. Many families do not have electricity, running water, or telephones.

The culture is matriarchal, and there is a complex system of clans. An individual is “born to” his mothers clan, and “born for” his mother-in-law's clan. There are strict rules about marriage, which clans can intermarry and which ones cannot.

“The first part of the Navajo Story of Creation parallels the Biblical book of Genesis in that it tells of the creation of the world. In fact the Navajo concept of the world is not unlike the early Judaic-Christian concept which described the earth as a land area floating

in an immense ocean overspread by a solid domed heaven which fit like a great lid with its edges on the horizon, resting on supports in the water.”²⁰

(Raymond Locke, “The Book of the Navajo”)

Some of the major “gods” associated with creation are “Changing Woman”, “White Shell Woman”, “Talking God”, “House God”, and the “Twin Hunter Gods”. Other characters in the story include “First Man”, “First Woman”, and “Coyote”, the trickster and contrary who is constantly causing trouble. (Note, the “parallel” noted above falls apart rapidly here!)

The “Blessing Way” is a ceremony lasting nine days in which the entire creation story is retold.

Traditional Navajo’s are generally quite superstitious. They believe that witches, (sometimes called “skinwalkers”), are actively involved in their lives, casting spells and other harmful things. Non-Navajo’s, called “belegaana”, are generally suspected of being witches when they come to the reservation, especially if they want to live there. Traditional Navajo’s living off the reservation are also generally not comfortable discussing religion or beliefs with “the belegaana”. There are elaborate death and burial rituals, and if a Navajo dies inside a building, the evil part of his spirit, his “chindi”, is trapped inside that building and will cause harm to any who enter it. For that reason, when a person dies inside a hogan, that hogan is abandoned by the rest of the family and will never be occupied again.

Non-traditional Navajo’s have a wide range of beliefs, and many are Christian. However, many are Mormon due to the fact that the Mormon church aggressively evangelizes to Native Americans, due to their belief that these people are the descendants of Jews who left Jerusalem in 600 BC and who immigrated to the Americas, where all memories of this heritage has been subsequently lost. However, these “Indian Mormons” are not integrated in with the rest of the Mormon church, but meet in separate “branches” in a blend of Traditional and Mormon practice.

B. Hopi and the Rio Grande Pueblo Tribes

The Rio Grande Pueblo tribes and the Hopis of Arizona are thought to be the descendants of the Anasazi, whose ruins are found throughout the Four Corners states. Unlike the semi-nomadic Navajo and plains tribes, these tribes have been community and “pueblo-dwellers” for centuries. Few Hopi live in isolation, and most live in proximity to a town, and are actively involved in farming and other occupations that require stability in an area.

They share with the Navajo a “Creation Story”, although it is somewhat different, and the gods are different as well, generally symbolized as “kachinas”, to whom they pray, and who provide all sustenance of life. Pueblo religious life is very extensive, and they believe that their faith is all that is holding the entire world together, and if they were to stop praying, the world would end. They are more open about some of their ceremonies, because they are praying for all people, not just for themselves. However, many ceremonies are still closed to outsiders.

There is a myth of a “pahana”, a great white god who will someday come to bring peace and save all people of the world. It is believed that this is related to similar myths originating with the Aztecs and Mayans of Mexico regarding a “quetzelcoatl”. There is

some question about the origin of this legend. Most believe it originated with the Spanish Christians/Conquistadores and was not present in the culture before that time.

There is a very complex system in the Tewa communities of the Rio Grande where people hold certain positions and roles in the community based on the season of the year. Thus there is a winter priest and a summer priest, a winter chief and a summer chief, etc. The ceremonies follow a yearly cycle and revolve heavily around soltices, equinoxes, etc.

C. Southern Ute and Ute Mountain (Northern) Ute

The Utes are also a northern tribe who migrated to this area at about the same time as the Navajo. Instead of a communal system such as the Navajo and Hopi use, when their reservation was set up, each family was given part of the land as private property, to buy and sell as they chose. Thus, there are many families who live on old homesteads, but many have been sold to other non-tribal members, so the reservations are not exclusively Ute. Beliefs share many similarities with the Navajo.

D. Jicarilla Apache

The Apache tribes originated in the Northern Mexico and have been present in the southern Four Corners states for many centuries. They share a nomadic lifestyle with the Navajo, and have a reputation as being more war-like and aggressive. However, it is unwise to stereo-type the people of today based on the activities of their ancestors during a time of war. The small Jicarilla reservation is located less than an hour south of Pagosa Springs. Most people live in the town of Dulce, and most people are actively involved in the community.

Beliefs are more reflexive of the Mexican origins and share some similarities with the Mayans and Aztecs of that area.

III. Scenario

Discuss how you would respond to the following statements and thoughts:

“Ojibway elders say that in life there is “only experiences”. There is no such thing as a good or bad experience, and we have to get away from the idea that there is good and bad, and that bad things cause unpleasant consequences. “ (Heard on radio program about AIDS in the Native American population)

“It’s hard to be an Indian, and it’s even harder to live like an Indian” (Navajo man speaking on same radio program)

“Native Americans really do share the same core beliefs as the Judeo-Christian beliefs.. There are so many similarities in the legends and stories we all tell, and this just shows that we all worship the same God, no matter what we call him, or them.”

IV. Journal Sharing Time

V. Next Month

- A. Doctrine of Election**
- B. Buddhism**
- C. Scenarios**
- D. Journal Sharing**

-
- ¹ Gibbs, Dr. Jeffrey, “Jerusalem and Parousia”, © 2000, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, pg. 154
- ² Book of Concord, Edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, © 2000, Augsburg Fortress Press, pg 23
- ³ Ibid, pg 24
- ⁴ Baur, Arndt, Gingrich, “Greek Lexicon to the New Testament, © 1957, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL
- ⁵ Sasse, Hermann, “We Confess Anthology”, “The 1500th Anniversary of Chalcedon”, © 1984, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, pg. 60
- ⁶ Book of Concord, Op. Cit., Formula Of Concord, Epitome VIII:18, pg 512
- ⁷ Book of Concord, Op. Cit., pg 24
- ⁸ Sasse, Hermann, Op. Cit., pg 61
- ⁹ Chemnitz, Martin, “The Two Natures in Christ”, translated by JAO Preus, © 1971 Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO, pp 289-290
- ¹⁰ Ibid, From chapter XXII, “No Commingling, Conversion, Abolition or Equating of Natures”, pp 267-285
- ¹¹ Lutheran Cyclopedia, Erwin Lucker Ed, © 1795, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO, pg 571
- ¹² Sasse, Hermann, Op. Cit., pg 59
- ¹³ Lutheran Cyclopedia, Op Cit., pg 555
- ¹⁴ Sasse, Hermann, Op. Cit., pg 60
- ¹⁵ Lutheran Cyclopedia, Op. Cit., pg. 279
- ¹⁶ Chemnitz, Martin, “The Two Natures in Christ”, translated by JAO Preus, © 1971 Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO
- ¹⁷ Lenski, Robert, “The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel”,© 1943, Augsburg Publishing House, pg 1040
- ¹⁸ Ibid, pg. 1119
- ¹⁹ Ibid, pg. 1119
- ²⁰ Locke, Raymond, “The Book of the Navajo”, © 1976, Mankind Publishers, Los Angeles, pg 55