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Final Response Paper

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1). The reasonableness of Christ's claim to deity must be examined in a context of R^{II} in epistemology and dualistic theism in metaphysics. The claim was also made in a certain historical setting involving a strict monotheism where polytheism was considered idolatry, and a strong expectation of a Messiah who would be both fully human and God himself. It is also plausible to assume that Jesus was an actual historical person and that the NT contains genuine historical information which attributes the Incarnation claim to Jesus himself (otherwise the development of Christianity would be inexplicable). At least three issues need to be examined if Christ's claim is to be found intelligible and free from internal contradiction.

First, the Incarnation claim involves the concept of a person with a single personality and two natures (one human and the other divine). How can we coherently understand this concept? It is clear that Jesus' personal self-consciousness is that of the preexistent Logos or the Eternal Son (John 17:5). Thus, Jesus' human nature must be understood as impersonal. Not that the Logos assumed human nature in general but that he assumed potential human individuality.

It was this potential human individuality (or the potential for personal consciousness which characterized Jesus' human nature) that was taken up into the personal consciousness of the Eternal Son as it progressively became actualized.

In the personal union of the two natures Jesus' humanity is not actually devoid of personality. It is in the sense that Jesus' humanity has personality in its actual existence through union with the Eternal Logos that it is called impersonal.

Second, did the Incarnate state confine the Eternal Logos to the ordinary limits of human nature? In the period of his earthly career there seems to be implied that Jesus was bound by certain limitations that would be contradictory to associate with the Theistic concept of God (e.g. Mark 13:32). This can be plausibly explained, for instance, by the fact that the limits seen on Jesus' knowledge are not restrictions associated with his divine omniscience but restrictions associated with Jesus' function as the Revealer of the Father. Jesus' subordination to the Father is an official functional subordination which does not compromise the fact that

ontologically he is the second person of the Trinity. In his union with human nature his divine attributes are in no way absolutely limited in such a way as to be inconsistent with the divine nature.

Third, how can we understand the resulting notions of the Divine Unity at the same time with the Divine Trinity? It would be a contradiction to say that God is one and three in exactly the same way at exactly the same time. God must himself have an essence (the Divine Essence). Any being that lacks that essence in any respect cannot be God. Therefore, God must be construed as unqualifiedly one in essence. Now, the Divine Essence must be self-actualized or he would not be God in the Theistic sense. Being self-actualized, God must also exist in a determinate number in order for the number of his instantiations not to be accidental (which would be inconsistent with his existence as absolutely necessary). The fact that we have reason to identify three centers of personal self-consciousness (namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) as actualizing the one Divine Essence is consistent with this understanding.

The responses to the above three problems show that Jesus' Incarnation claim is intelligible but is it plausible for individual belief? The first disciples seem to have gradually come to understand Jesus' claim by recognizing that he fulfilled the Messianic prophecies in the OT. This is not surprising in light of the mighty works of healing, etc. that he did that testified to his unique authority. In their three years with him they also witnessed a perfect personal adherence to God's moral standard and a perfectly stable psychological and emotional status. From the NT evidence it would hardly have been possible for them to have considered Jesus as either a liar or a lunatic with regard to his claim to deity. As we consider the truth basis for ourselves we find no reason to discard the testimony of the first disciples. We would have to call him self-deceived and/or intentionally deceptive but having no evidence for either. It is more plausible to understand that he made the claim, that he sincerely believed it, and that he knew that it was true. Thus, with a high degree of probability we can conclude that Jesus is God Incarnate!

2). Concerning the relationship of Jesus' claim to other basic elements in an over-all case for the Christian world-view perspective: First, with regard to the possibility of religious

knowledge John 1:1,9 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... he was the true light that gives light to every man who comes into the world.” There is a connection here between Jesus as the preexistent Word and epistemology. As the Eternal Logos, Jesus is the embodiment of the ultimate principles of thought and logic. In verse 9 Jesus is said to be the One who imparts “light” to every man that comes into the world. It is plausible to equate this “light” with the ultimate principles that are required by all beings who claim to be rational (whether they realize or admit it themselves). Thus, objective knowledge is possible, including objective religious knowledge based on the use of the ultimate principles of thought that are available to every person. Second, with regard to the metaphysics of theism it can be said that if there is no God then the notion of the Incarnation would be unintelligible. The Incarnation claim of Christ only makes sense in a Theistic metaphysical context. In a pantheistic context Jesus’ claim would amount to nothing more unique than could be said by any other person. Third, with regard to the authority of Scripture we encounter the question of whether the Bible is authoritative because it is grounded in Jesus as God Incarnate or must we establish the authority of the Bible first in order to “find” Jesus? Ultimately there is a sense in which the authority of the Bible must rest on the testimony of Jesus as God Incarnate concerning it. The Bible is authoritative only as it is God’s words to us. It is authoritative because of where it originated: God. Jesus quotes from and refers to the OT as authoritative as the word of God. He also adds to it in the Gospels (“I say to you...”). He also says in John 16:13-15 that he will send the Holy Spirit who will, by his inspiration, add more. Jesus as God Incarnate testified to the authority of the then past, present, and future written word of God. Fourth, with regard to the “good life” and how it is achieved the Incarnation implies a lot. The moral uprightness of Jesus becomes our example for living a good life. We do not have to wonder what kind of life God would live if he could be a person like us. The NT writers frequently use Jesus as an example: In Phil. 2:2-11 Paul uses Jesus’ life as an example of humility that we should learn from and follow. Jesus’ moral perfection also allowed him to be the perfect sacrifice and so constitute a fully adequate redemption for our moral regeneration. This is also related to his human nature because it was necessary for him to identify with the human condition and to be a representative of all of humanity in order to accomplish this vicarious moral exchange and meet our moral liability before God. Fifth, with regard to an

objective moral order of being: We are bound to fulfilling God's objective moral ideal but we have failed and so have become morally corrupt. God did not (and could not) merely waive the unconditional moral law that he had revealed to us. Instead, through the Incarnate Eternal Son he voluntarily accomplished the propitiation of our moral liability himself. The object moral order stands. Sixth, the death and resurrection of Jesus shows that death is not the final destiny of people. Jesus, who fully identified with us even to the point of death won the victory over it. He promised that through him we also would be able to have victory over death and live if we "believe in him."

3). The negative criticism against Christ's claim to Deity that I regard as the strongest is an alternative transcendental view known as Arianism which says that yes, Jesus is the Incarnation of a divine being but that even in his transcendent state is not God in the absolute sense, but rather a created being who is of similar (but not identical) essence with God. This view results from an attempt to explain the passages in isolation in the NT that describe Jesus' subordination to the Father. This view, however, fails to deal coherently with all of the passages that pertain to the person of Jesus. The NT writers did not seem to find Jesus' subordination and deity to be inconsistent. Jesus' subordination to the Father can be coherently understood as one of official office and function rather than of essence. Also, the early disciples would have been engaging in idolatry and blasphemy as they worshiped Jesus who, according to the Arian view, was only a creature and not God. Thus, the Arian view of Jesus is found to be not plausible.