

TOUCHED  
WITH OUR  
FEELINGS

*A Historical Survey of  
Adventist Thought on  
the Human Nature of Christ*

J. R. ZURCHER

# TOUCHED WITH OUR FEELINGS

*A Historical Survey of Adventist Thought  
on the Human Nature of Christ*

*“When we want a deep problem to study,  
let us fix our minds on the most  
marvelous thing that ever took place  
in earth or heaven—the incarnation  
of the Son of God.”*

*Ellen G. White*

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 904.

Based on the French  
“**Le Christ Manifesté en Chair**”

Translated by Edward E. White

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*To my son Frederic,  
without whose help this book would  
not have seen the light of day.*

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## PREFACE

From the time I was a small boy in the early 1920s my parents taught me that the Son of God came into this world with a physical heritage like that of any other human baby. Without making a big point of the sinners in His ancestry, they told me of Rahab and David, and emphasized that in spite of His inherited physical liabilities Jesus lived a perfect life as a child, youth, and adult. They told me that He understood my temptations, for He was tempted as I was, and that He would give me power to overcome as He did. This made a deep impression on me. It helped me look to Jesus not only as my Saviour but as my Example, and believe that by His power I could live the victorious life.

In later years I learned that my parents' teaching regarding Jesus was well supported by the Bible, and that Ellen G. White, God's messenger to the remnant, had made this truth clear in numerous statements, such as the following:

“Let children bear in mind that the child Jesus had taken upon Himself human nature, and was in the likeness of sinful flesh, and was tempted of Satan as all children are tempted. He was able to resist the temptations of Satan through His dependence upon the divine power of His heavenly Father, as He was subject to His will, and obedient to all His commands” (*Youth's Instructor*, Aug. 23, 1894).

“Jesus once stood in age just where you now stand. Your circumstances, your cogitations at this period of your life, Jesus has had. He cannot overlook you at this critical period. He sees your dangers. He is acquainted with your temptations” (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 235).

One of the major reasons that Christ entered the human family to live a victorious life from birth to maturity was to set an example for those He came to save. “Jesus took human nature, passing through infancy, childhood, and youth, that He might know how to sympathize with all, and leave an example for all children and youth.



He is acquainted with the temptations and weaknesses of children” (*Youth’s Instructor*, Sept. 1, 1873).

In my academy and college years I continued to hear from Adventist teachers and ministers that Jesus took the same kind of flesh that every human being must take—flesh affected and influenced by the fall of Adam and Eve. It was pointed out that Catholics do not believe this, because their doctrine of original sin requires them to distance Jesus from sinful flesh. They did this by creating the doctrine of the immaculate conception, the doctrine that Mary, the mother of Jesus, though conceived naturally, was from the moment of her conception free from any stain of original sin; thus, since she was unlike her ancestors and the rest of the fallen human race, she could provide her Son with flesh like that of the unfallen Adam. Although Protestants reject this Catholic doctrine, most still argue for a difference between Christ’s humanity and that of the human race He came to save. Supernaturally, they say, He was cut off from the genetic inheritance He would have received from His sin-fallen forebears, and hence was exempt from certain tendencies against which human beings as a whole must battle.

### **Challenged by Critics**

Because Adventists from the beginning have held that Jesus took human nature as He found it after more than 4,000 years of sin, ministers and theologians of other churches have distorted this belief and used it to turn people away from the Sabbath truth and the three angels’ messages. With the doctrine of original sin in their frame of reference, they have declared that if Jesus took a body “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3, KJV) He would have been a sinner and hence would have Himself needed a Saviour.

In the early 1930s an article challenging three Adventist teachings, including the nature of Christ, appeared in *Moody Monthly*. Francis D. Nichol, editor of the *Review and Herald* (now *Adventist Review*), responded to the charges by writing a letter to the editor. Regarding the teaching that Christ “inherited a sinful, fallen nature,” he said:

“The belief of the Seventh-day Adventists upon this subject is

definitely set forth in Hebrews 2:14-18. To the extent that such a Bible passage as this teaches the actual participation of Christ in our nature, we teach it.” Later, in an editorial commenting on the critic’s response to his statement, he wrote, in part:

“We readily agree that for one to say that Christ inherited a ‘sinful, fallen nature’ might, in the absence of any other qualifying statement, be misunderstood as meaning that Christ was a sinner by nature, even as we. This would indeed be an appalling doctrine. But no such doctrine as this is believed by us. We teach unqualifiedly that though Christ was born of woman, partook of the same flesh and blood as we, was so truly made like unto His brethren that it was possible for Him to be tempted in all points like as we are, yet that He was without sin, that He knew no sin.

“The key to the whole matter, of course, is the phrase ‘yet without sin.’ We believe unreservedly this declaration of Holy Writ. Christ was truly the Sinless One. We believe that He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us. Otherwise He could not have been our Saviour. No matter in what language any Adventist may endeavor to describe the nature which Christ inherited on the human side—and who can hope to do this with absolute precision and with freedom from any possible misunderstanding?—we believe implicitly, as already stated, that Christ was ‘without sin’” (*Review and Herald*, Mar. 12, 1931).

The position set forth by Elder Nichol was precisely the belief that the church, as well as many respected non-Adventist Bible students, had held throughout the decades. It certainly was the view held by Ellen White, who wrote: “In taking upon Himself man’s nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin. . . . He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are. And yet He knew no sin. . . . We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ” (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 256).

### **Dialogue and Change**

Imagine my surprise, then, when, as one of the editors of the *Review* in the 1950s, I heard some church leaders say that this was not

the correct view—that it was the view of only the “lunatic fringe” in the church! Dialogue was taking place with a few evangelical ministers who were committed to a view of the nature of man that included the “immortal soul” error. I was told that our position on Christ’s human nature was being “clarified.” As a result of this dialogue, several church leaders who had been involved in the discussions announced that Christ took the nature of Adam before—not after—the Fall. The shift was 180 degrees—Postlapsarian to Prelapsarian.

This dramatic change drove me to study the question with an intensity bordering on obsession. With all the objectivity I could muster, I examined the Scriptures. I read Ellen White’s writings. I read the statements of Adventist thinkers who had set forth their views during the previous hundred years. I examined studies and books by contemporary Adventist authors and non-Adventist theologians. I tried to understand what effect this shift in belief might have on (1) the symbolism of Jacob’s ladder reaching all the way from heaven to earth; (2) the purpose of Christ’s taking human flesh; (3) the relationship of His humanity to being qualified as our high priest (Heb. 2:10; cf. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 745 and *The Story of Jesus*, p. 155); (4) the relative difficulty of battling the adversary in sinless flesh instead of sinful flesh; (5) the deeper meaning of both Gethsemane and Calvary; (6) the doctrine of righteousness by faith; and (7) the value of Christ’s life as an example to me.

For 40 years I have continued this study. As a result, I have come to understand better not only the importance of holding a correct view of Christ’s human nature, but two Ellen White comments on why even simple truths are sometimes made to appear confusing: 1. “Professed theologians seem to take pleasure in making that which is plain, mysterious. They clothe the simple teachings of God’s Word with their own dark reasonings, and thus confuse the minds of those who listen to their doctrines” (*Signs of the Times*, July 2, 1896). 2. “Many a portion of Scripture which learned men pronounce a mystery, or pass over as unimportant, is full of comfort and instruction to him who has been taught in the school of Christ. One reason why many theologians have no clearer understanding of God’s Word is they close their eyes to truths which they do not wish

to practice. An understanding of Bible truth depends not so much on the power of intellect brought to the search as on the singleness of purpose, the earnest longing after righteousness” (*Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 38).

During recent decades a number of writers have attempted to make a case for their belief that Christ took the pre-Fall nature of Adam. Their biblical proof texts seem strong only when interpreted according to the presuppositions they have brought to them. On occasion they have even employed an ad hominem approach in which they have endeavored to discredit well-respected Adventist teachers and ministers who have held to the post-Fall view. As I see it, their attempts have been patterned after the lawyer who is reputed to have said, “If you have a strong case, stick to the facts. If you have a weak case, try to confuse the issue. If you have no case, rail on the jury.”

It is my deep conviction that before the church can proclaim with power God’s last warning message to the world, it must be united on the truth about Christ’s human nature. Thus I have long hoped that someone with impeccable spiritual and academic credentials would set forth in succinct, readable form a comprehensive view of Bible- and Spirit of Prophecy-based Christology and of how the church deviated from the truth on this question 40 years ago.

This book meets that hope. I have known the author for many years. He is a loyal Seventh-day Adventist, a scholar who has pursued truth with unusual objectivity. Nearly three decades ago he made a well-received contribution to contemporary theology by authoring the book *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969). With his clear understanding of the nature of humanity, Jean Zurcher has had the insights necessary to examine the biblical doctrine of Christ’s human nature. In the present volume he carefully sets forth the truth about Christ’s human nature, and shows that the glory of the Saviour’s successful mission to this world is enhanced, not diminished, by the fact that He triumphed in spite of taking the liabilities of “sinful flesh.”

I believe that this carefully researched and well-written book will be enthusiastically received by all who love truth and want to understand better how intimate is the relationship between Jesus and

the human family. Truly “the humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God” (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244).

Kenneth H. Wood, Chair  
Ellen G. White Estate Board of Trustees  
August 10, 1996

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the Christian Church the subject of Christology, which deals with “Christ, His person and work,”<sup>1</sup> has been at the heart of many theological disputes. The most dangerous heresies and most dramatic schisms have had their origin in the diversity of theories regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Because of the Hellenization of the faith and the emergence of heretical doctrines, the apostles and their successors were forced to wrestle with the issue of the divine-human nature of Christ. This resulted in the eventual creation of “a Christology in the strict sense of the word, that is to say, an express doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

Today Christ’s human nature remains a serious problem for Christianity, and various denominations attempt to resolve it in a variety of ways. It is a most important topic. Upon this point depends not only our understanding of the work of Christ but also our understanding of the way of life expected from each of us as we seek “the truth that is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:21).

### **The Apostles Confronted With Early Heresies**

It is interesting to notice that at the outset of Christianity the question raised about the subject of the person of Jesus was not “What was *His nature?*” but rather “*Who is He?*” When Jesus asked His disciples, “*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*” they replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” He asked, “*Who do you say I am?*” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:13-16).

As the evangelization of the Graeco-Latin world progressed, the question was no longer a simple matter of knowing who Jesus was.