

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

TITLE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE APOSTLE JOHN'S THEOLOGY OF THE INCARNATE CHRIST AND CONTEMPORARY CHRISTOLOGICAL VIEWS (SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS VERSUS JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES)

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Scholars have viewed the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ differently. Those who argue against the teaching, such as Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs), emphasize that the Word "Incarnation" is not found in the Bible and that Jesus never claimed to be an incarnate being. On the other hand, those who support the teaching, such as Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs), argue that though the term "Incarnation" is not found in the Bible, the teaching is there, basing their argument primarily on the theology of the Apostle John. These contrasting views prompted the research to be undertaken.

The study takes into account John's theological view as the basis for establishing the biblical stand and thereafter compares the contemporary teachings of the JWs against the SDA Church view. Bible commentaries, lexicons and other syntactical resource materials have been used to establish a balanced and correct understanding of the teaching.

According to the JWs, the teaching of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ does not exist and only false religions teach it. They argue that God cannot become a human being, and that Jesus was never God but a spirit creature, the first born of all created beings and for that reason His coming to live among human beings cannot translate to an incarnation. They explain their position using John 1: 1, they translate the “The Word was God” as “The Word was a god”. Their position is not new in the history of Christological debates, which started as far back as the first century A.D. The teaching of Arius was similar.

To the contrary, the SDA Church teaches and emphasizes that Jesus is the second person of the Godhead and is the Incarnate Son of God. Their position resonates with teachings of the early Church Councils such as those of Nicaea (325 A.D.) and Constantinople (381 A. D.).

The position of the researcher is that Jesus preexisted as God the Son together with God the Father before He was born on earth. The aspect of God becoming flesh is what is known as Incarnation. Accepting and understanding this teaching has a bearing on how one perceives God’s free gift of salvation to humanity. Rejection of the same leads the Bible student to have a wrong concept of God’s plan of salvation for humanity.

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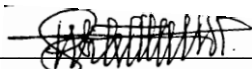
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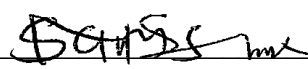
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Background of the Problem

The doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus is among key doctrines of the Christian faith. Despite this doctrine being at the center of the Christian faith, it has received many criticisms from as early as the time of the Apostles of Jesus till now. Though the word incarnation does not exist in the Bible, the teaching exists. The doctrine teaches that the second person of the divine trinity assumed a fleshly human body in Jesus Christ and lived a historical existence on this planet, subject to all the constraints and limitations of such an existence.¹ This means Jesus became one of us. Millard J. Erickson emphasizes, “If Jesus was not really one of us, humanity has not been united with deity and we cannot be saved; or the validity of the work accomplished in Christ’s death or at least its applicability to us human beings depends upon the reality of His humanity just as its efficacy depends upon the genuineness of His deity.”²

To the contrary, the early Jewish Christian sect known as Ebionites held a teaching that Jesus was an ordinary human possessing unusual but not superhuman or supernatural gifts of righteousness and wisdom, “a human in whom, for a time, the power of God was present and active to an unusual degree. They denied all of the scripture that point to the preexistence, the virgin birth, and the qualitatively unique status and function of Jesus.”³ The

¹ Markus Bockmuehl, *This Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 269.

² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academy, 2013), 643.

³ *Ibid.*, 634.

Koran speaks in the same vein that, “Verily Jesus is as Adam in the sight of God. He created him of dust; he then said to him, ‘Be’ and he was” (Surah 3: 52).⁴ The Jehovah’s Witnesses (JW) similarly believe that “Jesus was not an incarnation. He was born of a woman, made flesh.”⁵

These conflicting views about Jesus and His incarnation prompted an inquiry of what the Bible says about the subject.

The Apostle John’s View of the Incarnate Jesus

The main Bible author who advocates the reality of the incarnation of Jesus is the Apostle John. In the Gospel, John referring to Jesus states that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1: 1, 2, 14).

This Gospel is the only one which begins with the eternal existence of Jesus instead of beginning with the time He appeared on earth. It states that He created everything that is (John 1: 3), and later came to dwell among His creation. When He came to dwell among His creation, He became flesh (John 1: 14). Meaning that Jesus who pre-existed as God (John 1: 1) became human, acquiring the state, which He was not before.

Further, in his first epistle, John affirms the incarnation of Jesus by stating that himself and others (possibly his fellow apostles) saw with their eyes and touched with their hands the Jesus who was from the beginning and that He was the one they were proclaiming (1 John 1: 1-3). He also warns:

⁴ Samuel M. Zwemer, *Islam and the Cross* (Phillipsburg, NJ: R & R, 2002), 12.

⁵ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *Things for which it is Impossible for God to Lie* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1965), 231.

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come; by which we know that it is the last hour (1 John 2:18). Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the spirit of antichrist, which you have heard that was coming, and is now already in the world (1 John 4:1-3).

Both in the Gospel and in the first Epistle, John is emphatic that Jesus who was God became human and to deny this fact is to declare oneself to be an antichrist. The epistle was written as an instrument of shielding the Christian church in Asia Minor against false teachers who were becoming a serious threat to its existence. Donald W. Burdick affirms:

According to early church writers the father of the Gnostic heresy was Simon Magus who is referred to in Acts 8: 9-13. Another Gnostic teacher was the Egyptian Jew named Cerinthus who taught that the divine Christ rested upon the human Jesus from baptism to crucifixion. It is also probable that the Nicolaitans whom John mentions in Revelation 2: 6, 15 were Gnostics.

Such false teachers became a growing threat to the churches, with the assurance of some believers being shaken, and others actually defecting from the faith under gnostic influence. One of the major areas affected was the province of Asia Minor. ... It was to help the Asian believers resist the inroads of incipient Gnosticism that 1John was Written.⁶

The Gnostics preached a different gospel, which was heretic. They mingled the pure gospel with their own speculations to the distortion of the Christian faith. Burdick adds that “the false prophets argued out that Jesus did not come in the flesh (1 John 4:3); it was a logical deduction from their belief that matter was evil. How could the Supreme deity condescend to be united with an impure physical body, as a man?”⁷ They explained away the incarnation in one of the two ways. “Some did so by denying the actual humanity of Jesus,

⁶ Donald W. Burdick, *The Epistles of John* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1970), 12.

⁷ Ibid., 13.

holding that He only seemed to be human. ... Others explained away the incarnation by denying the real deity of Jesus.”⁸

Conflicting Views on the Incarnation of Jesus: Jehovah’s Witnesses versus Seventh-day Adventists (SDA)

The Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose membership stood at over seven million (7,000,000) worldwide, with Zambia ranking first among landlocked countries in Africa in the year 2002,⁹ and eight million worldwide (8,000,000), and one hundred seventy eight thousand, four hundred eighty one (178,481) members in Zambia by 2007,¹⁰ teach that “Jesus was a spirit creature before he became human, explaining that Jesus was just like God just as a human son may closely resemble his father in various ways.”¹¹ They also argue that Jesus was not “fully God and fully man” explaining that “Jesus was not and is not God but rather God’s first creation and God’s chief spokesman (the word).”¹² They explain, “Jehovah is called a Father because he is the Creator. Since God created Jesus, he is God’s Son. For similar reasons, other spirit creatures and even the man Adam are called sons of God Because of his high position among Jehovah’s creatures, the Word is referred to as “a

⁸ Curtis Vulghan, *Bible Study Commentary 1, 2, 3 John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 9.

⁹ Nation Master, “2002 Report of Jehovah’s Witnesses Worldwide,” 2014 *Year Book of Jehovah’s Witnesses*, accessed 12 August 2016, <http://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Religion/Jehovah’s-Witnesses>.

¹⁰ Jehovah’s Witnesses, “Demographics,” accessed 11 August 2016, <https://www.jw.org/en/search/?q=Demographics>.

¹¹ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of South Africa, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (Krugersdorp, South Africa: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of South Africa, 2014), 41, 202.

¹² Jehovah’s Witnesses, “Jehovah’s Witnesses Beliefs March 17, 2015,” accessed 5 August 2016, www.religionfacts.com/jehovahs-witnesses/beliefs.

god.”¹³ Witnesses further believe that “Jesus’ birth on earth was not an incarnation; instead He emptied himself of all things heavenly and spiritual. He was not a spirit-human hybrid, a man and at the same time spirit person. He was flesh.”¹⁴ They conclude, “He was only a perfect man, not God in flesh.”¹⁵

Meanwhile the SDA Church, whose membership stood at over nineteen million (19,000,000) in the year 2015 worldwide¹⁶ with over one million (1,000,000) baptized in Zambia as at April 2015,¹⁷ teaches the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The denomination teaches, “God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man.”¹⁸ The church further teaches, “in Jesus was the fullness of the Godhead. Far superior to any of the angels, equal with the Father in dignity and glory, He yet condescended to wear the garb of humanity.”¹⁹

The JW’s view of the incarnate Jesus is similar to that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church only to the extent that both believe that Jesus was born of a Virgin Mary; that he pre-

¹³ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of South Africa, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* 41, 202.

¹⁴ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *Things for which it is Impossible for God to Lie*, 180.

¹⁵ Matt Slick, “Jehovah’s Witness Beliefs,” accessed 21 January 2016, <http://carm.org/jehovah’s-witnesses-beliefs>.

¹⁶ Adventist World, “Adventist Church Tops 19 Million Members, 2016 July,” accessed 22 August 2016, <https://www.adventistworld.org>.

¹⁷ Harrington Akombwa, “From Ten to One Million Members,” *Exploits*, January-July, 2015, Vol. 1 (Lusaka, Zambia: Zambia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015), 2.

¹⁸ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 10.

¹⁹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Silver Spring, MD: Pacific Press, 2005), 49.

existed before His birth; and that Jesus lived a perfect life to give an example of righteousness to humanity. Nevertheless, the two Christian bodies hold conflicting views on the incarnation of Jesus as shown in the table below.

Table 1. A comparison between JW and SDA Views

Jehovah's Witnesses Views	Seventh-day Adventist Views
1. Jesus a spirit creature	Jesus the eternal Son of God, not a creature
2. Jesus not God	Jesus Truly God
3. Jesus chief spokesman (the word) and was a 'god'	Jesus the Word was with God in the beginning and was God
4. Jesus didn't become incarnate	Jesus the second person of the Godhead became incarnate
5. Jesus was totally flesh	Jesus was fully God and fully man

The comparative table above shows that the position of the Jehovah's Witnesses and that of the Seventh-day Adventists on the subject of the incarnation of Jesus differ in many aspects. Particularly, the two organizations do not agree on the incarnation owing to their differing views on the person of Christ before he became human. While Jehovah's Witnesses believe that He was a creature spirit, not God, Adventists believe He was God. If the incarnation of Jesus has a bearing on the salvation of mankind then there is need to take a study on the subject in order to come up with the correct biblical theological teaching.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that both in the Gospel and in the Epistle John attempts to make Jesus clearly known to his audience then and now and despite many books having been written by various scholars in support of the Incarnation of Jesus, there is still much disagreement on the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus. The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, in defense of monotheism (a belief in one Almighty God) have resisted the Adventist preaching in Zambia,

claiming that Seventh-day Adventists are in error for teaching about the incarnation. Hence, the Jehovah's witnesses view the Adventists as part of their mission field from which they have to reclaim souls to Jehovah. For example, in 1991 the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zambia embarked on an evangelistic campaign in a Jehovah's Witness stronghold region of Eastern Province, Kacholola under Nyimba district. According to the verbal interview by the researcher to the executive secretariat of the East Zambia Field, "the Seventh-day Adventist Church baptized 35 people at the end of the evangelistic program then. As at December 2015, there were only 9 Adventists in Kacholola after losing 23 to the Jehovah's Witness and 3 by death. All other evangelistic campaigns in the area by the Adventist Church have proved futile for the people in the area consider any other Christian Church as a false religion."²⁰

Purpose of the Study

Considering the reality of the conflicting views about the incarnation of Jesus among Bible Students, the study addressed the conflicting doctrinal views between Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. The analysis was done for the purpose of discovering how far departed the conflicting views are from John's biblical teaching of the incarnate Christ and consequently identified the heretic teaching and how they distort the Christian faith today and the Christian Witnessing.

Significance of the Research

In view of the contrasting views about the incarnation of Jesus Christ, views which were already in existence in the time of John and which have continued to date, this study contributes towards the Christological dialogue, and gives Adventists a clearer understanding

²⁰ Deus D. Phiri, Executive Secretary, East Zambia Field, interview by the author, Lusaka, 22 December 2015.

of the incarnation of Christ and enhances their witnessing mission to Jehovah's Witnesses and the rest of the people that need the saving gospel of the Incarnate Jesus.

Delimitations of the Study

In establishing and analyzing the incarnation of Jesus as presented by the Apostle John, the paper was limited to John 1: 1-3, 14. The study was also limited to Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventist views of the incarnate Christ.

For consistency purposes, the study used the New King James Version (NKJV) and the New World Translation. Other versions were used just for clarity purposes.

Methodology and Overview of the Study

Chapter one presents the background of study, the statement of the problem, the purpose, its significance and other relevant parts. Chapter two is the review of literature on the conflicting views.

Two approaches have been employed in Chapter 3. The historical grammatical approach determined what the text (John 1:1-3, 14) meant to the first century audience. The authorship, date, purpose, occasion, audience and grammar were analysed in detail. The second part compared the understanding of the Jehovah's witnesses on incarnation with the Seventh-day Adventists in light of the findings about John's theology in the text. Chapter 4 presented the summary, conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines the literature on the subject. The review has been guided by the historical sequencing of the topic. The sequence begins with the first century heretical teachings on the person of Christ, followed by the Early Church Councils, the reformers and finally the Bible scholars. The primary literature for the contemporary views of the JWs and SDAs has also been examined.

Most Bible scholars believe that the apostle John is the author of the Gospel of John as well as the three epistles, first, second and third John. In his Gospel, unlike the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, John does not give any details about Jesus' virgin birth by Mary; instead, he begins his introduction of Jesus by asserting that Jesus preexisted as the Word, the Word, which was with God, and the Word, which was God. That same Word became flesh and dwelt among human beings (John 1: 1-3, 14). Similarly, in his first epistle, John addressed the problem of false teachers whose heretical teachings affected the growth of the church in Asia Minor, but John affirmed the reality of the incarnation of Christ. He asserts that he and others heard, saw, and touched Jesus, not any other Jesus but the very One who was with God the Father (1 John 1: 1-3).

The Incarnation of Christ is central to John's theology. However, despite it being so cardinal to the Christian faith, it has been denied by some Christian denominations, organizations and Bible scholars. Accepting this doctrine demands that one first of all accepts the divinity of Christ. This is so because the incarnation refers to a divine being becoming human. Davis Steven T., Kendall SJ, Daniel and O'Collins SJ, Gerald, eds., rightly state that,

“incarnation involves a divine being who is eternal, without a body, and unlimited in power, knowledge, and presence personally taking up an existence that is temporal. ... Through the incarnation God who is Pure Spirit, assumes matter; eternal God personally enters time.”¹ Therefore when we talk of Jesus being incarnate we refer to Him as one who is divine, eternal, without a human body, and not limited in power, knowledge, and presence yet He took up the human body which is temporal. He entered into time, and voluntarily became dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit. This clear biblical teaching has received several contradicting teachings. Some of these false teachings were already prominent as early as the first four centuries A.D. This chapter will analyze such teachings and their counteractive views.

Early Centuries Heretical Teachings

In the early centuries A.D there were many heretical teachings that distorted the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ. One such teaching is known as Gnosticism. This teaching has its roots from Philo, a philosopher of Alexandria. According to David Jackman, “To the Gnostics to describe the eternal Son as having flesh and blood was unthinkable.”² They rejected the incarnation, as “it was a logical deduction from their belief that matter was evil. How could the Supreme deity condescend to be united with an impure physical body, as a man?”³ The views of Gnosticism are better understood in the context of Ebionism and Docetism.

¹ Steven T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins, eds., *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11.

² David Jackman, *The Message of John’s Letters* (England: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 15.

³ Burdick, *The Epistles of John*, 13.

The Ebionites, who were a Judaized form of Christianity, denied the divinity of Christ and his divine incarnation.⁴ The teaching of the Ebionites about the incarnation states that, “Jesus was an ordinary human possessing unusual but not superhuman or supernatural gifts of righteousness and wisdom. He was a human in whom, for a time, the power of God was present and active to an unusual degree.”⁵ This teaching undermines the divinity of Christ while emphasizing his humanity.

The other heretical teaching is Docetism. This teaching takes its name from the Greek verb *dokeo*, which means ‘to seem’ or ‘to appear.’ Docetism only had a partial belief concerning the incarnation with a view that Jesus only seemed to be human but was not human, arguing that, “The deity was real and complete, while the humanity was only appearance, God could not really have become material, since all matter is evil, and he is perfectly pure and holy.”⁶ Additionally, the teaching argues:

The transcendent God could not possibly have united with such a corrupting influence. Being impassable and unchangeable, God could not have undergone the modifications in his nature, which would necessarily have occurred with a genuine incarnation. He could not have exposed himself to the experiences of human life. The humanity of Jesus, his physical nature, was simply an allusion, not a reality. Jesus was more like a Ghost, an apparition, than a human being.⁷

This teaching rejects the incarnation of Christ by not accepting his humanity. Instead, the heresy emphasizes Christ’s divinity by claiming that Christ’s humanity was simply an illusion, not a reality.

Among major heretics of the early centuries to be considered is Arius. His heresy is known as Arianism. He rejected the divinity of Jesus. According to R. C. Sproul, Arius

⁴ John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 2:45, 46.

⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academy, 2001), 634.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 651.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

“believed that to refer to Christ as God would undercut monotheism and result in two gods- or three, if you include the Holy Spirit. He believed that Christ is a creature and therefore had a beginning in time. He declared that the son is “like” the Father (*homoiousios*), but that the son’s being is not the same as the Father’s.”⁸ Arius is further quoted by Millard J. Erickson to have said, “The son has no communion with or even direct knowledge of the Father. Although he is God’s Word and Wisdom, he is not of the very essence of God; being a creature, he bears these titles only because he participates in the word and wisdom of the Father. Totally different from the Father, the son is liable to change and even sin.”⁹

Similarly, the other teaching that did not accept the incarnation of Jesus is Apollinarianism, a view that was proposed by Apolinaris of Laodicea in the fourth century. He stated that “Jesus took on genuine but not complete human nature, flesh was the only aspect of human nature involved, and his soul was divine but had no human will, thus he could not sin.”¹⁰

One other heresy worth noting is that of Nestorianism which represents the view of the fifth century bishop of Constantinople, Nestorius. Nestorius reasoned that, “The Logos, being absolutely immutable was not born. ... The man Jesus was the organ of the divinity. Hence the Logos as God is strictly discriminated from the man.”¹¹ He did not deny the union of the Logos and the human nature of Jesus yet he insisted that, “In their union in Christ his two natures each retained its own mask or appearance.”¹²

⁸ R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P& R, 2006), 1:240, 241.

⁹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 365.

¹⁰ Ibid., 651, 652.

¹¹ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 603.

¹² Ibid

Additionally, Adoptionism, a heresy attributed to Paul of Samosara, a follower of Origen, teaches that, “Jesus of Nazareth was merely a human during the early years of his life. At some point, however, probably at baptism (or perhaps his resurrection), God adopted him as his Son.”¹³ This teaching denies the continuous divinity of Christ by claiming that God adopted him only at a certain point.

The other teaching that militates against incarnation and is worth noting is Eutychianism. Eutyches, trained in Alexandria, is the father of the teaching. This heresy rejects the two natures of Christ, affirming that Christ was simultaneously perfect God and perfect human and arguing that Jesus had two natures before the incarnation and only one after, that of divinity.¹⁴

After the heresy of Eutychianism, there seems to be no other new heresy concerning the incarnation of Jesus to have arisen except those that border around the aforesaid. As a result of this, the next section is about the Church Councils’ responses to the heresies above.

The Early Church Councils Teachings

Several early church councils were called upon to counter the false teachings about the person of Christ. Each council, as it shall be noticed in the paragraphs below, denounced a particular heresy in an effort to protect an established church teaching and to support the biblical view. It is however necessary to observe that every heresy that arose came as a result of some theologian or philosopher trying to defend the Bible truth and ended up going to one extreme or the other which was not accepted by the main church body. The main church councils we shall consider include the Council of Nicaea; the Council of Constantinople; the Council of Ephesus; and the Council of Chalcedon.

¹³ Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 236.

¹⁴ Ibid

The Council of Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea was held in the year 325 AD. The Council was convened by Emperor Constantine and was attended by over three hundred bishops.¹⁵ The purpose of the council was to address the conflicting views, that of Arius and Athanasius over the person of Jesus. While Athanasius taught that Jesus was of the same substance with the Father, Arius taught that Jesus was not of the same substance with God the Father because there was a time he was not and came into existence, being created by God the Father.¹⁶ The Nicene council condemned the teaching of Arius and favoured that of Athanasius. The Nicene Creed, as quoted by Alister McGrath, states that:

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty (*pantocrator*), the maker of all things seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father; only-begotten- that is from the substance of the Father; God from God; light from light; true God from true God; begotten not made; of one substance with the Father (*homoousion* to *patri*); through whom all things in heaven and on earth came into being; who on account of us human beings and our salvation came down and took flesh, becoming a human being; he suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens; and will come again to judge the living and the dead.¹⁷

The council of Nicaea seemed to settle the matter by emphasizing both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus. The creed which the council came up with, as quoted above, refuted Arius' claim that Jesus was a created being that had a beginning at some point in time and further established a teaching that Jesus was both eternal and truly God just like the Father.

The Council of Constantinople

The debate about the person of Jesus continued with the coming in of the heresy of Apollinaris who argued that Jesus was not a usual human being in that he did not possess the

¹⁵ William C. Placher and Derek R. Nelson, *A History of Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 60.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (England: Blackwell, 2001), 21.

human will; hence he was not human but divine. Apollinaris debated that, “The Word became flesh without assuming a human mind; a mind is subject to change, and is captive of filthy imaginations; but he was a divine mind, changeless and heavenly.”¹⁸ Views such as that of Apollinaris lead to the council of Constantinople.

The Council of Constantinople, 381 A.D., convened, at the request of Emperor Theodosius I, to condemn the heresy of Apollinarianism. The council upheld the Nicene Creed, which condemned Arianism and further “affirmed that Christ was *true man* came down ... and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin.”¹⁹ The council adopted what came to be known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.²⁰ Thus the two councils, Nicene and Constantinople, protected the union of the two natures of Christ, Jesus as both divine and human.

The Council of Ephesus

Beyond the Council of Constantinople the Christological struggles continued. Nestorius, who was both a politician and a bishop, came up with his new views about the nature and person of Christ, which eventually became to be known as the heresy of Nestorianism. This heresy led to the Council of Ephesus.²¹

The Council of Ephesus, which was led by Cyril of Alexandria was the third ecumenical council held in 431 A.D., under emperor Theodosius II, was called to look into the heretical teaching of Nestorianism. The issue of controversy centred on whether Mary

¹⁸ Placher and Nelson, *A History of Christian Theology*, 66.

¹⁹ Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 602.

²⁰ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Council of Constantinople,” accessed 10 September 2016, www.britannica.com/event/Council-of-Constantinople-AD-381.

²¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Nestorius,” accessed 10 September 2016, www.britannica.com/biography/Nestorius.

deserved to be called the mother of God or ‘God-bearer’ (theotokos), the view held by the church mother body or ‘Christ-bearer’ (Christotokos), a view held by Nestorius.²² The Council that was attended by over 198 bishops maintained the view that the Virgin Mary is “Theotokos” because “she gave birth not to man but to God as a man.”²³ The Theopedia explains that:

According to the Council, Nestorianism overemphasized the human nature of Jesus at the expense of the divine. The Council denounced the patriarch Nestorius’ teaching as erroneous. Nestorius taught that the Virgin Mary gave birth to a man, Jesus Christ, not God, the “Logos”. ... The Logos only dwelled in Christ, as in a Temple. ... The Council decreed that Jesus was one person, not two separate “people”: complete God and complete man, with a rational soul and body. ... The union of the two natures of Christ took place in such a fashion that one did not disturb the other.

The Council also declared the text of the Nicene Creed decreed at the First and Second Ecumenical Councils to be complete and forbade any additional change (additional or deletion) to it.²⁴

The Council of Ephesus, with its creed that included a warning that no one was to add or remove anything from it, should have been the last church council to deal with the nature and person of Christ. To the contrary, yet another council, the Council of Chalcedon, which had to deal with the heresy of Eutychianism, followed it.

The Council of Chalcedon

The Council of Chalcedon, held in 451 A. D. was prompted by the heresy known as Eutychianism, named after its proponent Eutyches, the head of a monastery in Constantinople. Eutyches propagated the view that, “our Lord was of two natures before the union [that is the Incarnation], but after the union there was only one.”²⁵ This proposition

²² Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 603.

²³ Theopedia, “Council of Ephesus,” accessed 11th September 2016, www.theopedia.com/council-of-ephesus.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 606.

brought up the problem of confusion of the two natures, thus, “out of two natures, one nature.”²⁶ As a result of this confusion, the Council of Chalcedon was called to address it and its creed reads as follows:

We confess one and same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of two natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one hypostasis.²⁷

The Synod’s Creed cited above refuted Eutyches’ teaching by dismissing the understanding that after his incarnation Christ had only one nature, that of humanity. The Council emphasized the two natures of Jesus, the divine-human nature. Thus Jesus was God-man in one person, without division. McGrath states it so well when he says, “The Chalcedonian council (451 AD) concluded that in the one person or hypostasis of Jesus Christ there concur two natures, a complete humanity and a complete divinity, and that they are united in His person without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”²⁸ Christian orthodoxy confesses:

Jesus Christ possesses two natures, a perfect divine nature and a perfect human nature, the former being the same as that of God the Father and God the Spirit, the latter being the same as ours, his fellow humans. Inextricably united in Mary’s womb, these two natures shall remain forever united in one person, the person of Jesus Christ. In other words, Christ’s divine and human natures are joined in *hypostatic*, or personal, union—an intrinsic and concrete union, as opposed to an extrinsic and abstract union, one that is merely metaphorical, moral, volitional, legal, or ideational. Moreover, the integrity of each nature is upheld in this personal union, not undermined or overturned.²⁹

²⁶ Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 606.

²⁷ Michael Welker, *God the Revealed* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 268.

²⁸ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 271.

²⁹ John C. Clark and Marcus Peter Johnson, *The Incarnation of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 37.

The orthodox confession is in line with the Chalcedonian decree. It appears that after the Council of Chalcedon there are no more new issues about Christology except the same issues resurfacing in one form or the other. However, with the coming of Protestant Reformers, there surfaced some Christological views that are worth noting in our study.

The Protestant Reformers Teachings

The sixteenth century Protestant Reformers, generally, did not debate much on Christological issues, especially on the Incarnation of Christ. The only Reformers that discussed, though briefly, on the incarnation are Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. The two did not agree in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The two had sharp differences concerning the sacrament. According to Jordan Cooper, "Zwingli held to a symbolic view of the supper. The bread and wine simply represented Christ's body and blood. For Luther, Christ's body and blood were truly communicated to the recipient."³⁰ Cooper further explains:

Luther believed that the human nature of Christ had communicated omnipresence, thus could be present in the Lord's Supper. Zwingli denied this saying that the finite was not capable of the infinite. The Lutheran divines saw this as a dangerous principle because taken to its logical conclusion; the human nature of Jesus would be incapable of the infinite God, thus denying the incarnation.³¹

Martin Luther further said, "This is the first article of our faith that Jesus Christ is essential, natural, true and complete God and man in one person, undivided and inseparable."³² Thus he believed that Jesus was both divine and human, accepting the incarnation. However, Luther's

³⁰ Jordan Cooper, "Zwingli on the Lord's Supper," accessed 29 October 2016, www.patheos.com/blogs/justandsinner/zwingli-on-the-lords-supper.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Paul R. Fries and Tiran Nersoyan, *Christ in East and West* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 133.

belief that the human nature of Christ had communicable omnipresence led him to conclude that “Christ could be present in the Lord’s Supper.”³³

The other reformer who made a theological contribution to the person of Christ is John Calvin. Raoul Dederen observes that Calvin “denied that the divine attributes could be imparted to the human nature of Christ.”³⁴ Calvin accepted the fact that Jesus was both divine and human, qualifying him to be “omniscient while at the same time limited in knowledge.”³⁵

Fredrick Schleiermacher and Others Teachings

Friedrich Schleiermacher, the nineteenth century theologian, is often called the father of modern theology. According to Alister E. McGrant, Schleiermacher:

Offered a searching analysis of the two natures teaching of Chalcedon, which he claimed to be incoherent. . . . Instead of beginning with the eternal Word who in an act of condescension assumes a human existence, he began from a human Jesus, whom he interpreted as the completion of the creation of man, the one in whom the creation of human nature, which up to this point, had existed only in a provisional state, was perfected.³⁶

Schleiermacher did not accept the teaching that Christ had two natures. He saw this kind of teaching to be from the field of “speculative metaphysics.”³⁷ According to Schleiermacher, “the only way to talk about the divinity of Christ is to refer to His absolute God-consciousness. Apart from that, Jesus is like us, though with a higher degree of God-consciousness.”³⁸

³³ Fries and Nersoyan, *Christ in East and West*, 133.

³⁴ Raoul Dederen, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 193.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Alister E. McGrant, ed., *The Modern Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 271.

³⁷ Vali-Matti Karkkainen, *Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 94.

³⁸ Ibid.

Seemingly in agreement with Schleiermacher's concept of the human nature of Christ is the teaching of sixteenth century, Socinian Christology that says, "Christ is a man, nothing more. No supernatural fact conceded, nor all combined, could raise him in his own nature or being above the plane of the human."³⁹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, however, as cited by Michael Welker, states:

Who is this God? He is the God who became human. He is completely human. Nothing human is foreign to him. The human being that I am is what Jesus Christ was also. We say of this human being, Jesus Christ, that he is God. ... This person's being God is not something added onto the being of Jesus Christ. ... But the essential difference [between him and all other human beings] is that the Word of God that comes from above is at the same time right here in Jesus Christ himself.⁴⁰

Bonhoeffer approves the incarnation of Christ. He also affirms the fact that in as much as Christ did not do away with his divinity, he was truly human. On the other hand, Albrecht Ritschl, a German Lutheran theologian and one of the great teachers of the liberal protestant tradition, denied the doctrine of the virgin Birth and the Incarnation of Christ, though he believed that Jesus perfectly revealed God to humans.⁴¹

Meanwhile, William G. Rusch, a Lutheran Professor of theology, and many other scholars presented below, affirm the incarnation of Christ and assert that it is the one which discloses the salvation of human beings, teaching that, "It is through knowing Jesus as a man that we penetrate to the heart of God. The incarnation discloses the depth of our salvation."⁴²

In the same way, Thomas F. Torrance, a former minister of the Church of Scotland, adds that, "The event that overshadows all others in importance is when God assumed

³⁹Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:54, 55.

⁴⁰ Welker, *God the Revealed*, 273.

⁴¹ New World Encyclopedia, Albrecht Ritschl, 15 September 2008; accessed 9 November 2016, www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Albrecht-Ritschl.

⁴² Fries and Nersoyan, *Christ in East and West*, 33.

humanity and became flesh. ... The incarnation is God's loving 'Yes' to every human being. The Son of God enters into a 'carnal union' with all humanity."⁴³

The Palestinian Evangelical scholar, Yohanna Katanacho, commenting on the Gospel of John, discusses the incarnation of Jesus in precise terms. He says:

In the Gospel of John a new stage is clearly initiated in which Christ is all in all. Christ, the God-man person, is not only the transcendent reality, but is also the immanent eschatological reality. Through his presence the divine reality is revealed, touched, heard, and seen. The heavens open and the Spirit of God appears (1: 32-34). The invisible God becomes visible (1: 14, 18). The full union between God and humanity becomes a reality that bursts forth with grace and truth (1: 14, 17). The God-man is not only with God but is also with humanity. He is not only in heaven but is also humble enough not only in heaven but is also humble enough to be found in Nazareth, a small backwater town.⁴⁴

Katanacho does not hesitate to confirm the reality of the incarnation. He brings out the fact that Jesus who became man, and humbled himself enough to be found on earth, was at the same time God.

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield in support of the reality of the incarnation of Jesus emphasizes that, "The doctrine of the incarnation is the hinge on which the Christian system turns."⁴⁵ Furthermore, Louis Berkhof explains that, "The incarnation of God the Son is a mystery. ... The creator of worlds, in whom was the fullness of the Godhead became the helpless babe in the manger. Far superior to any of the angels, equal with the father in dignity and glory, He yet condescended to wear the garb of humanity."⁴⁶ Karl Barth further states that, "Jesus Christ is very God, very man, and very God-man."⁴⁷

⁴³ Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and K. K. Yeo, *Jesus without Borders* (Carlisle, PA: Langham, 2015), 20.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1950), 211.

⁴⁶ Louis Berkhof, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: The Burner of Truth Trust, 2005), 72.

Roch A. Kereszty in the same vein explains that, “All that God has done, beginning with the creation of the universe, he has done through his pre-existent personal Word or Wisdom who is the same subject, Jesus Christ. The whole of history, of both Israel and the world, is to be viewed as a progressive coming of the Word who at length becomes flesh as Jesus Christ. He is the light who has illumined every member of the human race.”⁴⁸

According to Glenn W. Barker, in comparing the Gospel of John and the first Epistle of John, “The Gospel deals with the ‘personal word’ (*ho logos*), of his eternity and his entrance into time. The Epistle centres on the life heard and in turn proclaimed (cf. Acts 5: 20; Phil 2: 16). This message, the gospel, is from the beginning because it is from God. It precedes creation, time, and history. In God the message of life also draws near to humanity and finds its culmination in Jesus. In him the word of life becomes incarnated, manifested, and hence can be seen, touched, and even handled.”⁴⁹

Verlyn Verbrugge also adds that, “The Word was not only with God, He was God. By this Word, the universe was created and humans have life and the benefit of light. ... Without surrendering his essential divinity, the word became a mortal human, took up residence among the human race, and as the presence of God’s glory, signified the gift of God’s grace. And covenant faithfulness to them (John 1: 14, 16), surpassing the Old Testament revelation of the Word.”⁵⁰ Jerry D. Thomas comments, “Jesus gave up honour and glory to become a

⁴⁷ Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 140.

⁴⁸ Roch A. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ* (New York: Fathers and Brothers of St Paul, 2002), 165.

⁴⁹ Glenn W. Barker, “1 John, Text and Exposition,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 12:306.

⁵⁰ Verlyn Verbrugge, *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 765.

human. He showed that His character is just the opposite of Satan's. But Jesus went even further: He didn't just become human. He became a sacrifice to save humans."⁵¹

Paul Copan and William Lane Craig affirm that, "Jesus of Nazareth, though One Person, is fully God and fully human. He uniquely possesses two natures, one identical to our human nature and the other nature divine. ... In the incarnation God comes close to us; He comes alongside us in our weaknesses, even enduring difficult temptations and struggles."⁵²

A contrary view of the Nineteenth Century is Kenoticism. The teaching has its roots from the Greek word '*kenoo*' to 'empty.' The teaching states that, "Jesus emptied himself (Phil 2: 7) of the form of God such as omnipotence and omnipresence and took on human qualities" clarifying that, "in effect, the incarnation consisted of an exchange of part the divine nature for human characteristics."⁵³ The teaching holds that Christ emptied himself of the divine in the incarnation. If this be true, then there is no ground of atonement in the blood of Jesus Christ. His death would be like of any other human being without power to save. On this basis, the teaching is to be rejected.

Contemporary Views (Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists)

The contemporary views on the incarnation of Christ are those of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists. The views of the two organizations are contrary to each other. While the Jehovah's Witnesses Society rejects the teaching of the incarnation of Christ, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on the other side, approves it. We now analyse the two views beginning with that of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

⁵¹ Jerry D. Thomas, *Messiah* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2003), 15.

⁵² Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Contending with Christianity's Critics* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009), 223, 227.

⁵³ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1914), 490.

The Jehovah's Witness View

The Jehovah's Witness society was founded in the nineteenth century, 1872, in the United States of America by Charles Taze Russell. Russell, "a former haberdasher from Philadelphia was baptized a Congregationalist and was raised in a strict protestant family."⁵⁴ When Russell died in 1916, Joseph Frankline Rutherford succeeded him as the new leader of the movement. Rutherford came up with a teaching against the incarnation of Jesus. He argued:

Neither was Jesus a combination of two natures, human and spiritual. The blend of two natures produces neither one nor the other, but an imperfect hybrid thing which is obnoxious to the divine arrangement. When Jesus was in the flesh he was a perfect human being, previous to that time he was a perfect spiritual being; and since his resurrection he is a perfect spiritual being of the highest or divine order. It was not until the time of consecration even unto death, as typified in his baptism at thirty years of age (manhood according to the law and therefore the right time to consecrate himself as a man) that he received the earnest of his inheritance of the divine nature.⁵⁵

Rutherford's position has been maintained by the movement to date. The Witnesses believe that Jesus was a perfect human being while he was in the flesh, eliminating the fact that Jesus was not only human but also divine. The movement argues that Christ was not always there, instead, "He was formed countless millenniums ago as the first and the only direct creation by His Father, Jehovah, and because of his proved faultless integrity, was appointed by Jehovah as His vindicator and the chief agent of life toward mankind."⁵⁶

The movement insists, "Jesus had been a spirit Son of God in heaven, God's only begotten Son and in order that his begotten Son might be born as a perfect human creature, Almighty God divested the Son of his heavenly god like existence and transferred his life

⁵⁴ William Saunders, "What do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe?" accessed 21 April 2016, <https://www.ewtn.com/library/ANSWERS/JWBELIEVE.HTM>.

⁵⁵ Joseph F. Rutherford, "Jehovah's Witnesses-Origins and Errors," accessed 11 December 2015, www.wbcoc.org.

⁵⁶ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, *Make Sure of All Things* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1957), 207.

from heaven to Mary's womb by means of God's invisible active force or spirit."⁵⁷ The movement insists that there is no way God can become man. They say that, "Jesus was not an incarnation. He was born of a woman, made flesh."⁵⁸ To defend this position further they define incarnation as, "clothing, or state of being clothed, with flesh; taking on, or being manifested in, a body of flesh. Scripturally, it describes the condition of angels appearing to mankind on earth. False religion, they argue, claims it is the 'Union of Christ's divinity with his humanity.'"⁵⁹ Additionally, they teach "Jesus was a spirit creature before he became human, explaining that Jesus was just like God just as a human son may closely resemble his father in various ways."⁶⁰ They translate John 1: 1 as referring to Jesus as a 'god' not 'God'⁶¹ hence arguing that Jesus was not "fully God and fully man" explaining that "Jesus was not and is not God but rather God's first creation and God's chief spokesman (the word)."⁶² They explain, "Jehovah is called a Father because he is the Creator. Since God created Jesus, he is God's Son. For similar reasons, other spirit creatures and even the man Adam are called sons of God. ... Because of his high position among Jehovah's creatures, the Word is referred to as "a god."⁶³ Consequently Witnesses believe that "Jesus' birth on earth was not an

⁵⁷ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *Things for which it is Impossible for God to Lie*, 231.

⁵⁸ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Make Sure of All Things*, 180.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁶⁰ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of South Africa, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* 4, 202.

⁶¹ Jehovah's Witnesses, "Was the Word 'God' or 'a god'?" *The Watchtower* November, 2008, accessed 14 November 2016, <https://www.jw.org>.

⁶² Jehovah's Witnesses, "Jehovah's Witnesses Beliefs," accessed 5 August 2016, www.religionfacts.com/jehovahs-witnesses/beliefs.

⁶³ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of South Africa, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* 41, 202.

incarnation; instead He emptied himself of all things heavenly and spiritual. He was not a spirit-human hybrid, a man and at the same time spirit person. He was flesh.”⁶⁴ They conclude, “He was only a perfect man, not God in flesh.”⁶⁵

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the Jehovah’s Witnesses do not deny the Messiahship of Christ. The society states that, “At his baptism, Jesus became the Messiah or Christ. On that day, when Jehovah poured out the spirit on him, Jesus became the Messiah. He was the one whom God had chosen to be Leader and King.”⁶⁶

The Society’s acceptance of the Christ to be the Messiah has a concept that Jesus is a creature who was appointed by God to be the Leader and King over other creatures and does not include the concept of His being eternal and as divine as God the Father. This could be the reason the society rejects the incarnation of Christ.

The Seventh-day Adventist View

The Seventh-day Adventist Church that was officially organized in 1863,⁶⁷ teaches the incarnation of Jesus. Though the church teaches the incarnation, the understanding of it has not always been the same among its leaders and members. One of the most controversial positions in the Adventist Church was taken by Milian Lauritz Andreasen, who served, among other portfolios, as a professor of theology as well as field secretary of the General Conference in the mid-20th century. Andreasen held a position that “Christ became finite and

⁶⁴ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *Things for which it is Impossible for God to Lie*, 180.

⁶⁵ Matt Slick, “Jehovah’s Witness Beliefs,” accessed 21 January 2016, <http://carm.org/jehovah’s-witnesses-beliefs>.

⁶⁶ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* (Krugersdorp, South Africa: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of South Africa, 2015), 42, 43.

⁶⁷ Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 1.

incarnate that human beings can indeed keep the law and gain victory over sin.”⁶⁸ However, the church rejected that position. The denomination teaches, “God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. ... Forever truly God, He became also truly man.”⁶⁹ As one of the official fundamental teachings of the denomination, the statement on the doctrine is well stipulated:

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus the Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God’s power and was attested as God’s promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His People and the restoration of all things.”⁷⁰

The Church further explains:

When Christ came into the world, “a body” had been prepared for Him (Heb. 10: 5). When He took upon Himself humanity, His divinity was clothed with humanity. This was not accomplished by changing humanity into divinity or divinity into humanity. He did not go out of Himself to another nature but took humanity into Himself. Thus divinity and humanity were combined. When He became incarnate, Christ did not cease to be God, nor was His divinity reduced to the level of humanity. Each nature kept its standing.⁷¹

One of the Seventh-day Adventist theologians, George K. Knight equally explains that, “The real parallelism between the Gospel and 1 John is not found in ‘the beginning’ but in that Jesus ‘the Word was God’ (John 1: 1) and that ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’ as ‘the only Son from the Father’ (John 1: 14). It was the incarnation and the fact

⁶⁸ Roy Adams, *The Nature of Christ* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994), 29, 48.

⁶⁹ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 10.

⁷⁰ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 43.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

that Jesus of Nazareth was the divine Christ that dissidents whom John wrote against in his letter were denying (1 John 4: 2; 2: 22). And it was the reality that Jesus was the divine Christ and had truly taken the human flesh (1 John 1: 1, 2; 2: 23; 3: 8, 23; 4:2, 9, 10, 11, 15; 5: 1).⁷² Knight adds, “To John the denial of the incarnation of Christ was the ultimate heresy. His Gospel opens with the claim that Jesus “the word was God” and that “the word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1: 1, 4). To deny that reality was to undermine the entire message of salvation.”⁷³

Ekkehardt Mueller, one of the Seventh-day Adventist theologians, points out that, “To deny Christ’s divinity or humanity also means to deny His ministry as Saviour, as example, and as Lord. Salvation through Jesus depends on Jesus’ divine-human nature.”⁷⁴

Another Adventist Scholar who contributes to the subject of the Incarnate Christ is Jairyong Lee, a Korean national. He asserts, “The everlasting God became a man to be humanity’s Saviour. The incarnation became a reality by the willingness of the Son and through the work of the Holy Spirit. In this magnificent event all three members of the Godhead worked together as a team from the foundation of the world. Thus Jesus was born the Saviour of the world.”⁷⁵

Angel Manuel Rodriguez asserts that it still remains within the parameters of divine revelation that Christ was fully divine and fully human. That Christ was fully human and

⁷² George R. Knight, *Exploring the Letters of John and Jude* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2009), 35, 36.

⁷³ Knight, *Exploring the Letters of John and Jude*, 123.

⁷⁴ Ekkehardt Mueller, “Loved and Loving: John’s Epistles,” *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, 3rd and 4th Quarter 2009 (Grantham, England: Stanborough Press, 2009) 11.

⁷⁵ Jairyong Lee, “Amazing God-man,” accessed 13 November 2016, www.adventist.org

fully divine is a biblical fact. He insists that, “The Son of God indeed took human nature upon Him at the Incarnation.”⁷⁶

Ellen G. White, one of the founding members of the church, similarly approves the incarnation of Jesus. She says, “The King of glory stooped low to take humanity. Rude and forbidding were His earthly surroundings. His glory was veiled, that the majesty of His outward form might not become an object of attraction. He shunned all outward display.”⁷⁷ “By His obedience to all the commandments of God, Christ wrought out redemption for man. This was not done by going out of Himself to another, but by taking humanity into Himself. ... Christ took human nature that men might be one with Him as He is one with the Father, that God may love man as He loves His only begotten Son, that men may be partakers of the divine nature, and be complete in Him.”⁷⁸ She also attests that, “The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain a mystery. That which is revealed, is for us and for our children, but let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ all together human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be.”⁷⁹ White emphasizes further, “The Wonderful condescension of God—The doctrine of the incarnation of Christ in human flesh is a mystery, “even a mystery which has been hid from ages and for generations.” It was a great and profound mystery of godliness. “He was the Son of Mary; “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” Christ took upon Himself human nature, a nature inferior to His

⁷⁶ Angel Manuel Rodriguez, “Christianity’s Great Mystery-Incarnation,” accessed 13 November 2016, www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/theology-jesus-christ/christianitys-great-mystery-incarnation.

⁷⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Coldwater, MI: Remnant Publications, 1998), 22.

⁷⁸ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald Articles, Book III, 1901-1915* (La Grande, OR: Manna, 1995), 311.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

heavenly nature. Nothing so shows the wonderful condescension as this. . . . He was of the seed of David according to human descent.”⁸⁰

Summary

The person of Christ became a subject of heated debate in the early Christian Church. The debate would seemingly come to a conclusion but again resurface in one form or the other. To date, the arguments on the matter continue. The area that has been at the center of the arguments mainly relates to the incarnation of Christ. When we talk of Jesus being incarnate we refer to Him as one who is divine, eternal, without a human body, and not limited in power, knowledge, and presence yet He took up the human body which is temporal, and limited in power, knowledge and presence. This clear biblical teaching has received several contradicting teachings.

There have been several heresies surrounding the subject of the incarnation of Christ, some of which include Ebionism (Jesus was an ordinary human possessing unusual but not superhuman or supernatural gifts of righteousness and wisdom); Decetism (Jesus only seemed to be human yet not human); Arianism (Jesus was a created spirit being at some point in time past); Apolinarianism (Jesus had some elements of humanity and the rest divine); Nestorianism (Jesus was God-man, split into two distinct persons); Adoptionism (Jesus was merely a human during the early years of His life but at some point, most probably at baptism or resurrection God adopted Him as His Son); and Eutychianism (Jesus had two natures before the incarnation and one thereafter).

To the contrary, the Church Councils responded to the heresies by emphasizing that Christ was fully divine and fully human yet one person. Explaining that he was of the same

⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald Articles, Book II, 1890-1901* (La Grande, OR: Manna, 1995), 378.

essence and substance (homoousios) with the Father and not like (homoiousios) with the Father.

The two Reformers, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli on the nature of Christ as it applied to the Lord's Supper. While Luther argued that the human nature of Christ had communicable omnipresence, which made it possible for His real body and blood to be present in the communion bread and wine, Zwingli objected to this position by insisting that the bread and wine were only symbols of the body and blood of Christ. The researcher is in agreement with Zwingli's position; the Holy Communion bread and wine are simply emblems of the body and blood of Jesus.

The post reformation Bible scholars mainly debated on the nature of the Incarnate Christ. While some emphasized the divine nature, others emphasized the human nature and others further supported the view that He was both divine and human. Outstanding among the post reformation scholars emphasizing the humanity of Christ is Fredrick Schleiermacher who taught that Jesus was like any other human being except he had a much higher level of God consciousness.

The contemporary contradicting views under study, the one of the Jehovah's Witnesses and that of the Seventh-day Adventists to some extent hinge around the positions indicated above, the former in line with the heresy of Arianism and the later aligning with the position of the Church councils, especially that of the Council of Constantinople. Thus, Jehovah's Witnesses reject the teaching of the Incarnation of Christ on the basis of the emphasis on Monotheism, fearing that should they accept the doctrine, they would be accepting that Jesus was God before becoming flesh and consequently they would be accepting worshipping multiple gods, God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, Seventh-day Adventists accept the Incarnation, believing that

God the Son became man while maintaining His divinity and that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are One God though three distinct persons.

CHAPTER 3

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN'S THEOLOGY ON THE INCARNATE CHRIST AND CONTEMPORARY CHRISTOLOGICAL VIEWS

The statement of the problem has identified conflicting views concerning the Incarnate Christ. Some views support the teaching while others deny it all together. For this reason it is necessary to analyze John's theology of the incarnation of Christ as found in the Gospel (John 1: 1-3, 14) and his first Epistle (1 John 1: 1-3; 4: 2, 3) so as to provide a correct foundational teaching for contemporary Christology. Thereafter, both the views of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists will be analysed in light of John's Christology in order to determine the significance of the biblical-theological use of the Incarnate Christ and consequently provide a response to contemporary heretical Christological teachings.

The Context and Exegesis of John 1: 1-3, 14

This section covers the historical background, textual analysis and theological implications of the text. The historical context of the book contributes to the understanding of John's language in the text. Hence the authorship, date, occasion and audience have been examined.

The Historical Background of the Gospel of John

There is “no agreement among Bible scholars on the cultural and religious background”¹ to the Gospel. The primary factors that are to help us have a fair understanding of the background to the Gospel are authorship, date of writing, the audience the author addressed, the occasion, and the purpose of writing.

Authorship

Who wrote the gospel of John? This is a question that remains unanswered among some scholars, although noted theologians throughout the ages maintain that it was indeed the disciple John who penned the famous Biblical book.”² The title of the book itself is “The Gospel According to John” suggesting that John wrote this book. Additionally, the internal evidence indicates that the author was an apostle and one of the twelve, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (1: 14; 19: 35; 13: 23; 19: 26; 20: 2; 21: 20), and more specifically, John the son of Zebedee (13: 23-24; 18: 15-16; 20: 2-9; 21: 2-23). Matthew Henry, referring to the authorship of the Gospel, asserts, “We are sure that it was given by inspiration of God to John, the brother of James, one of the twelve apostles, distinguished by the honorable character of that disciple whom Jesus loved, one of the first three of the worthies of the Son of David, whom he took to be the witnesses of his retirements, particularly of his transfiguration and his agony.”³

¹ Gilbert Van Belle, “Gospel of John,” accessed 31 January 2017, www.oxfordbibliographies.com.

² Biblical Archeology Society Staff, “Gospel of John Commentary: Who Wrote the Gospel of John and How Historical Is It?” accessed 31 January 2017, www.biblicalarcheology.org

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, PC Study Bible (Electronic Database Copyright © 2006 Biblesoft, Inc.).

Date and Place of Writing

The most likely period of writing is between A.D. 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and A.D. 100 (before the death of John), but there is not enough evidence to be much more precise. According to William Barclay, “the fourth Gospel was written about the year A.D. 100.”⁴ Meanwhile, Matthew Henry suggests that it was written prior to John’s banishment into the isle of Patmos.⁵ (Probably was exiled around the year A.D. 95.)⁶

Though there is not much evidence to give the precise date when the Gospel was written, any date after A.D. 70 would be justifiable taking into account the possibility that the book was written as a means of responding to the heresies of Corinthus and the Ebionites (A Jewish sect which rose about the time of the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, A.D. 70),⁷ who taught that Jesus was a mere man; the Gospel’s emphasis on the deity of Christ would rightly have targeted this heresy. On the other hand, any date after A.D. 100 would be rejected owing to the fact that John the Apostle, believed to be author of the book, had by then died.⁸ The date can therefore be stated as the late first century, A.D.

Purpose, Occasion, and Audience

The purpose of the Gospel of John, as stated near its end (20: 30, 31), is to help those who read it to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who was sent by God the Father

⁴ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1975), 1:15.

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, PC Study Bible (Electronic Database Copyright © 2006 Biblesoft, Inc.).

⁶ Rodney W. Francis, “John on the Island of Patmos,” accessed 23 February 2017, www.gospel.org.

⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Ebionite: Religious Sect,” accessed 30 January 2017, <https://www.britannica.com>.

⁸ National Geographic Channel, “How Did the Apostles Die?” accessed 23 January 2017, channel.nationalgeographic.com.

to reveal the only true God and to provide redemption for humanity. Additionally, the Gospel appears to primarily address the problem the logos. Francis D. Nichol suggests, “The word *Logos* epitomizes the dominant theme of the book of John.”⁹ The term was greatly used in Greek literature,¹⁰ used by “many philosophers to mean "reason," the force which structured the universe; Philo combined this image with Jewish conceptions of the "word." The Old Testament had personified Wisdom (Prov 8), and ancient Judaism eventually identified personified Wisdom, the Word and the Law (the Torah).”¹¹

Among the stoics it was “used to describe the principle of divine reason which caused the natural creation to grow” while “Philo of Alexandria used it of the instrument through which the world was created, though he never thought of it to be a person.”¹²

According to Oscar Cullmann, “The point at which the author of John makes use of the Logos concept shows that the title is indispensable for him when he wishes to speak of the relationship between the divine revelation in the life of Jesus and the pre-existence of Jesus.”¹³ These conflicting views about the Logos lead John to clarify who the logos was.

As regards the occasion of writing the Gospel, Frank Wheeler points to the destruction of the temple (the temple was a symbol of the presence of God among the Jews) in A.D. 70, and the prevailing persecution of the Jews by Romans. The destruction of the

⁹ “Word” [John 1: 1], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 5:897.

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, et al., *New Bible Commentary* (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1025.

¹¹ Craig S. Keener, *IVP Backgrounds Bible Commentary* (England: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 264.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 249.

temple was interpreted to be a consequence of the sin and unfaithfulness of Israel; hence God's judgment visited them. With the destruction of the temple, Israel now looked with renewed expectations for the Messiah. The book of John was written with these issues in mind.¹⁴

John's original audience probably consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. These, according to the *Andrews Study Bible's* "Introduction to the Gospel of John," are second generation Christians, who knew Christ only through the testimony of others. This position includes both Jews and Gentiles. However, Daniel B. Wallace points out that "the recipients of this gospel are largely Gentile."¹⁵ This argument is substantiated by the "reference to 'Jews' as the enemies of Christ, as well as the many explanations, interpretations, and asides which would be unnecessary if the audience were Jewish (cf., e.g., 1: 38, 41, 42; 5: 2, etc.)."¹⁶ Wallace does not rule out the inclusion of Jews as part of the audience, except he is emphatic that the majority of the recipients of the book were Gentiles.

With these submissions, it seems clear to take the view that the audience of the book of John, though largely Gentile, was both Jewish and Gentile.

¹⁴ Frank Wheeler, "The Historical Background to the Gospel of John," accessed 26 January 2017, www.york.edu.

¹⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, "The Gospel of John: Introduction, Argument, Outline," accessed 01 February 2017, <https://bible.org>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The Translation of the Text¹⁷

John 1:1-3, 14

1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. 2 Οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. 3 Πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν. ... 14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν- καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός- πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things through him did happen, and without him happened not even one thing that hath happened.

14 And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth.

John 1: 1-3, 14 in its Context (Historical, Theological or Literary Context?)

The Gospel’s opening clause, “In the beginning” (1:1) reminds the reader of the first words of the creation account in the Old Testament “In the beginning” (Gen 1: 1). Similar words are used in John’s first Epistle: “That which was from the beginning” (1 John 1: 1). John introduces Jesus as one who existed before the beginning of time.

Following Louis Berkhof’s divisions of the Gospel of John, the setting of the text under study is the Advent and Incarnation of the Word (vv. 1-13) and the Incarnate Word as the only source of life to the World, (1: 14-6: 71).¹⁸

¹⁷ This text seems to have only one textual variant at the end of v. 3 οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν ἐν. The committee gave it a B rating. The main issue is on punctuation and on whether the phrase should be considered with what precedes it or what comes after it. The committee felt it should be considered with what precedes it and that since the original manuscripts did not have punctuation; it should be taken as such. This researcher supports this view. See Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini and Bruce Metzger, *Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft* 4th ed. (Stuttgart: C.H Beck, 2001) and also Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) on John 1:1-3, 14.

¹⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1915), 57.

Textual Analysis

This section will take into account the word study of key words, propositional phrases, parallel clauses and intertextuality of John 1: 1-3, 14 and the epistles of John.

Word Study

The first word is ἦν (εἰμί: I am), which has a nuance of “to belong to a particular class—‘to be,’” which implies that the “Word” belonged to a class of the deity—θεός. The second nuance stresses existence or being—the indicative mood of the imperfect emphasizes this reality—the Word preexisted the incarnation. Third, the verb is progressive imperfect, relating ‘to what exists; to denote God’s existence’¹⁹—it describes an action or state that is in progress in past time. In other words, the Word continued to exist in eternity past from John’s point of view.

The second word is ἀρχῇ (beginning). Both the preposition Ἐν and the noun ἀρχῇ in the dative are temporal—they denote a point in time and answer the question “When?”²⁰ Hence the “Word” which is in apposition with the dative noun (beginning), originates outside the sphere of time into eternity past.

The other word of great significance in the study is the definite article ὁ, which is nominative masculine singular. The article particularizes the noun to which it is related and “imparts a component of individuality in any form of expression. It also individualizes nouns and provides focus. With the subject in a copulative sentence, it helps to distinguish it from the predicate.”²¹ Therefore, the article in the clause “The Word was God” distinguishes the

¹⁹ Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 57.

²⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 155.

²¹ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), Bible Works, v.9.

Word from the God earlier indicated in the text, yet the Word is also God and that the Word is the subject while God is the predicate.

The next word is λόγος (Word). The word is a nominative masculine singular. It refers to God's full self-revelation through Jesus Christ *the Word*.²² The fact that the word is a noun and that it is masculine, it therefore rightly refers to Jesus and not necessarily the spoken or written word.

The other word worth taking into consideration is θεός (God, a god, deity). The word is equally is a nominative masculine singular. It is a predicate nominative in apposition to the substantive *Logos*. As a naming case θεός a concrete pre-existing supreme deity with personal qualities²³ (and such was Jesus) rather than an abstract deity or “a god.”

One other word to be examined is σὰρξ (flesh). The word is a noun in the nominative case. It refers to human beings as physical beings. In reference to the Logos, it could therefore mean the Logos became truly a physical human being not a spirit being.

The other word is the verb ἐγένετο (γίνομαι: became, to become). It is in the indicative mood and aorist tense, which means ‘to come to acquire or experience a state or change state or to become.’²⁴ The aorist indicates that the Word at a particular time acquired a new status, that of a human being.²⁵ This verb points to the Word entering into time.

²² Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), Bible Works, v.9.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), BibleWorks, v.9.

²⁵ Aorist tense presents an occurrence in a summary, viewed as a whole from outside, without regard for the internal make-up of the occurrence (Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 554).

Finally, the next word is ἐσκήνωσεν (dwell, spread a tent, tabernacle), which is aorist indicative. This verb refers to taking up residence or “to reside” among humans. It points to the immanence of God in Jesus who took up residence among His people.²⁶ Therefore, the word suggests the immanence of God in the context of taking residence among His people in the person of the human/divine Jesus.

Propositional Phrases

Ἐν ἀρχῇ (In the Beginning), locates the logos in time. The clause is “used absolutely, of the beginning of all things.”²⁷ This refers to the beginning of creation. It suggests that Jesus was in existence before the time of creation, implying that He was not created at some point.

Πρὸς τὸν θεόν (with God), indicates space, that is, the logos lived together with God. The clause suggests that the Word and God are distinct, though both belong to the Godhead. When used with stative verbs (e.g. ἦν), the preposition πρὸς with the accusative τὸν θεόν indicates association with or in company with²⁸ or a marker of association, often with the implication of interrelationships—‘with, before.’²⁹ This means the Word lived in association (in interaction)³⁰ with or near God in eternity past as a distinct personality.³¹

²⁶ Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), BibleWorks, v.9.

²⁷ Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Abridged and Revised Thayer Lexicon)* (Ontario, Canada: Online Bible Foundation, 1997), Bible Works, v.9.

²⁸ Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 380.

²⁹ Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), BibleWorks, v.9.

³⁰ B. M. Newman and E. A. Nida have advised translators, “this expression should not be read merely as connoting that the Word was in the presence of God but rather that, there

Parallel Clauses

There are two parallel clauses in the text under study. The clauses are i) θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος, and ii) ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο. Both these phrases are predicate nominative. The first clause informs the reader of what the Word was before, while the later, indicates what the Word became after. θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (The Word was God) points to the eternal existence of the Word. The Word, which was in the beginning, which was with God, was itself God.³² The verb ἦν, which is associated with the ‘Word’ in John 1: 1, is indicative imperfect. Since the indicative mood “is the mood of assertion, or presentation of certainty”³³ and the imperfect tense “portrays the action from within the event, without regard for beginning or end,”³⁴ its usage in the context of the logos would suggest that the Word has always been there, it has no beginning or end.

The other way to understand the clause is to consider the rule of the Predicate Nominative (PN) in relation to the Subject (S). According to Wallace, “The predicate Nominative (PN) is approximately the same as the subject (S) and is joined to it by an equivalent verb, whether stated or implied. ... The equation of S and PN does not necessarily or even imply complete correspondence.”³⁵ Wallace further explains how to distinguish the

existed a kind of interactive reciprocity between the Word and God. B. M. Newman and E. A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of John* (New York: U. B. S., 1980), 8.

³¹ “Jesus and God were distinct in person and function and yet they were identical in nature and purpose.” Clifton J. Allen, “Luke-John,” *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1970), 9:213.

³² “Having distinguished the Word (Jesus) from God, John now shows what both have in common: They are God.” Clinton E. Arnold, “John & Acts,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 2:5.

³³ Ibid., 2:448.

³⁴ Ibid., 2:541.

³⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 40.

Subject from the predicate nominative. He lists three ways which are (1) The subject will be a pronoun, whether stated or implied in the verb (2) The subject will be articular and (3) The subject will be a proper name.³⁶ He submits, “The significance of the ... three rules is that when only one nominative substantive has such a grammatical “tag,” the semantic relationship will be that of particular (subject) to class (predicate nominative). That is, the construction will be a subset proposition.”³⁷

In the case of the equative clause “θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος,” rule number 2 above applies; λόγος becomes the subject since it is articular while θεὸς is a predicate nominative. This means, the Word was God but not that God was the Word. A subset proposition is envisioned, “the λόγος belongs to the larger category known as θεὸς.”³⁸ Therefore Jesus belonged to the Godhead but he was not the entire Godhead.

Similarly, in the clause “ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο,” logos is the subject while sarx is the predicate nominative. In this case, the Word became what it was not. It became flesh. This is where the teaching of the incarnation is derived from.

The incarnation concept becomes clearer with the usage of the verb ἐγένετο. The verb is in the aorist tense. The aorist (punctiliar) tense, which in the “most cases takes the snapshot of the action,”³⁹ when it comes to the Word becoming flesh, it means the Word became flesh at a particular time. This would then refer to Jesus’ virgin birth at a precise time. Therefore, while the use of the imperfect tense (ἦν) in relation to the λόγος (John 1: 1) is indicative of the eternal existence of the Word, the use of the aorist tense (ἐγένετο) (John 1: 14) is indicative of the incarnation of the Word at a particular time. Wallace states, “Here, perhaps

³⁶ Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 43.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 45.

³⁹ Ibid.

as nowhere else in the New Testament, we have the full manhood of Jesus gloriously proclaimed. In Jesus we see the creating Word of God, the controlling reason of God, taking manhood upon himself.”⁴⁰ The clause therefore suggests that the Word was initially not flesh but at a certain time became flesh and dwelt among us, human beings. “The idea is not that the Word became ‘the flesh,’ nor ‘a flesh,’ but simply ‘flesh.’”⁴¹

The Use and/or the Absence of the Article

The phrase “The Word was God” appears in the Greek text in the imperfect tense. Both the ‘Word’ and ‘God’ are in the nominative case, third person, masculine, and singular. This suggests that the ‘Word’ had all the attributes of the ‘God.’ The challenge that has been raised by some Bible students is the absence of the article before ‘God,’ rendering a translation “The Word was a god.” Daniel B. Wallace argues, “If θεὸς were indefinite, we would translate it ‘a god.’ If so, the theological implication would be some form of polytheism, perhaps suggesting that the Word was merely a secondary god in a pantheon of deities.”⁴² Therefore the absence of an article does not indicate indefiniteness. Wallace clarifies his position on the seemingly confusing section of the text. He asserts:

The most likely candidate for θεὸς is qualitative. This is true both grammatically (for the largest proportion of preverbal anarthrous predicate nominatives fall into this category) and theologically (both the theology of the Fourth Gospel and of the NT as a whole). There is a balance between the Word’s deity, which was already present in the beginning (John 1: 1), and his humanity, which was added later (John 1: 14). ... θεὸς was his nature from eternity (hence, εἰμί is used), while σὰρξ was added at the incarnation (hence, γίνομαι is used).⁴³

⁴⁰ Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 45, 46.

⁴¹ Ibid., 264.

⁴² Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 119.

⁴³ Ibid., 120.

The definite article is not used in the text because the Word was not identical with God but was so perfectly the same as God,⁴⁴ thus, of the same character and quality and essence. Daniel B. Wallace points out “a subset proposition is envisioned here. The λόγος belongs to the larger category known as θεός. The force of this construction is most likely to emphasize the nature of the Word, not his identity. That is to say, the Word is true deity but he is not the same person as the θεός mentioned earlier in the verse.

There is identity in quality between the two nouns, ‘Word’ and ‘God.’ The Word is God and not a god. This means if God is deity, then the Word is a deity and has a close relationship and communion with God (the Father). What God was, the Word was too.

Apart from the Apostle John, Peter and Thomas equally confessed the deity of Christ. According to Peter, Jesus is “The Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16: 16), while according to Thomas, He is, “Lord and God” (John 20: 28). Jesus never rebuked any of His followers for calling Him God because that is what He was and what He is.

The Relationship between John 1: 1-3, 14 and Epistles of John

This section compares the Gospel of John and his epistles as regards the subject of the Incarnate Christ. The comparison is for the purpose of understanding the consistence of the author on the subject and draw theological lessons for a better understanding of the subject as it relates to human salvation.

⁴⁴ William Barclay holds a similar view. *The Gospel of John*: When Greek uses a noun it almost always uses the definite article with it. The Greek for God is *Theos* and the definite article is *ho*. When Greek speaks about God it does not simply say *Theos*; it says *ho Theos*. Now when Greek does not use the definite article with a noun that noun becomes much more like an adjective. John did not say that the Word was *ho Theos*; that would have been to say that the Word was identical with God. He said that the Word was – without the definite article, which means the Word was, we might say, of the very same character and quality and essence and being as God. When John said the Word was God he was not saying that Jesus was identical with God; he was saying that Jesus was so perfectly the same as God in mind, in heart, in being that in him we perfectly see what God is like.

There are some parallels between the Gospel of John and his Pastoral Epistles, particularly regarding the deity and humanity of Christ. These parallels and the overall language usage have contributed to the understanding that the author of the Gospel is the same author of the Johannean epistles. The immediate parallel that can be identified is the emphasis in both works that the Word became flesh. The table below illustrates the details of the parallelism.

Table 2. Parallel clauses between the Gospel of John and John's Pastoral Epistles

Gospel of John	Pastoral Epistles
Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος (In the beginning was the Word) (1: 1)	Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς . . . τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς- (That which was in the beginning . . . the Word of life) (1 John 1: 1)
Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα (1 John 4:2) ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν (The Word was with God) (1:1)	τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς . . . ἥτις ἦν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα (The Word . . . was with the Father) (1 John 1: 1, 2)
λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν (The Word became flesh) (1: 14)	Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα (Jesus Christ has come in the flesh) (1 John 4: 2, 3; 2 John 7)
μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός (the only begotten from the Father) (1:14)	τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ ἀπέσταλκεν ὁ θεὸς (God has sent His only begotten Son) (1 John 4: 9)

Summary of Exegesis

The exegetical study of John 1: 1-3, 14 done in this chapter has revealed that the 'Word' that John discusses is God the Son (Jesus) who is a deity, sharing the same attributes with God the Father. This God (the Word) became flesh and dwelt on earth in the real physical human body as the Incarnate Christ. Though he was truly human, he still remained truly God. This position agrees with the Seventh-day Adventist Church view on the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ, which states, "God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of

humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man.”⁴⁵

On the other hand, the study has proven that the views of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, such as denying the deity of Christ⁴⁶ and saying, “Jesus was not an incarnation but He was born of a woman, made flesh,”⁴⁷ are theologically wrong. There are undeniable reasons for this conclusion.

The first argument is based on the usage of the imperfect tense ἦν in relation to the logos. It suggests a continued action in the past as shown in word study. Unlike the Jehovah’s Witnesses who attribute temporary existence to the Word, John intends that his readers, by this construction, to know that the Word continued to exist in eternity past prior to His incarnation.⁴⁸

The second argument is based on the use of the prepositional phrase πρὸς τὸν θεόν, in the accusative. To emphasize association with or being in company with another person, against the Jehovah’s Witnesses who deny the deity of the Word, John uses this phrase intentionally with the stative verb ἦν to show that the Word was not only God in the fullest

⁴⁵ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 10.

⁴⁶ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of South Africa, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* 41, 42.

⁴⁷ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, *Make Sure of All Things*, 180.

⁴⁸ *in the beginning*: This allusion to Gen 1:1 is not merely typological of the new creation of Christ (1:19-2:11); as John goes on to show, Jesus is truly the creative Word of God who already existed at the beginning of time. *was*: The imperfect tense denoting continuous, timeless existence contrasts with the aorist used in vv. 3, 6, and 14 (creation, the mission of the Baptist, the incarnation) for events that have taken place at determined points of time. [R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, & R. E. Murphy, *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 2:422.].

sense of the word, but also lived as a distinct personality in association or in company with God in eternity past.⁴⁹

The third argument rests on the grammatical function of the predicate nominatives λόγος (v.1) and σὰρξ (v.14). The two linking verbs are ἦν and ἐγένετο respectively, thus making the verb “to be” function like an equal sign connecting two nominatives.⁵⁰ For example:

(v.1) θεὸς ἦν λόγος is the same as θεὸς = λόγος

(v.14) λόγος ἐγένετο σὰρξ is the same as λόγος = σὰρξ

The syntactical equation identifies *logos* as the common word in the two equations. Therefore, the Word was not only God in the beginning, but also became flesh. This equation places the Word on equal footing with God against the Jehovah’s Witnesses who subordinate the Word.

The fourth argument is based on the verb *egeneto* (became) which is in the aorist tense. The verb refers to the Word, which became flesh at a particular time (John 1: 14) in the past and it has not continued in that state, it was punctilio. This means the Word was not always flesh nor was He a creature as the JW teaching that Jesus is a created being. The aorist tense in the text stresses the beginning of an action or the entrance into a state and there is no implication that the action continues. This use of the aorist is common with *stative* verbs, in

⁴⁹ The English translation does not bring out the full richness of the Greek expression (*pros ton theon*). That phrase means far more than merely that the Word existed with God; it “[gives] the picture of two personal beings facing one another and engaging in intelligent discourse.” W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1979), 49.

⁵⁰ W. Larry Richards, *Read New Testament Greek in 30 Days* (Berrien Springs, MD: Break Through Books, 2006), 36: It is important to know that the so-called verb “to be” is equivalent to an equal sign. That is, the nominative case is always required on both sides of the verb.

which the stress is on *entrance into the state*.⁵¹ To say that Jesus became flesh is to say that at some point in history, He entered a new state he was previously not.

The fifth argument is based on the verb *ἐσκήνωσεν*, which emphasizes God pitching a tent among His People as He did among the Israelites in the wilderness.

Furthermore, if Jesus did not become truly human, then the disciples would not have seen and handled him (1 John 1: 1, 2, 3) and also he would not have felt tired (John 4: 6), hungry (Matt 4: 2), thirst (John 4: 7), and he would not have shed blood and died (John 18: 30).

Theology and Message

Four major theological implications arise from this exegesis. The first is the eternal existence of Christ. This understanding is based on the study of the linking verb ἦν (was) from εἰμί (I am), which according to Wallace is a progressive or descriptive imperfect pointing to an action or state that is in progress in time.⁵² The eternal existence of Jesus in the text is stressed by the four occurrences of the verb, thrice in verse 1 and once in verse 2. John intends his readers to recognize Jesus as the One who was eternally existent in the past before He was born in Bethlehem. Tokumoh Adeyamo takes a similar view when he says, “The first thing that John stresses about the Word is that he is eternal. ... The ‘was’ indicates that the Word already existed at the point labeled ‘the beginning.’”⁵³

This teaching is true even according to the Old Testament Messianic Prophecies. While Micah defines Jesus to be from everlasting, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be

⁵¹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar, beyond basics*, 558.

⁵² Ibid., 543.

⁵³ Tokumoh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006), 1252.

Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5: 2); Isaiah names Jesus as the “Everlasting Father.” (Isa 9: 6)

The second is the deity of Christ. This understanding is based on the predicate nominative θεός and its subject λόγος (John 1:1). The subject λόγος is equivalent to the predicate nominative θεός, meaning ‘the Word was God.’ Thus, though there is a distinction in individuality between God the Father and God the Son, they are essentially both God. John Calvin rightly states, “Christ is of the same essence with the Father, and yet that, in some respect, he is distinct from the Father.”⁵⁴ Lawrence Richards adds, “His unique position is based on His coexistence with God and as God from the beginning.”⁵⁵

The third is the incarnation, whose implication rests in the predicate nominative σὰρξ (flesh, v. 14) and the linking verb ἐγένετο (became, v. 14), which suggest that the eternal Word came into existence in form of flesh at a certain point in the past. This implies that the Word became what it was not before. He who was God took upon himself the full human flesh. Steven J. Cole states, “Jesus took upon Himself our full nature, except for sin. ... He will never cease to be human; He is forever both God and man in one person. ... “Became” does not mean that Jesus ceased to be what He was before. Rather, to His eternal deity, he added perfect humanity.”⁵⁶

The fourth is the immanence of God as depicted from the verb ἐσκήνωσεν (dwell, John 1:14) which points to the coming of the Word to dwell among human beings. Jesus who was God left the splendor of heaven to pitch a tent or to dwell or to tabernacle with mankind so as to be the light (1: 4) of men and to reveal the Father (1: 18). Cole explains, “The

⁵⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Galaxie Software, 2002), John 1:1.

⁵⁵ Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 575.

⁵⁶ Steven J. Cole, “The Word Became Flesh,” accessed 06 February 2017, <https://bible.org>.

tabernacle in the Old Testament was an earthly picture of God's dwelling place among men. Jesus, in His human body, was God "pitching His tent" among men for a period of time."⁵⁷ This resonates with the other name of Jesus, Immanuel, which is, translated "God with us" (Matt 1: 23; Isa 7: 14).

Analysis of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventist Views of the Incarnate Christ

Having analyzed the Apostle John's biblical theological meaning of the incarnation of Christ, it is now appropriate to analyze the JW and SDA views of the subject.

Jehovah's Witnesses

The JWs reject both the deity and the incarnation of Jesus. The movement explains that there is no way God can become man. They say that, "Jesus was not an incarnation. He was born of a woman, made flesh."⁵⁸ To defend this position they define incarnation as, "clothing, or state of being clothed, with flesh; taking on, or being manifested in, a body of flesh. Scripturally, it describes the condition of angels appearing to mankind on earth. False religion claims it is the 'Union of Christ's divinity with his humanity.'"⁵⁹

The Gospel, in John 1: 14, doesn't necessarily say Jesus was clothed with flesh, as if the flesh was like a robe. To the contrary, the John says the Word (Jesus) became flesh. The aorist tense in the text emphasizes the beginning of an action or the entrance into a state. In the text there is no implication that the action continues. To say that Jesus became flesh indicates that at some point in history, He entered a new state he was previously not.

⁵⁷ Steven J. Cole, "The Eternal Word Made Flesh," accessed 07 February 2017, <https://bible.org>.

⁵⁸ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, *Make Sure of All Things*, 180.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

Further, the incarnation of Christ cannot be likened to the appearance of angels in human form. The appearances of angels is never referred to in Scripture as becoming flesh, yet that of Jesus was not merely becoming flesh, but He also dwelt among human beings, even being tempted as human beings are tempted (Heb. 4: 15). The JW's conviction is that the incarnation did not take place.

The Society further believes and teaches that Jesus was created and because he was created first, he is considered to be the firstborn Son of God. The movement advocates that since Jesus is a created being, he is in no wise equal to God. The movement argues that Christ was not always there, instead, "He was formed countless millenniums ago as the first and the only direct creation by His Father, Jehovah, and because of his proved faultless integrity, was appointed by Jehovah as His vindicator and the chief agent of life toward mankind."⁶⁰

The rejection of the deity of Christ seems to lead the Society to reject also the incarnation of Christ. One of the Society's key doctrinal books, 'What Does the Bible Really Teach?' explains:

Jesus is Jehovah's most precious Son-and for good reason. He is called "the firstborn of all creation," for he was God's first creation (Colossians 1: 15). There is something that makes this Son special. He is the "only-begotten Son" (John 3: 16). This means that Jesus is the only directly created by God. Jesus is also the only one whom God used when creating all other things (Colossians 1: 16). Then, too, Jesus is called "the Word" (John 1: 14). This tells us that he spoke for God, no doubt delivering messages and instructions to the Father's other sons, both spirit and human.

Is the firstborn Son equal to God, as some believe? That is not what the Bible teaches ... the Son was created. Obviously then he had a beginning, whereas Jehovah God has no beginning or end (Psalm 90: 2). The only begotten Son never even considered trying to be equal to his Father. The Bible clearly teaches that the Father is greater than the Son (John 14: 28; 1 Corinthians 11: 3). Jehovah alone is "God Almighty" (Genesis 17: 1). Therefore, he has no equal.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, *Make Sure of All Things*, 207.

⁶¹ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of South Africa, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* 41, 42.

From the quotation above, it can be deduced that the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that:

1. Jesus is a created being
2. Jesus has not existed eternally but had a beginning
3. Jesus is not creator but an instrument used by God to create
4. Jesus is God's spokesperson on behalf of God to other creatures hence called "the Word"
5. Jesus is not equal to God but lower than God.

It can further be observed that in making reference to John 1: 14, the Witnesses only talk of the Word as referring to Christ as a spokesperson without taking time to exegete the text in order to get the correct concept of the Word (Jesus) becoming flesh. This is the text from which the concept of incarnation is built according to the Apostle John's theology.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

Concerning the deity of Christ, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is very precise that Jesus is equal to God the Father. In the Church's *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* of 2000, it states:

Jesus' teaching about Himself leaves no room for doubt concerning His divinity. He clearly declared that He was pre-existent with God the Father as His beloved Son. He said in His high-priestly prayer: "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world begun" (John 17: 5, NIV). Only One equal with God could claim direct first-hand knowledge of the Father: "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt 11: 27).⁶²

About nine (9) years later, in 2008, the church in its Sabbath School lessons for the second quarter availed its members a full study of the person of Jesus with the theme 'The

⁶² Hans K. LaRondelle, "Our Assurance of Salvation," *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, January, February, March, 2000 (Grantham, England: Stanborough Press, 2000), 20.

Wonder of Jesus.’ Among the topics the Bible study guide covered were topics such as ‘Who Was Jesus?’; ‘The Mystery of His Deity’; ‘The Reality of His Divinity’; and many others. On the subject of the deity of Christ, the Church explained that, “Jesus and the Father are one substance, one nature, yet not one and the same person.”⁶³ Meanwhile, the same study guide, on the topic of the humanity of Christ says, “Christ did not make-believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature.”⁶⁴

The denomination is more emphatic on the subject of the incarnation by stating that “God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. ... Forever truly God, He became also truly man.”⁶⁵ As one of the official fundamental teachings of the denomination, the statement on the doctrine is well stipulated:

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus the Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God’s power and was attested as God’s promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His People and the restoration of all things. Include the biblical references here.”⁶⁶

The Church further explains:

When Christ came into the world, “a body” had been prepared for Him (Heb. 10: 5). When He took upon Himself humanity, His divinity was clothed with humanity. This was not accomplished by changing humanity into divinity or divinity into humanity. He did not go out of Himself to another nature but took humanity into Himself. Thus

⁶³ Roy Adams, “The Wonder of Jesus,” *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, April, May, June, 2008 (Grantham, England: Stanborough Press, 2008), 131.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶⁵ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 10.

⁶⁶ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 43.

divinity and humanity were combined. When He became incarnate, Christ did not cease to be God, nor was His divinity reduced to the level of humanity. Each nature kept its standing.⁶⁷

Angel Manuel Rodriguez, a Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholar at the Church's Bible Research Institute, asserts, "It still remains within the parameters of divine revelation that Christ was fully divine and fully human. That Christ was fully human and fully divine is a biblical fact. The Son of God indeed took human nature upon Him at the Incarnation."⁶⁸

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's position on the teaching of the incarnation of Christ, as can be observed in the quotations above, seems to be made possible due to the Church's acceptance of the deity of the pre-existent Word. The fact that Jesus pre-existed as a deity; equal to God, incarnation had to take place. It can be concluded that the Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches that:

1. Jesus (the Word) pre-existed as truly God
2. Jesus is eternal, meaning He was not created at any given point in the past
3. At the incarnation, Jesus became truly man without ceasing to be truly God
4. As an Incarnate Christ, Jesus lived and experienced temptation as a human being
5. In the Incarnation, divinity and humanity were combined, thus, He was truly divine and truly human.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's position on the person of Christ can be traced back to the early Church Councils. The Church Councils, as observed in chapter 2 of this research, emphasized that Jesus who pre-existed as God, being of the same essence as God

⁶⁷ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 59.

⁶⁸ Angel Manuel Rodriguez, "Christianity's Great Mystery-Incarnation," accessed 13 November 2016, www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/theology-jesus-christ/christianity-great-mystery-incarnation.

the Father, became incarnate and that in His incarnate state, He possessed both the divine and human nature yet remained one person.

A Comparative Analysis of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventist Church in Relation to John's Biblical Theology

Having made an analysis of the theological teaching of the Apostle John's position on the Incarnation of Christ, it is now appropriate to make a comparison of the two contemporary religious bodies' teachings against the biblical teaching.

Table 3. Analysis of the Jehovah's Witnesses and SDA Views in Relation the Biblical View

John the Apostle	Jehovah's Witnesses	Seventh-day Adventists
Jesus Pre-existed as Deity (God) (1: 1)	Jesus pre-existed as a spirit creature (a god)	Jesus pre-existed as Deity (God)
Jesus is eternal (Has no beginning) (1: 1)	Jesus was created first	Jesus is eternal
Jesus became truly man (flesh) (1: 14)	Jesus was truly man	Jesus was truly man
Jesus the incarnate both divine and human (1: 1, 14)	Jesus was only a perfect man	Jesus was both divine and human
Jesus and God the Father are one (5: 23; 10: 30)	Jesus is not equal to God	Jesus and God are equal

The analysis table above clarifies that the SDA Church's view about the incarnate Christ is in agreement with the biblical teaching of John. To the contrary, the Jehovah's Witnesses differ with the Apostle John's teaching except on the aspect of Christ's being truly human though still differing in context; the biblical view is that Christ was both truly human and truly divine while on earth, while that of the Jehovah's Witnesses only emphasizes the aspect of Him being truly human.

The Implication of Christ's Incarnation on Humanity's Salvation

The acceptance or rejection of the Incarnation of Christ has salvific implications. Salvation may not be defined in a single statement. Salvation depends on the pre-existence as deity, the incarnation, and the atoning death on the cross, the resurrection, the intercessory ministry, and the second coming of Christ. Therefore to really define salvation, both the deity and humanity of Christ has to be appreciated. "If Jesus was not really one of us, humanity has not been united with deity and we cannot be saved, for the validity of the work accomplished in Christ's death, or at least its applicability to us as human beings, depends upon the reality of His humanity just as its efficacy depends upon the genuineness of His deity."⁶⁹ This submission is in the context of the incarnation of Christ and is quite true in stating that if Jesus did not become flesh, then humanity is not united with divinity. Sin separates human beings from God (Isa 59: 2) and if the gap caused by sin is to be bridged, someone who possesses the attributes of both humanity and divinity would be needed, and that someone is Jesus, the Incarnate. Therefore, reconciliation becomes the reason Christ had to become flesh. "By taking our place and suffering the penalty due to us because of our sins, Christ has overcome that barrier for us."⁷⁰ Erickson asserts, "God and humanity have been reunited. It was not an angel or a human who came from God to the human race; rather, God Himself crossed the chasm created by sin."⁷¹ Thus, Christ, by becoming human, has become the means of reconciling sinful mankind back to the Righteous God (2 Cor. 5: 19).

The other significance of the incarnation of Christ is to meet the requirement for the justice of God. Justice demands that the one who commits the crime receives the punishment necessitated by the offence. To meet this requirement, Jesus became man that he might suffer

⁶⁹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 645.

⁷⁰ Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*, 140.

⁷¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 642.

on behalf of mankind. “The justice of God requires that a man in the same human nature that sinned should make satisfaction for sin but yet he should be without sin himself.”⁷²

Thirdly, the incarnation of Christ is important for validating the atonement. The validity of the atonement of Christ is dependent on Christ’s being truly deity and truly human. “If Christ was not fully human he could not save us nor offer a true sacrifice of atonement on our behalf, nor could he empathize with us in our own weaknesses and temptation. He must be man to represent us just as he must be God to make God known to us.”⁷³

The fourth significance of the incarnation of Christ is to reveal God and His will to mankind. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld and others clarify, “Jesus the living Word, like the written Word, becomes the place of meeting where God’s hidden glory is unveiled and the Father becomes known.”⁷⁴ Keith Wellington also adds, “As a son best reflects his Father, so also Jesus in the flesh offers the most accurate and authentic portrayal of God possible on earth. He is the unique revelation of God, the most perfect mediator.”⁷⁵ It follows that humanity obtain the knowledge of God by studying the perfect and exemplary earthly life of Jesus.

The fifth significance of the Incarnation of Christ is, as alluded to in four above, to make Christ’s mediation or intercessory ministry possible and valid. The Apostle John states that one of the ministries of Christ is that of an Advocate for man in the presence of God the Father, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if

⁷² Letham, *The Work of Christ*, 25.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 4:635.

⁷⁵ Keith Wellington, *Discovering Jesus in the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 12.

anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2: 1). Karl Barth, as cited by Robert Letham, intimates, “In terms of the mediation of Christ, it is in the particular fact and the particular way that Jesus Christ is very God, very man, and very God-man in the fact that He is this One and not another.”⁷⁶ Those who truly believe and trust in the incarnate Christ are not judged according to their sins, but according to the righteousness of Jesus their advocate. That is grace.

The significance of the biblical-theological use of the incarnate Christ can be summed up in its relevance to communicating and revealing the will and the glory of God the Father; being the means by which the sinful human race is reconciled back to God the Father; the true fulfilment of the atonement for sin; a standard by which the justice of the wrath of God the Father is met; and a means by which humanity is able to approach the throne of the righteous God. The Incarnation of the Word (Christ) is the means for human redemption. Without the incarnation, mankind would be lost forever.

A Final Response to Contemporary Heretical Christological Teachings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses

This research has revealed that the Jehovah’s Witnesses, concerning Jesus Christ, accept his virgin birth by Mary and his Messianic role. Nevertheless, they reject the deity and the Incarnation of Jesus, arguing that Jesus is a created being and therefore not equal to God and not subordinate. They further argue that Jesus is ‘Word’ because he is God’s spokesperson to other creatures.

Jesus is Not God?

The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ rejection of the teaching of the incarnation of Christ is a direct rejection of the plain biblical truth. This rejection extends further to the rejection of the trinity. Commenting on John 1: 1 on the clause “The Word was God” the Jehovah’s Witness

⁷⁶ Letham, *The Work of Christ*, 25.

argue that the correct translation should read “The Word was a god.” The *New World*

Translation, a Jehovah’s Witnesses Bible version, on John 1: 1-3, 14 reads as follows:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god. This one was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence through him and apart from him not even one thing came into existence. So the Word became flesh and resided among us, and we had a view of his glory, a glory such as belongs to an only begotten son from a father; and he was full of divine favor and truth.⁷⁷

Defending why they translated the second *Theos* in John 1: 1 as ‘a god’ and not God, the Witnesses state that:

Bible verses that in the Greek language have a construction similar to that of John 1: 1 use the expression ‘a god.’ For example, when referring to Herod Agrippa I, the crowds shouted: ‘It is a god speaking.’ And when Paul survived a bite by poisonous snake, the people said: ‘He is a god.’ (Acts 12: 22; 28: 3-6) It is in harmony with both Greek grammar and Bible teaching to speak of the Word as not God, but “a god.”⁷⁸

This rendition is questionable realizing that the comparison being used between Jesus (The Word) as ‘a god’ and that of Herod and Paul as ‘gods’ is of different contexts. That of Jesus, the context is an introduction of one that has an eternal relation with the Almighty God and the one writing is John a Jew who is a monotheist who would not call the Word ‘a god’ apart from the One true God of heaven. Therefore when John calls the ‘Word’ God, he is aware that there is no other God but Jehovah (John 17: 3) and so he calls Jesus ‘God’ purposefully to signify the Godhead.

On the other hand the reference to Herod and Paul to be ‘gods’ is made by people that believe in multiple gods. To them a human being who performs a mystery qualifies to be called a god. Firstly, the people that addressed Herod as ‘a god’ were not of the Jewish background; instead, they were from Tyre and Sidon (Acts 12: 20). These were heathen

⁷⁷ New World Bible Translation Committee, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, 2013 Revision (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2013), John 1: 1-3, 14, accessed 10 January 2017, www.jw.org.

⁷⁸ Jehovah’s Witnesses, “Those Who Are Called ‘Gods,’” Watchtower Online Library, accessed 11th January 2017, wol.jw.org/wol/lp-e.

nations. The people of Tyre and Sidon worshiped multiple gods such as “Baal, Melkarth, and Adonis as their deities.”⁷⁹ On this basis, it was not a problem to them to consider the voice of a human being as a voice of a god. Furthermore, these people had a mind of worshipping Herod at this particular incidence and Herod having exalted himself to the level of being worshipped in place of God, he met the Judgment of God and died immediately. Meanwhile, the people of Malta (Melita), who called Paul a god (Acts 28: 1-6) worshiped “gods of underworlds which were believed to exist beneath the island and elsewhere, so called deities which were often identified with ‘serpents.’”⁸⁰ The survival of Paul from the venomous snakebite probably made them believe that Paul was one of the gods who could not die by being bitten by a serpent ‘fellow god.’

Examining the passages of Scripture used by Jehovah’s Witnesses to defend the translation of John 1: 1 to refer to the ‘Word’ as ‘a god’ helps to conclude that the *Theos* of John referring to Christ should be translated God, with capital ‘G,’ while that referring to Herod and Paul should be translated ‘a god’ and in no wise the same way.

The position of the Jehovah’s Witnesses on the teaching about the incarnation so far cannot be supported by the Bible; instead, it can only be supported by human theories such as that of Arius and other early church fathers who denied the teaching concluding that doing so would translate to polytheism. The teachings of Arius are here below analyzed.

Comparison of the Jehovah’s Witnesses Christology With The View of Arius

There is a similarity between the teachings of Arius and those of the Jehovah’s Witnesses concerning the person of Christ. The Witnesses believe that Jesus is a creature who

⁷⁹ Halvard J. Thomsen, “Tyre and Sidon,” accessed 11 January 2017, www.ministrymagazine.org.

⁸⁰ Graham Stuart, “Malta Temples and Tombs,” accessed 12 January 2017, www.bibliotecapleyades.net.

was created by God at some point in time past. The movement claims that Christ is not God, but “a god” who is a created being. The movement insists, “Jesus had been a spirit Son of God in heaven, God’s only begotten Son and in order that his begotten Son might be born as a perfect human creature, Almighty God divested the Son of his heavenly god like existence and transferred his life from heaven to Mary’s womb by means of God’s invisible active force or spirit.”⁸¹ This teaching can be traced from the fourth century teachings of Arius.

Paul M. Elliot in his article, “What do Jehovah’s Witnesses Believe about Jesus Christ,” affirms:

Jehovah’s Witnesses teach a form of Arianism, the false teaching that Jesus Christ is a created being and not God the Son from eternity. They teach that Christ is not God, but “a god.” For this reason, they consistently refuse to refer to Jesus Christ as God with a capital G, and they mistranslate many passages to make Jesus a “god” who is positionally in a close relationship with God, but not co-equal person of the Godhead.⁸²

In addition, G. C. Berkouwer quotes the Jehovah’s Witnesses as saying:

We are persecuted, as Arius writes to Eusebius of Nicomedia, because we say that the Son has a beginning and that God is without a beginning. The Father was not always Father, for there was a time when the Son was not yet created and hence God was not yet Father of his Son. He did not become Father till the creation of his Son. ... His Son is not truly God but a creature, however true it is that he is a perfect creature standing in a very special relationship to God.⁸³

The two quotations above are much similar. The Jehovah’s Witnesses movement who came later in history, after Arius had already made a statement claiming that Jesus was a creature, definitely adopted Arius’ position. This position is not biblical, as confirmed by the biblical exegetical work done in this research. The position of the Jehovah’s Witnesses was

⁸¹ Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, *Things for which it is Impossible for God to Lie*, 231.

⁸² Paul M. Elliot, “What Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Believe about Jesus Christ?” accessed 21 April 2016, <http://www.teachingtheword.org/apps/articles/?articleid=59591&blogid=5440>.

⁸³ G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), 60, 61.

coined by the founder of the movement, Russell (complete name), who was trying to avoid the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church by denying the doctrines of the existence of hell and the trinity. “In the process he embraced the Arian views concerning Christ by denying His divinity. He condemned the Trinity as pagan idolatry claiming that the idea was satanic.”⁸⁴

According to R. C. Sproul, “The teaching of Arius, the leading heretic of the fourth century, provoked the council of Nicaea. Arius wanted to prevent any understanding of pure monotheism. He believed that to refer to Christ as God would undercut monotheism and result in two gods or three, if you include the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁵ He believed that, “Christ is a creature and therefore had a beginning in time ... the son is “like” the Father (*homoiousios*), but the son’s being is not the same as the Father’s.”⁸⁶ Arius is further quoted by Millard J. Erickson to have said, “The son has no communion with or even direct knowledge of the Father. Although he is God’s Word and Wisdom, he is not of the very essence of God; being a creature, he bears these titles only because he participates in the word and wisdom of the Father. Totally different from the Father, the son is liable to change and even sin.”⁸⁷

Arius held that Jesus was a created being who had a beginning and was somehow like the Father but not the same as the Father. This understanding of Jesus is what influenced the founders of the Jehovah’s Witness movement to deny the divinity and incarnation of Jesus and instead over emphasize the name of God as Jehovah in support of monotheism.

⁸⁴ Saunders, “What do Jehovah’s Witnesses Believe?” accessed 21 April 2016, <https://www.ewtn.com/library/ANSWERS/JWBELIEVE.HTM>.

⁸⁵ Sproul, *Truths We Confess*, 1:240.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 1:240, 241.

⁸⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 365.

In contrast to Arianism, the researcher is in agreement with the Nicene Creed which states that “Christ is not only consubstantial (of the same essence) with the Father, but also co-eternal, that is, there never was a time when Jesus was not.”⁸⁸

Jesus Was Not Incarnate?

The other teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses that is contrary to the Bible is the rejection of the incarnation of Christ. This position is related to the previous one (Jesus is not God) in that it is built on the rejection of the deity of Christ.

According to our findings in this research, Jesus was God in His pre-existent state. He shared the same qualities with God the Father such as being deity, eternal and divine. He was not created at any given time, instead, it was at His incarnation that we find the verb “became” which refers to His acquisition of a new state, that of a physical human being. It is this acquisition of the human state by One who was God, which has been coined as ‘Incarnation.’ According to Glen G. Scorgie, “The word incarnation derives from the Latin translation of John 1: 14, ‘The Word became flesh,’ in an act of supreme condensation, the second person of the Trinity who is beyond space and time left heaven’s glory and, entering our world, assumed a sinless human nature through the virgin birth.”⁸⁹ To this effect, the Incarnation of Christ is real. The Jehovah’s Witnesses validate their argument only on the absence of the term ‘Incarnation’ in the Bible. However, the absence of the term does not render the biblically founded teaching invalid.

⁸⁸ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 241.

⁸⁹ Glen G. Scorgie, ed., *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 530.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The incarnation of Christ is cardinal to understanding the person and work of Jesus. There are conflicting views concerning the Incarnate Christ. The conflicting views have continued for centuries. As early as the first century A.D., arguments over the person of Christ arose, especially on the subject of His incarnation. Teachings such as Docetism, Ebionism, Arianism, Appollinarianism, Nestorianism, Adoptionism, and Eutychianism rejected the teaching of the incarnation in one way or the other. The Early Church Councils that were in favor of the teaching counteracted these heretical teachings. The councils were called to address these false teachings against the incarnation of Christ. From the first Church Council of Nicaea, which sat in 325 A.D., more than four other councils sat in the subsequent years. The last significant council was the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) which seemed to have settled the debate altogether. Nevertheless, in the sixteenth century, with the rise of reformers, the debate resurfaced though on a smaller scale.

The nineteenth century theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, often referred to as the father of modern theology, reintroduced the debate when he rejected the two natures of Christ, human and divine, and claimed that Jesus was not different from other human beings except he had a much higher degree of God consciousness.

These conflicting views on the subject of incarnation have continued to date, for example, SDA Church supports the teaching while the JW's reject it completely.

This study's comparative analysis of the Apostle John's theology of the Incarnate Christ and contemporary Christological views has revealed that Christ indeed was the Word

that was in the beginning with God the Father and He Himself was equally God. This same Word became flesh and tabernacled among human beings as both human and divine.

The study also revealed that the Word that existed before becoming flesh had all the attributes of God; though this reality has been challenged by some Bible scholars basing their argument on the absence of the definite article (the) before the “Word” in the Greek text. The argument rendered by these scholars lead one to the conclusion that the clause “The Word was God” should be translated as “The Word was a god.” Now if “The Word was a god” the theological implication will suggest some form of polytheism, suggesting that the Word was some secondary god in a pantheon of deities. Therefore, the absence of the article does not indicate indefiniteness. The correct translation should be, “The Word was God,” meaning, that, whatever God the Father was, God the Word also was before He became human. This affirms that Jesus was God and there was no time He was not. He did not come into existence at any given moment in eternity past as Arius and JW’s claim.

The study has pointed out that the incarnation of Christ really happened. This implies that the One who was God became what He was not before. The eternal Word came into existence in form of flesh at a particular point in time. At that point, He took upon Himself the full human nature, except for sin. Nevertheless, He did not cease to be divine while in the human nature. Not only did He become human, He actually pitched a tent among human beings, to the extent that, like any other human being, He was touchable and visible, He felt hungry, tired, thirst and shed blood and died.

This research has further revealed that the JW’s’ beliefs about the Incarnate Jesus are contrary to the teaching of the Bible. While the Bible teaches that Jesus preexisted as deity, the JW’s teach that He preexisted as a spirit being; while the Bible teaches that Jesus is eternal, the JW’s teach that is a created being (created first before other creatures); while the Bible teaches that Jesus became truly human/divine, the JW’s teach that Jesus was only a

perfect man not divine; and while the Bible teaches that Jesus and God the Father are one, the JWs teach that Jesus is subordinate to God. The Bible does not support the teachings of the JWs; instead, they can only be supported by human rationalism such as that of the fourth century heretic, Arius.

Contrary to the JWs teachings, the SDA Church agrees with the teaching of the Bible that Jesus is eternal, He has no beginning; the Incarnate Jesus was truly human/divine; and that Jesus and God the Father are one and equal though separate and distinct beings.

The research has furthermore identified some of the theological reasons why the JWs deny the clear biblical teaching of the Incarnation of Christ. These are:

1. Denial of the deity of Christ which is as a result of not understanding the interpretation of the absence of the definite article (the) in view of the predicate nominative and its subject in the phrase “The Word was God.” The understanding of the deity of Christ is based on the predicate nominative θεός and its subject λόγος (John 1:1) where the subject is equivalent to the predicate nominative.
2. Denial of the eternity of Christ which arises from their failure to appreciate the significance of the linking verb ἦν (John 1:1) which is a progressive or descriptive imperfect pointing to an action or state that is in progress in time, meaning the Word (Jesus) has been there eternally.
3. Failure to acknowledge the significance of the predicate nominative σὰρξ (flesh) and the linking verb ἐγένετο (became) (John 1:14) which suggest that the eternal Word came into existence in form of flesh at a certain time in the past. This implies that the Word became what it was not before. Understanding this fact helps the Bible student to appreciate the teaching of the Incarnation.
4. Failure to appreciate the immanence of God. This follows their failure to acknowledge the verb ἐσκήνωσεν (John 1:14) which points to the coming of the

divine One to dwell or to tabernacle with humanity. This concept is clear in the Exodus motif where God is portrayed to have pitched a tent among the children of Israel. In the context of the NT it is best understood in the other name of Jesus, “Immanuel,” which is translated “God with us.”

5. Lack of an open mind to studying the Scriptures. Their conviction that the known doctrines cannot be amended is a serious danger that has led them to have their own Bible translation known as *The New World Translation*.

Implications

The acceptance of the teaching of the Incarnation of Christ has salvific benefits. The rejection of the teaching has the following consequences:

1. Failure to defining salvation. It follows that to define salvation one has to appreciate both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus since the applicability of the death of Jesus depends upon the reality of His humanity and the genuineness of His deity. This concept can only be fully understood in the context of the Incarnation.
2. Failure to appreciate Christ’s reconciliatory ministry. Sin separates humanity from God and if the gap caused is to be bridged, someone who possesses the attributes of humanity and divinity is required, the attributes which became a reality in Jesus at His incarnation.
3. Failure to meet the demands of God’s justice. Justice demands that the one who commits the crime receives the penalty necessitated by the offence. To meet this requirement on behalf of humanity, Jesus became human (Incarnate) that He might suffer on behalf of human beings.
4. Losing the value of the atonement. The incarnation of Christ is important for validating the atonement. For the atonement to be of value, Christ must be truly

human and must be truly God, the component which could not be accomplished by the blood of animals.

5. Failure to appreciate the intercessory ministry of Christ. For mediation ministry to be valid, the mediator must be truly God and truly man.

The implications finally impact one's attitude towards Christ's saving grace which in this case would be negative and ultimately determine one's eternal destination.

Recommendations

In view of the limited scope of this study, the following recommendations are suggested for further research:

1. A study of the JW's' view on the doctrine of the Trinity (The Godhead) needs to be undertaken to help understand how they view the role of each member of the Godhead in the plan of redemption.
2. A study of the JW's' understanding of the doctrine of Atonement needs to be undertaken in order to discover how they validate the shed blood of Jesus without taking into account His incarnation.
3. An evaluation of the *New World Translation* Bible Version will help to identify and correct the JW's' wrongly translated words and phrases (such as "The Word was a god") which affect the correct understanding of God's word, not only to JW members but also to other people that may access that Bible translation.
4. The Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to consider carrying out a witnessing project which has the JW's as a target group realizing that the movement is fast growing and is determined to win some of the prominent SDA members to their faith even though some of their beliefs are not in agreement with Scripture.

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