

The Lands That Long in Darkness Lay

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

The lands that long in darkness lay,
Now have beheld a heav'nly light;
Nations that sat in death's cold shade,
Are bless'd with beams divinely bright.

The virgin's promis'd Son is born;
Behold th' expected child appear!
What shall his names or titles be?
"The Wonderful, the Counsellor!"

This infant is the mighty God,
Come to be suckled and ador'd;
Th' eternal Father, Prince of Peace,
The Son of David, and his Lord.

The government of earth and seas,
Upon his shoulders shall be laid;
His wide dominions still increase,
And honours to his name be paid.

Jesus, the holy child, shall sit
High on his father David's throne;
Shall crush his foes beneath his feet,
And reign to ages yet unknown.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Humanism and the Incarnation

Kevin T. Bauder

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These days humanism is often equated with secularism or human autonomy from the divine. Originally, however, the term was used to designate the celebration of the humanities, those pursuits and disciplines that are most characteristic of human enterprise. The humanities were thought to be valuable because they were humane—because they reflected the genuine humanity of those who pursued them. In this sense, humanism is nothing but a settled appreciation of the value and dignity of humans.

Of all people, Christians ought to be the most robust humanists. Why? Because the humanities derive their value from humanity (i.e., human nature), and humanity is very valuable and very dignified indeed. The inestimable value of humankind and human nature is underlined by nothing less than the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. To affirm the enfleshment of the God-man is to affirm the value of humanity. The Christmas story underlines human worth and dignity in three ways.

The first is by recognizing the complete humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole point of the incarnation is that the Second Person of the Godhead, without ceasing to be God, added to His divine person a complete human nature. Sometimes Christians say that God became man, but that statement is both false and misleading. It is false because no part of the Son's deity was converted into humanity. It is misleading because it leaves the impression of a Christ who is only partially divine (having converted some of His deity) and, most likely, only partially human (because His deity displaces some aspects of humanity).

The truth is that in His incarnation the Lord Jesus did more than to dip His toe into human nature. He plunged Himself into the deep end of the pool, taking into His divine person a nature that was and is fully and robustly human. Theologians debate whether human beings consist of two, three, or even more parts. Whatever the correct answer to that question may be, the Lord Jesus was born with a completely human spirit, plus whatever other invisible elements are necessary to make someone a *Homo sapiens*. He was also born with a completely human body—specifically, a male body—



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that had all the appendages intact and functional. He experienced human growth as a human child in a human family, gained human insight through human learning, expressed Himself in human language, endured human hunger, thirst, weariness, and pain, felt human love, joy, compassion, fear, sorrow, and anger, experienced human betrayal, died a human death, and ultimately gained a human resurrection. Furthermore, He is still human. At this moment, a human being sits and offers intercession at the right hand of the Father. From His Father's throne, a human—a man—exercises sovereignty over the universe. Such dignity for human nature is beyond imagining.

Jesus not only became a human, but did this in order to redeem humans. That is the second way in which the incarnation underlines the value and dignity of human beings. Christ's enfleshment was intended to rescue people, not only from the penalty that their sins brought upon them, but from the sins themselves. Ever since the fall, humans have been sinners by nature. Original sin, however, is not identical with human nature. The intrusion of sin into the human race degraded, but did not devalue, the shared nature of human beings.

The analogy is not perfect, but human nature immersed in sin is in some ways like a precious jewel immersed in a feed lot. The muck certainly degrades the gem and may even render it unrecognizable. Nevertheless, the precious stone retains its value. Someone who recognizes the jewel for what it is can retrieve it and, with a certain amount of care, restore it to its pristine beauty.

Christ does something like that, though the differences are real. Human beings are not impersonal stones and sin is not a substance. Even more importantly, to rescue us Christ had to become one of us while not becoming a sinner. He had to share our human nature without sharing our depraved nature. He had to suffer for the guilt of our sins without ever incurring guilt for His own. How can one imagine a gemstone immersed in the muck without ever becoming dirty? Yet that is what Christ did.

He came to rescue us. He came to redeem us. He came to restore us. He came to regenerate us. For those who believe, He immediately forgives us and begins the process of transforming us into His own image—and that is the image of a perfect human being.

Humanity is valuable because the Lord Jesus is one of us. Humanity is valuable because Christ paid an infinite price to redeem us. In these two ways, the incarnation underlines the value of human beings. But the incarnation also works in a third way that reinforces the dignity of the human race.

Ockham once speculated that it could have been possible for the Son of God to become incarnate as a donkey. Even if Ockham were right, it would not have been fitting or suitable for the Second Person to take asinine nature

unto Himself. For God to assume the nature of donkeys would degrade Him.

Yet assuming human nature does not degrade Him. Scripture plainly declares that it "became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:10-11). If indeed Christ is a lamb slain before the foundations of the world, then the incarnation was always God's purpose. That being so, He must have planned to create a human race and a human nature that would be fitting or proper for a divine incarnation.

Of all creatures, human beings alone are said to be made in the likeness and image of God. Whatever else this likeness and image entails, it was certainly a preparation for the day when the eternal Second Person "was made in the likeness of men" (Php. 2:7). He had to share our nature in order to redeem us (Heb. 2:14), and so He created us with a nature that would be worth redeeming.

The incarnation demands that we see the incredible value and dignity of human beings. Consequently, we Christians ought to be the truest humanist. People do not have to be tidy for us to love them. People do not have to be virtuous before we value them. We are never right to show contempt toward another human's person. Every son and daughter of Adam, no matter how disagreeable, debauched, dissolute, or degraded, is an immortal being made in the image of God, a distant cousin of the Lord of the universe, and a soul for whom the Son of God provided redemption.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
