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POTUIT NON PECCARE OR *NON POTUIT PECCARE*: EVANGELICALS, HERMENEUTICS, AND THE IMPECCABILITY DEBATE

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The debate over whether Christ was not able to sin or able not to sin results from Scripture's failure to address the issue directly. Some advocate that He was peccable (able not to sin), others that He was not able to sin (impeccable). Five hermeneutical issues relate to the resolving of this debate: what to do about the silence of Scripture, the argument from theological implications, the meaning of theological terms such as "ability" and "humanity," the role of theological presuppositions in exegesis, and an appeal to other relevant theological models. The role of theological suppositions includes a consideration of the meanings of πειράζω *(*peirazō*, "I tempt, test") in connection with Christ and of* χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας *(*chōris hamartias*, "without sin") in Heb 4:15. Relevant theological models to be consulted include the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ, the theological concept of "antinomy," and the kenosis of Christ. The preferred solution to the debate is that Christ in His incarnation was both peccable and impeccable, but in His kenosis His peccability limited His impeccability.*

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One of the greatest challenges believers face in seeking to answer questions the Scripture does not clearly or explicitly address is clarifying the relationship between hermeneutical, exegetical, and systematic theological questions. In issues where the Scripture is silent or unclear, hermeneutics play a role in aiding believers to arrive at an answer to such questions. So it is with the question of Christ's impeccability (i.e., whether Christ could have sinned or not). After elaborating on issues in the debate, this essay will examine several hermeneutical and theological issues that bear upon answering the question about Christ's relationship to sin.

Discussing the matter of Christ's relationship to sin is not a discussion of

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whether Christ actually sinned or not. This essay does not propose to deal with an issue about which evangelicals are in such wide agreement. The NT writers unanimously affirm that Christ was utterly and absolutely sinless in His incarnation.[1] The following discussion will build on that assumption.

THE DEBATE

Evangelicals of all varieties are committed to the doctrine of Christ's sinlessness, but they disagree over whether Christ could have sinned. Since no Scripture resolves the debate in unambiguous terms, the question becomes, what hermeneutical and theological issues come to bear in one's decision on that issue?[2]

Two main answers to the question of whether Christ could or could not have sinned are, Christ was "able not to sin" (*potuit non peccare*, peccability), and Christ was "not able to sin" (*non potuit peccare*, impeccability).[3] The peccability position asserts that Christ could have sinned even though He did not. This is by far the minority view in evangelical circles today.[4] Arguments include the following:

[1] *The full humanity of Christ.* If Christ in His incarnation assumed full humanity with all of its attributes, He must have had the ability to sin, since by itself, unfallen human nature is capable of sinning, as the fall of Adam and Eve

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[1]The sinlessness of Christ is affirmed by people as diverse as Christ Himself (John 7:18; 8:29, 46; 14:30); Luke (1:35; 4:34), Mark (1:24), Peter (John 6:69; Acts 3:14; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:22; 3:18), Judas Iscariot (Matt. 27:4), Pilate (Matt 27:24; Luke 23:4, 14, 22; John 18:38; 19:4, 6), Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:19), Herod Antipas (Luke 23:15), the penitent thief (Luke 23:41), the Roman centurion (Matt. 27:54), John (1 John 2:1, 29; 3:3, 5, 7), the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 4:15; 9:14), and Paul (Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21).

[2]So Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 95. Enns points out that generally (though not always) Calvinists hold to impeccability while Arminians hold to peccability (Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1989] 236).

[3]"Peccability" and "impeccability" are not synonyms for "sinfulness" or "sinlessness." The former does not presuppose a sin nature. Some impeccability advocates fail and erroneously accuse peccability proponents of such teaching. For example, William Banks, in answering the argument that "an impeccable Savior is unable to sympathize with us fully," asks the question, "must a surgeon have had cancer in order to skillfully operate on a cancer patient? Can only the ex-prostitute win prostitutes to Christ?" (William L. Banks, *The Day Satan Met Jesus* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1973] 50). Yet this would assume that Christ *must* have sinned in order to be sympathetic, not that He *could* have sinned, but did not.

[4]Advocates include Gleason L. Archer (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982] 418-19); Millard Erickson (*Christian Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985] 720); James Leo Garrett (*Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990] 572); Charles Hodge (*Systematic Theology* [London: James Clarke & Co, 1960 2:457]; cf. also idem, *Systematic Theology*, abridged ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988] 364-65).

shows (Gen 3:1-6);[5]

[2] *The temptability of Christ.* Christ was tempted in all points as others are (Heb 4:15); He endured numerous temptations throughout His life (Matt 4:1-11), and the ability to be tempted implies the ability to sin. This argument is the one most often appealed to by peccability advocates.

[3] *The free will of Christ.* That Christ had, as Adam did before the fall, a free will implies peccability.[6]

Peccability advocates see much at stake in this debate, preeminently the reality of Christ's humanity, His temptation, and a truly sympathetic priesthood. They assert that all of the above are compromised if Christ had no ability to sin.

The impeccability position asserts that Christ was unable to sin. This is by far the majority view within evangelicalism of the past and present.[7] Arguments for this viewpoint include:

[1] *The Deity of Christ.* Since Christ as a Person existed before the incarnation, it follows that Christ's personality resides in His deity. Since Christ is God and since God cannot sin (James 1:13), it follows that Christ could not sin, either.[8]

[2] *The Decrees of God.* Since God had decreed the plan of redemption to be accomplished by Jesus Christ, it follows that Christ could not sin, for had He

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[5]Floyd H. Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1984) 117; Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1992) 512.

[6]H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 62.

[7]Representative examples include Louis Berkhof (*Reformed Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932] 1:313-14; W. E. Best (*Christ Could Not Be Tempted* [Houston: South Belt Grace Church, n. d.] passim); Loraine Boettner (*Studies in Theology* [Philipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973] 211); R. L. Dabney (*Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemical Theology* [Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871] 470-73); Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 537-39); Herman Hoeksema (*Reformed Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966] 358); Gordon Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest (*Integrative Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990] 2:345-47); Lightner, *Evangelical Theology* 95; J. Dwight Pentecost (*The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981] 97-100); Charles C. Ryrie (*Basic Theology* [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1986] 265-66); William G. T. Shedd (reprint; *Dogmatic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.] 2:330-49); John F. Walvoord (*Jesus Christ our Lord* [Chicago: Moody, 1969] 148-52).

[8]A few impeccability advocates (ostensibly because James says that God "cannot be tempted by evil" [1:13]) assert that Jesus, being God, could not be tempted by evil, and thus assert that the "temptation" of Christ was actually a "testing" to prove that He could not sin rather than a solicitation to evil (cf. W. E. Best, *Christ Could Not Be Tempted passim* [esp. 13-17]; Lightner, *Evangelical Theology* 95; Pentecost, *Words and Works* 96-97]). In fairness to the impeccability position, it must be emphasized that only a few advocates of impeccability use this argument.

sinned, the plan of redemption would have failed.[9]

[3] *The Divine Attributes of Christ.* Some impeccability advocates argue from the *immutability* of Christ (cf. Heb 13:8). The reasoning is that if Christ could have sinned while He was on earth, then He could sin now. Since He cannot sin now, and He is immutable, it follows that He could not sin while on earth.[10] Other attributes appealed to are Christ's omnipotence (ability to sin implies weakness, and Christ had no weakness) and omniscience (John 5:25).[11]

Predictably, impeccability advocates see opposite issues at stake in this debate, preeminently the deity of Christ and the immutability of the decrees of God. Either of these, it would seem, would affect the Person of Christ. Thus, though some unclear questions of theology are nothing more than unprofitable speculation, one's position on this question will reveal much about his hermeneutical and theological method. Lewis and Demarest, impeccability advocates who admit that the question of whether Christ could have sinned is "purely hypothetical," nevertheless go on to state that in this case discussion is helpful, because it brings out the importance of "taking into account as many lines of evidence as possible in one's method of theological decision-making."[12]

In the discussion that follows, the present writer will argue that the kenosis (i.e., incarnation) of Christ makes it possible for Him to be both impeccable and peccable, and that, while He always possessed both capabilities in His incarnation, the exercise of his human attribute of peccability apparently limited the exercise of

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[9]Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 48-49; R. L. Dabney, *Syllabus* 471; Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* 358. This argument has a weakness concerning impeccability, for the decrees of God only guarantee that Christ *would* not sin, not that He *could* have sinned. This difficulty relates to the definition of theological terms such as "ability" (see below).

[10]Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 53-55; Dabney, *Syllabus* 473; Enns, *Moody Handbook* 237. An appeal to the immutability of Christ (Heb 13:8), especially in connection with the incarnation, must be cautious. In particular unqualified ontological assertions must be avoided. The context of Heb 13:8 refers to Christ's fidelity, not His ontology. Otherwise the incarnation would never have occurred, with Christ entering a new mode of existence as man (cf. George J. Zemek, *Theology I* [Sun Valley, Calif.: The Master's Seminary, 1990] 35, 48).

[11]Enns, *Moody Handbook* 237. Someone might contend that arguments from the attributes of Christ's deity are not decisive for this view, because in the kenosis Christ yielded the independent exercise of His divine attributes to the will of His heavenly Father. Thus, while impeccability may be implied by each of these divine attributes standing alone, Christ always exercised these in subordination to His Father's will.

Other arguments advanced for impeccability are that Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit (Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 45; Dabney, *Syllabus* 471) and that Christ's will was to do the will of the Father (Enns, *Moody Handbook* 238).

[12]Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 2:345.

His divine attribute of impeccability.[13] The problem appears to be that proponents have generally argued that Christ was exclusively peccable or exclusively impeccable, when a "both/and" explanation fits the data better. Recognizing strong evidence supporting both positions in Scripture and in formulating a viewpoint, one must properly account for all of the relevant biblical data.

HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE DEBATE

The rest of this essay will explore five crucial hermeneutical issues relevant to this question. The first two have only brief, tentative answers, as a full discussion would be outside the scope of the investigation. The final three issues will receive a fuller treatment.

[1] The significance of the silence of Scripture
[2] Arguments from theological implications
[3] The meaning of theological terms (e.g., "ability," "humanity")
[4] The role of theological presuppositions in exegesis
[5] An appeal to other relevant theological models (antinomy; hypostatic union of Christ's two natures; the kenosis)

The silence of Scripture

What is the significance of the Scripture's silence as to an explicit answer to the question of Christ's impeccability? First, this question may very well be one of the "secret things" that God has chosen not to reveal to us, and thus may best be left unanswered (Deut 29:29). "Arguments from silence" are tenuous at best, and thus open for debate.[14] Indeed, for an exegete/theologian to remain silent when Scripture does is often a demonstration of wisdom and not cowardice. As the incarnation of Christ is a great mystery (1 Tim 3:16), certain aspects of that incarnation go beyond the ability of finite human minds to grasp, especially when one considers the union of the two natures of Christ into one person.

Second, the silence of Scripture on this point may be an indication of forcing a question upon the Scripture that it does not answer. The NT writers may have been simply asserting Christ's sinlessness without speculating on the question of whether He, as the God-man, *could* have sinned. Thus, making passages speaking of the deity and sinlessness of Christ answer questions they were never intended to

[13]This position is close to that advocated by A. B. Bruce (*The Humiliation of Christ in its Physical, Ethical, and Official Aspects* [New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1892] 269) and Alfred Edersheim (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [McLean, Va.: MacDonald, n.d.] 1:298-99).

[14]Milton S. Terry warns against the "human tendency to be wise above what is written" (*Biblical Hermeneutics* [reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.] 585).

address may be dangerous.[15]

The argument from theological implications

Often theologians, especially when the Scripture is silent, argue for a position on the basis of implications of the contrary position. The impeccability/peccability debate is no exception. Earlier discussion has noted what each side sees as the consequences of denying its position. In short, impeccability advocates see the deity and even the sinlessness of Christ at stake while peccability advocates see the full humanity of Christ and the reality of Christ's temptations at stake. Or, to put it another way, impeccability advocates say, "If Christ could have sinned (peccability), how could He be God or even sinless?" Peccability advocates reply, "If Christ could not have sinned (impeccability), how could He be truly man or how could His temptations be real?" The other side must answer each set of questions appropriately. In doing so, it risks a danger of allowing finite, human knowledge and logic to fill in gaps or of even ignoring a significant part of the evidence when defending its viewpoint. In answering the questions, the theological implications on both sides are great, and so answers must account for all of the data.

The meaning of theological terms

Another issue that surfaces in this debate is the meaning of various theological terms. Careful definition of such terms is essential in the dialogue, because when terms such as "ability" or "humanity" are used, often no agreement prevails on the definition of these terms or how they are used.[16] Thus, a closer look at the two terms is necessary to frame the issue properly.

"Ability." One important example of this is defining the "ability" part of peccability/impeccability. What does one mean by Christ being "able" or "not able" to sin? One could define ability in several different ways. For example, if one defines peccability in *ontological* terms, then it would seem that Christ in His

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[15]This is not the only area in theology where this is done. For example, some have pressed into service 2 Sam 12:23, Jonah 4:11, and Matt 18:10 to demonstrate that children who die before the "age of accountability" go to be with the Lord, though none of those passages explicitly state that. Another debate among evangelicals is whether the "I" of Rom 7:13 ff. describes the experience of the regenerate or the unregenerate man. Since strong arguments exist for either position, some have asserted that Paul is not addressing that issue at all in Romans 7, but rather is speaking in terms of salvation history [cf. Douglas Moo (*Romans 1-8*, WEC [Chicago: Moody, 1991] 474 f.; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 126-30; John R. W. Stott (*Romans: God's Good News for the World* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994] 209-11)]. Though neither of these examples exactly parallels the theological issue addressed in this paper, they do illustrate the tendency to apply Scripture to issues the biblical writers never addressed.

[16]The same term can have several different aspects to it as well. Cf. Vern S. Poythress, who identifies originary, manifestational, and concurrent aspects of the same term (*God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999] 38-42), or "classificational, instantational, and associational" aspects (ibid., 70-72).

unfallen human nature was able to sin even while in His divine nature He was not, since peccability is a defining attribute of preconsummate humanity.

But what if one views "ability" from the standpoint of the decrees and the sovereign plan of God? This is one of the key arguments used in support of the impeccability position. Since Christ's saving work was ordained by God before "the foundation of the world" (cf. Eph 1:4; Heb 4:3; 9:26; 1 Pet 1:19-20; possibly Rev 13:8), since the OT contains many prophecies (beginning perhaps with the *protoevangelium* of Gen 3:15) which explicitly point toward Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise of redemption (certainly this is how the NT authors understood Christ in relation to the OT Scriptures), and since God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph 1:11), would it have been possible for Christ to sin and thus thwart the whole plan of redemption which God had decreed would come through Him? Viewed from that perspective, Christ could not have sinned, because in that case God's veracity and omnipotence would also come into question. It would not simply be Jesus who is not God; God would not be either.

But this is really a different question. To assert that Christ was impeccable because God had previously ordained that He would not sin does not prove that Christ could not sin. Rather, what the divine decrees prove (in Erickson's words) is that "while [Christ] *could* have sinned, it was certain that he *would* not. There were genuine struggles and temptations, but the outcome was always certain."[17]

A parallel issue theologically would be the issue of human "free" will and the sovereignty of God. Though men are in a certain sense free to make their own choices, that God's foreknowledge has already rendered man's choices certain is equally certain.[18]

"Humanity." A second definitional problem arises when one seeks to explain the relationship between peccability/impeccability and Christ's *human* nature. Was Christ, as true man, capable of sinning? To answer this, one must answer another question: "What constitutes ideal humanity?" Scripture discloses at least four different conceptions of humanity:[19]

[1] prefallen humanity (*potuit non peccare*).
[2] postfallen, unregenerate humanity (*non potuit non peccare*).
[3] postfallen, regenerate humanity (*potuit non peccare*)
[4] glorified humanity (*non potuit peccare*).

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[17]Erickson, *Christian Theology* 720; cf. Dabney, *Syllabus* 473.

[18]Cf. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 357-58. There are parallel examples of God's decrees with respect to a contingent event, such as the prophecies concerning the birth of Issac.

[19]This is similar to Cornelius VanTil's discussion of "Adamic consciousness," "unregenerate/sinful consciousness," and "regenerate consciousness" in connection with Christian epistemology (*Introduction to Systematic Theology* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.] 21-30); cf. also Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 52-53.

Note that these four states posit different answers regarding peccability. Prefallen humanity (i.e., Adam) was "able not to sin," and yet Adam could and did sin (peccability),[20] while postfallen (unregenerate) humanity is "not able not to sin." Glorified humanity, on the other hand, with the righteousness of Christ imputed to it (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21) will be sinless as prefallen Adam was sinless, but without the ability to sin (impeccability).

Thus, when one speaks of Christ's taking on a *human* nature in His incarnation (Phil 2:6-8; 1 Tim 3:16), a determination of which of these four options best relates to Christ's *human* nature is necessary before being able to ascertain whether peccability is a defining characteristic of that humanity.

Options [2] and [3] are impossible as pertaining to Christ's humanity, because they both would contradict the overwhelming NT testimony about the sinlessness of Christ. In addition, they implicitly assume that sinfulness is an essential component of true humanity rather than an *intrusion* into humanity.[21] Thus Silva is right to point out that while "it may be true that to err is human, . . . it is certainly untrue that to be human is to err!"[22]

This leaves prefallen humanity (peccability) and glorified humanity (impeccability). Some impeccability advocates have argued that since human believers will be confirmed in impeccable holiness in their glorified state, peccability is not an essential facet of a fully human nature (option 4). Thus Christ could possess a fully human nature and still be impeccable.[23] Yet strict impeccability advocates who employ this line of argumentation must demonstrate that the impeccability of Christ's full humanity derives from consummate humanity, since only the latter possesses the attribute of impeccability. This argument becomes increasingly difficult when noting the parallels drawn between Christ and Adam in the NT (cf. below), as well as the fact that the incarnation of Christ involved a veiling of His eternal glory (John 17:5; Phil 2:6-8). Thus, perfect humanity for Christ *on earth* seems defined best in terms of unfallen Adam (option [1]), not perfect humanity in the consummation. If Christ's humanity is defined in this way, then peccability is indeed an essential facet of His true humanity.

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[20]Similarly, postfallen, regenerate humanity restores the believers ability not to sin, though this restoration is in principle or standing only since regenerate humanity still must contend with sin, whereas prefallen humanity did not (VanTil, *Systematic Theology* 28).

[21]Erickson, *Christian Theology* 719-20; W. J. Foxell, *The Temptation of Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1920) 99. Erickson notes that "the type of human nature that each of us possesses is not pure human nature. The true humanity created by God has in our case been corrupted and spoiled. There have been only three pure human beings: Adam and Eve (before the fall), and Jesus. All the rest of us are but broken, corrupted versions of humanity. Jesus is not only as human as we are; he is more human. Our humanity is not a standard by which we are to measure his. His humanity, true and unadulterated, is the standard by which we are to be measured" (721).

[22]Moises Silva, *Has The Church Misread the Bible?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 45.

[23]Cf. Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 53-54.

The role of theological presuppositions in exegesis

A fourth relevant hermeneutical issue is the role of theological presuppositions in influencing exegesis. This is especially true in those passages relating to the nature of Christ's temptation. At least two clear examples of this relate to the impeccability/peccability debate: [1] The meaning of πειράζω (*peirazō*, "I tempt, test") as pertaining to Christ and [2] the meaning of χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας (*chōris hamartias*, "without sin") in Hebrews 4:15.

***Peirazō* in connection with Christ**. Theology does influence lexicography, especially when it comes to how one defines *peirazō* as it relates to Christ. Peccability advocates define *peirazō* in its more common meaning of "to entice to evil," while a few impeccability advocates argue such a definition in Jesus' case is Christologically inappropriate, since James says that "God cannot be tempted with evil" (1:13, cf. Hebrews 6:18, Jesus is God) and that temptation arises from one's internal lusts (1:14-15, Christ had no sin nature). For this reason, some impeccability advocates avoid the word "tempt" altogether in connection with Christ,[24] preferring instead to define *peirazō* (when Christ is the subject) more broadly as "testing" or "proving." Thus, the πειρασμός (*peirasmos*, "temptation, testing") of Christ was not for the purpose of enticing Him to sin, but rather to demonstrate that He could not sin. Both views have their problems. Peccability advocates have to factor Jas 1:13-15 into their position, while impeccability advocates must explain how *Satan* could be the agent of Christ's "testing" without at the same time soliciting Him to evil. Since Scripture makes it clear that Christ was "tempted" (*peirazō*) (Matt 4:1 ff.; Heb 4:15), three issues arise: (1) Were Christ's *peirasmoi* "testings" or "temptations" (cf. Jas 1:13)?; (2) Were the *peirasmoi* "internal" or "external" (cf. Jas 1:14-15)?; and (3) What bearing does one's position on peccability or impeccability have on the reality of Christ's *peirasmoi*?

(1) *Testing or Tempting?* Certainly it is true that *peirazō* can mean both "to test or prove" and to "solicit to evil,"[25] and thus its meaning depends on the context. But the difference between the two meanings is not in who is *being tested*, but in

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[24]Cf. W. E. Best, *Christ Could Not Be Tempted* (Houston: South Belt Grace Church, 1985) 1, 13-17; cf. also Boettner, *Studies in Theology* 211; J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963) 58 ff. who describes Christ's temptations as "trials"; Enns, *Moody Handbook* 237-38; Hoeksema (?), *Reformed Dogmatics* 358; Lightner, *Evangelical Theology* 95; Pentecost, *Words and Works* 96-97; Ryrie (?), *Basic Theology* 264-65. Authors in this note with a question mark (?) after their names use the word "testing" consistently in connection with Christ, but do not explicitly deny the appropriateness of the term "temptation" as Best would.

[25]Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948) 5:74; Foxell, *Temptation of Jesus* 47 f.; Graham Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, n.d.) 24; Robert L. Thomas, *Exegetical Digest on the Epistle of James* (La Mirada, Calif.: The author, 1974) L 9. Leon Morris ("Hebrews," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, ed. John R. Kohlenberger and Kenneth L. Barker. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 951) points out that πειράζω occurs more often in the NT in the sense of "tempt" than "test."

who is *doing the testing*. It is a fairly safe deduction that whenever God is the agent of *peirazō*, it must refer to a test or probation, since God does not tempt anyone with evil (Jas 1:13).[26] It is in this sense that God tested Abraham (Gen 22:1-12; cf. also Deut 4:34; 7:19; 29:2; Ps 95:8) and in which *peirazō* occurs earlier in James when the writer challenges his readers to "count it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials" (1:2; cf. vv. 3, 12).[27] But when Satan or one's own fallen nature is the agent of *peirazō*, it is a solicitation to evil.[28] Given Satan's role in Christ's temptation, to assert that the point of Christ's temptation was to prove that He could not sin becomes problematic. Not only does none of the texts explicitly assert that (apart from the meaning of *peirazō*, whose meaning could go either way), but the further danger of changing the *nature* of Christ's temptation to view it exclusively as a "testing," when Satan was clearly attempting to solicit Christ to do evil, is present.[29] A further problem relates to the availability of another word in the Greek language that means "testing in order to approve" (δοκιμάζω, *dokimazō*) that the NT writers could have used if that is what they intended regarding Christ's "temptation."[30] That Jesus *was* tempted is further evidence of His full humanity; thus, Jas 1:13 is not directly relevant to the question of *Jesus'* peccability as the God-man (cf. discussion on "kenosis" below).

(2) *Internal or External?* Does Jas 1:14 teach that *all* temptation (in the negative sense of *peirazō*) comes from one's internal lusts? If so, then temptation

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[26]Nor can He be tempted, though certainly some are presumptuous enough to try to test God in this sense (e.g., Acts 5:8-10; 15:10). On God's testing, cf. discussion in Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 30, 32-33.

[27]Additional indications that James was moving from the good sense of πειρασμός ("trial") in Jas 1:1-12 to the bad sense of "temptation" in vv. 13-18 include a use of noun forms in vv. 2, 12 and verbs in vv. 13, 14 and a use of words denoting approval in vv. 2-12 (δοκίμιον, vv. 3, 12) to terms denoting sin in vv. 13 ff. (κακῶν, v. 13; ἁμαρτίαν, v. 15) (Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Faith That Works* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986] 48; cf. also D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* [Chicago: Moody, 1979] 101).

[28]Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 5:74.

[29]Cf. discussion in Foxell, *Temptation of Jesus* 34 ff. Some (e.g., Schleiermacher) go so far as to deny all struggle in the temptation of Christ (noted in Louis Berkhof, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:304). Garrett asserts that impeccability advocate Louis Berkhof, in defense of his position, altered the nature of Christ's temptations and reduced the significance of Jesus' will in His obedience of the Father (Garrett, *Systematic Theology* 572, citing L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* 318-19 [*sic* 338]). Enns, who sees the temptation as a testing, appeals to the fact that it was the Spirit who drove Christ into the wilderness, and since the Holy Spirit could not have solicited Christ to sin (Jas 1:13), it must have been a testing (*Moody Handbook* 237-38). However, while it was indeed the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness (Matt 4:1; Luke 4:1), it was *Satan* who actually tempted Christ.

[30]Cf. Rom 1:28; 2:18; 12:2; 14:22; 1 Cor 3:13; 11:28; 16:3; 2 Cor 8:8, 22; 13:5; Gal 6:4; Eph 5:10; Phil 1:10; 1 Thess 2:4; 5:21; 1 Tim 3:10; Heb 3:9; 1 Pet 1:7; 1 John 4:1; Prov. 8:10 and 17:3 [LXX]. The adjective δόκιμος (v. 12) and noun δοκίμιον (v. 3) had already been used by James. Δοκιμάζω and its cognates all have the idea of "being approved" (BAGD, 202-3; Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 28-29 [on p. 31 Banks notes that this word is never used in the NT of Satan]). But πειράζω is used of the temptation of Christ.

in that sense would not be possible apart from an already existing sin nature, and Christ must therefore be impeccable if He was sinless.[31] There is much truth in this view; James does say, "*Each one* is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust" (1:14, emphasis added). If *peirasmos* is limited to this sense of "temptation arising from internal evil desires," it would be inappropriate to attribute that kind of temptation either to God or Christ, since Christ had no internal sin nature to which temptation could appeal.[32] He was χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας (*chōris hamartias*, "without sin") (Heb 4:15).[33] Yet the very fact that Christ *was* tempted suggests that *peirasmos* means much more than James' contextually specific use of this term in Jas 1:14. In light of the context of James 1 itself and the NT as a whole, several qualifications are necessary.

[1] *Peirazō*, when speaking of "temptation," is not restricted to *internal* solicitations to evil arising from one's sinful nature, but also includes *external* solicitations to evil coming from Satan himself. It was in this sense that Satan solicited Christ to do evil.[34] If Christ was tempted to do evil, then Jas 1:13, standing alone, is not directly relevant to the debate. Jas 1:13 states that God (as God) cannot be tempted to sin;[35] it does not address the question of whether the incarnate Jesus as the God-man could sin, or for that matter, even be tempted. The latter issue is directly addressed in

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[31]Enns comes close to saying this when he says, "[F]or sin to take place, there must be an *inner* response to the outward temptation. Since Jesus did not possess a sin nature, there was nothing within Him to respond to the temptation" (*Moody Handbook* 237-38; cf. better nuancing in Foxell, *Temptation of Jesus* 82, 83, 107). Yet would this not also mean that Adam and Eve sinned because they already had an inner sin nature?

[32]Contra, it would seem, Helmut Thielecke, who sees the temptations of both unfallen Adam and Christ as arising internally (*Between God and Satan* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958] 14-19; cf. also Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology*, 2nd ed. [London: Cambridge University, 1990] 28-60 [esp. 30, 43]).

[33]Cf. A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* 264.

[34]R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1992) 84. Donald Bloesch points out that a failure to recognize this distinction between internal and external temptation in relation to Christ has led many to the opposite extremes of either affirming the sinlessness of Christ while denying the reality of His temptation (e.g., Schleiermacher) or of affirming the reality of Christ's temptations while denying the sinlessness of Christ (e.g., Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* [New York: Scribner's, 1951] 1:269, 222) (Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978] 1:96, 115).

[35] The term *apeirastos* ("untempted") is a *hapax legomenon*, and uncertainty prevails regarding the meaning of the term. Does it mean that God cannot be tempted by evil, or that God, having no knowledge of sin, is therefore unable to tempt anyone. This is a very difficult issue, and this writer tentatively concludes that the first explanation—that God cannot be tempted by evil—is more likely, largely because the immediate context addresses the issue of temptation to sin (cf. vv. 14-15), and the *de* following *peirazei* marks a contrast to the temptableness previously denied by God. See discussion in Thomas, *Epistle of James* L8, P18-19 (Thomas prefers the second view above).

other passages (cf. below).

[2] The "each one" of Jas 1:14 must be limited to *fallen* man with a sin nature, which would not include either Christ or unfallen Adam in Gen 3:1-7. Hence, Jas 1:14 cannot possibly cover all scenarios of temptation. Adam and Christ, at least, were both tempted in their unfallen condition, which meant that they had no internal sin nature that temptation could appeal to. The first Adam was tempted externally and succumbed; the last Adam was tempted externally and was gloriously victorious over the temptation. Unfallen Adam had no sin nature, yet he was peccable and susceptible to external temptation.

[3] Not only is the "each one" of Jas 1:14 limited to those who already have a fallen sin nature, this expression may be even more contextually nuanced. A cognate noun of *peirazō* is used in vv. 2 and 12 in the broader sense of "trial" or "testing." Thus, in v. 14 James may be specifically addressing the one who does not persevere under *peirasmos* (v. 12). When that does not happen, the "testing" (which may come from God, v. 12) becomes a "temptation" (which is not from God, v. 13).[36] Such a man who is tempted because he does not respond appropriately to his trial must never assume that the solicitation to evil came from God (v. 13); rather it came from his own internal lusts (v. 14). Thus, the "each one" that James refers to may be "each one" who failed to respond to the *peirasmos* as God intended (v. 12). It is further possible that the *peirasmos* of 1:13-14 is also contextually defined in the restricted sense of temptation "to lust," rather than dealing with every kind of temptation.[37] Thus, temptation does not presuppose, nor does it equal, sinfulness.[38]

(3) *The reality of Christ's temptations*. Jesus, though He had no sin, nevertheless faced real temptations at repeated points.[39] Each of the Synoptic

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[36]See note 27 above. Zane C. Hodges recognizes this lexical progression in James when he states that "it may be safely said that in every 'trial' (broad sense) which we have, there is also a 'temptation' to evil (narrow sense)" (*The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Suffering* [Irving, Tex.: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994] 27). Hiebert also connects these by noting that "Because of a wrong inner reaction, the testings which God meant for our good can become an occasion for sin" [Hiebert, *James* 101].

[37]Cf. Thomas, *James* L 8.

[38]Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 122. Impeccability advocates Lewis and Demarest note, "In order to understand how Jesus could be tempted although he was unable to sin we must grasp the radical difference between temptation and sin. Because a godly person does not commit certain wrong acts, it need not mean that the appeal is not felt. Because an army cannot be conquered, can it not be attacked?" (*Integrative Theology* 2:345).

[39]The temptation issue was Reformed theologian Charles Hodges' main difficulty with an "absolute impeccability" answer: "Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect, and He cannot

Gospels records Jesus' temptation by Satan in the wilderness at the outset of Christ's public ministry (Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). Yet Satan's temptation in the wilderness was not the only time Christ was tempted; there were other attempts such as the ones through Peter on the eve of the Transfiguration (Matt 16:22 f.; Mark 8:32-33), in Gethsemenae (Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:44), and even in the repeated requests of the two thieves on the cross (Luke 23:39-43).

While the contrasts between Christ's temptation and that of Adam are instructive,[40] the parallels are significant. First, the temptations of both Adam and Christ were to disobey the mandates that they had received. For Adam it was not to eat of the tree; for Christ it was the Messianic mandate (cf. Heb 10:5-10).[41] Second, in both cases Satan used and mishandled the Word of God. Third, there is a similarity in the appeal of Christ to what 1 John 2:16 calls "the lust (ἐπιθυμία, *epithumia*, "desire") of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life." Though certainly in 1 John 2:16 "lust" is used in a negative ethical sense, *epithumia* can and often does have a neutral sense. Satan possibly used these three areas as he did with the woman (cf. "good for food . . . delight to the eyes . . . desirable to make one wise," Gen 3:6). With her he was successful; with Christ he was not (cf. stones to bread; throw yourself down; all these will I give You).[42] It would seem that maintaining the strong parallels between Adam's temptation in Genesis 3 and that of Christ in Matthew 4, Christ must have had an ability (in some sense) to succumb to those temptations.[43]

The meaning of *chōris hamartias* in Hebrews 4:15. A *second* example of the influence of theological presuppositions in exegesis is in the treatment of "yet without sin" (*chōris hamartias*) in Heb 4:15. Does it mean "without resulting in sin" or "without coming from a sin nature?" In many ways this is a false dichotomy; these two choices are not mutually exclusive. Christ's temptations certainly did not

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sympathize with his people" (Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 2:457; also idem, *Systematic Theology* (abridged edition) 364-65].

[40]For example, Christ's temptation lasted forty days while Adam and Eve's was apparently quite short; Adam and Eve had the garden with plenty of food; Jesus was in the wilderness with no food. Milton made Christ's temptations in the wilderness the theme of his "Paradise Regained," in that he saw here the beginning of the undoing of the damage done in Eden (cf. Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation* 5).

[41]Foxell, *Temptation of Jesus* 16.

[42]Cf. Strong, who notes that Jesus "had the keenest susceptibility to all the forms of innocent desire. To these desires temptation may appeal. Sin consists, not in these desires, but in the gratification of them out of God's order, and contrary to God's will" (Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* [Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1907] 2:677; cf. Foxell, *Temptation of Jesus* 74; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* 265). Because the desires in 1 John 2:16 are clearly sinful, it is impossible to draw an exact parallel without attributing a sin nature to Christ.

[43]It is possible, however, that if Christ was (exclusively) impeccable, Satan was not aware of that and sought to conquer Him as He had Adam and Eve, or that even Christ Himself, given his growth in knowledge (Luke 2:52), was not yet aware that He Himself was impeccable.

result in sin, nor did they grow out of a fallen sin nature (cf. Jas 1:14-15), and so both are true of Christ. But those who force a choice usually do so to some degree based on their presuppositions. Peccability advocates will state that while Christ could have sinned, He did not. *Hamartias* by this view is seen as an act of sin. Advocates of impeccability state that Christ could not have sinned, because He had no internal sin nature. He was *chōris hamartias*. With this view sin refers to a nature, a principle.

The writer of Hebrews has already stated, "Since He Himself was tempted (πειρασθείς, *peirastheis*) in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (πειραζομένοις, *peirazomenois*)" (2:18). These temptations and sufferings were not only those common to the rest of humanity, but also those "subtle temptations which attended his messianic calling,"[44] and specifically here probably Christ's death (cf. 5:7-8). The writer draws a parallel between Jesus and His people "not so much . . . in the nature and form of the temptation but in the fact that both sustain an experience of temptation."[45]

Hebrews 4:15 is even more explicit, when the author says, "We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."[46] As noted above, there is debate over whether *chōris hamartias* ("without sin") refers to the *result* of Christ's temptations (peccability) or the *way* in which He was tempted ("no sin nature prompting His from within," impeccability). Arguments for the "sin nature" view include the word order and another occurrence of *chōris hamartias* in 9:28, where it is not limiting the outcome of the temptation of Christ but the temptation itself.

However, this view is weakened by the parallel drawn between Christ's temptations and those of His people, which can and, given our sin nature, often do result in sin. If Christ was ontologically unable to sin, one wonders what the point of His temptation even was. How could it support the exhortation for believers to "hold fast their profession" (4:14) if it was impossible for Christ to sin? If there were not the potential of resulting in sin, what would be the point of saying that Christ was "without sin"? But if Christ could have sinned and endured under every possible temptation without sinning, then the argument of the writer of Hebrews is that much stronger. It is in the experience of temptation, not the yielding to it, where

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[44]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT revised (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 88; cf. G. C. Berkhouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 261; Guthrie, *Hebrews* 86, 122.

[45]Guthrie, *Hebrews* 96.

[46]J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., notes that this last expression does not teach that "Jesus Christ was tempted in every particular point just as we are tempted. . . . [but] that in every way in general He was tried similarly" (*Systematic Theology* 59). Thus one must be careful not to make this verse say that Christ was tempted by every possible sin, e.g., homosexuality (cf. discussion in Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation* 26; Banks, *Satan Met Jesus* 48 n.).

Christ's sympathy with us lies.[47] Further, κατὰ πάντα (*kata panta*, "in all things") in 4:15 appears also in 2:17 in a strictly unqualified sense. Therefore, it is more likely that *chōris hamartias* here represents an outcome rather than a qualification of *kata panta*. Given the fact that *chōris hamartias* ("without sin") follows *pepeirazmenon* ("tempted"), *pepeirasmenon* more likely has the more common use of "tempted" rather than "tested."

An appeal to other relevant theological models

Other relevant theological models play a great role in seeking to answer the question of whether Christ was peccable or impeccable. Indeed, the present writer has found these most helpful in formulating his own position, namely, that the incarnate Christ possessed *both* of these seemingly contradictory attributes. Three theological models undergird this position: (1) the hypostatic union of Christ's human and divine natures into one Person; (2) the theological concept of "antinomy"; and (3) the "kenosis" of Christ.

Hypostatic union of two natures in Christ. The difference between the peccability and impeccability positions essentially boils down to how one explains the relationship between the two natures of Christ. Impeccability advocates ask, "If Jesus could sin, how could He be truly divine?" On the other hand, peccability advocates ask, "If Jesus could not sin, how could he be truly human?"[48] Certainly this is one of the great mysteries of the incarnation.

Some impeccability advocates appeal to the unique joining of the two natures of Christ into one person as supporting impeccability. Since, it is argued, it is the person who sins, not his nature, and since the personality of Christ resides in His deity, it was impossible for the person of Christ to sin. William G. T. Shedd may be cited as representative when he appeals to the theanthropic person of Christ to resolve the debate: "Consequently, Christ while having a peccable human *nature* in his constitution, was an impeccable *person*. Impeccability characterizes the God-man as a totality, while peccability is a property of his humanity."[49]

On the surface, this appears to be a very strong argument, but to state that the impeccability of Christ's divine nature characterizes the entire theanthropic

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[47]Cf. Westcott: ". . . sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain" (B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: MacMillan, 1892) 59; cf. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 720, and Leon Morris, *The Lord From Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 51-52 (contra A. E. Taylor: "*If* a man does not commit certain transgressions . . . it must be because he never felt the appeal of them" [*Asking Them Questions*, ed. Ronald Shelby Wright [London: Oxford University, 1936] 94).

[48]House, *Charts* 62.

[49]Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* 2:333; cf. also Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* 117; Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 5:77; Dabney, *Syllabus* 471; Enns, *Moody Handbook* 237; Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* 358; Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 2:346; Ryrie, *Basic Theology* 265.

person of Christ raises questions concerning the relationship of the other attributes of Christ's divine nature to those of His human nature. Does Christ's omniscience in His divine nature override at all times the finite knowledge of His human nature (cf. Luke 2:40, 52)? Or does Christ's omnipotence override the limitations of his human flesh; at times He was tired and hungry? Certainly these conditions affected not just His human nature but His entire theanthropic person.[50] The great danger when one appeals to the unique theanthropic constitution of Christ's person to resolve these sorts of issues is that he must ultimately decide which facet of Christ's person—His human or divine nature—is most normative in determining the characteristics of Christ's incarnate person.[51] In this writer's view, both the peccability and impeccability positions when viewed as mutually exclusive fail in appealing to the humanity or deity of Christ to support their respective positions. To ask the question, "Was Christ peccable or impeccable in His incarnation?" is like asking the question, "Is Jesus Christ God or Man?" The answer to both questions is "yes."[52] That Jesus Christ in His incarnation possessed both attributes (peccability and impeccability) and that He exercised them in keeping with the will of His heavenly Father is better.

(1) *The humanity of Christ.* Though reviewing all the biblical evidence supporting the full humanity of Christ is beyond the scope of this essay, two issues

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[50]Cf. A. B. Bruce, *Humiliation of Christ* 273.

[51]E.g., Enns argues, "If he were only a man then he could have sinned, but God cannot sin and in a union of the two natures, the human nature submits to the divine (otherwise the finite is stronger than the infinite)" (*Moody Handbook* 237; cf. Boettner, *Studies in Theology* 211). Yet does this reasoning apply to the exercise of Christ's other human attributes? For example, would the fact that Christ was tired and hungry at the same time that He was omnipotent be a case of the human nature "submitting" to the divine nature? Would this not be a case of the divine nature "submitting" to the human nature of Christ? The issue in the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ does not seem to be whether one nature "submits" to the other, but how the two natures in their full integrity relate to one another, as the full *person* of Christ is submitted to the control of His heavenly Father.

[52]In dealing with this issue, a kind of modalism as touching the two natures of Christ must be avoided, i.e., that at one time Jesus operated from His divine nature and at another time operated from His human nature. Explanations of this sort fall into the trap of creating a divided Christ (e.g., Chafer, *Systematic Theology* 5:79; Foxell, *Temptation of Christ* 80; Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation* 7-8). The position presented here is that Jesus, as the God-man, operated at all times from both natures. As Erickson notes, "The union of the two natures meant that they did not function independently. Jesus did not exercise his deity at times and his humanity at other times. His actions were always those of divinity-humanity. This is the key to understanding the functional limitations which the humanity imposed upon the divinity. . . . [This] should not be considered a reduction of the power and capacities of the Second Person of the Trinity, but rather a circumstance-induced limitation on the exercise of his power and capacities" (*Christian Theology* 735; cf. also Norman Anderson [*The Mystery of the Incarnation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1978) 37-40, 42, 142] for a discussion of modalistic heresies in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity). Cf. also several passages where Christ exercises both divine and human attributes (e.g., Matt 14:22-33; Luke 8:22-25; John 11:32-36, 41-46) (Charles R. Swindoll, *Jesus, Our Lord* [Fullerton, Calif.: Insight For Living, 1987] 17-19).

of Christ's humanity that relate directly to the debate over Christ's impeccability are directly relevant.

First, the Scripture parallels Christ and Adam in several major passages (Rom 5:12 ff.; 1 Cor 15:22, 45; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21; Col 1:15; Heb 2:8-9). One of the titles given to Christ in the NT is "the last Adam" (cf. 1 Cor 15:22, 45).[53] Parallels such as these indicate that Christ is the one in whom the ideal man is realized. He succeeded where Adam had failed. When God created Adam and Eve, He created them as perfect, unfallen human beings. They had no sin nature, had no wrong thoughts, had done no wicked deeds. Yet, even with a perfect human nature, they fell into sin. God originally placed man on the earth to rule over it as His representative (Gen 1:28). Psalm 8, quoted in Heb 2:8-9, reiterates this original intention of God, showing that Adam's sin did not thwart that intention. In Rom 5:12 ff., "Jesus was our representative and obeyed for us where Adam had failed and disobeyed,"[54] while in Heb 2:8-9 Jesus "was able to obey God and thereby have the right to rule over creation *as a man*, thus fulfilling God's original purpose in putting man on the earth."[55] Two observations are significant: (1) While sinfulness is not an integral part of perfect human nature, peccability (i.e., the ability to choose to sin or not to sin) is, since Adam and Eve had the ability to sin in their unfallen humanity. (2) The parallel drawn between the first Adam and the last Adam in the NT (especially in the area of obedience vs. disobedience, cf. Rom 5:12 ff.) argues strongly that Christ, in His fully unfallen human nature, also had the ability to sin, if He was to be truly human. Thus, unlike God (Jas 1:13), Christ the God-man could be and indeed was tempted. He was subjected to an even greater test than the first Adam, but unlike the first Adam, the last Adam did not fail. To have the ability to sin does not guarantee one will exercise it.

Second, the NT consistently connects the sinlessness of Christ with His humanity, not His deity. In other words, the reasons given for Christ's sinlessness are not His inability to sin by virtue of His deity, but rather His continuous victory in His humanity over every temptation shows His sinlessness.[56] Hughes notes the significance of this in his comments on 2 Cor 5:21:

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[53]For fuller discussion on passages drawing parallels between Christ and Adam, see Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline Of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 53-58, 60-64, 70-78, 81-85, 96-98, 169, 225, 541-43; cf. also Louis Berkhof, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:314; Ernest Swing Williams, *Systematic Theology* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1953) 3:45; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 112-17; J. P. Versteeg, *Is Adam a "Teaching Model" in the New Testament?* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978) passim, esp. 8-29, 33-37. The works by Hoekema and Versteeg especially emphasize the doctrinal importance of the historicity of Adam.

[54]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 540. Cf. Scroggie comment in note 40 above.

[55]Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 541 (emphasis in the original).

[56]J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 1:338. One must be careful to avoid a false dichotomy here; sinlessness is an attribute of Christ both in His humanity and His deity.

> The sinlessness of which these passages speak [here, Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5] refers to our Lord's incarnate life. To wish, as some commentators (Windisch, for example) have done, to move it back to His pre-existent state prior to the incarnation is not only unwarranted but also pointless. That as God He is without sin goes without saying; but what is of vital importance for us and our reconciliation is that *as Man*, that is, in His incarnate state, Christ knew no sin, for only on that ground was He qualified to effect an atonement as Man for man.[57]

(2) *The deity of Christ.* Jesus Christ, though taking on a human nature in His incarnation, retained His deity with all of its attributes (cf. discussion on the *kenosis* below), including impeccability which is an attribute of deity (cf. Jas 1:13; Heb 6:18; Hab 1:13). This fact alone is fatal to an exclusive peccability view, for advocates of peccability who state that Christ could not have been impeccable and still fully human must, in effect, posit that Jesus Christ laid aside one of His divine attributes, which is impossible unless He was never God (cf. Phil 2:5 ff.). Therefore, the very fact that Jesus was God demands the retention of a belief in His full though not exclusive impeccability.[58]

(3) *The theanthropic person of Christ*.[59] How, then, can Jesus be peccable in His humanity and impeccable in His deity? For that matter, how can *any* of Jesus' divine attributes (e.g., His omniscience and omnipotence) coexist with His human attributes without compromising the integrity of His human nature? This was one of the earliest and most intense debates in the early church that was finally hammered out in the Chalcedon Creed of A.D. 451. This creed described Christ as

> one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures *without confusion, without change, without division, without separation* [emphasis added], the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature being preserved and coalescing in one *prosopon* and one *hypostasis*—not parted or divided into two *prosopa*, but one and the same Son, only-begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.[60]

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[57]Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 212-13 (emphasis in the original).

[58]Impeccability cannot be said to be a strictly incommunicable attribute of God, since believers will possess that attribute in their eternal state. Indeed, the *kenosis* of Christ (cf. discussion below) weakens the appeal to the other divine attributes of Christ (e.g., omniscience, omnipotence) as support for impeccability, since Christ yielded the independent exercise of these attributes to the will of the Heavenly Father.

[59]For an excellent, brief discussion on the doctrine of Christ's two natures in one Person, see Erickson, *Christian Theology* 734-38; cf. also A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* 39-48; A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1972) 381.

[60]Cited in Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Webber, *What Christians Believe: A Biblical & Historical Summary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 133-34; cf. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 556-58; A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* 380; B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth,

The first emphasized expression in the quotation above underscores the significant contribution of the Chalcedon statement—the relationship between the two natures of Christ. In the impeccability debate, as in other Christological questions, caution is not always exercised, so that the tendency to modify one of the two natures of Christ (as in Apollinarianism),[61] emphasize one at the expense of the other (as in the Christological heresies),[62] or divide one nature from the other in the Person of Christ (as in Nestorianism) is ever present. Specifically, in this debate there is a tendency to change either the human nature of Christ (on the impeccability side) or the divine nature of Christ (on the peccability side). Either position must be careful to retain the full integrity of both natures as they are joined in one Person. Again, practical theological consequences are at stake. Losing deity loses saving power, losing humanity loses Christ's identification with man in His sacrificial death (cf. Heb 2:14-15).

The theological concept of "antinomy." One possible objection to the position taken by this paper—namely, that Christ was both peccable and impeccable—is that it implies a contradiction. How can Christ be both impeccable and peccable in His Person? The issue of impeccability is not the only one where such a question arises in relation to Christ. One could just as legitimately ask, How could Christ be both omnipotent and tired? How could he be both omniscient and ignorant? Omnipresent and localized?

Finite and fallen minds trying to understand something that pertains to an infinite God is also part of the answer to such questions. This is an *apparent* contradiction to man in his limitations. J. I. Packer makes valuable observations that are directly relevant in his *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. He discusses another tension in theology, the apparent contradiction between the sovereignty of God in election and the responsibility of man in evangelism. Packer calls this an "antinomy," and states,

> [T]he whole point of an antinomy—in theology, at any rate—is that it is not a real contradiction, though it looks like one. It is an *apparent* incompatibility between two apparent truths. An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable. There are cogent reasons for believing each of them; each rests on clear and solid evidence; but it is a mystery to you how they can be squared with each other. You see that each must be true on its own, but you do not see how they can both be true together. . . . Neither [set of facts], however, can be reduced to the other or explained in terms of the other; the two seemingly incompatible

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1929) 207-9; Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, 2:114-19. Cp. with the more recent statement in the Westminster Confession of Faith: "The two whole, perfect and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, competition, or confusion" (cited in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877] 3:619-20).

[61]See Williams, *Renewal Theology* 1:335.

[62]Cf. discussion in Foxell, *Temptation of Christ* 85-87.

> positions must be held together, and both must be treated as true. . . . [An antinomy] is not a figure of speech, but an observed relation between two statements of fact. It is not deliberately manufactured; it is forced upon us by the facts themselves. It is unavoidable, and it is insoluble. We do not invent it, and we cannot explain it. Nor is there any way to get rid of it, save by falsifying the very facts that led us to it.[63]

Packer cites as an illustration the antinomy in modern physics of light consisting of both waves and particles at the same time, and concludes that we must "accept [an antinomy] for what it is, and learn to live with it. Refuse to regard the apparent inconsistency as real; put down the semblance of contradiction to the deficiency of your own understanding; think of the two principles as, not rival alternatives, but, in some way that at present you do not grasp, complementary to each other."[64] Certainly this counsel is relevant for the impeccability/peccability debate. It is a mystery, based on two sets of facts the relationship of which raises questions the Scripture does not explicitly answer. We must learn to live with the tension.

Yet does not an appeal to antinomy throw the door wide open to an "anything goes" approach to theology? After all, if one allows "antinomy" for this question, he can allow it for just about anything. Where are the controls? This is where Packer's careful observations of what is meant by an antinomy are so pertinent: It "is not deliberately manufactured; it is forced upon us by the facts themselves. . . . We do not invent it, and we cannot explain it. Nor is there any way to get rid of it, save by falsifying the very facts that led us to it." In other words, the controls on an antinomy arise from the Scriptures themselves. The discussion has noted that neither the peccability nor the impeccability of Christ is inherently an unbiblical position; both take the biblical text as it stands very seriously; and neither set of arguments seems stronger than the other. Seeing Christ as peccable in His human nature and impeccable in His divine nature is a conclusion that is forced upon us by the biblical facts themselves, and thus we, in the words of Packer, have an antinomy. Accordingly, the use of the theological model of antinomy is relevant in a solution of this debate.

The Kenosis of Christ. The term "kenosis," which gets at the heart of the incarnation, comes from the verb used in Phil 2:7, which says that Christ, "although He existed in the form of God, . . . *emptied* (ἐκένωσεν, *ekenōsen*) Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant."[65] Discussions of the doctrine of the *kenosis* have occupied volumes, and the purpose here is not to reproduce or to interact with the voluminous material on that issue, but simply to make some observations as to the

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[63]J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1961) 18-21.

[64]Ibid., 21.

[65]Cf. Other occurrences of κενόω in Rom 4:14; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:5; 2 Cor 9:3, where it is generally rendered "to make void."

relationship between this doctrine and the issue of impeccability.

First, that form of kenoticism which asserts that in "emptying Himself" Jesus laid aside His deity is wrong. This is impossible, because the NT teaches that Jesus continued to be God during His incarnation (1 John 5:20).[66] Further, if Jesus ever ceased to be God, then He was never God, because eternality is a defining characteristic of deity (cf. Gen 1:1; Isa 9:6; John 1:1). Jesus in spite of His *kenosis* continued to possess His divine nature, along with all of the attributes that go with it.[67] It is instead assumed that the *kenosis* of Christ is the yielding of the *independent exercise* of His divine attributes to the will of His heavenly Father, so that His exercise of them was in submission to the will of His heavenly Father (cf. Mark 14:36; Heb 10:8-10).[68]

Second, though the verb κενόω (*kenoō*) implies an "emptying," Phil 2:7 goes on to define the nature of the *kenosis* as Jesus' "taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men [and] being found in appearance as a man." In other words, the "emptying was not a subtraction but an *addition"* of a human nature.[69] That addition brought together several apparently contradictory attributes. Christ could be omnipotent (John 5:19; Heb 1:3) and yet tired and hungry (Matt 4:2; 8:24; 21:18; John 4:6) and doing all of His earthly works in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14, 18; Acts 10:38); omniscient (John 16:30; 21:17), and yet grow in knowledge (Luke 2:52; Heb 5:8) and even at times be ignorant (Mark 13:32; John 8:26, 28, 40);[70] omnipresent (John 3:13; Matt 18:20; 28:20) and yet

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[66]Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* 112.

[67]Milne points out that "if the incarnate Son lacked any essential divine attribute, he immediately fails us at three quite fundamental points: revelation (being less than God he cannot truly reveal God), redemption (being less than God he can no longer reconcile us to God) and intercession (if union with human nature necessarily diminishes the divine nature, the ascended Lord could not 'take to heaven a human brow'; his high-priestly intercession is immediately invalidated)" (Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1982] 147). Cf. discussions in Norman Anderson, *Mystery of the Incarnation* 49, 57-59, 131-35, 146-50; A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* 15-27, 359-68.

[68]Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* 112; Enns, *Moody Handbook* 228; Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 92-93, 216-17.

[69]Enns, *Moody Handbook* 228 (emphasis in the original); cf. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 734-35; Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 550; Milne, *Know the Truth* 147; B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* 180. Perhaps the "subtraction" implied by κενόω refers either to the veiling of Christ's divine glory or the limitations imposed on the exercise of His divine attributes by the addition of a human nature.

[70]Gerald Hawthorne appeals in some senses to the *kenosis* and in particular Christ's omniscience to suggest a possible answer to this debate: "[A]ssuming that it was impossible for Him to sin, because of the nature of His person, yet it is also possible to assume that He did not know this was the case. Mk 13:32 implies that the Son, in His incarnate role, was not omniscient—there is at least one thing recorded there which He did not know. If, then, there was one thing He did not know, ignorance of other things was also possible, even this concerning whether or not He could sin" ("Hebrews," in *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986] 1513; cf. discussion in Foxell, *Temptation of Christ* 88-89). The assumption is that Hawthorne intends to say that Christ in His *humanity*

localized (John 11:6-7); eternal in His deity and yet created in His humanity. Christ had two separate, complete natures, perfectly joined together in one person.[71] Thus, the incarnation made it possible for Jesus to do *as the God-man* certain things that were impossible for Him to do *as God*. He could be seen (cf. John 1:18), be tempted (Jas 1:13), display the sinless infirmities of humanity, and even die (Phil 2:8). This would include even the ability to sin though the NT is emphatic that He never exercised this ability.

That Jesus could and did retain apparently contradictory attributes is the ultimate answer to the impeccability/peccability debate.[72] However one explains the coexistence of seemingly incompatible attributes in Christ (such as divine omniscience and human finite knowledge), the same explanation would also apply to how Christ could also be both peccable and impeccable. As God, Jesus possessed the attribute of *impeccability*, and He could not lay aside that attribute without laying aside His deity. As perfect man, Jesus was *peccable*, since that as well is a defining characteristic of true, preconsummate humanity as seen in unfallen Adam. This peccability is conspicuous especially when Jesus Christ was tempted to depart from His messianic mission, whether in the wilderness, through Peter, in the Garden of Gethsemenae, and even on the cross. On the one hand, to deny Christ's impeccability is to deny Christ's deity. On the other hand, to deny Jesus' peccability is to deny His full humanity and the reality of His temptations. Though the mystery still remains, to this writer the only truly satisfying answer to the question of whether Christ ontologically could or could not sin is that He was both peccable and impeccable in His incarnation, and that in His *kenosis* the exercise of His human attribute of peccability apparently limited (in some sense) the exercise of His divine attribute of impeccability. Praise God, because Jesus knew no sin, had no sin, and did no sin, people can "be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). That is the basis of faith.

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was not omniscient (not that Christ did not possess the attribute of omniscience while He was on earth). If so, it is entirely possible that Hawthorne's suggestion—that Christ was indeed impeccable in His person, but that He did not know it when He was tempted—could retain the impeccability of Christ while at the same time underscoring the reality of Christ's temptation.

[71]Thus He had two wills, human and divine, with His human will being subject to His Father's will. The two wills, though always agreeing, are often distinguished in Scripture, even in those passages which suggest a *potential* conflict between them (e.g., Luke 22:42; Heb 10:5 ff.) (cf. Anderson, *Mystery of the Incarnation* 55-56, 154-55; Berkhouwer, *Person of Christ* 256; Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 561; Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 2:345). Enns argues for impeccability on the basis that "in moral decisions, Christ could have only one will: to do the will of His Father; in moral decisions the human will was subservient to the divine will" (Enns, *Moody Handbook* 238, citing Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* 2:332). Yet what if the divine will was that He be allowed to be tempted and thus able to sin? Further, there is the danger that led to the monothelite controversy of the Middle Ages—the teaching that there is only one will on Christ (cf. Johnson and Webber, *What Christians Believe* 134 f.).

[72]Though appealing, the *kenosis* is explicitly rejected by some (e.g., Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 2:346); the reasons these authorities give for rejecting the explanation suggested here are weak, especially when one applies them to other divine attributes of Christ.