

Re-thinking the Trinity Project

Hebrews and Orthodox Trinitarianism: Jesus as the Iconization of God

Appendix #2–B

by

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I have coined a term to capture what I think is the view of Jesus that is found in the book of *Hebrews* and throughout the New Testament: ICONIZATION.

The New Testament maintains that Jesus is the ICONIZATION of God. By that I mean that Jesus is the unique *eikon* (“image”) of God. (See Colossians 1:15) Jesus is understood to be the ICON [anglicized form of *eikon*] of God in the following sense: he was created to be that human being who, in his own human personhood, uniquely represents the very person of God himself. Jesus IS God, not by virtue of his being made of divine stuff or by virtue of having divine stuff within him; rather, Jesus IS God by virtue of his being that particular human being who has been divinely appointed to bear and exercise the very authority of God himself and to embody the very person of God himself. When Jesus speaks, God speaks; when Jesus judges, God judges; etc.

What about other concepts? Can we use concepts like incarnation or theophany to describe Jesus’ relationship to God? On the New Testament view, Jesus can legitimately be termed a theophany if by the term ‘theophany’ one intends to highlight the fact that Jesus is the way that God has chosen to *appear* to mankind. However, as the analysis below shows, when I use the term ‘theophany’ in this paper, I am suggesting much more than that Jesus is God appearing to mankind. I will always use the term in the sense analyzed in the table below. It is my contention that Jesus is not a theophany in the sense analyzed below.

Also, Jesus can legitimately be termed an incarnation, on the New Testament view, if by the term ‘incarnation’ one intends merely to highlight the fact that Jesus is the human embodiment of God himself. However, as the analysis below shows, when I use the term ‘incarnation’ in this paper, I am suggesting much more than that Jesus is the human embodiment of God himself. I will always use the term in the sense analyzed in the table below. It is my contention that Jesus is not an incarnation in the sense analyzed below.

The term ‘incarnation’ is so closely identified with the viewpoint of orthodox Trinitarianism that it is virtually impossible to separate the two. By ‘incarnation,’ the orthodox Trinitarian means that Jesus is the person of God dwelling within the person of Jesus (the two being “hypostatically” united with one another into a single individual). So, I will always use ‘incarnation’ to mean roughly what Trinitarianism means by it. Given its long and established usage, it would be too difficult to redefine this term without creating confusion.

In the table below, I analyze these three important ways that one could understand the nature of Jesus’ relationship to God: theophany, iconization, and incarnation. It is important to realize that ALL THREE positions maintain that *Jesus is God*. They differ in the *sense* in which they maintain that Jesus is God, not in the *fact* that they identify Jesus

as God. They also differ with respect to what are the implications of each assertion. These significantly different implications are analyzed in the table below:

Analysis of Three Views of Jesus

	If one construes Jesus to have been a THEOPHANY , then one has construed...	If one construes Jesus to have been the ICONIZATION , then one has construed...	If one construes Jesus to have been the INCARNATION , then one has construed...
his existence ...	to have been a temporary, ephemeral existence.	to have been created to be an ongoing, continuous existence for the rest of eternity.	to have been bifurcated between his human and divine natures.
	<i>He existed as a "man" only for as long as God was revealing himself in that form. (He was like the burning bush or the "man" who appeared to and dined with Abraham.)</i>	<i>He was created to reign forever over the eternal Kingdom of God.</i>	<i>His divine nature is eternal. It has always existed. His human nature was created to be ongoing, to exist henceforth forever.</i>
his personal identity...	to have been the personal identity of Yahweh himself.	to have been a personal, human identity distinct from the identity of Yahweh himself.	to have been bifurcated between his human and divine natures.
	<i>The human "form" in which Yahweh appeared has no distinct personal identity of its own. Jesus is not really and fully a human person per se.</i>	<i>Jesus existed and exists as a human person in distinction to the divine person of Yahweh.</i>	<i>His divine nature is the personal identity of the second person of the triune deity (Yahweh?) himself. His human nature is a personal, human identity distinct from the identity of the second person of the deity himself.</i>
his self-consciousness...	to have been the self-consciousness of Yahweh himself.	to have been the self-consciousness of a being distinct from Yahweh.	to have been bifurcated between his human and divine natures.
	<i>He would always have spoken of God in the first person: "I am the one who made the heavens and the earth."</i>	<i>He would have always spoken of God in the third person: "The Father sent me."</i>	<i>His divine nature is conscious of himself as being the second person of the triune deity (Yahweh?) himself. His human nature is conscious of himself as being a being distinct from the second person of the triune deity (Yahweh?).</i>