

## DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

---

# THE INCARNATION AND BEING HUMAN

by the Rev. Michael D. Gladish

Think about the word “human”. What does it mean? Are we “human” because of our size or shape? What about a baby? A Pigmy or a very tall man? Or what if a person loses an arm or a leg in an accident? Is he then no longer human? Scientists used to say that we are human because we have an especially movable thumb (called opposable) and an ability to make and use tools. But what if a person’s thumb gets cut off? Does that make him less human? Of course not! What makes us human is the special ability to think about the truth and to freely love and do what is good. Many animals can think, but none can reason about the truth the way people can. And many animals have freedom, but they don’t have the spiritual freedom of choosing and loving good or evil. They only love and obey whoever trains and feeds and protects them.

So to be human is to have the powers of will and understanding. But it is more than this, too. Have you ever seen something terrible and said “That’s *inhuman!*” If you have, then you know that the powers of will and understanding can be perverted and destroyed. A person can become more or less human depending on how he uses his powers. So when someone wills what is evil and understands things falsely, we say he is not truly human. On the other hand, someone who loves what is good and understands things correctly is truly human and is like an angel. In fact, the better a person becomes, the more he is like the Lord, who is the perfect Human.

All religions look to what is human in their teachings. The Jewish religion was able to do this better than any others in Old Testament times because the Lord had given the clearest possible instructions about human life to these people. Great leaders had been given to help them obey the Ten Commandments. Judges, kings and prophets were raised up by the Lord, and even angels were sent from heaven to be sure people could know and follow the teachings. But what happened? In spite of everything that the Lord provided, the people turned to evil and to misunderstanding—not once or twice, but hundreds of times, until finally hardly anyone knew what was good or true, hardly anyone knew what it meant to be truly human.

After all that had been given and done, what more could the Lord provide that might help people re-discover what it meant to be human? More explanations? More commandments? Some terrible punishments? No, these would merely have made life more miserable for people. The only thing left for the Lord to do was to come in Person and show everyone by His own perfect example the wonderful love and wisdom that are meant to belong to human life. No other way of teaching would have worked. Everything else had been done already.

Therefore He did the most wonderful miracle ever imagined. He came into the world for the first time in His own physical body, a body which He created for Himself according to the laws of natural order. He came to live among people as a Man, in many ways like themselves, so that they could come to know Him again and learn to respect His Word. So He made the teachings (the love and wisdom) of the Word come alive, in the flesh, in a most perfect form, as we read, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The Lord lived in the world so that

others might learn how to truly live, and by fighting and conquering all sorts of evils and falsities, He showed the way for others to be freed from them also.

The term “incarnation” comes from two Latin words meaning “in” and “flesh”. It tells how the Lord came into the world in a body of flesh. (“Advent” is another simple word that means “coming”, so we speak of Christmas as the time of the Lord’s “Advent” and this is the same as His “incarnation”.)

Of course, the Lord knew ahead of time that He would have to come into the world in a body, and so from the very earliest times He began to prepare people for this. All the lessons that the great leaders—judges, kings and prophets—told, and all the stories that are written in the Word, have something to do with what would happen when the Lord was to come. So when He did finally enter the world as a baby in Bethlehem there were plenty of signs to show who He was and why He had been born.

But by the time this happened, the evil and the misunderstanding had become so great that hardly anyone believed it was the Lord. So when He grew up, He had to tell people Himself, and do miracles to prove what He said, and explain everything in new lessons. Now all this is written down in the New Testament of the Word, and it is what Christianity was founded upon.

From the time of the Lord’s Incarnation onwards, people could learn more and more about the truly human qualities that the Lord taught and demonstrated. For He had unlocked a kind of door to new understanding and heavenly love. But history shows us that even after this door was unlocked, very few people opened it up and entered into real wisdom. They may have learned the Lord’s teachings, and even become better because of them, but they still did not really understand. And so there was a weakness which made it possible for evil to lead people astray from the Lord’s true meaning again.

Now you might be thinking, “Where will all this end?” And the Lord has provided an end. He has provided an answer to all the important questions that people might ask about human life and the incarnation. He knew that He would need to provide it, and He prepared people for it by saying that He would come again at another, later time. But note that He did not say He would come again in Person; He said He would come as “the Comforter” and “the Spirit of Truth” which would guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

The Lord knows that the highest plane of human life is in the mind or spirit, not merely the body. After His Incarnation had opened up the way to know and respect His teachings, He provided the last and greatest possible help that could ever be given for the human mind—the spiritual explanation of what it is to be human. That was the truth revealed in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church.

In the Heavenly Doctrine everyone can see what is necessary to be truly human. People can learn about the wisdom and the love that come from the Lord to make us human—to make us more and more like Him. The Heavenly Doctrine can help us to cut through the evil and misunderstanding of the world and come to appreciate the right way of life.

But remember this: as great and as powerful as the Heavenly Doctrine is, it would still be nothing without the Incarnation. All of history looked forward to the Incarnation—the birth of the Lord—and all of the future will be based on the knowledge that has come from it. For in that miracle the Almighty and Everlasting God became Human in a form that all could see and love. And all people—even today—can come to see and love that Perfect Man if they will only try to understand His story. For then He will live in our minds even as He lived in Galilee, and one day we will meet Him face to face in heaven. This, in the end, is the whole purpose of human life.