

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Special Messages</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>			Gary L.W. Johnson
<b>Text:</b>	<b>Philippians 2:5-11</b>		
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### Carmen Christi: Hymn<sup>1</sup> to Christ as to God

Depending on your viewpoint, author Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is either a great literary yarn, a publishing world cottage industry, an act of great Biblical heresy, or a marketing masterpiece that has yielded franchise after franchise in virtually every modern medium (or all of the above!). Since its publication March 18, 2003, the book has sold more than 46 million copies in 44 different languages, logging more than 150 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, including 54 of them at number one. The book is expected to reach the 100 million mark before the end of the year. It has become a golden goose for entrepreneurs in every arena, spawning television documentaries, bus tours, more than a dozen books (including apologies, responses, rebuttals, spoofs, and tie-ins alike.) Last March, Anchor Books shipped 100,000 copies of a paperback edition of *The Da Vinci Code: Special Illustrated Edition*. On May 19, Doubleday will release *The Da Vinci Code Illustrated Screenplay: Behind the Scenes of the Major Motion Picture*, synchronizing with the theatrical release of a \$125 million blockbuster film adaptation, directed by Academy-award winning Ron (Opie) Howard (*A Beautiful Mind*, *Apollo 13*) penned by Oscar-winner Akiva Goldsman (*A Beautiful Mind*, *Cinderella Man*), and starring two-time Oscar-winner Tom Hanks in the role of the Harvard professor of religious symbology, Robert Langdon, as well as Audrey Tautou (*Amelie*) as Sophie Nevue, Jean Reno (*The Professional*) as detective Bezu Fache, Sir Ian McKellen (*Lord of the Rings*) as Sir Leigh Teabing, the world renowned historian, and Paul Bettany (*Firewall*) as the self-flagellating Silas.<sup>2</sup>

When asked if he was a Christian, Dan Brown answered, "Yes. Interestingly, if you ask three people what it means to be Christian, you will get three different answers. Some feel being baptized is sufficient. Others feel you must accept the Bible as absolute historical fact. Still others require a belief that all those who do not accept Christ as their personal savior are doomed to hell. Faith is a continuum, and we each fall on that line where we may. By attempting to rigidly classify ethereal concepts like faith, we end up debating semantics to the point where we entirely miss the obvious – that is, that we are all trying to decipher life's big mysteries, and we're each following our own paths of enlightenment. I consider myself a student of many religions. The more I learn, the more questions I have. For me, the spiritual quest will be a life-long work in progress."<sup>3</sup> This is as Andrew Kostenberger recently pointed out, very revealing indeed. Brown identifies himself as a "non-traditional Christian," a spiritual seeker following his "own path of enlightenment." He is "a student of many religions." This seems to imply that he does not believe Jesus is God or the only way to God as the Bible claims (John 14:6), because, if so, it would be illegitimate for everyone to follow their own path of enlightenment. It also means that Brown does not hold a very high view of the Bible, because he substitutes his own personal religious philosophy for the teaching of Scripture itself. If anything, for Brown's own religious views to be validated, it would be helpful to find some other sources outside the Bible that relativize Jesus' and the Bible's exclusive claims, and this is exactly what Brown does throughout the novel.<sup>4</sup>

Edmund Clowney provides us with this important warning, “There is danger that you will begin to worship an imaginary Christ, not the Christ who says the things that are written, but a Christ of your own imagination, a harsh Christ who has not the meekness of Jesus, or a permissive Christ who is not the Holy One of God. It is so easy for us to invent another Christ and fail to be in subjection to the true Lord.”<sup>5</sup> The late John Gerstner persuasively argued that unless you come to a biblical understanding of Jesus (specifically that He was fully God and fully man) you are *not* a Christian – period.<sup>6</sup> But who is (or was) Jesus? There is the traditional view, of course, but hardly anyone (even among professing Christians) seems interested in the Christ who has come down to us in terms of orthodox theology.

## **I. THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT**

One of my former professors, in a class that focused on the exegesis of Philippians made this important observation. “The meaning of this well-known passage will only be ascertained if we can determine how the passage functions in the context of the whole letter. In what way do these verses contribute to achieving the apostle’s purposes? The question is hotly debated, as the subsequent exposition will show. Yet careful attention to the earnest concerns of the previous section (1:27-2:4) suggests a simple answer. If the opposition being experienced by the Philippians calls for steadfastness, if steadfastness is impossible without spiritual unity, and if unity can come about only from an attitude of humility, then surely Paul must reinforce the critical importance of humility in the hearts of believers. And what better way to reinforce this thought than by reminding the Philippians of the attitude and conduct of Him to whom they are united in faith? When admonishing the Corinthians to contribute generously for the sake of the poor in Jerusalem, Paul sets before them the example of Christ: ‘though He was rich, He became poor on account of you, so that through His poverty you might become rich’ (2 Cor. 8:9). Similarly here he appeals to the spirit of servanthood that brought Jesus to His death—a death which, incidentally, has overflowed in life for the Philippians.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, the Apostle in this passage points to the person of Christ as the example of what it means to act with humility of mind. Here is the great illustration of what it means to have certain rights and yet to *purposely* and *voluntarily* lay them aside in service to others. Paul’s design is not directly doctrinal, but ethical. “His object,” as Hawthorne remarks, “is not to give instruction in doctrine, but to reinforce instruction in Christian living. And he does this by appealing to the conduct of Christ. The hymn, therefore, presents Christ as the ultimate model for moral action.”<sup>8</sup> The passage divides into two sections with each section concluding with a climactic addendum. Thus in section one (vv. 6-8) we have three stanzas that speak of Christ’s *humiliation* with the climatic addendum “even death on the cross.” The second section (vv. 9-11) also has three stanzas that speak of Christ’s exaltation with the climatic addendum “to the glory of God the Father.”

## **II. PAUL’S EXHORTATION (2:5)**

“Your attitude should be” (NIV) “Have this attitude” (NASB) “Have this mind” (ESV) are various ways this has been translated. PHRONEITE lit. means “to think.” The complete phrase of v. 5 indicates that Paul’s exhortation speaks of a particular *disposition*; i.e., “Be so disposed in your attitude toward one another.” (cf. Philippians 4:2 for a similar exhortation).

## **III. THE GREAT DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST (2:6)**

What is the meaning of “nature of God” (NIV) “form of God” (NASB, ESV)? The word MORPHĒ is used only here in the Greek New Testament. It refers to a most profound and genuine identity.<sup>9</sup> David Wells cogently argues that it would appear inescapable that by “form” we are to understand that Paul meant the essence or essential characteristics of a thing.

He who was in essence a servant and showed the essential characteristics of serving was in essence divine and had those characteristics essential to being divine.<sup>10</sup> The word, for example is used four times in the Greek translation Old Testament (the Septuagint). In each instance, MORPHĒ refers to the visible form or appearance (the form of the son of a king, Judges 8:18; “there was no form before my eyes,” Job 4:16; an idol in the form of a man, Isaiah 44:13; the form of Nebuchadnezzar’s countenance was changed, Dan. 3:19).<sup>11</sup> Notice also the word “being” (ESV) “existed” (NASB). “The present participle HYPARCHŌN stands in sharp contrast with all the aorists which follow it, and therefore points in the direction of continuance of being: Christ Jesus was and is eternally existing “in the form of God.”<sup>12</sup> Paul does not say that Christ “came to exist” or “entered into existence,” but he uses the *present* tense to indicate *ongoing* existence. And since the time frame of the passage is clearly eternity past, the beginning assertion is that the One we know as Jesus Christ existed eternally in the very form of God. The “form of God” is not merely a category of existence (like “spirits” or “creatures”). The “form of God” presents a direct correspondence to reality itself—that which exists in the “form of God” is true Deity. B.B. Warfield was correct when he said, “Paul does not say simply, ‘He was God.’ He says, ‘He was in the form of God,’ employing a turn of speech which throws emphasis upon Our Lord’s possession of the specific quality of God. ‘Form’ is a term which expresses the sum of those characterizing qualities which make a thing the precise thing that it is...When Our Lord is said to be in ‘the form of God,’ therefore, He is declared, in the most express manner possible to be all that God is, to possess the whole fullness of attributes which make God, God.”<sup>13</sup> Putting the interpretation of all the elements together yields the following. Although Christ was truly God, MORPHĒ THEOU, two things resulted: (1) He did not attempt to “outrank” the Father, as it were (cf. John 14:28 for a similar thought: “The Father is greater than I am”); (2) Instead, he submitted himself to the Father’s will, even to the point of death on a cross. It was thus not Christ’s Deity that compelled his incarnation and passion, but his obedience.<sup>14</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** This passage ascribes Deity to Christ. “It does so in three ways: first, by its description of Jesus as ‘in the form of God (continually) being’; second, by its tacit ascription to him of ‘equality with God’ when it affirms that he did not ‘seize’ this station in the sense that at the time of his temptation he did not assert himself in a self-willed show of power commensurate with his divine station; and third, by the very nature of his delegated lordship, the entail of his exaltation.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Phil. 2:5-11 is considered to be a hymn or poem, not in a contemporary sense, but structurally. Scholars are divided over whether or not the hymn was composed by Paul or if he used this early Christian hymn as an apt illustration. Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (IVP, 1970), pp. 539-541 for discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from “The Creation of Mania: The biggest book of the decade becomes a blockbuster summer movie” *Pages: The Magazine for People Who Love Books* (May/June 2006), p. 38, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Posted at [www.danbrown.com](http://www.danbrown.com)

<sup>4</sup> A.J. Kostenberger, “The Da Vinci Code: A Myth of Christian Origins” in *Reformation 21 Online* (4/16/2006).

<sup>5</sup> E.P. Clowney, “The Unchanging Christ” in *Our Savior God: Studies on Man, Christ and the Atonement*, ed. J.M. Boice (Baker, 1980), p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> J.H. Gerstner, *Primitive Theology: The Collected Primers of John H. Gerstner* (Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), pp. 115-160.

<sup>7</sup> Moisés Silva, *Philippians: The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (Moody, 1988), p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> G.F. Hawthorne, *Philippians: Word Biblical Commentary* (Nelson, 1983), p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> Alec Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (IVP, 1984), p. 104.

<sup>10</sup> D.F. Wells, *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation* (Crossway, 1984), p. 64.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. R. Strimple, “Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Studies: Some Exegetical Conclusions” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (1978-79), p. 260.

<sup>12</sup> W. Hendriksen, *Philippians: New Testament Commentary* (Baker, 1962), p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> As cited by James White, “Beyond the Veil of Eternity: The Importance of Philippians 2:5-11 in Theology and Apologetics” *Christian Research Journal* (Vol. 22/no. 3), p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. D.B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan, 1996), p. 635.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R.L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nelson, 1998), p. 264.