Concise Notes on Christ's Two Natures

Introduction

I have looked at this in more detail elsewhere, but here I want to make some very simple notes to cover a specific objection to the orthodox doctrine. The Christian position is that Christ is the Second Person of the Trinity and is fully God. To achieve the work of redemption the Son became a man in time and, therefore, had two natures in one person. Thus Christ has a human soul, conscience, will, emotions etc, as well as a divine soul. There is no confusion or admixture in these; they are unified and also distinct in Christ's person (*hypostasis*). There are two centres of consciousness but not of self-consciousness; two natures but one person; the Son was a personality before he was incarnated.

In this union Christ assumed all that constitutes a man (body, soul and spirit). The personality of this man was the person that existed as the Son in the divine nature from eternity. A new personality was not constructed. The Son subsisted in human nature as truly as he did in the divine nature. Christ thought, willed and purposed as God (with omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence) and as man (with limited powers, limited knowledge, suffering).

There have been many heretical assaults on this doctrine, but the one I wish to consider here is that Christ was not made a man of the order of Adam, but was always a man in eternity, in that there was in the Son the prototype, or ideal form, of manhood. When he came to earth he came with this divine manhood. Thus there is no human soul in Christ; he only has one will and one soul. This theory claims that the orthodox doctrine is merely an over-rationalisation by men with no scriptural support.

It is important to see that the implications of this idea destroy, not only the Biblical statements of Christ's nature, but also his work. If this is true then the work of redemption is ruined and there is no hope.

Why this theory is plain wrong

It is an over-simplified rationalisation.

While claiming to be an antidote to orthodox rationalisation, it is just another human theoretical invention itself. It has no Biblical support in the slightest and contradicts literally thousands of Bible verses. It denies basic doctrines about God, Christ and salvation and does not even have historic support.

It has Platonic ideas in it rather than Biblical ones.

Plato taught a dualism between what was divine, absolute, spiritual, ideal and virtuous in heaven, and what is intrinsically material, and therefore, evil in this world. The moral virtues that men aspire to, already exist in the spiritual realm as eternal, ideal forms. The notion that Christ had manhood in him in a perfect, ideal, spiritual form, sounds like Platonism.

It is similar to Apollinarianism and Docetism.

This error claims that Christ's divine *logos* (divine nature) took the place of the human soul of Jesus Christ. This has been branded as heresy, and a denial of the two distinct natures, for nearly 2,000 years. Since the divine nature of Christ is the same nature as God, then it would mean that all the Godhead was incarnated. It would also mean that Jesus wasn't a real human being. The above error is not quite the same, positing that a divine form of eternal, ideal manhood in God took the place of a human soul in Jesus, but it is

very similar. There are also traces of Docetism, i.e. that Jesus Christ was not a real man but only the appearance of one; in reality he was a spirit looking like a man. These are very serious errors.

It denies the Biblical revelation of Christ.
Christ is God
Thus Christ is the Logos, the Second Person in the Trinity. As God he is self-existent, perfect, infinite and can have nothing in him that is created. It is impossible for the Son to have any concept of manhood in his divine being. If Christ is to redeem men then his manhood must be creaturely (created). If Christ had this material nature, even in an ideal, perfect form in eternity, it would destroy Christ's divinity. Also, manhood is temporal. Any existence of something temporal in the infinite being of Christ (and thus of God) would destroy his divinity.

Christ is man
Jesus was incarnated as a man in the line of Adam, an ordinary human being in his human nature. In order to redeem men Christ had to become man. If Christ was not an Adamic man but some pre-existent, ideal form of man in eternity, then he could not redeem men.

The essential nature of man is flesh, corporeal existence. Man did not exist until God created him by breathing the breath of lives into dust. Any ideal, divine, eternal form of manhood would be spiritual and not material – thus they would be two opposing species and not the same nature.

> *There is* one *kind of* flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, *and* another of birds. *There are* also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another. … There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven. 1 Cor 15:39-47

The Son, a spiritual being in heaven, became an Adamic man in time in order to redeem men. He was no different to ordinary human beings, with the exception of sin. If he had been different, then he could not be a substitute.

Christ is the Seed of Abraham
Paul argues convincingly that the divine promise to Abraham concerned Christ (see Gal 3). The one who would bring about the covenant blessing to all nations was a descendent of Abraham. This means that Christ had not only to be a human being like Adam, but a specific man from a certain tribe. Prophecies narrow down that lineage – he was a son of Judah and a son of David as well as being a Jew. If Christ was merely some ideal form of manhood in eternity, then he could not fulfil these necessary promises to save his people.

Christ is the Messiah
The prophetic scriptures give a progressive understanding about the prophet foretold by Moses, the saviour promised to Adam and Eve and the sovereign Lord and heir promised to David. All these scriptures are based upon the Messiah being a normal man, derived from Adam, but who is joined to God.

Perhaps Isaiah's *el Gibbowr* ('mighty God', Isa 9:6) sums it up best: 'For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'. Here the eternal Son is promised to be the Messiah. Jews understood it thus and so do Christians. That the Son is God is clear, he is called *'el* the shortened form of God's name. What is interesting is the additional

adjective 'mighty'. This really isn't necessary as *'el* carries that sense anyway. What is really significant is that the word *'gibbowr'* carries the real sense of being a man.

If Jesus was not a normal man but an expression of some unmentioned, absolute, ideal, eternal form of man, then he could not fulfil these promises.

Christ had a human will
Note, in John's Gospel in particular, that Jesus submitted himself to God's will – he only said what the Father said and did what the Father did. In his divine nature, Jesus was equally God with the Father so this submission to the divine will was his human will. This alone is proof that Christ had two wills, two natures.

It denies the basis of the atonement.
The Saviour had to be divine and human
The only way that men can be saved is for a saviour to redeem them from their sin and facilitate reconciliation with an offended, holy God. Christ does this by becoming an ordinary human being and taking on that sin in the place of men (penal substitution). If Christ was just a man then, even if he was righteous, he could only die for himself. To save all the elect, the Saviour had to also be divine with the value of an infinite life. Christ's personal life, being divine, is infinite with infinite value. Thus when he died in his human nature, it was more than equal to the value of all the elect.

Thus the redeemer had to be fully God and fully man. If he was not an ordinary man (but a theoretical ideal, absolute form) then he could not die for ordinary men.

Christ had to die in all the nature of man
Christ did not just die in the physical flesh; man's sins occupy more than his body. As well as bodily sins, there are mental, wilful and emotional sins. All the compartments of man's soul had to be atoned for (chiefly intellect, emotions and volition). This meant that on the cross Christ died for sin in his body, his human mind, his human emotions and his human will. All that was stained by sin in man's nature was atoned for at the cross; Christ took man's sin into his human soul and suffered for it.

Now, if Christ did not have two souls the repercussions are disastrous:
- If Christ had no real human soul then he could not have died for all man's sin, but only his bodily sins.
- If Christ died in his divine soul for man's inner sins then:
  a) He could not have been God since God is eternal and self-existent, he cannot die.
  b) If Christ did die in his divine soul then he took sin into God's essential being, thus destroying God's holiness and thus God himself. God cannot sin (impeccability)
  c) God cannot suffer (impassibility). If Jesus did not suffer in his human soul but in his divine soul then God suffered. Again, God's perfection would be destroyed.

It denies scriptural definitions of God
God is spirit
> God *is* Spirit. Jn 4:24

If God is spirit, then there can be nothing of man in his eternal being. In eternity past all the persons of the Trinity are spirit; there is no archetypal man present in the Second Person. The basis of man's nature is material, temporal and derived; none of these things are possible in God's essential being.

God is immutable
> For I *am* the LORD, I do not change. Mal 3:6

If Christ did not take on humanity in the incarnation but had an ideal form of manhood in eternity, and in this nature suffered on the cross, then God, of necessity, must change. This divine, eternal nature would suffer pain, loss, diminution and death. The idea is just preposterous.

God is impeccable (does not sin)
> God cannot be tempted by evil. Jm 1:13
> Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts. Isa 6:3

If Christ did not take on human nature but suffered on the cross in his divine soul, then he took sin into God's being.

God does not suffer
God's impassibility (an aspect of his immutability) means that God is without passions; he has no innate hungers or drives for fulfilment. No being can inflict stress, suffering or pain upon God against his will (though this does not imply insensitivity).

If Christ did not suffer in his human nature, but rather in a divine, eternal form of nature, then God would have suffered.

God is one
> God is one. Gal 3:20
> For *there is* one God. 1 Tim 2:5
> Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! Deut 6:4

If the nature that Jesus allowed to suffer on the cross was integral to the eternal, divine person then this nature in eternity was flesh since men are flesh - he died for fleshly men, and thus the nature had to be fleshly. But if this is true, then God in his essential Trinitarian being became flesh. The divine nature cannot become incarnate because it is common to all, the whole Godhead would become flesh. However, a divine person can become incarnate without the other members of the Trinity becoming affected, since the persons are distinct.

Conclusion

We could continue looking at various aspects of this at length, but sufficient points have been made to show that this idea is fallacious. It has grave repercussions on the doctrines of God, Christ and also salvation. It is to be firmly rejected as heresy. For more information, see my paper, *A Simple Examination of the Two Natures of Christ.*