

“What Advice Would You Give Someone Leaving an Abusive Church?”

We now realize that our church is [abusive](#). What advice can you give us?

I would advise you read a few books that will help during the difficult transition. *Recovering from Churches that Abuse* by Ron Enroth, *Healing Spiritual Abuse* by Ken Blue, and *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll. Often, there is a lot of hurt and bitterness. These books can help you overcome the pain and keep from becoming a bitter individual.

Second, I would advise you join a support group from a good church. There are very few support groups for spiritually abused victims but if you can find one, great. If not, a group to share your experience and pray with is a great help.

Third, many abused victims want to inform members who remain at the abusive church. This can be very frustrating and time consuming. I do not recommend spending a lot of your energy doing this. It is best to leave it all behind and begin a new chapter in your life.

Finally, enjoy your new freedom. Visit churches and fellowships. You will realize that the body of Christ is a lot bigger than you can imagine and this is refreshing to see. In the process, you will meet a lot of neat Christians who may become your new family in Christ.

Patrick Zukeran

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“What’s Dominionism?”

Mr. Anderson:

I heard you say on Point of View that your guest, Craig Parshall, can speak on many issues. You were talking about that PBS person, Bill Moyers.

What’s this “dominionism” thing? I went to [Wikipedia](#) and it doesn’t sound like anything a true follower of Christ Jesus would want to be involved with.

I noticed that the May 2005 issue of *Harpers* magazine that Craig Parshall was talking about on the program actually used the term dominionism. I really think the authors in that magazine article and in the Wikipedia entry are misusing the term.

Dominion theology defines a small group of postmillennial Christians who are part of the [Christian Reconstruction](#) movement. They are trying to bring about God’s kingdom on earth through government, societies, and cultures. That would not describe the theology or agenda of the members of the National Religious Broadcasters or the National Association of Evangelicals.

In fact, I can’t think of a single prominent leader in either of these organizations that would hold to that theological position. Perhaps there is one that I don’t know about, but it certainly does not describe the theology of NRB or NAE.

To put it simply, I don’t think the term “dominionist” in the magazine or even in the Wikipedia entry is a fair description of the evangelical leadership in America.

Thanks for writing.

“Why Was God Sorry He Made Man?”

“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He created man on the earth and He was grieved in His heart.”(Gen. 6:5&6 NKJV)

When I read this passage three things stood out to me and seemed contradictory to everything that I have been told about God and have read in other parts of the Bible.

1) God is perfect and infallible. Why then was He “sorry that He created man”? In my mind “sorry” indicates some admission of error.

2) God is pure good. The Word says that all things were created through Him (*logos* the Word) and there is nothing that exists on the earth which He did not create (my summation of John 1). Therefore evil exists, but who created evil: Satan or Lucifer? In my understanding he is the author of rebellion and all kinds of “evil.” OK, so who created Lucifer who is later called “adversary”? Well, God did. The universe and in fact all reality was conceived by God and given life by the Word (please correct if I am wrong, I truly want to believe). So evil had to have been conceived first by God in order for Lucifer to have the ability to rebel. Follow? Nothing exists that God did not create.

3) God is omniscient. If God created time and knows all then why did he create man when He knew man would turn their hearts to evil? Taking that thinking further, why did he make Lucifer knowing he would rebel? Therefore, why did God create rebellion?

The term "sorry" doesn't necessarily carry the connotation of admitting to an error. For instance, I can be "sorry" that a good friend has been stricken with a terminal illness. But this doesn't mean I'm taking responsibility for the illness, or that I've committed an error of some kind. Similarly, God was "sorry" and "grieved" by man's wickedness (to continue our analogy, the "illness" of sin). But God was not directly responsible for this wickedness rather, man was responsible. God created man in His image and endowed him with genuine libertarian freedom. Thus, man not only had the freedom to do good, he also had the freedom to do evil. Unfortunately, man exercised his will to do what was evil in God's sight. Hence, God was "sorry" that he made man. But the evil was not done by God, but by man whom God had created with genuine freedom (part of "the image of God").

It's true that no "thing" exists which God did not create. But most philosophers and theologians do not consider evil to be a "thing" (i.e. something which exists in its own right). Rather, moral evil is a corruption, perversion, or defect in some good thing created by God. Everything created by God was good. Moral evil entered the picture when the angel now known as Satan freely chose to exercise his will in defiance of God. This angel was created good, not evil. But he chose to do evil, and he did this freely. God did not force him to sin, or tempt him, or anything of the sort. Satan freely chose to rebel against God and was thus corrupted by sin. I personally think the fall of Satan is described in Ezekiel 28:11-19 (for reasons that I don't have time to get into here).

I think it's a mistake to say that God created rebellion. God did not create rebellion. Rather, God made rational moral

agents (like humans and angels) and endowed them with genuine moral freedom (which necessitates the genuine freedom to do good and/or evil). God's creatures some of them, at any rate chose evil. God did not. Of course, God knew the creatures would choose evil. So why did He create them? Apparently, He considered it worthwhile to create such free creatures even knowing ahead of time that they would sin. He provided a means, at His own expense, for man to be redeemed and saved from his sins. Satan and the demons will simply be destroyed.

At any rate, it's important to assign blame to whom it is due. God created free creatures and thus the possibility of moral evil. But it was the creatures themselves, not God, who actualized this possibility by freely choosing moral evil. God did not tempt them to sin, nor did He force them to sin. They freely chose to sin.

Hope this helps. By the way, an excellent website which you may want to visit is bible.org. They have thousands of helpful resources for studying the Bible.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“What’s the Difference Between Moral Relativism and Pluralism?”

Moral relativism and pluralism: I said they are, in effect, the same. The Unitarian academics smiled and suggested that I

am unlearned on the topic. What say you? ☐

The two terms are not necessarily linked. One could be a moral relativist and an atheist, which isn't quite the same as a religious pluralist. Theologian John Hick is an example of a religious pluralist who accepts all major world religions as viable paths to what he calls the "Other." However, he would reject the label of moral relativist, claiming that these belief systems cause followers to seek a good beyond themselves and that this lends to their behavior a certain ethical dimension not found in unbelievers.

The problem with John Hick's system is in its rejection of what these religious systems claim to believe about salvation and humanity's destiny in order to blend them into his pluralistic system. Harold Netland has written a helpful book for thinking through the problems of religious pluralism called *Dissonant Voices*.

For Him,

Don Closson
Probe Ministries

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“How Do You Answer the Claim That Jesus Was 100% Man Emptying Himself of God?”

I recently heard a pastor speak about some things that really bothered me. First, he said that Jesus was 100 percent man that emptied himself of God. He said that the miracle of God

becoming man would not be taken away if you do not believe this. His term was, "Jesus was 100% man that was God." He also threw in the comment that Jesus and the Father are one, not as in the Trinity but that Jesus was God and for instance in the garden when He was praying, He was praying to Himself. He also believed that in the temple when Jesus was young, when it says he grew in wisdom and stature that means he was learning, hence that he did not know everything.

Secondly—he does not believe that the serpent in the garden was Satan. He actually seemed that he didn't believe that there is a Satan. He used the meaning of Satan as tempter and not an actual creature. This has really been bothering me and I would like your answers and some advice in where to study this myself.

Thanks for your letter. It sounds like you have some good reasons to be concerned about the pastor. The orthodox doctrine of Christ holds that Jesus was fully God and fully man. He was not a man who "emptied Himself" of God, for in that case He would no longer be divine. What Philippians 2:5-11 rather tells us, I think, is that He "emptied Himself" by becoming human and temporarily (and voluntarily) giving up the independent exercise of His divine attributes. Jesus was fully God, but He voluntarily submitted, for a limited time, to a limitation in the independent exercise of His divine attributes (e.g. omniscience, omnipresence, etc.). Jesus could still exercise these attributes, but only insofar as it was consistent with the Father's will during His earthly sojourn. This, I think, is a better explanation of Philippians 2:5-11.

A good analogy is to imagine the world's fastest sprinter running in a three-legged race. He would voluntarily restrict and limit himself for a time, but even while running much more slowly than he was capable of, he never stops being the world's fastest sprinter. Jesus never stopped being divine even while He voluntarily limited Himself concerning His omniscience, His omnipresence, His omnipotence, etc.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to the Father. Christian orthodoxy believes in the Trinity. God is one in essence, but subsists as three distinct Persons. The Father is not the Son and neither are the Holy Spirit. Rather, each is a distinct Person, but all share mysteriously in the One divine essence. This pastor sounds like he rejects Trinitarianism, or holds to some form of what is known as "[modalism](#)." Some people have described modalism as "the swapping hats" theory: God swaps out the Father hat for the Son hat or the Holy Spirit hat, depending on who He wants to "be" at any given moment. According to orthodox Christianity, rejecting the Trinity or embracing modalism are heretical viewpoints.

Your pastor is correct, however, to say that Jesus grew in knowledge. But He did so as a human being. As God, He is all-knowing. However, as I said above, in the incarnation Jesus voluntarily surrendered the independent exercise of His divine attributes. Jesus Himself confessed that there were some things that He did not know during His time on earth; see Mark 13:32; etc.

Finally, while it is certainly true that Genesis 3 does not identify the serpent with Satan, this identification does seem to be made explicitly in Revelation 12:9. Also, a careful study of what the Bible teaches about Satan reveals that personal attributes are consistently applied to him. The Bible views Satan as a personal being, not as a metaphor for temptation, etc.

Hope this helps a bit. If you would like more information about biblical and theological issues, please visit The Biblical Studies Foundation website at Netbible.org. They have lots of great information about the Bible.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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“The Bible Has Been Changed and Corrupted Over Time”

You Bible-thumping Christians are so deluded and stupid. The Bible has been so changed and translated and mistranslated over time that it can't be trusted. Didn't you play the telephone game when you were a kid? Whatever the first person whispered to the second person, is going to be very different from what the last person hears. Stop acting as if you have all the answers—your Bible is a book of myths.

You're in good company; a lot of people think that way because they simply don't know the facts about how trustworthy the Bible really is. When you find out the truth about how the Bible has been handed down from one generation to the next, your charge will have as much significance as proclaiming that courts have no basis for determining the constitutionality of issues since the Constitution was written so long ago we can't know what it originally said.

But we can go back to the original Constitution and check, right?

We don't have the original biblical documents, but we have the next best thing: thousands of copies of the original New Testament manuscripts, by which we can determine what was originally said. The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (www.csntm.org) tells me that the current number is about 5500 copies of just the Greek New Testament, and when we combine the Greek with all translations in the various languages before the printing press was invented, there are a staggering 15,000 copies of NT manuscripts in existence, with more being found every day!

Greg Koukl of Stand to Reason (www.str.org) helps illustrate how Bible scientists (the discipline of textual criticism) can assure us of the Bible's accuracy:

RECONSTRUCTING AUNT SALLY'S LETTER

Pretend your Aunt Sally learns in a dream the recipe for an elixir that preserves her youth. When she wakes up, she scribbles the directions on a scrap of paper, then runs to the kitchen to make up her first glass. In a few days Aunt Sally is transformed into a picture of radiant youth because of her daily dose of "Sally's Secret Sauce."

Aunt Sally is so excited she sends detailed, hand-written instructions on how to make the sauce to her three bridge partners (Aunt Sally is still in the technological dark ages—no photocopier or email). They, in turn, make copies for ten of their own friends.

All goes well until one day Aunt Sally's pet schnauzer eats the original copy of the recipe. In a panic she contacts her three friends who have mysteriously suffered similar mishaps, so the alarm goes out to the others in attempt to recover the original wording.

Sally rounds up all the surviving hand-written copies, twenty-six in all. When she spreads them out on the kitchen table, she immediately notices some differences. Twenty-three of the copies are exactly the same. Of the remaining three, however, one has misspelled words, another has two phrases inverted ("mix then chop" instead of "chop then mix") and one includes an ingredient none of the others has on its list.

Do you think Aunt Sally can accurately reconstruct her original recipe from this evidence? Of course she can. The misspellings are obvious errors. The single inverted phrase stands out and can easily be repaired. Sally would then strike the extra ingredient, reasoning it's more plausible

one person would add an item in error than 25 people would accidentally omit it.

Even if the variations were more numerous or more diverse, the original could still be reconstructed with a high level of confidence if Sally had enough copies.

This, in simplified form, is how scholars do “textual criticism,” an academic method used to test all documents of antiquity, not just religious texts. It’s not a haphazard effort based on hopes and guesses; it’s a careful linguistic process allowing an alert critic to determine the extent of possible corruption of any work.[{1}](#)

When the thousands of copies of manuscripts (far more than for any other document of antiquity) are compared, we can know that the New Testament is 99.5% textually pure. In the entire text of 20,000 lines, only 40 lines are in doubt (about 400 words), and none affects any significant doctrine.[{2}](#)

Even if all the manuscripts in the whole world were to disappear, the New Testament is so comprehensively quoted by early church letters, essays and other extra-biblical sources that we could still reconstruct almost the entire testament.

We have a much fuller explanation of this in our article “Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?” at www.probe.org/are-the-biblical-documents-reliable

The historical evidence for the reliability of the biblical documents is so great that we can rest assured that the Bible we read today is the same Bible that God intended for us to have from the very beginning.

Wishing you well,

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

Notes

1. Greg Koukl, *Solid Ground*, Jan/Feb 2005, Stand to Reason.
2. Norman Geisler and William Nix, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 475.

“Who Controls the World—God or Satan?”

A friend and I were discussing whose rule the world was under, God's or Satan's. Of course we disagreed because I said God ruled the world and allows Satan to take us through suffering to make us strong and to test our faith. My friend feels that the world belongs to Satan because Eve succumbed to Satan in the Garden of Eden. Please clarify who controls the world today.

Thanks for your letter. Satan has been temporarily granted a tremendous amount of power over this world, as can be seen from the following passages:

John 12:31 – Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.

2 Cor 4:4 – ...in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

1 John 5:19 – We know that we are of God, and that the whole

world lies in the power of the evil one.

But God is the One who ultimately rules and reigns over all things. He is the Creator of all that exists (other than Himself of course) and all things are ultimately subject to His will and power. Many passages of Scripture bear this out – e.g. Psalms 9:7; 22:28; 47:8; 59:13; 66:7; 97:1; 99:1; 103:19; 146:10, as well as passages such as Gen. 1-2; Job 1-2; John 1; Eph. 1; Col. 1; Rom. 9-11; Rev. 19-22; etc.

Satan is a creature; God is his Creator. Satan cannot do anything that the Lord does not permit him to do (see Job 1-2) and God will one day cast Satan into the lake of fire for all eternity (Rev. 20:10).

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Did Christ HAVE to be Deity?”

Greetings Don,

I came across [your website article](#) concerning the deity of Christ and thought I would respond. if you have the time and interest, please entertain some of my thoughts and get back with me if time allows. My questions surround the topic of the necessity of Christ being deity. I accept that He is, but wonder if He MUST be for both the atonement and eternal salvation. What I would like to do is copy the text from my interaction with a good friend yesterday. That way I won't

have to rewrite our dialogue. When you have time, please interject if you would. WB is my good friend, a pastor. I am DB.

WB: Your questions about Christ's deity in regards to salvation do sound like the Jews. "God can do it anyway he so pleases" (even Calvin suggests this as well). If God wanted, he could have made a world without the possibility for sin as well. He can do it any way he pleases, but he has reasons for doing it the way he does.

DB: Yes, he does. But as God, he could do it any number of ways. If you hold to the middle/knowledge position, you would have to agree to this idea, and the idea that he chose the best possible way to redeem mankind. That, in-and-of-itself, doesn't demand that Christ be deity.

WB: The early church fathers reasoned (there, I used the dirty word "reason") that Christ had to be God for our salvation to be effectual. You have heard it before, even from me. Be patient as I explain it again. If I sin against you, how long does the sin remain? Answer: until you forgive me or until you die. Even if I die first, the sin remains as an offense against you.

DB: No problems here at all. I agree wholeheartedly.

WB: If I sin against God, how long does the sin remain? Until he forgives me or until he dies. Since he does not die, and is an infinite being, then the sin is eternal: actually, my sin against him becomes an infinite offense. Now: how can an infinite transgression be forgiven? (I hope we don't have to revisit justification in all of this). Only an infinite being can pay for an infinite sin – only an infinite being can absorb an infinite curse and satisfy the infinite penalty of an infinite crime. Only an infinite being can bear an infinite wrath. If Jesus was a man, his death would have no efficacy.

DB: Here's where questions arise on my part. I agree that my

sin is an infinite offense against God. Actually, God is eternal and infinite and we are neither (in the absolute definitions of those terms—i.e. “immeasurable or without beginning or end”). Hence, maybe there is some reservation on my part to claim I, a finite being, can commit an infinite act. I suppose since we live forever (in glory or judgment), our sins remain always or are cleansed and forgiven always; hence, they are infinite or erased. All that being said (I’m typing out my thoughts), I don’t feel it requires that Christ must be deity to be a sufficient sacrifice for my sins. What is required is a perfect sacrifice. If Christ was a created being, one who was higher than angels and who took on the form of man, lived a perfect, sinless life with free will (like Satan but succeeding), his sacrifice would be sufficient. I don’t understand how, using reason, it would not. Like us, he would have had a beginning. Like us, free will. Unlike Adam, he did not sin (even if he could have—if he was not deity, this would give even more credence to the example that even though he was a man, he did not sin vs. our position as Trinitarians). As he was sinless, created or not, his perfect example and sacrifice would be sufficient. It seems that if there coexisted TWO forms of deity at the same time, and it was possible for them to sin against each other as does man, then a mediator, who would then have to be deity, would be required. To require deity to be sacrificed for the sins of finite man seems overkill and doesn’t pan out in my mind as reasonable. It’s certainly plausible, but I don’t see how it has to be. Please correct me here. If God requires a perfect sacrifice, Jesus would have been a sufficient sacrifice if God said he was having lived a perfect life (as a perfect man or perfect Adam).

WB: The applicability of Christ’s atoning work to us as human beings depends upon the reality of his humanity.

DB: Absolutely.

WB: The efficacy depends upon the genuineness and completeness

of his deity. DB: Not if God only requires a perfect, sinless sacrifice vs. the sacrifice of a deity. I still fail to understand why reason disallows this. It seems to me we are predisposed to this position to embrace our view of the trinity vs. the other way around. Reason, in my mind, doesn't exclude this argument.

WB: The JW's reject this saying that God can do anything he pleases. Okay, why didn't he just let a muskrat die for our sins then? The beauty of the cross is not that we have been redeemed, but that the eternal Holy God was willing to undergo the kenosis (humiliation from glory to earth to servant to criminal to death to tomb).

DB: I agree—that is the beauty of the cross. But if God created for himself a son with free will (much like Satan—and NO, I don't think they were brothers!!!) to be a sacrifice for a lower mankind who despises them both and who hates them, then his suffering and sacrifice on our part for the love of his father, who he could disobey at will, is a lovely story as well. That's just as moving in my mind. If he was deity and couldn't sin (if he was impeccable), we can only glory in his suffering, not his resistance to sin. Again, reason warrants that conclusion.

WB: This reveals God. And it is this that is the centerpiece of the Christian faith (our salvation was the result, and the reason, but the emphasis is on the grand mystery of God himself. (How boring it would be to send someone else to do his dirty work)).

DB: I addressed this above.

Hello _____,

Thanks for your e-mail. Don is overwhelmed with other duties and asked me to respond in his place. I hope you understand.

Since you claim to accept the doctrine of Christ's deity, I

will simply assume this is a belief we share. Thus, rather than offering any arguments for this important doctrine, I will simply assume it is true for the purpose of this response.

Let me make just a few points by way of introduction. First, I think you raise an important issue that needs to be carefully considered and discussed. Second, I will have to reply in a somewhat abbreviated fashion, merely outlining what I consider to be some important points. Third, at the time of this writing, I freely admit that I CANNOT offer a conclusive argument that it was necessary for Christ to be God in order to provide an acceptable atonement for the sins of man. However, I want to offer a cumulative case for this position which I think is nonetheless compelling. This will involve both a response to some of your statements, as well as a brief, positive presentation of some evidence which I think makes it at least highly probable that Christ would indeed have to be God to provide an acceptable atonement for our sins. Finally, I offer these thoughts for your consideration since you wrote to Probe requesting a response. Although I have to reply rather quickly because of many other pressing duties, I am also offering a tolerably thoughtful response that I ask you to read carefully.

Please allow me to focus on your statements beginning with the remark, "Here's where questions arise on my part." You state:

"I don't feel it requires that Christ must be deity to be a sufficient sacrifice for my sins. What is required is a perfect sacrifice. If Christ was a created being, one who was higher than angels and who took on the form of man, lived a perfect, sinless life with free will (like Satan but succeeding), his sacrifice would be sufficient. I don't understand how, using reason, it would not."

I wonder HOW you actually KNOW this to be true? Granted, you

MAY be right. But HOW do you really KNOW? I note that you appeal to “reason” – a faculty for which I too have great respect – but it’s important to remember that reason, like ALL of man’s faculties, is fallen. This remark is not intended to denigrate reason. But it’s common knowledge that man often makes errors in reasoning about all sorts of things. Not only that, we often begin our reasoning from false presuppositions, which often results in correctly reasoning to false conclusions. Finally, we almost never have all the essential information which we would need to reason to the right answer – even if we didn’t continually commit errors in our reasoning.

I would argue that the question of whether or not it was necessary for Christ to be God in order to provide an acceptable atonement for the sins of man is the sort of question about which it would be quite easy to reason incorrectly. I would also argue that YOU BEAR THE BURDEN OF PROOF here. This is so for the simple reason that Christ was in fact God (as you admit), and the Father did in fact send His Son to be “the propitiation for our sins” (1 JN. 2:2). Since God is a rational moral agent, it seems fair to assume that He had some good reason for actually doing things as He did. Not only this, I think it’s fair to ask whether God would have sent His only Son as the sacrifice for our sins if He could have achieved this end in some other way. It is at least odd that God would have sent His only Son to do what a morally perfect creature could just as easily have accomplished. Since God did in fact send His Son, however, you clearly bear the burden of proof in demonstrating that this was, in fact, not necessary. I don’t think you can do so. Hence, I think your argument is ultimately unsuccessful.

Let me briefly illustrate this last point from a section of the dialogue between you and your friend:

WB: The applicability of Christ’s atoning work to us as human beings depends upon the reality of his humanity. DB:

Absolutely. WB: The efficacy depends upon the genuineness and completeness of his deity. DB: Not if God only requires a perfect, sinless sacrifice vs. the sacrifice of a deity. I still fail to understand why reason disallows this. It seems to me we are predisposed to this position to embrace our view of the trinity vs. the other way around. Reason, in my mind, doesn't exclude this argument."

Concerning your final comments, I would agree that reason, in itself, doesn't necessarily exclude the possibility that God only requires a perfect, sinless sacrifice rather than a Divine one. But remember my comments on "reason" again. Just because human reason cannot exclude the possibility that you mention does not in any way prove that a Divine sacrifice was not necessary! And since you bear the burden of proof here, I must ask you HOW, specifically, you KNOW that God does NOT REQUIRE A DIVINE SACRIFICE? Since this is what God actually did, I would argue that it is more reasonable to believe it was necessary than that it was not. Admittedly, this does not PROVE my argument is true, but I do think it's more reasonable. And I am not obligated to assume the burden of proof here anyway.

I think you make an interesting, and potentially revealing, comment when you write:

"It seems that if there coexisted TWO forms of diety at the same time, and it was possible for them to sin against each other as does man, then a mediator, who would then have to be diety, would be required."

Again, I wonder HOW you KNOW this? Why, specifically, would a Divine mediator be required? Certainly reason does not demand this! Why would any mediator "be required" at all? It's quite possible that the gods could mediate their own dispute, just as two men might do. It's also possible that a man, or a talking raccoon, could serve as a mediator. But here's what's

interesting. If your logic is valid, and a god must mediate between gods, why would it not also follow that a God-Man must mediate between God and man?

But here's another point. The example of reconciling two gods likely involves the reconciliation of equals. But this is not the case when we consider the reconciliation of man to God. Here, the parties are NOT equal. God is the Creator, man is His creation. It seems at least reasonable to believe (and is in fact true, I think) that the Creator may have a particular character which requires that reconciliation be achieved ONLY through a means which is perfectly consistent with all His attributes. And this, of course, may radically limit the means by which such reconciliation can actually be achieved. Again, I personally think it would be odd for the Father to send His only Son to accomplish on behalf of man what a morally perfect creature was capable of. Indeed, you yourself confess:

"To require diety to be sacrificed for the sins of finite man seems overkill and doesn't pan out in my mind as reasonable. It's certainly plausible, but I don't see how it has to be."

But since this is what God actually did, you bear the burden of proof in demonstrating that such a sacrifice was, in fact, overkill! Since God is a rational moral agent, it is at least reasonable to think that a Divine sacrifice may indeed have been NECESSARY. And if it was necessary it cannot, by definition, be overkill.

Let me conclude with two more observations. First, we both agree that Jesus was, in fact, the God-Man. I could easily demonstrate from the Scriptures both that Jesus believed this of Himself and that His disciples believed it as well. But here's the point. Every time that Jesus, or one of His disciples, makes the claim that He is the ONLY way to God there is, at least potentially, an implicit argument that only a God-Man can reconcile man to God! I could quote many verses,

but let me offer just a few. When Jesus says to Nicodemus, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life” (JN. 3:14-15, emphasis mine), He is speaking as the God-Man. I admit that it is not necessary to interpret such a statement as requiring a Divine sacrifice, but it certainly has this potential – and that’s something to think about. In other words, since Jesus is the God-Man, He could be implicitly understood as saying that ONLY such a One as He is capable of reconciling man to God. It’s the same with many such statements of Jesus (e.g. JN. 14:6, etc.). And Jesus’ disciples, who also believed in His deity, repeatedly claim that there is no other way for man to be reconciled to God. For example, in Acts 4:12 Peter declares, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.” Again, this does not PROVE that a Divine sacrifice was necessary (the burden is yours to show it was not), but it may certainly be read as implying its necessity.

Second, consider this. In Paul’s famous verse on substitution, 2 Cor. 5:21, we read: “He (the Father) made Him (the Son) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Luther referred to this as the “Great Exchange.” Christ takes our sin on Himself and gives us His righteousness in its place! Now an argument could be made that, in order to be acceptable to God, man must be clothed in His righteousness. If this is so, then it would seem to follow that a Divine substitute was not superfluous, but ESSENTIAL. For how could we become “the righteousness of God” in Christ, unless Christ was actually God? It’s reasonable to believe He could only give us God’s righteousness if He was, in fact, God. And if such righteousness is essential for our reconciliation to God, then it follows that a Divine substitute would be necessary to achieve this goal. Again, I fully admit that this argument is NOT CONCLUSIVE—it is merely suggestive. But as I’ve said repeatedly (I’m sure you’re sick

of it!), you bear the burden of proof – not me. Thus, I think I've offered some good reasons to believe that a Divine sacrifice was indeed necessary and not overkill. I also think I've demonstrated that you're far from proving your own position (if in fact it's actually your position; I'm not saying it necessarily is).

Wishing you God's richest blessings,

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“Does God Saying Something Is Right Make It Right?”

My daughter's philosophy professor posed the question, “Does God saying something is right make it right?” He says that if the answer is “yes” then God is arbitrary, and thus not loving, and if the answer is “No” then right and wrong had to exist prior to God and He is not all powerful. (The professor says that the later is the Catholic view, and seems to indicate that these are very early levels of philosophical thought.)

On a Web site about Socrates' ideas on the good life (http://academics.vmi.edu/psy_dr/socrates.htm), there is this paragraph:

In the Euthyphro the main question raised is: Are right/good acts right/good just because God (or the gods) says so, or does God say so because they are right/good? If it is just because God says so, then God's commandments seem arbitrary. And what if God does not exist? Does anything go? On the

other hand, if God's commandments are made for a reason, i.e. if there is something else (other than God's arbitrary decree) about bad acts that makes them bad, what is it? And is God then irrelevant to ethics?

The answer to the next-to-the-last question is the option your daughter's professor didn't offer, namely, the nature or character of God. Theologian J. Oliver Buswell said this about God's law: "The divine character is expressed by the divine will in the divine law" (*A Systematic Theology*, 1:264). What God says is good is good because it reflects the character of God which is good. What makes things bad is being against God's character. If God just plucked a law out of thin air, He would be arbitrary. However, seeking some other source of right and wrong wasn't the only other option. God's law reflects God's character. Thus, the answer to the last question in the above paragraph is no—God isn't irrelevant to ethics. Morality is grounded in His nature and made known by His will.

I hope this helps.

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