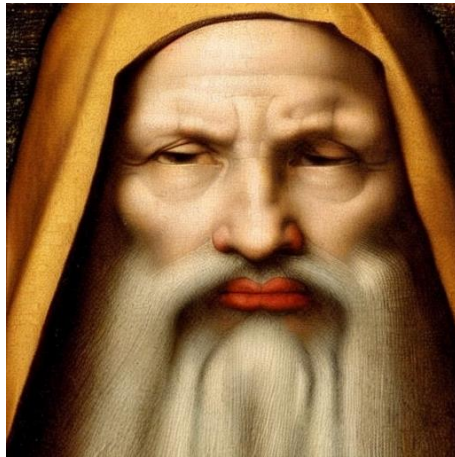


# HUMANIST OR HERETIC?

An Iconoclast's Christian  
Theology and Christology



## Brother Ælfric

*/ˈæɪ.lfrɪk/* • Adelaide, South Australia

Brother Ælfric is an iconoclastic monk from the radical Progressive wing of the Christian Church. He proposes a new Christian Theology and Christology that is fundamentally at odds with the Nicene Creed.

*Ælfric*

## Table of Contents

No. 1 – A PARADOX .....	3
No. 2 – THE WRONG GOD .....	5
No. 3 – THE CHRIST .....	8
No. 4 – DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD? .....	11

Humanist or Heretic?

## No. 1 – A PARADOX

Let us examine the Christian God as most Christians imagine God. It seems to me that Christians rarely think about the entirety of what they claim, and whether or not it makes any sense. We shall consider the Christian God in its broadest understanding, and critically analyse this as an exercise in formal logic.

### **The Axioms**

1. There is an essence which shall be called “God”
2. God is the creator
3. God is eternal
4. God is omniscient
5. God is omnipresent
6. God is omnipotent
7. God is a God of Love
8. God has Imbued Humans with a Freedom of Choice of Action

### **An Empirical Observation**

There is great suffering in God’s creation.

This is true in its widest possible sense. Most living things are suffering in some respect (and usually due to human activity, directly or indirectly). Creation itself is suffering due to humans exploiting its bounty without care for the implications of their actions. Climate change is an obvious example of this.

But the most egregious observation is that there is great suffering for a great many people in the world. Children are afflicted with horrible and fatal diseases. People are being killed, maimed, displaced, and violated by human conflict or human genocide. Examples of suffering seem to be boundless.

### **A Logical Argument**

Since God is the creator and is eternal, all suffering has existed while God has existed.

God knows that there is suffering, as God is omniscient.

God has not merely known of but has borne witness to the suffering, as God is omnipresent.

Since God is omnipotent, God could put an end to all suffering in an instant. But God has not.

God is a God of Love.

We have a **PARADOX**.

The axioms are inconsistent with empirical observation. One or more of the axioms must be false.

In future articles, alternative understandings of the nature of a Christian God will be put forward in order to find a theology that is logically consistent with reality.

Brother Ælfric – 19 May 2024

Humanist or Heretic?

## No. 2 – THE WRONG GOD

In the previous article, we examined the Christian God as most Christians imagine God. This led us to a paradox, in the light of the undeniable empirical observation that there is great suffering in the world.

This paradox requires resolution.

A core tenet of Christian theology is that God is a God of Love. Indeed, doctrinally we say, “God is Love.”

As the Christian God is so inextricably linked to Love, then what constitutes Christian Love must therefore be eternal. But Christians believe that for about a 33-year period of history, that Love was communicated directly to humankind through a person, namely Jesus of Nazareth.

Later in this series of articles, we shall of course be talking a lot about this man, Jesus of Nazareth. For the moment, all we need to observe is that he happened to be a Jew in the second-Temple period. Jesus communicated God’s Love to us through his words and his actions, and that was therefore inevitably in the context of a second-Temple Jew.

The Jews of course had a monotheistic religion dating back millennia. We argue that our characterization of the Christian God in the first article included characteristics of the Jewish God as well, effectively conflating the two.

Many Christians have always assumed that the Christian God was the same thing as the Jewish God. A little examination reveals this not to be the case.

The Jewish God is a wrathful, vengeful God, and cannot at all be characterized as a God of Love!

The Hebrew Testament of the Holy Bible is littered with examples of this. Let us note just a few.

One of the most famous Kings of Israel was King David. Following his armies' successes in battles against the Ammonites and the Philistines, the following story is told in 2 Samuel 24.

**2 Samuel 24:1,15** (*New International Version*)

<sup>1</sup> Again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah."

...

<sup>15</sup> So the Lord sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died.

Commentators on this often focus on two issues neither of which are of much concern to us.

Firstly, for many events of this period, there are parallel accounts in 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles. In this case, we refer the reader to 1 Chronicles 21. In the latter, the text states,

**1 Chronicles 21:1** (*New International Version*)

<sup>1</sup> Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.

So, was it the Lord or Satan that incited David? This question does not concern us.

Secondly, why did King David commit a sin by taking a census? A census in itself was not sinful. Rather, it is argued that King David, having just won great victories, was taking census in order to see how much further still he could enlarge his Kingdom: the sin was one of pride.

But even this is not our point. We have a King who committed a sin, and for which his entire Kingdom was collectively punished by God through a plague that resulted in 70,000 dead. A War Crime does not sit well with a Loving God.

What about a little earlier, when Saul was King of Israel.

## 1 Samuel 15:1-3 (New International Version)

<sup>1</sup> Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the Lord. <sup>2</sup> This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. <sup>3</sup> Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”

So, we have a God of Love ordering a Genocide! I think not.

If the axiom “God is a God of Love” in the previous article is removed, then we have a description that perfectly fits with the Jewish God smiting things hither and thither. There is no paradox.

But it’s the **WRONG GOD!**

Instead, to resolve the paradox and describe a Christian God of Love, we must remove the axioms,

- God is omniscient.
- God is omnipresent.
- God is omnipotent.

Establishing that the Jewish God and the Christian God are different concepts is an important step in our journey. But what we are left with is a somewhat tepid God. This God seems merely to be a creator God, one who creates the universe, the laws of physics and the code of Christian love, and then that’s it. The process just evolves.

What are we missing?

In the next article, we shall discover some further insights into the Christian God by considering the long-cherished but widely misunderstood concept of the Holy Trinity!

Brother Ælfric – 7 June 2024

Humanist or Heretic?

## No. 3 – THE CHRIST

In the second article of this series, it was argued that the Jewish God and the Christian God are different concepts. But what that argument left us with is a somewhat tepid God. This God seems merely to be a creator God, one who created the universe, the laws of physics and the code of Christian love, and then that's it. The process just evolved.

There is no agency.

What are we missing?

The answer is obvious, of course. We are talking about a “*Christian God*” and “the code of *Christian love*”, but there is nothing in what we have argued that says who a “Christ” is?

Let us first examine the concept of a Christ.

From the depths of prehistory, and in many of the world's cultures, there has been a concept of “the anointed one”, someone who stands out, a leader, a saviour. Anointing is the act of pouring a precious oil, often given religious significance by being blessed beforehand, on the head of the person concerned. For example, the act of anointing a sovereign is ancient, but it is still practised today, as witnessed in the 2023 Coronation of King Charles III of the United Kingdom, *et al.*

The Hebrew word for “the anointed one” is directly Anglicised as the word “Messiah”. The Koine Greek word for “the anointed one” is directly Anglicised as the word “Christ”. Thus, Messiah and Christ mean the same thing.

(Due in large measure to the empire created by Alexander the Great, Greek became the academic language of that part of the world, extending much further afield than the borders of modern Greece. This Ancient Greek language developed dialectical differences in different parts of the “Greek world”. The core, common Ancient Greek was called Koine Greek and was used in official writing.)



The Jewish people of the First Century were anticipating a Messiah, based on prophecy in their scriptures. Most envisaged this Messiah as a warrior leader who would free the Jewish people from the Roman tyranny. They would generally regard that this did not happen, and so the Jewish people still await their Messiah.

But there happened to emerge at that time, an itinerant prophet and teacher in Galilee, an area of the Roman Province of Judaea, by the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

(By “prophet” I mean a person who gives wise counsel, thus helping to shape the future in a positive way, rather than the meaning more often ascribed to the word as referring to someone who miraculously foresees the future.)

His philosophy of kindness to all, of treating others as you would have them treat you, and of unconditional forgiveness was revolutionary. His followers, who became the evangelisers of his philosophy in the Apostolic Age that followed his death, believed that it was this that marked Jesus of Nazareth as an “anointed one”, a Messiah, a Christ.

This was a very different projection of power than that of the anticipated Jewish Messiah. Thus, just as we concluded that the Jewish God and the Christian God are not the same, similarly the Jewish Messiah and the Christian Messiah are different. The Christian Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, just happened to be born a Jew in the closing century of second Temple Judaism.

In the first two articles, we considered transcendental concepts of God. We were implicitly thinking in terms of monotheism. It is worth remarking that monotheism was not a later, more “sophisticated” concept of God or Gods. In diverse cultures world-wide, forms of monotheism arose alongside polytheism. Monotheism and polytheism are not simply polar opposites. Some religions worshipped a single God, while acknowledging that other cultures had a valid worship of multiple Gods. “Each to his own”, as it were. The interested reader can find a rich study of what one might call degrees of monotheism. But let us return to our main line of discussion.

The transcendental Christian God discussed in the first two articles, was described as being a creator God, one who created the universe, the laws of physics and the code of Christian love. Jesus of Nazareth, known as the Christ, was the vector by which the code of Christian love was communicated to the people of the world.

Observe that the code of Christian love, the “Logos” described in the first part of Chapter 1 of the Gospel of John, was an integral part of creation. The Logos is eternal. It did not pop into existence at the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, but rather a person with sufficient wisdom to truly know the eternal Logos and to pass it on to humankind was born.

Traditionally, God the Creator is known as God the Father, and Jesus of Nazareth as God the Son. As we shall discuss later, there is much debate about whether Jesus of Nazareth ever actually called himself “the Son of God”. Certainly, the father/son metaphor is an unnecessarily complicating factor in contemplating these ideas. I prefer the terms God the Creator and God the Eternal Logos for the two distinct persons we have thus far discerned, that are nonetheless of the same essence, two parts of the same godhead.

Note that we have begun to develop the notion of what will eventually be the Holy Trinity view of the Christian God.

But before we proceed with these theological debates, let us, in the next article, ask the obvious question, “Is Jesus of Nazareth, the person, divine?”

Brother Ælfric – 24 June 2024

Humanist or Heretic?

## No. 4 – DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD?

“Do you believe in God?”

I find it quite remarkable that this ill-posed, ambiguous, and leading question is asked so often. (And the person being asked the question will immediately know that, irrespective of their answer, they are about to be given a sermon on the questioner’s theology!)

Note that, in the question, “God” is being used as a proper noun. There is no article, either indefinite or definite, in front of the noun. We are not being asked whether we believe in “a God” or “the God”, but simply “God”. Implicitly, we are being asked if we share the questioner’s own, monotheistic concept of God.

If you were to consult a dictionary on the word “god”, you would typically be given a two-part definition. One part would refer quite specifically to established, monotheistic religions and would use phrases like “creator” or “supreme being” in attempting to define it. This metaphysical way of conceptualizing ontological and existential issues is the sense in which we analysed in the earlier articles on the Christian God versus the Jewish God.

The second part would use the lower-case “god” or plural “gods”.

The entry would probably mention earthmother, druidical concepts of spirits inhabiting every natural feature: streams, woods, mountains, etc. These earthmother, druidical theologies can be seen to be naïve. (Here the word “naïve” is being used in its true meaning of “innocent” and “stripped of acquired sophistications”, not in the pejorative usage of “gullible” and “stupid”.) The person is regarded as part of the creation, no more nor less important than the rock or the meadow. These types of theology normally emphasize harmony in all things, and so can be argued to be useful ways of interpreting and acting within one’s perceived reality. However, these theologies do not attempt to address fundamental ontological, existential, and eschatological issues, and so they are not relevant to the present exercise of interpreting the Christian theology and Christology.

The dictionary entry would also mention theologies in which there is a pantheon of gods, each responsible for some area of human experience or emotion: a god of love, a god of war, a god of the sea, etc. The latter type of theology the reader would be most familiar with in the context of the Greco-Roman or Norse pantheons.

Let us consider these “pantheon of gods” theologies. In any area in which humans have difficulty conceptualizing, they tend to anthropomorphize the concepts, imagining that they take human-like form with human-like behaviours. And so, the gods of the pantheon are given proper names like Aphrodite, Ares, and Poseidon. As part of the anthropomorphizing, they sire offspring (Eros, the god of carnal love, is the son of Aphrodite) and even mate, usually without consent, with humans. They can fight among themselves, they can die, and the cultures that follow them will develop elaborate theogonies to tell their story. But, as a result, the gods become just another “race” in the mythical cosmos, a race with greater powers than the mere mortals.

This class of theologies can also be seen to be irrelevant to our quest for the understanding of a Christian theology and Christology.

Often a “god” can be defined in a dictionary as a “deity”, but then a “deity” is defined as a “god”, which is not terribly helpful.

The same sort of problem plagues words derived from “divinity”. Look up what it means for someone dead, or even still alive, to be “divine”, and you’ll get statements like “of or pertaining to a god”. Again, not terribly helpful.

At the conclusion of the previous article, “No. 3 – The Christ”, the reader was left to contemplate the question, “Is Jesus of Nazareth, the person, divine?”

I would certainly argue that The Logos is divine. It was concluded in that earlier article that The Logos may be considered a second person in a multipartite godhead.

But Jesus of Nazareth was a man who brought The Logos to humankind. Was this man “divine” while he was alive, did he always “exist” as a man and was he always “divine”, does he still “exist” as a man and is he “divine”? Theologians (and political leaders) have tied

themselves in knots about this debate ever since the time of Jesus of Nazareth!

But the only sense I can make of the debate is the following distinction:

- One worships a divine person;
- One lauds a wise person.

At the end of the day, is there really a distinction at all?

This is of course not the last to be said on this and related matters. But let us just leave the reader to contemplate these thoughts for the time being.

Brother Ælfric – 14 July 2024