

Reformation Fellowship

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Supplemental Notes: How is Jesus God?

Jesus, God, and Us: A Comparison

		ETERNALLY	IN THE HERE AND NOW	IN THE HERE AND NOW	IN THE AGE TO COME	IN THE AGE TO COME
		GOD	JESUS (in Galilee)	ME (here and now)	JESUS (in age to come)	ME (in age to come)
Qualitative Attributes						
	<i>Qualities that are distinctive of the transcendent Being we call God</i>	G = Omnipotent, omniscient, etc.	<u>not G</u>	<u>not G</u>	<u>not G</u>	<u>not G</u>
	<i>Qualities of God that are reflected by humanness (Man is the "image" of God= a Person as God is)</i>	P = Rationality, will, motive, purpose, etc.	P* =Rationality, will, motive, purpose, etc.	P* =Rationality, will, motive, purpose, etc.	P* =Rationality, will, motive, purpose, etc.	P* =Rationality, will, motive, purpose, etc.
	<i>Qualities of a being that is perfectly morally good / perfectly Righteous</i>	R = Perfect love, mercy, compassion, justice, etc. (as those would be expressed in and by God)	R* = Perfect love, mercy, compassion, justice, etc. (as those would be expressed in and by a human being)	<u>not R*</u>	R* = Perfect love, mercy, compassion, justice, etc. (as those would be expressed in and by a human being)	R* = Perfect love, mercy, compassion, justice, etc. (as those would be expressed in and by a human being)

Function / Role		GOD	JESUS (in Galilee)	ME (here and now)	JESUS (in age to come)	ME (in age to come)
	<i>God's role as author and determiner of all reality / God's role as King</i>	K = Sovereign ruler over all of creation	K* = Sovereign ruler over all of creation (as a promised destiny)	<u>not</u> K*	K* = Sovereign ruler over all of creation (as an actual reality)	<u>not</u> K*
	<i>Role as the one whose WILL shapes all of reality</i>	W = The one whose SPECIFIC will is always done	W* = The one whose SPECIFIC will is always done (in that his particular human will reflects the will of God)	<u>not</u> W*	W* = The one whose SPECIFIC will is always done (in that his particular human will reflects the will of God)	<u>not</u> W*
	<i>The Judge of mankind</i>	J = The one who determines who will receive Life and who will not	J* = The one who determines who will receive Life and who will not	<u>not</u> J*	J* = The one who determined who will receive Life and who will not	<u>not</u> J*
Particular-person-ness / This-one-ness	<i>The particular being that is God (Yahweh) himself</i>	Y = God (as the particular person who God is in and of himself)	Y* = God (insofar as he represents the particular person who God is)	<u>not</u> Y*	Y* = God (insofar as he represents the particular person who God is)	<u>not</u> Y*

The following statement is never found in the Bible in this particular form, but, arguably, it captures the view that is actually held by the New Testament writers:

Jesus is God

Different Kinds of Identity:

Consider the following statements in the form “X is Y”:

(1) *“The man behind the desk is the man I just saw on television five minutes ago.”*

This is the “X is Y” of **NUMERICAL IDENTITY**.

In numerical identity, the sameness of X and Y amounts to X and Y denoting one and the same particular entity. They share particular-thing-ness.

(2) A teacher passing out pieces of colored construction paper to her class, lifts up a piece of paper and points to it and says, *“This is what I am passing out. Make sure you get one of these.”*

This is the “X is Y” of **QUALITATIVE IDENTITY**.

In qualitative identity, the sameness of X and Y amounts to X and Y denoting different particular entities that share one and the same set of attributes. Since they share one and the same set of attributes, they are, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable from one another. But qualitatively identical things are different with respect to their particular-thing-ness.

(3) Pointing to a photograph, *“This is my grandmother.”*

This is the “X is Y” of **REPRESENTATIONAL IDENTITY**.

In representational identity, the sameness of X and Y amounts to the fact that what is represented by X is one and the same particular entity as Y. The thing represented by X shares particular-thing-ness with Y.

Relationship between qualitative identity and other forms of identity:

•When it comes to human beings, if X is *numerically* identical to Y at some given point in time, then X will also be *qualitatively* identical to Y.

If the man behind the desk is the same man as the man I saw on television five minutes ago, then they will look alike because, by in large, they will share the same set of attributes.

An infant is numerically identical to the adult man he grows into even though there are very few attributes they share in common. However, the qualitative differences are at different points in time. At any given point in time, we expect numerical sameness to imply qualitative sameness.

***Important:**

Representational identity does NOT imply qualitative identity in the same way that numerical identity implies qualitative identity! !

AN ANALYSIS OF THE NATURE OF REPRESENTATIONAL IDENTITY

There are two paradoxes that result in representational identity:

Paradox #1 > If X is representationally identical to Y, then both of these are true:

- (i) X is Y.**
- (ii) X is different from Y. (X is not Y)**

X is Y insofar as X “represents” Y.
X is not Y insofar as they do not share exactly the same set of attributes.
X is not Y insofar as they do not share particular-thing-ness.

Paradox #2 > If X is representationally identical to Y, then X has two “natures”:

- (i) X possesses the “nature” of being what it is in and of itself.**
- (ii) X possesses the “nature” of being a representation of something other than itself.**

Examples of the above paradoxes:

- An English translation of the Greek text of John 3:16 has two natures:
 - It possesses the nature of being a statement in English.
 - It possesses the nature of representing the Greek text of John 3:16.
(The Greek text and the English translation both convey the intended meaning of John 3:16; yet they are significantly different.)

Note: The English translation is qualitatively the same as the Greek text only to the extent that English can share the same attributes as Greek.

Qualitative sameness follows from representational sameness only to the extent that the medium being used to represent Y by X allows it !

- A photograph of my wife has two natures:
 - It possesses the nature of being a piece of paper stained by ink.
 - It possesses the nature of representing the shape and appearance of my wife.
(The photograph and my wife both contain the shape and appearance of my wife; yet they are significantly different.)

Note: The photograph is qualitatively the same as my wife only to the extent that a photograph (ink-stained-paper capturing a shape and visual appearance) can share the same attributes as a human being.

Qualitative sameness follows from representational sameness only to the extent that the medium being used to represent Y by X allows it !

- A musical score of a piece of performed music has two natures:
It possesses the nature of being a piece of paper stained by ink.
It possesses the nature of representing the sound and experience of the music to be performed.
(The score and the music both contain the sound and experience of the music to be performed.)

Note: The musical score is qualitatively the same as the musical performance only to the extent that a musical score (ink-stained-paper using musical symbols) can share the same attributes as a musical performance.

Qualitative sameness follows from representational sameness only to the extent that the medium being used to represent Y by X allows it !

Assume, for the sake of a thought experiment, that the author J.R.R. Tolkien made Treebeard, the Ent, to represent him within his trilogy, *Lord of the Rings*. Then,

- Treebeard, the Ent, has two natures:
Treebeard possesses his nature as an Ent.
Treebeard possesses the nature of representing the particular human being J.R.R. Tolkien.
(Treebeard and J.R.R. Tolkien both bear the particular-person-ness that the name J.R.R. Tolkien denotes.)

Note: Treebeard is qualitatively the same as Tolkien only to the extent that an Ent can share the same attributes as a human being; and only to the extent that Tolkien created Treebeard to share qualitative attributes.

Qualitative sameness follows from representational sameness only to the extent that the medium being used to represent Y by X allows it !

ORTHODOX TRINITARIANISM'S MISTAKE

The mistake that Orthodox Trinitarianism makes is that it assumes that

Jesus is **NUMERICALLY** identical to God and, therefore, **QUALITATIVELY** identical to God.

When, in fact, the biblical authors are asserting that

Jesus is **REPRESENTATIONALLY** identical to God and is only qualitatively identical to God insofar as God has chosen to make him so.

Implications of Jesus' Representational Identity with God:

(1) Since Jesus is *representationally* identical to God, it is just as true to say that

- “**Jesus is not God**”
as it is to say that
- “**Jesus is God.**”

(2) Since Jesus is *representationally* identical to God, Jesus will have two natures:

- Jesus possesses his nature as a particular human being, Jesus of Nazareth.
- Jesus possesses a nature of being a representation of the particular person that is God himself.

Note: Orthodox Trinitarianism is correct in its belief that Jesus has two natures. The mistake that Orthodox Trinitarianism makes is that it construes the two natures of Jesus in the wrong way.

	Wrong Way	Right Way
Human Nature	Jesus has an ontologically human nature.	Jesus has a nature insofar as he is a particular human being, Jesus of Nazareth.
Divine Nature	Jesus has an ontologically divine nature.	Jesus has a nature insofar as he is a representation of the particular person who is the transcendent God.

Consider the following analogy:

	Wrong Way	Right Way
Ent Nature	Treebeard has an ontologically Entish nature.	Treebeard has a nature insofar as he is a particular Ent, Treebeard.
Tolkien Nature	Treebeard has an ontologically Tolkien nature.	Treebeard has a nature insofar as he is a representation of the particular person who is the author of the story, J.R.R. Tolkien.

(3) Since Jesus is *representationally* identical to God, Jesus will—as a human being—have attributes that do **not** correspond to attributes in God.

- It need not be the case, for example, that Jesus’ particular skin color has a corresponding attribute in God. (The same thing could be said about his sense of humor, taste in music, sense of beauty, taste in food, etc. There need not be attributes of God that correspond to these qualities.)
- The extent to which such qualitative attributes of Jesus correspond to qualitative attributes of God is entirely determined by God’s will and purposes. There will be a correspondence just to the extent that God desires there to be a correspondence. There will not be a correspondence just to the extent that God does not desire there to be a correspondence.

It follows, therefore, that God could have created Jesus to be a different particular person than he did create him to be and yet have him remain the unique image of the invisible God that he is. (That is, Jesus could have been created with a different sense of humor, taste in music, personality, etc. without destroying his identity as the unique image of the invisible God.)

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS

Jesus is, and always will be, absolutely unique among God's human creations.

- **He, and he alone**, represents the particular person who is the transcendent God of all reality. This will always be true throughout all eternity.

In the age to come, other glorified human beings will be exactly like Jesus with respect to the nature of their humanity and morality. They will share exactly the same qualitative attributes.

In the age to come, only Jesus will function as the sovereign ruler over all created reality.

In the age to come, only Jesus will be the representation (in the form of a human being) of the particular person who God is. No other human being is such. God has willed it so. If God says Jesus and Jesus alone represents him, then that is how it is.

If one day, in the age to come, Jesus delegated his authority as sovereign ruler over all created reality to John Doe, then—still—John Doe (as King of kings for a day) would not BE God in the sense that Jesus is God. He would function with the authority of God, but he would not represent the particular-person-ness of God (as Jesus does).