

## Research Article

# The Concept of Incarnation in Christian Theology and in the Spirituality of Rut Björkman

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## Abstract

This paper explores and compares the ontological structures of the incarnation as defined in traditional Christian theology versus the mystical spirituality of Rut Björkman. Traditional Christian Christology, rooted in the Council of Chalcedon (451), defines the incarnation as a unique, substantial "hypostatic union". Within this framework, the divine person of the Logos subsists in two distinct natures—divine and human—without mixture or separation, operating from a "top-down" metaphysical trajectory. In contrast, Rut Björkman approaches the incarnation from a "bottom-up" mystical perspective. Rather than a singular historical event restricted to Jesus, Björkman views the incarnation as a universal, transient process accessible to every human being. In her spirituality, the incarnation is realized whenever an individual achieves a successful mystical union. The subject of this union is an apersonal, divine "creative power," which acts immanently within the human person as a tool of grace, rather than forming a substantial or hypostatic bond. Consequently, figures like Buddha, Lao-Tzu, and Paul are similarly regarded as historical expressions of this mystical realization. By analyzing the underlying ontological assumptions of both models, the study highlights several open philosophical challenges. For Christian theology, these include the problematic nature of the substance concept, the potential for volitional conflict between Christ's two wills, and the existential-ontological interpretation of the resurrection—vividly illustrated by the theological debate regarding what a running camera would have recorded in Jesus' tomb. For Björkman's model, the primary challenge lies in the tendency toward a universal world soul and the depersonalization of the human ego to accommodate the divine force. Ultimately, the paper concludes that while both frameworks diverge significantly in their dogmatic and existential intensity, they share a foundational hylomorphic intersection: both conceive of the incarnation as an informational, ontological reality that establishes a profound union between a formal divine principle and material human reality.

## Keywords

Female Spirituality, Incarnation, Hypostatic Union, Mystical Union, Christology, Rut Björkman, Transformation of Matter, Philosophical Anthropology

## 1. Introduction

The concept of the incarnation is what distinguishes Christian theology and spirituality, as outlined by Rut Björkman. On the one hand, there is the famous dogma of the Council of Chalcedon (451), which, after more than a hundred years of

theological struggle, tries to bring the divinity of Jesus into harmony with his humanity: Jesus is "recognizable in two natures, unmixed (asynchytōs), unchanged (atreptōs), unseparated (adiairetōs) and unseparated (achōristōs)" [1], which

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"unite into one person (prosōpon) and one hypostasis". It also follows that Jesus has two wills (Trullanum or III Council of Constantinople, 680), among others. [2].

Rut Björkman, on the other hand, identifies the incarnation as the effect of the divine power in man with every successful mystical union of every human being. [1] "Whoever gains unity with this spirit is one with all life, which constantly emanates from this spirit. This unity is rebirth." [2] Thus, in addition to Jesus, Lao-Tzu, Buddha and Paul are also "incarnations" of this mystical union.

What is the commonality, what is the difference between the two incarnatory conceptions? [3].

## 2. Incarnation in Christian Theology

The term "incarnation" means first of all etymologically "incarnation" or "into the flesh (working)". [4] Thus, a certain contrast to the material "flesh" is already implicitly stated about the subject of the incarnation, since it must be ontologically different; likewise, the concept of "incarnation" at the same time affirms a similarity or analogy between the object of the incarnation – the material body or the "flesh" – and the subject. Analogy also implies that the subject of the incarnation must be something ontologically something "higher": here the spirit soul is thought of as the "form of the body" (Council of Vienne, 1311).

In that case, however, every living body would be the incarnation of a (individual or universal) spirit soul. Therefore, if "incarnation" is used in Christian theology, it is in the sense of an extraordinary incarnation of a divine "person" or "hypostasis" that incarnates not only in a "body", but in a whole and complete human being with his own will (6th Ecumenical Council 681), but without a substance of his own. [5].

### 2.1. The Struggle for the Definition of Chalcedon

Accordingly, the struggle over the ontological interpretation of the "being" of Jesus is shaped: who was Jesus? [6] How can the historical Jesus be reconciled with the post-Easter Jesus? What happens to the assumed complete human Jesus after his resurrection or resurrection?

The theological starting point of revelation is the "empty tomb" and its theological interpretation. It was addressed at the end of the 20th century in an inner-theological discussion: what would a running camera have recorded in the tomb of Jesus? [7] All three logically possible positions were represented here:

- 1) the camera would have recorded the physically visible traces of the energetic transformation of the body of Jesus; then, for example, the Shroud of Turin would be a scientifically accessible indication of the realistically conceived resurrection; [8].
- 2) since the camera has no existential-ontological "senso-

rium" or a conscious perception, since it cannot open itself inwardly to the event of the resurrection (this, by the way, implies a relational dependence of the resurrection on the believing person), it would not be able to record anything physically: the resurrection would only be accessible "in the kerygma"; [9].

- 3) the camera and the cameraman or woman would not have recorded anything together either. "If a neutral observer had stood in front of the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning with a running video camera, he would not have recorded anything that we could call a resurrection, because the resurrection is not an inner-worldly, but an eschatological event." [10].

Furthermore, the transformation of the body of Jesus needs to be explained. Why is only the body of Jesus transformed, but not the body of all other people? [11] There are also different possible answers to this:

- 1) What the divine Creator intends for our world can be seen in the transformation of the body of Jesus: a universal transformation of matter by changing the spatiotemporal framework of earthly-material existence: "The resurrection of Jesus is not only an individual fate, but the beginning of the final transformation of matter and the opening of a new way of being of the world, in which the spatiotemporal barriers of transience are overcome by the creative power of God." [12].
- 2) Jesus was not a man, but some god, or "the" only real god or even just an angel. Therefore, his corpse, in contrast to all other human corpses, is transformed or "transfigured". His body was an "illusory body". [13].
- 3) In the Jewish-apocalyptic interpretation, Jesus is the "firstfruit of the departed" in the sense of the exception for a single person instead of the collective resurrection at the end of the current aeon. According to Karlheinz Müller, the accompanying break with Jewish tradition would then also be proof of the authenticity of the resurrection testimony and the resurrection reports. [14].

From the "empty tomb", which is currently doubted by the majority of theologians, as well as from the "visions" of the Risen One according to the account in 1 Cor 15: 3b-5, and the historically tangible change in the behaviour of the disciples of Jesus, the dogma-historical discussion of the person and the being of Jesus followed, which can be briefly summarised by means of a pictorial comparison according to Hubert Jedin:

The Alexandrian School: the divinity of Jesus permeates his humanity like fire permeates a piece of wood. There is a tendency towards Monophysitism here. [15].

The Antiochian School: the divinity of Jesus dwells in the man Jesus as in a temple. [16] Here, again, one notices a tendency towards the moral or gratific union of the man Jesus with the "Logos".

The Council of Chalcedon (451) now tries to unify both schools in a formula in the sense of a doctrine of two natures: according to this, the divine person subsists in two natures that are neither mixed with each other (against Monophysitism)

nor separated from each other (against Nestorianism). [17] Nor does the hypostatic union consist of two natures: the personal identity of the "logos" has an analogous effect in both natures, which are "complete" except for the personhood. The person unites both natures in their independence. How the concrete coexistence of divine and human work can take place in the hypostatically united being of Jesus is not said by the deliberately negative formulations of the Council.

Furthermore, it is assumed that there are different divine persons, but only one divine nature, in which the person of the "Logos" – along with the other two divine persons – also incarnates. However, this would be an intra-Trinitarian reversal of the ontological origin, according to which the one divine nature subsists in the three persons – and not the other way around.

Is this incarnation of the divine person of the "Logos" unique in both natures? That depends on which assumptions are shared for the incarnation or hypostatic union. From the Christian model of the incarnation of a divine person, there is nothing to be said against an arbitrary repetition of the incarnation, as Karl Rahner also notes. "Since a plurality of humanities is conceivable in the world, a plurality of incarnations of the Logos cannot be excluded a priori. If God has also created free spiritual beings in other worlds who need redemption, it is in principle possible that the Logos also assumes a creaturely nature there." [18] However, insofar as each incarnation would presuppose its own human history and historical biography, it would have to be explained how the different human beings fit into the identical divine bearer, i.e. the "hypostasis of the Logos".

## 2.2. Open Questions

Open questions arise that demonstrate the limits of the incarnation model:

Problematic concept of substance: [19] With regard to subsistence (*existere per se*), the concept of substance belongs to God (Thomas Aquinas, p. th. I, 29, 3 ad 4), but not in the sense of a category of substance to which accidents would belong (p. th. I, 3, 5f.). God is "supersubstantialis" (In div. nom. 1, 1). [20] But how can a "super-substance" or a specifically divine hypostasis unite substantially at all and thus become the bearer of accidents? Does not this make the substance or hypostasis of the man Jesus accidental?

Doesn't this Figure of thought remind us of the Aristotelian-inspired doctrine of transubstantiation, in which the substance of bread and wine is also replaced by the substance of the material (!) body of Jesus, so that the accidents "flesh" and "blood" are no longer recognizable, but are completely substituted by the accidents "bread" and "wine"? [21] Isn't this simply a conceptual – and not ontological – relabeling of "bread" and "wine" into "flesh" and "blood" of the transcendent (!) material body of Jesus? [22].

In addition, there is the difficulty that the human being is a

"substantial oneness of soul and body, not an accidental" oneness (i.e. a "unio... substantialis, non accidentalis" (Qu. disp. de pot. 5, 10, c): i.e., the ONE substance of man is bijectively realized in the body and spirit soul of Jesus, so that through the substitution of the substance of Jesus, the substance of the body of Jesus is ultimately also affected. Does not this also result in a transfiguration of the body of Jesus already before Easter?

How can the "eternal" and transcendent God be influenced by temporally transient beings? What repercussions does being human have on the divine person, especially since he is neither stoic-apatetic nor relational-dependent on being human? How can the middle way between the two extremes be formulated in such a way that no contradiction between the two dominates their union? How can the analogy between being human and the divine person of the Logos be sufficiently preserved without sacrificing it to the thought scheme of a negative or even dialectical theology?

How can the transcendence of God be reconciled with his reciprocally coupled immanence in the man Jesus – in contrast to all other people without a hypostatic union?

Don't two wills in Jesus (Council of Constantinople in 681 against "monotheletism") lead to dissonance and possible conflict between them? If the divine person of the "Logos" unites both wills, what consequences do this have for the concept of the person? Does the person possess a "super-will" that also goes beyond the divine will of the divine nature of Jesus? Or does the solution lie in the analogy to the inner-Trinitarian perichoresis, in that the "Logos" empathically appropriates the divine and human nature in order to realize himself through their opposition?

Is not the human will depotentized by the primary and supporting effect of the divine Logos as an actor as well as the goal and reason of the hypostatic union? How is the coexistence and intertwining of God and man in the being of Jesus to be conceived? How can the God-man Jesus as a self-determined being remain anchored once and for all and "absolutely certainly" in the divine Logos, which he expresses analogously – together with the divine nature?

## 3. Incarnation in the Spirituality of Rut Björkman

The complexity of the Christian concept of incarnation is now apparently reduced by thinking of "incarnation" as a universal possibility for all human beings. For here, too, the above-mentioned difficulties of thinking recur.

### 3.1. Prerequisites and Assumptions

Rut Björkman starts from the transformation of the human person as a condition of the possibility of incarnation, i.e. without a transformation of the human being, the talk of an incarnation is irrelevant. [23] The subject of the incarnation is the divine "creative power", i.e. something neutral, which is

reminiscent of the suprapersonal divine "spirit". The object of the incarnation, however, is the human person as a tool of the divine creator, who works immanently in man through his "power". The apersonal creative power thus does not collide with the personal will of the human being.

The successfully completed incarnation also forms the framework for the mystical union of man with God. Implicitly, through the mystical union, the transcendental ego of man is freed from its earthly entanglement in material externality. The depersonalized incarnation is reminiscent of the gift of the divine spirit in the sense of a revitalizing spiritual gift of grace, i.e. of a theological charism. Rut Björkman thus means in fact a gratial (graceful) union of man with God thanks to a divine power and "creative power", but not a hypostatic union. [24].

### 3.2. Universality of the Incarnation

Consequently, according to Björkman, every successful effect of the "creative power" is an equally successful incarnation of the divine in man. The incarnation is thus a universal phenomenon that can happen at any time – but can also pass away at any time. [25].

Since Rut Björkman favors a present resurrection, which in fact identifies the resurrection with the successful visualization of the creative power and thus also conceives of the mystical union as a temporally limited presence and effect of the divine creative power, the incarnation is also transient in time and thus also ontologically limited, but at the same time it is to a certain extent "unbounding" and meaningful. [26].

## 4. Comparative Summary

Theology assumes a unique hypostatic union, i.e. a substantial union of man with God, which is carried out "top down" by the divine person. Rut Björkman's spirituality, on the other hand, assumes a mystical union of man, which is made possible and supported "bottom up" primarily by man, who recognizes his "separation" from the "divine source" and through this "knowledge" can already release the immanent-transcendent creative power within himself.

What is the common ground between the two concepts? Is there such a thing as an intersection? – In fact, the concept of incarnation in the tradition of Aristotelian hylemorphism assumes a "form" as subject and a "matter" as the object of incarnation. What is incarnated, therefore, has something to do with an informational ontological reality. This does not speak in favor of formal idealism, according to which – according to Hegel – the "idea" represents the actual reality. Rather, following Aristotle, it is about the conception of reality as an intrinsic unity of a formal or informative as well as a material or passively determinable ontological principle of being.

According to Rut Björkman, the incarnation exists through the fact that an apersonal "creative force" is brought to effect. In order for a person-neutral "force" to have a personal effect, the person must also be depotentiated: and this is exactly what

happens in his spirituality. [27] The tendency is towards the concept of a universal world soul that incarnates in the individual – incidentally condemned by the Fifth Lateran Council (1517). This is also reminiscent of psychological and pan-psy-chic concepts such as those of C. G. Jung, according to which the "self" also substitutes the "I" of the human being.

What about the theology of the early church? Here the divine hypostasis of the "Logos", i.e. the goal ground of all order of being, comes into effect in the God-man Jesus. The self-determination of the "Logos" thus determines the (relative or relational?!) self-determination of the divine and human nature of Jesus. In order to ensure this, the "Logos" becomes the sole determining power, with which the Godness and humanity of Jesus can no longer – and does not want to – determine itself in any other way than along the dispositional directive of the Logos.

Does this mean that the person of Jesus is also eliminated in Christian theology in the same way as the human person is eliminated in Rut Björkman? – If one identifies the term "hypostasis" with the term "person", then the personality of Jesus is actually denied; if one now identifies "hypostasis" with "substance", then the "substance" of the God-man would ultimately be the divine "Logos", who "puts on" the God-man like a garment. [28].

In order to avoid these consequences of a "God in human form" or a "demigod", the "personal" or "substantial" union can be thought of in accordance with the inner-Trinitarian perichoresis and mutual empathy. The God-man Jesus and the divine "Logos" would be personally united, so that it can finally come to a historically ever-growing explicit awareness of the man Jesus of his divinity.

The concept of the incarnation – as a counterpart to Björkman's mystical union or the hypostatic union in Christian theology – thus has in common the commonality of a union (union) that is thought of differently in different personalities and thus existential-ontological intensity.

## Author Contributions

**Imre Koncsik:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Writing - original draft, Writing – review & editing

## Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflicts of interest.

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