

his new beard, and then excused himself to walk back to the train.

He's Never Too Busy

Remember that time when Jesus' disciples were trying to keep Jesus away from small children because they felt Jesus was just too busy for little children? Jesus told the disciples that unless they became like children they would never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:1-4).

Many labor under the false impression that God is so busy with emergencies and high-level, far-reaching meetings and appointments that he would never have the time for us.

But the story of Christmas is the story of God moving into the room, or the apartment or the house next door to you. He is your neighbor! He is one of us! "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14, *The Message*). □

Greg Albrecht is President of Plain Truth Ministries.

THE GREAT SCANDAL! THAT GOD BECAME MAN

BRAD JERSAK

Apes becoming man? C'mon, mate—that's not scary! You want to know what's really scary? **GOD becoming man!**

I admit, the bluster of this stereotypical Irishman has set me on my heels. And he isn't done yet!

"That's the scandal of Christianity!" he bellows, eyes as wild as his hair, waiting for my reaction.

"Smoke?" he asks, thrusting a carton my way.

"I beg your pardon?"

Oh, I see. My prof is offering me a cigarette.

"Uh, no thanks," I decline, as he lights up.

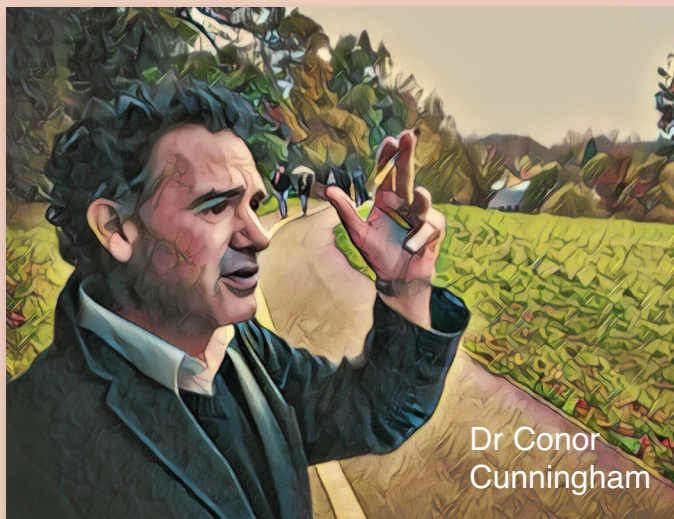
This is Dr. Conor Cunningham—philosopher, theologian, scholar. He's also my faculty host at the University of Nottingham, where I stayed as a "visiting scholar" in 2014.

It would take nine weeks for him to unpack his first sentences. It took me another two years to work them out as I composed my book, *A More Christlike God*. I will attempt to do so yet again in a few pages.

Cunningham's *Darwin's Pious Idea*¹ is easily the best researched text I've read to this day. It's why I made a trek to the UK, endured a single dorm cell without my wife and chained myself to a library for months. His thesis is that both the conservative creationists and their new atheist opponents are barking up the wrong tree, each tribe profoundly

mistaken in their quest for truth.

Ultimate truth is decidedly *not* found in bantering over whether or how apes evolved into human beings.



"Apes becoming man?" he guffaws. "You think that's a threat to Christian faith?"

He rolls his eyes, exasperated. In Conor's BBC documentary, *Did Darwin kill God?*² he introduces the topic this way:

"I'm a huge admirer of Charles Darwin. His theory of evolution is one of the greatest

contributions to science. 150 years ago, his theory changed mankind's perception of life on earth, forever. I believe religious alternatives like creationism and intelligent design are nonsense.

You may think that that would make me an atheist, but I am a Christian. I believe in God."

But Cunningham is not merely referring to "G-O-D," as in some vague and vacuous notion or abstract philosophy. That's not scary either—that's simply innocuous, feeble.

No, do you what to know what's really scary? My crazy Irish prof will tell ya: **God becoming man!**

God becoming man!

The truth we seek—the ground of our being—isn't found in the ever-shifting genealogies of natural science or in misguided Noah's Ark theme parks. It will never be unveiled in the wearisome creation-evolution debates.

The truth we seek is found in this scary (i.e. scandalous) reality: God becoming man! AKA: "the incarnation." John 1:14 testifies that the eternal, divine Word—with God and as God—assumed human nature and "became flesh"—not just *humanity* (Greek *anthropos*) but *flesh* (Greek *sarx*).

This means that when God became human, we're not merely talking about the humanity of innocent, unfallen, un-cursed Adam. Rather, God took on "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3)—all the passions, frailty and mortality of the descendants of fallen Adam—"yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

God the divine Son assumed the human condition to restore and renew every aspect of broken humanity. The eternal

Light entered our darkness and shone to expel that darkness with the light of love and truth.

The Scandal of Christianity

What did Dr. Cunningham mean when he claimed that God becoming man is "the scandal of Christianity?"

He would go on to explain how the Incarnation of the eternal God in the weakness of human flesh was scandalous to those

preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block [Gk. scandalon] to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."

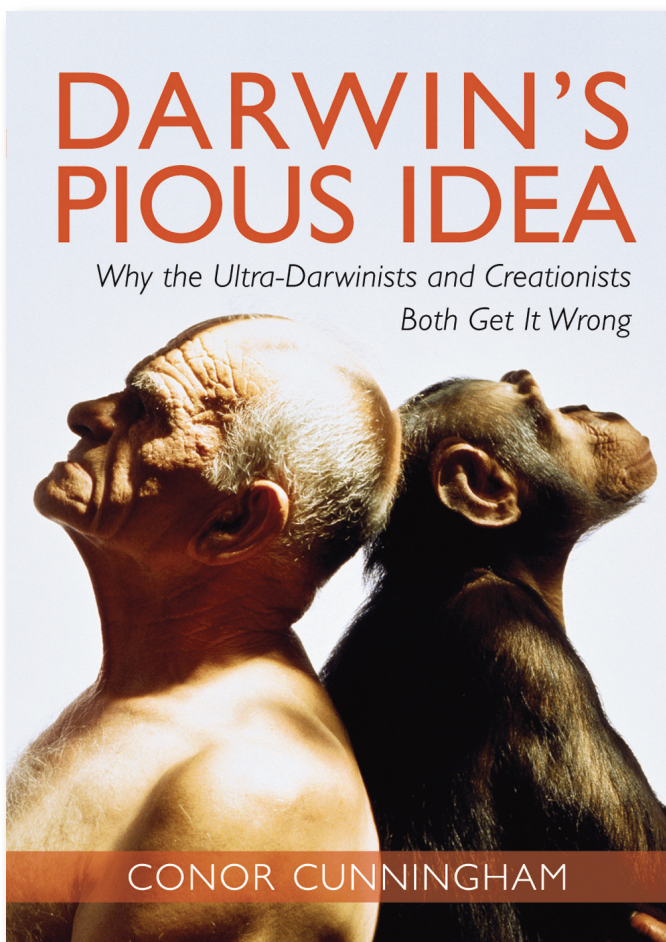
To emphasize this truth, Dr. Cunningham coined the phrase, "radical orthodoxy." He isn't claiming something more radical than Christian orthodoxy. Rather, radical orthodoxy insists there is simply nothing more radical than the historic Christian confession that God became man. Everything next to that is bland. Every aberration we call heresy—every departure from the Incarnation—is flaccid by comparison. There is no known claim more radical than this: Jesus Christ is forever both fully God and fully man.

How can God "become"?

In John 1:14, that word "became" can be puzzling. How can God, who cannot change (James 1:17), also be said to "become." I discovered a helpful explanation in a popular Greek Lexicon:

*"...this verb does not mean 'became' in the sense 'was changed into,' as when a chrysalis is changed into a butterfly and thereby ceases to be a chrysalis, but has the sense 'took on' or 'assumed'... a new, additional form of existence, as when a woman becomes the mother of her firstborn."*³

In other words, the divine Word (*logos*) became what God was not—flesh (*sarx*)—without



who first encountered him—especially in God's scandalous new capacity for humiliation and death! Some could not worship the almighty God when he revealed himself in human form, and especially in weakness.

As the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:21-25,

"For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was

ever ceasing to be what he was—God (*theos*). What makes this so radical is that God’s new form of existence as “the God-man” is “not temporary and reversible, but permanent and irreversible.”

Think on that. The perfect union of all that God is with all that we are, without in any way compromising either. That’s why we say this one

...the Incarnation of the eternal God in the weakness of human flesh is scandalous!

indivisible Person, Jesus Christ, is both *fully* God and *fully* man—not just a 50-50 hybrid.

Theologians call this the “*hypostatic union*,” but fear not—that \$50 phrase simply and mysteriously means that in the one Person (Christ) we have both natures (human and divine) in full measure.

That’s a paradox, but it’s one that parents may understand by analogy. Say you’ve had your firstborn and that child wins your whole heart. But then one day, you are expecting a second. “Oh no!” you might think, “how will this work? How will I divide the love up?” And of course, when the second child comes, you discover that your heart is not a pie to be sliced up. Both children win your whole heart! And if, like Eden and I, you have a third, again, your heart is filled with love for that child. It’s a miracle and a paradox, but that’s how love works.

So too, this union of God and man in Christ is a perfect union of divinity and humanity, filling his whole person with infinite love for us—for you, for me and for the whole world!

Is it any wonder, then, that the angelic messenger would announce, “*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.*” (Luke 2:10).

The whole-hearted love of God has entered our world in that glorious, scandalous God-man! This is the good news. We don’t need to be afraid any more, because Israel’s Messiah and the world’s Savior has shown us that God is self-giving love. And by love, this same Christ has determined to stop at nothing to redeem what was lost, restore what was broken and bring the cosmos to fulness in himself—so that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). □

Brad Jersak is editor-in-chief of CWR Magazine and author of A More Christlike God.

NOTES

1. Conor Cunningham, *Darwin’s Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get It Wrong* (Eerdmans, 2010).

2. Conor Cunningham, “Did Darwin Kill God?” BBC2, 2009.

3. Murray Harris, *John: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (B&H Academic, 2015).

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