Part II:

The Person of Christ

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then an heir, through God.

Galatians 4:4-7 (Christmas Sunday, *Revised Common Lectionary*, Year B)

Christmas

One of Us

"Jesus Is Lord"

If God had a name, what would it be
And would you call it to his face, if you were faced with him
In all his glory, what would you ask if you had just one question

Yeah, yeah, God is great
Yeah, yeah, God is good
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

What if God was one of us
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make his way home
[back up to heaven all alone
nobody calling on the phone
'cept for the Pope maybe in Rome]

If God had a face, what would it look like
And would you want to see, if seeing meant that
You would have to believe, in things like
Heaven and Jesus and the saints and all the prophets?

– Joan Osborne, "One of Us"

Every few years (every few months?) brings a new pop song designed to shock Christian sensibilities. Several years ago, it was Joan Osborne's turn to do the shocking. And Osborne, a recovering Catholic trying hard to be a rebellious rock star, outdid herself. Most others (Depeche Mode and XTC in my era, the '80s) choose peripheral targets: the problem of evil, Christian attitudes towards sex, and televangelism. Easy pickings! Osborne went right to the heart of Christian piety, and her efforts paid off handsomely. She stumbled right into the most shocking Christian vision of all: the orthodox doctrine of incarnation.

Two thousand years ago, a small group of Jews shocked their communities by claiming that a man they had known and followed was "Lord." Furthermore, they did so without becoming "recovering Jews," without turning their backs on the life whose daily prayers included the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is *one*." These people pointed both to YHWH as God alone and Jesus as Lord and Christ. For saying such outrageous things about their Nazarene friend, they were jailed, stoned, mocked, shouted down in the streets, laughed out of town, crucified, and burned alive – by Jews and Gentiles alike. Today their descendants sometimes receive similar responses from Muslims whose loyalty to the unity of God is similarly offended by their habits.

These first Christians must have been just as shocked as their persecutors were at what they found themselves saying. Yet their confessions that Jesus was "Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36) and "Lord and God" (John 20:28), and that the Messiah had come "in the flesh" (1 John 4:2) were all they could say, in light of what they had seen (Acts 2:22) and touched (John 20:27, 1 John 1:1-4). Jesus' disciples seemed either offensive or stupid to much of the world (1 Cor. 1). Their affirmations just led to more questions and more outrageous claims. They spent the rest of their lives trying to unravel their own claims, and we have inherited them in no less mysterious forms. But what else could they say?

In many ways, we face the same situation. Many claim to have met Jesus already in their own lives, in such a way that we already know what Christian doctrine struggles to teach: That Jesus the Messiah is also God made flesh, that the creator of heavens and earth has become the first of many creaturely brothers and sisters. Yet we still grasp at the right words to name what we know in our hearts.

However, in at least one respect, we are in a different place. Because of centuries of hard intellectual work within and without the Church, we have what Jesus' friends did not: A technical language, called *incarnation*, we can use to explain their (and our) convictions. Historically, Jesus' full divinity and humanity were affirmed in the face of early heresies in the second through fourth centuries, culminating in the confession of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in 325 and 381. The unity of his person was affirmed later, in the face of later Christological heresies, culminating in the Chalcedonian Formula in 451.

This chapter focuses on Nicene-Chalcedonian category of *substance* (or essence, or nature), and the next focuses on its category of *personhood*.

Some readers will feel less than grateful for these gifts from the past. The traditional doctrine of incarnation may be fine for professional theologians, but it usually spins heads in the pews. Perhaps only the doctrine of the Trinity is more intimidating and alien to Christians today. Furthermore, the Church's tradition of incarnation language has been under sustained attack for at least half of the Christian era. Many who call themselves Christians resent being excluded as heretics by the canons of Nicea or Chalcedon. Others disown their excommunication and regard the "catholic" position as the heretical one. Many others, orthodox in confession or at least in sympathy, still find the normative patristic categories of incarnation bound by indefensible metaphysics, framed by triumphalist Constantinian ambitions, or imprisoned in an extinct Church culture. The Qur'an offers a critique of incarnational and Trinitarian language (5:75-77, 5:116-17). Students of Christology have repeatedly tried to translate, rescue, improve upon, or defeat the Chalcedonian Formula in order to reconcile Christology and piety, to free orthodoxy from the Aristotelianism of late antiquity, to revive Trinitarian reflection on Jesus Christ, and to pay more respect to Jesus' humanity and historical particularity.

Certainly Nicene-Chalcedonian incarnation language is a product of its times, and its times have their shortcomings as well as their privileges. But at its heart, the language of incarnation is simply a way of describing Jesus in terms of three crucial things: (1) His relationship with the God who sent him; (2) his relationship with the rest of us; and (3) his relationship with himself. In other words, incarnation affirms that in Jesus we encounter *divinity without compromise*, *humanity without compromise*, and *personal unity without compromise*. When Jesus was conceived, the Word became flesh and dwelt (*eskênôsen*, "tented") among us, full of grace and truth, [so that] we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father (John 1:14). The Nicene and Chalcedonian confessions of Jesus' personhood are simply ways of speaking about the Incarnation that, in the past and present judgment of most of the Church, do not fundamentally betray it in the process. And the classical Christological heresies are ways that do.

Jesus' witnesses, commissioned to make disciples in his name, are called and bound to speak of the one whom they already know and meet and experience in the gathered Church, in the Word, in the sacraments, and in each other's lives. And that means that they too are bound to *some* kind of language of incarnation. Is the *traditional* doctrine of incarnation adequate to affirming Jesus' uncompromised divinity, humanity, and unity? Is it necessary? Is it dispensable? What roles does it play, and should it play, in the life of the Church?

These questions are complicated by a feature of incarnation language that is often overlooked in such discussions. It is, one might say, rich in dialects. The terms so familiar to theologians and intimidating to everyone else – *ousia*, *hypostasis*, and the like in Greek, and *substantia*, *persona*, and the like in Latin – are only several dialects, and by no means the most successful. There are other, more popular dialects. Above all, there is the language of adoration.

We will begin there, focusing on the praise that emerges around the time Christians remember the birth of Jesus Christ. Because the setting of Christmas on December 25 seems to have come before Constantine's conversion in 313, we can assume that it was originally reckoned Christologically, to stress the full divinity of the newborn King. As the Easter Cycle will be our handle on the *work* of Christ, so the Christmas Cycle is our handle on the *person* of Christ.

A Brief History of Christmas

Stuhlman's history of the liturgical year says that two traditions may have informed the celebration of Jesus' Nativity in the fourth century: The first is the nine-month-connection between Jesus' beginning at the Annunciation, celebrated on March 25 in the West and April 6 in the East. The second is a pagan winter-solstice festival instituted by Aurelian in 274 and widely observed in the Roman Empire.[1] The two feasts are superimposed on the first record we have of the celebration of Christmas, a chronograph from 354: "Natus Christus in Betleem Judaeae," and "N[atalis] Invicti [Solis]," "the birth of the Unconquered Sun." It certainly helped that Malachi 4:2 already spoke of the Son in terms of the sun: "For you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings." It also helped that Constantine, after his conversion, built St. Peter's on the Vatican Hill, where the sun had been already worshipped in the Mithras-cult. In the East, where the Nativity was observed on January 6, the date had already been connected with the virgin birth of Dionysius and with the legends of divine epiphanies.[2] So these holidays had a valuable and legitimate apologetic and evangelistic force in the way they accommodated to, and over time took over, analogous pagan celebrations.

Yet Christmas' popularity cannot be chalked up simply to its usefulness as a cultural survival strategy against other threatening holidays. The celebration of Christmas followed its

[1] Stuhlman, 184.
[2] Peter G. Cobb, "History of the Christian Year," in Cheslyn Jones et al., *The Study of Liturgy* (New York: Oxford, 1992), 466.

own internal logic. Says Cobb, "Whatever their origin, Christmas and Epiphany became widely celebrated only in the fourth century and their popularity undoubtedly owes much to the contemporary Christological controversies and the need to combat Arianism."[3] Christmas stakes a particular theological claim about Jesus over against alternative claims that were being made of him at the time.

Incarnation: The Heart of Christology

Christmas' relevance in the Nicene era helps us appreciate that the doctrine of incarnation was not simply an exercise in power politics and speculation, but rightly captured the attention of the whole Church. Arianism was a popular alternative vision of "incarnation" – an account of Jesus' relationships with God and with us that at times claimed the loyalty of the majority of ancient Christians, and whose revival among Jehovah's Witnesses is doing so again today. Its prominence in the story of Christmas underlines the crucial link between worship and doctrine that fueled the Christological debates of the first five centuries.

Similarly, Christmas' continuing popularity as a focus of worship signals the lasting relevance of the doctrine of incarnation beyond orthodoxy's guardians and beyond the academy. Christmas' versatility and power make it a powerful witness against a lot more heresies than just Arianism. (Just about the only one it seems unable to fight is a modern heresy: commercialism.) Now, as then, the doctrine of incarnation reaches into the very heart of Christian faith and practice.

Christmas celebrates *Emmanu-el* – "God with us" (Isa. 7:14, in Matt. 1:23, Fourth Sunday in Advent, Year A). These three simple English words concisely unpack the doctrine of incarnation's threefold claim of divinity without compromise, unity without compromise, and

[3] Cobb, 467.

humanity without compromise. In Jesus, and only in Jesus, do divinity and humanity truly meet in one person. Each word deserves its own attention.

"Us": Jesus' Humanity

Obviously, as Jesus is born and later, as his ministry begins, no one has any reason to doubt his humanity. Jesus' humanity only becomes an issue in light of his special relationship with God. Thus, especially in the early witnesses, we do not see extended biblical passages arguing that Jesus is truly a human being. However, we *do* see two features in particular that turn out to be more significant.

In the first half of the New Testament, we find *narratives of Jesus*, crafted and preserved in the conviction that Jesus' story is the shape and substance of eternal life (cf. Mark 1:1, Luke 1:4, John 20:31). This is as true of the Church catholic in which the gospels were received, preserved, and practiced as it is of the local figures and communities in which they originated.[4]

The fact of the gospels implies that Jesus is a biographical subject. Such massive attention to biography in the New Testament and patristic Church is an indicator not only *that* Jesus is human, but that Jesus' humanity – his lineage, his character, his words and deeds, and above all, his relationships with others – is of great theological importance. Recent Christology has rightly taken these stories (and their equivalents in the epistles) as the point of departure for interpreting Jesus "from below."

We can see the Christological significance of the gospel as literary genre by contrasting it with a recent trend among historians of religion, who have taken to writing "biographies of God." These are better called "treatments," to use the language of Hollywood, and their "God" is

[4] See Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

an ideological construction who may as well be Zeus or Hamlet. Whatever they are, they are not the gospels.[5]

In the second half of the New Testament, we find *arguments* that draw *theological conclusions from* Jesus' humanity. For instance, the so-called "Adam Christology" of Romans 5:12-21 compares the first human being's unfaithfulness to the faithfulness of "that one human being Jesus Christ." One brought the reign of death, the other of life. One condemns all, the other acquits all. One makes sinners, the other makes righteous. Paul's argument here depends on Jesus' humanity recapitulating and reversing the tragic human history started by Adam's trespass.[6]

Because the way of Jesus Christ has corrected the way of Adam, Jesus shows Paul the way to true humanity. "Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, *who is a type of the one coming*" (Rom. 5:14). Jesus' humanity typologically fulfills Adam's humanity. Jesus is therefore ontologically and epistemologically foundational for theological anthropology. He is the ground both of what it is to be human, and of what it is truly to know ourselves.

In 1 Corinthians Paul is answering the challenge of a young and divided Church with people who even "say that there is no resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:12). Jesus' humanity is the key to his response: "As by a human being came death, by a human being has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:20-22). Jesus is human, thus he died just as Adam did. *Now* he is raised imperishable and

[5] "Can God be known? I leave that question unanswered. What I claim is only that God's life as found on the pages of the Bible can be told." Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 24.
[6] And of course it is Jesus' quality as *anthrôpos* rather than *anêr* that matters here. The planet is not populated by sons of Mars and daughters of Venus, who need different saviors.

glorious, yet still human. Therefore in Christ we, though merely human, will also be raised imperishable and glorious. Jesus' story tells our story.

For the writer of Hebrews, Christ the human being is Christ the conqueror: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15). He is also Christ the sacrifice: "For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make atonement for the sins of his people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:16-18).

Hebrews goes beyond these already revolutionary words to claim something even more daring: Jesus' humanity is not merely our warrant for knowing God, but *God's* epistemological warrant for knowing those made in his own image: "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:15-16).

In Jesus, we have a Savior *like us* – a fitting antitype for reversing the destructive trajectory of Adam's sin and showing humanity a new way, whose death destroys the devil's power of death and atones for our sins, whose resurrection points to ours, and whose afflictions call forth sympathy for the plight of the afflicted. Justification, sanctification, resurrection, victory, intercession, divine revelation to an ignorant world, and even revelation back to its

creator: These are a few of the ways Jesus' humanity already matters to the first generations of Christians.

Yet these early Christian documents (some very early indeed) are noteworthy for another reason: They assume not only that Jesus is human, but that Jesus' humanity is unique. Jesus is not *merely* like us, or his story would be no more important than yours or mine. Something is profoundly special about him – specifically, his relationship with the One who sent him. This leads us to the topic of his *divinity*.

"God": Jesus' Divinity

Since Jesus' humanity is taken for granted in most of the New Testament, one would expect a much more sustained argument in favor of Jesus' *divinity*. But this argument is made surprisingly subtly in the New Testament writings. It is made so subtly, in fact, that many have missed it: Ebionites, who affirmed only Jesus' humanity; Muslims, latter-day Ebionites whose Quran calls Jesus "a Word from God and a Spirit from him," yet who deny that Jesus is more than a human messenger; Arians, who denied Jesus' full divinity (and possibly also his full humanity); and Jehovah's Witnesses, who are the Arians of the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries.

While the most tempting first line of argument against such readers has been the biblical prooftext, few biblical one-liners are all that helpful.[7] It is a pity that so much popular debate and apologetic is conducted at this level. While biblical scholars from Rudolf Bultmann to Raymond E. Brown have certified several as certain ascriptions of divinity to Jesus, the evidence is surprisingly thin – all the more so considering the dramatic nature of the claim.

Fortunately, a more persuasive (and edifying) case can be made by reading the texts as they ask us to read them: As a cumulative witness to the life of Jesus, rather than an atomistic string of propositions. When we finally read the New Testament this way, we meet a literature that reeks of divinity.

For instance, New Testament writers often show Jesus *doing* activities that are the prerogative of God. These texts show us the Church not merely affirming Jesus' divinity in the abstract, as a systematic theology course might, but using that prior understanding of Jesus' divinity to unpack some aspect of his relationship in *our* creation or redemption. Jesus has a role in creation (1 Cor. 8:6, Col. 1:16, Heb. 1:2, John 1:2-3). He exercises sovereignty over creation (calming the storm in Matt. 8:24-27, walking on water in Matt. 14:34-36, cf. Ps. 107:28-30, casting out demons in Mark 5:1-10, and feeding providentially in Matt. 14:20, Mark 6:42, and Luke 9:17).

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[7] Consider nine or so texts to which these apologists often appeal. John 20:28 contains Thomas' confession, "My Lord and my God!" Heb. 1:8 interprets Ps. 45:6-7 as referring to Jesus: "But of the Son [he says], 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." Rom. 9:5 calls Christ "the one who is over all God blessed forever" (unless one punctuates the sentence differently). 1 John 5:20 is less clear: "We are in the true one, in his son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." Acts 20:28 presents Paul claiming that God has obtained the Church "through his own blood." Titus 2:13 and 2 Pet. 1:1 refer to "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" – or perhaps merely to "our God, and *our* Savior Jesus Christ." The Johannine Prologue's *theos ên ho logos*, for all its clarity, can still be twisted in an Arian direction (though not without making hash of the rest of the Fourth Gospel). Likewise, the Prologue's conclusion, striking even for John, is obscured by a text variant and a translational ambiguity: "No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten God [Son], the One Who Is [who is] in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18). Later in John we find Jesus claiming, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). Its echo of Ex. 3:15 LXX's *egô eimi ho ôn* may be obscure to modern-day Gentiles, but it is not so in John's narrative: "So they took up stones to throw at him" (John 8:59).

These activities distinguish Jesus as having a special relationship with God, "the one who sent him." That relationship is a primary focus of the Church's canonical texts. It takes the rest of our project to unpack adequately: A special relationship with the Father as revealed at Jesus' conception and birth, baptism, ministry, transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, session, and return – in other words, everywhere in Jesus' life. This is well summarized in Matt. 11:27's "bolt from the Johannine blue": "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."[8]

To have a unique relationship with the Father is to have a unique relationship with the Holy Spirit – one emphasized in Jesus' conception, baptism, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, session, and return. "Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33). The patristic Church waited longer to confess the Spirit's full divinity than it did to confess the Son's. However, the reverse seems to have been the case in the Jewish milieu of the earliest Church. There God's spirit was well appreciated (even if not yet considered a "person"). Clear affirmations of the Spirit's divinity appear in 1 Cor. 2:10-11, 3:16 and 6:19, and Acts 5:3-4.[9] So some pursued a "Spirit-Christology" that saw Jesus as significant in terms of the Spirit, as well as vice-versa (Mark 1:1-11, John 3:34-36, Acts 10:36-38). Spirit-Christology was prone to reducing Jesus to a Spirit-anointed prophet, so Jesus' association with the Spirit is not as straightforward an affirmation of divinity as we might think today. It is a relationship that demands a much closer investigation (see below, Theophany and Epiphany).

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[8] [Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified*.]

[9] See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, ET Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.303.

Nevertheless, the relationship between Son and Spirit points to a further feature of the early Church's experience of God as Father *and* Son *and* Holy Spirit. While the New Testament Church can be called Trinitarian only anachronistically, it does seem to be arriving haltingly at a clear awareness of an irreducible "threeness" to its relationship with God. And Jesus is always part of these triadic passages, whether their structure is explicit (Matt. 28:19, 2 Cor. 13:14) or more implicit (Luke 1:35, 1 Cor. 12:4-6, Gal. 4:4-7, Eph. 3:14-16, Heb. 6:4-6, and so on). Historically, the doctrine of the Trinity depends upon the prior affirmation of Jesus' divinity. But the pre-Trinitarian Church's regular association of Jesus' name with the Father and Spirit is an implicit affirmation of the deity of its Messiah.

In all these ways the New Testament confesses Jesus as having divine qualities, even stepping up to the line of calling Jesus "God." But we have yet to examine the most convincing and powerful example, one that overshadows the entire chapter: The Church's liturgical habit of addressing Jesus as "Lord," *kyrios*. It is not coincidental that this practice dates as far back in the apostolic Church as we can recover historically, for the Church's first decades of reflection on Jesus were probably also the most fruitful.[10]

Kyrios has the same senses in Greek that "Lord" does in English: It can mean simply "Sir," or "Master," having no divine connotation (as in the British House of Lords). But the first Christians meant something far different when they called Jesus "Lord." Two bits of liturgical tradition preserved in Paul's letters prove it.

The first is a fragment of Aramaic Paul tosses in at the close of 1 Corinthians (16:22), without explanation *or even translation*: "*Marana tha*." "Our Lord, come!" This is significant because it refers so obviously to a Christian prayer from the Aramaic-speaking (thus Palestinian)

[10] Martin Hengel says that "one is tempted to say that more happened in this period of less than two decades than in the whole of the next seven centuries." See *The Son of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 2.

Church. These people were calling on Jesus of Nazareth to return, and calling him "Lord." Such a way of referring to Jesus must have been so widespread that Paul could quote it to a Greek-speaking Church without any embellishment. (Its Aramaic form proves it is more than just a prayer Paul taught the Corinthians himself.)

The second is a famous hymn Paul repeats (or perhaps writes) in Phil. 2:5-11, which concludes "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is *Lord*, to the glory of God the Father." This is a deliberate echo of God's own words in Isaiah 45:22-23:

> Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: *"To me* every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."

It is hard to imagine a more powerful claim to Jesus' divinity. Its use of *kyrios* plays upon the Septuagint's translation of *adonai*, the word that stands in for *YHWH* and is translated "Lord," linking Jesus ontologically with the God of Israel. Indeed, it appropriates *adonai* in one of the Old Testament's most striking affirmations of YHWH's *sole* divinity and *sole* claim on human loyalty. Phil. 2:5-11 takes an uncompromisingly monotheistic text that demands allegiance to YHWH alone, and inserts the name "Jesus" as a synonym for YHWH. The penalty for associating the wrong things with God was clear right in the text itself (Isa. 40:18-20, 41:5-10, 42:8, 42:17, 45:16-17, 45:20, 46:1-7). It may be the boldest orthodox hymn ever written.

Furthermore, Paul's use of the hymn is indirect. Paul's point is not to demonstrate that Jesus is Lord, but to exhort the Philippians to have the mind of Christ. As in 1 Cor. 16:22, Jesus' lordship is not being argued. It is presupposed, unquestioned, and undefended.

Finally, the hymn does not just affirm the divinity of some fellow named Jesus ben Joseph, but *confesses* the divinity of Jesus the Messiah, to whom the ends of the earth turn and are saved. Jesus' divinity is not just a claim for theologians to debate. It is a claim for salvation.

The Church's most fundamental confession is that "Jesus is Lord." Its few words make the same threefold claim as *Emmanuel*: God, is with, us. *Everything* informs and follows from the claim that Jesus is Lord: Trinity, pneumatology, creation, eschatology, ecclesiology, soteriology. So it is not surprising that already in the New Testament era, this combination of creed and doxology and prayer is being unpacked in profoundly different ways, especially (but not exclusively) by Paul:

–Here in Phil. 2 the claim is simultaneously ethical, doxological, narrative, and intertextually biblical: Because Jesus Christ is Lord, have Christ's mind. Work out your salvation as God works it out in you, for God worked out Jesus' salvation first.

–Paul uses the same confession in 1 Cor. 8:6 to repudiate the significance of idols, and thus of food offered to them. Here Jesus Christ's lordship and work in creation underwrites a radical affirmation of the profane world, and an ethic of charity towards those weak in faith (8:11). Likewise, in 1 Cor. 12:3 the confession illustrates the Spirit's common presence in all believers, undercutting the Corinthians' charismatic elitism. As his whole Corinthian correspondence can be seen as an unpacking of the phrase "the Lord Jesus Christ" (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:23), the phrase appropriately ends the discourse as one element of his triadic benediction (2 Cor. 13:14).

–In Rom. 10, agonizing over the future of Israel, Paul finds his answer in Deut. 30 (especially 30:14), which has been eschatologically fulfilled with Christ's coming. "The word is near you," he tells his readers – but the word that is near is the confession that Christ is Lord and risen from the dead, a word he has used to introduce and preview his entire argument (Rom. 1:4). The confession of Jesus' lordship and resurrection is Paul's hope for Israel's future.

–Luke shows Peter answering a homiletical question in a similar way: What is it to call on the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32)? It is to confess *Jesus* as Lord (Acts 2:36), a claim that yields Joel's promised salvation (Acts 2:38-39).

This is not some incidental feature of scattered New Testament passages, but marks the faith of the whole Church from its earliest times. In reading Israel's Scriptures, then its own, the Church's ultimate hermeneutic centers on this same confession.[11] Likewise, the most powerful argument for Jesus' divinity in the following few centuries is not this or that biblical prooftext, but the Christian practice of *worshipping* the risen Lord Jesus, and the Church's hope in *salvation through him alone*.[12]

A church of Jews, raised on the Shema's uncompromising claim that YHWH *alone* is God, is calling the risen Jesus *kyrios*. Those who have grown up Christian rarely appreciate how radical it is for such people to have done this. Perhaps today only Jewish and Muslim converts truly understand the fundamental transformation that happened among these people, and that unfolds even today as their witness is repeated and carried to the ends of the earth.

Arius' "Solution"

If this way of understanding Christianity's transformation of faith is only truly open to such converts, another way is open to the rest of us. We can explore the *failure* of Christian faith – its repeated surrender to other confessions in the face of their logics.[13] Early in the Church's history, these were often failures to appreciate the distinctions between Christian faith and its Jewish parents – hence the legalism of the Galatians and the Spirit-Christology of the

[11] See Telford Work, "The Confession of Christ as Hermeneutical Norm," Wheaton Theology Conference, 2001.
[12] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation.*

[13] Why else would the cataloguing of Christological heresies be more popular among those of us at home in the Church's cultural center, than among those of us who have migrated into Christian faith from the worlds of Judaism and Islam? [THIS IS A REALLY TENTATIVE POINT – BUT INTERESTING. WORTH PURSUING? OR CUT IT?]

Ebionites.[14] However, as the Gospel reached the nations, Christian witness soon become overwhelmingly Gentile witness, and so the Christological failures of succeeding centuries were capitulations to the worlds of Gentiles that failed to appreciate the Jewishness of Christian faith.[15] There are hundreds of such mistakes in the history of Christianity. To preserve our focus, we will concentrate on the most powerful: the teaching of Arius of Alexandria.

Arianism arose out of respect for a conviction that the Catholic understanding of incarnation violates God's transcendence and monarchy. If Jesus were truly "light from light, true God from true God," this could only be in a derivative, incomplete sense.[16] Begetting must be a temporal process that could only yield a *similarity* of substance (*homoiousion*) between the Creator and the creature. Thomas F. Torrance offers a first-rate description of Arius' theology:

> [Arius] had taught that owing to its utterly unique, eternal and transcendent nature, the being of the one God is unknowable, undifferentiated and incommunicable, which necessarily ruled out of consideration the idea of a Son or Word as another being who is eternally of the same nature as God himself, for that would mean that God's being is divisible and even plural. That there might be another being beside the Father, the unoriginated source of all reality, was only conceiveable to Arius if it were brought into existence out of nothing. Hence he taught that the Son or Word of God is not from the Father but was created out of nothing through an act of his will and, although he was adopted by God as a Son, he is no sense proper to the being of God, equal to him, or for that matter of the same being (*homoousios*). On the contrary, like all things created out of nothing he is altogether alien and different from the being and propriety of the Father. It follows from this that the Father is ineffable and quite incomprehensible to the Son or Word, so that the Son or Word cannot have or mediate any authentic knowledge of God, for he can know and understand only what is 'in proportion to his own measure' as a creature. Moreover, Arius held that ... as the created intermediary between God and man, the Logos was regarded as neither properly divine nor properly creaturely.[17]

[14] However, the history of Ebionism is far too shadowy to allow us confidence on its particulars.
[15] Judaism was of course already Hellenized by the first century, so the distinctions between these varieties of heresy should not be overemphasized. But important distinctions remain.
[16] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 121-122.
[17] Torrance, 118.

Arianism, in Torrance's judgment, "so confused truth and error that it sinned against both essential poles of evangelical belief, and was particularly damaging to the saving message of the Gospel for it was guilty of ebionite and docetic error at the same time."[18]

The irony of Arianism is that this ostensive respect for God's transcendence was in fact a basic violation of it. Arianism was popular as an account of the divinity and humanity of Jesus, and remains popular today. Yet what makes it so persuasive is its rootedness in the Hellenistic notion of "creation" as *emanation*. Gnostic sects had long flourished that had seen Jesus as *merely* an intermediary between God and humanity, a "middle manager" in the cosmic hierarchy of being, whose unparalleled proximity to the unapproachable God made him uniquely able to deal with God on behalf of humanity. Far from challenging this earlier vision of Jesus, Arianism depends on it. Our world is "distant" from God. Jesus' world is "closer," making him an appropriate interface. The "firstborn of all creation" is a God-like creature, an archangel of sorts, whose divine likeness-in-unlikeness allows him to slip into a shell of human flesh and represent the world beyond. As "created deity" or "divine creature," the Son alone could reach across the distance separating the eternal Father and his transient cosmos.

Or could he? Athanasius' brilliant argument in *Against the Arians* capitalizes on the contradiction between the Son's mediatorial role in the Arian hierarchy, and the dissimilarity Arians stressed between Son and Father. It meant that Arianism was undermining the very continuities between God and creation that its logic presupposed.

Patristic theology adopted a different strategy from its rivals, rejecting Jesus as the middle rung in a ladder to the Father. At Nicea, the first ecumenical council confessed Jesus as being truly and essentially divine, *and* truly and essentially human. The decisive move for those

[18] Torrance, 115-116.

who acknowledged Jesus as divine without qualification was to confess that Jesus is "of the same being with the Father" (*homoousion tô patri*). By *identifying* rather than merely *comparing* the Son's essence and the Father's, the Nicenes used the category of substance in a very un-Arian way. There *is* no ladder. This basic difference with Alexandria's subordinationist tradition has not always been appreciated.

The power of Nicene Christology is its respect for the scandalous power of apostolic faith, which utterly overturns the notion of similarity on which the Platonistic, Gnostic, and Arian visions depend. God is *not* quantitatively distant from the world, so that a series of intermediaries could overcome the distance by splitting the difference. God and the world are not apples and oranges, whose unbridgeable differences still respect overarching similarities of essence. Jesus cannot be a God-like creature, because *creatures cannot be God-like*: "You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall now bow down to them or serve them; for I YHWH your God am a jealous God" (Ex. 20:4-5). God "alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no human has ever seen or can see, to whom be honor and eternal dominion" (1 Tim. 6:16). Whatever incarnation is, it is not the creation of an intermediate species between the divine apple and the human orange. It does not split the difference between substances, because the difference between *these* substances cannot be split. The consequence of Arius' presuppositions, even if never taken to his conclusions, is exactly the opposite of what one might expect: It either anthropomorphizes God, or theomorphizes humanity. We might put the distinction between Arianism and Nicene Christology in a Kierkegaardian way: Only the latter fully respects the *infinite* qualitative distinction between God and humanity.

The Eastern Church's Platonized religious sensibilities, inherited culturally and sharpened theologically by *logos* Christology, provided enough room within the Arian camp either to stress Jesus' dissimilarity (*heteroousion*) with the Father, or his similarity (*homoiousion*). So given a choice between Nicene Trinitarianism and Arian subordinationism, many at first tried to split the difference. A conservative "semi-Arian" position grew in popularity in the decades following Nicea, enjoying sporadic backing from Arian emperors.[19] It took the intervening years between Nicea (325) and the second ecumenical council at Constantinople (381) to win over these "moderates" to Nicea's entirely different way of thinking.

Even then, the victory may have been incomplete, for this semi-Arian "middle ground" is really a radical form of the ancient and dangerous notion of ontological hierarchy: a chain of being that stretches from the created order to the Creator. Moderate, "orthodox" forms of this metaphysics would soon become immensely popular. They remain so to this day. Lutherans call them "theologies of glory" (see below, Holy Saturday).

Nicea and Chalcedon: The Triumph of Substance

The Nicenes skipped explicit nature language for Jesus' humanity, confessing only that Jesus, "for us human beings and for our salvation … became human." But by 451, nature-language had been pressed into service on behalf of Jesus' humanity too. The occasion was a new generation of theologians whose attempted affirmations of Nicene Christology abused its grammar of substance. One party, the Alexandrian, tended to repeat Arius' (and Origen's) error of commensurating – comparing – the human and divine substances. Its Eutychians, or "Monophysites," taught the incarnation as a fusion or change of the formerly divine and human

[19] Frances Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991), 47.

essences into one new one. This abuse provoked the objections of Antiochians (who tended instead to misuse the grammar of personhood, a topic for the next chapter).

The definition of Chalcedon addresses the concerns and problems of both camps by clarifying the use of substance for Jesus. It confesses the Lord Jesus Christ as "perfect both in deity (*theotêti*) and in humanity (*anthrôpotêti*) … truly God and truly human … of the same substance with God (*homoousion tô patri*) with respect to his divinity, and of the same substance with ours (*homoousion hêmin*) with respect to his humanity. … We know this one and only Christ – Son, Lord, only-begotten – in two natures (*duo physesin*)." Chalcedon's use of *ousia* acknowledges the divinity and humanity of Jesus while preserving them from confusion, change, division, or separation.

The theological offensive coincided with a liturgical offensive. Geoffrey Wainwright characterizes the fourth century as a time of a basic Catholic shift away from futurist eschatology. And "as the Church settled into the present world and made itself at home in history," it began to "sanctify time" by appropriating the holy days of pagans. Our first record of Christmas is in 354, right between the Nicene and Constantinopolitan councils and well into the era of Constantinianism. Among the liturgical innovations that accompanied the Church's full embrace of Trinitarian and incarnational theology was the prominence of new festivals on December 25 and January 6, commemorating the incarnation of the Word. (An even more striking innovation was the adoption of a new formula glorifying the Father *and* the Son *with* the Holy Spirit, defended by Basil the Great in *On the Holy Spirit* as a natural and complementary outgrowth of the old formula of glorifying the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit.) The Church's older, more conservative habits were giving way to a bold affirmation of the full divinity of Son and Spirit. In *On the Trinity*, Augustine soon took a further step, emphasizing the

shared substance of the divine persons and putting subordinationism ever farther on Christianity's margins.

It worked. Arians, Adoptionists, and Docetists, whose philosophical and theological commitments overdetermined their interpretation of Jesus' lordship, were condemned as confessing another gospel than the gospel of the universal, apostolic Church. The first four ecumenical councils (Nicea in 325, Constantinople in 381, Ephesus in 431, and Chalcedon in 451) remain the most respected collective acts of Christian leadership since the apostolic era, and their Christological canons the most widely binding.

Chalcedonian Christology was overwhelmingly successful in the Middle Ages, creating a soteriology of divinization in the Orthodox East and a soteriology of satisfaction in the Catholic West. Divinization, a "soteriology of Christmas," centered in Athanasius' bold claim that "he assumed humanity that we might become God"[20] and embracing a sacramental vision of the universe redeemed from its own corruption by its transcendent and now also immanent Creator. Anselm's satisfaction theory proceeded from, and in turn grounded, a vision of Jesus whose dual nature made him not merely a righteous representative of unrighteous humanity, but a substitute whose merit compensated for the debt of honor sinning humanity had accumulated towards God. In East and West, respectively, the power of these logics overcame the older visions of salvation (such as ransom theory) that had drawn only crudely on the grammar of incarnation.[21] Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology became basic to the Church's understanding of its faith. Far from being an add-on that had stolen its appeal from Roman paganism, Christmas had truly found its place in the Christian calendar.

Victory, Defeat, or Stalemate? Chalcedon Endlessly Reconsidered

[20] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, chapter 54 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1953), 93.
[21] See below under the heading of Good Friday.

Yet this course was tortuous. It had to wind its way through the intrigues of imperial politics and the difficulties and the failures of the Greek and Latin worlds to speak with one voice. It created a new set of ways to understand the relationship between human and divine in Jesus, as well as new ways to misunderstand and compromise Jesus' humanity, divinity, and unity. Thus it left many Christians behind and estranged, both within and (especially) without the Roman Empire. And many who have grown up in the Nicene fold have abandoned it for alternative Christologies – not just Nestorianism and oriental "Monophysitism," but also Islam and its unitarian Western counterparts, Mormonism, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, New Age docetism, Oneness Pentecostalism, radically apophatic "Quietism," nominally orthodox apathy, and many others. *We* are the ones who have been confused, changed, divided, and separated!

Nicenes often shrug off these movements as indirectly proving their point about the importance of two-natures Christology, and insofar as these other traditions hedge their affirmations of Jesus' humanity, divinity, and unity, the Nicenes are right. A failure to appreciate the profundity of the fundamental Christian confession that "Jesus is Lord" helps explain the repeated failures among Christians to confess Jesus' humanity and divinity with the Bible's own clarity. The earliest Christian heresies, Ebionitism, Docetism, and Arianism, were denials of one (or in the case of Arianism, both) of these affirmations. In different ways, each of these groups denied what the apostolic Church's experience of Jesus Christ had taught it: that this Nazarene man somehow *truly* belonged to both the divine and human realms.[22]

[22] Helpful surveys of the Nicene era in Christology include, in increasing levels of difficulty, Frances Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991), John P. Galvin, "Jesus Christ," in Francis Schlüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), and Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995). [LIST].

Yet later students of Christology have blamed not only the heretics, and the imperial authorities who were sometimes more interested in political unity than theological accuracy, but the orthodox themselves. The problem may not merely be the overly Platonized worldviews of Adoptionists, Docetists, and Arians. The problem – in part, anyway – may lie in the overly Platonized category of substance itself. This was, after all, an extrabiblical innovation. More importantly, it was a category Arians and Nicenes could agree upon enough to argue over!

The appeal to substance moved Nicene Christology to a new level of debate, and a new set of risks. It opened up a world of new rules for guarding the proper relationship among Jesus' humanity and divinity (Chalcedon), and new possibilities for compromising it (Apollinarianism, Eutychianism, Monotheletism, and Nestorianism). Some of these parties, both pro-Nicene and anti-Nicene, have continued to carry on campaigns against Chalcedon's compromise formula. Are the tireless opponents of Nicene and Chalcedonian Christology not evidence of its *weakness* as well as evidence of its power?

If substance is part of the problem, and not just part of the solution, then a further problem arises: Can the era's theology really be distinguished so neatly from the stomach-turning details of Roman imperial politics? Roman politics was comfortable with the Platonistic analogy of being, as it tied the world together under a One whose authority might emanate also through the imperial throne. Is the law of prayer really driving the law of faith, or is the law of the realm driving both? It was Constantine himself who allegedly suggested the use of *homoousion*. The connection between Constantianian politics and Nicene faith was underlined twelve hundred years later, when the radical Reformation both abandoned Constantinian politics and experimented with innovative Christologies.[23]

[23] This has been a persistent if rare feature of baptist Christology, from Menno Simons in the sixteenth century to James McClendon in the twentieth.

New Quests in Christology

Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology survived these challenges, becoming renewed and even strengthened in the Reformation era (particularly among Lutherans). But it had not faced its final opponent. Three successive revolutions of authority – the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment – gradually overturned Europe's medieval deference toward Holy Rome and its Holy Tradition. With their arrival, a new approach to studying Jesus presented itself: historical criticism. Three or so "quests for the historical Jesus" adopted modernistic historiographical criteria, rather than patristic or scholastic methods, for understanding Jesus. Some of these have been more suspicious of or antagonistic to Nicene categories (the first and third quests) than others (the second or new quest).[24] But the most striking feature of the modern quests for the historical Jesus is how little conversation they usually have with Nicene and Chalcedonian Christology. The two have taken places side-by-side in modern theological tradition. John P. Galvin's history of modern life-of-Jesus research ("Historical Foundations") follows his history of ancient and medieval Christology ("Classical Christology and Soteriology") as if the two have nothing to say to each other. Only after reviewing both does he appeal to the constructive work of two contemporary theologians, Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx. It would seem that we need systematic theology just to *compare* premodern and modern reflection on Jesus; synthesizing them is out of the question.[25]

Some of the incommensurability owes to the different focus of each project. And this may be a symptom of an even larger trend. Where incarnation is the focus of much patristic thought, and incarnation and crucifixion the most popular medieval focus, the focus of contemporary life-of-Jesus research is Jesus' public life, and the resurrection is the focus of the

[24] Helpful guides to modern life-of-Jesus research include….
[25] Galvin, 262ff.

most recent orthodox Christology.[26] One can read this shift as another symptom of the Church's continuing dissatisfaction with two-natures Christology, and its growing preference for two-stage (*i.e.*, "economic" or "historical") Christology. Is the Church outgrowing Nicea?

It would be unsettling if it were, for Nicea seems to be one of the strongest institutions keeping the Church aware of its unity *as* "the Church." Fundamental to the twentieth century's ecumenical progress has been a mutual recognition among Christian communities of their common fidelity to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.[27] Certainly many orthodox Christians (myself included) are not about to abandon classical Christology,[28] and find unpersuasive the arguments directed radically against it. An implicit two-natures Christology as the anchor of a genuinely Trinitarian witness would seem to be the very center of Church unity, catholicity, and apostolicity. Yet again, anti-Nicene, anti-creedal, and "a-Nicene" modern Christian movements are locked out of ecumenical reconciliation as long as two-natures language remains the Christological standard. Are *all* adherents to these other ways of confessing Jesus as Lord, Christ, and Savior really outside the fellowship of saints?[29] If the principle of church unity lies elsewhere (as even the WCC's use of the Nicene Creed suggests),[30] then is there a more fruitful way to confess together the lordship of our brother Jesus of Nazareth? Is there a way that better respects the *limits* of the category of substance, whatever its continuing strengths may be?

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[26] Galvin, 323.

[27] See *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as It Is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, Faith and Order Paper No. 153 (Geneva: WCC, 1991), especially paragraphs 12-17.

[28] A helpful and accessible case for the continuing relevance of the categories and superiority of the Nicene position is C. FitzSimons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy: An Affirmation of Christian Orthodoxy* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1994).

[29] The question is particularly sharp in my denomination, The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, where Oneness Pentecostals are concerned.

[30] Especially paragraph 13, which still expresses hope that representatives of non-creedal churches might confess the Nicene creed on special occasions.

One apparent solution is the *via negativa*: denial that Christians can know or speak of a divine essence that is, in Barth's words, "wholly other" from our own. As we have already hinted, even before Chalcedon this has been understood to be a necessary dimension of Chalcedonian Christology. The Cappadocians make it "commonplace to distinguish the divine *ousia* (substance), or what God is in Godself, from the divine *energaeiai* (energies), or what God is toward us."[31] The creation, including the human creation that is Jesus' human nature, exists at an infinite structural remove from the divine nature, which is ineffable, unnameable, and unspeakable.[32] In the East, the distinction between essence and energies hardens further in the apophatic or negative theology of Dionysius and Gregory Palamas.[33] The medieval West is more kataphatic or affirmative. Augustine stresses that of all essences, God alone is to be enjoyed and not used.[34] Yet this seminal Trinitarian thinker still speaks of God's ineffability, though ironically.[35] Thomas Aquinas grants that the divine essence, though knowable, is still incomprehensible.[36] The modern Catholicism that follows him remain open to embracing a relatively affirmative school of metaphysics. On the other hand, the Protestant West retreats to the more radically apophatic: The hidden God of Luther the nominalist, Calvin's iconoclasm, and Barth's rejection of the Analogy of Being all radically circumscribe what can be reliably claimed of divine nature. Across this spectrum of these Chalcedonian thinkers, the applicability of the word "substance" for both God and humanity is no ground for claims of similarity.

It is surprising only at first to find a postmodern Catholic, Jean-Luc Marion, taking the even more radical turn in rejecting *all* categories of "being" for God. He maintains that the very

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[31] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 39.
[32] LaCugna on Gregory of Nyssa, 56.
[33] LaCugna, 72. The criticisms of her account of the Cappadocian and Augustinian Trinitarian traditions do not call into question the basic distinction she describes between unknowable divine essence and knowable divine economy.
[34] *On Christian Doctrine* 1.III.3-1.V.5.
[35] *On Christian Doctrine* 1.VI.6.
[36] *Summa Theologica* 1Q12A1, 7.

language of substance, and not merely particular abuses of it, is an idol. Metaphysics itself manufactures a "God" that violates the transcendence of God. Moderns use "being" in an impoverished, existential way that refuses to see more than their own world, creating in the process "that god whose space of manifestation is measured by what portion of it a gaze can bear – precisely, an idol."[37] Their idea of "God" is Kantian modernity's idea of the "God" by which human beings guide themselves as the moral authors of their world. It begins "not from the nature – if there is one – of God, but indeed from human *Dasein*'s experience of it."[38] A thin ray of light passes through a hole in the ceiling of a dark room, and those inside mistake it for the whole sun.

The modern grammar of substance refuses the "infinite depth that crosses" the icon between eternity and time who is Jesus Christ.[39] But Marion's analysis does not impugn merely the Kants, Nietzsches and Feuerbachs who are "God's" modern champions and enemies. "Another infinitely more radical critique arises here … it wonders whether idolatry does not affect as much, or more, the conceptual discourse that pretends to accede positively to God. … Saint Thomas implements such an identification [between the apologetic concept of "God" and God himself] by an 'id quod omnes nominunt'…. In both [conceptual atheism and apologetics], human discourse determines God."[40] It is fitting for this argument to come from a Catholic because Marion's critique depends on a particular grammar of substance, on a specific interpretation of the Thomistic analogy of being.

Does Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology really use *ousia* in this way? There Jesus' human essence is not a rung in the ladder of being that extends to his divine essence. Richard Bauckham

[37] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 14.
[38] Marion, 31.
[39] Marion, 21.
[40] Marion, 33.

is right to defend the narrative, Trinitarian use of *ousia* against the charge that it is a capitulation to Greek categories.[41] The use of *ousia* for both divinity and humanity, while parallel, does no more than *esse*, "essence," does in Thomas' *On Being and Essence*: it must merely "signify something common to all natures, by means of which (natures) diverse beings are placed into diverse genera and species," and which "can in any way be grasped by the intellect."[42] An essence classifies, or refuses to classify, diverse things into commonalities. Even critics of essence use language just this way in their everyday lives, "as if the substance-attribute distinction were an absolutely valid one," remarks John McIntyre. "They seem to be, by their speech, as committed to the basic Aristotelian language structure as the Philosopher himself."[43]

Arians refused to classify either Jesus' preexistent being together with the One who sent him, or his physical being truly together with his human relations. Arian "moderates" acknowledged similarities (*homoiousion*), but no more, while Arian "radicals" would only acknowledge distinctions (*heteroousion*). The Nicene and Chalcedonian bishops made two different associations, and *only two*: with respect to his divinity, the Son and the Father are common; with respect to his humanity, the second Adam is common with the first. The two communities are not compared, nor necessarily comparable. This was a carefully narrow use of *ousia*, avoiding the Platonistic, Gnostic, Origenist, and Arian connotations that forced divine and human natures into a monistic metacommunity. It could resist the metaphysical apologetics that through Augustine, then Anselm, then Thomas, then Descartes and Kant, would become

[41] Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 78-79.
[42] Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, 6, 9, in Joseph Bobik, trans., *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1965), 44-45.
[43] John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 104.

Marion's idolatry of being. Thus Luther, Barth, and Marion – and even Thomas himself?[44] – can identify the Son and the Father, yet refuse to "chain God to being."[45]

We have seen, however, how thoroughly *ousia* must be rehabilitated in order to identify without chaining. The Chalcedonian formula might be called a strict set of rules to keep us from abusing the categories. We have also seen something more disturbing – how frequently *ousia* has been pressed into service before its rehabilitation is complete. Are not all those rules, heresies, technical terms, divisions, perplexed students, and cynical pastors evidence of a Christological grammar that is simply too complex and high-maintenance to be worth the hassle? Perhaps the Christological reign of "essence," however understandable historically, should come to an end.

What would then reign in its place? Against "essence" and its qualifying *via negativa* some propose a more positive alternative way. "Two-natures Christology has had its day, and we need not return to it save as to a monument of what has gone before."[46] Postliberal theology holds up a "new," but really ancient, way of speaking of Jesus: narrative.

This narrative, the Church's biblical and postbiblical narrative, has in fact been two irreducible narratives: One of a lost, penitent, rescued humanity, whose center is God's people Israel; and the other of a holy, compassionate, rescuing God, whose focus is the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. James McClendon follows P.T. Forsyth's *Person and Place of Jesus Christ* to name the former "*plêrosis*, the divine fulfillment in human life," and the latter "*kenosis*, the self-giving of God."[47] These two stories – or these two ways of telling one story – are permanently two,

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[44] "By displaying God as the source of whatever else there is, the five ways [to prove the existence of God in *Summa Theologica* 1Q2] signal the *difference* between God and all else. Thomas conceived God as altogether other than creation. For this reason, at this stage of the *Summa*'s argument, Thomas hlds that we can know not what God is, but only what God is not…" (McClendon 1994, 300).

[45] While Marion "suspects" Thomist apologetics of idolatry, but is willing to entertain his acquittal on the basis of Thomas' identification of essence with being in God alone. Thus Marion says Thomas refuses to "chain God to Being" or "chain God to metaphysics" (xxiii).

[46] McClendon 1994, 276.

[47] McClendon 1994, 275.

naming two eternal distinction: between Creator and creature, and between Redeemer and redeemed.

Jesus' divinity distinguishes the twoness of his story from the twoness in other creatures' narrative. In the latter, God plays two parts, but always at some remove.

> God is never 'in' [Joseph's] brothers' wickedness in the way God is 'in' Joseph's subsequent forgiveness of the brothers. Meanwhile, Joseph himself often leaves something to be desired: After all, he had been the insufferable brat who had provoked his brothers' hatred, and still in Egypt that insufferable quality may sometimes have reappeared.

In Jesus' narrative, the parts are different.

> When we come to Jesus, though, these blemishes in Joseph the type disappear. … Evil is still present in the narrative about Jesus…. Yet for the place of God in Jesus' own story, *no qualifiers are needed;* the action of Jesus is God's action; what Jesus suffers, God suffers.

Jesus is the single subject in whom the two stories converge completely, in whose story God acknowledges his own. And in this convergent story of Jesus, the human and divine narratives are forever brought into one gospel, without being dissolved into it.[48]

This is not a docetic narrative where God acts temporarily in a humanlike way. It is not an Ebionite narrative where Jesus is merely a new Moses or David, enjoying the Spirit's presence upon him as Israel's prophets always had.

Is it an Adoptionist narrative, in which Jesus' difference is (at first) only that he is sinless? McClendon does not mean it to be; but here we wonder. He admits that his account cannot "speak of an infant Jesus in full possession of all human and divine powers. The babe rather possesses the promise of the life that God will acknowledge, finally, as God's own."[49] But

[48] McClendon 1994, 276-277. The "stories" or "perspectives" as McClendon narrates them are hardly innovations; they echo the two-stage Christology of Luther and the narrative Christology of Barth, which McClendon explicitly appreciates (264).

[49] McClendon 1994, 277. McClendon's denial that Jesus does not fully possess all human and divine powers does not really address the issue, since even human infants are not in full possession of their ultimate human powers.

he refuses to associate it with the historical adoptionists' claims that "God held out divine sonship as a reward to the first successful claimant, and … Jesus won the race."[50] That is a soteriology of merit. McClendon's is a soteriology of pure grace. McClendon might call our suspicion of adoptionism a false problem, brought to the biblical text by both the alien "heretical" grammar of Monarchianism and the alien "orthodox" grammar of essence. And in a sense, he would be absolutely right: Antiochian "Adoptionism" comes to us through these grammars.

Yet McClendon's narrative Christology speaks of Jesus' pre-existence only as the eternity of God's *intentions* to identify with Jesus in exaltation. Jesus' pre-existence is Jesus' election, his predestination to lordship (McClendon cites Eph. 1:4).[51] It is this choice *in* and *for whom* (in and for *which*?) all things were made. The birth narratives (and arguably the entirety of Israel's prior canonical history) are temporal anticipations of that world-making event, and should not be taken as any more than "valuable, if subsidiary, parts of the full story." They point to "the full presence of God in the full story of Jesus."[52] Likewise, the *kenôsis* hymn of Phil. 2 is the story of a second Adam, creating anew the image of God in humble obedience and dominical exaltation.[53] And the Johannine Prologue is no claim of Jesus' *personal* pre-existence, but only calls Jesus "God's utterance," "the Word that God spoke in sending Jesus Christ … the word at human scale."[54] Here too, his pre-existence is the eternity of God's intentions for him and through him.

Setting the Story

[50] McClendon 1994, 272.
[51] McClendon 1994, 248, 272.
[52] McClendon 1994, 269-270.
[53] McClendon 1994, 266-269.
[54] McClendon 1994, 288-290.

McClendon's readings of John 1:1-18 and Phil. 2:5-11 are plausible, though minority, positions. But other witnesses make it clear that Jesus' pre-existence is more than just Jesus' eternal election. John repeatedly links Jesus' "coming from God" (John 8:42, 13:3, 16:27-28, 17:8) to his future "going to God." Jesus humbles himself and washes his disciples' feet because he knows "that he had come from God and was going to God" (13:3). After all the allegories and figures, Jesus finally speaks his plainly (!) to his friends: "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father" (16:28). The uniqueness of Jesus' coming into the world manifests his only (*monogenês*) Sonship and God's Fatherhood,[55] and his ascent is the ground for extending God's Fatherhood to all who are in Christ, so that "my Father" may be "your Father" (John 20:17-18).[56]

Life is to be found in the Johannine Jesus, for "the living Father" who sent him (John 6:57), "who has life in himself," has granted the Son also to "have life in himself" (John 5:26).[57] This much is clear throughout John's gospel. What the Prologue also makes clear (clearer than the Philippian hymn)[58] is that from the time of the first creation, life *was* (1:3) also to be found in the Johannine Word who became flesh and dwelt among among his own people. This is the backstory of the incarnational narrative.

McClendon rightly agrees with Hans Frei that Jesus' resurrection is the key to his identity.[59] But in John, and elsewhere in Paul, and in Matthew and Luke, the resurrection points

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[55] Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 134.
[56] Thompson, 136.
[57] Thompson, 139f.
[58] However, the hymn in the Colossian letter, which I take to be authentically Pauline, makes just such "Johannine" moves: All things were and have been made in and through and for the Son, *and* all things are reconciled made anew in his crucifixion and resurrection, so that Jesus is "the firstborn" (*prôtotokos*) and "beginning" (*archê*) of all creation (Col. 1:15-20, cf. Rev. 3:14), "for in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1:19). Claims of full divinity coincide with claims of pre-existence *and* resurrection.
[59] Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Basis of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 139ff.

backward to more than mere intention. It points to One whose comings are like his goings, whose ascents are like his descents. It points to an eternal *logos* who is "personal" after all. Jesus is proclaimed Son at his baptism (Matt. 3:17, Luke 3:22) and resurrection (Rom. 1:4), because he is Son already (Matt. 2:2, 2:15, Luke 1:35, 1:43, 2:11, Col. 1:3-20). The resurrection points not merely to "the full presence of God in the full story of Jesus" – the first Christians worshipped *Jesus*, not his "story," as *kyrios* – but to *him* in whom "the fulness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9), to *him* who had glory with the Father before the world was made (John 17:5). "*I* am … the life" (John 14:6).

McClendon is further proof that anti-Constantinian polity and revisionist Christology often go hand-in-hand. Menno Simons would be proud (though his dependence upon Chalcedonian Christology would not go uncorrected!).[60] But McClendon is also further proof that Alexandrian Christology is on to something crucial in insisting on an identification of *essence* between Son and Father, an identification that precedes Jesus' messianic career and even his birth. Whether or not the paths taken by theological essentialism were entirely healthy – or healthy at all – they rightly strive to respect a quality of Jesus' story that Mark the evangelist and his Antiochian champions do not fully portray.

Galvin's account of a Christological tradition that has moved over the centuries from incarnation through death, ministry, and now resurrection is an interesting contrast with the likely trajectory of apostolic Christology, which moved in the exact opposite direction (see below, Easter). The raising of Jesus from the dead cast new light upon his death, a fundamental reappraisal visible from the first strands of "apostolic preaching."[61] This train of thought, dominant in the decades that produced the Pauline epistles, in turn informed the Church's

[60] Cf. McClendon 1994, 257.
[61] C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (New York: Harper, 1951).

investigations and meditations regarding the words and deeds of Jesus' public ministry, yielding the Gospel-shaped narrative of Mark. And Mark's triumphs and irritations arguably provoked all three of the other evangelists to author their own narratives of Jesus' life.[62] These narratives each meditated, differently and ever more deeply, on the beginnings of that life. So before the apostolic *kerygma* of Jesus' atoning death and resurrection, Mark placed baptismal and itinerancy narratives. And before these, Matthew inserted genaeology and infancy narratives, Luke a conception narrative, and John a foreword on Jesus' pre-existence. As if gazing at a masterpiece, each evangelist steps farther back in admiration, seeking a perspective that will put each detail in its proper place.

The light of resurrection focused the Church's witness of Jesus so rapidly and brilliantly that twenty centuries of subsequent investigators have struggled to keep up. As the evangelists show us the masterpiece, we rush forward to examine its details, fixing back on the center and forgetting to listen to their commentary. Who needs docents? We can see for ourselves!

Historical criticism, supposedly so appreciative of context, has much to learn from postliberal Christology's appreciation for *narrative* context.[63] In the gospels, the coming of Jesus is narrated in terms of an extraordinary pre-history and birth. Nicea and Chalcedon aim to respect the past as well as the present and future of Jesus Christ. Their methods have left many heads spinning and many disciples excommunicated, but these methods arise out of a conviction that history, narrative, experience,[64] and metaphysics are not necessarily competitors. These genres coexist peacefully in the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian definition: It is the divine Son, the One of two natures, who was conceived, born, sojourned, manifested to us, died, was raised,

[62] I cannot help but wonder that if Mark had written a less objectionable gospel, his text would have fewer than three endings, and the Church would have had fewer than four canonical gospels!
[63] See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale, 1974).
[64] [Develop throughout?]

appeared, ascended, and is coming again. Some of the terms may be new, but the juxtaposition itself is rooted in the Johannine Prologue and the Church's earliest hymnody, for which Jesus' new creation is a perfection of his work of old creation. The Word's acquisition of human nature is a narrative event (John 1:14), and a historical one as well. McClendon's single subject of two narratives seems more a translation of Chalcedon than an alternative to it.

The basic compatibility of metaphysics and historical narrative does not, however, excuse us from the task of countering the abuses of both. Above all, it seems that Chalcedonian Christology runs the opposite risks – in no way unique to it – of under-translation and over-translation. On the one hand, the metaphysics can slip away from the narrative. The casualties here are the stunned students who fill my introductory Christology classes, who struggle to see how lists of ancient heresies and foreign technical terms have to do with the Jesus in their Bibles (let alone the one on their T-shirts and bracelets). On the other hand, the metaphysics can determine the narrative. These casualties are, ironically, many of the same students, who are perplexed to learn that Jesus' divinity does not necessarily entail his incarnate omniscience (cf. Luke 2:52, below). Their exposure to the basic grammar of incarnation has caused them, like linguistic neophytes, to "overcorrect." Even if Chalcedon belongs to a different world, we have brought more of it along with us than we often realize.

"Born"

Another way of appreciating Christology's harmony of metaphysics and narrative has been with us since the patristic rise of natures-Christology, and has stayed with us through Chalcedon's modern eclipse. It has even outlived the rises and falls of the academy's quests for the historical Jesus, which have had little use for the Bible's birth narratives. It is the celebration

of Christmas, the Nicenes' liturgical answer to Arianism – yet it is a practice instituted in a forgotten shepherds' field rather than Constantine's Rome (Luke 2:8-20).

Jesus "was born of the Virgin Mary." The prominence of his mother and the special circumstances of his conception have often caused us to emphasize the last part of the phrase: "born *of the Virgin Mary*." It is the *virgin* birth of Jesus (or at least his virginal conception) that is one of fundamentalism's Five Fundamentals. But Jesus' birth is theologically significant in and of itself: "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children" (Gal. 4:4-5, Christmas Sunday, *Revised Common Lectionary*, Year B). A key to Jesus' self-emptying is his "being born in the likeness of human beings" (Phil. 2:7).

Matthew's birth narrative really is a *birth* narrative. Of all the generations in Matthew's genaeology, only one mentions birth: "of whom Jesus was born" (1:16). The emphasis continues: "the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way" (1:18); "she will bear a son" (1:21, cf. Isa. 7:14); "he knew her not until she had borne a son" (1:25); "when Jesus was born in Bethlehem" (2:1); "where the Christ was to be born" (2:4). Matthew's wise men come to behold "the one born king of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2; cf. Isa. 62:2, Christmas Sunday, Year B).

The contexts make it clear that for Matthew, Jesus' birth is the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel (Matt. 1:17). More than Jesus' conception, it is the dramatic inauguration of the Christ's story. This is true even in Luke, who has already devoted so much attention to the events leading up to Jesus' birth (Luke 2:13-14). It is Luke 2, not Luke 1, that stresses the cosmic and not merely Israelite import of Jesus (2:1; 2:31-32, Christmas Sunday, Year B). Christmas is not about *essence* so much as it is about *arrival* – the sending of God's redemption to his people

(Ps. 147:12-20, Second Sunday after Christmas, Years A, B, and C). "O come, O come, Emmanuel, to ransom captive Israel!"

As a way to name God without Being, Marion proposes love (*agapê*). While accepting Aratus' claim that in God "we live and move and have our being," Paul emphasizes that being is a gift given from the Giver of everything (Acts 17:24-28).[65] The God who crosses Being to being – "creating *ousia*" to "created *ousia*" – does so only by submitting Being to death on a cross, in an *agapê* that passes all understanding.[66] And this, we may add, only by *first* submitting Being to being, to humble birth in the stable outside of an inconsequential town of an oppressed people. Christmas is not only a delivery *by* God as *giver*, but *the* delivery *of* God as *gift* (Luke 1:43). Its annual gifts are given to commemorate a gift received (Matt. 2:11).

Yet Christmas is not some false arrival of a docetic phantom or Arian archangel. It is the *delivery* of *God* as gift, no third party but God's own self, in the only way frail and sinning humanity can receive it. Among Jesus' ancestors, Matthew emphasizes women with inconvenient witnesses: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah, and finally Mary.[67] "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death…. It is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect" (Heb. 2:14-17, Christmas Sunday, Year A). Incarnation is the ontological self-expression of God as love. "It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them" (Isa. 63:9, Christmas Sunday, Year A).

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[65] Marion, 100-101.
[66] Marion, 106.
[67] "For Calvin, Tamar was a sign of the reality of the self-emptying and humiliation of Christ; for Luther, she was a sign that Christ had united with sinful flesh. While Luther focused on the reality of the humanity Christ assumed, Calvin concentrated on the prerogatives of divinity he set aside." David Steinmetz, "Calvin and Tamar," in *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 91.

The gift of God's being is not an ontological descent down the hierarchy by which the wise and powerful rule the foolish and powerless. The Father is greater than the Son as his source, not his superior (John 14:28).[68] Christmas does not establish worldly power upon a Platonistic or Arian analogy of being, but overturns those powers (Matt. 2:13-15 and 2:19-23, Christmas Sunday, Year A; Luke 2:34, Christmas Sunday, Year B). The Son's arrival is not a new era of worldly conquering, but a new reign of "compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing … forgiving … love … perfect harmony … peace" (Col. 3:12-17, Christmas Sunday, Year C).

Likewise, Christmas' liturgical remembrance of Jesus' arrival "cannot … speak of an infant Jesus in full possession of all human and divine powers,"[69] for it remembers that "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature" (Luke 2:52, Christmas Sunday, Year C). While triumphalists may read Jesus as a sign by which to conquer in the old way, the birth narratives tell of a conquest by humility quite like the remembrance of Phil. 2:7. The Son's military campaign begins not in Augustan Rome or Herodian Jerusalem, but in a stable in the City of David. His rule is no sooner confirmed than he is a refugee (Matt. 2, Christmas Sunday, Year A). This is no theology of glory.

McClendon is right that these birth narratives are subsidiary parts of Jesus' story. The Christmas cycle cannot be allowed to eclipse the Easter cycle, even when modern market economies demand it. But subsidiariness is not the same as dispensability. Long before Nicea, the Church appreciated their *indispensability.* There is Ignatius' "Jesus Christ … who is of Mary, who was truly born, ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified

[68] Thompson, 150.
[69] Cf. McClendon's criticism of two-natures Christology on 277. The patristic understanding of *kenôsis* also respected Jesus' human limitations in its own way (see below, Holy Saturday).

and died … who was also truly raised from the dead."[70] There is Irenaeus' "one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation … and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord."[71] There is Tertullian: "the one holy God has a Son, his Word … sent by the Father into the virgin and was born of her both man and God, Son of man and Son of God."[72] There is Hippolytus' "Christ Jesus, the Son of God, Who was begotten by the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary." This last phrase is closest to the Old Roman Creed, which is reflected in the Apostles' Creed's "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary."[73]

These are the phrases that frame the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return of the Lord of the Church from apostolic times forward. They predate Origen, Arius, Athanasius, and Constantine. They are apologetic and catechetical, not conciliar and anathematizing. They reach far beyond Alexandria *and* Antioch, to cover Roman Asia, Gaul, Africa, and Italy. They arise from the gospels' tense cosmopolitan mix of Judaism and Hellenism, framing the young faith of a Roman Church as it negotiates its newfound respect for the God of the *Shema*. Their pictures of creator God experiencing birth scandalize both the Gnosticism and the adoptionism that are more comfortable in this culture. They express communities' maturing worship of the Lord Jesus Christ. So the Church soon celebrates them with special days, just as it celebrates other events of Jesus' life. Lord Jesus was conceived, born, crucified, died, was buried, descended, rose, ascended, sits, and will return.

Jehovah's Witnesses, today's Arians, refuse to celebrate Christmas. They consider it a capitulation to the cults of Mithras and the sun-god. They condemn the wise men for their

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[70] Trallians 9:1-2, dateable between 107 and 138.
[71] *Against Heresies* I.x.1.
[72] *Against Praxeus*, 2.
[73] These are listed in John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, 3d ed. (Louisville: John Knox, 1982), 16ff.

astrology, suggesting that they followed a satanic star meant to expose and destroy the young Jesus. They reject the exchange of gifts as a violation of Jesus' rules for almsgiving (cf. Matt. 6:3-4).[74] Yet even if Christmas had no pagan credentials at all, Jehovah's Witnesses would have no compelling reason to celebrate it. For they also refuse to worship Jesus, and deny his equality with the Father (cf. John 5:18). They believe that "Jehovah," *kyrios*, LORD, is a name for the Father alone (even though, as if to underscore Jesus' unity with the Father, the gospels never show Jesus naming God *kyrios*, except when he is quoting Scripture). Isaiah 63:9 notwithstanding, they claim that Jesus was and is merely the archangel Michael, who put on flesh he would shed at his resurrection, who temporarily "materialized bodies" in order to appear to his disciples afterwards, and who in ascension has returned to his prior form (and to his old name).[75] Incarnation, then, would be no turning point in the relationship between God and humanity. The "second Adam" would be *adam* no longer. Jesus' resurrection would not anticipate the general resurrection after all. Our high priest could no longer truly sympathize, if ever he could.

Christmas is alien to neo-Arians not because it is Roman, but because its Christology is foreign to their story. No – make that foreign to their *two* stories, their narratives of God and humanity, which *never* converge completely in one "human story that God will without qualification acknowledge as his own."[76]

Christmas is *God* with *us,* unconditionally and permanently. No wonder it was so useful to a Church pressured for centuries by varieties of Arianism. It should be as useful to us today. For those in the Chalcedonian fold, glorifying the swaddled baby king is more catechetically

[74] *Reasoning from the Scriptures* (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), 176-178.
[75] *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 214-218.
[76] McClendon 1994, 276.

persuasive than lectures on the first four councils – and more evangelically and ecumenically promising for those outside Chalcedon's borders.

Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology may not be *indispensable* like the canon's birth-narratives, but its rehabilitation of *ousia* has both honored and enriched apostolic worship, as a set of grammatical rules for paying full respect to Jesus' lordship. The best proof of this is in the praise that incarnation raises among God's people.

> Come, O Bethlehem, prepare for the birth … the manger and the swaddling-clothes that carry God! The life which they enfold will break the bonds of death, granting mortals immortality.[77]
>
> May the gifts we offer on this festive day be pleasing to you, O God, and may this most holy exchange of gifts, through Your bountiful grace, cause us to be more like Him in Whom our substance is united with You: Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever.[78]
>
> We welcome Thee, most noble Guest,
> Through whom this sinful world is blest
> Thy coming is a boon for me;
> What thanks shall I return to Thee?[79]
>
> Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born this day of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever.[80]
>
> Christ, by highest heav'n adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord!
> Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of the Virgin's womb:
> Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,
> Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
> Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."[81]

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[77] Forefeast of Christmas, praises, quoted in Aslanoff, 1.117.
[78] Prayer over the gifts, First Mass, Christmas Day, *Saint Joseph Daily Missal and Hymnal* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1966), 40.
[79] Martin Luther, "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come," *Concordia Hymnal: A Hymnal for Church, School and Home* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960), 112.
[80] Contemporary Collect for Christmas Day, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 213.
[81] Charles Wesley, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration* (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), hymn 133.

The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger, In all our trials born to be our Friend.
He knows our need, To our weakness is no stranger. Behold your King, before Him lowly bend.[82]

O little town of Bethlehem I know just how you felt
So small and insignificant, I've felt that way myself
I heard a knock, a knock on my heart's door and I let him in and now I see
Just like he did in Bethlehem, he did a miracle in me.
O Bethlehem, talkin' 'bout Bethlehem
O sweet Bethlehem, the world is gonna hear about you. [83]

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.[84]

[82] John S. Dwight, "O Holy Night!" *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, hymn 148.
[83] Andrae Crouch, "Bethlehem (The World Is Gonna Hear About You), *The Gift of Christmas* (Warner 9 47091-2, 1999)."
[84] Latin hymn, ascribed to John Francis Wade, "O Come, All Ye Faithful," *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration*, hymn 145.

Christmastime

Taking Jesus Personally

"With": Jesus' Personhood

We have already discussed the "elements" of incarnation: divinity and humanity. Both of these are present, even close together, in the Old Testament. God takes a stroll in the Edenic afternoon, visits Abraham and Sarah, extends a ladder to Jacob, descends upon Sinai, appears to Moses, and dwells in his temple. Along with descent comes ascent. Isaiah is brought into God's presence, Enoch and Elijah are translated, and Ezekiel takes a chariot ride to heaven. Divinity and humanity dance close, then farther, then closer, then farther, in an always tantalizing, ultimately frustrating, salvation-historical encounter. The two extended fingers on the Sistine Chapel ceiling never quite touch. Finally, in incarnation, the impossible happens. A new age is inaugurated, which the Church remembers in "Christmastime," the span of time beginning with Christmas and ending with Epiphany (Jan. 6). Divinity and humanity come together. The uncircumscribeable is circumscribed (and on Jan. 1, circum*cised*). The invisible is imaged. Omnipresence comes.

Yet to put incarnation these ways is still to say far too little, for at its heart incarnation is the story of a person. The Nicene Creed is the narrative of *one* "who came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human." Incarnation is the story of a subject; and so this chapter concerns the *subject* of incarnation: the *person* of Christ.

The language of personhood is as problematic as the language of substance. Philosophers and theologians since antiquity have attempted to answer a puzzling question: What is a person? John D. Zizioulas chronicles the trajectory of Greek answers from the assumed identity of Greek

tragedy (*prosôpon*) to the Cappadocian Fathers of the fourth century, in which the patristic notion of person (*hypostasis*) as "a concrete, unique, and unrepeatable entity" which constitutes essence itself overturns the early classical notion of person as an optional and tragic adjunct to an otherwise whole, concrete identity, and transforms the earlier patristic equation of substance (*ousia*) and subsistence (*hypostasis*).[85] The Latin west transformed personhood from the dramatic role of a masked actor (*persona*) to Tertullian's distinguishing quality of concrete being, then to Augustine's distinguishing quality of relation, then Boethius' individual substance of a rational nature and Richard of St. Victor's incommunicable and singular existence.[86] Theology has at times followed, at other times rejected, the modern psychological, individual, and sociological transformations of the category, sometimes understanding God as a communion with three centers of consciousness (Moltmann, Pannenberg), other times as a single consciousness in three ways of being (Barth).

There is no love lost between partisans of the various Greek, Latin, and modern ways of conceiving personhood. But the camps agree on a few crucial things: That whatever personhood is, it (1) instantiates and thus expresses its content (2) fully and indivisibly, (3) constituting and distinguishing subjects relationally (*i.e.*, in terms of other subjects). That is, a human person is a full, indivisible instance of humanity, who is constituted, described, and distinguished from other human persons by his or her relationships with them. We name relationships, resemblances, and distinctions among subjects through the language of personhood.

The Relational Jesus

[85] "Personhood and Being," in John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1985), 27-65.
[86] R.A. Norris, "Person," in Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds., *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 42-443.

For the Church to describe Jesus as both personally divine and personally human thus performs enormous work. The Church saw both divinity and humanity in Jesus' *relationships* – with his family and neighbors, with sinners, with the creation, with the Scriptures, with himself, and above all with both the One who sent him and the Spirit who was sent to him and sent along to his followers. Everything Jesus did, said, was and is reflects these relationships.

Throughout his earthly life, from conception to ascension, Jesus is remembered as having a unique relationship with God. This is commonly and strikingly described in terms of sonship rather than lordship. Whether the speaker is a heavenly voice, or a centurion, or Jesus himself, the affirmation is the same: God is the only Father of Jesus (Matt. 23:9); Jesus is the only Son of the Father (Matt. 11:27).

In a similar way, Jesus is remembered as having right relationships with others, relationships that are not marred by the sin that infects all other human beings and human relationships (cf. Rom. 3:10-18). Yet here too Jesus' relationships with others are more than exemplary, even more than sinless. Jesus is a son of Israel whose faithfulness to that nation's covenantal commitments surpasses them to the point of redefining them. He is more than our brother (Rom. 8:29); he is our Lord (8:39).

Finally, and perhaps most remarkably, Jesus is remembered in terms of his relationship with all of creation (John 1, 1 Cor. 8:6, Col. 1, 1 Cor. 15:27, Rev. 3:12, etc.). This is a relationship that includes, but radically goes beyond, the privilege of stewardship extended to humanity from the beginning (Gen. 1:26, 2:15).[87]

God, humanity, and the rest of creation: In each of these three arenas, Jesus in the Church's eternal memory – that is, the Jesus of Scripture – enjoys two sets of relationships. First,

[87] See Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 35-40.

he instantiates and expresses the fullness of humanity in ways both unparalleled and typical (Rom. 5, 1 Cor. 15). Second, he instantiates and expresses the fullness of divinity in ways that both distinguish and unite him with his Father and his Spirit (Col. 1).

That these relationships are personal means that they are not accidental to who Jesus is. They are constitutive of who Jesus is. He is Son of the Father, receiver and giver of the Spirit (John 14:26, 15:26); root of David, Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5); firstborn of all creation, firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:15, 1:18).

The awe and the scandal of this memory is that neither set of relationships violates the other. Somehow the Church managed to say two seemingly incompatible things about the same subject – because the subject's life had shown that both belonged to his story.

Jesus is the common subject of these two sets of relationships, one divine and one human. The New Testament Church said in juxtaposition and dialectic, and the Council of Nicea in less elastic language:

> We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us humans and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made human.

Yet this language, directed against the Arian threat, still proved inadequate to meet challenges from other directions. The later Church was forced to restate its confession in explicit terms of personhood: Jesus is one person in (or out of) two natures, the divine and the human.

What pressed this issue, among other things, was the role of a seemingly minor character in Jesus' story.

Synaxis: Who Is My Mother?

The Academy Awards wind slowly, glacially, through a labyrinth of award categories that lead up Hollywood's hierarchy: Best Art/Set Direction, Best Animated Short Film, Best

Supporting Actor, Best Actress, Best Original Screenplay, Best Director, Best Picture. The Eastern liturgy, more interested in glorifying God than in raising its ratings, starts at the top of the hierarchy, without forgetting the lower rungs. In that tradition, a feast called the synaxis follows on the day after a great feast. The synaxis, or assembly, remembers the main event's contextual figures – the supporting actors, as it were.[88]

Thus, December 26, the day after Christmas, is the "Synaxis of the Mother of God."[89] It remembers Mary as the God-bearer, *theotokos*, the Best Supporting Actress in the best act of all creation.[90]

"We have now come to one of the places, and perhaps indeed to *the* place, at which at all times, and even largely within the Christian community, offense has been taken."[91] Mary's role in Christian practice has been characterized by abuse – in the forms of fixation, misunderstanding, and neglect. Her prominence in popular devotion sometimes marginalizes or even eclipses that of her son. Appeals to her intercessory power sometimes take eyes and hearts away from the living, neighboring intercessors that God has put together in local churches. Talk of immaculate conception, perpetual virginity, assumption, and co-mediation sometimes confuses and distracts brothers and sisters unfamiliar with (and even *familiar with*) the theological terrain in which it lives. Historical-critical excavations of the Gospels sometimes pronounce the virgin birth a mythological intrusion into the pure history of Jesus' origin, and miss its point. Fundamentalistic defenses against both historical-critical modernism and Catholic

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[88] Aslanoff, 1.123. Following through on this logic, the Sunday after Christmas commemorates both Joseph and King David, Jesus' legal and biological ancestors, respectively (1.124-130). December 29 (December 28 in the West) remembers the slaughter of the innocents (1.130).

[89] In the West December 26 is either the Feast of St. Stephen (so "Good King Wenscelas") or a bacchanalia of sale-shopping. In the East Stephen is remembered on December 27.

[90] In the West, Mary is commemorated on days both before and after Christmas: in the fourth Sunday in Advent (offertory and communion antiphons), the Sunday within the octave of Christmas (Epistle and Gospel), January 1, the feast of Jesus' circumcision (prayer), and the first Sunday after Epiphany, which is the feast of the Holy Family (prayer, Gospel, offertory antiphon, prayer over the gifts, prayer after communion).

[91] Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 95.

devotion sometimes demand that the virgin birth be insisted upon as a historical event and ignored as a theological one! Mary has proven to be arguably the most polarizing figure in Christian tradition, a sign spoken against and a sword to pierce others' souls (Luke 2:34). One wonders whether Matthew and Luke would have bothered to report her story, had they foreseen its sad trajectories.

Yet Jesus' biographers knew that incarnation's paradoxes must be faced for its confusions to be resolved. Their contributions, though definitive, were only the beginning. Insights and achievements, along with problems and mistakes, continued to surface in new forms as the Church struggled through centuries of confessing Jesus as Lord.

The "problem of Mary" may have been as old as Christian faith itself (Matt. 12:48). It came to a head in the fourth and fifth centuries, in the liturgical battleground between the Antiochian and Alexandrian Christological traditions. Was Alexandria compromising Jesus' humanity in calling Mary *theotokos*?[92] Was it positing a change in the divine nature that could enable the immutable God to be born and grow up? Were its worshippers implying that in Jesus divinity had only appeared to be a human being? Or blended with humanity to make some new, third substance? Or that God the Word had slipped into a less-than-fully human shell to become the mind of Jesus? Or that finite humanity had been absorbed by infinite divinity, like a drop into an ocean, so that only the divinity of Jesus still mattered? To solve the problem, Antioch offered a proposal: Why not also call Mary *anthropotokos*, human bearer, or at least *Christotokos*, to make it clear that Mary's son is fully human? After all, if Mary is *theotokos*, she is so only incidentally, as the Word is "in" the baby Jesus from before his birth.

[92] Antioch's hesitation over the term is more than matched by my students. When I teach Christology at evangelical churches, colleges, and seminaries, I offer an entry poll asking whether, among other things, it is true that Mary is God's mother. Almost every respondent rejects the proposition.

In Antioch's objections, Alexandria heard a different way of seeing Jesus, and a defective one at that. Was it implying that Mary bore a mere human being, perhaps one whose later anointing with the Holy Spirit adopted him into God's family like the prophets of Israel? Or that Mary was responsible only for the human side of a Jesus still divisible into two entities, "two Sons"? If so, what had really changed in the incarnation? Alexandria thus demanded that Antiochian theologians respect the orthodoxy of addressing Mary as Mother of God.[93]

> When they say that the Word of God did not become flesh, or rather did not undergo birth from a woman according to the flesh, they bankrupt the economy of salvation, for if he who was rich did not impoverish himself, abasing himself to our condition out of tender love, then we have not gained his riches but are still in our poverty.[94]

The issue recapitulates Adolf von Harnack's typology of two fundamental ways the early Church envisioned Jesus: Adoption Christology, and pneumatic Christology. Each of these visions carries a corresponding mistake – Adoptionism and Docetism, respectively – which C. FitzSimons Allison finds manifested not only in late antiquity and among the anathematized, but recurring constantly even among the formally orthodox.[95] In Adoptionism, Jesus is just a man until at some point – usually at his baptism – he is brought into an intimate relationship with God, like an adopted son. In docetism, Jesus is eternally divine, but his humanity is violated by divinity's demands on it.[96]

One in Christ Jesus: Incarnation's New World

The problems intrinsic to each of these two visions of Jesus reemerged when each vision narrated Mary according to its understanding of incarnation. Nestorius of Antioch followed

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[93] Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, trans. John Anthony McCuckin (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1995), 55.
[94] Cyril, 59.
[95] C. FitzSimons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy: An Affirmation of Christian Orthodoxy* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1994), 35, adapting William Porcher DuBose, *The Ecumenical Councils*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911) and Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma* ().
[96] [Check Harnack.]

Theodore of Mopsuestia in taking offense at the title *theotokos*. Legitimate issues were at stake: to this day the term confuses even orthodox believers. Yet Nestorius (or at least the school that took his name) still failed to understand the unity of human and divine in Jesus. Against Nestorianism (or at least what Alexandrians took to be Nestorianism), Cyril drove home several points. First, if Jesus' divinity is merely the Spirit-anointing of an Old Testament-like figure, the assumption of a man at some point in his narrative, then the old relationships between God and humanity still apply. Furthermore, whereas for Paul those relationships prove capable only to damn humanity, for Nestorianism they are enough to bring salvation. God is untouched by the sufferings of the Nazarene son of David. The Gospel is then not ultimately the story of God's humility, but of humanity's successful exaltation through God's presence. "The salvation promised in the work of Christ is reduced to the imperative to be like him…. As Jesus is one with the logos by his will, we are one with Christ by our wills."[97] Under or alongside the Christology of Nestorius lay the anthropology of Pelagius: God is the supporting actor in the story of salvation, and human beings are the stars. Hail Mary, Mother of Christ!

Against the Nestorian vision of a "communion" or "conjunction" of natures between the divine person and human person of Christ, Cyril of Alexandria insisted upon a *unifying* (*henosis*) of natures in the *one* person of Christ.[98] While the former echoes the old relationships between God and Israel's prophets, the latter is something entirely new. It marks the difference between sending messengers and sending a son (Matt. 21:33-41).[99]

Against Nestorius' "two sons," Cyril defended Jesus' single personhood by claiming that the divine person of the *logos* had assumed an impersonal human nature. "In all respects," claimed Cyril, the Word of God the Father *is* with the ensouled flesh he united with himself, in

[97] C. FitzSimons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1994), 125.
[98] Cyril, 72-74.
[99] Cf. Cyril, 81.

one person (*prosôpon*).[100] The divine Word and the human Jesus are not two subjects, each with its own set of relationships to God, humanity, and the rest of creation. They are not "twins," morally joined at birth or at baptism, but one subject, involved in every relationship in a way that includes each in the others. Therefore, the truly divine nature of the one growing in Mary's womb made her, properly speaking, the bearer of God, just as his truly human nature made her, properly speaking, mother of Jesus. Had Mary not borne God "after the flesh,"[101] the cross could not have borne it either.[102] At Ephesis in 431, the Church broadly followed Cyril over Nestorius, affirming "one divine nature, the Word incarnate."[103]

Alexandria had prevailed. Yet both Antioch and Alexandria had valid points against some of the other's Christologies. At Chalcedon in 451, the Church's gathered leaders struck an "uncompromising compromise" whose language better respected each school's critiques of the other's excesses. Jesus Christ is "in" or "of" (depending on the text) two natures, without confusion or change (here opposing extreme Cyrillian schools such as Eutychian Monophysitism), without division or separation (here opposing Antiochian movements such as Nestorianism).

The center held, but at great expense. Both the Nestorians of Antioch and the Monophysites of Alexandria refused to accept the new formula, and were excluded from the catholic fellowship.[104] Subsequent appreciations of Jesus (such as "Monotheletism," the claim that Jesus' will was merely divine and not human) sometimes failed to respect the Chalcedonian

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[100] Cyril, 109. [Tawhid?]
[101] Cyril, 64-65.
[102] Cyril too links the birth of the incarnate Word to his suffering (127ff).
[103] [Yeago on Council of Ephesus 431?]

[104] Coptic and Armenian "monophysitism" is in fact orthodox, though its non-Chalcedonian terminology blinded both sides to this fact until the twentieth century. Again, see Paulos Gregorios, William H. Lazareth, Nikos A. Nissiotis, eds., *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite? Towards Convergence in Orthodox Christology* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981).

rules. Within the catholic fold, partisans of the Antiochian and Alexandrian approaches continued to bicker. The insights and continuing controversies among these partisans are our next topic.

A Communication of Attributes?

Jesus is a new nexus of the divine and human communions. As such, he brings the benefits of each to the other. Cyril (writing shortly before Chalcedon) develops this revolution in terms of something named variously the *idiomatôn koinônia*, *antidosis idiotêtôn*, and *communicatio idiomatum*. This is usually translated "communication of attributes," but is better translated "communication of proper qualities."[105] Attributes of one nature are, in Christ, transferred to the other, without violating the integrity of either. Cyril illustrates the communication of divine attributes to Jesus' humanity as something like iron's transformation in fire:

> If it is true that fire has converse with materials which in their own natures are not hot, and yet renders them hot since it so abundantly introduces to them the inherent energy of its own power, then surely in an even greater degree the Word who is God can introduce the life-giving power and energy of his own self into his very own flesh.[106]

The cosmic scope of this revolution is named in the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of *theosis* or divinization: "He assumed humanity that we might become God," claims Athanasius at the climax of *On the Incarnation of the Word*. "He manifested himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the mind of the unseen Father. He endured shame from human beings that we might inherit immortality."[107] Cyril speaks in equally provocative language of "the single

[105] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 72-74, 142).
[106] Cyril, 132-133.
[107] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1993), paragraph 54. [Check translation.]

nature of God the Word incarnate."[108] Both claims make some Christians nervous that here a line of faith has been breached. Does greater respect need to be paid to the difference between Creator and creature? Have Athanasius and Cyril fallen into the Edenic and New Age temptation to take a shortcut in becoming like God?

Cyril's rhetoric obscures rather than clarifies the issue (and in its day, it needlessly alienated Nestorians). In moving from Ephesus to Chalcedon the Church has backed away from his terminology of a single nature, relying on the distinction between single personhood and double nature to protect the distinctions among God and humanity that both Athanasius and Cyril are in fact striving to respect. Divinization language is received unevenly: It is deeply woven into Orthodox theology, but generally rejected in the Reformed tradition, which prefers Anselmian satisfaction theory to describe the at-one-ment of God and humanity.

Some accounts of divinization ironically appeal to the very "analogy of being" between the divine nature and created natures that Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology freed the Church from having to respect.[109] Such an analogy would support the communication of attributes of one nature (for instance, the omnipresence of divinity) to the other. Cyril can thus claim on the basis of the chain of being that humanity is created for divine transfiguration, and that the incarnation of Christ is both the basis and the first-fruits of the deification of humanity in general. (Not for another thousand years will theologians venture to claim the converse, that the incarnation "humanizes" God as well. See below, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.)

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[108] Cyril, 77-79. His analogy of this "single nature" is the unconfused, unchanged unity of soul and body that comprises the single nature of humanity. Against Cyril, one should note that these two "constituents" are not called natures. The soul and the body (whether or not these are seen as distinct) are above all terms for *personhood*.

[109] The Cyrillian understanding of divinization is not to be found in 2 Pet. 1:4, which is about sharing a life together of godly virtue (2 Pet. 1:3-11, 3:13-14) through God's powerful promises, rather than attaining ontological unity with God. Cyril claims that what Christ was by nature, we attain by grace. The Athanasian and Augustinian doctrines are more modest, and closer to the sense of 2 Peter.

In the Antiochian tradition, which continues to stress the distinction of divine and human even after the incarnation, the communication of attributes is harder to maintain. In the Reformed tradition, it is replaced by a mere reciprocation of names (*antidosis onomatôn*). Mary is *theotokos* in that we may name the whole incarnate person of Christ by synecdoche, by referring to only a part.[110]

The incompatibility of these two approaches divided not only Alexandrian and Antiochian Christology in antiquity, but Lutheran and Reformed Protestantism in the sixteenth century. Luther's radically Cyrillian Christology led him to affirm the omnipresence of Christ's human body. Because the divine person of Jesus has assumed an impersonal human nature, the human nature participates in the glory and majesty (that is, the glorious and majestic qualities) of God.[111] On this ground Luther and his tradition based their doctrine of Jesus' bodily presence at the Eucharist. Zwingli's and Calvin's more Antiochian respect for the continuing distinction between the two natures of the incarnate Christ led the Reformed tradition to locate the humanity of the ascended Christ only at the Father's right hand, and thus not materially at the communion table.[112] The Reformed tradition thus relies on the Holy Spirit as mediator of Christ's presence, whether at the baptistry, pulpit, table, or prayer closet. Jesus is *personally* present, but not *bodily* present. This difference in Christology, which manifests a difference in cosmology, drove the failure of the two camps to agree at the Colloquy of Marburg, and has divided the Lutheran and Reformed traditions ever since.

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[110] Muller, 74; Calvin, 2.14.1.
[111] Muller, 73, on the *genus maiestaticum* of Lutheran Orthodoxy.
[112] See for instance Ulrich Zwingli, Letter to Vadian, 20 Oct. 1529, in G.R. Potter, ed., *Ulrich Zwingli* (New York: St. Martin's, 1977), 106-108 and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.17.30.

To understand and solve the impasse, we will need to understand the ways that theologians described the unity of two natures in Christ's one person, then propose a different way of stating the Chalcedonian faith.

Impersonal Humanity?

It was axiomatic in Chalcedonian Christology that there could be no full *impersonal* expression of a nature – no "anhypostatic natures." (One might say for example that a book or a love song is an concrete expression of human nature, but one would still not say that it is an irreducibly full one – that a text is a "person.")[113] In this linguistic principle lies a key to understanding and resolving the dilemmas that have challenged Christology since the first appeals to these categories.

Where Jesus is concerned, the axiom could be taken in a variety of ways. It produced two stable opposites, which are the heresies of Alexandria and Antioch: Jesus is one person in one nature (Monophysitism), or Jesus is two persons in two natures (Nestorianism).[114] Neither respected the unity and complexity of Jesus' relationships with God, fellow human beings, and the rest of creation. But this meant that other, more elusive applications of the axiom had to be found. We shall consider several.

Cyril's solution held that a divine person assumed and "personalized" an impersonal human nature. This was a move respected, but not demanded, by the Chalcedonian Definition of 451. But it could still be taken, and perhaps had to be taken, as compromising Christ's humanity, in that it held that "the human [nature] of Christ has no human [person]."[115] (Cyril's language of a single nature of the incarnate Word was hardly helpful here.) If personhood is expression in

[113] This is the route my doctrine of Scripture takes in affirming the true divinity and humanity of the Bible. See Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), chapter 1.
[114] John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 89-93.
[115] McIntyre, 95.

concrete relationality, how can an impersonal human nature enjoy personal relationships with human beings? They would be superseded by the relationships of the divine person. The humanity of Jesus would still be a basis and first-fruits of human salvation: "He took what was ours to be his very own so that we might have all that was his" (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9).[116] But with Jesus' humanity merely universal and no longer personally particular, the stage would be set for the divinization of an *abstracted* humanity. "The effects of our new first-fruits, that is Christ," says Cyril, "shall again pass into the entire human race."[117] Jesus' membership in Israel, no longer constitutive of his character, but only of his salvation-historical location "according to the flesh," falls into neglect.[118] Humanity becomes some*thing* assumed ("he took *what* was ours"), not some*one* born, baptized, murdered, raised, and ascended. Hail Mary, Mother of God, bearer of a changeling!

Leontius of Byzantium (and later John of Damascus and Karl Barth) took a different route from the anhypostatic, positing instead that the human nature of Jesus finds its personhood in the personhood of the Word, and so is "enhypostatic." Here the relationships of a human life would be assumed, not superseded, by the relationships of the divine person. However, this approach repeats some of the problems of anhypostatic Christology. Are Jesus' human relationships truly organic, or merely forensic? Is that human life really a human life, or just a divine double-life? Could *this* Christ be imitated? It is *human beings* who die and are raised. Can the incarnate Word and firstfruits from the dead really be called a *man* (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-21)?[119] Is Mary really the mother of *her* son? Or just a surrogate?

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[116] Cyril, 59.
[117] Cyril, 106.
[118] While Cyril affirms Jesus' Jewishness (82-84, 93, etc.) in the course of appreciating Jesus' full humanity, Jesus' particular ethnicity does hardly any soteriological work in his argument.
[119] McIntyre, 96-101.

Furthermore, the enhypostatic case demands a strong "analogy of personhood": Human personhood must be enough like divine personhood for divine personhood to express both natures adequately. The *logos* then gains anthropomorphic qualities such as will (thus both Alexandrian "Monotheletism" and orthodox "Duotheletism") and consciousness. One is then faced with the dilemma of whether to call God unipersonal or tripersonal. Among enhypostatic Christologians, John of Damascus follows the Cappadocian tradition, which is friendlier to the idea of multiple subjectivities in the Godhead, while Barth follows the Augustinian, which resists or rejects it.[120] Beyond these orthodox camps, but not far beyond, lie tritheists and unitarians.

Such an analogy between divine and human personhood *could* be the case, as the Cappadocian, Augustinian, and modern social Trinitarian traditions show. But *must* it be the case? The debate has proven interminable. Here too, the demands of fighting mistakes such as Arianism and Nestorianism have driven the staking of theological claims that cannot be substantiated, and thus fueled differences that cannot be reconciled and schisms that cannot be healed.

Recently Piet Schoonenberg has proposed an enhypostatic Christology that reverses its terms. It is the anhypostatic *divine* nature that finds its personhood, in the *human* Jesus. Since we know humanity is necessarily personal, but only know divine personhood insofar as God identifies with the creature Jesus, we are on firmer ground in insisting on the priority of Jesus' personhood than on the preexistent Word's.[121] But then what would be the distinction between Jesus and the one who sent him, besides the flesh of Jesus himself? The problems of

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[120] In fact, Augustine himself is friendlier to social Trinitarianism than usually acknowledged (for instance, in Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2d ed. [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997], 30-55). See *On the Trinity* 15.7.11. Furthermore, Augustine is less speculative and more exegetically informed than is commonly acknowledged (especially among readers who have skipped *On the Trinity* books 1-7).

[121] Piet Schoonenberg, *The Christ: A Study of the God-Man Relationship in the Whole of Creation and in Jesus Christ* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), cited in Ralph del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York: Oxford, 1994), 148-152, 217-219.

anhypostatic Christology return, now visited upon God rather than humanity. God becomes "persons" only in the Son's incarnation. The Holy Spirit becomes the divinity of Jesus. The relations of these "persons" (Schoonenberg remains unclear in what sense one should call the Spirit personal) is exclusively a function of their relations with human persons, not their relations with each other.[122] In making God "Son," the Mother of God also makes him "Father" and "Spirit"! (Furthermore, who else might mother God in the future? Schoonenberg's project, grounded in his claim of a fundamental immanence of God in the world, undermines the historical uniqueness of Jesus.)

John McIntyre's review of two-nature Christology proposes a fully Chalcedonian alternative to all these positions, one reportedly advocated by Ephraim of Antioch.[123] Ephraim generally follows Cyril, but explains the hypostatic union as a union *of persons*. In McIntyre's words, "While the two natures as such are not confused or compounded one with the other, the two *hypostaseis* are. Accordingly the *hypostasis* of Jesus Christ is a fusion of the human and divine *hypostasis*: it is *synthetos hê hypostasis*."[124]

McIntyre rightly judges that this rarely enunciated articulation of Nicene and Chalcedonian logic – let us dub it "synhypostatic" – solves many of the problems of its rivals. The personal subject who is God the Word *is* the personal subject who is Jesus of Nazareth. In him, both the divine and the human natures which are expressed in Jesus are fully, concretely, relationally intact. Jesus' unity relies on no necessary analogy of being, and requires no stronger analogy of personhood than what the common applicability of its original definition brings to it.

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[122] Del Colle criticizes Schoonenberg's proposal as modalistic not so much with regard to the Father as with regard to the Spirit (155, 219).

[123] Ephraim defended the catholic faith at Chalcedon against the Monophysites, later becoming Patriarch of Antioch. Krumbacher, *Byzantinische Litteratur* (Munich, 1897) ranks Ephraim with Leontius, explaining his obscurity to the fact that so many of his works have been lost. See Adrian Fortescue, "Ephraim of Antioch," in Kevin Knight, ed., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, online ed. (http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05500a.htm).

[124] McIntyre, 101-103.

Yet it avoids the double personhood of Nestorianism which would reopen the chasm between God and humanity. Its symmetry honors the symmetry in biblical Christological formulas (*e.g.*, Luke 1:70, Rom. 1:2). It allows us to say what we have wanted to say all along, which is that the one "begotten before all ages of the Father according to the divinity, and … born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the humanity" is "one and the same Christ, Son, Lord."

A Concurrence of Relations

For Jesus to be one person in (or out of) two natures is for him to be one concrete common expression of both natures. To return to our definition of personhood, a person is a full, indivisible instance of a nature, who is constituted, described, and distinguished from other human persons by his or her relationships with them. We name relationships, resemblances, and distinctions among subjects through the language of personhood. Therefore, the *idiomatôn koinônia* is in our telling a concurrence[125] of relations[126] in the concrete Jesus.

All persons – divine, human, and divine-human – are incarnation's beneficiaries. Those related *to* Jesus participate indirectly in both his sets of relations. In Christ humanity gains intercession (Heb. 2:10-18); in Christ God gains sympathy (Heb. 4:14-15). Human beings dwell with God (Col. 3:1-4); God dwells with human beings (Eph. 2:21-22, Rev. 21:3). Those made in God's image gain the Father as their own Father (Matt. 6:9); the Father gains them as adopted children (Gal. 4:5) and co-heirs with Jesus (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 3:6, Epiphany, Years A, B, and C).[127] Humanity gains a knowledge of the Father (John 1:18); the Father gains knowledge of them (Gal. 4:9). The Holy Spirit rests upon a man (John 1:32-34); a man issues the Holy Spirit

[125] The term "concurrence" seeks to maintain fidelity to the Chalcedonian term *suntrechousês* (Latin *concurrente*).
[126] Since personhood is not to be reduced to relationality, as if persons were pure relations, *communicatio idiomata* need not be *reduced* to the communication of relations.
[127] Cf. Cyril, 63: "'I am going to my Father and your Father; to my God, and to your God' (John 20:17). In his case the Heavenly One is his natural Father; in our case he is our God. But insofar as this true and natural Son became as we are, so he speaks of the Father as his God, a language fitting to his self-emptying. Still, he gave his very own Father even to us, for it is written: 'Yet to those who did receive him, those that believed in his name, he gave them authority to become the children of God' (John 1:12)."

(Acts 2:33). Mary gains God the Son as her own son; God the Son gains Mary as his own mother. Jacob regains God as King; God gains David's son as heir (see below, Epiphany). Jesus is a fitting image of the invisible God whose very name is relational: "I will be with you" (Ex. 3:13-15).[128]

The concurrence of relations understands that salvation is first and finally relational. In Christ the life of God and the life of humanity open up to each other without reserve. "You will be my people, and I will be your God." "His name shall be called Emmanuel." "I have called you friends." "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you." "I am with you always." "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." "They are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them." "I desire that they also may be with me where I am." "You have received the spirit of sonship." "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it." "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." "They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads." Conversely, when theology focuses on transference of attributes, we face the paradox of an omnipresent God absent from Hell. But when incarnation focuses on concurrent relations, we can narrate damnation as disownership, excommunication, alienation – relational rather than physical distance. Damnation is isolation, the denial of incarnation's communion: "Depart from me, for I never knew you."

Here one could also fill pages with the hymnody of Christmas, a season commemorating the *arrival* that Advent awaited: "Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till he appeared and the soul felt its worth." "He has opened heaven's door, and man is blessed evermore." "Late in time behold him come, offspring of the Virgin's womb: Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail

[128] Fiorenza and Galvin, 1.156-157.

th'incarnate Deity, pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel." "This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing: This, this is Christ the King, the babe, the Son of Mary." "God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heav'n." "Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay, close by me forever, and love me, I pray." "There is room at my side for thee." "Come and behold him, born the King of angels!" "God with us, revealed in us; his name is called Emmanuel." "Jesus, lord at thy birth."

The concurrence of relations affirms that the attributes of both natures are made common to the *person* of Christ (*idiomatôn koinônia*), while avoiding the speculation of naming attributes *transferred* from one nature *to the other* (such as omnipresence to the body of Jesus). Furthermore, it does not force us to decide whether in God there are three subjectivities, or one, or some other number. That is, it does not force the category of *personhood* to determine the category of divine person*ality*. It draws from the best that both Alexandria and Antioch have to offer, preserving both the continuing distinction between God and humanity and the revolutionary change in the relations among them that characterizes the world after Jesus. In Jesus' arrival, the old rules suddenly change, opening up a new world of possibilities. The invisible God gains a face. Human speech-acts do the work of God. Metal nails kill their immortal creator. A son of Adam enters the gates of heaven and sits down beside the throne of the unapproachable God. A young woman bears her own Lord (cf. Luke 1:43).[129]

The concurrence of relations opposes every Christological heresy, for every Christological heresy violates it in one way or another. Against "adoption Christology," this vision of incarnation insists that the concurrence of relations was neither an achievement of, nor God's gift to, a prior, merely human Jesus (as if the prior relationships among God, humanity,

[129] Cf. Cyril, 61.

and the rest of creation were adequate for the work of salvation). Against "pneumatic Christology," it insists that the force of divinity neither bends, nor breaks, nor supersedes Jesus' human relations (as if the prior relationships among God, humanity, and the rest of creation were incompatible). "Jesus Christ is a real man … so really man, in fact, that it was possible for someone to write a purely human account of his life and death."[130]

The concurrence of relations also respects the original and eternal uniqueness of Jesus. The unity of human and divine is both *specific* and *unique* to the person of Jesus. The Father and the Spirit are not incarnate. It is *through the Son* that their connection with the world is revolutionized. Mary and you and I are not the Word of God. It is *through the Son* that we gain the idea of the invisible God. It is fully and uniquely *in him* that the relationships constituting humanity and divinity concur and enrich each other. Thus, following up on the story of the newborn king, we can see how in Jesus alone we find out both what God is like, and what authentic humanity, untainted by sin, is like. "No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten God, the One Who Is (*ho ôn*) in the bosom of the Father, has exegeted (*exêgêsato*) him" (John 1:18). The concurrence of relations thus frames the rest of our Christological project: an examination of the specifics of Jesus' earthly and heavenly career, an "exegesis of the Son," whose own incomparable exegesis shows us the invisible God.

Family Resemblances

The concurrence of relations does more than fight formal heresies. It also corrects popular and even *orthodox* confusions about Jesus and his supporting cast. Our last chapter warned of the dangers of regarding the divine and the human essences as too similar. Both the ancient and the modern connotations of person and substance can confuse the grammar of

[130] McIntyre, 102.

incarnation, distancing this deeply biblical teaching from its beneficiaries. “How can two natures occupy the same space?” (This is Eutychian, “materializing” the idea of substance.) “Wouldn’t a person with two natures *look* different? Wouldn’t he glow or shine or something, like the angels do on television?” (Nestorian, also materializing substance. Besides, his own family would have figured him out before the resurrection.) “Wouldn’t his all-knowing brain function differently, earning him 100% on every test in school?” (Monothelete. Besides, he would have been murdered in the schoolyard rather than on Golgotha.) “Wouldn’t human flesh drag down the divinity, even betray and degrade it?” (Monophysite, materializing substance again in order to confuse or change divinity and humanity rather than uniting them integrally.) “Wouldn’t Jesus be free from sexual and other desires?” (Gnostic, confusing desires, which are originally and ultimately good, with sinful passions, which are both broken and redeemable. Hunger, thirst, survival instinct, and sexual desire belong to humanity before the rise of sin. To deny any truly human quality to the incarnate Son is to see the incarnation as suppression, rather than glorification, of humanity.) “Wouldn’t Jesus’ divine self have to do battle with and subdue the temptations of his human self, as in *The Last Temptation of Christ*?” (Nestorian, dividing or separating two selves to give Jesus multiple personalities rather than one person in whom all relationships are at perfect peace.)

Mistakes like these distort Father, Son, Holy Spirit, James, Peter, Paul, and every other character in the history of salvation. So errors at the Christological level manifest themselves as misunderstandings of other characters. Here again, Mary meets us, a sword in her heart. When we misunderstand Mary, we are misunderstanding her son. Furthermore, when we ignore Mary’s supporting role, we are putting Jesus at risk by leaving Christological assumptions concealed and untested. Finally, when we tolerate Mariological abuses, we endorse Christological abuses.

Confusions and disputes about Mary abound, which resemble the confusions about Jesus just listed. Catholics and Orthodox insist that her purity would demand sexual abstinence even throughout her marriage (a teaching that became even more awkward than before with the recent discovery of the ossuary of a "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus"). Orthodox believe her role in the Son's arrival *demands* that orthodox faith remember her own liturgical cycle, from her immaculate conception (December 9 in the East), nativity (September 8), Temple consecration and presumptuous entrance into the Holy of Holies (November 21), to her assumption or dormition (August 15, with two weeks of fasting proceeding).[131] Catholics claim that her maternal authority over Jesus (Ex. 20:12) would grant her eternal power in heaven, and many find in her single nature greater accessibility as an intercessor than the high priest himself. Fundamentalists historicize the infancy narratives to save Jesus' credibility, and often claim that Mary had to have been a virgin in order for Jesus to have been truly divine.[132] (It is hardly coincidental that docetism is strongest today in conservative Catholicism and Protestantism, where respect for Mary seems strongest.)

Reactions against these confusions can manifest countervailing confusions: Evangelicals plead that Mary's role is tangential to Jesus' being, character, and mission (cf. Matt. 1:16), or that she is redundant once Jesus reaches adulthood (cf. John 19:25-30). Historical critics dehistoricize the infancy narratives to save Jesus' credibility. Liberals claim that she could not

[131] For this reason, our liturgical Christology ignores the feasts of Mary's conception, birth, presentation, and dormition. This critique is not claiming, as some do, that either such remembrances or the Marian dogmas of the Catholic Church are indefensible beliefs or practices, or that they compromise the integrity of the Gospel. It does, however, insist that they are not *mandatory* features of Christian faith, articles on which the Church stands or falls, and thus "Church-dividing issues," the denial of which would be just cause for schism or excommunication.

[132] The virgin birth of Jesus is one of the Five Fundamentals that fundamentalism was born to affirm. This critique is not claiming, as some do, that the doctrine of the virgin birth is indefensible or that it compromises the integrity of the Gospel. It is eminently defensible and deeply respects the Gospel. The infancy narratives and Apostles' and Nicene creeds demand a respect for the doctrine it has not generally received under modernism. Nevertheless, the divinity, humanity, holiness, even Jewishness of Jesus need not be threatened had his flesh came from something besides a pneumatically fertilized egg. The dust of the earth, a rib, even a naturally fertilized egg would do if God had chosen them to raise a child of Abraham.

have been a virgin for Jesus to have been truly human. “Moderates” counter that Mary is more trouble than she is worth, and would be better off ignored. (It is hardly coincidental that adoptionism is strongest today in liberal Protestantism, where respect for Mary seems weakest.)

Few of these partisans will be entirely satisfied with the road taken here. To the first set of confusions, it responds that a supporting role, however important, belongs in its proper place. Mary is a minor figure in the gospels, even Luke, and practically invisible elsewhere in the New Testament. Many of the New Testament’s “high Christologies” show no dependence on her traditions. More importantly, the Bible proclaims that Jesus does his saving work in the context of everyday human community. After the extraordinary infancy narratives, Mary and Joseph fall back into the normal roles of parenthood. In the synoptics, Mary even sides with Jesus’ siblings against him (Mark 3:21-34 and parallels)! In John, she is a loyal but meddlesome disciple (2:1, 2:12, 19:25), perhaps clinging too long to her maternal privileges (2:3-4, 19:26-27?), and precipitating Jesus’ first sign only after she concedes the initiative to her son (2:5-12). In every account, the ultimate definition of Jesus’ family is not biological, but the circle of discipleship formed by his concurring relations (Mark 3:35, 19:25-27). Here our corrections for Mariology preserve one of Mariology’s greatest insights: That Mary is an authentic representative of both Jacob’s children and Jesus’ followers.

To the second set of confusions, it responds that a supporting role, however minor, remains important. Any adequate understanding of incarnation calls for respect for Jesus’ mother, just as any adequate understanding of atonement respects the cross on which our sins were remitted. God used Mary in ways that bring clarity to Jesus’ identity and mission, that proclaim the Good News, that fulfill ancient promises to Israel. Were Jesus simply the rootless Melchizedek of Heb. 7:3, the Gospel would be impoverished and Christology handicapped.

Mary is the biological and social mediator of human particularity to Jesus, the second Adam whose particularity has universal consequences for his fellow human beings. Her nation is his nation (Luke 2:22-38). Her faithfulness blesses both her and the fruit of her womb (Luke 1:42, 45). Here our affirmations of Mariology preserve one of anti-Mariology's greatest insights: That on Jesus alone rests the hope of the world.

Not for nothing did Mary end up in Gal. 4:4, the creed of Ignatius, Irenaeus' rule of faith, Tertullian's rule of faith, Hippolytus' creed, the creed of Marcellus, the creed of Rufinus, the creed of Augustine, the Old Roman and later Apostles' creeds, and the Nicene Creed. Would there even have been a Chalcedon without her memory? Could there have been? We need not revere Mary's parents, nor claim that she is immaculately conceived, or holy in life, or Ever-Virgin, or queen of angels, or co-mediatrix, or wonder-worker, to share the angels' reverence for her (Luke 1:28).

> What shall we offer to you, O Christ!
> Because for our sake you became human and manifested yourself on earth.
> Each of your creatures offers you its thankgiving:
> the angels their song, the heavens a star,
> the magi their gifts, the shepherds adoration,
> the earth offers the cave, the wilderness the manger,
> but we offer to you a virgin mother.
> Save us, O eternal God![133]

Let all generations call her blessed (Luke 1:48), for in Christ she is not only God's mother, but ours too (John 19:27). "Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, with us sing our Savior's birth."[134]

[133] Vespers sticheron, tone 2, Synaxis of the Mother of God (Aslanoff, 1.123).
[134] "Angels We Have Heard on High."