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Editorial: Reflecting on the Greatest Person Imaginable: God the Son Incarnate

STEPHEN J. WELLUM

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The well-known church historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, famously begins his book *Jesus through the Centuries* with the following observation: “Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of western culture for almost twenty centuries.”¹ Pelikan’s observation is no overstatement on a number of fronts. Even to this day a large portion of the human race continues to divide world history into BC and AD by reference to Jesus’ birth, signaling how important he is for world history. The importance of this particular Nazarene, however, goes far beyond natural historical observation.

Thinking biblically and theologically, it is unequivocally the case that there is no greater person to study than our Lord Jesus Christ. Such a study is what theologians label “Christology,” and it is no exaggeration to say that such a disciplined inquiry takes us to the very heart of the Gospel and to all of Scripture. The Bible is not a random collection of documents thrown together. Scripture is God’s self-revelation progressively revealed through the writings of human authors. And since Scripture is *God’s Word*, despite its

diversity, there is an overall unity to it which unfolds God's unfailing plan—a plan that Scripture asserts is ultimately centered and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

In fact, Jesus himself teaches the God-giveness of Scripture and the divine unity of its storyline. As the men on the road to Emmaus wrestled with how to make sense of Jesus' death, and as they heard strange reports of his resurrection (which made no sense to them), Jesus came alongside and began to expound the Scriptures. Jesus chided them for not believing all that the prophets had spoken in these famous words, demonstrating his conviction that *he* was the focal point of Scripture: “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:26-27, ESV). Or think about Jesus' statement in John 5:39-40 as he confronted the religious leaders: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” Jesus viewed himself at the center of God's plan and ultimately as the one in whom was found eternal life (see John 17:3).

But it was not only Jesus who emphasized his own centrality; all the biblical authors do so. Think of how the opening verses of Hebrews begin, underscoring the superiority and finality of God's self-disclosure in his Son (Heb 1:1-2a). As the author there reminds us, in the coming of Christ “in these last days,” the “at many times and in many ways” character of God's speech has now come to termination and fulfillment in the “Son.” God's previous revelation through prophets was fragmentary, incomplete, and anticipatory; but now, that revelation has reached its terminus in Christ. Or think of Paul's sweeping statement in Ephesians 1:9-10: God's eternal purpose and plan hidden in the past is now made known in Christ, and “in Christ” God's purpose is to “unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” In other words, Jesus stands as *the most important person* in God's new creation work—a work that restores and even surpasses what was lost in Eden. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ brings forth a new, redeemed and reconciled heaven and earth by and through the glorious person and work of his Son. Paul explains that all of the Triune God's work of redemption, indeed the very purpose of history, is rooted and grounded in Christ Jesus

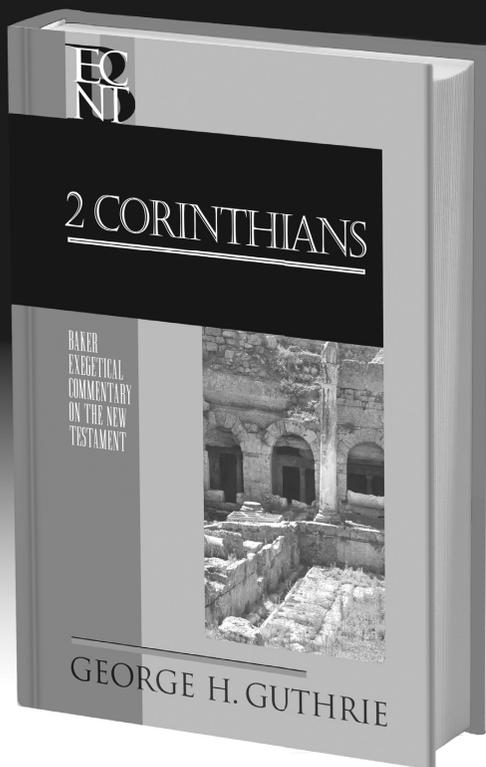
the Lord. Paul gives us the same truth in Colossians 1:16-17 (ESV) in terms of the cosmic pre-eminence of Christ, the creator and sustainer of all things: “For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

In light of such biblical teaching, it is not difficult to discern why Christology takes us to the very heart of the Gospel and all of the Scriptures. But we must go one step further: the study of the person and work of Christ is also the predominant theme and subject matter of *all* theological reflection. As Herman Bavinck so aptly reminded us a century ago in his magisterial *Reformed Dogmatics*, “The doctrine of Christ is not the starting point, but it certainly is the central point of the whole system of dogmatics. All other dogmas either prepare for it or are inferred from it. In it, as the heart of dogmatics, pulses the whole of the religious-ethical life of Christianity. It is ‘the mystery of godliness’ (1 Tim. 3:16).”²

It is for these reasons (and many more) that no further warrant is required to devote this entire issue of *SBJT* to Christology. In a wide-ranging and diverse set of articles, our contributors will investigate, mediate upon, and explicate the person and work of our Lord Jesus. From biblical reflections on Christ’s incredible and incomparable cross work, to theological discussions regarding the nature of the incarnation, to historical debates of our forefathers on crucial Christological matters, to current debates in Christological formulation, our essays will cover a wide array of topics in Christology. However, despite the diversity of topics, all of the essays are united in their attempt to grasp better the majesty and beauty of Jesus the Messiah, the Word made flesh, and the Lord of Glory who has become one with us in order to save us from our sins. It is my prayer that this issue of *SBJT* will lead us to a greater biblical-theological knowledge of Christ and thus to more love, worship, and obedience to our glorious Lord and Savior—the great Shepherd of the Sheep and the one we will love and adore for eternity. May our Lord Jesus Christ be praised and adored in his church, and may this issue help the church to better proclaim our Lord Jesus to the nations until that day arrives when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9-11).

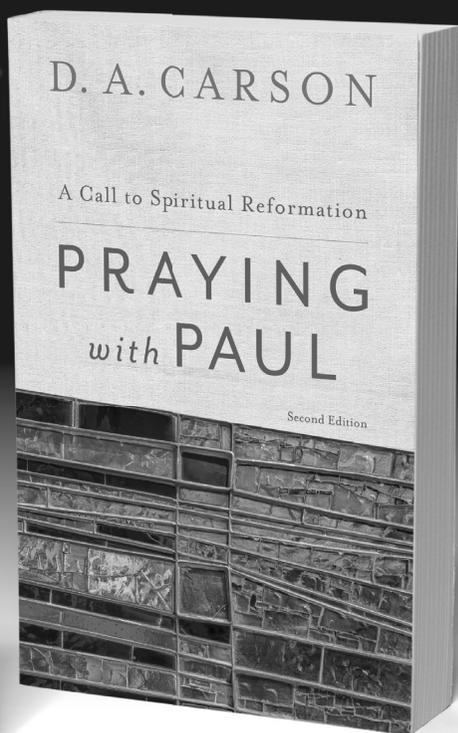
- ¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 1.
- ² Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 274.

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The Communication of Properties: A Post-Reformation Divergence between Lutheran and Reformed Theologies

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INTRODUCTION

The church has historically believed that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man, possessing two natures—the one divine, the other human—united in one person. The church has also historically affirmed that these two natures remain distinct in the God-man: the divine nature, characterized by omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, eternity, and the like, remains fully divine; and the human nature, characterized by spatio-temporal locatedness, limited strength and limited knowledge typical of all human beings, and the like, remains fully human. As the Chalcedonian Creed expressed this belief,

the church acknowledges Jesus Christ “in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one persona and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two person, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

Working within this traditional framework, theologians wondered “whether it is proper to speak of the human experiences of Christ while referring to him as God, and whether it is proper to speak of the divine experiences of Christ while referring to him as man.”² On the one hand, theologians insisted that when speaking of his human experiences of tiredness, hunger, thirst, temptation, death, and so forth, reference must be made to Jesus the man, and when speaking of his divine experiences of immutability, miraculous power, eternity, and so forth, reference must be made to the Son as God. Thomas Aquinas dissented from this view, insisting that “words which are said of Christ either in his divine or human nature may be said either of God or of man ... And hence of the man may be said what belongs to the divine nature, as of a hypostasis [person] of the divine nature; and of God may be said what belongs to the human nature, as a hypostasis [person] of human nature.”³ For example, the expression “crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8) ascribes what is true of the human nature—it dies—to the exalted person of Christ. Additionally, calling Mary *theotokos* ascribes what is true of the divine nature—the one whom she bears is God—to Jesus as he was developing in her womb. This communication of attributes or idioms (Latin, *communicatio idiomatum*) does not mean that the divine or human natures changed—the divine nature of Christ did not die; Mary only contributed the human nature of Jesus—nor does it mean that the natures mixed together. On the contrary, the two natures remained what they are, retaining their respective properties. “Nevertheless, what is said of either nature may be said of either God or man, because both ‘God’ and ‘man’ refer to the one person of Jesus Christ.”⁴

At the time of the Reformation, controversy arose between Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli as they opposed one another on the issue of the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. Zwingli believed that his memorial view was in harmony with the church’s historic position of the relationship between the divine and human nature in Christ, and he charged Luther’s

view of violating the church's classic position. Luther believed that his "sacramental union" view was in harmony with the church's historic position of the relationship between the divine and human nature in Christ, and he charged Zwingli's view of violating the church's classic position. This dispute became an important point of divergence between Reformed theology after Zwingli and Lutheran theology after Luther.

THE BEGINNING OF THE DIVERGENCE

Those who followed Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and the other Reformers continued to embrace and defend this traditional view of Jesus Christ. For example, the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* opened with a statement affirming the historic creeds of the church and recognizing them as the standard against which all heresies receive their condemnation:

Immediately after the times of the apostles—indeed, even while they were still alive—false teachers and heretics arose. Against these, the early church composed creeds—that is, brief and specific confessions that contained the unanimous consent of the universal Christian faith, and the confessions of the orthodox and true church. We publicly affirm that we embrace them and reject all heresies and all doctrines that have ever been brought into the church of God that are contrary to their decision.⁵

The *Formula* continued to affirm and explain Luther's Christology that led to his view of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. And it did so against the Christology of Calvin and his followers. The controversy focused on the communication of properties:

The principal question of this controversy has been whether the divine and human natures in the attributes of each are *really*—that is, truly and in very fact and deed—in mutual communication in the person of Christ, and how far that communication extends. The Calvinists have affirmed that the divine and human natures are personally united in Christ in such a way that neither communicates to the other really—that is, truly and in very deed—anything that is proper to either nature. Rather, the mere names are communicated. Dr. Luther and those who hold with him have firmly maintained the opposite opinion on this doctrine against the Calvinists.⁶

The *Formula* specifically denied that this communication of properties resulted in a fusion or confusion of the divine and human natures of Christ: “We believe, teach and affirm that the divine and human natures are not fused into one nature, nor one changed into the other. Rather, each nature retains its own essential properties.”⁷ This meant that the divine nature alone is omnipresent and the human nature does not become ubiquitous.⁸ Rather, it is in virtue of the communication of properties that Christ is present in the Lord’s Supper, according to the Lutheran view: “Being present everywhere, Christ can impart his true body and his blood in the Lord’s Supper. Now this is not done according to the way and property of human nature, but according to the way and property of the right hand of God, as Luther said. And this presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper is neither physical nor earthly; nonetheless, it is most true and indeed substantial.”⁹ In light of this, the *Formula* rejected the Calvinist understanding of Christ and his presence in the Lord’s Supper: “We repudiate the error that it is impossible for Christ, on account of the realities of his human nature, to be in more places than one—not to say everywhere—with his body. We repudiate the error that the Son of God is present to us on earth in the Word, the sacraments, and in all our troubles, only by his divinity, but this presence has nothing to do with his humanity.”¹⁰

On the Reformed side, the major Calvinist confessions continued to uphold the church’s historic Christology. For example, the *Belgic Confession of Faith* explained the incarnation in this way:

We affirm that God did fulfill the promise that he had made to the fathers by the mouth of his holy prophets when he sent into the world, at the time that he appointed, his own only-begotten and eternal Son. He “took upon himself the form of a servant and was made in human likeness” (Phil. 2:7-8), really assuming the true human nature, with all its weaknesses, except for sin. He was conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, without the participation of a man. And he did not only assume human nature as to the body, but also a true human soul, so that he would be a real human being.¹¹

And it affirmed the personal union of the two natures—which retain their respective properties—in the one person Jesus Christ:

We believe that by this conception, the person of the Son is inseparably united and connected with the human nature. Thus, there are not two Sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in one single person; yet each nature retains its own distinct properties. Since, then, the divine nature has always remained uncreated, not having a beginning of days or end of life, filling heaven and earth, so also has the human nature not lost its properties but remained a creature, having a beginning of days, being a finite nature, and retaining all the properties of a real body.¹²

These confessions of faith on the doctrine of Christ represented the beginning of the divergence between Lutheran and Reformed theologies.

THE POST-REFORMATION DIVERGENCE CONTINUED

Lutheran churches and theologians in the post-Reformation period continued to express the traditional doctrine of the two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ. Martin Chemnitz carefully defined the terms of this formulation:

- *Essence, or substance, or nature*, is that which of itself is common to many individuals of the same species, and which embraces the entire essential perfection of each of them.¹³
- *Person or individual* is something particular, possessing indeed the entire and perfect substance of the same species, but determined and limited by a characteristic and personal particularity.¹⁴ It thus subsists of itself, separated or distinguished from the other individuals of the same species, not in essence, but in number. For a person is an indivisible, intelligent, incommunicable substance, which neither is a part of another, nor is sustained in another, nor has dependence on another object such as the separated soul has on the body that is to be raised up. Therefore, the names of the essence or natures are θεότης, ἀνθρωπότης; divinity, humanity; divine nature, human nature; divine essence, human substance. The designations of the person are God, man.¹⁵

Concerning these two natures, John Andrew Quenstedt affirmed: “The incarnate person consists of two natures, divine and human. The divine nature he possesses from eternity, from God the Father, through eternal,

true and properly named generation of substance; from this, Christ is also the true, natural, and eternal God, and Son of God. A true and pure human nature he received in time, from the virgin Mary.”¹⁶ Proof that Jesus Christ possessed these two natures was marshaled by David Hollaz:

- *The true and eternal divine nature* is proved by the most complete arguments, derived from:
 - the divine names;
 - the attributes that are particular to God alone;
 - the personal and essential acts of God;
 - the religious worship due God alone.

- That Christ is *true man* is shown from:
 - human names;
 - the essential parts of a man;
 - the attributes that are particular to a true man;
 - human works;
 - the genealogy of Christ as a man.¹⁷

Against the historical errors of Christology, Lutheran theologians affirmed the historic orthodox position as articulated in the *Chalcedonian Creed*. For example, Hafenraffer stated:

The two natures in Christ are united

- *without change*: He did not become the Son of God by the change of his divine nature into flesh;
- *without confusion*: The two natures are one, not by a mingling, through which a third object (*tertium quiddam*) comes into being, preserving in no respect the entireness of the simple natures;
- *without separation and interruption*: The two natures in Christ are so united that they are never separated by any intervals either of time or place. Therefore, this union has not been dissolved in death, and the Word cannot be shown at any place without the assumed human nature.¹⁸

The Lutheran theologians acknowledged certain peculiar realities about the real and full humanity of Christ.¹⁹ The first was his impersonal human subsistence, Christ’s “ἀνυποστασία, the being without a particular subsistence, because this is replaced by the divine person (ὑπόστασις) of the Son

of God, as one far more exalted. If the human nature of Christ had retained its particular subsistence, there would have been in Christ two persons.”²⁰ As Quenstedt specified: “When the human nature of Christ is said to be ἀνυπόστατος, nothing else is meant than that it does not subsist of itself, and according to itself, in a particular personality. Moreover, it is called ἐνυπόστατος because it has become a partaker of the person of another and subsists in the λόγος.”²¹

The second peculiarity about Christ was his sinlessness, as affirmed by John Adam Scherzer:

Christ never sinned, nor was he even able to sin. We prove the statement that he was not even able to sin, or that he was impeccable, as follows:

- He who is like men, with the exception of sin, cannot be peccable. For, because all men are peccable, Christ would be like them also with regard to sin and peccability, which contradicts Hebrews 7:26 [“For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens;” Heb. 7:26].
- He who is both holy by his origin and is exempt from original sin, who can never have a depraved will, and constitutes one person with God himself, is clearly impeccable.
- He who is higher than the angels is completely impeccable.
- He to whom the Holy Spirit has been given without measure is also holy and just without measure and, therefore, cannot sin.²²

A third particular reality about the humanity of Christ, according to the Lutheran theologians, was an excellence of soul and body.

Following Luther, these theologians affirmed the communication of properties or natures. Quenstedt defined this as the following:

The communion of natures is that most intimate participation and combination of the divine nature of the Word and of the assumed human nature by which the Word, through a most intimate and profound *perichoresis* [mutual indwelling], so permeates, perfects, inhabits, and appropriates to himself the human nature that is personally united to him. The result is that from both natures mutually inter-communicating, there arises the one incommunicable subject—that is, one person.²³

Of particular importance was the implication that, in the incarnation, the divine nature communicated its properties—for example, omnipresence—to the human nature of Jesus Christ. This was affirmed by John William Baier:

From the personal union proceeds the participation of natures, through which it comes to pass that the human nature belongs to the Son of God and the divine nature to the Son of man. For marking this, the word *perichoresis* (which, according to its original meaning denotes penetration, or the existence of one thing in another) began to be employed. Thus, the divine nature might indeed be said actively to penetrate, and the human nature passively to be penetrated.²⁴

It was on this one particular point that Lutheran and Reformed theologians disagreed in their Christology. In dealing with this disagreement, Johann F. Cotta first listed nine areas of agreement between Lutherans and Reformed theologians:

They agree that

- in Christ there is only one person, but two natures; namely, a divine and a human nature;
- these two natures have been joined in the closest and most intimate union, which is generally called “personal;”
- by this union (a more intimate one than which cannot be conceived), the natures are neither mingled, as has been condemned in the Eutychians, nor the persons divided, as has been condemned in the Nestorians; rather
- this union must be regarded as without change, fusion, division, and interruption; therefore
- by this union neither the difference of natures nor the particular conditions of either have been removed; for the human nature of Christ is always human ... but the divine nature is and always remains infinite, immeasurable, impassible;
- nevertheless, by the power of the personal union, the properties of both natures have become common to the person of Christ, so that the person of Christ, the God-man, possesses divine properties, uses them, and is named by them; in addition to this,
- by means of the hypostatic union, there have been imparted to the human nature of Christ the very highest gifts of acquired condition; but

- to the mediatorial acts of Christ, each nature contributed its own part, and that the divine nature conferred on the acts of the human nature infinite power to redeem and save the human race.
- In summary, the intimate union of God and man in Christ is so wonderful and sublime that it surpasses in the highest degree the comprehension of our mind.²⁵

The main point of difference was the following: “The Reformed theologians differ from us [Lutheran theologians] when the question is stated concerning the impartation abstractly considered, or of a nature to a nature. They deny that, by the hypostatic union, the properties of the divine nature have been truly and really imparted to the human nature of Christ (and that, also, for common possession, use, and designation) so that the human nature of our Savior is truly omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient.”²⁶ According to the Lutheran position, however: “The majesty of the omnipresence of the Word was communicated to the human nature of Christ at the first moment of the personal union. In consequence of this, along with the divine nature, the human nature is now omnipresent, in the state of exaltation, in a true, real, substantial and effective presence.”²⁷

According to Hollaz, Reformed theologians employed three principal arguments against his—the Lutheran—position:

- because the reality of the body of Christ, of his death and ascension to heaven, would be disproved, inasmuch as a true human nature cannot be extended indefinitely [be everywhere present];
- because he who is omnipresent cannot die;
- because he who is by virtue of his omnipresence already in heaven cannot still ascend to it.²⁸

To these objections, Hollaz responded with the following points:

- The doctrine concerning the reality of the flesh of Christ is not overthrown by the ascription of omnipresence to it, for it is not omnipresent by a physical and extensive presence, but by a hyperphysical, divine, and illogical presence that does not belong to it formally and *per se*, but by way of participation and by virtue of the personal union.
- The doctrine concerning the death of Christ is not overturned by it, for the natural union of body and soul was indeed dissolved by

death, but without disturbing the permanent hypostatic union of the divine and human natures.

- The doctrine of the ascension of Christ is not disproved by it, for before the ascension the flesh of Christ was present in heaven by an uninterrupted presence as a personal act, but he ascended visibly into heaven in a glorified body according to the divine economy so that he might fill all things with his omnipresence of his dominion. For Christ, by virtue of his divine omnipotence, can make himself present in various ways.²⁹

Interestingly, what had been developed by Luther as an explanation for his view of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper—the divine nature communicated its omnipresence to the human nature of Christ—was now further developed by his followers into a full-fledged doctrine of the communication of properties.

Turning to the developments in post-Reformation Christology among the Reformed churches and theologians, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* echoed the traditional formula:

The Son of God is the second person in the Trinity, being true and eternal God, of one nature and equal with the Father. When the fullness of time came, he took upon himself a human nature with all the essential properties and common weaknesses, yet without sin. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, and is of her nature. Thus, two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, divine and human, were inseparably joined together in one person, without change, composition, or confusion. This person is true God and true man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.³⁰

The *Confession* also affirmed the communication of properties: “Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself. But by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person referred to by the other nature.”³¹

As noted above, the disagreement between Lutheran and Reformed theologians focused on the precise nature of this communication of properties. According to Amandus Polan:

The things peculiar to the separate natures are common to Christ's person and are accordingly attributed to and true of the natures only distinctly, but of the person without distinction—and this not merely verbally or by empty titles, but most really. For because the person embraces both natures, whatever participates in both natures or in one of them really belongs to it because of the hypostatic union of the natures. And what is proper to one nature is by no means common to the other one in it because of the essential and eternal difference between the natures, though it is common to the person or to one of the natures in the person.³²

Specifically, and over against the Lutheran view, Mark Frideric Wendelin explained further:

We acknowledge that in Christ dwells the entire fullness of divinity bodily, provided that the communication of the natures as well as the properties is understood to have taken place in the person through the union, not in the natures among themselves so that one nature has been communicated to the other along with its properties—namely, to the human nature [has been communicated] the divine nature and its properties, to the divine nature [has been communicated] the human nature and its properties. Communication of this kind confuses or abolishes the natures and the attributes, and it is not found anywhere in Scripture.³³

Thus, both Lutheran and Reformed theologians in the post-Reformation period embraced and defended the church's historic position on Jesus Christ, the God-man. But one major divergence over the proper understanding of the communication of properties separated the two theological camps.

¹ Creed of Chalcedon, adapted from Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1877-1905), 2:62-63.

² Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 378.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, pt. 3, q. 2, art. 4.

⁴ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 378-379.

⁵ *Formula of Concord*, epitome, 2. In Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3.94-95.

⁶ *Formula of Concord*, article 8, statement of the controversy. In Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3.147-148.

⁷ *Formula of Concord*, article 8, affirmation, 2. In Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3.148.

- ⁸ *Formula of Concord*, article 8, affirmation, 3. In Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3.148.
- ⁹ *Formula of Concord*, article 8, affirmation, 12. In Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3.153.
- ¹⁰ *Formula of Concord*, article 8, negatives, 11, 13. In Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3.156.
- ¹¹ *Belgic Confession of Faith*, 18. In Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3.402-403.
- ¹² *Belgic Confession of Faith*, 19. In Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3.404.
- ¹³ An example is human nature, which is a complex essence consisting of both a material aspect (the body) and an immaterial aspect (the soul or the spirit).
- ¹⁴ An example is my wife, Nora, who is a particular instantiation or concretization of the entirety of a human nature.
- ¹⁵ Martin Chemnitz, *Of the Two Natures*, 1. In Schmid, 297.
- ¹⁶ John Andrew Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica sive Systema Theologicum* (Lipsiae, 1715), 3:75. Cited in Schmid, 298.
- ¹⁷ David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, 656. Cited in Schmid, 299.
- ¹⁸ Matthew Hafenerffer, *Loci Theologiae sive Compendium Theologiae*, 3:77. Cited in Schmid, 307.
- ¹⁹ For clarification of the following discussion, a definition of the hypostatic union may be helpful: “the joining together (the union) of the two natures—one fully divine, one fully human—in the one person (Gk. *hypostasis*), Jesus Christ. The preexistent Son of God became incarnate by taking on a fully human nature—both a material aspect, or body, and an immaterial aspect, or soul. The man Jesus had no existence prior to the incarnation; he was *anhypostatic* (no personal existence). Rather, the human nature exists in the divine person; it is *enhyposstatic* (existing in the Son of God).” Adapted from Gregg R. Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, forthcoming).
- ²⁰ David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, 657. Cited in Schmid, 300.
- ²¹ John Andrew Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica sive Systema Theologicum* (Lipsiae, 1715), 3:77. Cited in Schmid, 300.
- ²² John Adam Scherzer, *Systema Theologiae* (1680), 189. Cited in Schmid, 302.
- ²³ John Andrew Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica sive Systema Theologicum* (Lipsiae, 1715), 3:87. Cited in Schmid, 310.
- ²⁴ John William Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, 463. Cited in Schmid, 317.
- ²⁵ The list was added by Cotta in his edition of Gerhard’s works. In John Gerhard’s *Loci Theologici*, 4, Diss., 1.50. Cited in Schmid, 329-330. Cotta produced the definitive edition of John Gerhard’s work as a twenty-two volume set published at Tubingen between 1762 and 1787.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ John Andrew Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica sive Systema Theologicum* (Lipsiae, 1715), 3:185. Cited in Schmid, 331.
- ²⁸ David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, 714. Cited in Schmid, 332.
- ²⁹ David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, 718. Cited in Schmid, 332.
- ³⁰ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 8.2. In Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3.619-620.
- ³¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 8.7. In Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3.622.
- ³² Amandus Polan, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (Hanover, 1624/1625), 6:16. Cited in Heinrich Hepp, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Ernst Bizer, ed., G. T. Thomson, trans. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1950), 439.
- ³³ Mark Frideric Wendelin, *Collatio Doctrinae Christianae Reformatorum et Lutheranorum* (Cassel, 1660), 69-70. Cited in Hepp, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 440-441.

The Mystery of the Incarnation: “Great is the Mystery of Godliness”

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ORIENTATION

The term “incomprehensible” has changed in emphasis over the years. It has strengthened in meaning and become rougher. It now means gibberish or nonsense, and usually refers to bits of verbal communication that are impossible for various reasons to make sense of. It’s a black or white term, a term of rebuke, a put down. But in Christian theology generally the term is not used of locutions, but of states of affairs, of realities. A state of affairs that can be incomprehensible to a degree, a matter of more or less so. We can grow in understanding, and what was totally incomprehensible can become less so, through being taught, or by our own reflection, or by gaining more information. Such thinking, the presence of incomprehensibilities and their toleration, is shunned by the rationalist temper, for whom what is not readily understood through the senses and by the reason cannot be real, or warrant serious attention. And there is something of that rationalist temper in all of us. We want to know, and suspect the claim that some matter cannot be fully understood as being evidence of some failure—or conspiracy. Ours is

a culture that tells itself that it is only satisfied with “transparency.”

“Mystery” is a positive New Testament word, almost exclusively Pauline but anticipated by Jesus’ references to the “mysteries of the kingdom” which were being made known to his disciples even as Jesus taught them. There is about such mysteries both disclosure and reserve. Paul uses the word to refer to happenings, events, and so to states of affairs, or combinations of these features. Sometimes what is or was mysterious has a dispensational ring to it. What is now revealed was previously a “mystery,” something that previously the angels “longed to look” and couldn’t because they were too early. What, after the “making known” still remains mysterious, held back, may and will be made known in the future.

At other times states of affairs that Paul calls a “mystery” are so because of their inherent strangeness. So it is with the Incarnation. This is a “mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints” (Col 1:26). In fact the Incarnation is both, something revealed, and yet remaining a mystery. Paul prays that the Colossian church may “reach all the riches of full understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). The nature and activities of God are also for Paul inherently inaccessible and must count as mysteries, matters which are “past finding out.” Whether there is a difference between mysteries which will forever remain unfathomable, and those which eventually will be made plain, will not concern us here. At one point in discussing the mysteries regarding person of Christ, the Puritan John Owen remarks, rather laconically, “What we shall farther comprehend of them in the other world, God only knows.”¹ Implied in these words is the distinction between the comprehension of some matter, and its “apprehension” a partial though real understanding of it.

In this article I wish to look at those elements of the Incarnation that are not fully comprehensible, but “apprehended.” That is, we have some understanding, drawn from our understanding of human affairs, used analogically, to characterize the ways in which God behaves according to Scripture. And then there are those elements of the doctrine that are well-nigh incomprehensible. But I shall finally argue that this is no reason to suspend our judgment regarding the reality of and the fundamental place of the Incarnation in our faith, much less to modify it or reject it.

There are two fundamental mysteries in the Christian faith, the Trinity and

the Incarnation. The mystery of the Trinity has to do with how the one God has three persons each of whom are distinct yet fully divine. "It seems to me, that nothing can be more admirable than the words of Gregory Nazianzen: "I cannot think of the unity without being irradiated by the Trinity; I cannot distinguish between the Trinity without being carried up to the unity."² Here Calvin endorses a kind of mental oscillation in order that we may remain steady in our appreciation of both the one-ness and the three-ness of God. We may regard this remark as identifying part of the discipline that Christians need to develop in their thinking about God and his ways.

The second mystery has to do with the Incarnation of one of these persons, the Logos of God, the second person of the three. This is what is chiefly to concern us in this piece. This involves the Logos, who is God, taking on human nature, both body and spirit, and thus becoming our mediator. His divine nature is eternal and immutable, while his human nature experiences growth and maturation.

A further preliminary has to do with systematic theological endeavor. What is the theologians' task? Theology is not a Christian technology. It is not the theologian's place to devise explanations of what is revealed, including its mysteries, and so help us to master God's revelation. The theologian is not like a detective or a consultant engineer. Rather, theologians help us to think about and understand our faith, including its mysteries, in a way that does not depart from the revelation which God has given us in Scripture and through his Son. If the stress of Scripture on the three-ness of God, his three-personhood, leads us to talk as if there are three gods, then this is a mistake, because it flies in the face of Scripture, with its repeated affirmation that the Lord our God is one Lord. If the recognition of the oneness of God leads us in the direction of deism, and the Mediator is regarded as merely a creature, though perhaps the highest of creatures, then we are to be corrected by the biblical data respecting the three-ness of God, and so on. So theology should foster the discipline of faithful thinking and speaking and, as with any discipline, the ways of thinking necessary for it have to be acquired.

THREE THINGS THAT WE PARTLY UNDERSTAND REGARDING THE INCARNATION

In saying that there are three things that we partly understand about the Incarnation I am not saying these things are all there are to our partial

understanding of this central mystery of our faith. But they are three central things, most of them discussed in the literature about the Incarnation. These things also remind us about important biblical emphases as to the shape of the Incarnation, its contours. I discuss them in no particular order, though you may think that they have an order.

(1) The accessing relationship. In the coming together of the Godhead and human nature in the person of the Logos, a one-sided accessing relationship is involved. The Incarnation was not the union of God with an abstract principle or concept, but of union with a particular instance of a human nature, one that from the earliest moment of its conception was in union with the Logos. There was no time such that in that instant the fetus in Mary's womb had a separate, nor even a separable existence as a mere human person. The Son did not become incarnate by adopting an already-existing human fetus or newly-born person. Further, it is a feature of this union that the eternal Son has access to the human mind of this instance of human nature, which in Incarnation became an aspect of the Person of the Son. The Incarnation was not the union of two separate things, the divine Logos and a fetus of a Jewish boy, but a divine Person taking on the powers and qualities of a human being, body and mind, into his own Person, separate still (according to Chalcedon³) but as joined as it is possible for such separate entities to be.

The human powers of the Mediator included human consciousness. We know from data in the New Testament that the human consciousness in the union was accessed by the divine person, but that the human consciousness did not in a parallel way have access to the contents of the divine mind, unless that divine mind revealed it in the regular way. And it seems inconceivable that the human consciousness could have direct access to the divine mind as God himself has access to it. The human personality was in no way divinized, even though it was (and is) in union of the divine. Moreover, the union did not entail a transfer of the human properties from the human nature to the divine person. When God became man, he did so not by losing divine properties, or by having them augmented in some way, but by gaining a human nature. Jesus Christ grew, his qualities developed in a normal human way; he asked questions, and learned, he obeyed his mother, learned a trade from Joseph, and so on. These were human properties of the human nature of the divine Logos who had become man. Hence that term "accessing." The use of this term should not be taken to indicate "distance" in the divine

person's appropriation of its human mind. The Gospels present Jesus as enjoying a seamless human consciousness, with only the occasional and significant distinction between them. Yet within that apparent seamlessness the Logos seems occasionally to identify itself as "I." So in "I have power (or authority) to lay down my life and have power to take it again" it seems likely that this power or authority the Mediator had in virtue of his divine nature. Nevertheless we never learn from the Gospels what it is like "from the inside" to live a two-natured life. (More on this later). This accessing relation is asymmetrical, a one way street for the divine to the human, but barred (or impossible) in the reverse direction. Barred by the creator-creature distinction, we might say. This does not prevent the New Testament from testifying to the closeness of the union by sometimes (using a kind of shorthand) ascribing human properties to God, as in Acts 20:28. This type of literary expression is known as "the communication of properties."

(2) A second feature in the Incarnation of the asymmetrical character of the relation between the divine and the human concerns willing. If we leave statements such as "Jesus is God and man" unparsed this language may suggest otherwise. For such a phrase may suggest that there is a parity between the two, that the Incarnation was a consequence of a willing binding agreement between the divine Person and the human nature. But there are at least two reasons why this could not be so. One is that until the Mediator's growth into consciousness and in understanding of the Mediator, Christ's human nature did not possess a will. And, a related point, by the time of the Incarnation, it was too late! The incarnation was accomplished. By the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit the union of the two was already done.

And the second reason is that the Incarnation was a Trinitarian occurrence, in which each person of the Trinity, not only the Logos, was active. The willing Logos became incarnate in order to do the will of his Father, and his human nature was imbued with the Holy Spirit. So, far from the relationship between the human and the divine being restricted to the Logos, the work was the will of the Triune God entire, each Person playing a characteristically different role in the work. Putting the point more abstractly, the Logos is a person of the Godhead, and fully divine. Hence quite apart from the Mediator's explicitly alluding to the Father and the Holy Spirit, that fact alone is enough to ensure that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each involved. For each is the eternal God, and such involvement is sufficient to

ensure the involvement of the Godhead, and thus of the three persons of the Godhead. It is true that in Incarnation the eternal glory of the Logos (“the glory I had with the Father”) was not displayed, but another, related glory, that of being filled with “grace and truth” (John 1:14) was. Nevertheless we may think with John that the glory that Christ had with his Father was transformed for us by the glory of the Son as the Suffering Servant, full of grace and truth and of his humbling to the death of the cross.

This concurrence of the three persons of the Trinity in the incarnation of the Logos can only be ensured by a classical understanding of the Trinity, each person being wholly the one God. On a social trinitarian understanding, where a generic idea and not a numerical identity of divinity is understood, then the divinity of the Son is distinct from the divinity of the Father, and of the Holy Spirit. The three persons are not one God, but three instances of divinity in the way your humanity is a different instance of humanity than mine.

Both one and two stress asymmetry, as does the third.

(3) Suppose I move my arm, and then I move yours. The two movements are quite different. My movement of my arm is the movement of “ownership.” Under normal circumstances I don’t move it by doing something else in order to move it but I simply move it. (Of course if my right arm is numb through paralysis or for other reasons, say, then it may be that the only way I can move it is in the indirect way, by using my left arm to move it, or by asking someone else to move it.) But when I move your arm then necessarily I have to move it by using one or both of my arms, the arms I “own” and which work naturally for me “from the inside.” Similarly with your thinking. I know my thoughts chiefly through my immediate consciousness and memory, or by a process of inference in my consciousness, but I know your thinking only if you tell me or indicate to me in other ways, say by your “body language.”

In the case of the Incarnation, the human bodily actions of Jesus are “owned” by Jesus in this sort of natural way. There is no artificial “re-routing” of the activity that is involved in moving one’s limbs, such that such activity is more labored. It is not as if the body of Jesus is at a distance from him, or dislocated in some way, rather the reverse. And similarly with his thinking. There are occasions when his growing up involved learning, listening and questioning (Luke 2:46), and that learning by experience was an important aspect of his ministry. Moreover, he learned obedience by the things that he suffered (Heb 5:8). There are times when his knowledge is distinguished

from that of his heavenly Father (Matt 24:36). Such occasions seem to have been rare, but sufficient to indicate that the knowledge that Jesus had was limited. In such instances we may say for clarification, "Jesus, in his human nature," but his knowledge and his ignorance are taken for granted by Christ. Though he undergoes and expresses a variety of emotions, we are given no inkling in the four Gospels what it is like to be a person having both an eternal mind which is all-knowing and a human mind which is temporal and limited in knowledge, except that Jesus meekly accepted the fact, which does not seem to have had particularly disruptive consequences for him. An exception to this is the temptation in Gethsemane. Here, nevertheless, his activity is always through his humanity, localized in time and place as we all are. Another example which might seem to be an exception to this is the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-8), and also the appearance of the risen Christ to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-5).

In his well-known article "The Emotional Life of our Lord," B. B. Warfield does not rule out in principle that Christ's expressions of emotion, his anger, his sorrow, and so on may have been on occasion an expression of his divine nature, but he decides that none that are recorded were.⁴ He notes the reserve that must be used in the venture of distinguishing the human from the divine. How one might discern whether the emotion was an expression of his divine nature, other than being told by Christ himself or by an Evangelist, Warfield does not say. But it is pretty clear that no one could tell by knowing what it was like to have the divine nature, or to have direct access to it, by knowing what it was like to be the God-man. The creature-Creator distinction presents an insurmountable barrier to anything like that.

More could be said about these features of our Lord's humanity and divinity. But the point to be stressed here is that the relationship of Jesus to his humanity and his relationship to his divinity is another case of asymmetry. Jesus does not behave as if he were a man who was unique in that he had access to the mind of God, but as God who had taken on, and so access to, human powers and limitations as his own powers and limitations. His humanity is authentic, never artificial or ethereal, or at a distance, not obviously "bolted on" to his divinity. But once again we are given no inkling from the inside of what it was like to be such a strange Person, a Person who is necessarily divine and who voluntarily takes on human nature.⁵

In summary, so far I have been indicating three ways, all having to do with

the asymmetry between the divine logos and human nature, that enable us to have some apprehension of the mystery of the Incarnation. This is as the result of a number of different factors; we already have some understanding of asymmetrical relations in our everyday experience, as we have been seeing; the scriptural claims about the nature of the Incarnation bear these out. We see, however, that a veil is drawn over any queries of this sort: "What must it or may it be like to be the divine Person united to human nature?" There are no data of Scripture that would encourage such an approach, but rather we find a reticence, a reserve, silence. And in view of what we know about the nature of God as this revealed in Scripture this ought not to be surprising.

So what "apprehension" we may have of the Incarnation cannot be built up "from the inside," what the experience of Jesus was like, but only "from the outside," from Scriptural statements about the nature and activity of God and what it tells us about human nature, men and women made in the image of God, and our disciplined reflection on these.

THE INCARNATION AND GOD'S ETERNAL BEING

To underline these limitations I wish to say something about the relation of the eternal God to time, and then about the relation of God's eternal being to the Incarnation.⁶ The reason for doing this is that we need always to remember that the Godhead and the divine person of the Logos were in no sense diminished or downsized by the Incarnation. Granting poetical license, we may sing with Charles Wesley that in the Incarnation our God was "contracted to a span," for God became man. But he became man not by ceasing to be God, eternal God. He came down to us by taking on our nature, not by diminishing his deity. Kenotic theories proposing the reduction in the powers of the Godhead in order to engage in Incarnation fail to convince, for they play havoc with the doctrine of God. Paul in Colossians states that through and for the Son all things were created, and in him all things hold together; "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (1:16-17, 19); "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3). There is hardly room for kenoticism here.

At the time of the Reformation, in connection with the debates about the Lord's Supper, the insistence that in the Incarnation the deity of God was not diminished was dubbed by the Lutherans the *extra calvinisticum*,

the Calvinists "extra," the implication being that this was something that they had invented. But in reality the Calvinists' insistence on this point might equally well have been called the *extra patristicum*, as David Willis⁷ pointed out. For this is what lay behind the Chalcedonian Definition and was routinely stated by Augustine, for example.

The "emptying" of himself referred to in Philippians 2:7 is best thought not as a "reduction" in the Godhead to smooth out the mystery of the Incarnation, but as the veiling of the Logos's glory and his subordination, in the outworking of the economy of redemption, to do the Father's bidding.

The Incarnation and time

With the tradition at this point I shall assume that God is without time, or apart from time, or exists timelessly, though having all points of created time accessible to his eternal mind. So, bearing in mind what we have been thinking about in regard to the Incarnation we may say that there is no pre-existent Christ with a life-history independent of and prior to the Incarnation. For the eternal God there was no time when he was not incarnated as Jesus of Nazareth. Why not? Because as the Logos, the Son of God is as eternal as the other Trinitarian persons are eternal. After all, the Logos is God.

Supposing that God freely but (as befits his divinity) eternally wills to be incarnate, being our Mediator, incarnate in Jesus Christ. There was no time when the Son of God was not willing himself to be incarnate in our history. That is, God eternally wills that he becomes incarnate in (as far as we can tell) 4-5 BC. Given such willing there is no other life story of God than the one that includes the Incarnation. However, from the perspective of the creature the Incarnation was an event in time that occurred around that time. This means that we must think about time and eternity from two standpoints. From the eternal standpoint, God has timelessly in his mind all that he wills to come to pass in time and so, in the Incarnation, all that is involved in the Logos taking on human nature and as the Mediator, being the person of Jesus of Nazareth whom the Logos assumed. That willing condescension is an aspect of the eternal life of the Godhead, and so of the Logos who is God. But this does not mean that the Incarnation or any other events in creation are themselves timeless. That would be to confuse "God eternally wills the occurrence of an event in time," and "God eternally wills

that an event in time be eternal.”

So there is the standpoint of time and space, the creaturely standpoint, according to which the Incarnation, though long foreshadowed, took place at a certain time in human history, and lasted until the time when a cloud took the risen Christ out of the disciples’ sight (Acts 1:9). That is, at the point when his human history as the God-man on earth came to an end. “But when the fullness of time had come, 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 sons” (Gal 4:4). From the eternal standpoint there was no time when the Incarnation was not, for the simple reason that the eternal standpoint does not have temporal change. From the creaturely standpoint, conditioned as it is by time and space, Christ “descended” and then “ascended.”

God’s identity and spirituality

God is an eternal spirit, existing in three persons, as we have been reminding ourselves. As God he does not have a body, nor is his mind a created human mind, nor like one. Yet it is confessed that in the Incarnation a human nature is in union with God, in the person of the Logos. The Son becomes two-minded and possesses a human body. He is the God-man. Can we understand this? How are we to approach it? The honest answer to such questions is that we cannot have much understanding of such matters. This is seen by how the church when faced with the mystery of the Incarnation resorted to the use of negative language, as we recognize in some of the phraseology of the Definition of Chalcedon. Here it is confessed that Christ is two-natured yet “*without* confusing the two natures, *without* transmuting one nature into the other, *without* dividing them into two separate categories, *without* contrasting them according to area or function.” And the Definition summarizes the position as “The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union.”⁸ The theological logic is perhaps more straightforward than the wording itself. It is that in a true Incarnation both the Godhood and the humanity must be undiminished, and that no expressions ought to be used which undermine Christ’s full divinity, or his true humanity.

In discussing this Oliver Crisp writes in one place of the divine nature being “expanded” to include a human nature, and allows himself to think of that nature as, upon Incarnation, “part” of God. He notes that “Christ is a

"part" of God in a "stretched" sense because of the well-known objections to God having proper parts. But aside from this ..."⁹ For instance, defenders of divine simplicity deny that God has any proper parts or properties. Yet it is not easy to determine what is being stretched and what is left un-stretched. It is not just the problem of divine simplicity and Incarnation that are involved here, but more general features of the Godhead, those of God's spirituality and infinity. These also require that "part" be used in a stretched sense.

So the problem of understanding is being addressed by stretching the ordinary senses of the terms being used in the account. This is of course a standard and time-honored way of approaching using language to characterize God, to appeal to metaphor, analogy and the like. It is helpful when considering individual features or attributes of God, but less so in the case of God himself and his relation to what is *ad extra*. The problem becomes truly acute with the case of God being *in union with* an aspect of the creation, human nature.

Part of the discipline of thinking about God and his relationship to the creation or any part of it is the strong tendency we possess, almost an intellectual reflex, to think of God in spatial terms. So it is tempting to think of God as an enormous sac, or perhaps as a gas, clear and translucent, encompassing all of created reality, which occupies a minute fraction of it. As Augustine put it, writing of his way of thinking when as a young man, he was associated with the Manichees,

I conceived even you, life of my life, as a large being, permeating infinite space of every side, penetrating the entire mass of the world, and outside this extending in all directions for immense distances without end; so earth had you, heaven had you, everything had you, and in relation to you all was finite; but you not so ... this was my conjecture, for I was incapable of thinking otherwise, but it was false.¹⁰

Just as we are not encouraged to psychologize the two mindedness of Christ, so we are not encouraged to spatialize the infinity and fullness of the divine being. Indeed we are positively discouraged to do this, to put it mildly. For the need to resist such a temptation seems to be behind the prohibition in the Second Commandment of making images of God.

We might try a different tack, not to provide us with a different conceptuality than the spatial, but to remind ourselves of the inadequacy of

“spatializing” God and the dangers of doing so. There is precedent in Scripture of the use of sounds, of notes, to express the glory of God—thunder, and song, and trumpet blasts, and “like the sound of many waters, the sound of the Almighty” (Ezek 1:24). We might think of God himself as a glorious sound. This is no more foreign to his spiritual being than thinking of God as spatial, yet thinking in these terms might free us of the reflex tendency to think of God spatially. His becoming Incarnate might then be expressed by the start of another sound which modifies our hearing of the original note or chord. Is God changed thereby? No, the original sound is there, but the change is some additional feature that it comes to have. I am making these suggestions seriously, not as a serious theological proposal but suggesting a way of freeing us from the reflex of thinking of God only visually, as an aspect of the discipline that we need to develop when trying to think of God. Theology is much more like adopting and developing a discipline of thought and of ways of thinking in which negation, the denial of what God is, the “stretching” of the meaning of everyday terms, and the freeing of our minds of various intellectual habits, all play their part.

CONCLUSION: CHRIST OUR FOUNDATION

Christians, if they are consistent, are foundationalists in their theology. Christ is our foundation. “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11). The church, the household of God, is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph 2:20).

So, if Christ is the foundation, even the cornerstone, and his person as incarnate is mysterious, incomprehensible and only apprehended fitfully by our finite and sin-darkened minds, then at the foundation of our faith there is a mystery. This is central to the existence of the church and to the proclamation of the offence of the Cross. Christians exist through a mystery, and at the center of the proclamation of the good news lies a mystery. “Great indeed ... is the mystery of godliness; He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Tim 3:16). Who? Christ Jesus the Lord!

- ¹ John Owen, *A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ – God and Man* (in *Works*, ed., W. H. Goold; London, Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 44.
- ² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) (trans. Henry Beveridge; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), I.13.17.
- ³ Part of the Formula of Chalcedon reads “[We] apprehend this one and only Christ – Son, Lord, only-begotten – in two natures without confusing the two natures...” in *The Creeds of the Churches* (ed., John H. Leith; Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1963), 36.
- ⁴ See for example, B. B. Warfield, “The Emotional Life of Our Lord” in *The Person and Work of Christ* (ed., Samuel G. Craig, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1950), 94.
- ⁵ This section is developed from Oliver D. Crisp, *God Incarnate* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 161-62.
- ⁶ The material in these sections arises from things Oliver Crisp says in *Divinity and Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and *God Incarnate*, but also from things that he does not say.
- ⁷ E. David Willis, *Calvin’s Catholic Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966). For further discussion see Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), ch. 3.
- ⁸ John H. Leith ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books 1963), 36. (Italics added).
- ⁹ Crisp, *God Incarnate*, 162, fn. 18.
- ¹⁰ *Confessions* (trans., Henry Chadwick; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), VII, I (1), 112.

Concerning the *Logos asarkos*: Interacting with Robert W. Jenson

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ABSTRACT

Robert W. Jenson has recently written a short article clarifying his argument against the doctrine of the *Logos asarkos* (Word without flesh). In this article I offer a critique of his remarks, showing that his reasoning has two consequences that are problematic. First, it implies that the Second Person of the Trinity incarnate has parts. Second, it raises significant concerns for divine impassibility.

INTRODUCTION

In a recent article, Robert W. Jenson has offered a clarification of his views on the *Logos asarkos*.¹ It provides readers of Jenson's work with a helpful addendum (though not retraction) to his previously published works on the matter of the *Logos asarkos*. This, very roughly, is the idea that the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, in some sense pre-exists his incarnate,

or creaturely state; that he exists in some sense “without flesh” or *asarkos* as well as “enfleshed” or *ensarkos*.²

Jenson is implacably opposed to the idea that there is some state prior to his being incarnate in which the Word of God exists *without flesh*. In his paper he explains that his previous work does not constitute crypto-Arianism, as some critics have claimed, because he does not hold to the idea that the Word *begins to exist* at the first moment of the Incarnation, nor that Christ *begins to exist* at the first moment of the Incarnation—provided we are careful about what we mean by such phrases. What Jenson means, it seems, is that Christ eternally exists as the Second Person of the Trinity. Christ is identical to the Second Person of the Trinity so that there is nothing above and beyond the Word Incarnate’s relation to the Father as a divine person incarnate to distinguish him from the Father. Because God does not bear relations to time in the same way that creatures do, Christ cannot be said to “pre-exist” his incarnate state as God the Son. For in “the divine life there is ... no line on which the relation describable as God’s sending and Jesus’ obedience could occupy a position ‘after’ anything. And again we must remember that antecedent to God’s life, there is no realm in which the Son/Logos might ‘pre’-exist, or not.”³ There is a monarchy of the Father’s relation to the Son within the eternal divine life, and this might be said to be conceptually prior to the relation Christ bears to the Father. But there is no divine life apart from these person-constituting relations.⁴

In this article, I argue that although Jenson’s clarification of his position does have its roots in classical Christology, and does avoid Arianism, it has two important theological costs that those sympathetic to Jenson’s disambiguated doctrine of Christ’s pre-existence may want to resist. These are, that in identifying God the Son with his human nature Jenson commits himself to the view that God Incarnate is, in some important sense, composite (a notion that he wants to avoid). In addition, Jenson’s position means God the Son cannot be immutable or impassible.⁵ I begin by recapitulating and extrapolating the central issues in Jenson’s recent paper relevant to the present concern. I then offer an argument for the conclusion that Jenson’s identification of Christ with the Word implies composition in the Second Person of the Trinity. Finally, I turn to the matter of divine impassibility, showing

that Jenson cannot hold his model of the hypostatic union and uphold the ancient theological notion that the “Impassible suffers.”

PART I

Like St. Thomas Aquinas before him, Jenson maintains that the divine persons of the Trinity are individuated as subsistent relations.⁶ That is, the Word of God is distinguishable as a divine person in virtue of his possessing a particular relation of origin, which can be expressed as his “being eternally generated by the Father.” This relational predicate, which applies only to the Word, distinguishes him from the other two divine persons. Indeed it is, as Richard Cross has recently pointed out, the *only* distinguishing feature of particular divine persons in the Godhead in the vast majority of western Christian theology.⁷ We might say that in this respect God is unique. It is not that he belongs to a class of entities that possess such subsistent relations that are person-constituting. Rather, he is the only entity for whom this is true because he is the only entity that is tripersonal.

This has bearing upon the question of the putative pre-existence of Christ because, according to Jenson, it is only as a subsistent relation within the Godhead that the Word exists. There is nothing more to his “pre-existence” because there can be nothing more primitive standing “behind” the Word, in this respect. God just *is* Father, Son and Spirit, and the Son as the Word of God is distinguished from the Father by being eternally generated—and nothing more.⁸ This encapsulates an important deliverance of what is sometimes referred to as the Latin model of the Trinity, which provides for a rather austere account of divine personhood over and against the so-called Social or Relational models of the Trinity, which typically have thicker accounts of the “distinctions” they apply to the divine persons of the immanent Trinity.⁹

Thus far, Jenson’s comments represent a helpful clarification (perhaps even, development) of his previous views. To this disambiguation, Jenson adds the claim that when we speak of Christ, we are speaking of that which is identical to the Word. He writes, “we must not posit the Son’s antecedent subsistence in such a fashion as to make the incarnation the addition of the human Jesus to a Son who was himself without him” and later, “It is not as an individual instance of humanity as such, not as one among many who have the same human nature, that Jesus is the second hypostasis of the

Trinity.”¹⁰ What is more, “it is Jesus’ relation to the Father—and not Jesus as a specimen of humanity—which is the second hypostasis of Trinity. The Father’s sending and Jesus’ obedience are the second hypostasis in God.”¹¹

It appears that the copula “is” stands in for the relation of identity in these passages. Christ just *is* the Word enfleshed (i.e., *ensarkos*); there is no meaning to be had in the claim that there is a state of affairs in which Christ is also *asarkos* (i.e., without flesh). Or rather, as Jenson repeats at the end of this paper, if there is a meaning to it, it remains obscure, “a *Vorstellung* in search of a *Begriff*.”¹² Christ’s “pre-existence” (if we may use such a locution) just is his Trinitarian state as the Second Person of the Trinity, nothing more; that much is simply classical orthodoxy. Nevertheless, it seems that there may be problems for Jenson’s account when one sets his claims about what I am calling Latin Trinitarianism against what he says regarding the identity of Jesus with God the Son.

Several distinctions will help make the matter clearer. In his latest paper Jenson does not identify Christ’s human nature with God the Son, he identifies Jesus with God the Son. The referents are Jesus, and God the Son. That seems right. We want to say that there is only one person involved in the Incarnation, namely, the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus is not an additional person, a sort of human person adopted or assumed by God the Son. Conceding that would involve embracing unorthodoxy in the guise of adoptionism and Nestorianism, and Jenson is not enamored of either. So perhaps what Jenson can say is that at the Incarnation the person of God the Son either (a) begins to exemplify the property of human nature, or (b) acquires a new relationship to a particular hunk of matter he did not have previously, one of metaphysical ownership. Note that in each of these scenarios one-and-the-same person is involved. The claim is not about whether God the Son is identical to *his human nature*, but whether God the Son is identical to *Jesus*. Suppose we think that incarnation involves some sort of transformation in God the Son.¹³ He begins to exemplify human nature. He has the properties necessary and sufficient to be human in addition to his divine nature. Then, on one way of construing things, it looks like Jesus is identical to God the Son because the Incarnation is a matter of God the Son being transformed into a human—without ceasing to be a divine person, which is of course non-negotiable for the two-natures doctrine of ancient orthodoxy. He instantiates humanity, expanding, as it were, so as

to encompass a particular human life in addition to his divine life. In some respects this may be akin to the transformation from caterpillar to butterfly: the caterpillar begins to exemplify the properties necessary and sufficient for being a caterpillar. Perhaps he does this without losing his essential “caterpillar nature,” whatever that might entail. Something similar could be said regarding the Incarnation, the relevant changes having been made.

Alternatively, the Incarnation is about coming into a particular relation with another entity. The assumption of human flesh involves the assumption of a concrete thing that comprises human nature. Suppose that is a human body and human soul, rightly configured. Then, in becoming Incarnate, God the Son acquires a particular relation to a concrete particular, that is, his human nature. On this view the human nature is not another person, but the natural endowment that would normally form a human person absent incarnation. (It cannot be another *person* on pain of Nestorianism.¹⁴)

Now, in the case of the transformation model, it looks like Christ is identical to God the Son, who “expands” himself to include a human nature within his life, so that he has a phase of his life that is without human nature, and a phase that includes a human nature. These two phases need not be chronological; they could be merely conceptual or logical, like the conceptual distinction between the morning star and the evening star, which both refer to the same thing at different times of the day, that is, Venus. This certainly seems to fit better with what Jenson says about the identity of Christ and God the Son, though he doesn’t align himself with a transformational model of Incarnation. But, in any case, this view comes with a theological cost attached: it requires that God the Son has parts, including physical parts. If one wants to retain a Latin account of the Trinity according to which there are no real distinctions in the Godhead and no parts in God because he is metaphysically simple, then this looks like this cost could be significant. Jenson does endorse the key claim of Latin Trinitarianism when he says that the eternal existence of God the Son is predicated upon the relation of origin he bears to the Father. But then, what should be said about the parts God the Son acquires in becoming incarnate, including human parts?

Alternatively, on the relational model, God the Son is not necessarily identical to Christ. On one way of construing this model, Christ has God the Son as a component, in fact, the most fundamental component because God the Son is the person who becomes incarnate. But in addition to God

the Son there is his human nature, a concrete thing comprising a human body and soul, rightly configured. In which case, God the Son is not identical to his human nature, nor is he identical to Christ strictly speaking. Rather, God the Son taken together with his human nature comprise Christ. The idea seems to be that at the moment of incarnation the metaphysically simple Second Person of the Trinity comes to have metaphysical ownership of his human nature so that his human nature and he, taken together, constitute God Incarnate. The composite whole is Christ. But, clearly, God the Son is only one component part of that whole, so God the Son is not identical to Christ just as I am not identical to my hand, though my hand is a part of the mereological whole that is me. Let us call this view *Christological compositionism*, since it is a view about the composition of Christ (i.e., mereology), in which the component “parts” of Christ, that is, God the Son, his human body and human soul, are said to be “concrete” things like artifacts in the world around us, not merely “abstract” objects, like properties.¹⁵

Such Christological compositionism will not appeal to Jenson precisely because it cannot accommodate his central Christological claim that God the Son and Christ are identical. At one point, almost in anticipation of such a view, he says that,

The Apologists’ creation of the ‘Logos Christology’, which presumes the *Logos* as a religious/metaphysical entity and then asserts its union with Jesus, was an historic mistake, if perhaps an inevitable one. Great genius has subsequently been devoted to the task of conceptually pasting together God and the Son/*Logos* and Jesus the Son/*Logos* of God, and we may be thankful for many of the ideas posted along the way. But the task itself is wrongly set and finally hopeless.¹⁶

However, there is an alternative version of Christological compositionism that goes back at least as far as St. Thomas Aquinas. It is also a concretist model of the hypostatic union. But unlike the first version of compositionism just outlined, it can accommodate Jenson’s claim that God the Son and Christ are identical.¹⁷ The idea seems to be this. At the Incarnation God the Son “expands” or “grows” to include his human nature as a proper part of himself, so that from the first moment of incarnation onwards, God the Son is composed by his divine nature and his human nature. The idea is intuitive even if there are not many cases of persons that expand in this manner. We

can conceive of scenarios in which a patient has a new limb graft, which acquires the right neurological connections to become a working addition to the rest of her body. According to this second version of compositionism, something akin to this happens at the Incarnation. God the Son has a human nature grafted onto himself, so to speak. Thereafter, he has his human nature as a proper part of himself. In which case, unlike the first version of compositionism, this version does imply that Christ and God the Son are identical. God the Son acquires a human nature (that is, a human body and soul rightly related) which become parts of his divine life; he owns this nature; he grows into it, as it were, to include it as part of his life in a way analogous to the addition of a new limb grafted onto a living organism.

However, this second version of compositionism has other drawbacks that make it a poor candidate for Jenson's Christology. Although it satisfies his desiderata that God the Son be identical to Christ, it comes at the cost of imputing parts to God the Son, which sits ill with his claim that the only distinctions in the Godhead are the relations of origin. For if this second version of compositionism is right, then God the Son is also distinguished from the other divine persons by having a human body and soul, and, therefore, by being a composite entity.

PART II

To this point, the advocate of a Jensonian position might simply shrug her shoulders. Jenson is clear that his own position is not compositional (a matter that he has underlined in personal correspondence).¹⁸ So attempting to repair or extend Jenson's account with a version of compositional Christology is unlikely to make much headway. In any case, compositional Christology has its own, not insignificant problems, and is often thought to be Nestorian, given its strong division between the Word and the human nature he assumes.¹⁹ At the very least, it appears that the defender of compositional Christology exchanges one set of problems, namely, how to speak of the Word Incarnate without implying he has parts whilst also upholding a traditional Latin Trinity, for another set of problems pertaining to the orthodoxy of one's Christology. The cure may well be worse than the disease, so to speak. Such are the vicissitudes of dogmatic theology.

However, the Christological question is a pressing one for Jenson. Not only

does his identification of Christ with the Word raise problems with respect to composition and divine simplicity. It also generates problems with the traditional doctrine of the impassibility of the Son. In another recent paper, "*Ipse Pater non est impassibilis*," he argues (amongst other things) that the notion of divine impassibility is a paradox. If the phrase, "one of the Trinity suffers in the flesh" is true then, he contends, this must mean what it says: God suffers in the flesh. Since God the Son is identical to Christ, this can only mean that God the Son suffers. Yet the biblical God is not passible, avers Jenson. "What are we to do? We are of course dealing with paradox" he replies.²⁰ "Perhaps, *in divinis*, '*x est passibilis*' is not the right contradictory to '*x est impassibilis*,'" he says. "Perhaps '*x non est impassibilis*' with the double negative is, *in divinis*, the precisely right stipulation."²¹ This is very puzzling. Let us put it in plain language. If some entity is capable of suffering, then it cannot be said to be incapable of suffering; an entity cannot be both passible and impassible at one and the same time on pain of contradiction. If an entity is not incapable of suffering, then, possibly, it suffers. That is, it is possible for it to suffer, which is just to say that it is in principle passible. So if God is said to be not incapable of suffering (i.e., *non est impassibilis*), then possibly he suffers; he is capable of suffering.

Now, a paradox is a contradiction.²² Plainly, several central Christian doctrines are *apparently* paradoxical. Clearly that is not the same as claiming that these doctrines are *actually* or *really* paradoxical. No *real* paradox can be true because no contradiction can be true. Yet Jenson is clear that the doctrine of divine impassibility is a paradox (he does not qualify this as an apparent paradox, but simply restates that "It is a paradox"²³). Yet when he comes to explain what he means by his use of paradox here, he ends up not with a paradox at all, but with the admission that God is in principle passible.

This lines up with what we have already seen of his doctrine of the Incarnation. If Christ is identical to God the Son, then it is very difficult to see how Jenson can insulate the divine person of the Son from the significant metaphysical changes his human nature undergoes. For if God the Son is identical to his human nature as Jenson supposes, then God the Son cries, suffers and dies; he is passible.

One common strategy deployed in order to avoid this implication is to claim via the doctrine of reduplication that when Christ suffers, we should understand by this that Christ's human nature suffers. His divine nature

cannot suffer, because it is impassible. Nevertheless, Christ suffers *qua* human. But Jenson cannot avail himself of this strategy if he affirms that (a) God the Son is identical to Christ in the way he does in his “Once more the *Logos asarkos*” paper, as well as claiming that (b) God is capable of suffering, which is the upshot of his “*Ipse pater non set impassibilis*” article. In the first of these papers he writes, it “is not as an individual instance of humanity as such, not as one among many who have the same human nature, that Jesus is the second hypostasis of the Trinity.” Rather, “a divine hypostasis is ‘a subsisting relation,’ that is, a relation that is its own term, and so is not an instance of anything at all.” What is more, “it is Jesus’ relation to the Father—and not Jesus as a specimen of humanity—which is the second hypostasis of Trinity. The Father’s sending and Jesus’ obedience are the second hypostasis in God.”²⁴ There is not a *Logos* independent of, logically prior to, the human nature of Christ according to Jenson. For what could such an entity be? There is just Jesus who is (identical to) the Word Incarnate. To put this rather starkly, it appears that he believes Jesus is a subsisting, person-constituting relation within the Godhead. But he also clearly affirms the notion that God is capable of suffering, that “*non est impassibilis*” applies to the divine life. So reduplicative language isn’t going to do much work for Jenson because there is no Word independent of Jesus, no divine person distinct from his humanity, and, in any case, God is capable of suffering.

So, in addition to the problem about composition generated as a consequence of Jenson’s strong account of the identity of Jesus with the Second Person of the Trinity, we have a problem regarding impassibility. Here a brief analogy might be helpful. Suppose one thinks humans are composed of bodies and souls, rightly related. Now, Jones is weeping on account of some terrible news he has just received. If a bystander were to ask, Who is weeping, Jones’ body or Jones’ soul? We might be forgiven for thinking that an odd question. Clearly, Jones’ body is doing the weeping; his soul cannot weep because his soul is not physical, has no tear ducts, and so on. However, if pressed, we would surely say Jones is crying. Jones is sad. Not Jones’ body, but Jones himself; the person. Why would we say this? Surely because we think Jones is identical to the person, Jones. Yes, it is by means of his body that he expresses his sadness in tears. But it is not his body that is sad; he is. Transpose this onto Jenson’s account of the Incarnation. If Christ is identical to God the Son, then when he weeps in the Garden of Gethsemane, or at

Lazarus' tomb, it is the person "in" Christ that is sad. Certainly he weeps in his body; his human soul and divine nature cannot weep because they are not physical objects. Nevertheless, it would be strange to say that Christ is sad in his human nature and not in his divine nature, given Jenson's account of the Incarnation and his willingness to countenance the prospect of divine passibility.

This, I think, is a serious problem for Jenson. It raises other worries about the Cyrillian tenor of his Christology. But, for now, this seems problem enough.

CONCLUSION

In summary: Jenson's clarification of his own position is helpful. He demonstrates that his view is compatible with an ancient model of the Trinity that has the weight of the Augustinian tradition behind it. However, when he affirms that Christ and the Word are identical, he generates particular problems for his own position, problems that (I think) are not easily resolved. Chief among these is implications this has for a doctrine of divine simplicity, which is normally thought to be a correlate of the subsistent-relation account of the individuation of the divine persons of the Trinity. It also means that there appears to be no way of insulating Christ's divine nature from the substantive changes incurred in the Incarnation. So it would appear that Jenson has to give up divine impassibility and immutability if he is serious about his Christology. There is an irony here. Jenson's latest foray into the issue of the *Logos asarkos* is largely about showing how his position is of-a-piece with orthodoxy: his doctrine of the eternal existence of Christ is Augustinian alright, but does not imply a species of *Logos asarkos* doctrine because he refuses to distinguish between the Word and the Christ in such a way that on his rendition (it seems that) Christ just is a subsistent divine relation.²⁵ However, this insistence upon identifying the Word with his human nature means he ends up committed to a position contrary to the doctrine of divine simplicity and/or divine immutability and impassibility (at least, as they have often been understood in the tradition). Thus, rather surprisingly perhaps, Jenson's Christology requires a substantive revision to traditional ways of conceiving the hypostatic union and, by implication, the eternal existence of Christ.²⁶

- 1 Robert W. Jenson, "Once more the *Logos asarkos*", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13.2 (2011): 130-133. As with Jenson's other writings, this short paper bears careful scrutiny.
- 2 See especially Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 141-144, as noted by Jenson himself in "Once more."
- 3 Jenson, "Once more," 133. Jenson's account of the relation of time to the divine life is notoriously difficult to grasp. For an illuminating and charitable interpretation, see Scott R. Swain, *The God of The Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013). Swain is particularly helpful in plotting Jenson's account of divine eternity, which I am unable to do here.
- 4 Jenson, "Once more," 133.
- 5 This is a little complicated and some commentators maintain that Jenson denies divine impassibility, e.g., Thomas Weinandy, "God and Human Suffering: His Act of Creation and His Acts in History" in James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, eds. *Divine Impassibility and The Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 99-116. In the same volume Jenson responds to Weinandy directly. See Jenson, "*Ipse Pater Non Est Impassibilis*", 117-126. He does not seem to entirely reject impassibility, but the form of his doctrine is rather difficult to discern. We shall return to the issue presently.
- 6 "Now distinction in God is only by relation of origin ... while relation in God is not as an accident in a subject, but is the divine essence itself; and so it is subsistent, for the divine essence subsists. Therefore, as the Godhead is God so the divine paternity is God the Father, Who is a divine person. Therefore a divine person signifies a relation as subsisting." *Summa Theologiae* I q. 29 a. 4, trans., The Brothers of the English Dominican Province.
- 7 "[T]he vast consensus in the West is inclined to hold, that the *only* distinguishing features of the persons are their relations—that, in the standard terminology, they are subsistent relations." Richard Cross, "Two Models of the Trinity?", *Heythrop Journal* 43.3 (2002): 287.
- 8 But what work is the copula "is" doing here? How is God just Father, Son and Spirit? This is an important theological matter as well. Jenson does not say exactly what he means by it, but what he says is consistent with the "is" of Latin Trinitarianism, according to which the divine persons are subsistent relations within the Godhead, and he does affirm that much in the paper and his other works. These divine subsistent relations do not "compose" the Godhead when taken together. Rather, they are said to be subsistent relations "in" God.
- 9 It is Cross' contention (amongst others) that the Latin and Social models are really not two distinct models as is often thought. See "Two Models of the Trinity?" Whether that is true historically speaking, it is certainly the case that one can find instances of "Latin" and "Social" models in the contemporary literature that are distinct and incommensurable. For present purposes, I mean by the Latin account of the Trinity the notion that the relations of origin are subsistent, person-constituting relations within the Godhead. I make no further claims about the Latin account, its historicity, or its relation to other distinct doctrines of the Trinity.
- 10 Jenson, "Once More," 130 and 133, respectively.
- 11 *Ibid*, 133.
- 12 *Ibid*. In other words, the *Logos asarkos* doctrine is an idea that still requires explanation.
- 13 I owe the distinction between transformational and relational models of the Incarnation to Jonathan Hill. See his Introduction to Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill, eds. *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 14 Brian Leftow elaborates upon this point in "A Timeless God Incarnate" in Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins, eds., *The Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 273-299.
- 15 For more detailed discussion, see Brian Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate;" *idem.*, "The Humanity of God" in Ana Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill, eds., *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 20-44 and Oliver D. Crisp, "Compositional Christology without Nestorianism" in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 45-66.
- 16 Jenson, "Once More the *Logos asarkos*," 130.
- 17 For a recent outline and defense of the Thomist account, see Jonathan Hill, "Aquinas and the Unity of Christ: A Defense of Compositionism," *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 71.2 (2012): 117-135.
- 18 Personal communication to the author in 2010.
- 19 I do not think it is Nestorian, and have argued that point in "Compositional Christology without Nestorianism." See also Leftow's "The Humanity of God." Objections to compositional Christology can be found in, e.g., Thomas Senor, "The Compositional Account of the Incarnation," *Faith and Philosophy* 24.1 (2007): 52-71, and Robin Le Poidevin, "Identity and the Composite Christ: An Incarnational Dilemma," *Religious Studies* 45.2 (2009): 167-186.
- 20 Jenson, "*Ipse Pater non est Impassibilis*," 120.

²¹ Ibid., 120-121.

²² I discuss paradox in Christian theology more fully in "Donald Baillie, Paradox and Christology," *Revisioning Christology: Theology in The Reformed Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), ch. 1. The most substantial (and helpful) recent treatment of this topic is found in James Anderson, *Paradox in Christology Theology: An Analysis of its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).

²³ Jenson, "*Ipse Pater non est Impassibilis*," 120. Things get even more complicated later in this paper when Jenson attempts once more to clarify his doctrine of divine eternity, with (in my view) no greater clarity than his previous attempts.

²⁴ Jenson, "Once more," 133.

²⁵ A further worry: if Christ is identical to God the Son and Christ, not God the Son, is a subsistent relation (as Jenson avers) then we might wonder how an entity that includes a corporeal part (Christ's human body) and a human soul can be a subsistent relation.

²⁶ I am grateful to Robert W. Jenson and Scott R. Swain for comments on earlier drafts of the paper, which greatly improved the argument.

A Chalcedonian Argument Against Cartesian Dualism

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INTRODUCTION

Determinations about the constitution of human persons are notoriously difficult. Christian theologians and philosophers who investigate this issue are faced with a host of complicated biblical, theological, philosophical, historical, scientific, and practical questions. One of the most pressing of these questions concerns the precise relation between the body and the mind. Are human persons essentially spiritual beings, material beings, or some combination of the two? Contemporary opinions on this question typically fall into one of two broad categories: dualism and physicalism in their various manifestations.¹ Among dualisms, Cartesian dualism seems to enjoy a certain pride of place. Cartesians sometimes consider their view not only the most common position in Christian history but also the most intuitive position across human cultures.² According to Cartesian dualism, a human person “just is” a human soul. The person is identifiable with the immaterial, substantially simple soul. While the soul and body may interact with one another in important and reciprocal ways, the body is not the person, nor even a constitutive part of the person, but merely a contingently possessed tool or instrument of the person.³ As some have put it, “You do

not have a soul. You *are* a soul. You have a body.”⁴

Whatever merits or demerits Cartesian dualism possesses as a coherent model of human personhood, this article will suggest that it stands in some tension with the understanding of human personhood implied in the Chalcedonian Definition and the Christological reflections that flowed from it. The statement produced by the Council of Chalcedon (451) famously defined the “hypostatic union” of two natures in the person of Christ. According to the Chalcedonian Definition, the incarnate Son of God is “at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body.”⁵ So the human nature that the Son assumed in his incarnation consists of two parts: a reasonable soul—that is, a soul possessed of mind or reason—and a body. As subsequent Christological reflections made clear, the Son did not assume a distinct human person, but rather he gave personhood to the distinct body and soul that he assumed. The human soul of Christ must be distinguished from his person in order to avoid the heresy of Apollinarianism. And the Son’s assumption of a distinct human soul cannot imply his assumption of a distinct human person upon pain of Nestorianism. In short, person and soul cannot be equated, at least in the case of the incarnate Christ. This article will seek to tease out the potential problems that this Chalcedonian distinction between person and soul poses for Cartesian dualism and will also suggest some possible ways that Cartesians might resolve these problems.

PROLEGOMENA TO THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

But first, a brief word on methodology. I take it that when it comes to developing theological models of human personhood (or any other doctrinal issue, for that matter) Scripture serves as the *norma normans*: “the ruling rule” to which all other sources of authority must be subordinated. Scripture, when taken as a whole and read in light of its own categories, must set the parameters for and determine the shape of our theological models. When it speaks clearly and unambiguously to a particular issue, Scripture must be embraced and affirmed even if its teachings may conflict with theories from other areas of inquiry, such as neurobiology or philosophy of mind. The relevant question for our purposes is, *does* Scripture speak clearly and unambiguously to the question of human constitution? Does the Bible solve

the mind-body problem, so to speak? It is my conviction that many of the common proof texts cited in this discussion are underdetermined. In other words, many of the biblical texts cited in favor of this or that anthropological model admit of several possible interpretations. What is needed, then, is not simple proof-texting (citing, say, 2 Cor 5:8, “we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” as if it provided a “slam dunk” case for substance dualism), but rather attending to patterns of thinking and speaking about human nature that are organically developed across the biblical canon⁶ and then seeking to develop patterns of thinking and speaking about human nature in new contexts—patterns which may, in some sense, move beyond the biblical concepts but which nonetheless render the same theological judgments as Scripture.⁷

I also take it that the Christian tradition, while not to be construed as a second source of revelation alongside Scripture, should nonetheless function as an authoritative (but fallible) guide to interpreting Scripture.⁸ In this sense, tradition functions as the *norma normata*: the “ruled rule,” which is subordinated to the ultimate authority of Scripture. Tradition does possess a kind of authority in Christian theology, but it is a derived authority—an authority it possesses by virtue of its fidelity to Holy Scripture. The ecumenical creeds and councils of the church, developed in the early centuries of Christian history in response to trinitarian and Christological heresies, are especially significant in terms of their authoritative status. While Protestants rightly reject the idea that the creeds and councils are infallible, they would be unwise to dismiss these ecumenical symbols as outdated or optional. Surely the judgment of Oliver Crisp is correct on this point: “It seems to me that someone dissenting from the findings of an ecumenical council of the Church should have a very good reason—indeed, a very good *theological* reason—for doing so.”⁹ So if it turns out that the ecumenical councils either teach or imply a particular view of human constitution and if that view is integrally related to the Trinitarian and Christological conclusions of those councils, then such a view should be afforded a great deal of deference by contemporary theologians. And if it turns out that such a view has held sway throughout most of Christian history, then the commitment to the conciliar view is only strengthened.

The place of science in theological anthropology also warrants some comment. Many contemporary theologians and philosophers of mind are

especially concerned to develop anthropological models that square with the advances of neuroscience, the study of the brain and nervous system.¹⁰ For the purposes of this article, it is not necessary to tease out all of the issues involved in the relationship between science and theology. Still, I take it that the reciprocal relationship between mental states, on the one hand, and activity in the brain, on the other, poses a problem for at least the more radical forms of dualism. But I also take it that mental events are not equivalent to and do not merely supervene upon physical events, and therefore it is a category mistake to think that scientific study of the brain could ever exhaust the content of mental events. Even if scientists in the future could develop a complete map of my brain and all of the physical events going on in it during every one of my mental states, they still would have no access to the first person experience that is my consciousness.¹¹ So while science can serve as a kind of “handmaiden” to the task of theological anthropology, I think it is a mistake to believe that it is determinative for that task.

With these preliminary considerations out of the way, we now turn our attention to the main thesis of this article, namely, that the theological anthropology implied in the Chalcedonian Definition poses a potential problem for the Cartesian identification of the person with the soul. The argument proceeds in three steps. First, we will briefly consider in more precise terms what is meant by “Cartesian dualism.” Second, we will explore the anthropological implications of Chalcedon and its progeny and point up the potential problems that these implications pose to Cartesianism. Finally, we will suggest some ways that Cartesians might solve these problems and weigh the relative merits of these solutions.

CARTESIAN DUALISM

By Cartesian dualism, I simply mean any view of human constitution that affirms the following set of propositions:

- P¹ Human beings are (ordinarily) constituted by two distinct substances: a material body and an immaterial soul.
- P² The soul and the body interact with one another in causally reciprocal ways.
- P³ Human persons are to be identified with their souls.

Defining Cartesian dualism in this manner may include some thinkers who predate René Descartes, for whom the position is named.¹² Ironically, it may

also exclude Descartes himself, if certain revisionist scholars are correct about Descartes' own position.¹³ But it is the position itself, not necessarily its proponents, that is relevant for the purposes of this article.

Quite obviously, Cartesian dualism is form of "dualism," the belief that humans are made up of both material and immaterial substances (or parts). There are other versions of dualism on offer both in the Christian tradition and in the contemporary philosophical literature, but all forms of dualism would affirm P_1 in some sense (though depending on how "substance" is defined, not all dualists would wish to be considered *substance* dualists). However, some versions of dualism (such as Spinoza's non-interactive dualism) would deny P_2 . But other versions of dualism (such as William Hasker's "emergent dualism"¹⁴) would share P_2 in common with Cartesianism. I take it, then, that P_3 is at least one of the distinguishing marks of Cartesian dualism. A person may possess a body as an instrument or as a non-necessary constituent, but the person is to be identified only with the soul. There are other issues debated among Cartesians, such as the precise point at which the soul interacts with the body or whether instead the soul is be conceived of as filling the space occupied by the body. But these intramural debates need not deter us. The crucial point for our purposes is the Cartesian identification of the person with the soul, the immaterial part of human nature.

Descartes own version of dualism is based upon a certain intuition, an "introspective awareness," of himself as a simple, psychological substance distinct from his body.¹⁵ He argues,

[O]n the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing [that is, a mind], and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.¹⁶

Some may balk at Descartes' appeal to introspective awareness here, and perhaps there are other ways of arguing for substance dualism that avoid this introspective move.¹⁷ Additionally, as noted above, there may be reason to question whether or not Descartes consistently excluded the body as a constitutive part of human persons. But as he defines it here, Descartes summarizes well the main notion associated with Cartesian dualism: the person,

the subjective “I,” is to be identified with the soul or mind, the psychological part of human nature. The body is merely a contingent possession of the person, but it is substantially distinct from the person himself.

Richard Swinburne, one of the most able defenders of substance dualism in the contemporary philosophical literature, understands substance dualism as “the view that those persons which are human beings (or men) living on Earth, have two parts linked together, body and soul.”¹⁸ The body is the material, non-essential part of human nature, to which physical properties belong. The soul in turn is the immaterial, essential part of human nature, to which mental properties belong. Thus, Swinburne differs from Cartesian dualism in one important respect: he is willing to speak of the body as a part of the human person.¹⁹ Nevertheless, because the body is merely a contingent part, and because the soul is the essential principle of personal identity, Swinburne sometimes uses the term “soul” to describe an individual human person. He identifies the soul as the “principle of identity of the individual human.” A “personal being” is one in possession of a mental life.²⁰ Further, a person is “pure mental substance.” Having a body might be necessary for a “worthwhile” human existence, but it is not necessary for the existence of human persons.²¹ So while Swinburne would disagree that the person “just is” the soul, without remainder, he often uses the two terms interchangeably.

CHALCEDONIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

The Council of Chalcedon appears to present a very different understanding of human personhood than the one summarized in this Cartesian scheme. The council convened in 451 to address a series of Christological heresies that had been plaguing the church for over a century. The “Definition” produced by the council affirmed the unity of two natures in the one person or subsistence of Christ. In this hypostatic union, the Son’s divine and human natures are united “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” Against the Arians, Chalcedon affirmed that the person of the Son is “of one substance with the Father.” Against the Nestorians, the council was careful to note that the two natures are “not parted or separated into two persons.” Against the Eutychians, the council claimed that “the distinction of the natures [is] in no way annulled by the union.” And, especially significant for our purposes, against the Apollinarians, Chalcedon

affirmed the Son's assumption of a complete human nature—both a body and “a reasonable soul.”

So what are the anthropological implications of the Chalcedonian Definition? Two points are especially noteworthy. First, the council takes up the key terminological distinctions of Patristic trinitarian thought and applies them to the incarnate Christ. The person/nature distinction, which was crucial for Nicene trinitarianism, is now applied to the person of the Son in his incarnate state. Now the person, or subsistence, of the Son is spoken of as having two natures, or substances: the divine nature that he shares eternally with the Father and the human nature that he assumed in the incarnation. Thus, Chalcedon forges an analogical link between trinitarian personhood and human personhood, and the univocal core of the analogy is the incarnate Son himself.²²

Second, the council made clear that the human nature that the Son assumed consists in two parts: a physical body and a reasonable, or rational soul. The context for this affirmation is the Apollinarian heresy, which had denied the Son's assumption of the higher soul of human nature: the “spirit” (*pneuma*) or “mind” (*nous*). According to Apollinaris and his followers, the Son assumed a human body and an animal soul (*psychē*), but the person of the Son himself took the place of the spirit or mind of Christ. Apollinarianism had already been denounced by the Cappadocian Fathers and condemned at the First Council of Constantinople in 381. The argument of Gregory of Nazianzus had proved decisive: the unassumed is unhealed.²³ If there is a component of human nature that is not taken into union with the Logos, then that component would remain corrupted and condemned by sin. But here again at Chalcedon, the church reaffirmed its insistence that the Son assumed a reasonable soul, that is the higher soul or spirit of human nature possessed of mind or rationality. This affirmation is significant for our purposes because the council is drawing a distinction between the person of the Son and the soul of Christ, the latter of which inheres in his human nature. To confuse person and nature on this point would be to upend the Definition's principle terminological clarification, namely, that the singular person and dual natures of Christ must be distinguished conceptually.

This intuition to distinguish the person of Christ from the soul of Christ is also born out in the next two ecumenical councils. At the Second Council of Constantinople (553), the church reasserted its opposition to

Nestorianism—the two-persons heresy rooted in the thought of Nestorius of Constantinople (c. 386-450)—by clarifying that it is the person of the eternal Son of God who is in view in the incarnation. It is not merely a composite figure, the incarnate Christ, who is the “person” identified in Chalcedonian Christology, but it is none other than the eternal Son, one of the three members of the Godhead. This assertion is significant for theological anthropology because it once again explicitly applies the person/nature distinction to the man Christ Jesus. The person of the Son preexists his incarnation, and yet his incarnation involves the assumption of a distinct human soul. So, at least in the case of Christ, the person and the soul must be conceptually distinct. The Son did not assume a distinct human person in the incarnation; in this sense, his human nature is *anhypostatic*, i.e., without a person. At the same time, the human nature of Christ is given personhood by its assumption in the person of the Son; so the Son’s human nature is also *enhypostatic*, receiving its personhood in the person of the Son. What is noteworthy is that Constantinople II does not argue similarly with regard to the soul of Christ. There is no *apneumatic/empneumatic* doctrine affirmed by the council. Instead, the council reaffirms Chalcedon with its insistence that the person of the Son is distinct from the body-soul nature he assumed.

The Third Council of Constantinople (680-81) makes the point even clearer. When the person of the Son assumed a human soul, he also assumed a human will, which inheres in that soul. The soul that the Son assumed, then, is not merely an abstract universal property, but more fundamentally it is a concrete particular. The Son assumed a concrete human soul equipped with a concrete human will. Therefore, the incarnate Christ possesses two wills, one divine and one human, which correspond to his two natures. Yet again the person/nature, person/soul distinction is maintained.

So it seems that by equating person and soul, Cartesians are caught on the horns of a Christological dilemma. Either the person of the Son does not assume a human soul, since he is already a “soul” in the relevant sense, resulting in Apollinarianism. Or else by assuming a human soul, the person of the Son also assumes a distinct human person, resulting in Nestorianism. But is there a way for Cartesians to resolve this apparent contradiction? The following section explores two possible avenues for seeking such a resolution.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Perhaps Cartesians can avoid the heretical implications of this conflation of person and soul by clarifying their terms. In other words, perhaps we are dealing with an equivocation. Perhaps the Cartesian “soul” is not the same as the Chalcedonian “soul.” In the Cartesian sense, the soul is the person—the individual, immaterial substance capable of bearing properties. Perhaps the “soul” of Chalcedon is not the substance but the properties possessed by that substance. In this case, the “soul” of the Son (that is, the person of the Son) assumes the “soul” of human nature by taking to himself that set of abstract properties essential to humanity. He does so without losing his divine properties, that is, the divine nature (what we might call the “divine soul” in the Chalcedonian sense). Let us call this the *abstract human soul solution* to the Chalcedonian problem posed to Cartesianism.²⁴

Richard Swinburne opts for this kind of solution. He argues that the “reasonable soul” of Chalcedon was simply “human soul,” viewed as a universal—a property capable of being instantiated in a number of different things. In this sense, the Chalcedonian “soul” is closer to Aristotle’s “form,” meaning a “way of thinking and acting.” Swinburne’s sense of “soul,” however, is different. Indeed, Swinburne recognizes that it must be different upon pain of heresy: “But the Council could not have meant by [reasonable soul] that there were in Christ both a divine and a human soul in my sense of ‘soul.’ For that would have been to say that Christ was two individuals, a doctrine to which Chalcedon was greatly opposed.”²⁵ So by “soul” Swinburne means the individual, the person capable of bearing mental properties. In the case of the incarnate Christ, we have a single individual (“soul” in the Swinburnean sense) who possesses both divine and human properties (“soul” in the Chalcedonian sense). Thus, Swinburne is able to sidestep formally any heretical implications of equating person and soul.

But this abstract human nature view is not without its costs from the perspective of historic Christian orthodoxy. As Oliver Crisp has pointed out, even if abstractists can square their view with Chalcedon, they face greater difficulties with later conciliar developments, specifically with regard to the Sixth Ecumenical Council.²⁶ At Constantinople III, the church affirmed that Christ has two wills, the one will of the Godhead, and a distinct human will that inheres in his human nature. The Son’s human soul, in this view, is

not a universal, but a particular. It is not merely a set of abstract properties, but a concrete substance. The bishops at Constantinople III apparently believed that this dyothelite, concrete-human-nature understanding of the incarnation was simply the outworking of Chalcedon's affirmation of Christ's "reasonable soul."²⁷ Alvin Plantinga has suggested that the abstractist view was the majority view at Chalcedon, but the bishops of the Sixth Ecumenical Council would demur.²⁸ According to the dyothelite tradition, in assuming a human soul, Christ assumed a concrete human will and not merely a set of abstract human properties.

Interestingly, Swinburne tries to make room for the two-wills position in his own Christological proposal, but it is clear that he has adjusted the terms of Constantinople III to fit his abstractist scheme. Insofar as Christ can be spoken of as possessing two minds or two wills, it is only as two *ways of thinking* or *ways of willing*, that is, as two sets of abstract properties possessed by the singular "soul" or person of the Son.²⁹ It remains an open question as to whether or not this abstract-human-nature understanding of the incarnation can be squared with the Chalcedonian Definition, but it at least stands in tension with the traditional interpretation of Chalcedon's "reasonable soul" as expressed in subsequent Christological reflections.

Another potential avenue for reconciling Cartesian dualism with Chalcedonian Christology may lie in clarifying the uniqueness of Christ's participation in the category of human personhood. Oliver Crisp takes this tack in his attempt to explain how dyothelitism can avoid Nestorianism. Crisp suggests that ordinarily the coming together of a human body and a concrete human soul would constitute the formation of a distinct human person. In the case of the incarnate Christ, however, this combination cannot constitute a human person, upon pain of Nestorianism. So perhaps, Crisp suggests (following Brian Leftow), we should state things more precisely. Perhaps a human zygote "has the property 'constituting a distinct, individual person when composed of a body + distinct soul, intellect and will, *unless assumed by a divine person.*'"³⁰ In other words, the incarnation is a special case; it is in a category by itself. Ordinarily a human soul (combined with a human body) constitutes a human person; but in the case of the incarnate Christ, the soul is prevented from becoming a human person by virtue of its union with the person of the Son. Let us call this the *sui generis solution* to the Chalcedonian problem posed to Cartesianism.

Leaving to one side the *ad hoc* nature of this proposal, one wonders if perhaps there is simpler solution to the Nestorian objection posed to dyotheletism. Perhaps we should apply the person/nature distinction to all human persons, and not only the incarnate Christ. Perhaps the person is distinct from the soul (which is a part of human nature) in all human persons. If we adopt a more Thomistic understanding of personhood, the human person would be conceived of as the individual subsisting thing (Latin, *suppositum*) that exists in and through the human nature, conceived of as a body-soul composite. As is well known, Thomas Aquinas identifies the soul as the form of the body; the soul gives to the material body its rational configuration. It is also commonly recognized that this is a rather unique “form” in that it is capable of existing without the material body in the intermediate state.³¹ But what is not always appreciated is how Thomas employs the language of person (*hypostasis* or *persona*) in this theological anthropology. Thomas maintains that the person cannot be equated with either the soul or the body. It is a distinct conceptual category. He cites Augustine in this regard: “On the contrary, Augustine (De Civ. Dei xix, 3) commends Varro as holding ‘that man is not a mere soul, nor a mere body; but both soul and body.’”³² So Thomas argues that the soul cannot be equated with “man,” conceived of either as a species or as an individual. Instead, Thomas maintains that the soul is a *part* of man along with the body. He concludes:

Not every particular substance (*substantia*) is a hypostasis or a person (*persona*), but that which has the complete nature of its species. Hence a hand, or a foot, is not called a hypostasis, or a person; nor, likewise, is the soul alone so called, since it is a part of the human species.³³

So the soul is in some sense a *substance*, distinct from and even capable of existing apart from the body, but it is not a *hypostasis*; it is not a person.³⁴ A person has the “complete nature of its species,” which, in the case of a human being, ordinarily includes (bracketing out the question of the intermediate state) a body and a soul. In sum, Thomas maintains the person-nature distinction even outside of its normal Trinitarian-Christological context and applies it consistently to ordinary human persons as well.

So, to return to the Nestorian objection to dyotheletism, perhaps there is simpler solution than the one Crisp and Leftow prescribe. Perhaps no

human person is identical with his or her soul. In this case, the person of Christ would not be an exception. Perhaps the person should always be distinguished from the soul, even in ordinary (that is, non-theanthropic) persons. Thus, Nestorianism could be avoided by dyothelites without an *ad hoc* argument. The Son's assumption of a concrete human soul/mind/will does not entail his assumption of a distinct human person because no human soul/mind/will constitutes a distinct person. The person is the individual, the suppositum, that exists in and through in the soul (and body). So perhaps we need a three-part anthropology (person, soul, body) to match Crisp's three-part Christology (Word, soul, body).

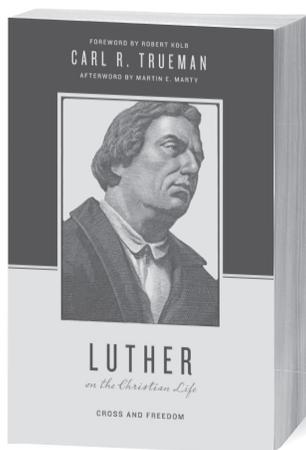
CONCLUSION

Cartesians maintain that the person "just is" the soul. But as we have seen this equation of the person with the soul poses a potential problem for Chalcedonian Christology. Chalcedon and its progeny distinguished the person of the Son from his nature, which was composed of a body and a "reasonable soul." Thomas Aquinas developed an understanding of human personhood consistent with this person/nature distinction, arguing that neither the soul nor the body could be equated with the person. Cartesians could perhaps avoid the unfortunate Christological consequences of their view by arguing for an abstract-human-nature understanding of the incarnation or by arguing for the *sui generis* nature of Christ's personhood. But as we have seen these solutions are not without their difficulties. This exercise in Christological anthropology may not prove decisive against Cartesian understandings of human personhood, but perhaps it does point up a potential weakness in developing anthropological models independent of Trinitarian and Christological considerations.³⁵ Perhaps other versions of dualism (hylomorphic, emergent, etc.) may be better equipped to handle the anthropological demands of Chalcedonian Christology. Some have even considered the Christological implications of a physical account of human personhood.³⁶ In any event, it is apparent that more work needs to be done in applying the person/nature distinction more consistently to theological anthropology.³⁷

- 1 George Berkeley's idealistic monism is an important exception, but it does not command a significant following among contemporary philosophers of mind. See George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (London: Hackett, 1982).
- 2 See, for example, Stewart Goetz, "Substance Dualism," in *In Search of the Soul: Four Views on the Mind-Body Problem* (ed., Joel B. Green; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 33-60.
- 3 Richard Swinburne, a contemporary defender of substance dualism, does speak of the body as a "non-essential part" of a human person. In this, he differs from Rene Descartes. See Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 146. Still, Swinburne defines human persons as "pure mental substances" and sometimes uses "person" and "soul" interchangeably. Swinburne's views will be discussed in more detail below. Richard Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.
- 4 This saying is often, but probably erroneously, attributed to C. S. Lewis. On the origins of the saying, see <http://mereorthodoxy.com/you-dont-have-a-soul-cs-lewis-never-said-it/>, accessed January 13, 2015.
- 5 "The Definition of Chalcedon (451)," in *Creeeds of the Churches* (ed., John Leith; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 35-36.
- 6 One of the best examples of this kind of canonical work is found in John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). For my own part, I think Cooper's handling of the biblical material is largely sound. The totality of the biblical witness seems to imply something like Cooper's "holistic dualism," though perhaps there is a range of philosophical models that can account for it.
- 7 This distinction between "concepts" and "judgments" comes from David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (ed., Stephen E. Fowl; Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 87-100. Also important in this regard is avoiding the mistake of thinking that our theological concepts must be used in the exactly the same way as biblical concepts. So, while the Hebrew word for "soul" (*nephesh*) might mean something like "life" or the "whole person" in a biblical context, this fact does not rule out a different use of the term "soul" in our theological models, namely, as a designator of the immaterial part of human nature.
- 8 This view corresponds to what Heiko Oberman calls "Tradition 1," as opposed to "Tradition 2," which adopts the two-source theory. Heiko Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 280.
- 9 Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35 (emphasis original).
- 10 This is true of both physicalist models and some dualist models of human personhood, such as William Hasker's emergent dualism. See William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Cornell University Press, 1999).
- 11 So I would not espouse a kind "soul of the gaps" theory in which the soul is posited to fill in the gaps of scientific discovery. Even if all of the gaps in our knowledge of brain activity were filled, this would have no bearing on the question of consciousness or mental events. For more along these lines, see David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). Similarly, Richard Swinburne distinguishes mental events from physical events precisely in terms of "privileged access." He writes, "A subject's privileged access to his or her thoughts, desires, beliefs, etc. would remain, even if we were to discover that all such events as had been previously studied had been caused by brain events in accord with an apparent law-like regularity." Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will*, 86.
- 12 Eleanore Stump suggests that the Platonic understanding of the soul opposed by Thomas Aquinas was "an account very like that of Cartesian dualism." Eleanore Stump, "Non-Cartesian Dualism and Materialism without Reductionism," *Faith and Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (October 1995): 506. Further, as John Cooper points out, Descartes "considered himself to be a Christian philosopher in the Augustinian line." Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, 15.
- 13 On Descartes' relation to Cartesian dualism, see Margaret Wilson, *Descartes* (London: Routledge, 1978), 177-85.
- 14 William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).
- 15 Goetz, "Substance Dualism," 39.
- 16 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 2.54.
- 17 Other philosophers claim to have an immediate, intuitive sense that they just are physical substances. See, for example, Peter van Inwagen, "Dualism and Materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?" *Faith and Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (1995): 476.
- 18 Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, 145. Interestingly, in contrast to many other philosophers, Swinburne sees "no real difference" between the Platonic-Cartesian view and the view of Thomas Aquinas. Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will*, 172-73.
- 19 Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, 146.

- ²⁰ Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 194.
- ²¹ Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will*, 2.
- ²² Michael Horton similarly suggests that the person of Christ is the “univocal core of God.” Still, Horton argues, our knowledge of Christ remains analogical and ectypical. Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 97-98.
- ²³ Gregory of Nazianzus, “To Cledonius Against Apollinaris (Epistle 101),” in *Christology of the Later Fathers* (ed., Edward R. Hardy; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1954), 218-19.
- ²⁴ The distinction between “abstractist” and “concretist” understandings of the incarnation is fairly common in contemporary literature on the subject. See Alvin Plantinga, “On Heresy, Mind, and Truth,” *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (April 1999): 182-93. See also Jonathan Hill’s introduction in Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill, eds., *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10-19.
- ²⁵ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 196-97.
- ²⁶ Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 34-71.
- ²⁷ The council reaffirmed the Chalcedonian Definition and applied Chalcedon’s two-natures logic to the two wills of Christ. It even used the four privatives to refer to the union of two wills in the person of Christ “without separation, without change, without partition, without confusion.” See “The Statement of Faith of the Third Council of Constantinople (Sixth Ecumenical),” in Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 383.
- ²⁸ Plantinga, “On Heresy, Mind, and Truth,” 184. Plantinga’s historical judgment on this point is debatable. Plantinga cites Philip Schaff in support of his view. In his discussion of Chalcedon, Schaff argues that “the Logos assumed, not a human person (else we would have two persons, a divine and human) but a human nature which is common to us all.” Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1877), 1:30. But this is a statement that all orthodox concretists could affirm. In assuming a concrete human nature, the Son did not assume a distinct human person, as the Nestorians claimed. Furthermore, the belief that the Son assumed a concrete human nature does not preclude the view that, in another sense, he assumed our common humanity. The anhypostatic/enhypostatic doctrine seems to affirm both. In one sense, Christ assumed the human nature common to all: his human nature was anhypostatic, without a separate human person. But in another sense, Christ assumed a specific human nature: his human nature was enhypostatic, given personhood by the Second Person of the Trinity. Christ has all of the properties common to humanity but he also possesses a concrete manifestation of these properties. For an argument along these lines, see Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 79-89.
- ²⁹ Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 208-09.
- ³⁰ Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 64. Crisp is citing Brian Leftow, “A Timeless God Incarnate,” in *The Incarnation* (ed., Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 281.
- ³¹ Philosophers are divided on the coherency of Thomas’ anthropological model, which seeks to reconcile Aristotle’s hylomorphism with the traditional Christian understanding of the continuing existence of the soul after death. “And so, Aquinas has to hold, [the soul] is a very unusual form in that, unlike other forms of inanimate things and of animals, it can exist and have a life without being instantiated in matter.” Richard Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will*, 172. For a defense of the coherency of Thomas’ view, see Stump, “Non-Cartesian Dualism and Materialism without Reductionism.”
- ³² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (trans., Fathers of the English Dominican Province; rev., Daniel J. Sullivan; Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952), 1.75.4.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Though we should be careful to note that for Thomas, the soul is not a substance “in its own right” but merely a subsistent part of the body-soul composite that is a human being. For more on Thomas’ distinction between these two notions, see Stump, “Non-Cartesian Substance Dualism,” 517-18.
- ³⁵ Marc Cortez’s analysis of Karl Barth’s Christocentric anthropology is a welcome exception to the rule that theological anthropologies are often developed in isolation from Christology. Marc Cortez, *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies: An Exercise in Christological Anthropology and Its Significance for the Mind/Body Debate* (London: T&T Clark, 2008).
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 110-54. See also Oliver Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 137-54.
- ³⁷ I am grateful to Joshua Farris for reading and commenting on a previous version of this essay. Perhaps it could have been improved had I accepted all of his suggestions, and any weaknesses in the final product are mine alone. Farris’ forthcoming edited volume on theological anthropology looks to be an important contribution to the ongoing conversation over these issues. Joshua R. Farris and Charles Taliaferro, eds., *The Ashgate Companion to Theological Anthropology* (London: Ashgate, 2015).

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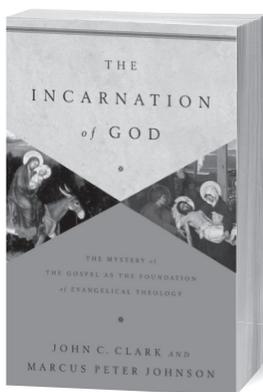
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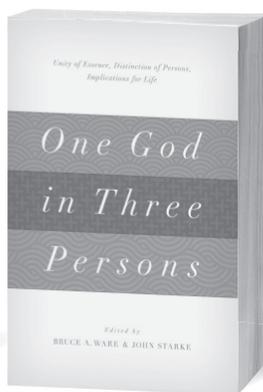
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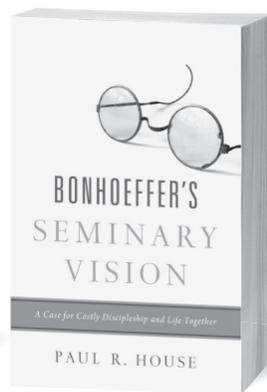
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A Model of Jesus Christ's Two Wills in View of Theology Proper and Anthropology

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INTRODUCTION

Among the many sticky questions about the Incarnation, the question of Jesus' two wills can seem nitpicky and arcane to most Christians. The question seems to be one for the theologians, those who care to parse details that are practically irrelevant to daily life, much like debating how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Further cause to dismiss consideration is the shadow of political intrigues and failed ecumenical strategies that surrounded the ancient discussion of Christ's wills in 680-81. Nevertheless, few questions in early theology received such focused attention as this one when the Sixth Ecumenical Council weighed arguments and rendered a verdict at Constantinople in 681. Brilliant theologians of that time understood the great importance to theology that Jesus possesses two wills, one divine and one human, since he is truly God and truly human. All branches of Christianity have embraced this doctrine as important and orthodox theology.

Questions related to the topic of Jesus' two wills are important for understanding the incarnation and salvation that Jesus accomplished. First, is Jesus fully human like we are? Possession of a created human will seems necessary for true human life, including temptation and obedience for righteousness as a man. This leads to a second question: Was Jesus able to sin when he was tempted? A quick answer is to say no; his divine will overruled his human will so that he could not sin. If that is right, then does Jesus possess a real human will with the capacity of free choice? Further, do free choice and temptation entail the ability to sin? It seems that we must affirm that Jesus possesses a true human will since God cannot be tempted (Jas 1:13) and Jesus was truly tempted (Heb 4:15). Accordingly, if Jesus truly possesses a human will, then could he disagree with himself (his divine will)?

Against the prospect of a conflict in one person with two wills, some theologians (ancient and contemporary) have sought to ground the unity of the incarnation in a single will of the Son of God. If right, then the ancient one-will view (Monothelitism) means the will is part of being a person, not as a capacity of one's nature. The definition of the will as personal or natural, more than the number of wills in Christ, is the real issue of disagreement. The label of "Monothelitism" may be a misnomer, since the statements of "one will in Christ" often meant a unity of his human will with his divine will.¹ Thus, in Monothelitism, the Son of God is one person, exercising his one will for all his divine actions and his human actions (Jesus of Nazareth). This formulation of the one-will view leads to another question about the Trinity: since the Son of God possesses a will because he is a person, then so do the Father and the Holy Spirit. If they are persons with distinct wills, then could they choose against each other? To preserve the unity of the incarnation by locating the will in the person, Monothelitism entails the problem of conflict in the triune God.

Opposite to Monothelitism, I will argue that the two-wills model (Dyothelitism) is more accurate to the biblical and theological evidence for the incarnation, and the model elucidates a consistent meaning of the will for God and for human beings. I see two reasons for considering the topic of Jesus' two wills in connection with God and human beings. First, the incarnation provides the clearest revelation of divine and human existence, so whatever clarity or obscurity we have about Jesus is magnified in our thinking about God and humanity. Second, whatever we think about Jesus' two wills,

everyone agrees that we are talking about a divine will and a human will, so we should consider what these wills are. The concept of the will is not clearly revealed in the Bible, and science has not yet discerned the will empirically (actually, some neuroscientists deny the capacity for free choice as a trick of the human mind²). When we understand what the will may be for God and human beings, we can apply that to Jesus and see how this theological model works. For these reasons, I will proceed by considering the faculty of will that God possesses, what the will is for human beings, and then apply these conclusions to a model of Jesus' two wills. In preparation, some definitions, biblical theology, and historical theology can set the context of the discussion of Jesus' two wills.

DEFINITIONS

I offer working definitions for three terms that are relevant in the discussion: person, nature, and will. First, the term *person* used throughout refers to someone, an agent who relates with other persons with unique existence as some sort of natural kind (whether God, angel, or human). A person possesses unique identity and self-consciousness as the subject of one's actions (including mental, emotional, and volitional processes). A person exercises freedom of choice, to act or not to act. Donald Fairbairn helpfully observes that the patristic idea of personhood developed "to see a person as an active subject who *does* things and *to whom things happen*."³ The idea of person answers the question of *who* as an identity, a distinguishable self that is more than merely a thing. This definition of person has more psychological depth than ancient and pre-modern definitions.⁴ I think the developments of psychology and philosophy are rightly reflected in a contemporary definition of person that refers to the same reality intended by patristic theology.

The meaning of *person* is best applied to God and human beings in an analogical way (instead of univocal or equivocal), so that the likenesses and differences are acknowledged. The analogy of divine and human personhood must be close enough for a divine person to personalize the human existence that he creates to live in. The Son of God is a divine person who also lives as a true human person, since he is a person living in a human nature that is uniquely his own.⁵ All persons possess a nature (or, essence) as their mode of existence. In the case of the incarnation, God the Son is one person who

possesses two natures, having added a human nature while continuing to possess his divine nature (hypostatic union of each nature to the person who is owner).

Second, the term *nature* refers to *what* a person possesses as a particular mode of existence, what kind of a thing it is (also true for creatures that are not persons, such as animals and insects). A *nature* is all the properties (or, substances) that are necessary for membership in a natural kind (for example, one must possess a human body and soul to count as a human being). Normally, a single person instantiates a single nature, as in “Tim is a human being, since Tim possesses a human nature.” Uniquely, the three of the Trinity co-possess one nature (the divine essence, or, all the properties necessary for being God) so that these divine persons are numerically just one God. Also uniquely, one of the Trinity assumed a second mode of existence, a human nature, and so the Son of God lives a dual life as God and as a man simultaneously. As a Dyothelite model, I will follow the definition of nature as the collection of properties that includes the will (by contrast to Monothelitism that denied this, claiming the will is a personal property, *hypostatic will*).

Third, the term *will* as I intend it refers both to the desires (or, inclinations) of attraction to particular actions, states of affairs, or objects, and the capacity to deliberate and select a desire and move the nature in action (i.e., choice). The capacity of agent causation is the person’s operation of a nature’s properties by means of the will. The will is embedded in the nature, just as with the intellect, as a spiritual organ (or, capacity) for the person to perceive desires and choose among them. As a patristic witness, Maximus quotes Clement of Alexandria: “The natural will is ‘the power that longs for what is natural’ and contains all the properties that are essentially attached to the nature.”⁶ The process of willing (or, deciding) involves one’s desires interrelated with the intellect and emotion, so that, for example, fear, anger, or perceived goods and evils can be strong influences on how a person wills. Hovorun observes that while the Greek tradition had been to link volition as an aspect of intellect, Christian theologians began distinguishing the will and mind for God in the fourth century (countering Arius).⁷

Desires of the will are related to beliefs, what is known to be good and evil, so some correlation to the mind (or, intellect) is operative for the will. Scholastic theologians disagreed about the relation of the intellect and the

will: Thomists thought the intellect informed the will concerning the good to be desired; Scotists countered that the desires led the intellect in perception of the good.⁸ The process of willing is mysterious. Freedom of choice, agency, intention, inclination, wish, deliberation, judging, consideration, inquiry, self-determination, and desire are all facets of what persons do through the will of a rational nature.⁹ The will is a way to label the depths of decision-making and the many processes related to agent causation.

By analogy, the will is like the steering wheel for a car. Just as a driver “feels” the road and enacts choices for the direction of the car by means of the steering wheel, so also a person “feels” desires and enacts choices by means of the will in coordination with particular beliefs. The distorting effect of sin on both desires and beliefs (intellect) hinders the ability of a creature that is sundered from God to know and choose the good in harmony with God. Our understanding of the will has limitations because of the dysfunction we experience in willing.

Whatever the will is, damaged volition is central to the problem of humanity; renewed willing is central to the solution (salvation).¹⁰ Since the human will is ravaged by sin, then the Son of God must have taken up a human will to restore human nature for salvation. For this reason, ancient proponents of Dyothelitism repeated the axiom stated famously by Gregory of Nazianzus: “That which has not been assumed has not been healed; but that which is united to God is also being saved.”¹¹ Misuse of the will separated Adam and Eve from God; renewal of the will in repentance and faith is the Christian’s reconciliation with God. Perhaps it is best to recognize that we can only have a faint understanding of volition and mind as distinct operations that we use to understand the very operations in abstract.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE WILL

The OT and NT use a variety of terms to present the concepts related to the will for God, angels, and human beings. Biblical writers present the parallel of God’s will (expressed in purposes, choices, and desires) to creaturely freedom of choice and moral responsibility. God holds people accountable for choices that are nonetheless planned, shaped, and rewarded or punished by God (e.g., Gen 50:20). God repeatedly tolerates the resistance of creatures who violate his commands. God does not need to overrule creaturely willing

that opposes him; mysteriously God can uphold his creatures' freedom and fulfill his own purposes by means of creaturely choices. "God's will or desire is perfect, but it is large enough to incorporate and circumvent human will where necessary (Acts 2:23)."¹²

Clear in Scripture is the reality of the will in connection with agency, desires, intellect, and emotion (often collected as the *heart*, the inner being of a person, e.g., Mark 7:21-22). Cognition and volition are closely related and overlapped in biblical theology, philosophy, and colloquial usage because *will* has two senses of (1) personal causal action or decision and (2) desire, intention, or inclination.¹³ Unclear is evidence that shows if the will is a natural property or personal property, as in the dispute over Monothelism. Regarding the main NT terms for volition, Schrenk observes the development of theological formulation beyond Scripture's pragmatic focus on outcomes of the process of willing:

The psychological presuppositions [in the Monothelite controversy] are that the *nous* [mind] is active in the *thelema* [will] and that what is willed is then expressed in words and acts... The NT itself has no interest in this type of psychology, which is Greek in source. The Monothelite and Dyothelite discussion always regards *thelema* as an organ of volition, whereas in the NT *thelema* is what is willed, and the whole emphasis falls on the content of volition.¹⁴

The difference noted by Schrenk between the developing theology of volition and the NT presentation of the will should not trouble us. As with many questions that develop as implications from the Bible, Scripture holds back from providing evidence that we might want to find there, requiring the theological task. An ancient debate was necessary to expand upon the biblical starting points that are given. Scripture reveals that God chooses in some way similar to humans, with enough correspondence that we can imagine models of the will in God and the will(s) in Jesus Christ. Based on this analogy, theology must systematically work with Scripture and experience to formulate a model of the will. Scripture informs the model, and the model elucidates the interpretation of Scripture, as in the question of Jesus' will(s) when he prays to God the Father in Gethsemane. Is Jesus' "not my will" his human will or his divine will? Is the "your will be done" the Father's will alone, or is it the identical divine will possessed by the Son and the Spirit?

We turn to theological categories to test and explore the Dyothelite model of the will as a natural property. The theology of two wills in Jesus did not come easily. As in the case of some other important topics, disputes led to clarity and the establishment of orthodoxy. Strangely, the disputes in this case did not originate with the church, but with the Byzantine Emperors.

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY OF THE WILL

Serious controversy about Dyothelitism and Monothelitism developed throughout the seventh century. The debate culminated in the Sixth Ecumenical Council that met at Constantinople for nearly a year 680-81. This council was the conclusion to a five-decade political project to preserve the Roman Empire through inventing an ecumenical theology of unified actions and will of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ The project proved to be a failure for the Empire, but the debate provided for clarification about Jesus and the will, primarily through the work of Maximus the Confessor.

Emperor Heraclius (reigned 610-41) suffered Visigoth conquest of Spain in the West, and Persian and Arab conquests encroaching in the East, to which losses he responded by an ecumenical theology for imperial solidarity.¹⁶ The fifth column against Heraclius in the East was the Monophysite population of Christians that had been condemned by the Council of Chalcedon (451) as heretics in line with Eutychianism (two natures before the union, one nature after the union). These non-Chalcedonian Christians in Armenia and Syria welcomed Persian conquest as the "...passing of the Chalcedonian night" since they had been oppressed by Byzantine Chalcedonian orthodoxy.¹⁷ Heraclius and Cyrus of Alexandria managed a compromise in 633 to regain the allegiance of Egyptian Monophysites: there are two natures in Christ but only one mode of activity (*monenergism*).¹⁸ This new term for the unified activity of Jesus (*energeia*) was developed further in the idea of one mode of willing (Monothelitism). Heraclius issued the *Ecthesis* in 638 (written by Sergius, patriarch of Constantinople) as an imperial document ratified by five patriarchs, the main point being to forbid theological discussion about the numbers of activity in Christ. The *Ecthesis* also shifted advocacy for monenergism to assert that there was a single will in Christ (and denounced two wills as going beyond even Nestorianism).¹⁹ Pyrrhus, the patriarch of Constantinople (638-41, 654) further asserted Monothelitism in 641 through

writing an encyclical and a letter of defense to Pope John IV.²⁰

Reactions that formed Dyothelite and Monothelite arguments seemed to have followed different concerns in Christology and soteriology. Monothelites resisted the idea of two wills since they assumed a human will in Christ would mean a will that could be contrary to God and liable to sin, hence a conflict.²¹ Maximus responded that only a sinful will was opposed to God, so Jesus' human will should be affirmed as moved and shaped by the divine will (what he termed deification by union with God).²² Despite the clear assertions of Monothelites that Jesus exercised a single will only, what this meant for some proponents was a complete submission of the human will to the divine will, so that the "one will in Christ" was his divine will unopposed by conflict from his human will. For example, Galot explains the troublesome statement of Pope Honorius (for which the Pope was anathematized by the Sixth Council): "We confess one single will in our Lord Jesus Christ," by saying, "What [Honorius] meant by this was that Christ's human will is one through its conformity with the divine will which it has never contradicted."²³ Perhaps some Monothelites were misunderstood when they actually affirmed a human will in Christ in union with his divine will, but the dislocation of the will from the nature to be a personal property follows the Apollinarian heresy and seems a bad fit for theology proper. For Christology, even the most modest formulation that told a divine will overriding of the human will in Christ seemed to Dyothelites as going too far and diminishing the human obedience of Jesus, so the debating continued.

The imperial mandate of Monothelitism as orthodoxy did not achieve the political gains desired for Heraclius (d. 641) or his successors. Emperor Constans II issued a ban on all discussion of Christ's wills in 648 (the *Typos*), but this only provoked greater opposition in the West when Pope Martin I convened the Lateran synod at Rome to condemn the *Typos* and Monothelitism in 649.²⁴ The imperial reaction to the leaders of the Lateran synod was to arrest Martin and Maximus for treason, and then punish both with exile after making them to stand trial in Constantinople in 653. Maximus was recalled from exile and tried a second time in 661 to be condemned for upholding Dyothelitism, suffering the removal of his right hand and his tongue (to prevent writing or teaching the anti-imperial doctrine), and then he was returned to exile where he died that same year (at age 81).²⁵ Despite the attempt to silence Maximus (and Martin), he was vindicated after his

death in exile as having articulated the more accurate theology.

Political expedience that earlier launched Monothelitism became less attractive when the plan failed, so Emperor Constantine IV (668-85) now sought union with Rome in the West by calling the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680 to resolve the question of the will(s) in Jesus Christ. Having endured imperial intrusion into matters of doctrine, church leaders at the council declared the orthodoxy that had been articulated chiefly by Maximus the Confessor. In an odd turn of history, this doctrine "became a pillar of union rather than a source of division between churches of East and West."²⁶

The two parties at the Sixth Council located the will differently within human and divine existence. Monothelites argued that the will is a capacity of the person, not the nature, so one person means one will. To say there are two wills in Jesus Christ means there are two persons (the heresy of Nestorianism). A representative statement is Macarius of Antioch: "I confess... one hypostatic [personal] will in our Lord Jesus Christ."²⁷ Opposite the one-will view, Dyothelites located the will as a property (or, capacity) of the nature, which corresponds to two wills in Jesus Christ and one will in the Trinity (as in the definition of the will given above). Writing to the Sixth Council from Rome, Pope Agatho charged that the claim of a single *personal* will in Christ implied three *personal* wills in the Trinity.²⁸ Thus the proponents for both positions had to reach beyond the limited array of biblical passages that speak on the will(s) of Jesus to consider the theological connections to theology proper and anthropology.

THEOLOGY PROPER AND THE WILL

The Sixth Council found a major weakness of Monothelitism in the inability of the model to work in the case of the triune God, whereas the Dyothelite model worked better for the Trinity. If the Dyothelite model is true, then we should be able to demonstrate a consistent explanation of volition in God as a property of the divine nature, a single will of the three persons.

God is a person who makes choices as a unified agent, being just one God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy total harmony and absence of conflict that might be supposed were they to possess distinct wills (as in Monothelitism). According to Dyothelitism, the unity of the three persons is expressive of the single divine will exercised by three agents. If the will is a property

of God's nature (a natural will), then we can imagine that God's desires are the set of known goods held in common by all three triune persons. This set of desires is coordinate with God's unified knowledge that is also held in common as the single divine nature. In this sense, the desires of the Father are identical to the desires of the Son and the Spirit. Each person knows and desires the same goods that the other two persons know and desire (just as all three are omniscient, etc.). None can choose independently of the other two, since the will of one person is also the will of all three.

By analogy, divine properties are like a single bank account held in common by three owners. Given that the entire amount of funds is co-possessed by three owners, no person may spend from the account independently, since the money does not belong to one alone. All three owners must co-sign for any expenditure. Similarly, for God, no one or two persons may form any choice apart from the full agreement of all three agents. For God and the will as a property of their nature, like a bank account held in common by three agents, the deep unity of the triune persons comes from their common will. Thus, the meaning of the will as a natural property co-possessed by the triune persons is consistent with the unity of God. What then of their genuine agent causation as distinct persons?

The three persons possess the same will, and each personally exercises choice in relation to one another (*ad intra*, the immanent trinity). The importance of distinctions in the choices of three triune persons is immense; as the basis of their relationships and actions, choices may be the very ground of trinitarian diversity of persons (otherwise, God's reality would be a lonely and loveless Unitarian existence). While the Monothelites sought to distinguish trinitarian willing as distinct wills of each person, Dyothelitism views the single natural will of three agents as a co-possession for diverse agent causation. The *will* is of the nature; *willing* is activity of the persons. For example, the Father shows distinction as a personal agent by choosing to send the Holy Spirit (e.g., Matt 10:40; Luke 11:13) and the Son on missions for salvation (thirty-nine times Jesus speaks of having been *sent*). The repeated statement that the Father loves the Son also entails distinct personal exercise of will in relationship (e.g., John 3:35). The Son is distinct as an active, choosing agent by repeated obedience to his Father's commands as the Word sent into the world, which is expressive of his love for his Father (John 14:31). The Son also freely chooses with the Father to send the Holy

Spirit to indwell individual Christians (two persons willing jointly in relation to the third person's willing action—John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). The Spirit is voluntarily responsive to the Son's authority for what the Spirit reveals to Christians, and he freely chooses to honor the Son through the church, per the Son's authority (John 16:13-14). Thus, the distinct volition of the triune persons in eternal relationship is consistent with the meaning of will as agent causation and desires. Possessing the same desires, triune persons always will distinctly and conjointly with one another.

The three of the Godhead also exercise choice distinctly from each other by the different actions they will in relation to creatures (*ad extra*, God's works in creation). The triune persons know and desire the same goods, so they may choose those same goods, fulfilling distinct aspects in united action (as in a team). For example, the NT frequently identifies divine election and the plan of salvation as exercise of will by the Father (Eph 1:11, 14, 15; 1 Pet 1:1-2). The Father's agency of will shows in the emphasis on his responsiveness to prayer, his readiness to reward acts of obedience and mercy, and his willingness to grant forgiveness, the Spirit, and other goods to people who ask him (e.g., Luke 11:2-13). The Spirit engulfs the Son in his human life so that he can be the Messiah, and renews the Messiah's dead body in resurrection (Rom 8:11). The Spirit is also noted as distributing ministries in the church according to his will (1 Cor 12:11). Many choices of the Spirit are implied in acts of healing, exorcism, prophecy, and other works of God within creation that are attributed to the Spirit as the agent of them all (e.g., Matt 12:28; 2 Pet 1:21).

There is some ambiguity about the Son's acts of will since the incarnation involves him in two kinds of willing as God (divine) and as a man. The Son reveals this by speaking as a man at times with reference to both wills, so the interpretation of Jesus' statements about willing are not equally clear to all interpreters (hence the ancient dispute: a single hypostatic will, or two natural wills? his divine will or his human will?). What is clear is that the Son exercises personal divine volition to become a man and give himself and the Spirit for the benefit of those he saves (e.g., Mark 10:45; John 15:26). Therefore, the three persons possess and exercise a single will held in common, a property of their single divine nature, to express their unique identities through continuing works in the creation they brought forth. The Dyothelite model of the will as a natural property of agent causation and

desires is a satisfactory explanation for the will in God.

While consistency of definitions when applied to God and people is always desirable, we must acknowledge that the reality of the will for God may be analogically compared to the reality of the will for human beings. For a difference, the triune persons co-possess a single will; human persons do not. No matter how closely human beings might agree on shared desires and choices, the decisions remain individually distinguishable movements of the separable wills of the persons involved. For similarity, the Bible uses the same terms for human willing and divine willing. The use of common terms is so close that statements by Jesus are ambiguous as to what sort of willing he refers to by saying, "I am willing; be cleansed" (Matt 8:3 NASB). Is this willing as God or as man? As with most affirmations about the Trinity, we end up with a paradoxical statement: each triune person possesses the same will as the other two persons; each person distinctly chooses by personal and distinct exercise of will in genuine agent causation.

By comparison, were volition for God to be a personal property apart from the divine nature (as in Monothelism), discord among the triune persons seems unavoidable. Distinct wills entail distinct desires. For example, the Son possesses desires that the Spirit does not, nor the Father. What would prevent three agents with different desires from willing against each other? For this reason, the ancient Dyothelites saw polytheism as an implication of Monothelism. Three wills in God would be three agents in potential opposition.

In conclusion, the Dyothelite model of the will as a natural property fits with theology proper. The unity of the triune God is confirmed by the single capacity to will that is enjoyed alike by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are persons with authentic agent causation and unique identity, but without any possibility of discord. If the Dyothelite model is right, then we should find consistency between the will in God and the will of human beings.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE WILL

Dyothelite arguments against Monothelism insisted that a true human will is necessary for the Son of God to accomplish salvation; thus, the meaning of the human will bears investigation in terms of this model. We will consider the human will in several modes described by Scripture and explained according to the meaning of the will as a property of the nature. Hovorun

interprets Maximus' grasp of this claim: "[N]obody is taught to will, but by nature knows how to will. In this sense, willing is a feature of nature, because men employ the properties of nature without being taught."²⁹

By comparison, the Monothelite model of the will as a personal property can also make sense of the human will.³⁰ Were anthropology the only focus for explaining human willing, I do not think either model has an edge from Scripture, philosophy, or psychology. The theological concept of the will in anthropology depends on theology proper and Christology. Two Monothelite approaches may be considered. First, it is possible to imagine that the will in God is a property of the nature, and that for humanity the will is a personal property. This move seems unlikely because of the incarnation in which a personal will would have to be added to the eternal person, the Son of God, to function as a human being equipped with a human will. Second, perhaps the personal will of the Son is also used for his human nature. This also seems unlikely because only a created will is subject to temptation (cf. Jas 1:13). Since the nature-will seems to be the best account for the Trinity, and the incarnation requires some consistency for a triune person to live as a man, then it seems most appropriate that human will is a natural property possessed and exercised by the human person. Accordingly, we will explore how the Dyothelite model makes sense of the human will. If this is right, then the model should make sense of the several states of human will.

God created human nature thoroughly good; damage of the will came through misuse. Adam and Eve possessed the ability to obey God and to sin (*posse non peccare, posse peccare*). They knew and desired the good; they could also be deceived. Maximus describes this state of the will as the "desire of things according to nature."³¹ The man and woman also desired what was contrary to nature (sin). The desire for independence from God, perhaps to define for themselves what was good and evil, attracted them in the will, so they chose evil, wrongly believing it was a good. The will is the connection between the persons and their actions. Viewing the will as a property of human nature seems to give a clear account of freely chosen sin. What was the effect of sin on the will?

When Adam and Eve sinned, they became enslaved through the ruin of their wills, unable to know and desire the good as before (*non posse non peccare*). To them, evil looked good, and true good no longer appeared to them as good. For example, they now hid from God and blamed others for

their actions. In Maximus' view, sin broke the will's natural harmony with God, twisting the will to desire what is against God's order.³² This mode of human will is *gnome*, the uncertain and ambiguous struggle of the will about good and evil, being ignorant of the true good and pulled to evil action instead.³³ All people are born into this condition, living as "slaves of sin" (John 8:34; Rom 6:6, 17), "dead in sins" and they are "walking according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:1, 2). This is the condition that Luther called the bondage of the will:

So man's will is like a beast standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills... If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it... [W]ith regard to God and in all that bears on salvation or damnation, [a person] has no 'free-will', but is a captive, a prisoner and bondslave, either to the will of God, or to the will of Satan.³⁴

Luther's intention is not to say that the will chooses automatically in accordance with a "rider," but that the person with a damaged will is either in thrall to God or the devil, and chooses accordingly. This idea is not determinism, since the person chooses sin voluntarily, as Luther says: "We do not sin against our will but rather according to our will."³⁵ The will is a deformed capacity of the person's nature. The enslaved will limits the person to desires that are unnatural, selfish, and against God, though rationalized as goods. Blind to the good and twisted to desire evil because of the corrupt will, the person can only choose sin. Hence, all choices of the person are voluntary and dislocated from God until the nature of the person is renewed, including restoration of the will containing desires.³⁶

For the Christian, renewal by regeneration of the Holy Spirit (and Jesus' deliverance from the power of sin) restores the desires of the will in harmony with God (what had been lost through sin). This restoration is part of the meaning of the new heart with new desires from the indwelling Holy Spirit to purify them and "cause you to walk in My statutes" (Ezek 36:25-27 NASB). All people who belong to Jesus Christ are newly enabled to desire and choose according to God's will (*posse non peccare*) and they remain able to choose

sin (*posse peccare*). The will is cluttered with desires for good and sin (the biblical category of *the flesh* as the condition of opposition to the Spirit, e.g., Gal 5:16-26). McFarland interprets this condition of struggle and hope as the shared vision of Augustine and Maximus: “[They] view postlapsarian humanity’s struggles with sin as a battle between a will that has, in turning from nature, been cut off from nature and nature’s God alike, and a will that, healed by grace, has been reintegrated into nature’s order.”³⁷ Whether this reintegration is termed progressive sanctification or deification, both identify the NT call to life in the Spirit and in Christ that is possible for the Christian through God’s influence on the will in conjunction with the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2). In this way, the person is at liberty to choose freely in accordance with God because of a will that has been changed. This regeneration for new creation will be completed in resurrection.

Perfect human freedom includes only desires that accord with God, and excludes the ability to sin (*non posse peccare*). Anticipation of this final, glorified state of human life and the will shows in Jesus’ earthly sinlessness that Maximus calls a model of deification (more on Jesus below). Since the new creation is described partly by saying “there will no longer be death” (Rev 21:4 NASB), and death is the consequence for sin, then we can expect that everlasting life is freedom like God’s, only for the ability to choose good. This perfection of will fits the perfection of the resurrected nature. This state of the human will is an advance beyond Eden in the confirmed and voluntary dependence upon God permanently. Such dependence as a creature is Jesus’ exercise of his human will to embrace God’s calling instead of his desires to avoid suffering.

CHRISTOLOGY AND THE WILL

In correspondence with what we have considered about the will for theology proper and anthropology, we can compare how the Dyothelite model of the will as a natural property works for Christology. First, we have noted in theology proper that God the Son makes choices in coordination with the Father and the Spirit. We have cited biblical examples of the Son’s *ad intra* and *ad extra* choices. This exercise of his divine will involves personal agency in relation to desires possessed in common among the three persons. For example, the Son uniquely chose to become incarnate in conjunction with

the Father's choice to send him into the world (John 10:36), and with the Spirit's choice to create his human nature by "overshadowing" Mary (Luke 1:35). The unity of the three persons through co-possession of one nature, including one natural will, coincides with the distinct agency of personal choices. In this sense, the Son possesses a divine will.

Second, theological anthropology and the will showed four states of human willing, one of which corresponds to the Son's human will. What sort of human will does the Son of God live with as Jesus of Nazareth? The idea may be attractive that Jesus lived with a human will that was capable of sin (*posse peccare*), either as in original creation or as corresponding to the states of fallen or regenerate humanity. The Son of God's continuing existence as a divine person when he becomes a man excludes sharing in our capacity to sin (or, our inability to succeed at doing the right, good, and true). Being unchangeably good, God the Son cannot live otherwise even in a second mode of life as a creature. Any capacity for sin as a man would mean that God could sin, which is false (since Scripture is clear that God is immutable and almighty in his goodness).

By comparison to human sin, the common human experiences of ignorance, weakness, and finite presence are all impossible for God, but these experiences accord with the nature of humanity that God created. These aspects of created existence are good, which means they are harmonious with God. Even death and pain that Jesus embraced are consistent with his divine identity since they are the means to salvation and his obedient responses to the Father's calling. By contrast to these common creaturely realities, sin is unnatural to the creation and a contradiction to God, so sin must be excluded even as a capacity for the Son of God in his human exercise of will. He is truly human and impeccable, just as his people will be in the resurrection. Perfected freedom includes the natural desires for only the good in unobstructed relationship with God. Thus, the sort of human will that Jesus lived with must have been the same that will be true of glorified humanity.

This mode of creaturely freedom is consistent with being God and with being vulnerable to temptation, as Jesus surely was (Heb 4:15). More could be said to explain this,³⁸ but suffice it to say that the Son need only experience the natural desires to avoid pain and seek goods if he is to feel the pull of temptations. In the wilderness temptations, Jesus felt the blameless desire to end his pain of hunger by the wrong means suggested by the devil—to

break from the Father's "provision" and provide bread for himself. The devil also suggested an alternative to the pain of the cross, which route Jesus again considered in Gethsemane—both times sinlessly—as legitimate creaturely desires that he felt as a man and also denied to himself. This self-denial of his desires to avoid pain is a human operation of will that corresponds to Jesus' call to all who follow him (Luke 9:23). His experiences are the basis of his true sympathy with our struggle to follow God despite suffering along the way (Heb 2:17-18; 4:15). Our inspiration and real help is to know of Jesus' human experience that is the pattern for ours (Rom 8:17; 1 Pet 2:21-25). Since Jesus denied himself as a man for us, we may deny ourselves in response to his call to us. The correspondence between his human will and our human will is clear. The Son of God chose as a man by his natural human will. He saved us and modeled for us the life in the Spirit who empowers him and us for a renewed humanity.

Third, the harmony of the Son's two natural wills shows in the interpersonal relationship with his Father *ad extra*, which also models our relationship with the Father. When the Son chose as God to become a man, this was *ad intra* harmony between the Father and the Son. When the Son chose as man to obey his human parents (Luke 2:52), this was *ad extra* harmony between the Father and the Son, which means personal harmony among the Son's desires as God and as a man (within the incarnation). As a man, he wants to do what is right, even when he also wants to do other things, such as remain at the temple when he was twelve or avoid the cross. Jesus represents healthy functioning as a creature to desire and choose only the good, even when other apparent goods (such as avoiding pain) are available to him. This functioning anticipates the perfection of human freedom in the resurrection so that people will exercise real choice without any capacity for sin.

How was the Son's human will aligned with his divine will in a way that preserved his real creaturely freedom? Patristic theology developed the concept of deification to explain this elevation of human functioning through union with God (as in 2 Pet 1:2-7). For Jesus, this was union within the incarnation; for others the deification occurs through union with God in Christ by the Spirit.³⁹ I think the emphasis is right to mark the Spirit's work to elevate human function in harmony with God is life in the Spirit—the filling, leading, shaping, and enlightening the child of God. In this way, the Spirit of God is active in the Messiah and for all people who are in Christ

to enable the freedom of natural concurrence with God. Patristic theology preferred to see deification of Jesus' human will as caused by incarnational union. A more consistent approach is to mark the Spirit's activity in parallel with what occurs for the Christian in regeneration and sanctification by the Spirit. In any case, the model of the will as a natural property explains both Jesus' genuine human struggle with desires in temptation, and his voluntary alignment to embrace the Father's will calling him to suffer as a man.

More specifically, the Dyothelite model explains Jesus' statement of self-denial in Gethsemane "not My will" as expression of a created human will by contrast to "Your will be done," referring to his Father's will. Since Jesus is more than merely a man, being God the Son, the Father's will is simultaneously the Son's will (*ad intra*), sharing the same divine desire that they accomplish salvation through the Son's suffering the cup of wrath. The interaction is genuinely interpersonal between the Father and the Son, though in a created mode *ad extra*; the Son first requests as a man of his Father "to let this cup pass from Me" and then resolves as a man to embrace his Father's will. In this way, God the Son lives by a second mode of relationship as a creature to God the Father (*ad extra*), truly in our place.

We can point to the analogy of a human father and son who work together as boss and employee—they live in two modes of relationship that run parallel in the order of authority and submission. One mode is family, and the other mode is workplace. This human will includes the Son's desires, decision-making process, and choices as a man. Hebrews 12:2 commends Jesus' human resolve to choose the "joy" of accomplishing salvation by means of enduring the cross as humanly motivating for the readers; Jesus is the pinnacle of other human forebears who proved faithful to God's call. In Gethsemane, Jesus fought for and rescued his people, struggling as they struggle, on our behalf, being the last Adam constructing a new humanity. The Son of God embedded himself in a human struggle between obeying God and self-preservation. Jesus also wrestled authentically as our model, demonstrating the painful path for them to follow him (Rom 8:17; 1 Pet 2:21-25). Jesus had to make the choice as a man to deny himself, set aside his desires for self-preservation, and embrace God's call and will that he suffer Hell. This is the same situation for the believer who follows Jesus.

By contrast, these things are impossible for someone who possesses only a divine will as in the Monothelite model of the will as a personal property.

Monothelitism misunderstands the interpersonal, *ad intra* relationship of the Father and Son in the incarnation. By the mistaken model of the will as personal, when Jesus prays “not My will” Monothelitism views him as referring to his divine will that he possesses distinctly from the Father, who wills differently “Your will be done.” Jesus’ humanity is reduced to being a puppet attached to the *ad intra* relationship of the Father and Son. Such a divine will of the Son could not experience temptation that the NT clearly reports as corresponding to the full array of normal human temptations (Heb 2:17-18; 4:15). Temptation is impossible for God apart from incarnation (Jas 1:13), so the only way the Son could be vulnerable to temptation is through a created human will. Despite the gains of unity for the incarnation and supposing to avoid a conflict between the Son’s human and divine wills, the Monothelite model of the will as personal breaks on this important point of temptation to sin. Jesus’ human obedience would also be excluded (as required for justification by faith, Rom 10:4).

CONCLUSION

Instead of the imperial theological formulation that became Monothelitism, the Dyothelite model of the will as a natural property works wherever we look theologically. The process of willing is mysterious for us, but we may see clearly that neither do we choose independently of our natural desires, nor do we lack the capacity to transcend them. Being persons embedded in the array of natural properties we possess, we make choices under the influence of our beliefs, experiences, perceptions, and the Spirit of God. We may imagine that the Son of God experienced something very close to us. Whatever conflicts we struggle against in denying particular desires so as to choose the Father’s calling to us, Jesus entered the same struggle for us and for our salvation.

¹ Richard Price, “Monothelitism: A Heresy or a Form of Words?” *Studia Patristica* 48 (2010): 221-32. Even if the label is faulty as a mere “form of words,” the Monothelite model of the will is still mistaken.

² E.g., Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 5. “Free will is an illusion. Our wills are simply not of our own making. Thoughts and intentions emerge from background causes of which we are unaware and over which we exert no conscious control. We do not have the freedom we think we have.”

- 3 Donald Fairbairn, "The One Person Who Is Jesus Christ: The Patristic Perspective," in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective* (ed., Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler; Nashville: B&H, 2007), 83. Emphasis original.
- 4 Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), "persona," s.v.
- 5 The oddity of this idea has background in the patristic concern to affirm that the Son of God assumed his own human nature and was the sole person of it (no human person was pushed out for the Son to become a man, *anhypostatic*). Patristic theologians also rightly denied that the human nature assumed for incarnation had independent existence before or apart from the incarnation (*anhypostatic*).
- 6 Opusculum 3, 45D, cited and trans. in Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 193.
- 7 Cyril Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 147-48. He gives the example of Gregory of Nyssa *Life of Moses* 2:34, "Thoughts are the fathers of the will."
- 8 Muller, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, "appetitus," s.v.
- 9 Maximus the Confessor, in his *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, crafted definitions for all these terms associated with willing (following Aristotle). Cited in George C. Berthold, "Aspects of the Will in Maximus the Confessor," *Studia Patristica* 48 (2010): 66-67.
- 10 This point that is was the human will that had been guilty of sin, so Christ had to have a human will to redeem humanity's fallen one was urged by Maximus, and voiced later by John of Damascus. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (700-1700)*, vol. 2, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 75.
- 11 Gr. Naz. Letter 101.32. Cited and trans. Christopher A. Beeley, "'Let this cup pass from me' (Matth 26:39): the soul of Christ in Origen, Gregory Nazianzen, and Maximus Confessor," in *Studia Patristica* 63 (2013): 36. An earlier formulation of this idea shows in Origen, *Dialogue with Heraclides* 7.
- 12 M. William Ury, "Will," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed., Walter Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 819.
- 13 Biblical word groups for the will match these two senses (Ury, "Will," 819), but the mind is also said to include choosing or decision making, hence the overlap (Philip H. Towner, "Mind/Reason," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 529).
- 14 G. Schrenk, "Thelema," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. III (ed., Gerhard Kittel; ed., and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 62.
- 15 Cyril Hovorun, "Controversy on Energies and Wills in Christ: Between Politics and Theology," in *Studia Patristica* 48 (2010): 217-19.
- 16 "Heraclius," in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 756.
- 17 John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450-680 A.D.* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 333, 341.
- 18 Joseph C. Ayer, *A Source Book for Ancient Church History: From the Apostolic Age to the Close of the Conciliar Period* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 660.
- 19 Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom*, 75. Price, "Monothelitism: A Heresy or a Form of Words?" 224.
- 20 Marek Jankowiak, "The Invention of Dyothelitism," *Studia Patristica* 43 (2013): 339-41.
- 21 Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom*, 143.
- 22 Beeley, "Let this cup pass from me," 42.
- 23 Jean Galot, *Who is Christ?* (trans. M. Angeline Bouchard; Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 646.
- 24 Hovorun, *Will, Action, and Freedom*, 82. An excerpt of the *Typos* translated by Hovorun: "We declare to our Orthodox subjects that, from the present moment, they no longer have permission in any way to contend and to quarrel with one another over one will and one energy, or two energies and two wills."
- 25 Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom*, 85.
- 26 Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, eds., and trans., *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions: Documents from Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30.
- 27 Macarius was the main proponent of Monothelitism at the Sixth Council. Cited and trans. in Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom*, 143.
- 28 Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 14 (A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series; ed., Henry R. Percival; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 332-33. From Pope Agatho's letter to the Sixth Council: "For if anybody should mean a personal will, when in the holy Trinity there are said to be three Persons, it would be necessary that there should be asserted three personal wills, and three personal operations (which is absurd and truly profane). Since, as the truth of the Christian faith holds, the will is natural, where the one nature of the holy and inseparable Trinity is spoken of, it must be consistently understood that there is one natural will, and one natural operation."

- ²⁹ Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom*, 156, commenting on Maximus, *Disputation with Pyrrhus*, 304BC.
- ³⁰ Garrett J. DeWeese, "One Person, Two Natures: Two Metaphysical Models of the Incarnation," in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective*, 138. DeWeese includes consciousness and volition with his definition of person, distinct from nature.
- ³¹ *Opuscula Theologica et Polemica* 14, cited and trans. in Ian McFarland, "'Naturally and by grace': Maximus the Confessor on the operation of the will," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58/4 (2005): 415.
- ³² McFarland, "'Naturally and by grace,'" 413.
- ³³ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Copenhagen: Lund, 1965), 229.
- ³⁴ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston; Tarrytown, NY: Revell, 1957), 103-4, 7.
- ³⁵ Luther, *WA* 39, 378, cited and trans. in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (trans. Robert C. Schultz; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 156.
- ³⁶ The Monothelite objection to two wills was by the assumption that a human will in Christ was necessarily opposed to God, *non posse non peccare*. Maximus clarified that the will in Christ was aligned to God, not opposed, because of union for deification.
- ³⁷ McFarland, "'Naturally and by grace,'" 431.
- ³⁸ See John E. McKinley, *Tempted for Us: Theological Models and the Practical Relevance of Christ's Impeccability and Temptation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009).
- ³⁹ Paul M. Blowers, "Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus on Gnostic Will in Christ: Clarity and Ambiguity," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, vol. 63: 3 & 4 (2013): 49.

The Son and the Spirit: The Promise and Peril of Spirit Christology

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a growing number of Christian theologians have devoted considerable attention to the person and work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the person and work of the Son. That is, various forms of Spirit Christology have become commonplace on the landscape of contemporary theology. The term Spirit Christology is used broadly to refer to any proposal in which the person and work of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) figures prominently and indispensably in one's articulation of the person and work of Jesus Christ (Christology).

Some contemporary proposals of Spirit Christology are explicitly non-Trinitarian, articulating a unitarian/modalistic paradigm for understanding the mission and message of Jesus in light of his experience of the Spirit of God. That is, for some, Spirit Christology is an alternative to the Logos Christology of the ecumenical creeds.¹ It will be seen that such non-Trinitarian proposals are little more than contemporary iterations of an ancient Christological heresy—adoptionism.

Many contemporary proponents of Spirit Christology, however, attempt to develop their models within the general boundaries of Trinitarian orthodoxy, as established by the ecumenical creeds, even if they critique the traditional formulae at key points.² For heuristic purposes, two methodological approaches to this Trinitarian variety of Spirit Christology can be identified.³ The first may be called the “biblical-exegetical approach” because proponents devote their presentation almost exclusively to the exegesis of key biblical texts. Such proposals tend to focus on the role of the Holy Spirit upon or through Christ according to his human nature during his earthly life and ministry. The other methodology may be called the “historical-systematic approach” because proponents develop their proposals primarily in dialogue with the ideas of their theological/philosophical predecessors and contemporaries. These proposals tend to place much greater emphasis on questions of immanent Trinitarian relations.

While some may laud the influx of Spirit-Christology proposals as a much needed pneumatological enrichment of traditional Christological formulae, others are undoubtedly troubled that the contemporary emphasis on the Holy Spirit entails dangerous theological problems. It is the purpose of this article to show that contemporary models of Spirit Christology present a number of distinct theological advantages that hold out the promise of a valuable pneumatological enrichment of evangelical Christology within the framework of traditional Trinitarian theology. These advantages, however, are attended by a number of theological dangers that potentially jeopardize some of the most cherished theological commitments of the Christian faith. If a constructive proposal of Spirit Christology can be articulated that preserves all of the potential theological advantages identified in this article while carefully and clearly avoiding the theological dangers, then the hope of the pneumatological enrichment of evangelical Christology can be achieved.

METHOD

The article will proceed in three sections. First, non-Trinitarian proposals of Spirit Christology will be surveyed. In this section, a brief examination of the ancient Christological heresy of adoptionism will be followed by a survey of a representative contemporary proposal of non-Trinitarian Spirit Christology. This will demonstrate that the contemporary non-Trinitarian

proposals are just new iterations of the old heresy. The second section will survey several important contemporary proposals of Trinitarian Spirit Christology. Examples of both the biblical-exegetical and the systematic-historical methodological approaches identified above will be considered. The third section will be an exercise in theological assessment in which I will identify and discuss the theological advantages of Trinitarian Spirit Christology, i.e., those distinctives that hold out the most promise for the pneumatological enrichment of evangelical Christology. In this section, I will also identify the attendant theological dangers of Spirit Christology. It will be seen that the advantages are only genuine enrichments insofar as they can be articulated without succumbing to the dangers that attend many models of Spirit Christology.

NON-TRINITARIAN SPIRIT CHRISTOLOGY

Gary Badcock observes that “some of the earliest christologies of the church ... were broadly pneumatic in character.”⁴ Of these early (pre-Nicene) Christological models, the most famous is that of adoptionism, an ancient heresy that has been revived in recent years.

Ancient Adoptionism

The term adoptionism, also commonly referred to as dynamic Monarchianism, is typically reserved for the second and third-century movements that took shape under the leadership of Theodotus the Cobbler and Paul of Samosata.⁵ Theodotus was a learned man of Byzantium who was summoned to Rome about AD 190 to present and defend his views concerning Christ to Victor, then Bishop of Rome. J. N. D. Kelly summarizes his Christological position:

Theodotus held that until his baptism Jesus lived the life of an ordinary man, with the difference that He was supremely virtuous. The Spirit, or Christ, then descended upon Him, and from that moment He worked miracles, without, however, becoming divine—others of the same school admitted his deification after his resurrection.⁶

For Theodotus, Jesus was a mere man. His sonship to God was to be understood only in terms of the descent of the Spirit/Christ upon him. Furthermore, the Spirit was understood to refer to the manifestation of divine power, not to a distinct divine person. Theodotus was eventually excommunicated by Victor for his denial of the true ontological deity of Jesus Christ.

Paul of Samosata is probably the most famous of the early adoptionists, but his teachings are difficult to reconstruct with any precision. It is primarily through the words of later critics (e.g., Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History*). If these critiques are accurate, Paul of Samosata taught the same kind of adoptionism for which Theodotus was excommunicated. The church clearly and strongly rejected this early attempt at explaining the supernatural dimensions of the life of Jesus Christ.

Theological Themes of Adoptionism

A few important theological themes of these early adoptionist Christologies should be made explicit. It will then be seen that these same themes characterize some contemporary proposals of Spirit Christology. First, the adoptionists held in common a unitarian view of God. When the adoptionists speak about the Spirit/Logos descending upon Jesus at his baptism, they do not mean a distinct, personal hypostasis. Rather, God is monopersonal, and the Spirit/Logos is merely the active manifestation of divine power or divine inspiration.⁷ The second theme is specifically Christological and follows quite naturally from the first. All of the early adoptionists rejected the personal pre-existence of Jesus Christ. The personal existence of Jesus began in the womb of Mary, not before. Third, while the adoptionists could speak of divine power at work in, upon, or through Jesus, they could not speak of Jesus as a divine person. He was a *merely human person* in/upon/through whom the divine power of the Spirit was at work.

Theologian Gary Badcock regrets the church's thorough rejection of the adoptionist paradigm because it stymied pneumatological developments in Christology: "The loss of Spirit as a Christological category in the early tradition meant that this Christological perspective went undeveloped, resulting in negative implications that are still with us."⁸ The result is that "we lack a developed conceptuality"⁹ for articulating a robust and coherent Spirit Christology. While it may be true that strong pneumatological emphases in

Christological thought went undeveloped for a long time, it is difficult to lament the firm and thorough rejection of the heresy of adoptionism. The trajectory of adoptionism was not in the direction of an eventual affirmation of the ontological deity of Jesus Christ and a mature Trinitarian theology. It is only along the path paved by the Logos Christology of the ecumenical creeds that a responsible Spirit Christology can be developed, one that is faithful to the biblical testimony concerning the prominence of the role of the Spirit in the person and work of the ontologically divine Son. In fact, the church's utter rejection of the heretical Spirit Christology of adoptionism is one of the key factors that has opened the door for the fruitful development of an altogether *different kind* of Spirit Christology in the contemporary context.

Contemporary Adoptionism

In spite of the church's rejection of adoptionism as heretical and antithetical to the biblical presentation of Jesus Christ as true God and true man, some modern scholars have revived the ancient heresy. In this section, I will dialogue primarily with Geoffrey Lampe's work, *God as Spirit*, but James D. G. Dunn and Roger Haight have also made adoptionistic proposals.¹⁰ I will demonstrate that the same theological themes that characterize ancient adoptionism—(1) a unitarian view of God; (2) a denial of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, and; (3) a denial of the ontological deity of Jesus Christ—also characterizes the proposal offered by Lampe.

The Anglican theologian Geoffrey Lampe believes that the concept of God as Spirit is the key to answering a puzzling question of Christology: "What is the relation of Jesus to God?"¹¹ For Lampe, the answer to the question is "best approached by way of the concept of the Spirit of God."¹² In this statement, one can see that Lampe is developing a *kind* of Spirit Christology. However, by the term "Spirit of God," Lampe does not mean the third person of the Trinity. Rather, he insists that "the Spirit of God is to be understood, not as referring to a divine hypostasis distinct from God the Father and God the Son/Word, but as indicating God himself as active towards and in his human creation."¹³ For Lampe, the concepts of "Word," "Wisdom," and "Spirit" are interchangeable metaphors. He explains: "Any one of these terms could be used to speak of the outreach of God himself as revealed and experienced."¹⁴ Thus, a denial of the hypostatic identity of

Spirit is identical to a denial of the hypostatic identity of the Son/Logos as well.¹⁵ Given his rejection of the hypostatic distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit, it is not surprising that Lampe refers favorably to the modalism of Praxeas: “This was a view which should not have been so lightly rejected in the interests of the theology of the pre-existent Logos-Son-Christ.”¹⁶ Put succinctly, Lampe is fundamentally unitarian in his theology.¹⁷

Given Lampe’s unitarian understanding of the Godhead, it is not surprising to learn that he rejects the traditional understanding of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, thus expressing the second major theological theme of the ancient adoptionists. “In a sense,” Lampe says, “all creation is pre-existent, in that it subsists from eternity as an idea in the mind of the Creator.”¹⁸ However, to identify the pre-existent God with Jesus of Nazareth is seen as highly problematic. For Lampe, the very idea belongs more to the realm of science fiction literature, in which “superman from a distant planet ... visited the earth in flying saucers or some other kind of space-ships.”¹⁹ In Lampe’s view, the development of this idea into the creedal confessions of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon proved disastrous. The resulting theology is hopelessly incoherent, causing “inconsistency and confusion.”²⁰ Thus, like the ancient adoptionists, Lampe rejects the personal pre-existence of the person of Christ.

Though unitarian in his theology and rejecting the pre-existence of Jesus, Lampe expresses a desire to preserve belief in the “true incarnation of God in Jesus.”²¹ But what does he mean by “true incarnation”? For Lampe, the incarnation in Jesus is just one instance of incarnation among many, albeit the supreme instance:

God has always been incarnate in his human creatures, forming their spirits from within and revealing himself in and through them; for although revelation comes from beyond the narrow confines of the human spirit and is not originated by man himself, there is not, and never has been, any revelation of God that has not been incarnated in, and mediated through, the thoughts and emotions of men and women.²²

Here the concepts of incarnation and revelation are conflated. Traditional Logos Christology has always affirmed that the incarnation is the supreme instance of revelation (cf. Heb 1:1-2). The eternal Son’s assumption of a

human nature by which he dwelt among us is a revelatory event (John 1:14) so that Jesus can say to Philip, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). For Lampe, however, the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus is simply the divine revelation given to the man Jesus as the archetypal model for all other instances of incarnation/revelation. Thus, the incarnation does not establish the utter ontological uniqueness of Jesus. Rather, Jesus’ uniqueness is conceived only in terms of the degree to which he experienced revelation. Like the liberal tradition sired by Schleiermacher, Lampe can affirm the presence of divinity in Christ but not the predication of divinity to Christ.²³

When viewed against the backdrop of the early adoptionist Christologies, Lampe’s Spirit Christology is seen to embrace all the distinctive theological themes that resulted in the church’s rejection of adoptionism: a unitarian theology, a denial of the personal pre-existence of Jesus Christ, and a denial of the ontological deity of Jesus Christ. Thus, when weighed in the balance, the Spirit Christology of Lampe is little more than a new articulation of an old heresy—adoptionism.

TRINITARIAN SPIRIT CHRISTOLOGY

Not all models of Spirit Christology are adoptionistic. Many Spirit-Christology proposals are made within the confessional boundaries of traditional Trinitarian theology and Christology. Specific attention will be given only to a few of the more significant proposals here. As already noted, a distinction will be maintained between two methodological approaches to Trinitarian Spirit Christology: the biblical-exegetical approach and the historical-systematic approach.²⁴

The Biblical-Exegetical Approach

For some proponents of Trinitarian Spirit Christology, the pneumatic dimension of Christology is presented via an almost exclusively exegetical approach.²⁵ Space considerations limit this discussion to the most significant contributor: Gerald Hawthorne. Other thinkers who have contributed to the discussion of Spirit Christology from a biblical-exegetical approach include Bruce A. Ware,²⁶ Klaus Issler,²⁷ Sinclair Ferguson,²⁸ and Thomas Oden.²⁹

In 1991, Gerald Hawthorne, the late New Testament scholar at Wheaton, published what remains to this day the only book-length treatise devoted exclusively to the role of the Holy Spirit in the earthly life of Christ—*The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus*.³⁰ In this seminal book, Hawthorne intends to answer the question, “To what extent was this extraordinary life [of Christ] the direct result of the Spirit’s activity upon it?”³¹ For Hawthorne, “[T]he Holy Spirit was the divine power by which Jesus overcame his human limitations, rose above his human weakness, and won out over his human mortality. It will be the purpose of the major part of this volume to show how this is so.”³² For “the major part of this volume,” Hawthorne conducts an exegetical examination of the work of the Spirit in every phase of the life of Christ,³³ seeking to demonstrate that “the Holy Spirit was indeed operative in every experience of Jesus so that the great moments of his life were indeed the result of the Spirit’s powerful presence within or upon him.”³⁴

According to Hawthorne, the New Testament emphasis on the presence and power of the Spirit in the life of Christ stands in marked contrast to the tendency of post-biblical authors, who appeal to the deity of Jesus as the explanation for the extraordinary features of his life and ministry. One of the great problems Hawthorne sees with the traditional emphasis on Christ’s deity is a kind of implicit, if unintentional, Docetism in which the full humanity of Christ is masked in favor of a sort of super-human existence for Jesus on earth, charged by his full possession of the divine nature. He contends, “In their zeal to affirm the deity of Jesus, these writers and others like them effectually eliminate the realness of his humanity. But this the New Testament writers do not do. They stand unalterably opposed to such Docetism.”³⁵

This concern to preserve a robust portrait of the full humanity of Jesus Christ (and thus his solidarity with those he came to save) is common in Trinitarian Spirit-Christology proposals, especially those of the biblical-exegetical type.³⁶ In fact, many have emphasized the role of the Spirit in the earthly life of Christ for the sake of enriching the concept of the *imitatio Christi* (the imitation of Christ).³⁷ If Jesus’ authority over demonic forces, his resolve to obey his Father’s will, and his strength to resist temptation are all attributed to his possession of the divine nature, how can he be imitated by those who do not possess the divine nature? However, if Jesus worked all these things by the power of the Spirit, then his followers truly can imitate

him because they are endowed with the same Spirit.

Proponents of the biblical-exegetical type of Spirit Christology do not typically explore the implications of their proposals for issues of immanent Trinitarian relations (e.g., How does this proposal impact one's understanding of the Trinitarian order of subsistence *ad intra*? Does this model have any bearing on the ongoing debate over the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed?). They also do not give any treatment to questions of the traditional understanding of Trinitarian action in the world (e.g., Is this understanding of the role of the Spirit in the life of Christ consistent with the traditional doctrine of the inseparable operations of the Trinity *ad extra*, i.e., that all of the external works of the Trinity are undivided?). It will be seen, on the other hand, that these issues loom large in the works of those who approach the issue of Spirit Christology with a more historical-systematic methodology.

The Historical-Systematic Approach

This approach describes those who develop Spirit Christology primarily through dialogue with the ideas of their predecessors and contemporaries. While the proposals included in this type are numerous and cover a wide variety of traditions, only the contributions of Ralph Del Colle and Clark Pinnock will be considered here. The basic contours of each proposal will be briefly considered with the purpose of ascertaining the distinctive contributions made by each. Other theologians who have developed models of Trinitarian Spirit Christology with a historical-systematic approach include Philip Rosato,³⁸ David Coffey,³⁹ Yves Congar,⁴⁰ Myk Habets,⁴¹ John Zizioulas,⁴² Gary Badcock,⁴³ and Amos Yong.⁴⁴

Ralph Del Colle

The late Ralph Del Colle was a Roman Catholic charismatic theologian. In his greatest work, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit Christology in Trinitarian Perspective*, he attempts to articulate a model of Spirit Christology that is consistent with the broader contours of Roman Catholic Trinitarian theology and Christology. He succeeds at synthesizing the work of his Roman Catholic predecessors (e.g., Rosato and Congar), drawing especially on the work of David Coffey. From the beginning, Del Colle recognizes that Spirit

Christology is particularly difficult for theologians in the Western tradition because of the West's affirmation of the *filioque* clause,⁴⁵ which was inserted into the Nicene Creed at Toledo in AD 589 and led to the official division of the church in AD 1054. Del Colle believes that the *filioque* clause has resulted in an "excessive Christocentrism" in the West.⁴⁶ Del Colle is intent on keeping his proposal within the parameters of official Roman Catholic dogma, which includes the *filioque*, but he is aware of the problems this presents for a robust Spirit Christology: "How can the Holy Spirit be fully recognized in the economy of God if within the trinity its relationship of origination from the Father is also made dependent on the Son?"⁴⁷ In order to get through this impasse, he engages in extensive dialogue with the neo-scholastic tradition, spending considerable time explicating the Thomistic account of the doctrine of the inseparable operations of the Trinity *ad extra* and the concurrent appropriation of divine works to one particular person of the Godhead.⁴⁸ For the neo-scholastics, the doctrine of the inseparable operations of the Godhead *ad extra* entails that one cannot ground the distinction between the persons of the Godhead in the economic Trinity because the economic works are indivisible. Therefore, in keeping with this tradition, Spirit Christology can only be developed speculatively from the standpoint of the immanent Trinitarian relations.

Del Colle proposes that the traditional Latin account of immanent Trinitarian relations based on the model of generation and procession,⁴⁹ including the disputed *filioque*, is correct as far as it goes. However, the account does not go far enough. While the procession-generation model can account for the revelatory *descent* of God to man, the model cannot account for the soteriological *ascent* of man to God. This is so because the traditional model does not allow for any kind of reciprocity. Generation and procession are unidirectional concepts always moving from the Father but never back to him. Thus, Del Colle proposes a bestowal model for understanding the hypostatic individuality of the Spirit, which he insists is complementary to the traditional model of procession/generation. In the bestowal model, the Father bestows the Spirit on the Son and the Son reciprocates by bestowing the Spirit on the Father. Put in the language of procession, this model suggests that, within the eternal being of God, the Spirit proceeds from the Father *to the Son* and from the Son *to the Father*. Thus, there is procession from the Father *and the Son*, but it is a reciprocal procession.⁵⁰

Del Colle's proposal is a Trinitarian Spirit Christology at the highest conceptual level. The very eternal hypostatic identity of God the Son in the immanent Trinity can only be properly conceived in terms of the Holy Spirit. For Del Colle, the careful articulation of Spirit Christology is a means to ensure that the person of the Holy Spirit is given due consideration as a fully divine person whose eternal place in the Godhead and whose mission and role in the world are understood as equal to that of the Son. He believes he has proposed "a model of Spirit Christology that stresses the pneumatological dimension of the divine economy that underscores filioquist sensibilities without compromising the monarchy of the Father or implicating a subordination of the Third Person."⁵¹ As such, Del Colle hopes his Spirit Christology may be a step toward bridging the gap between Eastern and Western traditions, a gap that has revolved around the *filioque* clause. That is, Del Colle's Spirit Christology is proposed as a tool for furthering ecumenical dialogue.⁵²

Clark Pinnock

In his work on the Holy Spirit, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Clark Pinnock attempts to approach all of the traditional loci of systematic theology from the perspective of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Pinnock's Christology is *Spirit Christology*. Integral to understanding correctly Pinnock's Spirit Christology is his view of the Spirit in creation. Pinnock emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in creation as the one brooding over the primordial earth, bringing to fruition the creative purposes of God the Father. He fears that the Spirit's role in creation has been neglected in much theology with devastating effects. Because the Creator Spirit has been ignored, the church has been able to confine the concepts of soteriology and communion with God to the realm of the church. If, however, the Spirit is the author of the creation of the whole world, then it is wrongheaded to limit his presence and activities to the sphere of the church. According to Pinnock, a recovery of the vision of Creator Spirit will help Christians realize, with humility, that "The Spirit is present in all human experience and beyond it. There is no special sacred realm, no sacred-secular split."⁵³ By acknowledging the role of the Spirit as Creator, one is able "to believe and hope that no one is beyond the reach of grace."⁵⁴ Only through Pinnock's presentation of Spirit as Creator can one

fully understand Pinnock's Spirit Christology.

Pinnock believes that, "Just as there has been a neglect of the Spirit as Creator, there has been a neglect concerning the work of the Spirit in relation to Christ."⁵⁵ As a result, the Spirit has been subordinated to the Son such that the mission of the Spirit in the world has been conceived as an aspect of the mission of the Son. However, by a recovery of Spirit as Creator in conjunction with a model of Spirit Christology, Pinnock is able to argue that the mission of Christ is "an aspect of the Spirit's mission," rather than the other way around.⁵⁶ By framing his Spirit Christology in terms of the Spirit's mission of creating man in the image of God and by suggesting that the mission of the Son is an aspect of that mission, Pinnock is able to present the incarnation of the Son of God as the supreme exemplary event, marking the crowning achievement of the Spirit's work: "We begin by placing Christology in the context of the Spirit's global operations, of which incarnation is the culmination."⁵⁷

This approach to Spirit Christology gives Pinnock the tools to articulate an inclusivist soteriology. While the incarnational mission of Christ on earth is the culmination of the Spirit's mission, it is not the *only* aspect of the Spirit's mission. For Pinnock, what the Spirit achieved supremely in the incarnation of Christ, he is achieving in a lesser way throughout all the world. In his chapter on "The Spirit and Universality," Pinnock argues that the Spirit is at work in all creation, including among the non-Christian religions, bringing about salvific communion with God, which is patterned after the ultimate communion between God and man that occurred in the person of Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ Thus, Pinnock does believe that apart from the incarnation, there could be no salvation. However, explicit faith in Christ, while advantageous for those who have it, is by no means necessary for salvation in the economy of the Spirit. Thus, Pinnock's Spirit Christology is integral in the development of his inclusivist soteriology.⁵⁹

ADVANTAGES AND DANGERS OF SPIRIT CHRISTOLOGY

In this section, the potential advantages of Trinitarian Spirit Christology will be made explicit and briefly discussed. Also, the attendant dangers, which some proposals have failed to avoid, will be considered. Any proposal of Spirit Christology that offers genuine pneumatological enrichment to

evangelical Christology must achieve these advantages while clearly and coherently avoiding these dangers.

Theological Advantages of Spirit Christology

The first potential advantage of Trinitarian Spirit Christology is that it corrects a perceived neglect of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in theology, especially in Western traditions. Jürgen Moltmann has observed that, for a long time, the Holy Spirit was the “Cinderella of Western theology.”⁶⁰ The general consensus is that the neglect of the Holy Spirit in western theology has resulted from a Trinitarian theology and Christology in which the person and role of the Holy Spirit are tangential to the person and role of the Son. While many have gone too far in their attempts to ascribe a prominent place to the Holy Spirit in Christology (see dangers below), there is certainly room for development of the pneumatological dimensions of Christology in evangelical traditions. Christians should not regret the church’s early and utter rejection of the heresy of adoptionism, but they should be willing to acknowledge that the right and necessary focus on the centrality of the person and work of Christ in the ecumenical creeds has resulted in a considerably less developed theological emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit that is still evident, even if being remedied, today. As a theological proposal that highlights the prominence of the person and role of the Spirit in the very life and mission of the Son, indeed in the very hypostatic identity of the Son in the immanent Godhead, Spirit Christology strikes at the very foundation of perceived Western pneumatological neglect. In this way, Spirit Christology has opened the door for explorations of other loci of systematic theology from a pneumatological perspective.

A second important theological advantage of Trinitarian Spirit Christology is that this approach highlights the genuineness of Christ’s humanity against an implicit Docetism⁶¹ that can potentially endanger traditional Christological models that do not adopt some form of Spirit Christology as a tool for understanding the human experience of Jesus. If all the extraordinary features of the earthly life of Jesus are ascribed to Jesus’ personal exercise of the power of the divine nature, it is quite difficult to conceive of his experience as being genuinely human. However, a carefully constructed Trinitarian Spirit Christology is able to preserve the genuine humanity of

Jesus' experience by appealing to the Holy Spirit as the terminating subject of the divine power by which Jesus performed supernatural feats. The Holy Spirit is given by Christ to his followers, and his followers are imbued with the Holy Spirit for the completion of their mission in service to Christ, just as Jesus Christ, according to his human nature, was imbued with the Holy Spirit for the completion of his mission in service to the Father. Therefore, the danger of conceiving of Jesus' human existence as some kind of a divine-human admixture is avoided, and Jesus' solidarity with the rest of humanity is preserved.

A third theological advantage of Spirit Christology follows naturally from the second. Spirit Christology can serve to enhance Christian discipleship by making sense of the *imitatio Christi*. The New Testament is replete with the injunction to follow the example set by Christ (John 13:15, Phil 2:5, 1 Peter 2:21). Of course, many have appealed to this motif as the *sumum bonum* of the incarnation and atonement, neglecting the far more prominent biblical theme of atonement by penal substitution. Nevertheless, danger looms on the other side of this fence. If Jesus is God the Son incarnate, how can Christians follow his example at all? Once again, Spirit Christology as a complement to Logos Christology is helpful here. If Jesus is empowered by the Holy Spirit to live his human life, then believers can follow in his example insofar as they also have the Spirit.

A fourth theological advantage of Spirit Christology is exegetical. There are a number of important gospel passages, which, if understood in terms of Trinitarian Spirit Christology, are far more meaningful and shed tremendous light on the identity and mission of God the Son. If those same passages are read without the motif of Spirit Christology, the tendency can be to overlook the pneumatological emphasis as an anomaly. For example, in Luke's gospel, the string of pneumatologically rich passages, which dominate the text from 3:16 through 4:2, is integral to Luke's overall presentation of Jesus as the Spirit-anointed Messiah who is baptized with the Spirit and then baptizes with the Spirit, who bears the Spirit and then bestows the Spirit. Once a kind of Trinitarian Spirit Christology is embraced as faithful to the biblical witness, such passages take on new life.

Virtually every model of Trinitarian Spirit Christology appeals to these theological advantages, and it is through these concepts that Spirit Christology holds out the promise of pneumatological enrichment to evangelical

theology in general. While the above advantages can be construed in a way that jeopardizes the cherished beliefs and traditions of evangelical theology, there is no reason that they must. In fact, I am convinced that all of the advantages of a robust Spirit Christology can be achieved by the utilization of the tools of classical Christian Trinitarian theology and Christology. If the dangers discussed below can be avoided, Trinitarian Spirit Christology enables a deeper and more robust affirmation of these things than Christology conceived without this pneumatological orientation.

Theological Dangers of Spirit Christology

While Trinitarian Spirit Christology offers considerable theological advantages, there are several attendant theological dangers lurking here as well. This may explain the hesitancy of some to embrace the model. First, the danger of adoptionism looms large in models of Spirit Christology. While all of the proponents of Spirit Christology discussed here would be quick to reject the adoptionist models of Geoffrey Lampe, James Dunn, and Roger Haight as unacceptable, there may be a more subtle danger, one to which even the Trinitarian models can succumb. To illustrate, consider the following. It is popular in Spirit Christology proposals to read of the implicit Docetism of classical Logos Christology. Of course, no proponent of classical Logos Christology formally embraces Docetism. Rather, all classical Christian theologians embrace the affirmation of Chalcedon that Jesus is *homoousios* with us according to his humanity. This is precisely why the Docetism is said to be implicit, rather than explicit. Might it be the case that, in a similar fashion, an implicit adoptionism at times characterizes some models of Trinitarian Spirit Christology? In Trinitarian Spirit-Christology proposals, adoptionism is rejected and the Logos model affirmed confessionally in an attempt to avoid heresy. However, seldom does one read a sustained treatment of the inimitable uniqueness of Christ owing to his divine nature in the literature of Spirit Christology. Instead, sometimes it seems as though the majority of the ink is spilled in the interests of showing that the full deity of Christ is not nearly so obviously displayed as many suppose. However, the full ontological deity of Jesus Christ is a prominent feature of the New Testament witness, and no apologies should be made for emphasizing it. In their zeal to avoid an implicit Docetism, Spirit-Christology proponents

must be wary of an implicit adoptionism.

A second danger attending proposals of Spirit Christology is the potential rejection of the conceptual framework that has enabled Christians to affirm the unity of the Godhead. I am referring here to the conviction that the three persons of the Godhead share in identically the same nature/essence (*homoousios*). Therefore, any work of God outside of himself (*ad extra*), because it flows from the one divine nature as its principle, is a work of the entire Godhead. This is the historic doctrine of the inseparable operations of the Trinity. The danger here is that all of this talk of whether it is the Spirit or the Son who is the divine subject of the supernatural power on display in and through the life of Christ might obscure the fact that the three persons share in the same divine nature, so that the power on display is always the power of all three divine persons. A holistic model of Trinitarian Spirit Christology must be consistent with the doctrine of the inseparable operations of the Trinity, carefully ascribing works to one divine person or another in a way that is consistent with this basic affirmation of the unity of the Godhead. Apart from this traditional affirmation of divine unity and inseparable operations, it is difficult to avoid an implicit tri-theism.

A third danger of espousing a model of Spirit Christology is the possibility of overcorrecting the perceived neglect of pneumatology to the neglect of a healthy and robust emphasis on the person of Christ. Trinitarian Spirit Christology, on many occasions, has been too willing to forfeit the church's correct Christocentric soteriological impulse in an attempt to invite the Cinderella Spirit to the theological ball. For example, the traditional generation/procession model of immanent Trinitarian relations, including the *filioque* clause, does not represent a desire to consign the Spirit to a lesser role in the Trinity. Nor is it simply vain speculation occurring in a vacuum. Rather, the traditionally conceived *taxis* of Trinitarian relations is the result of careful reflection on the economy of salvation. The basic hermeneutical conviction that God *is* as God *does* results in a traditional model of Trinitarian relations, a model of eternal generation of the Son from the Father alone and the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son. This is so for a number of reasons. First, both the Father and the Son are said to send the Spirit in the economy of salvation (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7). If God *is* as God *does*, then this indicates that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son in the immanent Trinity. Secondly, Jesus says that the Spirit, in

carrying out his mission, will not speak on his own initiative but will glorify the Son (John 16:13-14). If God *is* as God *does*, then the eternal hypostatic identity of the Spirit in the Godhead is not according to his own initiative but manifests the glory of the Son. Suggesting that the traditionally conceived model of immanent Trinitarian relations is the culprit in theological neglect of the Spirit is a serious move that should not be taken lightly. The *raison d'être* of the traditional model is to preserve the Christocentric soteriological paradigm of the New Testament. There is a priority given to Christ in the Trinitarian work of salvation that is not given to the other persons, not because his divine identity is more dignified, but because he is the divine person who is the supreme revelation (Word) of the Triune God and the divine person at the center of God's saving purposes as the incarnate, crucified, and risen Savior. Surely Fred Sanders is right that "there is no such thing in Christian life and thought as being too Christ-centered." It is possible to be "Father-forgetful and Spirit-ignoring."⁶² However, as Sanders observes, to be properly mindful of the Father and the Spirit is to emphasize the Son. The fact that some theologians have exploited a modified account of immanent Trinitarian relations, specifically the rejection or reversal of the *filioque*, to propose an inclusivist soteriological model (e.g., Pinnock and Yōng) illustrates the reality of this danger. Any emphasis on the person and work of the Spirit that results in the eclipse of the glory and honor of the Son has failed both the Spirit and the Son and dishonored the Father (John 5:23). Just as it is unwise to construct a model of Christology without due reference to the role of the Holy Spirit, so it is unwise to construct a pneumatological soteriology without due reference to the centrality of Christ.

A fourth danger of Spirit Christology involves the exegesis of key gospel texts pertaining to the life of Christ. Earlier, it was suggested that the perspective of Spirit Christology can vivify one's understanding of certain passages in the gospels. However, once a robust Trinitarian Spirit Christology is embraced, there is an equal danger of missing the full import of other passages in the gospels which seem to indicate that Jesus' supernatural signs serve the purpose of bearing witness to his deity. For example, when Jesus calms the storm, and the disciples respond by asking, "Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mar 4:41), the expected answer is not, "This is the man anointed with the same Spirit with which you can be anointed." Rather, the expected answer is, "This is Yahweh incarnate."⁶³ There can be a

tendency in Spirit Christology proposals to miss the import of such a passage as this. Thus, a healthy Trinitarian Spirit Christology must be able to account for and embrace biblical passages which put the inimitable uniqueness of Christ as God the Son incarnate on full display.

A fifth inherent danger of Spirit Christology is the tendency to overemphasize the potential for ecumenical dialogue. Jesus, in his high priestly prayer, did indeed pray that his disciples would “all be one” (John 17:21). Thus, a certain ecumenical impulse among Christians is right and good. However, there is a tendency in much ecumenical dialogue to treat ecumenical unity as the *criterion* for truth rather than the *consequence* of it. This is not a biblical model. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed that his people would be sanctified in the truth, which is God’s word (John 17:17). It is this people, sanctified in the truth of divine revelation, whom Jesus prays would be one. That is, in Jesus’ high priestly prayer, unity is the consequence of truth, not the criterion for it (cf. 1 John 1:7). If proponents of Spirit Christology are embracing the model because of its ecumenical potential and arguing from that starting point to its plausibility as a theological paradigm, then errors are sure to abound. Rather, Spirit Christology should be embraced primarily for its faithfulness to Scripture and secondarily for its consistency with tried traditions. Ecumenism may be the welcome consequence of a healthy Spirit Christology, but it should not be motivation for it.

The dangers attending Trinitarian Spirit Christology proposals jeopardize cherished biblical and theological convictions at the heart of the Christian faith. The potential for pneumatological enrichment does not outweigh these dangers. Thus, for Trinitarian Spirit Christology to hold out the promise of pneumatological enrichment for evangelical Christology, these dangers must be clearly and coherently avoided.

CONCLUSION

Spirit Christology is a complex theological paradigm that has been used to refer to a wide range of models across a number of theological traditions. Some kinds of contemporary Spirit Christology are heresies of the first order, amounting to little more than a re-articulation of the old heresy of adoptionism. However, some Spirit-Christology proposals are self-consciously Trinitarian and cling confessionally to the ontological deity of Christ. These Trinitarian

Spirit Christologies bring a number of important theological advantages to the table, but they can bring their share of dangers as well. There is work to be done here, but if a robust Trinitarian Spirit Christology can carefully and coherently avoid the theological dangers identified in this article, the potential advantages will result in a welcome and valuable pneumatological enrichment for evangelical Christology.⁶⁴

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- ¹ Logos Christology, of course, derives its name from the first chapter of John's gospel, in which the eternally divine Word (Gk. *logos*) became flesh. Thus, Logos Christology holds to the ontological deity and pre-existence of the Son.
 - ² Myk Habets distinguishes between these two broad kinds of Spirit Christology in his book *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology* (Princeton Monograph Series; ed. K. C. Hanson, Charles M. Collier, and D. Christopher Spinks; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010). For a more concise presentation from Myk Habets, see "Spirit Christology: Seeing in Stereo," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (2003): 199-234.
 - ³ The labels for these methodological approaches are my own.
 - ⁴ Gary Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 145.
 - ⁵ Theodotus and Paul of Samosata had clear predecessors in the Jewish-Christian sect of the Ebionites, one variety of which taught that Jesus was a mere man imbued with power from on high when the Holy Spirit descended upon him at his baptism.
 - ⁶ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper, 1959), 116.
 - ⁷ Myk Habets is right when he says of adoptionist Christologies, "The Spirit is thus seen as a divine power and not a person, so that Jesus the man is indwelt by the divine power of God" (Habets, *Anointed Son*, 58.).
 - ⁸ Badcock, *Light of Truth*, 146.
 - ⁹ *Ibid.* To be clear, Badcock is not advocating an adoptionist Spirit Christology
 - ¹⁰ See James D. G. Dunn *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) and Roger Haight, "The Case for Spirit Christology," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 257-87. Each nuances the discussion in his own way. Dunn's objective is primarily historical, and his method is primarily exegetical. Through a rigorous examination of the relevant New Testament texts Dunn seeks to present an objective historical presentation of the way that Jesus and the earliest Christian communities understood their experience of God as Spirit. In spite of the brevity of his treatment, Roger Haight is worthy of mention because he explicitly refers to his Christological formulation, which is theologically the same as that of Lampe and Dunn, by the term Spirit Christology. In spite of different methodological approaches and nuances in their proposals, the Christological conclusions of the authors are of the same kind. Thus, the conclusions drawn concerning Lampe's Christology could also be drawn concerning the Christology of Dunn and Haight.
 - ¹¹ Geoffrey Lampe, *God as Spirit: The Bampton Lectures 1976* (London: SCM, 1983), 11.
 - ¹² *Ibid.*
 - ¹³ *Ibid.*
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 140. Similar statements showing these concepts to be interchangeable are made throughout the volume.
 - ¹⁵ Roman Catholic theologian Ralph Del Colle recognizes this feature of Lampe's theology: "[Lampe] completely dispenses with hypostatic distinctions within the trinity of God. There are not hypostases (or persons) distinct from the Father who function as divine mediators. God as Spirit present in Jesus and now to believers as the Christ-Spirit is an exercise in monopersonal theism" (*Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective*, [New York: Oxford, 1994], 163).
 - ¹⁶ Lampe, *God as Spirit*, 139. Interestingly, Schleiermacher makes a similar appeal to the early modalist understanding of the Trinity, suggesting that a return to modalism is the best way forward for Trinitarian theology. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, 2nd

- ed.; Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile, 2011), 787.
- ¹⁷ Roger Haight expresses his unitarian theology in terms very similar to those used by Lampe. In fact, he cites Lampe as support for his views (“The Case for Spirit Christology,” 266-8). Dunn, for his part, is less forthcoming about his own theology in light of the fact that he is attempting an objective history of the experience of Jesus and the early Christians. However, he does indicate his disdain for moving from the triadic pattern of the believer’s experience of God to speculations about the eternal identity of God. Rather, Trinitarian talk should be reserved for the economy of salvation and never referred back to the being of “Godself” (*Jesus and the Spirit*, 325-6).
- ¹⁸ Lampe, *God as Spirit*, 120.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 142.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 23.
- ²³ Schleiermacher contends that Christ is distinguished from all other humans “by the constant potency of his God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in him” (*The Christian Faith*, 385).
- ²⁴ These labels are my own. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they broadly characterize the methodological emphases in the respective approaches. In my estimation, a thorough proposal of Spirit Christology that blends the best elements of these two approaches is needed. I hope to provide such a proposal in my forthcoming dissertation from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- ²⁵ Authors who take the biblical-exegetical approach seldom, if ever, use the term Spirit Christology. Nevertheless, given the literature on the subject, it is accurate to use the label to describe their proposals.
- ²⁶ See Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005); *idem.*, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).
- ²⁷ Klaus Issler, “Jesus’ Example: Prototype of the Dependent, Spirit-filled Life,” in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Intermediate Christology* (eds. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 189-225.
- ²⁸ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Contours of Christian Theology; ed. Gerald Bray; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).
- ²⁹ Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, vol. 3 of *Systematic Theology* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992).
- ³⁰ Originally published in 1991 by Word. The book has recently been reprinted: Gerald Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010). All subsequent references are to the Wipf and Stock reprint.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 35.
- ³³ Hawthorne divides the phases of Christ’s life (each a chapter in the book) as follows: The Spirit in the Conception and Birth of Jesus (ch. 2), The Spirit in the Boyhood and Youth of Jesus (ch. 3), The Spirit in the Baptism and Temptation of Jesus (ch. 4), The Spirit in the Ministry of Jesus (ch. 5), The Spirit in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus (ch. 6).
- ³⁴ Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 114.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24. Later in the book, Hawthorne takes up this accusation again: “In a legitimate concern to preserve at all costs the deity of Jesus Christ, many contemporary teachers of the church have followed the lead of the ancient fathers and have become *de facto* Docetists, failing to estimate fully the humanity in which divinity made itself visible” (205).
- ³⁶ Bruce Ware writes, “Jesus could not really have experienced life as we know it, or lived life as authentically human, if, for example, he was omniscient in his own consciousness as the person, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. While his divine nature continued to possess the attribute of omniscience, Jesus accepted the limitation of not having access to this infinite knowledge so that he could live as we live, and grow in wisdom and understanding, through the hard work of learning, by the power of the Spirit” (*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 92).
- ³⁷ This is the main point of Klaus Issler’s essay, “Jesus’ Example: Prototype of the Dependent, Spirit-filled Life” and is a prominent feature in Bruce Ware’s *The Man Christ Jesus*.
- ³⁸ Philip Rosato is a Jesuit Catholic motivated by a concern for ecumenical dialogue, and he believes that Spirit Christology holds out promise for ecumenism. See “Spirit Christology: Ambiguity and Promise” *Theological Studies* 38 (1977): 423-49.
- ³⁹ David Coffey is another Roman Catholic who has contributed many articles to the subject of Spirit Christology, though he does not use that term. See especially “The ‘Incarnation’ of the Holy Spirit in Christ” *Theological Studies* 45 (1984): 466-80. Coffey’s thought is very important to Ralph Del Colle, who is considered in some detail in this article.

- ⁴⁰ Yves Congar is another Roman Catholic theologian with a great interest in ecumenical dialogue. See *The Word and the Spirit* (trans. David Smith, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).
- ⁴¹ Myk Habets is a New Zealand theologian who has done for Protestants what Del Colle did for Roman Catholics. Synthesizing the work of many who came before him, Habets' book, *The Anointed Son* is a scholarly tour de force and a must read for any serious student of pneumatology and Christology. In addition to his thorough summaries and critiques of others, Habets makes his own proposal for a model of Trinitarian Spirit Christology.
- ⁴² John D. Zizioulas is an Eastern orthodox theologian, famous for his social exposition of Trinitarian theology. For his proposal of Spirit as a Christological category, see *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).
- ⁴³ Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love*.
- ⁴⁴ Amos Yong is a Pentecostal theologian who develops Spirit Christology as part of his larger project of developing a theology of world religions that blurs the distinction between pluralism and inclusivism. See *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). Yong's thought bears striking resemblance to many of the ideas of Clark Pinnock, who will be considered in some detail in this article.
- ⁴⁵ *Filioque* is Latin for "and the Son." The early Nicene Creed affirmed that the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father." With the addition of *filioque*, the affirmation was made that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son.
- ⁴⁶ Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit*, 12.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ For an introduction to and defense of the doctrine of the inseparable operations of the Trinity, especially as articulated by Augustine and John Owen, see Kyle Claunch, "What God Hath Done Together: Defending the Historic Doctrine of the Inseparable Operations of the Trinity," *JETS* 56 (2013): 781-800.
- ⁴⁹ Within the one being of God, the three distinct hypostases are distinguished by relations of origin or opposition. The Father generates the Son, and the Son is generated. The Father spirates the Spirit, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. The Son spirates the Spirit also, and the Spirit also proceeds from the Son.
- ⁵⁰ For a clear discussion of Del Colle's own appropriation of this model, apart from the dense interactions with the neo-scholastics and David Coffey, see Ralph Del Colle, "Reflections on the *Filioque*" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34 (1997): 202-217.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 202.
- ⁵² Myk Habets, like Del Colle, has proposed a modified account of immanent Trinitarian relations of origin, in which there is reciprocity. Habets believes his model holds out hope for ecumenism. However, unlike Del Colle, Habets is not Roman Catholic and prefers that the *filioque* clause be dropped from the Nicene Creed (*The Anointed Son*, 224, 279). The hope of furthering ecumenical dialogue and critiquing the *filioque* clause is a common feature of the literature on Spirit Christology. Many prefer to jettison the *filioque*, or even reverse it, as in the case of Clark Pinnock.
- ⁵³ Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 62.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 185-217.
- ⁵⁹ Pinnock's conclusions in *Flame of Love* are remarkably similar to those of Amos Yong in *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*. Some differences include the fact that Yong does not explicitly ground his universalist tendencies in a pneumatologically conceived doctrine of creation. Also, Yong is more explicit in his attempt to accommodate traditional Christocentric categories while Pinnock is happy to simply reverse the paradigm: the Spirit sends the Son rather than the other way around.
- ⁶⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmatio* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 1.
- ⁶¹ I am not suggesting that traditional models that do not employ some form of Spirit Christology are necessarily Docetic. Traditional Christology is a rejection of Docetism. This is why I use the term "implicit" in this regard. Some have spoken of Jesus' exercise of divine power in a way that makes his solidarity with the rest of humanity difficult to grasp conceptually. Spirit Christology is a tool in service of traditional Christological categories that can be used to strengthen the long-held conviction that Jesus is simultaneously fully God and fully human.
- ⁶² Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 171.
- ⁶³ A comparison of this story in Mark 4 with the words of the psalmist in Psalm 89 is helpful here. In Psalm

89:8, the psalmist asks the question, "Who is like you, Oh mighty LORD?" The implied answer is, "No one." Yahweh is utterly unique. His uniqueness is then described in v. 9: "You rule the swelling sea. When its waves rise, you still them." The uniqueness of Yahweh is described in terms of calming the swelling sea. Thus, when the disciples ask, "Who is this?" the expected answer is, "This is Yahweh who calms the swelling sea."

⁶⁴ My forthcoming dissertation from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary will be an attempt to construct a holistic model of Trinitarian Spirit Christology that tries to achieve these advantages while avoiding the dangers.

“He Descended to the Dead”: The Burial of Christ and the Eschatological Character of the Atonement

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INTRODUCTION

Expositions of Christ’s atoning work tend to emphasize the crucifixion and resurrection, and rightly so. Good Friday and Easter Sunday are of paramount importance in what Jesus accomplished, as the Nicene Creed puts it, “for us and for our salvation.” And yet there is more to the atonement than the cross and the empty tomb. There is Christ’s life and ministry, his burial, ascension, giving of the Spirit, and his return. Although each of these other atoning acts of Jesus are significant, the particular focus of this essay will be Christ’s burial, one of the most neglected events in explications of the atonement. As Mark Davis explains,

... even when the burial remains in a church's reading as part of the Passion Sunday or Good Friday lection, it is overlooked in lieu of the crucifixion itself, or of the hints of the resurrection found in the elaborate detail of the posting of guards and the Chief Priest's anticipations of foul play with Jesus' body by the disciples. After all, touching though it is, one is tempted to see Joseph's burial of Jesus as just a necessary moment along the way from the cross to the empty tomb, as opposed to having meaning in itself.¹

This is not, however, the picture Scripture gives us about Christ's burial. Paul, at least, connects Christ's burial with the *euangelion* in 1 Corinthians 15:4 and with the new nature of believers in Romans 6:4. The church has confessed throughout its history that Christ was buried, and in the context of the creeds' emphasis on Jesus' work, this implies atoning significance. Therefore this paper will argue that this neglected act in the theo-drama of salvation, the burial of Christ, is vicarious and can be considered salvific in a variety of ways.

I do not wish to stop, though, at only showing how Christ's burial is atoning, but also hope to establish how Christ's time in the tomb demonstrates the eschatological location of the atonement. Each of the events in Christ's work of salvation, seen cumulatively as the united atoning act of Jesus, is eschatological in character. While the atonement is typically located within Christology, soteriology, theology proper, and ecclesiology, this eschatological character of the atonement is sometimes left to the margins. Perhaps this is due to the modern revision of eschatology to include only "last things" (e.g., death, judgment, the eternal state). And yet the Bible and the early church speak of Christ's work of salvation in terms of the "last days."² The economy of salvation, centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ, is eschatological in the sense that it inaugurates the new age of the kingdom of God.

This essay seeks to focus on these two underappreciated aspects of the atonement: the burial as a vicarious act and the burial as an eschatological event.³ To anticipate the biblical and theological argument, Christ's time in the tomb on Holy Saturday is an eschatologically charged, vicariously salvific act because it is at this point in Jesus' work that he takes his Sabbath rest after finishing his new creation, embodies the already/not yet tension inherent in salvation, represents the firstfruits of the intermediate state in his sleep, and defeats death, Hades, and the Dragon. The essay will proceed by examining

these four main eschatological implications of Christ’s burial, and in doing so will connect the burial of Christ to a number of eschatological doctrines, including the millennium, universalism, and the intermediate state.

ESCHATOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST’S ATONING BURIAL

The Burial of Christ and the Descent to the Dead: Historical Perspective

While Christ’s burial has been somewhat neglected in both soteriology and eschatology, it has not been completely abandoned. In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the doctrine most associated with Holy Saturday—Christ’s descent to the dead. There are numerous historical and exegetical problems with this particular creedal affirmation, including how early it was included in any creed or formula, the change from *inferos* to *inferna* in the Apostles’ Creed,⁴ and the exegetical basis for it. Passages used in exegetical support by a particular theologian or commentator are almost as varied as the explanations they give for what exactly *descensus ad inferos* means. Over time⁵ 1 Peter 3:18–21, many times in conjunction with 1 Peter 4:6, became a popular plank in building a theology of the descent.⁶ Ephesians 4:9–10,⁷ Romans 10:7,⁸ and Revelation 20:6⁹ are also texts upon which supporters of the *descensus* doctrine rely heavily. Other passages utilized include Jesus’ reference to Jonah in Matthew 12:40,¹⁰ Peter’s reference to Jesus’ mortem state in Acts 2:24–28, a possible allusion to the gates of Hades in John 10:1–5¹¹ and Psalm 24,¹² Jesus’ parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16, and a host of OT texts that discuss Sheol and perhaps imply the Messiah’s journey there (e.g., Pss 16:10; 18:4–5, 16–20; 71:20; 107:15–16). Later, in ancient Christian writings such as the *Odes of Solomon*¹³ and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*,¹⁴ the authors rely heavily on these same OT and NT texts in their explanation of the *descensus*. Although the doctrine, and even the event itself, is questioned today, it is clear that the early Christian theologians, and subsequently most of historic Christianity, have affirmed that Jesus descended to the dead and accomplished something there. The question throughout the history of doctrine has been what exactly Christ accomplished in his descent.

While exegetical options and matters of historical development¹⁵ are important in untangling just what is meant by *descensus ad inferos*, and while

they will at times further the discussion below, the focus here is on how Christ's time in the tomb helps locate his atoning work within the doctrine of the last things. In other words, our focus in the sections that follow will not include arbitrating between different views of the descent or assessing their biblical warrant, but rather will remain on understanding how they demonstrate the connection between Christ's burial and eschatology. The descent to the dead, and the multiple understandings of its meaning throughout church history, provides one of the clearest examples of how the burial of Jesus is an eschatological atoning act. In what follows I will sketch the various options for how to understand the *descensus* doctrine and how they locate the atonement within eschatology.

The Patristic and Orthodox View

There are at least five possible interpretive options found in the history of the doctrine. First, there is the Patristic and subsequent Orthodox view of the descent,¹⁶ which is primarily understood as Jesus' healing of the first Adam through his role as the second Adam. Jesus descends to the dead in order to conquer Death and Hades¹⁷ and, in doing so, to liberate all those held captive.¹⁸ In his discussion of the early church's view on the descent, Jared Wicks summarizes Origen's view thusly: "Christ broke death's oppressive power once and for all, for the benefit of all humankind, including death's prisoners, and so Paul rightly says in the passage being explained, 'death no longer has dominion over him' (Rom 6:9)."¹⁹ There is here a strong sense of Christ as victor, but victory is combined with liberation. Cyril of Alexandria, for example, combines these two motifs in his understanding of the descent, arguing that Christ defeats both Hades *and* Adam's sin and its effects, which thereby liberates the entire human race from its captivity to Satan and death.²⁰ Similarly, Syrian theology, represented most notably by Ephrem, affirmed that "... Christ, through his saving work, has undone the consequences of the fall and removed the curse from humanity [see, e.g., *Nisbene Hymn* 36:1]."²¹

One of the more common ways that the early church theologians discussed Christ's victory in the descent is through tying it to his baptism, and sometimes also to his incarnation. In both of these other descents, the God-man descends to a watery locale and, as a result, crushes Satan's head.²²

In doing so, Christ is victorious over Adam’s jailer and thus liberates him and his progeny from bondage. In the Patristic sources, which gives rise to Orthodox reflection, there is, then, a strong affirmation that Christ’s descent to the dead is universal in its atoning significance, especially in the sense that it a) defeats the universal enemies of Death, Hell, and Satan and b) at least provides the possibility for universal salvation, since Christ’s liberating work affects all those formerly bound by death. That is, it liberates Adam’s entire race from the effects of his sin.²³

The Roman Catholic View

A related view is the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of the *descensus*, also referred to as the Harrowing of Hell.²⁴ Here, Christ descends to the uppermost part of Hades (and not to the supposed lower three regions), the limbo of the fathers. Its inhabitants are virtuous pagans and faithful Jews who died before Christ’s first advent and therefore did not have the opportunity to respond to the gospel. Christ’s descent, understood as the referent of 1 Peter 3:18, is for that very purpose—to preach the good news to those who have already died. In response to that proclamation by Jesus, inhabitants of the *limbus patrum* can respond with faith or unbelief. If the former, they are taken out by Christ. In distinction from what became standard in Orthodoxy, Jesus does not in this view lead every human being out, but instead saves those who were prepared for it in the era before Christ. There is less emphasis on universal possibilities (although that is certainly not excluded)²⁵ and more on providing salvation to virtuous pagans and faithful Jews who lived and died before Jesus’ advent.²⁶

The Reformers: Martin Luther and John Calvin

In Luther, Christ’s descent is almost solely couched in victorious terms. Jesus, in descending to the dead, has broken the gates of Sheol and triumphed over the devil. According to Richard Klann, “Luther taught that after Christ’s burial, after He became alive again in the grave and before His emergence from the grave, the God-man descended to hell in a supernatural manner, conquered the devil, destroyed hell’s power, and took from the devil all his might (Article IX, Tappert ed., p. 610).”²⁷ Notice that for Luther the Patristic

perspective on Christ's victorious descent is decoupled from their liberating motif, at least in the sense that it universally liberates humanity from Adam's bonds. Luther does not seem to draw on either the Orthodox or Roman Catholic liberating overtones. Notice also that Luther places Christ's spirit in Hades *after* his resurrection; this is rare in terms of timing.

Calvin, on the other hand, focused more on Christ's substitution for sinners in the *descensus* than on the victory accomplished by it.²⁸ In his view, the descent happens on the cross as Jesus experiences the full separation from the Father due to bearing the weight of sin, expressed in the cry of dereliction. Jesus, in his humanity, experiences the torments of hell, most notably the separation from God, on the cross in the place of those who receive him by faith.²⁹ Calvin, and later Lightfoot, saw the descent doctrine not only as teaching substitutionary atonement but also as anti-Apollinarian.³⁰ Christ did not only suffer in his body but in his body and his soul, thus maintaining the unity of his human person. It thus has implications in Calvinist thought for the intermediate and eternal states. Though Calvin's view is important in the history of the doctrine, it is less helpful here since its focus is on Christ's crucifixion and not on his burial.

Hans Urs von Balthasar's View

Balthasar's explanation of the descent has provided an opportunity for much reflection and debate. Depending on one's perspective, he has either radically departed from Roman Catholic orthodoxy³¹ or provided a legitimate explication of the doctrine that furthers the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of it.³² In any case, Balthasar combines many of the themes in Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation theology and provides a unique picture of Christ's descent. Balthasar desires to unite some of the disparate models of the atonement in his understanding of soteriology, especially victory, liberation, and substitution.³³ The climax of Christ's atoning work, especially in terms of substitution, comes for Balthasar on Holy Saturday. Unlike Calvin (and later, Barth³⁴), Balthasar places Christ's descent on Saturday in the tomb instead of on Friday on the cross. Like Calvin, though, the purpose of the descent is to stand for humanity, experiencing the pains of hell with them and for them.³⁵

While this may seem rather innocuous, since all that has happened is a

date change to this point, there is a reason Balthasar’s position is considered radical by some. He posits that Jesus, in his descent to hell, experiences all that is included in the torment of hell, and especially the separation from the Father due to the presence of sin.³⁶ Problematic for many is the fact that, unlike Calvin, Balthasar wants to place this separation not only between the human spirit of Jesus and God but between Christ’s divine nature and the Father as well.³⁷ His motivation seems to be to head off Nestorianism.³⁸ Balthasar does attempt to defeat any criticism here by first arguing that there is already separation between Father and Son *vis-a-vis* eternal generation, a separation that does not negate fellowship within the Godhead.³⁹ Second, he argues that the separation experienced is only subjective, not objective, and thus not technically an ontological split between persons of the Trinity.⁴⁰ Third, he argues that the entire point of this separation is so that it might be defeated via the love that exists between Father and Son as expressed in the Spirit.⁴¹ Hell and its effects are thus swallowed up and transformed by being taken into the life of the Trinity. Here again we hear echoes of the universalism⁴² of the Patristic period combined with the substitution language explicit in Calvin and implicit in the Roman Catholic tradition. Balthasar is also clear that the descent destroys hell, and so the victory element, so prominent in the Fathers and Luther, is retained as well.⁴³

Contemporary Evangelicals and the Descent

Finally, there are some evangelical theologians who abandon the *descensus* doctrine altogether, most notably Wayne Grudem.⁴⁴ Grudem’s primary arguments are exegetical in the first place—he disagrees that 1 Peter 3:18–21 teaches a descent to the dead—and theological in the second place, in that he ties it almost exclusively to the harrowing of hell, and thus to a view of justification and the salvation of Old Testament saints alien to Protestant theology. It is unclear, though, how Grudem deals with Jesus’ burial apart from denying particular views about it.

This is not to say that all contemporary evangelicals deny the descent doctrine. On the contrary, David Scaer responds directly to Grudem, arguing for retention of the creedal formula.⁴⁵ Millard Erickson, while not endorsing the doctrine, does note that there is room for confessing evangelicals to affirm it,⁴⁶ and Tom Nettles gives a contemporary Calvinian understanding of the

descensus.⁴⁷ Keith Johnson provides a unique perspective by arguing that, rather than importing the events of Good Friday or Easter Sunday into Holy Saturday, we should understand on its own terms. This means seeing it as Jesus' willingness to descend even to the depths of hell to rescue his people, which then allows his people to "confront any evil ... with full confidence that Christ himself ... has gone before us into the depths and goes with us still."⁴⁸ In any case, even if some evangelicals deny the *descensus*, they do affirm that Jesus "died and was buried." There are still implications of Christ's time in the tomb even if one does not affirm that Jesus' descended to the place of the dead during that time.⁴⁹ In other words, while one may not wish to speak of Jesus' burial as a descent, his burial still carries many of the same eschatological and soteriological connotations. In the section below, then, I will discuss the implications of all of these views together, and distinguish between them only when necessary.

Atoning Significance and Eschatological Impact

Judgment and Victory

We can see a number of different soteriological and eschatological threads running through the various interpretations of the Jesus' burial. First, there is a strong sense of victory and liberation. One also finds substitution well represented specifically in explications of the *descensus*, especially in the Roman Catholic view and in Balthasar.⁵⁰ Thus for these theologians the burial of Jesus, specifically seen through the lens of the descent, is as much a part of the atoning work of Christ as are the cross and the resurrection. What we have also seen, though, is that for the Roman Catholic tradition the atoning work accomplished on Holy Saturday is eschatological, specifically with respect to the final judgment and to the defeat of God's enemies. Typically, victory and judgment are left to discussions of the empty tomb and the cross, but, for Roman Catholics, the descent highlights both of these accomplishments in Jesus' burial.

For those who affirm the Roman Catholic view of the *descensus*, then, Christ's substitutionary burial is eschatological because in it, Christ takes the believer's place in final judgment. Jesus receives condemnation in the sinner's place and on their behalf, condemnation that would be their lot in the final

judgment. Final judgment is thus averted and atoned for via Christ’s work, and, at least in Balthasar, it is in his burial that Jesus takes on the full brunt of that final judgment. One would need to ask, though, whether or not the Roman Catholic view and Balthasar’s subsequent revisions deal adequately with the biblical data, especially with respect to the place of the dead and to the nature of Christ’s substitution.⁵¹

Another eschatological impact of Christ’s descent is the defeat of God’s enemies. In the OT expectation and the NT explication of the “last days,” Yahweh’s rule over those who oppose him is a major theme.⁵² The Orthodox view, while not necessarily comfortable with the substitution language of the West, emphasizes this eschatological victory, noting that atonement comes in the form of healing humanity. Luther, too, emphasizes victory, although it is less clear that he highlights any aspect of substitution or healing.

The common thread here, for those who affirm and for those who deny the descent, is that in Jesus’ burial, he defeats the last enemy, which is death (1 Cor 15:26), and crushes Satan’s head. Death is swallowed up in death. Jesus thus accomplishes what will happen on the Day of the Lord: the defeat of Satan, sin, death, hell, and the grave. Indeed, his Passion is the Day of the Lord. The burial of Christ is an eschatological act in its defeat of Hades, both accomplishing that victory and anticipating its culmination at Jesus’ return.⁵³ Again, even if one does not affirm a Catholic, Orthodox, or Lutheran perspective on the descent, Jesus was still dead for three days and, in being dead, defeated death. His burial can thus be affirmed by all traditions as eschatologically salvific because it gains the victory over God’s enemies.

The Millennium

Another possible eschatological implication derived from Jesus’ descent comes with respect to the millennium of Revelation 20. On the one hand, if Satan is defeated and thrown into the abyss through Christ’s victorious descent, this may point to an amillennial reading of Revelation 20:1–6. In the LXX, the word for “abyss” is used on occasion to speak of the place of the dead or as a parallel to Sheol, and in Revelation it is used to speak of the realm where God’s enemies dwell and from whence they arise (e.g., Rev 11:1). If Jesus has already descended to the place of the dead and defeated

it, it may lead readers of Revelation 20 to assume that Jesus has already cast Satan into the abyss in that eschatologically atoning act. So, perhaps, affirming the descent may lead to affirming a more spiritual or idealistic reading of Revelation 20:1–6.

On the other hand, what about the dead saints who come to life in Matthew 27:52?⁵⁴ This seems to be a direct result of Christ's defeat of death, accomplished particularly in his crucifixion in Matthew 27 but also in his burial in the history of doctrine. Both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic versions of the doctrine affirm that Jesus not only descended to the dead but also led captives out of it. For those who affirm these two versions of the *descensus*, is it possible that the resurrected saints in Matthew 27:52 are a foreshadowing of the "first resurrection" in Revelation 20 as seen in a historic premillennial position? The point here is not to use the burial of Christ and its atoning work as a solution to the problem of the millennium, but only to note that Jesus' time in the tomb may have implications for this eschatological issue.

Universalism and Cyril of Alexandria

Finally, as seen especially in the early church and Orthodox understandings of the descent,⁵⁵ there is the question of universalism. Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis* is many times linked in the secondary literature to his understanding of the descent,⁵⁶ and Cyril of Alexandria likewise notes the universal implications of Jesus' work on Holy Saturday. As Keating argues, though, Cyril is not a strict universalist.⁵⁷ Yes, Christ's descent accomplishes something with universal atoning consequences, but that does not mean, for Cyril, that all will experience life with God in eternity. That is still left to whether or not one is united to Christ in faith. One possible *via media* is that Christ's burial is universally atoning *only in the sense that it defeats death for all humanity*. In other words, the reason that all are raised to life prior to the final judgment (Rev 20:4–5, 12–15; cf. Dan 12:2) is that Christ's defeat of death does in fact defeat what Revelation calls "the first death" for all humanity. But that would not negate final judgment, where one either experiences eternal life or eternal death. Further, the recognition of Jesus' burial as eschatologically atoning may provide a solution to the problem of the resurrection of *all* the dead, believing and unbelieving, at the final judgment that does not necessarily

entail a strict universalism. This view of the burial may also have implications for the tension in Calvinism and Arminianism between unlimited and limited atonement. If Jesus’ burial defeats death for all humanity, then it is universal. But if, as Cyril argued, one still only receives eternal life on the basis of faith in Christ, then the atonement is also limited in its application. In any case, the question of universalism, an eschatological question, is raised many times in direct response to the atoning work of the burial of Jesus.

Other Eschatological Atoning Aspects of Christ’s Burial

The Intermediate State and Christological Anthropology

There are a number of other eschatological atoning aspects of Christ’s time in the tomb. One of the intriguing connections between eschatology and the atonement as seen in Christ’s burial is the intermediate state. While much has been said on this issue regarding theological anthropology, the burial of Jesus is hardly mentioned in any discussion.⁵⁸ And yet in Christ we see the firstfruits not only of the resurrection but also of the intermediate state. Jesus experiences death vicariously for humanity, not only in his descent but also in his simply being dead. His body lying in the grave is atoning, not only because it evokes Day of Atonement imagery, seen especially in John’s echoes of the Holy of Holies in his description of Jesus’ tomb,⁵⁹ but also because by it he redeems the state of death for all those who united to him. Death for Jesus is not the final word, and thus it is not the final word for those united to him (more on this in the “Already/Not Yet” section below).

Jesus’ intermediate state is thus helpful in articulating the intermediate state of those united to him with respect to the question of the unity of the person. The hypostatic union is not severed here. Jesus the God-Man is still fully human and fully divine, and so he experiences death in this united state. His humanity is not severed between body and soul, either, but he experiences death in his humanity as a psychosomatic unity. Further, Jesus experiences death as fully human and fully divine. Here we may wish to appeal to the notion of reduplication, the *qua* humanity/*qua* divinity distinctions, so as not to posit that God the Son dies and is separated from the other persons of the Trinity. (Note that this would exclude Balthasar’s explication as a legitimate option for the *descensus*.) This, though, is the point – because

his full humanity fully experiences death *while still united* with his divinity, death is swallowed up by the Triune God and defeated. Christ vicariously experiences death and conquers it fully and completely precisely because he is the God-Man. Thus, for those who are united with Christ, they too can experience the intermediate state with hope. They can hope and believe, first, that their entire person will still be united when Christ returns. Christ remained fully human—body and soul—during death, and believers will remain fully human during death. They can hope, second, that because this unity is maintained they, like Jesus, will be raised bodily and in continuity with their life pre-mortem (1 Cor 15:35–49).

Jesus' intermediate state in the grave may also speak to the question of soul sleep. Jesus' death is vicarious and also the firstfruits of believers' death, and so whatever we want to say about Jesus' time in the tomb has implications for those united with him.⁶⁰ Depending upon how one interprets Jesus' burial, soul sleep is either more or less likely as an option for the intermediate state of humanity. In other words, if one is willing to affirm that Jesus' human soul is "asleep" during his time in the grave due to its unity with his dead body, then soul sleep appears to be a legitimate option for humanity's intermediate state. Likewise, if one is a material monist, one needs to consider the implications of that position for how they view Jesus' time in the grave. If, on the other hand, Jesus' soul is "awake" during Holy Saturday, this may preclude soul sleep as an option.⁶¹

Finally, one's interpretation of the *descensus* has implications for the intermediate state of believers. So, if Jesus descended only to Paradise, and only as part of his "being dead," this tells us about the nature of the intermediate state for the believer.⁶² If, though, one takes a view of the descent in which Jesus descends to the dead in order to vanquish Hades, then from a more Roman Catholic view this opens up the possibility of purgatory and speaks to the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist debate.⁶³ Finally, the Orthodox perspective, on the descent provides the *possibility* for a universal occupation of Paradise since Jesus in this view defeats death and liberates all humanity from its grip.⁶⁴

Sabbath Rest

Another eschatological implication of Christ's burial is that it is, in some ways, his Sabbath rest.⁶⁵ Although his ascension also should be characterized

thusly, because Jesus is crucified on the sixth day and in the tomb on the seventh, the burial does have sabbatarian symbolism.⁶⁶ Jesus finishes his work of salvation on the cross on the sixth day, rests on the seventh, and then on the eighth day rises again, inaugurating the new creation. The Sabbath for which the people of God hope (Heb 4:1–11)—the eschatological rest promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—is inaugurated in Christ’s burial. Jesus’ Passion inaugurates the last days in many ways, but the eschatological Sabbath rest is inaugurated specifically in Christ’s burial.

Embodiment of Already/Not Yet

Finally, Jesus’ burial is eschatologically vicarious for all who are united with him because in it he embodies the already/not yet tension⁶⁷ inherent to believers in the church age. He sleeps, and in sleeping takes on the inevitable state of all those who live and die before his return. Although those who are buried with him are also raised to new life (Rom 6:1–4), they still “fall asleep” (1 Thess 4:14) if they die before Jesus’ return. There is thus a tension in their hope for the resurrection promised to them. There is hope in that because Christians are united to Christ *in his death*, they also anticipate that they will be united to him in his bodily resurrection (Rom 6:5; also Paul’s language of sowing and reaping in 1 Cor 15:48–49). Because Christ has already experienced death, and experienced it *pro nobis*, Christians have hope that death is not the final experience. Rather, “since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thess 4:14). Still, though, this hope is “not yet.” Those united to Christ have yet to experience physical resurrection. Christ’s burial embodies this same tension, with the OT promises of resurrection standing in apparent (but not real) conflict with Christ remaining in the grave. There is much here in common with the previous point about Christ’s death being victorious, although here the specific point is that the death believers experience, and the subsequent tension between death and a promised resurrection, is experienced vicariously by Christ. This already/not yet character of Jesus’ burial thus demonstrates yet another way in which Christ’s burial is both atoning and eschatological.

CONCLUSION

The burial of Jesus, although neglected in the doctrines of atonement and eschatology, proves to be both more important to each than is often acknowledged and also a nexus between them. By understanding how the burial of Jesus is atoning, in that by it he defeats God's enemies, vicariously experiences the intermediate state, experiences and brings Sabbath rest, and embodies the already/not yet tension, we see also how it is thoroughly eschatological. Like the rest of Jesus' work, his burial inaugurates the last days, brings victory over Satan, sin, and death, and is vicarious for those united to Christ. The burial of Jesus is thus an integral piece of his vicarious work and helps to demonstrate the eschatological character of his full work of atonement.

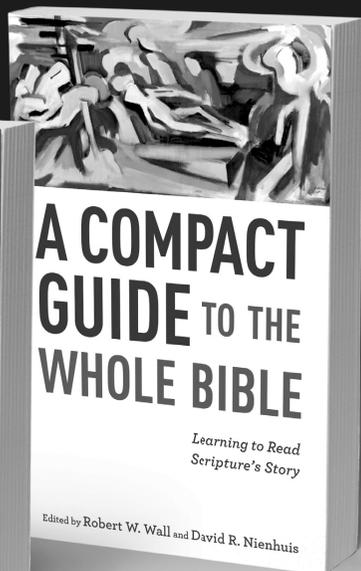
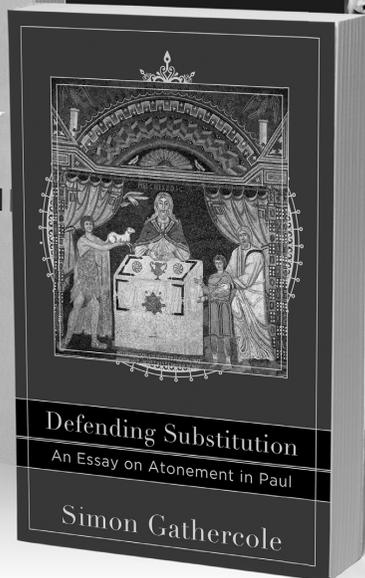
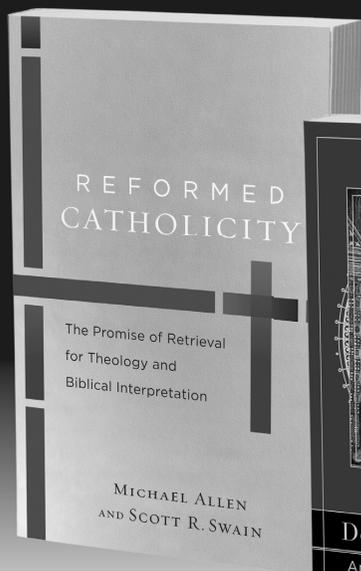
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- 1 Mark Davis, "Matthew 27:57-66," *Interpretation* 60.1 (2006): 76-77.
 - 2 John A. McGuckin, "Eschatological Horizons in the Cappadocian Fathers," 193-210 in *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History; ed., Robert J. Daly, SJ; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 194-95.
 - 3 When scholars do tie in atonement with eschatology, it is typically only with respect to the resurrection and its implications for creation and anthropology in the new heavens and new earth.
 - 4 I have chosen to retain the more ancient *inferos*, thus the title of the paper: "He Descended to the Dead" (as opposed to using *inferna*, "He Descended to Hell"). See, for instance, Martin F. Connell, "*Descensus Christi Ad Inferos*: Christ's Descent to the Dead," *TS* 62 (2001): 264, n. 3.
 - 5 On the history of the descent, including the relevant passages used in support of various understandings of the doctrine, see J. A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (London: T&T Clark, 1930).
 - 6 See, for example, A. T. Hanson, *The New Testament Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SPCK, 1980), 122-34. Recently, though some contemporary evangelical theologians have called this interpretation of 1 Peter 3 into question. See, John Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18-20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State," *WTJ* 48 (1986): 303-36; Wayne Grudem, "Christ Preaching Through Noah: 1 Peter 3:19 - 20 in the Light of Dominant Themes in Jewish Literature," *TrinJ* 7 (1986): 3-31; and idem, "He Did Not Descend Into Hell: A Plea for Following Scripture Instead of the Apostles' Creed," *JETS* 34.1 (1991): 103-113.
 - 7 William Bales, "The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9," *CBQ* 72 (2010): 84-100.
 - 8 Bales, "The Descent," 98.
 - 9 Hanson, *The New Testament Interpretation of Scripture*, 127.
 - 10 John Woodhouse, "Jesus and Jonah," *The Reformed Theological Review* 43.2 (1984): 33 - 41; and Dominic Rudman, "The Sign of Jonah," *The Expository Times* 115.10 (2004): 325-28.
 - 11 Adele Reinhartz, "The Shepherd and the Sheep: John 10:1-5 Reconsidered," *Proceedings* 9 (1989): 161-77.
 - 12 Allen Cabaniss, "The Harrowing of Hell, Psalm 24, and Pliny the Younger: A Note," *Vigiliae Christianae* 7.2 (1953): 65-74; and Milton McCormick Gatch, "The Harrowing of Hell: A Liberation Motif in Medieval Theology and Devotional Literature," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 36 (1981): 79.
 - 13 See, for example, William Romaine Newbold, "The Descent of Christ in the Odes of Solomon," *JBL* 31.4 (1912): 168-209; and, more recently, Ute Possekel, "Expectations of the End in Early Syriac Christianity," 160-74 in *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History; ed., Robert J. Daly, SJ; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 169-71.

- ¹⁴ See MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell*, 152–73.
- ¹⁵ For the history of the doctrine, including the change in the Latin phrasing, Rufinus' role in perpetuating *inferna* rather than *inferos*, and the different options held by a variety of theologians throughout church history, see, for example, Martin Connell, "Descensus Christi Ad Inferos"; Gatch, "The Harrowing of Hell," 75–88; C. E. Hill, "Hades of Hippolytus or Tartarus of Tertullian: The Authorship of the Fragment *De Universo*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 43 (1989): 105–106; and Randall Otto, "Descendit Ad Inferna: A Reformed Review of a Creedal Conundrum," *WTJ* 52 (1990): 143–50.
- ¹⁶ Here I am not attempting to equate fully Patristic views with subsequent Orthodox understandings, but am simply a) discussing them together because of similarities and b) acknowledging that Orthodox views on the descent are largely reliant on the Patristic, and especially Eastern Patristic, sources covered in this section.
- ¹⁷ One reason that such a wide variety of views exist on the descent is that there are an equally wide variety of views on the meaning of Hades, Sheol, Gehenna, Hell, and Death, as well as into which of these places Jesus descended. On the biblical language about death and the afterlife, see Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, "The Origins of Christian Hell," *Numen* 56 (2009): 282–97; and Gary Yamasaki, "Jesus and the End of Life in the Synoptic Gospels," *Vision* (5.1): 40–47.
- ¹⁸ See, for example, Malcolm L. Peel, "The 'Descensus Ad Inferos' in 'The Teachings of Silvanus (CG VII, 4),' " *Numen* 26.1 (1979): 39–49. See also McGuckin, "Eschatological Horizons in the Cappadocian Fathers."
- ¹⁹ Jared Wicks, S.J., "Christ's Saving Descent to the Dead: Early Witnesses from Ignatius of Antioch to Origen," *Pro Ecclesia* 17.3 (2008): 306.
- ²⁰ Daniel Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades: According to Cyril of Alexandria," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 55.3 (2011): 253–69.
- ²¹ Irina Kukota, "Christ the Medicine of Life," *Road to Emmaus* 6.1 (2005): 47.
- ²² Here, the abode of the Dragon is in the waters of chaos, and thus Christ's step into the waters means that he is stepping onto Satan's head, crushing it. On parallels between the descent and the incarnation, see, for example, Kukota, "Christ, the Medicine of Life," 19–20; Peel, "The 'Descensus ad Inferos,'" 35–36. On parallels between baptism and the descent, see, for example, Georgia Frank, "Christ's Descent to the Underworld in Ancient Ritual and Legend," 211–26 in *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, 217, 224–25; and especially Kilian McDonnell, "The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and the Descent into Hell," *Worship* 69.2 (1995): 98–109.
- ²³ Although we should note here that many of the Patristic theologians were careful about how they articulated this universal significance. Both Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine saw universal significance in Christ's descent but not universal salvation. See, respectively, Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades," and Connell, "Descensus Christi Ad Inferos," 270–71.
- ²⁴ See, for example, Martin Connell's summary of Aquinas' view, for a representative Roman Catholic understanding. Connell, "Descensus Christi ad Inferos," 271–75. See also Alyssa Lyra Pitstick's summary of the "traditional" Roman Catholic view in *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1–86. Note, though, Paul J. Griffiths' rejoinder concerning Pitstick's alleged overreach in "Is There a Doctrine of the Descent into Hell?" *Pro Ecclesia* 17.3 (2008): 257–68.
- ²⁵ See Thomas Joseph White, "On the Universal Possibility of Salvation," *Pro Ecclesia* 17.3 (2008): 269–80; and See Steffen Lösel, "A Plain Account of Christian Salvation? Balthasar on Sacrifice, Solidarity, and Substitution," *Pro Ecclesia* 13.2 (2004): 153.
- ²⁶ "The typical 'Catholic' position, at least since the time of the Catechism of Trent, has been to define Christ's descent into hell as simply the triumphal rescue of the dead awaiting the Messiah's advent, resulting in an enumeration of different hells, where the 'hell of the damned' is that designated for those without faith in Christ (as either coming or having come)." Joshua R. Brotherton, "Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Redemptive Descent," *Pro Ecclesia* 22.2 (2013): 168.
- ²⁷ Richard Klann, "Christ's Descent into Hell," *Concordia Journal* (1976): 43. Also Martin Luther, "The Third Sermon, on Easter Day," *Logia* 12.3 (2003): 37–50.
- ²⁸ This does not mean, though, that Calvin did not see any victorious elements in Christ's burial. Rather, Calvin's interpretation of the *descensus* creedal affirmation in particular has the substitutionary interpretation. In the previous section, on the phrase "he died and was buried," Calvin very clearly affirms that Christ's death and burial is victorious over death and the grave. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. I (The Library of Christian Classics; ed., John T. McNeil; trans., Ford Lewis Battles; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960; repr. 2006), 511–12.
- ²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 512–20.
- ³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 520; Chad B. van Dixhoorn, "New Taxonomies of the Westminster Assembly (1643–52): The Creedal Controversy as Case Study," *RRR* 6.1 (2004): 93.

- ³¹ That is, Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*. For another critical view of Balthasar's position, see Gavin D'Costa, "The Descent into Hell as a Solution for the Problem of the Fate of Unevangelized Non-Christians: Balthasar's Hell, the Limbo of the Fathers and Purgatory," *IJST* 11.2 (2009): 146–71.
- ³² Edward T. Oakes, "The Internal Logic of Holy Saturday in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *IJST* 9 (2007): 184–99. See also his response to critics of Balthasar, including Pitstick and D'Costa, in "Descensus and Development: A Response to Recent Rejoinders," *IJST* 13.1 (2011): 3–24.
- ³³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, Part IV: The Action (trans., Graham Harrison; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 317–19.
- ³⁴ Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 (trans., G. W. Bromily; ed., G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), §59.2, esp. 244–56. See also David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement and the Christian Life* (eds., John Webster, Hans Anton-Drewes, and George Hunsinger; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), who notes that Barth "... basically endorses Calvin's position" (80).
- ³⁵ There is some shifting in language in Balthasar between "solidarity" with humanity and "substitution" for humanity. See Lösel, "A Plain Account of Salvation?" esp. 150–54.
- ³⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, 335. See also Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell*, 74.
- ³⁷ For a highly critical articulation of Balthasar's position on this issue, see Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 205–207.
- ³⁸ Oakes, "The Internal Logic of Holy Saturday," 192–93.
- ³⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, 330–32.
- ⁴⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, 338. Balthasar also argues that, in descended to the dead in both his humanity and divinity, Christ is totally passive. *Ibid.*, 335. This is yet another point of contention among contemporary theologians about the validity of Balthasar's approach and whether or not he departs from the tradition. For a sympathetic assessment, see Oakes, "Internal Logic," 192.
- ⁴¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, 338, 349–51.
- ⁴² See Oakes, "Internal Logic," who argues that Balthasar's universalism is necessarily inclusivist because of the centrality of Christ's work within its schema.
- ⁴³ In this regard, Moltmann also attempts to combine these major themes and to follow in a combined fashion Luther, Calvin, and Balthasar on the descent. See Nigel G. Wright, "Universalism in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann," *EQ* 84.1 (2012): 33–39.
- ⁴⁴ Grudem, "He Did Not Descend into Hell." See also Grudem, "Christ Preaching through Noah," and Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18–20."
- ⁴⁵ David P. Scaer, "He Did Descend to Hell: In Defense of the Apostles' Creed," *JETS* 35.1 (1992): 91–99.
- ⁴⁶ Millard J. Erickson, "Did Jesus Really Descend into Hell?" *Christianity Today* 44.2 (2000), 74.
- ⁴⁷ Tom J. Nettles, "He Descended into Hell," *Modern Reformation* 11 (2002): 38–41.
- ⁴⁸ Keith L. Johnson, "He Descended into Hell," *Christian Reflection* 50 (2014): 27–34.
- ⁴⁹ At this point, though, one would need to ask where Jesus' human soul was during his time in the grave. This will be discussed more in the section on soul sleep, but the point here is that, unless one affirms material monism and/or soul sleep, Jesus' human soul was presumably doing what all other human souls do during death. The biblical evidence seems to point to a place of the dead, with Luke 16:19–31 clarifying that, for those who trust in Yahweh, Abraham's Bosom awaits. This is presumably the same place that Jesus calls Paradise in Luke 22:43.
- ⁵⁰ Substitution is also a major implication for Calvin and Barth, but their view of the descent is that it occurs on the cross, not in the burial.
- ⁵¹ I am not convinced that the Roman Catholic view of the descent or Balthasar's subsequent revisions adequately reflect the biblical data.
- ⁵² See, for example, G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 88–116, 129–60.
- ⁵³ So Gatch, "The Harrowing of Hell," 78.
- ⁵⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, Melito of Sardis, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen make this connection between the descent and the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27, although they do not then tie it to the question of the Millennium. See Wicks, "Christ's Saving Descent," 304, 309.
- ⁵⁵ Of course, there is a strong universalist strain running through Balthasar and his subsequent interpreters as well. See Oakes, "Internal Logic" and "Descensus and Development," as well as D'Costa, "The Descent into Hell." Both Oakes and D'Costa focus on the creation of purgatory and its implications for the solution to the problem of world religions and the unevangelized.
- ⁵⁶ Wicks, "Christ's Saving Descent to the Dead," 304. Connell, "Descensus Christi ad Inferos," 269.
- ⁵⁷ Keating, "Christ's Despoiling of Hades," 261–69.

- ⁵⁸ I am here excluding those who affirm some form of the *descensus* doctrine that includes rescuing people from Hades or Hell, since those views are necessarily applicable to the interim state (so notes 58 and 59). Those who do not affirm either the Roman Catholic or Orthodox versions of the doctrine, though, do not usually mention Christ’s burial as normative for the anthropological makeup in the interim state. For example, the following theologians make no mention of Jesus’ time in the tomb in their discussion of the intermediate state: Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 1179–90; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996; rev. ed., 2000), 810–27; Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 92–108; Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 910–15; John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 66–92, 103–112; and Helmut Thielicke, *Death and Life* (trans., Edward H. Schroeder; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 213–17. Although Erickson and Horton do note that Jesus “commends his spirit” to the Father in Luke 23:46, they do not connect this with the burial of Jesus in any way or speak to its anthropological and eschatological implications.
- ⁵⁹ Nicholas P. Lunn, “Jesus, the Ark, and the Day of Atonement: Intertextual Echoes in John 19:38–20:18,” *JETS* 52.4 (2009): 731–46.
- ⁶⁰ Of course, not everything that happens to Jesus in the tomb is repeated in believers’ experience. This is particularly true of his victory over Satan in his burial. Nevertheless, this victory still has implications for those united to Christ, in that they are freed from death and the power of sin. The point here is that what happens to Jesus in his humanity has implications for the intermediate state of those united to Christ.
- ⁶¹ I find texts such as Luke 16:19–31; 23:43, 46; Phil 1:23; and Rev 6:9 to be indicators that soul sleep is not in accordance with biblical language about death. The point here, however, is not to take a position on the issue but to point out that Christ’s time in the tomb grounds whatever else we might say about the intermediate state, and specifically here about soul sleep.
- ⁶² On early Christian views of the hypostatic union and whether Christ descended bodily, see Wicks, “Christ’s Saving Descent,” 307–309.
- ⁶³ For example, Oakes, “Internal Logic”; idem, “*Descensus* and Development,” esp. 23; and D’Costa, “The Descent into Hell.”
- ⁶⁴ So Kukota, “Christ, the Medicine of Life,” 54. The language is much stronger in Moltmann; universalism is not just a possibility but a definitive result. See Wright, “Universalism in the theology of Jürgen Moltmann.”
- ⁶⁵ One recent theology of Holy Saturday is Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). Lewis is heavily dependent upon Balthasar and, to a lesser extent, Moltmann, and focuses on Holy Saturday as Jesus’ Sabbath. In doing so, however, Lewis focuses on Jesus’ time in the tomb as a “dark” and “atheistic” Sabbath rather than a positive rest. See *ibid.*, 31, 56, 78.
- ⁶⁶ Paul L. Redditt, “John 19:38–42,” *Interpretation* 61.1 (2007): 68–70.
- ⁶⁷ Note that this tension is inherent in the rest of the eschatological implications we have already mentioned. See, for example, Lösel, “A Plain Account of Salvation?” 155, on the already/not yet tension in Christ’s victory through the descent.

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Book Reviews

The Second Letter to the Corinthians. By Mark A. Seifrid. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014. 569 pp., \$50.00 hardback.

Mark Seifrid is Mildred and Ernest Hogan Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* and *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*.

Seifrid begins the commentary with a discussion of the interaction between the Apostle Paul and the church at Corinth. He traced this interaction from Paul's first visit to Corinth during his second missionary journey to his third visit to Corinth during which he wrote his letter to the church of Rome.

He briefly discussed the identity of Paul's opponents in Corinth, a "vexing conundrum." Seifrid objected to the mirror-reading that often sidetracks interpreters. He would later describe this approach as "necessary, albeit precarious," sometimes based "on mere supposition and guesswork," and "likely to reveal more about the interpreter than about Paul or his opponents." He urged that readers observe Paul's actual descriptions of his opponents. Consequently, he rejected the notion that the opponents were Judaizers. They had Jewish credentials but "there is no indication that they appeal to Moses or the Law as a means to spiritual power" (xxix). Seifrid concluded that Paul's statements do not reveal a developed theology of the opponents. Instead, Paul combats a practical theology that "legitimizes apostolic mission (and thus Christian living) on the basis of the open display of rhetorical skill, deeds of power, and ecstatic visions" (xxix).

Seifrid rejected the theories that view 2 Corinthians as a composite letter. Such views were possible and not to be rejected *a priori*. However, the evidence for them is rather weak. Apparent disruptions were a product of Paul's stormy relationship with the Corinthians rather than cutting and pasting by a later editor. Seifrid concluded: "At the end of the day, a coherent rhetoric may be discerned rather easily throughout Second Corinthians. The apparent disruptions make sense in context" (xxx).

Seifrid argued that the fundamental issue in 1 Corinthians remains the focal issue in 2 Corinthians, the identifying marks of a true apostle. Although, in the opponents' view, ability as a communicator, miraculous activities, and visionary experiences were the marks of an apostle, Paul insisted that hallmark of the apostle is the message of the cross. But the message of the cross is not only proclaimed verbally by the apostle. He embodies the message by bearing "the deadness of Jesus" in order that the resurrected life of Jesus might be displayed through him. God's grace is displayed by the exercise of Christ's power in Paul's weakness. Seifrid's discussion of this theme throughout the commentary led to an insightful critique of contemporary trends in the church. The pastoral concerns that he raises desperately need to be heard and heeded for the sake of the health of the church.

The body of the commentary is different from what one has come to expect in a number of ways. First, many modern commentaries devote much space to enumerating various interpretive options, detailing the strengths and weaknesses of each view, and defending the commentator's personal view. This can result in a work that is more a commentary on other commentaries than a commentary on the biblical text. Even a passing glance at Seifrid's commentary shows that he has chosen a very different approach. The commentary details his own rich theological interpretation of 2 Corinthians based on his analysis of the Greek text. He occasionally interacts with other views, particularly on some of the more controversial texts in the letter, but he obviously does not feel constrained to do so. The reader will be struck by the observation that the majority of pages do not contain footnotes referring to secondary literature. Most pages refer only to primary sources, especially other biblical texts.

This does not mean that Seifrid is unaware of recent literature on 2 Corinthians. He is obviously well informed of current trends in scholarship. But he refuses to be enslaved to these trends or to grant too much authority to the academic guild of Pauline studies and frequently blazes his own trail in exegesis. Those familiar with the major commentaries on 2 Corinthians will probably find this to be refreshing. Sometimes a reader finds so much similarity among the evangelical commentaries on a Pauline letter, he wonders if the purchase of another commentary was worth the investment. However, one need not worry that this volume merely repackages the views of other commentators.

The avoidance of interaction with secondary literature will leave some readers dissatisfied. When the reader is unconvinced by an interpretation espoused by Seifrid, he will naturally ask whether other scholars support his view and will wish to evaluate arguments for and against the position. Readers who want exposure to a wider variety of interpretations will need to supplement Seifrid's commentary with one of the other major evangelical options such as Murray Harris' volume in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Although it has become increasingly common for one scholar promoting the work of another scholar to exclaim, "If you can purchase only one commentary, this should be it," Seifrid's commentary was not intended to serve as the sole resource for understanding 2 Corinthians.

Seifrid's commentary is also deeply theological and rich with pastoral insights. Because he refrains from extensive discussion of the secondary literature, Seifrid is able to devote more space to explaining how individual statements in the letter fit with the message and purpose of the letter as a whole and integrate with the theology of the entire Pauline corpus. Although he does not isolate application from interpretation, he often encapsulates the meaning of a particular text in memorable and moving expressions. Sometimes these summaries are quotes from others, such as Luther's comment: "A theologian is made by living, or rather by dying and being damned, not by thinking, reading, or speculating" (206). Sometimes these summaries are Seifrid's own comments. When describing the affliction from Satan that following the heavenly apparition, he quips: "The visit to heaven is accompanied by visits from hell" (444). Although some may regard such quotations and quips as an unnecessary distraction, they are likely to be appreciated by those who proclaim 2 Corinthians and are certain to make their way into many sermons.

Seifrid's commentary also appears to be heavily influenced by the thought of the reformer Martin Luther. This impression can be quickly confirmed by an analysis of the "Authors Index"; Seifrid cites Luther more than any other author. In fact, he cites Luther more frequently than several modern commentators (Belleville, Furnish, and Harris) combined. In the process, he demonstrates that Luther has often been as misinterpreted as Paul has and challenges many modern conceptions of the theology of the reformer.

Although I was not convinced by every exegetical detail in the commentary, the commentary has clearly captured the essence of Paul's thought in

2 Corinthians:

The lesson of Second Corinthians is that the Gospel may be lost not merely by bad doctrine but by bad living, and not merely by the ‘bad living’ of immorality—which was certainly present in Corinth—but by the decision to measure the work of the Gospel and the presence of Christ by the standards of power, success, and popularity. According to Paul, this practical judgment, which above all else values charisma, wealth, and numbers, is heresy (107).

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The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social and Historical Contexts.
Edited by Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald. Grand Rapids: Baker
Academic, 2013, xxiv+616, \$49.99 hardcover.

Written to provide concise summaries on the various background issues of the New Testament, *The World of the New Testament* certainly fulfills its purpose. Editors Joel Green and Lee Martin McDonald, both highly respected in the field of New Testament studies, have assembled a reputable who’s who of scholars for this volume. The list of thirty-four contributors includes: Michael Bird, James H. Charelsworth, Bruce Chilton, David A. deSilva, James D. G. Dunn, Nicholas Perrin, Ben Witherington III, and many others. The entire volume includes forty-four articles on New Testament backgrounds.

The volume began as project of the Institute of Biblical Research, an evangelical research group that exists to foster the development of New Testament studies within a broadly orthodox and evangelical tradition. The editors underscore the necessity of this volume when they describe the distance between the modern reader and the world of the New Testament. “We forget that the reading of the pages of the New Testament for everyone in the twenty-first century is a cross-cultural experience” (3). Thus, to avoid overlaying a modern grid (or even a wrong-headed ancient grid) of cultural values, symbols and preferences onto the New Testament world, the reader of the Scriptures must, as much as possible, interpret the New Testament

with a proper appreciation of the cultural world of the New Testament text.

The structure of the volume comprises five inter-related parts: 1. Setting the Context: Exile and the Jewish Heritage (5 essays), 2. Setting the Context: Roman Hellenism (8 essays), 3. The Jewish People in the Context of Roman Hellenism (12 essays), 4. The Literary Context of Early Christianity (8 essays), and 5. The Geographical Context of the New Testament (9 essays). The sections are usually straightforward. Occasionally, there is overlap between the essays but not in a tautological sense. For example, there are essays on both “Pseudonymous Writings and the New Testament” and “Early Non-canonical Christian Writings.” Yet, only the former article discusses pseudonymity in the New Testament world and the latter article comments briefly on the issue.

This volume is a helpful contribution to students and scholars of the New Testament, but I have a few quibbles. First, the lack of articles on the Jewish Heritage (part 1) compared to the rest of the volume is slightly misleading because of its close relationship and overlap with part three (“The Jewish People in the Context of Roman Hellenism”). Second, an alphabetical index of essays would make this volume more user-friendly. Third, the essays in the volume switch between in text and footnote annotation. This switch is distracting at times. Fourth, some articles are too dense. For example, in the essay about non-canonical Jewish Writings, the author gives short descriptions of the Apocrypha, but opts to detail only a few books of the Pseudepigrapha (*Jubilees*, *Letter of Aristeas*, *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*).

These quibbles aside, this book makes a helpful contribution to the field of New Testament backgrounds. The annotated bibliographies at the end of every chapter alone are reason enough to purchase the book.

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Preaching the Farewell Discourse: An Expository Walk-Through of John 13:31-17:26. By L. Scott Kellum. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014, 350 pp., \$29.99 paper.

Doing several things well at the same time is a difficult task, especially when it involves discourse analysis, exposition, hermeneutics, and practical theology. L. Scott Kellum, however, has done the difficult with the Farewell Discourse of the Fourth Gospel.

Kellum teaches New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He received his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Mississippi in Classical Civilizations with an emphasis in Greek Language. His Masters of Divinity came from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and his Doctor of Philosophy from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. His dissertation was subsequently published entitled *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse: The Literary Integrity of John 13:31-16:33*. This extensive study of the Farewell Discourse is evident in the current work and much of the content of *Preaching the Farewell Discourse* arose from spiritual insights gained during his dissertation studies. Kellum has also co-authored *The Cradle, The Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* with Andreas Köstenberger and Charles Quarles.

Kellum's academic and pastoral experience has convinced him there is an unfortunate disconnect between hermeneutics and homiletics. He acknowledges there is a need for separate monographs in both fields but asserts that both types of books should incorporate the subject matter of the other better than they do. This work is intended to begin to bridge that gap by modeling how to examine, interpret, and make application from a large section of Scripture. It serves as "a place to begin and a procedure to follow, adapt, and perfect ... to take [a person] through the hermeneutical process to the shaping of an outline and an expository sermon" (2).

Kellum arranges his book into seven chapters followed by two appendices. In the first chapter, the author describes the four major aspects of studying a passage and preparing to preach it: Examine Literary Context, Identify Historical Context, Identify Canonical Context, and Proclamation. Each major aspect is further delineated into minor steps, with a very brief but helpful explanation and supporting examples for each. These explanations are concise because this process is repeatedly modeled through the entire

Farewell Discourse in chapters 3-7. Kellum's discussion on transitioning from hermeneutics to homiletics is particularly beneficial, especially his comments on identifying the main idea of the text (MIT) and converting that into the main idea of the message (MIM). His instructions regarding the rules for using illustrations are equally valuable.

Chapter 2, "Analyzing Literary Structure and Flow of Thought," details Kellum's process for identifying the macro- and microstructure of the text. He bases his semantic and structural analysis (SSA) of a text on Beekman and Callow's *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication* and on the more recent *Meaning-Based Translation* by Mildred Larson. Even if the reader isn't familiar with these works, Kellum's explanation of the "major communication relations used in hortatory discourse like the Farewell Discourse" (57) which ends chapter 2 is sufficient to allow the reader to take advantage of the author's structural analysis of John 13-17.

Chapter 3 serves as an introduction to the Farewell Discourse in which Kellum gives evidence for why he divides the passage as he does and then discusses the literary and historical context of the entire discourse. As such, these contexts are discussed only as necessary when the individual pericopes are examined in chapters 4-7. Chapter 3 concludes with an examination of John 13:31-38 as the introduction to the Farewell Discourse proper.

Each of chapters 4-7 examines one of the four major units in Jesus' Farewell Discourse: Commands that Comfort (14:1-31), Commands that Unite (15:1-16:4c), Advantages of Jesus' Departure (16:4d-33), and The Final Prayer (17:1-26). These chapters are the heart of Kellum's work and what one expects from the title, *Preaching the Farewell Discourse*. They are, as the subtitle expresses, *An Expository Walk-Through of John 13:31-17:26*. That is, the reader walks alongside the author as he considers each sermon-sized passage sequentially.

Kellum organizes the study of each of the smaller passages in three steps: analyzing the text, interpreting the text, and preaching the text. In the first step, the overall structure of the text is summarized using the SSA explained in chapter 2. This includes the head statements and the significant structural relationships in the passage. A detailed SSA of every clause of the Farewell Discourse is made available to the reader via a PDF download (66 n. 31). The structure of the text forms the basis for the interpretation of the text. In the interpretation section, Kellum explores the lower-level structural relationship

between clauses not addressed in his previous discussion of the overall structure. Here he uses footnotes judiciously to present various positions on debated theological issues pertaining to the passage and to support his own opinions of semantic and theological topics. In addition, this section considers textual and grammatical issues. It reveals for the reader the thought process of the author as he models which questions should be asked of the text and how one should proceed to answer those questions--the "spade-work of hermeneutics" (3). The final section on each passage considers how that section of Scripture could be preached. Kellum gives his one-sentence summary of the MIT and his suggestion for the MIM based on the purpose of the text then and now. In his "Sermon Sketch," he summarizes a suggested sermon introduction and conclusion and outlines a sermon that could be preached on the passage. The main points of the sermon usually come from the main movements of the passage. In the book's introduction, the author argues the sermon must be text-driven. That is, the main idea, purpose, and major movements of the text should normally be the main idea, purpose, and major movements of the sermon. He expounds each main point with subheadings "Text" and "Today," explaining the passage as "Text" and then applying the passage to "Today."

A brief conclusion follows chapter 7 in which Kellum overviews the Farewell Discourse in light of the closing chapters of the Fourth Gospel. The greatest benefit of this section is the author's insights into the connection between the Farewell Discourse and the reinstatement of Peter. He also includes an admonition to develop one's ability to do accurate discourse analysis, employing one's knowledge of the original languages.

As noted, two appendices are included. The first briefly (10 pages) discusses the types of research tools a fully-equipped expositor should have on his bookshelf and suggests standard works for each type. The second appendix is an expansion of the sermon sketches presented in chapters 4-7. Each sermon sketch is broadened, including a more detailed introduction and conclusion and added illustrations for most of the main points. These outlines are not like those found in copy-and-paste sermon booklets but, rather, are intended to provide pastors and students with an idea of what a biblically-based, culturally-relevant sermon could look like. Finally, a bibliography and name, subject, and Scripture indexes conclude the work.

Preaching the Farewell Discourse succeeds in providing the reader with a clear and competent example of how to analyze, interpret, and preach John 13-17. Two additional strengths warrant mentioning. First, Kellum's insights into the structure, theology, and themes of the Farewell Discourse discussed in the interpretation sections of chapters 3-7 are remarkably astute and will serve the reader over and over as he returns to this resource in preparing to preach or teach this section of John's Gospel. Second, this work is accessible to all students of Scripture, even those without competency in the biblical languages. While structural analysis is perhaps best done in the original languages, those armed with only an accurate, formally-equivalent translation can still take advantage of the vast majority of benefits gained from some type of structural analysis. Kellum demonstrates this superbly.

If there is a weakness to Kellum's work, perhaps he attempted to do too many things. His comments at the end of his conclusion urge his readers to practice discourse analysis regularly and to maintain (or recover, as the case may be) their use of the original languages. After such a thorough and careful treatment of his subject, these comments seem cursory and detached. Similarly, Appendix 1, "Preparing Your Study," is too brief to be of significant value. The work would have been more unified had these elements been omitted.

In conclusion, this work is profitable for pastors as well as students. Both will benefit by the model of competent, conservative biblical exposition. In particular, pastors have a resource to which they can turn when preaching the Farewell Discourse that is faithful to John's purpose, cognizant of his flow of thought, and focused on the present audience.

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