

# CHRISTOLOGY

*A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic  
Study of Jesus*



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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

placing 'the Lord Jesus Christ' before 'God'. Presumably the apostle's sense of the historical mediation of revelation and salvation through Christ led here to his placing in first place 'the Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>15</sup>

The order and the names (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) found in Matthew's baptismal formula became and remained standard for Christian faith. Yet even that formula does not clarify anything about the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To speak, on the one hand, of 'the Father/the Son' and, on the other, of 'the Holy Spirit' ('Holy' obviously through being 'the Spirit of/from God') is to offer a very minimal identification of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in their relationship to each other. In its own setting the Marthean baptismal formula is no less concerned than the Pauline benediction with the blessings that have come through Christ. The soteriological motif remains to the fore, as we shall also see, in the story of subsequent christological reflection and debate.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> On 2 Cor. 13: 14 see V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible 32 A (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 583-4, 587-78; R. P. Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary*, xi: 2 *Corinthians* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1986), 491, 495-7, 503-7.

<sup>16</sup> See further J. M. Bassler, 'God in the NT', *ABD* ii: 1049-55, at 1055.

## 7 To the First Council of Constantinople



Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, of his boundless love, became what we are that he might make us what he himself is.

(St Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*)

My immediate purpose in this and the next two chapters is to prepare the way for the heart of the book: the systematic chapters on Christ's being and saving work. Over the last two millennia various church teachers and writers have addressed in depth most of the central christological issues. It is at our peril that we neglect their discussions and conclusions. We have something, or rather much, to learn from those councils and theologians before raising the crucial issues for ourselves. At the same time, however, in our retelling of the story of developments in christological thought, teaching, and terminology, we will mention only the major points and try not to lose sight of the systematic discussion to come.<sup>1</sup>

To approach the heart of early christological developments, one can usefully ask: on what basis did (or could) these

<sup>1</sup> On the early history of Christology see A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2 vols. (London: Mowbrays, 1975 and 1995); R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A. & C. Black, 5th edn., 1968); R. Williams, 'Jesus Christus II', *TRE* xv: 726-45. On individual writers and themes see the relevant articles in F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd edn., forthcoming), and in A. di Berardino (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1992). For the teaching of councils and their contexts, see the bibliographical information provided by N. P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990).

Christians believe or say this or that about Jesus? This question breaks up into four further queries. (1) What experiences fuelled their insights and assertions about Jesus? (2) How important for them was the task of interpreting the scriptural testimony to Jesus? (3) What contextual factors put a pattern on their christological understanding? (4) What language did they reach for when interpreting their convictions about Jesus' being and doing? Question (1) has already threaded through Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6. Questions (2), (3), and (4) obviously hearken back to issues briefly outlined above in Chapter 1. Expounding the biblical texts (2), in particular those which make up the NT, necessarily involved subsequent Christian believers in questions of history, no matter whether they were fully aware of this or not. Cultural, religious, and, in particular, philosophical currents (3) massively shaped the context of the Mediterranean world in which christological interpretation developed. Struggles with questions of terminology (4) marked not only the first period of christological debate but also later centuries. The debate over *homoousios* and other terms witnessed to the wide Christian concern that their official language about Jesus should not take a wrong turn.

Before reviewing relevant themes from St Ignatius of Antioch (d. c.107) to the First Council of Constantinople (381), it seems useful to develop these four queries. They can help to put a pattern on the story of Christology as it unfolded.

#### Four Queries

1. Right from the outset the driving force behind theological inquiry and official teaching about Jesus was clearly the experience of salvation. Having experienced through him the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the new life of grace in community, Christians asked themselves: what questions does this experience of salvation raise about Jesus, his being, and his identity? What did/does he have to be as the cause, in order to save us in the way that we have experienced (the effect)? What does 'Christ experienced by us/me' say about Christ-in-himself and Christ-for-God?

The overriding concern for salvation and their experience of it led Christians to maintain that two basic conditions make it possible for Jesus to do this for them: he must be truly human and truly divine to function as their effective Saviour.

Irenaeus classically expressed the salvific reason for divinity and humanity being united in Christ:

If a human being had not overcome the enemy of humanity, the enemy would not have been rightly overcome. On the other side, if it had not been God to give us salvation, we would not have received it permanently. If the human being had not been united to God, it would not have been possible to share in incorruptibility. In fact, the Mediator between God and human beings, thanks to his relationship with both, had to bring both to friendship and concord, and bring it about that God should assume humanity and human beings offer themselves to God. (*Adversus haereses*, 3. 18. 7; see 3. 19. 1)

Without the incarnation of the *Son of God*, divine redemption would be impossible. Yet without a genuine *incarnation*, the battle against the diabolic forces of evil would not be won from the inside.

The Adam/Christ contrast elucidated what Irenaeus understands by 'rightly overcoming the enemy': 'As it was through a man's defeat that our race went down to death, so too through a man's victory we rise up to life' (ibid. 5. 21. 1).

One basic and persuasive conviction about the conditions for salvation was then that, to have healed and saved us/me, Jesus must be truly and fully human. This conclusion, current from the time of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen in the second and third centuries, received its classical formulation from Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century: 'the unassumed is the unhealed' (*Epistola* 101. 32). His friend St Basil of Caesarea (c.330–79) wrote of Christ needing to take on true humanity if he were to do what we know him to have done—namely destroy the power of death and sin:

If the Lord did not come in our flesh, then the ransom did not pay the fine due to death on our behalf, nor did he destroy through himself the reign of death. For if the Lord did not assume that over which death reigned, death would not have been stopped from

effecting his purpose, nor would the suffering of the God-bearing flesh have become our gain: he would not have slain sin in the flesh. We who were dead in Adam, would not have been restored in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

A century later Leo the Great (d. 461) insisted that Christ had taken through Mary the same human nature as the first Adam to whom he was traced in Luke's genealogy (Luke 3: 38). Unless Christ had truly assumed our humanity, the redemptive 'battle' would have 'been fought outside our nature' and we would not have experienced what we have experienced, deliverance from the power of evil:

If the new man, made in the likeness of sinful flesh, had not taken our old nature, if he, one in substance with the Father, had not accepted to be one in substance with the mother, if he who was alone free from sin had not united our nature to himself,—then men would still have been held captive under the power of the devil. We would have been incapable of profiting by the victor's triumph if the battle had been fought outside our nature. (*Epistola* 31. 2)

The passage from Basil quoted above also expresses the other basic conclusion to which deliverance from the power of sin and death through Christ brought believers: he has to be the divine Lord; his flesh is 'God-bearing'. To have effected our salvation, he must be truly divine. As Gregory of Nazianzus put it, for sinful human to be 'fashioned afresh', this needed to be effected, 'by one who was wholly man and at the same time God'.<sup>3</sup>

From Irenaeus (*Adversus haereses*, 3. 19; 4. 20) and Athanasius, through to its high point in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, and beyond in the teaching of Augustine of Hippo, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, and others, the experience of becoming 'godlike' or being 'deified' through Christ in a 'wonderful exchange' (*admirabile commercium*) underpinned the conviction about his identity: 'It was God who became human that we humans might become divine.' Cyril asks in one of his christological dia-

logues: if Christ had only received his own divine filiation by gift without possessing it by natural right, how could he bestow on others the power to become children of God (*Quod unus sit Christus*, 738c, e; 762c; 768c–769a; 771c; 773a)? It takes a divine 'Insider' to grant such a gift. Centuries later in his *Summa theologiae* Thomas Aquinas makes what amounts to the same point, but in terms of the universal redemptive scope of the incarnation: 'the goodness of someone who is merely a man cannot be the cause of good for the entire race' (3a. 2. 11. *resp.*). It was because in the person of Jesus Christ God had really assumed human nature and entered our history that we could experience what we do experience, that sharing in the divine life which salvation has brought us (see 2 Pet. 1: 4). In brief, so the argument ran, we are truly divinized (our experience) because the Son of God truly became man. His assumption of humanity is the condition of our/my sharing in divinity.

Through the notion of a 'new creation', Athanasius expressed the same belief. The saving work of Christ has brought us a 'new creation'. But creation is God's exclusive prerogative. Hence Christ must be divine in order to bring about the new creation. Athanasius' argument rests on a parallel or really a continuity between creation and redemption (conceived as new creation). It was through the Word that God created at the beginning. Likewise it was through the same divine Word, who now assumed human nature, that God effected human renewal in the new creation (*De incarnatione Verbi*, 1. 1, 4).

If the experience of salvation made early Christian writers draw the conclusion that Christ must be truly divine, they also at times drew a similar conclusion under the rubric of revelation. To be the revealer of God (as they knew him to have been), he had to belong on the divine side. Irenaeus wrote: 'no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except his own proper Word' (*Adversus haereses*, 5. 1. 1). Here the patristic argument for the revealer being divine paralleled the argument for the saviour being divine. The parallelism was completed when it was argued that the revealer must also be humanly visible in order to reveal God to us. Thus Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) explained that the Word of God was 'begotten of a woman according to

<sup>2</sup> *Epistola* 261. 2; trans. H. Bettenson, *The Later Christian Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 70.

<sup>3</sup> *Epistola* 101. 15; Bettenson, *Later Christian Fathers*, 107.

the flesh, inasmuch as, being God by nature' and so 'invisible and incorporeal', it was not possible for him to make himself visible 'to the inhabitants of the earth otherwise than under an appearance like ours' (*Quod unus sit Christus*, 718d; see 721c-d; 723c; 761e).

A few years later Leo the Great used the same 'invisible/visible' scheme in affirming that the Son of God, 'invisible in his own nature', became 'visible in ours'. This 'self-emptying, whereby the invisible made himself visible', was 'a condescension of compassion, not a failure of power' (*Letter* 28. 3 = *Epistola dogmatica ad Flavianum*). What was divinely invisible would have remained unrevealed. The self-revelation of the Son of God called for the compassionate condescension of the incarnation. Believers' experience of the divine revelation in Christ implied his having become genuinely human as well as being truly divine. To have mediated revelation and salvation, Christ needed, so to speak, a foot in both camps.

2. Our second query concerned the way Christians, from the second century on, went about interpreting Jesus through their inherited Scriptures. The christological interpretation of the biblical texts would need at least a book-length excursus. Here let me call attention to several relevant points which emerged in the second century and beyond.

A second-century heretic, Marcion, who was expelled from the Christian community of Rome in 144 and died around 160, justified his antithesis between the powerful but evil God in the OT and the merciful Father of Jesus Christ in the NT by rejecting all the Jewish Scriptures and accepting only a version of the Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline letters (also emended). Justin and other orthodox Christians disallowed Marcion's truncated Scriptures. They continued to cherish the Jewish bible, their inherited, sacred Scriptures, which Justin cited extensively as books of divine origin to support his christological faith. To understand Christ, the OT patrimony and its Scriptures were essential. Justin's surviving authentic writings also show him drawing on what he called the 'memoirs of the apostles' (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 105-7, *passim*), the Gospels, in particular those of Matthew and Luke, for their decisive witnesses to Christ.

The existence of four Gospels, and especially the differences between all four Gospels and between the Synoptic Gospels and John (with the blatantly explicit self-presentation of Jesus in John over against the largely implicit Christology of the other Gospels), also provided a challenge. Justin's student Tatian met the problem by producing around 155 a history of Christ compiled from all four Gospels. This *Diatessaron* or harmony of the Gospels witnessed to their authority—a fourfold authority vigorously defended by Irenaeus. His loyalty to the four Gospels he received from the tradition helped to assure their acceptance and continued use for liturgy and teaching.

Irenaeus had in fact to fight on two fronts: both against those who wanted to reduce the authoritative Scriptures and against those who were trying to expand them. In opposition to Marcion and any others (especially some Gnostics) who truncated the Bible, he reaffirmed the Christian and christological value of the OT and its sacred writings. He emphasized that the Creator-God of the OT was/is identical with the Father of Jesus Christ (*Adversus haereses*, 5. 15-24). He faced also the work of Gnostic leaders who were busy composing new 'gospels' and other works—on the basis of alleged fresh communications received from the risen Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

Irenaeus himself illustrates the possibilities for development and misunderstanding in the christological use of both OT and NT themes and the Scriptures. We have already noted (in Chapter 2) how Irenaeus in presenting the story of salvation, with its centre in the redemptive and revelatory 'recapitulation' effected by Christ, successfully developed the possibilities of Paul's contrast between the first (disobedient) and the second/last (obedient) Adam. The case proved somewhat different with a phrase that has a broad range of significance in the Gospels: 'Son of man' (see Chapter 3 above). Even before Irenaeus, Ignatius of Antioch in his *Letter to the Ephesians* (20. 2) used the phrase simply to denote the humanity of Christ over against his divinity: he was not merely 'Son of man' but also 'Son of God'. Through

<sup>4</sup> See M. A. Donovan, 'Irenaeus', *ABD* iii. 457-61. On Marcion see J. J. Clabeaux, 'Marcion', *ibid.* iv. 514-16.

Irenaeus<sup>5</sup> this dyad became and remained common currency, with 'Son of man' simply expressing Christ's humanity or human nature. Origen, Tertullian, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, and further Church Fathers followed suit; Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians maintained the usage and kept 'Son of man' as a standard way for denoting the human nature of Christ.

With the second century an inevitable shift of Christian language began setting in: from the first-order, pre-philosophical language of the Gospels, the NT generally, and the liturgy there came a change to the second-order, somewhat 'philosophical' language of doctrinal debate. In this move from narrative to theological Christology, apparent or real differences of meaning between particular biblical texts fuelled a great deal of sharp and even fierce discussion.

In the *Contra Arianos* (1.37–64) Athanasius recorded many of the scriptural passages up for debate in the Arian controversy over Christ's divinity (e.g. Heb. 1: 4; 3: 1; Acts 2: 36). In 1 Cor. 15: 24–8 the Arians found justification for their thesis of the inferiority of the Son to the Father. In Col. 1: 15 they read the 'image' and 'first-born' language ('He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation') as meaning, respectively, that the Son was an inferior copy as contrasted with the original (God) and that he was a created being. After Justin Martyr in the second century identified Christ with the figure of wisdom in Prov. 8: 22 ('the Lord created/begot/possessed me at the beginning of his work'), this became a key OT text for christological thinking. In a letter of AD 262 written to Dionysius the Great (bishop of Alexandria), St Dionysius (bishop of Rome) rejected a subordinationist exegesis of this verse, and expounded it in terms of the Son being 'begotten but not made' (DS 114). In the following century the Arians naturally pounced on the same verse to support their thesis of the Son being only a creature, albeit the most perfect of creatures.

Both at the time of the Arian controversy and later, orthodox teachers in their turn could put opponents on the defens-

ive by insisting on other such texts as 1 Cor. 8: 6 and Phil. 2: 9–11. Cyril of Alexandria quoted the first text (which expresses Christ's involvement in creation) and asked: 'How is everything created by a man' (*Quod unus sit Christus*, 749c–d)? Given that creation is a divine prerogative, Paul's language implied that Christ was/is more than merely human. Appealing to the second Pauline text and its picture of 'every knee in heaven, on earth and under the earth bending' at the name of the crucified and exalted Jesus, Cyril remarks that believers are forbidden to adore a mere man. The apostle indicates Christ's divine status (*ibid.* 771b).

Cyril's major opponent was, of course, Nestorius (d. c. 451), whose liking for Heb. 1: 1–3 and Phil. 2: 6 meant that Cyril gave considerable attention to those texts. At the same time, a fascination with John's Gospel led Cyril to wrestle in particular with the sense of the 'Word becoming flesh' (John 1: 14). He understood the 'becoming' not as a change of nature (as if the Word of God could cease to be what he was/is and change into flesh) but rather as an assumption of something (humanity) for a function (salvation), while remaining what he is as divine. In support Cyril cited Ps. 94: 22 ('the Lord has become my stronghold'), where there is no question of the immutable God literally changing into something else (*ibid.* 718b); it is rather that God 'becomes' something (a saving refuge) for me/us (*ibid.* 717e). In short, the Word's becoming flesh meant adding or assuming a human existence for our salvation. In a brief christological dialogue, *Quod unus sit Christus* (written between 434 and 437), Cyril over and over again recalled this point by speaking of 'the economy of the Saviour', 'the economy of the flesh', 'the economy of the incarnation', or, simply, 'the economy'.

That same dialogue not only constantly cited passages from the OT and NT to support and illuminate its argument but also repeatedly appealed to 'the sacred scriptures', 'the holy scriptures', or 'the inspired scriptures'. Only rarely was any claim based on post-NT teaching (e.g. 'the orthodox and genuine dogmas of the Catholic church' in 716a). In this dialogue Cyril never appealed to the authority of philosophers, even if he frequently used such popularized philosophical terms as 'nature' (*physis*). In the fifth century, as in

<sup>5</sup> See from the third book of his *Adversus haereses*, 16, 3, 7; 17, 1; 18, 3, 6; 19, 1, 2, 3; 22, 1.

the fourth, the struggle was to interpret rightly the scriptural testimony (in the light of the Church's living tradition and present experience). Philosophy played a role in clarifying and interpreting biblical texts and Christian beliefs. But the development of second-order, philosophical language remained at the service of that central authority, the biblical text. The decisive normativity of the Scriptures shows through any study of the Arian, no less than the Nestorian, controversy.

Against Arius and his followers, Athanasius and the orthodox quoted Johannine texts that set Christ on a par with God: e.g. 'I and the Father are one' (John 10: 30; see 10: 38; 17: 21-2). In arguing for Christ's subordinate position the Arians retorted by quoting John 14: 28, 'The Father is greater than I' and explained away John 10: 30 as pointing only to Jesus' always acting and speaking in harmony with the Father and his will. The orthodox dealt with the 'subordination' in John 14: 28 by referring it simply to Jesus in his incarnate life on earth. But for both sides the central question remained: what did/does a faithful interpretation of the Scriptures—and, in particular, of John's Gospel—say about Christ's being?

This is not the place to indulge a huge excursus on patristic methods of exegesis. In any case others have described and evaluated at length their methods.<sup>6</sup> Here I simply wish to note the central role which the Scriptures played in christological developments and debates. From Justin Martyr in the second century to Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth and beyond into later centuries, church writers used and appealed to the Scriptures as the decisive norm in their expositions and arguments.

3. The inspired texts were read in contexts affected by a wide variety of cultural, political, and pastoral concerns. Debates with Jewish and pagan thinkers, as well as the defence of Christians' existence and civil rights before the imperial court, shaped for instance much of Justin's christological reasoning. Two hundred years later, after Con-

stantine the Great (d. 337) had granted toleration and then imperial favour to the Christian faith, Athanasius suffered banishment in 336 from the emperor who a decade earlier had convened and personally opened the Council of Nicaea (325) to settle the Arian dispute and introduce into the creed the controversial language about Christ being 'of one substance' with the Father.

A section of Athanasius' *De incarnatione Verbi* (7. 33-40) illustrates how christological debates with Jews, if obviously less important than in Justin's day, still mattered—at least to a bishop of Alexandria, which had enjoyed one of the largest Jewish communities in any city of the ancient world. The philosophical presuppositions of contemporary culture unmistakably continued to prove an even greater challenge to Athanasius and other church leaders and writers. How could the Word of God, a divine being by nature eternal, incorruptible, and incorporeal, appear in a mortal, human body? For the cultured Greek mentality of Alexandria and elsewhere the divine attributes ruled out the very possibility of an incarnation. God could not take on and be revealed in the existence of a human being; this was simply incompatible with the perfection of God (ibid. 1. 1-2; 8. 1-9; see Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 2. 8). Alongside the debate with Jews and cultured pagans, Athanasius' greater concern was a pastoral one: the unity of Christians around the faith in Christ's divinity expressed at Nicaea. Before his peaceful death at home in Alexandria (May 373), that inner-church struggle had caused Athanasius much suffering, not least through five separate periods of banishment from his diocese.

Where the philosopher Justin had spoken out for Christians threatened with martyrdom, Athanasius dedicated his episcopal energies to resolutely combating the Arian heresy and reconciling dissidents to the faith of Nicaea.

I have used Justin and Athanasius to exemplify four major factors that helped to constitute the context in which the scriptural witness to Christ was heard and interpreted: the debate with Jews, the political climate (of toleration and imperial involvement in church affairs replacing active persecution), doctrinal and other inner-church controversies, and the influential presence of various philosophical and

<sup>6</sup> See P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, i: *From the Beginnings to Jerome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); R. Grant and D. Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2nd edn., 1980); J. W. Rogerson and W. G. Jeanron, 'Interpretation, History of', *ABD* iii, 424-43.

wider cultural currents. As regards this last factor, from the time of Justin Christian teachers repeatedly confronted, dialogued with, and drew on various forms of Platonism. Justin himself struggled to interpret the message of Christ to a culture affected by Middle Platonism, as well as by Stoic thought. This brings us to the language of christological interpretation.

4. Three Greek terms played key roles in the development of christological interpretation: *ousia*, *hypostasis*, and *physis*. *Prosōpon* also enjoyed its importance in the fifth century. But it will be simpler to examine these terms later: in the contexts through which they moved into christological vocabulary.

### *Ambiguities and Intimations*

To have some further perspectives on what follows from Justin to Constantinople I, it seems useful to remark on two features in the development of thinking and teaching about Christ. We can call them, respectively, linguistic ambiguities and early intimations.

The ambiguities come from ways of describing the incarnation as (1) an appearing, (2) a being clothed (with flesh), (3) a dwelling within (the humanity of Jesus), and (4) a mixing or blending of divinity and humanity. (1) The NT itself refers to Christ's coming as an 'appearing' (Tit. 2: 11; 3: 4). This description could be distorted into a Docetic view according to which Christ merely appeared to be human; his body seemed to be earthly but that was only an illusion. At the same time, an orthodox Church Father like Cyril of Alexandria could speak of the Son of God 'in his human appearance', without wishing to undercut the full reality of the incarnation (*Quod unus sit Christus*, 770c).<sup>7</sup> (2) The same bishop illustrates unwittingly the ambiguity latent in the language of the Word of God being 'clothed' with a human nature. He writes of the Word 'putting on the flesh' (in the biblical sense of a full humanity) through which he could

suffer (ibid. 766d), and 'putting on our likeness' (ibid. 775d-e), only to denounce a few pages later the Nestorian view that, according to Cyril, turned the genuine incarnation of the Word into 'a kind of clothing thrown over him' (ibid. 774d). 'Putting on the flesh' and 'wearing a body', for all this ambiguity, was language already employed by Athanasius (*Epistola ad Serapionem*, 4. 14) and before him by Tertullian (*Adversus Praxean*, 27. 6). Even earlier Melito of Sardis in his homily 'On the Pasch' stressed the reality of the incarnation against spiritualizing Gnostic tendencies. Nevertheless, he spoke of Christ 'clothing himself with a human nature' and 'appearing in our midst as a man'. In the event, Melito removed the ambiguity from the notions of 'clothing' and 'appearing' by adding that Christ not only appeared 'with a body capable of suffering' but also 'took upon himself the suffering of those who suffered' (66).

3. When employing the language of 'indwelling', the NT pointed at times to the gift of the Holy Spirit which turned Christians into God's temple (e.g. 1 Cor. 3: 16-17; 6: 19) and at other times to Christ himself in whom 'the whole fullness of deity dwells embodied' (Col. 2: 9; see 1: 19). Athanasius perpetuated the imagery of Colossians by writing of the Word of God 'dwelling in the flesh' as in a temple (*Epistola ad Adelphinum*, 7). In the following century his successor in the see of Alexandria sensed, however, the imprecision of this language. In the context of his criticism of Nestorius, Cyril argued against the image of the Word indwelling a human being (DS 262). That could confuse the incarnation with the condition of baptized Christians who are 'the temple of God' in which the Holy Spirit dwells (*Quod unus sit Christus*, 737e, 738b).

4. A fourth ambiguity comes from the habit which began in the second century of explaining as a 'mingling' the union of divinity and humanity in Christ. By 'his advent in the flesh', Irenaeus saw 'effected the mingling and uniting of God and man' (*Adversus haereses*, 4. 20. 4). A few years later, when arguing for a genuine incarnation against Marcion, Tertullian wrote of the Son 'mingling in himself man and God' (*Adversus Marcionem*, 2. 27). Yet the same Tertullian insisted

<sup>7</sup> More than 200 years earlier than Cyril, Tertullian, precisely in a work aimed at affirming the reality of the Son of God's human body and birth, wrote of his 'appearing' and 'clothing himself' as a human being (*De carne Christi*, 3. 1, 4).

that the union of humanity and divinity in the one person of Christ did not entail a 'mixture' (*Adversus Praxean*, 27. 8-9). Later in this chapter we will see, however, the Cappadocian Fathers in the fourth century using the language of 'mingling' and 'blending' when attempting to account for the relationship between Christ's two natures. In the following century Cyril of Alexandria explicitly rejected this terminology as a way of accounting for the incarnation (*Quod unus sit Christus*, 737a-b). Our next chapter will recall the way Eutyches finally paid the price for the ambiguous inadequacy of the 'mingling/blending' language.

Alongside early christological ambiguities research also turns up 'early intimations'—themes which surfaced early and bore fruit later. At least four such early intimations deserve mention.

1. One phrase which eventually came into its own at the Council of Chalcedon expressed the double generation of the Son: in his divinity born of the Father 'before the ages' and in his humanity born of the Virgin Mary 'in the last days' (DS 301). Prefigured in a kerygmatic fragment cited by Paul (Rom. 1: 3-4) and almost articulated as such by Ignatius of Antioch (*Epistola ad Ephesios*, 7. 2), this theme of the double, eternal/temporal generation of the Son flowered with Irenaeus (*Adversus haereses*, 2. 28. 6; 3. 10. 2) and a century later even more clearly with Lactantius (*Divinae institutiones*, 4. 8. 1-2).

In a passage listing various dyads attributable to Christ, Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313-386) included the double 'nativity': 'his birth is twofold: one, of God before time began; the other, of the Virgin in the fullness of time' (*Catecheses*, 15. 1). Before the Council of Chalcedon met in 451, Cyril of Alexandria cultivated the theme of the Word's double generation: the first, eternal and divine, the second in history and 'according to the flesh' (e.g. *Quod unus sit Christus* 721e, 731e, 734b, 740d, 746c, 747a, and 752e). The same theme of the Word's double generation figured prominently in Cyril's second letter to Nestorius (February 430). In his *Tome* or dogmatic letter of June 449 to Flavian, bishop of Constantinople, Leo the Great endorsed the language of Christ's double birth, eternal for his divine nature and temporal for his human

nature. Two years later this language passed into the Chalcedonian definition of faith.

2. A scheme of double 'consubstantiality' matched the dyad of eternal/temporal generation.<sup>8</sup> In his *Adversus Praxean* Tertullian wrote of Christ's two 'substances' (*substantiae*), a twofold mode of being which made him both divine and human (27. 10-11). This early intimation marked the start of a trajectory, which led through the Council of Nicaea's teaching on the Son being 'of one substance' (*ousia*) with the Father' (DS 150) to Chalcedon's profession of faith in Christ as being 'of one substance' (*homoousios*) with the Father in his divinity and of one substance (*homoousios*) with us in his humanity' (DS 301). Chalcedon's teaching on Christ's double consubstantiality did little more than unpack the language of 'double substance' fashioned by Tertullian more than 200 years earlier.

3. A third early intimation concerned the unity of Christ as subject. Against Gnostic attempts to misinterpret the Fourth Gospel and 'divide' the Son of God, Irenaeus insisted that he was/is 'one and the same' (*Adversus haereses*, 3. 16; 2. 8). A few years later Tertullian rejected any division of the Word into 'Son, Christ, and Jesus', insisting that he is 'one person' (*Adversus Praxean*, 27. 2, 10, 11). In what almost seemed glosses on Irenaeus' text, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa consistently repudiated any talk of Christ as two sons. Gregory of Nazianzus set his face against 'anyone who introduces two sons, one derived from God the Father and the second from his mother, instead of being one and the same' Son (*Epistola* 101. 18). The trajectory of this theme of Christ being 'one and the same' continued through Cyril of Alexandria (e.g. in his second letter to Nestorius and almost *passim* in his *Quod unus sit Christus*) to the Chalcedonian definition of faith, which three times confessed Christ as 'one and the same Son' (DS 301-2).

4. The fourth example of early intimations concerns something essentially based on the unity of subject in Christ: the 'communicatio idiomatum' (interchange of properties). Since

<sup>8</sup> See B. Studer, 'Consubstantialis Patri—consubstantialis Matri', *Revue des études augustiniennes*, 18 (1972), 87-115; reprinted in id., *Dominus Salvator, Studia Anselmiana* 107 (Rome: S. Anselmo, 1992), 29-66.

they believed that divinity and humanity were/are united in the one person of the incarnate Son of God, Leo the Great and other Church Fathers predicated of Christ attributes of one nature even when he was being named with reference to his other nature: e.g. 'the Son of God died on the cross', and 'the Son of Mary created the world' (see DS 251). Obviously this method of attribution called and calls for certain distinctions, so as not to confuse the two natures. The Son of God precisely as divine did not die on the cross, nor did the Son of Mary precisely as human create the universe. The emergence of a sense of the interchange of properties is often associated with the Council of Ephesus (431) and the work of Cyril of Alexandria. But my point here is that this method of predication had in fact shown up much earlier, even if its full implications were not yet grasped.

Back in the late second century, in his homily 'On the Pasch', Melito of Sardis spoke of Christ's crucifixion in a way that named him as divine Creator but predicated of him his shameful human death: 'He who hung up the earth is himself hung up; he who fixed the heavens is himself fixed [on the cross]; he who fastened everything is fastened on the wood; the Master is reviled; God has been killed' (96). Even before Melito the NT itself had initiated this method of predication, by naming the one who was crucified and died not only as 'Jesus of Nazareth' (e.g. Mark 16: 6) but also as 'the Lord of glory' (1 Cor. 2: 8; see Gal. 6: 14) and 'the Son of God' (Rom. 8: 32). Shortly after the NT period Ignatius of Antioch wrote of the Son of God being truly born and crucified (*Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, 1-2).

A few years after Melito, Tertullian's acceptance of Christ as 'one person' allowed him to speak of the 'crucified God' (*Adversus Marcionem*, 2. 27; *De carne Christi*, 5. 1) and declare: 'the Son of God died' (*Adversus Praxeum*, 29. 1; *De carne Christi*, 5. 4). Origen offered some 'explanation' of why human attributes could be predicated of 'the God-man' even when named in terms of his divinity, and of why divine attributes (e.g. coming in divine glory) could be predicated of 'the God-man' even when named in terms of his humanity.

The Son of God by whom all things were created is called Jesus

Christ, the Son of man. For the Son of God is said to have died in respect of that nature which was certainly capable of death; and he is called the Son of man who is proclaimed about to come 'in the glory of God the Father'... the divine nature is spoken of in human terms, and at the same time the human nature is accorded the distinctive epithets proper to the divine. (*De principis*, 2. 6. 3)<sup>9</sup>

But a fully deployed notion of 'person' was still lacking, as was the realization that attributes are predicated of the subject and not properly speaking of the nature(s). Nevertheless, even before the work of Cyril of Alexandria and Leo the Great helped to lay out clearly how his personal unity justified the interchange of properties between the natures of Christ, an instinctive sense of his being one acting subject encouraged fourth-century theologians to keep practising this way of predication. Thus Gregory of Nazianzus spoke of the 'birth of God' and of the 'crucified God' whom we should 'adore' (*Orations*, 45. 39; *Epistola*, 101. 17, 22).

### *Divinity and Humanity*

After sketching some basic queries, persistent ambiguities, and early intimations that characterize christological thought in the patristic period, we will spend the rest of the chapter on major efforts to clarify Christ's humanity and divinity—through to the First Council of Constantinople in 381.

NT faith set the terms of the challenge. Drawing on traditional formulations, Paul wrote of Christ as both Son of God and 'born of woman' (Gal. 4: 4) or as both Son of God and 'descended from David' (Rom 1: 3). John's prologue presented the Word both as 'God' (John 1: 1) and as becoming 'flesh' (John 1: 14). How could believers maintain this new faith without introducing a radical rupture with their belief in the one and only God which they had drawn from their Jewish heritage? How could they interpret these parallel affirmations about Christ's divine sonship and his humanity without tampering with the integrity of either element?

Heterodox solutions reduced or simply sacrificed either

<sup>9</sup> H. Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 217.

Christ's divinity or his humanity. As we saw in Chapter 1, the Ebionites dropped his divinity, while the Docetic tendency questioned the genuine bodily and historical reality of Jesus. Since they dismissed his body as only apparent or really 'heavenly', Docetists in effect excluded Christ's true incarnation and death. To eliminate every link between the evil demiurge (or creator of the material universe) and Jesus the Saviour, Marcion attributed to him a merely heavenly body. Valentinian Gnostics admitted that the Saviour had assumed only what was to be saved and hence no physical body.

With the work of Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen, a page began to be turned in exploring the humanity and divinity of Christ without sacrificing a truly monotheist faith. In his *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin explained that 'God has begotten of himself a rational Power' that was called in the Scriptures by various titles: 'sometimes the Glory of the Lord, at other times Son, or Wisdom, or Angel, or God, or Lord, or Word' (61. 1; see 61. 3). To interpret the generation of the Word, Justin appealed to the sun sending forth its rays or a fire kindling other fires. Just as in these analogies, the begetting of the Son did not mean an 'amputation, as if the essence (*ousia*) of the Father were divided' (ibid. 128. 3, 4). Here Justin touched a question which was to be long debated in the fourth century, the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son (or Word) in sharing the same essence or *ousia*. By that time, thanks to Tertullian, Justin's image of 'Light from Light' had entered the Creed (DS 125).

A further approach threatened either to destroy monotheism or at least to reduce Christ's divinity. Justin spoke of him as 'another God' alongside the Creator (*Dialogue*, 50. 1; 56. 1, 11): Jesus Christ who is 'the Son of the true God' and whom Christians honour as 'the second in order, with the Spirit of prophecy in the third place' (*First Apology*, 13. 3). This subordination of the Son (and the Holy Spirit) to 'the Creator of all things' (ibid.; see *Dialogue*, 56. 4) did not, however, lead to any denial that the pre-existent Logos was the universal mediator of creation (and revelation). This universal mediation, according to Justin, meant that the 'seeds of the Word' are everywhere and in every person (*Second Apology*, 8. 1, 10; 13. 5). Although 'the whole human race

shares' in the Logos (*First Apology*, 46. 2), some people live only 'according to a fragment of the Logos' (*Second Apology*, 8. 3; see 10. 2; 13. 3); Christians live 'according to the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Logos, who is Christ' (ibid. 8. 3; see 10. 1, 3).

As Logos, the Son mediated creation. As 'Angel', he was the one who spoke to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and others in OT theophanies. Since 'the Creator of all things' is so utterly transcendent and ineffable, this 'Author and Father of all things' has 'never appeared to anyone and never spoken in person'. It was 'a God and Lord' different from 'the Creator of all things' who spoke to the OT patriarchs and others, and who is therefore 'called Angel' because 'he announces' and brings about the will of God (*Dialogue*, 56. 1, 4).

In his concern to protect the absolute transcendence of the 'Author and Father of all things', Justin developed the theme of the intermediary roles of the Son as 'another' or 'second' God. As Logos he mediates and is present in all creation; as Angel he reveals the divine will in the OT theophanies, which in effect become Christophanies. When the Neoplatonic notion of intermediaries became popular a century or more later, the stage was set for Arius' full-blown subordination of the Logos. Justin's subordinationism, however, did not lead him to anticipate Arius and deny the genuine divinity of the Logos. He disagreed with Greek philosophy's insistence that God's eternal immutability was not to be compromised by talk of a true incarnation and death. Trypho spoke not only for Jews but also for cultured pagans when he challenged Justin's faith in the incarnation: 'You are attempting to prove what is incredible and practically impossible, namely, that God deigned to be born and to become man' (*Dialogue*, 68. 1). In his *First Apology* Justin acknowledged the continuing scandal of the crucifixion for the cultivated non-Christians of his time: 'They accuse us of madness, saying that we attribute to a crucified man a place second to the *unchanging* and *eternal* God, the Creator of all things' (13. 4; italics mine).

More a biblical theologian than the philosophically trained Justin, Irenaeus, as we have already recalled earlier in this chapter, developed a number of themes that maintained the

integrity of Christ's humanity and divinity: (1) the salvific (and revelatory) reasons for humanity and divinity being united in Christ; (2) the value of his prehistory (in the OT) and human history (in the four Gospels); (3) the Adam/Christ antithesis in which the new head recapitulated the unified divine project of creation and redemption in one great history of salvation; (4) Christ's double generation, the ineffable and eternal generation from the Father and the temporal generation from Mary.

In passing, Irenaeus upheld the Son's eternal pre-existence with the Father (*Adversus haereses*, 2. 30. 9; 3. 18. 1), but he was much more concerned with the economy of salvation. Against the Gnostics he insisted on the Word becoming real flesh and on salvation being effected through the flesh (ibid. 3. 10. 3; 3. 19. 1). The genuine incarnation postulated the real resurrection of the flesh for Christ and others. Thus the struggle with the Gnostics encouraged a certain shift of interest from Christ's death and resurrection back to his incarnation.

We will see how in the fifth century the Nestorian and Monophysite controversies also contributed to this shift. In his own immediate context Irenaeus' major contribution lay in his countering the anti-incarnational teaching of Marcion and the Gnostics. Against them he defended the real humanity of Christ, the Word become flesh (John) and the new Adam (Paul) whose history was told by the four Gospels.

The next pair of writers, Tertullian and Origen, take us into the third century. In exploring the real divinity and humanity of Christ, they anticipate something which will develop even more towards the end of the fourth and in the first half of the fifth century: the application of trinitarian thought and terminology to Christology.

The targets of his criticisms helped to give a direction to Tertullian's contributions to trinitarian and christological thought. On a first front, he wished to maintain his faith in one God and not lapse into pagan polytheism. The defence of Christ's divinity could not mean abandoning monotheism. On a second front, Tertullian fought to maintain and clarify the truth against Christians who developed modalist monarchianism. This is an umbrella term for different forms of a

rigid monotheism which claimed that any 'trinitarian' interpretation of the story of creation and salvation (1) referred only to the several ways (or 'modes') in which God acts externally and (2) did not describe anything about the inner divine life. The aim of these heterodox Christians was to exclude any distinctions within the divinity and safeguard at all costs the unique 'mon-archy' (one principle) of God (the Father). Thus Noetus and Praxeas taught the 'patripassian' doctrine, according to which it was the Father and not a distinct Son who was born in the incarnation, suffered, and died (Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeum*, 2. 1). Slightly later in the third century Sabellius (see DS 105) and the Sabellians brought the Holy Spirit into their version of modal monarchianism. The 'Father' in the OT, the 'Son' in the incarnation, and the 'Holy Spirit' at Pentecost were interpreted as being merely three manifestations of the one God, three different relationships which the one God assumed successively in creation, redemption, and the sending of the Spirit. The Sabellians treated the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* as synonyms for an individual substance. The more moderate among them were ready to speak of God's three *prosopa*, the three roles played by one and the same divine *hypostasis*.

Faced with pagan polytheists and Christian modalists, Tertullian wrestled with the question: is the divinity of the Son (and the Holy Spirit) compatible with genuine monotheism? Against the patripassians Tertullian wrote of God's one unique 'substance' (*substantia*) and three distinct but undivided 'persons' (*Adversus Praxeum*, 2. 4; 12. 1, 3, 6, 7). The distinction (not separation) of persons does not destroy the unity of substance and the true divine 'monarchy'.

The invaluable asset of Tertullian's linguistic skills made him the first Christian writer to exploit the term 'persona' in theology, the first to apply 'Trinitas' (Trinity) to God (*De pudicitia*, 21. 16), and the first to develop the formula 'one substance in three persons'. This creator of theological Latin pulled in various (material) analogies to suggest how the Word (or *Sermo*) and the Holy Spirit could be derived from the Father without a real separation taking place. He wrote of a root producing a shoot, a spring giving rise to a river, and the sun sending forth its ray.

The Spirit makes the third from God [the Father] and the Son, as the fruit from the shoot is the third from the tree, the canal from the river the third from the source, the point of focus of a ray third from the sun. But none of these is divorced from the origin from which it derives its own properties. Thus the Trinity derives from the Father by continuous and connected steps. (*Adversus Praxean*, 8. 5-7)<sup>10</sup>

This way of looking at the 'derivation' of the Son and Spirit, Tertullian argued, did not subvert the unity of the one divine substance or 'monarchy'.

Right in the same *Adversus Praxean* Tertullian went on to apply to Christology his trinitarian terminology of 'substance' and 'person'. First, he recognized Christ's divinity and humanity as 'Word (*Sermo*) and flesh', 'Spirit and flesh', 'God and man', or 'Son of God' and 'Son of man' (27. 7-10). Far from merely appearing in a human form, the Word undergoes a genuine incarnation; through the flesh he can be truly seen and touched. Against Marcion and the Gnostics, Tertullian emphasized that it was for the sake of our salvation that the Word becomes flesh and takes on a real human existence.<sup>11</sup> In the incarnation two distinct 'substances' are joined in one 'person', without the substances being mixed to form some impossible *tertium quid* (ibid. 27. 7, 10-11). Instead 'the property of each substance remains intact' (*salvague est utriusque proprietates substantiae*) (ibid. 27. 11)—a phrase that was to resurface more than two centuries later in Leo's *Tome* and get incorporated in the christological teaching of Chalcedon. Tertullian insisted on the one person and rejected any separation between the Son, Christ, and Jesus (ibid. 27. 2), without, however, exploring how 'person' offered the right key for interpreting the union between Christ's two substances.

We can sum up Tertullian's contribution. Against Praxeas and the modalist monarchians he upheld the true divinity of the distinct person, the Word or Son of God. Against Marcion and the Gnostics he stressed Christ's complete human substance, in particular, his genuine bodiliness. Tertullian can

<sup>10</sup> Translation (corrected) from Bettenson, *Early Christian Fathers* 120-1.

<sup>11</sup> In Tertullian's lapidary phrase, 'the flesh is the hinge of salvation' (*caro cardo salutis*) (*De resurrectione carnis*, 8. 2).

be seen to have ruled out in advance four major aberrations to come: Arianism by maintaining that the Son is truly God ('Light from Light'), Apollinarianism by defending Christ's integral humanity,<sup>12</sup> Nestorianism by insisting on the unity of Christ's one person, and Eutychianism by excluding any mixture of divinity and humanity to form some *tertium quid*.

The last writer we will look at before moving to Arius and the Council of Nicaea is Origen. As with his theology in general, he developed his reflections on Christ's humanity and divinity largely in response to heterodox views of the time. Against the adoptionists, who excluded Christ's divinity and held that he was merely a creature adopted by God, Origen insisted on the eternal generation of the Son and repudiated the notion that 'there was a time when he was not' (*De principiis*, 1. 2. 9; 4. 1. 2; 4. 4. 1). Against the Valentinian Gnostics he maintained that this eternal generation did not involve a division of the divine substance.

Although he would not call the Son and the Holy Spirit inferior in power, Origen favoured a certain 'subordinationism' which highlighted the place of the Father as the ultimate principle: 'We say that the Saviour and the Holy Spirit are incomparably superior to all things that are made, but also that the Father is ever more above them than they are themselves above created things' (*In Ioannem*, 13. 25). Origen's conception of the Father as the ungenerated source of the Son's mission encouraged him to develop a picture of the 'subordinate' Mediator, somewhat along the lines of Middle Platonism. As Logos, the Son brings about creation and reveals the divine mysteries.

As regards the humanity of Christ, Origen became notorious for maintaining the Platonic view that the human soul of the Logos existed prior to the incarnation, being created with other human souls who likewise pre-existed their historical, earthly lives. In the incarnation his utterly sinless human soul (*De principiis*, 2. 6. 5) effected the union between the Logos and 'the flesh' (ibid. 2. 6. 3).

<sup>12</sup> When Tertullian argued against Marcion and the Gnostics that the Word had assumed both a soul and a body (ibid. 34. 10), the critical point at issue was the taking of a body and real flesh. Apollinarius was to tamper with faith in Christ's integral humanity by denying that the Word assumed a rational soul.

Sympathetic specialists rightly interpret Origen's Christology as keeping within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy of his day.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, his stress on the transcendence of the Father left questions about the real divinity of the Son and the Spirit. If Christ's being divine seems somewhat 'levelled down', his humanity seems 'lifted' beyond what is normal. Origen deserves, of course, credit for breaking new ground by attending to Christ's human soul and its theological significance. However, his picture of a pre-existent soul and of its impeccability being already decided in that pre-incarnation state (rather than in the context of Christ's human history) makes it difficult to recognize Christ's genuine humanity. The problem, one should admit, is a wider, anthropological one. Origen's version of the human condition, with his scheme of pre-existent souls coming to inhabit their bodies, represents a Platonic dualism which has long ago been rejected.

Like Tertullian, Origen approached Christology in the light of his trinitarian doctrine. What he held about the Logos' eternal existence with God the Father largely shaped what he would say about the Son's incarnation and incarnate life.

Born shortly after Origen died, like others in Alexandria Arius (c.260–c.336) inherited Origen's trinitarian teaching: the Father, Son, and Spirit as three *hypotheses* or distinct subsistent realities who share in the one divine nature but manifest a certain subordination (of the Son and the Spirit to the Father).<sup>14</sup> Arius apparently wanted to push this subordination much further. The Father is absolutely beyond the Son and, being unbegotten, is the only true God. A generation 'from the substance (*ousia*)' of the Father would misinterpret the divinity in physical categories and wrongly suggest the divine substance being divided into two or three parts. Like the Sabellians, Arius and his followers wanted to

preserve the absolute, transcendent 'mon-archy' of God, but unlike the Sabellians they held on to the real difference of identity between the Father and the Son. (Arius had practically nothing to say about the Holy Spirit.) Where Sabellianism asserted a strict unity of the divine essence without any real distinction of subjects, Arianism distinguished the subjects while denying their unity of essence. As Athanasius reported the Arian position, they considered the Son strictly inferior to and, in fact, infinitely different from the Father (*Contra Arianos*, 1. 6).

In an incoherent statement ridiculed by Athanasius, Arius described the Son/Logos as being created before the beginning of the world, out of nothing and by the will of the Father, but not created 'like one of the creatures'. Using a phrase repudiated by Origen in the previous century, Arius denied that the Son was co-eternal with the Father: 'there was a time when he was not.' Since Arius apparently understood 'eternal' and 'unbegotten' as synonymous, he had to deny the Son's eternity. The Son must be 'later' than the Father; otherwise he would be 'unbegotten' like the Father.

After initially speaking of the Son as created out of nothing, Arius subsequently allowed for the Son being 'generated' by the Father but persisted in considering this act of generation to be in effect a creation. The only creature directly created by the Father, the Son carried out the will of the Father by creating everything else and so acting as a kind of demiurge, a Logos exercising divine power between God and the universe. Hence the One who became incarnate was not truly divine but less than God. Christ was also not truly and fully human. According to Arius, the Logos took the place of the human soul in Christ. The Council of Nicaea (325), however, concerned itself with rebutting only Arius' challenge to Christ's divinity.

Nicaea I, speaking of 'the Son' and never of 'the Word', confessed in its creed that the Son is 'of the substance (*ousia*) of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father' (DS 125). The Council anathematized those who said of the Son that 'there was a time when he was not', and that 'he was created from nothing and

<sup>13</sup> See H. Crouzel, 'Origen', in *Encyclopaedia of the Early Church*, ii, 619–23; J. W. Trigg, 'Origen', *ABD* v, 42–8.

<sup>14</sup> On Arius and Arianism, see D. E. Groh, 'Arius, Arianism', *ABD* i, 384–6; M. Simonetti, 'Arius–Arians–Arianism', and C. Stead, 'Athanasius', both in *Encyclopaedia of the Early Church*, i, 76–8, 93–5; R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1987).

is of different *hypostasis* or *ousia* from the Father' (DS 126). This was to hold that the Son is truly Son of God and not less than God: in the generation (not creation) of the Son, the substance of the Father has been fully communicated, and the Son is co-eternal with the Father.

Nicaea spoke out clearly for Christ's divinity, but three terms continued to run into difficulties well after the Council: *ousia*, *homoousios*, and *hypostasis*.

*Ousia* ('being', 'reality', 'essence', or 'substance') had a chequered background in Gnostic and Christian circles before it came to be adopted in Nicaea's teaching about the Son being 'of the same substance' (*homoousios*) as the Father. In the second century Valentinian Gnostics taught a triple consubstantiality: the human spirit was 'consubstantial' (*homoousios*) with God, the soul with the demiurge, and matter with the devil. In the third century the term came up when Paul of Samosata was deposed in 268 as bishop of Antioch. In speaking of the Logos as *homoousios* with the Father, he was apparently suspected of using the term in a modalist or Sabellian sense and holding that the unity of the *ousia* was such that there was no personal distinction between Father and Son/Logos. When Nicaea pressed *homoousios* into service, the Council almost inevitably recalled a boggy-figure (Paul of Samosata) and caused some to fear a lapse back into Sabellianism. As we shall see in a moment, the use of *hypostasis* as synonymous with *ousia* compounded this fear.

The other question for *homoousios* was the meaning of 'homo-'. In what sense are the Father and the Son 'of the same/one substance'? Numerically the same individual substance which they share as two particular subjects? Or is the adjective to be understood in an 'abstract' way as denoting the substance or essence common to different individuals (e.g. siblings in a human family)?<sup>15</sup> The former meaning won through but, as we will recall shortly, not without a struggle.<sup>16</sup>

As used both in the NT and in (Platonic and Stoic) philosophy, the relevant range of meanings for *hypostasis* clusters under two headings: the *hypostasis* (1) as the primordial

essence, or (2) as the individuating principle, subject, or subsistence. This basic ambiguity in the term surfaced in 262 when Pope Dionysius condemned those who divided the one divine 'mon-archy' into three *hypostases* (*hypostasis* being understood in sense (1)). To do that would obviously be to split the one divine essence into three divine essences and come up with 'three gods' (DS 112). Shortly before Dionysius' condemnation, however, Origen had been confronting Sabellian modalism by speaking of the trine God as three individual *hypostaseis* (= meaning (2) of the term). The terminological problem was bedevilled by the fact that Western (Latin) Christians, ever since the time of Tertullian, understood the Greek *hypostasis* to correspond to their Latin term *substantia*: that is to say, they took *hypostasis* in sense (1) above. Hence when Eastern (Greek) Christians acknowledged the three *hypostaseis* of God, Westerners were easily shocked as they interpreted such a statement to mean three separate divine substances—in a word, tritheism. However, from their point of view, the Greeks could misunderstand Latin talk about the one divine *substantia* as lapsing into the modalist position of one *hypostasis* in sense (2) of the word and hence as a denial of any personal distinctions in God.

The upshot for Nicaea of this inherited ambiguity about *hypostasis* was that taking *ousia* and *hypostasis* as equivalents ran the risk of *homoousios* being understood in a Sabellian way. Father and Son are not only of the same *ousia* but also of the same *hypostasis*—in sense (2) of *hypostasis*. Then there would be no real distinction between Father and Son; they would not be distinct, individual subsistences. Fortunately, Nicaea did not encourage this false conclusion by coining in anticipation a sixth-century adjective, *homohypostatos*, and using it in sense (1) of *hypostasis* as a straight synonym for *homoousios*.

After Nicaea some bishops, while opposed to Arius, continued to prefer a term which had been discussed and rejected by the Council: *homoiousios*, in the sense of the Son 'being of like substance' with the Father. The supporters of Arius rejected both *homoousios* and *homoiousios*. Eventually, from around 355, extreme Arians like Aetius and Eunomius even

<sup>15</sup> On this problem see Athanasius, *De synodi*, 28; *Contra Arianos*, 1. 18; 3. 5; *Ep. ad Serapionem*, 2. 3.

developed the Anomean ('dissimilar') doctrine, according to which the Son is not only the first creature but also in essence simply 'unlike' the Father and radically inferior.

Then there were many bishops and others who simply remained uneasy about or antagonistic to the term *homoousios*. (1) It was not biblical. (2) It had been condemned in the controversy over Paul of Samosata back in 268. But, as Athanasius insisted, the term had been used then in a different setting and against a different error (*De synodis*, 41, 43-5). (3) We have seen how *homoousios* could be interpreted in a Sabellian sense, as if the Father and the Son were identical not only in substance/nature but also as personal subjects. (4) Furthermore, in itself *homoousios* was ambiguous. Did it merely have that 'specific' meaning whereby individual beings of the same species, which quite separately exemplify the same nature, can be said to share in the same substance (e.g. a brother and a sister who are 'of the same substance' as their parents)? (5) The term could also have the broader, 'generic' meaning whereby beings of the same genus (e.g. different animals) or things which show natural similarities can be grouped together as being 'of the same substance'. (6) Finally, *homoousios* might be applied to material substances like a whole mass of bronze that can be cut up into parts and made into such particular, separate objects as coins. Some at least of the older 'material' illustrations for the relationship between the Father and the Son were open to this misunderstanding.

Everything depended on what was meant by 'the same' in *homoousios*. It was easier to deal with some misinterpretations. Thus Basil of Caesarea could sweep aside (6): orthodox faith was not talking materialistically of one divine substance (*ousia*), as if it were some 'stuff' out of which Father, Son, and Spirit were made. It was possibilities (3) and (4) that mattered more for Basil's analysis of various misunderstandings of *homoousios*. Those who failed to acknowledge in God the real community of essence (4) were lapsing into polytheism and in effect believing in three gods. Those who forced *homoousios* to the extreme of disallowing any personal distinction within the godhead (3) were returning to Judaism or its Christian equivalent, Sabellianism. In a

letter written in 375 to the leading Christians of Neocaesarea (Pontus), Basil stated:

It is indispensable to clearly understand that, as he who fails to confess the community of the essence (*ousia*) falls into polytheism, so he who refuses to grant the distinction of the *hypostaseis* is carried away into Judaism. . . . Sabellius . . . said that the same God . . . was metamorphosed as the need of the moment required, and spoken of now as Father, now as Son, and now as Holy Spirit. (*Epistola*, 210. 5)

By that time the battle, led by Basil, St Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315-67), and (from around 350) by Athanasius in support of *homoousios* and its right interpretation, had almost been won. The term *homoousios* pointed to the numerical identity of essence between the three divine persons. In particular as regards the 'substance' of God, the Father and the Son are the 'same one'.

The letter from Basil just cited signals both the triumph of Nicaea's teaching on the common essence or *ousia* shared by Father and Son (and Holy Spirit) and also a switch away from the Council's terminology. No longer are *ousia* and *hypostasis* being used as synonyms. Like Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil writes of one *ousia* (numerically identical essence) and three *hypostaseis* (individual personal subsistences with their particular properties) in God.

Seven years later this trinitarian terminology was officially adopted after the First Council of Constantinople. In its letter to Pope Damasus a post-conciliar synod confessed 'one divinity, power, or substance (*ousia*)' in 'three most perfect *hypostaseis*', that is, in three perfect *prosōpōis*.<sup>16</sup> Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and, even more, Gregory of Nyssa had been using interchangeably *hypostasis* and *prosōpon* (= the 'face' or visible manifestation and characteristics of the *hypostasis*). Although ready to talk of three *hypostaseis* in God (*Tomus ad Antiochenos*, 5-6), Athanasius had preferred *prosōpon* to *hypostasis*. Building on Origen, the Cappadocians, and Athanasius, Constantinople I put trinitarian language firmly in place: three *hypostaseis* or *prosōpa* and one *ousia* or *physis* in God. Origen, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and

<sup>16</sup> Tanner, 28.

the post-conciliar synod of 382 (in its letter to Pope Damasus) spoke of God's *physis* (the essence seen as a principle of activity) interchangeably with the divine *ousia*.

We saw above how Tertullian led the way in fashioning a trinitarian vocabulary in Latin which he then applied in Christology. Eastern (Greek) theology followed the same path in using christologically their trinitarian terms. Gregory of Nazianzus (*Epistola*, 101. 19) and then Gregory of Nyssa (*Oratio catechetica*, 10. 1, 3–4) wrote of Christ's two *physis* (natures or principles of activity). Gregory of Nyssa distinguished between the two *physis* and the one *prosōpon* of Christ (*Contra Eunomium*, 6. 1, 2, 4). The fourth-century trinitarian vocabulary was fully taken over in Christology when (the one) *hypothesis* began to be attributed to Christ after the Council of Ephesus (431).<sup>17</sup> By that time debate had shifted to the question of the union of/in Christ. Fifty years earlier Constantinople I had, at least officially, put an end to controversy about Christ being truly divine and fully human.

At the trinitarian level Constantinople I reaffirmed the Nicene confession of faith that the Son was 'of one substance' with the Father, as well as teaching the divinity of the Holy Spirit (DS 150). In its letter to Pope Damasus (quoted above) the post-conciliar synod of 382 confessed 'the uncreated, consubstantial (*homoousios*) and coeternal Trinity'. At the purely christological level, Constantinople I (DS 151) rejected the teaching of Apollinarius of Laodicea (c.310–c.390) and the post-conciliar letter to Damasus called Christ 'perfect' or 'fully man' (Tanner, 28).

Intent on defending against the Arians the Nicene faith in Christ's divinity, Apollinarius had taken 'Logos/sarx' Christology to an extreme. Paradoxically, this meant following Arius in holding that in the incarnation the Logos assumed a body (with its life-giving soul or *psyche*) but took the place of the higher (spiritual and rational) soul or *nous*. The difference lay in the fact that, where Arius underinterpreted the condition of the Logos, Apollinarius underinterpreted the condition of Christ's *sarx* ('flesh'). A friend of Apollinarius,

Athanasius developed a 'Logos/sarx' Christology in which a human soul was irrelevant for any interpretation of Christ's being and work. In a few texts (e.g. *Tomus ad Antiochenos*, 7) we find Athanasius apparently acknowledging an intelligent, human soul in the incarnate Word. Athanasius stopped short of essentially undercutting the full humanity of Christ, as did Apollinarius, out of a desire to defend the incarnate Word's real divinity and strict unity. This made Apollinarius an easy target for Gregory of Nazianzus (*Epistola*, 101), Gregory of Nyssa (in his *Antirrheticos*), and others.

Nevertheless, even after (or especially after?) Constantinople I, the Apollinarian question remained. Granted that Christ is truly divine (Nicaea I and Constantinople I) and perfectly human, how is the union between his divinity and humanity to be understood and interpreted?

<sup>17</sup> According to Epiphanius (*Adversus haereses*, 73), however, the Semi-Arian Synod of Ancyra (358) acknowledged the Son as particular *hypothesis*.

## 8

## Ephesus, Chalcedon, and Beyond



There was equal danger in believing the Lord Jesus Christ to be God only and not man also, or man only and not God.

(St Leo the Great, *Tome*)

Differences between what have been called the 'schools' of Antioch and Alexandria set the stage for the christological controversies of the fifth century and beyond. Unlike the followers of Arius and Apollinarius, the groups who remained unreconciled to the teaching at Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451 still have their followers—known, respectively, as the Nestorians (who call themselves 'Assyrians' or 'the Church of the East') and Monophysites (now generally called 'Oriental Orthodox'). 'Logos-anthropos' (Word-man) and 'Logos-sarx' (Word-flesh) have often been used as convenient labels to distinguish the Antiochenes, whose Christology may be summarized as 'the eternal Word assuming the man Jesus', from the Alexandrians, whose Christology highlighted the Johannine theme of 'the Word becoming flesh'.

From the late fourth century, as heirs of the teaching from Nicaea I and Constantinople I, the two schools faced a common challenge. In defending Christ's true divinity (against the Arians) and his perfect humanity (against the Apollinarians), how were they to conceive the unity in Christ without stating it weakly, on the one hand, or, on the other hand, maximizing it to the point of eliminating the real distinction between the two natures? Decades passed before it became clear that the union should be seen as taking place in the person and not in the natures.

In the last chapter we noted how the Cappadocian Fathers

contributed to the clarification of christological terminology. But they also exemplify the problem created by presuming that Christ's unity is to be explored at the level of natures. The Cappadocians presented his unity by using Stoic language about the 'mixing' (*krasis*) and 'blending' (*synkrisis*) of two natural substances which completely permeate each other without losing their characteristic nature.<sup>1</sup> The obvious problem with this doctrine of mixture is that it makes Christ out to be a kind of amalgam, a divine-human hybrid, as well as moving too much in the area of material categories. It would take time to go beyond such attempts to interpret Christ's unity in terms of his natures, no matter whether this nature–nature relationship was explained through categories of 'mingling' or in other ways.

The analogy with the union between the human body and soul provides another example of failing to get the question right. In his *Contra Celsum* (3. 41) Origen presents Christ's personal union in a way that recalls the Aristotelian theory of the union between matter and form. Somewhat nuanced but still clearly affirmed, this analogy turns up in a letter by St Augustine of Hippo: 'just as in any man (except for that one who was uniquely assumed) soul and body form (*est*) one person, so in Christ the Word and the Man form (*est*) one person' (*Epistola* 169. 2. 8 = *Ad Evodium*). A few years later Cyril of Alexandria twice used the same analogy in his third letter to Nestorius (Tanner, 52, 55). The extra difficulty about this analogy is that, in the case of the body (matter) and soul (form), we are dealing with incomplete substances that together make up one complete substance (a human being). In the case of Christ two complete substances are united. The inadequacy of any appeal to the body–soul analogy illustrates once again how accounts of Christ's unity should be addressed to the personal level; his two natures form his duality.

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations*, 30. 8; 37. 2; 38. 13; *Epistola* 101. 21.

*The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon*

The dramatic differences between the schools of Antioch and Alexandria came to a head at Ephesus in 431. As an Antiochene, Nestorius (patriarch of Constantinople from 428) aimed at defending Christ's integral humanity or, as he put it in his second letter to Cyril of Alexandria, at not 'destroying the distinctive character of the natures (*ta tōn physēōn*) by absorbing them into the one title of "Son"' (Tanner, 46). Hence he taught the 'conjunction' (*synaphēia*) of Christ's two complete natures in one 'prosōpon' (ibid.), this latter term being intended as someone's or something's concrete form of existence and particular 'appearance'. Using *prosōpon* to cover the sum total of individual properties that manifest themselves, Nestorius could not only speak of the Christ's one 'prosōpon' but even, as Cyril accurately reports, of the union between the 'prosōpa' (plural) in Christ (ibid. 43). Each nature can be said to enjoy its own (natural) *prosōpon*. In presenting Christ's distinction at the level of natures (*physeis*) and unity at the level of *prosōpon*, Nestorius stressed more the natures over the one subject of these two natures and the one manifestation of the natures.

Although, as we have just seen, Nestorius could also write of Christ's unity (*henōsis*), he preferred the term 'conjunction' (*synaphēia*). What did this 'conjunction' signify? His critics interpreted Nestorius' language about the man Jesus being 'assumed' (*homo assumptus*) and about the Word being present in him as in a temple to mean the mere 'conjunction' of two separately existing subjects, Jesus and the Word of God (who did not truly become flesh). In effect, they accused Nestorius of turning the distinction between Christ's two natures into a separation and proposing a merely moral unity between the eternal Son of God and Jesus as adopted son. Later Nestorius was to defend himself vigorously against such charges.

The conflict which led to the Council of Ephesus was a practical and a political one, but it suggests where the heart of the problem lay. Nestorius could not find a theological basis for the traditional *communicatio idiomatum*, which for centuries had justified the Christian practice of saying that

'the Son of God died on the cross'. He refused to attribute to the Word of God the events of Jesus' human life: in particular, his human birth from Mary. Hence, at least at first, Nestorius declined to call Jesus' mother the 'Mother of God' (*Theotokos*). This Marian title (see Luke 1: 43) had probably been used by Origen and had been commonly used by Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, and other fourth-century figures. Nestorius at first proposed 'Mother of Christ' (*Christotokos*) and eventually was ready to accept *Theotokos*. But by then it was too late. His role as patriarch of Constantinople had been fatally jeopardized by his insistence on the integrity and distinction of Christ's two natures and his failure to appreciate the unity of the one acting subject which justified calling Mary the mother of the Son of God.<sup>2</sup>

The controversy between Nestorius and Cyril dragged on for more than two years before the Council of Ephesus met in June 431. Cyril's defence of Christ's unity was notoriously bedevilled by his appeal to a formula which he believed to come from Athanasius but in fact originated with Apollinaris: 'mia physis tou (Theou) Logou sesarkōmenē(ou)' (the one *physis* of the (God) Word become flesh); 'become flesh' agreed grammatically with either *physis* or Word. To Antiochene and other ears this sounded like a heretical fusion of Christ's two natures. Cyril's thirty-ninth letter, written to John of Antioch in April 433, showed him anxious to rebut the charge of 'blending' or 'mixing up' Christ's divinity and humanity (Tanner, 72). A year or two later he came back to answer the same accusation in *Quod unus sit Christus*, insisting that it was 'without mixing up and change' that the divinity and humanity were united in Christ (736a), and that his formula of 'the one *physis* of the enfleshed Son' does not mean a 'confusion and mixing up', as if the human *physis* disappeared in the face of the divine greatness (ibid. 737a, b). If Nestorius switched from singular to plural in his use of *prosōpon*, Cyril did the same with *physis*. It could mean the individual subject of activity (as in his classical or notorious phrase about 'the one *physis* of the Word become flesh').

<sup>2</sup> On Nestorius see A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, trans. J. Bowden et al., 2 vols. (London: Mowbrays, 1975 and 1995), i. 443-72, 501-19.

But Cyril was also ready to speak of Christ's two 'physis' (natures), as we see both in his second letter to Nestorius (Tanner, 41) and in his letter to John of Antioch (ibid. 72).

On 22 June 431, without waiting for the papal legates or the Syrian bishops led by John of Antioch, Cyril opened the Council of Ephesus. It condemned Nestorius' teaching, excommunicated him, and proclaimed Cyril's second letter to Nestorius as consonant with the faith of Nicaea (DS 250-68).

1. A reading of that letter yields at least seven points of significance for the development of christology. Cyril points to the Nicene Creed (Tanner, 41), which attributes to the same subject both divine and human attributes. This implies the appropriateness of appealing to 'the exchange of properties' and confessing that the eternal Word of God was born, suffered, died, and rose from the dead.<sup>3</sup> Cyril made this appeal to a liturgical profession of faith without explicitly justifying his argument by invoking the *lex orandi lex credendi* (the law of prayer is the law of belief) principle. By a curious coincidence St Prosper of Aquitaine (c.390-c.463), when composing a year or so later the *Indiculus* or a dossier on grace drawn from the writings of Augustine, created that theological axiom in the fuller form of 'legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi' (let the law of prayer establish the law of belief) (DS 246). Prosper's theme is the doctrine of grace, Cyril's is Christology. But their major (but not exclusive) theological justification ('the law of prayer') is, in effect, the same.

2. In his second letter to Nestorius Cyril states that the Logos 'united to himself hypostatically (*kath hypostasin*) flesh enlivened by a rational (*logikē*) soul' (Tanner, 41; DS 250). The insistence on a 'rational soul' is directed, of course, against the Apollinarian heresy. The new element here is the phrase that recurs four times in Cyril's second letter to

Nestorius: 'kath hypostasin'. Where it occurs with the verb 'unite', as in the words just quoted above, the Tanner translation renders the phrase as 'hypostatically united' (Tanner, 41, 42, 44); where the phrase is linked to the noun 'union' (*henōsis*) (ibid. 43), it is translated as 'the hypostatic union'. The Bologna edition of the decrees of the ecumenical councils, from which the Tanner edition takes over the original (Greek and Latin) texts, in its translation shows more sensitivity to the ambiguity in Cyril's use of *hypostasis*: it renders 'kath hypostasin' once as 'substantially united' (*unio sostanzialmente*), twice as 'union of person' (*unione di persona*), and once as 'hypostatically' (*ipostaticamente*).<sup>4</sup> Cyril has the merit of introducing 'union by *hypostasis*' as a christological formula, which after the Council of Chalcedon will be understood as 'personal union' or 'union in the person'. But Cyril himself still thinks somewhat more in terms of substance when he uses *hypostasis*, even if, as his third letter to Nestorius indicates, he is also ready to use *hypostasis* and *prosōpon* as synonyms (Tanner, 56). A few years later he employs the same pair of terms synonymously in *Quod unus sit Christus* (758a). But Nicaea's coupling of *ousia* and *hypostasis* as equivalents still has its long-term effect on Cyril. The phrase 'united *kath hypostasin*', as Alberigo and his Italian translator rightly recognize, can also mean 'substantially united' when used by Cyril himself.

3. As we have already seen, Cyril's second letter to Nestorius showed that he was ready to admit the terminology of the incarnate Word's 'two natures (*physis*)'. Just over twenty years later this language was to be endorsed by the Council of Chalcedon. The same thing was to happen to the letter's (4) scheme of Christ's double 'generation' (from the Father in eternity and from Mary in time), (5) insistence on Christ's being (in Irenaeus' language) 'one and the same', and (6) use of *Theotokos*, the popular Marian title based theologically on the 'interchange' of her Son's divine and human properties. (7) By endorsing Cyril's second letter, the Council of Ephesus joined him in rejecting any Nestorian talk either of 'two Sons'

<sup>3</sup> Apropos of liturgical usage—that is to say the baptismal confessions in use—J. N. D. Kelly points out that both in the East and in the West the old baptismal creeds were not at once replaced by the Nicene Creed. Its fuller form after 381, in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, however, seems to have been quickly employed as a baptismal confession: Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longman, 3rd edn., 1972), 254-62, 344-5.

<sup>4</sup> G. Alberigo et al., *Concilium oecumenicorum decreta* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1991), 41-4.

or of a union of *prosōpa* (persons in the plural). Chalcedon was to say practically the same thing by teaching that the one, only-begotten Son, as one *prosōpon*, is not 'separated or divided into two *prosōpa*' (DS 302).

The whole controversy with Nestorius, like that with Eutyches twenty years later, continued to shift theological attention away from Christ's death and resurrection to his incarnation and the relationship between his human and divine natures. The particular impact of the Council of Ephesus was to emphasize that the humanity and divinity of Christ were not to be understood as separated. With different nuances that rejection clearly came through points (1), (2), (5), (6), and (7) of Cyril's second letter to Nestorius. Yet, if the two natures were not separated, were they really to be distinguished? And how were they united? Those questions remained to set the agenda for the Council of Chalcedon twenty years later.

The central terminology for that later council was already coming into wider use, even if it was not yet firmly in place. Cyril's second letter distinguished 'two' natures (*physis*). Even more than his second letter (in which some ambiguity, as we noted above, still clung to the phrase *kath'hypostasin*), his third letter to Nestorius (which was not, however, officially approved and proclaimed at the Council of Ephesus) helped to give *hypostasis* a personal meaning in christological and not merely trinitarian usage. By coupling *hypostasis* more or less interchangeably with *prosōpon*, Cyril encouraged the move towards dissociating *hypostasis* from *ousia* (with which it had been synonymously linked at Nicaea I) and allowing the term to express more the sense of subsistence than that of substance.

Prevented by Cyril's peremptory impatience from being present when the Council of Ephesus opened in June 431, John of Antioch and his followers produced a formula of union (August 431) which helped to reconcile differences in christological teaching (DS 271–2). In this document the Antiochenes maintained their particular way of excluding Arianism, on the one hand, and Apollinarianism, on the other, by calling Christ 'perfect God and perfect man', maintaining his double generation (in eternity from the Father

and in time from his mother Mary), and teaching a double consubstantiality (divine with the Father and human with his mother). They abandoned support for Nestorius by endorsing the Marian title of *Theotokos* and confessing Christ to be only one *prosōpon* and two natures (*physis*) in an 'unconfused union' (*henōsis*).<sup>5</sup> Here they dropped the term Nestorius preferred for the link between Christ's humanity and divinity: 'conjunction' (*synaphēia*). They also left Nestorius behind when they wrote of the 'union of the natures' (*henōsis tôn physeōn*).

In a letter to John of Antioch in April 433, Cyril accepted the formula of union. In doing so, however, he wrote of 'the difference' of Christ's natures 'from which' (*ex hōn*) came the union (Tanner, 72). Shortly after Cyril's death in 444, this language was being pushed to extremes by the head of a large monastery in Constantinople, Eutyches. His 'monophysite' position illustrated spectacularly the failure to appreciate that Christ's human nature was assumed by the person of the Word and not as such by the divine nature. In looking to interpret in terms of the two natures the union effected by the incarnation, Eutyches apparently argued that after the union the human nature is absorbed by the divine nature. Hence Christ is 'from' two natures but not 'in' two natures. Only one 'nature' (*physis*) remains after the union, and Christ cannot be said to be and remain 'consubstantial' with human beings.

Condemned in 448 at a home synod in Constantinople, Eutyches was rehabilitated the following year at a synod which was held in Ephesus and dubbed by Pope Leo the Great the 'Latrocinium' (brigandage). In his *Tome* to Flavian, the patriarch of Constantinople, Leo maintained a classical balance when describing the undiminished duality of Christ's perfect natures and the unity of his person. Borrowing language from Tertullian, he wrote of 'the distinctive character of each nature remaining intact and coming together into one person' (*salva ... proprietate utriusque naturae et in unam coeunte personam*) (*Epistola* 28. 3; DS 293). Here Leo acknowledged Christ's one person as the key to his unity.<sup>5</sup> A year

<sup>5</sup> On the *Tome* see H. Arens, *Die christologische Sprache Leos des Grossen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982).

earlier, at the home synod of 448, Flavian spoke of the one 'hypostasis' or 'prosōpon' of Christ, apparently using them as equivalents, as did Cyril of Alexandria in his third letter to Nestorius (see above).

When it met in 451, the Council of Chalcedon first confirmed four texts: the Nicene Creed in its fuller form from Constantinople I, Cyril of Alexandria's second letter to Nestorius, Cyril's letter to John of Antioch in 433, and Pope Leo's *Tome*. Then the Council added its own christological confession, the first part of which (DS 301) drew on the Antiochene formula of union from 431. This first part of the Chalcedonian confession changed somewhat the order of phrases and terms from the 431 formula but added nothing, apart from two phrases ('true God and true man' and 'like us in all things apart from sin').

The second part of the confession (DS 302) broke new ground by affirming Christ's one person ('prosōpon' and 'hypostasis') 'in' his two natures, human and divine. It specified that 'the one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, and Only Begotten' had been made known in these two natures which, without detriment to their full characteristics, continue to exist 'without blending or change, and without division or separation', while belonging to only one and not two 'persons' (*prosōpa*). In other words, the unity of Christ exists on the level of person, the duality on that of natures. Through the unity of subject in Jesus Christ, the eternally pre-existent Son of the Father is also the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary. 'Without blending or changing' aimed to exclude the current error of Eutyches in merging Christ's two natures, 'without division or separation' to exclude the error attributed to Nestorius of separating the two natures.

Apropos of the position of the Chalcedonian definition on the subject in Christ, I made the following comments some years ago:

[the definition] did not literally describe Christ as a 'divine person'. It spoke of the one *hypostasis* uniting two natures, but did not in so many words declare this to be the pre-existent divine person of the Logos. (It was left to the Second Council of Constantinople to uphold and interpret the unity of subject in Christ by identifying the principle of union as the pre-existing Logos.) Nevertheless,

Chalcedon got very close to identifying the one *hypostasis* when it moved straight from affirming the oneness of person to talk of 'one and the same Son and only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>16</sup>

In an article challenging my interpretation of Chalcedon, Anthony Baxter rightly follows E. Schwartz's edition of the Greek text and translates the last phrase from the definition as 'one and the same Son, Only-begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>17</sup> If one wants to be rigidly 'correct', however, the translation should be: 'one and the same Son, Only-begotten, God [the] Word, Lord Jesus Christ.' Baxter's highly detailed arguments against my interpretation do not strike me as convincing. Essentially my difficulties with his rebuttal are twofold. First, the definition names Christ once as 'true God', once as 'God [the] Word', four times as 'Lord' (presumably in the strong sense of *Kyrios* or divine Lord), and three times as 'Son'. Since the Son is named as being 'of one essence' with God the Father and as 'Only-begotten', Son should be understood as the (Only-begotten) Son of God the Father. Given these ways of naming Christ, Chalcedon clearly implies that the one *hypostasis* it confesses is a divine *hypostasis*. Second, Baxter's own interpretation leaves me puzzled. He acknowledges that Chalcedon both excludes two *hypostases* (one divine and the other human) and does not propose that Christ is a merely human *hypostasis*.<sup>18</sup> Surely one can only conclude then that Chalcedon recognizes (albeit implicitly) that the *hypostasis* in question is divine? Yet Baxter is reluctant to accept this conclusion.

#### *After Chalcedon*

In confessing that the unity of Christ exists on the level of person and the duality on that of his natures, the Council of Chalcedon proved a lasting success in regulating language about Christ. Its terminology of 'one person in two natures'

<sup>16</sup> Interpreting Jesus, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983) 182.

<sup>17</sup> 'Chalcedon and the Subject in Christ', *Downside Review*, 107 (1989), 1-21, at

9. <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 12.

became normative down to the twentieth century. Its teaching effected a brilliant synthesis between the Alexandrians, who highlighted Christ's unity, and the Antiochenes, who championed the duality of Christ's distinct natures. The subject who acts is one (divine) person; in what he does he reveals the two natures through which he acts.

In synthesizing the concerns and insights of the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools, Chalcedon provided a 'logical' conclusion to the first three ecumenical councils. Against Arianism, Nicaea I used the term *homoousios* to reaffirm 'Christ is divine'. Against Apollinarianism, Constantinople I affirmed 'Christ is human'. Against Nestorius, Ephesus I professed that Christ's two natures (his divine being and his human being) are not separated. Against Eutyches, Chalcedon confessed that, while belonging to one person, the two natures are not merged or confused. One can appreciate the way the first four councils became acknowledged as representing the essential and orthodox norm for understanding and interpreting the christological (and trinitarian) faith of the NT. Five months after his election to the papacy, St Gregory the Great in a circular letter of February 591 to the five eastern patriarchs declared that he received and venerated the first four councils just as he received and venerated the four Gospels (DS 472).

For all of its proving a logical conclusion, Chalcedon obviously left some, even much, unfinished business. To begin with, it did not define the key terms it used when distinguishing in the innovative part of its confession 'nature' (*physis*), on the one hand, and 'person' (*prosōpon/hypostasis*), on the other. In any case, rather than being the proper work of an ecumenical council, the analysis and definition of such terms belong rather to philosophers and theologians. Half a century after Chalcedon, Boethius (c.480–524) influenced all subsequent Christology in the West by his definitions. In his *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* (also called *Liber de persona et duabus naturis Christi*), he defined nature as 'the specific difference informing anything' (1), and person as 'an individual substance of a rational nature' (3). Boethius also grasped the soteriological motivation of Chalcedon by arguing that, if Christ were not one divine person in two

complete but distinct natures, he could not have acted as Saviour.

Boethius' desire to rebut both Nestorius and Eutyches reflected the way the differences between an Antiochene Christology of distinction or even separation (represented by Nestorius) and an Alexandrian Christology of union (pushed to an extreme by Eutyches) had not been laid to rest by the achievement of Chalcedon. The Second Council of Constantinople (553) interpreted Chalcedon in a way that represented a return to the Alexandrian triumph at Ephesus, whereas the Third Council of Constantinople (680/1) swung the pendulum in the Antiochene direction. The Second Council of Nicaea (787) reached back behind the Alexandrian–Antiochene controversies to reassert in a new context (the iconoclastic controversy) the truth of the incarnation taught by Nicaea I and Constantinople I. Let us review in turn these post-Chalcedonian developments.

In a synodical letter (February 591) written to the five oriental patriarchs a few months after his election to the papacy, Gregory the Great, as we recalled above, expressed his veneration for the first four ecumenical councils by comparing them to the four Gospels (DS 472). Even so late in the day, his endorsement of the second council, Constantinople I of 381, was important. Before recognizing that council, in which none of its bishops had taken part, the Western Church had shown some resistance. In his letter, as often elsewhere, Gregory also indicated his unqualified acceptance of the fifth council. But this endorsement of Constantinople II was motivated by its fidelity to the first four councils. They remained the touchstone for essential christological and trinitarian orthodoxy.

The Emperor Justinian promoted Constantinople II in an unsuccessful attempt to win over the hard-line followers of Cyril of Alexandria. For a century they had expressed their dissatisfaction with the Chalcedonian formula ('in two natures'). In a swing back to the Council of Ephesus' condemnation of Nestorius, Constantinople III, through its 'Three Chapters', posthumously condemned three authors for supposedly favouring Nestorianism. The condemnation touched the works and person of Theodore of Mopsuestia

(c.350–428), some writings by Theodoret of Cyrthus (c.393–c.466), and a letter by Ibas of Edessa (from 433) (DS 434–7). By (1) using Cyril's 'one nature' and Chalcedon's 'two natures' as equivalent expressions (DS 429) and (2) presenting the union between 'God the Word' and 'the flesh' as taking place 'by way of synthesis' and 'hypostatically' (DS 424–6, 429–30), Constantinople II highlighted the unity of Christ's person over the distinction of his natures. This also came through noticeably when Chalcedon's 'in' two natures was replaced by Cyril's 'from' two natures (DS 429). Its high, Alexandrian Christology also led the Council to remove any possible, lingering ambiguity about his divine identity by calling 'our Lord Jesus Christ' 'one of the holy Trinity' (DS 424, 426, 432). In line with its stress on the union of divinity and humanity in Christ, the Council anathematized those who would not 'venerate in one act of worship God the Word made flesh together with his flesh' (DS 431).

With still no peace in sight between the 'monophysites' (who championed Cyril's language) and the 'diphyssites' (who followed Chalcedon's teaching on 'two natures'), Sergius (patriarch of Constantinople from 610 to 638) proposed a compromise with his formula of two natures but 'one energy' in Christ. In a correspondence with Sergius, Pope Honorius I (d. 638) spoke of there being only 'one will' in Christ. Defenders of Honorius I may explain how he did not lapse into heresy: he was not talking 'ontologically' (as if Christ's human nature literally lacked a will) but merely 'morally' (in the sense that Christ's human and divine wills worked in such perfect harmony that it was if they were one). Nevertheless, one can hardly acquit Honorius of the serious charge of being gravely imprudent in his two letters to Sergius. His 'monothelite' (one will) language threatened belief in Christ's full humanity, as if the human nature of Christ lacked an essential faculty, its will. The monothelite view transposed 'monophysite' reductionism from the level of human nature as such to that of human faculties, and represented Christ's human will as being 'absorbed' by his divine will. Patriarch Sergius' 'one energy' formula, in effect, did the same. It slipped over the fact that Christ's 'energy' or modes of activity come from his natures and not as such from his person.

Hence to assert 'one energy' was tantamount to asserting 'one nature'. It amounted to a 'monophysite' view of Christ's activity, as if his human action were absorbed by the divine principle of activity.

The Third Council of Constantinople (680/1) took a firmly Chalcedonian line by distinguishing the two natures of Christ in terms of their willing and activity. It taught that Christ enjoyed a human and a divine will (the two wills being in perfect harmony with each other) and two 'energies' or 'natural operations'. Applying Chalcedonian terminology to the issue it faced, Constantinople III insisted that the two wills and 'natural operations' were neither separated from each other nor blended together (DS 556–8). Thus, at the level of Christ's will and 'natural' activities, the Council upheld the Chalcedonian balance between a 'Nestorian' separation and a 'Eutychian' blending.

The vindication of Christ's complete humanity was motivated by soteriological considerations. Without a human will not only would his true 'consubstantiality' with us have been defective but also the reality of the salvation he mediated would have become suspect. Lacking a human will, Christ could not have freely accepted also on our side (and for our sake) his redemptive mission and have carried it through.

The Second Council of Nicaea (787), called to put an end to the iconoclastic heresy, formed an epilogue to the previous six councils. St John of Damascus (c.675–c.749) had prepared the way for this seventh council by defending images of Christ and the saints. In particular, he argued that icons of Christ were a necessary consequence of the incarnation: they visibly expressed faith in the Word of God taking 'flesh' and assuming a human existence in our material world. At a practical level, by endorsing iconic expression of belief in the incarnation, Nicaea II summarized and drew to a close the christological teaching of seven ecumenical councils.

### *Into the Middle Ages*

The first major contribution from the Middle Ages which calls for attention is the theory of satisfaction from St Anselm

of Canterbury (c.1033–1109).<sup>9</sup> But before examining his approach to soteriology and its enduring influence, something must be said about the patristic background.<sup>10</sup>

The last chapter devoted its opening pages to the way Irenaeus and many others interpreted the experience of salvation as a 'wonderful exchange' in which the Son of God's incarnation brought our divinization. Along with this interpretation of redemption, Irenaeus, Basil, Leo, and others introduced further soteriological language that also enjoyed a basis in the Scriptures: through his battle with and victory over the forces of evil, Christ destroyed the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil. In such hymns as 'Vexilla regis prodeunt' and 'Pange lingua gloriosi' Venantius Fortunatus (c.530–c.600) classically expressed for Western Christianity this image of redemption as a victory in battle. Since the resurrection turned the crucifixion into a victory, Venantius Fortunatus represented the cross as a trophy erected on the site of the triumph. The *Exultet* or Easter Proclamation, which goes back at least to the seventh century, celebrates the two redemptive victories of light over darkness: in the crossing of the Red Sea and in the night of Christ's resurrection from the dead. The Easter sequence 'Victimae paschali laudes' (of the eleventh century) symbolically proclaims the same victorious deliverance in which life triumphed over death. The (sixth-century?) Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood* extols Christ as the heroic young champion who went into battle on the cross and saved humanity from the powers of evil.

Along with this language of victorious conflict, some Fathers extended the NT metaphor for salvation as 'buying back', 'redeeming', and 'setting free by paying a ransom' (e.g. 1 Cor. 6: 20; Gal. 3: 13; 4: 5; 1 Pet. 1: 18). From the third century we begin to hear of a ransom paid to the devil and even of 'the rights of the devil'. Thus Origen wrote of Christ's

<sup>9</sup> On Anselm and *Cur Deus homo* see G. R. Evans, *Anselm and Talking about God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 126–93; R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 77–121; id., *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> On various post-NT theologies of redemption, see B. Sesboué, *Jésus-Christ l'unique médiateur: essai sur la rédemption et le salut*, 2 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1988–91).

blood being the price paid to the devil who had held power over enslaved sinners (*In ep. ad Romanos*, 2. 13). This 'business' transaction turned into a fight in which the devil, expecting to receive the soul of Christ, was disappointed and defeated. Overcoming the power of death, Christ offered life to all those who wished to follow him (*In Matthaeum*, 16. 8). In the following century Gregory of Nyssa notoriously developed this language. Since human beings had voluntarily sold themselves into his hands, the devil was their legitimate owner. By concealing his divinity under the veil of humanity, Christ tricked the devil into 'swallowing the hook of divinity' along with the bait of flesh' and so losing both his 'rightful' ransom and his captives (*Oratio catechetica*, 21–4). Some Fathers like John Chrysostom (*Homiliae in Johannem*, 67. 2) and Augustine (*De Trinitate*, 13. 12. 16; 13. 13. 17; 13. 14. 18) qualified this theory of the devil's rights by adding that he had abused these rights in putting to death the innocent Christ. For his part, Gregory of Nazianzus vigorously contested the whole idea of divine redemption as a ransom paid to the devil (*Oratio*, 45. 22), but his protests failed to carry the day.

These two theories of redemption, whether kept distinct or merged, largely held the field prior to Anselm. To highlight Christ's victorious combat and/or ransom paid to the devil was to take very seriously both the powers of evil and what redemption cost Christ. These pre-Anselmian approaches also held together the crucifixion and resurrection in the paradox of this violent and atrocious death being the moment of victory. Repelled especially by talk of the rights of the devil, Anselm turned elsewhere to elaborate a more 'reasonable' version of salvation.

'Satisfaction', a non-biblical term drawn from Roman law and applied by Tertullian to penitential practice, took pride of place in Anselm's theology of redemption as developed in *Cur Deus homo* (1098). 'Every sin', he argued, 'must be followed either by satisfaction or by punishment' (1. 15). God does not wish to punish but to see the good project of creation 'completed' (2. 5). Satisfaction requires from human beings not only that they should stop sinning and seek pardon but also that they do something over and above existing obli-

gations, a work of supererogation. However, since all sin offends the honour of the infinite God, the reparation made must have infinite value—something of which finite human beings are incapable. Moreover, they have nothing extra to offer God, as they already owe God everything. Thus Anselm concludes to the 'necessity' of the incarnation. Only the *God-man* can offer something of infinite value; the hypostatic union confers such value on the human acts of Christ. Only the *God-man* has something to offer, being without sin, Christ is exempt from the need to undergo death and hence can freely offer the gift of his life as a work of reparation.

Although Anselm's context was primarily monastic, he aimed to present a rational case for the coherence and even 'necessity' of the incarnation to a non-Christian—in particular, a Jewish—audience. In doing so, he laid a fresh stress on the humanity and human freedom of Christ, who spontaneously acts as our representative and in no way is to be construed as a penal substitute who passively endured sufferings to appease the anger of a 'vindictive' God. Anselm's theory, for all its originality, puts him with those like Irenaeus, Basil of Caesarea, and Leo the Great who, as the previous chapter reported, understood redemption to be brought about *also* from within the human scene.

Anselm's theology of satisfaction has often been criticized for being juridical and Roman. In fact, its cultural roots were found rather in the feudal society of northern Europe. So far from being a legal and private matter, the 'honourable' service owed by vassals to their lords was a social factor that guaranteed order, peace, and freedom. Denying the honour due to lords meant chaos. Anselm's 'inculturation' of the theology of redemption was more vulnerable on other grounds: its non-biblical version of justice and sin. Rather than expressing God's fidelity to all creatures and, especially, to human beings, Anselm's commutative notion of justice seemed to picture God as so bound to an abstract order of things that it would be 'unthinkable' simply to grant forgiveness without requiring reparation. Likewise, instead of interpreting sin very clearly as an infidelity and disobedience which bring a break in personal relationship with a loving God, Anselm understood it more as an infinite dishonour that upset the

just order of things. Although elsewhere he richly recognized the role of God's merciful love, *Cur Deus homo* contained only a brief closing reference to the divine mercy. Other notable omissions in this theology of satisfaction included (1) the resurrection (with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that major patristic theme, the divinization of the redeemed), and (2) the full significance of Jesus' life and public ministry. For the scheme of satisfaction it was enough that the incarnation occurred and that Christ freely gave his life to make reparation for human sin. Anselm turned Christ's life into a mere prelude to death.

Despite his common ground with notable predecessors among the Greek Fathers over the essential role of Christ's human will in redemption, Anselm stands for a Western parting of the ways with Eastern theology. He opens the christological development which will take us through the medieval period to our own times.