

Christology in the Fourth Century

Khaled Anatolios

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Edited by Francesca Murphy

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Abstract and Keywords

Christology of the fourth century often drew a connection between the proclamation of Christ and the theme of divine goodness. The Christological apologetics of the fourth century defended the intelligibility of faith in a crucified Lord by narrating reality as a story of divine goodness, in which the original benevolent divine act of creation is consummated and superseded by the Incarnation and the salvific work of Christ. Trinitarian doctrine included conceptions of Christ's divinity as intrinsic to divine goodness and of his humanity as a manifestation of that goodness in the mode of self-emptying. The Apollinarian controversy clarified that Christ's salvific self-emptying consisted not merely in the divine mind directly ruling over human flesh, without the mediation of a human mind, but rather in a complete communion and solidarity between the divine Word and the entirety of the human being. All these aspects of Christological doctrine informed fourth-century preaching.

Keywords: Christology, apologetics, divine goodness, Trinity, divine Word, preaching

WITH Galerius' Edict of Toleration in 311, followed by Constantine's and Licinius' Edict of Milan in 313, Christians began a migration from the margins towards the center of political and social life in the Roman Empire. At the same time, the Church of the fourth century was racked by internal divisions caused by tumultuous doctrinal debates that struck at the heart of its identity as a community dedicated to the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. Modern scholars often characterize these disputes as 'Trinitarian' inasmuch as they were concerned with divergent assessments of Christ's divinity as it related to the Father and the Spirit. A narrative of the development of Christian doctrine is then constructed which tells how Christ's divinity was controverted in the fourth century and, once that was more or less settled through the triumph of the Nicene *ὁμοούσιος*, questions about Christ's humanity and the relation between his humanity and divinity were then taken up in the Christological debates of the fifth century. Although it is true that the boundaries between the debated doctrinal positions in the fourth century are typically drawn by pointing to distinct standpoints regarding Christ's divinity, the underlying logic of these

positions included assessments of Christ's humanity and its relation to divinity. Moreover, both with regard to particular questions about the divine-human identity of Jesus Christ and more general questions of the intelligibility and plausibility of Christian faith, fourth-century Christians were often preoccupied with how the humanity and divinity of the crucified and risen Lord were to be conceived in light of the Christian proclamation of the unfathomable and endlessly surprising mystery of divine goodness. This chapter will present the legacy of fourth-century Christology in terms of an accumulating vision of Jesus Christ as the ultimate revelation and enactment of divine goodness. I present some fundamental elements of the fourth-century construction of this Christological vision: (1) Christological apologetics in the fourth century; (2) the Nicene-'Arian' debates about the status of Christ's divinity; (3) the Apollinarian controversy about Christ's human soul; and (4) Christological proclamation in fourth-century preaching.

(p. 106)

Christological Apologetics

One way Christians reacted to their enhanced social and political status after the Constantinian settlement was by attempting to communicate to their fellow citizens the intelligibility of Christian faith. In an earlier epoch, Christian apologists had to deal with objections that Christians were atheists, since they rejected the prevailing syncretistic religious culture; or that they practiced immorality and violence in their cultic rituals; or were not good citizens. But the official imperial endorsement of Christianity and the consequent public visibility of Christians rendered such objections and suspicions largely obsolete. Nevertheless, accusations of the sheer irrationality and unintelligibility of Christian claims persisted well after political and social critique had subsided. Some of the important treatments of Christology in the fourth century are constructed in terms of this apologetic concern. Athanasius' classic *On the Incarnation* declares its intention to counter the objection that Christian faith is 'irrational' (ἄλογον) because it proclaims as Lord a man who was crucified and died. Eusebius of Caesarea, in his *Proof of the Gospel*, sets himself against 'the mob of slanderers flooding us with the accusation that we are unable logically to present a clear demonstration of the truth we hold ... [T]hey say that we only teach our followers like irrational animals to shut their eyes and staunchly obey what we say without examining it at all, and call them therefore "the faithful" because of their faith as distinct from reason' (*Proof* 1.10; Ferrar 1920: 6). Towards the end of the century, Gregory of Nyssa's *Catechetical Orations* is offered as a guide for Christian catechists to enable them to respond to 'those who are searching for the rational basis of our religion' (*Cat. Or.* 15; Hardy 1954: 291).

These apologetic treatises of the fourth century employed strategies inherited from earlier eras, such as the argument from Old Testament prophecies and retaliatory denunciations of Greek mythology and idolatry. But the most distinctive feature of fourth-century Christian apologetics is an effort to present the reasonability of Christian faith in terms of the efficacy of the Christological proclamation to generate a coherent and compelling view of reality as a whole. This strategy is displayed in two works of the fourth century: Athanasius' *On the Incarnation* (c.328–5) and Gregory of Nyssa's *Catechetical Orations*

(composed in the early 380s). In both treatises, the intelligibility of confessing an incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord is seen to reside in the logic of a consistent narrative of divine goodness, which is manifest in God's special love for humanity, φιλανθρωπία. The Christian newness of the doctrine of the Incarnation is rendered intelligible by being presented as a maximal confirmation and dramatization of the more universally accepted principle of the generosity of divine goodness, such as we find in Plato's *Timaeus* (*Tim* 29e). However, the distinctly Christian narrative of divine goodness begins with a doctrine of creation in which the world was not simply always there, even just as formless matter, but rather was brought into being from nothing through the sovereign will of an omnipotent and benevolent God. God intentionally (p. 107) brings about what previously did not exist in order that 'light may not remain unseen or glory unwitnessed, or goodness unenjoyed, or that any other aspect we observe of the divine nature should lie idle with no one to share or enjoy it' (Gregory of Nyssa, *Cat. Or.* 5; Hardy 1954: 276).

Such an articulation of the logic of creation as based on the divine will to self-communication prepares the way for presenting the Incarnation as an intensification of the very same logic. This point is rhetorically reinforced by Athanasius when he transfers the language of divine compassion associated with God's redemptive work to the divine work of creation. God's act of creation is already a merciful condescension (*Inc.* 3). Athanasius presents human sinfulness as an obstacle not only to human flourishing but also to the divine goodness itself: 'It was not worthy of the goodness of God that those created by him should be corrupted ... The weakness, rather than the goodness of God, is made known by neglect, if, after creating, he abandoned his own work to be corrupted' (*Inc.* 6; Behr 2011: 63). In the face of pervasive human evil, the Incarnation and redemptive work of Christ are presented as consistent with the logic of God's benevolence in the act of creation and as manifesting the higher logic of the perseverance of divine generosity in the face of human sinfulness. Divine transcendence, goodness, and power must be newly conceived in terms of this higher logic: 'God's transcendent power is not so much displayed in the vastness of the heavens ... as in his condescension to our weak nature' (Gregory of Nyssa, *Cat. Or.* 24; Hardy 1954: 301).

The intelligibility of the Incarnation is thus presented as exemplifying the invincible goodness of the divine nature, which was already manifest in the act of creation but has been even more lavishly displayed in the work of redemption. At the same time, the proclamation of the God-human was made more plausible by being correlated with a theological anthropology which emphasizes that the radical structure and content of the human being lies precisely in its intrinsic likeness to God, its status as *imago Dei*. Gregory of Nyssa understands the *imago Dei* precisely as the capacity to participate in divine goodness (*Cat. Or.* 5; SC 453, 164) and uses the common terminology of 'mingling' (κρᾶσις) to describe the synthesis of material and spiritual elements in the human constitution as well as the union of human and divine in Christ. This terminological overlap emphasizes the point that the material-spiritual mingling that is constitutive of human nature also constitutes its intrinsic readiness for the Christological mingling of human and divine that will be its fulfillment.

Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa thus present the intelligibility of the Incarnation in terms of its consistency with both divine goodness and the intrinsic human disposition to share in that goodness. The Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ thus realize the triumph of the self-communication of divine goodness, even in the face of human evil. In response to the persisting objection that such a unity of divinity and humanity compromises the integrity of divine impassibility, both employ a conception of the relation between God and creation that echoes the Stoic cosmological framework, namely that the divine active principle of *logos* pervades the passivity of matter. Transposed into a Christological key, this notion is used to explain that just as God is active and humanity receptive in divine-human interactions in (p. 108) general, so also in the unity of divinity and humanity in Christ. The result of this dialectic is a transformative relation between the human and the divine such that the human is assimilated to the divine without the divine being compromised by the human. In Christ, God transformatively appropriates to himself human weaknesses, to the point of death, but this brings about not the diminishment of God but the death of death itself, resurrection and deification.

This Christological narrative of the triumph of divine goodness in the face of human limitations and evil, which both Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa offer as part of a defense of the intelligibility of Christian faith, was nevertheless not ready-made for the use of fourth-century theologians. It was constructed not only in the midst of struggles with non-Christians, but also among Christians themselves, regarding the way in which this narrative of divine philanthropy relates to the questions of the identity of Jesus Christ, his divinity and humanity, and the relation between the two. Throughout the fourth-century debates about the status of Jesus' divinity, all sides considered the point at issue to be not merely some esoteric speculations describing the divine being, but rather the Christian vision of reality itself. That Jesus Christ, in his divinity and representative humanity, enabled humanity's access to divine goodness was at the center of this vision.

The Nicene-'Arian' Controversy

The fourth-century Church was dominated by the doctrinal debates that erupted in Egypt, around 320, between Alexander, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and Arius, an Egyptian presbyter, and only began to arrive at a definitive resolution at the Council of Constantinople of 381. A synoptic view of these debates can be gained by identifying the central agitating issue as that of reconciling an intensified sense of God's absolute primacy, as uncaused and unoriginated (ἀγέν(ν)ητος), with the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. The intensified emphasis on God's transcendence as 'uncaused' was partly a reaction to Origen's speculation that God's eternal almightiness necessitated that there always be a creation over which God is almighty through his Word (*First Principles* 1.2.10). This Origenian hypothesis seemed to be a regression to a Hellenistic worldview in which the world itself always existed and was unoriginated (cf. Aristotle, *de caelo* 1.3.270b). By the beginning of the fourth century, there was a general consensus among Christians that God alone is uncaused, while creation was brought into being from non-existence as an effect of his sovereign will. For some, it was merely tautological to say that God alone is uncaused and to

say that being uncaused was in fact what it meant to be God. The problem then became how to reconcile this Christian reassertion of the sovereignty of the uniquely self-existent and uncaused God with the proclamation that Jesus Christ is Lord, despite the scriptural attestations that Christ was both a human creature and originated from the Father as his only-begotten Son (cf. John 1:14).

(p. 109) Assessments of Christ's Divinity

Throughout the tumultuous interplay of various factions, alliances, and competing Church councils that pervaded the fourth-century debates, two main approaches could be discerned to the problematic posed above. One approach, exemplified by a trajectory of thinkers including Arius, Asterius, and Eunomius, was based on the premise that the primary criterion of absolute divinity was precisely God's self-existence as uncaused and unoriginated (ἀγέν(υ)ητος). In this schema, Christ's lordship and divinity were conceded and designated by such scriptural titles as Word, Wisdom, and Power of God. But these titles were interpreted as indicating a lower level of divinity than the one absolutely transcendent and unoriginated God. If even in his divinity, this Word and Wisdom was caused—inasmuch as he was 'begotten'—then he is in the last analysis a creature. Moreover, to say that he was altogether caused was to say that he came into existence from non-being, like all other creatures, through the sovereign will of the one uncaused God. In Arius' infamous slogan, 'there was once when the Son was not'. Nevertheless, he was unique as the first and highest creature, who was created to be the obedient instrument of all of God's subsequent creative activity. His unity with the God he called 'Father' is therefore a unity of will and activity, not a unity of substance. Christ's creaturely divinity nevertheless represented the ideal and unsurpassable mode of relation between creation and the sovereign God, which is epitomized by his perfect obedience: 'obedient with regard to the ordering and creation of all existing things, obedient with regard to all governance ..., obedient in his words, mediator in doctrine, mediator in law ... He became obedient unto the cross and unto death' (Eunomius, *Confession of Faith*; Vaggione 1987: 155).

In this account of Christ's divinity, his being is not identifiable with absolute divine goodness. Expounding Jesus' rejoinder to the rich young man, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone' (Luke 18:19), Eunomius asserts that it is only the Uncaused God who is properly good, 'the cause of his own goodness and of all goodness' (Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 3.9.1; GNO II, 264). For Eunomius, it is necessary to acknowledge the Son's ontological inferiority so that we may not acquiesce in his created divinity but employ it as a vantage point from which to give glory to the only uncaused God. Indeed, the Son represents divine goodness precisely because he was brought into being as a benevolent mitigation of divine transcendence which is necessary for mediating between the only uncaused God and creation. As Asterius put it, apart from this attenuation, creation could 'not withstand the immediate hand of God' (Fragment 26; Vinzent 1993). Eusebius of Caesarea explains that since created things were not capable of approaching God, the Father's philanthropy established his only-begotten Son and entrusted him with the constitution and governance of the universe (*Ecclesiastical Theology* 1.13). This interpretation of Christ's mediatorial divinity thus reinforces a view of divine transcendence in

which the highest level of divinity is conceived in terms of otherness with respect to creation, while Christ represents the activity of divine goodness in bringing about a mediatorial being between the one uncaused God and the rest of creation.

(p. 110) If one option in the assessment of Christ's divinity in the fourth century was to qualify that divinity by reference to the standard of being-uncaused as the marker of absolute divine transcendence, the alternative trajectory redefined divine transcendence by the standard of Christ's relation to the Father. Eventually, as discussion extended to the status of the Spirit, the eternal relations between Father, Son, and Spirit were conceived as intrinsic to and constitutive of divine being (Gregory Nazianzus, *Or.* 31.9). In this account, divine goodness was fully shared within the Father-Son relation, and the content of divine goodness and love consisted in the Father's perfect sharing of his own being with the Son. Hilary of Poitiers puts it thus: 'God does not know how to be ever anything else than love, nor to be anything else than Father. He who loves does not envy and he who is a father is at the same time wholly a father ... Hence, in so far as He is the Father, He must be the whole Father of all His own attributes which are in the one whom He has begotten from Himself, while the perfect birth of the Son, with all of these attributes, completes Him as the Father' (*Trin.* 9.61; McKenna 1954: 383-4). The Son's 'perfect birth' from the Father means that he is not just the product or mediator of the Father's goodness but a full sharer in that goodness. Gregory of Nyssa describes Christ as 'the fullness of all good' (*Against Eunomius* 3.6.7; GNO II, 188), 'equal in every conception of existent or conceivable good to the majesty of the Father's goodness' (*Against Eunomius* 1.339; GNO 1, 127). The same is true of the Holy Spirit: 'Everyone knows that the person of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit do not lack anything of perfect goodness, perfect power, and every such quality' (*Against Eunomius* 1.167; GNO 1, 77).

This is the trajectory represented by the Council of Nicaea of 325, which declared the Son to be 'one in being' (ὁμοούσιος) with the Father. A few decades later, in response to the teachings of Marcellus and Photinus that the Father and Son are ultimately identical and without distinction in the eternity of divine being, Basil of Caesarea proposed the terminological distinction between the common being of Father, Son, and Spirit as sharing the same essence (οὐσία) and the particular mode of being by which each of them shared in the single essence as distinct 'persons' (ὕποστάσεις). Thus, the Son shared all the perfections of the Father in the distinct particularity of his receiving them from the Father as only-begotten Son. With this distinction in place, the Council of Constantinople reaffirmed the Nicene ὁμοούσιος, which was now taken to mean that the Son was both eternally distinct from the Father in his personal particularity and yet fully and equally shared in the being of the Father.

The Divinity and Humanity of Christ in Trinitarian Debate

The fourth-century debates about the proper way to speak about Christ's divinity were always bound to different conceptions of just how this divinity was related to and disclosed by the humanity. From that point of view, the two trajectories outlined above can be distinguished in terms of whether they conceived the relation between Christ's divinity and

humanity within a continuum of Christ's mediatorial function or, more (p. 111) dramatically, in terms of the humanity bringing about a kenotic reversal of divine attributes even while paradoxically maintaining these divine attributes. These distinct Christological options also projected two different conceptions of how Christ's humanity and divinity manifested divine goodness.

Christologies which attributed to Christ an inferior divinity argued to this conclusion partly on the basis of his human limitations. At the beginning of the controversy, Alexander identifies this style of reasoning on the part of Arius and his followers: 'Recalling all the words about the salvific suffering, humiliation, self-emptying, "poverty", and other attributes that the Savior took on for our sake, they pile these up to impugn the supreme deity that was his from the start' (Optiz, 1936: *Urk* 14.37). These Christologies tended to posit continuity between his humanity and divinity, as both encompassed within his primordial function of mediating between creation and the utterly transcendent and uncaused God. Indeed, in some cases, not only is Jesus' divinity reduced so as to approximate his humanity, but his humanity is elevated so as to approach the status of his mediatorial divinity. In Eusebius of Caesarea's Christology, for example, we encounter in Christ's divinity both a mitigated transcendence and also a mitigated humanity, inasmuch as Jesus is conceived as lacking a human soul (*Ecclesiastical Theology* 1.20). In these Christologies of continuity, the unity of Christ is easily ascertained, while the soteriological function of Christ 'for us' (*pro nobis*) is applied to the very origin of his being. From the perspective of Nicene theologies, the fatal flaw of such Christologies of continuity was that they separated the divinity and humanity of Christ from the putatively superior divinity of the uncaused God. Moreover, they seemed to make the very being of Christ, even in his divinity, a means to human flourishing, in contrast to the scriptural teaching that not only were all things made through Christ but for him (cf. Col. 1:16). Finally, the most potent and visceral accusation leveled against such a Christology by its opponents was that it made the Christian worship of Christ into idolatry, worship directed to a being who is other than the one true God.

On the other hand, theologies which asserted the full and equal divinity of the Son interpreted Christ's humanity not as part of a continuum that includes his creaturely and attenuated divinity but rather as a dramatic act of divine self-emptying. In this perspective, the disclosure of the shared divinity of the Father and Son through Christ's kenotic humanity had a paradoxical logic. On the one hand, the limitations of this humanity constituted a certain negation or abandonment of divine perfections with respect to the assumed humanity: the Immortal became mortal, the one who was in the form of God took on the form of a servant (cf. Phil. 2). On the other hand, this self-emptying was consistent with the divine goodness and love for humanity that characterized the shared divine nature of both Father and Son. For these Christologies of reversal, the activity of divine goodness is manifest not in the ontologically middle status of the Son but rather in the activity of his self-humbling and suffering. So, against Eunomius' insistence that only the uncaused God is good, Gregory of Nyssa points to Christ's self-emptying as the decisive sign of his divine goodness: 'What more bitter malice can one find than to deny that he is good who "being in the form of God did not regard equality with God (p. 112) as some-

thing to be exploited" (Phil. 2:6) but lowered himself to the abasement of the human nature and did so only for the love of humanity?' (*Against Eunomius* 3.9:8; GNO II, 266).

One of the strongest criticisms leveled against these Christologies of kenotic reversal was that they effectively posited 'two Christs', one who was no less transcendent and impassible than the Father, and another who was the subject of human limitations and suffering. The labors of Nicene theologies in rebutting this charge required balancing the differentiation between Christ's humanity and divinity with the assertion of a single subject of both. The fruits of these labors set the stage for the Christological formulas of the later Christological councils, and may arguably be seen to anticipate the logic, if not the terminological precision, of these formulas. We may profitably analyze this logic as it was constructed in relation to three important Christological issues: (1) the Christological shape of Scripture; (2) Christ's relation to the Spirit; and (3) the suffering of Christ.

The Christological Shape of Scripture

Anti-Nicene theologies referred to the human limitations of Christ as evidence of his inferior divinity. They also capitalized on any language that designated Christ's exalted status as 'received', and took special advantage of the description of Wisdom in Prov. 8:22 as 'created' ('The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways, for his works', LXX). In general, this exegetical procedure attributed all scriptural language understood to be referring to either the Incarnate or pre-existent Christ as indifferently applicable to and expressive of the mediatorial being of the created Word and Son. Nicene theologies, however, insisted that the Scriptures posited two distinct dramatic stages in the career of the Word, which had to be properly differentiated in order to be correctly applied to the Word who became Incarnate. This two-act Christological metanarrative of Scripture was seen to be presented in condensed form in Scripture itself, as in the double affirmation in John 1 that the Word was with God in the beginning and that the Word became flesh or in the Philippians hymn that speaks of the transition from the form of God to the form of a servant. When these condensed summaries of the Christological narrative are applied to Scripture as a whole, they yield, in Athanasius' words, 'a double account of the Savior' (*Orations* 3.29; *AW I.I/3*, 340). The recognition of this double account discloses the necessity for correctly assigning any Christological predication to one or other of these acts in the Christological drama, whether to the pre-existent divinity or to the Incarnate state. This yields the basic Christological rule of interpreting Scripture, which Gregory of Nazianzus articulates thus: 'Apply what is more elevated to the divinity, the nature that is superior to passivities and corporeality, and what is more abased to the composite one who for your sake emptied himself and became enfleshed ... and then was exalted' (*Oration* 29.18). Thus, the distinction between Christ's divinity and humanity is seen to be inscribed in the first place in the Christological narrative of Scripture, while there is one subject who is posited as the protagonist of this two-act (p. 113) drama. Moreover, both acts of this drama are disclosive of the goodness of God: the exalted correlativity of Father and Son discloses that goodness as an intra-divine generosity whereby the Father

shares his being fully with the Son, while the humiliation of the Son manifests that goodness as love for humanity, φιλανθρωπία.

Christ and the Spirit

Non-Nicene theologies typically designated the Spirit as created by the Son and third in the ontological hierarchy that begins with the uncaused God. At the same time, scriptural language about Christ's being 'anointed' (cf. Ps. 45:7: 'Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions', NRSV) or 'sanctified' was used as evidence that the divinity of Christ was something he acquired, rather than being connatural to him. In dealing with such texts, defenders of Nicene theology applied the Christological hermeneutic outlined above with reference to Christ's relation to the Spirit. The result is a 'Spirit Christology' in which Christ's giving of the Spirit is assigned to his divinity, while his reception or being anointed by the Spirit is assigned to his humanity. The salvific import of this transaction is that humanity now has the capacity to receive the fullness of the Spirit by being incorporated into Christ's humanity. The fact that it is the same one who both gives and receives the Spirit guarantees that humanity's reception of the Spirit will be indefectible for those who are in Christ:

Just as the apostle's words indicate that we would not have been freed and 'highly exalted' if it were not that 'he who is in the form of God took the form of a servant,' (Phil. 2:6, 7) so also David shows that in no other way would we have partaken of the Spirit and been sanctified if it were not that the Giver of the Spirit, the Word himself, spoke of himself as anointed by the Spirit for our sakes. Therefore we have received securely in that he is said to be anointed in the flesh.

(Or. 1:50; Anatolios 2004: 108)

The Suffering of Christ

The complex ways in which estimations of Christ's divinity were bound up with interpretations of his humanity are manifest with particular intensity in different understandings of how Christ's suffering discloses both his divinity and humanity, as well as the relation between them. This complexity is manifest in the polemical exchanges between Eunomius and the Cappadocian brothers, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, which involved reciprocal accusations that each side was ashamed of the Cross. On this occasion, the question of how the crucifixion of Christ was related to his divinity was contested in reference to Acts 2:36: 'God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified' (NRSV). A significant element in the logic of (p. 114) theologies that attributed a reduced divinity to the preexistent Christ was the principle that susceptibility to suffering and death could not be ascribed to the highest level of divinity. Theologies that affirmed that the Son's divinity is equal to the Father dealt with the problematic of Christ's suffering by attributing it to the *kenotic* condition of his humanity, while maintaining that, in his divinity, the Son fully enjoyed an unmitigated divine impassibility. It was in reaction to this logic that Eunomius accused Basil of being ashamed of the Cross inasmuch as he did

not allow the suffering of the Cross to be attributed to Christ's divinity. Eunomius challenged the whole logic of a differentiation of divine and human attributions as inconsistent with the notion of Christological *kenosis*. According to Eunomius, ascribing Christ's human limitations and sufferings exclusively to the humanity makes the humanity of Christ both the subject and the object of the self-emptying, as if it was the humanity that emptied itself to be human (Nyssen, *Against Eunomius* 3.3.26; GNO II, 117).

In clarifying his own position on the interpretation of Acts 2:36, Gregory of Nyssa is forced by this polemical exchange to balance the differentiation of the humanity and divinity, on the one side, with the attribution of both to a single subject, on the other. Gregory's subsequent exposition of this exegetical approach is comprised of three main elements. First, the divinity and humanity are clearly differentiated, principally along the lines of an active/passive distinction. In this regard, Gregory explains that 'our contemplation of the respective properties of the flesh and the divinity remains unconfused (ἀσύγχυτος) as long as each is contemplated in itself ... The flesh is of a passible nature (παθητικῆς ἐστὶ φύσεως), while the Word is active (ἐνεργητικῆς δὲ ὁ λόγος). The flesh is not the Creator of existent things nor is the power of the divinity passive' (*Against Eunomius* 3.3.64; GNO II, 130). While this principle of differentiation serves to protect the impassibility and thus genuine divinity of the Incarnate Word, it is also vulnerable to the accusation that the supporters of Nicaea teach a doctrine of 'two Christs'. The second element of Gregory's treatment of Christ's suffering responds to that charge by reasserting the unity of Christ by recourse to the principle of the sharing of properties: 'the Master takes to himself the bruising of the servant while the servant is glorified with the honor of the Master' (*Against Eunomius* 3.3.66; GNO II, 131). In order to see why this principle of the communication of properties does not annul the distinction of natures, we have to keep in mind Gregory's active/passive distinction. There is an asymmetrical dynamism to the contact and 'mingling' between Christ's divinity and humanity, such that the divinity remains operative and transformative in this contact while the humanity is receptive and transformed unto deification. The third element of Gregory's treatment of Christ's suffering is to posit a single subject of this dynamic exchange of divine and human properties. Thus, the references to the crucifixion and the lordship of Christ in Acts 2:36 are described as two states (δύο πράγματα) that nevertheless belong to one person (ἐν πρόσωπον) (*Against Eunomius* 3.3.42; GNO II, 122). The Word Incarnate is the same one (ὁ αὐτός) as the eternal Word even if the humanity that he actively assumes and deifies is other than the humanity that receives the transformative power of his divinity (*Against Eunomius* 3.3.62; GNO II, 130).

(p. 115) The Apollinarian Controversy

Gregory of Nyssa's analysis of the suffering of Christ was part of his effort to argue for the full divinity of the Son despite Christ's human sufferings, without positing 'two Christs'. The Nicene vulnerability to the accusation of teaching 'two Christs' was central to the problematic of the second main controversy that animated the development of Christological doctrine in the fourth century, that surrounding the teaching of Apollinaris

of Laodicea (c.315–92). Apollinaris was a staunch supporter of Nicene Trinitarian theology whose sensitivity to the possible distortions of that theology was awakened especially by the teaching of another supporter of Nicaea, Marcellus of Ancyra. Marcellus interpreted the Nicene teaching on the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son as meaning that there was ultimately no distinction between Father and Son in God's internal and eternal being. For Marcellus, the primary name to designate the divinity of Christ was Word (λόγος) and this Word was eternally immanent in God until it was extrapolated and made subsistent in view of the act of creation. Once Christ's salvific work is completed, the Word will be retracted back into the eternal divine singularity. Marcellus read this doctrine into Paul's remark that Christ in the end will hand over his kingship to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Marcellus' teaching was condemned by various Church councils, stretching from 336 to the Council of Constantinople. The confession in the Constantinopolitan Creed that Christ's kingdom will not end is directed against this Marcellan teaching. Marcellus' approach confirmed some of the worst fears of those suspicious of Nicaea. Not only did he seem to be teaching a kind of modalism, but his emphatic assertion of divine singularity did not allow him to find any place for Christ's humanity in the eschatological retraction of the Word into the divine oneness. Marcellus admitted that he simply did not know what would become of Christ's humanity once the economy of salvation is consummated. His Trinitarian modalism thus led directly to an emphasis on the difference and separation between the eternal Word and Christ's economic identity. The accusation of 'two Christs' seemed entirely warranted in the case of the modalist pro-Nicene theology of Marcellus.

In reaction to Marcellus, as well as to other pro-Nicenes who seemed content with a divisive Christology, such as the Antiochian, Diodore of Tarsus, Apollinaris was intent on shoring up the unitive dimension of Nicene Christology. His drastic strategy for accomplishing this goal was to insist that the Word took the place of the human mind of Christ. Nevertheless, Apollinaris anticipated Chalcedonian language by speaking of Jesus Christ as ὁμοούσιος with both God and humanity (*On the Union in Christ* 8; Leitzmann 1904: 188). His consubstantiality with humanity resides in his assumption of human flesh, which was perfectly obedient to the divine Word. Just as a human being is composed of flesh and spirit, so is Christ, even if in his case, the spiritual or intellectual component is the divinity itself (*Fragment* 89; Leitzmann 1904: 227)! But, contrary to the later Chalcedonian formula, for Apollinaris the double consubstantiality of Jesus (p. 116) Christ with humanity and God does not result in two substances but in a single essence (οὐσία), composed of the combination of divine mind and human flesh (*Fragment* 117; Leitzmann 1904: 236).

Three main motives impelled Apollinaris to this conclusion. First, he was concerned about the integrity of Christian worship directed to Christ, which must have only one object (*Fragment* 9; Leitzmann 1904: 206–7). Second, for Apollinaris the reliability of human salvation required that the immutable divinity be solely in charge of the work of human salvation and not share that responsibility with a changeable humanity. This element of Apollinaris' reasoning seems to invoke the active/passive distinction that we have encountered previously. According to this reasoning, the human mind is structurally active with

respect to the passibility of the body. Inasmuch as human sanctification and deification comes about through the divinity actively transforming the passive humanity, this transformation can only be secured if the active principle that governs this process is the immutable divinity and not a changeable humanity (*Fragment 76*; Leitzmann 1904: 222). A third motivation for Apollinaris' position is also explicable in terms of the active/passive distinction. Apollinaris argues that the supposition that Christ did have a human mind would actually result in the destruction of human freedom and thus of human nature (*Fragment 87*; Leitzmann 1904: 226). That is because the combination of the two active principles of divine and human intellects would naturally result in the divine active principle overruling the activity of the human principle and extinguishing self-rule. However, in Apollinaris' understanding, the supposition that the divine mind replaces the human soul succeeds in retaining the natural dynamism of the immanent interaction of activity and passivity in the human being. The passible flesh is perfected in its passivity through Eucharistic communion with Christ's flesh, while the active human intellect retains its self-standing integrity and achieves perfect governance over the flesh by freely assimilating itself to Christ (*Fragment 74*; Leitzmann 1904: 222).

With regard to the development of Christian doctrine, the significance of Apollinaris' Christology arguably lies not so much in its intrinsic contents as in the reactions it generated. It was articulated in the midst of a polemical confrontation with Diodore of Tarsus that sounded the opening salvoes in the antagonism between 'Alexandrian' and 'Antiochian' Christologies. Diodore rejected Apollinaris' model of the divinity and humanity constituting a single essence and spoke rather of the indwelling of the humanity by the divine Word. The union between the two was one of grace and honor, rather than nature, and it was on the basis of this association by grace that Christ was to be worshiped, rather than on a unity of essence between his divinity and humanity. Despite some modern anachronistic interpretations, Diodore's principal concern was not to safeguard the full humanity of Christ but rather to avoid making Christ's divinity itself the subject of the limitations and passibilities of the humanity. Diodore's polemic against Apollinaris was taken up by his student, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and later by Nestorius, thus generating an Antiochian anti-Alexandrian style of Christological reasoning. Although later Alexandrians disowned Apollinaris' teaching on the lack of a human soul in Christ, Cyril's insistence that the Word was the subject of human (p. 117) predications in Christ would call forth a similar critique by later Antiochians as was directed by Diodore against Apollinaris.

A different approach to refuting Apollinaris, one that would have a more formative legacy in the later tradition, was generated by the Cappadocians Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. The Cappadocian response could accommodate the full humanity of Christ without diluting the affirmation of a single ontological subject. Gregory of Nazianzus' *Epistle 101*, composed in the early 380s, is a model of this approach. After the customary expressions of shock and dismay at Apollinaris' 'innovation', Gregory puts forth a synthetic Christological confession that posits a single subject of a twofold dramatic plot in which the first act belongs to the eternity of his divinity and the second describes his self-humbling on humanity's behalf:

We do not separate the human being from the divinity, but we confess as dogma one and the same, who before was God and not human, the only Son before all ages, unmingled with body or anything bodily; but who at the consummation of the ages has assumed humanity for our salvation, passible in his flesh, impassible in his divinity; circumscribed in the body, uncircumscribed in the Spirit. The same one is earthly and heavenly ... so that by one and the same, who was a complete human being and also God, the entire humanity that had fallen through sin might be refashioned.

(*Epistle* 101.13–15; SC 208)

Gregory could be seen to be reaching for a way to apply the developing precision of Trinitarian formulation to the description of Christ. He explains that the latter case is the reverse of the former; in the Trinity, there are three ‘he’s’ (ἄλλος καὶ ἄλλος) but only one ‘it’, whereas in Christ, there are different ‘it’s’ (ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο) but only one ‘he’. Gregory explicitly designates the two ‘it’s’ of Christ as two natures (φύσεις δύο; *Epistle* 101.19; SC 208), though he insists that this does not amount to ‘two sons’. He uses the analogy of the unity of soul and body, which was to become prominent in later Christological debates, to insist on the ‘unity and identity’ of Christ. Against the objection that positing a complete humanity as well as a complete divinity in Christ would inevitably lead to two juxtaposed wholes, Gregory seems to transpose Apollinaris’ active/passive framework in a way that both affirms a human active principle and renders it receptive to divine activity. He explains: ‘So our mind is complete and a governing principle, but only in relation to soul and body; not complete in an absolute way; rather it is a servant of God and subject to God’ (*Epistle* 101.43; SC 208). In this way, Gregory manages to uphold Christ’s complete humanity while enfolding that humanity within a dynamic unity in which it is subservient to the divinity. But the most historically significant element in Gregory’s response to Apollinaris is his famous articulation of the fundamental principle that binds together Christology and soteriology: ‘What is not assumed is not healed’ (*Epistle* 101.32; SC 208). Stated positively, this principle stipulates that the unity of Christ, whose motive and goal is human salvation, is to be conceived as the union of the entirety of human being with the divine: ‘Keep the whole humanity and mingle it with God so that you may benefit me completely’ (*Epistle* 101.36; SC 208).

(p. 118) Christ Proclaimed: Preaching Christ in the Fourth Century

Modern students of ancient Christianity are often puzzled by the passion with which ordinary people of that time seem to have engaged the sophisticated doctrinal debates that pervaded the fourth century. Surely, a good part of the explanation for the popular participation in these debates must be that their import was communicated through skillful preaching. A brief overview of an exemplary instance of such preaching can be gained from a homily commemorating the birth of Christ, delivered by Gregory of Nazianzus, around 380. The central motifs of this homily can provide a summary of some of the main

elements of fourth-century Christology, as well as demonstrate how the concrete significance of these doctrinal elements was communicated to ordinary Christians.

Gregory begins by exhorting his congregation to Christological joy. This joy consists in being caught up in the exaltation that results from Christ's loving condescension: 'Christ is born—give praise! Christ comes from heaven—rise up to meet him! Christ is on the earth—be lifted up' (Daley 2006: 117). This distinctly Christian joy is to be differentiated from pagan frivolity; it is properly celebrated not by carousing and dissipation but by recounting the Christian story of reality which finds its principle and climax in the mystery of Christ: 'As for us who worship the Word, if we must live luxuriously, let us luxuriate in the word, and in the law and in the narratives of God' (Daley 2006: 119). The author of this story is God, identified as Trinity, a conception of God as dynamic and self-contemplating Goodness which is to be distinguished from that held by those who are 'stingy with divinity' and admit only divine singularity. The latter are explicitly identified as the Jews, but his listeners are surely meant to associate this stinginess with Christian anti-Nicenes as well. The Triune Goodness communicates itself in creation because 'the Good needs to be poured out ... that there might be more beings to receive its benefits' (Daley 2006: 121). The summit of God's goodness, however, is manifest especially in the creation of the human being as a 'mixed' worshiper, constituted of both matter and spirit, and innately oriented towards deification. In response to human sinfulness, God's generosity was not diminished but rather stretched to the unfathomable point of the Incarnation. Gregory's account of the Incarnation pointedly contains an anti-Apollinarian thrust: the Word 'came to his own proper image and bore flesh for the sake of flesh, and mingled with a rational soul for my soul's sake, wholly cleansing like by like' (Daley 2006: 123). 'O new mixture! O unexpected blending!' sings Gregory (Daley 2006: 123), yet he has deftly prepared us precisely to expect this blending by depicting humanity itself as originally constituted by a similar blending. Nevertheless, it is the divine self-humbling in the Christological economy that is a higher manifestation of divine goodness than the original act of creation: 'How rich is his goodness? ... He establishes a second communication, far more amazing than the first: just as then he gave us a share in what was better, so now he takes on a share of what is worse. This is (p. 119) more godlike than the first gift' (Daley 2006: 124). Gregory concludes his homily with a doxology that is the rhetorical climax of an exhortation to appropriate Christ's union with humanity through concrete imitation:

Walk uncomplainingly through all the ages and miracles of Christ, as Christ's disciple. Be purified, be circumcised ... And in the end, be crucified with him, die with him, be buried eagerly with him, so that you may also rise with him and be glorified with him and reign with him, seeing God, so far as that is attainable, and being seen by him: the one who is worshipped and glorified in a Trinity, who we pray might be revealed to us even now ... in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power for the ages of ages. Amen.

(Daley 2006: 127)

Christology in the Fourth Century

The Christian narrative of God's self-communicating goodness in Christ, proclaimed homiletically by Gregory, was what was fundamentally at stake both in the apologetic self-presentation of Christians in the fourth century and throughout the doctrinal debates of that period.

Suggested Reading

Anatolios (2011); Grillmeier (1965/75); Young and Teal (2010).

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Khaled Anatolios

Khaled Anatolios received his doctorate from Boston College in 1996. He is Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame and the author of *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (2011), *Athanasius* (2004), and *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought* (1998).