

Investigating Modern Miaphysitism

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Abstract

Contemporary œcumenical dialogues between the Oriental Orthodox Churches (OOC) on the one hand and the Chalcedonian and East Syriac Churches on the other have not proven fruitful.

This paper will explore why this has happened — thinking especially of the long tendency for the Chalcedonian theologians to misunderstand both the theology and Church relations within Oriental Orthodoxy.

There is often an assumption that the OOC must have a similar Christology to the Chalcedonians but that there is a confusion over terminology and language. Therefore, the deep theological framework of the OOC is not appreciated. There is a common failure to grasp the genuinely different approach to Christology within the OOC.

There is also a failure to understand the genuine diversity with hard-won unity within the OOC. The issues that have a high priority with the Chalcedonian churches do not always have the same weight in OOC churches and therefore it is hard for modern Chalcedonians to appreciate the complex unity that exists among all the different sects and factions within the OOC.

It might be easy to have apparently fruitful œcumenical discussions with certain kinds of OOC who are closer to the Chalcedonian position, yet this does not mean there is genuine progress towards true œcumenical unity. The theological price of œcumenical unity demanded by some Chalcedonians (for example the Eastern Orthodox Athonites) is for the more moderate OOC to anathematise other OOC who are much more opposed to Chalcedon (and in fact opposed to most of the so-called œcumenical councils). Such a high theological price is too much to pay and makes the goal of true œcumenical progress highly unlikely.

The middle-to-late 20th Century saw a new wave of dialogue between the main Chalcedonian and non-Ephesian Communion (Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, Lutheranism and the Churches of the East) and the main Miaphysite or non-Chalcedonian Communion, that is the Oriental Orthodox Church (hereafter OOC).¹

Despite progress in reconciling the OOC and Chalcedonian traditions' Christological terminology, "the Christological difficulties...do not thereby disappear by lexicological magic, as if they never existed outside the realm of semantic confusion and misunderstanding."² The doctrine of Miaphysitism can be seen as symptomatic of deeper disagreements between the Oriental Orthodox and Chalcedon. As Fr. Shenouda M. Ishak and Dn. Anthony Bibawy wrote:

"This was not merely a misunderstanding and difference of semantics based on differences of terminologies and definitions between the two Christological schools, but it was based upon different ontological premises that have serious implications on fundamental Trinitarian, soteriological, sacramental, and anthropological Christian theologies".³

Miaphysite language is inclusive of many doctrines — some of which may be objectionable to Chalcedonians — and exclusive of other doctrines that are widely taught in other traditions. Because it has included many distinct cultures from the outset, OOC have had to create "ontological premises" which can work for a variety of philosophical and cultural backgrounds in a way Roman Churches did not.

OOC accepted no councils as œcumenical since Ephesus II in 449, and therefore have fewer common statements of Faith. OOC is decentralised and

¹ OOC is comprised of the Patriarchates and Catholicates of the Copts, Cilicians, Tewahedo (including Ethiopians and Eritreans) Syriacs, Malankara, Jacobite Indians and Armenians (itself comprised of patriarchal sees of Jerusalem, Constantinople and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin).

² Fr. John Anthony McGuckin, "St. Cyril of Alexandria's Miaphysite Christology and Chalcedonian Dyophysitism", in *Ortodoksia*, 53 (2017), 33-57, p.34.

³ S. M. Ishak and Antony Bibawy, "The Christology of the Coptic Orthodox Church", in *The Dialogue Between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches* ed. by Christine Challot (Melissatika: Volos Academy Publications, 2016), 273-87, p.274.

pluriform. Coptic Pope Shenouda III's (1971–2012) attempt to establish himself as a strong leader for the Copts and perhaps even all Miaphysites remains one of the more controversial elements of his tenure.⁴ He frequently engaged in public disputes with other Coptic preachers and teachers, with his dispute with Fr. Matthew the Poor and Dr. George Habib Bebawi being the most noteworthy.⁵ The Coptic Church as a whole definitively sided with neither party, and their respective teachings about matters as crucial as Theosis and the Energetic-Essence distinction remain up for each individual Copt's interpretation since the rehabilitation of Dr. Bibāwī after his excommunicated for teaching theosis without having to renounce his views in 2020.⁶

Were the OOC to enter full communion with the Eastern Orthodox (EO), they would have to come to the same conclusion about these teachings, and would likely have to denounce members of their own tradition. The Community of Athos, among other EO bodies, have made it clear that they require the OOC to fully embrace EO teaching and fully anathematise what EO anathematise, including their saints Severus and Dioscorus.⁷ Inter-OOC discussions can be very heated.

Chalcedonians have typically engaged with groups that they perceive as being normative within OOC and thus expect reaching an agreement with them will yield agreement with the whole. The level of representation and control exerted by these groups is much less than Chalcedonians assume. If Chalcedonians have dialogue exclusively with these groups, they fail to understand minority groups that

⁴ Samantha C. Leveugle, "The Copts and the Egyptian State: The Economic and Political Marginalization of the Coptic Christians of Egypt from Muhammad Ali to the Present", in *UCI Undergraduate Research Journal*, 16 (2013), p.22; Elizabeth Monier, "Whose Heritage Counts? Narratives of Coptic People's Heritage", in *CREID Working Paper*, 11 (Brighton: Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Institute of Development Studies 2021), p.12.

⁵ Joseph Youssef, *Becoming Saints: Coptic Orthodox Monasticism, Exemplarity, Negotiating Christian Virtue*. (Ph.D. Thesis. University of Toronto 2019), p.13 n.4.

⁶ عاجل.. وفاة جورج حبيب بباوي وغموض حول مصير الصلاة عليه داخل الكنيسة (2021) الوطن. Available at: <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/5280022> (Accessed: 15 September 2023).

⁷ Paul Ladouceur, "Orthodox Critiques of the Agreed Statements Between the Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches", in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 60 (2016), p.353.

use their influence against seeking union. The groups that have voted against reunion are precisely the groups with which Chalcedonians never engage. As long as this continues, union is unachievable.

The leaders of OOC churches are influenced by the minor sects as they attempt to keep unity. The leaders of OOC do not seek just to maintain their strict orthodoxy but also the variety of acceptable beliefs. Even if they support one theology, their actions in appeasing and supporting these groups shows that their focus is in unity through acceptance of the non-mainstream. The question remains whether any Chalcedonian Communia are capable of remaining in communion with traditions that deviate from their mainstreams to this degree.

A further investigation into not only the language but also the metaphysics of these minor groups is needed to resolve the possibility of reunion. Additionally, arguments for each doctrine (especially when they are answers to commonly held objections) are worth investigating to better understand the underlying concerns of OOC who hold opinions separate from Chalcedonian norms.

OOC Terminology

While 20th Century dialogue was flawed, it was correct in understanding that the way OOC uses certain terms differently is imperative to proper dialogue as Chalcedonians misunderstand or misuse many basic terms. Of course, one can find exceptions to these usages, especially among East Syriac and Chalcedonian converts to OOC or in the early stages of OOC theological development, but these definitions fit the modern OOC norm as well as the language used in crucial councils and formularies.

The Greek term *ousia* (Syriac: ܐܘܨܝܐ ('ithutha) or ܘܨܝܐ (usiya) Coptic: ܐܘܨܝܐ (ousia) Armenian: Էութիւն (ēut'iwñ)) is employed to describe common natures composed of idealised characteristics. *Ousiai* are unreal, observed and extrapolated.⁸ The Tewahedo tend to avoid using an equivalent for *ousia*, opting instead for the terms Divinity and Humanity without mentioning nature in a generalised sense as is the case in their version of the Nicene Creed which says the Son "is equal with the Father in divinity".⁹ One can be the same according one's physis (*yābahriy*),¹⁰ as an approximation of the concept of 'common physeis' seen in Cyril and James 3:7. Translations of *ousia* are used in literalistic translations of Greek, Arabic and Coptic texts, such as the Coptic Pope St. Matthew III using the term ܘܬܐ (hilawē) meaning reality, existence or being.¹¹ The Catholic missionaries in the 16th century used the term ܡܢܐܝܐ (*t'ābayat*),¹² referring to observed behaviours or characteristics. Though the terms may be used in studying foreign theology, they gained little traction in Tewahedo thought.

Hypostasis (Syriac: ܩܢܡܐ (qnome) or ܦܪܫܘܬܐ (Paršupā), Ge'ez: ܐܬܐ ܐܬܐ,¹³ or in some translations ܐܬܐ ܐܬܐ (hayipositasīsi), Coptic: ܗܘܦܫܬܐܨܝܐ (hypostasis) Armenian: ցոյութիւն (goyut'iwñ)) refers to the complete attributes of a person, comprising of their physis and form as well as other parts such as one's history, character, names, ranks and titles.

Physis (Syriac: ܕܥܢܐ (Kyānā/Kyono) Ge'ez: ܐܬܐ ܐܬܐ (bahṛəy) Coptic: ܫܘܬܐ (physis) Armenian: քնութիւն (bnut'iwñ)) is employed to describe a single

⁸ Irreal denoting a lack of concrete existence without necessarily being a figment or illusion.

⁹ David L. Appleyard, "An 'Old Amharic' Commentary on the Nicene Creed", in *Aethiopica*, 6 (2003), 111-36, p.127.

¹⁰ Yoseph Mengistu, *He was Anointed Because He was Incarnated: Cyrillo-Alexandrian Orthodoxy in the View of Modern Ethiopian Theologians* (Ph.D. Thesis. SOAS, University of London, 2012), p.114.

¹¹ Anaïs Wion, "Abba Lebsä Krestos of Gong Selalo: Sources for Discussing Religious Identities in Goğğam (Early Seventeenth Century, Ethiopia)", in *CV*, 9 (2017), 493-525, p.518.

¹² Mengistu, p.77.

¹³ Gideon Goldenberg, "Ethiopian Studies", in *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference, Tel Aviv*, (Rotterdam and Boston: A. A. Balkema, 1980), p.207.

concretised or individuated instance of a nature composed of personalised characteristics. These characteristics are semi real and have the potential to become fully real. This word famously occurs in 2 Peter 1:4 “ye might be partakers of the divine nature (φύσεως)”, but it also refers to an origin in Galatians 2:15; Romans 2:27. The terms physical or physically will always refer to physis in this paper.

Form (Greek: μορφή (morphē) Ge’ez: መልክዕ (mälkəʾ) Coptic: ΜΟΡΦΗ (morfe) or ΕΙΔΟΣ (eidos)) is employed to describe the real form something has taken. This describes what individuated characteristics are being actualised at the present moment. In a sense the form is what is most real. It is dependent on what a person is capable of, their physis. So the formal characteristics are dependent on individuated characteristics, which in turn evince ideal characteristics. “It is indeed external form, that which strikes the eye, but as such it accurately represents the underlying nature from which it springs.”¹⁴

Appearance (Greek εἶδος or ὄψις Coptic: 𐩬𐩣𐩪 (hrb) or 𐩬𐩢𐩪𐩠 (eidea)) is different to form. Appearance may be described as “superficial resemblance”,¹⁵ though it should be without any value judgement on the term “superficial”. When a form creates an appearance, it may be the appearance, not the fact of what is exerted or not, that is most meaningful, as is typically the case with icons.

An example of how this works is a smile. It is in human ousia-nature to be able to smile. This is observed from many instances of humans smiling. If an individual human being has the necessary muscles and capacity, they can smile. This is an individuated characteristic, belonging to one’s *physis*, but it only describes one’s potential and it therefore is not totally real. Only when the person actually smiles by applying their facial muscles, bringing the smile from potential to form,

¹⁴ Alva J. McClain, *The Doctrine of the Kenosis in Philippians 2: 5-8*, (Winona Lake: Grace Theological Seminary, 1967), p.4.

¹⁵ McClain, p.5.

does the smile become a reality, but the meaningful thing is the appearance that the muscles create. The appearance does not really exist in the physical or formal characteristics themselves but is created in observation by another person.

Another distinction is in character. Some OOC are more insistent on the issue of free will and therefore want to attribute less to one's nature, as actions dependent on nature are predetermined. A common theme is that of defying nature, adapted from St. John Chrysostom's phrase, "Do not ask how! For where God wills, nature's order is conquered by Him".¹⁶ God, being the most free, is easily able to defy His Own Nature, but defiance of nature is achievable to us through Grace in the processes of salvation and sanctification.

These distinctions are crucial because they clarify one of the most persistent misunderstandings about Miaphysite language. It is sometimes asserted that *physis* and *hypostasis* are seen as synonymous in OOC,¹⁷ but this is too simplistic. In fact, in Tewahedo thought *baḥrəy* "never refers to person" and Tewahedo theologians have criticised Western attempts to frame OOC understanding of hypostasis and physis as synonymous as deliberate attempts to distort their doctrines.¹⁸ An *hypostasis* describes the entirety of a person, while a *physis* is the actualisation of an *ousia* within that person. It is entirely possible for a person to be composite of many *physeis* because they belong to more than one *ousia*. In fact, apart from the Father and Spirit, everything is believed to be composite of *ousiai* such as spirit and flesh.¹⁹ Miaphysites are not only worried that two *physeis* would necessarily divide the **personal** reality of Christ but His **physical** reality.

¹⁶ Dana Iuliana Vieceure, *Verbum Crucis, Virtus Dei: a Study of Theopaschism from the Council of Chalcedon (451) to the Age of Justinian*, (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 2009), pp.42, 63.

¹⁷ Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor*, (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p.33; Joseph Watson, "Armenian Christology and the Council of Chalcedon", in *Master of Sacred Theology Seminar Papers*, 29 (2002), p.29.

¹⁸ Goldenberg, p.206.

¹⁹ Rev. Fr. Tadros Yaqoub Malaty, *Christology According to the Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches*, (Alexandria: St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, 1995), p.10.

Sects

It is impossible to give a standard belief system for OOC as it is so decentralised and pluriform. This has contributed to Western confusion as dialogue has progressed. What may be more fruitful is to find what OOC totally denounces and excommunicates against what beliefs may be held by believers with whom they have proved capable of maintaining communion for centuries. It is thus helpful to examine peripheral beliefs in non-Chalcedonian Churches and not only the standard Cyrillian or Severan views which are seen as the easiest to reconcile with Chalcedonian thought. Sects are different from traditions, catholicates and patriarchates which mainly represent issues of liturgy and hierarchy. Sects concern theology more directly.

Over the course of the dissertation, each topic will be examined in order, so that the extreme boundary of what is acceptable belief in OOC is defined. Nevertheless, a brief overview of the sects may be helpful. Each sect can span many patriarchates, or can be one of the many sects particular to one. The reach of each sect will be explained in their respective section.

Historically, the Tewahedo and Armenian Apostolic had some of the most divergent traditions. As Dr. Krikor G. Haleblian notes 'we have to remember that Armenian theology was not uniform: opposing theologies existed side by side. On account of its spirit of tolerance, Armenian theology "seems to have grown by a process of addition rather than a dialectic of rejection".²⁰ This eclecticism not only included those strongly opposed to Chalcedon, but also those in favour.²¹ It is true that 'the Armenian rejection of Chalcedon, while involving "linguistic, cultural and

²⁰ Krikor G. Haleblian, "Art, Theology, and Contextualization: The Armenian Orthodox Experience", in *Missiology*, 32.3 (2004), 309-35, p.323.

²¹ Haleblian, p. 327.

political factors," primarily is theological in nature', but this does not apply to all sects and traditions within Armenian Orthodoxy.²² The divergent Tewahedo traditions will be seen in more detail.

Cyrrillian Perspectives

Many issues that divide OOC from Chalcedonians find their origins in their interpretations of Cyril. Cyrrillian Orthodoxy emphasises a strong unity of Christ's Person, so that the Divine Elements attribute the suffering of the Flesh to themselves as human spirits do. This means that there is no difference in subsistent reality, actions, will or experience between the *physeis*. Similarly, Cyril's soul-flesh example is preferred:

"Let us once more take the example of an ordinary man. We recognise two natures in him; for there is one nature of the soul and another of the body, but we divide them only at a theoretical level, and by subtle speculation, or rather we accept the distinctions only in our mental institutions, and we do not set the natures apart nor do we grant that they have a radical separateness, but we understand them to belong to one man."²³

Others see Cyril's career as one of increasing deviation from Roman Christianity and Hellenic thought, resulting in ever greater Theopaschism and union between Christ's Divine and Human Elements.²⁴

In its more extreme forms, these interpretations see Cyril as beginning a process of freeing OOC from Hellenic thought, a process that continued after his death. Such a theologian will appreciate Cyril as both a saint and theologian but will deviate from his teachings in significant ways.

²² Joseph Watson, p.30.

²³ McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology, and Texts*, Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements, 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p.363.

²⁴ Matthew Joseph Pereira, *Reception, Interpretation and Doctrine in the Sixth Century: John Maxentius and the Scythian Monks*, (New York: Columbia University, 2015), p.56.

Severian Orthodoxy

The Patriarch of Antioch St. Severus the Great largely expressed concepts in line with Cyrillian Orthodoxy, though he integrated several Antiochene concepts as well as those popular elsewhere in the Roman Empire (such as the Antiochene concept of “futuristic” against “realised” incorruption granted in the Eucharist).²⁵

He called his theology an antidote to imperial sickness, describing Eutychianism as an illness to which was prescribed an overdose of Nestorianism.²⁶ Severus’ theology was thus intentionally a middle ground designed to appeal to the Roman mainstream as to disaffected non-Chalcedonians within the Roman Empire,²⁷ in which he was opposed by other non-Chalcedonians who embraced the opportunity to be free of Roman authority and territorial restraints.²⁸

Nevertheless, while Severianism has been characterised as “verbal Monophysitism” or “Miaphysitism in Name Only” that agrees with Chalcedon in substance,²⁹ among the EO criticisms of OOC dialogue has been the use of certain key phrases from St. Severus, especially:

“...reality is attributed only to the composite nature or hypostasis of Christ... the human nature of Christ having no longer any real subsistence and only being distinguished in thought (in theory, such that a distinction in reason does not correspond with a real distinction) from the moment that the Word becomes the Word incarnate”³⁰

EO objectors have stated that “Chalcedon affirms that the distinction of the two natures in Christ is real, not merely “in thought alone,” and subsists after the

²⁵ Yonatan S. Moss, *In Corruption: Severus of Antioch on the Body of Christ*, (Ph.D. Thesis, Yale University, 2013), p.197.

²⁶ Moss, 2013, p.114.

²⁷ Moss, 2013, p.116

²⁸ Moss, 2013, p.145.

²⁹ Alastair Hamilton, *The Copts and the West, 1439-1822: the European Discovery of the Egyptian Church*, (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p.19.

³⁰ Ladouceur, p.339.

Incarnation”³¹ While OOC and EO may have common ground in deconcretising the Divine Ousia-Essence,³² it seems that a key assumption OOC want to avoid, that Ousia must have concretisation in a physis and that this physis has a distinct subsistent reality within Christ, is an assumption believed by many EO and has served as grounds to avoid reunion.

Severus’ teachings on theopoiesis also gave itself to a different understanding of Christ’s pre and post-Resurrection Body.

The question of the perfection of the Church Fathers’ teachings was a major point of disagreement between Severus and Julian of Halicarnassus. Severus believed that the teachings of the Fathers, Cyril included, were perfect and disagreement and false teaching were illusory. Julian believed that the Patristic corpus had serious blemishes which interpreters needed to fix.³³

Philoxenian Orthodoxy

Philoxenian Orthodoxy is prevalent in Syriac Orthodoxy, which includes the Indian Catholicate and, historically, the Churches of Persia and China under the Maphrianate.³⁴ In each of these jurisdictions, they had to compete with the East Syriacs (also called the Church of the East or the Nestorians). Where many Chalcedonian and OOC churches have been characterised as misunderstanding the East Syriac position as Nestorian, Syriac Orthodox often understood their teachings

³¹ Ladouceur, p.240.

³² Peter C. Bouteneff, "From Ousia to Sophia: The Patristic and Classical Background to Twentieth-Century Essentialism and Personalism", in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 23.1 (2021) 57-67, p.66.

³³ Moss, 2013, p.275.

³⁴ Much of the Persian Church’s missionary activities has been attributed solely to the East Syriac Church of the East but under the Sassanids the Miaphysites and non-Ephesians were governed as one church, see: Kenneth T. Morrow, *Negotiating Belonging: The Church of the East's Contested Identity in Tang China*, (Richardson: The University of Texas at Dallas, 2019), p.22. For this reason the Maphrianate sees itself with an equal claim to the Church of the East’s illustrious history, see: *His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Jacob III Bartella, History of the Monastery of Saint Matthew in Mosul*, trans. by Matti Moosa (Piscataway: Gorgias Press. 2008).

which they received from Mar Babai the Great and others, rather than mischaracterising them as Nestorian. St. Philoxenus himself was a Persian educated in the School of Edessa (which was closed for its supposed Nestorian leanings) and became a professor there.³⁵

Within the Syriac tradition, St. Philoxenus is often seen as a contrarian. In the light of the Appollinarian controversy, to use phrases such as "Christ commingled Himself" and "In His Embodiment...there became participation and commingling to God with our Nature" makes him seem like a firebrand.³⁶

"Philexenos hoped to stem the tide of heresy by cutting off its source: inappropriate inquiry and interpretation concerning the ineffable mysteries of the Divine."³⁷ This concern can be seen in later Coptic writers, such as Pope St. Alexander II who denounced those who attribute actions, energies or properties to one nature or another as "technologountes".³⁸

Philoxenianism takes Christ's distinct Divine and Human ideated elements to be identical according to *physis* and form. As His Holiness Moran Mor Baselios Marthoma Mathews III summarises St. Philoxenus' Christology: "The particular properties of Godhead and Manhood coming into union, deny their particularities and become everything common to them. Thus they become one common, no more particularly expressed, but commonly everything."³⁹

³⁵ Mark DelCogliano, "The Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction", in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 49.4 (2014), 547-550, p.548.

³⁶ His Holiness Moran Mar Baselios Marthoma Mathews III. p.234.

³⁷ David A. Michelson, "'It Is Not the Custom of Our Syriac Language...': Reconsidering the Role of Translation in the Polemics of Philoxenos of Mabbug" in *Shifting Cultural Frontiers in Late Antiquity* ed. by David Brakke, Deborah Deliyannis and Edward Watts (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2016), p.16.

³⁸ Leslie SB. MacCoull, "The Paschal Letter of Alexander II, Patriarch of Alexandria: a Greek Defense of Coptic Theology Under Arab Rule", in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 44 (1990), 27-40, p.37.

³⁹ His Holiness Moran Mar Baselios Marthoma Mathews III. *Word Became Flesh: the Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug*, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte, 63 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2021), p.234.

In theopaschite terms, the physical elements necessary to suffer and not suffer act as one because they are in fact one physical element which conforms to two ideated elements at the same time. The non-suffering and suffering must be the same action, the immortal and suffering must occur in the same physical and material elements. So he asserts that even in death Christ's Body saw no corruption due to it being physically divine. The Death was a separation of material and spiritual reality, but not of divinity and humanity in either reality.

Philoxenus considered himself to be in the vein of Cyril, though he was going further than him in some respects. Cyril's anathemas along with those from Nicæa list what the Son cannot be described as: κτιστόν (created), τρεπτόν (liable to be turned) and ἀλλοιωτόν (able to be changed) and His Natures cannot be described as confused (φύρᾱμα), alloyed (κρᾱσις) or mixed (σύγκρᾱσις). Philoxenus adheres to this, but focuses on what Cyril highlights as unacceptable with each of these words.

A confusion ceases to be either of the things it was before. When oil is emulsified with egg yolk, it ceases to be an oil and becomes a sauce: mayonnaise. It no longer has properties of oil such as rising to the top of water and separating from it, and neither can it be described as an animal product. It has become a new substance.

Such a description of Christ is wrong because He continues to fit into the categories of Humanity and Divinity, but Philoxenus maintains that there is a unity comparable to mixture but in which Jesus continues to fully fit within the category of Divinity.

Cyril says that an alloy or κρᾱσις is inappropriate because the substances are preserved side-by-side within the alloy. An alloy of iron and mercury can melt at room temperature while being strongly ferromagnetic. Both substances would be

moved by magnetism and would be in a liquid state, so the characteristics of one are shared by the other, but they would be two different real substances and could thus be dissolved. It is Cyril's concern in *On the Unity of Christ* that "When something does not arise from a nature, but instead is added on from outside, is there not always the possibility of losing it?"⁴⁰ and the Philoxenian solution (which is attributed to Cyril) seems to be not only an enhypostatic union, but enphysical one with the Divine physis participating in the two *ousiai*. Among Philoxenians, this view was preferred over explicitly Cyrillian statements, such as Cyril's fire and iron analogy which Barsalibi considered to be deeply erroneous.⁴¹ These reactions to Cyril's analogies are some of the most helpful in seeing the belief that Cyril started a process of freeing theologians from Greek syncretism and other erroneous systems of thought while still being somewhat under its influence.

The concern with mingling, alloying, etc. also specifically describes damage done to the characteristics in ideation, according to Ousia. If Christ is God in accordance with these, a merely physical or formal "change" (or "becoming" as he terms it) is not a change to *'ithutha* or ousia. He insists that it is only necessary for His *'ithutha* to remain without change.⁴² So Christ can "become" Flesh and Soul. By asserting that all the limitations of Humanity were voluntary, Philoxenus asserts that the Divine potential remains. He is then consubstantial with the Father even as He is in human form. That human form also proves all his human potential, thus He is consubstantial with us.

Yet these "becomings" all occur within Jesus' Divine Physis. For this reason, Philoxenus rejected Cyril's phrase "from two natures" and preferred to speak only of

⁴⁰ *St. Cyril of Alexandria, On the Unity of Christ* tr. McGuckin, Popular Patristics Series, 12 (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995). p.81

⁴¹ St. Dionysios Bar-Šalibi, tr, Alphonse Mingana. "Baršalibi's treatise against the Melchites", in *Woodbrooke Studies*, 1 (1927), p.21.

⁴² His Holiness Moran Mar Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, p.79.

one nature: the one Christ had Divinely from eternity. That nature became an human nature.

Tewahedo Sects and the Uncion Controversy

The Tewahedo Uncion Controversy was the focus of the Tewahedo Church from the 16th to the 20th centuries, though it has its origins from before the 13th century. Three (or four) sects emerged as a result: Hulätt-Lidät, Qibatočč and Şägga.

The discussions came to a head during Emperor Susinyos' union with the Roman Catholic Church and the aftermath of the new schism with the West that followed his death.⁴³ Each sect sought to introspect into the Tewahedo tradition and explain the root causes of the Tewahedo Church's rejection of Chalcedonian Christianity. In doing so, they either revealed or created doctrines and theories that scandalised other traditions within their Church.⁴⁴ Although there are major doctrinal differences, these sects do show a unique philosophical and theological background to Tewahedo beliefs that is separate not only from Chalcedonianism but from other groups in OOC.

Under the Ethiopian Emperor Yohannes IV (1871–1889), the 1878 Council of Borumeda (the last synod as of writing) determined in favour of the Hulätt-Lidät position (often derogatively called the “Knifist” or *Kirra* position in reference to the violence that imposed Borumeda on dissidents as well as “cutting out” the “third birth”).⁴⁵ His successor Menelik II was a moderate who also denounced some of the perceived excesses of the Hulätt-Lidät position and created the modern Orthodox

⁴³ Mebratu Kiros Gebru, *Liturgical Cosmology: The Theological and Sacramental Dimensions of Creation in the Ethiopian Liturgy* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of St. Michael's College, 2012), p.48.

⁴⁴ Shaalini LV. Ranasinghe, *The Castle of Emperor Fasiladas: Missionaries, Muslims, and Architecture in Gondar, Ethiopia* (New York: Columbia University, 2001), pp.82-83.

⁴⁵ Mengistu, p.15.

Tewahedo position.⁴⁶ Other parts of Borumeda have been rejected in practice, such as its prohibitions on freedom of religion which was contradicted by Emperor St. Haile Selassie.⁴⁷ In local terms, prohibitions against marriage between Qībatočč and Tewahedo, among other markers of separate identity, are regularly ignored.⁴⁸ Nevertheless the Hulätt-Lidät position is often seen as the official view.

Ethiopian Orthodoxy's dominance over politics, society and religion depends on their demographic plurality or majority, which is only made possible by including the three sects. When the Qībatočč attempted to set up their own Patriarchate based in Gojjam in 1991, the movement was suppressed by the federal and regional governments.⁴⁹ Currently, the Ethiopian Census lists *Tewahedo*, *Kibat* and *Tsega* as acceptable categories within Ethiopian Orthodoxy.⁵⁰ Instead of the suppressive tactics of the 19th century, the current tactic for maintaining prominence in Ethiopia has been the inclusion of these different sects within the Ethiopian Tewahedo Patriarchate, suppressing their *independence* but not necessarily their *beliefs*. As the Qībatočč are part of the regional identity of Gojjam, there is a legitimate fear that an independent Gojjamese Qibat Church would open up a new front in an ethnic conflict that may have already left at least 600,000 civilians dead.⁵¹ Even after the conflict has ended, caution must be used to avoid tensions flaring again, thus the inclusion

⁴⁶ B. Lourié, "A Lonely Church As A Symbol Of Faith And Power", in *Scrinium*, 10.1 (2014), 516-22, p.522; Mengistu, pp.15, 186.

⁴⁷ Andrew DeCort, (2022) *Christian Nationalism is Tearing Ethiopia Apart*, *Foreign Policy*. Available at: foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/18/ethiopia-pentecostal-evangelical-abiy-ahmed-christian-nationalism (Accessed: 08 September 2023).

⁴⁸ Fentahun Worku, *A History of Patriotic Resistance Against Italian Occupation: The Case of Bälläsa District, 1936-1941*, (MA Thesis. UOG, 2021), p.6.

⁴⁹ Temesgen Gebeyehu Baye, "Gojjam (Ethiopia): Peopling, Christianization, and Identity", in *African Identities*, 14.3 (2016), 255-72, p.268.

⁵⁰ Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia, *The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: CSA, 2007), p.51.

⁵¹ J. Naranjo, (2023) *Ethiopia's Forgotten War is the Deadliest of the 21st Century, With Around 600,000 Civilian Deaths*, *EL PAÍS English*. Available at: english.elpais.com/international/2023-01-27/ethiopias-forgotten-war-is-the-deadliest-of-the-21st-century-with-around-600000-civilian-deaths.html (Accessed: 08 September 2023).

of these sects must be treated as a permanent element in discussion between Chalcedonians and OOC.

All Ethiopian Orthodox refer to themselves as Tewahedo in terms of denomination. When used of a sect, Tewahedo (meaning union) refers to the Divinity of Christ being conferred to His Flesh at the moment the two natures achieved full union as one nature, though to avoid confusion some prefer the term Hulätt-Lidät (Two-Birther).⁵²

Although Hulätt-Lidät insist that Borumeda was final, its position is somewhat precarious as the Qibat position has been the official position of the Tewahedo Church in the past and some Qibatočč may feel that another council could change their fortunes.⁵³ The tolerance between these communities in one church prevents a new Patriarchate forming for the Qibatočč. When a Patriarchate formed in Oromia in January-February 2023, the religious dispute spilled over into violence, including beatings and illegal detentions, and at least eight were killed.⁵⁴ Reunion was achieved by tolerating their Oromo-language services, and agreeing to expand them to include more Oromo and Ugandan churches.⁵⁵ The question of whether the same could be achieved in the case of dissident Qibatočč following new formularies adopted for reunion with Chalcedonians is a serious one which is far from unprecedented and has potentially fatal consequences. In discussing their rejection of reunion, the monks of Athos noted that the changes to liturgy — especially the saints whose *vitae* will have to be changed and who they may no longer be able to venerate — was reason enough to reject reunion.⁵⁶ The same certainly applies to the

⁵² Mengistu, p.14. n.15.

⁵³ Mengistu, p.143, n.137.

⁵⁴ AfricaNews (2023) *Ethiopian Orthodox Church says Internal Crisis Over After Dissidents Apologise*, *Africanews*. Available at: africanews.com/2023/02/16/ethiopian-orthodox-church-says-internal-crisis-over-after-dissidents-apologise (Accessed: 05 September 2023).

⁵⁵ AfricaNews (2023)

⁵⁶ Ladouceur, p.354.

Qībatočč who continue to venerate saints from the beginning of the Unction crisis that took the more extreme versions of the Qibat doctrine.

The Qibat movement (adhered to by Qībatočč, also called Unctionists or Anointers), is a broad category that “maintain that the union of the divine and the human nature of Christ was affected by the Unction of the Holy Spirit”.⁵⁷ They also assume a role for the Spirit in the Eternal Generation of the Son.⁵⁸ Even as late as the 1990s, the Unction debate in Ethiopia and Eritrea has been described as “a very bitter religious controversy” in some regions such as Gojjam.⁵⁹ If established language has difficulty in satisfying all the theological concerns in the Tewahedo churches of Ethiopia and Eritrea, the adoption of new languages could intensify a situation already on the brink of violence. While polemics may present their side as firmly decided by Church Councils and accepted as the official teaching of the Church, others note the discussion is ongoing.⁶⁰ In fact, some observers have seen relations between the sects have worsened since 2010.⁶¹

Qībatočč are mostly found in Beta-Ewostatewos monasteries and are entrenched throughout Gojjam.⁶² The initial Qibat movement asserted an “extreme kenotic Christology” in which the Word shed physical and formal characteristics upon His Incarnation so that He became a mere man. He remained God because of His character, hypostasis and relation to the Father and Spirit. At some point in His

⁵⁷ Mulatu Wubneh, "Governance and Administrative Structure of Gondar City", in *Planning for Cities in Crisis*, 155-189 ed. by Mulatu Wubneh (Cham: Springer, 2022), p.161.

⁵⁸ Basil Lourié, "Nicephorus Blemmydes on the Holy trinity and the Paraconsistent Notion of Numbers: A logical Analysis of a Byzantine Approach to the Filioque", in *Studia Humana*, 5.1 (2016), 40-54, p.43.

⁵⁹ Habtamu Mengistie, "Lord, Zèga and Peasant: a Study of Property and Agrarian Relations in Rural Eastern Gojjam", in *FSS Special Monograph Series*, 1 (2002), p.126 n.2.

⁶⁰ Getnet Tamene, "Features of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the clergy", in *Asian and African Studies*, 7.1 (1998), 87-104, p.100.

⁶¹ Melaku Tilahun, Walleign Zelalem and Temesgen Birhanu, "Religious Institutions and Their Implication for Sustainable Peace in Amhara National Regional State: A Study on Some Selected East Gojjam Woredas", in *International Journal of Business Marketing and Management (IJBMM)*, 4.12 (2019) p.80.

⁶² Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p.104.

Earthly Life, the Spirit descended on Him and restored His Divine Glory. This was almost invariably said to occur at His Conception, but is also occasionally ascribed to His Baptism.⁶³

Ss. Theophilus and Cyril's main concern about synousiasts was that Jesus would cease to "be what He was" regarding His Divinity,⁶⁴ but the Q'ibatočč do not see any characteristic as necessary to Divinity, with Divinity being more akin to a Name or Title. It was a characteristic of Samson to be strong, but he was still Samson when he was weak. Jesus is the Creator of the Universe, and given that the past is immutable, there is nothing that can take that away from Him. He no longer needs the characteristics necessary to create the Universe, as He has already made it. They attribute Divinity solely to the Divine Hypostases, and not to the *ousia*, *physeis* or forms of the Persons. Thus the Spirit is said to have restored Divine Glory, Form and sometimes even *baḥrəy* but not Divinity itself.

It is for this reason they can say Jesus shed His *baḥrəy* (meaning physis) while also being God because of His *baḥrəy* (his origin) because the word *baḥrəy*, like physis, refers to both origin and characteristics as it derives from ብሔር, meaning regional or ethnic origin.

Because their definition of Divinity is based on His Role, History and Person and not any Characteristics, from their perspective, they do not admit any change into Christ's Divinity upon His Incarnation even though every characteristic changed. So Jesus can be called the Fulness of the Godhead in Human Form because He is

⁶³ LaVerle Bennette Berry, *The Solomonic Monarchy At Gonder, 1630-1755: An Institutional Analysis Of Kingship In The Christian Kingdom Of Ethiopia* (Boston: Boston University Graduate School, 1976), p.11; Saheed A. Adejumobi, *The History of Ethiopia* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2006), p.23.

⁶⁴ Norman Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2006), p.131; Steven Alan McKinion, *Words, Imagery, and the Mystery of Christ: a Reconstruction of Cyril of Alexandria's Christology*, *Vigiliae Christianae*, Supplements, 55 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p.144.

God Hypostatically and He is filled with the Spirit without measure, so He as a mere substantial Man filled with the Spirit can be the Fullness of God.

This original form was followed by the moderate Qibat theology of Abuna St. Akalä Kīrstos, described thus:

'...the purpose of the anointment was to glorify the humanity rather than the divinity. Because of the hypostatic union duality was lost and the Word was able to become a man. But it was precisely the anointment of the Holy Spirit that made the opposite move possible: the man was made God... The attributes of humanity were predicated to divinity. But the attributes of the divinity were not predicated to the humanity as yet. After the union, God is now able to be what he could not be in his own divine being without losing or compromising his deity. By the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the humanity was elevated to the status of divinity without ceasing to be human. The human was able to be what he could not in his own nature... God became man by union and man became God by anointment'.⁶⁵

This version of Qibat was sometimes criticised as falling into Chalcedonianism, especially considering Susīnyos' Council of Ač'afār which ruled in their favour. Close analysis showing the council misrepresented their views⁶⁶ and it is worth noting that Susīnyos was zealously Orthodox in his early reign and had not yet converted to Catholicism.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the Qibat union seemed to be described in terms of uniting an human physis to the Divine, giving some separate concretisation to Christ's Humanity.

There are defences against this charge, such as stating that the Spirit made the human elements of Christ so Christ's anointing by the Spirit included the production of His Flesh but there is a debate as to whether this position is truly Qibat or Hulätt-Lidät under a *Mānfās Qiddus Qib'* subcategory.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Mengistu, p.114.

⁶⁶ Mengistu, pp.142-43.

⁶⁷ Mengistu, pp.92-93.

⁶⁸ Mengistu, pp.137-39.

If the Son has always been Divine through participation in the Father and Spirit, saying that He became Human but was made Divine in the instance of Conception is simply a way of expressing the Miaphysite reality.

If, on the other hand, Jesus was reduced to mere humanity and was made Divine at a later point, then Jesus had another Breath than the Spirit, and the Father and Spirit must have had another Word, for that length of time. If it is asserted that Jesus still had no other Breath than the Spirit, then it must be questioned how one can have the Spirit without measure and not have the Divine Glory.

Thus the Tewahedo mainstream asserts a Philoxenian-type of active self-limiting which addresses kenoticism while appeasing trinitarian concerns of other Tewahedo sects:

"God can limit Himself... God's Omni nature can make Him able to act both ways in action and in non-action without changing...During the perfect union this nature of God was functionally manifested in non-action, while still retaining His Omni-power, being incapacitated within the limits of human nature...the incarnation is a temporary limitation, non-activation of God the Son's divine enablement",⁶⁹

The entire Qibat spectrum is united by the crucial thesis that Christ was made Divine by the Anointing of the Holy Spirit, something that could have always occurred alongside His Eternal Generation. Their key belief is that the Spirit was the ointment by which Christ becomes God. A similar concern is picked up on by the non-Qibat Abuna Petros (1881–1917) who said "the Holy Spirit, being in and of itself the breath, is the breath for the Father and the Son. They do not have another breath. Through it they are called possessors of life. In its separate perfect Person it is called Lord, Divinity, God."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Esckinder Taddesse, "Christological Conceptions within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewhado Church (EOTC) and the Ethiopian Evangelical Churches (EEC): Possible Christological-Soteriological Unity between the EOTC-EEC", in *History*, 135 (2013), 169, pp.258-61.

⁷⁰ Magdalena Krzyżanowska and Stéphane Ancel, "Early 20th Century Theological Controversies in Ethiopia: A Letter of the Coptic Metropolitan Petros of 1904", in *Aethiopica*, 17 (2014), 121-51, p.142.

Even though the moderate Qībatočč may be reconcilable to Chalcedonianism, groups like Athos that represent strong Chalcedonian orthodoxy have said that they will require the denunciation of what they consider heretics from OOC. The Qībatočč may have to denounce members of their own community as well as their deeply venerated saints (perhaps even St. Ewostatewos), which may never be a safe thing to demand.

The third position is known as the *Sost-Līdāt* (Three-Birth) or *Şägga* position. It maintains that “Christ became the second Adam through the anointing of the Holy Spirit”.⁷¹ The Spirit was poured on Him not for His own sake, but for those that were in Him as the new Adam. Christ must become a son of Grace so that we can be as well. The phrase “son of Grace” caused the movement to be denounced as adoptionist and as a result many denunciations of the movement have misunderstood it or acted in poor faith.

Kenosis and Glorification

Although the debate about the *communicatio idiomatum* (the communication or trade of Christ’s Divine and Human Characteristics) extends at least as far back as the Nestorian Controversy itself, it received new precision in the debates between Lutherans and Calvinists early in the Reformation. Several *geni* of this doctrine were identified. For this thesis, the *genus kenoticum* (or *tapeinoticum*) and *genus majesticum* (or *auchematicum*) are the most important. OOC interpretations may lie outside of this paradigm.

St. Cyril describes something similar to the *communicatio*, when he says ‘He Himself remained what He was; but being united once and for all He is reckoned as

⁷¹ Krzyżanowska and Ancel, p.140.

one with the Manhood and He appropriates all that belongs to it while introducing to it the Power of His Own Nature'.⁷²

In some ways, an understanding of the *communicatio* that includes the *kenoticum* and *majesticum* shares key features with OOC Christology. If both are applied, the Divine Nature is said to humble itself such that it is capable of suffering and the Human Nature is exalted such that it can be omnipresent and all-glorious. The lasting distinction between Christ's Humanity and Divinity would inevitably dissipate, however, it would apparently be the case that human elements would be capable of Divine Actions and Attributes and vice versa whereas according to Philoxenus, the human and Divine Characteristics belong to the same physical elements.

Rather than fitting into one genus of *communicatio*, OOC can be thought of as rejecting the *communicatio* entirely. Far from communicating characteristics or elements, the Divine Elements change within Christ's Single Physis or perhaps in Form without permitting any change within the Divine *Ousia*. The language of communication between natures is disliked due to the plurality of natures. It was Pope Leo's use of *communicatio* that the Patriarch of Antioch St. Athanasius the Cameldriver singled out as being so offensive about the "Nestorian" Tome.⁷³

The Kenotic tradition in Lutheranism and some Reformed circles desires to maintain not only the Human Elements of Christ but the entire human experience. They share doubt about the extent to which Christ can be said to have humbled Himself if, simultaneous to Christ's suffering, there was an infinite substantial part of Him that remained utterly separate from that Suffering. To what extent is humility

⁷² McGuckin, 2015, p.

⁷³ Kurt Gustav Peter Schimke, *The Character of the Purse: Analyzing Tax Records and Administrative Policy from the Perspective of Christology in 7th-8th century Egypt* (Ph.D. Thesis. Stellenbosch University, 2019), p.216.

compatible with infinite glory? So there are solutions provided that permit Jesus to have lost Infinite Glory for at least a time, regaining that Divine Characteristic (be it seen, individuated or ideated) at some point.

Zär'a-Ya'eqobite Orthodoxy

All forms of Tewahedo Faith show the influence of the great emperor, theologian and polymath St. Zär'a-Ya'eqob, but we may describe a kind of Zär'a-Ya'eqobite Orthodoxy that strongly adheres to his teachings. It is no longer the prevailing orthodoxy from a top-down perspective, although it has a lot of influence on a popular level.

This Zär'a-Ya'eqob is not to be confused with the similarly-named early modern philosopher Zera-Yaqob who was an unrelated lowborn monk-turned-exile whose existence is debated.⁷⁴

The great Philosopher-King St. Zär'a-Ya'eqob was the Solomonic Emperor of Ethiopia and thus the political head of the Tewahedo from 1434–1468. He is often considered to be among the greatest Ethiopian Emperors of all time as well as one of its greatest thinkers. His reputation extends far beyond the borders of Ethiopia, making his appearance in foreign media such as the video game *Sid Meier's Civilisation IV*.

St. Zär'a-Ya'eqob initiated Papal-Tewahedo relations,⁷⁵ but also sought to crystallise many of the most unique Tewahedo teachings and traditions. Whether he introduced the first definitive canonical list of Scripture into the Tewahedo tradition or

⁷⁴ Fasil Merawi and Setargew Kenaw, "Is there an Ethiopian philosophy? Rereading the Hatetas of Zera Yaacob and Walda Hewat in the context of Knowledge Production", in *Ethiopian Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities*, 15.1 (2019), p.71.

⁷⁵ Matteo Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402-1555*. (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2016), pp.46, 62-5; Tsehai Berhane Selassie (1977). "Zare'a Ya'eqob, c. 1399 to 1468, Orthodox, Ethiopia", in *The Encyclopaedia Africana Dictionary of African Biography*, ed. by L. H. Ofosu-Appiah, (New York: Reference Publications., 1997).

not, he is known to have insisted on the inclusion of certain texts, like Enoch, that are not found in other traditions and he is believed to have been responsible for a renaissance in the use of these texts.⁷⁶ Zär'a-Ya'eqob's legacy was not in enforcing his own opinion as the one truth of the Empire, but rather that the Tewahedo opinions and traditions that were most distinct would be preserved or even emboldened in the face of an opening Empire.

Among Emperor St. Zär'a-Ya'eqob's most notable teachings was Corporealism, particularly in the form of Anthropomorphism. This concept was popular in hagiography and iconography, and the story of St. Gebre Menfes Kidus ascending to the Highest Heavens on a number of occasions to see the anthropomorphic forms of the Three Persons, and even be embraced and kissed by them, is a crucial part of his story.⁷⁷ The Tewahedo never had any major controversy surround their depictions of God the Father (unlike EO which ruled against such depictions in the 1666 Great Moscow Synod) in fact Tewahedo anthropomorphic depictions of the Trinity tend to be among the most popular and recognisable designs.⁷⁸

Ancient Context

OOC traditions trace themselves to the 1st Century AD and prior: the Copts to the biblical patriarch Joseph and the Apostle Mark, the Malankara to the Apostle Thomas, the Tewahedo to the Queen of Sheba, Matthew and the Ethiopian Eunuch,

⁷⁶ Daniel Assefa, "The Biblical Canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāhēdo Church (EOTC)", in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Orthodox Christianity*, (2022), 211, 219-21.

⁷⁷ Sir Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge (trans.), *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church: A Translation of the Ethiopic Synaxarium Maṣḥafa Senkesār [transliterated from Ethiopic]*, 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. 433-42.

⁷⁸ Neal Sobania and Raymond Silverman. "Icons of Devotion/Icons of Trade: Creativity and Entrepreneurship in Contemporary "Traditional" Ethiopian Painting", in *African Arts*, 42.1 (2009), 26-37, p.30

the Syriacs to Christ and Peter, the Armenians and Cilicians to Jude, Bartholomew, Simon, Matthias and Paul (a native of Cilicia). They do not now, and never have, considered themselves derivative or dependent on Roman-derived or any other Western traditions. As Eurocentric church history begins to be questioned in the West, it is worth noting that it was never the norm in OOC.

The concept of these churches being derivative of Roman Christianity is not a new one, but it is one that was rejected by Barsalibi,⁷⁹ among others. In dialogue with OOC, Chalcedonians must be conscious of their separate and ancient history. There are frequent appeals to the Church Fathers, which can include figures as late as St. John of Damascus who lived centuries after the Chalcedonian Schism. OOC have their own Church Fathers and give greater emphasis to different Fathers than Chalcedonians.

Each region had their own philosophies and ontologies that differed immensely from Greco-Roman philosophy, which in turn meant that they interacted with Christianity differently and developed separate doctrines, or expressions of doctrines.

The forms of Christianity and Judaism that developed in Hellenistic colonies (such as Alexandria, Antioch and to a lesser extent Cæsaræa Maritima) are, especially from an OOC perspective, clearly syncretistic which “should not carry with it a value judgement”, as Dr. Christopher J. Cornthwaite explains, because it is an inevitable feature of proximity to other beliefs, especially in the eclectic and persecution-filled atmosphere of the Classical period.⁸⁰ Even among Hellenising Second-Temple Jews such as Philo and Josephus it is clear that there were

⁷⁹ St. Dionysios Bar-Ṣalibi, p.52.

⁸⁰ Christopher J. Cornthwaite, *Torah in the Diaspora: a Comparative Study of Philo and 4 Maccabees*, (London, Ontario: The University of Western Ontario, 2013), pp.34-38.

“different degree[s] of penetration of the Greek spirit”.⁸¹ Yet areas and groups distanced from Greek centres of culture and thought, such as the Qumran community, could show either no Greek influence or occasional references to Greek thought being “always treated with polemic” with “a very definite and critical stance towards it.”⁸²

In the cultural and liturgical milieu in which Christianity emerged it is not true that there was a strong division between what was Hellenic/Roman and Jewish/Christian (a fact which is often used to justify Socratic language and philosophy) but neither was it true that the Hellenic concepts used by Philo and other members of Greek or Roman colonies represented the normative mode of thought, let alone the universal one.

Features of unhellenised Jewish and early Christian groups are seen in modern and mediæval Ethiopic, Syriac and Indian Orthodoxy. These churches are the direct result of Jewish-Christian evangelisation and are thus without Greek syncretism. Although Tewahedo history has a strong connection to Alexandria, modern historians explain their strongly Jewish character through early Jewish-Christian Syriac missionaries.⁸³ Tewahedo writers who fall closer to Judaism may ascribe their Church’s foundation to the Ethiopian Eunuch rather than the 4th Century Ss. Emperor Ezana and Frumentius.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Dorothy M. Peters, *Noah Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Conversations and Controversies of Antiquity*, Early Judaism and its Literature, 26 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), p.3.

⁸² Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, "Scrolls and Non-Jewish Hellenistic Literature", in *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls* ed. by George J. Brooke and Charlotte Hempel (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 156-163.

⁸³ Václav Ježek, "Byzantium and Ethiopian monasticism", in *Byzantinoslavica-Revue internationale des Etudes Byzantines*, 70.1-2 (2012), 97-112, p.99.

⁸⁴ Rev. Dr. Tibebe Teklu Senbetu, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's Interpretation of Ἀναξίως in 1 Cor. 11: 27– 29 in Relation to Worthy Admission to the Eucharist in Light of Ritual Jewish Purity Laws Embedded in its Qeddassé and Tradition*, (Ph.D. Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2022), pp.3-5.

In response to renewed engagement with Christianities that had not gone through the Greek syncretic process, John Paul II said that “the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought”, but as Colin Gunton replied, “she must surely abandon what she has *mistakenly* taken”.⁸⁵ A number of the disagreements OOC have with Chalcedonians are seen as developing from this divide. Expecting Chalcedonians to abandon these views may be extreme, but a perspective in which Chalcedonian history — including its history before the Schism — is understood to be a totally separate identity can only be helpful for dialogue.

Tewahedo Judaic elements remain strongest in the Beta-Ewostatewos monastic order founded by the 13th-century Tigray St. Ewostatewos, whose disciples preached along Lake Tana⁸⁶ where the Beta Israeli were historically based.⁸⁷ The other main indigenous monastic order is that of another 13th-Century saint, Tekle Haymanot (an ethnic Amhara) based in his Debre Libanos monastery. The Beta-Tekle-Haymanot have tended to have the most imperial favour and their Abbot, the Ichege, was often seen as the foremost monastic in the Tewahedo Faith.⁸⁸ They have historically been more likely to align with the Coptic Papacy and Coptic Christianity.⁸⁹ While they may be the most Greco-Roman-influenced Tewahedo group, they are only influenced third-hand so their doctrines have many major differences from Greco-Roman Christianity.

⁸⁵ Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), p.5

⁸⁶ Daniel Asmare, *The Melting Pot Of The Word And The Sword: Royal Power And Monastic Asceticism In The Medieval Monasteries Of Lake Tana, Ethiopia*, (MA Thesis, Central European University Budapest, 2011), p.15.

⁸⁷ Bar Kribus and Verena Krebs, "Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jewish) Monastic Sites North of Lake Tana-Preliminary Results of an Exploratory Field Trip to Ethiopia in December 2015", in *Entangled Religions*, 6 (2018), 309-44.

⁸⁸ Izabela Anna Orlowska, *Re-imagining Empire: Ethiopian political culture under Yohannis IV, 1872-89*. (Ph.D. Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, 2006), p.13.

⁸⁹ Berry, p.lix.

New insights into Tewahedo religious philosophy are especially important as “ancient and mediæval Ethiopian manuscripts whose importance as possible sources of authentic philosophical reflections might have otherwise been overshadowed by the effort to attach the name “Ethiopian philosophy” exclusively to the *hatetas*” of (pseudo-)Zera-Yaqoub and (pseudo-)Walda Hewat: 17th-century philosophers whose works may have been forgeries created by the 19th-century Jesuit Fr. Giusto d'Urbino.⁹⁰ Whether they are forgeries, their teachings were so uninfluential within pre-20th-century Ethiopia that they were unmentioned in all sources before d'Urbino even though the Tewahedo were thorough in listing dissident works in that time period.⁹¹ Most English-language works about Ethiopian philosophy give a central position to a figure who was unknown — and may not have been real — largely because his philosophy adhered to Eurocentric norms.⁹² Crucially, this view of Ethiopian philosophy sees it as contingent on a translation of Socratic Philosophers called *The Book of the Wise Philosophers*⁹³ which thus disregards all native philosophies of Ethiopia. So (psuedo-)Zera-Yaqoubian philosophy does not represent a thoroughly native Ethiopian philosophy. It was unpopular and westernised.

Modern western criticisms of the “Classically Theistic” norm, whether from Open Theists or others, have concerned OOC since antenicene times, though they do not necessarily agree with Open Theistic solutions. For example, the Open Theistic concern that the “concept of God as an all-powerful, perfect and infinite being, is not derived from Scripture itself but rather has its historical origin in the God

⁹⁰ Merawi and Kenaw, p.73.

⁹¹ Merawi and Kenaw, p.70.

⁹² Merawi and Kenaw, pp.71-72.

⁹³ Jonathan Joshua Egid, "How Does Philosophy Learn to Speak a New Language?", in *Perspectives*, 31.1 (2023), 104-18, pp.111-12

images of the Hellenistic (*pantokrator*) and Roman era..."⁹⁴ Additionally, many non-OOC scholars also assert that the concept of infinity is only really first expressed in the works of Gregory of Nyssa.⁹⁵ While Gregory and the Cappadocians are highly revered, OOC theologians can be harsh critics of theologians they consider to be saintly, such as Fr. Athanasius Iskander's criticism of Gregory Nazianzen.⁹⁶ Some OOC may perceive Classical Theism to be Greek syncretism and question overemphasising or believing in Divine Infinitude in every sense, as will be explored in the corporealism section.

The Classical Theistic perspective on the development of Christian doctrine has been given thoroughly elsewhere, so I will not engage with it. Rather, I will attempt to give a thoroughly OOC perspective. I must question the term Classical Theist because each OOC group describes their own Classical period or their traditional teaching, none of which conform to "Classical Theism". The term Latin Trinitarianism or Latin Theism was coined in response to some of these concerns, though it strictly refers to theologies that "begin from the oneness of God, and try to explain just how one God can be three divine Persons".⁹⁷

In ancient times, unity was temporarily achieved under the auspices of the Imperial Saints Justinian and Theodora and the Fathers of the Second Council of Constantinople (the Fifth Œcumenical Council). The following sentence is often cited as the main clause that proves the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Faiths are compatible:

⁹⁴ Nico Vorster, "The Problem of Theodicy and the Theology of the Cross", in *In die Skriflig*, 41.2 (2007), 191-207, p.205.

⁹⁵ Lucas Francisco Mateo-Secco and Giulio Maspero (eds), *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, *Vigiliae Christianae*, Supplements, 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p.623.

⁹⁶ Abouna Athanasius Iskander, *Theopoiesis and Theosis* (Kitchener: St. Mary and St. Maurice Coptic Orthodox Church, 2016), p.29.

⁹⁷ Christopher T. Porter "A Modern Look at Social Trinitarianism", in *Quaerens Deum: The Liberty Undergraduate Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 3.1 (2017), 2, p.1.

“if anyone understands the two natures in the mystery of Christ in the sense of a division into parts, or if he expresses his belief in the plural natures in the same lord Jesus Christ, God the Word made flesh, but does not consider the difference of those natures, of which he is composed, to be only in the onlooker's mind, a difference which is not compromised by the union (for he is one from both and the two exist through the one) but uses the plurality to suggest that each nature is possessed separately and has a subsistence of its own: let him be anathema.”⁹⁸

The Fifth Council led OOC to believe that Chalcedonians believed that the Flesh did not suffer without the Word. After this council, Theopaschism was adopted by Neochalcedonians and helped unite Chalcedonians and OOC in the immediate aftermath of the council.⁹⁹ However, new ways of denouncing theopaschism while still formally adhering to the Council convinced OOC theologians and hierarchs that Chalcedonians and OOC had different Christologies.

Œcumenical Councils

A crucial disagreement between OOC and several other churches is in the œcumenical councils. As the OOC only agree to the first three (and East Syriacs only agree to the first two) the very term œcumenical is questionable.

In the Council of Nicæa, Emperor St. Constantine I the Great, Equal-to-the-Apostles, made sure to invite representatives from beyond his empire. A number of ancient sources (including Mar Marutha of Martyropolis) mention a single Persian representative at Nicæa called John,¹⁰⁰ but the acceptance of the Nicene Creed throughout the Church to the east of the Roman Empire only began in

⁹⁸ Norman P. Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1990), p.117.

⁹⁹ Vieux, p.29.

¹⁰⁰ J. Kollaparampil, "The Identity of Mar John of Persia and Great India Who Attended the First Council of Nicaea", in *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 247 (1994), 281-97.

earnest following the 410AD Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.¹⁰¹ With the approval of the Council of Constantinople, Mar Marutha enforced a translation of the Creed in Syriac.¹⁰²

The Tewahedo were represented by the Copts, as the Tewahedo only became autocephalous in the last century. The Coptic Pope's presence in Constantinople I and Ephesus I and II thus gives the Tewahedo some representation, provided that the Tewahedo also accepted the council on their own terms afterwards. This text was heavily adapted to adapt not only to the change in language but the difference in philosophy.

In a similar way to how the Nicene Council and Creed's global nature depended on the much later Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Nicene œcumenical authority also depended on Tewahedo participation. At Nicæa, they were not yet represented *through* another bishop in the same way that the Papal legates represented much of the West because Tewahedo dependence on Alexandria only began with St. Frumentius' mission decades later. Thus the Nicene Council's status as œcumenical depends on the way in which it was adapted to Tewahedo thought.

While it is worth understanding the theological background to the Nicene Fathers and how they came to use the language and philosophy that underpinned their Greek original text, another perspective places the reception of the text in a more privileged position. Nicene Christianity is thus a broader category than the opinions of those most immediately engaged in the debates at Nicæa.

The view of Nicæa among Chalcedonians tends to be that it was an œcumenical council from the outset, somehow representing a Global Church that

¹⁰¹ Daniel H. Williams "The Evolution of pro-Nicene Theology in the Church of the East", in *From the Oxus River to the Chinese Shores: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia*, Orientalia - Patristica - Oecumenica, 5 ed. by Li Tang and Dietmar W. Winkler (Zürich-Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013), 387-97, p.387.

¹⁰² Williams, p.389.

was not present and had not sent representatives. From this other perspective, Nicæa and Constantinople I were better than later councils in that they included many non-Roman observers and participants, but they created formularies that were to be used only in the Latin and Greek-speaking worlds and adaptations were needed to include groups that did not conform to Greek language or thought. Thus, Nicæa did not become œcumenical until almost a century after the fact.

The proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon are criticised and numerous OOC leaders have made it clear that they cannot accept it as œcumenical.¹⁰³ The behaviour of the papal legates and their expectation that the Tome of Leo should be accepted as a ruling of faith could be seen as opposed to the spirit of œcumenism. Leo accepted clergy that the Alexandrians had excommunicated (Theodoret and Eusebius of Doryleum), and then deposed Dioscorus on the grounds that “one should not receive into communion those excommunicated by others”, a double-standard which is interpreted as stemming from an inequality in the treatment of bishops.¹⁰⁴ The Chalcedonian Creed begins saying “we... all with one consent, teach...” but the Illyrians and Palestinians constantly voiced their disapproval and asked for forgiveness after the conclusion was reached — all the while the Egyptians were excluded — and many who signed the Tome recanted afterwards.¹⁰⁵ Chalcedon is considered to be a robber’s council because the manner of the proceedings alone make it unacceptable.

Some OOC believe that it may be possible to revert to a pre-Chalcedon Faith, treating Ephesus II and Chalcedon as local councils, specifically dealing with the *oikumene* of the Roman Empire rather than that of the Global Church. A Tewahedo

¹⁰³ Ladouceur, p.345.

¹⁰⁴ Julie Khella, *Leo's Council?: Dioscorus, Leo, and the Council of Chalcedon* (MA Thesis. Regent University, 2016), p.51.

¹⁰⁵ Khella, pp.32-33, 39.

representative at the Consultation in Geneva, Fr. Habte Mariam, suggested that the Chalcedonians can continue to accept Chalcedon while the OOC do not.¹⁰⁶ The idea is essentially to create a new superstructure in which both OOC and EO can exist. Both can retain councils formerly held to be œcumenical but as great synods instead, presumably this would include Ephesus II. The groups themselves do not need to revert to an ante-ephesian norm but the dogmatic requirements of the overall communion will. While some EO have pointed out that this is canonically possible and has been achieved in the past, John Romanides' response at the time was that "Such a condition is unacceptable and for us can only mean the end of dialogue".¹⁰⁷ While dialogue continued some time after that point, the necessity for OOC to accept Chalcedon et. al. continues to be proposed and rejected. No proposal has been able to win over all the moderates, let alone the hardliners in each group. It has not been the end of dialogue, but it perhaps should have been as the two communia as a whole are unable to move past it, each for very good reasons.

EO critics of reunion, especially those from Athos, have made it clear that reunion requires accepting Chalcedon as œcumenical, while OOC have made it equally clear that they will never do so. While some have explained why this need not be true *canonically*, there is a strong feeling that the Councils were spiritually inspired and have thus been the basis of the Church's teaching ever since.¹⁰⁸ From the Athonite perspective, the canonical rules for accepting and rejecting councils was useful at the time as there were false councils under semi-Arians and other heretics

¹⁰⁶ Ladouceur, p.345.

¹⁰⁷ Ladouceur, p.345, n.24.

¹⁰⁸ Marius Florescu, "Dogmatic Questions and Practical Issues in the Unofficial Bilateral Theological Dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Oriental Orthodox Churches", in *Ecumenical Review Sibiu/Revista Ecumenica Sibiu*, 11.3 (2019), p.466.

that needed to be rejected. Over a millennium of adherence to Chalcedon has proven the validity of the council to them and it is now beyond an issue of dispute.

Both communia are historic faiths and it is not enough to isolate doctrines as ideas divorced from history. The question is whether two churches are joining each other as equals or one is joining the other. If OOC had to accept at least seven œcumenical councils, they would be admitting that their **deliberate** exclusion from these councils did not prevent them from being œcumenical, which in turn suggests that they are not true churches. The creation of a new orthodoxy that accepts only the first two or three councils but allows for great synods would not be a new structure but would be simply extending OOC. OOC have tolerated Chalcedonian expressions for centuries, so there would be no discernible changes for OOC. Similar things can be said about Catholicism.

Anglicans have often rejected councils after Constantinople I, so this same issue may not prove fatal yet Anglicanism faces its own issues because of decisions made *without* the support of an œcumenical council, such as the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopacy as well as same-sex blessings. Dialogue had previously broken down in 2003 over the issue of homosexuality.¹⁰⁹

Modern Context

The modern period of Chalcedonian-OOC dialogue began with the 1431-1449AD Council of Florence which saw attendance from OOC and EO representatives.¹¹⁰ It began the process of ending schism with a few OOC and EO churches, but over the

¹⁰⁹ Tribune, N.S., 2003, Nov 21. Oriental Orthodox dialogue on hold: [Chicago Final Edition]. *Chicago Tribune*, 12. ISSN 10856706.

¹¹⁰ Samantha Kelly, "Ewostateans at the Council of Florence (1441): Diplomatic Implications between Ethiopia, Europe, Jerusalem and Cairo", in *Afriques. Débats, Méthodes et Terrains d'histoire*, 7 (2016); Michael Cherniavsky, "The Reception of the Council of Florence in Moscow", *Church History*, 24.4 (1955), 347-59.

following two centuries, each church had largely broken away again with a few Catholic remnants becoming the “uniate” churches. A new wave of attempts came about as a part of the general push towards œcumenism in the 20th century. It is these efforts that have stalled.

In ancient and recent times, it was the Fifth Œcumenical Council and its helpful phrase that proved the most useful in fostering reunion. While there have been some statements claiming that OOC Miaphysitism & Chalcedonian Christology are compatible, they were made on a philosophical understanding that further dialogue has proven to be false. The Fifth Council phrase is at the forefront of this but there are many other problems that undermined the perceived compatibility of the Christologies. Western interpretations of the Fifth Council phrase have dampened OOC enthusiasm, and Theopaschism has once again become a shibboleth to prove how one interprets this phrase.

Theopaschism

Theopaschism is often denounced as the view that it is a Divine Attribute to suffer (and this has been embraced in some modern contexts, such as in Liberation Theology), but in an OOC context it is better described as “the view that the unity of the Incarnation included the Divine Nature experiencing suffering and death”.¹¹¹ The term passibilism is sometimes used specifically to describe the belief that passibility is a Divine characteristic.¹¹²

Central to the OOC position on Theopaschism are the definitions found in the 726AD Council of Manzikert, which united the Syriac Orthodox and Armenian

¹¹¹ David A. Michelson, *The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p.18.

¹¹² Alexei Streltsov, ““God Gave the Son—the Only One”(John 3: 16), Theopaschism as Love”, in *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 84.3/4 (2020), 351-62, p.351.

Apostolics, divided on Severian and Julianist (so-called Aphthartodocetist) grounds respectively. It “condemned the errors of both Julian and Severus”, which really condemned the extreme followers of both individuals.¹¹³ The council condemned the belief that Christ’s sufferings were illusory, something never taught by Julian.¹¹⁴ At Manzikert, it was asserted that Julian and Severus were actually in agreement but “Severus spoke according to the abstract nature... while Julian’s perspective related to the union.”¹¹⁵

The council agreed that Christ’s Humanity was made incorruptible through the hypostatic union (so the sense in which Christ adopted corruptible humanity was in *ousia* but having one theandric physis the incorruptibility overruled it, so corruptibility was never a physical reality) and that all of Christ’s sufferings were not a result of nature or inevitability but as a “sovereign divine decision”.¹¹⁶ Manzikert’s rejection of Julianism was in asserting that the prelapsarian state of humanity was corruptible (the importance of which we will cover later when we examine "Nature Distinctions") and the rejection of Severus was in the idea that Jesus’ Body was incorruptible before the Resurrection.¹¹⁷ Christ’s Flesh was made Divine through the Union of the Natures (or the assumption of Flesh into the Divine Nature) and not in a separate moment of anointing.

The council clarified what was meant by Christ’s Flesh being Divine. It was not the case that it was to be called Divine simply because it was possessed by a

¹¹³ Nikoloz Aleksidze, "Caucasia: Albania, Armenia, and Georgia", in *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World, ed. by Josef Lössl and Nicholas J. Baker-Brian (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2018), 135-56, p.151.

¹¹⁴ Moss, *Incorruptible Bodies: Christology, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2016), p.34.

¹¹⁵ Cowe S. Peter, "Armenian Christology in the Seventh and Eighth centuries with Particular Reference to the Contributions of Catholicos Yovhan Ōjneč'i and Xosrovik T'argmanič'", in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 55.1 (2004), 30-54, p.47.

¹¹⁶ Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, "Beyond Empire I: Eastern Christianities from the Persian to the Turkish Conquest, 604-1071", in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, 3 ed. by Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 65-85, p.69.

¹¹⁷ Moss, 2013, p.17.

Divine Person but it was divine in physical and ideated characteristics. Christ's Flesh had to conform to Divinity, which was a notable difference from Severus' conception of the pre-Resurrection Flesh.

For Severus, Christ had Flesh that had the potential or "futuristic" characteristics of divinity but in form it conformed to fallen human nature with the exception of sin.¹¹⁸ Potential and individuated characteristics might be put into the category of physis because Severus held that these characteristics were real and meaningful, even if not actualised. Christ had one divine-human physis but His Form consisted of human and divine parts, especially in death when His Soul was in Hell, His Body in the Earth and His Divinity was in Heaven.¹¹⁹ This does not allow for the physis to be divided as human corpses properly belong to the person even after death, hence the miracles caused by saints after death.

St. Philoxenus expresses more caution in these divisions, speaking only of Christ's material (ruhonuto) and spiritual realities (ruhonuto), both of which include Divinity and Humanity.¹²⁰ Although he maintains that Christ had only existed in Spiritual Reality before His Incarnation, this reality became an human soul without ceasing to be what it was. Conversely, the material reality conforms to Divine Characteristics, so that the Flesh itself has to be immortal, perfect, etc.

If a real, radical or subsistent reality is ascribed to the term physis (which seems to be a point of agreement), the physical union described in OOC is similar to the union of hypostases in Ephesian Christianity.

¹¹⁸ Moss, 2013, p.192.

¹¹⁹ Moss, 2013, p.370.

¹²⁰ Sebastian Brock, M.A. Mathai Remban, et al. "Philoxenus of Mabbug", in *Seeri Correspondence Course (SCC) on Syrian Christian Heritage*, 9 (Kottayam: St. Ephrem Research Institute, 1989), p.6

As T.F. Torrance described Chalcedonian theology: "the human nature of Christ was given a real and concrete subsistence within the hypostatic union".¹²¹ So Christ's Humanity never had its own hypostasis-level of reality in the dyophysite hypostatic union; it was not subsumed, having existed outside of Him. Nevertheless, within Christ's hypostasis are two subsistent realities which are the *physeis*.

Philoxenianism could be described as anhypostatic, but much of their focus is on the level of *physis*. There was not even a *physis*-level of subsistence in Christ's Humanity. The Divine Elements of Christ became Human Elements without ceasing to be what they were, so the Incarnation took place within the Divine Elements. So Christ's Human *Physis* was always His Divine *Physis*.

While Philoxenus agrees that *ousia* needs *physis* or else it is unreal, a concretised reality that conforms to two ideations can satisfy both *ousia*. Philoxenus believed that the ideation simply needs some concretised reality which does not need to be unique. This may be the crucial ontological premise that separates Philoxenianism from Chalcedonianism.

Manzikert was not œcumenical but it was seminal for both Syriacs and Armenians and it meant that certain views had to be tolerated across OOC, even if it did not raise any teaching or doctrine to dogma. One of its effects was bringing Syriacs and Armenians into communion while distinguishing "Armenian orthodoxy from...the West Syrian communion (Severian and Julianist) and hence to grant it a unique profile, which in our own day is reclaiming the attention of theologians of a neo-patristic persuasion within the Armenian Apostolic Church."¹²²

The focus of Manzikert was in uniting Syriac Orthodoxy with Armenian Julianists. Julian was venerated for centuries after Manzikert, but Julianist teaching

¹²¹ Thomas Forsyth Torrance, "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church", in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 7.3 (1954), 245-69, p.249.

¹²² Cowe, p.49.

is conveyed more through notable Armenian theologians such as Yovhannes Mayragomec'i.¹²³ True Julianist theology (not apthartodocetism) remains in parts of OOC and would need to be reconciled in dialogue with Chalcedonians.

The Theopaschite conflict predates the Julianist one, beginning in the early years of the Chalcedonian Schism, Theopaschite elements were widely adopted into liturgies in OOC.¹²⁴ This included the Syriac Orthodox but in their specific language and philosophy they expressed the view that while suffering does not belong to the Divine *Ousia*, the Death of Christ is attributable to His Divinity because His Divinity only has subsistence in the One Physis of Christ.

If one says that Jesus did not suffer in His Divine Nature, that may simply mean that Jesus' Divine Nature was not directly the cause of His Suffering (here "in" meaning something closer to "of" or "in being God" and nature meaning *ousia*), but when theologians distinguish between characteristics that properly belong to His Divinity, such as His Omnipresence, and say that no suffering occurred there, then there is a lasting and physical distinction between the Human and Divine Natures of Christ and many OOC theologians express difficulty in understanding how the difference between the Natures exists only in the onlookers' minds when there are very real instances separate from each other that undergo different experiences. If part of Christ suffers and another part does not, and if the unsuffering part neatly corresponds to His Divine Nature, then one cannot really say that the difference between the Natures exists in the onlookers' minds at all, it is entirely based in reality.

Cyril is believed to have laid the foundation for OOC Theopaschism by setting "limits on the Platonic influences by proclaiming there was divine suffering in the

¹²³ Cowe, p.48.

¹²⁴ Bishara Ebeid, "Miaphysite Syriac Patristic Florilegia and Theopaschism. Abū Rā'īṭah's Defence of the Christological Trisagion Hymn", in *Annali di Scienze Religiose*, 14 (2021), 231-69, p.235.

flesh”.¹²⁵ Joseph M. Hallman identified vastly different approaches within the works of Cyril concerning Theopaschism. In earlier works, Cyril explicitly rejected Theopaschism especially due to the taint of Apollinarianism that was associated with it. Cyril was often accused of Apollinarianism and was keen to free himself from those charges. Hallman argues that by his final theological treatise, St. Cyril had still not decided on a solution to the problem, although OOC and neo-Chalcedonian theologians tend to say he decided on a solution that allowed for the Divine Elements to suffer.¹²⁶ John J. O’Keefe believed Theopaschism to be the core of the Nestorian controversy, and sees Cyril’s career as one of increasing Theopaschism.¹²⁷

Some OOC closely adhere to Cyril’s earlier teaching on Theopaschism: that the Divine Elements exist in the spiritual realm and so they can only be said to suffer inasmuch as an human soul suffers along with one’s flesh.¹²⁸ The way in which the Divine Elements would participate in the suffering would still be real, as Cyril describes “the tearless nature weeping”.¹²⁹ Yet later in his career, Cyril saw his enemies divide the human and divine natures in the suffering, so that the rational soul of Christ was seen to suffer in some way more than the Divine Elements.¹³⁰ He explained in a letter that he was growing wary of using the term human nature to describe Jesus’ suffering elements, and that he preferred to simply refer to Jesus’ suffering Flesh.

Many OOC also feel that God is more glorious being able to defy or conquer “His Own Nature”. If one says that God *cannot* suffer, then in a serious way God is

¹²⁵ Pereira, p.56.

¹²⁶ Pereira, p.58.

¹²⁷ Viezure, p.8.

¹²⁸ McGuckin, 2004, pp. 300-01.

¹²⁹ Andrew Mellas, “‘The Passions of His Flesh’: St Cyril of Alexandria and the Emotions of the Logos”, in *Phronema*, 29.1 (2014), p.82.

¹³⁰ Pereira, p.164.

greatly diminished; He is incapable so they instead conclude that “God can limit himself...God’s Omni nature can make him able to act both ways in action and in non-action...”¹³¹ The response that there are capabilities that are negative and are therefore greater not to possess was always unlikely to convince non-Socratics. If He only makes some human elements or an human physis attached to His Divinity suffer, then the Divine Nature is no more capable as it was unable to suffer.

There is a rejection of dialectics and apophatism among many OOC. In their philosophy, a statement that God cannot do or be something is just as offensive as describing what He is or is capable of. Negative descriptions are seen as descriptions and acts of privation are seen as acts.

Thus, one of the core reasons Divine Impassibility is maintained in OOC is that it makes the Divine Suffering more glorious. Once we understand why God seems to be without suffering, the fact that He actually suffered makes Him more worthy of worship. In this context, the belief that God is impassible means that suffering is not ascribed to the Divine Ousia-nature because suffering was not observed prior to the Incarnation, but it does not mean that God is incapable of suffering or that suffering would contradict His Divinity as long as it was voluntary. God would seem to be impassible logically as that seems to be what creation requires of Him, but God is not limited by what creation requires of Him and He can and did defy that requirement.

This glory is only really felt if it is fully true in every aspect. If God attached to Himself a body that suffered for Him while “What He Was” continued not to suffer, this would mean He only suffered on a technicality and being merely technically capable of defying nature is not glorious enough. A body, which could possibly be

¹³¹ Taddesse, p.132.

described as Divine Hypostatically, suffered but if one views the situation essentially, physically or in form, the same cannot be said. In a Philoxenian context, this reality extends all the way to form.

If one maintains Divine Impassibility, one must be careful not to weaken God by making Him incapable of anything, especially not of something as easy as suffering and dying which humans can do without even trying. Certainly, we cannot tell God what He can and cannot do, and neither what He is or is not. If we are to believe in Divine Infinity, it cannot be a constraining infinity that prevents His Divinity from any action.

But there is the need to hold God to His **own** standard. Jesus says that “unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48). If God is infinite, and yet He created a finite Universe, there is a sense in which it is not *that* praiseworthy an act. If anyone else had infinite power, they could achieve it as well, so it is not apparently the optimal or most impressive use of that power. In the same way, a billionaire who builds a company is less impressive than someone who established the same kind of company from scratch. However, the Incarnation and Crucifixion are truly praiseworthy acts because God shrunk Himself down to a span and with the little that He made of Himself, He accomplished something of infinite importance. To make Himself truly praiseworthy He needs to humble Himself. If the Divine Nature undergoes these Acts, then the Divine Nature is praiseworthy. Praise should not be offered simply due to power, but because of virtue. God is only virtuous if He can accomplish much with a little. If He is incapable of having a little, then He is incapable of adhering to His own standards of virtue.

This may be described as a Cosmic Rule of Law, where God is not seen as a tyrant Who established “rules for thee but not for me” but is clearly applicable to the

standards He sets for us. A two-tiered morality cannot be applied to the Christian God. This established the Cosmic Rule of Law, where we are called to be Holy in the exact same way that the Father is Holy.

Central to the OOC concept of Total Depravity is that we must come to God and Scripture with no preconceptions or developed ideas of good and evil of our own, but we must learn our definitions straight from Him. God is not above the morality He establishes for us, but is completely moral in every way.

Nature Distinctions and their Effect on Soteriology and the Doctrine of God

The concept of absolute divine simplicity is accepted by some and rejected by others in OOC. Distinction between the Divine Characteristics and Essence was “fundamental to both the Alexandrian Greek Fathers and medieval [sic] Copto-Arabic philosophical theologians...”¹³² Divine Simplicity was first dogmatised in a Roman Catholic Œcumenical Council during the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council, which stated that the Persons have “one absolutely simple essence, substance or nature”.¹³³ Western Christianity only crystallised and enforced that teaching long after communion with OOC was broken. One may find a strong contrast between the Lateran Council and Rev. Fr. Tadros Yaqoub Malaty, one of the foremost modern Coptic scholars, who says that:

“God is never alone (*monas*), nor an absolute identity as One in isolation (*monas*)... We have to make a clear distinction between

¹³² Stephen J. Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (New York City: Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), p.277.

¹³³ Tanner and Alberigo, p.230.

monos (alone) and *eic* (one). The first is the non-Christian philosophical solipsism, or the radical religious monotheism; the second is the Christian concept of a living God as One and Triune. It is monotheism in the direction of Enotheism, i.e., identity in communion... [OOC never describes] God as alone and [an] absolute simplicity of essence nor of three individual beings”.¹³⁴

Simplicity is taken to be synonymous with unity so that God is never said to be dependent on any parts originating outside the Trinity, but there may be distinguishable parts, characteristics, energies and so on, some belonging to the whole (substantial attributes) and many of being found only in One Person (hypostatic attributes).¹³⁵ It is enough to say of the Trinity, as per Philoxenus, that “everything outside it is created, and whatever is within it is eternal”.¹³⁶ St. Dionysius of Alexandria said God is “eternally simple, for the Three are not separated nor has One existed before the others. They are like the fire which has flame, light and heat at the same time.”¹³⁷ The flame, light and heat are not introduced from outside the fire and one cannot have one without the other. Thus, although each element may be described as a “part” with particular characteristics, it is not a part that pre-existed the other parts and is thus part of a composition in an Aristotelian sense. Although analogies that suggest differences in the persons are shied away from in many Chalcedonian readings, they are typically preferred in OOC and the introduction of

¹³⁴ Rev. Fr. Tadros Yaqoub Malaty, *God* (Alexandria: St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, 1994) pp.14-15.

¹³⁵ Fr. Daniel Abba-Moses, *On the Divine Attributes: an Account of the Alexandrian Patristic Tradition* (Corpus Christi, Texas: St. Mary & St. Moses Abbey, 2022).

¹³⁶ Sara Leila Hussein, *Early Christian Explanations of the Trinity in Arabic in the Context of Muslim Theology*. (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011), p.42.

¹³⁷ Rev. Fr. Tadros Yaqoub Malaty, *How Can Three be One?*, trans. by Salam Solimon, Jina Erian, Amal Abadir and Ibrahim Wassef (Holmdel: St. Mina's Coptic Orthodox Church, 2015), pp.1-2.

analogies that suggest a stronger similarity are reacted to much more strongly as we will see in the “Three Suns” Controversy section of this dissertation.

Immortality is seen as the Divine Characteristic *par excellence*. As Fr. Athanasius Iskander explains, “Being made into a god is to be made immortal, incorruptible and passionless.”¹³⁸ It is the focus of OOC discussions of the Doctrine of God in a similar fashion to how the Father and Son were discussed much more than the Spirit when defining the personal relations against heresies like Arianism.

Humans are initially made with a corruptible nature and then given divine nature as a gift. This idea is partially due to the OOC understanding of *ousia* as “only in observation”. There is no reason to distinguish God’s Immortality from that of any mortal if their observable effects are the same.

Ousia is unreal but it is not meaningless. *Ousia* is an observed extrapolation of what one could expect from one’s physis. If a physis is left to its own devices, it will act according to its *ousia*, but physeis are not left to their own devices all the time.

The grafting of a wild branch to share the nature of a native plant deserves deep analysis, according to Paul in Romans 11. If a golden delicious branch is grafted onto a crabapple tree, it becomes part of that tree’s physical reality, yet it will not act according to the crabapple’s *ousia*-nature, it will produce golden delicious fruits instead. When the grafted branch is cut off, and if another branch grows, this branch will grow crabapples. The *ousia* will win out unless there is intervention, but if a physis has grafted in real elements from other *ousiai*, it may be indistinguishable from other physeis that naturally derive from that alien *ousia*.

¹³⁸ Abouna Athanasius Iskander, p.8.

For St. Athanasius and many other OOC after him, human beings were made to be naturally completely separate from the Divine Ousia so that the Divine could be grafted in and we could become totally physically Divine, but only as a gift.¹³⁹

Though these concepts may seem similar, the EO doctrine of Theosis is frequently cited within OOC as a crucial reason that OOC cannot reenter communion. In one of his most heated arguments with Fr. Matthew the Poor and Dr. George Habib Bebawi, Coptic Pope Shenouda denounced them for their supposed wholesale adoption of EO Theosis.¹⁴⁰

As with the Miaphysitism itself, the difference is apparently linguistic but the difference in expression represents deeper problems. Also like Miaphysitism it stems from a strict adherence to a phrase originating with a Coptic Pope, in this case St. Athanasius; that is “we might be made God (θεοποιηθῶμεν)”¹⁴¹ rather than speaking of us becoming God as in Theosis. The problems with Theosis as described by OOC theologians are twofold:

That it overestimates what an human being can achieve, even through cooperation,
That it underestimates what the processes of sanctification can achieve.

Theopoiesis (to be made God) is a process by which a person’s physis, but not one’s hypostasis or *ousia*, is made Divine. It is a crucial OOC belief that the “Divine Essence is able to and does share some of Its own Divine Attributes with created beings” without transforming their *ousia*.¹⁴² It is in this distinction that the

¹³⁹ Keith Edward Norman, *Deification: the Content of Athanasian Soteriology*. (Ph.D. Thesis, Duke University, 1980), p.88.

¹⁴⁰ Youssef, p.13 n.4; Monier, p.12.

¹⁴¹ St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, 54.3.

¹⁴² Abba-Moses, p.14.

ousia appears most real in OOC tradition, or in the very least, discussions about *ousia* are justified despite its being unreal with a lack of biblical basis.

Most discussion about Theopoiesis focuses on immortality. As Fr. Athanasius Iskander explains: “to be deified is to attain immortality, and immortality is not an innate human characteristic”.¹⁴³

While these characteristics become personal and so we become physically Divine, one does not become Divine according to one’s *ousia*. These characteristics are distinguished from one’s naturally human characteristics by the phrase “given as a gift” or possessed “by participation”, the latter deriving its language from 2 Peter 1:4.

The language of gifts here shows that the Divinity we will possess is real but we are not the source of it. Once given, it is truly possessed, but it is still unnatural in the sense of *ousia* and will never become natural to us. The main difference this causes is, as Cyril says “When something does not arise from a nature, but instead is added on from outside, is there not always the possibility of losing it?”¹⁴⁴ Cyril uses this phrase to explain how Jesus must be human by nature, so it describes an exactly opposite situation, but the metaphysics are still thought to apply.

In contrast to Julian of Halicarnassus describing a change in nature after the Fall, St. Severus explained that Adam always had the ideated characteristic of the possibility of corruption, which was never actualised until the Fall.¹⁴⁵ The Fall primarily affected Humanity’s relationship with God, which in turn affected human *physeis* and forms. Severus maintained that Jesus was corruptible despite having no relation to sin, and for that reason he rejected Julianism.¹⁴⁶ St. Severus here was

¹⁴³ Fr Athanasius Iskander, p.15.

¹⁴⁴ St. Cyril of Alexandria, 1995, p.81.

¹⁴⁵ Cowe, p.37.

¹⁴⁶ Moss, 2013 p.56.

defending a form of Total Depravity, and it is clear that this form of Total Depravity is central to Theopoiesis.

In EO criticism of Total Depravity, it is asserted that “It is because of the image of God present in man that we all have the power to choose the good and reject the evil,”¹⁴⁷ whereas that is not apparently the case in Severan theology in which it is the elements unlike divinity that are capable of reacting to the Divine Nature. Therefore, once deprived of Divine Characteristics such as immortality, humanity became totally depraved.

The level of human activity in the process reflects the differences in how much the OOC believe one is made Divine. One coöperates in becoming Divine if the way in which we become Divine is actually something more like compatibility with God or reflecting Him better. In many theosis models, we do not participate in the Divine Physis but rather in the energies, which are often seen as secondary to the Nature. Most OOC models prefer to express a more immediate participation in the Nature. This means that living in a manner that is acceptable to God is distinguishable from theopoiesis. We can cooperate with God in good works and these works help in making us acceptable for the process of theopoiesis which is a passive process that changes our *physeis*.

That there is ground for further discussion can be seen in the EO theologian’s description of theosis “In deification [theosis] we are by grace (that is to say, in the divine energies), all that God is by nature, save only identity of nature”.¹⁴⁸ Yet many OOC theologians are yet to be convinced that these beliefs can be reconciled, so this issue remains a stumbling block on the road to reunion.

¹⁴⁷ Gerald Bray, "Eastern Orthodox Theology in Outline", in *EVANGEL*, 15 (1996), p.20.

¹⁴⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clark and Co., 1957), p. 86.

Corporealism and Anthropomorphism

The purpose of this section requires more explanation than others. This section is not explaining a doctrine of any OOC church *per se* but looks at a common belief among clergy and laity in some OOC churches. The importance of Anthropomorphism is not the belief itself but rather in how it is tolerated and in its prevalence; those who reject it in OOC do not tend to describe it as an heresy or even a serious error but rather as a disagreement in philosophy or physics which is thus of relative unimportance. Central figures in OOC churches may not express Anthropomorphism but it is indicative of the different philosophy and ontology of these belief systems. Anthropomorphism would not be possible in many Chalcedonian systems of thought (including the systems endorsed by most unitary formulae) and it is that difference that is worth studying. Anthropomorphism is beyond the bounds of the Coptic and Syriac philosophical norms but it is well within the bounds of dogmatic orthodoxy, especially in terms of the communion as a whole.

Cyril wrote a few short treatises against Anthropomorphism, yet Cyril's concern was specifically with sects who took the Father to be incorporeal and invisible but believed otherwise of the Son, making Cyril's concern distinctly Christological.¹⁴⁹ Zār'a-Ya'eqob's form of Anthropomorphism is totally equal in its treatment of the Persons. Cyril's uncle and predecessor St. Theophilus accepted Anthropomorphites later in his career, and Theophilus is often considered a greater theologian than Cyril, with Cyril being described as a second or lesser Theophilus. While Theophilus has been said — since at least the time of Socrates Scholasticus — to have been simply manoeuvring through theological politics by allying with

¹⁴⁹ Paul A. Patterson, *Visions of Christ: the Anthropomorphite Controversy of 399 CE*, Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity, 68 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), p.71.

Anthropomorphites to attack Origenists,¹⁵⁰ the fact remains that he did not consider them to be heretics. If one teaches Cyril or Theophilus' philosophy or physics as dogma then one is not really following in the footsteps of those for whom the difference between philosophy and theology was crucial.

He derived this from St. Athanasius who disagreed with *Creatio ex Hyles* but strongly maintained that it should not be made a matter of doctrine and should be kept purely within the realm of philosophy.¹⁵¹

Anthropomorphism is the belief that the Three Persons of the Trinity eternally possessed humanoid figures that served as the model for the appearance of humanity. Some believe that these appearances are caused by spatially complex forms, in which case it is a subset of corporealism which can also ascribe inhuman forms to the Persons. One might distinguish between Anthropomorphism and Anthroöpsism, the latter being that the Persons might have appearances without the limitations of spatially complex forms. This too is possible due to the different philosophy OOC utilises, but this can arguably be seen in Catholic mystic traditions and in the Palamite understanding of energies. Augustine was more lenient to Anthroöpsism, saying that if the LORD were to have an appearance, the human one was the greatest.¹⁵² Anthroöpsism in the Western tradition might best be expressed in the *Visio Dei*.

In the ante-Nicene period, most Anthropomorphic Christian texts have been described as Jewish-Christian such as the *Clementine Homilies*, *Sibylline Oracles*, *Testament of Moses*, *Apocalypse of Moses* and *Life of Adam and Eve*.¹⁵³ It continued

¹⁵⁰ Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and of a Heretic* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp.27-30.

¹⁵¹ Keith Norman, "Ex Nihilo: The Development of the Doctrines of God and Creation in Early Christianity", *Brigham Young University Studies*, 17.3 (1977), 291-318, p.309 n.90.

¹⁵² St. Augustine, "C. ep. Man. 23: Summa Dignitate in Suo Genere" in *CSEL* 25:220.

¹⁵³ Silviu Bunta, "Too Vast to Fit in the World: Moses, Adam, and šlm 'lhjm in Testament of Moses 11: 8", in *Henoch*, 26.2 (2004), 188-204.

to be popular in post-Nicene Upper Egypt and was once the standard teaching throughout Egypt in the aftermath of the First Origenist Crisis.

Theistic anthropomorphism is to be distinguished from angelic anthropomorphism. Belief in the corporeality of angels persisted separately from Divine Corporeality likely because of St. Macarius the Great of Egypt who said that angels had “subtle” or wispy bodies¹⁵⁴ in contrast to the (pseudo-)Dionysian tradition which refers to angels as bodiless powers.¹⁵⁵ Ss. John of Damascus and John Chrysostom, while using the language of “bodiless powers” asserted that they were really made of spatial but weightless fire,¹⁵⁶ with Chrysostom claiming they are bodiless in the sense of having no earthly concerns.¹⁵⁷ This is comparable to the different ways σάρξ is used by the Apostle Paul, sometimes referring to lusts and other times referring to corporeality.¹⁵⁸

Angelic anthropomorphism is seen clearly in parts of the Ethiopic canon where angels marry humans and are circumcised.¹⁵⁹ These Scriptures were defended by the Anthropomorphite Zär’a-Ya’əqob,¹⁶⁰ which demonstrates that angelic corporealism was preferable for theistic anthropomorphites yet angelic corporeality was sometimes caused by opposition to Divine Corporeality. Ss. Augustine and John of Damascus described angelic corporeality in contrast between

¹⁵⁴ Hermann Dörries, Erich Klostermann and Matthias Kroeger, eds. *Die 50 geistlichen Homilien des Makarios*, Patristische Texte und Studien, 4 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), pp.33-34.

¹⁵⁵ Dimitrios Pallis, "Dionysius the Areopagite", in *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, ed. by David A. Leeming (New York: Springer, 2020), 650-54 p.652.

¹⁵⁶ Siphilwe Ndlovu and Angelo Nicolaides. "Angels and Angelology: The Ministering Spirits and Elect 'sons of God'", in *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 102 (2021), p.7.

¹⁵⁷ Mark Roosien, "'Emulate Their Mystical Order': Awe and Liturgy in John Chrysostom's Angelic πολιτεία", in *Studia Patristica*, 97 (2017), 115-30, p.13.

¹⁵⁸ Robert G. Bratcher, "The Meaning of Sarx ("Flesh") in Paul's Letters", in *The Bible Translator*, 29.2 (1978), 212-18, pp.212-14.

¹⁵⁹ Chris Keith, *Beyond Canon: Early Christianity and the Ethiopic Textual Tradition*, Library of New Testament Studies, 643 (London: T&T Clark, 2020), p.76.

¹⁶⁰ Assefa, pp. 219-21.

God as creator and the whole created order.¹⁶¹ God's uniqueness is better defended if he is the only incorporeal. A core argument for Divine Incorporeality (that God is Spirit, implicitly stating that spiritual beings are necessarily incorporeal) was not always effective.¹⁶² In order to believe in theistic corporeality one must believe in angelic corporeality, but the reverse is not true.

Ethiopic philosophy does not differentiate between the material and immaterial but rather flesh and spirit (*menfes መንፈስ*). Ethiopic thought tends to describe spirit as a different **kind** of material not something that is transcendent, immaterial, simple or formless.¹⁶³

Zär'a-Ya'eqob was strongly opposed by the Monastic Order of the Zämika'elites and many of their works that are still highly revered, such as their *Andämta* which have anti-anthropomorphic tendencies.¹⁶⁴ Yet the successors of both Zär'a-Ya'eqob and Zämika'el are today united in full communion within one Church. The Tewahedo liturgy includes *anaphoras* written from Anthropomorphic and anti-Anthropomorphic views, allowing each church to celebrate mass with either view expressed in the liturgy.

Given the tendency for Tewahedo theology to be ambivalent towards attributes of the Divine Nature, their view can be compared to James Barr's question "when He does appear in a form at all, is it thought that the human form is the natural or characteristic one for him to assume?"¹⁶⁵ Appearances are *ipso facto* meaningful

¹⁶¹ Seamus O'Neill, "'Aequales Angelis Sunt': Angelology, Demonology, and the Resurrection of the Body in Augustine and Anselm", in *The Saint Anselm Journal*, 12.1 (2016) 1-18, pp. 8-9; Ndlovu and Nicolaides, p.7.

¹⁶² For example, St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* Ia Q3.A1. See also: M. Maher and J. Bolland. "Spirit" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. (New York: Robert Appleton Company. 1912) Retrieved August 11, 2023 from New Advent: newadvent.org/cathen/14220b.htm.

¹⁶³ Minna Opa and Anna Haapalainen, eds. *Christianity and the Limits of Materiality* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), pp.78, 94.

¹⁶⁴ Ralph Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopic and Ephremic Literature* (Ph.D. Thesis. SOAS, University of London, 2011), p.55.

¹⁶⁵ James Barr, "Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament", in *Congress Volume Oxford 1959* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), pp.32-33.

things that can be adopted by forms. Human appearance is thus a meaningful thing taken from God. This *Visio Dei*-like belief can be described as metacorporeal.¹⁶⁶

Two issues can cause corporealism: a rejection of Aristotelian preference for realisation against potential and a belief that reality is corporeal.

In Aristotelian thought, realised potential is seen as greater than potential alone, so God is held to be pure act and fully realised, having no potential. This is implicitly rejected in the ability for God to limit Himself. In modern times, many Western philosophers have begun to develop a preference for potential over actualisation. Instant gratification in the social media and internet age has been a lens by which people have come to realise the benefits of potential against actualisation.

While Harnack claimed “the idea of a corporeality of God may be traced back to Stoic influence”,¹⁶⁷ and the Stoic-influenced theory shows much fruit in many early Christian Anthropomorphic texts (though the Jewish influenced early forms of Anthropomorphism show marked difference from Stoic forms), Zār’a-Ya‘əqob’s main concern was in distinction rather than the main Stoic concerns of reality, eternity and indivisibility in the atomic sense. It seemed that if all persons were consubstantial and equally incorporeal, they were physically and really identical, so he accused incorporealists of modalism. His critics point out that such a conclusion was only possible through his controversial “Three Suns” theology.

¹⁶⁶ Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, and Gerald O’Collins SJ, eds. *The Incarnation: an Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p.45.

¹⁶⁷ Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1 (New York: Dover, 1961), p.180 n. 1.

The “Three Suns” Controversy

Emperor St. Zär’a-Ya‘əqob and Abba Giyorgis famously sparked controversy when they described God as Three Suns.¹⁶⁸ This was to emphasise the equal divinity of the Persons by suggesting that each person possessed a total Divine *baḥrəy* with each characteristic in the fullest, in a manner parallel to the pseudo-Athanasian Creed of Western Christianity.

This was in reaction to the traditional OOC description of the Unity of the Trinity, where the Father is said to be like the Sun, the Son is like its rays, and the Spirit is like the heat the rays carry.¹⁶⁹ Simplicity is in action and being where each Person is different characteristically in a totally complementary way, with such unity of action that one cannot be seen, and cannot act at all, without the others. There is no Aseity or self-reliance in any Person but they exist only in mutual interdependence.

St. Eusebius of Cæsaræa was an early and controversial advocate for the separate existence of the Son. He also criticised the Sun analogy but he replaced it with his own scent-related one. He said that when perfume is taken away, it leaves a scent that exists on its own and yet would not exist without the perfume.¹⁷⁰ It is not that the Father must ontologically generate the Son, though it is true that He would be less good without Him. His eternal generation is thus more related to character than being.

Zär’a-Ya‘əqob is in line with St. Eusebius’ view. Christ has a separate existence that is poorly described by one *baḥrəy* according to the Tewahedo

¹⁶⁸ Getatchew Haile, "The Cause of the Ḥṣṭifanosites: A Fundamentalist Sect in the Church of Ethiopia", in *Paideuma*, 29 (1983), 93-119, p.108; Gebru, p.42.

¹⁶⁹ Coptic Pope St. Athanasius I the Apostolic, *Discourses Against the Arians*, 4.25.11.

¹⁷⁰ Jon M. Robertson, *Christ as Mediator: A Study of the Theologies of Eusebius of Caesarea, Marcellus of Ancyra, and Athanasius of Alexandria* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2007), p.49.

understanding of nature. Without adopting Greek ontology, such a distinction would be difficult to express. Yet the Three Suns position is to emphasise the full divinity in each Person

The One Sun position might refer to a particular *baḥrəy* of the Divine Persons, but it is not the “particular physis” found in Cyril’s works which is primarily defined as distinct from a common physis, which OOC typically call *ousia*. The Persons are not participating in a form or nature distinguishable in any sense from the Persons themselves, but they only participate *directly* with the other Persons. By avoiding any language of *ousia*, OOC do not permit thinking of Divinity as a sum greater than the parts of the Persons, there are only the Persons as Abuna Petros describes:

“Through [the Father] they are called possessors of intellect...Through [the Son] they are called possessors of speech...the Holy Spirit...is [also] the breath for the Father and the Son. They do not have another breath. Through it they are called possessors of life... Because of this we call [all] Three equally Lord, [all] Three equally Divinity, [all] Three equally God...[heretics] take person separately and divinity separately. We, however, do not separate divinity from person and person from divinity.”¹⁷¹

By belonging to each other, the Persons possess each Divine Attribute so it cannot be said that the Father is unwise without the Son *because* He is never without the Son, not because He possesses wisdom in his own particular *baḥrəy*. In this sense they are one *baḥrəy*. They are each a physical reality of their own in the

¹⁷¹ Krzyżanowska and Ancel, pp.141-44

sense Eusebius describes. In a nominalist sense this is not an *esse*, existence or even person participating in an higher essence that can be considered distinct from the instance itself because no such essence exists. By removing *ousia* language, this distinction does not even exist in observation, the lowest level of reality. This safeguards the Tewahedo from the developed substance theology of the West. It also demonstrates the extent to which the person-physis distinction is understood within Tewahedo thought despite the different conclusions they derive from it.

It fully embraces a limited sense of the Divine Simplicity in which the unity of action (*Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*) is all that is meant. The real distinction between *propria* is the only way to maintain three *baḥrəyat* and one *baḥrəy*, that many physical realities could share one physical reality. Partialism is thus crucial to Tewahedo theology, and importantly, it is central in maintaining the peace between sects within the Tewahedo churches in a period of internecine conflict. Any formulation that would endanger the superstratum of conciliatory language or any individual interpretation is to be avoided, but cannot be avoided in the proposed formulae for reunion with Chalcedonians.

Like other Tewahedo controversies, there is a middle-ground currently reached in which the different parties are recognised and are represented through different liturgies. The Anaphora of St. Mary says “The Father is the sun, the Son is the sun, and the Holy Spirit is the sun”¹⁷² while Ethiopic Clement (part of their broader Canon) states: “My Father is sun, I his light, and the Holy Spirit his heat.”¹⁷³

Unlike the Qebat controversy, the Three Suns controversy has already spilled into violence in recent years. In 2021, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces attacked the

¹⁷² Gebru, p.43.

¹⁷³ Gebru, p.34.

monastery Waldeba monastery, the main centre of Three Suns teaching today,¹⁷⁴ killing at least 13 monks and destroying the library they were protecting.¹⁷⁵

Judaic Heritage

Tewahedo and Armenian traditions include Judaic practices which were crucial factors in the breakdown of Catholic and EO communion respectively.

Tewahedo practice circumcision, have copies of the Ark of the Covenant with ten commandment tablets (called tabots), keep dietary restrictions and ritual cleanliness. Those partaking in sexual relations cannot receive communion (based on Exodus 19:15), and neither can menstruating women and postpartum mothers.¹⁷⁶

St. Paul warns us not to trust either in “circumcision nor uncircumcision” (Galatians 6:15). Were a circumcised and ritually Jewish nation to change its practices to gentile norms, this would be trusting in uncircumcision just as much as the Galatians and other gentiles changing to Jewish norms was trusting in circumcision. In Ethiopia, Jesuit opposition to Circumcision was based on the idea of the centrality of Paul as the anti-Sabbath Apostle of “non-circumcision”.¹⁷⁷ For the Jesuits, far from legitimising the practice, it was precisely the fact that Ethiopia inherited Circumcision from their Jewish past that made the rejection of the rite necessary.¹⁷⁸

As with other controversies the issues of Judaic practices has a storied history of controversy in OOC and was often the focus between the Beta-Ewostatewos and

¹⁷⁴ Krzyżanowska and Ancel, p.136.

¹⁷⁵ Martin Plaut, (2022) *The Tigray Crises and the Monastery of Waldba*. Available at: martinplaut.com/2022/03/22/the-tigray-crises-and-the-monastery-of-waldba (Accessed: 12 September 2023).

¹⁷⁶ Rev. Dr. Tibebe Teklu Senbetu, pp.26, 48.

¹⁷⁷ Verena Böll, Dr. Steven Kaplan and Andreu Martinez D'Alos-Moner, ed. *Ethiopia and the Missions: Historical and Anthropological Insights*, African Studies, 25 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), p.37.

¹⁷⁸ Böll, p.47.

Beta-Tekle-Haymanot.¹⁷⁹ Emperor St. Zär'a-Ya'eqob ruled in favour of the Judaic practices of the Beta-Ewostatewos against Coptic Papal pressure.¹⁸⁰ It is asserted that while grace was once conveyed through circumcision as the Old Testament version of baptism (Old Testament signs were “counted as baptism” as per 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 and Colossians 2:9-12), it is now merely a cultural rite.¹⁸¹

Armenians practise animal sacrifice (matagh/մատաղ) and retain specific ritual elements from the Old Testament. The meat is salted (Leviticus 2:13), living birds are released (Leviticus 14:7) and bulls without blemish or offered (Leviticus 22:19).¹⁸² Tewahedo animal sacrifice also shows heavy adherence to Jewish norms.¹⁸³ Animal sacrifice was denounced in the Third Council of Constantinople due to being a “Jewish rite”, and the Armenian practice was singled out.¹⁸⁴ The practice is common in rural EO churches (as *kourbania*), but is formally condemned and stopping the practice is often the focus of centralised efforts since Byzantine times.¹⁸⁵

Armenians assert that animal sacrifices do not remit sins, thus communion has a more central place. To make this point clear, they have restrictions against applying the blood to buildings, blessing only the salt or connecting it to New

¹⁷⁹ Berry, p.lix.

¹⁸⁰ Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia: 1270–1527* (Los Angeles, CA: Tsehai Publishers, 2009), pp. 206–23.

¹⁸¹ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church Diocese of the U.S.A and Canada (2015) *The Mystery of Baptism, Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church Diocese of the U.S.A and Canada*. Available at: english.eritreantewahdo.org/baptism (Accessed: 13 September 2023).

¹⁸² Armenian Church of St. Petersburg (2018) *Матах (пожертвование) и освящение соли [Matah (donation) and blessing of salt]*, AAC. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230111061908/http://armenian-church.org/prikhozhanam/obryady-tains-tva-molitvy-pritchi/1851-matakh-pozhertvovanie-i-osvyashchenie-soli> (Accessed: 09 September 2023).

¹⁸³ Curtis Hutt, “A Threefold Heresy: Reassessing Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Animal Sacrifice in Late Antiquity”, in *History of Religions*, 58.3 (2019), 251–76, p.270.

¹⁸⁴ Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.195.

¹⁸⁵ Ekaterina Kovaltchuk, “The Encaenia of St Sophia: Animal Sacrifice in a Christian Context”, in *Scrinium*, 4.1 (2008), 158–200, p.163.

Testament love feasts by banning whole-burnt offerings and giving the food to the poor (though these regulations are not always followed).¹⁸⁶

The fact remains that communion ended over these practices and in none of the agreed statements or councils are these practices addressed, revealing the weaknesses of the dialogue.

Conclusion

The shared philosophical and metaphysical basis of OOC allow for robust discussions of and challenges to every part of theology. It is acceptable to a Philoxenian or a Severian that a Zār'a-Ya'əqobite or a Qībatočč never denies the Divinity of Christ at any point of His Existence, even if they thoroughly disagree about the Nature of Divinity Itself. It seems that beliefs concerning the Divine Essence are considered to be of lesser importance than what is believed about the Persons and their relation to Divinity. There is more up for debate concerning the Essence and Its Attributes, including their existence, but as long as one has defined Divinity in a way that clearly applies to all Persons at all times, there is more room for diversity.

There is not so much room in the major Chalcedonian Communion. The Fifth Council of Constantinople, held by EOC as the Ninth Œcumenical Council, dogmatised the belief that the Divine *Ousia* is real, simple and cannot be participated in. The Lutheran Book of Concord describes the *communicatio genus kenoticum* as abhorrent, leaving Confessional Lutheranism beyond reunion with OOC as a

¹⁸⁶ H. Gasparyan, (2021) Մատաղի խորհուրդը, *Qahana.am* | Մատաղի խորհուրդը. Available at: <https://qahana.am/post/1849> (Accessed: 09 September 2023); Armenian Church of St. Petersburg (2018)

whole.¹⁸⁷ It would be exceedingly difficult to preserve communion with Qībatočč as Tewahedo hierarchs have so carefully done while joining communion with a group that describes the kenotic *communicatio* in such harsh terms. The Catholic Church accepts Lateran IV as the Twelfth Œcumenical Council, and that council anathematised Corporealism and anything opposing “Absolute Simplicity”. The Westminster Confession similarly describes God as without parts or passions, though the incompatibility of OOC episcopal polity (in which sacraments are necessary for salvation and can only be administered in a three-fold ministry with apostolic succession) and presbyterian polities make Reformed reunion basically impossible.

While one could point out parties within a Chalcedonian communion that seem compatible with OOC, this has not facilitated reunion thus far. For example, EO views on the Divine Simplicity and the mechanics of the Incarnation vary but these have been grounds for vetoing any attempt at union for some autocephalies, especially Athos which has a role in safeguarding strict orthodoxy. While they have not investigated and taken steps against members of their own communion that may disagree with them in these points, allowing in new Christians whom they know to disagree is another matter. EO has its own careful balance of power which could be endangered. The same can be said for Anglicanism, as Canterbury has shown itself poor in preserving unity in the build up to and aftermath of the Kigali Conference of 2023. Why would ancient OOC African churches consider joining a communion that is seen as consistently belittling and ignoring its African members? For Catholicism, Thomism likely forms the biggest movement that would prevent OOC union. While some interpretations find alignment between Thomas and Palamas, these

¹⁸⁷ David Law, "Divine Suffering and the Communicatio Idiomatum", in *T&T Clark Handbook of Suffering and the Problem of Evil*, ed. by Matthias Grebe and Johannes Grössl (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), 284-295, p.291.

interpretations require specific perspectives of both authors and are unlikely to convince the hardliners of either party. Important OOC interpretations move significantly further from the philosophical underpinnings of Thomism than Palamas.

Discussions so far have amounted to saying that there is no substantial difference between OOC Miaphysitism and the Chalcedonian definition, particularly considering the Fifth Œcumenical Council and its “helpful phrase” “the distinction between the Human and Divine Natures exists only in the onlooker’s mind”. This phraseology may be acceptable to OOC, but it is clearly interpreted differently by Chalcedonians than it seems to be by OOC. From an OOC perspective, Western sources seem to explain it away, and they are able to point to real and lasting distinctions between the natures in Chalcedonian thought. In terms of Thomism, absolute simplicity demands that the created and uncreated parts of Christ be completely unlike and incommunicable to each other. The closest widely accepted opinion in OOC to this view is the belief that the Divine Elements exist in one Physis with Christ’s Flesh, acting as human spirits do to their flesh. But it is clear that one physis with no separate subsistent reality is meant.

There is also a problem when other communions approach OOC through a small group of theologians they believe to be representative of the whole churches they seek to enter communion with. No OOC *sui iuris* church is centralised enough to make such a tactic viable. Such talks do little more than establish that there are factions within OOC patriarchates that are more closely aligned to Chalcedonianism. Chalcedonians may pursue uniting with these specific factions at the expense of the unity of those churches, but there is no guarantee that they will join them.

The suggestion remains the only possible method of reunification but it is very unlikely. While it is true that councils have changed status in Catholicism and EO (i.e.

Trullo ceasing to be considered œcumenical and the Lateran Councils retroactively becoming œcumenical) the œcumenical councils have become codified in structures such as canon law and are thus unlikely to change. OOC requires episcopal ordination with apostolic succession, so the vast majority of Chalcedonians remain incapable or highly unlikely to join communion with OOC.

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