

## CHAPTER 9

# Development of Classical Christology

Unlike soteriology, the development of classical christology reached a certain plateau with the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Although the doctrine of Chalcedon was not accepted by churches representing the extremes in the contemporary christological debate, this doctrine became a central teaching of most of the Christian churches and has remained a touchstone of orthodoxy. Chalcedon is a classic symbol of Christian faith.

The history of how the church arrived at this christological doctrine four hundred years after the death of Jesus is well known; the story has been analyzed many times.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the second century, Ignatius of Antioch wrote confidently: "There is only one physician—of flesh yet spiritual, born yet unbegotten, God incarnate, genuine life in the midst of death, sprung from Mary as well as God, first subject to suffering then beyond it—Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>2</sup> During the course of the century Justin Martyr and the other apologists began building bridges between Christian self-understanding and Greco-Roman culture, and Irenaeus defended a bible-based christology against gnostic novelties. The third century witnessed reactions against modalism and patripassionism, and the development of a conception of God's inner life that was differentiated and of which Jesus Christ was a part. It also developed what is sometimes called a "non-heretical" subordinationism.<sup>3</sup> The fourth

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1. Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 1, *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon* (451) (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975); Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (New York: Dover Publications, 1961); J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A & C Black, 1977); Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, 1, *History of Doctrines in the Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1905); Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), and *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to Literature and Its Background* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

2. Ignatius of Antioch, "Letter to the Ephesians," 7.2, in Cyril C. Richardson et al., eds., *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 90.

3. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 167.

century was marked by the controversy between the Arians and the Nicenes, and Athanasius was the interpreter and defender of the doctrine of the first ecumenical council which established the divinity of Jesus against a radical subordinationism. And, finally, during the first half of the fifth century, a controversy concerning the constitution of the person of Jesus Christ came to a head. It pitted an incarnational, Word-flesh christology that depicted Jesus Christ as a divine subject clothed in human nature, against an "assumed human being" christology that depicted Jesus Christ as a human being in whom the divine Word dwelt. Relying heavily on a letter of Pope Leo, the Council of Chalcedon used a language of person and natures, a language marked by tensions and paradoxes, in order to preserve the values contained on each side of this debate. As a practical formula, the teaching of Chalcedon succeeded remarkably well.

My aim in this chapter is not to try to represent this four-hundred-year history in an objectively adequate way. Rather, I will presuppose knowledge of the main lines of this development and comment upon it within the framework of four themes which are relevant to the task of systematic christology. The themes are, first, inculturation and the tensions that are involved in it; second, the dynamic character of christological development and the role of soteriology in it; third, the problem of the relation of Jesus, insofar as he is recognized as divine, to God; and, fourth, the narrow christological problem of the constitution of Jesus Christ as human and divine. In the light of this commentary on the historical development of the theology, the next chapter will present a more pointed analysis and interpretation of the doctrines of Nicaea and Chalcedon. These doctrines make little sense apart from the theological conflicts that generated them.

## NEW TESTAMENT SOURCES AND CULTURAL INTELLIGIBILITY

Christology continued to develop after the first century as Christianity spread and entered into contact with new communities. At the same time, the writings of the first century were gradually gathered into a canon which served as a touchstone for authentic Christian belief. The relation between these two developments is interactive, forming a tension between the New Testament sources of christology and the intelligibility of christology for new cultural situations. I want to comment on how this tension manifested itself in the second century, for it had a lasting effect on the whole future development of christology.

Aloys Grillmeier notes how during the second century Christian belief moved from being a set of religious beliefs, more or less integrated with other knowledge of the world, to a generalized Christian religious view of reality. By this he means a more inclusive vision that responds to fundamental questions such as those of God, human existence, life, death,

destiny, matter, and spirit. This development occurred alongside of gnosticism, a loose movement of thought that emphasized a religious doctrine of dualism and a system of salvation based on gnosis.<sup>4</sup> The solidification of the vision was carried forward by a questioning, reflective, and constructive mode of thinking that aimed at ever more comprehensive understanding. Inevitably this was accomplished by entering into dialogue or interaction with the culture in which Christians found themselves, the culture which new Christians brought with them into the church. Christian beliefs were placed in conjunction with the broad system of language, culture, and knowledge that was in place at the time. This movement can be seen in the Apologists generally and in Justin Martyr in particular, especially with reference to the area of christology.

This process of interaction with Greek and Roman cultures occurred in tandem with the formation of the canon. This means that the dialogue with culture was not a free interchange, but one that was already bound by Jewish tradition in its scriptures, and by a New Testament tradition that had become objectified in writing. Whether or not it was the intention of its authors, scripture assumed the function of preserving the foundational experience of the church, what was taken to be the classic expression of its faith, so that it provided a decisive norm against corrosive innovation. Unlike an oral tradition that retains more freedom to move forward and change, writing objectifies and preserves a privileged moment in the historical life of the community, so that development into the future doubles back on the classic record which functions precisely as a canon or rule of faith.<sup>5</sup> The canon of scripture was by no means closed in the early second century, but its contents were almost all written, and they were appealed to as an authority.

Christian reflection moves forward in an attempt to integrate beliefs within a wider framework of knowledge. At the same time, Christian reflection is bound to its origins in Jesus and the first formulations of the community's faith in him. These two poles exist in tension with each other. Christology has to be formulated in the language of the culture to which it is addressed, if it is to be understood. But at the same time, that which is reformulated is based on particular historical sources or media and has the scriptures as its norm. There will always be a tension between these

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4. According to Grillmeier, gnosticism represented a common religious experience of the time. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 80–81.

5. See Paul Ricoeur, "Speaking and Writing," *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 27–30, for a brief analysis of what occurs socially in the transition from an oral tradition to a written tradition. James Barr explains the formation of the canon as a social act of formulating and preserving a classical account of the church's foundational religious experience in *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 114–18.

two poles in christology. The norm that is scripture enters into a tensive relationship with a new linguistic tradition and culture, a broad intellectual matrix, a different form of community experience. This will demand a new form of intelligibility, new language, new thought forms, and new forms of life. The result is a tensive structure in the quest for intelligibility, as Jesus Christ is interpreted in a new language and culture, and the New Testament sources act as a controlling norm.

Two features in the process of christological thought in the post-New Testament period had a decisive impact on the future of its development. The first is the objectification of the tradition which is effected by writing. By objectification I mean the turning of the record or witness of a participatory form of religious encounter into an objective source for what appears to be representative religious knowledge and data. On the one hand, the scriptures are able to serve as an objective norm or reference precisely because they rendered the tradition universally available by their written form. On the other hand, the scriptures almost inevitably perform their function by being appealed to as an objective source of directly representative knowledge. Scripture functioned as more than a theological norm; it was read at liturgy and nurtured the spiritual life. But insofar as it served as a source and norm for theological reflection, its content tended to be regarded as containing revealed information and data that was continuous with worldly knowledge.

The second decisive feature of the period concerns the understanding of Jesus of Nazareth, who is the final norm in christology because he is its source and object. After the New Testament period, the understanding of Jesus Christ became governed by the framework and language of the Prologue of John's gospel. The Jesus who was the subject matter of christology ceased to be the Jesus of the synoptics. Or, to put it in another way, the Jesus of the synoptics became understood in Johannine terms. The three-stage christology of the Prologue became the standard framework or form of thought within which Jesus of Nazareth was construed. The process of a genetic growth in interpretation and understanding of the human being Jesus of Nazareth was reversed, and a descent-ascent christology from above became the dominant schema. The pluralism of New Testament christology was gradually but effectively blunted, and a particular model of incarnational christology, involving a pre-existent Logos, developed into the controlling paradigm for all christological thinking. John's christology quickly became not one christology among others but the controlling framework within which mainline christology unfolded. Because of the identity of the subjects, Jesus and Logos, one could even speak of a pre-existent Jesus. This was not a difficult transition in a culture for which the world of transcendence was densely populated with various levels and kinds of invisible beings, and for which Logos was a philosophically meaningful category.

The christology of Justin Martyr exemplifies these trends.<sup>6</sup> He frequently appeals to scripture as a source of objective, other-worldly or transcendent data about Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> Johannine christology lies at the basis of his speculative account of the Christian vision of reality. Justin operates within the framework of a three-stage, descent-ascent christology. The pre-existent Logos, or Son, or "our Savior Jesus Christ became Incarnate and took upon Himself flesh and blood for our salvation . . ." (1 Apol 66, p. 105). Although this incarnation is a definitive self-presence of the Logos, the same Logos is the agent or subject of other interactions with the world. It was Christ, for example, who addressed Moses "under the form of fire" (1 Apol 62, p. 101; Trypho 59, pp. 241–42). Christ, then, is one title among many for the Logos who in principle is God's agent interacting with the world, and who finally became incarnate in the flesh of Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

The Christ or Logos was generated from within the Godhead itself: "God has begotten of Himself a certain rational Power as a Beginning before all other creatures" (Trypho 61, p. 144). This hypostatized rational power of God is the principle of the intelligibility of the created universe. Each instance of human reason is formed according to it, and actively participates in it when it acts reasonably. Analogous to a Platonic form, then, Christ as Logos and as Reason is immanent in the whole universe, and present to human beings who, in their turn, are engaged with Christ in their knowledge of truth. Christ "was and is the Logos who is in every person . . ." (2 Apol 10, p. 130). In another place Justin says:

We have been taught that Christ was First-begotten of God [the Father] and we have indicated above that He is the Word of whom all humankind partakes. Those who lived by reason are Christians, even though they have been considered atheists. . . . So, also, they who lived before Christ and did not live by reason were useless people, enemies

6. Justin Martyr, "The First Apology," "The Second Apology," "Dialogue with Trypho," *Saint Justin Martyr*, ed. by Thomas B. Falls (New York: Christian Heritage, 1948). All references to Justin are to this edition of his works.

7. Justin, 1 Apol 45, pp. 82–83, is an example. Here Justin uses Ps 109:1–3 as a prophecy that depicts events that happened later or were happening at his time of writing. This is of course part of a general pattern of arguing from prophetic fulfillment.

8. Justin cites many names and many appearances of the Logos. "Now, the Word of God is His Son, as we have already stated, and He is called Angel and Apostle . . . What has been written has been here set down to prove that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and His Apostle, being of old the Word, appearing at one time in the form of fire, at another under the guise of incorporeal beings [i.e., as an angel], but now, at the will of God, after becoming man for mankind, He bore all the torments which the demons prompted the rabid Jews to wreck upon Him" (1 Apol 63, p. 102; also Trypho 61, p. 144). Grillmeier judges Justin's christology subordinationist on the basis of these inferior names. There are other indications as well, one of which is the transcendence of the Father compared with the Son who is the mediator between heaven and earth.

of Christ, and murderers of those who did live by reason. But those who have lived reasonably, and still do, are Christians, and are fearless and untroubled. (1 Apol 46, p. 83; also 2 Apol 13, p. 133)

Thus Justin took the christology of John's Prologue and fused it with a Greek conception of the world. He combined the Platonic idea of a world-soul with the doctrine of the immanent seeds of the Logos as the source of reason in each human being. "According to the Platonists, the world-soul is the principle at work in ordering the world, both at creation and in sustaining the world. It has a rational element which is termed *Nous*, Logos or even *he logike*.<sup>9</sup> Jesus Christ is this Logos. In this christology he has assumed the function of the cosmological principle of intelligibility as God's ordering intelligence; and in the incarnation this Logos has appeared in history.

Let me sum up this first point as it is illustrated in Justin Martyr. Theology is a continued effort at inculturation. This involves reformulating christological doctrine in a way that addresses the questions of the culture and uses the language of the culture in response. These responses are in tension with their source and norm, scripture. In going back to scripture, christology during this period employed it as a source of objectified revealed knowledge. And it built christology on the basis of a model taken from the Prologue of John's gospel. Thinking unfolded within this framework in such a way that it became established as the controlling paradigm. This framework then operated as a presupposition, or a "given." Thus two premises of this christology clearly distinguish it from christology in our time: one is the hypostatization of the titles of Jesus, such as Wisdom and Logos; and the other is the use of scripture as a source of objective representative knowledge. These developments, when they are contrasted with the historical development of New Testament christology, also illustrate a shift from a christology "from below" to a christology "from above."<sup>10</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT AND THE SOTERIOLOGICAL NORM

There is a tendency to read the history of the development of patristic christology as though it unfolded along a teleological trajectory that led

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9. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 93.

10. I have not used the term "Hellenization" because of the negative connotation it bears, that is, a compromise of authentic New Testament teaching. Those who view this development positively argue that the patristic councils actually saved rather than compromised the New Testament message about Jesus. But either way, no one can deny that this case of inculturation involved a significant change in the manner of thinking about Jesus Christ. An analytical comparison between the material of Chapters 3 through 6 and Chapters 8 through 10, respectively, would show significantly different christological languages and modes of thinking, resulting in different understandings of the content of faith.

to Chalcedon; the doctrine of Chalcedon simply needed time to be discovered. Thus the earlier centuries are read as preparatory to the denouement in the mid-fifth century. A present sense of the contingency of history calls this view into question. History contains more particular occasions of sheer chance than the inner logic of ideas can control. As a result, the history of interpretation is open, so that Chalcedon, however true and however important as a marker in the history of doctrine it may be, is neither the goal nor the end of interpretation.

Although the process of Christian interpretation never ceases, it is not without criteria and norms. Attention has been called to two of them operative in the christology of Justin: scripture, especially the New Testament which was then being constructed, and intelligibility, which implies inculturation. The dialectical interaction between inculturation and the normative sources of faith is the motor of theological development. Here we consider a third theological norm, the Christian life, which correlates with an existential-historical conception of salvation.<sup>11</sup> When salvation is not reduced to an objective situation, but is also appreciated as an experienced and appropriated relationship with God, it becomes a factor of the Christian life. And a conception of Christian encounter with God in historical life is foundational to christological construal. I have already illustrated the close relationship between the experience of salvation and christology in the consideration of New Testament christologies.

One can distinguish two distinct paradigms or trajectories of salvation in the Greek and the Latin traditions, respectively. For example, J. Patout Burns develops the contrast by employing four sets of variables in the two traditions of understanding the process of salvation. One of these variables is whether the grace "through which God works the process of salvation might be operative or co-operative."<sup>12</sup> Another way of stating the same factor would be in terms of the degree to which human freedom is engaged in the process of salvation. Burns measures the distance between eastern and western soteriologies according to this criterion along with the others. However, because of the correlation between soteriology and christology generally, I believe that differences in christology itself can be also charted or measured according to the lines of differences in the underlying anthropology and soteriology. Especially important is the degree to which human freedom and activity are given a place in human salvation. In order to test this correlation, I will analyze the relationship between the soteriologies and the christologies of Irenaeus and Origen.

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11. Recall that in Chapter 6 I showed how the situation of a pluralism of christologies requires a norm for christology that is internal to the genesis of christology itself, namely, the experience of salvation mediated by Jesus.

12. J. Patout Burns, "The Economy of Salvation: Two Patristic Traditions," *Why the Church?*, ed. by W. J. Burghardt and W. G. Thompson (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 56.

I examined the way Irenaeus interpreted the story of how Jesus saves in the last chapter. He combines the incarnational Logos christology of John's Prologue with the final Adam soteriology of Paul. The Logos recapitulated a full human existence first by becoming fully human and then by living out a full human life. Jesus Christ both divinizes human existence and acts as a revealer and new model for human existence. It is clear that Irenaeus delicately balances the two types in question. But in order to illustrate the objective side of salvation, I will highlight those aspects of his christology that correspond most closely with his incarnation-divinization soteriology.

Irenaeus's christology falls into the Logos-sarx type of soteriology. He spoke of the Word becoming flesh, and did not insist on the human soul of Jesus. The stress is on the flesh which needs salvation.<sup>13</sup> Given this premise, three aspects of Irenaeus's christology directly correlate with his incarnational soteriology. By this I mean that he draws the christological conclusion on the basis of a soteriological argument that is incarnational. The first point is his insistence on the divinity of Jesus Christ against the Ebionites. That which was incarnated in Jesus Christ is the Son of the Most High God the Father. The basic rationale for this lies in mediatorship, uniting God and human existence: if Jesus Christ is not divine, we would not receive "God so as to have union with Him, but [would] . . . remain in that Adam who had been conquered and expelled from Paradise. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Second, Irenaeus argues in the same vein for the authentic and full humanity of Jesus against Docetists. "For He would not have been one truly possessing flesh and blood, by which He redeemed us, unless He had summed up in Himself the ancient formation of Adam" (AH 5.1.2, p. 527). According to the final Adam christology of Paul, expounded as recapitulation by Irenaeus, salvation is not accomplished unless the Son fully enters into the real cycle of human flesh and blood life.

13. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 103.

14. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.1.3, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: I. The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 527. Further references to *Against Heresies* in the text are to this edition. Irenaeus says again: "For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by the incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (AH 3.19.1, p. 448). See also AH 5.1.1, p. 526, where Irenaeus reasons that only a divine Word could reveal things pertaining to the inner life of God.

Third, and perhaps redundantly, Irenaeus also argues to the unity of the divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ on soteriological grounds. The argument is as follows: Jesus Christ binds the divine and the human together. If he were deficient in either regard, the uniting would not have been effected. "For it was incumbent upon the Mediator between God and human beings, by His relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord, and present man to God, while He revealed God to man. For, in what way could we be partakers of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us" (AH 3.18.7, p. 448).

In sum, there is a balance in Irenaeus's christology between the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ, despite its being of the Logos-flesh variety. And this balance correlates neatly with his soteriology. On the one hand, he insists on the divine character of Jesus, because only a divine Logos can reveal God and divinize flesh. On the other hand, because it is precisely humanity that needs divinization, and because the final Adam recapitulates human life, he must be one of us.

## ORIGEN

Since Origen's theology of salvation was not analyzed in the preceding chapter, I shall begin with a brief interpretation of Origen's account in his *De Principiis*.<sup>15</sup> This work expresses a complex worldview or cosmology in which Christ, as God's personified Wisdom, Word, and Son, plays a role from the very beginning.<sup>16</sup> I presuppose the expansive framework of creation, the falling away of rational souls, the creation of the world as the region from which they must work their way back to God and find salvation. In this schema Jesus Christ, who is identical with the eternally begotten Son, or Wisdom, or Word, is the mediator. He is, first of all, the principle who binds created reality to God, because God creates through God's Word or Wisdom. But after the fall, the Son is mediator in a second way as incarnate savior. All things will return to God through the saving mediation of Wisdom, Word, or Son incarnate in the human soul and flesh of Jesus.<sup>17</sup> The question, then, is how is Jesus savior?

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15. The purpose of the *De Principiis*, according to Origen, is to integrate and systematize into "a single body of doctrine" by the use of "clear and cogent arguments" applied to data drawn from the "holy scriptures" and what can be deduced from them by reason, logic, and correct interpretation. Origen, *Origen on First Principles*, ed. by G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973), 1. Pref. 10, p. 6. Hereafter cited in the text by book, chapter, paragraph, and page in this volume. See Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 94.

16. Christ is the only begotten Son of God, God's Wisdom, and God never existed without God's Wisdom. This Son, Word, or Wisdom is eternally begotten. He is truth itself because the image of the Father. Prin 1.2.1-6, pp. 15–20.

17. The basic role of the Son is to mediate between the Father and creation. The Son

Two prior issues largely determine the answer to the question of how Jesus is savior. One is the centrality of freedom in Origen's thinking. The fall is due to human freedom; the return to God will be through human freedom; God is not savior against but only through human freedom (Prin 1.6.1, pp. 52–53). The notion of human freedom thus acts in a decisive way in Origen's thought.<sup>18</sup> The other prior issue concerns what human existence is saved from. For Origen, despite our freedom, we cannot save ourselves. Rather, we must be saved from ignorance, from an attachment to this world,<sup>19</sup> and from a certain bondage to sin and the power of Satan who inclines or encourages human beings to sin. "The opposing powers and the devil himself are engaged in a struggle with the human race, provoking and inciting people to sin" (Prin 3.2.1, p. 211).<sup>20</sup>

In relation to these conditions Jesus Christ is savior first of all by revealing God; Jesus Christ is the image of the Father.<sup>21</sup> Thus Jesus as the incarnation

mediates by doing God's will, carrying out or effecting God's plan in creation and in salvation, the divinization of rational creatures. James A. Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 115. Lyons summarizes this mediation in two functions: first, Christ is the instrument of creation; second, Christ is the exemplar of creation. *Ibid.*, 129.

18. The just, impartial, and egalitarian character of God together with the principle of human freedom and merit have cosmic implications for Origen. The inequalities in the world stem from lapses of human freedom before worldly time, "*in illo tempore*" (Prin 1.8.1-2, pp. 66–69). On the creation of this world and the explanation of each rational being occupying his or her place or situation according to the principles of prior freedom and merit, see Prin 2.9, pp. 129–37. In brief, he writes that "divine providence arranges all creatures individually in positions corresponding to the variations in their movements and the fixed purposes of their minds." God thus "placed everyone in a position proportionate to his [or her] merit . . ." (Prin 2.9.6, p. 134). This position is held as a Christian view against Greek conceptions that this "world is governed either by chance movements or by a fateful necessity . . ." (Prin 3.5.5, p. 242). "God's providence and the free will of rational creatures shape Origen's understanding of the world. God leaves souls free but in the creation of the material world sets conditions for them which will ultimately lead them to return to God willingly." Trigg, *Origen*, 110.

19. The antitheses of materiality and spirituality, of descent or fall and ascent to salvation, and of correlated evil and good are very clear in Origen. The cosmic fall and devolution calls for ascent, escape, and salvation. And these antitheses govern the ideal Christian life. Origen speaks of human souls who rise above their bodily natures by an ascetic life, mortifying their bodily members and rising above their bodily nature and reaching for a truly spiritual life (Prin 1.8.4, pp. 71–72).

20. Origen also cites abundant testimony to a whole world of external spirits and demons (Prin 3.2.1, pp. 211–13). But sin also has its roots in internal inclinations to sensual excess of every kind. External forces are not the only source of human sin and Origen honors the principle of human freedom in sin as well as salvation. And, finally, saving goodness can never be brought to completion without God's help. Thus he writes: "So I think that a man can probably never by himself overcome an opposing power, but only by the use of divine help" (Prin 3.2.5, p. 220). Thus Origen's insistence on freedom does not amount to human autonomy. See Prin 2.3, pp. 211–22, *passim*.

21. As a replica might reveal an immense reality [for example, as a globe might

nation of the Son is the light of the world, the Word who interprets the mysteries of reality. He is the way, the truth, and the life (Prin 1.2.7, pp. 20–21).

Second, Jesus saves by being exemplar. He is to be imitated; he is the archetypal human being; he is the pioneer of our salvation whom we are to follow. This respects human freedom; we are to follow Jesus in his obedience.<sup>22</sup>

Third, Jesus saves by his obedience all the way through death and resurrection, and in so doing he conquers Satan and other demons.<sup>23</sup> His obedience is a victory over the power of Satan and his resurrection is the goal toward which human freedom is destined and can now knowingly strive. This imitation of Christ's obedience calls for a certain asceticism; salvation may not be from an evil world, but it is a liberation from attachment and bondage to a world of matter, and a movement toward perfect spirituality even in this world.

But, fourth, the Spirit also has a role in salvation; the Holy Spirit is the agent by which one becomes united to the Father and the Son. Jesus the Word reveals, but it is the Spirit which sanctifies (Prin 1.3.5, pp. 33–4). It is true that the Spirit too "reveals God to whom he will" (Prin 1.3.4, p. 33). But the principal function of the Spirit is to bind a person to the Word of God and to sanctify. For "it is impossible to become partaker of the Father or the Son without the Holy Spirit" (Prin 1.3.5, p. 33).<sup>24</sup> In sum, Jesus reveals and the Spirit sanctifies and empowers, not against freedom, but always in and with freedom.

Origen's christology is also complex; it involves a pre-existent Logos, who is eternally begotten (Prin 1.2.4, p. 18), a descent-ascent pattern, and roughly a two—"natures" composition of Christ. But just as freedom has a

reveal the planet earth], so too has the Son, replica of the Father, become our size to reveal the incomprehensible God (Prin 1.2.8, pp. 21–2).

22. The divine Son, Word and Wisdom of the Father "emptied himself, and taking the form of a servant became obedient even unto death in order to teach them obedience who could in no other way obtain salvation except through obedience . . ." (Prin 3.5.6, p. 242). This exemplarism has a deep cosmic structure. As God is that according to which Christ exists, and Christ is God's image, so too Christ is that according to which human existence should exist. This makes Jesus the paradigmatic human being. See Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, 127.

23. Jesus the Son also "'subdues all enemies under his feet'; and by the fact that he must reign till he puts his enemies under his feet he teaches the rulers themselves the arts of control" (Prin 3.5.6, p. 242).

24. In Origen "the working of the power of God the Father and God the Son is spread indiscriminately over all created beings, but a share in the Holy Spirit is possessed, we find, by the saints alone" (Prin 1.3.7, pp. 36–37). In other words, the Spirit does not initiate holiness, but bestows it in the wake of the revelation of Jesus or the cosmic Christ and a free turning of a person toward God. God sanctifies by the Spirit "all that is worthy of sanctification" (Prin 1.3.7, p. 37). This is another sign of Origen's respect for human freedom. The Spirit does not cause holiness but indwells and makes holy those who have chosen through their freedom the God who has been revealed.

large role in Origen's anthropology and soteriology, so too does it have a role in his christology, and it is to this that I call attention. For in Origen Jesus Christ does have a human soul; his is not a Logos-sarx christology. The human soul is the point of connection between the Word and the flesh. The result is that Origen has a broader notion of Jesus' humanity: his union with God and his being the Christ involve human freedom.

"The Son of God, therefore, because for the salvation of the human race he wished to appear to men and to dwell among them, assumed not only, as some think, a human body, but also a soul, in its nature indeed like our souls, but in will and virtue like himself, and of such a kind that it could unswervingly carry into effect all the wishes and plans of the Word and wisdom . . ." (Prin 4.4.4, p. 318). Origen proves this with scriptural texts where there is reference to Jesus' soul. The human soul of Christ is incapable of sin because of its union with the Logos. The human soul of Christ is filled with God's presence, having "received into itself the whole wisdom of God and his truth and life . . ." (Prin 4.4.4, p. 319).

It is because he had such a human soul which was so attached to the Word that Christ can be a model, pioneer, and exemplar. "This is why Christ is set forth as an example to all believers, because as he ever chose the good, even before he knew the evil at all . . . so too, should each one of us" follow his example, take him as "a leader for the journey" and proceed along the way of virtue. "This Word, then, and this wisdom, by our imitation of whom we are called wise or rational, becomes 'all things to all men, that he may gain all'" (Prin 4.4.4, p. 319).

Origen's salvation theory, then, provides a place for the exercise of human freedom. Jesus Christ is revealer of God and guide in the human return to God. "For as the word in us is the messenger of what the mind perceives, so the Word of God, since he has known the Father, reveals the Father whom he has known, because no creature can come into contact with him without a guide."<sup>25</sup> This soteriology of revelation and exemplarism requires a Jesus Christ who is truly human and imitable, a Jesus Christ whose humanity includes the rationality and freedom of human beings. Irenaeus, whose anthropology and soteriology do not stress the role of human freedom the way Origen does, was content with the Johannine formula, "the Word became flesh," and thus a Logos-sarx christology. Origen's stress on human freedom called for and correlates with a Logos-anthropos christology. I want to suggest that the differences exemplified in the soteriologies and christologies of Irenaeus and Origen are paradigmatic. I will continue to argue this thesis when I deal with the competing christologies of the fifth century that lead to the formula of Chalcedon. The paradigm will also help in the understanding of the differences between Arius and Athanasius, and thus in the interpretation of the Nicene Creed.

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25. Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John Books 1-10* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 1.277, p. 91.

## JESUS AND GOD

What is the relation between Jesus of Nazareth and God? This question focused one of the major problems that Christian theology had to face in the development of its christology. We have seen that this relationship was conceived in a variety of ways in the New Testament. But in all of its christologies at no point in the New Testament is Jesus identified with the transcendent God without ambiguity. The Prologue of John's gospel, which seems to be the most straightforward statement of Jesus being divine, has to be read according to its genre as poetic, figurative language. In a Greco-Roman world of polytheism, the monotheism of Jews and early Christians was self-conscious, and the transcendence of God carefully guarded. Young suggests that Jesus was not a case dissimilar from other messengers of God on the cosmic or ontological map: servants, prophets, angels, kings. Jesus was never a rival of the one God of Abraham.<sup>26</sup> Jesus was not Yahweh; Jesus was not the Father, who was preeminently the one transcendent God. The question of Jesus' relation to God, then, was clearly not settled by Johannine christology but remained a problem until the fourth century.

And yet Jesus was experienced as divine. At some time during the first century, probably early in the formation of a Christian community, Jesus became the center and the object of Christian cult, and an object of worship.<sup>27</sup> We have seen the development of the wisdom hymns. In John's gospel the author has Thomas say to the resurrected Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). In John's gospel an exalted Son of God christology is combined with a wisdom and Word christology to express belief in a Jesus who is in some sense divine. But this leaves the question of how this divine Jesus is related to the transcendent God of monotheistic faith.

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26. Young, *Creeds*, 34. Summarizing the thrust of eastern christology, Young underlines the desire for the distinction of the Father and the Son and the transcendence of the Father. "The one Lord Jesus Christ was the incarnation of the pre-existent Logos, the creative instrument used by God to generate his creation and communicate with it. He was a second *hypostasis*, a distinct existence, never to be confused with the one ultimate, ingenerate God." *Ibid.*, 45.

27. In Chapter 6 I referred to the work of Larry W. Hurtado. He investigates how early Jewish Christians venerated Jesus in cult while at the same time preserving their monotheism. He examines the precedents and conceptual models in Jewish tradition that facilitated this accommodation. He concludes that Christian devotion to God included Jesus as the chief agent of God for salvation. Jesus was an object of worship, not independently but always "to the Glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11). "Devotion to Jesus did not involve confusing him with God or making Jesus a second God." Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 121. Hurtado views this material as a basis for the development of the doctrine of Nicaea. But the data he presents are also quite consistent with Arianism. The New Testament remains ambiguous. I will return to this material in Chapter 15 when I consider worship of Jesus.

How is this development to be understood? And how did it unfold?

From a historical perspective one can understand the genesis of the problem of Jesus' relation to God by the hypostatization of symbolic language about God, in this case the symbols "wisdom" and "word." Hypostatization generally means making an idea or a concept into a real thing. In its broad sense the term "hypostasis" means the individuality of a something: a hypostasis is an individual instantiation within a class or species. To hypostatize is to interpret a concept as an existing being, to concretize or materialize an idea. It is to reify, in which process reification means to construe the object of a figure of speech as a reality. By contrast, the symbols Wisdom, Word, and Spirit, which are found in the Jewish scriptures and refer to God, are not hypostatizations but personifications. Personification is a figure of speech in which the symbol is consciously or deliberately treated or spoken of as a person. Proverbs 8 contains a clearly intended personification of God's intelligence or wisdom as a pre-existent person and agent of God. As a figure of speech, it does not intend that wisdom is a distinct or discrete entity or being.

A major development occurred when a personification became transformed into a hypostatization, that is, when what was a figure of speech became intended not as a figure of speech but as referring to "a real being."<sup>28</sup> Wisdom is no longer a linguistic symbol referring obliquely to an attribute of God, but a real being; Logos is no longer a figure of speech but a distinct being; Spirit is no longer a constructive exercise of the human poetic imagination that metaphorically depicts the effects of God as the invisible power of the wind, but a literal something. The hypostatization of a pre-existent Logos and Wisdom creates a problem. As long as Logos and Wisdom remain what they were originally, personifications, that is, figures of speech used to say something about God, it makes sense to say that God's wisdom was actualized in Jesus, and that Jesus embodies God's wisdom. But when the Logos is understood to be a reality in itself, distinct from the Father, and yet somehow divine, and as a divine entity to have assumed flesh, a far different assertion is being made. This language becomes analogous to the thinking of the polytheistic culture which was familiar with hierarchies of divine entities populating the invisible world. Was Jesus the incarnation of "a second God"?<sup>29</sup> And yet how else could Christians, who were monotheists, express their distinctive experience in worship that Jesus was of God? When this development is

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28. Referring to Logos or Wisdom as "a real being" in the Christian context is at best ambiguous and misleading. Just what such a hypostatization might mean constituted a major problem. The development of language indicating distinction and individuation of the Logos within the Godhead required a great deal of time and discussion before any consensus was achieved.

29. Justin Martyr referred to the Logos as a "second God." Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 148. Origen, too, occasionally used this language. See his "Dialogue with Heraclides," *Alexandrian Christianity*, ed. by J. E. L. Oulton and H. Chadwick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 438.

placed within the context of the objectification of Christian language that occurred with the writing of the New Testament, and of the decisive influence of John's Prologue in christology, one can understand the problem that was to be taken up in the second century.

One can define the problem in terms of the relation of Jesus to God: how should Christians understand and express the divinity of Jesus and at the same time preserve their monotheism? There is little doubt that Christians used the transcendent language of divinity in speaking of Jesus. Grillmeier finds the principle of "the exchange of predicates," which is based on the human and divine character of Jesus within the unity and identity of the one subject, operative in Ignatius of Antioch.<sup>30</sup> In Tertullian the practice was used to express sharp paradoxes: "And the Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd."<sup>31</sup> But it is another matter to give an account of the rationale for this language. The manner in which early theology explained the divinity of Jesus while retaining belief in one sole God involved three moves: a transferral of the problem to the inner life of God, a conception of differentiation within the Godhead, and the subordination of the Logos-Son to the Father. This reasoning can be illustrated in the theology of the second and third centuries.

First, a solution to the problem caused by the conviction that Jesus is in some way divine was sought within the framework of the one God of monotheism. To know God, according to Justin, is to know the Father, and to know "that the Father of all has a Son, who, as the First-born Word of God, is also God" (1 Apol 63, p. 102). This move of Justin, which was dictated by John's Prologue, reflects the common thinking of the patristic period. From the very beginning, then, monotheism was never compromised, because the question of Jesus' divinity was from the beginning considered within the framework of the inner life of the one transcendent God. Here, too, one finds the roots of trinitarian reflection, which is strictly christological in its origin, and is always oriented back toward the question of the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth.

The second element in addressing the issue of Jesus' divinity, then, was to find differentiation within the life of God. The differentiation was suggested by the hypostatized Word and Wisdom, which were in turn conceived as incarnated in Jesus. The Father generates a Son. Now theologians began to reflect on the nature or character of this generation. Justin, for example, thinking within a context of Greek philosophy that was current, but also reflecting the wisdom tradition, suggests that "God has begotten of Himself a certain rational Power as a Beginning before all other creatures" (Trypho 61, p. 144). This is confirmed by Proverbs 8 when it is read objectively as referring to a hypostatization (Trypho 61, pp. 144–45).

30. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 86–89. See the citation of Ignatius at the beginning of this chapter.

31. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 122, citing Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 5.4.

Differentiation within God is the supposition of Tertullian's response to the suggestion of an incarnation of the Father: it is the Son who is incarnate. The Son or Logos (*Sermo*) already has a reality, a certain individuality, and a divine status within the life of the Godhead.<sup>32</sup> By the time of Origen reflection on the generation of the Son within the life of God had advanced. "Wisdom, therefore, must be believed to have been begotten (Prin 1.2.1, p. 16).<sup>33</sup> This generation is internal, eternal, spiritual.<sup>34</sup> The internal generation of the Word is not merely posited on the basis of scriptural data but is also justified by Platonic reasoning: "how could rational beings exist, unless the Word or reason had existed before them? Or how could they be wise, unless wisdom existed?" (Prin 1.2.4, p. 17). Both philosophy and the scriptures, then, suggested a living God with internal differentiation and movement.

The third element in this development was the subordination of the Son to the Father. In other words, although Jesus was divine and of the inner life of God, he was of lesser rank than the Father. This reflects and continues the tradition of the New Testament which stops short of equating Jesus with the Father. This subordination is communicated in a variety of indirect ways since, for the most part, the point of christology was to show Jesus' divinity. In Justin, for example, statements such as the following only suggest this subordination: "For we worship and love, after God the Father, the Word who is from the Unbegotten and Ineffable God, since He even became Man for us, so that by sharing in our sufferings He also might heal us" (2 Apol 13, p. 134). A strong tradition that also suggests subordination was the inability to imagine the Father as incarnate in the world: "no one with even the slightest intelligence would dare to assert that the Creator and Father of all things left His super-celestial realms to make Himself visible in a little spot on earth" (Trypho

32. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 129. Modalism, which denies distinctions within God between Father, Son, and Spirit, holding them to be aspects or modes of the one divine Person, was also a way of asserting forcefully the divinity of Jesus Christ and, at the same time, preserving the unity of God. But one does not sense that modalism ever gained a serious hearing because of two factors: first, the absolute transcendence of God, localized in the Father, forbade the Father-God's descent into the world; second, it seemed to contradict the New Testament witness when it was read as direct representative information, for the Father and the Son were clearly distinct beings, and it was the Son not the Father who was incarnate.

33. Origen says that "he [the Word] does not *come to be* 'with God' as though previously he were not with him, but because he is always with the Father, it is said, 'And the word *was* with God,' for he did not '*come to be* with God'" (Origen, *Commentary on John*, 2.8, p. 97). He continues: "before all time and eternity 'the Word was in the beginning,' and 'the Word *was* with God'" (*ibid.* 2.9, p. 97).

34. This is an eternal begetting as brightness is begotten from light. For he does not become Son in an external way through the adoption of the Spirit, but is Son by nature. The begetting proceeds spiritually and internally "as it were an act of his will proceeding from the mind" (Prin 1.2.4-6, pp. 18-19).

60, pp. 242–43).<sup>35</sup> The Father enjoyed the highest transcendence, which was a distinguishing character of God, not the Son. As Irenaeus put it, it was the Word of God who was constantly present to human beings throughout history. “It is not the Father, for He is transcendent and unseen” (PAP 45, p. 77). This emphasis on the transcendence of God which, given the differentiation within God, is now focused in the Father is the reason why modalism, especially with its implication of patripassionism, failed. Tertullian rejects any suggestion that it was the Father who was in Jesus Christ; it simply does not fit the testimony of the New Testament which speaks of the Son or Word becoming flesh, not the Father.<sup>36</sup>

This subordination is well developed in Origen. God the Father is absolutely transcendent, unknowable, utterly incomprehensible. But the Son can be known and the qualities of the Son mediate a certain knowledge of the transcendent properties of the Father.<sup>37</sup> The Son is the “image of the invisible God” (Prin 1.2.6, p. 18). This subordination is clear in Origen’s hierarchical arrangement of Father, Son, and Spirit, and his description of their different functions in his *On First Principles*. In his *Commentary on John* he is also explicit: God the Father, with the article, *the* God, is truly God. But “everything besides the very God, which is made God by participation in his divinity, would more properly not be said to be ‘*the* God,’ but ‘God.’ To be sure, his ‘firstborn of every creature,’ in as much as he was the first to be with God and has drawn divinity into himself, is more honored than the other gods beside him . . .” (*Commentary on John*, 2.17, p. 99). For Origen, the Father is truly and absolutely God, while the Son is the Word, the archetype of all other realities, the medium and way back to the Father, him in whom the qualities of the transcendent Father are known because he participates in them.<sup>38</sup>

35. This comment of Justin is instructive. On the one hand it reveals a profound experience of God’s transcendence. On the other hand, the naive, materialistic, and objectivist form of expression so limits the conception of God’s infinite capacity that it becomes impossible to take the statement at face value today. When the transcendence of the Father is thought of in these terms, modalism is automatically ruled out.

36. Tertullian, *Tertullian’s Treatise against Praxeas*, ed., intro., trans., and com. by Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1948), 27, pp. 172–75. Subordinationism in christology is linked by Grillmeier to too much stress on the absolute transcendence of God. “God the Father was thought to have such an absolute transcendence that he could not possibly deal actively with men (R. Holte). The danger of subordinationism was not far off.” Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 110. But not only subordinationism. Differentiation within God and the need of mediation itself are also dependent upon growth of an idea of a kind of absolutist transcendence of God. If this were considered in the light of a concept of God as subject today that is more malleable, and that can tolerate language about God suffering, the premises of the traditional reasoning would be considerably weakened.

37. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 142.

38. “Origen insisted that only God is to be worshiped, and worship is offered to him through the Son.” Young, *Creeds*, 42.

Is Jesus God in the theology that extended from the second into the fourth century? The answer to this question is yes, but an attenuated yes. What makes it difficult to appreciate this answer is the historical framework in which the answer is given and the intricate process by which the answer was generated. This is christology from above in its pure form, in which conclusions about Jesus of Nazareth are being expressed in terms of the authority of a reading of scripture that communicates directly referential and transcendent information, and a speculative reasoning about the inner life of God.<sup>39</sup> Jesus was an incarnation of the distinct but subordinate aspect or “person” from within the differentiated life of God, that is, the Word or Son. The characteristics of the Son are identical with Jesus because in a three-stage christology Jesus is the Son enfleshed. And the Son is the image of the Father.<sup>40</sup> Jesus is thus truly God, but less than the transcendent Father from whom he is eternally begotten. This solution is not Arian, because the Son is not a creature, but in the light of the Arian controversy, it will be revised. I will look more closely at the Arian formula and its formal contradiction at the Council of Nicaea in the next chapter. I pass now to the development of the question of Jesus’ person.

## THE CONSTITUTION OF JESUS CHRIST

“Christology” in the narrow and formal sense of the term is the understanding of the constitution of Jesus Christ. In its classical form this question involves the understanding of the divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ, and how they are interrelated in the single individual with his proper identity. This question was entertained during the second and third centuries of the development of classical christology in both an implicit and an explicit way. But the discussion was clearly intensified after the formulation of the Nicene creed, and we pick up the debate at that point. If the Logos or Son is of the same substance as the Father, the question of his being changeable, passible, and generally involved in the material sphere of human existence becomes newly problematic.<sup>41</sup>

A standard strategy for describing fourth- and fifth-century christology is to present two broad traditions or lines of thinking that began to take shape during this period. The first is a Word-flesh and incarnational christology associated with Alexandrian theologians; the second is the

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39. It should be clear that the conviction of the divinity of Jesus did not come from this theology; this theology is rather an attempt to express and “explain” the faith experience of the Christian community.

40. This distinction of the Son from the Father, along with the subordination of the Son to the Father, which were pervasive themes in eastern christology, explain the tendency of the East to be sympathetic to Arianism during the fourth century. Young, *Creeds*, 43–45.

41. Young, *Creeds*, 65.

Word-human being and indwelling christology associated with Antioch.<sup>42</sup> I shall work within this framework as I consider the christologies of Athanasius, Apollinaris, and Cyril of Alexandria on the one side, and Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius on the other. I will also note the interpretation of Jesus' work of salvation in these authors and how it correlates with the christology. The goal here is not to lay out an integral picture of these two traditions, but to use these developments to illustrate the following theses: christology is intrinsically linked to soteriology, and it involves a tension between the humanity and the divinity of Jesus that cannot be resolved. These theses both reflect the development of this period and help to explain it.

It was pointed out earlier that the doctrine of Chalcedon was not a datum of revelation that would inevitably have been discovered by reflection and formulated in the terms it actually took. But there is another side to that issue. The symbolic character of Jesus Christ, his being a medium of God's presence and salvation, entails an intrinsic dialectical structure, a tension between Jesus being a finite human being and creature, and Jesus being or mediating the presence of God in history. In the measure in which Chalcedon reflects this dialectical structure of christology, some form of a Chalcedon-like doctrine is essential to christology. The intrinsic tension between the humanity and the divinity, therefore, corresponds to the structure of religious symbols generally, and to Jesus being the concrete symbol who mediates God to Christian faith. From this perspective, I turn to the two distinct lines of theology that provided the language, concepts, and distinctions that form the background for the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon.

The christological trends associated with Alexandria and Antioch share much in common. Both are christologies from above; they are three-stage christologies; they presuppose the doctrine of Nicaea that the Logos or Son is of the same substance as the Father. They unfold by means of reflection on the objective data of revelation proposed in the scriptures. Their goal is to understand the character or constitution of the figure Jesus Christ. How does his defined divinity cohere with his earthly appearance as a human being? What does it mean to say that this one figure, Jesus Christ, is both divine and human? If it was unthinkable that God the Father should be mixed up in the corruptible world of matter, what does it mean to say the Son, who is of the same nature as the Father, "suffered, died, and was buried"?

### ALEXANDRIAN LOCOS-SARX CHRISTOLOGY

The core of Alexandrian christology lies in the consistent unity or continuous self-identity of the Logos or heavenly Son through the three stages

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42. These two paradigms are thus identified with two historical traditions. The second section of this chapter suggests that these two traditions of christology reflect different experiences of salvation.

of "his career," so to speak. There is one single subject in this christology, that of the Logos. This Logos-Son is the eternal Son of God who, in a manner that seems to have been understood quite literally, took on human flesh for the span of a human lifetime, and then rose from death and ascended to his place within the Godhead. For example, John 1:1-3, 14 directly characterizes Athanasius's christology: the Word is God and the Word became flesh. The Philippians hymn (Phil 2:6-11) also characterizes this descent christology. Both are cited together as proof texts.<sup>43</sup> When one reads Athanasius on Jesus of Nazareth, it is quite clear that the real subject is the divine Son; he who acts is God. "There can be no doubt that the Logos is not merely the personal subject of Christ's bodily life, but also the real, physical source of all the actions of his life."<sup>44</sup> This unity and identity of the subject, Jesus Christ, is an explicit concern of Apollinaris, another Alexandrian theologian who underlines it. He cannot conceive of two intellects or rationalities in one person. The conscious subject in Jesus is the Logos itself, continuous with its divine pre-existence. "Therefore, it is inconceivable that the same person should be both God and an entire man. Rather, he exists in the singleness of an incarnate divine nature which is commingled [with flesh], with the result that worshipers bend their attention to the God inseparable from his flesh and not to one who is worshiped and one who is not. . . ."<sup>45</sup> This paradigm explains why Cyril of Alexandria reacted so strongly against what he perceived in Nestorius, namely, an adoptionism that divided the unity of the divine subject who is Jesus Christ. This paradigm cannot accept any hint of worshiping a man "along with" the Word, or dissociating the body of Christ from the Word. Any separation leads in the end to division, to two Sons of God, the Eternal Son of God and Jesus the Son of God.<sup>46</sup>

The unity and continuous self-identity of the divine Logos as the subject who is also Jesus of Nazareth is emphasized still further in this Alexandrian christology by a deliberate minimization or denial of a human soul in Jesus. It is as though a "Word-flesh" paradigm were to be taken in a literal or physical sense, with the Word functioning as the "rational soul" of Jesus' flesh. Discerning the measure of such an understanding in Athanasius is difficult, because the term "flesh" is a broad and inclusive symbol for "humanity" or "human existence." But even if he did allow for a human soul in speaking of Jesus' humanity broadly, Athanasius was systematic in not assigning a specific function for a ratio-

43. Athanasius, "Against the Arians: Discourse III," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, IV, St. Athanasius, ed. and trans. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 3.29, p. 409. References to this work in the text by discourse and paragraph are to this translation.

44. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 312.

45. Apollinaris, in a text presented by Richard A. Norris, ed. and trans., *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 108.

46. Cyril of Alexandria, "Second Letter to Nestorius," *Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. by Lionel R. Wickham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 6, p. 9.

nal soul in Jesus.<sup>47</sup> Apollinaris is much more explicit in denying a human rationality in Jesus Christ. Divine Wisdom functions as the rational part of Jesus. Christ "is not a human being but is like a human being, since he is not coessential with humanity in his highest part."<sup>48</sup> Speaking of the sanctification of the flesh of Jesus, he describes this as taking place by direct presence: "For in these circumstances the body lives by the sanctification of the Godhead and not by the provision of a human soul, and the whole is completely joined in one."<sup>49</sup> Cyril in a certain sense represents a break with this tradition since he admits a rational human soul in Jesus Christ. We affirm, he wrote, "that the Word substantially united to himself flesh, endowed with life and reason, in a manner mysterious and inconceivable, and became man. . . ."<sup>50</sup> This human soul in Cyril's christology served as a link between the Logos and flesh, and helped him to explain Jesus' suffering. But Cyril remains in the tradition by insisting that "God the Logos did not come into a man, but he truly became man, while remaining God."<sup>51</sup> The significance of this tradition is that the principle of the activity of Jesus Christ is entirely God's or the Word's; there is no human initiative here.

This is confirmed by the use of language that suggests that the flesh of Jesus Christ is an instrument of the Logos. "In the word *organon* Athanasius sums up the whole significance of the Logos-sarx relationship."<sup>52</sup> This is still more pronounced in Apollinaris: "God who has taken to himself an instrument of activity is both God insofar as he activates and human with respect to the instrument of activity which he uses. Remaining God, he is not altered. The instrument and its user naturally produce a single action, but if the action is one, the essence (*ousia*) is one also. Therefore, there has come to be one essence of the Logos and his instrumental means of activity."<sup>53</sup> The implied passivity of the instrument is mitigated somewhat in Cyril. But in each case, when one has recourse to a concrete historical imagination and asks who was acting in the seemingly thoroughly human actions of Jesus, such as his ignorance and suffering, the responses are strained. Was Jesus Christ ignorant? No, for the Word was God and knew all things. But the Word feigned ignorance, because ignorance was proper to the flesh. Did Jesus Christ suffer?

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47. See Grillmeier's nuanced discussion of Athanasius on this point in *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 320–28.

48. Apollinaris, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 109. "In their irrational body, people are coessential with irrational animals, but insofar as they are rational, they are of a different essence. So also God, who is coessential with men in his flesh, is of a different essence insofar as he is Logos and God." Ibid., 111.

49. Apollinaris, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 106.

50. Cyril, in Wickham, *Select Letters*, 3, pp. 5–7.

51. Cyril, quoted by Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 477.

52. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 317. See Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 3.35, p. 318.

53. Apollinaris, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 110.

Literally no, for the Word is impassible; but yes, in a certain sense, one could say "he suffered" by indirection. For the Word assumed flesh, and the flesh suffered, and thus by appropriation this christology can say that Jesus Christ suffered, that is, insofar as his flesh did.<sup>54</sup> Some of Cyril's responses to the question of Christ's suffering, however, are practically impenetrable. He says that "since his own created body suffered these things he himself 'suffered' for our sake, the point being that within the suffering body was the Impassible."<sup>55</sup> The idea seems to suggest suffering by external appropriation or attribution on the part of the essentially impassible Logos. The Logos is impassible, but "he is seen to attribute to himself the passions that occur in his own flesh. . . . In order that he may be believed to be the savior of the universe, Christ refers the passions of his own flesh . . . to himself by means of an appropriation which occurs for the sake of our salvation."<sup>56</sup> The problem in this tradition is that it is a christology of only one subject, and, that subject being impassible, it leaves no other subject who can suffer.

But underlying this christology is not a soteriology whose center lies in Jesus Christ suffering for our salvation. Although that is not excluded, for it came with the larger tradition, the centering conceptual image is divinization and revelation. It is flesh that needs saving, and it is saved by the Word assuming it. Athanasius says that by nature

the Word Himself is impassible, and yet because of that flesh which He put on, these things are ascribed to Him, since they are proper to the flesh, and the body itself is proper to the Saviour. And while He Himself, being impassible in nature, remains as He is, not harmed by these affections, but rather obliterating and destroying them, human beings, their passions as if changed and abolished in the Impassible, henceforth become themselves also impassible and free from them for ever. . . .<sup>57</sup>

The very assumption of flesh by the Logos constitutes the gradual salvation of flesh. Apollinaris expresses this in terms of a fallen human rationality. "What was needed was unchangeable Intellect which did not fall under the domination of the flesh on account of its weakness of understanding but which adapted the flesh to itself without force."<sup>58</sup>

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54. Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 3.37–56, pp. 414–24, *passim*.

55. Cyril, in Wickham, *Selected Letters*, 5, p. 7.

56. Cyril of Alexandria, "Letter to John of Antioch," in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 144.

57. Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 3.34, p. 412.

58. Apollinaris, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 109. For Apollinaris, saving revelation and divinization required that Jesus Christ be God as Logos enfleshed as opposed to an inspired human being. His conception of salvation entailed a christology of "mixture," in which Jesus Christ was like a cross-breed or *tertium quid*, between God and human existence. Jesus Christ "is neither wholly man nor wholly God, but a

The process of divinization is expressed beautifully by Athanasius as a gradual growth and assimilation of flesh to Wisdom. This is seen in his response to the question of what it means to say Jesus grew in wisdom, since divine Wisdom cannot advance. The advancing or growth took place in the flesh, as the flesh was in the Word and was the Word's and is called His. "Neither then was the advance the Word's, nor was the flesh Wisdom, but the flesh became the body of Wisdom. Therefore, as we have already said, not Wisdom, as Wisdom, advanced in respect of Itself; but the manhood advanced in Wisdom, transcending by degrees human nature, and being deified, and becoming and appearing to all as the organ of Wisdom for the operation and the shining forth of the Godhead."<sup>59</sup>

In sum, one sees a remarkable correspondence between a conception of salvation and this christology. And despite the variations among these influential Alexandrians, there is a steady consistency in the fundamental insight. This is centered in the one divine Logos taking on flesh as his own. This "flesh" originally signified all that is entailed in being a human. But in the Alexandrian tradition Jesus does not seem to be conceived as an integral human being. He lacks a rational soul, or is not a human subject, or is without a principle of human individuality, freedom, and action. All of these elements would undermine the effective presence and initiative of God for our salvation. Commentators usually affirm that the strength of this christology lies in the unity of the being of the savior that controls the conception. There is but one Logos through three distinct phases: pre-existence, earthly existence, new glorified existence. While this view of a single continuous being across three stages of existence was undoubtedly credible in its time, the monophysitic tendency of this christology appears as a weakness today. For from a historical perspective, any and all symbolic mediation of God in our world must be dialectical in structure. Such a dialectical structure is the condition of the possibility of a historical mediation of God. The tendency of Alexandrian christology is to dissolve this necessary tension into a single divine nature. Its theological conceptions seem directly to represent, and thus communicate to the imagination, an understanding that borders on the mythological: Jesus existed in eternity; Jesus came down on earth, Jesus returned to eternity. The weakness of this position appears at the point where it touches history, specifically in the issue of the suffering of Jesus. The real strength of this christology lies in the religious experience and conviction that salvation can only come from God, and that Jesus is the mediator of God for human salvation. Its strength is what it emphasizes to a fault, namely, the divinity of Jesus Christ.

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mixture of God and man. He is God by the enfleshed spirit and man by the flesh assumed by God." Young, *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 188.

59. Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 3.53, p. 422.

## ANTIOCHENE LOGOS-ANTHROPOS CHRISTOLOGY

The core of Antiochene christology lies in a consistent vision of Jesus Christ as an historical figure or person who bore two distinct natures. Whereas the focus of attention or referent of Alexandrian christology is the divine subject, the Logos who became flesh, Antiochene christology has as its imaginative referent the historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, and this entails a different view of things. In contrast to "Word-flesh," this christology is called "Word-human being" and an "indwelling" christology, in which Jesus Christ is the "human being assumed" by the Word. It is not, however, adoptionist. Theodore of Mopsuestia explicitly rules this out: "The one who was assumed according to foreknowledge was united with God from the very beginning, since he received the foundation of the union in his very fashioning in his mother's womb."<sup>60</sup> The guiding theme, then, is the duality of divinity and humanity held together in the one figure Jesus Christ.

A number of texts from the work of Theodore depict the duality in Jesus Christ in a pointed way. "Let the character of the natures stand without confusion, and let the person be acknowledged as undivided—the former in virtue of the characteristic property of the nature, since the one assumed is distinct from the One who assumes him, and the latter in virtue of the personal union, since the One who assumes and the nature of the one assumed are included in the denotation of a single name."<sup>61</sup> The point is to preserve the distinction and integrity of each nature, as opposed to confusion or mixture of one into the other or the formation of a third thing. Each of the natures is conceived as remaining indissolubly in itself. "Moreover, it is also quite evident that the notion of 'union' is thoroughly congruous, for by means of it the natures which are brought together make up one person according to the union."<sup>62</sup> This duality in Jesus Christ held together in union was behind Nestorius's calling into question whether God had a mother. A distinction must be maintained: "A creature does not produce him who is uncreatable."<sup>63</sup> On the one hand, Jesus Christ from the beginning is an assumed human being in whom God dwells. On the other hand, this

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60. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *De Incarnatione* 7, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 119.

61. Theodore, *De Incarnatione* 5, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 113.

62. Theodore, *De Incarnatione*, 8, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 120. "In the same way we say that the essence of God the Word is his own and that the essence of the man is his own, for the natures are distinct, but the person effected by the union is the one. In this way, when we try to distinguish the natures, we say that the person of the man is complete and that that of the Godhead is complete. But when we consider the union, then we proclaim that both natures are one person, since the humanity receives from the divinity honor surpassing that which belongs to a creature, and the divinity brings to perfection in the man every thing that is fitting." Ibid. 8, pp. 120–21.

63. Nestorius, "First Sermon against the Theotokos," in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 124.

indwelling produced a unity who was the figure Jesus Christ. "We confess both and adore them as one, for the duality of the natures is one on account of the unity."<sup>64</sup> In responding to Cyril, Nestorius says he fears a confusion of natures in his work, and for his part speaks of the "conjunction" of natures.<sup>65</sup> The language of both Theodore and Nestorius shows that they intend more than a mere moral union of two natures constituting the person of Jesus Christ. The thought is moving in the direction of a distinction of levels in which ontological union is preserved on one level and distinction of "natures" on another. But no clear, stable, and commonly recognized terms for expressing this have been found.<sup>66</sup>

A Word-flesh christology depicts the humanity of Jesus Christ as a passive instrument of the Word. What kind of language is used by Word-human being christology to characterize Jesus Christ in history? Jesus Christ is an integral human being within whom the Logos dwells. When contrasted to an extreme form of Logos-flesh christology, Antiochene christology provides a logic for a language that speaks of Jesus Christ's human intelligence and freedom. The idea that the humanity of Jesus Christ is an instrument of the Logos, however, is not completely abandoned; it is relevant especially in actions that display divine power, such as miracles. But at the same time the indwelling Logos permeates, shapes, and informs the entire human nature and thus all its actions.<sup>67</sup> One can appreciate the different way in which this christology envisions Jesus in history by contrasting the account of Theodore of Jesus' growth in wisdom with that of Athanasius just cited:

On the one hand, he held fast to this way [of being oriented to the good and hating evil] by his own will, while on the other hand this purpose was faithfully guarded in him by the cooperating work of God the Logos. And he progressed with the greatest ease toward a consummate virtue, whether in keeping the Law before his baptism or in following the citizenship in grace after his baptism. He furnishes us a type of this citizenship and is himself a way, so to speak, established for this end. Thus, later, after the resurrection and ascension, when he had shown himself worthy of the union by his own

64. Nestorius, "First Sermon against the Theotokos," in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 131.

65. Nestorius, "Second Letter to Cyril," in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 136–37.

66. Grillmeier, in *Christ in Christian Tradition*, assesses Nestorius's christology quite positively. His christological formulas "could compete with any christology of their time" (457). His christology "shows quite an orthodox conception of the incarnation" (462). At certain points Nestorius's language fell short of his intentions, but on the whole Grillmeier believes that Nestorius was misunderstood and misjudged (468, 472). Young concurs, after representing Nestorius's christology as fairly close to that of Chalcedon. Young, *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 229–40. Similarly Kelly, *Doctrines*, 316–17.

67. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 432.

will (having received the union even before this in his very fashioning, by the good pleasure of the Lord), he also unmistakably furnished for ever after the proof of the union, since he had nothing to separate and cut him off from the working of God the Logos but had God the Logos accomplishing everything in him through the union.<sup>68</sup>

The conception of Jesus Christ communicated in this text combines a recognition of Jesus' human freedom and decision making with a sustaining and efficacious presence of God as Logos to him.

As in Word-flesh christology there lies beneath this christology a conception of the way Jesus Christ is savior. Salvation received involves human freedom, and salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ is achieved in and through the working of Jesus' freedom. This conception is hinted at in the text of Theodore just cited: Jesus Christ is a type for life in grace and provides a way for our imitation. In Theodore, the created soul of Jesus Christ's human nature is a source of human actions that are decisive for human salvation.<sup>69</sup> Since salvation is a divine work, this is the work of the Logos, but the instrumentality involved implies a Logos which draws up into itself real, rational, and free human actions. This allows Jesus Christ to be a type and an exemplary "way."

Nestorius proposed an interpretation of Jesus' work of salvation in terms that integrate human freedom into the story. It combines a narrative of redemption and a final Adam christology within a Nicene framework. Jesus Christ in his humanity struggles with Satan to repay the debt incurred by the first human being, Adam. "Our nature, having been put on by Christ like a garment, intervenes on our behalf, being entirely free from all sin and contending by appeal to its blameless origin, just as the Adam who was formed earlier brought punishment upon his race by reason of his sin. This was the opportunity which belonged to the assumed man, as a human being to dissolve, by means of the flesh, that corruption which arose by means of the flesh."<sup>70</sup>

In sum, one finds a mutual consistency between a conception of salvation and the main lines of this Word-human being christology. On the premise that the story of salvation lies close to the way Jesus Christ is experienced, one can say that this christology is informed by a conviction that Jesus Christ was a full and model human being. One looks to Jesus Christ for direction on how to lead a life that leads back to God. Descending Logos christology is combined with an integral anthropology

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68. Theodore, *De Incarnatione* 7, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 118. Commenting explicitly on Jesus' growth in age, wisdom, and grace (Luke 2:52), he uses the language of cooperative grace which is based on the union of Jesus' integral freedom with the Logos. *Ibid.*, 119.

69. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 427–28.

70. Nestorius, "First Sermon against the Theotokos," in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 128.

that includes a mind and freedom in Jesus, and the two, divinity and humanity, are held together in a union that is never quite satisfactorily conceived. This particular strand of the pre-Chalcedonian debate is much closer to modern, historically conscious sensibilities, but it is still pre-critical. Its strength lies in its preservation of the humanity of Jesus Christ together with his divinity. Its weakness lies in its inability to present a coherent characterization of the unity of the figure Jesus Christ. But it may be that this problem is not the fault of this line of thought, but of the constraints which the received tradition had imposed upon it. Logos-anthropos christology faced an intrinsic problem because of the suppositions under which it was working, namely, the hypostatization of the Logos and a pattern of objectivist thinking. The conception of Logos as a hypostasis creates a problem that defies a solution. With the individualization of the Logos, there are "two," Logos as an individual and the individual human being Jesus, out of which one cannot make "one" without compromising one or the other. What one finds in this christology is not dialectical thinking but an impossible conceptual dilemma.

## CONCLUSION

The historical development of what turned out to be classical doctrines about Jesus Christ is, needless to say, important for the understanding of the classics themselves. I will in the next chapter focus attention on the doctrines of Nicaea and Chalcedon as the most important and influential products of this period. But there are other lessons to be learned from this early period of development after the first century.

A comparison between patristic christology and New Testament christology indicates that there were real changes in christology from one period to the next. A major change is effected by the writing of the New Testament. The christology that is reflected in the New Testament as a whole is fluid and open; the pluralism reflected there is far-ranging. Also the christology of the New Testament literature is still in dialogue with Jesus or a memory of Jesus which is quite recent. Even in the New Testament literature that does not focus imaginatively on Jesus of Nazareth, such as the letters of Paul, one must reckon that Jesus is not forgotten, and that memory of him is a constitutive dimension of the life of the community. As history moves away from the event of Jesus, memory of him is objectified and recorded in writing. Then, in the wake of the dominating influence of John's gospel in christology and the hypostatization of Logos as a discrete divine being, christological thinking undergoes some major shifts. Reflection, doubling back on New Testament writings, tends to make this literature into a source book for revealed representative information about God. One finds a tendency "to treat the Bible in an 'atomic' way as if each verse or set of verses was capable of giving direct

information about Christian doctrine apart from its context. . . ."⁷¹ The framework for christological thinking becomes narrowed down to a Johannine pattern of thought. Logos or the Son becomes the subject matter of christology, subtly displacing Jesus of Nazareth as the referent of christological imagination. The list of New Testament paths for christological thinking that were not followed is long.

Another real and significant change in christological thinking was mediated by the change of language, that is, the shift from a way of thinking that is rooted in a Jewish, religious cultural tradition to one that is more self-consciously philosophical and Greek in its roots. I refer to forms of questioning and a tradition of meaningful linguistic categories that shape a conceptual worldview. The shift of a cultural matrix involved new questions that generated answers that were not found in the New Testament literature in any explicit way. The point, however, is not made against change and in favor of retaining an alien language in a new culture. The point is simply the recognition of the newness of these conceptions and their changeability in turn.

The overview of this history has demonstrated that this development was historically contingent. This contingency is frequently illustrated, if not proved, with the following rhetorical question: what would have been the result if Christianity had spread toward the East? Yet despite the contingency and the pluralism of patristic christologies, one can detect below the surface a series of perennial questions or problems that are structural. There are topics in christology that necessarily arise and will have to be addressed in any cultural context. Some examples of these that are exemplified in the patristic development are worthy of note. The soteriological structure of christology is constant. The question of the relationship between Jesus and God arose early in the Christian tradition and, on the basis of the New Testament witness, is a fundamental question that cannot be avoided. The relationship between what came to be called Jesus' divinity and the historical fact of Jesus' humanity is also a constant factor in the development of christology after the first century, and it was accentuated by the Nicene formula. And, finally, there is the persistent methodological question concerning criteria and norms for christological judgments. Amid the various interpretations of Jesus as the Christ, how are decisive judgments to be made? All of these issues are addressed in different ways, but the questions that are being asked are intrinsic to christology.

Thus this theological development, when it is analyzed, begins to reveal the intrinsic criteria of theological reflection itself. By intrinsic criteria I want to point again to elements in the structure of the exercise itself as distinct from external criteria, such as other theologies or church doctrines. Throughout this development there is a constant citation of the sources of scripture as a norm; christology has to be faithful to the first witness to

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71. R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 848–49.

Jesus and to the person of Jesus as he appears in that witness. The process of inculturation, of using the categories of Greco-Roman intellectual culture to understand and explain Jesus Christ, indicates that intelligibility is a norm for christology. And, finally, the consistent correspondence of christology with a conception of how Jesus saves indicates that experience and the Christian life are inner criteria for assessing the point of christology. These criteria will come to bear on an analysis and interpretation of the two monuments of patristic christology, the doctrines of Nicaea and Chalcedon.