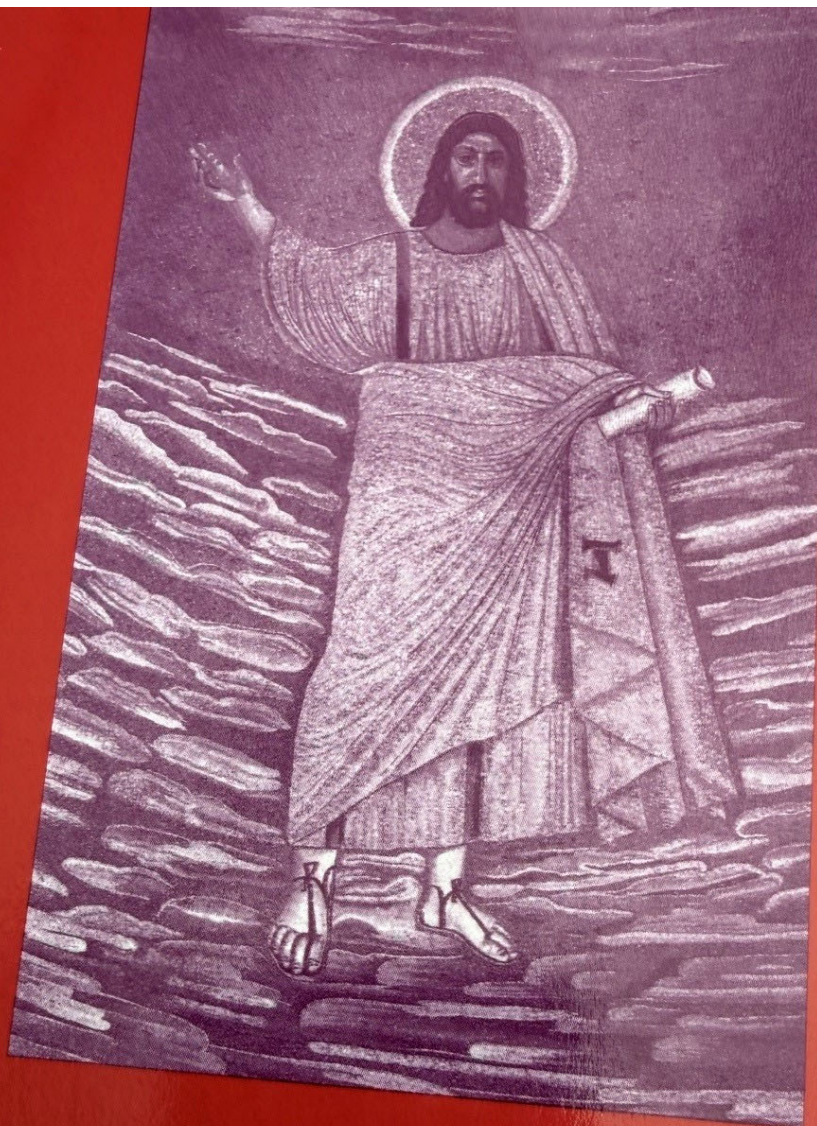


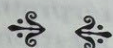


CHRISTOLOGY

A BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL, AND SYSTEMATIC
STUDY OF JESUS

GERALD O' COLLINS S. J.

To the First Council of Constantinople



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

(St Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*)

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

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

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

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

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

Four Queries

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

The overriding of it led Christ make it possible truly human a Saviour.

Irenaeus claimed that the Son of God became truly human and truly divine.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³ *Epistola* 101. 15; Bettenson, *Later Christian Fathers*, 107.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

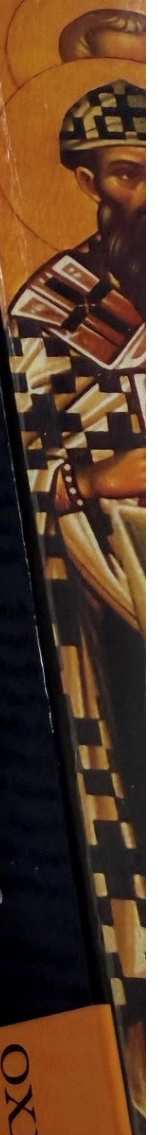
Irenaeus himself illustrates the possibilities for development and misunderstanding in the christological use of both OT and NT themes and the Scriptures. We have already noted (in Chapter 2) how Irenaeus in presenting the story of salvation, with its centre in the redemptive and revelatory 'recapitulation'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

⁴ See M. A. Donovan, 'Irenaeus', *ABD* iii. 457–61. On Marcion see J. J. Clabeaux, 'Marcion', *ibid.* iv. 514–16.

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Irenaeus⁵ this dyad became and remained common currency, with 'Son of man' simply expressing Christ's humanity or human nature. Origen, Tertullian, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, and further Church Fathers followed suit; Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians maintained the usage and kept 'Son of man' as a standard way for denoting the human nature of Christ.

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

In the *Contra Arianos* (1. 37–64) Athanasius recorded many of the scriptural passages up for debate in the Arian controversy over Christ's divinity (e.g. Heb. 1: 4; 3: 1; Acts 2: 36). In 1 Cor. 15: 24–8 the Arians found justification for their thesis of the inferiority of the Son to the Father. In Col. 1: 15 they read the 'image' and 'first-born' language ('He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation') as meaning, respectively, that the Son was an inferior copy as contrasted with the original (God) and that he was a created being. After Justin Martyr in the second century identified Christ with the figure of wisdom in Prov. 8: 22 ('the Lord created/begot/possessed me at the beginning of his work'), this became a key OT text for christological thinking. In a letter of AD 262 written to Dionysius the Great (bishop of Alexandria), St Dionysius (bishop of Rome) rejected a subordinationist exegesis of this verse, and expounded it in terms of the Son being 'begotten but not made' (DS 114). In the following century the Arians naturally pounced on the same verse to support their thesis of the Son being only a creature, albeit the most perfect of creatures.

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

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

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

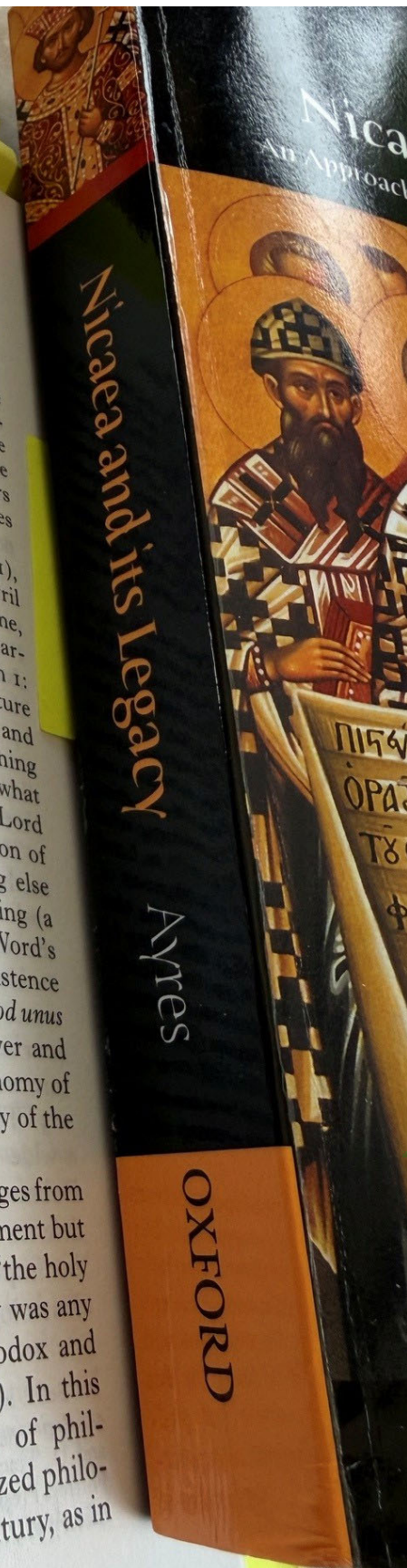
Cyril's major opponent was, of course, Nestorius (d. c.451), whose liking for Heb. 1: 1-3 and Phil. 2: 6 meant that Cyril gave considerable attention to those texts. At the same time, a fascination with John's Gospel led Cyril to wrestle in particular with the sense of the 'Word becoming flesh' (John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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶ See P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, i: *From the Beginnings to Jerome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); R. Grant and D. Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2nd edn., 1989); J. W. Rogerson and W. G. Jeanrond, 'Interpretation, History of', *ABD* iii. 424-43.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ambiguities and Intimations

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

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

⁷ More than 200 years earlier than Cyril, Tertullian, precisely in a work aimed at affirming the reality of the Son of God's human body and birth, wrote of his 'appearing' and 'clothing himself' as a human being (*De carne Christi* 1.1).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Divinity and Humanity

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

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

Heterodox solutions reduced or simply sacrificed either

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² When Tertullian argued against Marcion and the Gnostics that the Word had assumed both a soul and a body (*ibid.* 34.10), the critical point at issue was the taking of a body and real flesh. Apollinarius was to tamper with faith in Christ's integral humanity by denying that the Word assumed a rational soul.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁵ On this problem see Athanasius, *ad Serapionem*.

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

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

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

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developed the Anomean ('dissimilar') doctrine, according to which the Son is not only the first creature but also in essence simply 'unlike' the Father and radically inferior. Then there were many bishops and others who simply remained uneasy about or antagonistic to the term *homoousios*.

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

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

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letter written in 375 to the leading Christians of Neocaesarea (Pontus), Basil stated:
It is indispensable to clearly understand that, as he who fails to confess the community of the essence (*ousia*) falls into polytheism, so he who refuses to grant the distinction of the *hypostaseis* is carried away into Judaism. . . . Sabellius . . . said that the same God . . . was metamorphosed as the need of the moment required, and spoken of now as Father, now as Son, and now as Holy Spirit. (*Epistola*, 210. 5)

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

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

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

¹⁶ Tanner, 28.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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