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The Metaphysics of the Incarnation

R. L. Sturch

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There has been a very noticeable tendency in British theology, and to some extent in American too, over the past three or four decades, to move from a generally 'Alexandrian' Christology to a generally 'Antiochene' one. In the earlier part of the century, though there were exceptions such as Sanday, the prevailing tone was Alexandrian through and through. The most famous topic debated was that of 'kenosis': did God the Son, in becoming man, 'empty Himself' of such divine attributes as omnipotence and omniscience?¹ But this question could only be asked in this form on an Alexandrian basis, by somebody wondering 'How it is that the Word could become flesh?' An 'Antiochene', beginning more with the question, 'How is this man Jesus one with the Word?', would hardly even think of 'kenosis' of this kind, either to accept it or to reject. Yet the debate flourished for years without anyone saying 'We are asking the wrong question to begin with'; the Alexandrian position was common ground.

This is certainly not the case today. D. M. Baillie, in his celebrated book *God was in Christ*,² spoke of 'the end of docetism'; correctly enough, for no theologian is likely nowadays to fall into the trap of even inadvertently denying Christ's full and complete humanity. But he might equally well have spoken of 'the end of Alexandrianism'. Most of the works reckoned as important contributions to Christology since Baillie wrote have fallen into the Antiochene category on the whole. A few examples may be mentioned: apart from *God was in Christ* itself, we could note two books by Dr. W. N. Pittenger (*The Word Incarnate*³ and *Christology Reconsidered*⁴); John Knox's *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ*⁵; and A. T. Hanson's *Grace and Truth*.⁶ A similar approach manifested itself, on a smaller scale, in J. A. T. Robinson's *Honest to God*⁷ and in the essay on Christology contributed by H. W. Montefiore to *Soundings*.⁸ The attitude is not confined to professional theologians. I have noticed with interest an American professor of English, Mr. Gunnar Urang, discussing the Alexandrian leanings of C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams, implicitly criticise them for this; the general correctness of the Antiochene position he evidently takes for granted.⁹ The reversal of fortunes is not of course complete. There are still Alexandrians about!¹⁰ But I think that if one had to generalise it would be to the effect that the more *influential* pattern of Christology in Britain today is of the 'Word/man' or Antiochene type, not the 'Word/flesh' or Alexandrian.

¹ The debate is not completely dead: cf. e.g. E. L. Mascall, *Christ, the Christian and the Church* (1946), 23ff.

² D. M. Baillie, *God was in Christ* (1947).

³ W. N. Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate* (1959).

⁴ W. N. Pittenger, *Christology Reconsidered* (1970).

⁵ J. Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ* (1968).

⁶ A. T. Hanson, *Grace and Truth* (1975).

⁷ J. A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (1963); cf. *The Human Face of God* (1973).

⁸ A. Vidler (ed.), *Soundings* (1962).

⁹ G. Urang, *Shadows of Heaven* (1961), 33-4 and 86-7.

¹⁰ Cf., for a recent case, H. E. W. Turner, *Jesus the Christ* (1976); or Mascall, *op. cit.*

The writers involved have for the most part no wish to be unorthodox. Antiochenism is a legitimate traditional approach, with its foundations in Scripture, and the Council of Chalcedon, which standardised Christological orthodoxy for centuries, was a reaction in the direction of Antioch from the extreme and heretical Alexandrianism of Eutyches. But take it too far, and it too, like so many positions, is capable of giving birth to what is certainly not orthodox. In patristic times, this took the form of 'adoptionism', the theory that the Word only took on

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or 'adopted' the person of Jesus at His baptism in the Jordan. That particular error no modern theologian is likely to revive. But it is clearly 'Antiochene' thought that lies behind the still more extreme position tentatively put forward a few years ago by Professor M. F. Wiles,¹¹ where the attempt to preserve the unity of the Word and the Man is actually abandoned, though there is still present the wish to insist on the 'specialness' of Jesus, at least for the believer.

Can we discern any reasons for this change in Christological fashion? One, which is very much insisted on by the writers themselves, is the recovery of a strong sense of the Lord's humanity and human personality. People reading the Gospels felt, not so much a remote Deity walking the earth in human guise, but a person whom they could almost feel they knew in the same sort of way that they knew their friends. Hence the question 'How is this man Jesus one with the Word?' became a much more natural one than perhaps it had been. By itself, however, this rediscovery of the Lord's humanity would surely not have provoked quite such a reaction. The asking of the Antiochene question does not necessarily preclude the asking of the Alexandrian; more was needed.

One major factor, I suspect, was the enormous importance that the question of revelation had come to have. With the rise of Darwinism and of biblical criticism during the nineteenth century, the nature of the biblical revelation became an acute problem, and one possible way to avoid this problem, or at least mitigate it, was to regard God's revelation as being primarily in the *incarnate* Word rather than in the *written*. 'The only-begotten Son, He has revealed Him.' And from this it was not too difficult to take a further step, even though there was no logical need to, and treat revelation as the chief purpose of the Incarnation. Not necessarily its *only* purpose. It was not intended that Christendom should forget about the Atonement. But it is not, I think, too fanciful to see something of this 'revelational' stress in, for instance, Baillie's treatment of the Atonement. Having rightly stressed the fact that God is always in some sense carrying the sins of His people, that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, he calls the Cross of Christ 'the point in human history where we find the actual outcropping of the divine Atonement'.¹² The Cross is not just a symbol for Baillie,¹³ but it would not be unfair, I think, to say that he tends to treat it as simply the eternal Atonement made visible—revealed to human sight. Some similar idea may lie behind, for instance, Pittenger's use of the word 'exemplification' for Christ's relationship to the principles of the 'God-man relationship' (though the debt to

¹¹ 'Does Christology rest on a Mistake?' in S. Sykes and J. P. Clayton (eds.), *Christ, Faith and History* (1972); cf. *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* (1974). The recent symposium edited by John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977), would also be relevant.

¹² Baillie, *op. cit.*, 201.

¹³ *Id.*, *op. cit.*, 191.

Whitehead here makes this uncertain). Whether this is right or not, the point remains that a revelational Christology can very naturally be worked out in 'Word/man' terms. We did not need to suppose that the Word descended from heaven or 'emptied Himself' into the pages of Scripture, even if we believed in the full inspiration of that Scripture; and no more did we need to suppose such a process with the revelation in Christ Jesus. The stress on revelation has no doubt grown much less important in more recent theology, but its effects still linger in the Christological field. They have not, it is only fair to say, gone unnoticed or uncriticised; and John McIntyre, for instance, has insisted very strongly that redemption is a 'first-order model' and revelation only a 'second-order' one, dependent on the former.¹⁴

A third factor which I think may have helped was a distrust of metaphysics. The writers we have been mentioning—with the outstanding exception of Dr. Pittenger

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—are not much interested in metaphysics or philosophy. This is no great sin, of course, especially as the main reason for their lack of this particular interest is often a greater interest in the Bible. But it is a serious mistake to go and reject the philosophy of others when you have none of your own, or (more probably) only a crude and unthought-out one. This Montefiore, for one, recognises. 'The impasse in which Christology (and all theology) finds itself is primarily due to the lack of a metaphysic in which it can be securely grounded.'¹⁵ It is only unfortunate that he himself does not *either* stop at this point *or* remedy the defect.

The rejection of metaphysics shows itself both in the doctrine of God and in the doctrine of man, and therefore doubly so in Christology. A refusal to think philosophically about God and His relationship to the world leads normally to one of two results. One possibility is anthropomorphism. This is far and away the safer of the two. The Bible habitually uses anthropomorphic language, and provided that we keep in mind the ultimate inadequacy of such language to do justice to Him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, it will do us no harm. Indeed, it is necessary to the most enthusiastic of metaphysicians when he is on his knees, in his pulpit, or reading his Bible! But few professional theologians can maintain the necessary lack of sophistication required to stay firmly in this framework.

The second possibility is a kind of quasi-deism. The world is regarded, basically, as self-contained, even if it is not strictly speaking self-sufficient. This may be expressed in various ways: as, for instance, in a refusal to separate the 'sacred' from the 'secular', which is undoubtedly in many respects justified. But the unjustifiable conclusion can all too easily be drawn that there is nothing special about anything, even Christ, or at least nothing so special as to disturb the continuous fabric of nature. 'There has been,' writes Robinson, 'a persistent tendency in the history of Christian doctrine—stretching... from the Fathers to Karl Barth—to assume that Jesus could not be both a genuine product of the process and the Word of God to it.'¹⁶ One is tempted to say that surely it has, on the contrary, been the test of Christian orthodoxy to say that Jesus was both these things—both human and divine. But of course Robinson is in

¹⁴ J. McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology* (1966), 168.

¹⁵ Vidler, *op. cit.*, 161.

¹⁶ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, 201.

effect assuming that in order to be a 'genuine product of the process' one must be entirely produced by that process, wholly determined by it alone, that any supernatural element destroys the genuineness.

Now the point Robinson has in mind could be given a perfectly orthodox interpretation. Many theologians have supposed that the Creation was all along intended as a vehicle for Incarnation; and that means that the 'process' was designed specifically in order that Jesus should be the Word of God to it. Knox takes a similar line: 'We cannot say this' (that God was in Christ) 'about the career of Jesus without implying that God was creating Him, and creating Him for His supreme redemptive purpose, from the beginning' of the entire 'organic cosmic process'.¹⁷ But once again it is taken for granted that God could not *both* intend this all along *and* bring it about by any means other than the strictly natural.

If this line of thought is pressed to its conclusion, intervention of any kind by God in His creation is excluded. Everything God does, He must have done in the original creation of the cosmic process; descent from heaven, miracle, and revelation are all impossibilities. But it is more than that. The 'paradox of grace' of which Baillie speaks so admirably,¹⁸ and which he uses as his model for the Incarna-

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tion, disappears. We cannot say, as he does, that grace 'makes a gulf between the Christian way of life and any "mere morality" '; for both the Christian way of life and the moralists'—and, for that matter, the murderer's—were laid down by God in the instant of creation.¹⁹ Yet I doubt if any of our writers are such extreme determinists. Of course, we may refuse to press to such a conclusion; but in that case there was something wrong with the first step into a naturalist metaphysics of the world.

It is only fair at this point to pay attention to the one theologian of this group who both recognises the need for a philosophical background and has sought to supply one. Dr. Pittenger is of course well known as a defender of the metaphysics of A. N. Whitehead, and as one who seeks to understand and interpret these from a Christian point of view. Now the Whiteheadian God most certainly is not the remote Deist-style God I have suggested is implied by the attitude of many of these writers. God for Whitehead is intimately bound up with the world, so much so that in two celebrated aphorisms Whitehead felt able to say 'It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World.... It is as true to say that God creates the world, as that the World creates God.'²⁰ This as it stands would surely make the relationship between God and the world too close for there to be anything special about Jesus (or anything else); but Pittenger in fact seems to me to stress the transcendence of God more than Whitehead did. 'God is not exhausted by the creation... He is transcendent over it, even transcendent in it'.²¹

¹⁷ Knox, *op. cit.*, 108.

¹⁸ Baillie, *op. cit.*, 114ff.

¹⁹ I have tried to discuss this point at greater length in an article 'On Discontinuity', *Evangelical Quarterly* (forthcoming [Vol. 51.4 (Oct.-Dec. 1979): 214-221]).

²⁰ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (1929), 492.

²¹ W. N. Pittenger, *God in Process* (1967), 17.

It is clear that Pittenger at least is not chargeable with the defect I have just suggested is present in some of the other neo-Antiochene writers, whether or not we think that his metaphysical preferences are sound.

There remains the problem of our philosophy of *man*. Here again we find a lack of sophistication which leads to sweeping and unnecessary judgments. As an example, we could take the words of Knox: 'We can have the humanity without the pre-existence and we can have the pre-existence without the humanity. There is absolutely no way of having both.'²² What, we may wonder, is the justification for this rather startling assertion, which seems to condemn *all* past Christologies, Alexandrian and Antiochene alike, as a waste of time before they were even drafted? (I say 'seems'; Professor Knox does later on give us a demythologised version of pre-existence, in so far as he believes God was always intending the existence and work of Jesus.) The main one seems to be the claim that Christ's pre-existence must imply that His human existence was 'in some self-conscious way continuous with his earlier existence as a heavenly being'.²³ Now if pre-existence *did* imply this, so that (presumably) the Child in the manger was conscious of continuity with the previous existence of God the Son, we might indeed feel qualms. But this is only so if Christ's manhood—i.e. anyone's manhood—is such a unity that there is, so to speak, no imaginable point of junction with pre-existent divinity except the whole of it, self-consciousness and all. If manhood, Christ's or ours, is a simple, unanalysable thing, then union with Deity on the lines Knox is attacking is indeed impossible. But it is surely unlikely that manhood is any such thing. It may be that previous metaphysical analyses of it have been wrong, so that no 'point of junction' has yet been found. But unless there is reason to suppose that none can *ever* be found, we should simply try and improve our metaphysics. Where exactly one should look for such a point of junction will, of course, have to be discussed later on.

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It may be felt that in what I have been saying I have been virtually taking for granted that there is something wrong in the general approach of these theologians, despite a verbal acknowledgment that Antiochenism is legitimate theologising. So it is provided that it is not taken by itself. 'The one is the complement of the other' says Dr. Sellers;²⁴ and 'The truth', as Charles Simeon said of another debate, 'is not in the middle, and not in one extreme, but in both extremes'.²⁵ It is not the assertions of the neo-Antiochenes that I feel unhappy with, it is their avowed or implicit denials. We cannot, I submit, do without the Alexandrian element in Christology. William Temple once wrote that the purpose of the divine act which Christology considers 'would seem to be twofold—Revelation and Atonement. For the former, what is necessary is that Jesus Christ should be truly God and truly Man; for the latter what seems to be necessary is that human experience as conditioned by the sin of man should become the personal experience of God the Son—not an object of external observation but of inward feeling (to use the language of human consciousness)'.²⁶ This seems to me to hit the nail on the head with admirable precision. On the Antiochene scheme, ancient or modern, the flow in the Incarnation is all from God to man, not

²² Knox, *op. cit.*, 106.

²³ *Id.*, *loc. cit.*

²⁴ R. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies* (1954), 257.

²⁵ Quoted in H. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (repr. 1948), 77.

²⁶ W. Temple, *Christus Veritas* (1924), 140.

merely in the Church but in the person of Jesus Christ Himself. It is noteworthy that the theologians we have been considering say much about the *activity* of God in Christ, and little or nothing about His *passivity*. This might be the result of a strong belief in the impassibility of God (some of the Antiochene Fathers did argue that one of the main strengths of their position was the way in which it safeguarded that impassibility).²⁷ But I can see no evidence that they do in fact hold any such strong belief; it is quite alien to Pittenger's process philosophy, and Baillie explicitly states that he would like to modify the doctrine.²⁸

The lack of stress on the Cross is very notable in nearly all our writers. Perhaps a few examples may help to illustrate the point. Pittenger's *The Word Incarnate* includes a chapter on 'Revelation and Christian Faith' and one on 'The Self-Expression of God in Jesus Christ'; the only reference to the Atonement in the index refers us to a passage about one page summarising Emil Brunner. Others make more of the Cross, but only as a revelation or an act of God. Thus Hanson regards obedient suffering (above all, though not exclusively, that of Christ) as 'a revelation of God's self-giving, because [it is] God's action, God's design, God's manifestation of His nature'.²⁹ Knox, who has, to be fair, written a separate book on *The Death of Christ*, when he deals with the difference between a Christology which asks questions about the *event* and one which asks them about the person, thinks of the earliest 'creed' as to the general effect (in modern terms) 'that Jesus' human career was the locus of an incomparably significant divine action', and asks 'If we had inherited directly from the earliest Church this earliest creed, would we have felt the need to say more?'"³⁰ And Baillie's use of the word 'outcropping' in a similar context we have already noted. In less traditionally-minded writers the effect is naturally still more pronounced. To Robinson atonement, resurrection and parousia are 'present realities or possibilities in human experience, of which for the Christian Christ is the energising centre';³¹ while Wiles, agreeing with Robinson that the doctrine of the *fall* relates not to an actual historical event but to 'a dimension of human experience', in applying this to redemption as well doubts the need of a 'logically necessary link between the theological assertion' and the actual events of Jesus's life and death.³²

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To discuss the problems of this last sort of position would take us too far from our main theme. We are concerned with the more moderate positions of those who are trying to maintain a generally orthodox pattern of belief in a purely Antiochene framework. Can these give the Cross its proper importance? It seems to me that they cannot: the categories with which they are trying to operate will simply not do the work.

Primarily these categories are *act* and *revelation*. We should also take into account Baillie's model of grace, and Pittenger's extended list of 'divine-human relations'—'creation, providence,

²⁷ Cf. Sellers, *op. cit.*, 183ff.

²⁸ Cf. Baillie, *op. cit.*, 198ff.

²⁹ Hanson, *op. cit.*, 60.

³⁰ Knox, *op. cit.*, 59.

³¹ Robinson, *The Human Face of God*, 231.

³² Sykes and Clayton, *op. cit.*, 7-8.

co-operation of will, attention(prayer), mystical union' in addition to grace.³³ Now we have to try and show how the passion and death of Jesus of Nazareth are at the very least explicable in terms of these categories, and preferably, if we are to do justice to the stress laid on the Cross by the New Testament, how they are overwhelmingly important in terms of these categories.

Will 'act' do? No. That God was active in the Passion is of course absolutely certain to Christians. It was brought about by His wisdom; but His wisdom must have had some purpose in doing so. The Passion must have had some significance of its own for it to be suitable as an act of God.

Can that significance lie in revelation? Hardly. The Cross can manifest God's nature, undoubtedly; but only if the One crucified is actually God. No doubt I could 'reveal' my astonishment at some marvellous event by saying 'It bowled me over completely, like this' and then knocking someone else down; but it would be felt by all that there was something wrong *ethically* with such a manner of 'revealing'. God could hardly reveal the costly bearing of sin that goes on eternally in His nature by letting someone else suffer as an illustration. If God revealed Himself in Christ, and acted in Him, but no more, then Christ's sufferings on Calvary were no more than a personal matter to God (though no less) than those of the thieves who were crucified with Him. We are perilously close to the horrible Saviour of some of the Gnostics, who stood by and laughed while Simon of Cyrene was crucified in His place. Naturally none of our theologians intends anything remotely resembling this, but can they avoid it?

And similarly with grace and the other relationships mentioned by Pittenger. In none of them does God share or enter a human life; He only affects it from outside. There is no question of 'human experience's becoming the personal experience of God the Son'. The Cross is left dangling, as it were; it seems to be at best a demonstration of how far the devoted obedience of a man inspired by God's act of grace can take him, at worst a tragic and regrettable mistake. (Is it not one of the reasons Muslim apologists sometimes give for denying the Crucifixion, that God would surely not have allowed so great a prophet as Jesus so terrible an end?) Nor is this difficulty to be resolved by abandoning a substitutionary view of the Atonement. Even the Abelardian view requires that God should be demonstrating His love for man and moving us to repentance by Himself suffering: 'Nostra sunt, Domme, nostra sunt crimina, / qui tua criminum facis supplicia'.³⁴ 'Whatever our theoretical conception of the doctrine of Atonement may be, for many minds the sufferings and death of Christ would be deprived of their atoning value and efficacy, if there were nothing more in them than the sufferings and death of a merely human hero, or of a human personality from which the divine element is withdrawn'.³⁵

If the above is correct, and Antiochene Christologies cannot stand on their own, what remedies can we find for the situation which has led to their popularity? Some will occur at once to evangelicals, and traditional 'supernaturalist' Christians in general. If we believe in the Scriptural revelation, then, since we naturally do not believe in the deity of Scripture, we shall be the less likely to want to understand the deity of the Lord in terms of His revelatory work. (This is not, of course, to dissociate the two completely, only to leave their relationship an open question for the

³³ Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate*, 198.

³⁴ P. Abelard (ed. G. M. Dreves), *Hymnarius Paraclitensis* (1891), 109.

³⁵ J. Caird, *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* (1899), ii, 109.

moment.) Because we are not anxious to say that God has revealed Himself in His Son alone, we are not even tempted to say that in Him He has done nothing but reveal Himself.

Nor, of course, are we tempted to think of God as One who does not intervene in His creation. We believe in miracle, in prophetic inspiration, in the hearing and answering of prayer; and an Incarnation which interrupted the natural continuity of history is quite consonant with these. (The interruption was, of course, long prepared for; but that preparation was itself composed of 'interruptions'.) Here too we are unlikely to fall into this particular sort of error. The remedy for an inadequate Christology is to be found, partly at least, in a proper view of revelation and a proper view of God's relationship to the world He made.

But we dare not congratulate ourselves. There were other reasons for contemporary Antiochenism as well. One, it will be remembered, was the recovery of a sense of Jesus' full humanity; and it is quite easy for evangelicals, while asserting that humanity with their lips, to disregard it or forget about it in practice. We do not, after all, sing hymns to the honour of an itinerant carpenter or an uncertificated rabbi; it takes a conscious effort to think about Jesus in these terms, even though logic and honesty compel us to admit that they are, strictly speaking, quite true as far as they go. Here without a doubt many of us do have, however unintentionally, an erroneous view of Christ, and need to remind ourselves from time to time of that which in theory we acknowledge.

That, however, is not the only thing needed. We must also find a way to accommodate this truth of Christ's human personality within a Christology which does not fall into the mistakes we have been looking at. The Antiochene view *did* do justice to that; can any other? We need intellectual effort as well as a remembrance of our own official definitions. There are, I think, five conditions which have got to be satisfied by any Christology with claims to be adequate.

Firstly, Christ's Godhood must be genuine and complete. This surely ought not to give rise to much difficulty; there can hardly be anyone in 'mainstream' Christianity who wants to ascribe some kind of demi-god status to Christ. Kenotic theories are a possible, though certainly unintended, exception. So, certainly, was Arianism; but this is hardly a live option today. There may be problems about how this genuine Godhood can belong to Christ; but that is a different matter, and we shall come to it later.

Secondly, Christ's Manhood must also be genuine and complete. Nor can we have any nonsense about being 'man but not a man'. This point has been stressed enough already in this article; it must, however, be kept firmly in mind.

Thirdly, there must be room for the revelatory work of the Son. 'The divinity manifested in the humanity' may not suffice for a complete Christology, but it is certainly true.

Fourthly, there must be room for His redemptive work. The Cross must be

more than the culmination of a life of obedience if we are to do justice to the way the New Testament stresses it.

And fifthly, the *really* difficult condition: there must be a unity in and of Christ, and this unity must reside in something either common to Godhood and manhood *or* outside them both (or, of course, both of these). That is, we cannot look for a point of junction which is simply part of the manhood or the Deity. If we do, then we lose some part of the other nature. This was, of course, the error in Apollinarianism, and very possibly in many Alexandrian views since. If some part of human nature is in Christ replaced by something divine, then, whether that part be the rational soul, as in Apollinarianism, or the will, as with the Monothelites, or anything else, then Christ is not fully human, and failure in the fifth condition has produced failure in the second. It is arguable that Kenotic theories do the reverse: that in effect they substitute, let us say, the human mind of Jesus for the Divine mind or understanding of the Logos, and so undermine our *first* condition. But this is not the place to discuss kenoticism. It also seems clear to me that modern Antiochenism fails to satisfy this condition, making the links all one-sided in a different way; for grace (to take an example) is an action only of God, and a thing received only on the part of man. But we shall discuss this point later.

The Fathers, as is well known, used three main terms to conduct their discussion—*prosopon*, *physis*, and *hypostasis*. All agreed that there was but one *prosopon* of the Incarnate Son; but the Monophysites held that there was also one *physis* and one *hypostasis*, the Nestorians that there were two of each, and the Council of Chalcedon that there was one hypostasis but two *physeis*. I have no competence whatever to deal with what was actually meant by each of these words; but there might be some possibility of asking ourselves 'What could there be two or one of in modern terms?' and possibly linking these with the patristic ones.

Christ is a single being, not two. This is, I should imagine, the truth insisted on by the patristic formula of 'one *prosopon*', one Person. He is marked off from all else that there is by what we might call the boundary of His united being, just as other 'persons' are. I said just now that the unity of Christ could lie in something outside both His Godhood and His Manhood; and such a 'boundary', since it includes both, fits this description. The problem is whether this is *enough*, as the Nestorians claimed. Is there not the possibility that the boundary is like that of a pantomime horse, marking it off indeed from everything else on stage, but concealing a *disunity* within? (The comparison, however ludicrous, need not be wholly inept; we can conceive of one of the two pairs of 'legs' as utterly obedient to the directives of the other....) The two natures are associated when they are contrasted with anything else in the world, but are they when they are contrasted one with another?

I have used the word 'nature'; this word at least has not changed in meaning very much from the Greek '*physis*', and is still in quite common use. Nevertheless, it has been felt by some modern writers that it should be left out of Christology. Bishop Montefiore certainly takes this line.³⁶ We do not, he argues, know what either divine nature or human nature is. 'The nature of God is beyond our human comprehension,' he writes, adding, significantly in view of what has been said above about revelation, 'If we had really known the nature of God, there would have been

³⁶ Vidler, *op. cit.*, 153ff.

no need of an Incarnation to reveal Him to us'. As for man, no absolute line can be drawn between him and the higher mammals, nor can we know his

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future potentialities. Even if we set these points aside (reasonably enough, I should have thought, seeing that the Jesus whose humanity is being considered was neither *Homo erectus* nor some being from the remote future of science fiction). we are unable to define exactly what constitutes human nature now; and he quotes and criticises a number of attempts that have been made to do this in times past.

Now the odd thing is that Montefiore has already in effect answered these points himself. They assume a Christology which speaks of the natures in positive form. But this is quite unnecessary. If the Fathers of Chalcedon really did do this, it was not with any presumptuous certainty that they fully understood human nature, let alone divine. They could equally well have spoken in a more general form: whatever qualities or disjunctions of qualities go to make up humanity, and whatever qualities or disjunctions or qualities go to make up divinity, the Incarnate Lord had both sets. Such qualities need not be static ones. 'Terms like substance, essence, being, nature (in its theological usage) and the like do appear to have an inert quality which can be devastating in its effect upon the biblical picture of the living God,' remarks Dr. Pittenger.³⁷ It is to his credit that he says 'appear', and acknowledges that it is oversimplifying to dismiss the 'perennial philosophy' on such a charge. It is possible that the Fathers did tend to think too 'statically'. But there is no need to imitate them if we do not wish to, and we can still use the word 'nature' if we like.

Montefiore's only objection to the Chalcedonian use of '*physis*' understood in this more general way is that it 'assumes that we know enough about manhood and godhead to assert that both can be united in their perfection in one person'. This is true, but no objection. The Fathers of Chalcedon believed—as Christians generally have believed before and since, and as indeed Montefiore himself believes—that manhood and godhead have been united in their perfection in one person. And since *ab esse ad posse valet inferentia*, we do know enough about them to assert that they can be so united. The problem for Christology is not 'Are they united in Christ?' but '*How* are they united. in Him?'

However, we are still left with that problem, if, as I have suggested, the union in one *prosopon* is not enough. Chalcedon spoke of union in one '*hypostasis*', but the meaning of that word seems to have varied a good deal, and it will be simpler to disregard it. We want some point which the divine and human natures have in common; if we find one we may for convenience call it an *hypostasis* if no better word is forthcoming, but we shall do so without implying that it is what the Fathers meant by the word. In any case, the divine and human natures are so different (this is surely true, whatever they may comprise) that it is hard to see how they can have *any* point in common, unless one or the other is incomplete.

³⁷ Pittenger, *Christology Reconsidered*, 17.

But human beings do not consist of human natures alone. There is surely involved in each of us that which *has* the human nature. This is of course the age-old philosophical problem of 'substance', and many different solutions have been proposed to it; certainly I do not aspire to produce one here. Whether it is true that *any* grouping of qualities must have some centre to hold them together is arguable. But a much stronger case can be made out for saying that such a centre is required for any *consciousness*, whether human or any other kind. The case in question derives ultimately from Kant, and it is of some interest to note that Temple, trying to find some more modern equivalent for 'hypostasis', suggested that the nearest one was Kant's 'analytic unity of apperception'.³⁸

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The argument may be very briefly summarised as follows:³⁹ If I, or any other conscious being, am aware of two or more related things, then it must be the same 'I' who am aware of both. Otherwise I could not be aware of the two as related to one another. Two experiences may succeed one another in time, for instance, but how can they both be *my* experiences, rather than 'fall apart into separate worlds of experience', unless *I* am aware of them both? We can, of course, point out that there is a third experience involved in such cases, namely, that of being aware that the two are related. But this is itself part of *my* experiences. We cannot use it to unite the other two unless we have a fourth to unite it to them, and so on for ever. Even if we reject the substance/attribute analysis of things in general, we need it to account for the union of experiences in one conscious subject. I should add that we also require it to account for our own sense of personal identity. In dreams, for example, we are not aware of our bodily continuity with our past, nor do we necessarily remember anything from that past during the course of the dream; yet we are aware of our 'I-ness', of our own being, and it is not some other person who has the dream!

The point could of course be elaborated at much greater length; but I hope it is reasonably clear what I have been getting at. Now it seems highly probable that it is in this centre of experience or 'substantial self' that we have the sort of 'point of junction' that is required for the divinity and humanity of our Lord. So far as I am aware, the only theologian of our group who has even considered this possibility is Pittenger,⁴⁰ and he does so very briefly, so that I am not quite sure whether he has exactly the same point in mind as I have. 'To think of His' (Jesus's) 'person', in this sense, as divine would be equivalent to saying, with Apollinarius, that the normal human centre of experience, the psychological ego, was replaced by the divine Word. If that were so, our Lord would not be truly human at all.... Interpretations of Jesus Christ as One in Whom God is the sole "experiencing" centre are not only absurdly untrue to the actual remembered historical picture of our Lord in the gospels, but also tend to be (and usually are) heretical in terms of classical christological formulation'.

If Pittenger is thinking of 'ego' in something like the Freudian sense, he is of course right; but his use of 'centre' suggests that he is thinking more of what I have been trying to describe. And

³⁸ Temple, *op. cit.*, 136.

³⁹ This statement of the case is based on that of C. A. Campbell, *On Selfhood and Godhood* (1957), 75ff. Cf. also J. M. E. McTaggart, *Philosophical Studies* (1934), 72f., or in *HERE*, s.v. 'Personality'.

⁴⁰ Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate*, 114.

in that case his objection is ill-founded. If the human 'centre' is that which has all a human being's experiences (in the widest possible sense, including actions, desires and so on), then the expression 'A human centre' does not mean 'A centre of the particular type we call "human"' but 'A centre with human experiences inhering in it'. Similarly, a divine 'centre' is a centre of divine experiences, not one of a special divine type. We might illustrate the point by a diagram consisting of two squares touching one another at a corner.

The geometrical point at which they meet is a corner of both squares, yet neither square lacks any necessary feature. We cannot say that the smaller 'human' square is in some way incomplete; nor for that matter that the larger 'divine' one is.

We might note in passing that this understanding of the union fits the later doctrine of the 'enhypostasia'. The experiencing centre—what corresponds on this view to the *hypostasis* of the Fathers, whether or not they meant anything like it by that word—already existed as the hypostasis of God the Son before the Incarnation, and no new centre of being had to be created for the man Jesus of Nazareth. More importantly, this picture fits, I think, all the requirements we

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listed earlier. Christ's Godhood is complete and genuine; so is His Manhood. If any quality or feature is necessary to either nature, it is there in the appropriate 'square'. The Cross is of course located in the 'human' square, but it is the Cross both of the whole diagram ('*prosopeon*'?) and of the corner where the two squares touch, which is the experiencing centre ('*hypostasis*'?) of God the Son as well as of Jesus the Jew. Christ's human knowledge and powers, as also His poverty and weakness, are of course located in the human square. His divine knowledge and omnipotence in the divine one. (Of course, we cannot imagine what such an existence would be like; but then we cannot imagine what it would be like to be God anyway, let alone God incarnate. The nearest human analogy I can think of would be dreams—if I dream I am Bismarck, my knowledge as Sturch is not functioning in the 'Bismarck' of the dream—but this is probably nearer a kenotic model!) Our Lord's miraculous powers and supernatural knowledge would then be communicated to His human life and nature when needed, and His contemporaries were right to see them as signs of prophetic status (Lk. 7: 16; Jn. 4: 19). Hence He could indeed reveal God as God chose, not so much because of His divine status as because of the divine activity in and through Him. And indeed Theodoret is quoted by Sellers as saying that Jesus during His earthly life 'knew as much as the indwelling Godhead revealed'.⁴¹

Or is 'indwelling Godhead' perhaps not quite right here? It is always rash to pile one speculation on another, but it may be worth trying. It has been usual to see the inspiration of the prophets as the work of God the Holy Spirit rather than God the Son. Is it not at least possible that we should apply this to the prophetic office of Christ as well? The association of the Holy Spirit with our Lord is made clear enough in the New Testament. The Spirit descended on Him at His baptism; He proclaimed that in Him were fulfilled the words of Isaiah 61: 1 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me'; Peter told Cornelius that God anointed Him 'with the Holy Spirit and with power'. Yet most Christologies virtually omit all reference to the Spirit; the divine side of the Saviour's

⁴¹ Sellers, *op. cit.*, 146.

life is ascribed entirely to the Word. An outstanding exception is Professor Lampe's essay on 'The Holy Spirit and the Work of Christ',⁴² which goes to the opposite extreme, exploring the possibility (it does not actually assert it) that all we need for the Incarnation is a relationship between the Spirit and the man Jesus, so that no doctrine of the Logos would be needed at all. Significantly, Lampe's proposed Christology is firmly Antiochene, with the difficulties over the experiences of Jesus (and above all the crucifixion) that I have already mentioned. 'The Logos/Son Christology could ascribe everything predicated of Jesus Christ to the one personal subject, God the Word. Against this, Spirit christology must be content to acknowledge that the personal subject of the experience of Jesus Christ is a man'.⁴³ I suggest that possibly Lampe may be absolutely right in interpreting that side of the truth seen by Antiochene theologians, ancient and modern, in terms of the Holy Spirit rather than the Logos, but wrong in thinking that this could stand on its own as an account of the divine presence in Christ. It was more than mankind ever asked or deserved, that God should fill the life of one of our number with His Spirit, teaching, revealing, guiding and proclaiming; but it was less than mankind needed. It was also necessary that He should give His life as a ransom for many.

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⁴² Sykes and Clayton, *op. cit.*, 111-130.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 124.