

2. The Sovereignty of God and Divine Transcendence: Two Views from the Early Church¹

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As we begin this series of explorations on the topics of divine providence and transcendence, the introduction to a wonderful new book, *Heresies and How to Avoid Them: Why It Matters What Christians Believe*, comes to mind. Here we are reminded that “what Christians believe is wonderfully simple, but to say what is simple is not easy.”²

And so, I propose to begin this discussion at the beginning; or at least at what has historically been the *arche* of all such discussions for the church, namely, the Incarnation. For it is here that the divine and human meet. It is here where we learn what it means to be God and, at the same time, what it means to be truly human. It is at the Incarnation that we learn of God’s sovereignty and transcendence *as* we learn of God’s immanence and relationality.

It is also in our discussions around the Incarnation that our anxieties about the sovereignty of God and human freedom find expression; and that was nowhere more evident than in the late-fourth to early-fifth century discussion between the ancient Sees of Alexandria and Antioch, each representing contradictory—even mutually exclusive—understandings of the Incarnation, divine suffering, and the relationship between the transcendent God and God’s creation. Theirs was a discussion that did not end (though the fourth and fifth Ecumenical Councils hoped it

1. An earlier version of this essay appeared under the title “Is There Room for Two? Cyril’s Single Subjectivity and the Prosopic Union,” in *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 52 (2008) 95–110, and is used here with the kind permission of the publishers.

2. Ben Quash, Michael Ward, and Stanley Hauerwas, *Heresies and How to Avoid Them: Why It Matters What Christians Believe* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007) x.

would) but, as I hope will become apparent by the end of this essay and this book, it is still at the core of most of our theological discussions on the interplay between divinity and humanity to this day.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE FORMULA OF REUNION

Two years after the notorious church gathering in the hot summer of Ephesus, Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria, wrote a now famous letter to John of Antioch, dated April 433:

We confess, therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, perfect God and perfect man, consisting in a rational soul and flesh begotten before the ages of the Father according to his divinity, and in the last days, the same for us and for our salvation, of the Virgin Mary according to his humanity, of the same substance as the Father according to his divinity, and of the same substance as us according to his humanity; for there was a union of two natures. Therefore, we confess one Christ, one Son, and one Lord. In accordance with this understanding of the unconfused union, we confess the holy Virgin to be the Mother of God, because God the Word was incarnate and became man, and from the very conception he united the temple taken from her with himself.³

Cyril's letter caused quite a stir among the faithful of his see. They were amazed at its language because just a short five years earlier, in 428, in the heat of the Nestorian controversy, Cyril had sent an encyclical to the monks of Egypt where he affirmed a single nature in Christ, born of God and the Virgin Mary, coming together in perfect unity: "one nature of the Word incarnate."⁴ Was this new language a capitulation of the long-standing Alexandrian *communicatio idiomatum*? Was this an acceptance of the Antiochene language of prosopic union?

Some have argued that Cyril was led primarily by a sincere desire for ecclesiastical unity and therefore "made a genuine concession . . . when he accepted the dual-nature language."⁵ Others have suggested that, in

3. *Epistulla Cyrilli Alexandrini ad Iohannem Antiochenum* (CPG 5339), ACO I.I.4, 17 ll. 9–17, in Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and a Heretic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 270.

4. *Epistula Cyrilli Alexandrini ad Monachos*, ACO I.I.1, 18 ll. 4–16, in Wessel, *Cyril*, 277.

5. Wessel, *Cyril*, 275 n. 76.

truth, there is no great difference in the two formulations because the Antiochene assignment of attributes to each of Christ's natures and to the *common prosôpon* (especially as expressed by Theodore of Mopsuestia) is somewhat equivalent to the classical *communicatio idiomatum*⁶—therefore one could infer that the two camps might not have been as far apart as the ancient protagonists wanted to believe.

THE PROSOPIC UNION AND DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE

It is also often argued, correctly, that one cannot provide an adequate reading of either Theodore's or Nestorius's understanding of the Incarnation if one does not take into account Antioch's commitment to Nicaea, which led to an overwhelming apprehension of Arianism and Apollinarianism, and an intense desire to account for the full humanity of Christ and "safeguard the freedom of the will in the 'assumed man' as in all other men."⁷ This desire to protect the humanity of Christ, though, is only part of the reason for the Antiochene insistence on the two-natures language. As McLeod notes, "Theodore derives his understanding of the unity of Christ's natures from the exegetical and dogmatic traditions that he inherited at Antioch and . . . is especially convinced of the need to preserve the integrity of Christ's two natures in a union where the Word's transcendence was not compromised [either]."⁸ Divine transcendence, immutability, and impassibility are also essential in understanding the Antiochene concept of the Incarnation, as is expressed in the prosopic union.

Writing against the Alexandrians, Nestorius would contend that "by granting that . . . [the Son] accepted suffering, you evacuate him of *impassibility* and of *immortality*, and of being consubstantial (*ὁμοούσιος*) with the Father, because he acquired a change of nature, seeing that [the Son] accepts and [the Father] accepts not [these sufferings]."⁹ Thomas G.

6. Frederick G. McLeod, *The Roles of Christ's Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuestia*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005. Especially chaps. 6–7.

7. Kevin McNamara, "Theodore of Mopsuestia and the Nestorian Heresy: Part II," *Irish Theological Quarterly* (1953) 188.

8. McLeod, *Roles of Christ's Humanity*, 144–45.

9. Nestorius, *The Bazaar of Heracleides*, edited by C. R. Driver and L. Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925) 39, 91–95. Emphasis mine.

Weinandy has pointed out that in *The Bazaar of Heracleides*¹⁰ Nestorius presents a threefold argument for the immutability of God: First, being transcendent, God is all perfect, immutable in himself, and thus cannot change. Second, God must also be immutable in relation to the Incarnation, for if any change was effected upon God by virtue of the Incarnation, then the incarnate one, he who is “man,” is no longer God but whatever God has been changed into. And third, “the Son must be immutable for the sake of the human nature, i.e., a change in the Son becoming man effects a change in the humanity as well, rendering it no longer an authentic humanity.”¹¹ Weinandy argues that at the heart of the disagreement between Cyril and Nestorius was a difference not in the terms used to describe the Incarnation, but in the conceptualization of the Incarnation itself: “The problem was not that Nestorius and Cyril were using different words for the same concept, but rather they were using the same words for different concepts.”¹² Both Cyril and Theodore (and by extension Nestorius) used the term *ὑπόστασις*; for Cyril it signified the *subject* to whom attributes and operations can be applied within the true substantial unity (i.e., the true existing individual), while for Theodore, *ὑπόστασις* indicated the real, complete, existing *nature* (*φύσις*) in Jesus Christ; and since Christ is composed of two natures, by necessity he would have two *ὑποστάσεις*, thus safeguarding the principle that “Christ’s human will act freely in an integral, existential way within its ‘exact’ union with the Word.”¹³

For Cyril, then, single-subjectivity, being indicative of a single *ὑπόστασις* (via the *hypostatic union*) indicates one nature, that of the Word Incarnate. For Theodore, on the other hand, only one hypostasis in Christ would mean that his human nature has lost its *own reality* and has been changed into a divine nature: “When, however, we return to the union

10. Nestorius, *Bazaar of Heracleides*, 16, 26–27.

11. Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000) 177 n. 8. Milton Anastos, in “Nestorius was Orthodox,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962) 140, also argues that the impassibility of God rather than a concern for the fullness of the human nature of Christ was the driving force for Nestorius. Weinandy (*Does God Suffer?* 179) will counter Anastos’s attempt to reduce the Nestorian controversy to a battle over the meaning and use of terms (“Nestorius was Orthodox,” 120) that had not yet been defined and his claim that both Nestorius and Cyril, at the end, could probably agree upon their common concepts.

12. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 179, n. 11.

13. McLeod, *Roles of Christ’s Humanity*, 194.

(συνάφεια) [of the soul with its body], then we announce one *prosôpon*. Likewise, when we define a human nature, we say that the nature of the soul is one [and] that of its body is another, since we acknowledge that each one of these (i.e., body and soul) has a *qnômâ* (Syriac for *hypostasis*) and a nature and are convinced that the soul, whenever it is separated from its body, remains in its nature and its own *qnômâ*.¹⁴ Though both might have agreed that the humanity of Christ did not have an ontology preexisting the union with the divine, conceptually Nestorius imagined the two natures as separate before the incarnation. “Because of this mental imaging,” says Weinandy, “he conceived the incarnational process, the ‘becoming,’ as the coming together or the joining of the two natures, but having mentally separated them prior to the joining, he could not possibly conceive them as becoming ontologically one without destroying them in the process,”¹⁵ which, ironically, is exactly what he thought Cyril was doing, creating a *tertium quid*.

This reading of Nestorius leads Weinandy to conclude that, unlike the divinity and the humanity, the Antiochene *common prosôpon* has no ontological depth but is merely a “phenomenological interplay” between the divine and the human predicates due to the close relationship.¹⁶

Theodore, too, has been read as promoting a more dynamic, functional union rather than a metaphysical one. This union, however, may be more than just a circumincession of two activities, for they “point to the inner presence in Christ of a human and a divine nature that not only function as one but *are* one in a union where Christ’s humanity shares in the Word’s honors, much in the same way the body shares with its soul an organic kind of union,”¹⁷ but it is not ontological. This conclusion has been challenged recently by Eric Phillips, who has argued that the reason Theodore seems to be presenting a merely functional union in the “*common prosôpon*” is both because he rules out the “union by substance” as an option and because of his frequent use of the of the soul-body analogy. Theodore does not use the language of single-subjectivity apart from the pragmatic/economic manifestation of the union as presented in Scripture. “He is content to have two subjects,” argues Phillips, “because

14. Theodore, *De Incarnatione* VIII, translation from McLeod, *Roles of Christ’s Humanity*, 152.

15. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 181.

16. *Ibid.*, 179.

17. McLeod, *Roles of Christ’s Humanity*, 202–3. Emphasis mine.

what is important to him is the *union* between the two persons, not the question of whether they are *one* afterwards in any ontological sense . . . The question whether ‘Jesus Christ’ is the assumed man or the Person of the union poses a false dichotomy; He is both, because the Person of the union *is* the assumed man, as surely as He also is the assuming Word.”¹⁸

Commenting on Philippians 2:5–7, in his *First Sermon Against the Theotokos*, Nestorius would explain that the apostle “Did not say, ‘*Let this mind be in you that was in God the Logos, who being in the form of God, took the form of a slave.*’ Rather, he takes the term *Christ* to be an expression which signifies the two natures, and without risk he applies to him both the style ‘*form of a slave,*’ which he took, and that of God. The descriptions are different from each other by reason of the mysterious fact that the natures are two in number.”¹⁹ Later in the same sermon he would conclude: “That which was formed in the womb is not in itself God. That which was created by the Spirit was not in itself God. That which was buried in the tomb was not in itself God. . . . But since God is within the one who was assumed, the one who was assumed is styled because of the one who assumed him. . . . God has been joined to the crucified flesh, even though he has not shared its suffering. . . . We confess both and adore them as one, for the duality of the natures is one on account of the unity.”²⁰

This language lends itself to the argument that the prosopic union may indeed be seen as a “dynamic equivalent” of the Alexandrian *communicatio idiomatum*. McLeod concludes that while “for Cyril, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Word . . . Theodore [(and Nestorius)] insists that human attributes ought to be imputed to Christ’s human nature and divine attributes to the divine, while allowing both attributes to be assigned to

18. Eric Phillips, “Man and Salvation in Theodore of Mopsuestia” (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 2006) 4.35. For an excellent discussion on how the union of the *common prosôpon* is more than a functional one, see also Richard A. Norris Jr., *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) 211–34: “One aspect of the divine Nature’s ‘working all things’ in the Man, is the perfect co-operation of the Man’s will with the purposes of God: but this co-operation, wrought by the assistance of divine grace, is not what Theodore *means* when he refers to the union. . . . He insists upon the reality of this co-operation, but within, and as a consequence of, the union” (227–28).

19. Nestorius, *First Sermon Against the Theotokos*, in *The Christological Controversy*, edited and translated by R. A. Norris Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 125–26.

20. *Ibid.*, 130–31.

the ego of the *common prosôpon*.”²¹ The two *hypostaseis* are always one *prosôpon*, the hypostasis of Christ’s humanity never being separated from that of the Word, “not even at Jesus’ death on the cross.”²² I, too, have made the case elsewhere that Theodore indeed expressed a form of the *communicatio idiomatum* in his Christology; not the Alexandrian form (*in abstracto*), but rather what would later be called a *communicatio idiomatum in concreto*, where the interchange of predicates is understood as taking place at the level of the *common prosôpon*, not between the natures.²³

As a result of this dual subjectivity and predication, the Antiochene interpreters also advanced a division of the dominical sayings. This division protected divine transcendence and, at the same time, safeguarded the fullness of the “assumed man” in the union. The problem it created, of course, was that such language was susceptible to the accusation it advocated “two sons”—a charge they would deny strenuously.²⁴

CYRIL’S COMMUNICATION OF IDIOMS AND DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE

It seems quite ironic that in this discussion it would be Cyril, coming from the “allegorical school” of Alexandria, that would be more faithful to the Scriptural narrative of the Incarnation than his interlocutors in Antioch, firm supporters of the *historia* of Scripture. Unlike his counterparts in the East, Cyril was far less interested in the impassibility of God *per se* than he was in the narrative of the Incarnation.²⁵ Led by this narrative, Cyril’s articulation of the communication of idioms insisted that, in the Incarnation, the divine and human attributes were not predi-

21. McLeod, *Roles of Christ’s Humanity*, 238–40.

22. *Ibid.*, 153.

23. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Early Christian Studies 7, trans. George Kalantzis (Strathfield, Australia: St. Paul’s, 2004) 34; also, G. Kalantzis, “*Duo Filii* and the *Homo Assumptus* in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia: The Greek Fragments of the Commentary on John,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 78 (2002) 57–78.

24. “And what is said of God the Word is also clearly understood of the one assumed, even though he has been made perfect. And we are not forced because of this to say ‘two sons.’ For the soul and its body are two natures and are not like each other.” Translation from McLeod, *Roles of Christ’s Humanity*, 189.

25. See John J. O’Keefe, “Impassible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology,” *Theological Studies* 58 (1997) 39–60, for a good discussion on the topic.

cated of their respective natures, but of the single person of the Son *καθ' ὑπόστασιν*. Such a reading of the communication of idioms ensured two fundamental precepts of human salvation: first, that it was indeed the *Son of God*, the Second Person of the Trinity, who experienced suffering, and, second, that it was *true* human suffering that the Son of God experienced.²⁶ This meant that “the Incarnation is not the compositional union of natures [(as was the case in the prosopic union)] but the person of the Son taking on a new manner or mode of existence.”²⁷

Before the Formula of Reunion Cyril would insist: “As for our Saviour’s statements in the Gospels, we do not divide them out to two subjects or persons. The one, unique Christ (*ὁ εἷς καὶ μόνος Χριστός*) has no duality though he is seen as compounded in inseparable unity out of two differing elements . . . all the sayings contained in the Gospels must be referred to a single person (*ἐνὶ προσώπῳ*), to the one incarnate subject of the Word (*ὑποστάσει μιᾷ τῇ τοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένῃ*).”²⁸ For Cyril what was most important was to protect the integrity of the Scriptural narrative of the Incarnation itself—the narrative within which salvation occurs—not God’s transcendence or impassibility:

Take the normal human being. We perceive in him two natures: one that of the soul, a second that of the body. We divide them, though, merely in thought, accepting the difference as simply residing in fine-drawn insight or mental intuition; we do not separate the natures out or attribute a capacity for radical severance to them, but see that they belong to one man so that the two are two no more and the single living being is constituted complete by a pair of them. So though one attributes the nature of manhood and of Godhead to Emmanuel, the manhood has become the Word’s own and together with it is seen one Son (*ἡ ἀνθρωπότης γέγονεν ἰδίᾳ τοῦ λόγου καὶ εἷς υἱὸς νοεῖται σὺν αὐτῇ*). Inspired Scripture tells us he suffered in flesh and we should do better to use those terms than to talk of his sufferings ‘in the nature of the manhood’ (*τῇ φύσει τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος*). . . . It is futile, then, for them to talk of his suffering in the nature of the manhood, separating it, as it were, from the Word and isolating it from

26. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 203.

27. *Ibid.*, 200.

28. *Ad Nestorium* 3.8, in *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters*, edited and translated by L. R. Wickham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 22–25.

him so as to think of him as two and not one Word from God the Father yet incarnate and made man.²⁹

In order to protect the full humanity of Christ—against Apollinarius—Nestorius had to begin from an anthropomorphic interpretation of the Incarnation; but that also meant that he “could not conceptually unite Jesus’ full divinity and full humanity in an *ontological union* for fear that such a union necessitated that the human experiences of the Son of God jeopardize the integrity of his divine status.”³⁰ For Cyril, however, rather than being inconceivable, the union of the two *hypostaseis* was the interpretive key to the reality that “God *qua* God could not be born [or suffer], but if he became man, he could truly be born [suffer, and die].”³¹ In turn, this interpretation allowed him to confess that “the very Son begotten of God the Father, the Only-begotten God, impassible though he is in his own nature, has, as Scriptures say, suffered in flesh (*καίτοι κατὰ φύσιν ιδίαν ὑπάρχων ἀπαθής, σαρκὶ πέπονθεν*) for our sake and that he was in the crucified body claiming the sufferings of his flesh as his own impassibly (*τὰ τῆς ιδίας σαρκὸς ἀπαθῶς οἰκειούμενος πάθη*).”³² Though within his existence as God the Son is impassible, within his existence as human he truly suffers and shares in our suffering.

It is precisely at this point that the Antiochene prosopic union diverges from Cyril’s formulation of the communication of idioms. Foundational to the concept of the *common prosōpon* is the incompatibility of the two component elements: the divine and the human nature. Careful to protect divine transcendence and founded on anti-Arian and anti-Apollinarian polemic, the prosopic union would be necessarily anthropomorphic, insisting not only on the full humanity of the incarnate Son, but, moving one step further, it would result in a “phenotypical,” a functional, an economic “hybrid”—a meta-person, a real prosopic unity, but not a true Person: “When he ascends, he will manifest clearly the nature that is dwelling in him (*clare manifestabit naturam in se habitantem*), which obviously descended with no [physical] location having been changed.”³³ On the contrary, the Alexandrian *communicatio idiomatum*

29. Cyril *Ad Succensus* 2.5, in Wickham, *Select Letters*, 92–93.

30. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 175.

31. *Ibid.*, 174.

32. *Ad Nestorium* 3.6, in Wickham, *Select Letters*, 20–21.

33. Theodori Mopsuesteni *Commentarius in Evangelium Johannis Apostoli*, in *Corpus*

will be focused on the incarnational center, *ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο*. For Cyril, the Incarnation is truly an *ἐνανθρώπησης*: “The one, unique Christ (*ὁ εἷς καὶ μόνος Χριστός*) has no duality, though he is seen as compounded in inseparable unity out of two differing elements.”³⁴ This unity, then, also extends to the fundamental question of will. While the Antiochene insistence on the human will led, by necessity, to the obedience of the human to the will of the divine (resulting in the post-resurrection exaltation of the human nature), Cyril sees no such distinction:

We refuse to say of Christ ‘I venerate the possessed because of the possessor; I revere the one visible because of the invisible’.³⁵ . . . To say this is once more to divide him into two Christs and to posit man separately on his own and to do the same with God. It is expressly to deny the union (*ἔνωσιν*) by virtue of which the one is not somehow worshipped or called ‘God’ along with another (*ἕτερος ἐτέρω*) but recognition is given to one (*εἷς*) Christ Jesus, Only-begotten God, venerated with his flesh in a single worship.³⁶

Furthermore, this Antiochene assertion of a “union” as *συνάφεια* of (fundamentally contradictory) natures was very different to Cyril’s understanding of the “union” as *ἔνωσιν*. Cyril saw this *inhabitation of a man*, Theodore’s *homo assumptus*, as mandating a double-subjectivity—whether ontological, pedagogical, or simply phenomenological—that negated the incarnation as *ἐνανθρώπησις* and forced an unacceptable concretion of idioms, unable to account for the mystery of the suffering of the Incarnate Logos, *as it is written*.

Richard Bauckham and Fred McLeod both see in Alexandria and Antioch the fundamental dichotomy between what they call the “ontic” Christologies of the Fathers and the “functional” Christologies that mirror the Synoptics respectively.³⁷ Unlike Nestorius’s “functional” Christology, Cyril insisted on a “personal/existential” conception *καθ’ ὑπόστασιν*.

Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 115, edited and translated by J. M. Vosté (Louvain: Officina Orientali, 1940) 72/50 (Syr./Lat.).

34. *Ad Nestorium*, 3.6, in Wickham, *Select Letters*, 20–21.

35. Here Cyril quotes Nestorius’s famous turn of phrase in his *First Sermon Against the Tehotokos* (cf. Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 130).

36. *Ad Nestorium* 3.6, in Wickham, *Select Letters*, 21.

37. R. Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998) 28; and McLeod, *Roles of Christ’s Humanity*, 203.

Through his *mia-physis* formulation Cyril intended to show that, as a human being is one entity, so Christ was also one *entity* and not one *quiddity*. “Jesus is the *person* of the Son *existing* as a man.”³⁸

THE HYPOSTATIC UNION: A LOGICAL CONTRADICTION?

Cyril’s insistence on an Incarnation in which God suffers *qua* God seemed like utter madness to the Antiochenes. It appeared to drag God into “the mess of humanity”³⁹ and compromise God’s essential, divine, predicates. Even years after the fateful events of 431, Nestorius would claim that such talk of “impassible suffering” was a blatant contradiction, a theological double-talk. “And, like those who change him from his nature [(that is, the Arians)], at one time they [(that is, Cyril and his followers)] call him now impassible and immortal and unchangeable, and afterwards they prohibit him from being then called immortal and impassible and unchangeable, being angry against any one who repeatedly calls God the Word impassible [i.e., himself].”⁴⁰ Theodoret, too, one of the “moderate” Antiochenes, would exclaim: “Who in his senses would ever stand for such foolish riddles? No one has ever heard of an ‘impassible passion’ or an ‘immortal mortality.’ The impassible has never undergone passion, and what has undergone passion could not possibly be impassible.”⁴¹

What, then, is one to make of such “foolish riddles”? Or, to return to the original question, was Cyril abandoning such formulations of “theological double-talk” by 433 in favor of a more easily explainable “two-natures” Christology?

In a recent article on the nature of the hypostatic union, John Lamont⁴² has provided what seems to me to be invaluable assistance in re-evaluating the importance of the hypostatic union in Christology and the non-contradictory character of the impassible suffering of God. Beginning with a division of the predicates that assign divine and human attributes to the single person of Christ (divinity, eternity, infinite good-

38. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 195–97.

39. O’Keefe, “Impassible Suffering?” 58.

40. Nestorius, *Bazaar of Heracleidas*, 13, 94.

41. Theodoret, *Eranistes*, in F. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (London: SCM, 1983) 218.303–4.

42. John Lamont, “The Nature of the Hypostatic Union,” *Heythrop Journal* 47 (2006) 16–25.

ness, etc., on the one hand and manhood, birth, being the son of Mary, having a rational body, etc., on the other) Lamont reminds us that “some of the predicates on the human list . . . are *substantial* predicates, that is, for a thing to have such a predicate true of it is for it to be something that has an independent existence, rather than for it to exist as part or an attribute of something else.”⁴³ When we ask the question of how we are to understand the relationship between the one to whom the human predicates apply and the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, Lamont argues that there are two possible answers: the first is a *connection of identity*; the other sees the human predicates as *added* to the divine being, carefully maintaining the distinction between the predicates that are substantial in the cases of all other humans but are not substantial predicates in the case of Christ.⁴⁴ Following Lamont’s argument, I propose that the prosopic union represents this second answer.⁴⁵ Proceeding from an anthropomorphic understanding of the Incarnation, the prosopic union would ascribe inferences of human attributes and properties (manhood, birth, thirst, suffering, death, etc.) to the “*common prosôpon*,” but only at the level of the human nature, never to the divine. Theodore explains it this way: “In the same way we say that the essence of God the Word is his own and that the essence of the man is [man’s] own, for the natures are distinct, but the person effected by the union is one.”⁴⁶ As such, the prosopic union allows the Antiochenes “to adopt the general strategy of claiming that these inferences are valid when [they] want to preserve the [union],⁴⁷ and invalid when [they] want to avoid contradiction.”⁴⁸ For example, in his

43. Ibid., 16. Emphasis mine.

44. Ibid., 17.

45. Here Lamont is going to remind us that, as Richard Cross has shown (Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) this understanding of the hypostatic union was the only in operation through the Middle Ages.

46. Theodore, *On the Incarnation* VIII.8, Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 120.

47. The *communicatio idiomatum*, says Lamont.

48. Lamont, “The Nature of the Hypostatic Union,” 18. Therefore, concludes Lamont, “the attribute of being a man, which in other men consists in being independently existing substance, in Christ amounts to being something like part or an attribute of the Second Person; where it is the Second Person that exists on its own rather than as a feature of something else. The [prosopic union] will then consist in the Second Person’s having these parts or attributes mentioned in the [list of human predicates] added on to his original divine being, the divine being that is described by the predicates of the divine list” (17).

Commentary on the Nicene Creed, Theodore imagines the Word explaining, “I would not have allowed this to happen to it [the Word’s temple] had I not intended to do a higher thing to it.”⁴⁹ In this (additive) relationship we can say that Christ indeed died on the cross because the human nature of the *common prosôpon* suffered the death, and we can also say, at the same time, that the divine did not suffer, because “the centers for divine and human activities are their existing natures—though always in relation to the ego of their *common prosôpon*.”⁵⁰

The second possible answer—first in Lamont’s account—is the relationship of identity. Lamont is quite aware (as am I) that a clear formulation of the indiscernability of identicals (Leibniz’s Law) and predicate logic (Frege) did not develop until the mid-nineteenth century, and that such an argument can be challenged as quite anachronistic, especially as one attempts to apply it to the fourth century.⁵¹ Yet, I believe that Cyril’s understanding of the hypostatic union was not as far removed from this notion of identity as it might seem at first. And that is because in Cyril’s vocabulary, the term for ‘person’ is not *prosôpon*, as it is for the Antiochenes, but *hypostasis* (or *physis*), signifying a singular subject of unity and attribution in Christ: the Second Person of the Trinity *is* the person of Jesus Christ.⁵² Commenting on Isaiah 11:12, he says:

Now, we claim that the proclamation . . . did not introduce Jesus to us as a mere man who was later inspired and became a sharer in gifts from God in the manner we do. Rather, he portrays the *Word of God made man, full of every good as far as his nature goes, which he makes his own along with humanity and all that goes with it*. It is characteristic of humanity, in fact, to possess none of the gifts from on high of itself and from its own nature; there is said to it, remember, ‘What do you have that you did not receive?’

49. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Nicene Creed*, Woodbrooke Studies 5, edited and translated by A. Mingana (Cambridge: Heffer, 1932) 85.

50. McLeod, *Roles of Christ’s Humanity*, 157–58.

51. Lamont will develop the rest of his argument on the basis of divine simplicity, meaning that “God cannot have the contrary of any human or created property, but it allows that God can have the contradictories of human or created properties” (21), with the result that “every positive conception one has of God must be taken away” (22).

52. See Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*; idem. *Does God Change? The Word’s Becoming in the Incarnation* (Petersham: St. Bede’s, 1985); John Lamont, “Aquinas on Divine Simplicity,” *Monist* 80/4 (1997) 521–39, for a thorough discussion the issue.

(1 Cor 4:7) Rather, it is enriched from outside and from another source—namely, from God—with what surpasses its nature. The only-begotten Word of God, therefore, in lowering himself to the point of emptying (Phil 2:7), could not decline being demeaned by the emptying, and instead had to accept it because of the humanity, *not for his own sake but for ours*, who are in need of every good, though by nature he is filled with them. And so even if in one place he is said to receive the Spirit, despite himself being the source of the Holy Spirit, giving the Spirit not in a measured way but as it were distributing it to the saints from his own fullness, let us understand his receiving it as an index of the implications of the emptying, this being the way we shall properly arrive at the truth.⁵³

Quite clearly, then, all predicates, whether those assign human or divine attributes, can truly be said of the single person. Far from being a blatant contradiction, a theological double-talk, or jeopardizing the role for Christ's human freedom in the union,⁵⁴ Cyril's account of the hypostatic union allows him to prevent the contradictions from arising in the first place. "This is because," argues Lamont, "[Cyril's account of the hypostatic union] is a statement about the identity of individuals, and . . . not about the natures of Christ at all. It thus preserves what St. Cyril wanted to express about the hypostatic union without having to make any claims about the identity or unity or mingling of the divine and human natures of Christ; it makes no claim about anything happening to either the divine or the human nature of Christ. It does make claims about these natures belonging to a particular individual, but the constitution of the natures themselves are left untouched by this claim."⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

The Antiochene prosopic union was based on the principle that those predicates that assign human attributes to Christ, those predicates that are substantial for all other humans, cannot be substantial predicates in the case of Christ. To avoid contradiction—and even the hint of divine passibility—the attributes of each nature will be understood as expressed

53. Cyril, *Commentary on Isaiah*, edited and translated by R. C. Hill, forthcoming. Emphasis mine.

54. McLeod, *Roles of Christ's Humanity*, 231.

55. Lamont, "The Nature of the Hypostatic Union," 24.

in the Incarnation only at the level of the *common prosôpon*, in a functional manner; the Scriptural statements describing the idioms of each nature during the Incarnation will have to be divided, and a careful relationship will have to be established between biblical interpretation and worship. On the contrary, the hypostatic union will insist that there are no contradictions that need to be explained in the unmediated presence of the Second Person of the Trinity, for one cannot speak of the two natures as separate, isolated entities threatened by the union of incompatibles. Which is why Cyril can sign off on the Formula of Reunion without seeing much of a contradiction in the dual-nature language. His emphasis is on the identity of the unified, the person, the single subject of the Incarnation: “The difference between the natures of Christ was not abolished by the union [the reason being that the union is not a union in natures], but the property of each nature being preserved and harmonized (*συντρεχούσης*) in the one *prosôpon* and one *hypostasis*.”⁵⁶

56. Wessel, *Cyrl*, 277. “οὐχ ὡς τῆς τῶν φύσεων διαφορᾶς ἀνηρημένης διὰ τὴν ἔνωσιν.” *Epistula ii Cyrilli Alexandrini ad Nestorium*, ACO I.I.1, 27 ll. 2–3. See the formula of the Council of Chalcedon in Wickham: *Select Letters*, 7 n. 8: “οὐδαμοῦ τῆς τῶν φύσεων διαφορᾶς ἀνηρημένης διὰ τὴν ἔνωσιν” (ACO II.1, 325 ll. 31ff.) “In no way was the difference between the two natures abolished on account of the union.”