

POST-CHALCEDONIAN CHRISTOLOGY

The Christological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor

The question of the constitution of the person of Christ went through extensive specification and provoked fruitful doctrinal development in the controversies between monophysites and Chalcedonians following the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Both sides took as given the exclusion of two perspectives condemned at previous councils: Apollinarianism and Nestorianism, and at times accused their opponents of one or the other of these recognizably heretical positions.

APOLLINARIANISM

Apollinarianism, as condemned, could only conceive of a unity in Christ by sacrificing some of his humanity. The argument is that if the Son is to become human, he can only do so by making room within human nature for the presence and operation of his divinity. The insight—later to become essential of Christology—that the true identity of the human encountered in Jesus is the Son of the Father himself is held to but only by eliminating the properly human in Jesus. If Jesus is God, so the logic goes, then properly speaking he is not human because what makes a human person truly themselves, the mind (*nous*), is, in Jesus, the Logos. Thus, the instability of action and will inherent in human nature is overcome because the principle of this instability, the human mind, is replaced by the Logos himself. The position serves to emphasize the unity of the person of Jesus, his identity as Son of the Father, and his perfection and sinlessness (Bathrellos, 11). It also excludes any possibility that Christ was a mere man gifted with honor and grace and thus called Son only by resemblance (Bathrellos, 10, quoting Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics*, 1958, 106). Positively, Apollinarianism is able to argue that humanity and divinity come together in the one person of the Logos. There cannot be said to be two subjects working out our redemption, or two sons (see Bathrellos, 11). Negatively, of course, the unity of Christ is achieved only by compromising the completeness of his humanity, and his human nature becomes only the passive instrument of the Son.

Apollinarianism shows some of the difficulties of the controversies to follow in that it identifies hypostasis and nature, as Bathrellos points out (12). The nature of the Logos works through the humanity as “one nature, one hypostasis, one energy, one person, the same fully God and fully man” (Bathrellos, 12, quoting Apollinaris in Leitzmann, *Apollinaris of Laodicea*, 199). It also highlights one of the fears of conceiving Christ as integrally human. Apollinaris, it seems, saw human nature as inherently sinful because of its instability, writing that the Logos “did not assume a human mind, which is subject to change and the captivity of filthy thoughts, but was a divine and heavenly, immutable mind” (Bathrellos 12, Lietzmann, 256.4-7). Thus, the salvific action of Christ is to allow humans to take on the mind of Christ such that their own fickleness can be grounded in the unchangeability of the Word. For a human will to exist in Christ, there would be an internal division in the same way that our wills create a sinful attitude when not subjected completely to the divine will so as to become one with it, the human will in that case being completely taken over by the divine (Bathrellos, 12-13). As Bathrellos shows, it could be, as Wolfson argued, that Apollinaris saw the humanity of Christ not as a nature in and of itself but as qualities assumed by the Logos (see Bathrellos 14, Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 1976, 434-444).

NESTORIANISM

Nestorianism shows the opposite tendency in reading the person of Jesus. It starts with the assertion of the full and complete humanity of Jesus, as well as the complete divinity of the Logos acting through Jesus, but then has difficulties speaking of the oneness of the incarnate Word. The Antiochean approach has its strength in the insistence on the full humanity and real humanity of the one born from Mary, but even at its most sophisticated in the elaboration of Nestorius, it cannot conceive more than a simultaneity or harmony between humanity and divinity in Christ. As much as the unity of person between the Son of Mary and the Son of the Father is stressed, the language does not admit of more than an occasional, contingent identity.

There may be one person, called Christ, in whom the divine nature and human nature cohere, but it cannot be said that the Son of the Father is human. Further, there is always the idea of a partial or graded divinization of the human, excluding divinity from any change, suffering, or limitation of the human Jesus. Paradoxically, like Apollinarianism, this line of thought also posits an incompatibility between humanity and divinity. For the human to become divine—both the human nature of Christ and, by extension, our human nature—a distinctive aspect of our humanity—contingency, change, suffering—has to be erased and engulfed by divinity. For both approaches, our only hope of salvation is complete and utter submission to the Spirit, where God's being overwrites our own.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

The Cyrillian move—following Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzen—of making hypostasis the place of union is able to talk convincingly of identity. The phrase “one incarnate nature of God the Word” emphasizes that in the being of Jesus, in his concrete existence, the full divine nature of the Son exists in and as true human nature. The incommensurability of divine and human natures is overcome through the logic of creation and image. It cannot be impossible for the Son to exist as Son and as human because the existence of humanity—and all creatures—is already a participation in the Son. Thus, to become incarnate, the image of the Son that is human nature has only to be completed by the elevation of a particularly existing humanity to become the human hypostasis of the Word.

This does not overcome all of the difficulties, however, because the end result of Cyril's conception is that the Son is human in all respects, lives a human life, and suffers both the limitation of being human and the inflictions of other humans. This means that the Son is limited, but the Son cannot be limited. The Son is and always is the Son of the Father, of the same substance as the Father, and thus by nature unlimited. How he can remain unlimited and yet still be limited is the issue. The thought moves ahead on two poles. First, the full divinity of the Son must be preserved even in his incarnation. Second, the full humanity of the Son must be preserved even as he is divine.

Each side risks falling into error, and the dangers are starkly present in the Chalcedonian formula. If the divinity and humanity of Jesus remain in Jesus as two spheres of his existence, each according to its own nature, it is easy to see how some would see a duality in Jesus. Yet, if Jesus is completely one, it is difficult to see how the properties of each nature are preserved.

SEVERUS OF ANTIOCH

The monophysite approach saw the danger of duality as the key problem. If there are two natures after the union, this must mean that the relationship between divinity and humanity remains an unresolved tension in Jesus's own person. There cannot be true unity when there are two natures. Thus, Severus and others sought to resolve the duality into a single nature of the Logos made human. It is for them improper to speak of a human nature in Jesus, just as it is improper to speak of a human person in Jesus. One can only speak of the incarnate nature of the Word who remains divine even in taking on the fullness of humanity. As Bathrellos notes, this amounts to reducing Jesus's humanity to a property of his divinity (31, quoting Letter X of Severus cited by Roberta Chestnut in *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 16-17).

LEONTIUS OF BYZANTIUM

Nature only exists as hypostasized. Human nature is hypostasized in the Son. Thus the Son becomes a human hypostasis.

LEONTIUS OF JERUSALEM

The human nature of Jesus is truly hypostasized, but always in the Logos. Therefore, there is not a human hypostasis in or alongside the Son.

SECOND COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (553)

Condemned monophysitism and also condemned the Three Chapters (Theodore of Mopsuestia, Thodoret of Cyr, epistle of Ibas to Maris), showing that Nestorianism and anything suggesting Nestorianism was also condemned.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bathrellos, Demetrios, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).