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ABSTRACT

There has been a recent resurgence of interest in the exploration of the resources of kenotic Christology as a way of countering charges that the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation is incoherent. However, John Hick and others have charged the proponents of this strategy with saving coherence at the price of orthodoxy. Some analytic philosophers of religion and philosophical theologians (notably Stephen T. Davis, C. Stephen Evans and Ronald J. Feenstra) defend a modified version of kenotic Christology, one that they think does not contradict the major creedal Christological statements. But to this date no one has produced an extended study of the relation of modified kenotic Christology to classical Christian orthodoxy.

In chapters one and two I introduce both this study and the modified kenotic model under consideration. The third chapter explores ability of modified kenotic Christology to account for the biblical witness to the humanity as well as the divinity of Christ. Chapters four and five are focused on the issues of Arianism, Apollinarianism, Monophysitism and Monotheletism. Drawing upon some relevant patristic scholarship, I investigate whether or not modified kenotic Christology entails or implies any of these views. In chapter six I explore the possibility that modified kenotic Christology entails a sort of tritheism on account of its doctrine of the Trinity. Finally, in chapter seven I offer a conclusion and point out some areas that await further study.

In this dissertation I argue that a modified kenotic Christology need not fall prey to heterodoxy. I argue that this modified kenotic model of the Incarnation does not violate the biblical and traditional standards of orthodoxy insofar as it does not entail either Arianism, Apollinarianism, Monophysitism or tritheism, and I suggest that a

modified kenotic Christology may be at once coherent, orthodox and religiously meaningful.

Chapter One: Introduction

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The last few decades have witnessed a remarkable surge of interest in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Biblical scholars and historians have joined the “Jesus Seminar”¹ or embarked upon the “Third Quest” with enthusiasm and passion.²

¹ E.g. Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover (eds.), *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993) and Robert W. Funk, Bernard Brandon Scott and J.R. Butts (eds.), *The Parables of Jesus: Red Letter Edition* (Sonoma, California: Polebridge, 1988). Major works from members include Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), John Dominic Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

² E.g. Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ: The Christologies of the New Testament and Beyond* (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1998), N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), Gerd Thiessen and Annette Metz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), Gerd Thiessen, *The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), Peter Stuhlmacher, *Jesus of Nazareth-Christ of Faith* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993), Richard Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Greco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), Marcus Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), P.M. Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* 3 Volumes (New York: Doubleday, 1991-2001).

Introductions and overviews of the “Third Quest” are readily available, e.g. Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997) Craig A. Evans, *Life of Jesus Research: An Annotated Bibliography* (Leiden: Brill, 1989) and Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

Theologians have again found the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation to be loci of immense interest and potential fruitfulness, and philosophers of religion are now finding traditional theological topics (such as the Incarnation) to be both fascinating and important. But contemporary Christians who are committed to orthodox Christianity often find that they are faced with challenges to their faith in some important areas. One such area is the doctrine of the Incarnation – often it is alleged by critics of traditional Christology that it is somehow irrational or even immoral to hold to the traditional Christian picture of Jesus Christ as the fully human and fully divine Son of God. For instance, John Hick has asserted that it is impossible to hold to traditional Christian belief that is at once coherent, orthodox and religiously meaningful.³ Hick now appears to have backed off of his earlier claims that the traditional affirmation “Jesus is God” is “as devoid of meaning as” the statement “this square is a circle;”⁴ he now admits that it is possible to have a *coherent* picture of the Incarnation. But Hick continues to insist that it is not possible to have such a picture that is also both orthodox and religiously meaningful. Hick concludes that both the “two-minds” model which has been ably defended by Thomas V. Morris⁵ and the kenotic approach that has recently been modified

³ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 4, 58-59.

⁴ John Hick, “Jesus and the World Religions,” in John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977), p. 178.

⁵ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) and “The Metaphysics of God Incarnate” in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr (eds.), *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, pp. 110-127 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). Others who defend similar views include Gerald O’Collins, SJ, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1985), pp. 260-267, Richard Swinburne, *The*

by such analytic philosophical theologians as C. Stephen Evans, Ronald J. Feenstra and Stephen T. Davis fail the tests of orthodoxy and religious meaningfulness.

The perennial problem is that of holding together in one person both the divine and human natures of Christ. This problem is sharpened by the critical Hickian-type assertions that it is impossible to hold to an account of the Incarnation that is at once coherent, religiously meaningful and orthodox.

PRESENT STATUS OF THE PROBLEM

The last two decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in exploring the resources of kenotic Christology as a way of countering the charges that the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation is somehow incoherent. The deepest and most careful reflections and formulations have come from a small group of analytic philosophers of religion and philosophical theologians. In his earlier work Stephen T. Davis has formulated and defended a kenotic model of Christology in which the pre-existent and fully divine Son is said to “give up,” relinquish or “empty himself of” certain divine properties while retaining all of the *essential* divine properties and thus remaining fully divine.⁶ In his more recent work, Davis has given more extended consideration of the orthodoxy of the proposed model.⁷ Ronald J. Feenstra has drawn upon the resources of

Christian God (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 200-202 and Richard Sturch, *The Word and the Christ: An Essay in Analytic Christology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

⁶ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 118-131 and Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?” in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Jesus: A Debate On Christology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), pp. 39-76.

⁷ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” forthcoming.

the tradition of kenotic Christology while making some important modifications to it. He interacts with the Christology of Thomas V. Morris, and he suggests that the divine Son becomes fully human while remaining fully divine by employing the essential divine attributes or properties in such a way so as not to conflict with any essential human properties.⁸ C. Stephen Evans has also endorsed and defended kenotic Christology,⁹ and he works to apply it to other areas of philosophical theology.¹⁰

Although this work is helpful and promising, I believe it could use more historically informed theological analysis than it has received to this point. Evans, Feenstra and Davis are convinced that their formulations do not contradict the major Christological statements (Niceno-Constantinopolitan and Chalcedonian). But much of their energy has been spent in looking at the coherence of the doctrine of the Incarnation on their model, and to this date no one has produced an extended study of the relation of this modified kenotic Christology to classical Christian orthodoxy.

PROPOSED METHOD

In this dissertation I seek to evaluate the recent movement in modified kenotic Christology according to its orthodoxy. I hope to offer a biblically and traditionally

⁸ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology" in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (eds.), *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 128-152 and Ronald J. Feenstra, "Kenotic Christology and the Divine Attributes," forthcoming.

⁹ C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 132-136 and C. Stephen Evans, "The Self-Emptying of Love: Some Thoughts on Kenotic Christology" in Stephen T. Davis, Gerald O'Collins, SJ and Daniel Kendall, SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 246-272.

¹⁰ C. Stephen Evans, "Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God," forthcoming.

informed systematic investigation of the orthodoxy of a modified kenotic model of the Incarnation. The scope of this study is limited to the modified kenotic model that is currently being proposed by several analytic philosophical theologians – C. Stephen Evans, Ronald J. Feenstra and Stephen T. Davis. Accordingly, I will first describe and define exactly what it is that is under review. I will discuss the major factors that serve to motivate this kenotic model as well as outline what I take to be its primary features. I will then look at what criteria must be met by a doctrine or model in order for it to count as orthodox.

I shall then proceed to look closely at what may seem to be the main “problem areas” for the modified kenotic model. I shall investigate claims that it fails to qualify as orthodox because it violates the *homoousion*. I next consider the charge(s) that the kenotic model inevitably finds its terminus in Apollinarianism or something dangerously close to it. I then turn my attention to the possibility that the kenotic model somehow entails or implies belief in more than one God. Finally, I conclude that, with certain modifications and adjustments, this modified kenotic model need not fall prey to the charges of heterodoxy.

OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

Chapter One: Introduction

The introduction contains an overview of the project, an explanation of the methodology and a statement of the thesis. Here I delineate the parameters of the study, I explain the rationale for the project and I promise to argue that it is possible to have a

version of modified kenotic Christology does not obviously violate traditional accounts of orthodoxy.

Chapter Two: Modified Kenotic Christology

Chapter Two will outline the major tenets of the modified kenotic model. Here I shall discuss the issues under consideration and the major factors that motivate Evans, Feenstra and Davis to endorse and defend kenotic Christology (most notably the desire to be faithful to the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ and the apologetic need to meet the charge of incoherence with a model that is both coherent, orthodox and religiously meaningful). Proceeding in conversation with some of the representatives of earlier kenotic Christology (most notably H.R. Mackintosh) to show some areas of significant continuity and discontinuity, I will summarize the modified kenotic model that is under consideration. Here I shall note that the modified kenotic Christology that is being analyzed should not be confused either with the kenotic Christology of the earlier movements or with kenotic theism. I will seek to lay out both the actual theological and Christological conclusions of Evans, Feenstra and Davis and some of the more important religious, theological and metaphysical assumptions and commitments which they avow and from which they work.

Chapter Two will also explore several pertinent accounts of what it means to be “orthodox” and thus what might make a theological model unorthodox or heterodox. I will point out that there are different criteria in different traditions, and I will note the importance of keeping this in mind as the project unfolds. I will offer working definitions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

Chapter Three: Modified Kenotic Christology and Holy Scripture

In this chapter I will begin to take a close look at what might be the most obvious problem for the modified kenotic model – the charge that it violates the *homoousion* principle. Here I take the first of several steps toward investigation of this important issue. I propose to examine how well this kenotic model is able to account for what the pro-Nicene patristic theologians described as one of the reasons for which they insisted on the term. These pro-Nicene patristic theologians said that they employed and defended the term *homoousion* because it captured the *intention* of Holy Scripture – the double *homoousion* of Jesus Christ both with us and with the Father was able to express both the full humanity and full divinity of Christ. So the first such step is to look at how well the modified kenotic model is able to handle two important sets of New Testament texts:

- (a) those texts which the church traditionally has taken to reveal or emphasize the divinity of Christ and
- (b) those texts which the church traditionally has taken to reveal or emphasize the full and complete humanity of Christ (of which the passages which show him to be weak, ignorant, fearful, etc. would be important subsets).

Here it will be argued that the modified kenotic model performs admirably well with regard to the scriptural witness to the humanity of Christ. It will be argued as well that the modified kenotic model does not obviously fail to account for the biblical texts which

point toward the divinity of Christ – unless it fails in some other way to account for divinity, it does not have a problem here.

Chapter Four: Modified Kenotic Christology, the Homoousion and Arianism

In this chapter I take the second major step in investigating the charge that modified kenotic Christology somehow violates the *homoousion* principle. In taking this step I address a more historically focused question – does the modified kenotic model reduce to some form of Arianism by introducing gradations of divinity and thus reducing the essential divinity of the incarnate Son? Here I shall draw upon some historical scholarship on the Arian controversy and the various forms of Arianism in the formulation of an answer. I will argue that the modified kenotic model need not entail any gradation of divinity or reduction of the ontological status of the Son. I will also address the issue of the Son's knowledge of the Father, and I will point toward some possible solutions of this problem. I will conclude that, with the right modifications, the kenotic model under consideration need not entail nor even imply a violation of the *homoousion*.

Chapter Five: Modified Kenotic Christology and Apollinarianism, Monophysitism and Monotheletism

In this chapter I will take a long, hard look at what might be the stiffest challenges for a kenotic model of the Incarnation that tries to be orthodox by traditional standards – the charge of Apollinarianism and the related issue of the mind(s)/will(s) of Christ. Here I will argue that, armed with the metaphysical distinctions of contemporary analytic philosophy, it may be possible for the proponent of modified kenotic Christology to avoid outright Apollinarianism. The issue of the mind(s)/will(s) of Christ is much more

daunting, however. Here I will state the problem as carefully and clearly as possible, and I will look at several ways in which the proponent of modified kenoticism might try to account for this problem and avoid the obvious heterodoxy. I will suggest a way out for the kenoticist – whether or not this way is attractive remains to be seen, but it is a way ahead.

Chapter Six: Modified Kenotic Christology and Polytheism

In this chapter I propose to consider the charge that the modified kenotic model results in tritheism or some other version of polytheism. I shall first point out that since the kenotic model under consideration does not count as polytheistic on the classic polytheist heresy of the Christian tradition (Arianism), then it must do so in some other way if it is to do so at all. I shall look closely at the most promising way of making the charge of polytheism stick to the modified kenotic model – namely the argument that

- (1) Modified Kenotic Christology entails a doctrine of “Social Trinity;”
- (2) “Social Trinity” doctrines are inevitably tritheistic or polytheistic;
- (3) Therefore, Kenotic Christology inevitably results in tritheism or some other version of polytheism.

I propose to subject this argument to closer analysis. I will first point out that (just as there are different versions of kenotic Christology) there are different versions of “Social Trinity” doctrine. I will argue that the argument from (1) – (3) does not make enough allowance either for the breadth of doctrines of Social Trinitarianism or for the variety of models of kenotic Christology. I will argue that the modified kenotic model needs only the more modest and defensible of the Social Trinity doctrines. And, since the more

modest of these Social Trinity doctrines have not been shown to be tritheistic or polytheistic, I will conclude that the objection that the modified kenotic account entails polytheism fails.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In the conclusion I first will take note of some areas related to kenotic Christology that still await investigation. I will focus on one such area – that of modified kenotic Christology’s relation to what has come to be known as “Perfect Being Theology.” Here I point out some issues and problems that may arise at the conjunction of the modified kenotic model with the traditional Christian doctrines of divine omnipotence and divine simplicity, and I will offer some brief suggestions as to how this discussion might proceed.

I then offer a summative overview of the contents of the dissertation. Here I restate the main argument of the thesis – I will point out that although some important questions remain, it is not obvious that the modified kenotic model does not count as orthodox. I suggest further that it holds the promise of being deeply religiously meaningful, and I indicate some areas related to kenotic Christology that still await discussion, defense and application.

In this dissertation I argue that a modified kenotic Christology need not fall prey to heterodoxy. I propose to argue that a modified kenotic model of the Incarnation does not violate the biblical and traditional standards of orthodoxy insofar as it does not entail either Arianism, Apollinarianism or polytheism, and I suggest that a modified kenotic Christology may be at once coherent, orthodox and religiously meaningful.

Chapter Two: Modified Kenotic Christology

In this chapter, which is primarily descriptive, I seek to accomplish several goals. First, I shall review some recent work by C. Stephen Evans, Ronald J. Feenstra and Stephen T. Davis in order to offer a summary statement of the modified kenotic Christology that is under review. In order to help clarify this account, I will offer a brief look at some of the more significant areas of continuity and discontinuity with earlier kenotic theories. After outlining this model of the incarnation, I shall then focus on what I take to be the major motivating factors for Evans, Feenstra and Davis. Following this exercise, I then point out some of the religious, theological and metaphysical assumptions and commitments which they avow and from which they work as these are important to their project. Finally, I shall look at several pertinent accounts of orthodoxy and heresy.

MODIFIED KENOTIC CHRISTOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple of decades, Stephen T. Davis, Ronald J. Feenstra and, more recently, C. Stephen Evans have explicated, defended and further developed a kenotic account of the incarnation. In this section I will offer an overview of their work by tracing its development.

Stephen T. Davis

In 1983, Davis began his first essay on kenotic Christology by quoting the declaration of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Here he declares that “these words form the basis of the orthodox Christian doctrine of the incarnation, a doctrine which has been

nearly universally believed by Christians ever since.”¹ He summarizes the “main idea” as follows: “Jesus Christ is one person in whom two natures co-exist, a divine and a human; these natures are neither confused nor separated in him; he is ‘truly God and truly man.’”² Here it is clear not only that Davis is committed to the traditional doctrine of “two natures and one person” but also that he sees the Chalcedonian definition as the standard of orthodoxy.

Davis is, however, sensitive to the charges that the traditional doctrine is incoherent. He recognizes that theologians have always found the doctrine to be mysterious, and he wants to do nothing to remove the sense of profound awe and mystery that surrounds the doctrine. But he considers in detail this question: “is the claim that Christ is ‘truly God and truly man’ also incoherent, i.e. is it a statement which cannot possibly be true?”³ He recognizes that such charges as John Hick’s assertion “to say, without further explanation, that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that this circle drawn with a pencil on paper is also a square”⁴ are to be taken seriously, and he devotes much reflection to consideration of this charge.

Davis is convinced that this is an issue of vital importance, for if the traditional doctrine of the incarnation is incoherent and thus necessarily false, then it is necessarily

¹ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p. 118.

² Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 118.

³ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 118.

⁴ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 119. The quotation from Hick is taken from John Hick, “Jesus and the World Religions,” in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (ed.) John Hick (London: SCM Press, 1977), p. 178.

true that Christians have been and are wrong in their belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He states that “not only is the classical Christian understanding of the incarnation at stake here – so perhaps is Christianity itself.”⁵ Because “the doctrine that ‘God became man in Jesus Christ’ is universally recognized by Christians as being at the heart of their faith,” the “theological stakes could not be higher.”⁶

Thus Davis focuses his attention on the coherence of the traditional doctrine; rather than attempt to provide a full Christology he promises a “philosophical prolegomenon to Christology”⁷ and a preliminary “outline of Christology.”⁸ But when considering the charges of incoherence, however, Davis insists that “the importance of this prolegomenon ought not be underestimated” – for “if the orthodox Christology is incoherent it must be rejected no matter how many arguments can be amassed in its favor.”⁹ Davis believes that a kenotic model of the incarnation is able to offer a coherent account of the traditional doctrine, and he sets himself to the task of showing just how kenotic Christology might help the Christian with traditional views of the incarnation meet or avoid the charge of incoherence.

Davis notes that the Christian believer in the traditional doctrine of the incarnation believes that Jesus Christ possesses all of the essential divine properties and all the essential human properties. He locates an important difference between what he calls the

⁵ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 119.

⁶ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 119.

⁷ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 119.

⁸ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 130.

⁹ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 119.

“classical route” and what he labels the “kenotic route.”¹⁰ He points out that the “classical route” deals with any problems with this view by employing what has since come to be known as the “reduplication theory” – the classical route proposes that Jesus Christ was omniscient and omnipotent as God while being non-omnipotent and non-omniscient as man.¹¹ The kenotic route, on the other hand, proposes that

in the incarnation Jesus plainly *did not have* the (1)-(4) properties (omnipotence, omniscience, etc.) (and any other divine properties that are inconsistent with humanity) and thus was ‘truly man.’ But he was still ‘truly God’ in virtue both of the divine properties he kept (those that were consistent with his humanity) and of the divine properties he once had, temporarily gave up in the incarnation, and then regained in his ascension.¹²

Davis does not oppose the kenotic theory to the classical approach; instead he says that they are “not mutually exclusive.”¹³ He works to provide an interpretation of the Chalcedonian formula that allows for logical consistency, and he thinks that his kenotic proposal allows for this. He finally settles on this interpretation:

Jesus Christ has certain essential properties of God and certain essential properties of man; his divine properties and his human properties are consistent; the divine properties are sufficient to make him truly God and the human properties are sufficient to make him truly man.¹⁴

So the Son is said to give up or empty himself of certain divine properties, properties which we normally take to be essential to divinity. By giving up these divine properties, the Son thus is able to take on certain human properties (all of those properties which are essential to being human) without producing any inconsistency or incoherence: “the

¹⁰ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 122.

¹¹ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 122.

¹² Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 122.

¹³ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 123.

¹⁴ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 123.

Second Person of the Trinity voluntarily and temporarily gave up those properties every divine being has that are inconsistent with being human.”¹⁵ As Davis summarizes it, the “basic idea” is this: “Jesus Christ failed to have some divine properties but was still God and had some divine properties but was still a human being, and he failed to have some human properties but was still a human being and had some human properties but was still God.”¹⁶

Davis recognizes that this proposal will prompt some objections. He is aware that Christians (and theists generally) often think of such attributes as omniscience as essential to divinity, and he admits that the kenotic account forces a reappraisal of which divine properties are essential to divinity and which are not essential. Davis doubts that “omniscience *simpliciter*”¹⁷ is an essential divine attribute, but he also insists that “even if omniscience *in some sense* is essential to God, my theory affirms Jesus’ omniscience in a relevant... sense: he was an omniscient being who temporarily took non-omniscient form.”¹⁸ Thus the Son was not omniscient while kenotically incarnate; instead the Son is said to rely upon the work of the Holy Spirit for insight and the ability to accurately predict future events.

The essential notion here is “that of a being voluntarily abandoning some of its knowledge while retaining the ability to regain it.”¹⁹ The application of this notion yields the result that Jesus “was in fact non-omniscient; he knew no more than other people

¹⁵ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 124.

¹⁶ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 129.

¹⁷ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 126.

¹⁸ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 126.

¹⁹ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 127.

knew or at least could have known,” and this “is sufficient for him to have been truly human in his knowledge.”²⁰ And because Jesus was both formerly omniscient and also “at any point able to call upon his temporarily abandoned omniscience,” he also counts as being truly divine.²¹

Davis responds to various objections to his model from Frances Young, Don Cupitt and Maurice Wiles, and he closes his essay with three observations. First, he concludes that the kenotic model which he has proposed renders the sentence “Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man” coherent – when “properly understood” in this way, the “classic christological claim that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man” is not a contradiction.²²

His second point is that this kenotic model “seems consistent with the great christological passages of the New Testament.”²³ Although Davis does not engage in any detailed exegesis at this point, he suggests that his kenoticism coheres nicely not only with Philippians 2:5-8 but also with 2 Corinthians 8:9, John 1:1,4 and John 17:4-5.²⁴ He does not claim that his understanding of the identity of Christ is demanded by any of these passages, but he does believe that his kenotic model of the incarnation does not contradict any of them and indeed fits well with them.

Davis’ third point is that the Fathers at Chalcedon produced a guideline for belief in the incarnation rather than a full explanation of the mystery. His summary of

²⁰ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 127.

²¹ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 126.

²² Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 129.

²³ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 129.

²⁴ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 130.

Chalcedon states that “any christology is acceptable that affirms the divinity, the humanity and the unity of the person of Christ.”²⁵ And since he believes that his kenotic model preserves all three of these elements, Davis concludes that his “outline” of Christology “falls within the boundaries of Chalcedonic orthodoxy.”²⁶

In his essay “Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?,” Davis rejects what he terms “minimalist” Christologies in favor of what he labels a “maximalist” Christology. He defines “maximal” Christology as one which “is based upon or presupposes or argues for (even though it may struggle with) the classical doctrine of the incarnation from Nicea to Chalcedon (i.e., Christ is ‘truly divine and truly human’ and ‘two natures in one person’).”²⁷ He opposes this to “minimalist” Christologies, by which he means those which:

- (a) view the Bible as a “wholly, or at least primarily, human book” and do not accept doctrines of biblical inspiration and/or trustworthiness as embodying or conveying divine revelation;
- (b) presuppose or argue for a “great variety of distinct and inconsistent Christologies” within the New Testament as well as an evolutionary view of biblical Christology;
- (c) believe that the classical doctrine of the incarnation is incoherent and should be rejected on “purely logical grounds;”
- (d) insist that there “never has been a universally accepted Christology” in the Christian church;

²⁵ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 130.

²⁶ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 130.

- (e) hold that belief in the traditional doctrine of the incarnation is responsible for immoral behavior (e.g. anti-Semitism) and should be rejected on ethical as well as logical grounds;
- (f) and conclude that “what the New Testament writers say or were trying to say about Jesus can best be captured via a minimal Christology.”²⁸

Davis again begins his own description of the kenotic model of the incarnation with reference to the declaration of the Council of Chalcedon (451).

He again summarizes the “main idea” of this classic statement of consensual Christian belief:

It is that Jesus Christ is one person, truly divine and truly human. That is, Jesus Christ is one person with two natures, a divine nature and a human nature. The two natures are neither confused nor separated in him. Nor are they merged or amalgamated – divinity and humanity are far too different for that. Nor are they fused so as to produce a third, or hybrid, nature. The two are united in the person of Jesus Christ “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”²⁹

Davis notes that the Chalcedonian statement leaves unexplained some important aspects of the doctrine of the incarnation; he repeats his earlier point that it rules out certain heresies (e.g. adoptionism, Docetism, Arianism, Ebionism), and he concludes that the fathers “set a boundary” by the Chalcedonian definition.³⁰ He does not think that the consensual statements of the fathers have the same binding authority that Scripture has,

²⁷ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ: Saviour or Guru?” in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Jesus: A Debate on Christology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 40.

²⁸ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 41.

²⁹ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 42.

³⁰ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 42.

but he does confess “to a strong belief that the church was led to the classical doctrine by the Holy Spirit.”³¹

Davis affirms the value of historical-critical biblical studies, but he questions and ultimately rejects the more radical conclusions of some of the historical-critical scholarship. He believes that the methodology itself is completely legitimate and even very helpful for theology – what he rejects is the “deep skepticism” of many New Testament scholars.³² He accepts “as accurate the basic New Testament picture of Jesus,” and his method is “to trust the Gospels as reliable witnesses to Jesus except in instances where there is compelling reason not to do so.”³³

Davis’ confidence in the New Testament picture of Jesus leads him to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was both the incarnate Logos, the fully divine second person of the Trinity as well as the fully human Jew of Galilee. He thus rejects, on biblical grounds, all forms of both Docetism and Arianism.³⁴

Davis is, of course, well aware that his endorsement of the traditional understanding of the incarnation will draw charges of incoherence. He readily admits of mystery – he is happy to say that the doctrine is “puzzling, mysterious, paradoxical.”³⁵ But he insists that the traditional doctrine need not be rejected on the grounds that it is

³¹ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 43.

³² Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 44.

³³ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 46.

³⁴ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” pp. 48-49.

³⁵ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 49.

incoherent (where something is understood to be incoherent when it cannot make sense or cannot be true for logical reasons).³⁶

Davis again defends the coherence of the traditional doctrine by employing his kenotic model. He begins this defense by offering some important distinctions, clarifications and definitions. He defines an *accidental property* as an attribute that some entity X “can fail to have but still be X.”³⁷ An *essential property*, on the other hand, is “an attribute that X has and cannot fail to have and still be X.”³⁸ Davis continues by defining a “*common property of a kind K* (as) an attribute that all members of K have (e.g. for humans never having lived on Mars).”³⁹ He says that the “*nature* of K is all the common properties of K that are essential properties of those members of K (e.g., for a circle, being a closed geometrical figure and having all points equidistant from the center).”⁴⁰

Davis employs these definitions to “restate Hick’s objection in a slightly more sophisticated form” than the “remarkably crude” formulation of Hick’s own earlier charge.⁴¹ He lists some of the attributes which are often understood to be properties of God and human persons: God is necessary, eternal (however that is to be understood),⁴²

³⁶ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 50.

³⁷ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 50.

³⁸ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 50.

³⁹ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 50.

⁴⁰ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 50.

⁴¹ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 50.

⁴² For an introduction to this debate, see Gregory E. Ganssle (ed.), *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), cf. these valuable and important works: Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford

omnipotent, incorporeal and omniscient while humans are contingent, finite, non-omnipotent, corporeal and non-omniscient.⁴³ Davis uses this understanding of properties to emphasize the force of the Hickian criticism. He highlights the apparent incongruence of these sets of properties, and he grapples with what appears to be a serious problem for the traditional Christian belief.

Davis also employs this understanding of properties to defend the traditional Christian doctrine. He insists that what “Christians want to say about Jesus Christ in the incarnation” is that “he was *truly human* but not *merely human*, *truly divine* but not *divine simpliciter*.”⁴⁴ Davis wrestles with the question of “what would have to happen in order for God to remain divine and to become a man?” He is happy to admit that anything close to a full answer is far beyond him. He is, however, convinced that “*one* of the things that would surely have to happen would be that God would have to give up whatever divine properties (accidental ones of course; the essential ones cannot be given up if God is to remain God) are inconsistent with being divine.”⁴⁵

This notion of “giving up” something common to divinity brings Davis to the kenotic theory. The basic idea of kenotic Christology, as Davis sees it, “is that Jesus Christ was ‘in the form of God’ as the Logos, or the Second Person of the Trinity and that

University Press, 1994), Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 375-436, Nicholas Wolterstorff, “God Everlasting” in Clifton Orlebeke and Lewis B. Smedes (eds.), *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975) pp. 181-203, Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (London: Macmillan, 1992), William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001) and Gregory Ganssle and David Woodruff (eds.), *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴³ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 50.

⁴⁴ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 52.

⁴⁵ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 52.

at a certain point in human history he voluntarily and obediently ‘emptied himself’ both of the divine glory and of certain divine properties; he then took on ‘human form,’ i.e., became a human being.”⁴⁶ Davis offers a further “kenotic explanation of the incarnation:”

In the incarnation Jesus Christ “emptied himself” by giving up those divine properties that are inconsistent with being truly human while retaining sufficient divine properties to remain truly divine; he gave up those common human properties that are inconsistent with being truly divine but retained sufficient human properties to remain truly human. In the incarnation, then, Jesus Christ was not *a mere human* but truly human; he was not God *simpliciter* but truly God. Perhaps one cannot simultaneously be a mere human and truly divine; and perhaps one cannot be God *simpliciter* and truly human; but perhaps it is possible to be “truly divine and truly human.”⁴⁷

Having offered this outline of the kenotic model, Davis thus proceeds to distinguish it from several theological aberrations. He denies that kenosis is “a theory that so qualifies the divinity of Jesus Christ that it becomes a part of his humanity” or that it makes Jesus Christ “a kind of demigod by enlarging his humanity with a few divine properties.”⁴⁸ He also denies that that it entails that God exchanges his divinity for humanity or that it somehow leaves vacant the providential role of God in “guiding, controlling and sustaining” the universe.⁴⁹

Davis concludes that “the theory of kenosis, then (which, in my opinion, is not the only promising way of doing orthodox Christology), helps us grope toward an explanation of the incarnation.”⁵⁰ Kenotic Christology allows us to say legitimately that

⁴⁶ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 52.

⁴⁷ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 53.

⁴⁸ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p.54.

⁴⁹ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 54.

⁵⁰ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 57.

Jesus Christ is both truly human and truly divine, even if that means that we have to rethink our intuitions about what it means to be human, divine or both.

Ronald J. Feenstra

Ronald J. Feenstra begins his 1989 essay “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology” by presenting kenotic Christology as “one important modern attempt to articulate a theology of the Incarnation that comports with the Chalcedonian affirmation that Jesus Christ is truly divine and truly human.”⁵¹ He chooses Gottfried Thomasius as the “representative kenotic figure”⁵² to provide the “basic outline of the kenotic theory of the Incarnation” which he later discusses, develops and modifies.⁵³ Feenstra is in full agreement with Thomasius that the foundation of orthodox Christology is “the canon that every conception of the person of the mediator that endangers either the reality of his deity, or the truth of his humanity, or the unity of his person, is an erroneous one.”⁵⁴ He is also sympathetic to Thomasius’ inability to hold to both the full divinity and humanity and the unity of the person “without the supposition of a self-limitation of the divine Logos.”⁵⁵

Feenstra demonstrates that Thomasius distinguishes between “relative” divine attributes (e.g., omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence) and the immanent divine

⁵¹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology” in *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement: Theological and Philosophical Essays* edited by Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 128.

⁵² Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 129. Feenstra chooses Thomasius “both because he was the first nineteenth century theologian to offer a systematic statement of kenotic Christology and because much of the subsequent debate over the kenotic theory of the Incarnation has either referred to or assumed the position Thomasius represents.”

⁵³ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 132.

⁵⁴ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 129. The quotation is from Gottfried Thomasius, “Christ’s Person and Work,” in *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology*, translated and edited by Claude Welch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 37.

⁵⁵ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 129.

attributes. According to Thomasius, the Son of God divests himself of the relative divine attributes in becoming incarnate, and in doing so the Son is able to be truly human without contradiction and without risk to the unity of the person. The relative attributes are nothing more than the manifestation of the immanent attributes in relation to the world. As Feenstra summarizes it, Thomasius' proposal is that

God the Son has certain immanent or essential attributes which, in the state of divine glory, are manifested in his relationship to the world as the "relative attributes" of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. When the Son gives up the state of divine glory in order to become incarnate, he retains the essential divine attributes but divests himself of any manifestation of the essential attributes that is appropriate only to the state of glory. So the Incarnation involves the Son's divesting himself of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, but not of the divine essence, which includes the immanent divine attributes.⁵⁶

Feenstra concludes that

Thomasius's kenotic Christology therefore holds that the incarnate Son of God is one person who is both truly divine and truly human. He is truly divine even in his self-emptied state because, although he gives up the relative divine attributes, he retains those attributes that are essential to his being divine. He is truly human even in his exalted state because the attributes he regains in the exaltation, although they are incompatible with the limits he took on during his life on earth, are not intrinsically incompatible with any properties essential to being truly human.⁵⁷

He then considers whether "kenotic Christology can preserve the true deity of Christ during the period of his earthly life..."⁵⁸ Here he examines the charge (as repeated by Wolfhart Pannenberg) that since the relative attributes are the really divine attributes,

⁵⁶ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," pp. 130-131.

⁵⁷ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," p. 132.

⁵⁸ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," p. 133.

kenotic Christology does not preserve the true deity of Christ.⁵⁹ For several reasons, Feenstra focuses attention on omniscience.⁶⁰ He interacts with the way that Davis confronts the question of the kenosis and the divine attributes, and he notes that Davis appears to “deny that omniscience is essential to God;”⁶¹ since Davis “believes that Jesus Christ was both divine and non-omniscient, he must deny that it is essential for a being to be omniscient in order to be divine.”⁶²

But Feenstra also notes that Davis qualifies this claim by allowing room for belief that the incarnate Son was omniscient in some sense. Feenstra points out that the position of Davis leaves “two crucial questions unanswered.”⁶³ First, it is not clear what Davis means when he says that the kenotically incarnate Son is omniscient “in some sense.” And second, it is not clear how an essentially omniscient being can also temporarily non-omniscient.

Feenstra draws upon the important work of Thomas V. Morris (who considers the kenotic model but finally rejects it in favor of what he calls the “two-minds” model) in answering the questions posed to Davis.⁶⁴ Morris makes an important distinction between “omniscience *simpliciter*” and a “rather distinct property, the property of being

⁵⁹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 135. Here Feenstra refers to Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, translated by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe, second edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 310.

⁶⁰ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 135.

⁶¹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 136. Cf. Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 124.

⁶² Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 137.

⁶³ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 138.

⁶⁴ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

omniscient-unless-freely-and-temporarily-choosing-to-be-otherwise.”⁶⁵ It is something like this latter, more complex property, that the proponent of kenotic Christology holds to “rather than omniscience *simpliciter*” which is said to be the “logically necessary condition of deity.”⁶⁶ It is not omniscience *simpliciter* that is that is an essential attribute of any person or being that is God – the property of being omniscient-unless-freely-and-temporarily-choosing-to-be-otherwise is the necessary property or essential attribute of God.

Morris himself favors the “two minds” model over the kenotic model because he thinks that this modified kenotic model still suffers from two important defects. First, he recognizes that the kenotic view leaves open the possibility that all three divine persons could simultaneously become incarnate, thus again rendering omniscience not a necessary attribute but only a contingent divine property. Morris’ second problem with this kenotic picture is that it conflicts with an Anselmian notion of God as the greatest possible, or maximally perfect, being.⁶⁷

Feenstra, however, is not convinced that these problems are fatal to the kenotic view, and he proposes solutions to both of them. He tackles the first of Morris’ criticisms by arguing that Morris’ own statement of the essential divine attributes under question is “too permissive” because “it does not adequately restrict the occasions on which a divine person might be temporarily non-omniscient.”⁶⁸ In place of Morris’ suggestion that “omniscient-unless-freely-and-temporarily-choosing-to-be-otherwise” is the essential

⁶⁵ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 99.

⁶⁶ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 99.

⁶⁷ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 76.

⁶⁸ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 140.

divine attribute, Feenstra proposes that we think of the essential divine property as “omniscient-unless-kenotically-incarnate.”⁶⁹ Feenstra recognizes that this may appear to open the kenotic position to charges that it somehow violates or compromises the metaphysical equality of the three divine persons. For if the Son alone has this more complex property while the Father and Spirit have omniscience *simpliciter*, then it seems that omniscience *simpliciter* is an essential property of some of the divine persons but not of the Son.

Here the kenotic proposal seems to be caught on the horns of a dilemma. If, on the one horn, the kenoticist says that all of the divine persons together share the same essential attribute (omniscient-unless-kenotically-incarnate) and are thus able to employ this attribute in becoming incarnate, then it appears that omniscience is merely a contingent or accidental rather than essential property of divinity. If, on the other horn, the kenoticist insists that only the Son has this complex property while the Father and Spirit have the attribute of omniscience *simpliciter*, then it seems that the divine persons in fact do have different essential properties and are thus of different essences. On one horn, omniscience becomes a contingent property of God. But on the other horn we find that the *homoousion* is impaled. Either way, things do not look good for the proponent of a kenotic Christology that attempts to remain faithful to traditional Christian orthodoxy.

Feenstra, however, believes that the kenotic model can be rescued from this dilemma. He suggests that we should think of the essential divine attribute as the property of “omniscient-unless...,” and he insists that this divine attribute is shared by all three persons of the Trinity. But he avers that this does not entail the loss of omniscience

⁶⁹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” pp. 141-142.

as an essential divine property. Following the basic biblical narrative which presents the incarnation as occurring for the purpose of redemption, Feenstra adds the "qualification that a divine person can become kenotically incarnate only for the purpose of redemption."⁷⁰ In other words, the essential divine attribute is that of being "omniscient-unless-kenotically-and-redemptively-incarnate." During the incarnation of the Son, the Father and Spirit employed the divine attribute in one way while the Son employed it in another. So it is true that omniscience was never lost, even though the Son was temporarily non-omniscient. It was, however, the same essential attribute that was shared by all of them. And since the Christian claim is that redemption was fully accomplished through the incarnation and atonement of the Son, "there is therefore neither the need nor even the possibility of yet another divine incarnation."⁷¹ Feenstra's own summary of his position is important enough to see at length:

So on this view, while any of the three divine persons could have become kenotically and redemptively incarnate, once the Son has become incarnate in this way, then neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit can become similarly incarnate and they are, in an important sense, unalterably omniscient. Another way of stating this position is as follows. The property of being omniscient-unless-kenotically-and-redemptively-incarnate is an essential property of each of the divine persons. So when the Son in fact becomes kenotically and redemptively incarnate, and in addition accomplishes the work of redemption, then it is no longer a live option for either the Father or the Holy Spirit to become incarnate in this way.⁷²

Feenstra obviously sees this as an adequate solution to the foregoing problem, and he also thinks that an adequate answer to Morris' second problem is available. Morris finds the kenotic view wanting because it is not in accord with the Anselmian conception

⁷⁰ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," p. 142.

⁷¹ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," p. 140.

of God – to him it is obvious that the kenotic position entails a view of the divine attributes that undercuts his Anselmian intuitions about the conception of a maximally perfect or greatest possible being. To this objection Feenstra offers two responses. He points out that, as Morris himself is ready to admit, our “Anselmian intuitions” are defeasible – they stand in need of “revelational control” and may need to be corrected if and when they conflict with other Christian claims.⁷³ Feenstra also notes that Morris’ Anselmianism provides a conception of a maximally perfect being rather than a clear notion of each divine person of the Trinity. He argues that the kenotic theory proposed by him allows “one to argue that the one, triune God is, by virtue of the omniscience of at least one of the divine persons, omniscient in every possible world and therefore essentially omniscient.”⁷⁴ Feenstra concludes “it seems plausible to hold that the kenotic theory of the Incarnation can be reconciled with Anselmianism.”⁷⁵

Feenstra considers further the issue of the continuing humanity of the exalted Christ and kenotic Christology. Here he again recognizes that the kenotic strategy is in danger of being impaled on the horns of a difficult dilemma. As Feenstra notes, “several critics of kenotic Christology have claimed that this theory implies the cessation of the true humanity of Christ at his exaltation.”⁷⁶ The apparent problem is this: if the properties given up by the Son in the incarnation are incompatible with true humanity,

⁷² Ronald J. Feenstra, *Reconsidering Kenotic Christology*,” p. 140.

⁷³ E.g. Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), p. 43.

⁷⁴ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 143.

⁷⁵ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 144.

⁷⁶ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 144.

then the exalted Son must either remain without the divine properties or must relinquish the humanity. Feenstra recognizes that the proponent of the kenotic theory could just bite the bullet and give up on the humanity of the exalted Christ. But he sees that this conflicts with traditional Christian belief, and he suggests two other ways out of the problem. He points out that the kenotic theologian “could argue that, while Christ’s *being* incarnate, or *being* truly human, does not conflict with his being omniscient, yet Christ’s *becoming* incarnate, or *becoming* truly human, does conflict with his having this attribute.”⁷⁷ In other words, the Son needed to empty himself in order to become incarnate, but “Christ can, once he is incarnate, regain this attribute without ceasing to possess true humanity.”⁷⁸ Feenstra recognizes that this may seem to be “contrived” or even “futile” attempt, but he thinks that it is worthy of consideration.⁷⁹ The line of response that Feenstra prefers, however, involves a distinction between kenosis and incarnation. According to this approach, “Christ’s condition can therefore be seen as a temporary sharing of our lot or condition in this life, with the Incarnation continuing after the kenosis ceases.”⁸⁰ Feenstra is convinced that this strategy allows the kenoticist to retain belief in the continuing humanity of the exalted Christ; he sees it as a possible way to hold both to a kenotic view and a traditionally orthodox Christology.

In a more recent essay, Feenstra restates and develops further his kenotic proposal.⁸¹ Here he argues that “an orthodox kenotic Christology not only can account

⁷⁷ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 147.

⁷⁸ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 147.

⁷⁹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p.147.

⁸⁰ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” p. 149.

⁸¹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology and the Divine Attributes,” forthcoming.

for some perplexing biblical claims about Jesus Christ but also offers a fruitful method for deepening our understanding of God's nature."⁸² As in his earlier essay, Feenstra again begins with the Chalcedonian definition of faith, "the touchstone for Christian orthodoxy."⁸³ He offers a discussion of the doctrine of the "communication of attributes" – here he describes the "standard view of orthodox Christianity" as the doctrine that "the attributes of both the divine nature and the human nature are 'communicated to' or predicated of the one person, Jesus Christ."⁸⁴ The "heart of the doctrine" is recognized as this: "the incarnate Son of God has the divine attributes essentially and from all eternity and has the essential human attributes (which do not include being sinful) because he took on human nature in the incarnation."⁸⁵ Feenstra is committed to the traditional doctrine of the *communicatio*, and he states that concern over some "apparent incompatibilities" involved with it are "a motivating factor for kenotic Christology."⁸⁶ After offering an overview of the patristic disputes over the *communicatio* doctrine (especially focusing on the debate between Cyril and Nestorius), he connects his kenotic model with discussion of the divine attributes.

Feenstra prefaces his statement of kenotic Christology with a commitment to biblical and traditional orthodoxy: "this paper articulates a version of kenotic Christology that attempts to be faithful both to Scripture and to Chalcedonian orthodoxy."⁸⁷ He lists

⁸² Ronald J. Feenstra, "Kenotic Christology," p. 1.

⁸³ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Kenotic Christology," p. 1.

⁸⁴ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Kenotic Christology," p. 3.

⁸⁵ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Kenotic Christology," p. 4.

⁸⁶ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Kenotic Christology," p. 4.

⁸⁷ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Kenotic Christology," p. 19.

several biblical passages from which kenotic Christology takes its cue. These include not only the famous use of *ekenosen* in Philippians 2:7 and its conceptual parallel in II Corinthians 8:9 but also the statements about the knowledge of the man Jesus (e.g., Mark 13:32 and Luke 2:52) as well as the prayer of Jesus to his Father (John 17:5) and the suggestive statements of Hebrews 4:15.

In substantial agreement with his earlier work (and the suggestions of Davis and Morris), Feenstra offers a summary statement of the kenotic Christology under review:

In sum, on the revised kenotic proposal, the property of being omniscient-unless-kenotically-incarnate (where a kenotic incarnation is understood as freely chosen, temporary, and for the purpose of reconciliation) is an essential property of each divine person. So when the Son freely, temporarily, and for the purpose of redemption becomes kenotically incarnate, it is no longer a live option for either the Father or the Holy Spirit to become incarnate in this way. And once the Son has accomplished the work of reconciliation, then Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be said to be unchangeably and unalterably omniscient.⁸⁸

Feenstra thus concludes that on this kenotic model it is possible to affirm that during his incarnate earthly life, the Son was not only truly human and truly divine but also was not omniscient.

Feenstra realizes that this proposal of kenotic Christology draws fire from various angles. He notes that even someone as sympathetic as Morris finally decides against it, and he lists several objections to kenotic Christology that have been lodged by Richard Swinburne. For Morris prefers the “Two Minds” model to MKC on the grounds that it does not require “significant altering (of) the traditional conception of divinity.”⁸⁹ And, as Feenstra points out, Richard Swinburne “objects to kenotic Christology because it is

⁸⁸ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” pp. 23-24.

⁸⁹ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, pp. 133-134.

incompatible with (some forms of) natural theology, it departs from Chalcedon, and it is overly complex.”⁹⁰

Feenstra takes these objections seriously. He recognizes that “these objections point to the need to consider whether kenotic Christology follows an appropriate method in discerning what the divine attributes are.”⁹¹ He also notes that John Hick has recently criticized kenotic Christology for altering and jettisoning “much of the traditional Christian understanding of God” to clear “conceptual space for divine incarnation.”⁹² Feenstra recognizes that the proponent of the traditionally orthodox Christian doctrine of the incarnation (that the Son is one person of a truly human nature and a truly divine nature) is faced with a dilemma. For it seems that the traditional doctrine may be held to be coherent only if some of our common intuitions about

- (a) human nature,
- (b) divine nature, and
- (c) personhood

are altered. In other words, the doctrine of the incarnation requires us to rethink what it might mean to be divine, what it might mean to be human and/or what it might mean to be a person. So while Morris finally is unwilling to make the significant alterations to his intuitions of divinity required by the kenotic model, he is willing to conceive of the unity of the person in a way that is unpalatable to the proponents of the kenotic model (the “two minds” model). The kenotic theorists balk at the notion that one person may have

⁹⁰ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology and the Divine Attributes,” p. 25.

⁹¹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 25.

⁹² Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 30. The Hick quote is from John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 73.

two minds, but they are willing to allow the doctrine of the incarnation to call into question their preconceived ideas of what the divine nature must be. And so Feenstra argues that “it is right and proper for Christian theologians to use Christian beliefs that Jesus Christ was truly divine and truly human and biblical statements about his knowledge as controls in formulating their understanding of God.”⁹³

Feenstra heeds the advice of Alvin Plantinga when Plantinga argues that Christian philosophers can and indeed should work from the bases of Christian knowledge.⁹⁴

Feenstra points out that Morris himself argues that our understanding both of human nature and divine nature should be informed Christian belief in the incarnation.⁹⁵

Feenstra notes that this important point of theological method has been understood and accepted by theologians as diverse as Tertullian, Karl Barth and N.T. Wright.⁹⁶ He argues that Christian theologians

should not first devise concepts of God and of human nature and then try to determine whether, given these concepts, a divine person can become incarnate. Rather, they should start with what they know, namely, that the divine Son of God has become incarnate as described in the New Testament, and then work to what they do not know as clearly, namely, the best way to state the divine and human attributes.⁹⁷

Although he clearly recognizes a legitimate and important place for the Anselmian method, Feenstra points to the inadequacy of this approach for understanding and

⁹³ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology and the Divine Attributes,” p. 31.

⁹⁴ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 31. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984): 260-261.

⁹⁵ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 31. Cf. Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 64, 88.

⁹⁶ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” pp. 33-38.

⁹⁷ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 33.

articulating a Christian doctrine of God. For instance, the Anselmian method alone is unable to arrive at the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and Feenstra points out that “it would be odd if the incarnation of God contributed to our knowledge that God is triune, but contributed nothing to our understanding of the divine attributes.”⁹⁸ The Anselmian method, which is “to attribute to God great-making properties, that is, properties that it is better to have than to lack, and then to say that God has these properties to a superlative degree,” is helpful to Christian theology.⁹⁹ But Perfect Being theology does not trump Scripture, and “if there is any conflict between the deliverances of Scripture and the deliverances of the Anselmian method, Christian theologians should favor what Scripture says.”¹⁰⁰ Anselmian or Perfect Being theology “can only be a guide, not the final word on the divine attributes.”¹⁰¹

Feenstra asks, then, “By what method, should Christian theologians develop their understanding of God’s attributes?”¹⁰² His answer is clear – the Christian theologian should start with Scripture. Feenstra believes that Scripture depicts God in a way that comports well with many of the conclusions of Perfect Being theology. The God of Scripture has the great-making properties of greatness, sovereignty, power, knowledge, everlastingness, goodness, justice and love (among others), and the God of Scripture has these great-making properties to a superlative or maximal degree.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 39.

⁹⁹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 39.

¹⁰⁰ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 39..

¹⁰¹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 40.

¹⁰² Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 39.

¹⁰³ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 39.

But Feenstra also argues that Scripture says that Jesus grew in wisdom and that Jesus was (during the time of the incarnation) ignorant of the time of the end of the age.¹⁰⁴ Given this, he says, and

given the teaching of Scripture and the creeds that Jesus Christ is fully divine, the divine knowledge attribute must be understood in such a way that the Son can be divine and non-omniscient during the time he was humiliated for the purpose of bringing about reconciliation. The term “omniscient-unless-kenotically-incarnate” (where a kenotic incarnation is understood as freely chosen, temporary, and for the purpose of reconciliation) is a way of expressing the divine knowledge attribute in order to account for what has been revealed by and through the incarnate Christ. If God’s knowledge is supremely exalted and perfect, yet the divine Son can, without giving up his divinity, be less than omniscient for a time during his life on earth, then our understanding of the essential divine knowledge attribute needs to be modified accordingly.¹⁰⁵

Feenstra thus argues that the basic insights of Davis and others can be rescued from the ambiguities and potential problems that might beset them. He also argues that it need not violate a Christian understanding of the divine attributes. He is convinced that “kenotic Christology offers a way of understanding the divine attributes that remains faithful to both Chalcedonian orthodoxy and biblical claims about Christ.” He offers “the method for understanding the divine attributes used by kenotic Christology” as one that is “fruitful... for deepening our understanding of the divine nature.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 40.

¹⁰⁵ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 40.

¹⁰⁶ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 40.

C. Stephen Evans

In his monograph *The Historical Christ and The Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History*,¹⁰⁷ C. Stephen Evans considers both the “two minds” approach of Thomas V. Morris and the kenotic model as proposed by Feenstra. He finds the theory of Morris to be coherent, but he prefers the kenotic model. This preference is partly due to the “great moral and spiritual power” involved in the idea of kenosis. It is also partly due to the fact that “such a view seems simpler than the ‘two-minds’ view, and seems to be a view that can more naturally and easily accommodate the historical portrait of Jesus provided in the Gospels.”¹⁰⁸

More recently, Evans has emerged as an active proponent and defender of the kenotic view. In a recent essay, Evans offers some insight on the motivation and appeal for the kenotic theory. “The first and most powerful source of the appeal of a kenotic theory,” according to Evans, is the “great religious power and meaning that is intrinsic to the idea of a God who sacrifices and suffers with and on behalf of his creatures.”¹⁰⁹ Evans states that the second source of appeal is the ability of kenotic Christology “to deal without embarrassment with the very human portrait of Jesus that is seen in the Gospels.”¹¹⁰ Evans explains that a third source of appeal is not intrinsic to the kenotic theory; to him the difficulties faced by the “two minds view” are much greater than those

¹⁰⁷ C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and The Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁸ C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, pp. 135-136.

¹⁰⁹ C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love: Some Thoughts on Kenotic Christology” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 249.

¹¹⁰ C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 250.

of the kenotic model.¹¹¹ For while Evans is not hostile to the “two minds” model, he does see the kenotic view as one that is both more plausible and more religiously satisfying.

In this essay Evans offers an overview of some recent discussion, and he offers some helpful reflections on the relation of kenotic Christology to divine omnipotence. Here he endorses Feenstra’s responses to the criticisms of Davis’ view, but he worries that “the property of ‘being-omnipotent-unless-freely-choosing-to-limit-one’s-power’ (or some similar property) may have an artificial ‘cooked-up’ feel to it.”¹¹² He explains that “attributing such a property to a divine being may seem to be an *ad hoc* move to save a theory, and even someone inclined to think our ‘Anselmian intuitions’ are fallible might well think that it would be better to have plain old omnipotence.”¹¹³ Evans does not, however, think this to be an insoluble dilemma. Employing Swinburne’s resolution of the paradox of the stone, he mounts an argument to the effect that there is no such thing as “plain old omnipotence” – Evans argues that “at the very least” it is “epistemically possible that the only kind of omnipotence there could be is omnipotence that includes the power to limit itself.”¹¹⁴

Evans next discusses kenotic Christology and the problem generated by the glorification of the risen Christ. Here he offers some amendments to Feenstra’s responses, and he concludes that there are two types of responses open to the defender of the kenotic view.

¹¹¹ C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 251.

¹¹² C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 260.

¹¹³ C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 260.

¹¹⁴ C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” pp. 260-261.

It seems to me that the defender of a kenotic theory can then respond in one of two ways to the charge that such an account does not do justice to the glorified status of the ascended Christ. One may argue that the ascended Christ is omniscient and omnipotent and that this is quite consistent with his emptying himself of those qualities to become incarnate. *Kenosis* is not necessary for incarnation, but it is necessary either to become incarnate in our present type of body or necessary only for other redemptive purposes. Alternately, the kenotic theorist may hold that the ascended Christ, though glorified and exalted in ways we do not fully understand, has received whatever supernatural power and insight he possesses from the Father. The self-emptying of the incarnation is not in this case a temporary loss but an irrevocable decision that is rewarded by God with glory, and this provides us with a model of our own intended destiny.¹¹⁵

Evans also considers another problem that may arise for the kenotic model: the problem of personal identity. Evans frames the problem this way: “if the choice to become an embodied spirit and be born as a human being was a self-conscious choice on the part of Christ to empty himself of the attributes of omnipotence and omniscience, one might think that a change of this magnitude would threaten the self-identity of Christ.”¹¹⁶ Evans then contextualizes this problem within the current philosophical debate about the nature of personal identity. He follows Swinburne’s threefold typology, and he considers the promise of the “bodily continuity theories,” the “theories stressing memory” and the “simple theories.”¹¹⁷ Evans believes that kenotic Christology is compatible with “a reasonable version” of a psychological theory as well as memory theories (although he finds them “far-fetched”), but he is attracted to “simple theories.” He argues that “if we accept a theory in this ‘simple’ category, I see no reason why a kenotic theory is incompatible with an affirmation that the incarnation preserved the identity of Christ as

¹¹⁵ C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 267.

¹¹⁶ C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 267.

¹¹⁷ C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” pp. 267-272.

the second person of the Trinity.”¹¹⁸ Evans concludes that kenotic Christology is “a viable means of making sense of that truth” of the incarnation, and he is convinced that it is a Christological theory that “does justice to the Chalcedonian claims.”¹¹⁹

Evans is also interested in the relation of Christology to our understanding of the divine nature. In a recent essay, he discusses discusses kenotic Christology and theology proper, and he promises to “look seriously at the links between kenotic Christology and kenotic theism.”¹²⁰ He does not believe that “the God of the philosophers is necessarily incompatible with the God of biblical revelation,” but he does see a “tension” between the two sources of insight.¹²¹ In this essay he emphasizes the congruence of kenotic Christology with the orthodoxy of the creeds; it is clear that he sees the kenotic model as an interpretation or version of Chalcedonian orthodoxy rather than as an alternative to it.¹²² After offering a summary of the kenotic proposal, Evans again recounts the strengths of the kenotic model.¹²³ He considers the question “is divine self-limitation possible?” He argues for an affirmative answer, and he considers further the implications of a positive answer for our understanding of God. He concludes that “the incarnation truly does give us a window into God’s powers that transforms our understanding of what

¹¹⁸ C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 271.

¹¹⁹ C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 272.

¹²⁰ C. Stephen Evans, “Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God,” forthcoming, p. 3. This paper was presented at a Calvin Seminar in Christian Scholarship conference on kenotic Christology at Calvin College, May 2002.

¹²¹ C. Stephen Evans, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 4.

¹²² C. Stephen Evans, “Kenotic Christology,” p. 6.

¹²³ C. Stephen Evans, “Kenotic Christology,” pp. 10-11, 14-17.

God is capable of doing” and thus that the incarnation provides us insight into the very heart of God.

In this section I have offered an overview of the model of kenotic Christology that is under review in this study. By tracing its development from the formulations of Stephen T. Davis through the amendments of Ronald J. Feenstra to the reflections of C. Stephen Evans, I have traced the development and defense of this theory of the incarnation. I have not attempted a full history of its development over the last couple of decades, nor have I tried to offer a comprehensive understanding of this theory. Instead, I have offered a summative overview, one that I hope is sufficiently clear.

IN WHAT SENSE MODIFIED? – A BRIEF COMPARISON WITH EARLIER MODELS

In this section I will provide a brief glance at some of the most important areas of continuity and discontinuity of this kenotic model when compared to some of its more illustrious predecessors. Because the term “kenotic Christology” almost inevitably conjures up images of the nineteenth century versions, I will highlight some of the more significant areas of agreement and departure. I am not trying to give anything that even remotely resembles a comprehensive history or even a thorough survey of the history of kenotic Christology.¹²⁴ Nor do I propose to offer a complete account of the relationship between the earlier, later and contemporary kenotic theories. My goal is much more

¹²⁴ For a very helpful overview, and one to which I am deeply indebted in this section, see Thomas R. Thompson, “Nineteenth Century Kenotic Christology: The Waxing, Waning, and Weighing of a Quest for a Coherent Orthodoxy,” forthcoming. This paper was presented at a Calvin Seminar in Christian Scholarship conference on kenotic Christology, May 2002.

modest. Hoping to clarify the contemporary proposal, I simply mention what I take to be some of the salient areas of similarity as well as some important differences.

Similarity and Continuity

It should be noted at the outset that there was a great deal of variety within the kenoticisms of the nineteenth century – it is not clear whether it should be classified generally as a “mediating”¹²⁵ or “confessional” theology¹²⁶ (or indeed whether it can even be classified as a whole).¹²⁷ But the recent kenoticism shares some important points of agreement with the more intentionally confessional of the earlier kenoticists. For instance, the contemporary model holds a strong commitment to the classical doctrine of the Trinity. And of course it maintains belief in the personal pre-existence of the Son – in fact it is this belief that fuels the kenotic engine in the first place. These convictions were shared by some of the earlier kenoticists.¹²⁸

Thompson reports that Thomasius “consciously distances his position from those Hegelian, speculative Christologies of Strauss and Baur.”¹²⁹ MKC has both continuity and discontinuity with Thomasius regarding this issue. The distaste of Thomasius for Hegelian determinism and idealism also resonates with the contemporary proposal (the modified kenotic view can recognize that the nineteenth century kenoticism sprang up in

¹²⁵ See Donald G. Dawe, *The Form of a Servant: A Historical Analysis of the Kenotic Motif* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 90-91.

¹²⁶ For an example of this kind of classification, see Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 233.

¹²⁷ Cf. Thomas R. Thompson, “Nineteenth Century Kenotic Christology,” p. 4.

¹²⁸ According to Thompson, “from Thomasius to Mackintosh, it is precisely a commitment to the pre-existence of the personal Logos, presupposing a Trinity distinguished *ad intra* from *ad extra*, that sets modern kenoticism apart from all other monist-tending speculations,” “Nineteenth Century Kenotic Christology,” p. 4.

¹²⁹ Thomas R. Thompson, “Nineteenth Century Kenotic Christology,” p. 6.

an era permeated by idealism but disavow any indebtedness to Hegelianism or to idealism generally). But there is also an important aspect of discontinuity with the earlier kenotic models at this point – the contemporary proposal is being advocated by analytic philosophical theologians, and often it bears little formal similarity to its earlier British and especially Continental predecessors while retaining none of the idealist connotations.

As demonstrated earlier, Feenstra, Davis and Evans in full agreement with Thomasius on the three “basic pillars of Christology.”¹³⁰ Accordingly, the modified proposal concurs with Thomasius that “every conception of the person of the mediator that endangers either the reality of his deity, the truth of his humanity, or the unity of his person, is an erroneous one.”¹³¹ Similarly, they agree with the “four axioms” of Mackintosh (the deity of Christ, his personal pre-existence, his true humanity and the unity of his person).¹³² The modified kenoticists are also sympathetic to the aversion of the earlier movements to the traditional interpretation of the kenosis as mere *krypsis*. Furthermore, they tend to agree with Thomasius that a more “social” doctrine of the Trinity is required by the kenotic model.¹³³

With Mackintosh, the modified model insists that the omni-attributes (at least in some form) are essential to divinity, and its proponents generally seem sympathetic to

¹³⁰ Gottfried Thomasius, “The Person of the Mediator,” in Claude Welch (ed.), *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 59.

¹³¹ Gottfried Thomasius, “The Person of the Mediator,” p. 37.

¹³² H.R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1912), pp. 469-470.

¹³³ Thompson notices that Thomasius’ model “demands a greater cooperative effort of all divine members... since the Son is restricted in power to the dimensions of the human condition, his dependence on the Father through the Spirit becomes more explicit.” Thompson, “Nineteenth Century Kenotic Christology,” p. 12. Evans is inclined to agree with David Brown that “kenotic accounts of the incarnation are committed to some form of Social Trinitarianism.” C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 248.

something like his suggestion that the Son retains these omni-attributes in a state of potency rather than in actuality.¹³⁴ The modified proposal also agrees with the earlier models that some expressions of traditional orthodoxy actually compromise either the humanity of Christ or the unity of the person.

One of the most significant areas of agreement between the modified version and the older models (at least the theology of Mackintosh) is what the incarnation reveals about the nature of God. According to Mackintosh, on the basis of God's self-revelation in the incarnation we can and should conclude that "what is immutable in God is the holy love which makes his essence."¹³⁵ As Thompson puts it, "for Mackintosh love is both the motive and the unchangeable divine essence which makes kenosis possible. Since the kenosis is an expression – better, the supreme expression – of divine love, it is wholly consistent with who God is and therefore no violation of divine immutability."¹³⁶ It should be clear that this approach comports well with the conclusions of Feenstra and Evans.¹³⁷

Dissimilarity and Discontinuity

Despite these important areas of continuity with the earlier kenotic proposals, the modified version under review takes leave of the earlier work at some significant points. Careful and analytic, it is much less speculative than its earlier Continental counterparts. It is also much less influenced by what has been called "the moralizing of dogma" than

¹³⁴ Cf. H.R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Christ*, pp. 476-477.

¹³⁵ H.R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Christ*, p. 473.

¹³⁶ Thomas R. Thompson, "Nineteenth Century Kenotic Christology," p. 22.

¹³⁷ Cf. Ronald J. Feenstra, "Kenotic Christology and the Divine Attributes" and C. Stephen Evans, "The Self-Emptying of Love" and "Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God."

was its British ancestors.¹³⁸ The modified kenotic Christology under review does not and need not endorse just any or all of the particular strategies of the earlier kenoticists – it especially does not require a complete or total renunciation of the omni-attributes. The modified proposal does not endorse the notion of Thomasius (but also Ebrard, Martensen and even Mackintosh) that the Son was “divesting himself of the divine mode of being” during the incarnation.¹³⁹ And the contemporary proposal does not entail any sort of Gessian doctrine, according to which the Son relinquished all of the divine attributes (and thus divinity) during the incarnation!¹⁴⁰

Contrary to these views, the modified kenoticism insists that the Son is fully and truly divine and fully and truly human in the unity of his person during the incarnation. There is no renunciation of divinity – it is not saying that the Son was divine in a pre-incarnate state, then was not divine during the incarnation but was again made divine at the exaltation. Nor is it hinting that the Son gave up or emptied himself of any of the essential divine attributes (omni-attributes or otherwise). Nor does the contemporary proposal suggest that the Son gave up his divine mode of existence in exchange for a human mode.¹⁴¹ Instead, modified kenotic Christology insists on the reality of the full divinity as well as the full humanity of Christ throughout the incarnation of the eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity.

¹³⁸ On this see Thomas R. Thompson, “Nineteenth Century Kenotic Christology,” p. 16.

¹³⁹ Gottfried Thomasius, “The Person of the Mediator,” p. 48. See the discussion of Ebrard, Martensen and Mackintosh by Thompson, “Nineteenth Century Kenotic Christology,” pp. 9, 15, 18.

¹⁴⁰ On the thought of Wolfgang Friedrich Gess, see the introduction and subsequent endorsement by Thomas R. Thompson, “Nineteenth Century Kenotic Christology,” pp. 15, 41.

¹⁴¹ These options correspond to the threefold typology of Oscar Bensow, *Die Lehre von der Kenose* (Leipzig: A. Deichert Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903), pp. 123ff. For an overview, see Thompson, “Nineteenth Century Kenotic Christology,” p. 15.

It should be clear that the modified kenotic proposal under review is forthright in its affirmation of the traditional doctrine of the two natures of Christ. Whereas some of the earlier kenotic Christology shows evidence of an ambivalence toward the traditional doctrine, the proponents of the contemporary proposal do not see the kenotic theory as an alternative to the traditional doctrine but as an explanation or interpretation of the classic doctrine. It should also be noted that these points distinguish such a proposal from the important work of David Brown. According to Brown, the kenotic model (KM) is to be seen in contrast to the two natures Christology (TNC), not as an explanation or even a variation of it. He argues that KM involves a “change of substance” in the Son.¹⁴² He is convinced that KM’s understanding of the attributes is “straightforward:”

All one need say is that divine attributes apply exclusively before the Incarnation, human attributes exclusively to the period of the Incarnation and divine attributes again exclusively to the post-Incarnation period, and both divine and human predicates to the one continuing person who is the subject of all these experiences, when no temporal segment is indicated.¹⁴³

Brown concludes that the proponent of KM must be prepared to admit that “there was a time when God the Son was not,”¹⁴⁴ but the proponents of the modified kenotic proposal will admit no such thing. Their understanding of the divine attributes might not be nearly so ‘straightforward’ as this, but they are exercised to hold to the traditional doctrine of the two natures of Christ. And they are convinced that it is their version of kenotic Christology that allows them to do so in a way that is consonant with the biblical witness.

¹⁴² David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1985), p. 256.

¹⁴³ David Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, p. 257. This, of course, is the appropriate target of the charges of such critics of kenotic Christology as Richard Swinburne and Donald MacLeod. Cf. Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 233 and Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 205-220.

¹⁴⁴ David Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, p. 257.

Because the kenotic theory has been subjected to what Davis calls “ridiculous and bizarre criticisms,” the proponents of the modified proposal take pains to distinguish it from “many theological aberrations.”¹⁴⁵ It is not, as Davis points out, “a theory that so qualifies the divinity of Christ that it becomes part of his humanity,” nor does it “make Jesus Christ a kind of demigod by enlarging his humanity with a few divine properties.”¹⁴⁶ Nor does it “imply that the Logos, shorn of many of its divine attributes in the incarnation, is temporarily excluded from the Trinity.”¹⁴⁷ The advocates of the modified kenotic model also deny that there is any necessary connection with denials that Jesus really performed miracles.¹⁴⁸ Davis also denies that there is any necessary connection with “affirming pantheistically that God and human beings are different forms of the same thing or at least are not very different, claiming that we too, like Jesus, can be incarnations of God or insisting that women should be subordinate to men.”¹⁴⁹ Nor is kenotic Christology to be confused with the movement known as kenotic theism,¹⁵⁰ for while some of the proponents of kenotic Christology are sympathetic to kenotic theism, they are quick to point out that there is no necessary connection between the two theological proposals.

¹⁴⁵ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?,” p. 54.

¹⁴⁶ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 54.

¹⁴⁷ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 54.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 249 and Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” forthcoming, p. 2. This paper was presented at a Calvin College Seminar in Christian Scholarship on kenotic Christology, May 2002.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ See John Polkinghorne (ed.), *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).

In this section I have pointed out some significant areas of continuity and discontinuity between the earlier kenotic models and what I shall now call Modified Kenotic Christology (MKC). I have also noted that MKC should not be confused with some other prominent movements in theology. Without attempting to be exhaustive, I have highlighted some of the more important features of MKC when compared with other models. Along the way, I have offered a brief indication of some of the factors that motivate the advocates of MKC. It is to a more extended look at these factors that I now turn.

MAJOR MOTIVATING FACTORS – AN OVERVIEW

The proponents and defenders of MKC are straightforward about the motivations for their proposal. MKC is attractive to its proponents because it is understood as offering a way to “remain faithful to both Chalcedonian orthodoxy and biblical claims about Jesus Christ,”¹⁵¹ because it holds promise of a response to the Hickian-type charges of incoherence, and because it has great “religious power and meaning.”¹⁵²

Fidelity to Scripture

First and foremost, it should be noted that MKC takes seriously the biblical witness to the full divinity and the full humanity of Christ. The proponents of MKC do not argue that Scripture *demand*s a kenotic doctrine of the incarnation; they do not

¹⁵¹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Kenotic Christology and the Divine Attributes,” p. 41.

¹⁵² C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 249.

believe that it is “explicitly taught in Scripture” (nor would they expect it to be).¹⁵³ But they do affirm the following:

- (a) There is ample “scriptural permission” for MKC;¹⁵⁴
- (b) MKC allows for a coherent reading of the biblical texts, one which gives due consideration both to the true divinity and the true humanity of Jesus Christ;
- (c) MKC further provides a reading of the biblical texts that also allows for fidelity to Chalcedonian orthodoxy;
- (d) MKC may be suggested by various passages of Scripture (even if it is not demanded by them).

The proponents of MKC draw inspiration from the classic kenosis passage (Philippians 2:6-11), but they do not base their model of the incarnation upon it. As Davis summarizes this view, whether or not Philippians 2 is pre-Pauline and/or a hymn, they agree that it is a “unified text” that “reflects the beliefs of the very young church and contains a ‘high’ Christology.”¹⁵⁵ But they also recognize that the text of Philippians 2 is what Davis calls “an exegetical and especially a lexical minefield.”¹⁵⁶ And at any rate, the issue of specific interest to MKC – “whether in the incarnation the Logos ‘emptied’ himself of some of the properties that God normally has – does not appear to be answered by exegetical considerations alone.”¹⁵⁷ They conclude that MKC is not ruled out by Philippians 2. On the contrary, they believe that MKC coheres nicely with the

¹⁵³ So says Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 20.

¹⁵⁴ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 20.

¹⁵⁵ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 21.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 21.

¹⁵⁷ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 22.

Christology of Philippians 2.¹⁵⁸ Something like MKC may even be suggested by it. The proponents of MKC are also convinced that their view of the incarnation fits well with Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 8:9; 2 Corinthians 12:9 and Hebrews 2:9,17.¹⁵⁹ They are confident that the prayer of Jesus in John 17:4-5 (where it is evident that Jesus once had divine glory with the Father, then did not possess it at the time of the prayer and looked forward to receiving it once again) lends support to MKC.¹⁶⁰

The proponents of MKC are convinced that the orthodox tradition is correct in insisting that the New Testament teaches the true divinity of Jesus Christ. Davis presents a "two stage argument" for this conclusion.¹⁶¹ The first stage points out that the worship of Jesus "was a very ancient phenomenon for the Christian community;" here Davis argues that this "is a fact about early Christian history that is becoming clearer and clearer, even if radical methods of criticism are employed."¹⁶² Davis notes that prayers were addressed to Jesus "from the earliest times" (1 Corinthians 16:22; 2 Corinthians 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; 3:5,16; Acts 1:24; 7:59-60).¹⁶³ He demonstrates that doxologies (2 Timothy 4:18; 2 Peter 3:18; Revelation 1:5-6, 13; 7:10; Romans 16:27; 2 Corinthians 1:20) as well as hymns of praise (Philippians 2:6-11;

¹⁵⁸ Gordon D. Fee provides exegetical argumentation in support of this conclusion, e.g. "The New Testament and *Kenosis* Christology," forthcoming, p. 16. This paper was presented at a Calvin College Seminar in Christian Scholarship conference on kenotic Christology, May 2002.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 130 and "Is Kenosis Orthodox?," p. 23.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 130, "Is Kenosis Orthodox?," p. 23 and Ronald J. Feenstra, "Kenotic Christology and the Divine Attributes," p. 20.

¹⁶¹ E.g. Stephen T. Davis, "Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?" in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O'Collins, SJ, *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 234.

¹⁶² Stephen T. Davis, "Was Jesus?" p. 234.

¹⁶³ Stephen T. Davis, "Was Jesus?" p. 235.

1 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) were addressed to Christ.¹⁶⁴ Davis also points out that “in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 Paul accepts the classic *Shema* of Judaism (Deuteronomy 6:4), but interprets the monotheism of the Christian community as including the lordship of Jesus.”¹⁶⁵ And after noting that “in the book of Revelation, Jesus is considered worthy of divine worship because worship of Jesus can be included in worship of the one God (Revelation 5:8-12), he concludes that “worship of Jesus *was* worship (not of a competitor to God but) of God.”¹⁶⁶

The next stage of Davis’ argument follows and extends his earlier work on the subject. He offers five “sub-arguments” for a “cumulative case” that Jesus actually taught his own divinity, even if implicitly.¹⁶⁷ Davis argues first that Jesus “assumed for himself the divine prerogative to forgive sins (see Mark 2:5, 10).”¹⁶⁸ Davis is aware that such an interpretation of this passage is rejected by John Hick. But he points out that the violent reaction of the scribes to the actions of Jesus “belies Hick’s interpretation of such texts” (as Mark 2:1-12), and he sees this as a reason to understand that Jesus thought that he was divine.¹⁶⁹ Davis also discusses Jesus’ use of the word *Abba* in relation to his Father. He recognizes that the significance of this is hotly disputed (e.g., John Hick and James Barr vs. Gordon D. Fee and Ben Witherington III).¹⁷⁰ But he is convinced that this

¹⁶⁴ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus?” p. 235.

¹⁶⁵ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus?” p. 235.

¹⁶⁶ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus?” p. 235.

¹⁶⁷ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus?” p. 240. Cf. Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus: Savior or Guru?”, pp. 47-48.

¹⁶⁸ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus?” p. 240.

¹⁶⁹ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus?” p. 241.

¹⁷⁰ See John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, p. 31 and James Barr, “Abba Isn’t Daddy,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1988): 28-47, “Abba, Father,” *Theology* 91 (1988): 173-179 for opposition to the

shows a consciousness on the part of Jesus “of a unique position in relation to God,” and on the basis of this “intimate, almost blasphemous way Jesus addressed God” he concludes that “Jesus very probably thought of himself as God’s special son.”¹⁷¹

Davis believes that “Jesus spoke with authority” in an unprecedented way. Jesus seemed to speak as God (rather than merely on behalf of God) in correcting Mosaic teaching about divorce in the Sermon on the Mount (e.g. Matthew 5:31-32; Mark 10:2-12). Davis concludes that this authoritative teaching leads us to believe “Jesus did not think of himself as just another prophetic spokesperson for God; he spoke as if he were divine.”¹⁷²

As a fourth consideration, Davis also notes that Jesus made statements that the religious leaders of his day understood as blasphemy. These statements are not only in the Johannine corpus; they are also found in the Synoptics (e.g. Mark 14:61-62). They lead Davis to conclude that “Jesus seems to be claiming to be the Son of God in a unique and exclusive sense, the only true and authoritative revelation of the Father.”¹⁷³

Finally, Davis argues that Jesus made “two dramatic claims” about how he relates to us and God: “first, that our relationship to him would determine our final status before God; second, that he himself would be the judge of all human beings at the end of

view espoused by Davis. Davis is convinced that Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), pp. 408-412 and Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 215-221 have offered strong support for the position he takes.

¹⁷¹ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad or God?”, p. 241.

¹⁷² Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus?” p. 242.

¹⁷³ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus?” p. 243. In his earlier “Jesus: Savior or Guru?” Davis also argues from passages such as Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 5:18; 10:30-36; 14:9.

history.”¹⁷⁴ Davis concludes, on the basis of these passages, that Jesus understood himself to be divine.¹⁷⁵ Davis argues that it is *possible* (on the basis of the understanding of the early church as reflected in the prayers and doxologies addressed to Jesus) that Jesus thought himself to be divine. But Davis argues more as well – he argues that Jesus *actually* did teach that he was divine.

On the basis of these conclusions, as well as the more explicit New Testament affirmations of the divine Sonship and incarnation (Davis mentions John 1:1, 18; 20:28, 31; Romans 1:3-4; 8:3; Galatians 4:4; Colossians 1:15-19; 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Hebrews 1:8; Titus 2:13 and 1 John 5:20), Davis concludes that the New Testament clearly teaches the incarnation of the Son of God.¹⁷⁶

The proponents of MKC also take the New Testament depiction of the humanity of Christ with utter seriousness. Typical is the statement of Davis:

The incarnation means first that Jesus Christ is a *person*, a real, living human person. Jesus Christ is not an idea, an ideal, an emanation from God, a divine influence, a principle, a lifestyle, or an ethical principle. These notions are ruled out because what God became was a man (“and the word became flesh and dwelt among us”)... Jesus Christ was a human being. He had a human body; he got hungry and thirsty and tired (John 4:6); he was tempted (Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 4:15); he wept when a friend died (John 11:35); he was not omniscient, expressing at one time ignorance of who had touched his garment (Mark 5:30)

¹⁷⁴ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus?” p. 243.

¹⁷⁵ N.T. Wright argues forcefully against those who claim that it would have been impossible for a first century Jew to think thus. See his *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), “The Divinity of Jesus,” in Marcus J. Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998) and especially “Jesus’ Self-Understanding” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ, *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 47-61.

¹⁷⁶ See Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus: Savior or Guru?,” pp. 48-49. Gordon Fee offers a strong argument (contra James D.G. Dunn) to the conclusion that the texts from the Pauline corpus support a “high” Christology. See his “St. Paul and the Incarnation” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ, *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 62-92.

and at another time of the date of the parousia (Mark 13:32); lastly, he died (Mark 15:36).¹⁷⁷

The proponents of MKC are convinced that the entirety of the New Testament bears witness to the humanity of Christ. And although they almost take the biblical witness to Christ's humanity for granted, they do place special significance on some passages. There is ample Pauline witness to the humanity of Christ (e.g. Romans 1:3-4; 5; 8:3; 9:5; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 2:9; 4:6; 10:1; 13:4; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:7-8; 1 Timothy 2:5; 3:16).¹⁷⁸ There is also, as Gordon D. Fee notes, a clear sense of the reality and importance of the humanity of Christ in the book of Hebrews (e.g. Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9).¹⁷⁹ Fee also points out that the consistent Lukan witness to the life and ministry of Jesus as "under the guidance and empowering of the Holy Spirit" makes the Lukan narrative "the most thoroughgoing in terms of portraying a 'kenotic' Jesus."¹⁸⁰

The proponents of MKC pay special attention to the Gospel portraits of Jesus. They do not shy away from what the tradition has sometimes regarded as problematic passages – instead they embrace these passages and work to show that MKC has the resources to account for them. Chief among these passages are those that are honest and forthright about the growth, ignorance, weakness and other limitations of Jesus. And so MKC accepts as straightforward the report of Luke that Jesus increased in knowledge and wisdom (Luke 2:52). MKC is not embarrassed by the admission of Jesus that he did not

¹⁷⁷ Stephen T. Davis, "Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?," p. 47.

¹⁷⁸ Of course the inclusion of the passages from 1 Timothy as Pauline is controverted. But as Gordon D. Fee points out, "these two passages reflect what is clearly Pauline elsewhere." Gordon D. Fee, "St. Paul and the Incarnation," p. 90.

¹⁷⁹ Gordon D. Fee, "The New Testament and *Kenosis* Christology," pp. 19-20.

¹⁸⁰ Gordon D. Fee, "The New Testament and *Kenosis* Christology," p. 22.

know time of the end of the age (Mark 13:32). And they hear the desperate cry of Jesus during the time of his passion (“take this cup from me... yet not my will, but yours”) as the real prayer of someone in time of need. The advocates of MKC are convinced that theirs is a model of the incarnation that can take these seriously; they believe that MKC allows for a realistic and straightforward interpretation of these types of passages in a way that also coheres with Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

It is instructive to note that it is precisely at this point – fidelity to the biblical data – that MKC’s advocates find it so attractive. The proponents of MKC do not deny that Morris offers a coherent account of the incarnation; they most certainly are not hostile to his “two minds” model of the incarnation.¹⁸¹ But when it comes to dealing with these biblical accounts (and especially those portraying the ignorance of Jesus), they think that MKC is superior to the “two minds” model. They do not deny that Morris’ approach can account for these passages, but they are dissatisfied with its resources and prefer the results of applying MKC. When faced with the biblical accounts of the ignorance of Jesus (e.g., Mark 13:32), Morris can say that Jesus is saying that he “does not know the day or the hour” according to his human mind. But, as the advocates of MKC point out, this does not adequately answer the question of what the one human-divine *person* knows. The answer to that question must be, if the divine mind truly is omniscient, that the person of the incarnate Son *does* know the day and the hour (at least in some not insignificant sense). In the words of Evans, “a kenotic theory can handle this data in a more natural and convincing manner than does a two minds theory.”¹⁸² MKC allows for

¹⁸¹ E.g. C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 251 and *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History*, pp. 128-132, 135.

¹⁸² C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 251.

a more intuitively acceptable reading of the biblical text, says its defenders, and for that reason is preferable to the “two minds” model of Morris (and those like Morris’).

In summary, it is clear that the advocates of MKC think that it is permitted by Scripture – even if it is underdetermined by Scripture, there are no exegetical reasons to reject it. Even if it is not *explicitly* taught in Scripture, the witness and teaching of the New Testament leaves plenty of room for it. Furthermore, they believe that several biblical passages are suggestive of MKC, even if it is not plainly taught. They also hold that MKC allows for a coherent and convincing reading of the biblical texts, one which takes seriously both the true humanity and true divinity of Christ while not violating the standards of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. For these reasons, they are attracted to MKC.

Apologetic Relevance

The proponents of MKC are concerned to meet the charge that the traditional doctrine of the incarnation is incoherent, and they think that MKC has the resources to do just that. They know that they face a multi-pronged challenge, for they are committed to meeting this charge of incoherence in a way that does not compromise traditional orthodoxy. They also realize that part of the apologetic challenge is meeting the charge of incoherence with a response that is not only broadly logically possible but also plausible and religiously meaningful.

The earlier work in MKC shows a strong emphasis on the importance of meeting the charge of incoherence. For instance, Davis interprets Hick’s comments in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (“to say, without explanation, that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that this circle... is also a square”)¹⁸³ as a

¹⁸³ John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, p. 178.

statement that the incarnation is a logical impossibility and therefore necessarily false, and he works to defend the traditional doctrine by means of MKC.¹⁸⁴ Later he concludes that Hick's assertion is not only "remarkably crude" but also wrong.¹⁸⁵ Hick no longer makes or defends such criticisms of the traditional doctrine,¹⁸⁶ and the advocates of MKC are now turning their attention to other important issues and aspects of the model. They are convinced that their view offers a coherent account of the traditional doctrine, and the fact that the incoherence charge no longer holds court is testimony to the coherence of MKC and other defenses.

Traditional Orthodoxy

The defenders of MKC are now paying more attention to the issue of the orthodoxy of their model than they did in the past. But it is important to note that they have always been concerned with the issue of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. The first paragraph of Davis' earliest essay opens with a repetition of the statement of Chalcedon,¹⁸⁷ as does Feenstra's earliest published work on the subject.¹⁸⁸ As Feenstra puts it, "this definition has served for over 1500 years as the standard of christological orthodoxy within the Christian church."¹⁸⁹ Suffice it to say that the defenders of MKC are exercised to formulate the kenotic model in a way that conforms to traditional orthodoxy, and they have attempted to do so from the beginning. Whether or not they are

¹⁸⁴ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 119.

¹⁸⁵ Stephen T. Davis, "Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?" p. 50.

¹⁸⁶ See John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, pp. 3-4 for his clarification and a preview of his revised criticisms of the traditional doctrine.

¹⁸⁷ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 118.

¹⁸⁸ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," p. 128.

¹⁸⁹ Ronald J. Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," p. 128.

finally successful is the subject of this study, but it should be clear from the outset that this is one of their goals; the conviction that MKC offers an model of the incarnation that is at once both coherent and orthodox drives the project forward.

Again, a comparison with the work of Morris is helpful. The proponents of MKC do not deny that Morris' view offers a coherent account, nor do they argue that his account flaunts traditional orthodoxy in some way. As noted earlier, they are sympathetic to his approach. But they think that his account lacks plausibility. To many (if not most or even all) people, talk of one person possessing two minds is counterintuitive at best, and it does not help Morris' case that his only examples are either of dysfunctional cases or artificial intelligence.¹⁹⁰ They are convinced that MKC has more plausibility and thus more apologetic value than does the "two minds" model of Morris.

Religious Appeal

For Evans, the "first and most powerful source of appeal" is the "great religious power and meaning that is intrinsic to the idea of a God who sacrifices and suffers with and on behalf of his creatures."¹⁹¹ Davis understands the purposes of the incarnation to be threefold. First, the incarnation was designed to "show us what God is like, especially that God is loving."¹⁹² He also believes that the "incarnation was designed to make it possible for us to come to know God; apart from Jesus Christ... people can have only a hazy knowledge of God."¹⁹³ Finally, the incarnation "was designed to defeat all the

¹⁹⁰ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, pp. 103-107.

¹⁹¹ C. Stephen Evans, "The Self-Emptying of Love," p. 249.

¹⁹² Stephen T. Davis, "Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?," p. 47.

¹⁹³ Stephen T. Davis, "Jesus Christ," p. 47.

forces in the world that are God's enemies."¹⁹⁴ And while MKC allows for an adequate account of the fulfillment of the last two purposes, it performs magnificently with regard to the first. As Evans summarizes it, "a God who empties himself out of love for human beings, who recklessly as it were gives up divine privileges to endure all the hard realities of human life, is a God whose love is credible and inspires love in return."¹⁹⁵ While their expressions of it might not be as precise as are their expressions of other issues and sentiments, the proponents of MKC are convinced that their model of kenotic Christology allows offers deep religious meaning.

STARTING POINTS

The proponents of MKC are honest and forthright concerning the theological and metaphysical convictions to which they adhere and which influence and in many ways structure their work. Looking first at the theological and then at the metaphysical, in this section I will draw attention to some of the assumptions and commitments which are most important for this study.

Religious and Theological Convictions

First of all, it should be noted that the proponents of MKC all believe that Scripture adequately contains and preserves divine revelation.¹⁹⁶ The Bible is not merely a historically located book of interesting religious insight and reflection, much less is it

¹⁹⁴ Stephen T. Davis, "Jesus Christ," p. 47.

¹⁹⁵ C. Stephen Evans, "The Self-Emptying of Love," p. 249.

¹⁹⁶ E.g. Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977) and C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*.

just an ancient collection of religious mythology.¹⁹⁷ Rather, Holy Scripture is the “Word of God” in a real and important sense. This means that Scripture is authoritative for Christian belief and life – indeed it is authoritative in a way that other sources of religious truth are not. As Davis puts it,

Scripture is our source of religious truth above all other sources, our norm and guide to religious truth above all other norms and guides. In other words, all other sources of theological truth are subordinate to Scripture and are to be tested by Scripture. Scripture has the last word, the final say. There may be other criteria of religious truth – e.g. tradition, reason, experience – but Scripture is the final test, the sure norm, the infallible rule of what we are to believe. When it is correctly interpreted, whatever Scripture says, goes.¹⁹⁸

MKC’s advocates affirm the complete trustworthiness and authority of Scripture, but they do not deny that historical-critical study of the Bible has some value. Evans does not wish to “attack the value of historical biblical scholarship,”¹⁹⁹ and he offers advice on how the Christian who holds to traditional beliefs might interact with and profit from historical-critical scholarship.²⁰⁰ Feenstra agrees with Peter Van Inwagen that the Christian believer has grounds for accepting the claims of Scripture that are independent of critical studies (grounds that are not undermined by critical studies). But he also challenges Van Inwagen’s bold and vigorous argument for the wholesale rejection of the value of critical studies. Contra Van Inwagen, he argues that critical studies that “work out of basic Christian presuppositions about the nature and purpose of the New Testament” might “advance the theological task and deeply enrich the life of the

¹⁹⁷ On mythology and the truth of the Christian revelation (especially as it relates to the incarnation), see C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, pp. 47-79.

¹⁹⁸ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” p. 16.

¹⁹⁹ C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, pp. viii-ix.

²⁰⁰ C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, pp. 302-320.

Church.”²⁰¹ Davis also makes it clear that he places value on the historical-critical study of the New Testament; his view is “that the historical-critical study of the Bible is to be strongly encouraged.”²⁰²

However, the defenders of MKC deny any sort of Babylonian captivity of theology to critical biblical studies. They strongly resist the hegemony of modern biblical studies. Davis lists five reasons why he is “suspicious of many of the more radical conclusions some historical-critical scholars are reaching about the Gospels,”²⁰³ and he states that he accepts “as accurate the basic New Testament picture of Jesus” and “trusts the Gospels as reliable witnesses to Jesus.”²⁰⁴ Evans points out that the questionable literary and philosophical assumptions make the “conclusions” of the historical-critical guild of biblical scholarship suspect, and he argues forcefully that the historical-critical principles of Ernst Troeltsch and Van Harvey are problematic.²⁰⁵ Evans argues further that belief in the incarnation can be properly basic and warranted if produced by the work of the Holy Spirit, and he looks at ways that “evidentialist” and “Reformed epistemological” accounts of religious knowledge can be put together.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Ronald J. Feenstra, “Critical Studies of the New Testament: Comments on the Paper of Peter VanInwagen” in Eleonore Stump and Thomas P. Flint (eds.), *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), p. 197.

²⁰² Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?,” p. 43.

²⁰³ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” pp. 43.

²⁰⁴ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 46.

²⁰⁵ C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, pp. 321-350, 184-202. Cf. C. Stephen Evans, “Empiricism, Rationalism and the Possibility of Historical Religious Knowledge” in C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal (eds.), *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993).

²⁰⁶ C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, pp. 203-301.

The proponents of MKC also confess belief that the Holy Spirit has guided the Christian Church in its interpretation of Scripture;²⁰⁷ they affirm the central doctrines of Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement as they are expressed in creedal documents.²⁰⁸ As Davis expresses it, “I confess to a strong belief that the church was led to the classical doctrine (of the incarnation) by the Holy Spirit.”²⁰⁹ Furthermore, they are reticent to move very far away from theological statements that are of such importance that they have attained “classical” status, whether or not these statements are creedal. In summary, it may safely be stated that the proponents of MKC take very seriously the theological heritage of traditional orthodoxy.

It should also be noted that the defenders of MKC readily admit that there is an irreducible element of mystery connected to the doctrine of the incarnation, and they have no desire to either deny or undermine it. Davis states that “there is no doubt that the classical doctrine is puzzling, mysterious, paradoxical. Its defenders admit as much.”²¹⁰ He also says that “there is no escaping the fact that there is paradox involved in the notion of incarnation... we will not be able to use kenosis, or any other theory, to remove all mystery from the doctrine.”²¹¹ Evans makes the same point with great eloquence:

The last thing I would want to claim is that the incarnation is unsurprising. It is a profound mystery, and I believe that Kierkegaard was right to insist that the incarnation was paradoxical, contrary to our human expectations about what God could and would do. However, I think he was also right to insist that this

²⁰⁷ E.g. Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” pp. 18-19, “Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?,” p. 43.

²⁰⁸ More specifically, they tend to be attracted to Social Trinitarianism, e.g. C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” pp. 247-248 and Stephen T. Davis, “Perichoretic Monotheism: A Defense of a Social Theory of the Trinity,” forthcoming.

²⁰⁹ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?,” p. 43.

²¹⁰ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ,” p. 49.

²¹¹ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” pp. 10-11.

paradoxicality is actually a mark of its truth: ‘comedies and novels and lies must be probable,’ but one mark of the transcendence of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is precisely something that ‘could not have arisen in any human heart.’”²¹²

The defenders of MKC celebrate rather than deny the mystery of the incarnation. This, however, does not lead them to concede that it is logically impossible or incoherent. They see MKC as a possible and helpful way to affirm that this mystery is also a reality.

Metaphysical Convictions

By this point it should be apparent that metaphysical issues play an important role in the formulation and defense of MKC. Because of their importance, I now offer an overview of some of the central issues at stake. First I will look at the MKC’s employment of some crucial distinctions drawn by Thomas V. Morris. I then offer a summary of the metaphysical commitments of the proponents of MKC regarding such issues as *nature*, *essence* and *person*.

In his important and influential *The Logic of God Incarnate*, Thomas V. Morris makes some helpful clarifications. He says that “recent work in essentialism gives us a new appreciation for the metaphysical roles a concept of a nature properly can have,”²¹³ and he employs essentialism to argue that the ascription of two natures to Christ is not incoherent. He draws an important distinction between *individual-essences* or *individual-natures* on one hand, and *kind-essences* or *kind-natures* on the other hand. An individual-essence or individual-nature is a haecceity (to use a medieval term that has

²¹² C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 272. The Kierkegaard quotation is from *Philosophical Fragments*, H.V. Hong and E.V. Hong (editors and translators), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 52.

²¹³ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 38.

enjoyed a recent revival).²¹⁴ It is “the whole set of properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for being numerically identical with *that individual*.”²¹⁵ Morris explains that “on this concept of nature, the claim that no individual can have more than one nature would stand as a necessary truth. No individual can have more than one individual-nature.”²¹⁶ Morris notes that the second notion of nature is “at least as important as this one.”²¹⁷ This second notion is that of a kind-essence or kind-nature, and Morris states that it “can be understood as constituted by a shareable set of properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for membership in a kind.”²¹⁸

Morris explains that “no individual has more than one individual nature. But of course it does not follow from this that no individual has more than one kind-nature.”²¹⁹

He relates this distinction to traditional two-natures Christology:

An individual will count as human only if it has all the properties essential to being human, the joint satisfaction of which will be sufficient for exemplifying human nature. Likewise, an individual will count as divine only if it has all the properties essential to being God, the joint satisfaction of which will suffice for having the nature of deity.²²⁰

He summarizes the “claim of orthodoxy” as being “that Jesus had all the kind-essential properties of humanity, and all the kind-essential properties of divinity, and thus existed

²¹⁴ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 38.

²¹⁵ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 38.

²¹⁶ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 38.

²¹⁷ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 38.

²¹⁸ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 39.

²¹⁹ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 40.

²²⁰ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 40.

(and continues to exist) in two natures”²²¹ while remaining one individual-nature or one person. Morris is not claiming that it is possible for just any individual to co-exemplify two or more natures. Instead, he is claiming “that because of the distinctiveness of divinity and humanity, it was possible for the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, to take on human nature while retaining his deity. The two particular natures involved, despite appearances to the contrary, allowed this unusual duality.”²²²

Morris also draws an important distinction between *common* and *essential* human properties. An essential human property is just any property that is part of the kind-essence of humanity. It is a property that must be exemplified in order to count as having human nature; it is a property such that an individual is of the kind-essence humanity iff she has this property. A common human property, on the other hand, is simply “one which many or most human beings have.”²²³ It may even be a universal human property (at least to some point in history), but that does not entail that it is an essential human property. For instance, Morris notes that the property of having hair is a common human property.²²⁴ Similarly, having been born on earth and not being able to run one hundred meters in less than eight seconds are common human properties. But surely we would not want to deny that someone is human simply because she lacked hair, happened to be born on a space shuttle mission or shattered the world record for sprints.

This leads Morris to his third distinction: the distinction between being *merely human* and being *fully human*. To be fully human is to exemplify the kind-essence of

²²¹ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 40.

²²² Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 40.

²²³ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 63.

²²⁴ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 63.

humanity, while to be merely human is to exemplify *only* that kind-essence. As Morris summarizes it, his point is that

The kind-nature exemplified distinctively by all human beings is that of humanity. To be a human being is to exemplify human nature. An individual is fully human just in case he fully exemplifies human nature. To be merely human is not to exemplify a kind-nature, a natural kind, distinct from that of humanity; it is rather to exemplify humanity without also exemplifying any ontologically higher kind, such as divinity.²²⁵

Morris employs these distinctions to argue that Chalcedonian Christology should not be dismissed as incoherent. To the contrary, he finds it “logically beyond reproach.”²²⁶ For “the Chalcedonian claim is not that Jesus was merely human. It is rather that he was, and is, fully human in addition to being divine.”²²⁷

The proponents of MKC are appreciative of the gains made by Morris, and they employ these distinctions in their formulation and defense of the kenotic theory. They endorse the distinction between individual-essences and kind-essences, and they agree that in the incarnation the Son is fully human without being merely human. They also are clear about the distinction between common and essential properties, but they extend Morris’ use of this distinction in a couple of ways. First, MKC is willing to entertain the notion that Morris’ distinction between common and essential *human* properties may also be extended to our understanding of the *divine* properties as well. It should be noted that MKC is not following the lead of the earlier kenotic movements here – they are not trying to divide up the divine attributes into moral and non-moral categories and then saying that the Son kept the moral attributes while emptying himself of the non-moral

²²⁵ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 66.

²²⁶ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 46.

²²⁷ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 66.

attributes.²²⁸ Instead, they simply point out that some properties normally associated with divinity (such as the property of not being embodied) are not essential to divinity. For if the incarnation is contingent (that is, if the incarnation is neither necessarily false and thus impossible nor necessarily true), then some common divine properties must not be essential to the kind-essence divinity.

Davis also offers a further clarification (one with which I suspect Morris would be in full agreement). He distinguishes between *de dicto* essential properties and *de re* essential properties. As he explains it, a *de dicto* essential property, “when lost, means that the thing that once possessed it no longer belongs to its previous natural kind.”²²⁹ A *de re* essential property, on the other hand, “when lost, means that the thing that once possessed it no longer exists.”²³⁰ If the Son of God were to lose a *de dicto* divine property in the incarnation, then he would no longer be divine. If the Son of God were to lose a *de re* divine property in the incarnation, then the Son of God would cease to exist. The important point to be made for present purposes is that on MKC’s account the Son of God loses neither *de dicto* nor *de re* divine properties in the incarnation.

It is important to recognize that MKC works with an abstract notion of a kind-nature or kind-essence. A kind-essence is the full set of properties, essential for membership, which are necessarily instantiated by any haecceity with membership in the kind. A kind-essence is thus an abstract thing and must be instantiated in or exemplified by a particular. Kind-essences do not have concrete existence on their own; they do not exist as concrete apart from instantiation by substances or haecceities. Accordingly,

²²⁸ E.g., Gottfried Thomasius, “The Person of the Mediator,” p. 73.

²²⁹ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 4.

MKC holds that the second person of the Trinity assumed the abstract human nature in the incarnation; the Son assumed the full set of properties that are necessary and sufficient for being human.²³¹ This is important to note, for many interpretations of Chalcedon operate with a concrete notion of nature (according to which, by Alvin Plantinga's lights, the Son assumed a "creature with will and intellect").²³² And since many later Christological proposals appear to assume a concretist understanding,²³³ it needs to be clear that MKC takes an abstract view of the meaning of an essence or nature.

The advocates of MKC also operate with a particular notion of *person*. They seem to work with a basically Boethian-Thomist notion of personhood: a person is an *individual substance of rational nature*. Davis holds that a person, divine, human or human and divine, is a "subsistent center of consciousness, will and action."²³⁴ He "loosely defines" a person as

²³⁰ Stephen T. Davis, "Is Kenosis Orthodox?" p. 5.

²³¹ On the difference between concrete and abstract natures in incarnation doctrine, see the discussion by Alvin Plantinga, "On Heresy, Mind and Truth," *Faith and Philosophy* 16:2 (1999): 183-185.

²³² Alvin Plantinga, "On Heresy, Mind and Truth," p. 184.

²³³ Alvin Plantinga notes that "Aquinas apparently endorses the concrete nature view," "On Heresy, Mind and Truth," p. 184. This judgment seems to be supported by Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas' Metaphysics of the Incarnation" in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O'Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 197-218. For discussion of medieval accounts of the incarnation, see Alfred J. Freddoso, "Human Nature, Potency and the Incarnation," *Faith and Philosophy* 3:1 (1986): 27-53, Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Richard Cross, "Aquinas on Nature, Hypostasis, and the Metaphysics of the Incarnation," *The Thomist* 60 (1996): 171-202, Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Metaphysics of the Incarnation in some Fourteenth-Century Franciscans," in William A. Frank and Girard J. Etzkorn (eds.), *Essays Honoring Allan B. Wolter* (St. Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute, 1985), pp. 21-57, Marilyn McCord Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature? Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999) and Christopher Hughes, *On Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas' Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

²³⁴ Stephen T. Davis, "Perichoretic Monotheism: A Defense of a Social Theory of the Trinity," forthcoming, p. 3.

A conscious purposive agent... *conscious* means that persons are things that engage in “mental” or “conscious” acts like thinking, feeling, loving, willing, believing and knowing. *Purposive* means that persons are things that have desires, intentions and aims; and they frequently set out to achieve them. *Agent* means that persons are things that have the ability to act, to do or achieve things.²³⁵

He offers favorable consideration to the possibility that persons might be moral things, things that exist in social relations and as members of linguistic communities. Davis also sets aside (or eliminates altogether) such notions as autonomy, individual rights and individualism. Davis concludes that a person “whether divine or human, is a property-bearer that is conscious, and has intellect, will and the ability to be an agent.”²³⁶ Feenstra seems favorably inclined to something like this view as well, as does Evans.²³⁷

As for the kind-essential properties of humanity, the proponents of MKC are aware that it is notoriously hard to delineate a complete list of the full set of properties.²³⁸ They are convinced that, if the doctrine of the incarnation is true, then it might have the resources to reveal to us what some of those properties are, and in any case they are resistant to rigid *a priori* notions of human nature. However, it seems that they would be in agreement with Klaus Issler and Garrett DeWeese when the latter state that the kind essential properties of humanity include but are not limited to

(a) beginning as a member of the species *Homo sapiens*

²³⁵ Stephen T. Davis, “Perichoretic Monotheism,” pp. 9-10. This seems to be very close to what Peter VanInwagen says about “person” in Trinitarian theology: “my thesis is that ‘person’ in the Creeds ought to be understood as meaning no less and no more than it does in everyday speech, provided that we understand the everyday word in its inclusive sense,” *God, Knowledge and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 263.

²³⁶ Stephen T. Davis, “Perichoretic Monotheism,” p. 10.

²³⁷ Distaste for the “two minds” seems to be at the root of Evans’ problem with Morris’ model, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” p. 251.

²³⁸ E.g. Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” p. 6.

and (b) bearing the image of God.²³⁹

With regard to the kind-essential properties of divinity, the proponents of MKC are also cautious. It should be obvious that they are not opposed to “Perfect Being Theology,” but they insist that it needs revelational control. Accordingly, they believe that the kind-essential properties of a Perfect Being would include maximal co-exemplification of great-making properties as these are consistent with an incarnation of a bearer of these properties. Surely this would include some version of (without being limited to) these attributes:

(a) Aseity

(b) Everlastingness/Eternity²⁴⁰

(c) Omnipotence²⁴¹

(d) Necessity²⁴²

(e) Immutability²⁴³

(f) Omnipresence-unless-kenotically-and-redemptively-incarnate²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Garrett DeWeese and Klaus Issler, “Is the Two-Wills/Two-Minds View of the Incarnation Coherent? A Re-examination of the Condemnation of Monothelism,” paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, 2002.

²⁴⁰ Davis goes on record as favoring everlastingness over a timeless notion of divine eternity. Cf. Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, pp. 11-24.

²⁴¹ Davis offers extended discussion of divine omnipotence in *Logic and the Nature of God*, pp. 68-85. Evans works to reconcile the doctrine of omnipotence with MKC in “The Self-Emptying of Love,” pp. 260-263.

²⁴² I am confident that the advocates of MKC would agree with Alvin Plantinga that if God exists, then God exists as a necessary being. See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

²⁴³ Davis formulates the doctrine of divine immutability in a way that is consistent with MKC in *Logic and the Nature of God*, pp. 41-51.

²⁴⁴ I am not aware that either Davis, Feenstra or Evans deals with omnipresence, but I am confident that they all affirm some version of the traditional doctrine. Depending on their views of the so-called *extra*

- (g) Omniscience-unless-kenotically-and-redemptively-incarnate²⁴⁵
- (h) Goodness/Benevolence
- (i) Truth
- (j) Righteousness
- (k) Holiness
- (l) Love.²⁴⁶

It might also include some versions of the doctrine of divine simplicity, although this is far from obvious and in any case would likely not be attractive to the proponents of MKC. Whether or not the formulations of these attributes demanded by MKC are right, acceptable or plausible is ample fodder for interesting discussion; my point here is simply that the proponents of MKC think that some version of these are kind-essential properties of divinity.

Before moving on, it should also be noted that MKC makes use of the traditional way of making Christological affirmations – it affirms that Jesus Christ has some properties *as divine* and other properties *as human*.²⁴⁷ Employing a strategy long used by the church and recently termed “reduplicative propositions” by Peter Geach,²⁴⁸ MKC distinguishes what we can say the Son *as God* can do from what the Son *as man* can do.

Calvinisticum, they may or may not be willing or able to affirm the “unless-kenotically-and-redemptively-incarnate part.

²⁴⁵ See the extended discussions by Ronald J. Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” pp. 139-142 and “Kenotic Christology and the Divine Attributes,” pp. 23-24.

²⁴⁶ As noted earlier, it is partly the ability of MKC to offer eloquent testimony to these “moral attributes,” especially divine love, that inspires its advocates, e.g. C. Stephen Evans, “The Self-Emptying of Love,” pp. 249-250.

²⁴⁷ On this see Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” p. 9-11 and “Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?,” pp. 56-57.

²⁴⁸ Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 25-28.

Davis employs the example of a person named Malan who is both mayor of the town and athletic director at a college, and he notes that activities predicated of Malan the mayor and activities predicated of Malan the AD are distinct even though the person is the same.

As Davis explains it,

In sentences such as “A as P is Q,” Geach says, we are not to think of Q as a predicate attached to the complex subject “A is P” – rather, we ought to read the sentence as “A is, as P, Q.” Thus we can sensibly say such things as “Jesus Christ is, as God, unable to die” and “Jesus Christ is, as a human being, able to die” without nonsense.²⁴⁹

This use of reduplicative propositions is beneficial to MKC in several important respects.

In this section I have highlighted some religious, theological and metaphysical issues that come into play in the exposition and analysis of MKC. I first looked at the views of the nature and use of Scripture, and I noted that the proponents of MKC evidence a deep respect for Holy Scripture as divine revelation as well as an abiding respect for the value of critical biblical studies. I then noted that the advocates of MKC also confess to a belief that the Holy Spirit guided the Christian Church in the formulation of the major creedal statements, and I pointed out the sense of mystery that its defenders maintain for the doctrine of the incarnation. Following this exercise, I brought to light some basic metaphysical issues that come into play in the statement and defense of MKC, and I outlined the position of MKC on some of these issues.

The proposal of MKC should be clear. It strives to be both coherent and orthodox as well as religiously meaningful. It seems to be a coherent position – even as ardent an opponent as John Hick appears to admit as much.²⁵⁰ But is it orthodox? Such is the

²⁴⁹ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” p. 9.

²⁵⁰ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, p. 75. This parallels his criticisms of Morris, e.g. “The Logic of God Incarnate,” *Religious Studies* 25 (1989): 409, 423.

subject of this study, but the question cannot be answered without first looking at what might make something orthodox or heterodox.

CRITERIA OF ORTHODOXY

Davis asks whether MKC might be able to count as orthodox. In his discussion, he uses the word “orthodox” to denote those beliefs that are *acceptable* for the people of God (as opposed to those positions that view something as orthodox because it is *required* for the people of God). He notes that different theological traditions have different criteria of orthodoxy. He also offers a brief survey of some of these criteria; here he looks at both the “older Catholic theory” and the “revisionist Catholic theory” as well as the Protestant view.

As a Protestant, Davis tends “toward accepting some version of” the Protestant principle “scripture alone.”²⁵¹ But he rejects the notion that Scripture is our only source of religious truth, and he finds the formulation “Scripture is our only sure guide to truth in matters of religion” to be “almost, but not quite, right.”²⁵² It is almost right because “scripture, properly interpreted, is our primary criterion or test for truth in matters of religion.”²⁵³ But it is not quite right because scripture neither tells us what scripture is, cleans up textual corruptions nor decides whose interpretation of scripture gets to count as correct and authoritative.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” p. 14.

²⁵² Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 15.

²⁵³ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 15.

²⁵⁴ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 16.

Davis argues that the authoritative interpretation of scripture “is an act of the entire Christian community, past and present.”²⁵⁵ So even though he retains commitment to the Protestant slogan “scripture alone,” he also insists that the theological tradition be taken with utmost seriousness. His preferred way of interpreting *sola scriptura* is explained in this way:

Scripture is our source of religious truth above all other sources, our norm or guide to religious truth above all other norms or guides. In other words, all other sources of theological truth are to be subordinate to scripture and are to be tested by scripture. Scripture has the last word, the final say. There may be other criteria of religious truth – e.g. tradition, reason, experience – but scripture is the final test, the sure norm, the infallible rule of what we are to believe. When it is correctly interpreted, whatever Scripture says, goes.²⁵⁶

It should be clear that Davis holds to Scripture as the ultimate and final authority, the “norming norm.” He recognizes, however, that there are various understandings or degrees of “being scriptural.” For instance, some theological claims are demanded by Scripture, some such claims are allowed by Scripture while others are ruled out of bounds by Scripture. For some theological claim, statement, doctrine or theory *p*, he analyzes five broad categories where *p* might be scriptural. These may be summarized as:

- (SA1) *p* is a consensus of the teachings of the whole of scripture (i.e., *p* is either taught or presupposed everywhere in scripture or in every text relevant to the truth or falsity of *p*);
- (SA2) *p* is either taught or presupposed in places in scripture (though perhaps not everywhere or in every relevant text), and is inconsistent with nothing that is either taught or presupposed elsewhere in scripture;
- (SA3) *p* is nowhere either explicitly taught or presupposed in scripture, but can be considered the best interpretation of the witness of the whole of scripture or of various scriptural texts taken as a whole;
- (SA4) *p* is consistent with what is either taught or presupposed in scripture (i.e., nothing in scripture contradicts *p*);

²⁵⁵ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 16.

²⁵⁶ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 16.

(SA5) some scriptural texts can be interpreted as supporting p, although other texts can also be interpreted as rejecting p.²⁵⁷

Davis' useful analysis helps make clear the aims of the proponents of MKC. They do not propose to argue that MKC is scriptural and orthodox in the sense of either (SA1) or (SA2), although of course it would be convenient for them if some biblical exegetes were to advance convincing arguments that MKC is biblical according to (SA2) or (better yet) (SA1). But they do not argue for this, nor do they think that it is incumbent upon them to do so. Instead, the defenders of MKC argue that it has scriptural authority in the sense of (SA4) or (more optimistically) (SA3). They believe that MKC is orthodox because it is biblical in this way.

The defenders of MKC also take seriously the theological tradition. As noted earlier, Davis and Feenstra begin their essays with references to Chalcedon; it is obvious that they view the creedal formulations of Nicea and Chalcedon as non-negotiables in theology. Davis confesses to belief that the church "was led to the classical doctrine by the Holy Spirit,"²⁵⁸ and he argues for an "important place in theology for tradition."²⁵⁹ He laments the Protestant tendency (both left and right) to pay insufficient attention to the great tradition of Christian theological reflection. His own view may be said to be broadly representative of the proponents of MKC:

In my view, tradition remains indispensable in interpreting scripture... all who do serious exegesis or theology must be knowledgeable about the history of Christian thought and practice... tradition is necessary for interpreting scripture.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Stephen T. Davis, "Is Kenosis Orthodox?" p. 17.

²⁵⁸ Stephen T. Davis, "Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?," p. 43.

²⁵⁹ Stephen T. Davis, "Is Kenosis Orthodox?," p. 17.

²⁶⁰ Stephen T. Davis, "Is Kenosis Orthodox?" pp. 18-19. Davis goes on to say that scripture takes priority over tradition, for it is "our highest source and norm of religious truth."

The defenders of MKC take the creedal statements of Nicea and Chalcedon as normative for orthodox Christology. But it should be noted at this point that, in agreement with Sarah Coakley²⁶¹ (who follows Paul D. Jones and Richard Norris),²⁶² Davis understands the great ecumenical creeds to be setting guidelines or boundaries rather than offering full explanations.²⁶³ This understanding of the creedal statements makes space for models of the incarnation that do not agree with all traditional interpretations of those statements. This does not, however, so reduce the limits imposed by the creeds that they are then open to the very heretical views that they were invoked to correct (Davis denies that MKC has anything to do with Apollinarianism, Eutychianism or extreme Nestorianism).²⁶⁴ Recognizing that the ecumenical creeds set limits and guidelines merely allows the adherents of the creedal faith to interpret and seek to understand this faith in ways that are consistent with it.

In conclusion, we can see that for MKC to count as orthodox, it must be biblical (at least in the sense of (SA4) or (SA3)) and it must not violate the conclusions of the christological tradition as these are expressed in the ecumenical creeds and confessions of the Christian faith. Of course, the critic of MKC may disagree with these standards of orthodoxy – she is free to insist upon biblical authority in the sense of (SA2) or even

²⁶¹ Sarah Coakley, “What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian ‘Definition’” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 143-163.

²⁶² Richard A. Norris, “Chalcedon Revisited: A Historical and Theological Reflection” in Bradley Nassif (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), pp. 140-158.

²⁶³ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” p. 24.

²⁶⁴ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 26.

(SA1) or to demand agreement with all, most or some of the major theologians of the Christian tradition. But the critic of MKC who takes the first of these routes should be prepared to admit that many Christian doctrines are arguably biblical only in the sense of (SA3). And the critic who opts for the second route should be ready to deal with the fact that there are rival interpretations of the orthodox pronouncements among the major theologians of the Christian tradition.²⁶⁵ For the purposes of this study, adopting the understanding of orthodoxy that is offered by Davis seems to me to have several advantages. First, it avoids creating any artificial guidelines that the advocates of MKC might simply dismiss as arbitrary. It also works hard to capture what I take to be essential for Christian orthodoxy – something is orthodox if and only if it is in agreement with Holy Scripture as this Scripture has been understood by the vast “cloud of witnesses” of the Christian faith. Because I agree that Scripture alone is the final authority and that it needs the interpretation of the believing community (both past and present) as that community has been guided by the Holy Spirit, I accept the general outlines of Davis’ understanding of orthodoxy.

In this chapter I have offered an overview of MKC and some relevant issues. By reviewing some recent work by C. Stephen Evans, Ronald J. Feenstra and Stephen T. Davis, I offered a summative statement of what MKC is. Because MKC is likely to be confused with its predecessors, I then gave an outline of some important areas of continuity and discontinuity of MKC with earlier kenotic theories. Following this, I highlighted what I take to be the major motivating factors for Evans, Davis and Feenstra. I then focused attention on some important theological, metaphysical and logical issues.

²⁶⁵ E.g., the plethora of medieval interpretations of Chalcedonian Christology. For detailed analysis of some of these, see Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Aquinas to Duns Scotus* and

Finally, I looked at what it might take for MKC to count as orthodox. Davis, Evans and Feenstra are convinced that MKC is orthodox by biblical and historical standards. But is it? To this point they have not provided a close investigation of this question. It is to the issue of orthodoxy that I now turn.

Chapter Three: Modified Kenotic Christology, the *Homoousion* and Holy Scripture

In this chapter I will begin to take a close look at what might be the most obvious problem for modified kenotic Christology (MKC) – the charge that it violates the *homoousion* principle. Here I take the first of several steps toward the investigation of this issue. I propose to examine how well MKC is able to account for what the pro-Nicene patristic theologians described as one of the reasons for which they insisted on this admittedly non-scriptural term. These pro-Nicene patristic theologians said that they employed and defended the *homoousion* statement because it captured the *intention* of Holy Scripture – the “double *homoousion*” of Jesus Christ both with us and with the Father is able to express both the full humanity and the full divinity of Christ.¹ So the first step in this investigation is to explore MKC’s ability to handle two important sets of New Testament texts:

- (a) those texts which the church traditionally has taken to reveal or emphasize the full and complete divinity of Christ and
- (b) those texts which the church traditionally has taken to reveal or emphasize the full and complete humanity of Christ.

Here it will be argued that MKC performs admirably well with regard to the scriptural witness to the humanity of Christ. I will argue as well that MKC does not obviously fail to account for the biblical texts which point to the divinity of Christ – unless it fails to account for the divinity in some other way, MKC does not have a problem here.

¹ On the “double *homoousion*” (its patristic development and relevance), see Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), pp. 207-210 and Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp. 149-153.

Accordingly, I first shall look at MKC's relation to what the church has traditionally taken to be the biblical witness to the divinity of Christ. Here I will look at those passages that have been understood to show that Jesus Christ performs the works of God. I shall then turn attention to the scriptural witness to the prayers to and worship of Jesus in the early church. Following this I will explore MKC's relation to those biblical passages that have been understood to refer to the pre-existence of Christ. Finally, I will investigate MKC's ability to deal with those passages that portray Jesus as having equality and unity with the Father, and I will conclude with a look at those passages that call him "God." In each case I will also show (with reference to some relevant patristic theologians) that this is indeed a traditional way of reading these passages.

I shall then explore MKC's relation to the biblical witness to the humanity of Christ. Here I will look at the New Testament witness to the full humanity of Jesus as it appears not only in the Gospels but also in Pauline theology and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. I will focus attention on the biblical witness to the growth, ignorance and other limitations in Jesus, and I will argue that MKC offers an account of these passages that is both plausible and coherent with Scripture.

This is, of course, an approach to Scripture that is basically pre-critical. The pre-critical approach taken in the first sections of this chapter should not be understood to imply that the proponents of MKC are exclusively pre-critical in their work. To the contrary, we have seen that they affirm rather than deny the value of historical-critical biblical study.² But since the fundamental issues of Christological orthodoxy were

² E.g. C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. viii-ix, 302-320, "Methodological Naturalism in Historical Biblical Scholarship" in Carey C. Newman (ed.), *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N.T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), pp.

settled pre-critically, it seems that an investigation of the orthodoxy of MKC should begin pre-critically. Following this, I will summarize the conclusions of some recent critical arguments to the conclusion that Jesus was worshipped in the early church, that Jesus claimed to be divine and that the New Testament displays the historical Jesus as the preexistent Son of God.

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

Several kinds of biblical texts played an important role in the development of (what came to be) the orthodox position on the person of Jesus Christ. Most notably, these include those passages that speak of Jesus Christ performing the works of God, those which refer to the prayers to and worship of Jesus in the early church and those that point to the pre-existence of Christ. Of course, those that either portray Jesus as having equality and unity with God or explicitly call him “God” also were seen as very important.

Jesus Christ and the Works of God

The New Testament depictions of the person of the Son as active in creation have played a key role in the traditional argumentation for the divinity of Jesus Christ. Creation was recognized in the early church as the exclusive act of God, and the NT passages that portray Jesus as the active agent of creation were formative. Of particular importance was John 1:3 “though him all things were made; without him nothing was

180-205, Ronald J. Feenstra, “Critical Studies and the New Testament: Comments of the Paper of Peter VanInwagen” in Eleonore Stump and Thomas P. Flint (eds.), *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), p. 197 and Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru?” in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Jesus: A Debate on Christology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 43.

made that has been made.” Athanasius,³ Ambrose,⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem,⁵ Gregory Nazianzen,⁶ Gregory Nyssen⁷ and Hilary of Poitiers⁸ all argued from this passage to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is divine. Colossians 1:16-17 was also central to the understanding that Jesus Christ is the Creator,

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

³ E.g. Athanasius, *Against the Heathen*, III.41-42, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, volume 4 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), pp. 26-27 and *On the Incarnation of the Word* 3, p. 37, *The Deposition of Arius*, p. 70, *On Luke 10:22*, p. 87-88, *Defense of the Nicene Definition* IV.13, p. 158, *On the Opinion of Dionysius* 2, p. 176, *To the Bishops of Egypt* 13, p. 230, *Discourse I Against the Arians* IV.13, p. 314, VI.19, p. 317, XIII.58, p. 339, *Discourse II Against the Arians* XIV.5, p. 351, XVII.24, p. 361, XVIII.35, p. 367, XVIII.39, p. 369, XIX.50, 376, XXI.71, p. 387, XXII.80, p. 392, XXII.82, p. 393, *Councils of Arminium and Seleucia* 48, p. 476.

⁴ E.g. Ambrose, *Of the Holy Spirit* II.27, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, volume 10 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 97, *Of the Christian Faith Book I*, II.13, p. 203, XIV.88, p. 216, *Of the Christian Faith Book IV*, IV.46, p. 268, XI.140, p. 280.

⁵ E.g. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, VI.9, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Gregory Nazianzen* volume 7 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 35, XI.12, p. 67, XI.21, p. 70.

⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, *Letter to Cleodnius the Priest Against Apollinarius* in *A Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Gregory Nazianzen* volume 7 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 440.

⁷ Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book I*, 20, in *A Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.* volume 5 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 58, 24, p. 66, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 7, p. 111-112, 9, p. 116, *Against Eunomius Book III*, 1, p. 136, 2, p. 139, *On the Holy Spirit, Against the Followers of Macedonius*, p. 319.

⁸ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book II*, 22 in *A Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *St. Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus* volume 9 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 58, *On the Trinity Book XII* 12, p. 221, 56, p. 233.

Again, Athanasius,⁹ Ambrose,¹⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem,¹¹ Gregory Nyssen¹² and Hilary¹³ all found this passage to be persuasive. Additionally, as we can see in the thought of Ambrose¹⁴ and Cyril,¹⁵ Hebrews 1:10 (“in the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands”) was interpreted in support of the view that the Son is the Creator of all that exists that is not God.

Hebrews 1:3 says that “the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” Athanasius,¹⁶ Ambrose,¹⁷ Gregory Nazianzen¹⁸ and Gregory Nyssen¹⁹ all took this to refer to the

⁹ Athanasius, *Against the Heathen*, III.41, p. 26, *Statement of Faith*, 3, p. 85, *On the Opinion of Dionysius*, p. 176, *Discourse Against the Arians Book II*, XVIII.31, p. 364, XIX.45, p. 373, XIX.49, p. 375, XIX.51, p. 376, XXI.62-63, pp. 382-383, *To the Bishops of Africa: Letter of the Ninety Bishops of Egypt and Libya Including Athanasius*, 4, p. 491.

¹⁰ Ambrose, *Of the Holy Spirit Book I*, III.50-51, p. 99-100, *Of the Holy Spirit Book III*, XI.84, p. 147, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, 3, p. 223, V.40, p. 228, *Of the Christian Faith Book III*, VII.46, p. 249, *Of the Christian Faith Book IV*, IX.100, p. 275.

¹¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures IV*, I.4, p. 20, I.16, p. 23, *Catechetical Lectures XI*, 21, p. 70 and 24, p. 71.

¹² Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book I*, 23, p. 63-64, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 6, p. 108, 14, p. 130, *Against Eunomius Book III*, 1, p. 136, *Against Eunomius Book XII*, 1., p. 240.

¹³ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book II*, 19-20, p. 57, *On the Trinity Book V*, 4, p. 86, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 60, p. 176, *On the Trinity Book XI*, 19, p. 209.

¹⁴ Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book V*, 29, p. 288.

¹⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures XV*, 28, p. 113.

¹⁶ Athanasius, *Against the Heathen*, 41-43, pp. 26-27, *The Deposition of Arius*, 3, p. 70, *To the Bishops of Egypt*, 13, p. 230, *Discourse I Against the Arians*, IV.12, p. 313, VII.24, p. 321, XII.49, p. 335, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XVIII.32, p. 365, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXX.59, p. 426, *To the Bishops of Africa*, 4, p. 490.

¹⁷ Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book I*, XIII.79, p. 214, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, 3, p. 223, *Of the Christian Faith Book IV*, IX.109, p. 276, *Of the Christian Faith Book V*, XI.137, p. 301, *Of the Christian Faith Book V*, XIX.227, p. 313, *Sermon Against Auxentius*, 32, p. 435.

¹⁸ Gregory Nazianzen, *Third Theological Oration: On the Son*, XVII, p. 307.

¹⁹ Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book I*, 39, p. 94, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 6, p. 108, 7, p. 111, 9, pp. 114, 116, 11, p. 121, *Against Eunomius Book IV*, 8, p. 169, *Against Eunomius Book VIII*, 1, p. 201, 4, p. 205, *On the Faith: To Simplicius*, p. 338.

agency of Jesus Christ in the sustaining and providing work of God; each of these theologians understood this passage to refer to the divinity of Christ.

The actions of Jesus Christ in judging and ruling over the created order were also understood to be indicative of his divinity. For instance, in Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus is portrayed as judging – here he makes it clear that his judgment will send some to eternal punishment and others to eternal life. This is a bold claim indeed, and it was taken by the many theologians of the fourth century to reveal the divinity of Christ. For instance, Athanasius,²⁰ Ambrose,²¹ and Cyril of Jerusalem²² all understood this passage to point to the divinity of Christ, and Athanasius,²³ Ambrose,²⁴ Cyril,²⁵ Gregory Nyssen²⁶ and Hilary²⁷ all interpreted the phrase “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow” in Philippians 2:10 in a similar manner. Cyril also read Hebrews 1:8 in this way: “Hear also a second testimony to Christ’s Deity, that which has just now been read, ‘Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.’”²⁸

The work of Christ in salvation was also widely recognized to be the work of God. Ambrose emphasized the forgiveness of sins by Christ; he saw this as the work of

²⁰ Athanasius, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XXII.76, p. 389.

²¹ Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith, Book III*, XIII.103, p. 257.

²² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XV.24, pp. 111-112.

²³ Athanasius, *Letter LX, Ad Adelphium*, p. 576.

²⁴ Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book V*, XIII.167, pp. 304-305.

²⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XV.25, p. 112.

²⁶ Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 11, p. 120, *Against Eunomius Book IV*, 3, p. 157.

²⁷ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 8, pp. 157-158.

²⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XI.15, p. 68.

God.²⁹ As he expresses it, “The Lord’s Cross, then, is my wisdom; the Lord’s Death my redemption; for we are redeemed with his precious blood... with his blood, then, as man, the Lord redeemed us, Who also, as God, has forgiven sins.”³⁰ Athanasius and others consistently argued that since God alone can save, Jesus Christ must be God if there is to be any salvation.³¹

Broadly speaking, we can see that the pro-Nicene theologians of the fourth century arrayed a battery of arguments much like the following:

- (1) Only God can perform the works of God (notably creation, providence and redemption);
- (2) The man Jesus Christ performs the works of God;
- (3) Therefore, the man Jesus Christ is God.

More specifically, the theologians convinced of the full divinity of Christ were wont to employ what I shall call the “Soteriological Argument:”

- (1`) Only God can forgive sins and effect salvation;
- (2`) The man Jesus Christ forgives sins and effects salvation;
- (3`) Therefore, the man Jesus Christ is God.

We are now in a position to ask several distinct but closely related questions of MKC. First, does MKC allow for a robust affirmation of (1`) – (3`)? The answer to this question is quite straightforward – there seems to be no reason why the proponent of

²⁹ E.g. Ambrose, *On the Christian Faith Book II*, XIII.109-122, pp. 238-239.

³⁰ Ambrose, *On the Christian Faith Book III*, V.36, p. 247.

³¹ E.g. Athanasius, *Discourse Against the Arians I*, XI.42-44, pp. 330-332, XIII.55-63, *Discourse Against the Arians II*, XIV.7-10, pp. 351-354, XIV.66-70, pp. 384-387, *Discourse Against the Arians III*, XXVI.31-35, XXIX.57, p. 424, *Discourse Against the Arians IV*, 6-7, pp. 435-436. On the importance of the full divinity of Christ for salvation as it was understood in the fourth century, see Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 141-149.

MKC could not (or would not want to) enthusiastically affirm the Soterological Argument.

But does MKC enable the affirmation of (1) – (3) more generally? Or does it somehow call into question the ability of the Son to engage in the works of God?³² I can see no reason at all to think that the Son would not be able to participate in creation according to MKC, for the creation of the universe would have occurred prior to the kenotic incarnation of the Son of God.³³

As for the sustenance of the universe, I can see no reason why MKC need think that the kenotically incarnate Son is not able to be active in this work. To the contrary, the advocates of MKC are convinced that the kenotically incarnate Son *is* active in this divine work, and they are able to point to his miracles as examples of this work. Of course, according to MKC it is true that the kenotically incarnate Son is active in this work (the same work) in a different role or function than is the Father and the Holy Spirit, but that seems to be true of any Trinitarian doctrines of providence and salvation. For instance, on any orthodox Trinitarian understanding of incarnation and atonement, only the Son becomes incarnate and makes atonement by his life and death, while the Son is always guided and empowered by the Father and Spirit. No good reason why MKC should deny the work of the Son in sustenance and providence is apparent.

Is MKC able to affirm that Christ is active in judgment? Some critics may think not. An objection might go something like this:

³² It should be noted at this point that a failure here on the part of MKC need not entail the denial of the full divinity of Jesus Christ, but it would be much harder to argue for it.

³³ Of course, any use of such temporally loaded terms as “prior to” are bound to raise questions of temporality and timeless eternity, but I cannot explore such issues here. To my knowledge, the proponents of MKC are all inclined toward some version of divine temporality. This would render their position consistent, but at any rate it is not clear that MKC needs a temporal notion of divinity to work here.

- (4) According to MKC, the kenotically incarnate Son is functionally non-omniscient;
- (5) A non-omniscient person (functionally or otherwise) is not in that great of a position to be the ruler and judge of the universe;
- (6) An omniscient, omnipotent and maximally benevolent God would make certain that the ruler and judge of the universe would be a good fit for that role;
- (7) Therefore, MKC (or at least any MKC that believes in an omniscient, omnipotent and maximally benevolent God) should deny that the Son is the ruler and judge of the universe.

But on closer inspection, we can see that this conclusion clearly does not follow.

There are several routes open to the defender of MKC. For MKC can argue that the ultimate judgment of the universe will come after the ascension and during the session of Christ – the proponent of MKC can just deny that Christ is still non-omniscient while judging. And as for the concern over the judgments of Christ while he is kenotically incarnate, the advocate of MKC can simply hold that the Son, empowered by the Holy Spirit, could be informed of those things that he needed to know. I conclude that there is no compelling reason for MKC to give up on the traditional belief that the man Jesus Christ is the ruler and judge of the universe. On the contrary, I think that there are good reasons for MKC to affirm that the man Jesus Christ is God because he does the works of God; MKC is able to sincerely affirm (1) – (3). MKC can agree with the tradition that the actions of Jesus Christ bear eloquent and powerful testimony to his divinity.

Worship, Prayer and Jesus Christ

The pro-Nicene tradition saw the worship of Jesus by various people as indicative of his divinity. Athanasius,³⁴ Ambrose³⁵ and Gregory Nazianzen³⁶ recognized the presence of prayers to Jesus in the New Testament (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:5,16) while Gregory Nyssen emphasized the importance of 1 Timothy 3:16 as a doxology that included Jesus Christ as worthy of worship.³⁷

In making a parallel argument for the divinity of the Holy Spirit, Ambrose insisted the Spirit be worshipped *as* “the Son too is worshipped.”³⁸ Gregory Nazianzen saw the worship of the Magi (Matthew 2) as both right and good.³⁹ Hebrews 1:6 states that “when God brings his first-born Son into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him,’” and Athanasius,⁴⁰ Ambrose,⁴¹ Cyril⁴² and Gregory Nyssen⁴³ found great significance in this when arguing for the divinity of Christ.

³⁴ Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXV.11, p. 400.

³⁵ Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit Book III*, XIV.94, p. 149, *Of the Christian Faith*, X.87, p. 235.

³⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, *On Pentecost*, IX., p. 382.

³⁷ Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book IV*, 2, p. 155, *Against Eunomius Book V*, 3, p. 176, *Against Eunomius Book XI*, 2, p. 232.

³⁸ Ambrose, *Of the Holy Spirit Book III*, XI.85, p. 147.

³⁹ Gregory Nazianzen, *On the Theophany*, XVII, p. 351.

⁴⁰ Athanasius, *Discourse I Against the Arians*, XI.40, p. 330, XIII.61-62, pp. 341-342, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XVI.23, p. 361, XXI.64, p. 383, *Councils of Arminium and Seleucia*, 49, p. 476.

⁴¹ Ambrose, *Of the Holy Spirit Book I*, III.47, p. 99, *Of the Holy Spirit Book III*, XI.75, p. 145, XVIII.142, p. 155, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, 2, p. 223.

⁴² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XIV.28, p. 102.

⁴³ Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 8, pp. 112-113.

This way of arguing may be summarized in what I will label the “Doxological Argument:”

- (8) Only God is rightly worshipped;
- (9) The man Jesus Christ is rightly worshipped;
- (10) Therefore, the man Jesus Christ is God.

This common patristic argument was both simple and powerful in the influence that it wielded. It has become a standard weapon in the traditional arsenal for arguments in favor of the divinity of Christ. But can MKC endorse it? Can MKC give sincere assent to the worship of Jesus Christ as God? Or does MKC somehow explicitly call into question or implicitly undermine robust belief in the worship of Jesus as God? Is the doxological argument somehow out of reach of MKC?

In my judgment, MKC can stay with the tradition here. Not only can MKC affirm that the incarnate Christ was and is to be worshipped, but it can also employ the argument for the conclusion that Jesus is God (or as part of a cumulative case argument). As we have seen, Stephen T. Davis does just that – he employs something much like the Doxological Argument as part of his argument that Jesus was “mad, bad or God.”⁴⁴

Of course, if one is set on worshipping certain divine attributes (such as omniscience) that the Son does not employ while kenotically incarnate, then maybe Jesus Christ is not worthy of worship. But if the worship is of the *person* of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, rather than some abstract property or set of properties, then there is no real problem. A critic might object, however, that on the doctrine of divine

⁴⁴ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad or God?” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 234-235.

simplicity (DDS) the problem does not go away so easily, even if it is not so crudely put. The problem here might be that the attributes or properties of divinity are identical with God and thus with the divine persons, so worship of the divine person and worship of the divine attributes or properties amounts to exactly the same thing. Now I suspect that MKC does not fit well with the usual formulations of simplicity doctrine, and it is open to the proponents of MKC to reject DDS out of hand. At this point, however, such a move might not be necessary. For according to MKC the Son does retain all of the essential divine attributes or properties even while employing them differently than do the Father and the Spirit – if the DDS critics of MKC want to worship the divine attributes, then they can do so anyway. Such critics simply will have to do so knowing that the Son employs these attributes differently than do the other persons of the Holy Trinity.

But perhaps critics will not want to worship certain attributes but will want to worship a being with a certain set of great-making properties that they consider essential to divinity. If so, however, MKC can respond that we should worship God as God is revealed in Scripture – not as we want God to be. MKC believes that the New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ is divine; it also maintains that the New Testament shows that Jesus Christ is not in possession of some knowledge while incarnate (at least some of the time). MKC tries to put these two elements together – it works with a broadly “Anselmian” conception of God that is rounded out or even corrected by Scripture. I conclude that MKC can wholeheartedly affirm that the incarnate Son is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

The Preexistence of Jesus Christ

The pro-Nicene patristic theologians who argued for the divinity of Christ continually pointed to the ample New Testament witness to the preexistence of the Son, the Word of God. By itself it was not enough to defeat the Arian challenge (the Arians could agree that the Son existed before his incarnation and even before creation while denying that he was equal with the Father). Nevertheless, the recognition of the preexistence of Christ played an important role in the establishment of what was to become Niceno-Constantinopolitan orthodoxy.

Several passages were of special importance. John's statement (1:1) that the Word not only was in the beginning and with God but also *was* God in the beginning was employed by Athanasius,⁴⁵ Ambrose,⁴⁶ Cyril,⁴⁷ Gregory Nazianzen,⁴⁸ Gregory Nyssen⁴⁹ and Hilary⁵⁰ in a variety of contexts. Similarly, John's statement (1:18) that the *monogenes* is the only one who has seen God and has made him known was used by

⁴⁵ E.g. Athanasius, *Against the Heathen*, III.40, p. 25, III.41, p. 26, *The Deposition of Arius*, 3, p. 70, *On Luke X.22*, 3, p. 88, *On the Opinion of Dionysius*, 1, p. 176, *To the Bishops of Egypt*, 14-16, pp. 230-231, *Discourse I Against the Arians*, IV.11, p. 312, VII.24, p. 321, XI.41, p. 330, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XVIII.32, p. 365, XVIII.35, p. 367, XX.53, p. 377, XX.56, p. 379, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXIII.4, p. 395, XXX.59, p. 426, *Discourse IV Against the Arians*, I.1, p. 433, 25, p. 443, 29, p. 445, *Councils of Arminium and Seleucia*, 49, p. 476, *Ad Adelphium*, 8, p. 578.

⁴⁶ E.g. Ambrose, *Of the Holy Spirit Book I*, XI.120, p. 109, *Of the Christian Faith*, VIII.56, p. 209, XIX.123, p. 221, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, 4, p. 223, II.29, p. 227, *Of the Christian Faith Book III*, VIII.54, p. 250, *Of the Christian Faith Book V*, I.18, p. 286, IX.116, p. 299, *Concerning Virgins Book III*, I.2, p. 381.

⁴⁷ E.g. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, III.14, p. 17, XI.10, p. 66, XII.1, p. 72.

⁴⁸ E.g. Gregory Nazianzen, *Third Theological Oration: On the Son*, XVII, p. 307.

⁴⁹ E.g. Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 4, p. 104, 8, pp. 113-115, 12, p. 125, *Against Eunomius Book IV*, 1, p. 154, *Against Eunomius Book V*, 1, p. 173, *Against Eunomius Book VI*, 1, p. 182, *Against Eunomius Book IX*, 1, p. 211, *Against Eunomius Book XII*, 3, p. 245, *On the Faith: To Simplicius*, p. 338.

⁵⁰ E.g. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book II*, 13, p. 56, 23, p. 58, *On the Trinity Book IV*, 3, p. 76, *On the Trinity Book VII*, 9, p. 121, *On the Trinity Book XII*, 25, p. 224, 56, p. 233.

Athanasius,⁵¹ Ambrose,⁵² Cyril,⁵³ Gregory Nazianzen,⁵⁴ Gregory Nyssen⁵⁵ and Hilary⁵⁶ to argue for the preexistence of the Son. The statement in Colossians 1:15 that Christ is “the image of the invisible God, firstborn over all creation,” was used by the various “Arian” parties to show that Christ was created, but the pro-Nicenes were far from ready to concede this verse to their opponents. Athanasius,⁵⁷ Ambrose,⁵⁸ Gregory Nyssen⁵⁹ and Hilary⁶⁰ all notably resisted Arian-type interpretations of this passage. Their basic arguments were that this verse, when properly interpreted according to the rule of faith, taught that

- (a) the first phrase of this verse, “the image of the invisible God,” actually demonstrated that the Son was exactly like the Father or one with the Father rather than some lower-grade deity;⁶¹

⁵¹ E.g. Athanasius, *Against the Heathen*, 41-42, pp. 26-27, *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, III.13, p. 158, V.22, p. 164, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XXI.62, p. 382, *Discourse IV Against the Arians*, 16, p. 439-440, 24, p. 442.

⁵² E.g. Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book III*, III.24, p. 246.

⁵³ E.g. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, VII.11, p. 46, IX.2, p. 51, XIV.27, p. 102.

⁵⁴ E.g. Gregory Nazianzen, *Third Theological Oration: On the Son*, XVII, p. 307.

⁵⁵ E.g. Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 2, p. 102, 12, p. 125, *Against Eunomius Book III*, 2, p. 140, *Against Eunomius Book VII*, 4, p. 198.

⁵⁶ E.g. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book II*, 23, p. 58, *On the Trinity Book IV*, 42, p. 84, *On the Trinity Book V*, 33, p. 95, *On the Trinity Book VI*, 39, pp. 112-113, *On the Trinity Book XII*, 24, p. 224.

⁵⁷ E.g. Athanasius, *Against the Heathen*, 41, p. 26, *Statement of Faith*, p. 85, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XIX.45, p. 373, XXI.63-64, pp. 382-383.

⁵⁸ E.g. Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book I*, VII.48, p. 208, XIV.89, p. 216, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, V.40, p. 228.

⁵⁹ E.g. Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 8, p. 112, *Against Eunomius Book IV*, 3, pp. 157-159.

⁶⁰ E.g. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book VIII*, 48, p. 151.

⁶¹ E.g. Athanasius, *Statement of Faith*, p. 85, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XXI.63-67, pp. 382-385, Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book VIII*, 48, p. 151.

(b) the second clause, “the firstborn over all creation,” should be understood of the humanity of Christ rather than the person of the Son;⁶²

(c) this verse should be interpreted with 1:16, and there the Son is seen to be the Creator (who, of course, can only be God).⁶³

Interpreted this way, and with insights from passages such as John 8:58,⁶⁴ this verse was used to argue for the preexistence of the Son of God.

How does MKC fare with respect to the biblical witness to the preexistence of the Son? Is it able to wholeheartedly affirm the preexistence of the Son, or does it falter at this point? In my judgment, there is nothing in MKC that would cause the slightest problem here. MKC can, should, and in fact does agree with the traditional view of the preexistence of the Son. Again, the only potential pitfall that I can see would come from a stringent DDS. Sometimes the DDS is taken to mean that God is identical with his attributes or properties (and thus actually has no attributes or properties that are really distinct from himself). In that case, the kenotically incarnate Son (who while kenotically incarnate employs the divine attributes differently than he did prior to the incarnation) could not be identified with the pre-incarnate Son, and so it might be impossible to affirm the pre-existence of the person of Jesus Christ. But the versions of the DDS that would hold to such a view are commonly recognized to be beset with other problems (many of

⁶² E.g. Athanasius, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XXI.63-67, pp. 382-385, Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book I*, VII.48, p. 208, XIV.89, p. 216, Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 8, p. 112,

⁶³ E.g. Athanasius, *On the Opinion of Dionysius*, p. 176, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XVIII.31, pp. 364-365, XIX.45, pp. 372-373, XIX.50-52, pp. 375-376, Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, V.40, p. 228.

⁶⁴ E.g. Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book III*, IX.61, p. 251.

which seem fatal),⁶⁵ and it seems that any orthodox doctrine of the incarnation might run afoul of such versions of the DDS.⁶⁶ At any rate, I doubt that the proponents of MKC are attracted to these versions of the DDS. It is doubtful that they need to worry about it. As long as the DDS does not ensnare MKC, it looks to me as though MKC has no problems with the biblical teaching of the preexistence of Christ (as it has been traditionally understood).

Jesus as God: Unity and Equality with the Father

The recognition that Jesus is actually called “God” in the New Testament has played a large role in the traditional insistence on the full divinity of Jesus Christ. For instance, Cyril saw the angelic announcement in Matthew 1:23 (“the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means, God with us”) as highly significant.⁶⁷ He was convinced that Hebrews 1:8 (“But about the Son he says, your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever...”) is a “second testimony to Christ’s deity.”⁶⁸ Athanasius,⁶⁹ Ambrose,⁷⁰ Cyril,⁷¹ Gregory Nazianzen⁷² and Gregory

⁶⁵ E.g. Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980). For a response to Plantinga, see F.G. Immink, *Divine Simplicity* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1987).

⁶⁶ For a study of how the DDS of Thomas Aquinas relates to his doctrine(s) of the Incarnation (and Trinity), see Christopher Hughes, *A Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas’ Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁶⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XI.14, p. 68.

⁶⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XI.15, p. 68.

⁶⁹ Athanasius, *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, III.7, p. 155, IV.17, p. 161, V.19, p. 163, *On the Opinion of Dionysius*, 2, p. 176, *Discourse I Against the Arians*, VI.19, p. 317, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XVIII.31, p. 365, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXIII.4, p. 395, XXVII.39, p. 415, *Councils of Arminium and Seleucia*, III.35, p. 469, *To the Bishops of Africa*, 4, p. 491.

⁷⁰ Ambrose, *Of the Holy Spirit Book I*, II.29, p. 97, *Of the Christian Faith Book I*, III.26, p. 205, *Of the Christian Faith Book IV*, VIII.92, p. 274, XI.139-140, p. 280, *Of the Christian Faith Book V*, III.45, p. 290.

⁷¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, X.1, p. 57, X.10, p. 60.

Nyssen⁷³ all took the statement of 1 Corinthians 8:6 as a testimony to the divinity of Christ. They understood “there is one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live, and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live” as meaning that Jesus Christ and God the Father are both divine and equal in power and essence.

Similarly, Athanasius,⁷⁴ Ambrose,⁷⁵ Cyril⁷⁶ and Hilary⁷⁷ all understood Philippians 2:11 (“every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”) to point unmistakably to the full divinity of Jesus Christ.

Of course the Johannine materials have played an important role in traditional argumentation for the divinity of Christ. The statement in John 1:18 that “no one has seen God, but God the one and only” was taken by Athanasius,⁷⁸ Ambrose,⁷⁹ Cyril,⁸⁰ Gregory Nazianzen,⁸¹ Gregory Nyssen⁸² and Hilary⁸³ to reveal Christ’s deity. Jesus’

⁷² Gregory Nazianzen, *Theological Oration XXXIV, On the Arrival of the Egyptians*, XV, p. 338.

⁷³ Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book VII*, 1, p. 194, *Against Eunomius Book X*, 4, p. 226.

⁷⁴ Athanasius, *Discourse I Against the Arians*, XI.41, p. 330, *To Adelpius*, p. 576.

⁷⁵ Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, IX.82, p. 234.

⁷⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, VII.4, p. 45.

⁷⁷ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 41-42, p. 169.

⁷⁸ Athanasius, *Against the Heathen*, II.41-42, pp. 26-27, *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, III.13-14, p. 158, V.21, p. 164, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XXI.62, p. 382, *Discourse IV Against the Arians*, 15-22, pp. 438-442, 25, p. 443.

⁷⁹ Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, 2, p. 223, *Of the Christian Faith Book III*, III.24, p. 246.

⁸⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XIV.27, p. 102.

⁸¹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Third Theological Oration, On the Son*, XVII, p. 307.

⁸² Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 2, p. 102, 4, p. 104, 12, p. 125, *Against Eunomius Book III*, 2, p. 140.

claim to have existed before Abraham (John 8:58) was very significant for Athanasius⁸⁴ and Cyril,⁸⁵ and Peter's confession of Jesus as his "Lord and God" was taken by Athanasius, Ambrose,⁸⁶ and Hilary as definitive proof of the divinity of Christ.

Athanasius proclaims that those who are in doubt as to the divinity of Jesus should "reverence Thomas, who handled the crucified and pronounced Him Lord and God."⁸⁷

Hilary's view of what this passage reveals is clear indeed:

In the light of the resurrection, the whole mystery of the faith had become visible to the Apostle. He had often heard such words as, "I and the Father are one" and "all things that the Father has are mine" and "I in the Father and the Father in me," and now he can confess that the name of God expresses the nature of Christ without peril to the faith. Without breach of loyalty to the one God, the Father, his devotion could now regard the Son of God as God, since he believed that everything contained in the nature of the Son was truly of the same nature with the Father. No longer need he fear that such a confession as his was the proclamation of a second God, a treason against the unity of the divine nature... It was not a title of honor; it was a confession of nature. He believed that Christ was God in substance and in power.⁸⁸

The divinity of Jesus Christ, seen as attested to in these ways, was not understood by the developing orthodox tradition as any sort of inferior-grade deity. To the contrary, the tradition has read several biblical passages as portraying the full equality and unity of Jesus Christ with the Father. For instance, the statement in Colossians 2:9 that "in Christ

⁸³ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book II*, 23, p. 58, *On the Trinity Book IV*, 8, p. 73, 42, p. 84, *On the Trinity Book V*, 34, p. 95, *On the Trinity Book VI*, 40, p. 113.

⁸⁴ Athanasius, *Discourse I Against the Arians*, IV.13, p. 314, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XX.53, p. 377, *Discourse IV Against the Arians*, 20, p. 441.

⁸⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XI.20, p. 69.

⁸⁶ Ambrose, *Of the Holy Spirit Book III*, XV.108, p. 150.

⁸⁷ Athanasius, *Letter to Maximus*, p. 578.

⁸⁸ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book VII*, 12, p. 123.

all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” was taken by Athanasius,⁸⁹ Ambrose, Hilary⁹⁰ and Gregory Nyssen⁹¹ as indicative of the equality of Jesus with the Father. As Ambrose puts it, “He, therefore, possessing the fullness of divinity and glory, is not, in respect of his divinity, inferior.”⁹²

Athanasius, Ambrose, Gregory Nazianzen⁹³ and Gregory Nyssen also understood Hebrews 1:3 this way. Athanasius asks “how is He ‘unlike in substance to the Father,’ seeing He is the perfect ‘image’ and ‘brightness’ of the Father...?”⁹⁴ Ambrose says that “the Apostle was taught to call the Son ‘the radiance of the Father’s glory,’ for the Son is the radiance of his Father’s light, co-eternal... inseparable.”⁹⁵ Nyssen argues that “express image” and the “form of God” is “surely the same thing as His essence.”⁹⁶

Jesus’ statement in John 10:30 that “I and the Father are one” has been widely understood to reveal his unity and complete equality with the Father. For instance,

⁸⁹ Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXVI.31, p. 410, *Councils of Arminium and Seleucia*, III.38, p. 471.

⁹⁰ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book II*, 8, p. 54, 20, p. 57, *On the Trinity Book VIII*, 53-56, pp. 153-154, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 1, p. 155.

⁹¹ Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 14, p. 129, *Against Eunomius Book XII*, 1, p. 241.

⁹² Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, VIII.65, p. 231. Cf. *Of the Holy Spirit Book III*, IV.19, p. 138, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, IX.82, p. 234, *Of the Christian Faith Book III*, XII.102, p. 257, *Of the Christian Faith Book V*, XVIII.220, p. 312, *Concerning Virgins Book III*, I.3-4, p. 381.

⁹³ Gregory Nazianzen, *The Third Theological Oration, On the Son*, XVII, p. 307.

⁹⁴ Athanasius, *Deposition of Arius*, 3, p. 70. Cf. *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, III.12, p. 158, *On the Opinion of Dionysius*, 8, p. 179, *To the Bishops of Egypt*, II.13, p. 230, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, IV.12, p. 313, VII.24, p. 321, XII.49, p. 335, XIII.55, p. 338, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XVIII.32, p. 365, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXX.59, p. 426, *To the Bishops of Africa*, 4, p. 490.

⁹⁵ Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book IV*, IX.109, p. 276. Cf. *Of the Christian Faith Book I*, XIII.79, p. 214, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, 3, p. 223, *Of the Christian Faith Book V*, XI.137, p. 301, *Sermon Against Auxentius*, 32, p. 435.

⁹⁶ Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book IV*, 8, p. 169. Cf. *Against Eunomius Book I*, 39, p. 94, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 9, p. 116, 15, p. 133, *Against Eunomius Book VIII*, 1, p. 201, 4, p. 205, 5, p. 207, *On the Faith: To Simplicius*, p. 338.

Athanasius,⁹⁷ Ambrose,⁹⁸ Gregory Nyssen⁹⁹ and Hilary¹⁰⁰ all took this affirmation as definitive proof of the full equality of the Son with the Father. The theologians who were instrumental in the developing orthodoxy of the fourth century were convinced that this passage establishes beyond reasonable doubt the unity and equality of the incarnate Son with the Father.

But is MKC able to affirm the full unity and equality of the Son with the Father? If so, is it able to affirm the full unity and equality of the Son on the same basis and for the same reasons? Or must it try to do so for other reasons (textual or otherwise)? I see no reason why MKC could not affirm wholeheartedly the belief that Jesus is God – that the incarnate Son has complete unity and equality with the Father. And it can do so for the same reasons as did the tradition, for it can interpret these passages as revealing that Jesus Christ is indeed fully divine and equal with the Father.

I suspect, however, that critics of MKC will complain that the equality of the Father and Son *is* compromised by MKC. The argument against MKC might go something like this:

⁹⁷ E.g. Athanasius, *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, IV.16, p. 160, V.21, p. 164, VII.31, p. 171, *On the Opinion of Dionysius*, 2, p. 176, *Discourse I Against the Arians*, I.4, p. 308, VI.16, p. 316, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XVIII.33, p. 366, XX.54, p. 377, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXIII.4, p. 395, XXIII.6, p. 396, XXV.10-25, pp. 399-407, XXIX.55-56, pp. 423-424, XXX.67, p. 431, *Discourse IV Against the Arians*, 9-10, p. 436, 19, p. 440, 35, p. 447, *Councils of Arminium and Seleucia*, 48-49, p. 476, *To the Bishops of Africa*, 6, p. 491, 7, p. 492, 9, p. 493.

⁹⁸ E.g. Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book I*, I.9, p. 203, XVII.111-112, p. 219, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, IX.73, p. 233, *Of the Christian Faith Book V*, XVIII.224, p. 313.

⁹⁹ E.g. Gregory Nyssen, *Against Eunomius Book I*, 16, p. 54, 35, p. 81, *Against Eunomius Book II*, 4, p. 104, 6, p. 107, *Against Eunomius Book XI*, 2, p. 233.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book I*, 30, p. 48, *On the Trinity Book II*, 10, p. 55, 20, p. 57, 23, p. 58, *On the Trinity Book III*, 23, pp. 68-69, *On the Trinity Book VII*, 6, p. 120, 12, pp. 122-123, 22-27, pp. 127-130, *On the Trinity Book VIII*, 5-9, pp. 139-140, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 1, p. 155, *On the Trinity Book X*, 5-6, p. 183, *On the Trinity Book XI*, 12, p. 206.

- (11) The Father and Son must be equal in power if they are to share full and complete equality;
- (12) According to MKC, the Father and Son are not equal in power;
- (13) Therefore, the Father and Son do not share full and complete equality according to MKC.

Ambrose would seem to agree with (11). He insists that “almighty power appertains both to the Father and to the Son; nevertheless, it is One Almighty God, for there is oneness of majesty...,” and he concludes that “We cannot then, doubt that he is almighty, who has all things that the Father hath (for it is written: ‘All things that the Father has are mine’).”¹⁰¹ If the traditional interpretation of these biblical texts is right, and if the critics of MKC are right about (12), then it appears that MKC might have a hard time endorsing the traditional orthodox affirmation of the equality of the Son with the Father.

Discussions of omnipotence (and/or “almightiness”) are notoriously complex, and surely many of these issues will come into play in any response to this problem. This is not the place for extended reflection on the various notions of omnipotence, and any discussion of this problem risks oversimplification. Fortunately for MKC, however, there are a couple of routes of escape open to its proponents, routes that do not require the resolution of all of these complex and difficult issues. The defender of MKC could just reject (11); here the MKC advocate could simply challenge the Ambrosian-type insistence that true and full equality means true and full equality of power. This maneuver strikes me as somewhat counterintuitive, and at any rate it takes MKC a step

¹⁰¹ Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith Book II*, IV.36-38, p. 228.

farther from traditional argumentation on the deity of Christ. But MKC need not take this route, and it might be better not to do so.

I think that there is another way for the proponents of MKC to respond; by my lights it is a way that looks much more promising. The defender of MKC can challenge (12) – she can argue that it should be established rather than merely assumed that MKC entails that the Father and Son are not equal in power. Here the advocate of MKC could argue that one could have or possess this power without making constant or continual use of it. She could also argue (as does Evans) that having omnipotence means being able *not* to use it.¹⁰²

There might, alas, still be a problem in the neighborhood. The critic of MKC might charge that the knowledge of the kenotically-incarnate Son is less than that of the Father, and thus that the Son is not equal to the Father. The argument might go something like this:

- (11`) The Father and Son must be equal in knowledge if they are to share full and complete equality;
- (12`) According to MKC, the Father and Son are not equal in knowledge;
- (13`) Therefore, the Father and Son do not share full and complete equality according to MKC.

This looks like a tougher problem for MKC. MKC does hold that the Father and the kenotically-incarnate Son are not equal in knowledge. They take the statements of Luke that Jesus developed and grew in knowledge and understanding (2:52) as well as Jesus'

¹⁰² Cf. C. Stephen Evans, "The Self-Emptying of Love: Some Thoughts on Kenotic Christology" in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O'Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 260-263.

own confession that he did “not know the day or the hour” of his return (Mark 13:32) very seriously. This, of course, rules out a rejection of (12`).

The defenders of MKC might point out that the equality affirmed in Scripture (as traditionally interpreted) is not specific – Scripture does not explicitly say just what this equality is. They might try to avoid this problem by arguing that since Scripture leaves open the question of what this equality consists of, so we also should simply leave open what the equality of the Father and Son might entail. As we shall see (in the next chapter), however, this would not help the proponent of MKC fend off the charges of Arianism (Arians were generally willing to attribute unity and equality in some senses while insistently denying it in others). I suggest that MKC not take this route of escape.

I think that a more promising direction would be to take issue with (11`). The defenders of MKC might respond that the argument from (11`) – (13`) does not make enough allowance for an important traditional distinction – that distinction being between *ontological* and *functional* subordination. The orthodox tradition has always affirmed this distinction; it has denied the former while affirming the latter. Here it might be argued that (11`) takes insufficient notice of this important distinction. It might be argued further that, parallel and related to the distinction between functional and temporary subordination (on one hand) and ontological and abiding non-subordinate equality (on the other hand), is a distinction between functional and temporary non-omniscience and ontological and abiding omniscience. MKC recognizes (with orthodoxy generally) the distinction between functional and ontological subordination, and it now works to extend this to the understanding of the knowledge of the Son. The Son has ontological and abiding omniscience (or omniscience-unless-kenotically-and-

redemptively-incarnate) just as the Father does. But the Son has functional and temporary non-omniscience. The Son is non-omniscient *while* kenotically incarnate for the *function* of redemption – perhaps just as the Father could have been. So the Son (possessing, as he does, ontological and abiding omniscience) shares with the Father the essential knowledge attribute while employing it differently as he is kenotically incarnate. This may mean that the Son is not equal to the Father in knowledge, but this inequality is merely one of *function* (rather than *essence*). The critics of MKC might reject the kenotic strategy for various reasons; they might find this notion of omniscience too “cooked-up” or simply too counterintuitive. But they should not reject it on grounds that it is incoherent on this point or that it somehow obviously compromises the essential equality of the Father and Son.

Summary

In this section I have looked at MKC and some of the more prominent traditional arguments from scripture for the divinity of Christ. So where does this leave us with regard to MKC’s relation to the biblical witness to the divinity of Christ? I have argued that MKC can affirm that Jesus Christ does the works of God – I have suggested further that MKC *should* affirm that Jesus Christ performs divine action in creation, sustenance, providence, judgment and salvation. I have also argued that (in the absence of problems coming from a strong doctrine of divine simplicity) the pre-existence of Christ, the belief that Jesus Christ is to be worshipped and the insistence Jesus has unity and equality with the Father can and should be affirmed by MKC.

Recall (from the last chapter) the categories of Scriptural authority discussed earlier:

(SA1) p is a consensus of the teachings of the whole of scripture, i.e., p is either taught or presupposed everywhere in scripture (or in every text relevant to the truth or falsity of p);

(SA2) p is either taught or presupposed in places in scripture (though perhaps not everywhere or in every relevant text), and it is inconsistent with nothing that is either taught or presupposed elsewhere in scripture;

(SA3) p is nowhere either explicitly taught or presupposed in scripture, but can be considered the best interpretation of the witness of the whole of scripture or of various scriptural texts taken as a whole;

(SA4) p is consistent with what is either taught or presupposed in scripture, i.e., nothing in scripture contradicts p;

(SA5) some scriptural texts can be interpreted as supporting p, although other texts can also be interpreted as rejecting p.

In relation to the divinity of Christ, it seems clear to me that MKC has biblical warrant or scriptural authority in the sense of (SA2) at a minimum, at least *when the biblical witness is interpreted traditionally*. Furthermore, there appears to be nothing to prevent MKC from staking claim to (SA1) with respect to the affirmation of the divinity of Christ.

Of course, even if MKC were not able to agree with the traditional argumentation for the divinity of Christ, it would not necessarily disqualify MKC from affirmation of Christ's divinity. MKC might, after all, be able to provide some other reason(s) for holding to belief in the divinity of Christ. But loss of the traditional argumentation for the divinity of Christ would make the task much harder for MKC, and at any rate it would lose an important connection to the tradition of Christological orthodoxy. But since MKC can and does access the traditional argumentation (even if it does not always do so for apologetic reasons or otherwise), we can see very clearly that MKC does not obviously compromise orthodoxy by rejection of the biblical witness to the divinity of Christ. I conclude that MKC is not unable to account for the biblical witness to the

divinity of Christ. Unless it fails in some other way (e.g., by offering an Arian interpretation), MKC does not lose its claim to orthodoxy with respect to the divinity of Christ.

THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

As we have seen, the proponents of MKC recognize ample Pauline witness to the humanity of Christ. Romans 1:3-4; 5; 8:3; 9:5; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 2:9; 4:6; 10:1; 13:4; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:7-8 and 1 Timothy 2:5; 3:16 are all seen as clear and definitive demonstration of the humanity of Christ. They also view the book of Hebrews as a vivid testimony to the full humanity of the incarnate Son, and they take special notice of the Gospel pictures of the humanity of Jesus. Their ringing affirmation of the full humanity of Christ (on biblical grounds) is evidenced in this statement from Davis:

The incarnation means first that Jesus Christ is a *person*, a real, living human person. Jesus Christ is not an idea, an ideal, an emanation from God, a divine influence, a principle, a lifestyle, or an ethical principle. These notions are ruled out because what God became was a man (“and the word became flesh and dwelt among us”)... Jesus Christ was a human being. He had a human body; he got hungry and thirsty and tired (John 4:6); he was tempted (Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 4:15); he wept when a friend died (John 11:35)... lastly, he died (Mark 15:36).¹⁰³

It seems clear to me that, in this affirmation of the full and true humanity of Christ, MKC is at one with the orthodox tradition in accepting the biblical witness to the humanity of the incarnate Son. With the very notable exception of the earlier bouts with

¹⁰³ Stephen T. Davis, “Jesus Christ: Savior or Guru,” p. 47.

Docetism,¹⁰⁴ by and large the church did not struggle with the biblical witness to the humanity of Christ nearly like it did with the biblical witness to the divinity of Christ. During the era in which the church was driving toward what would become creedal orthodoxy, the humanity of Christ generally was not prominently in question. The situation is quite similar today, and MKC is convinced of the full humanity of Christ.¹⁰⁵ In summary, it may safely be concluded that MKC does not fail to account for the scriptural witness to the humanity of Christ – we can say with confidence that MKC does not fall prey to Docetism or some Docetic-type heresy.

A Special Case: The Ignorance of Christ

I have suggested that there are no obvious reasons to think that MKC cannot account for the broad biblical witness to the humanity of Christ. It might be objected, however, that MKC does not deal with these passages in the traditional way(s), especially regarding the biblical testimony to the growth and ignorance of Christ. Here I think that MKC has access to several related responses. First, MKC's advocates can argue that their view does account for the pertinent biblical data, even if it does so in a way that is different in some respects from that of many exegetes in the tradition. Since the main issue concerns the biblical witness to the humanity of Christ rather than various interpretation of some passages, the question of how various influential theologians have interpreted these passages is not of primary importance. Nor is the interpretation of various theologians (important though they may be) to be confused with either the

¹⁰⁴ On this see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978), pp. 147-148.

¹⁰⁵ Of course, differing accounts of what is meant by the humanity of Christ were at stake in the Apollinarian controversy. But since MKC's relation to Apollinarianism is to be explored at a later point in this study, for now I will pass on this issue.

biblical witness itself or the conclusions of creedal orthodoxy. Second, MKC can point to the fact that it is not at all obvious that the tradition always interprets the disputed passages in the same way. Finally, MKC can argue that their view allows for a more – not less – satisfying and convincing interpretation of these passages than do some of the other options. It is this last option that I shall explore further.

That there is some variety in the interpretation of the passages in question is evidenced in the ways that Athanasius and Hilary each deal with Luke 2:52 and Mark 13:32. Athanasius responds to those who conclude from Mark 13:32 that if “the Son were, according to your interpretation, eternally existent with God, he would not have been ignorant of the Day, but had known as Word....”¹⁰⁶ To his opponents who argued that the Son’s ignorance is proof that the Son is of a different essence than the Father, Athanasius responds that it cannot be that the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is ignorant:

For the Lord of heaven and earth, by whom all things were made, has to litigate before them about day and hour; and the Word who knows all things is accused by them of ignorance about a day... now what can be spoken more contrary to sense, or what madness can be likened to this? Through the Word all things have been made, times and seasons and night and day and the whole creation; and is the Framer of all said to be ignorant of his work?¹⁰⁷

Athanasius recognizes a sense in which the ignorance is real, but he attributes this to the human nature rather than the divine: “this is not the Word’s deficiency, but that of the human nature, whose property it is to be ignorant.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXVI.26, p. 408.

¹⁰⁷ Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXVIII.42, p. 416.

¹⁰⁸ Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXVIII.43, p. 417.

Athanasius lays down his fundamental rule for interpretation of these passages – whatever refers to the weakness, growth, fear or ignorance of Christ pertains to his humanity, while whatever refers to the knowledge and power of Christ pertains to his divinity. He explains how this strategy works:

On this account it is reasonable to ascribe to his manhood everything which, after he became man, he speaks humanly. For it is proper to the Word to know what was made, nor be ignorant either of the beginning or of the end of these (for the works are his), and he knows how many things he wrought, and the limits of their consistence.¹⁰⁹

Athanasius argues that Christ, “on becoming man, hungers and thirsts and suffers with men, so with men, as man he knows not; though divinely, being in the Father Word and Wisdom, he knows, and there is nothing that he knows not.”¹¹⁰ When Christ says that he does not know the day or the hour, he speaks as the “*Son of Man*,”¹¹¹ (rather than as “Son”). And when Christ does so, says Athanasius, he does so “for our sakes.”¹¹² Thus Athanasius declares that “concerning the day or the hour he was not willing to say according to his divine nature, ‘I know,’ but after the flesh, ‘I know not,’ for the sake of the flesh that was ignorant.”¹¹³ In summary, it may be said that the strategy of Athanasius is to ascribe to the divine nature all that is fitting of divinity while attributing to the human nature all that is not worthy of divinity.

¹⁰⁹ Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXVIII.43, p. 417.

¹¹⁰ Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXVIII.46, p. 419.

¹¹¹ Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXVIII.43, p. 417.

¹¹² Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXVIII.48, p. 420.

¹¹³ Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXVIII.48, p. 420.

Hilary of Poitiers employs an interpretive strategy that mirrors that of Athanasius in some respects while differing from it in others. He also responds to those argue from the professed ignorance of Jesus (Mark 13:32) to the conclusion that Jesus must, “from his ignorance, be alien from the Father who knows; a nature limited in knowledge cannot partake of that majesty and might which alone is exempt from the tyranny of ignorance.”¹¹⁴ Hilary explains this statement of Jesus by a “gradual revelation... of his nature and power.”¹¹⁵ Hilary affirms that the incarnate Son is “one person, both man and God... being of two natures united for that Mediatorship,”¹¹⁶ and he shows some openness to the Athanasian-type strategy of attributing some things to the divine nature and other things to the human nature.¹¹⁷ Hilary also argues that it is less than credible to think that the Son who is the Creator and Preserver of all is ignorant of the creation.¹¹⁸

But Hilary’s response to this challenge is distinct from that of Athanasius in some respects. He argues from the goodness of the Father to the omniscience of the Son (it would deny the love of the Father and impute malice to him if he were to withhold knowledge from the Son).¹¹⁹ He also argues from divine simplicity to the omniscience of the Son – “to say that there is one of God’s properties which he has not, is almost equivalent to saying that he has none of them.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book I*, 29, p. 48.

¹¹⁵ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book I*, 30, p. 48.

¹¹⁶ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 3, p. 156.

¹¹⁷ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 5, p. 157.

¹¹⁸ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 59, p. 175.

¹¹⁹ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 60, p. 176.

¹²⁰ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 61, p. 177.

So the Son cannot be ignorant. How does he then deal with the apparent ignorance of Jesus Christ? Here we see more distance from Athanasius, for at this point Hilary just denies that the Son is ignorant:

Whenever God says that he does not know, he professes ignorance indeed, but is not under the defect of ignorance. It is not because of the infirmity of ignorance that he does not know, but because it is not yet the time to speak, or the divine plan to act.¹²¹

Hilary thus insists that the Son is never ignorant (and cannot be if he is divine). Of course there are places where it looks like he is ignorant, but these places are to be explained as the words of the omniscient Son who knows best what human needs for knowledge really are. He concludes that

The Lord Jesus Christ, then... has no weakness in his nature, that he should not know, for, as we perceive, even the fact of his ignorance proceeds from the omniscience of his nature... The All-knowing, though not ignorant of thoughts and deeds, sometimes inquires as if he were, as for instance when he asks the woman who it was that touched his garment... But he, who knows all things, sometimes by a practice of economy professes ignorance, even though he is not ignorant.¹²²

For Hilary, “his ignorance was not ignorance, except in words.”¹²³ The ignorance of Jesus, as the “ignorance” of God, “is not ignorance but a mystery.”¹²⁴ It may look like ignorance to us, but it is only the divine omniscience being employed in such a way that is in our best interest.

It should be clear that, despite their similarities, there is an important difference (at least one of emphasis) between what I shall call the Hilarian and Athanasian

¹²¹ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 63, p. 177.

¹²² Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 66, p. 178.

¹²³ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 66, p. 178.

¹²⁴ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity Book IX*, 68, p. 179.

strategies. For while Hilary denies any ignorance, Athanasius admits that Christ is ignorant – but with the insistence that we predicate the ignorance to the human nature rather than to the person. We can also see that both of these responses (or perhaps both of these versions of the same response) to the problems generated by the biblical statements which affirm ignorance differ from the strategy of MKC.

It is here that MKC stakes a claim to a more adequate and convincing reading of Scripture. It is a reading of Scripture that coheres well with the broad traditional view of the biblical witness to the humanity of Christ. But it is one that departs from and is said to improve on the dominant versions of traditional exegesis.¹²⁵ For contrary to the approach of Hilary, MKC does not deny that the Son really was ignorant of some things during his career on earth. And contrary to the Athanasian strategy, MKC does not admit ignorance but resort to saying that the ignorance is predicated only to one nature rather than to the person of Jesus Christ. MKC grasps the nettle and readily affirms the genuineness of these statements of ignorance.

MKC tends to see the Hilarian strategy as calling into question the role (if not the reality) of the humanity of Christ. MKC also recognizes that the Hilarian strategy presents a picture of a Christ who intentionally, even if benevolently, misleads. MKC sees these as serious problems with the Hilarian strategy.

¹²⁵ In commenting on the strategies of the pro-Nicene polemicists, Hanson removes the mantle of historian and engages in criticism of the patristic interpretations: “the result is, inevitably, much perverse and some positively grotesque interpretation,” R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 826. Hanson goes on to call these approaches “exegetical contortions.” Cf. the discussion by Kevin Madigan, “*Christus Nescius?* Was Christ Ignorant of the Day of Judgment? Arian and Orthodox Interpretation of Mark 13:32 in the Ancient Latin West,” *Harvard Theological Review* (2003), pp. 255-278.

Thomas V. Morris has recently given a rigorous defense of the Athanasian strategy.¹²⁶ One could ask of the Athanasian model how it is that a *nature* could know something (or how a person could know something according to a nature). To many modern ears, the claim that a nature could know something seems rather odd, and for this reason (perhaps among others) the Athanasian strategy seems problematic to many people. Morris' approach interprets the "two natures" as entailing (or at least involving) "two minds," and he provides a strong defense of this model. The attribution of two minds to Jesus Christ, however, raises other concerns for some philosophers and theologians. Some worry that talk of two minds sounds Nestorian or denigrates the unity of the person of Christ. And many think that Morris' version of the Athanasian strategy, while internally coherent and coherent with the tradition, is at best counterintuitive and thus of dubious apologetic value. Finally, some critics think that the strategy of Athanasius and Morris involves an overly complicated hermeneutic; the proponents of MKC are convinced that Athanasian-type readings of such passages as Mark 13:32 are both unnecessary and unhelpful. They are convinced that MKC offers a more straightforward, convincing and thus better reading of the New Testament witness to the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Summary

So where does this leave us with regard to MKC's relation to the biblical witness to the humanity of Christ? I cannot see how MKC has any problem with the scriptural testimony to Christ's humanity. MKC affirms the full humanity of Jesus; MKC is able to hold to the complete physical, emotive and mental life of the person of Jesus Christ. It

¹²⁶ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

seems clear to me that with respect to the broad biblical witness to the full and true humanity of the Son, MKC is in full agreement with traditional interpretation and can claim scriptural authority in the very robust sense of (SA1). As for MKC's relation to the biblical testimony of the ignorance of Christ, in my judgment MKC performs remarkably well. Surely its view of the ignorance of Christ is consistent with what is taught or presupposed in scripture, i.e., nothing in scripture contradicts it. And even though it is probably inevitable that intuitions play a large role in influencing my judgment, I am confident that MKC has scriptural authority at least in the sense of (SA3). For while I do not think that MKC is explicitly taught or perhaps even presupposed in scripture, I think that it is the best interpretation of the witness of these passages of scripture taken as a whole. The advocates of MKC might wish to argue for something more – maybe they think that MKC has a legitimate claim to scriptural authority in the sense of (SA2) or even (SA1). I am not so sure, but I do think that MKC can lay claim to (SA3) authority.

This is not the place for a detailed examination of Morris' model, but it seems likely that MKC could make a strong argument that it is at least as well off as the "two minds" model here. It may be true that the "two minds" model has biblical authority in the sense of (SA4) (I think that it does), but it is not clear that it can easily access (SA3). I doubt that the proponents of the Athanasian-Morrisian strategy would even try to argue for (SA1) or even (SA2). The bottom line here is that MKC appears to be at least as well off as the other options, and it is arguably better equipped than its competitors to deal with the statements affirming the humanity and especially the ignorance of Jesus Christ. I conclude that MKC does not have a problem in the affirmation of the true and full humanity of Christ.

THE INCARNATION AND MKC

It seems that MKC is able to say amen to the New Testament witness to both the humanity and the divinity of Christ. In fact, it is a strength of MKC that it is able to do so in a convincing manner. But does MKC, despite its best intentions, somehow compromise the scriptural witness to the event of the incarnation? Does it in some way contradict what the New Testament actually says about the manner in which the divine Son became human? Before moving further, we should pause to consider this possibility.

Athanasius cites John 1:14, Acts 2:36, Hebrews 3:1-2 as well as Philippians 2 as central to the biblical teaching of the incarnation or en-fleshment of the eternally divine Son.¹²⁷ According to him, the “scope and character of Holy Scripture” is this:

It contains a double account of the Savior; that He was ever God, and is the Son, being the Father’s Word and Radiance and Wisdom; and that afterwards for us he took flesh of a virgin, Mary bearer of God, and was made man...let it suffice to mention as a specimen, first John saying, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the was Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was made not one thing;’ next, ‘and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father;’ and next Paul writing, ‘Who being in the form of God, thought it not a prize to be equal with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion like a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.’¹²⁸

Is there something in this biblical witness to the incarnation that MKC struggles to affirm? Even though MKC is able to account for both the biblical witness to the humanity of Christ and the divinity of Christ, can it also account for the passages which speak of the Son’s act of becoming human? As will become apparent, I see no reason

¹²⁷ E.g. Athanasius, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, XIV.1, p. 348.

¹²⁸ Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XVI.29, p. 409.

why MKC might stumble here. MKC can – and does – offer wholehearted and enthusiastic affirmation to the “double account” of Holy Scripture to the full humanity and (continuing) full divinity of the Son in the incarnation.

In Philippians 2:5-11 we have what many advocates and defenders of orthodoxy (MKC and otherwise) see as an extremely important biblical text on the incarnation:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Verse 6 tells us that Jesus Christ existed in the nature or form (*ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ*) of God, and verse 7 tells us that Christ “made himself nothing” or “emptied himself” (*ἐάυτου ἐκενωσεν*). Verse 7 informs us that in the *kenosis* Christ “made himself nothing” by “taking on the nature of a servant” (*μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν*) and by “being made in human likeness” (*ἐν ὁμοιωματι ἀνθρώπων γενομένος*). This indicates that the “emptying” of Christ involves the “taking on” or assumption of human nature.

The Christian tradition has understood this passage to teach both the full divinity and the full humanity of Christ.¹²⁹ The traditional interpretation has not been that Christ emptied himself of *divinity* – rather the Church has insisted that the *kenosis* involves a “taking on,” for in the incarnation the Son takes on our human nature for our salvation.¹³⁰ Still, it seems that this “taking on” of humanity involves an emptying of some sort. John S. Feinberg asks the crucial question: “If Christ’s emptying involved taking on a

¹²⁹ E.g. Athanasius, *Letter to the Church of Antioch*, 7, p. 485, *Discourse I Against the Arians*, XI.41, p. 330.

¹³⁰ E.g. Athanasius, *Ad Adelphium*, 4, p. 576.

complete human nature, of what did he empty himself?”¹³¹ Feinberg’s answer is both clear and concise:

The answer most consistent with the biblical teaching about the incarnate Christ is that while maintaining his divine nature, he gave up the full and constant exercise of his divine powers and the continual display of the glory that are his as God. That is, he ceded the privileges of being God without relinquishing the position of being God.¹³²

Feinberg complains that kenotic Christology violates the obvious teaching of this passage. We need not look far to see his rationale: “the kenotic view solves the problems (of the incarnation) by claiming that in becoming incarnate Christ divested himself of all divine attributes.”¹³³

In a careful analysis of Philippians 2:5-11, N.T. Wright offers a reading of this passage which both coheres well with MKC and helps illuminate MKC’s response to the type of criticism lodged by Feinberg.¹³⁴ Following and expanding on the earlier work of Roy W. Hoover,¹³⁵ Wright argues that Philippians 2 teaches that the Son was already

¹³¹ John S. Feinberg, “The Incarnation of Jesus Christ” in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (eds.), *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 231. Ben Witherington III notes that “the verb stripped or emptied must have some content to it, and it is not adequate to say that Christ did not subtract anything because he actually added a human nature. The latter is true enough, but the text says he *did* empty or strip himself. It does not tell us explicitly what he emptied himself of.” *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), p. 264.

¹³² John S. Feinberg, “The Incarnation of Jesus Christ,” p. 231.

¹³³ John S. Feinberg, “The Incarnation of Jesus Christ,” p. 230.

¹³⁴ I think that Wright’s preferred interpretation would also fit with other models of the incarnation (notably that of Feinberg), but to argue for that is not the burden of this essay.

¹³⁵ Roy W. Hoover, “The Harpagmos Enigma: A Philological Solution,” *Harvard Theological Review* (1971), pp. 95-119.

divine (and thus possessed equality with the Father) but did not regard this divinity as something to be taken advantage of.¹³⁶ Wright explains the significance of this view:

Over against the standard picture of the oriental despots, who understood their position as something to be used for their own advantage, Jesus understood his position to *mean* self-negation, the vocation described in vv.7-8. In Moule's phrase, divine equality does not mean 'getting' but 'giving.' It is properly expressed in self-giving love. We could then translate v. 6f: 'who, being in the form of God, did not regard this divine equality as something to be used for his own advantage, but rather emptied himself... If we apply this understanding of vv.6f to the passage as a whole, a new coherence results. The pre-existent son regarded equality with God not as excusing him from the task of (redemptive) suffering and death, but actually as uniquely qualifying him for that vocation... *ΕΚΕΙΩΘΕΝ* does not refer to the loss of divine attributes but – in good Pauline fashion – to making something powerless, to emptying it of apparent significance. The real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross is that one who was himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation. The real theological emphasis of the hymn, therefore, is not simply a new view of Jesus. It is a new view of God.¹³⁷

Witherington also takes this approach; he argues that “the contrast between vv 6b and 7a is very suggestive. It suggests Christ set aside his rightful divine prerogatives, or perhaps his *doxa*. This probably does not mean he set aside his divine nature, but it does surely indicate some sort of self-limitation, some sort of setting aside of divine rights or glory. He lived among humans as one of them, drawing on the power of the Spirit and prayer through which God revealed much to him.”¹³⁸

MKC can wholeheartedly agree with this view (even if it goes beyond Wright and Witherington in offering an account of what this means). For it agrees with Witherington that “perhaps it (Philippians 2) means that Christ did not act or draw on his ability to be

¹³⁶ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 81.

¹³⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, pp. 83-84.

¹³⁸ Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage*, p. 264.

omnipotent, omnipresent or omniscient.”¹³⁹ It affirms that the kenosis means a surrender of some of the powers and privileges that ordinarily come with divinity, and it denies that divinity itself or the divine attributes essential to divinity are lost in the incarnation. Furthermore, it agrees with Wright that in the incarnation we receive the clearest revelation of God – the incarnation does offer us what is in some respects a “new view of God.”

With this explanation of Philippians 2 in mind, we are in a better position to evaluate Feinberg’s criticism. As we have seen, he complains that kenotic models of the incarnation hold that divine attributes (or divinity itself) is lost in the incarnation. But is this true of MKC? Does MKC put forth a view of the incarnation that is in conflict with what Philippians 2 actually teaches about the incarnation? I readily admit that Feinberg’s criticisms (which I think are expressive or representative of many theologians) may apply to the more radical or Gessian-type kenotic models – in fact I am inclined to think that they do hit the target. In other words, I am prone to agree with Feinberg that those kenotic models that deny the divinity of Christ or that do not admit any “taking on” or assumption in the incarnation are liable to this criticism. But I do not think that this criticism applies to MKC. For unless MKC denies the continuing divinity of the Son during the incarnation or denies that there was a real “taking on” of human nature by the divine person, I fail to see that there is a problem here. MKC fully affirms the continuing divinity of the kenotically-incarnate Son (even if it understands what that means or how

¹³⁹ Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage*, p. 264 n.62.

that takes place somewhat differently than many in the tradition). And I see no reason for MKC to deny that the Son “takes on” full human nature while remaining divine.¹⁴⁰

If Feinberg (and Wright) are correct that Philippians 2 teaches that “the answer most consistent with the biblical teaching” is that the fully human and fully divine Christ “gave up the full and consistent exercise of his divine powers and the continual display of the glory,” then MKC fits very well with the teaching of Philippians 2. What MKC offers is a more precise and careful way of thinking about what it means for the incarnate Son of God to give up the full and consistent exercise of his divine powers. For MKC insists that the kenotically-incarnate Son shares the essential divine attributes (e.g. omniscience-unless-kenotically-and-redemptively-incarnate) with the Father and the Spirit while employing them differently while kenotically incarnate.

To this point I have taken a fairly close look at MKC’s ability to account for the biblical witness to both the humanity and the divinity of Christ, at least when Scripture is read in a broadly traditional way. I have argued that MKC is not unable to account for the scriptural revelation of the divinity of Christ. I have also argued that MKC is able to offer a clear and intuitively convincing picture of the humanity of Jesus Christ – one that coheres very well with the vivid biblical testimony. Finally, I have argued that MKC has the resources to deal with the scriptural witness to the actual event of the incarnation. I conclude that MKC is not liable to charges that it violates the teachings of scripture regarding the true and full humanity and the true and full divinity of Christ. MKC may not be demanded by the deliverances of scripture (although it is open to its advocates to

¹⁴⁰ Thomas R. Thompson thinks that MKC is a Gessian-type kenoticism. He looks at several historical models or types of kenotic Christology and locates MKC where he sees the best fit. I see things differently – I think that MKC is a kenotic model distinct from all the types or models that he surveys. If he is right

make this claim), but it does not obviously transgress the biblical account of the incarnate Son.

CONTEMPORARY CONCERNS

We have seen that, when the biblical teachings of the identity of the person of Jesus Christ are interpreted in a broadly traditional sense (and thus pre-critically), there is no reason to think that MKC fails to account for what Scripture says about Christ. I think that this would also hold true for a post-critical or canonical-critical approach.¹⁴¹ To the contrary, MKC fits quite well with the biblical accounts when they are interpreted this way. The critic might object, however, that MKC gets into trouble precisely at this point – its overly traditional reading of Scripture leads it to ignore (and perhaps even violate) what the Bible really teaches. More pointedly, it might be said that MKC goes astray by ignoring the findings of historical biblical criticism; by the lack of interaction with (or dependence upon) critical biblical scholarship MKC allows tradition to trump what the New Testament actually says.

The concern that overly traditional theological readings of Scripture are actually misleading is so prevalent that it seems to have taken on the status of orthodoxy in many circles. It is evidenced in the work of N.T. Wright, who worries that “pre-critical”¹⁴²

about MKC, then perhaps this criticism applies. Cf. Thomas R. Thompson, “Trinity and Kenosis,” forthcoming, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ E.g. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflections on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 70-94. Childs states that the “entire New Testament presupposes the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God,” and he argues that “it is irresponsible to dismiss such confessions as Nicea and Chalcedon as ‘abstract’ or ‘Greek’ . . .,” pp. 469, 482.

¹⁴² N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God, Volume Two* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 104. C. Stephen Evans notes the rather pejorative manner of

interpretations make it all too easy for the theologically motivated observer to “inflict his or her point of view onto unwilling material,”¹⁴³ and who insists that he agrees “completely with the (Jesus) Seminar that the search for Jesus in his historical context is possible, vital and urgent. I am as convinced as they are that if the church ignores such a search it is living in a fool’s paradise.”¹⁴⁴ This concern is also seen in this bold statement of the Jesus Seminar about the “smothering cloud of the historic creeds:”

The church appears to smother the historical Jesus by superimposing this heavenly figure on him in the creed: Jesus is displaced as the Christ, as the so-called Apostle’s Creed makes evident... the figure in this creed is a mythical or heavenly figure, whose connection with the sage from Nazareth is limited to his suffering and death under Pontius Pilate. Nothing between his birth and death appears to be essential to his mission or to the faith of the church. Accordingly, the gospels may be understood as corrections of this creedal imbalance.¹⁴⁵

This general concern, as narrowed to the doctrine of the incarnation, is expressed with force by John Hick:

The historical Jesus did not make the claim to deity that later Christian thought was to make for him: he did not understand himself to be God, or God the Son, incarnate. Divine incarnation, in the sense that Christian theology has used the idea, requires that an eternally pre-existent element of the Godhead, God the Son or the divine Logos, became incarnate as a human being. But it is *extremely*

Wright’s use of “pre-critical,” “Methodological Naturalism in Historical Biblical Scholarship,” pp. 189-190.

¹⁴³ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p. 117.

¹⁴⁴ N. Thomas Wright, “Five Gospels But No Gospel: Jesus and the Seminar” in Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans (eds.), *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus: New Testament Tools and Studies, Volume XXVIII,2* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 119. Wright goes on to say that “my own study of Jesus leads me to believe that ‘conservative’ and ‘orthodox’ Christianity, in the twentieth century at least, has often, indeed quite regularly, missed the point of Jesus’ sayings and deeds almost entirely.” Wright also says (contra Brevard Childs?) that traditionally-minded Christians are “capable of all kinds of fantasies and anachronisms in reading the Gospels, and to pull the blanket of the canon over our heads and pretend that we are safe in our private, fideistic world is sheer self-delusion,” “Jesus and the Identity of God,” *Ex Auditu* 14 (1998), p. 49.

¹⁴⁵ Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover and The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1993), p. 7. Cf. P.M. Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 163.

unlikely that the historical Jesus would have thought of himself in such a way. Indeed, he probably would have rejected the idea as blasphemous...¹⁴⁶

This objection to MKC (or cluster of objections) seems to cover several important issues. It might include the complaint that MKC does what the earliest Christians did not do; namely, worship Jesus Christ as divine. This objection might go further to argue that MKC makes the mistake of thinking of Jesus what he never thought of himself – that he was divine. Furthermore, even if it is allowed that Jesus was venerated as divine (and even if this is because he made implicit claims that led people to this conclusion), it might be objected that the NT does not teach that the person of Jesus Christ was preexistent.

Before proceeding I note that there are several ways that MKC could respond to this argument. In other words, MKC might not even worry about justifying itself at the bar of historical biblical criticism; MKC could go any of several routes to avoid the alleged problem without facing it directly. First, it could adopt the aforementioned canonical-critical approach. It could go with the “radical reformation” hermeneutic of John Howard Yoder, “according to which it is safer for the life of the church to have the whole people of God reading the whole body of canonical Scripture than to trust for enlightenment only to certain of the filtering processes through which the learned folk of a given age would insist that all truth must pass.”¹⁴⁷ The advocates of MKC could take

¹⁴⁶ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 27, emphasis original.

¹⁴⁷ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vic Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 4. I am indebted to Keith D. Stanglin for this reference.

another track and reassert or argue for the “superiority of pre-critical exegesis.”¹⁴⁸ Or they could simply agree with Peter VanInwagen (and Alvin Plantinga) that such critical considerations are irrelevant for the theologian.¹⁴⁹

MKC’s advocates may not want to take any of these routes; they might prefer to challenge the objection from historical-critical biblical scholarship directly. In other words, they might prefer to engage in an exercise of what C. Stephen Evans calls “type-two methodological naturalism” – they may choose to employ a method (methodological naturalism) that may be valuable without regarding that method as obligatory.¹⁵⁰

Accordingly, I will mention some critical arguments to the conclusion that Jesus was worshipped in the early church, that Jesus claimed divinity (at least implicitly) and that Jesus is seen by the NT writers as the Son of God who was both fully divine and pre-existent.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ E.g. David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” reprinted from *Theology Today* in Stephen E. Fowl (ed.), *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), pp. 26-38. Cf. Daniel J. Treier, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis? *Sic Et Non*,” *Trinity Journal* (2003), pp. 77-103.

¹⁴⁹ Peter VanInwagen, “Critical Studies of the New Testament and the User of the New Testament” in Eleonore Stump and Thomas P. Flint (eds.), *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), pp. 159-190. VanInwagen argues that “if a user of the New Testament has grounds for believing that the New Testament is historically and theologically reliable, grounds that are established independently of Critical Studies, and if he has good reason to believe that Critical Studies do not undermine these grounds, then he need not attend further to Critical Studies,” p. 161. Alvin Plantinga states that he concurs (at least “for the most part”) with VanInwagen, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 375.

¹⁵⁰ C. Stephen Evans, “Methodological Naturalism in Historical Biblical Scholarship” in Carey C. Newman (ed.), *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N.T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), pp. 180-206.

¹⁵¹ I make no attempt to be comprehensive in treating the various critical studies that are relevant to these issues. A mere survey of the last two decades of research on the life of Jesus and early Christian traditions would be far beyond the reach of this study (not to mention the research of the last two centuries!). Interaction with and evaluation of this vast sea of material is of course out of the question. My aim is much more modest (and realistic) – I simply mention some of what I take to be the more promising arguments. To attempt to do more would be foolhardy; to pretend to do more would be posterous.

The Worship of Christ in the New Testament

There are several lines of evidence that converge to support the conclusion that Jesus was worshipped in earliest Christianity. Stephen T. Davis offers a helpful overview of some of the relevant evidence:

Prayers addressed to Jesus can be found from the earliest times. It is significant that Greek-speaking churches preserved in Aramaic the cry *Maranatha* (“Our Lord, come!”) (1 Cor. 16:22, Didache 10:6); this shows its primitive origin. Personal prayers to Jesus seem to have been commonplace (2 Cor. 12:8; 1 Thess. 3:11-13; 2 Thess. 2:16-17; 3:5,16; Acts 1:24; 7:59-60). There were also doxologies addressed to Christ, or to Christ and the Father together, although most appear in relatively late NT texts (2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Peter 3:18; Rev. 1:5-6,13; cf. 7:10). In earlier texts, doxologies with the phrase “through Jesus Christ” appear (Rom. 16:27; cf. 2 Cor. 1:20). Hymns of praise to Christ were also common (Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16; cf. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).¹⁵²

On closer examination, we can see that Davis’ argument has ample support in contemporary scholarship.

In his recent work, Larry W. Hurtado makes an impressive case that exalted devotion to and even worship of Christ is well-attested in the New Testament. He begins with an examination of the recognition and corresponding worship of Christ in pre-Pauline and early Pauline theology. After surveying Paul’s use of familial language (e.g., “Son”) for Jesus, Hurtado concludes that for Paul the “biblical category ‘Son’ was a profoundly expressive way of registering this radically changed view of Jesus,” a Jesus who was now recognized as “having a uniquely favored status and relationship with God.”¹⁵³ This alone does not show a great deal, but it adds to the total picture of early Pauline and pre-Pauline conceptions of Jesus. This portrait is developed further by a look

¹⁵² Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?,” p. 235.

¹⁵³ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), p. 108.

at Paul's use of the title *Kyrios* with reference to Jesus. Hurtado argues that Paul's application of OT *Kyrios* passages which "originally have to do with God" to Jesus "connote and presuppose the conviction that in some profound way he is directly and uniquely associated with God."¹⁵⁴ Hurtado's argument gathers steam as he surveys Paul's understanding of the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus. His argument gains momentum as he looks at the prayers to Jesus, invocation and confession of Jesus, baptism in the name of Jesus and the hymns to Jesus in the New Testament. He argues that Paul and the earliest Christians never surrendered monotheism (as monotheism was conceived in Second Temple Judaism) but rather included Jesus in it. He concludes that the Jewish monotheistic tradition underwent a "significant mutation"¹⁵⁵ that resulted in nothing short of "binitarian worship."¹⁵⁶ Despite worries by some critics that this devotion to Jesus (pronounced though it is and significant though it may be) might not amount to *worship*, Ben Witherington III declares that the "Christological import" of the early and pre-Pauline material may be summarized in this way: "(1) It was believed that it was appropriate to pray to or to confess Jesus in the same way God was prayed to or confessed. (2) It was believed that it was appropriate to call Jesus, at least after his resurrection, by the title that was used in the Old Testament of God – *kyrios*. This title denoted a relationship between the believer and Jesus that formerly Jewish believers had

¹⁵⁴ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 112.

¹⁵⁵ Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), p. 100.

¹⁵⁶ E.g. Larry W. Hurtado, "Jesus' Divine Sonship in Paul's Epistle to the Romans" in Sven K. Soderlund and N.T. Wright (eds.), *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), pp. 224-225, *One God, One Lord*, p. 100 and *Lord Jesus Christ*, pp. 134-153.

only recognized as appropriate to describe the relationship of God and the believer.”¹⁵⁷

In short, we can see that there is a strong case to be made for the presence of worship of Christ from the earliest times.

Although the Christology of the Synoptics and Q (especially Q) is often assumed to be much “lower,” there are arguments that this issue is not nearly as neat as is commonly supposed. Hurtado contends that “Q presents a clear and sustained emphasis on the importance of Jesus,” and he concludes that, at the least, there is nothing in Q that counts against the “high” Christologies of other sections of the NT.¹⁵⁸ Witherington goes a step further; he contends that “the significance and preeminence of Jesus are established in the Q tradition in two ways: (1) by the identification of Jesus with Wisdom... and (2) by the identification of Jesus as the Son of Man, both of which categories are pointers to the divinity of Christ.”¹⁵⁹

Hurtado also notes Matthew’s “fondness for scenes where people give reverence to Jesus,” for “much more frequently than the other Gospel authors, Matthew uses the Greek word *proskynein* to describe the reverence that people offer Jesus.”¹⁶⁰ Hurtado is aware that this demonstrates very little of itself, for the verb can mean either the worship one gives to a god or designate “a reverential posture that one adopts toward a social superior when pleading for mercy or seeking a favor.”¹⁶¹ But he also concludes that “it is

¹⁵⁷ Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ: The Christologies of the New Testament and Beyond* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), p. 77.

¹⁵⁸ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 245.

¹⁵⁹ Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ*, p. 93.

¹⁶⁰ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 337.

¹⁶¹ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 337. Cf. the wise discussion by C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 175-176.

also likely that the intended readers would have seen the reverence as an unwitting anticipation of post-Jesus Christian circles.”¹⁶² Furthermore, this exalted sense of devotion to Jesus makes sense in the context of Matthew’s emphasis on the identity of Jesus as the embodiment of Wisdom. Witherington argues that Matthew has a “high” Christology because he presents “Jesus not merely as a sage but as God’s Wisdom come to earth” – indeed “as God’s presence on earth, Immanuel.”¹⁶³ He states that

The use of the term Immanuel or the idea behind it to frame the Gospel (1:23 and 28:20-21) is likely to indicate not just that Jesus brought the presence of God to God’s people while he was on earth, but, as Matthew 28 suggests, he continued to be, even after his death and resurrection, the divine presence with them forever. This concept likely has ontological overtones suggesting the omnipresence of Jesus after his exaltation.¹⁶⁴

Witherington concludes that in Matthew we have “the apex of canonical Christological development,” for according to Matthew there is “one great sage, one great teacher, one final Son of David, one person who can be called Immanuel. This person is Jesus... it is clear that Jesus is seen as both human and divine, both sage and Wisdom, even if Matthew nowhere directly uses the term *theos* of Jesus.”¹⁶⁵ Even if Witherington is not completely right, even if he has overstated the case somewhat, even if the evidence that Jesus was worshiped as divine is somewhat ambiguous in the Synoptics,¹⁶⁶ this

¹⁶² Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 338.

¹⁶³ Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ*, p. 139.

¹⁶⁴ Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ*, p. 145.

¹⁶⁵ Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ*, pp. 149-150.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Larry W. Hurtado, “Homage to Jesus and Early Christian Devotion,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (2003), pp. 131-146. Hurtado holds that it is highly likely that the devotion paid to the historical Jesus was not intended as worship; he also maintains that in Matthew we see a “clear programmatic effort to heighten the homage given by people to the earthly Jesus,” p. 146. Hurtado does not think that Matthew is engaging in distortion of the historical facts, rather Matthew’s editorial process places an emphasis on homage that would be recognized by Matthew’s readers.

interpretation of the data coheres very well with the overall NT picture of Christ as the fitting object of worship. Again, it is far from obvious that the witness of the Gospels counts *against* the notion that Jesus was worshipped as divine. To the contrary, it fits nicely.

The “high” Christology of the Fourth Gospel has long been recognized. But recent study strengthens the argument that Jesus is portrayed as divine and worshipped accordingly in this gospel. For instance, after looking at the references to the divine name in John in comparison to the references to the divine name in Isaiah 40-66, Hurtado concludes that

In light of these Isaiah references, when we consider the several Johannine references to the divine name, we can see the background that is presupposed and adapted in GJohn to make important claims about Jesus. GJohn draws upon this rich, close, almost interchangeable association of God and God’s name to express a uniquely intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father. Indeed, for the author of GJohn, for whom the biblical traditions provided the authoritative store of vocabulary, images, and themes by which to express the significance of Jesus, this divine-name tradition constituted the most profound way to portray the relationship of the “Son” to the “Father.” To speak of Jesus as invested with the divine name, as coming with and in the name of God, as given the name, and as manifesting God’s name in his own words and actions, was to portray Jesus as bearing and exhibiting God in the most direct way possible in the conceptual categories available in biblical tradition, and within the monotheistic commitment of that tradition.¹⁶⁷

Hurtado also compares the Johannine picture of Jesus with later efforts to push toward creedal clarification, and he suggests that “the Johannine use of divine-name tradition is in its own terms an equivalently radical and direct claim about the linkage of Jesus to God.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 385.

¹⁶⁸ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 385.

From his examination of Johannine devotion to Christ, Hurtado is convinced that “in spite of the Johannine distinctives in vocabulary and motifs, this consistent reference to Jesus in relation to God attests to a profound agreement with the rest of the New Testament.”¹⁶⁹ He concludes that, for John, “the only way to honor God is to honor Jesus.”¹⁷⁰

When we look at other sources for our understanding of how Jesus was viewed in early Jewish Christianity, it is arguable that we see little or nothing to contradict the exalted view of the worship-worthy Jesus that is found elsewhere in the NT. Hurtado points out that the Christologies of the “other early Jesus books” (e.g. Secret Mark, the Gospel of Peter, the “infancy gospels,” and especially the Gospel of Thomas) are also “high” in some ways.¹⁷¹ These gospels most certainly do not have a “proto-orthodox” view of Christ, but they do have an exalted view of him.¹⁷² When we look at the Christology of Luke-Acts, however, the situation is markedly different; here it is sometimes argued (from the sayings and actions of Jesus as well as from the divine name) that Jesus is actually seen and revered as “Yahweh’s co-equal.”¹⁷³

The testimony of the later NT documents to the worship of Jesus is well attested in recent NT scholarship. Hurtado is willing to refer to the Jesus of Hebrews as the

¹⁶⁹ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 394. In taking this position, Hurtado is not alone, e.g. Richard Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity: Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series* (London: SCM Press, 1970), pp. 58-59, Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ*, pp. 139-140 and H. Douglas Buckwalter, *The Character and Purpose of Luke’s Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 240-264.

¹⁷⁰ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 405.

¹⁷¹ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, pp. 427-485.

¹⁷² “Proto-orthodox” is Hurtado’s term, for an explanation and discussion see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, pp. 563-648.

¹⁷³ E.g., H. Douglas Buckwalter, *The Character and Purpose of Luke’s Christology*, pp. 184-185.

“unique divine Son” who also has a “fully human existence.”¹⁷⁴ In Hebrews 1:1-4, it is arguable that Jesus is the object of adoring worship in this early Christian hymn. As Witherington puts it, “here Christ is affirmed to be the eternal Son of God... our author wants to stress the superiority of Christ over angels and all other lesser beings that might garner human attention and worship.”¹⁷⁵ In other words, Hebrews does not flinch to worship Jesus as divine. The worship of Jesus is perhaps even more pronounced in the Revelation of John. In an important study of this topic, Richard J. Bauckham argues that there is a sharp distinction between angels (who *must not* be worshipped) and God (who of course *must* be worshipped). Bauckham argues further that the author of Revelation consistently locates Jesus on the side of God and not the angels, and he makes a strong case that (even in the context of the monotheism of Second Temple Judaism) Jesus was revered and indeed worshipped as only a divine being should be worshipped. Bauckham states the point clearly; for him “there can be no doubt that in 5:8-12 John portrays explicit divine worship being paid to Christ.”¹⁷⁶ He shows how this theme of worship is seen throughout the book:

At 15:13 the climax of the throne-vision is reached as the circle of worship expands to encompass the whole creation and the doxology is addressed to both God and the Lamb, uniting the praise of God (4:9-11) with the praise of the Lamb (5:9-12) in a single hymn which anticipates the goal of God’s purpose through Christ, the universal worship in the new heaven and earth. The conjunction of God and the Lamb (cf. 7:10; 11:15; 14:4; 20:6; 21:22; 22:1) in this verse illustrates how John, while holding Christ worthy of worship, remains sensitive to the issue of monotheism in worship. Christ cannot be an alternate object of worship alongside God, but shares in the glory due to God. So the specific

¹⁷⁴ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 505.

¹⁷⁵ Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ*, p. 214.

¹⁷⁶ Richard J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 137.

worship of Christ (5:9-12) leads to the joint worship of God and Christ, in a formula in which God retains the primacy.¹⁷⁷

His conclusion is clear: the author “places Christ on the divine side of the distinction between God and creation, but he wishes to avoid ways of speaking which sound to him polytheistic.”¹⁷⁸

In summary, it should be clear that there are arguments to be made that Christ was indeed worshipped in the earliest days of Christianity. As Davis puts it, “*worship of Jesus was a very ancient phenomenon.*”¹⁷⁹ There is evidence that Christ was worshipped as divine in the early Pauline documents (as well as in hymnic fragments which are likely pre-Pauline). There is also reason to believe that early Jewish Christianity (especially as expressed by Luke) had what might minimally be called extraordinary devotion to Jesus, and there is nothing in the Synoptics or even in Q to make us think otherwise. In the Johannine corpus, the later Pauline and particularly in other later NT documents (e.g. Hebrews) the situation is even more straightforward, for the worship of Christ is more pronounced. And in the book of Revelation the scene could scarcely be clearer: here worship of Jesus is not merely permissible; it is demanded. As Witherington summarizes it, this is a “high Christology” which we find “at least as early as the Christological hymn

¹⁷⁷ Richard J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 138-139. Cf. Richard J. Bauckham, “The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity,” *New Testament Studies* (1980/1981), pp. 322-341.

¹⁷⁸ Richard J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, p. 140. Cf. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), pp. 261-265.

¹⁷⁹ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?,” p. 234, emphasis original.

material which goes back to the earliest Jewish Christians; we find it in the Pauline corpus, in Hebrews, in the Johannine corpus, and also in Second Peter.”¹⁸⁰

Hurtado’s conclusion is fitting. He recognizes the amazing diversity within early Christian views of the identity of Jesus, but he argues that one unifying theme is primary:

Christians were proclaiming and worshipping Jesus, indeed, living and dying for his sake, well before the doctrinal/creedal developments of the second century and thereafter that have received so much attention... The early convictions about Jesus and the corresponding devotion offered to him that became so widespread in earliest Christianity were sufficiently robust to nourish the prolonged and vigorous attempts to articulate Christian faith in persuasive doctrinal formulations.¹⁸¹

If these arguments are successful, then it is obvious that Jesus was worshipped in earliest Christianity. But why would he have been worshipped this way? To this question we now turn.

The Claims of Christ

The worship of Jesus as divine comes so early, and indeed seems to have been so settled that it could be almost taken for granted by Paul (if Philippians 2 does contain a hymnic fragment that predates him), that it is hard to imagine how this worship might have arisen *in opposition to* what he himself taught. In fact, there are good reasons to believe that the worship of Jesus actually is rooted in the claims that he made for himself.

I am not saying or even meaning to imply that Jesus ever said, “Howdy, I’m the Second Person of the Trinity.” In fact, at this point I am not saying that Jesus made *explicit* claims to divinity. What I shall focus attention on are what R.T. France calls the “less obvious, but arguably more impressive... way Jesus’ sayings sometimes assume

¹⁸⁰ Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ*, p. 225.

¹⁸¹ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 650.

divine functions for himself, or seem to put him in the place of God.”¹⁸² In what follows I shall follow the lead of Davis in showing that there are strong arguments that “presuppose the basic correctness of the methods and conclusions of some of the most radical of biblical critics” and yet conclude that “Jesus implicitly taught his own divinity.”¹⁸³

Did Jesus claim – even implicitly – to be divine? Many scholars would give a negative answer on the grounds that it is highly implausible (if not impossible) that a God-fearing first-century Jew would make such a claim.¹⁸⁴ But other scholars disagree; they think that this conclusion is too hasty and too driven by pre-conceived (as well as ahistorical) notions of what a first-century Jew could or could not think. In a recent essay, N.T. Wright challenges this conclusion. He argues that the Old Testament narrative (and especially of Daniel 7 and Isaiah) “is that of the long-awaited return from exile, not only of Israel’s return, but above all that of YHWH himself... Jesus understood his own vocation in these terms; that he would embody in his own actions, his own journey to Jerusalem and what he would do there, and supremely in his own death, this long-promised and long-awaited action of YHWH.”¹⁸⁵ Wright admits that such a self-understanding would have been “shocking,” “striking” and even “worrying,” but he

¹⁸² R.T. France, “The Worship of Jesus: A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?” in Harold H. Rowden (ed.), *Christ the Lord: Essays in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982), pp. 27-28.

¹⁸³ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?,” p. 234.

¹⁸⁴ N.T. Wright states that “we still live in an climate of thought in which two propositions are assumed as axiomatic: (a) no first-century Jew could think of incarnation, let alone believe it, let alone believe it of himself; (b) no sane people (and we hope that Jesus was sane, though even his family said he was mad!) could think of themselves as the incarnate Sons of God,” “Jesus’ Self-Understanding” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 50.

¹⁸⁵ N.T. Wright, “Jesus’ Self-Understanding,” p. 55.

insists that “what was thinkable for the early Jewish church must have been thinkable for the early Jewish Jesus.”¹⁸⁶

Even if it is possible, however, we are still left to wonder if there are any reasons for thinking that Jesus *did* make such claims. Some scholars are far from convinced. For instance, James D.G. Dunn concludes that it is “likely that Jesus made no attempt to lay claim to any title as such; also that he rejected at least one which others tried to fit him to... it would appear that Jesus saw it as no part of his mission to make specific claims about his own status.”¹⁸⁷ Dunn thinks that we *can* be reasonably confident that Jesus saw himself as “God’s eschatological agent at the climax of God’s purposes for Israel.”¹⁸⁸ Dunn also thinks that we can be confident of Jesus’ “sense of intimate sonship before God and of the dependence of the disciples upon him, and his probably strong hope for final acknowledgment as the man who was playing the decisive role in bringing the kingdom to fulfillment and consummation.”¹⁸⁹ But he finally asks “at a responsibly historical level, can we say more?”¹⁹⁰ For Dunn, apparently not.

But there are other scholars who see things differently. For instance, Witherington argues that the relationships of Jesus as well as the deeds and sayings of Jesus (e.g., taking onto himself not only the “Son of Man” title but also that of

¹⁸⁶ N.T. Wright, “Jesus’ Self-Understanding,” p. 55.

¹⁸⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), p. 761.

¹⁸⁸ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, p. 762.

¹⁸⁹ James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, p. 762

¹⁹⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, p. 762.

“Wisdom”) point to implicit claims to divinity.¹⁹¹ Taking texts that are accepted as authentic by scholars as skeptical as the Jesus Seminar, Davis makes a case that “Jesus implicitly taught his own divinity.”¹⁹² On the basis of such passages as Luke 11:20/Matthew 12:28; Mark 7:14-15/Matthew 15:11/Thomas 14:5; Mark 2:7-8/Matthew 12:8/Luke 6:5; Matthew 8:22/Luke 9:59, Matthew 5:43-44/Luke 6:27; Mark 12:1-9/Thomas 65:1-7 (all of which are considered at least probable by the Jesus Seminar), Davis argues that Jesus assumed the authority to reinterpret and (perhaps) even correct the Mosaic law. In doing so, Jesus was not merely challenging *rabbinic interpretations* of the Torah – he was taking authority over the Torah *of God* and thus placing himself in the place of God. Davis is not claiming that the critics accept his *interpretations* of these texts; instead his claim is “simply that they consider these statements from Jesus to be authentic or probably authentic, and that from these texts alone a very high Christology can be inferred. That is, a probable case can be made that Jesus implicitly taught his own divinity.”¹⁹³

The assumption of Jesus of the authority to forgive sins (e.g., Mark 2:5-10; Luke 7:48) also reinforces belief that Jesus implicitly claimed to be divine.¹⁹⁴ As a devout Jew,

¹⁹¹ E.g. Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ*, pp. 24-72 and *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

¹⁹² Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?,” p. 236.

¹⁹³ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?,” p. 239. Davis notes that Jacob Neusner “states that Jesus’ attitude toward the Torah makes him want to ask: ‘Who do you think that you are? God?,’” p. 242.

¹⁹⁴ Mark 2:5b-10 and Luke 7:48 are not considered authentic by the Jesus Seminar. The Jesus Seminar does admit, however, that with respect to Mark 2 “it is possible that these words echo something that Jesus actually said” (because they appear in at least two independent sources), but they “have designated these words black, however, primarily because they appear to have been invented by the storyteller as something appropriate for the specific occasion,” Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover (eds.), *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 45. No other reason is given – other than the fact that this saying *would* make sense here – for rejecting the authenticity of this passage.

Jesus would have known that only God has the prerogative and authority to forgive sins, and yet he takes this authority on himself.¹⁹⁵ Jesus' radical calls to discipleship (e.g. Luke 9:62; Mark 10:23, 25) can also be interpreted in this way.¹⁹⁶ Royce Gordon Gruenler comments that what these passages "say of Jesus' self-understanding is astounding: in making an absolute demand of his hearers he is evincing a self-concept that implies that he considers himself absolutely worth following."¹⁹⁷ He asks, "Who else could make such a demand and have so high an estimate of his own authority but one who is either mad or the divinely authoritative person he claims to be?"¹⁹⁸ And when we consider the charges of blasphemy incited by the claims of Jesus to be "the Christ, the Son of the Blessed" (Mark 14:61-62; cf. Luke 22:69), the case that Jesus claimed divinity looks even stronger.¹⁹⁹

Davis follows the lead of Joachim Jeremias in arguing that Jesus' use of *Abba* "indicates a uniquely close relationship to God" that is expressed in a way that is so

¹⁹⁵ Cf. E. Earle Ellis, "Deity-Christology in Mark 14:48" in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ, Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), pp. 192-203.

¹⁹⁶ These are rated as probable by the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, pp. 91, 316.

¹⁹⁷ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels: A Phenomenological and Exegetical Study of Synoptic Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 61.

¹⁹⁸ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 61.

¹⁹⁹ This passage is rejected by the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, pp. 122-123. But see the vigorous argument for its authenticity by Darrell L. Bock, "Jewish Expressions in Mark 14:61-62 and the Authenticity of the Jewish Examination of Jesus," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (2003), pp. 147-159, and the analysis of this passage in its historical context in Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus: A Philological-Historical Study of the Key Jewish Themes Impacting Mark 14:61-64* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) and Darrell L. Bock, "The Son of Man Seated at God's Right Hand and the Debate over Jesus' 'Blasphemy'" in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ, Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), pp. 181-191.

“intimate” as to be “almost blasphemous.”²⁰⁰ Davis concludes that Jesus’ “use of *Abba* shows a consciousness on his part of a unique position in relation to God... Jesus very probably thought of himself as God’s special son.”²⁰¹ This expression is very likely authentic,²⁰² and it arguably demonstrates a very high degree of filial consciousness of Jesus in relation to the Father. As James D.G. Dunn puts it, “this Christian assertion (that Jesus is the Son of God) did not begin as a theological assertion but in Jesus’ own experience of intimate sonship and specifically in his experience of prayer.”²⁰³

C.F.D. Moule argues that the “high Christology” of the later Christian formulations “was not necessarily an innovation, built up from material borrowed from alien sources, but could, rather, have been the articulation of an insight appropriate to what was at least implicit all along.”²⁰⁴ Similarly, R.T. France concludes that “we have the raw material in Jesus’ own teaching for an increased awareness that he was more than a prophet, and for that attitude to him which could ultimately result in worshipping him

²⁰⁰ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?,” p. 241. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1965). The intimacy of this term (and the implications of it) have been challenged by James Barr, “Abba Isn’t ‘Daddy,’” *Journal of Theological Studies* (1988), pp. 28-47 and “Abba, Father,” *Theology* (1988), pp. 173-179 and John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, p. 31. The view of Jeremias and Davis has been defended by Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of St. Paul* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1995), pp. 408-412 and Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus*, pp. 215-221.

²⁰¹ Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?,” p. 241.

²⁰² Larry W. Hurtado notes the preservation of this Aramaic term in Pauline (and perhaps pre-Pauline) literature, and he argues that this is probably “best accounted for as indications that traditions about Jesus’ relationship with God were known and were in fact influential in shaping the early Christian message of him as God’s Son” in “Son of God,” Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 902.

²⁰³ James D. G. Dunn, “Prayer” in Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 619.

²⁰⁴ C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, p. 41. Moule is referring specifically to the confession of Jesus as Lord.

as God.”²⁰⁵ Witherington agrees: “the indirect evidence suggests a messianic self-understanding... the application of *theos* language to Jesus is a post-Easter development, but this does not mean it had no foundation in how Jesus evaluated himself.”²⁰⁶

To argue that Jesus (at least implicitly) affirmed his own divinity does not require the proponent of MKC to deny that there is variety, development or transition in the Christologies of the NT. Instead it is an affirmation of one way that these Christologies developed, one that is arguably consistent with both the worship of Jesus in early Christianity and the statements and actions of Jesus himself. With its affirmation of the claims of Christ, MKC can agree with Wright’s account if this process of development:

The resurrection proved, first and foremost, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. This meant, at once, that his death had to be regarded in the same fashion as a victory, not a defeat, whereupon all of Jesus’ cryptic sayings about the meaning of his death fell into place. Within that, again very quickly, the earliest Christians came to see that what had been accomplished in Jesus’ death and resurrection, as the decisive climax to his public career of kingdom-inauguration, was indeed the victory of YHWH over the last enemies, sin and death. And with that they could no longer resist the sense, backed up again by Jesus’ cryptic sayings, that in dealing with him they were dealing with the living – and dying – embodiment of YHWH himself, Israel’s God in person. From that it is a short step – not a long haul, involving abandoning Jewish categories and embracing those of the pagan world! – to speaking of “that which was from the beginning, which we heard, which we saw with our eyes, which we beheld, and which our hands touched, concerning the word of life” (I John 1:1). The worship of Jesus in early Jewish Christianity, a worship which was not perceived as flouting monotheism but as discerning its inner heart, was indeed, as is now more regularly seen, the beginnings of Christian thinking about Jesus. But that worship was simply discerning, in the Jewish categories that he had himself made thematic, what lay at the heart of the vocation and self-understanding of Jesus himself.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ R.T. France, “The Worship of Jesus: A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?” in Harold H. Rowdon (ed.), *Christ the Lord: Essays Presented to Donald Guthrie* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 29.

²⁰⁶ Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ*, p. 69. Witherington adds that “the use of the language of Wisdom as a form of self-reference already suggested moving in that direction,” p. 69. Cf. *The Christology of Jesus*, pp. 276-277.

²⁰⁷ N.T. Wright, “The Self-Understanding of Jesus,” p. 61. Cf. Raymond Brown, “Did Jesus Know He Was God?” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* (1985), pp. 74-79.

The Preexistence of Christ

One could still object, however, that the NT does not clearly teach the preexistence of Christ as a person. In other words, one could grant that the early Christians worshipped Christ and even that Christ made claims to divinity yet still argue that the doctrine of the incarnation of the preexistent Son of God does not appear in the New Testament. After all, perhaps Jesus was adopted by God or became divine in some other way. Or perhaps the New Testament simply does not address the question of the existence of Jesus Christ prior to his birth and appearance on earth.

But such a position would find very little support in contemporary biblical scholarship. Even so skeptical (or – more charitably – cautious) a scholar as Dunn concludes that the New Testament at times affirms preexistence. He admits that the book of Hebrews presents a Christology that is very close to a concept of preexistence, and he sees it clearly in Johannine Christology. Of Hebrews he concludes that Jesus “is not only the climax of God’s revelatory and redemptive purpose but also he is more real, more really of heaven, more really divine, than anything on this imperfect earth... (this) implies some concept of pre-existence and is but a step away from a Christology consistently incarnational through and through.”²⁰⁸ But in reference to John 1 he is emphatic: “without doubt John 1:1-18 expresses the most powerful Word-Christology in the NT. Here, beyond dispute, the Word is pre-existent, and Christ is the pre-existent Word incarnate.”²⁰⁹ He concludes that

²⁰⁸ James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, second edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), p. 258.

²⁰⁹ James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p. 239. Cf. James F. McGrath, *John’s Apologetic Christology: Legitimation and Development in Johannine Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 100-101.

Now at last we have the thought of Jesus as the Son of God not merely from his resurrection or from the beginning of his ministry or from the beginning of his life but from eternity, and of the Logos-Son no longer as the impersonal (even if personified) utterance of God but as the Son of God conscious of his existence with the Father before the world was made. Here indeed in a clear and emphatic way we have a doctrine of the incarnation clearly formulated. In a very real sense all that follows hereafter is a dotting the “i’s” and crossing the “t’s” of John’s Christology.²¹⁰

Some scholars are convinced that there is a great amount of continuity among the various Christologies of the NT (more than Dunn will allow); they argue that this Johannine Christology actually fits well with the broader NT portrait of Jesus Christ. For instance, Martin Hengel thinks that there is an “amazing inner consistency from the oldest Christian confession to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel.”²¹¹ While allowing that the Christological “statements of the earliest Church... reach their climax in the Fourth Gospel,”²¹² Hengel also argues that there is nothing short of an “inner necessity about the introduction of the idea of pre-existence into Christology.”²¹³

This consistency is arguably seen in Hebrews 1:1-14. John P. Meier is convinced that this passage speaks of “the preexistent Son, creator of the world and image of God’s being;” he claims that “what the author is doing is bringing together... a Christology of preexistent Wisdom (e.g., Phil 2,6; John 1,1) and a Christology of Jesus who is enthroned

²¹⁰ James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p. 258.

²¹¹ Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), p. 389.

²¹² Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology*, p. 367.

²¹³ Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 71.

as Son or Lord at the time of his resurrection/ascension (e.g., Rom 1,4; Acts 2,34-36; 13,33; Phil 2,9-11).”²¹⁴

Other scholars maintain that preexistence is evident in the Pastoral Epistles. For instance, I. Howard Marshall contends that “incarnational language is found in 1 Timothy 3:16,” and he argues that 1 Timothy 1:15 “probably implies the pre-existence of the Saviour.”²¹⁵ Similarly, Gordon D. Fee notes that the “very fact that Christ’s humanity, and therefore identity with human beings” is so emphasized in 1 Timothy 2:5 “indicates that the presupposition is with his deity, so that special note needs to be made of his humanity.”²¹⁶

Many scholars see several instances of preexistence Christology in the Pauline corpus. In reference to 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, Fee points to the “*presuppositional* nature of Christ’s pre-existence as personally present at creation itself. Thus the one who at his exaltation is granted the right to be called ‘Lord’... is understood by Paul already to be present at creation as its mediating agent.”²¹⁷ Dunn objects to the presence of preexistence here on the grounds that the passage deals with creation rather than preexistence; he concludes that “Christ is being identified here not with a pre-existent

²¹⁴ John P. Meier, “Structure and Theology in Heb 1,1-14,” *Biblica* (1985), p. 185. Cf. Martin Hengel, *The Son of God*, p. 85-88, Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), pp. 205-227 and I. Howard Marshall, *Jesus the Saviour: Studies in New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), p. 174. L.D. Hurst, “The Christology of Hebrews 1 and 2” in L.D. Hurst and N.T. Wright (eds.), *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 163-164 and James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, pp. 207-209 are much more reserved about the existence of preexistence in Hebrews.

²¹⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *Jesus the Saviour*, p. 173.

²¹⁶ Gordon D. Fee, “St. Paul and the Incarnation” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 90.

²¹⁷ Gordon D. Fee, “St. Paul and the Incarnation,” p. 68.

being but with the creative power and action of God... the thought is not of Christ as pre-existent but of the creative act and power of God now embodied in a final and complete way in Christ.”²¹⁸ But Wright (correctly in my view) points out that this simply “begs the question,” for this passage tells of one who pre-exists creation and is thus able to mediate it.²¹⁹ After demonstrating the way that in this passage Paul has placed Jesus Christ within the *Shema* and thus “redefined it christologically, producing what we can only call a sort of christological monotheism,”²²⁰ Wright concludes that this passage “tells strongly in favor of the statement, here as in Colossians 1:15-16, of the pre-existent activity, mediating the creation, of the one who then became human as Jesus of Nazareth.”²²¹

Fee also argues that that the concept of preexistence is found in Romans (particularly in 1:3-4; 8:3-4 and 9:5).²²² C.E.B. Cranfield is in fundamental agreement with Fee on the Christology of Romans; the conclusion he draws from

The evidence of Romans is surely, *pace* Professor Dunn, that its author firmly believed in the pre-existence of Christ, in the sense that as Son of God he has shared the divine life from all eternity, and in the Incarnation, in the sense that at a particular time the eternal Son of God assumed our human nature for the sake of mankind and of the whole creation.²²³

²¹⁸ James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p. 182.

²¹⁹ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 131.

²²⁰ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 129.

²²¹ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 131.

²²² Gordon D. Fee, “St Paul and the Incarnation,” pp. 90-91. Dunn dismisses 9:5 on the grounds that the “punctuation is too uncertain,” *Christology in the Making*, p. 45. It is unfortunate that he never considers in any detail the careful work of Bruce Metzger on this issue, cf. Bruce M. Metzger, “The Punctuation of Romans 9:5” in Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (eds.), *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 95-112.

²²³ C.E.B. Cranfield, “Some Comments of Professor J.D.G. Dunn’s *Christology in the Making* with Special Reference to the Evidence of the Epistle to the Romans” in L.D. Hurst and N.T. Wright (eds.), *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 280.

Some scholars also argue (again contra Dunn) that Galatians 4:4 emphasizes what Fee calls the “presuppositional nature of Christ’s preexistence;”²²⁴ they hold that this passage makes little sense without the notion of preexistence.

Fee demonstrates the continuity of Colossians 1:15-20 with the Prologue of John, for “both assert Christ’s full deity, including his preexistence, both assert his revelatory role, and both assert his role as the divine agent of the creation of ‘all things.’”²²⁵ Dunn objects that there is no clear notion of preexistence in this passage. According to him, the assertion made in Colossians 1 is “not of Christ as present with God in the beginning, nor of Christ as identified with a pre-existent hypostasis or divine being (Wisdom) beside God, but of Christ as embodying and expressing (and defining) that power of God which is the manifestation of God in and to his creation.”²²⁶

But N.T. Wright is convinced that here (as in 1 Corinthians 8:6) we have an expansion of the *Shema* in which Jesus is now “set within the monotheistic statement himself.”²²⁷ Wright concludes that, according to this passage, “the pre-existent lord of the world has now become the human lord of the world, and in so doing has reflected fully, for the eyes of the world to see, the God whose human image he has now come to bear.”²²⁸

²²⁴ Gordon D. Fee, “St. Paul and the Incarnation,” p. 86. Fee makes a case that Dunn confuses the fact that this phrase “does not necessarily refer” to preexistence with the conclusion that “it therefore probably does not,” p. 85. Cf. I. Howard Marshall, *Jesus the Saviour*, p. 171.

²²⁵ Gordon D. Fee, “St. Paul and the Incarnation,” p. 72.

²²⁶ James D.G. Dunn, *The Christology of Jesus*, p. 194, emphasis original.

²²⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 114.

²²⁸ Wright notes further that this “explains... the nature of the language often used to describe this figure: as in 2 Corinthians 8:9, the pre-existent one, who (strictly speaking) had not yet ‘become’ Jesus of Nazareth,

Philippians 2:6-11 has long held pride of place in traditional discussions of preexistence and incarnation. Remarkably, Jesus Christ is included in a transformation of what Moule calls a “great monotheistic passage” (Isaiah 45:23).²²⁹ This should leave little room for doubt about the status of the exalted Jesus. But does the passage testify to the preexistence of Jesus as the Son? Dunn denies that Philippians 2:6-11 (and 2 Corinthians 8:9) clearly refer to preexistence and incarnation; instead he states that “*Philippians 2.6-11 is simply a way of describing the character of Christ’s ministry and sacrifice.*”²³⁰ He sees Paul’s point here as exclusively having to do with a contrast between Adam and Jesus (as the second Adam), and he dismisses the concept of preexistence. However, Hurst and Hurtado both point out that an “Adam Christology” and an incarnation Christology are not inconsistent – they are not mutually exclusive categories.²³¹ Some scholars oppose Dunn’s view by denying that there is an “Adam Christology” there at all.²³² But others readily grant that there is an Adam Christology while still holding to preexistence.

For instance, N.T. Wright is convinced that “the presence of Adam-Christology, then, says nothing of itself against pre-existence,” and he suggests that “it (Adam-

can be referred to by that name in advance, much as we might say ‘the Queen was born in 1925,’” *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 116.

²²⁹ C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, p. 41.

²³⁰ James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p. 120, emphasis original.

²³¹ Larry W. Hurtado, “Pre-existence” in Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 745 and L.D. Hurst, “Re-enter the Pre-existent Christ in Philippians 2:5-11?” *New Testament Studies* (1986), pp. 449-457.

²³² See the forceful rejection of Dunn’s view by Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), pp. 259-260. This also appears to be the view of I. Howard Marshall, “Incarnational Christology in the New Testament” in Harold H. Rowdon (ed.), *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 6.

Christology) may actually require it (pre-existence).”²³³ He argues (contra Dunn) that the issue is not about a preexistent *man* – Wright insists that Paul uses “this phrase (‘our Lord Jesus Christ’)... to refer to *the person who became* Jesus Christ.”²³⁴

More recently, Dunn has pushed for recognition of the preexistence of Christ as the preexistence of divine Wisdom.²³⁵ Exactly what this means for Dunn is less than pellucid.²³⁶ But regardless of what Dunn means by it, some exegetes are certain that it cannot mean that Christ preexisted only as a personification rather than as a person. They contend that the preexistence referred to in the NT is that of someone with the power of conscious choice. Wright expresses this point with force:

The fact that the nearest antecedents to this Christology are apparently *personifications* (of, e.g., Wisdom or the Torah) in the relevant Jewish literature does not mean that Paul’s talks about Jesus’ pre-existence is equally to be taken as a mere figure of speech. As Caird points out, Philippians 2.6f and 2 Corinthians 8:9 attribute a conscious choice – a choice that can be used, in each case, as an ethical example – to this pre-existent one. No mere personification, then, but a person, a conscious individual entity, is envisaged. Equally, the line of thought explored above (in relation to the corollaries of Paul’s ascription of Isaiah 45:23 to Jesus) shows that the one thus exalted is to be identified as an individual entity existing, equal to God the Father, prior to his birth.²³⁷

²³³ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 92.

²³⁴ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, pp. 96-97.

²³⁵ James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), pp. 274-275.

²³⁶ As noted by Gordon D. Fee, “St. Paul and the Incarnation,” pp. 73, 80. Fee has raised doubts about the very existence of a Pauline “wisdom Christology,” “Wisdom Christology in Paul: A Dissenting View” in J.I. Packer and S. Soderlund (eds.), *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp. 251-279.

²³⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 97. Cf. Ben Witherington III, “It cannot be stressed strongly enough that vv 5-7 are talking about a being who has a particular mindset and makes particular choices – a mindset and choices which Paul wishes his audience to emulate,” *Jesus the Sage*, p. 261.

Fee concludes that Pauline Christology coheres well with that of John: “the explicit incarnational theology of John has its *theological* predecessor in Paul, both in terms of Christ’s personal pre-existence with the Father and in the ways they express the role of the pre-existent One and his ‘being sent’ in order to redeem.”²³⁸

Summary

In this section I have noted that, despite the fact that there are some contemporary historical-critical biblical scholars who might object to MKC’s belief in the divinity of Christ, there are other critical scholars who provide arguments that offer broad support to MKC’s affirmation of the traditional doctrine of the divinity of Christ. Specifically, I have noted that there are arguments to the conclusion that the worship of Jesus in the early church was both early and widespread, that Jesus himself claimed to be divine (even if implicitly) and that Jesus Christ was consistently recognized as preexistent by the writers of the NT. Without attempting to be comprehensive, and without trying to add to the discussion, I have shown that it is arguable that the New Testament (as expressive of the beliefs of earliest Christianity) affirms the complete divinity and personal preexistence of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.²³⁹

In this chapter I have looked at MKC’s relation to the teachings of Scripture about the divinity of Christ. I have argued that, when these teachings are interpreted in a broadly traditional sense, MKC does not violate the teachings of Scripture with regard to the divinity of Christ. MKC can – and, by my lights should – endorse the traditional arguments from Scripture that Jesus Christ does the works that only God does. Jesus

²³⁸ Gordon D. Fee, “St. Paul and the Incarnation,” p. 91.

²³⁹ Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), pp. 171-195 and Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God*, 288-299.

Christ is active in creation, providence, redemption and judgment. Furthermore, MKC can and should affirm that the prayers offered to Jesus and the worship directed toward him in earliest Christianity are pointers to his divinity. MKC can and does make a robust affirmation of the preexistence of the Logos. While making allowance for the functional subordination of the Son, MKC insists on holding to the biblical witness to the full unity and equality of the Son Jesus Christ with the Father.

I have also shown that MKC recognizes ample biblical witness to the humanity of Christ. Following the teachings of Scripture, MKC maintains that Jesus Christ is fully and completely human. And MKC allows for a straightforward affirmation of the temporary but real ignorance of Christ; we have seen that it is arguable that in this respect MKC is superior to the strategies of both Hilary and Athanasius.

I have argued as well that MKC does not come into conflict with the NT witness to the event of the incarnation. To the contrary, MKC fits well with the interpretations of Philippians 2 (and similar passages) offered by N.T. Wright, Ben Witherington and others. Finally, I have shown that there are arguments from historical-critical biblical scholarship that lend support to MKC's affirmation of the divinity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Whether Scripture is interpreted traditionally or by the standards contemporary historical-critical exegesis, I conclude that MKC does not conflict with what Scripture teaches about either the humanity or the divinity of Christ.

Chapter Four: Modified Kenotic Christology and Arianism

We have seen that MKC is able to account for the biblical witness to both the humanity and the divinity of Christ. But at this point another important question must be asked: Does MKC somehow interpret the biblical witness in such ways as to open itself to charges of heresy? More specifically, is MKC heterodox in its *interpretation* of Scripture due to its (implicit or explicit) Arianism? After all, as Christopher Stead and Rowan Williams point out, “Arius’ *purpose* is not to degrade the Son.”¹ Moreover, the various Arian parties all claimed to be biblical in their Christology. Colin Gunton notes that “it is apparent to anyone reading Athanasius’ diatribes against the Arians that at stake is not which texts from Scripture are used but the way in which they are used.”² R.P.C. Hanson concurs: “one of the lessons learnt by the bitter experience of the Arian Controversy was that you cannot interpret the Bible simply in biblical terms. If your intention is to explain the Bible’s meaning, then on crucial points you must draw your explanation from some other vocabulary....”³ So does MKC employ a “vocabulary” – or, more importantly, a theory couched in a vocabulary – that somehow entails or even implies Arianism? This is the question that this chapter seeks to answer.

In this chapter I draw upon some historical scholarship on the Arian controversies of the fourth century. I first shall look at Early Arianism (the Arianism associated with Arius himself). I will lay out some of the major characteristics of Arianism, and I will

¹ Rowan D. Williams, “The Logic of Arianism,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (1983), p. 56. Cf. G.C. Stead, “The *Thalia* of Arius and the Testimony of Athanasius,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1978), p. 38.

² Colin Gunton, “And in One Lord Jesus Christ... Begotten Not Made,” *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (2001), p. 261.

³ R.P.C. Hanson, “The Doctrine of the Trinity Achieved in 381,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983), p. 53.

explore the relation of MKC to these characteristics. I then shall look at the tenets of Homoian Arianism; next I will offer an analysis of MKC's relation to the characteristics and arguments of Homoianism. Following this, I shall explore the possibility that MKC falls prey to "Neo-Arianism." Finally, I shall look at the relation of MKC to Homoiousionism.

The goal of this chapter is to examine the possibility that MKC is liable to charges of Arianism. I am not trying to add anything to what Christopher Haas has called the "stream of scholarly studies on the Arian controversy (that) has risen to a veritable floodtide."⁴ I am not, for instance, attempting to break new ground in the discovery of the antecedents of Arius. My goal is not to write nor even to sketch a history of the events and developments of the fourth century theological scene. For instance, I am not arguing or even conjecturing about the possible influence of Athenagoras, Clement, Origen, Dionysius, Lucian or others on Arius,⁵ nor am I taking sides in the discussions about Platonic, Plotinian or Aristotelian influences on Arius.⁶ I am not trying to ascertain "Alexandrian" or "Antiochene" provenance of Arian thought.⁷ Nor am I worrying about

⁴ Christopher Haas, "The Arians of Alexandria," *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993), p. 234.

⁵ E.g. L.W. Barnard, "The Antecedents of Arius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 24 (1970), pp. 172-188, Christopher Stead, "Arius in Modern Research," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1994), pp. 30-36, R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381 AD* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp. 60-84.

⁶ E.g. T.E. Pollard, "The Origins of Arianism," *Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1958), pp. 104-105, G. Christopher Stead, "The Concept of Divine Substance," *Vigiliae Christianae* 29 (1975), pp. 1-14., R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 84-94.

⁷ E.g. Rebecca Lyman, "Arians and Manichees on Christ," *Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1989), pp. 495-498. Rowan Williams concludes that it is "perfectly valid" to locate Arianism "well within the Origenian mainstream of Alexandrian exegesis," *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987), p. 17.

such issues as the role of the West at Nicea,⁸ the disputed authorship of various works,⁹ the socio-political aspects of the controversies,¹⁰ the relation of the “Arians” and various sympathizers to Arius¹¹ or the role and behavior of Athanasius.¹² Further, I am not trying to sort out the various debates on whether Arianism was primarily a cosmological scheme or a soteriological system¹³ or whether Arius and the early Arians were philosophical or biblical theologians.¹⁴

⁸ E.g. Jorg Ulrich, “Nicea and the West,” in *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997), pp. 10-24 argues that the influence of the West at Nicea was minimal at most, while Daniel H. Williams takes the traditional line in saying that Hosius of Cordova was “the leading architect of the homoousios formula” at Nicea in “Another Exception to Later Fourth-Century ‘Arian’ Typologies: The Case of Germinius of Sirmium,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996), p. 336.

⁹ E.g. R.P.C. Hanson, “The Source and Significance of the Fourth *Oratio Contra Arianos* Attributed to Athanasius,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 42 (1988), pp. 257-266, Charles Kanengiesser, *Holy Scripture and Hellenistic Hermeneutics in Alexandrian Christology: The Arian Crisis*, Protocol of the Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture 41 (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1982), pp. 54-57.

¹⁰ E.g. Christopher Haas, “The Arians of Alexandria,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993), pp. 234-245, Charles Kanengiesser, *Arius and Athanasius: Two Alexandrian Theologians* (Variorum: Brookfield, Vermont, 1991), pp. 460-465.

¹¹ E.g. G. Christopher Stead, “Eusebius and the Council of Nicea,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 24 (1973), pp. 85-100 and R.D. Williams, “Arius and the Meletian Schism,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986), pp. 35-52, Maurice Wiles, “Attitudes to Arius in the Arian Controversy” in Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (eds.), *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 31-44, Dennis E. Groh, “New Directions in Arian Research,” *Anglican Theological Review* 68 (1986), pp. 350-351. Hanson lists Eusebius of Nicomedia (whom Arius had called a “co-Lucianist”), Asterius, Athanasius of Anazarbus, Theognis, George of Laodicea and Eusebius of Caesarea as prominent contemporary supporters of Arius, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 19-59.

¹² E.g. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381 AD* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp. 239-273, Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹³ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh argue that Arianism (at least in its early version(s)) was primarily a view of salvation, albeit one that entailed some broader theological and cosmological ramifications that were not lost on the Arians, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981). Much of the older scholarship either argued for or simply assumed that Arianism was at base a cosmological system, e.g., H.M. Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903), G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1952), pp. 155-156 and J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 225. The thesis of Gregg and Groh has not gone unchallenged, e.g. Rowan D. Williams, “The Logic of Arianism,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (1983), pp. 57, 80, Charles Kanengiesser, *Arius and Athanasius: Two Alexandrian Theologians* (Brookfield, Vermont: Gower Publishing Co., 1991), pp. 471-473, Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian*

I do not for a moment deny the importance of these issues or the value of the studies that address them, but I do not see that they are relevant for this study. So I happily shall leave such interesting issues, and the questions and debates spawned by them, to the historical theologians who explore them. I see such issues as peripheral to the question of MKC's susceptibility to charges of Arianism, so I shall focus on what is relevant for this project. By discussing Arianism and its relation to MKC along the lines of Early Arianism, Homoian Arianism, Neo-Arianism and Homoiousionism, I am following the direction of the last few decades of patristic scholarship. Recent scholarship has called into question the older textbook views of Arianism and orthodoxy;¹⁵ it questions and indeed rejects many of the older characterizations and categories.¹⁶ In place of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century understandings, current patristic scholarship is calling for recognition of the complexity of the development of the doctrine in the fourth century. In my analysis of MKC and Arianism, I am following the lead of this scholarship. Of course, the approach that I adopt may also

Tradition Volume One (Philadelphia: John Knox Press, 1975), p. 231 and Thomas A. Kopacek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, Volume I (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Ltd., 1979), p. 37. I tend to follow Hanson on this issue when he argues that Gregg and Groh were

- (a) right to bring soteriology into the discussion, for it is an essential element of the position;
- (b) wrong to conjecture (at least with such confidence) the influence of Stoicism;
- (c) perhaps wrong about "moral progress" and the perfection of Christ for Arius; and
- (d) wrong to insist that the Son is an example of human achievement for the Arians because the Son is not fully human for the Arians (for Gregg and Groh's Arians, the Son takes a human body without taking the human mind or soul), *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 96-98.

¹⁴ Here I am inclined to accept the verdict of Rowan D. Williams that "Arius' aim was to develop a biblically-based and rationally consistent" position, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, p. 111. On Arius' logic see Rowan D. Williams, "The Logic of Arianism."

¹⁵ E.g. Joseph Lienhard, "The Arian Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered," *Theological Studies* 48 (1987), pp. 415-437.

¹⁶ E.g. Johann Adam Mohler, *Athanasius der Grosse* (Mainz: Kupferberg, 1827) and John Henry Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (London: Rivington, 1833).

be liable to criticism from historians. I do not mean to oversimplify the situation; I admit that the edges are blurred in some cases even as alliances were constantly shifting.¹⁷ I am convinced, however, that the general approach employed here is both helpful for this study and supported by the scholarship.¹⁸ As Winrich A. Lohr puts it, even though the traditional designations (of Nicenes, Arians or Semi-Arians or even Nicenes, Homoians, Homoiousians, Heterousians) can be “very misleading” because “the historical reality is much more varied and fluid” than is often supposed, “the existence of definite theological alignments... need not be doubted.”¹⁹

Drawing on recent patristic scholarship to help answer the question that drives this chapter, I will argue throughout that MKC need not entail any gradation of divinity or reduction of the ontological status of the Son. I will conclude that, with the right modifications, MKC need not entail nor even imply a capitulation to any of the forms of Arianism or a violation of the homoousion..

It should be noted at the outset that what I outline are important identifying characteristics of these forms of Arianism. It is less than obvious that they are either necessary or sufficient conditions for Arianism. If MKC can avoid them altogether, then whether or not these identifying characteristics are either necessary or sufficient conditions is a moot point. But if it were determined that MKC does not avoid them,

¹⁷ E.g. Joseph T. Lienhard, SJ, “Did Athanasius Reject Marcellus?” in Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (eds.), *Arianism After Arius: Essays in the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), pp. 65-80, *Contra Marcellum: Marcellus of Ancyra and Fourth-Century Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

¹⁸ This is the basic approach adopted by R.P.C. Hanson in his landmark study, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*.

¹⁹ Winrich A. Lohr, “A Sense of Tradition: The Homoiousion Church Party” in Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (eds.), *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 81.

then it would have to be established that these are indeed sufficient conditions for inclusion in Arianism before MKC could be labeled “Arian.” However, since (as I shall argue) MKC does not satisfy any of these conditions, then we do not need to ascertain whether or not these are either necessary or sufficient conditions. If I am right, then MKC just is not Arian.

MODIFIED KENOTIC CHRISTOLOGY AND EARLY ARIANISM

In this section I will first lay out both the major tenets of early Arianism and the prominent supporting arguments marshaled on its behalf. Following this I shall compare MKC to this form of Arianism, and I shall conclude by taking a brief look at MKC’s ability to deal with some of the more influential arguments of early Arianism.

The Theology of Early Arianism

Hanson (who is following Lorentz) summarizes the views of early Arianism under “nine heads.”²⁰ I realize that these categories overlap (sometimes significantly so), but they offer a helpful overview of the rationale of Arianism.²¹ Therefore I use them as given by Hanson.

(EA1) “*God was not always Father; he was once in a situation where he was simply God and not Father.*”²²

Early Arianism places stress on the incomparability and solitude of God. J.N.D. Kelly insists that the “fundamental premise” of Arius’s system “is the affirmation of the

²⁰ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 20-23.

²¹ Of course, they also come from a scholar who is widely recognized as a dean among Arianism specialists.

²² R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 21.

absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God, the unoriginate source (ἀγγένετος ἀρχή) of all reality.”²³ Grillmeier maintains that the Arians hold that “only the first hypostasis, the Monad, is God in the real and unqualified sense... the Son does not arise from eternity *in* God, as Origen and Gregory Thaumaturgus have it, but *outside*.”²⁴ As Hanson puts it, God “was once in a situation where he was simply God and not Father... the majestic solitariness of God was a central point of this theology.”²⁵ Gregg and Groh show that

In Arian usage, the term “Father” signifies a relationship which God has to the Son, not an attribute which he has in himself. This is attested to in the care with which Arius distinguishes between God and Father. God only receives the name Father, he argues, upon the creation of the Son.²⁶

Gregg and Groh argue that “Fatherhood and Sonship are thus neither absolute nor essentialist words in Arian vocabulary.”²⁷ They point out that the Father/Son relationship is relational rather than ontological, characterized by dependence and subordination rather than equality and grounded in the will of the High God and the performance of the Logos/Son. As Rowan Williams puts it

To be Father is, *as it happens*, an identifying and thus inalienable characteristic of God, but it is not part of the ‘essential’ definition of God, since God as such, being self-subsistent, cannot be defined as to *what* he is by reference to anything else. So ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ are not, *in divinis*, mutually definitory....²⁸

²³ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 227.

²⁴ Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p. 227.

²⁵ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 20.

²⁶ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism*, p. 83.

²⁷ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism*, p. 84.

²⁸ Rowan D. Williams, “The Logic of Arianism,” p. 61.

(EA2) “*The Logos/Son is a creature. God made him ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων (out of nothing.)*”²⁹

Kelly explains that because “begat” and “create” were synonymous for the Arians, “the Word must be a creature, κτίσμα or ποίημα, Whom the Father has formed out of nothing by mere fiat.”³⁰ As a creature the Word must have a time of beginning; it must be true “that there was when he was not (ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν).”³¹ Hanson states that for the Arians, the Son “cannot be related by nature or substance (ousia) to God who is the Unoriginated, the Eternal...”³² Gregg and Groh conclude that

The Jesus of history and the preexistent “Son” for the Arians were not only twin aspects of the same christological reality; they were two harmonious ways to safeguard their cardinal principle – that all creatures, the redeemer notwithstanding, were ultimately and radically dependent on a Creator whose sole method of relating to his creation was by his will (βουλεμα) and pleasure (θελημα). There is no better-attested Arian principle... This meant to Arius, as to his cohorts, that the mediator was not an extension of the divine nature but a creation of the divine will.³³

The Son exists by the creative will of the Father – *not* out of his substance. In his discussion of the “rationale” of Arianism, Hanson points out that the Logos/Son is thus a reduced God; the Son is God but not fully God (in the same sense that the Father is God). This entails for the Arians the imperfection and inferiority of the Logos *qua* Logos; the divine Word (not just the human body or human nature) is imperfect and thus inferior to the high God.³⁴ Arius insisted that the Son was not a creature *like one of the creatures*.

²⁹ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 20.

³⁰ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 227.

³¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 228.

³² R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 20.

³³ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism*, p. 5.

³⁴ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 106-108, cf. Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p. 248.

Williams argues that “the Arian Son stands at the absolute summit of creaturehood, and because he praises and worships God as his Father, he shows that what is glorious and honorable in creation has its roots beyond creation.”³⁵ But the early Arians still held that the Son was a creature who was created out of nothing. And the results of this are clear. As Kelly puts it, to call the Son “God” or even “Son of God” is to bestow what are “in fact courtesy titles.”³⁶ For as Arius himself spells it out, “He is not God truly, but by participation in grace (μετοχη χάριτος)... He too is called God in name only.”³⁷ (EA3) “*There are two Logoi and two Wisdoms (Sophiae), and several powers (δυναμεις) of God.*”³⁸

Hanson explains that “Arius distinguished between an original Reason (Logos) or Wisdom immanent from eternity in the Godhead and the Son who was not immanent in the Godhead but created, and who could only be given these titles loosely or inexactly.”³⁹ (EA4) “*The Son is variable by nature, but remains stable by the gift of God.*”⁴⁰

Thus the Son is mutable and liable to sin, even though he does not in fact do so.⁴¹ This comports well with what Gregg and Groh call the “central point” of Arianism: “Christ gains and holds his sonship in the same way as other creatures – thus it is asserted

³⁵ Rowan D. Williams, “The Logic of Arianism,” p. 80.

³⁶ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 229.

³⁷ Quoted in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 229.

³⁸ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 20.

³⁹ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 20.

⁴⁰ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 21.

⁴¹ Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 229. As Kelly explains it, for the Arians the Son is “liable” in the sense that he *might* sin, not that he indeed does so.

that what is predicated of the redeemer can and must be predicated of the redeemed.”⁴²

This also allows Christ to be the “suffering God;” the Son suffers as a lower deity while the Father, as impassible, cannot and does not suffer. The statement of Asterius is representative: “the Gentiles and the peoples crucified the God of the four corners of the earth, and crucified him because he tolerated it.”⁴³ Hanson thinks that it is here that “we can see into the heart of Arianism. The Arians want to have a God who can suffer, but they cannot attribute suffering to the High God, and this is what (with some reason) they believed the Homoousion doctrine would entail.”⁴⁴

(EA5) *“The Logos is alien from the divine Being and distinct; he is not true God because he has come into existence.”*⁴⁵

Hanson’s explanation goes like this:

Arius does not fight shy (as the later Neo-Arians tended to) of speaking of the Father begetting the Son. But for him begetting and creation were identical, and both always meant dependence. His school of thought believed that their opponents taught a physical begetting of the Son, and they insisted on the other side that the Son was given existence from the Father’s will. He and his followers insist again and again that the Son was produced before times and ages, yet they hold onto the conviction that there was a time when the Son did not exist, and again there was another time when he was in existence.⁴⁶

Thus there is no common divine nature or substance.⁴⁷ Rowan D. Williams is convinced that, for the early Arians, “Father” and “Son” are titles that “name two individuals whose

⁴² Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism*, p. 67. If Gregg and Groh are right that Arianism is primarily a system of soteriology, then this issue is of even more importance.

⁴³ Quoted in R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 109.

⁴⁴ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 112.

⁴⁵ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 22.

⁴⁷ Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 104.

essential properties are different.”⁴⁸ In the words of Gregg and Groh, the Father and Son are thus positively “foreign in essence, related by will.”⁴⁹

(EA6) “*The Son’s knowledge of God is imperfect.*”⁵⁰

Kelly states that for Arianism, “the Son can have no communion with, and no direct knowledge of, His Father.”⁵¹ Gregg and Groh explain that for the Arians, “since the Son is a child of the Father’s sovereign will, he has no immediate and natural access into the structures of being.”⁵² Because the Son is a creature, and because created things cannot have full or perfect knowledge of their creators, the Son cannot have perfect knowledge of the Creator God. As we shall see, this doctrine distinguishes Early Arianism from Neo-Arianism.

(EA7) “*The Son’s knowledge of himself is limited.*”⁵³

Because he is a creature who is not infinite, the Son has limited knowledge of himself.

(EA8) “*Anthropocentric Cosmology: the Son has been created for our sakes, as an instrument for creating us.*”⁵⁴

(EA9) “*A Trinity of dissimilar hypostases exists.*”⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Rowan D. Williams, “The Logic of Arianism,” p. 61.

⁴⁹ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism*, p. 91.

⁵⁰ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 22.

⁵¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 228.

⁵² Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism*, p. 7.

⁵³ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 22.

⁵⁵ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 23.

Gregg and Groh are convinced that the “preserved utterances of Arius about the Trinity” illustrate this well:

...there is a Triad not in equal glories; their subsistences (ὑπαστάσεις) are unmixed with each other, one infinitely more inestimable in glories than the other. The essences (οὐσίαι) of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit are separate in nature (μεμερισμένοι τῇ φύσει), and are estranged, unconnected, alien (ἀπεζομένοι, ἀπεζουνημένοι, ἀλλότροι), and without participation in each other (ἀμέτεχοι εἰσιν ἀλλήλων)... They are utterly dissimilar from each other with respect to both essences and glories to infinity.⁵⁶

Hanson’s summary is clear indeed: “A Trinity of dissimilar hypostases exists: the three existing realities are unlike in their substances (ousia). The union which makes them a Trinity is a purely moral one, a unity of will and disposition.”⁵⁷ Gregg and Groh remark that “the Arians appear to have described the unity of the Son with the Father as an agreement (συμφωνία, σύμφωνος) with God, an agreement in the sense of harmony rather than identity.”⁵⁸ Kelly captures well this Arian conclusion: “the Three he envisages are entirely different beings, not sharing in any way in the same nature or essence.”⁵⁹

MKC: Early Arianism Again?

How does MKC relate to these major tenets of Early Arianism? With regard to many of these planks of the Arian platform, it should become clear that MKC is far from Arianism. As we shall see, others may cause some initial concern, but on closer reflection there turns out to be less common ground than sometimes assumed.

⁵⁶ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism*, p. 98.

⁵⁷ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 23.

⁵⁸ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 229.

When we look at (EA1), we immediately see that there is no problem here for MKC. MKC does not say that there was a time when God was not a father. Nor is there anything germane to MKC that might call the traditional orthodox teaching into question. On the contrary, MKC offers a resounding and robust affirmation of the eternal generation of the Son. Not only can it say that God is always Father (and Son), it can also agree with Athanasius that “It is more godly and accurate to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name God from his works alone and call him Unoriginate.”⁶⁰

The situation is similar with respect to (EA2). MKC joins the tradition in emphatic denial of the doctrine that the Son was created. It recognizes (again with the tradition and against Arianism) the important distinction between “begotten” and “created.” MKC denies that there was ever a time when the Son did not exist. MKC rejects the notion that there is no common divine nature or substance (the full set of properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for being divine), and MKC resists any doctrine of the inferiority of the Logos qua Logos.⁶¹ To the contrary, MKC affirms a common divine nature or substance;⁶² MKC insists that the Son is to be called God “truly,” not merely by “participation in grace.” MKC is at odds with (EA2).

(EA3) is also dispatched fairly easily for MKC – there is nothing essential to MKC that makes it admit several logoi or several powers of God. MKC actually affirms

⁶⁰ Athanasius, *Discourse I Against the Arians*, I.34, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, volume 4 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 326.

⁶¹ Of course, MKC does allow for some form(s) of *functional subordination* (according to which the Son is “subordinate” due to his performance of certain functions (e.g., incarnation for the purpose of redemption).

⁶² Cf. Stephen T. Davis, “Perichoretic Monotheism,” pp. 3-4.

that the divine Son just *is* the Logos. A critic of MKC might object that MKC does hold that there *are* several divine powers, for the Son (at least the kenotically-incarnate Son) does not have the same power as does the Father (and, presumably, the Holy Spirit). On this criticism, it might be said that the Father and the Holy Spirit are omnipotent while the incarnate Son clearly is not. So even if the kenotically-incarnate Son has divine power, it is not the same power as that possessed by the Father and Holy Spirit. But the defender of MKC can simply reply that there is still no reason to suppose that there are several different divine powers. For according to MKC, the Son possesses *the* divine power (however that is understood and spelled out). The Son might not employ or use the divine power as does the Father and the Spirit, but what power he uses may still be the divine power. If Evans is right to follow Swinburne in arguing that an essential element of omnipotence must be the ability not to use it, then there seems to be no problem here for MKC.⁶³

According to (EA4) the Son is variable by nature and remains stable only by God's grace. Thus the Son is not immutable; the Son is liable to sin. How does MKC fare at this point? After all, MKC does affirm important changes in the life of the Son. Does this mean that MKC succumbs to the Arianism of (EA4)?

It is important to note here that there is some critical ambiguity in (EA4). The doctrine of divine immutability is widely – and sometimes hotly - disputed,⁶⁴ and the

⁶³ C. Stephen Evans, "The Self-Emptying of Love: Some Thoughts on Kenotic Christology" in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O'Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 260-263. Cf. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 157-158.

⁶⁴ E.g. John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 264-276, William Mann, "Simplicity and Immutability in God," *International Philosophical Quarterly* (1983), pp. 267-276, Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 73-94, Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, pp. 212-218, Thomas V. Morris,

situation seems to have been no more settled in the fourth century than it is today. Does “variable by nature” mean that the Son can change in just any way? Surely MKC needs *some* doctrine of divine mutability. But must the doctrine of divine immutability be taken to imply that the Trinity or any of the divine persons cannot change in any way whatsoever? I am not trying to solve the mysteries of divine immutability, and I am aware of the danger of over-simplification at this point. Still, I think that we can distinguish between some senses of “variability” or “mutability” that are relevant for this issue. Consider these senses of divine mutability:

(DM1) God is mutable just in case God changes (or could change)⁶⁵ in any way whatsoever. This sense of divine mutability includes “Cambridge changes”⁶⁶ as well as changes related to “indexical properties.”⁶⁷

(DM2) God is mutable just in case God changes (or could change) with respect to God’s desires.

(DM3) God is mutable just in case God changes (or could change) with respect to actions related to those desires.

(DM4) God is mutable just in case God changes (or could change) with respect to God’s essential properties. This includes both *de re* essential properties (by virtue of which the thing that once possessed it no longer exists when it is lost) and *de*

“Properties, Modalities and God,” *Philosophical Review* 93 (1984), pp. 35-55, idem, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 76-97.

⁶⁵ “Or could change” is included to parallel Swinburne’s notion of “strong immutability,” e.g. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, p. 212.

⁶⁶ I am using the notions of “Cambridge changes” and “Cambridge properties” in what I take to be the usual sense, e.g. Peter Geach, *God and the Soul* (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 71.

⁶⁷ E.g. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, p. 164 and John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 269-270.

dicto essential properties (by virtue of which the thing that possessed it no longer belongs to its previous natural kind when it is lost).⁶⁸

MKC surely affirms (DM1). But so does much (if not all) Christian theism, and it is hard to see why or even how someone would dispute this (of course, whether such change is significant or even real is another matter entirely). Not even Arianism would seem to have a reason to deny (DM1) – even of the “high God.”

As for (DM2), I cannot see why MKC must take sides here. For instance, perhaps God always (or – depending on God’s relation to time – eternally) desired for a human community to know and share the love of the Trinity. Or maybe God began to desire this at some point (and then took action – creation, incarnation and atonement – accordingly). It is hard to see how taking a stance one way or the other is relevant for MKC at this point.

But with (DM3) the situation is markedly different – it seems obvious to me that MKC must affirm divine mutability in this sense. For according to MKC, at one point the Son is not kenotically-and-redemptively incarnate, at another point the Son is kenotically-and-redemptively incarnate, while at a later point (after the ascension) the Son is incarnate but perhaps not kenotically-incarnate. So MKC needs (DM3) or something like it. However, it seems equally obvious to me that all orthodox Christology is best off with (DM3) or something like it. For unless the Son is eternally incarnate, then there is a sense of real change (not merely “Cambridge change”) in the actions of God when the Son becomes incarnate. And if the Son is eternally incarnate, then it looks as if creation is also eternal (otherwise, what sense can we make of the *carnis* in the incarnation?). If

⁶⁸ Cf. Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” p. 4.

the creation is also eternal, then it is arguable that a robust sense of *creatio ex nihilo* is damaged,⁶⁹ and at any rate a significant aspect of the crucial distinction between *begotten* and *created* is blurred (for both are eternal). So MKC needs (DM3), but then so does orthodox Christology generally.

(DM4) is another story. It seems to be at the root of the problems associated with (EA4); it seems to be close to what the Arians had in mind. And it is almost certainly the sense of divine mutability that is most likely to be associated with MKC by many critics. If MKC is committed to (DM4), then MKC is very close to Arianism. For if the Son changes with respect to the essential divine properties – if the Son ceases to have something essential to being God – then the Son either ceases to exist or ceases to exist as the divine Son. Neither prospect looks good for MKC. I maintain, however, that MKC does not need (DM4). MKC is committed to (DM4) if and only if the divine attributes may be had or employed in only one way. For instance, MKC needs (DM4) if and only if the essential knowledge attribute of God is omniscience *simpliciter*. But, as we have seen, MKC hold that the essential knowledge attribute is omniscience-unless... – not omniscience *simpliciter*. Similarly, MKC can hold that God is impassible-unless-choosing-to-be-otherwise; MKC can safely say that the divine persons do not suffer unless they choose to undergo suffering (for the sake of redemption).⁷⁰ So for MKC the

⁶⁹ For an argument to this conclusion, see William Lane Craig, “Response to Paul Helm,” in Gregory E. Ganssle, (ed.), *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 65-67 and “Creation and Conservation Once More,” *Religious Studies* (1998), pp. 177-188.

⁷⁰ MKC can, of course, simply deny the doctrine of impassibility in any or all of its forms. Cf. Richard Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 246-254, Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, “Suffering Love” in Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame

essential divine attribute is not impassibility *simpliciter* but something else. (EA4) says that Christ is the “suffering God” because he is a lower deity while the Father cannot and does not because (as the “high God”) he is impassible. (EA4) insists that the Son suffers while the Father does not suffer because their essential attributes are different. MKC can respond that the Son suffers because he is kenotically-and-redemptively incarnate while the Father does not suffer (at least not in the same way as the Son suffers) because the Father is not incarnate. The Son suffers and the Father does not suffer because the incarnate Son employs the essential divine attributes differently than does the Father. To assume that the divine attributes in question are omniscience *simpliciter* or impassibility *simpliciter* and then to criticize MKC accordingly is to beg the question.

In summary, we can see that MKC is committed to (DM1); we can also see that this is of little consequence. We also can see that MKC does not need to take a position on (DM2). MKC does need (DM3), but this is not an obvious problem. To the contrary, it relieves some problems. MKC would be in some trouble if it needed (DM4). But MKC does not need it, nor is it committed to it.

An important aspect of (EA4) is the peccability of the Son. For Arianism, the Son must be liable to sin, even though he does not in fact do so. I fail to see that MKC must take a position on this issue. It seems to me that MKC could formulate the doctrine of divine goodness in such a way as to allow for divine freedom to do evil.⁷¹ On this account of divine goodness the Son, when resisting a real temptation, would merely be exemplifying a common divine property (common to all persons of the divine Trinity).

Press, 1988), pp. 196-237, *idem.*, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), pp. 80-83.

On the other hand, it also seems to me that the defender of MKC could adopt the traditional position of necessary divine goodness with regard to the incarnate Christ. A distinction could be drawn between the epistemic possibility of sinning and the ontological possibility of sinning; the former could easily be granted (a non-omniscient person might not know that he was necessarily good) while the latter could be denied.⁷² Either way, the charge of Arianism is avoided – neither approach entails the relinquishment of any essential divine attributes. And so MKC is not liable to Arianism as it is exemplified in (EA4).

(EA5) takes the position that the Son is not truly divine – the Logos is both distinct from the divine being and alien to it. It should be clear by this point that MKC does not deny the true divinity of the Son. Of course, as the emergence of orthodoxy made clear, the Son *is distinct* from the Father and the Holy Spirit. But the Son is not alien to the Father – the Son is intimate to the other persons of the Trinity. The true divinity of the Son would be compromised if the Son were created or if the Son were to give up any essential divine attributes. But MKC does not posit a created Son, and it goes to great lengths (too great, some critics would say) to deny that the Son gives up any attributes that are essential to divinity. In short, MKC does not seem to endorse (EA5).

(EA6) and (EA7) warrant a very close look. These tenets of the Arian platform insist that the Son is limited in knowledge, and MKC is ready and willing to give assent to the limited knowledge of the Son. So is there a problem here for MKC? Is MKC

⁷¹ As does Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 86-96.

⁷² In personal conversation, Ronald J. Feenstra has indicated that this is the approach that he finds preferable.

really Arian in this respect? Worse yet, does this show MKC's true colors – does it reveal that MKC is at root an Arian Christology?

I do not believe that MKC collapses to Arianism here. Several points deserve mention. First, it should be noted that the limited knowledge of the Son is not *essential*. In other words, according to MKC the Son was not limited in knowledge prior to his incarnation. This alone is enough to separate MKC from early Arianism.

Secondly, patristic scholarship argues that the central point for early Arianism had to do with communal, personal, direct knowledge. Kelly is clear on this point: “the Son can have no communion with, no direct knowledge of, His Father.”⁷³ As Gregg and Groh put it, the Son “has no immediate and natural access” to the Father – the Son is limited in his knowledge of the person of the Father.⁷⁴ MKC does not think that this is the case at all. MKC can maintain that the Son has unbroken communion with the person of the Father; the Son's knowledge of whatever facts about the universe that are necessary for him to count as omniscient has nothing to do with his intimate knowledge of the persons of the Father and Holy Spirit. According to MKC, the Son does not have knowledge of some facts. Maybe the incarnate Son does not know how many hairs are on the head of Pontius Pilate's wife, how many cubic inches are in the Roman Empire or how many seconds it will take Abraham Lincoln to trim his beard before debating Daniel Webster. And the Son does not know, according to MKC (and Mark 13:32) what the “day or the hour” of the coming of the Son of Man will be. But this has little or nothing to do with his personal knowledge of the Father and the Spirit, and MKC insists that the Son (even

⁷³ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 228.

⁷⁴ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism*, p. 7.

while kenotically-incarnate) has intimate and personal communion with the Father and Spirit. Again, surely this is enough to separate MKC from Arianism.

As we have seen, MKC denies (with consistency) the creation of the Son. Therefore it has no problems with (EA8) – if the Son is not created, then the Son is not created for the purpose of creating us.

According to (EA9), the Trinity is made up of hypostases who are “utterly dissimilar” from each other – the union of the divine persons is “merely moral and volitional.” In a later chapter I will be focusing much attention on the issues of Trinity and tritheism, so I shall reserve most of the investigation until then. At this point, however, several comments are appropriate. First, MKC most certainly does not posit the existence of three hypostases who are *dissimilar*. MKC does not, and as far as I can see need not, believe that the union is *merely* moral or volitional. MKC can and should resolutely deny the Arian conclusion that the three persons do “not share in any way in the same nature or essence.”⁷⁵ In summary, it should be clear that MKC does not endorse or entail the Arian doctrine of the Trinity. If MKC has problems with tritheism, they will come from other directions.

To this point I have looked at the relationship of MKC to the early version of Arianism (that version associated with Arius himself). I have explored MKC’s relation to various major characteristics of Early Arianism, and I have argued that MKC does not fall prey to charges that it is Arian in this sense. But might it be Arian in another way? To this question I now turn.

⁷⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 229.

MODIFIED KENOTIC CHRISTOLOGY AND HOMOIAN ARIANISM

If MKC is not liable to charges of Early Arianism, then might it qualify as what is often called “Homoian Arianism?” Homoian Arianism was taught and defended by such theologians as Akakius of Caesarea, Eudoxius, Valens of Mursa, Ursacius of Singidunum, Ulfilas, Palladius and Germinius of Sirmium.⁷⁶ It was enshrined in the Second Creed of Sirmium (357), and it is obvious in the Creed of Nike (360) and the Rule of Faith put forward by Ulfilas.⁷⁷ It was not so philosophically driven as either early Arianism or (especially) Neo-Arianism.⁷⁸ It was, however, quite popular in both Greek and Latin theology during much of the mid-fourth century. It seems to have made something of a comeback in recent times.⁷⁹ Does MKC also resort to Homoian Arianism?

The Theology of Homoian Arianism

Hanson reports that “like according to the Scriptures” became the “watchword of this type of Arianism.”⁸⁰ It was likely designed specifically to eliminate the defenders of the Nicene homoousion, the followers of Basil of Ancyra and others who preferred the

⁷⁶ For a list of prominent Homoian Arians, see R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 579-597. Daniel H. Williams argues that Germinius does not fit the neat categorization provided by Hanson, “Another Exception to Fourth-Century ‘Arian’ Typologies: The Case of Germinius of Sirmium,” pp. 335-357.

⁷⁷ R.P.C. Hanson lists these (and other documents of less importance), *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 558-559 and “A Note on ‘Like According to the Scriptures,’” *Zeitschrift Fur Kirchengeschichte* 98 (1987), p. 231.

⁷⁸ The lack of interest in philosophical speculation is pointed out by Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 568.

⁷⁹ In my judgment, the Christology of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is close to Homoian Arianism in several ways. See “What Does the Bible Say About God and Jesus?” and “Is God Always Superior to Jesus?” in *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 1989).

⁸⁰ R.P.C. Hanson, “A Note on ‘Like According to the Scriptures,’” p. 231.

homoiousion as well as the Neo-Arians.⁸¹ Since the Scriptures do not say anything about the ousia of the Father and Son, then neither should we. The theology of the Homoian Arians is very close to that of early Arianism, but several points stand out. These can be summarized as follows:

(HA1) *The Father is absolutely incomparable; he is incomparable because he is superior to everything else that exists.*

As Hanson puts it, the “main pillar is the incomparability of God the Father, but not, as with the Eunomians, his ingenerateness... the Father is incomparably greater than the other Two, has no equal and no creditor, and is different from the Son in all sorts of respects – nature, order, rank, relation, dignity, power, activity.”⁸²

(HA2) *The Son is created out of the will of the Father.*

Hanson states that “Homoian Arianism does not maintain that the Son was created by the Father ‘out of non-existence’ (ex ouk onton).”⁸³ Rather, the “stock teaching of Homoian Arianism on the origin of the Son” is that “He was created from the Father’s will, not his nature, and this could be called either creation, though it must be distinguished from the creation of everything else, or begetting.”⁸⁴

(HA3) *The Son is thus drastically subordinated to the Father.*

The Son is inferior to the Father in both mission and being. Hanson concludes that, from the Second Sirmian Creed onward, “a drastic subordination of the Son to the

⁸¹ Here I am in agreement with the conclusion of Hanson rather than Gwatkin, e.g. R.P.C. Hanson, “A Note on ‘Like According to the Scriptures,’” pp. 230-231.

⁸² R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 563.

⁸³ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 564.

⁸⁴ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 565.

Father had been the keynote of this school of thought.”⁸⁵ The union of the Father and Son is one of will, *not* nature. The inferiority of the Son means a reduction in the divinity of the Son. The Son is divine, but only in a lesser sense than is the Father.

(HA4) *The Trinity is of different beings who are of different rank.* Hanson notes that “Palladius’ ‘Trinitarian’ doctrine consists of one High God, one demi-god and one superior angel.”⁸⁶ The Homoian doctrine of the Trinity thus posits a “high God who does not mingle with human affairs, a lesser God who does” and a Spirit who must be as “rigorously subordinated to the Son as the Son is to the Father.”⁸⁷

MKC and Homoian Arianism: A Problem?

Does MKC equal or entail Homoian Arianism? A closer look will show that MKC is not equivalent to Homoian Arianism, nor does it need it to be consistent.

MKC does, of course, agree with Homoian Arianism that the Son is like the Father “according to the Scriptures.” But so could the pro-Nicenes; Hilary and Athanasius both use the term ὁμοιος (or similis) with no hesitation – they understand it to be synonymous with homoousion.⁸⁸ For “like according to the Scriptures” is necessary for orthodoxy. But it is not sufficient for orthodoxy unless stated with (the proper) further explanation. Of course the pro-Nicenes say much more than this, but so does

⁸⁵ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 567.

⁸⁶ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 564.

⁸⁷ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 570.

⁸⁸ As is pointed out by Daniel H. Williams, “The Case of Germinius of Sirmium,” p. 336 n.4 and “The Anti-Arian Campaigns of Hilary of Poitiers and the ‘Liber Contra Auxentium,’” *Church History* 61 (1992), pp. 8-9.

MKC. So the fact that MKC agrees with the “official formula” of Homoianism does not of itself present a roadblock to its drive for orthodoxy.⁸⁹

When we look at (HA1), it should be clear that MKC does not hold to this. MKC would agree with Homoianism that the Father is different from the Son with respect to relation; MKC would also likely be in agreement that the Father is different with respect to order. MKC might agree further that the Father is different with respect to activity – here MKC would admit that the Father participates in the activities of the Trinity (e.g. creation and salvation) in a different way than do the Son or Spirit. But MKC would also insist that the activities of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (as one God) are the same. However, MKC could deny that there is a problem with regard to its bid for orthodoxy; MKC could argue that it is in general agreement with the orthodox tradition about these issues. Of course degrees of nature, rank, dignity and power are something else entirely. If MKC were to admit these, then MKC might qualify for (HA1). But MKC denies that the Father is superior and the Son inferior with respect to nature, rank, dignity, or power, and it is hard to see why MKC would have to make this admission.

How does MKC relate to (HA2)? As we have seen, MKC insists on the traditional distinction between creating and begetting – MKC denies that the Son was created by the Father. So if the Son (as begotten eternally of the nature of the Father) is not a created being, then the Son is not created out of will any more than he is created out of non-existence.

(HA3) subordinates the Son to the Father in both mission and person. According to (HA3), the Son is inferior both economically and ontologically. MKC regards this

⁸⁹ Hanson declares that the formula became “official” for the movement with the Second Sirmium Creed, “A Note on ‘Like According to the Scriptures,’” p. 230.

equation of function and being as a mistake. MKC agrees with Homoianism (but also with the orthodox tradition) that there is an element of economic subordination of the Son to the Father. But MKC parts company with (HA3) – and stays with the tradition – in denying that subordination of function is to be equated with or entails ontological subordination. To the contrary, MKC believes that the union of the Father and Son is one of nature. And MKC rejects any reduction of the divinity of the Son. For MKC, the Son is fully and truly divine. The Son is active in the works of God in such ways that he employs the divine attributes differently than does the Father and Spirit, but this entails no necessary reduction of divinity.

MKC's corresponding doctrine of the Trinity will be examined in more detail in a later chapter, but at this point it should be pointed out that MKC does not endorse the Homoian Arian doctrine of the Trinity. As we have seen, MKC categorically denies that there are different beings of different rank within the Trinity. MKC can agree fully with the traditional critiques of the Homoian doctrine of the Trinity.⁹⁰ MKC is nowhere close to (HA4).

In summary, it should be clear that MKC is no closer to Homoian Arianism than it is to Early Arianism. MKC agrees that the Son is like the Father “according to the Scriptures.” But such a statement is hardly controversial. Of course Homoianism goes much farther than this, and MKC quickly takes leave of it when it does so. MKC denies the ontological inequality of Son and Father and the subordination of the Son to the Father, it rejects the notion that the Son is created (either out of the will of the Father or

⁹⁰ R.P.C. Hanson reports that Hilary criticizes the Arian Trinity of three diverse persons as a disruption rather than a unity, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 569.

ex nihilo), and MKC insists that the persons of the Trinity are one God. MKC avoids the pitfalls and the problems of Homoian Arianism.

MODIFIED KENOTIC CHRISTOLOGY AND NEO-ARIANISM

Neo-Arianism is most often associated with the names Aetius and Eunomius.⁹¹ It argues on both biblical and philosophical grounds,⁹² and clearly it is opposed to the parties of both the Homoiousians and the Homoousians. Neo-Arianism is similar to Early Arianism in several ways. Both Early Arianism and Neo-Arianism insist that God is absolutely transcendent and incomparable; the Father or the “high God” does not and indeed cannot share his essence.⁹³ All versions of Arianism hold that there is no real distinction between “begotten” and “created.”⁹⁴ The very idea of eternal generation is thus nonsensical. And because the Father (as uncreated/unbegotten) and the Son (as created/begotten) are inherently different, they are inherently unequal.⁹⁵

Neo-Arianism resembles Homoian Arianism in some noteworthy ways. First, both held to the incomparability of the Father.⁹⁶ Both also insisted that the incarnate Son

⁹¹ For a detailed look at the life and career of Eunomius, see Richard Paul Vaggione, OHC, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁹² The penchant of the Neo-Arians for philosophical argument is well known, but Thomas Kopacek argues that biblical argumentation was important enough to Eunomius that he insists that biblical inerrancy must be denied if the heteroousion is not accepted, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, Volume II (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Ltd., 1979), p. 330.

⁹³ Cf. Michael E. Butler, “Neo-Arianism: Its Antecedents and Tenets,” *St. Vladimirs Theological Quarterly* 36 (1992), p. 362.

⁹⁴ Cf. Michael E. Butler, “Neo-Arianism: Its Antecedents and Tenets,” p. 363.

⁹⁵ Cf. Michael E. Butler, “Neo-Arianism: Its Antecedents and Tenets,” p. 363.

⁹⁶ Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 634-635.

had no human mind or soul.⁹⁷ Finally, both insisted on the drastic ontological subordination of the Son to the Father.⁹⁸

Neo-Arianism also differs from Early Arianism and Homoian Arianism in some important respects. Other than the use of the vocabulary and conceptual apparatus of Greek philosophy (which was employed with great rigor by the Neo-Arians, less so by the Early Arians and almost not at all by the Homoians), several issues stand out and warrant special mention. First, the Neo-Arians were confident that the essence of God is comprehensible to humanity, while the Early Arians and Homoians resolutely denied this.⁹⁹ The Homoians held to the incomparability of the Father (as did the Neo-Arians), but they also thought that the divine essence is incomprehensible (even for the Son). The Neo-Arians, however, were sure that both the Son and an ordinary believer could know the essence of God. The Neo-Arians held to the immutability of the Son; this seems to have been (mostly) denied by the Homoians.¹⁰⁰ And where the Homoians were insistent that the Son's relation to the Father is "like according to the Scriptures," the Neo-Arians were convinced that the Son is "like according to will, different according to ousia."¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 635.

⁹⁸ Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 635.

⁹⁹ Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 635, Michael E. Butler, "Neo-Arianism: Its Antecedents and Tenets," p. 365.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 635 and Thomas A. Kopacek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* Volume I, pp. 190-191.

¹⁰¹ Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 635.

The Theology of Neo-Arianism

With this brief bit of historical background, we are now in a position to highlight the salient features of Neo-Arianism. These features may be summarized in this way:

(NA1) *Names reveal the essence of things.*

Thus the ingenerateness of the Father is expressive of his essence, and the generateness of the Son is expressive of his essence. According to Micheal E. Butler's rather terse summary, "ἀγέννητος = God, γεννητὸς = Son."¹⁰²

(NA2) *Because names reveal the essence of things, God can be known exhaustively.*¹⁰³

The reported statement of Eunomius about our ability to know the essence of divinity shows this clearly:

God does not know more about his own ousia than we do, and it is not known more to him and less to us. But whatever we may know about it, that he certainly knows; and conversely whatever he knows, that (knowledge) you will find exactly in us.¹⁰⁴

(NA3) *Ingenerateness is the exhaustive definition of God.*

Hanson states that the "basic belief" of Neo-Arianism, "from which all else flows, is the ingenerateness (*agennesia*), and with that the incomparability, of God, the Father."¹⁰⁵ Butler explains that since "ἀγέννητος exhaustively defines the essence of God," the "divine essence is absolutely simple and beyond all comparison or analogy."¹⁰⁶ This means, as Hanson explains further, that for Eunomius and the Neo-Arians "there is

¹⁰² Michael E. Butler, "Neo-Arianism: Its Antecedents and Tenets," p. 370.

¹⁰³ For more on this point see Graham A. Keith, "Our Knowledge of God: The Relevance of the Debate Between Eunomius and the Cappadocians," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990), pp. 60-88.

¹⁰⁴ R.P.C. Hanson is convinced that this statement is genuinely expressive of the thought of Eunomius, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 629.

¹⁰⁵ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 621.

only one God, strictly speaking, who exists neither from himself nor from another. God must be before everything, for this follows from his ingenerateness.”¹⁰⁷ Of course this rules out the divinity of the Son (who is confessed by all sides to be generate).

(NA4) *The Son, therefore, is heteroousion; the Son is different in essence from the Father and dissimilar to all created things.*

With respect to the use of ousia language, Hanson argues that Eunomius actually prides himself on being a proponent of “Heteroousion:” “it is doubtful that he even would have approved of the strictures of the Second Sirmian Creed on those who wish to introduce the word ousia into the Trinitarian debate. He wished to bring the word forward, in order to emphasize the difference of ousia in the Father and the Son.”¹⁰⁸

Hanson concludes that “in short, for Eunomius generatedness and ousia are inseparable, because the Son is generated his ousia cannot but be different from the Father’s.”¹⁰⁹

(NA5) *The Son is radically subordinate to the Father.*

The Son exists only at the will of the Father; the Son’s existence is contingent. Hanson states that “the most exalted language which Eunomius can use about the Son is to say that ‘he is generated Sole from the Sole by the power of the Ingenerate and has become, once created, the most perfect agent.’”¹¹⁰ The Son is midway between the Father and the angels; the Son is the angel of the high God while also being the God of

¹⁰⁶ Michael E. Butler, “Neo-Arianism: Its Antecedents and Tenets,” p. 370.

¹⁰⁷ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 621.

¹⁰⁸ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 625.

¹⁰⁹ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 626.

¹¹⁰ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 625.

the lesser beings.¹¹¹ As it turns out, Eunomius is convinced that this is a good thing, for it works for our salvation. For an incarnation of the high God is impossible – only a lower level deity could do this kind of work.¹¹²

Neo-Arianism: A Pitfall for MKC?

If MKC is able to avoid Early Arianism and Homoian Arianism, then it seems that it should not endorse the more radical Neo-Arianism. Still, it is worth taking a closer look to see if this actually is the case. With respect to (NA1) and (NA2), it should be clear that MKC does not hold to these positions. For MKC can maintain that names are expressive of substances without assuming that these names are comprehensive or exhaustive in what they reveal. And, as we have seen, MKC's proponents are exercised to protect the mystery of theology.¹¹³ MKC does not endorse (NA1) or (NA2) in any way, nor does it need to do so for the sake of consistency.

Similarly, MKC disavows anything to do with (NA3). MKC does not hold that ingenerateness is the exhaustive definition of God. MKC has no reason to deny the full and true divinity of the Son on this account.

MKC also emphatically rejects (NA4) – MKC affirms that the Son is homoousion and thus denies that the Son is heteroousion. On the contrary, the Son is of the same essence of both the Father and (subsequent to the incarnation) humanity. As for (NA5) – it is also denied by MKC. MKC does not think that the Son's existence is contingent, it does not hold that the Son is some sort of lower level deity or that the Son is somehow

¹¹¹ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 626.

¹¹² Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 628.

¹¹³ E.g. Stephen T. Davis, "Is Kenosis Orthodox?," pp. 10-11 and C. Stephen Evans, "The Self-Emptying of Love," p. 272.

midway between the Father and the angels. For MKC the Son is subordinate to the Father *functionally*; the Son is subordinate while kenotically-and-redemptively-incarnate. But this does not obviously entail the ontological subordination of the Son.

To this point I have worked to show that MKC is not liable to charges that it violates the homoousion doctrine by virtue of capitulation to some kind of Arianism. I have shown that MKC is not Arian in the sense of Early Arianism, Homoian Arianism or Neo-Arianism. I have also tried to demonstrate that there are no good reasons to think that MKC should be Arian in one of these ways for the sake of consistency. In most cases we have seen that MKC is actually incompatible with Arianism, and in a few cases we have seen that MKC need not take the Arian view (even if it could do so). The work on the question of the homoousion is not done yet, however, for there is still the possibility that MKC violates the homoousion by endorsing the homoousion.

MODIFIED KENOTIC CHRISTOLOGY AND THE HOMOIOUSION

The Homoiousion position, dubbed “Semi-Arianism” by Epiphanius,¹¹⁴ occupied an area of middle ground between the Homoousions on one hand and the Homoians and (especially) the Neo-Arians on the other hand. Whether or not there was an actual “party” of Homoiousionism,¹¹⁵ it is clear that there was a group of theologians who found this terminology to be helpful in resisting what they saw as the problematic implications

¹¹⁴ This tag has stuck to the Homoiousian position for centuries, e.g. H.M. Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy*, p. 91. R.P.C. Hanson maintains that this epithet is the result of some rhetorical tactics that were not entirely fair, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 349.

¹¹⁵ Hanson states that this term was not a slogan used to define or unite a party, R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 350. Lohr is convinced that it was unified enough to be called a “party,” cf. Winrich A. Lohr, “A Sense of Tradition,” pp. 81-100.

of the other views. The Homoiousion position is seen most clearly in the theology of Basil of Ancyra, Eustathius and George of Laodicea.¹¹⁶

The Theology of the Homoiousions

In arguments drawn from Scripture, the Homoiousions insisted that essence language was everywhere in both the Old Testament and the New Testament; they held that essence language is there *conceptually* even if it is not explicit. Kopacek's quotation of a statement preserved by Epiphanius illustrates this: "the sense of the term essence is conveyed everywhere in Old and New Testaments (even though) the term does not lie nakedly" in the biblical texts.¹¹⁷ As for arguments from tradition, the Homoiousions argued that their position has precedence in the Creed of Dedication (the second creed of Antioch 341).¹¹⁸ They also argued (after 359) that their position offered the best interpretation of the "Dated Creed."¹¹⁹ In particular, they argued that "like in all things" (the formula of the Dated Creed) includes "like according to essence."¹²⁰

The Homoiousions argued against the Neo-Arians that there is an important distinction between the relationships of Father-Son and Creator-Creature. Contra the Neo-Arians, the Homoiousions insisted that God must be both Creator and Father.¹²¹ They insisted further that, even though the Father may be said to be the creator of the

¹¹⁶ Whether or not this is the same George of Laodicea who was earlier the presbyter who wrote a letter to Alexander in defense of Arius (322) is disputed. Most scholars assume that it is. R.P.C. Hanson has doubts, for a discussion of the related issues see his *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 350.

¹¹⁷ Thomas A. Kopacek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* Volume I, pp. 183-184.

¹¹⁸ On this see Thomas A. Kopacek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* Volume I, pp. 184, 196 and R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 351-352.

¹¹⁹ See R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 352-353.

¹²⁰ See Thomas A. Kopacek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* Volume I, p. 184.

¹²¹ On this see R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 353-354.

ousia of the Son, the categories of generacy/ingeneracy are inferior to the pervasive biblical language of Father and Son. As Hanson puts it, “Basil says that those who deny that the Son is ‘like in ousia’ say in effect that the Son is not a Son, but only a creature, and the Father is not a Father but only a creator.”¹²² Kopacek summarizes the Homoiousion argument: “the essential homoiousion argument was that the ungenerated/generated terminology succeeded in differentiating God and the Mongenes but did not succeed in any way in communicating the intimate connection between them, a connection to which both scripture and the ecclesiastical tradition witnessed.”¹²³ For the Homoiousions, Neo-Arianism is simply unable to account for the relation between the Father and the Son, and this results in a dangerous subordination of the Son.

Homoiousianism also attacks the apparent Sabellianism of Marcellus of Ancyra. It is for the same reason they are resistant to the Homoousion. According to Hanson, the worries about latent Sabellianism are a major motivation for the Homoiousion. The homoiousion is believed by Basil to be “necessary as a safeguard against Sabellianism: ‘that which is like can never be the same as that to which it is like.’”¹²⁴ Kopacek demonstrates that the defenders of the Homoiousion made a sharp distinction between their position and the Homoousion on the following grounds:

it (the homoousion) involved the materializing notion that there is a prior substance which Father and Son divide among themselves, it was rejected by the anti-Paul of Samosata council of Antioch during the third century and it was unscriptural.¹²⁵

¹²² R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 354.

¹²³ Thomas A. Kopacek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* Volume I, p. 188.

¹²⁴ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 353.

¹²⁵ Thomas A. Kopacek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* Volume I, p. 176. Winrich Lohrs shows this as well, “A Sense of Tradition,” p. 88.

In rejecting both the lurking Sabellianism of the Homoousions (and especially Marcellus) and heresy of the Neo-Arians, the supporters of Homoiousios believed that they had obtained a position that was able to account for both the unity and the distinction of the Father and the Son. Kopacek's summary is helpful:

Conscious that Athanasius had pointed out in his *De Decretis* that the Macrostich's "like in all things" was impotent as a weapon against Arianism and had posed the only alternatives as either homoousion or heteroousion, Basil and Eustathius accepted Athanasius' attitude toward "like in all things" but rejected his alternatives as the only viable ones. The Son, they argued, is neither same-in-essence (homoousion) nor different-in-essence (heteroousion) but, rather, like-in-essence, that is, homoiousion.¹²⁶

The Homoiousion position was doomed to failure for several reasons, and these need not concern us here.¹²⁷ Especially important for this study, however, are two key elements of Homoiousian theology:

(H1) *The Son is like the Father according to ousia.*

The Son is thus similar to the Father with respect to essence. However, the Son is not identical to the Father in any way. He is not "unlike" the Father, for he is similar to the Father in both essence and activity. But the Son is not one-in-essence or same-in-essence as the Father.

¹²⁶ Thomas A. Kopacek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* Volume I, p. 130.

¹²⁷ Neo-Arianism rejects Homoiousionism for the same basic reasons that it rejects Homoousionism, while Homoousionism was highly critical of Homoiousionism according to the same rationale that it rejected Early Arianism, Homoian Arianism and Neo-Arianism (e.g., it is not able to adequately account for the biblical witness to the divinity of Christ, it cannot handle worship of the Son and it threatens salvation). For more on this see R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 357-386, Thomas A. Kopacek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* Volume I, pp. 132-198 and Rowan D. Williams, "The Logic of Arianism," p. 70.

(H2) *In the incarnation, the Son is like humanity according to ousia.*

Again, the Son is similar to us with respect to essence. He is not dissimilar to us – he is like us. But the Son does not possess the same human essence; he is not one with us.

Kenotic Homoiousionism?

When we compare MKC to Homoiousionism, several conclusions emerge with some clarity. Starting with (H1), it should become apparent that MKC does not need Homoiousionism, nor is it committed to it. With regard to the identity of the Son and the Father, MKC would agree that the Son is not identical to the Father in the strict sense of identity. After all (on the identity of indiscernibles),¹²⁸ if Father and Son are strictly identical, then every property that is possessed by the Father would be possessed by the Son and every property of the Son would also be possessed by the Father. On this sense of identity, all of the personal properties of the Son would also be the personal properties of the Father. If this were true, then all personal identity would be obscured, and surely Sabellianism would follow. But MKC, along with both the orthodox tradition and Homoiousianism (as well as the different versions of Arianism), denies this sense of identity. But when we consider the identity of predication, we see that MKC affirms the identity of the Father and the Son (and, of course, that of the Holy Spirit as well). For MKC affirms that the Son is of the same essence as the Father – both Father and Son share the same divine essence. In this sense there is a real sense of identity between Father and Son. The Son is not similar in essence to the Father; such claims are not nearly strong enough. The divine essence of the Son is the same as the divine essence of

¹²⁸ (x) (y) [(x=y) > (P) (Px <> Py)].

the Father. This may mean that MKC is committed to a generic view of the divine essence. If so, then MKC is open to charges that it compromises the unity of the Godhead.¹²⁹ I will explore these issues in a later chapter, but at this point I simply note that MKC is not committed to a denial of the homoousion. To the contrary, it has ample reason to affirm it.

When we examine MKC in relation to (H2), we see that the situation is similar. MKC is exercised to affirm that the Son is one with humanity – MKC insists that the incarnate Son possesses the essence of humanity. In other words, the incarnate Son is of the natural kind *humanity*. The Son does not have an essence that is similar to humanity in some (or even many) ways; the Son does not possess an essence that is close to that of humans but different from it in some respects (let us call it humanity-q). While incarnate the Son is in possession of all the properties that are essential to being human. He does not possess all of the common human properties (notably sinfulness), so he is “like” us in many respects while not like us in others. But while incarnate the Son is human – not human-q. He has all of the essential human properties, and so he is said to be a member of the natural kind *humanity*. MKC denies (H2); MKC affirms that the Son is homoousios with us.

I suppose that it might be possible for MKC (or something like it) to adopt the Homoiousion position. I have argued that it *need not* do so; I also think that it is clear that it *does not* do so. I believe that it rejects the Homoiousion position and stays with the Homoousion tradition for good reason, and I suggest that it *should* continue to do so.

¹²⁹ At this point the criticisms of MKC will have moved to the opposite end of the spectrum from those lodged by Homoiousianism. Where the Homoiousians had charged the Homoousions with not giving adequate account of the distinction between the persons, any complaints that a generic view of the divine unity is not enough are alleging that such a view does not sufficiently safeguard the divine oneness.

For if the Son is not one with the Father, then we are not joined to God in our union with Christ. Thomas F. Torrance expresses this concern with force:

The Nicene and Constantinopolitan fathers realized that if they allowed the dualist ways of thought in the prevailing culture to cut the bond of being between Christ and God the Father, then the whole substance and heart of the Christian Gospel would be lost. If what Christ does, for example, in forgiving our sins, is not what God does, then it is not finally valid. If God himself has not come to be one with us in the incarnation, then the love of God finally falls short of coming all the way to be one with us... If it was not God himself incarnate who suffered for us on the cross in making atonement, then the sacrifice of Christ has no ultimate and final validity, and we are still in our sins. If Jesus Christ and God are not of one and the same being, then we do not really know God, for he is some hidden, inscrutable Deity behind the back of Jesus, of whom we can only be terrified – and the final judgment of the world will be a final judgment apart from and without respect to Jesus Christ and his forgiving love and atoning sacrifice. Cut the bond of being between Jesus Christ and God, and the Gospel message becomes an empty mockery.¹³⁰

And if the incarnate Son is not one with us, then we again are left without union with God. To quote Torrance again:

It is essential to realize that Jesus Christ the Son of God is also man, of one and the same being and nature as we are. If he is not really man, then the great bridge which God has thrown across the gulf between him and us, has no foundation on our side of the gulf. Jesus Christ, to be Mediator in the proper sense, must be wholly and fully man as well as God. Hence the Creed stresses the stark reality and actuality of his humanity.¹³¹

MKC not only can affirm the homoousion rather than the homoiousion, it also does and indeed should continue to do so.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the possibility that MKC violates the homoousion principle by falling prey to Arianism or (the “Semi-Arianism” of) Homoiousionism. I

¹³⁰ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp. 7-8.

¹³¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, p. 8.

have looked at MKC's relation to Early Arianism, Homoian Arianism, Neo-Arianism and Homoiousionism. Drawing from some relevant patristic scholarship, I have examined MKC in relation to the essential and defining characteristics of each position. In each case, I have declared that MKC is not susceptible to charges that it somehow violates the homoousion on these grounds. I conclude that MKC does not cross the lines of historic orthodoxy at these points – MKC is not guilty of transgression of the homoousion doctrine by virtue of incipient Arianism.

Chapter Five: Modified Kenotic Christology and Apollinarianism, Monophysitism and Monotheletism

We have seen that Modified Kenotic Christology (MKC) does not obviously reduce to a form of Arianism. It does not violate the homoousion of Jesus with the Father. But does MKC offer a Christology that is the modern equivalent of an earlier “solution” that has been judged as heterodox by the tradition? Does it destroy the homoousion of Jesus with humanity? If it does, then it is obvious that MKC does not count as orthodox.

I explore this possibility in this chapter. Here I take a close look at what might be the stiffest challenges for a kenotic model of the incarnation that tries to be orthodox by traditional standards – the charges of Apollinarianism, Monophysitism and Monotheletism. I am not trying to make any contributions to patristic scholarship; instead I am relying upon those historians who specialize in this period and on these controversies. There are many interesting issues related to the study of these theological controversies that I will leave to the side, for I am focusing only on those issues that are most central and vital for this study. I argue that MKC is not a species of Apollinarianism; despite some formal similarities it is very different in some important respects. I will also argue that, when armed with its metaphysical distinctions, it is possible for MKC to avoid Monophysitism. The issue of Monotheletism is much more daunting, however. In this chapter I simply state the problem as carefully and clearly as possible, and I look at several ways that the proponent of modified kenoticism might try to either avoid this problem or provide a solution.

MODIFIED KENOTIC CHRISTOLOGY AND APOLLINARIANISM

Basil Studer reports that Apollinarius, a “strict Nicene and as such a friend of Athanasius and Basil of Caesarea,” erred when he “carried the unitarianism of the Logos-Sarx framework to its logical end by expressly denying the existence of a human soul in Christ.”¹ Does MKC end up merely as another (albeit much more recent) version of Apollinarianism? I think not, but the issue certainly warrants further investigation.

Overview of Apollinarianism: Background and Theology

J.N.D. Kelly follows Gregory of Nazianzus in dating the Apollinarian heresy “as early as c. 352.”² Kelly calls Apollinarius “an enthusiast for the homoousion of the Son” and a “life-long opponent of the dualist, later to be called ‘dyophysite,’ strain in the Antiochene approach to Christology.”³ Apollinarius generally is taken to be a fairly extreme proponent of an Alexandrian or Word-flesh Christology.⁴ Apollinarius and his followers were staunchly opposed to Arianism, and his Christology reflects this opposition.⁵ The following features are key to Apollinarian Christology:

¹ Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 194.

² J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), p. 290.

³ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 290. On “Antiochene” and “Alexandrian” trends in Christology, see R.V. Sellars, *Two Ancient Christologies: A Study in the Christological Thought of the Schools of Alexandria and Antioch in the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: S.P.C.K., 1954).

⁴ E.g. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 291, Charles Raven, *Apollinarianism: An Essay on the Christology of the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. 179, Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), p. 192 and Reinhold Seeberg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines: Volume I, History of Doctrines in the Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1905), p. 247.

⁵ E.g. Kelley McCarthy Spoerl, “The Liturgical Argument in Apollinarius: Help and Hindrance on the Way to Orthodoxy,” *Harvard Theological Review* 91 (1998), pp. 130-132. On the other hand, Raven thinks that Apollinarius “felt that Arianism had spent its force,” *Apollinarianism*, p. 179.

(A1) *Apollinarian Christology is Based Upon a Trichotomous View of Humanity.*

According to many historians, a trichotomous anthropology is fundamental to the scheme of Apollinarius.⁶ Reinhold Seeburg points out that “he regarded the trichotomy of man’s nature as established by I Thessalonians 5:23.”⁷ And central to his account of the incarnation is the notion that the Logos assumed the flesh but replaced the intellectual aspect of humanity. As Seeburg puts it, “the Logos assumed the body and soul of a man, but the divine Logos itself took the place of the spirit (νοῦς) or intellectual soul (ψυχή νοερά).”⁸ Kelly quotes Apollinarius: “the divine energy fulfills the role of the animating spirit (ψυχή) and of the human mind (νοῦς).”⁹

(A2) *For Apollinarius, the Human Mind and Will are Essentially and Necessarily Sinful.*

Apollinarius saw this model of the incarnation as necessary due to the essential nature of humanity and especially of the human mind. He was convinced that the human mind is necessarily both mutable and sinful. As R.L. Ottley articulates it, “if Christ assumed the totality of human attributes, He undoubtedly had human reasoning powers; and it is impossible for these to be free from inherent sin.”¹⁰ Whether or not Ottley is correct in labeling this a “quasi-Manichean” position, surely he is correct in stating that for Apollinarius “human nature is *essentially* and by its very constitution sinful, the most

⁶ E.g. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 292, Charles Raven, *Apollinarianism*, pp. 186-190, 198, J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas: Volume II, From St. Athanasius To St. Augustine (318-430)* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1984), p. 97, Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies*, p. 161. Kelly notes that the issue is not completely settled.

⁷ Reinhold Seeburg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, p. 245.

⁸ Reinhold Seeburg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, p. 245.

⁹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 292.

¹⁰ R.L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: Methen and Co., Ltd.), p. 375.

distinctive element in it being nous, which according to Apollinarius is the necessary seat of sin.”¹¹

(A3) *The Logos, on the other hand, is understood to be immutable.*

Kelly McCarthy Spoerl argues that for Apollinarius “the Word is unchangeable as the Father is, and the experience of incarnation does not change this aspect of his pre-existent nature.”¹² By taking on the flesh of humanity while replacing those parts that were sinful, the Logos remains immutable and impassible. Thus the incarnate Logos is not sinful and in need of salvation; the incarnate Logos is able to bring salvation to others.

(A4) *For our Salvation, the Logos Replaced a Part of Humanity – the Rational Soul.*

Soteriology is central to Apollinarian Christology (and theology generally). Sellars states that the Christology of Apollinarius was “dominated” by soteriological concerns.¹³ This is seen in two ways. First, the immutability of the Logos is important to the Apollinarian scheme because it guarantees salvation. There is also a further concern regarding salvation. We see that these concerns come to the fore for Apollinarius in two ways: in his emphasis on the immutability of the Word and in his insistence on the unity of the person of Christ. Kelly notes that it is by “having the divine life pulsing through Him, the Incarnate was made immune from psychic and fleshly passions, and became not only Himself invincible to death, but also able to destroy death. It was because the Word

¹¹ R.L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, p. 375. Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 293, Charles Raven, *Apollinarianism*, p. 182, J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, pp. 96-97.

¹² Kelley McCarthy Spoerl, “Apollinarius and Early Arian Christology,” *Studia Patristica XXVI* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1993), pp. 424-425. Cf. Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma* (London: Williams and Northgate, 1898), p. 151.

¹³ R.V. Sellars, *Two Ancient Christologies*, p. 50.

was, biologically and physically, the vital force and energy in Him that He was able to raise the dead and bestow life.”¹⁴ Pointing out that the unity of the person is at the heart of the issue, Spoerl states that “If one separates Christ from the Trinity by distinguishing within him two persons, one divine and one human, it is much more difficult to understand how sacramental incorporation into his humanity can enable the faithful to access his divine and saving power.”¹⁵ Kelly notes that Apollinarius “was convinced that, if the divine was separated from the human in the Saviour, our redemption is imperilled.”¹⁶ Because the unity of the person of the Son as well as the immutability of the Logos is protected for Apollinarius, salvation is guaranteed. The unity of the person insures that it is the Logos who is working out salvation for humanity, and the immutability of the Logos makes certain that the person of Jesus Christ is *non posse peccare*.¹⁷

Tixeront maintains that for Apollinarius our salvation is worked out by the incarnate Logos in two ways (or at two distinct levels). The salvation of our bodies comes by the death of Christ, “but as to the soul, he declares that it will be saved by following the example of Jesus and becoming like unto him.”¹⁸ The important point is this: by the incarnation of the immutable Logos replacing the rational soul of the human nature, the salvation of humanity is made possible and actual. Apollinarius saw his view as the only consistent anti-Arian position. As Brian Daley notes, “by rejecting his party’s

¹⁴ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 293.

¹⁵ Kelley McCarthy Spoerl, “The Liturgical Argument in Apollinarius,” p. 141.

¹⁶ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 291.

¹⁷ Cf. R.V. Sellars, *Two Ancient Christologies*, p. 61.

¹⁸ J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, p. 98.

conception of Christ as the divine mind enfleshed in an animated body, Apollinarius argues, his opponents' only alternative is to conceive of him as a graced human being."¹⁹ Of course such a being could not offer salvation. Tixeront summarizes the importance of soteriology for the Apollinarian system:

Apollinarius is above all anxious to affirm and maintain the perfect unity of Jesus Christ, for the sake of soteriology. A God alone could save us: man was unequal to such a task, both on account of the inferiority of his nature and of the weakness of his will. Hence a God must be born, suffer and die for us; but this could not take place unless the divinity and the humanity in Jesus were one, and constituted but one nature, performing both the human and the divine works.²⁰

Clearly, soteriological concerns play a key role in the development of Apollinarian theology.

(A5) *Apollinarianism affirms Only One Nature in Christ.*

The strong concern for the unity of the person of Christ leads Apollinarianism to the affirmation of "one nature" in Christ. As Charles Raven points out, the Apollinarian form of Monophysitism is in some respects very different from that of the later proponents of Monophysitism (which we examine in a later section of this chapter).²¹ It is nonetheless, a form of Monophysite theology. In the words of the Apollinarius, "He is one nature (*mia physis*) since He is a simple, undivided Person (*prosopon*); for the body is not a nature by itself, nor is the divinity in virtue of the incarnation a nature by itself; but just as man is one nature, so is Christ who is come to be in the likeness of man."²² He

¹⁹ Brian J. Daley, "Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa's Anti-Apollinarian Christology," *Modern Theology* 18 (2002), p. 500.

²⁰ J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, p. 95.

²¹ Charles Raven, *Apollinarianism*, pp. 226-227.

²² Quoted in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 293.

was convinced that the admission of two full, perfect natures would entail two persons, so he insisted that there is only one nature.²³ This does not mean (as Eutyches would later say) that there is a confusion or blending of the two natures. On the contrary, the Logos is a complete nature that unites itself with a human body that is not a complete nature in itself.²⁴ Whether or not Spoerl is correct that this is a “truly hard-core monophysitism,” surely it *is* a version of “one nature” Christology.²⁵

(A6) *For Apollinarius, Christ’s Human Nature is of Another Kind.*

Apollinarian Monophysitism combines with the doctrine of immutability to produce a notion of an eternally divinized flesh of Christ. Daley believes that “it is accurate, in Apollinarius’s view, even to say that ‘Christ the human being’ is heavenly and eternal.”²⁶ But if this is true, as Apollinarius insists (and if the human nature of Christ has no rational soul), then Jesus Christ does not have the same human nature as do the rest of us. This led many critics of Apollinarius to charge that he was positing some sort of “tertium quid.”²⁷ And this charge appears to have some merit, for Apollinarius states that Christ is “a mean between God and man, neither wholly man nor wholly God, but a combination of God and man... a nature compacted and intermediate between God and man.”²⁸ At the very least the conclusion that the humanity of Apollinarianism’s

²³ Cf. R.L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, p. 274 and Reinhold Seeberg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, p. 245.

²⁴ Cf. J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, pp. 98-99.

²⁵ Kelley McCarthy Spoerl, “The Liturgical Argument in Apollinarius,” p. 148.

²⁶ Brian E. Daley, “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation,” p. 500, cf. Reinhold Seeberg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, p. 246.

²⁷ On this see Kelley McCarthy Spoerl, “Apollinarius and Early Arian Christology,” p. 425 and R.A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 106-111.

²⁸ Quoted in Charles Raven, *Apollinarianism*, p. 204.

Christ is different than ours is justified; surely Tixeront is correct when he states that “His humanity is not consubstantial with ours; between them, there is not homoousia, but homoioima only.”²⁹ Apollinarius may continue to assert the consubstantiality of Jesus Christ with the Father, and he may even insist that Jesus is consubstantial with humanity with respect to his body. But the conclusion is inescapable: on the Apollinarian model the Son does not share the same human nature as we do.

We are now in a position to summarize these salient features of Apollinarian Christology. Raven claims that the “denial to Christ of a human mind or spirit is the sum of Apollinarius’ heresy, and his own statements leave us no doubt that he realized and intended such a mutilation.”³⁰ Assuming a trichotomous view of humanity, and convinced of the essential sinfulness of human nature, Apollinarius maintained that the immutable Logos replaced the human rational soul in the incarnation for our salvation. This led Apollinarius to the conclusion that there is at most one nature in Christ, and this entails that the human nature of Christ is fundamentally different than the humanity possessed by the rest of humanity.

Is MKC an updated version of Apollinarianism? Does it reduce to a form of this ancient Christology that was deemed heretical in the fourth century? Or is it sufficiently different from Apollinarianism to avoid its problems? With this overview of Apollinarianism, we can examine this issue more closely. After noting some initial similarities, I will demonstrate that MKC does not default to Apollinarianism.

²⁹ J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, p. 97.

³⁰ Charles Raven, *Apollinarianism*, p. 185.

MKC: An Apollinarian Christology?

There are some similarities between MKC and Apollinarianism. MKC is sympathetic to some of the major impulses of Apollinarianism. For instance, MKC joins Apollinarius in enthusiastic support of the homoousion and pro-Nicene theology. They are both opposed to Arianism. Furthermore, they seem to be united in their endorsement of Word-flesh Christology. But in these areas MKC is also in league with the theology of Athanasius and the Cappadocians; there is nothing here to prevent MKC from also joining with Athanasius and the Cappadocians in their opposition to Apollinarianism.³¹ MKC is also sympathetic to the typical Apollinarian concern about the unity of the person of Christ. Seeing such views as “two minds” or “two wills” as threatening the unity of the person, Apollinarianism takes the position that there is only one will and one mind in Christ. MKC would seem to share some of these concerns, and this might raise the worry that MKC is Apollinarian.

Despite these similarities, however, MKC is different from Apollinarianism in several important respects. Indeed, it is opposed to Apollinarianism in some important ways, and this can be seen when MKC is compared to the major tenets of Apollinarian Christology. When we look at (A1), it should be clear that MKC is not, and does not need to be, committed to a trichotomous view of humanity. It may hold to this anthropology, but it need not. Therefore, it does not go with Apollinarianism in asserting that the Logos replaced the intellectual and volitional aspects of humanity.

³¹ Of course the relation of Athanasius to Apollinarius is debated in the current scholarship. Much of the support for the view that Athanasius opposed Apollinarius turns on the authorship of the *Contra Apollinarem*. I am satisfied by the work of George D. Dragas that there is solid evidence for Athanasian authorship, cf. George D. Dragas, *St. Athanasius Contra Apollinarem* (Athens: 1985).

When we examine MKC in relation to (A2) the situation is similar. There is nothing germane to MKC that would indicate that something about humanity is essentially or necessarily sinful. MKC is in a position to be able to deny this, and I suppose that the proponents of MKC would want to deny it. The proponents of MKC would probably agree that the property of being sinful is a *common* property of human persons – indeed to the extent that they agree with the mainstream of Latin or Western Christianity on “original sin” they will think that it true that this is a common property. But as we saw earlier, MKC recognizes an important distinction between *common* properties and *essential* properties. Thus they are able to agree that the property of being sinful is a common human property while denying that it is an essential human property.

(A3) is tied up with notions of immutability. As we saw when examining MKC in relation to Arianism, MKC may be committed to some forms of the doctrine of divine immutability while clearly not in a position to affirm other versions. Similarly, MKC needs to admit some version of divine mutability. But it is hard to see exactly what bearing this might have on the question of MKC’s alleged Apollinarianism. For if the intellectual and volitional aspects of human nature are not essentially sinful or do not necessarily lead to sin (as MKC can deny), then we do not need an immutable Logos (in a strict or “strong” sense of immutability) to guarantee the absence of sin (as Apollinarianism affirms).

MKC’s view does, however, appear to have the resources to turn away the Apollinarian worries that non-Apollinarian Christologies somehow compromise salvation by risking the sinlessness of Christ. Recall

(DM1) God is mutable just in case God changes (or could change)³² in any way whatsoever. This sense of divine mutability includes “Cambridge changes”³³ as well as changes related to indexical properties.³⁴

(DM2) God is mutable just in case God changes (or could change) with respect to God’s desires.

(DM3) God is mutable just in case God changes (or could change) with respect to God’s actions related to those desires.

(DM4) God is mutable just in case God changes (or could change) with respect to God’s essential properties. This includes both *de re* essential properties (by virtue of which the thing that once possessed it no longer exists when it is lost) and *de dicto* divine properties (by virtue of which the thing that possessed it no longer belongs to its previous natural kind when it is lost).

As noted earlier, MKC affirms (DM1), while there is no obvious reason why MKC must take sides on (DM2). Earlier I pointed out that MKC needs (DM3) or something like it; I also argued that MKC does not need (DM4). This is important because it allows the actions of the Logos to be different when incarnate than when not-incarnate. And it does so in a way that need not entail the peccability of the incarnate Son. For if the attribute of goodness is essential to God (as many theists believe), then

³² “Or could change” is included to parallel Swinburne’s notion of “strong immutability,” cf. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 212.

³³ Again, I am using the notions of “Cambridge changes” in what I take to be the usual sense, cf. Peter Geach, *God and the Soul* (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 71.

³⁴ On “indexical properties” see Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, p. 164 and John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 269-270.

the mutability of the Logos (in the sense of (DM3)) need not entail peccability.³⁵ And if the Logos is impeccable during the incarnation, then there is no loss of the power of Jesus Christ to provide salvation (even by the Apollinarian scheme). In this way, the Apollinarian critique of non-Apollinarian Christologies is blunted.

As (A4) indicates, Apollinarianism is built around and driven by soteriological concerns. In this, MKC is close to it. But in this, MKC is also near to the developing orthodoxy as expressed by the Cappadocians and others. A brief look at the respective soteriologies of the Apollinarians and the Cappadocians will help us locate MKC.

Apollinarius held that salvation is made possible and actual by the steadfastness of the immutable Logos in the incarnation. Because the Logos remains immutable as he is joined to the flesh of humanity, so the flesh of humanity is saved by its union with the Logos. This causes Apollinarius to be criticized on several fronts. First, he is criticized by Gregory of Nyssa for placing limits on the Logos; the Logos must be eternally incarnate (in some sense at least) if the Logos is to be incarnate and also strictly immutable. In Daley's words, Nyssen objects because "Apollinarius's conception of Christ not only limits the Logos by making him the rational soul or 'spirit' guiding a human body; it implies that this one governing soul, at least, is eternal, *sumphulon theou*."³⁶ Nyssen also objects that the Apollinarian scheme degrades humanity. To quote Daley again, Gregory insists that "to replace the human mind of Christ with the eternal Logos is to make his humanity simply into a lower form of animal life, a 'beast of burden; to have a right to be called human and to be the revealer of human apete, Christ

³⁵ Of course some theists (and indeed some proponents of MKC) may wish to deny that divine goodness is an essential divine attribute, e.g. Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 86-96. If this is the view of MKC, then it is even further from Apollinarianism.

needed a human mind, human needs and human limitations, and especially a human will.”³⁷

But direct soteriological concerns weighed heavily in the judgment of the orthodox against Apollinarianism. Ottley explains their basic concern:

The main motive of resistance to Apollinarianism was a right jealousy to maintain the reality and completeness of man’s redemption in Christ. If he did not assume a human nature in its integrity, including its most distinctive element – the element most worthy of redemption, and therefore specially needing salvation – Christ could not either be our perfect *example* nor our *redeemer*. Catholic writers complained that the Apollinarian Christ was not really human... He had not assumed the substance which actually needed restoration. Only that which was really united to God could be regarded as “saved.”³⁸

The orthodox theologians who opposed Apollinarius were convinced that, despite his noble intentions, his scheme actually threatened salvation. For if Christ was not fully human, then he could not save fully. And if he had no human rational soul, then he was not fully human. As Kelly puts it, “for all its concern for soteriology, the Apollinarian Christology, in the opinion of its critics, failed to meet the essential conditions of redemption. It was man’s rational soul, with its power of choice, which was the seat of sin; and if the Word did not unite such a soul with Himself, the salvation of mankind could not have been achieved.”³⁹ Gregory Nazianzen states this conviction with force:

If anyone has put his trust in him as a man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind... *For that which he has not assumed he has not healed; but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved.* If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves must be half also; but if the whole of his nature

³⁶ Brian E. Daley, “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation,” p. 500.

³⁷ Brian E. Daley, “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation,” p. 500.

³⁸ R.L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, p. 378., cf. George D. Dragas, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Anti-Apollinarian Christology,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42 (1997), p. 311.

³⁹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 297.

fell, it must be united to the whole nature of him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole.⁴⁰

Nazianzen expresses this further:

If the mind was utterly rejected, as prone to sin and subject to damnation, and for this reason he assumed a body but left out the mind, then there is excuse for them who sin with the mind; for the witness of God – according to you – has shown the impossibility of healing it...that which transgressed was that which stood most in need of salvation; and that which needed salvation was that which also he took upon him. Therefore, mind was taken upon him.⁴¹

Daley concurs that this is Nyssen's view as well: "it is essential for him to conceive of Christ as possessing all that is vulnerable and variable in our nature, including our mind, precisely so that all that is natural and changeable in each of us may, beginning in Christ, be transformed and exalted."⁴²

MKC is in a position to go with the Cappadocian rejection of Apollinarianism rather than with Apollinarius and his soteriology, and I assume that its proponents will want to do so. They can readily and heartily agree with the fundamental maxim of Gregory Nazianzen: "that which he has not assumed he has not healed, but that which is united to his Godhead is saved." With the Cappadocians, MKC can also affirm that all of human nature is included in the incarnation – all of those properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for inclusion in the natural kind humanity are included in the incarnate life of the Son. MKC can agree with the Cappadocians that every aspect of human nature must be assumed in order to be healed; it can agree further that the mind

⁴⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Letters on the Apollinarian Controversy," in Edward R. Hardy (ed.), *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954, pp. 218-219.

⁴¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, "Letters on the Apollinarian Controversy," pp. 220-221.

⁴² Brian E. Daley, "Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation," p. 501.

and will of the person Jesus Christ was fully human. Furthermore, there is no reason apparent why MKC cannot also join Leo in saying that

While the distinctness of both natures and substances is preserved, and both meet in one Person... in the entire and perfect nature of very Man was born very God, whole in what was his, whole in what was ours (by ours I mean what the Creator formed in us in the beginning; and what he assumed in order to restore)... he took on him "the form of a servant" without the defilement of our sins, augmenting what was human, not diminishing what was divine; because that "emptying of himself," whereby the Invisible made himself visible, and the Creator and Lord of all things willed to be one among mortals, was a stooping down of compassion, not a failure of power.⁴³

It should be clear that there is nothing about MKC that renders it unable to offer a full endorsement of the pronouncement of Chalcedon:

Following therefore the holy fathers, we confess one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, and we all teach harmoniously (that he is) the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father in Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in manhood, like us in all things except sin...⁴⁴

Because the differences between the Apollinarian version of Monophysitism and the other versions of Monophysitism are not obviously relevant for this comparison with MKC, I shall postpone discussion of (A5) and (A6) until the next section, simply noting here that MKC does not *wish* to affirm Monophysitism (of this or any other sort). In conclusion, it should be clear that MKC does not hold that the Logos replaced anything that is essentially human; it insists that he took on a complete and full human nature. Furthermore, MKC is in a position to take the side of the soteriological concerns of the theologians of orthodoxy. MKC denies that anything essentially human was left behind, and it affirms that the Son took upon himself and redeemed all of human nature in the

⁴³ Leo, "The Tome of Leo" in Edward R. Hardy (ed.), *Christology of the Later Fathers*, pp. 363-364.

⁴⁴ "The Chalcedonian Decree" in Edward R. Hardy (ed.), *Christology of the Later Fathers*, p. 373.

incarnation (even if it might understand that human nature somewhat differently than did the Cappadocians). I conclude that, unless it has problems with Monophysitism, MKC is not guilty of Apollinarianism.

MODIFIED KENOTIC CHRISTOLOGY AND MONOPHYSITISM

Critics of MKC might think that it is close to Monophysitism. It may be an updated version of Apollinarianism, or it might be a modification of the Eutychian variety. On the other hand, it might be dangerously close to the “classic” Monophysite doctrines of Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus, Sergius or Jacob of Sarug. It is commonly accepted that these positions are not all the same; in fact, Severus is said to have been staunch in his opposition to Apollinarianism (as well as Chalcedonianism).⁴⁵ Despite these differences, however, there is substantial overlap and continuity between these various versions of Monophysitism. For whether it is Eutyches maintaining that phusis or nature is concrete and insisting that there is one “mixed” or “blended” nature of the incarnate Christ,⁴⁶ or whether it is Apollinarius rejecting this notion of mixture and saying that the Logos (as a complete nature) takes upon itself a human body (which is *not* a nature),⁴⁷ there is substantial agreement on several key points. And both of these positions are very close in some respects to the Christology of the later Monophysites, including that of Severus (who is commonly taken to have “reiterated the traditional

⁴⁵ E.g. W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 209 and Iain R. Torrance, *Christology After Chalcedon: Severus of Antioch and Sergius the Monophysite* (Norfolk: The Canterbury Press Norwich, 1988), pp. 64-65.

⁴⁶ Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 333 and Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, p. 200.

⁴⁷ Cf. J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, pp. 98-99.

statements of orthodoxy and acknowledged two natures in Christ” but who went on to identify physis with hypostasis and taught that in the incarnation a synthesis of the two natures occurs so that there is one nature after the incarnation),⁴⁸ Timothy Aelurus,⁴⁹ Peter Fuller, Julian of Halicarnassus,⁵⁰ Philoxenus of Mabbug⁵¹ and Jacob of Sarug.⁵²

Surely I.A. Dorner is right that “we find amongst the Monophysites also, an interesting and internally progressive variety of opinion.”⁵³ But it also appears to be true that there is enough agreement among the various schools of Monophysitism that we can consider them together. For if MKC qualifies as Monophysitism *simpliciter*, then we do not need to ascertain exactly which kind of Monophysitism it is. Such issues might be important for other purposes; the questions surrounding them might be historically interesting.⁵⁴ But they are not obviously relevant for this study. On the other hand, if MKC is not a form of generic Monophysitism, then it hardly seems necessary to try to figure out which species it might belong to. So I shall lay aside questions of interesting

⁴⁸ Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies*, pp. 184-185, cf. R.V. Sellars, *Two Ancient Christologies*, p.48, Rebecca C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 9-56, Iain R. Torrance, *Christology After Chalcedon* and John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington and Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1969), pp. 26-28.

⁴⁹ Cf. John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, pp. 24-25 and R.V. Sellars, *Two Ancient Christologies*, p. 48.

⁵⁰ Cf. R.L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, pp. 440-441.

⁵¹ Cf. Rebecca C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, pp. 57-112, John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, pp. 25-26.

⁵² Cf. Rebecca C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, pp. 113-141. Meyendorff states that “the great Monophysite theologians” of the fifth and early sixth centuries “clearly dominated the scene,” *Christ in Early Christian Thought*, p. 24.

⁵³ I.A. Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ: Division Second, From the End of the Fourth Century to the Present Time, Volume I*, translated by Rev. Prof. D.W. Simon (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, n.d.), p. 121.

⁵⁴ For a detailed study of the history of this controversy, see Patrick T.R. Gray, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East (451-553)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979).

but irrelevant historical detail – instead I shall describe generic Monophysitism and compare MKC to it while noting any areas in which differences between the various species of Monophysitism might make an important difference.

Monophysitism: An Overview

As we have seen, Apollinarian Monophysitism was motivated by a desire to safeguard the unity of the person of Christ; thus it held that the person of the Logos (as a complete nature) assumed the flesh of humanity (which was not a complete nature). Eutycheism, out of a similar concern, maintained that the nature of the God-Man was a mixture of the human and the divine.⁵⁵ As a consequence, both affirmed that Jesus Christ was of “one nature.”

With the later Monophysites the situation is somewhat different, but they too finally insist on a one nature Christology. They were motivated by opposition to both Apollinarianism and Eutycheism on one hand and by resistance to Chalcedon on the other hand.⁵⁶ Brown goes so far as to say that “opposition to Chalcedon is the real hallmark of the Monophysites.”⁵⁷ They were also exercised to follow the Christology that had been handed to them by the Cappadocians and especially by Cyril of Alexandria.⁵⁸ In fact, Meyendorff even concludes that “it cannot be denied that Severus

⁵⁵ Cf. R.L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, pp. 417-430, J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 330-334.

⁵⁶ Cf. W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, pp. 209-210, Iain R. Torrance, *Christology After Chalcedon*, pp. 64-66, R.L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, p. 438, John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁷ Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies*, p. 184.

⁵⁸ Cf. John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, pp. 27, 30 and W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, p. 208.

opposed Chalcedon out of faithfulness to Cyril.”⁵⁹ But in league with Apollinarian and Eutychean Christology, the later Monophysites vehemently reject any notion of two minds, two wills or two centers of energetic activity in Christ.⁶⁰

Brown identifies the “fundamental impulse” of Monophysitism: it is “the insistence that the unity of the divine and human in Christ is fulfilled in the physical life of Christ and produces *a single nature*.”⁶¹ Monophysitism may be briefly summarized in this way:

(MP1) *Hypostasis/Person and Phusis/Nature are Identical for Monophysitism.*

Meyendorff points out that for the Monophysites, these terms (hypostasis/person and phusis/nature) were “synonymous.”⁶² Chesnut argues that Severus understood hypostasis as referring to the “individual, rather than the generic.”⁶³ But (as Meyendorff makes clear) “nature” or “phusis” was taken by the Monophysites as identical with “person” or “hypostasis.” Thus both hypostasis and phusis refer to the concrete and individual rather than the abstract and generic for Severus.

(MP2) *Because Christ is One Person, Christ has One Nature.*

The Monophysites saw that two natures would mean two persons; they also saw that the loss of the unity of the person of Christ would threaten salvation. Meyendorff states that “the starting point of their Christology was the contemplation of the identity between the pre-existent Word and the incarnate Word; this identity was a soteriological

⁵⁹ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, p. 28.

⁶⁰ Cf. A.A. Luce, *Monophysitism Past and Present* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1920), pp. 81-85.

⁶¹ Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies*, p. 184.

⁶² John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, p. 25.

⁶³ Rebecca C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, p. 11.

necessity asserted by the Creed of Nicaea and by Cyril against Nestorius.”⁶⁴ He quotes Timothy Aelerus to demonstrate the “simple logic” of Monophysitism:

No man whose heart is healthy in the faith teaches or believes two natures, either before or after the union, for when God the Father’s fleshless Word was conceived in the womb of the Holy Virgin, in a manner known to him alone, while he remained without change or modification as God, and was one with his flesh, for his flesh had no hypostasis or essence before the conception of God the Word so that one could give it the name of particular or separate nature, for the nature does not exist without the hypostasis, nor the hypostasis without the person (prosopon); therefore, if there are two natures, there are also necessarily two persons; but if there are two persons, then there are also two Christs.⁶⁵

This affirmation of one nature was to lead inevitably to the conclusion that the nature of Christ is a *tertium quid*. Torrance points out that Severus “understood the Word incarnate as a *tertium quid*: not as the Word become man, but that the Word and a human nature had become some sort of an inbetween thing, with peculiar properties of its own.”⁶⁶

Monophysite Christology led to direct conflict with the *Tome* of Leo. Meyendorff explains that “this is why the formula in the *Tome* of Leo on the active properties of each nature... taken over by the Chalcedonian definition, ‘each nature having its own way of being,’ was for the Monophysites most difficult to admit. In their eyes, two energies meant two active beings, and the hypostatic union was reduced to an illusion.”⁶⁷ So for the sake of salvation and the unity of the person of Christ (upon which salvation depends), the Monophysite theologians resisted Leo’s Christology and denied the decree

⁶⁴ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, p. 25.

⁶⁵ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, p. 25.

⁶⁶ Iain R. Torrance, *Christology After Chalcedon*, p. 62. Torrance also notes that (in Severus’s mind at least) “this is a viable alternative to confusion/destruction (which was the view of the heretics: the Synousiasts, the Eutychians, the Apollinarians), and juxtaposition (which he sees as the view of the Nestorians),” p. 63.

⁶⁷ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, p. 28.

of Chalcedon. To Monophysitism the reason to reject Chalcedon is clear – because Jesus Christ is one person, so he can only be of one nature. Anything else threatens salvation.

MKC: Modern Monophysitism?

In some respects, MKC is similar to Monophysitism. MKC shares with Monophysitism an aversion to any notion that there are two minds or two wills in Christ. Both MKC and Monophysitism are inclined toward Word-flesh Christology. As we have seen, MKC is not committed to the distinctly Apollinarian version of Monophysitism – the Logos does not *replace* anything essential to humanity. But MKC is closer to the other versions of Monophysitism, for it (much like Severus) makes use of Cappadocian theology and appears to be committed to the basic tenets of Cyrilline Christology.

But despite these mutual sympathies and similarities, MKC is distinct from Monophysitism in some important ways. We can begin to see some of these differences when we look at MKC in comparison to (MP1) and (MP2). When we look at MKC's relation to (MP1), we see that MKC is not saying the same thing at all. In an earlier chapter we noted that MKC agrees with Thomas V. Morris in drawing an important distinction between *individual-essences* or *individual-natures* on one hand and *kind-essences* or *kind-natures* on the other hand. An individual-essence or individual-nature is a haecceity: it is “the whole set of properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for being numerically identical with that individual.”⁶⁸ MKC denies that Hypostasis or Person is identical to Phusis or Nature. But Monophysitism identifies person with nature – it is at odds with MKC over this issue.

⁶⁸ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 38.

This brings us to (MP2). MKC would assent to the proposition that it is true that Christ has one individual-nature. Surely MKC is in agreement with Monophysitism here. But just as surely MKC is in agreement with any Christologian (Monophysite or otherwise) who understands and accepts this essentialist metaphysic. For as Morris notes, “on this concept of nature, the claim that no individual can have more than one nature would stand as a necessary truth.”⁶⁹ But when it comes to kind-essences or kind-natures, here we see that MKC makes a radical departure from one-nature Christology. Recalling that kind-essences are the full set of properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for membership in a (natural or supernatural) kind,⁷⁰ we can see that MKC is in a position to affirm that the person of Jesus Christ has *two* kind-natures. And *this* is what Chalcedon affirmed. In this sense MKC is anything but Monophysite.

MKC’s position on the natures of Christ becomes more clear when we look at the doctrine of the “communication of the attributes.” MKC believes that the *communicatio idiomatum* means that the properties or attributes of each nature are communicated to the *person*, but it can deny that the properties of the human nature are communicated to the divine nature. In other words, the properties of the human nature are rightly attributed to or predicated of the *person*, but they are not attributed to or predicated of the divine nature. Nor are the properties of the divine nature communicated to the human nature.

Thomas Aquinas illustrates the traditional view. He insists that the divine and human natures remain distinct in the incarnation: “Human nature is not called divine by essence, but deified – not, indeed, by its being converted into the Divine Nature, but by

⁶⁹ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 38.

⁷⁰ Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, p. 39.

its conjunction with the Divine Nature in one hypostasis...”⁷¹ Aquinas also maintains the unity of the person, for “whether we say *man* or *God*, the hypostasis of Divine and human nature is signified.”⁷² But he denies that the properties of one nature can be attributed to the other nature; instead they are both attributed to the person. He lays down his fundamental rule: “those things that belong to the Divine Nature are predicated of Christ in His Divine Nature, and those that belong to the human nature are predicated of Christ in His human nature.”⁷³ So the properties of both natures truly are predicated *of Christ*, but the two natures remain distinct. The properties of the two natures are predicated to the same person, but they are predicated to the person according to the respective natures. Aquinas’ reason for holding this doctrine is clear; the properties of the distinct natures can both be attributed to the hypostasis because there is only one hypostasis, but the properties of one nature cannot be attributed to the other nature because the natures always remain distinct. He is convinced that “in the mystery of the incarnation, the Divine and human natures are not the same; but the hypostasis of the two natures is the same.”⁷⁴ For Aquinas, this means that “certain things are said of the Son of God which are not said of the Divine Nature; thus we say that the Son of God is born, yet we do not say that the Divine Nature is born.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III. 16, 3, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Revised edition, 3 volumes (New York, Benziger, 1948), p. 2109.

⁷² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III. 16, 4, p. 2110.

⁷³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III. 16, 4, p. 2110.

⁷⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.16, 5, p. 2111.

⁷⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.16, 5, p. 2111.

MKC can readily affirm Aquinas' view of the *communicatio*. So, for instance, according to MKC the person Jesus Christ is omniscient-unless-kenotically-and-redemptively-incarnate in virtue of his divine nature – the human *nature* never attains or receives the divine knowledge attribute. In this sense the properties of each nature are always distinct, yet the properties of both natures are predicated of the same person. MKC can affirm with Leo that “the properties of the divine and human nature might be acknowledged to remain in him without causing a division, and that we might know that the Word is not what the flesh is as to confess that the one Son of God is both Word and flesh.”⁷⁶ For MKC the natures are never blurred – they always remain distinct. MKC can join with Chalcedon in stating that there is

One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, unique; acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation – the difference of the natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the distinctive character of each nature being preserved, and each combining in one Person and hypostasis – not divided or separated into two Persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets of old and the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us about him, and the symbol of the Fathers has handed down to us.⁷⁷

Here we see MKC's alliance with the orthodox tradition – it should be clear that MKC is not a version of Monophysitism.

MODIFIED KENOTIC CHRISTOLOGY AND MONOTHELETISM

We have seen that MKC is not a version of Monophysitism. But is it a form of Monothelism? And if so, is there a way for MKC to circumvent or overcome the

⁷⁶ Leo, “The Tome of Leo,” *Christology of the Later Fathers*, p. 367.

⁷⁷ “The Chalcedonian Decree,” *Christology of the Later Fathers*, p. 373.

difficulties associated with a Christology of “one-will?” Might there be a way out for MKC? These are questions that warrant a close look.

Monothelism: The Heart of the Issue

Monothelism generally is seen as a “compromise” with Monophysitism.⁷⁸ In all of its various forms, the basic issue seems to have been the same.⁷⁹ Ottley summarizes the “point” of Monothelism:

The point, however, which appears to be common to these two classes of monothelites is the view that will belongs, not to the nature, but to the personality... Thus Pyrrhus, the successor of Sergius, in his disputation with Maximus, insisted that if Christ was one, He could have but one will, for it was impossible that there be two wills in the same person (prosopon) without contrariety.⁸⁰

To protect the unity of the person of Christ and thus the salvation that only Christ can bring, the Monothelites insisted that there is one and only one will in Jesus Christ.

The orthodox tradition opposed Monothelism for the same reasons that it opposed Monophysitism. If Christ has only one will, reasoned the opponents of Monothelism, then Christ is either not truly and fully human or is not truly and fully divine. Dorner notes that the “chief argument brought against the Monothelites” was “that Christ would have been no longer by nature perfect God and by nature perfect man... if He had not had both an essentially human and an essentially divine will. God is no longer God, and man is no longer man, if we do not attribute to God the essential or

⁷⁸ E.g. W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, pp. 352, 356, Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies*, pp. 188-189, Reinhold Seeberg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, p. 279.

⁷⁹ Dorner identifies three “stadia” of Monothelism, *The Person of Christ*, pp. 165-187, cf. R.L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, pp. 452-454.

⁸⁰ R.L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, p. 453.

natural divine will, and to man the essential or natural human will.”⁸¹ Seeburg points out that this concern was at the heart of Maximus’ defense of Dyothelitism: “he was inspired by a keen interest in the reality of the humanity of Christ. Without a human will, he maintained, Christ would not have been a man.”⁸² Meyendorff also comments on the soteriological motivation to uphold the complete humanity of Christ in the thought of Maximus, for Maximus believed that “the recapitulation of human nature in Christ implies that the incarnate Word assumed human energy and restored it in conformity with the primitive divine plan. There are thus in Christ two energies or wills.”⁸³ In summary, it may fairly be said that the Dyothelite opponents of Monotheletism insisted that the doctrine of the “two wills” of Christ be defended because it protected the full humanity and divinity of the incarnate Son and thus guaranteed salvation. To them, anything else gave away the gains made at Chalcedon. Meyendorff offers a fine summary of the rationale of the Dyothelite opponents of Monotheletism:

This essentially dynamic doctrine of salvation supposes a double movement: a divine movement toward man consisting of making God partakable of creation, and a human movement toward God, willed from the beginning by the Creator and restored in Christ. *The hypostatic union of these two movements in the incarnate Word constitutes the essence of Maximus’s Christology: two natures imply two energies or wills meeting one another.*⁸⁴

Monotheletism was directly opposed at the Sixth Ecumenical Council (the Third Council of Constantinople). This council decreed that

⁸¹ I.A. Dorner, *The Person of Christ*, p. 182.

⁸² Reinhold Seeburg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, p. 281.

⁸³ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, p. 111. Meyendorff also points out that “will” had been used as synonymous with energy even before Maximus. For more on the relation of the human and divine wills in the theology of Maximus, see Demetrios Bathrellos, “The Relation between the Divine Will and the Human Will of Jesus Christ according to Saint Maximus the Confessor,” *Studia Patristica* XXXVII, pp. 346-352.

We also proclaim two natural willings or wills in him and two natural operations, without separation, without change, without partition, without confusion, according to the teachings of the holy fathers – and two natural wills not contrary (to each other), God forbid, as the impious heretics have said (they would be), but his human will following, and not resisting or opposing, but rather subject to his divine and all-powerful will... believing our Lord Jesus Christ, our true God, to be one of the holy Trinity even after the taking of flesh, we declare that the two natures shine forth in one hypostasis, in which he displayed both the wonders and the sufferings through the whole course of the dispensation, not in phantasm but truly, the difference of nature being recognized in the same hypostasis by the fact that each nature wills and works what is proper to it, in communion with the other. On this principle we glorify two natural wills and operations combining with each other for the salvation of the human race.⁸⁵

The Monotheletism of MKC

MKC's proponents have not taken a stand on this issue, and they might be able to find a way to affirm their view in a way that is consistent with the Sixth Ecumenical Council. On the other hand, MKC might affirm that there is one and only one will in Jesus Christ. As there is only one mind, so there is only one will. In fact, its proponents might even see this as a major strength of the modified kenotic view. They may not be arguing that two wills (and, on Morris' account, two minds) just *are* two persons; they might not even be assuming that such a position would *entail* that there are two persons or a split person. But MKC might find a two-wills/two minds Christology to be inferior to a one-will/one-mind Christology. To the advocates of MKC, a one-will/one-mind notion of personhood might be intuitively superior to the two-wills/two-minds view. If this is the case, then MKC is unabashedly Monotheletic. MKC might even see its Monotheletism as a selling point in its favor.

⁸⁴ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, p. 109, emphasis mine.

⁸⁵ "The Statement of Faith of the Third Council of Constantinople (Sixth Ecumenical)" in Edward R. Hardy (ed.), *Christology of the Later Fathers*, pp. 383-384.

If MKC takes this route, it can argue that its Monothelite Christology does not threaten salvation. It can deny that possession of a complete human nature requires that there be a distinct human will. In other words, it can deny that the person of Christ has a will that is *merely* human. The *person* of Christ is completely human as well as completely divine. The natures (as complete sets of necessary properties) do not have wills – persons have wills. So the theanthropic person Jesus Christ has a will that is both human and divine. Therefore nothing is “left out” or “left behind” when the Son takes on complete human nature. Nor is anything essential to humanity lost in the kenosis of the incarnation. The incarnate Son is able to recapitulate all of human nature without taking on a human will that is distinct from his divine will, for there just is no discrete faculty of will in the full set of necessary properties that is human nature. The property of having a will is a property of a person (whether divine or human), and the person of the incarnate Son has this property. But the Son has this property in virtue of being a person; it is not obvious that he has this property in virtue of having either nature. In this case, the disagreement between MKC’s Monothelism and the theology of Maximus (and the Sixth Ecumenical Council) would be primarily metaphysical. MKC might just flatly disagree with Maximus that “two natures implies two energies or wills meeting one another.”⁸⁶ But with its metaphysic MKC can blunt the charge that just any Monothelism threatens salvation.

Still, if MKC takes this route then there could be no denying the fact that MKC is in material breach of the pronouncements of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. It would

⁸⁶ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, p. 109.

directly violate the Dyotheletism laid down there as orthodoxy. Is this a problem? If so, then how might MKC go about responding to it or correcting it?

As I see it, there are three broad options for MKC. As noted earlier, MKC's defenders might attempt to come up with some way to hold onto some version of "one-will" Christology that preserves the unity of the person of Christ to their satisfaction while also somehow does not deny the Dyotheletism of the Sixth Council. MKC might try to hold that there are two wills in Christ but not two minds, thus remaining within the bounds of traditional orthodoxy while also avoiding the distaste of a two-minds Christology. If this strategy would work, then surely it would be attractive. But I have no idea as to how such a strategy might proceed; its future does not look very bright. So I simply mention it as a possibility for the proponents of MKC, even if it looks like a project that would be difficult.

MKC might take another route. We have seen that Monotheletism was an attempt at "compromise" with Monophysitism.⁸⁷ Indeed, it may be seen as the last gasp of the Monophysites who tried to remain in communion with the orthodox. Corresponding opposition to Monotheletism on the part of the orthodox was based on the ecclesiological politics of opposition to Monophysitism – Monophysitism has already been deemed heterodox, and there could be no room for compromise. When viewed in terms of its motivation, MKC clearly is not close to historical Monotheletism. Therefore it should not be opposed for those reasons. MKC is not Monophysite, nor is it a compromise with Monophysitism. Because MKC's Monotheletism is distinctly different than the historic version(s), it should not be dismissed on the same basis as that earlier version. MKC

⁸⁷ E.g. W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, pp. 352, 356, Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies*, pp. 188-189 and Reinhold Seeberg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, p. 279.

might, therefore, be in a position to argue that its Monotheletism is not heretical as was the historic version. MKC is free to take this route, but if it does so it will still be faced with the reality that it violates the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

MKC might take this way out – it might simply deny the authority of the Sixth Council. MKC might endorse the judgment of Dorner that the German Reformers were right to dismiss the claims of this council to authority:

So little harmony was there in the conclusions of this Council, so great was the confusion with respect to the true state of the matter: the German Reformers were right, therefore, in refusing to recognize the authority of this Council. The Fathers who composed it are chargeable with vacillation, not merely between the two opposed modes of considering the matter... but also between the Nestorian doctrine of a twofold series of wills and knowledges on the one hand, and a Monophysitic predominance of the divine nature, which left no room for the free activity of the human nature, on the other hand; and the positing of all these things together, proved but a very poor mode of reconciling the contradictions.⁸⁸

It would help MKC's case here if they were able to argue that Scripture teaches that Christ has one and only one will. For since MKC's proponents think that "Scripture takes priority over tradition" where there is conflict between them, they could argue that Christians interested in orthodoxy *should* believe in Monotheletism.⁸⁹ MKC does not, however, make a case for this. And unfortunately for MKC, such arguments do not seem to be readily available or even very promising. MKC can argue that the Gethsemane prayer of Jesus ("not my will but yours be done") does not demonstrate that Jesus has two wills (after all, he is praying to the person of the Father), but it is hard pressed to show that Scripture teaches clearly that Christ has only one will.

⁸⁸ I.A. Dorner, *The Person of Christ*, pp. 204-205.

⁸⁹ E.g. Stephen T. Davis, "Is Kenosis Orthodox?" forthcoming, p. 17.

Such a move by MKC would not deny their claims to be faithful to Niceno-Constantinopolitan and Chalcedonian Christology. But it would threaten to undermine their broader claim to be faithful to the Christian tradition. If MKC is indeed Monotheletic, then its Monotheletism is a real problem for those Christians who are committed to traditional orthodoxy.

There is another way out for MKC. Alas, it is quite drastic, and it may not be very attractive to MKC's proponents and defenders. It is a further modification of kenotic Christology, one that combines with Morris' "two-minds" model. To avoid Monotheletism, MKC could hold that the Son is (or has) a distinct center of consciousness and will before the incarnation. They could hold further that in the incarnation, the Son takes on ("hypostasizes") human nature in such a way that he takes on a mind and will that is not only fully but also merely human. So the person of Jesus Christ has a human mind and will that are distinct from his divine mind and will; after the incarnation the Son has two minds and two wills. So far, so good for a traditional Christology. But so far, there is nothing distinctly kenotic about this view.

The kenosis comes into play in the incarnation. When the Son takes on ("hypostasizes") human nature in such a way that he takes on a human mind and will, the Son employs the divine knowledge attribute (omniscient-unless-kenotically-and-redemptively-incarnate) in such a way that the divine mind of the person becomes (temporarily) non-omniscient. The result is this: both the human mind and the divine mind are non-omniscient during the incarnation, but there are always two minds and two wills.

There would be several attractive advantages to this synthesis of kenotic Christology and a more traditional two-minds/two-wills model. It would allow its proponent to take with utter seriousness the biblical account of the knowledge of Jesus Christ – she could say without crossing her fingers that the Son of Man during his time on earth did not know the day or the hour of the *parousia*. She could say it without meaning “according to his human mind,” for it would be true for both the human mind and the divine mind. And she could say it without worrying what it is that the *person* knows. This synthetic further modification of MKC also allows for the possibility of fidelity to traditional orthodoxy, for it affirms two minds and could easily affirm two wills. Thus it is able to account for the biblical teachings about the knowledge of Jesus while also not violating any of the six ecumenical councils.

Despite these advantages, however, there appear to be some serious drawbacks to this model. For instance, it might be objected that this model too is quite novel. It is true that it is novel and unusual by traditional standards – the notion that the divine mind of Jesus Christ was non-omniscient during the incarnation would have been very rare and odd among patristic theologians. But novelty in application of the consensual creedal statements and heterodoxy are distinct. This synthetic and further modified MKC might be unusual, and it might be true that it is fairly new. But that alone does not mean that it is heterodox, for if it does not contradict the creedal pronouncements then it does not step outside of the boundaries prescribed in the traditional formulas. And MKC, if further modified in this way, would not contravene either the deliverances of Scripture or the statements of the councils.

A critic might object that this model, as further modified, is incoherent. For instance, she could charge that there is nothing to keep the human mind and the divine mind of Christ really distinct if both are non-omniscient. But this type of objection is easily laid to rest, for a non-omniscient divine mind could still be distinct in knowledge from the human mind – surely each mind could know some things that the other mind does not know (a non-omniscient divine mind could know much more than the two week old mind of the baby Jesus). Thus the two minds of Christ would be distinct with respect to the contents of their knowledge.

But even if these objections (and others like them) can be met, I suspect that this fairly radical modification of MKC might be unpalatable to MKC’s defenders and detractors alike. To many theologians and philosophers it will just sound rather too strange. More importantly, it may be judged even more counter-intuitive than the proposal of Morris. It might be seen as combining the worst of both worlds. For those who find Morris’ “two-minds” doctrine to sit ill with an intuitively acceptable notion of the unity of the person will surely find that the same problems accrue to this further modified model. And those who find it hard to stomach MKC’s tweaking of the traditional doctrines of the divine attributes will no doubt have problems here as well.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the relation of MKC to some Christological options that have been judged heretical by the Christian tradition. I first explored the relation of MKC to historic Apollinarianism. Here I concluded that MKC is not a form of Apollinarianism. Even though it has some formal similarities, it is very different in some fundamental respects. MKC does not hold that the Logos replaced anything

essentially human. To the contrary, MKC insists that the Son took on a full and complete human nature. MKC can easily take the side of orthodoxy regarding the soteriological concerns related to Apollinarianism; it denies that the Son left out any essential parts of human nature and it affirms that the Son took on and redeemed all of human nature in the incarnation. My conclusion is that MKC is not guilty of Apollinarianism.

I next looked at the question of whether or not MKC is a species of Monophysitism. Drawing on the important distinction between individual-essences and kind-essences, I pointed out that MKC can readily affirm that the person of Jesus Christ has two kind-essences. The conclusion of my argument in this section is that MKC is anything but Monophysite while able to agree fully with Chalcedonian Christology.

Finally, I opened the issue of Monotheletism's relation to MKC. Here I noted that MKC might be Monotheletic, and I pointed to some possible ways that MKC might try to either circumvent or overcome this problem. Whether or not any of these options will be attractive to the proponents of MKC is an open question, but I have tried to show some ways that this dilemma might be resolved. I conclude that if MKC can find a way to avoid Monotheletic heterodoxy, then MKC is neither Apollinarian, Monophysitic or Monotheletic.

Chapter Six: Modified Kenotic Christology and Tritheism

In this chapter I shall consider the charge that modified kenotic Christology (MKC) results in tritheism (or some other form of polytheism).¹ If MKC is guilty of polytheism, then surely it is not viable as a Christological theory. I have already argued that MKC is not a form of Arianism. So MKC does not count as polytheistic on the classic polytheist heresy of the Christian tradition (Arianism). If MKC is guilty of polytheism, then it must be on other grounds. It seems to me that the most common objection to MKC (and the one to which it is the most susceptible) on this ground is likely to come from MKC's connection to so-called "Social Trinity" doctrines. The argument that MKC is guilty of some sort of polytheism would probably go like this:

- (1) MKC entails a doctrine of "Social Trinity;"
- (2) "Social Trinity" doctrines are inevitably tritheistic;
- (3) Therefore, MKC entails tritheism.

I will subject this argument to closer scrutiny. I will agree with (1), but I will argue against (2). I hope to accomplish several goals in this chapter. First, I will attempt to bring greater clarity to this discussion. I will contend that the argument from (1) – (3) is much too vague to be forceful or even very useful. I will point out that there are several distinct types (or kinds or versions) of Social Trinitarianism (ST), and I will demonstrate the MKC does not need and is not committed to all of these types.

Secondly, I will offer some reasons for Christians to think that some ST doctrines are

¹ It is possible to be some sort of a "Christian" polytheist without being a tritheist. For instance, in Christological disputes one could leave aside the question of the identity of the Holy Spirit; it is possible in this way to be a ditheist. Again, if the social doctrine of the Trinity results in four deities, then we are left with a quaternity. For a possible example of the former, see C.J.J. Webb, *God and Personality, Being the Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Aberdeen in the Years 1918 & 1919, First Course* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919). For worries about the latter by someone sympathetic to ST, see Edward Wierenga, "Trinity and Polytheism," *Faith and Philosophy*, forthcoming.

viable and perhaps even the best statements of the doctrine of the Trinity available. Because this dissertation is focused primarily on Christology rather than the doctrine of the Trinity, I am not attempting to offer a comprehensive defense of ST; instead I show some biblical and traditional support for ST and indicate how some arguments for ST might go. My third and final goal in this chapter is to respond to some recent criticisms of ST. Here I focus on the forceful arguments advanced by Brian Leftow, and I argue that his argument that ST is polytheistic is not compelling. Throughout I will argue that MKC needs only the more modest and defensible of the ST doctrines. I will conclude that the objection that MKC entails polytheism is not successful – MKC is not obviously guilty of belief in more than one God.

SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

It is something of an understatement to say that social doctrines of the Trinity seem to be the driving force in much of the constructive work that is taking place in the recent “renaissance of Trinitarian theology.”² Doctrines of the Trinity that are “social” in some sense have been set forth, defended and applied to many areas of theology and praxis. ST has also been roundly criticized on several fronts. But despite the attention that ST has received in recent years, much of the discussion (be it pro or con) is characterized by a lack of clarity regarding *which* ST doctrine is being addressed. Exactly what doctrine do detractors have in mind when they criticize ST? Is it the ST of Jürgen Moltmann? Is it the ST of Richard Swinburne? Or is it that of John Zizioulas? Or are all ST doctrines the same? Many critics and not a few advocates proceed as if

² Cf. the judgment of Thomas R. Thompson, “Trinitarianism Today: Doctrinal Renaissance, Ethical Relevance, Social Redolence,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 32 (1997), p. 10.

there is just something called “ST.” I contend, however, that such over-generalization is not at all helpful. Just as there are many different motivations for ST, so there are many different aspects (or kinds or versions) of ST. Without attempting to be comprehensive, I think that we can see some important variety in the different versions of ST. Consider the following aspects of ST, some of which may include or entail others but others of which may stand alone:³

(ST1) *The Trinity can be thought of by means of a social analogy.*

This includes Trinity doctrines that conceive of the three divine persons as analogous to three human persons in some significant way. As examples of (ST1) we can see such classic illustrations as Gregory Nyssen’s analogy of “Peter, James and John”⁴ and Gregory Nazianzen’s “Adam, Eve and Seth;”⁵ we can also point to Cornelius Plantinga’s “Hoss, Adam and Little Joe.”⁶

(ST2) *The divine persons can be conceived of as distinct agents.*

This includes the distinct agency of the divine persons in speech, in actions and in speech-acts. As the Methodist ST theologian Miner Raymond puts it, “a person is a subject who is the conscious author of an intentional act... a person is one who can say, I,

³ As will become clear later in this chapter, I think that some of these entail others. However, some contemporary theologians wish to hold to some without adopting others, and I want to leave open the possibility that they may be able to do so with consistency. Furthermore, some theologians in the tradition are very clear in their endorsement of some of these while remaining silent on others.

⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, “On ‘Not Three Gods: To Ablabius,’” in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.* volume 5 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 331.

⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Fifth Theological Oration: On the Holy Spirit,” in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Gregory Nazianzen* volume 7 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 321.

⁶ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. “The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988), pp. 42, 50.

thou, me, my, mine (or) he.”⁷ Such a criterion may seem so basic to orthodox Trinity doctrine that it hardly seems worthy of designation as something so controverted as “ST.” Even a theologian such as Wolfhart Pannenberg (who worries that Cappadocian and other traditional forms of ST are liable to charges of tritheism) insists that the divine persons “must be understood... as living realizations of separate centers of action.”⁸ But it appears to be enough for Brian Leftow to label as ST and criticize accordingly.⁹ (ST2) clearly is a problem for such a prominent theologian of the Trinity as Karl Rahner, for he insists that there is “only one self-utterance.”¹⁰ Similarly, Karl Barth maintains that “we are not speaking of three divine ‘I’s’ but thrice of the one divine ‘I.’”¹¹ He insists that “there is only One Willer and Doer who the Bible calls God.”¹²

(ST3) *The divine persons can be thought of as lovers and co-lovers.*

Again, this may seem so central to traditional Trinitarian theology that it scarcely qualifies as being distinctly “ST,” but what I am labeling (ST3) has drawn fire from its critics. For instance, Karl Rahner maintains that there is “properly no mutual love

⁷ Miner Raymond, *Systematic Theology Volume I* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1877), p. 483.

⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology Volume I* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), p. 319. His concern about traditional ST as tritheism is seen on p. 279.

⁹ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 206-207, 249.

¹⁰ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, translated by Joseph Donceel with an introduction, index and glossary by Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: The Crossroad Herder Publishing Company, 1997), p. 106.

¹¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1, The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), p. 351.

¹² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, p. 348.

between the Father and Son, for this would presuppose two acts,”¹³ and Brian Leftow speculates that the notion that God is a communion of love is “what motivates ST.”¹⁴

(ST4) *The divine persons can be thought of as distinct centers of will and consciousness.*

If (ST2) and (ST3) would hardly seem to qualify as ST, (ST4) is not so ambiguous. John Miley states the ST conviction with clarity: “if we posit for the Trinity one intelligence, one consciousness, one will, seemingly we are very close upon unitarianism.”¹⁵ Karl Rahner rejects (ST4) vehemently: God is “one consciousness (who) exists in a threefold way.”¹⁶ Karl Barth is also strongly opposed to this aspect of ST, for “what we call the ‘personality’ of God belongs to the one unique essence of God.”¹⁷ Barth is convinced that it cannot belong to the divine persons, for three of these in God would be “the worst and most extreme expression of tritheism.”¹⁸ Furthermore, James D.G. Dunn is convinced that it is a grave mistake to treat “person’ in the Trinitarian formula (‘one substance, three persons’) in the sense that... Jesus of Nazareth was a person. If the pre-existent Word of God, the Son of God, is a person in that sense, then Christianity is unavoidably tritheistic.”¹⁹

¹³ Karl, Rahner, *The Trinity*, p. 106.

¹⁴ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 205.

¹⁵ John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1892), p. 229. I do not wish to make Miley out to be an obviously “ST” theologian; he admits that he sees “no present solution” to the problem of the personhood of the divine persons, p. 275.

¹⁶ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, p. 107.

¹⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, p. 350. Cf. *Church Dogmatics IV/1*, p. 205: “The one ‘personality’ of God, the one active and speaking divine Ego, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Otherwise we should obviously have to do with three gods.”

¹⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, p. 351.

¹⁹ James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), second edition, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

(ST5) *The divine persons can be considered “persons” in the full modern sense of the term.*

Just exactly what the “full modern sense” of the term “person” *is* remains quite slippery and is widely debated. However, for the purposes of this study I take it to mean not only entities which are distinct centers of will, consciousness and communication but who are also *autonomous individuals* who first exist and then (may) come into relationships with others. For examples of this modern notion of person we can look to the Boston Personalists (who were opponents of early twentieth century ST); they understood individuality to be primary and relationality and sociality to be secondary and derivative components of personhood. Relationality is not primary or basic but secondary and derived – thus Albert Knudson says that “a person is one who thinks and feels and wills.”²⁰ Even if “such a being by his very nature seeks communion with others,” he is essentially an autonomous individual.²¹ He concludes that “three centers of self-decision” in God necessarily reduces to tritheism.²² But many early twentieth century advocates of ST also seem to operate with the same basic view of personhood. For instance, C. Norman Bartlett insists that a person is an “indivisible self which is and acts as a self-conscious being and a free moral agent.”²³ He thus concludes that the divine persons are God’s “threefold individuality, the three personal centers of

²⁰ Albert C. Knudson, *The Doctrine of God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930), p. 299.

²¹ Albert C. Knudson, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 299.

²² Albert C. Knudson, *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 416-417.

²³ C. Norman Bartlett, *The Triune God* (New York: American Tract Society), p. 79. Bartlett’s view makes less of autonomy than does Knudson’s, but it also emphasizes separateness.

consciousness, three separate self-conscious and self-determining persons or selves” – they “are three in the sense of each being a self-conscious and self-determining self.”²⁴

(ST6) *Generic notions of essence can be relied upon for an account of the divine unity.*

Many proponents of ST make use of the notion of generic unity. For instance, Cornelius Plantinga defines the Triune God as the “divine, transcendent society or community of three fully personal and fully divine entities (who are) wonderfully unified by their common divinity, that is, by the possession of the whole generic divine essence.”²⁵ Plantinga denies, however, that this is his only notion of divine oneness, for the divine persons are “also unified by their joint redemptive purpose, revelation and work....”²⁶ He also maintains that the divine oneness is stronger than generic oneness: “the mysterious in-ness or one-ness relation in the divine life is short of personal identity, but much closer than common membership in a class.”²⁷ Other theologians have relied much more heavily – even exclusively, it seems – on the generic oneness as an account of the divine unity.²⁸ But (ST6) is criticized – sometimes harshly. William Burt Pope argues that the divine unity is not one of “kind, because there are not three individuals of the same species.”²⁹ Herman Bavinck argues against (ST6) (and (ST1)): “Just as the

²⁴ C. Norman Bartlett, *The Triune God*, p. 80.

²⁵ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” p. 27.

²⁶ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” p. 27.

²⁷ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” p. 29.

²⁸ John Philopponus, Roscelin of Compiègne, Gilbert of Poitiers and Joachim of Fiore are often thought to have relied heavily, if not solely, on generic oneness as an account of divine unity. For more on these important theologians, and the debates they ignited, see Byunhoon Kim, “Tritheism and Divine Person as Center of Consciousness With a Comparative Appraisal of Jurgen Moltmann and William J. Hill as Test Cases,” Ph.D. dissertation, Calvin Theological Seminary, 2002, pp. 45-88.

²⁹ William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines for a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical* volume 1 (New York: Hunt and Eaton, n.d.), p. 258.

gods of polytheism are ‘similar in nature’ but not ‘same in nature or one in nature,’ so also human individuals are not only ‘distinct but also separate.’ The same cannot be affirmed with reference to God. The divine nature is not a mere general concept, neither is it something that exists separate from, above, and next to the persons; on the contrary, not only is it present *in* the persons, but in each of these it is ‘totally and numerically the same.’”³⁰ Karl Barth is even more forceful, for he asserts that “the idea we are excluding is that of a mere unity of kind or a mere collective unity... the truth we are emphasizing is that of the numerical unity.”³¹

(ST7) *Trinity doctrines sometimes criticize monotheism or advocate the repudiation of monotheism.*

Moltmann, for instance, advocates ST while criticizing Christian monotheism and insisting that tritheism is not a problem or even a threat to Christian theology simply because it “has never existed.”³²

(ST8) *Trinity doctrines that conceive of three gods or three lords are social doctrines.*

We see (ST8) in the work of Richard Swinburne. In his earlier work, Swinburne posits that “the first God solemnly vows to the second God in creating him....”³³ More

³⁰ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955) p. 298.

³¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, p. 350.

³² Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 144. It should be noted that this is Moltmann’s more moderate work. In his earlier work his thought is much more extreme (as well as overtly Hegelian with its talk of “stasis within God” and “God against God”), e.g. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1974).

³³ Richard Swinburne, “Could There Be More Than One God?,” *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), p. 232.

recently, Swinburne has backed away from these claims. But he continues to argue that there is more than one “divine individual,” and he considers how this might be so.³⁴

We are now in a position to make several important observations. First, it should be clear that MKC does not need all of these forms of ST. I see no reason to think that MKC is committed to (ST8) or (ST7) – surely MKC does not need to repudiate monotheism or posit the existence of three divinities. Nor is there any obvious reason why MKC would need to rely solely on a generic account of the divine unity. And even though MKC is a recent (and in some respects probably distinctly modern) approach to Chalcedonian orthodoxy, it does not need the individualism of (ST5) to make a coherent case. The important point here is this: MKC’s ST should not be confused with these other forms of ST, and it should not be hastily assumed that any problems associated with these other forms of ST also accrue to MKC.

MKC does need (ST2) and (ST4); it also is in a position to make good use of (ST1) for the sake of clarity. It also coheres well with (ST3). As Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it, “it is precisely in the kenosis of Christ (and nowhere else) that the inner majesty of God’s love appears, of God who ‘is love’ (1 John 4:8) and a ‘trinity.’”³⁵ MKC needs (ST2), for it conceives of a Son who is a distinct agent – one distinct enough, it seems, to employ the essential divine attributes differently than do the Father and the Holy Spirit.

³⁴ Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 170-180. Cf. Timothy Bartel, “Could There Be More Than One Almighty?” *Religious Studies* 29 (1993), pp. 465-495 and “Could There Be More Than One Lord?” *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994), pp. 357-378.

³⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 71. Lucien Richard illustrates this connection between kenotic Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity as love when he states that “the essence of God is self-giving love. The persons of the Trinity are understood as forms of surrender of the divine love that flows from the Father as fountainhead of the divine... The inner trinitarian kenosis is the eternal procession of the Son and the Spirit from the Father,” *Christ: The Self-Emptying of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), p. 110.

And MKC needs (ST4) as well, for according to MKC the Son's knowledge is clearly distinct from that of the Father and Spirit (at least while kenotically-incarnate).

The different kinds of ST mentioned here are not mutually exclusive. In fact, there is considerable overlap among them. On the other hand, neither is there entailment among all of them. Some of them may entail others, but not all entail or are entailed by the others. For the purposes of this study we need not explore all of the relationships between these kinds of ST, but there are a couple of relationships that are important to MKC and its version of ST. Importantly, (ST4) seems to be required by (ST3) and (ST2). According to (ST2), the divine persons are distinct with respect to speech, to actions and to speech-acts. As Miner Raymond summarizes it, the point is that "the Father says I, the Son says I and the Spirit says I," while none of the divine persons are reducible to the others.³⁶ I will examine (ST2) more closely in a subsequent section of this chapter; at this point I simply note that (ST2) seems to be basic to biblical teaching and Christian orthodoxy. For only the Son becomes incarnate, while each of the divine persons are said to speak to one another and interact with one another. So the Father says that he is pleased with the Son, the Son says that he performs actions that glorify the Father. (ST4) is necessary to even make sense of (ST2), for how could the Son be distinct (from the other divine persons) with respect to his speech and actions if he is not also distinct in consciousness and will?

The situation is similar when we consider (ST3) in relation to (ST4). (ST3) maintains that each of the divine persons belongs to a relationship of love with the other divine persons. Stephen T. Davis notes that this claim, the claim "that God in God's

³⁶ Miner Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, p. 494.

inner life is like a loving community,” requires that the three divine persons “have distinct minds and wills... that there are three persons or subsistent centers of consciousness, will and action within God.”³⁷ Surely Davis is right about this, for how could someone love another and not be aware of it? Here (ST2) and (ST3) come together to require (ST4) – if the Father is able to say “I love the Son” and the Son is able to say “I love the Father,” then they must be distinct centers of consciousness.

Some critics may object that any distinction between (ST4) and (ST5) is artificial. After all, they may ask, is not (ST4) just the same thing as the modern notion of person? What real difference is there between them? Critics may also be inclined to think that (ST4) necessarily leads to (ST5). Catherine Mowry LaCugna’s concern about ST is evidence of what I am convinced is a common confusion of (ST4) and (ST5):

We in the West today think of a person as a ‘self’ who may be further defined as an individual center of consciousness, a free, intentional subject, one who knows and is known, loves and is loved, an individual identity, a unique personality endowed with certain rights, a moral agent, someone who experiences, weighs, decides, and acts. This fits well with the idea that God is personal, but not at all with the idea that God is three persons. Three persons defined in this way would amount to three gods, three beings who act independently, three conscious individuals.³⁸

LaCugna merges notions of personal rights and moral agency with that of persons who exist together in a knowing and loving relationship (where they thus know and love as distinct knowers and lovers). She wants to hold onto belief that the divine persons

³⁷ Stephen T. Davis, “Perichoretic Monotheism,” forthcoming, p. 3.

³⁸ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1973), p. 250. This concern also seems to be at the root of Colin E. Gunton’s uneasiness with ST, for he sees a “danger of the concept of communion” as a “form of tritheism which appears to relate the three persons in such a way as to suggest that they have distinct wills,” *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), p. 167.

love one another,³⁹ but here she is worried that this results in three centers of consciousness and thus in three separate gods. I think that she is right to maintain belief in the loving communion of the divine persons, and I agree with her that this leads to a notion of person as distinct center of consciousness and will. But I do not see that this must entail belief in three separate individuals who act independently (and thus perhaps to belief in three gods). I just do not see that it follows.

I maintain that there is an important distinction between (ST4) and (ST5), and I do not think that (ST5) follows necessarily from (ST4). Several comments may be helpful at this point. I do not deny that there has been much development in the philosophy of mind throughout the centuries, but (as will become clear in subsequent sections of this chapter) I do not think that just any sense of (ST4) was foreign to theologians of earlier generations. So I do not see that there is anything exclusively modern about it.

There is also an important difference between (ST4) and (ST5). (ST4) says nothing about separateness or autonomy, where (as I have briefly summarized it) these are germane to (ST5). Many proponents of ST (in the preceding senses of ST) are not at all satisfied with modern notions of the person as an autonomous individual who freely decides to enter or exit relationships with others. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. makes this point well:

Each member is a person, a distinct person, but scarcely an *individual* or *separate* person. For in the divine life there is no isolation, no insulation, no secretiveness, no fear of being transparent to another. Hence there may be penetrating, inside knowledge of the other *as other*, but as co-other, loved other, fellow. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are “members of one another” to a superlative and exemplary degree... We ought not to picture the holy Trinity as a set of miscellaneous divine

³⁹ E.g. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us*, pp. 288-305.

persons each of whom discovers he has the divine essence and all of whom form an alliance to get on together and combine their loyalties and work. Not at all.⁴⁰

This means for Plantinga that “the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not independent persons... if belief in three *autonomous* persons or three *independent* persons amounts to tritheism, the social analogy fails to qualify.”⁴¹

Many advocates of ST (at least advocates in the sense of (ST2) and (ST3)) actually see promise in the doctrine of the Trinity for overcoming the modern notion of personhood – they actually see ST as a corrective to modernity’s individualism and a protection against its dangers.⁴² But in any case the distinction between (ST4) and (ST5) should be clear. It is one thing to start with autonomous individuals who exist in isolation and only then come into relationships – it is quite another to begin with what Thomas Torrance calls “onto-relations” where persons are constituted by their relations with other persons. Some ST proponents of an earlier generation seem to have realized this. For instance, J.R. Illingworth states that “ a person is essentially a social, as he is an individual, being, he cannot become his true self apart from society.”⁴³ More recently, recognition of the distinction between (ST4) and (ST5) has been growing. As Torrance

⁴⁰ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity,” p. 50.

⁴¹ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” p. 37.

⁴² E.g. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1973), Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), John D. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation with special reference to Volume One of Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1988).

⁴³ J.R. Illingworth, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Apologetically Considered* (London: Macmillan and Co.), p. 144. Olin A. Curtis also affirms that the three divine persons are “self-conscious,” but he denies the existence of three “separate individual Gods.” Olin A. Curtis, *The Christian Faith: A System of Doctrine* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1905), p. 486.

explains this concept, “person” is an “onto-relational” concept: “no divine person is what he is without relation to the other two, and yet each divine person is other than and distinct from the other two.”⁴⁴ This means that the being of the divine persons is for one another; “they dwell in one another, love one another, give themselves to one another and receive from one another the communion of the Holy Trinity.”⁴⁵ And William J. Hill, while maintaining that “each person is constituted (by) what might analogously be called an ‘I’ in self-awareness of its own unique identity,” also insists that this is “only be way of rapport to the other two persons.”⁴⁶

As I see it, (ST5) assumes individuality and autonomy and moves toward relationality or sociality, but (ST4) “starts” with a notion of a person as a subsistence or substance who subsists or exists in a communion of love. John D. Zizioulas draws a distinction between what I am calling (ST4) and (ST5) when he concludes that because the divine persons “are so united in an unbreakable communion (koinonia) that none of them can be conceived apart from the rest... (this) precludes individualism and separation (or self-sufficiency and self-existence).”⁴⁷ Zizioulas actually argues against (ST5) while affirming (ST2), (ST3) and (apparently) (ST4), for he insists that “personal identity is lost if totally isolated, for its ontological condition is relationship... (it) can emerge only through a relationship so constitutive ontologically that relating is not consequent upon

⁴⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 157.

⁴⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 163.

⁴⁶ William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), p. 272.

⁴⁷ John D. Zizioulas, “The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution,” in Christoph Swobel (ed.), *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Act and Being* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), pp. 48-49.

being but is being itself.”⁴⁸ While not wishing to defend or even endorse all aspects of their respective Trinitarian theologies, I think that Torrance and Zizioulas are substantially correct in arguing for an important distinction between (ST4) and (ST5). It is clear to me that the proponent of ST may (and, to be consistent, *should*) come to embrace (ST4) because of her conviction that (ST3) and (ST2) are true, but I fail to see that this leads inevitably to (ST5). I see no reason to assume that any person who is a distinct center of will and consciousness must also be an autonomous and separated or essentially isolated individual.

SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM AND HOLY SCRIPTURE

To this point I have shown that MKC needs (ST2) and (ST4). In this section I will focus on the biblical support for these forms of ST. Because MKC is also able to usefully access (ST1) and (ST3), I will explore the relation of Scripture to these as well. And because MKC does not need (ST5), (ST6), (ST7) or (ST8), I will lay these aside, noting only that MKC and the ST that it needs are not to be confused with them.

I am attempting to be concise; I am only trying to demonstrate that ST is present in the New Testament. I am not attempting a full defense of ST or anything close to a complete survey of biblical teachings on this issue.⁴⁹ Therefore I will focus my efforts on

⁴⁸ John D. Zizioulas, “On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood,” in Christoph Schwobel and Colin E. Gunton (eds.), *Persons, Divine and Human: King’s College Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), p. 46. Ultimately, this means for Zizioulas that “love ceases to be a qualifying – i.e. secondary – property of being and becomes the supreme ontological predicate,” *Being as Communion*, p. 46.

⁴⁹ I think that a defense of ST can also be developed from other sections of the New Testament, but for economy of space I do not attempt this project here. Cf. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” pp. 23-32 and “The Hodgson-Welch Debate and the Social Analogy of the Trinity,” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1982, pp. 95-176.

John 17. My intention is only to show that ST is present in Holy Scripture – I shall focus attention on John 17 as an example of the presence of ST in Scripture. While I do not intend to attempt a comprehensive defense of ST, I will argue that there is good reason to believe that a strong case can be made for the biblical warrant for ST as it is conceived here. Before proceeding, however, a caveat: I am not saying that a full doctrine of the Trinity is present in John 17 (or in any other single passage of Scripture); I am not defending the view that a complete account of the threeness/oneness problem is here resolved. After all, the Holy Spirit is not even mentioned in John 17.⁵⁰ What I am saying is this: when read *theologically* (when read in light of the broader biblical materials), we see that ST is present in John 17. I am in fundamental agreement with C. Kavin Rowe when he argues that there is an “exegetical necessity” to trinitarian doctrine. Rowe recognizes that “there is an organic continuity between the biblical testimony and the early creeds, and the creeds can serve as hermeneutical guidelines to reading the bible because it is in fact the biblical text itself that necessitated the credal formulations.”⁵¹ I do not intend to attempt anything like a comprehensive defense of ST, but in this section I argue that there is good reason to believe that a strong case can be made from John 17 for the biblical warrant for ST as it is conceived here. Accordingly, I shall first argue that John 17 has a social analogy; then I shall argue that this prayer of Jesus demonstrates that the divine persons are distinct agents. Following this, I will contend that this passage shows that the Father and Son are distinct while united in their love for one another, and I

⁵⁰ In John 16, however, there is ample discussion of the Holy Spirit in ways that fits nicely with what I note here about the Father and the Son in John 17.

⁵¹ C. Kavin Rowe, “Luke and the Trinity: An Essay in Ecclesial Biblical Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003), p. 4.

will conclude by making a case that the Father and Son are distinct centers of will and consciousness in John 17.

Holy Scripture and (ST1)

When we look in the New Testament, we are able to see support for (ST1). Certainly the *locus classicus* is to be found in the prayer of Jesus to the Father in John 17.⁵² Jesus prays that the Father will protect the disciples “so that they may be one as we are one” (17:11). He later prays for all future believers: “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (17:21).⁵³

It is important to note what is *not* in John 17. The social analogy as it is often conceived is not obvious in this prayer. This is not an exact “social analogy” where the social analogy is linked with a generic oneness. Royce Gordon Gruenler notes that “not all the world belongs to the new society of God but only those who are kept and guarded by the Family of God.”⁵⁴ There is no hint that the disciples are like the Trinity simply due to their being human or being part of the natural kind humanity. Nor are the disciples like the Trinity in “oneness” due to their existence *as disciples*. In other words, the disciples are not “one” by virtue of their individual possession of the substance humanity, not are they “one” as is the Trinity by virtue of the fact that they each severally and together follow Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus does not say here that the disciples are “one”

⁵² D.A. Carson sees “a summary of the entire Fourth Gospel to this point” in this prayer (at least in “some respects,” which include the “unity of the disciples modeled on the unity of the Father and the Son”), *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), p. 551.

⁵³ G.R. Beasley-Murray sees 17:21 as an “expansion” of 17:11, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 36: John* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), p. 301.

⁵⁴ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John: A Thematic Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 126.

as the Father and Son are one in the loving communion of the Holy Trinity – instead he prays that they “*may* be one” as the Father and Son are one (17:21). He implores the Father to protect the disciples “so that they may be one as we are one” (ἵνα ὡσίν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς) (17:11).⁵⁵ As Gail O’Day puts it, “the purpose of this request... is to ensure the unity of the faith community, which mirrors... the unity of God and Jesus (cf. 10:30).⁵⁶ Leon Morris argues that there is a sense in which the unity or “oneness” referred to in 17:11 is complete. He interprets the present subjunctive ἵνα ὡσίν to have the force of a completed reality: “the unity prayed for is a unity already given: Jesus does not pray that they may ‘become’ one, but that they may ‘continually be’ one.”⁵⁷ Morris also argues, however, that the prayer of Jesus in 17:23 petitions the Father for a greater or superior unity: “It looks for the disciples to be brought to complete unity. They already had a unity of a sort. But this unity is not regarded as being sufficient. There is to be a closer unity, a ‘perfected’ unity.”⁵⁸ D.A. Carson holds that “some measure of unity is assumed, but Jesus prays that they may *be brought to complete unity*, sharing richly in

⁵⁵ I join Leon Morris in interpreting the hina as expressive of purpose, *The Gospel According to John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 645. Raymond Brown comments on the “remarkable grammatical parallelism between the six lines of 20-21 and the six lines of 22-23.” He notes that each of these blocks of four lines consists of “three *ἵνα* clauses with a *καθὼς* clause separating the first and the second... the *καθὼς* clause in each block holds up for the believers the model of the unity of Jesus and the Father,” *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John, Introduction, Translation and Notes* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1970), p. 769.

⁵⁶ Gail R. O’Day, “The Gospel of John” in *The New Interpreters Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary & Reflections for each Book of the Bible including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in Twelve Volumes, Volume IX* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), pp. 792-793.

⁵⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 644. Cf. Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), p. 561 and C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), p. 502.

⁵⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 650-651.

both the unity of purpose and the wealth of love that tie the Father and the Son together.”⁵⁹

But neither is the social analogy simply a device used by Jesus Christ to illustrate only the *threeness* of the persons (while relying on other analogies or refusing to resort to any of them in reference to divine oneness). He does not here employ the analogy between human persons and divine persons as a reflection of how the divine persons are distinct; instead he uses it to illustrate or demonstrate the divine oneness or unity. PHEME PERKINS comments, “the unity of the community is founded in and testifies to the truth of this basic Christological insight: Jesus and the Father are one.”⁶⁰

The “oneness” of human persons that is shared commonly is not the pattern for the divine life. The opposite is true; the unity of the divine persons in the Trinity is the pattern for the “oneness” of those who come to know the Triune God and are sanctified by this relationship. As Gruenler puts it

The plurality and unity of the persons of the divine Community become the pattern of a new community of believers. Jesus fervently prays for the vindication of the social model in the new society, just as it is a reality in the Triune family. The reality of the distinct personalities within essential unity is attested in the formula “we...one,” and is to be replicated in the circle of the redeemed “they...one.”⁶¹

Jesus’ prayer is that the disciples *will* be “one” as is the Trinity; he prays that this “oneness” will become a reality as the disciples experience and come to “know” the

⁵⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 569. Cf. Barnabas Lindars, *New Century Bible: The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants, 1972), p. 531.

⁶⁰ PHEME PERKINS, *The Gospel According to St. John: A Theological Commentary* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), p. 204. This does not mean, of course, that the personal distinctions are ever blurred in this passage, cf. T.E. POLLARD, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 18 and MARK L. APPOLD, *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel: Motif Analysis and Exegetical Probe into the Theology of John* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1976).

⁶¹ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, p. 125.

loving relations that the divine persons share among themselves in the loving communion of the Triune life. Gruenler comments that “the way of the higher Family is to share what is received, so that there is perfect oneness in love. As (kathos) the persons of the divine family are one, so, Jesus prays, may the believing family become perfectly one.”⁶² C.K. Barrett states that the unity of the church both “is modeled upon, and springs from, the unity of the Father and the Son.”⁶³ Gruenler concludes that “Jesus’ prayer reveals that the goal of the divine family is to bring the separated and fallen into a redeemed and unified family that reflects the relationship of the divine persons in their ultimate oneness.”⁶⁴ It appears that Jesus Christ thinks that there is at minimum the potential for a social analogy in the human relations of the disciples. Herman Ridderbos comments that Jesus’ prayer that the disciples may be one “as we are one” “introduces a motif that helps to shape the entire prayer, and... serves to define the unity of the disciples as their being taken together into the fellowship of the Father and the Son.”⁶⁵ As his disciples and future believers are sanctified (17:17-19) and indwell the Trinity (17:23), Jesus is convinced that the human persons who come into the communion of the Triune God of Holy Love will come to the “complete unity” shared by the divine persons.⁶⁶

Raymond Brown concludes that this means that

⁶² Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, p. 128. Ridderbos understands καθος in a causative sense, e.g. *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, pp. 463, 519, 561-562. Carson interprets this as purposive, e.g. *The Gospel of John*, p. 554, Raymond Brown sees it as both “comparative and causative,” *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 769.

⁶³ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 508.

⁶⁴ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, p. 129.

⁶⁵ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, p. 553.

⁶⁶ Cf. Stanley B. Marrow, *The Gospel of John: A Reading* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), pp. 318-319.

Some type of vital, organic unity seems to be demanded by the fact that the relationship of the Father and Son is held up as the model of unity. The Father-Son relationship involves more than moral union; the two are related because the Father gives life to the Son (6:57). Similarly the Christians are one with one another and with the Father and the Son because they have received of this life.⁶⁷

There *is* a social analogy here, even if it is not a garden variety version. Morris concludes that “this does not mean that the unity between the Father and the Son is the same as that between believers and God, but it does mean that there is an analogy. The Father is in the Son and does his works (14:10). The Son is in the Father. The two are one (10:30) and yet are distinct. So in measure is it with believers. Without losing their identity they are to be in the Father and in the Son.”⁶⁸ Barrett agrees that the “unity of the church is strictly analogous to the unity of the Father and the Son:”⁶⁹ “the relation between the disciples and the Godhead is of a similar reciprocal kind.”⁷⁰ The Son prays here that the human persons who know God will come to be “one” as the Father and Son are one. There is no sense in which the distinctness of the persons is ever blurred, either between the Father and Son, between the divine persons and the disciples or between the disciples themselves. But this distinction in no way compromises the “complete unity” according to Jesus Christ. Gruenler points out that this prayer “does not suggest an absorption into God where personality is lost, nor does it suggest that believers become a

⁶⁷ Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to St. John, Introduction, Translation and Notes* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1970), p. 776. On “organic unity” see Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Croall Lectures, 1942-1943* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944), pp. 85-96.

⁶⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 649.

⁶⁹ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 512.

⁷⁰ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 513.

necessary or essential part of the divine Community.”⁷¹ I conclude that (ST1) is here, even if it is somewhat different than the common versions.

Holy Scripture and (ST2)

(ST2) is also evident in John 17. We can see this both in the distinct actions of the Father that are depicted here and in the distinct actions of the Son. The Father gives authority “over all people” to the Son (17:2). The Father gives those who will be saved to the Son (17:2,6). The Father gave “work” (ἔργον) to the Son (17:4). The Father gives “words” (ῥήματα) to the Son (17:8); the Father is also said to give his “name” (ὄνοματι) (17:11). The Father sends the Son into the world (17:18, 17:21, 17:25). The Father gives glory to the Son (17:22), and the Father loves the Son (17:23, 17:24, 17:26).⁷²

We also see the distinct actions of the Son in John 17. Of course these are closely related to the Father; they are always done in dependence on the Father and in accord with the Father’s will. As Ridderbos points out, “this is the case in the mutuality based upon his unity with the Father: ‘all yours are mine.’”⁷³ But these are ascribed to the Son in contradistinction to the Father. Here the Son prays *for* his disciples and all future believers; here he prays *to* the Father (17:1). Jesus gives eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον) to those whom the Father has given to him (17:2). He brings glory to the Father (17:4); he does this by completing the work that the Father has sent him to do (17:4). He asks the Father to “glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (17:5; cf. 1:1). He states that he has revealed (ἐφάνερωσα) the Father “to those

⁷¹ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, p. 128.

⁷² Cf. Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, translated by G.R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 165 and Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), pp. 30-31.

⁷³ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, p. 552.

whom you gave me out of this world” (17:6).⁷⁴ The Son informs the Father that he has given the disciples the “words” (ῥήματα) (17:8) and the “word” (τόν λογόν) (17:14) which the Father had entrusted to the Son.⁷⁵ Jesus testifies that not only has he come from the Father (17:8) but also that he has been “sent by” the Father (17:18, 17:23). Furthermore, he sends the disciples into the world like the Father has sent him into the world (17:18). He has come from the Father; he now states that he is “coming to” the Father (17:11, 17:13).

Jesus testifies that he has “protected” his disciples; he has “kept them safe” *by* the “name” (ὀνόματί) that the Father had given to him (17:12). He speaks (ταῦτα λαλῶ) so that the disciples may have the “full measure” of his joy (17:13). The Son says “I sanctify myself” (ἐγὼ ἀγιάζω ἑμαυτόν) so that his disciples may be “truly sanctified” (ἡγιασμένοι ἐν ἀλεθείᾳ) as well (17:19). Carson thinks that this speaks of “Jesus’ determination to co-operate with the Father’s sanctification of him. Jesus is as determined to set himself apart for his Father’s exclusive service as the Father is to set him apart.”⁷⁶ Jesus states that he has given to the disciples the glory that the Father has given to him, and he clearly insists that the purpose of this is that the disciples “may be one as we are one” (ἵνα ὧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἓν) (17:22). Finally, Jesus says that he

⁷⁴ D.A. Carson maintains that this statement summarizes “all of Jesus’ ministry,” and he holds that God’s character is the reference of the revelation, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 558. Cf. Rudolph Schnakenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John: Volume Three Commentary on Chapters 13-21* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), p. 175 and C.K. Barrett, who opines that the use of the aorist supports the view that this statement “sums up the work of the ministry,” *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 505.

⁷⁵ According to D.A. Carson, “a good case can be made that when in the Fourth Gospel Jesus refers to his *words* (plural) he is talking about the precepts he lays down, almost equivalent to his commands... but when he refers to his *word* (singular) he is talking about his message as a whole, almost equivalent to ‘gospel.’” *The Gospel According to John*, p. 559. Cf. C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 421. Raymond Brown thinks that such distinctions are “tenuous,” *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John*, p. 743.

⁷⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 567.

has made the Father known to them – and this “in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (ὅνα ἡ ἀγάπη ἣν ἠγάπησας με ἐν αὐτοῖς ἢ καὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτοῖς) (17:26).

Here we see that the actions of the Father and the Son are distinct; they interact as personal agents. As Leon Morris puts it, the Father and Son are so “closely connected” that “to glorify the Son is to glorify the Father.”⁷⁷ Yet the distinction is never removed or blurred. As Gruenler summarizes this point: “the Father glorifies the Son and makes himself available to him, the Son glorifies the Father and defers to him.”⁷⁸ The Father and Son are united in what they are working to achieve, but they operate in distinct ways to bring their work to fulfillment or completion. Carson’s comment on 17:21 captures this well:

The Father is actually in the Son, so much so that we can be told that it is the Father who is performing the Son’s works (14:10); yet the Son is in the Father... The Father and Son are distinguishable (the pre-incarnate Word is “with” God, 1:1; the Son prays to his Father; the Father commissions and sends, while the Son obeys), yet they are one. Similarly, the believers, while distinct, are still to be one in purpose, in love, in action undertaken with and for another, in joint submission...⁷⁹

Holy Scripture and (ST3)

The mutual love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father is evident in John 17.⁸⁰ In fact, it is almost taken for granted here – the point of the requests of Jesus are for the disciples and future believers (and the world) to see, experience, “know” and

⁷⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 636.

⁷⁸ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, p. 122.

⁷⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 568.

⁸⁰ C.H. Dodd notes how this love permeates the Gospel and holds it together, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 418.

share that love! Gruenler points out that the “Father and Son are utterly at the disposal of one another in selfless and dynamic love, and manifest this generosity to the new society, which in turn is empowered to pass it on to others.”⁸¹ F.F. Bruce comments that “the Father and the Son know each other in a mutuality of love, and by the knowledge of God men and women are admitted to the mystery of this divine love, be loved by God and loving him – and one another – in return.”⁸² Jesus prays that the disciples and believers will be brought to “complete unity” in order “to let the world know” (ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος) that the Father sent Jesus and has “loved them even as you have loved me” (καὶ ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας) (17:23).⁸³ Again, Jesus prays “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory” (17:24). This glory is the glory that the Father gave to the Son (17:24). Barrett thinks that this “is the essential inward love of the Godhead, the love with which the Father eternally loves the Son (the love which God *is*, 1 John 4:8,16).”⁸⁴ And the reason for the gift of this glory is clear – it is “because you loved me before the creation of the world” (17:24). And Jesus concludes this “high priestly prayer” thus: “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (17:26). The reason for the revealing work of the Son is clear indeed – it is “in order that” (ἵνα) the mutual love of the Father and the Son may be shared with the disciples and the world. G.R. Beasley-Murray argues that “the

⁸¹ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, p. 127.

⁸² F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p. 329.

⁸³ Ridderbos states that this “perfect unity” is a unity of “the highest degree,” *The Gospel According to John*, p. 563 n.263.

⁸⁴ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 515.

statement of this goal has a variety of significations: (i) it implies an ever increasing understanding of the love of the Father for the Son; (ii) an ever fuller grasp of the wonder that that love is extended to believers also; and (iii) an ever more responsive love on their part toward the Father.”⁸⁵ Gruenler’s conclusion is clear:

In the final refrain of his prayer Jesus acclaims once more the likeness of the Father’s love for believers and his love for the Son, the equality of Father and Son, and the inexhaustible and dynamic love of the divine Community for the redeemed community as divine knowledge and love are to be poured out in mutual indwelling and interpersonal communion.⁸⁶

I conclude that there is ample attestation to (ST3) in John 17.

Holy Scripture and (ST4)

That the Father and Son are distinct centers of will and consciousness is clear. It is evidenced in two ways. First, there is the explicit statement of Jesus Christ to the Father which makes use of first-person and second-person indexicals: “I know you” (17:25).⁸⁷ O’Day notes that this passage reveals the intimacy of Jesus’ relationship with the Father; there is a “tone of intimacy, for the whole prayer is built around an I/you axis of communication.”⁸⁸ Much more pervasive, however (and likely much more important) are the implications drawn from other explicit statements in this prayer. Gruenler states that “Jesus can think of himself in personal terms because he consciously and voluntarily merges his will with the Father’s and because he chooses to be at the disposal of the

⁸⁵ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 305.

⁸⁶ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, p. 130.

⁸⁷ Cf. G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 297. Beasley-Murray argues both that this coheres very well with the kingdom of God statements in Matthew 11 and that this knowledge is beyond cognitive and indeed is one of *koinonia*.

faithful.”⁸⁹ In 17:1-2 Jesus shows some awareness of sharing in the glory of the Father in a pre-incarnate state, and in 17:3 he testifies that he “has glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work” that the Father had given him to do. In 17:4 Jesus prays that the Father will again glorify him with the glory which they shared before creation. Gruenler comments that “Jesus displays again his consciousness of preexistence and correlativity with the Father (cf. 8:58) and prays for the restoration of his glorious status in the divine ascent that follows the divine descent and shapes the U of divine disposability (cf. Phil. 2:5-11).”⁹⁰ James D.G. Dunn is well aware that modern notions of personhood should not be read into the early church, but he admits that “John does seem to present Jesus as a ‘being self-consciously distinct’ from his Father.”⁹¹

It seems reasonable to conclude that (ST1), (ST2), (ST3) and (ST4) are present in John 17. Gruenler’s summary of the depiction of the Trinity in John 17 is helpful:

Jesus’ high-priestly prayer to the Father discloses the social nature of the divine Family. It underscores Jesus’ teaching throughout his ministry that God is social and that creation, insofar as it images God, is also social in nature. Individuality is real, as are Father, Son and Holy Spirit; however, true individuality is not separateness or egocentricity but faithful interrelatedness in oneness. As with believers in the new community, so with the divine Community in the highest and most original sense: reality lies in generous love and being at one another’s disposal. As he faces his final act of disposability, Jesus proclaims in intercessory prayer that this is the highest and final glory for God as well as believers.⁹²

⁸⁸ Gail R. O’Day, “The Gospel of John,” p. 798. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh also point out that the explicit use of the “name” of the Father by Jesus points to personal nature of this prayer, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 247-248.

⁸⁹ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, pp. 122-123.

⁹⁰ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, p. 124. Cf. G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 297. Cf. D.A. Carson: “The petition asks the Father to reverse the self-emptying entailed in his (sic) incarnation and to restore him to the splendour that he shared with the Father before the world began,” *The Gospel According to John*, p. 554.

⁹¹ James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p. 264.

⁹² Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, p. 131.

Gruenler is right when he notes that “there is no claim to independent individuality (which would be tritheism), but an assertion of essential identification in loving communion.”⁹³ Social Trinitarianism appears to be well attested to in Holy Scripture.

SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION

In this section I argue that (ST1) – (ST4) all have a basis in the theological tradition. I will not limit my observations to “Eastern” or “Greek” theology; instead I will work to show that representatives of so-called “Latin Trinitarianism” also make use of and defend what I am calling (ST1), (ST2), (ST3) and (ST4).⁹⁴ I am not attempting anything like a comprehensive historical case for ST; rather I offer some reasons to think that the version(s) of ST needed by MKC appear to be present in the Christian tradition. Again I shall ignore the other versions of ST; because they are not essential to MKC they may be left alone.

The Cappadocians and (ST1)

Gregory of Nyssa does not hesitate to make use of a variety of analogies for the Trinity. In his response to charges of tritheism he will use the time-honored analogy of

⁹³ Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, p. 122.

⁹⁴ David Bentley Hart is representative of a growing number of patristic scholars who are convinced that the common notion that “East” is to be pitted against “West” in Trinitarian theology is simply wrong: “The notion that, from the patristic period to the present, the Trinitarian theologies of the Eastern and Western catholic traditions have obeyed contrary logics and have in consequence arrived at conclusions inimical each to the other – a particularly tedious, persistent and pernicious falsehood – will no doubt one day fade away from lack of documentary evidence,” “The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002), p. 541. Michel R. Barnes posits the genesis of this reading (or at least of its influence) in the work of Theodore de Regnon, e.g. “De Regnon Reconsidered,” *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995), pp. 51-79. In her polemic against an ST reading of Gregory of Nyssa, Sarah Coakley notes that “it is ironic to find Lossky at points directly dependent on de Regnon on this issue, and Zizioulas on Prestige! To have the ‘West’ attacked by the ‘East’ on a reading of the Cappadocians that was ultimately spawned by a French Jesuit is a strange irony,” “Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction – Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of *The Song*,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002), p. 434.

spring and water,⁹⁵ and in his “Address on Religious Instruction” he employs an interesting “psychological analogy” of the divine word and breath of a person.⁹⁶ But Nyssen’s most famous analogy for the Trinity is his celebrated (or lamented) so-called “social analogy” – he defends the notion that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three divine persons in a sense analogous to the way that Peter, James and John are three human persons.

Lewis Ayres points out that it is the “opponents of truth” who have brought this analogy to Gregory; it is they who have “deployed the analogy of three people to show what they take to be a logical implication of Cappadocian theology” (that is, tritheism).⁹⁷ But it is important to note that Gregory does defend the analogy, and he does so in an interesting and informative way. He admits that the charge of tritheism is “very difficult to deal with,” and he calls it a “monstrous dilemma.”⁹⁸ But he is nonetheless prepared to defend the admittedly inadequate analogy. In an intriguing passage that may lend support to the view that his social analogy posits a generic divine essence, he explains the social analogy by comparing it to the relation of the substance “gold” to many gold coins. He applies this illustration to the social analogy: “as then, the golden coins are many, but the gold is one, so too those who are exhibited to us severally in the nature of man, as Peter, James and John, are many, yet the man (human nature) in them is one.”⁹⁹ He recognizes

⁹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, “On Not Three Gods,” p. 332.

⁹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, “Address on Religious Instruction,” p. 477.

⁹⁷ Lewis Ayres, “On Not Three People: Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology as Seen in *To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods*,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002), p. 447.

⁹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, “On Not Three Gods,” p. 331.

⁹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, “On Not Three Gods,” p. 335.

that Scripture itself often speaks of multiple human persons as “men;” he handles this objection by arguing that Scripture accommodates itself to current use. He insists that the word “God” is used “carefully in the singular, guarding against introducing different natures into the divine essence by a plural signification of gods.”¹⁰⁰

It is noteworthy that Gregory of Nyssa is not alone in his use of the social analogy, for Gregory of Nazianzus is also prepared both to employ and to defend it. He certainly recognizes that the social analogy is imperfect,¹⁰¹ but he is willing to use and defend it even when he is aware that it consistently will prompt charges of tritheism. Nazianzen modifies the common Peter, James and John scenario to one of Adam, Eve and Seth because this analogy illustrates not only how three persons can be consubstantial but also how a person’s cause of origin can be in another and yet the person not be begotten.¹⁰²

Ayres helpfully points out that the Cappadocians do not speculate on the mental or psychological characteristics of the divine persons when they employ the social analogy. He states that “we find almost no direct discussion of the interactions between the three divine persons that relies on analogies of interactions between three distinct human agents.”¹⁰³ I think that Ayres is right about this; it seems that the Cappadocians are more interested in using the social analogy to illustrate the distinct identity of each of the three persons in their unity than they are in using it to demonstrate the distinct psychological content of the persons. We can see this when we compare their use of the

¹⁰⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, “On Not Three Gods,” p. 335.

¹⁰¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Fourth Theological Oration: On the Son,” p. 317.

¹⁰² Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Fifth Theological Oration: On the Holy Spirit,” p. 322.

¹⁰³ Lewis Ayres, “On Not Three People,” p. 447.

social analogy to their use of other analogies. When Nazianzen uses other analogies, he sometimes modifies or replaces them to emphasize the distinctness of the persons. For instance, he rejects the analogy of the sun, its light and its warmth, preferring instead to think of “one mingling of light, as it were of three suns joined to each other.”¹⁰⁴ And he avoids the time-honored analogy of the spring, the river and the lake due to his fear that “a numerical unity would be introduced.”¹⁰⁵

Sarah Coakley laments the “stranglehold” that the social analogy has exerted on common understandings of Cappadocian Trinitarian theology,¹⁰⁶ and she actually argues that Gregory of Nyssa is *not* a Social Trinitarian theologian.¹⁰⁷ Lewis Ayres also cautions that “we must be careful what we think we see in those passages where Gregory does offer some parallels between the divine *hypostases* and three people.”¹⁰⁸ Surely Ayres is right that we should guard against anachronistic readings of the Cappadocians; we should not assume either too much (or, for that matter, too little) continuity with later ways of thinking about persons and substances when trying to understand their complex theological and philosophical discussions. Still, it is clear that the Cappadocians think that the three divine persons of the Trinity are analogous to three human persons in some important ways. Of course they do not use it exclusively, and they are profoundly aware

¹⁰⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Fifth Theological Oration: On the Holy Spirit,” p. 322.

¹⁰⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, “The Fifth Theological Oration: On the Holy Spirit,” p. 328.

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Coakley, “Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa,” p. 433.

¹⁰⁷ Sarah Coakley, “Persons’ in the ‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of the Current Analytic Discussion” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 131-137.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis Ayres, “On Not Three People,” p. 447.

of its limitations.¹⁰⁹ But the Cappadocians continue to use the social analogy – even when they know that it elicits concern. They explain it by means of a further comparison that lends itself to a generic account of the divine essence, and they defend it against charges of tritheism. So in the sense of (ST1) the Cappadocians *are* Social Trinitarians.

Augustine, “Latin Trinitarianism” and (ST1)

The textbook account of Augustine – that he emphasizes the unity of the essence rather than the distinctness of the persons – is often repeated. Edmund Fortman states that “He stresses oneness rather than threeness and starts from the one divine essence rather than the saving deed of God in Christ.”¹¹⁰ This thesis has recently (and forcefully) been called into question.¹¹¹ But it seems to be beyond debate that Augustine’s famous psychological analogies for the Trinity and strong doctrine of divine simplicity have been influential to the point of dominating discussions of Augustine’s influence in the development of the doctrine of God. This trend is unfortunate, because these analogies and doctrines (while no doubt important to his theology and deserving of much attention) have obscured other important elements of Augustine’s theology. His use of the social analogy (or something like it) is one of these other elements.

It is often asserted that Augustine rejects the social analogy, and surely there is warrant for such assertions. Augustine briefly considers this analogy, but finally rejects it because he cannot make sense of it either as genus or species:

¹⁰⁹ Cf. the helpful article by Lewis Ayres, “On Not Three People,” pp. 445-474.

¹¹⁰ Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 141.

¹¹¹ E.g. Michel R. Barnes, “Rereading Augustine’s Theology of the Trinity” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 145-176.

What I am saying is that if being contains several species, it does not follow that one being contains several species, just as one animal does not contain several species simply because animal is a genus word. So the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit are not three species of one being. If, however, being is a species word like man, and those three which we call substances or persons have the same species in common, as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have in common the species which is called man; and if while man can be subdivided into Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it does not mean that one man can be subdivided into several single men – obviously he cannot, because one man is already a single man; then how can one be subdivided into three substances or persons? For if being, like man, is a species, then one being is one man.¹¹²

Again, he concludes his rejection of the familial social Trinitarian motif by stating bluntly: “We should not understand man being made in the image of the supreme trinity, that is, to the image of God, as meaning that this image is to be understood in three human beings.”¹¹³

However, Augustine’s discussion of the Old Testament theophanies shows a different side of his theology. While these are not, strictly speaking, social “analogies,” they do provide for a fascinating glimpse into his understanding of the distinctness of the three divine persons. Especially interesting is his discussion of the appearance of the three mysterious visitors to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18. Augustine flatly rejects the idea that the three visitors are the pre-incarnate Son and two angels: “nor can you legitimately answer that one of the three is implicitly shown to be superior and is taken to be the Lord the Son of God while the other two are his angels...”¹¹⁴ He argues that because Abraham sees three but addresses them as one Lord, and because none of the three is clearly superior to the other two persons, we should understand that the three

¹¹² Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book VII.3, translated, with an introduction and notes, by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), p. 229.

¹¹³ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book XII.9, p. 327.

¹¹⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book II.21, p. 112.

mysterious visitors are nothing less than the three persons of the Trinity who appear in human form. He concludes that we should “take the episode as a visible intimation by means of visible creations of the equality of the triad, of the single identity of substance in the three persons.”¹¹⁵

A brief comparison with Gregory of Nyssa’s use of the social analogy is instructive here. For where Nyssen (like the other Capadocians) is willing to employ and defend the social analogy (perhaps as the best of the admittedly inadequate analogies), he is also quick to point out the weaknesses of the approach as well as the significant disanalogies. For instance, Nyssen is keenly aware of the incomprehensibility of the divine essence, and he recognizes that the oneness of common humanity is not nearly so unified as the oneness of the divine life. It is clear that he sees the analogy as just that – *an analogy*.

But where Gregory is extremely cautious in pressing this analogy, Augustine is quite bold. To Augustine the appearance of the three visitors to Abraham is not a limited analogy for the Trinity – it just *is* the Trinity (albeit revealed as a “visible intimation by means of visible creations”). The theophany of the Trinity does not remove all mystery from the doctrine for Augustine, nor does he ever suggest that this is a complete representation or revelation of all aspects of the Triune life. But he does insist that this is a real manifestation of the three divine persons, and it follows that they must be a manifestation of three divine persons who are distinct enough to reveal themselves in the form of three human (or quasi-human) persons. So at the least we have something much like the social analogy, and it appears that in Augustine we have something that is

¹¹⁵ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book II.20, p. 112.

actually much stronger. For it looks as though we have an actual social *event* in the life of the Triune God. At any rate, we certainly have an instance of (ST1) (if not something much stronger) in Augustine.

To these examples others could be multiplied. For instance, Anselm makes use of the social analogy. His use of it is cautious and limited, but he uses it nonetheless. For even though he appears to prefer the analogy of the Nile, he also makes use of the social analogy.¹¹⁶ He seems to be well aware of the possible abuses of the social analogy (perhaps due to his engagement with Roscelin),¹¹⁷ for he cautions against any notion that the divine persons are unified merely by a unity of their wills. He argues against his opponents that it is “impious” to think this way:

If he says that the three things have the name “God” by reason of their power and will, just as we call human beings kings by reason of their regal power, “God” is not the name of a substance; rather, we by chance call these three (I know not what) things three gods, as we call three human beings possessing regal power three kings. For three human beings cannot be one king.¹¹⁸

Anselm’s actual use of the social analogy, and his view of the threeness/oneness issue generally, is not completely obvious and is debated. Without trying to adjudicate the debates, I simply note a few salient points. First, his view of the “heretics” in question seems to be that they think that generic substances are less than real. He asks “how can someone who does not yet understand how several men are one man in species

¹¹⁶ Anselm, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (eds.), “On the Incarnation of the Word of God,” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 255-257. For a good, critical discussion of this analogy, and how it works for Anselm, see Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas’ Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 166-186.

¹¹⁷ Cf. the discussion by Edmund Fortman, *The Triune God*, pp. 174-175.

¹¹⁸ Anselm, “On the Incarnation of the Word of God,” p. 245.

comprehend how in that mysterious and lofty nature several persons, each of whom is perfect God, are one God?”¹¹⁹ His use of the social analogy seems to be quite limited. Anselm is prepared to say that the divine persons are in some ways analogous to one human person, for “by analogy to one human being, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit preserve the uniqueness in the divine nature.”¹²⁰ But on the other hand, he is also willing to say that the three divine persons *are* like three human persons in this sense: “like different human persons, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have plurality of persons by reason of names signifying the relation of generation or procession, since one who is from another, and one from whom another is cannot be one and the same if there is God from God, whether by generation or procession.”¹²¹

It is important to note that Anselm is not arguing that the divine persons are like human persons in virtue of their distinct psychological characteristics. It is also important to bear in mind the caution not to read into Anselm more recent (or, for that matter, more ancient) notions of what the social analogy means or might imply or entail. But it should be clear that Anselm does have some use for the social analogy, and in this sense is a proponent of (ST1).

Amy Plantinga Pauw recently has made a case for the presence of the social analogy in Reformed Scholasticism and Puritan Orthodoxy as well as in the theology of Jonathan Edwards. After noting that the influence of a strong doctrine of divine simplicity makes the appearance of the social analogy much more surprising, she points out that Petrus van Mastricht referred to the Trinity as “the eternal fellowship and society

¹¹⁹ Anselm, “On the Incarnation of the Word of God,” p. 237.

¹²⁰ Anselm, “On the Procession of the Holy Spirit,” p. 433.

of this family, into which the church was adopted in time.”¹²² She demonstrates that Richard Sibbes and Cotton Mather both saw John 17 as the model for the unity of the church, and she quotes Thomas Goodwin as portraying the divine persons as “three blessed Companions of a knot, and Society among themselves; enjoying Fellowship and Delights accordingly in themselves.”¹²³ She also demonstrates that Edwards was given to the employment of the social analogy, for he referred to the Trinity as “a family of three” and a “society of three persons.”¹²⁴

From this brief survey it should be clear that a wide variety of theologians make use of and defend the social analogy. Even though they may not all place the same emphasis on its usage, and even though some of these theologians are indeed quite cautious, it is obvious that the social analogy has been employed and, in some cases, defended in the face of charges against tritheism. I conclude that, as these examples help show, there is ample precedent for (ST1) in the Christian tradition.

Tradition and (ST2)

The orthodox Christian tradition has always given assent to (ST2). In fact, it is difficult to conceive of anything more basic to Trinitarian doctrine than that the actions of the divine persons are distinct in some important ways. After all, the struggles with Sabellianism and Patripassianism revolved around this issue, and the orthodox tradition denied that the Father and Spirit became incarnate and suffered. So even though all of

¹²¹ Anselm, “On the Procession of the Holy Spirit,” pp. 433-434.

¹²² Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), p. 36.

¹²³ Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, p. 36.

¹²⁴ E.g. Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, p. 37.

the divine persons are involved in the work of redemption (and in every divine work!), they are involved in distinct ways.¹²⁵ Only the Son becomes incarnate, suffers, dies and is raised in the resurrection and in the ascension. To deny this is to flout the most basic claims of orthodoxy, and not even the most ardent supporters of divine simplicity in the Christian tradition (Latin or otherwise) were about to challenge this tenet. This conviction is so ingrained in the Christian tradition that even Thomas Aquinas (to many historians and theologians a high-water mark of Latin Trinitarianism) is prepared to say that the divine persons are distinct with respect both to action and to speech. He states bluntly that “it is not true that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one speaker.”¹²⁶ It appears that (ST2) is secure on traditional grounds, even if it is criticized by some modern theologians for its implicit tritheism.

Augustine and (ST3)

Augustine’s famous analogy of the Trinity as lover, beloved and love is a clear instance of (ST3). He employs this analogy in language that seems to evidence real relations between agents who are distinct enough to share a communion of love. He clearly states that “now love means someone being loved and something loved with love. There you are with three, the lover, what is being loved and love. And what is love is a kind of life coupling or trying to couple together two things, namely lover and what is being loved.”¹²⁷ Augustine is aware of the limits of this analogy, but he is willing to

¹²⁵ As Nonna Verna Harrison describes it, for the Cappadocians the “common divine activity is internally differentiated in a triune way, that is, it originates in the Father, is accomplished by the Son, and is perfected by the Holy Spirit,” “Human Community as an Image of the Holy Trinity,” *St. Vladimirs Theological Quarterly* 46 (2002), p. 352.

¹²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, QQ 34.1.1. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Reprint, 5 volumes (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1981), pp. 178-179.

¹²⁷ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book VIII.25, p. 255.

press on with its use and defense. To him “this is true even of the most external and fleshly kinds of love. But in order to quaff something purer and more limpid, let us trample on the flesh and rise to the spirit. What does spirit love in a friend but spirit? So here again there are three, lover and what is being loved, and love.”¹²⁸

Augustine clearly conceives of the love in strictly pneumatological categories; the Holy Spirit just *is* the *vinculum caritas*.¹²⁹ For some theologians this raises the question of whether such a move sufficiently safeguards a full and robust sense of the personhood of the Holy Spirit, but the sociality of this analogy should be apparent. And even if Augustine’s critics are right that this analogy lends itself to a rather binitarian theology, such a theology must be sufficiently *social* to account for a deep and rich relationship of love between (at least) two personal agents. Augustine may be the father of (ST3) – at the least he seems committed to it.

Richard of St. Victor and (ST3)

In Richard of St. Victor we see the full flowering of the seed planted in Augustine’s justly famous analogy. As a good medieval theologian, Richard assumes (what has come to be known as) “Perfect Being theology,”¹³⁰ and he works toward a constructive statement of Trinitarian doctrine from this foundation. Richard’s argument for a Trinity of co-lovers may be briefly summarized as follows:

(4) Perfect Being > Perfect Love;

A Perfect Being must be perfect in all aspects, so of course a Perfect Being must be perfect in love.

¹²⁸ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book VIII.25, p. 255.

¹²⁹ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book XV.31, pp. 420-421.

(5) Perfect Love Must be Shared to be Perfect;

Even if love for oneself is possible in a strict sense, love of a Monad for itself would be selfish and thus imperfect. To be perfect, love cannot be alone. Perfect love must be shared.

(6) Perfect Love Must be Shared Between Equals to Be Perfect;

If God needed a created world to love, then God would be dependent on the created world. As such, he would be less perfect than a God who is not dependent on the world. Furthermore, if God's love were only for creatures, then God would have no object truly worthy of the divine love.

(7) Perfect Love is love that is shared between lover, beloved and co-lover.

Love between two can be selfish, thus the "perfection of charity (*caritatis consummatio*) requires a Trinity of persons."¹³¹

Richard attempts to imagine a "lonely" God; he is convinced that a divine Monad would be imperfect in comparison to a God who is fulfilled in love:

But if He would be absolutely unwilling to have one to share with Him when he really could if he wanted, then observe, I ask you, what a defect of benevolence this would be if a divine person (*in divina persona benevolentiae defectus*) and how great it would be. Certainly, as has been said nothing is sweeter than charity; nothing more pleasing than the delights of charity... He would lack these delights in eternity if he remains all alone on the throne of majesty because He lacks fellowship.¹³²

¹³⁰ Cf. Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Herder, 1997), p. 104.

¹³¹ Richard of St. Victor, *The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of the Trinity*, translated by Grover Zinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 385.

¹³² Richard of St. Victor, *Book Three of the Trinity*, p. 377.

Richard concludes that “we can realize what kind and how great the defect of such benevolence would be if He should prefer to keep for Himself alone in a miserly fashion the abundance of his fullness.”¹³³

He admits that perfect or supreme wisdom and power could be possessed by a monopersonal deity, but he argues that perfect love cannot be.¹³⁴ Richard goes on to say that “if He were like this, He should quite rightly hide from the gaze of the angels and everyone. If such a defect of benevolence were in Him, quite rightly He should blush with shame to be seen or be recognized.”¹³⁵ As M. William Ury summarizes Richard’s point, “divine glory by its very nature is perfect; accordingly a full comprehension of that consummate glory would include a God who is not narcissistic but self-giving. For Richard the essential nature of divine glory is relational.”¹³⁶

This does not mean for Richard that the creation of a universe with sentient and volitional creatures is thus necessary for God. For Richard, God’s love is perfect and complete in the Triune life of mutual and consummate love. God has no need of the world for God’s own fulfillment. In fact, as Nico DenBok points out, Richard implicitly offers a new argument for the patristic doctrine of divine aseity which he inherits: “God does not have to create out of other-directed love, because this love is complete as it is in

¹³³ Richard of St. Victor, *Book Three of the Trinity*, p. 377.

¹³⁴ Cf. the discussion by Nico DenBok, *Communicating the Most High: A Systematic Study of Person and Trinity in the Theology of Richard of St. Victor* (Paris: Brepols, 1996), p. 302.

¹³⁵ Richard of St. Victor, *Book Three of the Trinity*, p. 377.

¹³⁶ W. William Ury, “The Role and Meaning of ‘Person’ in the Doctrine of the Trinity: An Historical Investigation of a Relational Definition,” Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1991, p. 198.

his own Trinitarian being.”¹³⁷ Perfect love means love that is shared between divine persons, and for Richard this entails that there are three (but only three) divine persons:

Therefore it is necessary that each of those loved supremely and loving supremely should search with equal desire for some who would be mutually loved (*condilectum*) and with equal concord (*concordia*) willingly possess him. Thus you see how the perfection of charity (*caritatis consummatio*) requires a Trinity of persons, without which it is wholly unable to subsist in the integrity of its fulness.¹³⁸

Because the Triune God is perfect in loving communion from all eternity, this Triune God of loving communion has no need of creatures on whom to bestow or share benevolence.

Richard’s Trinitarian theology is seen more clearly in his adaptation and correction of Boethius’ definition of “person.” Whereas Boethius defines “person” as an “*naturae rationabilis individua substantia*,”¹³⁹ Richard conceives of a divine person as a “*divinae naturae incommunicabilis existentia*.”¹⁴⁰ Richard’s understanding of personhood includes at least the following closely related components: incommunicability, what might be called “exo-centrism” and perfection in mutuality.¹⁴¹ Incommunicability emphasizes the distinct personal properties of the divine persons; it

¹³⁷ Nico DenBok, *Communicating the Most High*, p. 294.

¹³⁸ Richard of St. Victor, *Book Three of the Trinity*, p. 385. This is not the place for an exploration of why perfect love requires three and only three for Richard. In brief, Richard’s reason seems to be that while an infinite progression or regression is possible, such an infinity would not reach fulfillment and thus would be less than perfect.

¹³⁹ Anicinus Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium III*, in *The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 84-85.

¹⁴⁰ Richard of St. Victor, “Book Three of the Trinity.”

¹⁴¹ Here I am in substantial agreement with (and somewhat indebted to) Nico DenBok, *Communicating the Most High*, pp. 259-281.

presents a safeguard against modalism by stressing the absoluteness of each person.¹⁴²

What I am calling “exo-centrism” refers to Richard’s insistence that the divine persons each have their existence only in relation to one another; the divine persons exist out of one another and toward one another even as they are each utterly unique. Ury explains it this way:

Against Boethius Richard makes it clear that the Persons do not equal the divine nature... the Persons exist or subsist in that which confronts their incommunicability. There is no One outside of the other two. The “*dilectio*” of the Father and the Son is only perfect as the “*condilection*” of the three persons is manifest. To separate existence from origin defaces Richard’s method and conclusions and opens up the Trinitarian doctrine to the typical heresies. To “stand from” is to “stand toward” in each of the Existants.¹⁴³

According to Richard, the perfection is found in the mutuality of the three. Just as perfect love is unthinkable alone (for love which desires another is superior to self-love), so also perfect love shared between two desires to share itself with a third:

Sovereign charity must be perfect in every respect. To be sovereignly perfect, it must be of such an intensity that there can be nothing more intense and of such quality that there can be nothing better... In true charity, the supreme excellence is to want another to be loved as one is loved oneself... The proof of consummate charity is the desire for the love with which one is loved to be communicated.¹⁴⁴

For Richard, the divine perfection of the one God is found precisely in the mutuality and love of the three divine persons. Surely Richard sees the divine persons as distinct lovers and co-lovers – here we see a bright example of (ST3) in the Latin theological tradition.

¹⁴² Cf. the discussion by M. William Ury, “The Role and Meaning of ‘Person,’” p. 213.

¹⁴³ M. William Ury, “The Role and Meaning of ‘Person,’” p. 215.

The Cappadocians and (ST4)

In this section I shall argue that there are good reasons to think that the Cappadocians were Trinitarians in the sense of what I am calling (ST4). I realize that I am challenging a considerable body of scholarly literature in making this claim, but I persist nonetheless because I am convinced that there is textual evidence (in both the primary and secondary sources) to think this. Against the view that the Cappadocians were advocates of social Trinitarianism in this sense, G.L. Prestige concludes that in God there is “but one centre of divine consciousness. As seen and thought, He is three; as seeing and thinking, He is one.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, R.P.C. Hanson (who follows Prestige) states that we should not “assume that they (or any other theologian in the ancient world) held the too popular modern theory that God is three persons in our modern sense, i.e. three centers of consciousness.”¹⁴⁶

I agree with Lewis Ayres in his assessment that “*On Not Three Gods* does not offer an account of an analogy between three human persons and the three divine ‘persons’ dependent on a psychologically dense account of what it is to be a person.”¹⁴⁷ But I think that Gregory of Nyssa does offer such an account in other places. I am open to the possibility that Michel R. Barnes is correct in arguing that “a knowledge of Gregory’s psychology” makes clear “that *personal relationship* or *consciousness* are not

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 104.

¹⁴⁵ G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: S.P.C.K, 1952), p. 301.

¹⁴⁶ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), p. 737.

¹⁴⁷ Lewis Ayres, “On Not Three People,” p. 464.

the important, substantial psychological concepts for Gregory.”¹⁴⁸ And I am in agreement with Barnes when he argues that Gregory’s normal use of *hypostasis* means “an existent with real and separate existence” rather than “a subject of cognition or volition.”¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless (as Ayres admits),¹⁵⁰ this does not mean that a conception of the divine persons as distinct centers of will and consciousness plays *no* role in his thought. To the contrary, I think that this conception is real for the Cappadocians; I maintain that it does play an important role in their conception of divine personhood.

For instance, Gregory of Nazianzus says this about the person of the Holy Spirit:

Now if He were an accident, He would be an activity of God, for what else, or of whom else, could He be, for surely this is what most avoids composition? And if He is an activity, He will be effected, but will not effect and will cease to exist as soon as He has been effected, for this is the nature of an activity. How is it then that He acts and says such and such things, and defines, and is grieved, and is angered, and has all the qualities which belong most clearly to one who moves, and not to movement?¹⁵¹

Here we see that Nazianzen clearly conceives of the person of the Holy Spirit not only as a distinct speaker and agent but also as someone who is a distinct psychological entity.

Barnes infers from this that “what is at stake is not simply the ‘separate reality’ of the

¹⁴⁸ Michel R. Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self: Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology in its Psychological Context,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002), p. 476.

¹⁴⁹ Michel R. Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self,” p. 482. I take Barnes’ sense of “separate,” however, to mean “distinct.” Here I agree with Lucien Turcescu when he says that for Gregory the divine persons are “distinct” but “not separated from one another” as if the existence of one did not imply the existence of the others, “The Concept of Divine Persons in Gregory of Nyssa’s *To His Brother Peter, on the Difference Between Ousia and Hypostasis*,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42 (1997), p. 79.

¹⁵⁰ Lewis Ayres, “On Not Three People,” p. 468.

¹⁵¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, “Fifth Theological Oration: On the Holy Spirit,” p. 319.

Holy Spirit, but the Spirit's status as what we would call a 'person:' the Holy Spirit 'acts and says such and such things, and defines and is grieved and is angered.'"¹⁵²

Barnes points out that Gregory of Nyssa's major pneumatological works come after this theological oration by Nazianzen. Barnes states that "there is reason to believe that he understood the need for stronger and clearer language on both the distinct and the personal reality of the Holy Spirit – language which made clear that the Spirit *like the Son* was a psychological entity with a distinct existence."¹⁵³ We can see that there is ample warrant for such a conclusion in Nyssen's theology.

Gregory clearly states that the Word "certainly has the faculty of will, for no one of living faculties is without such a faculty."¹⁵⁴ He goes on to say that the Son "lives and subsists, in that He is God's Word, (and) has a will too, in that He lives, (and) has the power to effect what He wills, and wills what is absolutely good and wise."¹⁵⁵ When he addresses the topic of the Holy Spirit, Gregory is equally clear:

But we conceive of the Spirit as an essential Power, regarded as self-centered in its own proper person, yet equally incapable of being separated from God in whom it is, or from the Word of God whom it accompanies... but as being, after the likeness of God's Word, existing as a person, able to will, self-moved, efficient, ever choosing the good, and for its every purpose having its power concurrent with its will.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Michel R. Barnes, "Divine Unity and the Divided Self," p. 485.

¹⁵³ Michel R. Barnes, "Divine Unity and the Divided Self," p. 485.

¹⁵⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, "The Great Catechism," pp. 475-476.

¹⁵⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, "The Great Catechism," p. 476.

¹⁵⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, "The Great Catechism," p. 477.

Gregory here shows that the Spirit (as well as the Son) has a faculty of will. He is emphatic in his insistence that the divine persons are in complete agreement in what they will, but he also maintains that they each have distinct faculties of will.

And when he makes use of the social analogy in his debate with Eunomius, he quite clearly extends the analogy to the union of wills. Nyssen's comments on John 17 make this evident:

Accordingly, a man becomes "one" with another, when in will, as our Lord says, they are "perfected into one," this union of wills being added to the connection of nature. So also the Father and Son are one, the community of nature and the community of will running, in them, into one.¹⁵⁷

Barnes concludes that "Gregory may indeed be said to have a psychology of the Individuals of the Trinity."¹⁵⁸ Barnes argues forcefully (and, by my lights, correctly) that Nyssen's psychology also "maps out a radical difference between our self-experience and the 'self-experience' of those Individuals."¹⁵⁹ For while our wills are in conflict both within ourselves and with other persons around us, there is no such conflict in the divine life shared by the three persons.¹⁶⁰ But even though the life of the divine persons as centers of will and consciousness is markedly different than is ours, the important point for present purposes is that the Cappadocians do conceive of the divine persons as

¹⁵⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, "Against Eunomius" I.34, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.* volume 5 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 81. δια τουτο αντηροπος προς αντηροπον εν γινεται, όταν δια προαιρεσεος, καθως ειπεν ο κυριος, τελειωθωσιν εις το εν, της φυσικης συναφειας την κατα προαιρεσιν ενοτητα προσλαβουσης. Και ο υιος εν εισι, της κατα την φυσί και την προαιρεσιν κοίώιας εις εις το εν σύδραμενουσης. *Gregory Nysseni Opera* (ed.) W. Jaeger, Volume I (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), p. 171.

¹⁵⁸ Michel R. Barnes, "Divine Unity and the Divided Self," p. 487.

¹⁵⁹ Michel R. Barnes, "Divine Unity and the Divided Self," p. 487.

¹⁶⁰ See the discussion by Barnes, "Divine Unity and the Divided Self," pp. 487-490.

distinct centers of will. In this light, we can see that the comments of Cornelius

Plantinga, Jr. present an accurate summary:

Gregory does not speak of “centers of consciousness” or of “personalities.” He does not call the Trinity a “society.” He shows little interest in developing the sorts of mutuality and intersubjectivity themes that are regnant in a part of the twentieth century tradition... Still, though Gregory presents no full-blown social analogy he does set a direction and make a contribution. First, he pretty clearly thinks of the Father, Son and Spirit as persons in the kind of full sense of “person” required for a social analogy. He does not use the phrase “center of consciousness,” but he does consistently depict Father, Son and Spirit as distinct actors, knowers, willers, and lovers – what *we* would call centers of consciousness whether Gregory did or not.¹⁶¹

Despite the protestations of those who oppose any ST reading of the Cappadocians,¹⁶² I think that there is good reason to believe that they thought of the divine persons as distinct centers of consciousness and will. While I have not made a comprehensive historical case (nor have I tried to do so) I conclude that the Cappadocians were social Trinitarians in the sense of (ST4).¹⁶³

Latin Trinitarianism and (ST4)

In the Latin theological tradition we can also see that there are examples of (ST4). Some of these are implicit, but others of them are quite explicit. For instance, Tertullian mounts an argument to the effect that there is within the Triune God what is effectively a

¹⁶¹ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity,” *The Thomist* 50 (1986), pp. 351-352. Sarah Coakley points out that Plantinga focuses primarily on the social analogy and related issues; she thinks that more attention should be paid to other aspects of Nyssen’s Trinitarian theology, “Persons’ in the Social Doctrine of the Trinity,” p. 131 n.27.

¹⁶² E.g. Lewis Ayres, who complains that Christopher Stead and Lucien Turcescu provide us with “evidence for concluding that Gregory does not intend to draw any detailed or dense analogy between three people and the triune God, but still insist that this is precisely Gregory’s intention,” “On Not Three People,” p. 472 n.19. Contra Ayres, I think that Stead and Turcescu are faithful to point out areas where Nyssen does not draw these analogies while also recognizing that there are places where Gregory does draw them out.

¹⁶³ If Lucien Turcescu is correct in his criticisms of John Zizioulas, then maybe Gregory was an (ST5) social theorist as well, (Lucien Turcescu, “Person’ Versus ‘Individual,’ and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa,” *Modern Theology* 18 [2002], pp. 527-539).

relationship of mutual communion and communication. J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig point out that Tertullian's conception of an "I-Thou" relationship within the Godhead makes Tertullian (at least) an implicit advocate of what we are calling (ST4). They state that "Tertullian clearly thinks of the Father, Son and Spirit as individuals capable of employing first-person indexicals and addressing one another with second-person indexicals, which entails that they are self-conscious persons."¹⁶⁴

It is also arguable that Augustine maintains that the divine persons are distinct centers of will and consciousness. We have already seen that Augustine takes the social analogy very seriously indeed – for Augustine the divine persons are distinct enough to be able to appear as three distinct human persons. Despite this aspect of Augustine's theology, however, some scholars aver that such is not the case. Fortman quotes a passage from Augustine in which the Doctor of Hippo states that "the will of the Father and the Son is one, and their operation inseparable."¹⁶⁵ This statement could be taken to mean either

(a) the Father and the Son are or have exactly one faculty of will

or

(b) the Father and the Son are united in the act of willing; they always will the same things.

Fortman takes Augustine's statement in the sense of (a), and his may be the correct historical reading. If so, however, it appears that Augustine is guilty of outright contradiction, for elsewhere he states the contrary (as we shall see in the following

¹⁶⁴ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 580.

¹⁶⁵ Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God*, p. 141.

paragraphs). The more generous reading of Augustine is in the sense of (b), for this allows for the possibility of consistency.

In his disclaimer to the psychological analogy of memory, understanding and will, Augustine asks, “But who would presume to say that in the Trinity the Father does not understand either himself or the Son or the Spirit except through the Son, or love except through the Spirit, but only remembers either himself or the Son or the Holy Spirit through himself?”¹⁶⁶ Augustine goes on to point out the dissimilarities of the psychological analogy. He does so by insisting that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit each are distinct with regard to will, memory and consciousness:

The trinity which is God cannot just be read off from those things which we have pointed out in the trinity of our minds, in such a way that the Father is taken as the memory of all three, the Son as the understanding of all three, and the Holy Spirit as the charity of all three; as though the Father did not do his own understanding or loving, but the Son did his understanding for him and the Holy Spirit his loving, while he only did the remembering for himself and for them; and the Son neither remembered nor loved for himself, but the Father did the remembering and the Holy Spirit the loving for him, while he only understood for himself and for them; and again the Holy Spirit neither remembered or understood for himself, but the Father did the remembering and the Son the understanding for him, while he himself only did the loving for himself and for them.¹⁶⁷

It is clear from this passage that Augustine thinks of the Father as a person with the capacity to understand, remember and love, the Son as a person with the capacity to understand, remember and love, and the Spirit as a person with the capacity to understand, remember and love. His conclusion about the faculties of the divine persons

¹⁶⁶ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book XV.12, p. 403.

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book XV.28, p. 419.

could hardly be more vivid: “*It is rather that all and each of them has all three things in his own nature.*”¹⁶⁸

In summary, I think that it is clear that a strong case can be made that Augustine sees the divine persons not only as distinct agents and lovers but also as distinct centers of consciousness and will. If this is so, then in Augustine we have another case of a theologian who endorses (ST4).

Richard of St. Victor’s emphasis on the oneness of the divine persons in a communion of love raises the issue of whether or not he sees the divine persons as distinct centers of consciousness and will. It appears that he does so at least implicitly, for it seems that for three divine persons (or any other persons) to relate to one another in love they must have the faculties to do so. In other words, it looks like for Richard the divine persons must be (or have) centers of consciousness and will that are distinct enough for love to be given and received. As DenBok puts it, “if a *Person* is not communicating *in virtue of* an intellect, will and power, He cannot communicate at all; however, if a *Person* is not communicating *to* an intellect, will and power, He does not communicate either.”¹⁶⁹ The issue may be confronted directly by asking two questions:

- (c) Does Richard state that the divine persons each have distinct centers of consciousness and will?
- (d) Does Richard’s theology imply that the divine persons each have distinct centers of consciousness and will?

¹⁶⁸ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book XV.28, p. 419.

¹⁶⁹ Nico DenBok, *Communicating the Most High*, pp. 333-334.

Asking such questions inevitably runs the risk of pressing modern concerns upon medieval theology in an anachronistic way, but it should be noted that Richard very likely had awareness that this issue had been raised by theologians before him.¹⁷⁰ Several considerations may help to answer these questions.

First, Richard clearly states that the divine persons have one will (just as they have one love).¹⁷¹ This raises the question asked of Augustine: what does he mean by “one will.” Again, such a locution could be taken to mean either

(a) the Father and the Son have exactly one faculty of will

or

(b) the Father and the Son are united in the act of willing; they always will the same things.

Richard does not spell out what he means in explicit terms. DenBok recognizes that “Richard himself does not indicate whether he thinks of a *union* of wills or of a strict *unity* (of one) will.”¹⁷² But two points are especially noteworthy. The first is Richard’s use of the social analogy in this regard; he believes that human persons can be “one in heart and soul” (by the work of the Holy Spirit) and the divine persons can be “one in will.”¹⁷³ The second important consideration is Richard’s reference to the Father as “*voluntas paterna*.”¹⁷⁴ In identifying the Father as the *fons* of divinity, Richard is

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Nico DenBok, *Communicating the Most High*, p. 341.

¹⁷¹ Cf. the discussion by Nico DenBok, *Communicating the Most High*, p. 247.

¹⁷² Nico DenBok, *Communicating the Most High*, p. 335.

¹⁷³ See the discussion by Nico DenBok, *Communicating the Most High*, p. 335.

¹⁷⁴ Nico DenBok, *Communicating the Most High*, p. 330.

prepared to speak of the will of the Father in a distinctive sense – the Father wills the existence of the Son as a beloved (*dilectus*) and the Spirit as their co-lover (*condilectus*).

So it seems that the answer to (c) is either ambiguous or negative, for Richard does not explicitly endorse the view that there are three centers of consciousness and will within the Triune God. But the answer to (d) is almost certainly positive. DenBok concludes that Richard’s theology clearly fits better with (b) than with (a), for there is a “strong suggestion of a plurality of three wills:”

It seems inescapable: Richard’s conception of the divine communion of love, can only consistently be interpreted if we assume that there is *one thing willed* (in this sense: one divine will) and three things willing (three subjects of willing).¹⁷⁵

In commenting on Richard’s acceptance of ST, Ury is convinced that Richard “was not only aware of the possibility of abusing the relational category but also willing to take the risk.”¹⁷⁶ He concludes that for Richard’s theology this does not entail tritheism or even (ST5): “the mutuality of the divine life did not necessarily admit of self-determinative entities somehow able to mutiny, if you will, and exit the divine life.”¹⁷⁷

Other examples of implicit and explicit (ST4) are not hard to adduce. For instance, Anselm argues that the divine persons each have self-knowledge as well as knowledge of one another: “Father and Son know their very selves, and the Holy Spirit knows the Father and the Son.”¹⁷⁸ Similarly, Thomas Aquinas conceives of the divine persons as agents who are distinct enough to communicate and understand; he insists that

¹⁷⁵ Nico DenBok, *Communicating the Most High*, pp. 339-340.

¹⁷⁶ M. William Ury, “The Role and Meaning of ‘Person,’” p. 231.

¹⁷⁷ M. William Ury, “The Role and Meaning of ‘Person,’” p. 231.

¹⁷⁸ Anselm, “On the Procession of the Holy Spirit,” p. 434.

“each person understands and is understood.”¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, it seems that something like (ST4) is presupposed by the application of the doctrine of the Trinity to the Reformed “covenant theology” of the seventeenth century.¹⁸⁰ I think that contemporary proponents of covenant theology should either be ardent defenders of ST (at least (ST4)), or show how covenant theology can avoid the entailment of three centers of consciousness and will while still retaining a contract between the Father and the Son.¹⁸¹ Other examples of ST may be readily drawn from lesser-known theologians in the Christian tradition.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, QQ 34.1.1, p. 179.

¹⁸⁰ The “covenant theology” in question does not refer to the covenant between God and God’s people; rather it refers to the doctrines which postulate a contract between the Father and the Son for the salvation of some people. Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Volume Four: The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), pp. 266-267.

¹⁸¹ Cf. the sharp criticisms of Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/1*, p. 65: “The conception of this inter-trinitarian pact as a contract between the persons of the Father and the Son is also open to criticism. Can we really think of the first and second persons of the triune Godhead as two divine subjects and therefore as two legal subjects who can have dealings and enter into obligations one with another? This is mythology, for which there is no place in a right understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity as the doctrine of the three modes of being of the one God, which is how it was understood and represented in Reformed orthodoxy itself.”

¹⁸² E.g. William Sherlock, *A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever-Blessed Trinity, and the Incarnation of the Son of God, occasioned by the Brief Notes on the Creed of St. Athanasius, and the Brief History of the Unitarians, or Socinians, and containing an Answer to both* (London: 1690), *An Apology for Writing Against Socinianism in Defense of the Doctrines of the Ever-Blessed Trinity and Incarnation* (London: 1693), *A Defense of Dr. Sherlock’s Notion of a Trinity in Unity* (London: 1694), *A Modest Examination of the Authority and Reason of the Late Decree of the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford and some Heads of Colleges concerning the Heresy of Three Distinct Infinite Persons in the Holy and Ever-Blessed Trinity* (London: 1695), *The Distinction Between the Real and Nominal Trinitarians Examined, and the Doctrine of a Real Trinity Vindicated from the Charge of Tritheism, in answer to a late Socinian Pamphlet, Entitled The Judgment of a Disinterested Person, Concerning the Controversy about the Blessed Trinity, depending between Dr. South and Dr. Sherlock* (London: 1696) and *The Present State of the Socinian Controversy* (London: 1698). Cf. the responses by Robert South, *Amnidiversions Upon Dr. Sherlock’s Book, Entitled A Vindication of the Holy and Ever-Blessed Trinity, Together with a more Necessary Vindication of that Sacred, and Prime Article of the Christian Faith from his New Notions and False Explanations of It* (London: 1693) and *Tritheism Charged Upon Dr. Sherlock’s New Notion of the Trinity and the Charge Made Good, in an Answer to the Defense of the Said Notion against the Amnidiversions Upon Dr. Sherlock’s Book, Entitled, A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever-Blessed Trinity* (London: 1695).

In this section I have not attempted to provide a summary of the full Trinitarian theology of any of these theologians. I have not argued nor even suggested that any of these important theologians are full-orbed proponents of ST in a modern sense. I am not denying that there may be real and important differences between modern social Trinitarians and the Latin and Greek theological traditions. However, I believe that I have met my goal in this section – it should be clear that the theological distinctives of (ST1), (ST2), (ST3) and (ST4) are resident in the theologies of major thinkers in the Christian tradition.

SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM AND TRITHEISM: A RESPONSE TO BRIAN LEFTOW

Criticisms of ST are largely focused on two important areas of discussion – they are alleged actually to have little or no basis in Scripture or traditional interpretation of Scripture and subsequent theological formulation, and they are accused of being either incoherent or heterodox due to their tritheism. In the preceding sections of this chapter I have argued that some forms of ST appear to be present in Scripture and tradition. In this section I propose to address the latter of these concerns. Because Brian Leftow’s recent influential essay forcefully advances the second criticism (while evidencing a tacit reliance on the first) I shall focus on his work.

Leftow states that ST “starts from the threeness of the Persons and tries to say just how three Persons can be one God.”¹⁸³ He claims that “for ST, Father, Son and Spirit are individual cases of deity, three divine substances, as Adam, Eve and Abel are three

¹⁸³ Brian Leftow, *Anti Social Trinitarianism*, p. 203.

human substances.”¹⁸⁴ He goes on to say that in ST there are “three tropes of divinity;” he continues by commenting that “in most versions of ST, each Person has his own discrete mind and will, and the ‘will of God’ and the ‘mind of God’ either are ambiguous or refer to the vector sum of the Persons’ thoughts and wills.”¹⁸⁵

Leftow contrasts ST with LT (Latin Trinitarianism): where ST starts from the threeness of the Persons and tries to hold to belief in one God, LT begins “from the oneness of God, and (tries) to explain just how one God can be three Persons.”¹⁸⁶ He cites the “Athanasian Creed” and the Creed of the Council of Toledo to support his claim that in LT “each single Person is wholly God in Himself and... all three Persons together are one God.”¹⁸⁷ He rejects the social analogy: “while Father and Son instance the divine nature (deity), they have but one trope of deity between them, which is God’s. While Abel’s humanity ≠ Cain’s humanity, the Father’s deity = the Son’s deity = God’s deity.”¹⁸⁸

Leftow charges that there are two “hard tasks” for ST: the first such assignment is “to explain why its three Persons are ‘not three Gods, but one God,’ and do so without transparently misreading the Creed.”¹⁸⁹ The second “hard task for ST is providing an account of monotheism which is both intuitively acceptable and lets ST count as

¹⁸⁴ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 204.

¹⁸⁵ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” pp. 204-205.

¹⁸⁶ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 203.

¹⁸⁷ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 203.

¹⁸⁸ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 204.

¹⁸⁹ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 206.

monotheist.”¹⁹⁰ Leftow is convinced that ST does not have the resources to meet these challenges. He argues that “ST cannot be both orthodox and a version of monotheism,” and he promises to “show *en route* that LT does not have ST’s problems with monotheism.”¹⁹¹

But is Leftow right? Is it inevitable that ST ends up being either Arian (or some other classic heresy) or tritheist? And does Leftow’s preferred version of LT avoid or resolve the threeness/oneness problem? I am not convinced that Leftow’s analysis is convincing or that his proposal is helpful – I am not persuaded either that “ST cannot be both orthodox and a version of monotheism” or that Leftow’s version of LT does not itself face some daunting problems. I have already argued that “LT” itself includes a substantial ST component. I now point out that in light of this historical reality it appears that such criticisms as those of Leftow appear to be somewhat hasty and overdrawn, and I argue that some important statements of ST do not obviously fall prey to his criticisms. Because I largely agree with Leftow that *merely* functional monotheism is inadequate, I will focus largely on his discussion of “Trinity Monotheism” while looking at “Functional Monotheism” and “Group Mind Monotheism” as these strategies “overlap” and support “Trinity Monotheism.”¹⁹²

Leftow argues that Trinity Monotheism is inadequate because it cannot provide adequate accounts of either omniscience or omnipotence. He rejects C. Stephen Layman’s speculation that the divine persons are may not be *individually* omnipotent or

¹⁹⁰ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 207.

¹⁹¹ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 203.

¹⁹² Leftow recognizes that these strategies “sometimes overlap,” “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 209.

omniscient.¹⁹³ For while Layman believes that the persons would still qualify as divine in virtue of being uncreated, eternal and morally perfect, Leftow holds that “this is an unacceptably low standard for divinity.”¹⁹⁴ He doubts that all the divine persons *could* be uncreated, and he thinks that “any number of angels could exist eternally (if God can [as I think] create a universe with an infinite past) and be morally perfect, even by nature.”¹⁹⁵ There is a nest of suppositions here that Leftow needs to support his point, but suffice it to say that someone (such as I) who does not share Leftow’s intuitions is unlikely to be persuaded by this argument.¹⁹⁶ Leftow continues to insist that the bar for divinity is set too low by Layman’s standard, for “one can imagine an eternal morally perfect feckless simpleton – someone of perfect character who has always been and always will be there, with barely enough knowledge and power to count as a moral agent – but one cannot imagine worshipping such a being.”¹⁹⁷ Leftow thus concludes that “no version of Trinity monotheism is acceptable unless the Persons are somehow individually omnipotent and omniscient,” and he considers several ways that ST might try to account for this.¹⁹⁸

ST and Divine Omniscience

With regard to omniscience, Leftow considers the possibility that ST’s divine persons mutually indwell one another in some sort of cognitive perichoresis. According

¹⁹³ C. Stephen Layman, “Tritheism and the Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* (1988), pp. 295-296.

¹⁹⁴ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 210.

¹⁹⁵ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 210.

¹⁹⁶ A full discussion of these suppositions is beyond the scope of both Leftow’s essay and this section of this chapter. Leftow’s reticence to believe that all the divine persons could be uncreated may be evidence of a blurring of an important distinction. Leftow’s belief that God could create a universe with an infinite past is extremely controversial.

¹⁹⁷ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 210.

¹⁹⁸ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 210.

to this theory, each person would have “his own stock of knowledge” and each person “supplements his own stock by drawing on the others’ stocks.”¹⁹⁹ There are some things that only the Father knows *first-hand* (e.g., “I am the Father”), there are some things that only the Son knows *first-hand* (e.g., “I am the Son”), and each divine person knows through their perichoretic communion what the other persons know first-hand.²⁰⁰

Leftow recognizes that this strategy ties the deity of each person to the others, “for the Persons would not be divine if they were not one as they are.”²⁰¹ But he rejects it on the grounds that it compromises divine perfection. His argument can be summarized as follows:²⁰²

- (8) Divine Omniscience is Perfect Knowledge.
- (9) Knowledge by inference is less than perfect.
- (10) Perichoretic ST entails knowledge by inference.
- (11) Therefore, perichoretic ST fails to qualify as allowing for divine omniscience.

Leftow concludes that “true deity seems to require some more perfect mode of knowledge.”²⁰³ But why should we believe that? More pointedly, why should we believe that (9) is true? Why should we think that knowledge by inference is somehow less than perfect? Leftow offers no *reasons* to think that this; he merely assumes that his intuitions regarding this are universal or correct (or both). Perhaps he holds to (9)

¹⁹⁹ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 212.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” p. 43.

²⁰¹ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 213.

²⁰² Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 213.

²⁰³ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 213.

because human knowledge by inference always seems to be tentative and therefore inferior. But even if this is true, why should we suppose this to be true of divine knowledge?²⁰⁴ Human persons do not usually share knowledge by indwelling one another in communion, so it should come as no surprise that our acquisition of knowledge by inference may seem inferior to what we may know directly. But why should we think thus of God? Leftow offers us no reasons as to why we should. And without good reasons to think that (9) is true, why should we be troubled by it?

Leftow may have good reasons that he has yet to disclose; he may be right about (9). But that would not necessarily count against the possibility that ST qualifies for “Perfect Being” theology (upon which Leftow obviously relies). For (at least according to some versions) Perfect Being theology only insists that “God is a being with the greatest possible array of *compossible* great-making properties.”²⁰⁵ Again, until Leftow offers some reasons to think either that this definition of Perfect Being theology is inadequate or that ST does not qualify for it, why should we think that ST somehow fails to count as Perfect Being theology?

Leftow asserts that this kind of cognitive perichoresis raises a “puzzle.” Referring to a model of cognitive perichoresis proposed by C.J.F. Williams, he asks “what would keep Williams’s discarnate minds distinct?”²⁰⁶ He reasons that “if they do not differ in

²⁰⁴ Cf. George Mavrodes, “How Does God Know the Things He Knows?” in Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 345-361.

²⁰⁵ So Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), p. 35, emphasis mine.

²⁰⁶ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 225. Leftow is referring to C.J.F. Williams, “Neither Confounding the Persons Nor Dividing the Substance” in *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honor of Richard Swinburne*, ed. Alan Padgett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 240.

mental state, presumably their non-identity rests on or involves their not sharing some other, non-mental sort of state,” and he concludes that since “we do not know what kind of non-mental states discarnate minds have,” we “really have no way to fill out Williams’s picture. We do not whether what he describes is possible or not.”²⁰⁷

I suspect that ST’s response to Leftow’s question is the standard answer of Trinitarian orthodoxy L and S: it is the *personal properties* that keep the divine persons distinct.²⁰⁸ If this is not enough (if some argument from the identity of indiscernibles or elsewhere means that the divine persons are not really distinct), then surely it is not enough for LT either. It is unfortunate that Leftow never seems to consider this possibility, but in the absence of arguments to the contrary we are left to wonder why the personal properties would *not* sufficiently distinguish the persons. Leftow’s conclusion to this point also raises an interesting question. He states that “we do not know whether what he describes is possible or not.” Here he seems to have confused knowing *how* something is possible with believing that it is possible. But surely we do not know that cognitive perichoresis is *impossible*. Why should we have to know how something is possible to believe that it might be possible? Leftow offers no reasons to think that this must be so, and in the absence of some argumentation I cannot see how his point is compelling.²⁰⁹

Leftow has more problems with the “cognitive perichoresis” strategy of ST. He argues that if the knowledge and volition of the persons is shared to such an extent, then

²⁰⁷ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 225.

²⁰⁸ Additionally, for (ST4) the first-hand knowledge of the Father would distinguish his knowledge from that of the Son (and, *mutatis mutandis*, the same could be said for the other persons of the Trinity).

²⁰⁹ Leftow may, of course, be presupposing an internalist epistemology.

it follows that “the Trinity, not the Second Person, does all that Christ does.”²¹⁰ And if this is true, he reasons, then it follows that “not only the Son but the whole Trinity becomes incarnate (and) this is theologically unacceptable.”²¹¹

Leftow’s argument here is puzzling indeed. He has been criticizing ST for positing that the divine persons are overly distinct, but now he seems to be criticizing ST for not accounting enough for a distinction between the persons. But if the cognitive perichoresis of ST does not run aground elsewhere, then it seems that it would work fine here, for the divine persons are distinct because (among other reasons) each divine person knows some things first-hand that the other divine persons do not know first-hand. On the other hand, I wonder how Leftow’s LT might fare against this criticism. Leftow’s argument hinges upon his assumption that intentionality is a necessary component of divine personhood for orthodoxy.²¹² I judge his assumption to be warranted by Scripture and tradition and indeed correct – for orthodoxy, only the Son becomes incarnate, and the Son does so intentionally. But is the Son a distinct personal agent for Leftow’s LT? If not, then it appears that his version of LT might have difficulty avoiding modalism,²¹³ and at any rate begins to look like a departure from orthodoxy. But if the Son is a distinct intentional agent, then the Son is either

(12) A distinct intentional agent with distinct awareness and consciousness

²¹⁰ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 226.

²¹¹ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 226.

²¹² Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 226.

²¹³ There are, of course, different versions of modalism, ranging from Barthian modalism (with a denial of three distinct divine agents and speakers and a corresponding preference from the term “modes of existence”) to Sabellian modalism (according to which the divine “persons” are successive representations of the one divine agent).

or

(13) A distinct intentional agent without distinct awareness and consciousness.

If Leftow's LT would advance (12), then he would be adopting ST. But if he opts for (13), then surely some indication of how to make sense of this would be helpful.

ST and Divine Omnipotence

Leftow mentions some puzzles that arise from the conjunction of ST and traditional doctrines of omnipotence (e.g., can the divine persons thwart one another?). He considers the possibility that an appeal to perfect moral goodness or perichoresis might provide a provisional solution to these conundrums.²¹⁴ As he summarizes it, "one might cash this out as: the Persons are perfectly joined, intertwined, and sympathetic, and *this* perfection rules out attempts to thwart one another."²¹⁵ Leftow rejects this possible ST strategy:

If neither the Father nor Son can fail, and each can will P or ~P, each has the power to restrict the other's agency. For each, by willing ~P, can make it the case that if the other tried to bring about P, he would fail... So if the Father wills that ~P, he keeps the Son from trying to use his power to bring about P: given that the Father has willed ~P, the Son is unable to try to effect P. This limits the Son's divine agency and freedom, and being unable to use one's power sits ill with being divine.²¹⁶

Leftow continues that "this might leave the Son less effective than we are... because he cannot fail, the Son cannot even try. Oddly enough, omnipotence hamstringing him."²¹⁷

²¹⁴ I am not sure why it must be perfect moral goodness *or* perichoresis for Leftow.

²¹⁵ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 218.

²¹⁶ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," pp. 218-219.

²¹⁷ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 219. I cannot help but wonder why this would leave the Son *less* effective than are we.

Leftow believes that ST's account of omnipotence means that "even if there is no possible world in which the Son tries to bring about P and fails, the Son's power is such as to be able to fail. For there is an act that the Son tries in some possible worlds which his power will permit to fail."²¹⁸ Leftow informs us that he can conceive of a power that is greater than this.²¹⁹ And because Leftow can conceive of a greater power than that had by any person of the Trinity on ST's account, he rejects the possibility of perichoretic cooperation.²²⁰ His argument seems to be:

- (14) Perfect Being theology requires that omnipotence be understood as the greatest conceivable form of power (or something close to it);²²¹
- (15) Only power which guarantees unlimited freedom qualifies as the greatest conceivable form of power;
- (16) ST's perichoretic account of power does not allow for unlimited freedom;
- (17) Therefore, ST's account of power does not qualify as omnipotence.

I suspect that some proponents of ST would accept Leftow's argument as sound and yet be nonplussed. Some advocates of ST might just reject the notion that Perfect Being theology is helpful; they might simply shrug and say that ST (and Christian theology

²¹⁸ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 220.

²¹⁹ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 220.

²²⁰ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 220.

²²¹ Ronald J. Feenstra has pointed out to me that Leftow's argument does not need "the greatest conceivable form of power." It does seem clear to me, however, that Leftow's argument needs an understanding of omnipotence according to which "no other power is great enough to impede," p. 220. At any rate, the concept of "greatest conceivable power" plays an important role in Leftow's argument, for he clearly states that "it is hard to hold that any divine being has a form or degree of power... than which a greater is conceivable," p. 220.

generally) is better off without the traditional doctrine of omnipotence.²²² But there are also a couple of ways that defenders of ST might hold to Perfect Being theology while avoiding Leftow's criticisms. One could challenge (14) and argue that Leftow's notion of Perfect Being theology needs work. Here it could be argued (with Thomas V. Morris and others) that since what is needed for Perfect Being theology is only the concept of a Divine Being "with the greatest array of compossible great-making properties," ST might yet fit well with Perfect Being theology.²²³

But the defender of ST could also take issue with (15). I wonder why just *any* limitation on the range of divine freedom would compromise divinity. There may be a great many (broadly logically) possible worlds which are not *feasible* for a morally perfect deity.²²⁴ I hardly see how this counts against God's existence as a Perfect Being, even an omnipotent Perfect Being.²²⁵ To the contrary, I think that the fact (if indeed it is a fact) that there are some possible worlds which are not feasible for God may not only be consistent with but entailed by his existence as a morally Perfect Being. Accordingly, it may be that there are some (broadly logically) possible worlds in which there are acts that the Son cannot perform due to the Father's having willed otherwise. But these possible worlds just are not feasible for God, and so would belong in those galaxies of

²²² I am thinking especially of the liberation and process friends of ST, e.g. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, and Joseph Bracken, *The Triune Symbol: Persons, Process and Community* (Lanham, Maryland: University of America Press, 1985). Of course, even as traditionally understood, the doctrine of omnipotence is not universally agreed upon.

²²³ Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God*, p. 35.

²²⁴ For instance, it is far from clear that a morally perfect being could create a world in which he commands cruelty for its own sake.

²²⁵ Cf. Thomas P. Flint, "The Problem of Divine Freedom," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1983), pp. 255-264. Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 51-59 and Thomas P. Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso, "Maximal Power" in Alfred J. Freddoso (ed.), *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 81-113.

possible worlds which are not feasible for God. I am not arguing that this is in fact the way that things really are, but I am pointing out that this is a way out of the noose of Leftow's argument. It is a way forward that he has not blocked, and I suspect that it is not likely to be blocked without some serious work on his part.

The upshot of Leftow's argument is that perichoretic ST means that the divine persons are less divine than is the Trinity. He insists that perichoretic ST demands a high price: "the good of sharing in love has a price in terms of the freedom of action."²²⁶ It seems clear that for Leftow "freedom of action" is a property good enough such that a divine person or divine being must have the requisite amount – if they do not, then they are less perfect and thus less divine than the Trinity.

I have argued that this may not be such an insoluble dilemma for ST. But I think that it is fair to consider how Leftow's LT fares at this point. Recalling that Leftow is already committed to (14) and (15), how might the persons of Leftow's LT relate to this freedom of action? Perhaps Leftow would endorse something like

- (18) LT's divine persons enjoy the freedom of action necessary for them to count as omnipotent.

On the other hand, maybe Leftow would prefer something like

- (19) LT's divine persons do not enjoy the freedom of action necessary for them to count as omnipotent.

If Leftow approves of (18), then it appears that what we have is ST by a different name (with the problems, alleged or real, that Leftow has raised), and I wonder what the fuss is all about. For if each of the divine persons is an agent with the kind (or amount) of

²²⁶ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 230.

freedom that Leftow thinks is necessary for omnipotence, then it looks as if we have another instance of (ST2) (if not also (ST4)). But if Leftow opts for (19), then the persons do not have enough of what it takes to be omnipotent (and thus truly divine). If this is the case, then Leftow's LT would be hoist on its own petard.

ST and Monotheism

Leftow compares ST to paganism; he worries that ST sounds much like Greek polytheism would if only "Zeus and his brood (were) only far more cooperative, and linked by procession."²²⁷ He argues that "it is hardly plausible that Greek paganism would have been a form of monotheism had Zeus and Co. been more alike, better behaved and linked by the right causal relations."²²⁸ He asks us to imagine how things might be different if Zeus were somehow able to destroy his Olympian cohorts and replace them with "gods qualitatively just like himself, begotten out of his own substance... and sustained by his own power."²²⁹ Leftow concludes that this scenario would be much like ST; he avers that "deities' conduct does not seem the sort of thing that makes a religion monotheist."²³⁰

The friends of ST could respond in any of several ways. For instance, they could explore the possibility that Leftow is begging the question by equating "person" with "being" (more on this later). But I believe that there is a more important point to be made. The scenario that Leftow invites us to imagine is intriguing, but it hardly describes

²²⁷ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 232.

²²⁸ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 232.

²²⁹ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 232.

²³⁰ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 233.

most ST doctrines.²³¹ What Leftow describes is a form of Arianism (where, as we have seen, the Son exists only at the *will* of the Father) – the picture that Leftow paints does not describe ST.²³² And so it appears that Leftow’s point holds if and only if he is successful in demonstrating on other grounds that ST is either a form of Arianism or some other form of tritheism.

Leftow quotes the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4), and he argues that “the Christian version of monotheism should complete, perfect, or fulfill its Jewish version. It should be a monotheism that a Jew could accept as monotheistic, and a completion of Jewish monotheism.”²³³ But he never addresses this question: *Whose* Jewish monotheism? Does the Jewish monotheism of Paul and the other authors of the New Testament get to count? If their monotheism gets to count (and if, as I have argued, they do indeed present the divine persons as distinct actors and speakers), then there appears to be plenty of room for ST. Maybe their Jewish monotheism does not qualify, but Leftow offers us no good reasons to think that it might not.

Leftow states that ST has a difficult time explaining why there are only three persons: “we wonder why just three, not more.”²³⁴ There seems to be at least two questions here. The first is this: why *are* there only three divine persons? In response to this question, I suppose that the defenders of ST may take any of several routes of

²³¹ It does seem to fit with the earlier (and more extreme) locutions of Swinburne, e.g. “the first God solemnly swears to the second God in creating him...,” “Could There Be More than One God?,” p. 232.

²³² I owe this point to comments by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. and Ronald J. Feenstra.

²³³ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” pp. 236-237.

²³⁴ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 239.

response to Leftow.²³⁵ Or they might simply shrug and say that they do not know. The second question is this: why does ST think that there are only three divine persons? I believe the most straightforward and best answer is that ST believes that there are three divine persons because God has revealed himself as three persons. If there is a problem here, it is a problem for Trinitarianism L and S. But surely such an answer ought to suffice for a philosophical theologian (such as Leftow) who sets himself up as the defender of orthodoxy.

Leftow has promised to show that LT does not have ST's problems with monotheism.²³⁶ But it is not at all clear that his LT avoids this problem. He believes that the problem just does not arise for LT because "for LT, there is just one case of deity."²³⁷ Exactly what he means by "one case of deity" is less than pellucid, but on any account LT still must deal with the fact that there it also has three "persons." If these persons are distinct, then we can also wonder why only three. If they are not distinct, then we wonder why not just one person? And if there can be three who are not distinct, then why could there not be thirty or thirty million? Of course, if the testimony of Scripture (taken as revelation) is enough, then the more traditional versions of LT are in the same position as ST and can give an adequate answer to this question. But if, as Leftow insists, the divine persons are only "God... more prominent in one role (or state, etc.) than he is in others," then I wonder why there are only three roles (or states, etc.) and not more.²³⁸ At this point an appeal to revelation may not be of much help, for God has revealed

²³⁵ Most notably, they may follow the route mapped out by Richard of St. Victor.

²³⁶ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 203.

²³⁷ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 239.

²³⁸ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 238.

himself in *many* roles and states throughout Scripture.²³⁹ Either way, it is far from obvious that Leftow's LT is better equipped to answer the "why this many?" question.

ST and Inequality

Leftow is concerned that ST appears to endorse belief in a created God. Here he quotes Swinburne's statement that "there is an overriding reason for a first God to create a second God and with him to create a third God."²⁴⁰ I readily grant that he may have a point against Swinburne and other versions of (ST8). But if his criticism is lodged only against Swinburne and other versions of (ST8), then it is not all that interesting as a broader critique of ST. But Leftow extends it to ST, for he believes that "it is hard to see how ST which entails divine 'begetting' can avoid the claim that God creates the Son *ex nihilo*."²⁴¹ His argument seems to be based upon a very non-Nicene assumption – it appears that he assumes that "begotten" is identical in meaning with or necessarily entails "created." This assumption may be reasonable according to his intuitions, but it has been rejected explicitly and forcefully by the orthodox tradition. As the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed puts it, the Son is "begotten not made." Without some compelling argument that "begotten" means "created," why should we suppose with Leftow that they are indeed identical or that there is a relationship of entailment between them? At any rate, Leftow's LT seems to be no better off than ST. If God in the "role (or state, etc.)" of the Son is begotten of God in the "role (or state, etc.)" of the Father, and if "created" is the strict equivalent of, or entailed by, "begotten," then it would seem

²³⁹ Cf. Allan Coppedge, *Portraits of God: A Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

²⁴⁰ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 242. The Swinburne passage is taken from "Could There Be More than One God?," p. 233.

²⁴¹ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 242.

that God in the “role (or state, etc.)” of the Son is also created by God in the “role (or state, etc.)” of the Father.

Leftow worries further that ST creates inequality within God, for “ST’s Father seems to have more of what makes for divinity than the other two Persons.”²⁴² But how might the Father have “more” at all? Leftow agrees with C.J.F. Williams that “God” is not a “mass-noun,” but is “divine person” a mass-noun?²⁴³ It is not immediately obvious that it is. (Furthermore, if Leftow is ultimately right and ST’s persons are all gods, then “divine person” is *not* a mass-noun.) He states that for ST, “were there no Trinity, the Father would be identical with God.”²⁴⁴ He recognizes that the “conditional has a necessarily false antecedent” (from which just anything follows logically, including such locutions as “were there no Trinity, the Father, Son and Spirit would be identical with God”).²⁴⁵ But what he asserts about ST is simply not the case, for according to ST (at least some expressions of it), without the Trinity there would be no *God*.²⁴⁶

What seems to be at the root of Leftow’s concern is the concept of the Father as the fount of divinity. Simply put, he thinks that if the Father causes the Son and Spirit in any way, then the Father has some kind of ontological superiority and we are left with a

²⁴² Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 245.

²⁴³ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 207. Cf. C.J.F. Williams, “Neither Confounding the Persons nor Dividing the Substance,” p. 236. As Leftow uses this term, it means that there “cannot be a parcel or lump of God.”

²⁴⁴ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 244. He continues, “in LT, were there no processions, there would be no Persons, but simply God.” But might not this latter statement imply that the divine persons are less divine than the divine substance that somehow underlies the divine persons? It is not immediately obvious how such a proposition might cohere with the LT doctrine of divine simplicity that Leftow endorses.

²⁴⁵ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 244.

²⁴⁶ E.g. John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 41.

gradation of divinity. He admits that he “knows of no obvious truth which *entails*” this, but he continues to insist that “there is no question that ST’s Father is greater and has more of what makes for divinity than do the other Persons.”²⁴⁷ Trinitarian orthodoxy (LT and Eastern) has long held that the Father is the “ultimate font” of divinity, and if this is a problem for ST then it is for historic LT as well. But why should we think of it as a problem? If Leftow were able to offer some argument for the truth or even the superiority of his intuitions, then we might be in a better position to evaluate what he says. But in the absence of such an argument, I cannot help but wonder why we should trust his intuitions about monotheism and Trinitarian orthodoxy.

Leftow has promised to show both that “ST cannot be both orthodox and a version of monotheism” and “show *en route* that LT does not have ST’s problems with monotheism.”²⁴⁸ In this section I have offered a close reading and analysis of what I take to be Leftow’s strongest argument against ST. While I have agreed that some of his arguments may be compelling when applied to some versions and expressions of ST, I have argued that his arguments are in each case either wide of the mark of ST in general, that Leftow’s criticisms are based on assertion rather than argument or that there is a way out for the proponents of ST. To me it is not at all apparent that ST’s problems are such that it cannot count as orthodox. In other words, I judge that Leftow has not succeeded in delivering on the first part of his promise. I have also noted that in many cases it is not clear that Leftow’s LT fares any better – again it is not obvious that his LT is superior to ST. But Leftow’s LT also faces other problems, and a brief look at some of these

²⁴⁷ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 247.

²⁴⁸ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 203.

problems shows that ST (at least the versions of ST needed by MKC) may be a preferable version of Trinitarian theology.

Ambiguities and Assumptions in Leftow's Argument

Several ambiguities and assumptions hamper Leftow's argument at several points. First, it should be noted that Leftow assumes that the Athanasian Creed is *the* standard of orthodoxy.²⁴⁹ Although it certainly is *a* standard of orthodoxy for some, it has never been approved by an ecumenical council, and it has actually been rejected (as an authoritative document) by the Eastern Orthodox Church(es). It is hard to escape the idea that Leftow is (probably unintentionally) loading the dice by an appeal to a distinctly LT document for his definition of orthodoxy when trying to decide whether LT or ST best comports with orthodoxy. Nevertheless, I think that ST does qualify as orthodox by the standards of the Athanasian Creed.²⁵⁰ But if it failed to do so that would hardly disqualify it as heterodox – it would only disqualify it from *LT* orthodoxy.

A critical area of ambiguity concerns Leftow's discussion of "substance." It is not always clear if he is talking about primary or secondary substance, and this has an important bearing on the topic. He is also vague about the language of personhood. In many cases he seems to equate "person" with "being" without offering a rationale for doing so.

As noted earlier, Leftow also tends to assume that "begotten" means "created" and "unbegotten" means "uncreated." For the Christian tradition, "uncreated" is a property of the divine nature (and thus an essential property of the Godhead), while

²⁴⁹ Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," pp. 203, 206.

²⁵⁰ As is argued by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Social Trinity and Tritheism," pp. 21-47.

“unbegotten” or “uncaused” is a *personal* property of the Father (and thus an essential property of Fatherhood but not of divinity). If Leftow equates the terms in question, then he is making a significant departure from the Christian tradition (LT as well as ST). He may be right to do so, but if so then there is a problem here for historic LT as well as ST. He never actually argues that “created” is the equivalent of “begotten” or that “uncreated” equals “unbegotten.” But he consistently assumes that these terms are identical (or nearly so) in meaning, and thus begs the question of whether a begotten divine person is a created divine person or a created God.²⁵¹

Leftow uses the terms “distinct” and “discrete,” but exactly what he means by them is not obvious. He states that “in LT, the Persons are distinct but not discrete” while “in ST the Persons are distinct and discrete.”²⁵² Just what might this mean? Leftow does not take “distinct” to mean really distinct and “discrete” to mean “separate, individual or autonomous,” for he recognizes that (ST4) does not ascribe this to the meaning of “discrete.”²⁵³ Does his understanding of “distinct” and “discrete” mean that the divine persons are *conceptually* distinct (if for God as well as us, then perhaps *formally* distinct?) but not really distinct? If this is what Leftow means, then he has again bid farewell to the LT tradition. He likely has something else in mind – but what? Surely more explanation would be helpful.

A Glance at Modalism

Leftow does explain this a bit when he tells us what it means that the divine persons are *not* discrete: “in LT, the Son is *not* discrete from the other Persons. For the

²⁵¹ E.g. Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 247.

²⁵² Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 204.

Son to be in the forefront of an action is just for God to be more prominent in one role (or state, etc.) than he his in others.”²⁵⁴ Leftow does not offer much with which to work, but he appears to be endorsing some form of modalism.²⁵⁵ This raises several interesting questions. Are the “roles” capable of communicating not only with human persons but also with one another (as the biblical witness clearly suggests)? Are there only three such roles or states? If so, then why only three? Does all of God become incarnate and make atonement in the role or state of the Son? Does only a part of God (the one in the forefront of an action) become incarnate and make atonement in the role or state of the Son? Is there some other way of understanding incarnation and atonement (and other divine action) on this model? Surely there is, but some hint as to what it might be would be helpful.

Are the persons as roles really distinct for God? If they are not, then LT means only “Leftowian Trinitarianism” and not “Latin Trinitarianism.” But if they are distinct, then (given Leftow’s obvious commitment to a strong doctrine of divine simplicity),²⁵⁶ his doctrine faces another problem. He would seem to be affirming

- (20) The Father is really distinct from the Son;
- (21) The Father is identical with the divine essence, which he just is; and
- (22) The Son is identical with the divine essence, which he just is.

(20) – (22) appear to be an inconsistent triad, for the affirmation of any two of the foregoing will surely entail the denial of the third. To affirm all would be to say that the

²⁵³ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 231.

²⁵⁴ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 238.

²⁵⁵ He does not suggest Sabellian modalism.

²⁵⁶ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” pp. 204, 229, 244, 246.

Father is not the Son but is identical with the divine essence with which the Son is also identical. To affirm both this doctrine of divine simplicity and the doctrine of the Trinity is to say that the one divine essence is identical with the three persons and with each of the three persons who are not identical to one another. On this account, the Father just is the essence of the Son, and the Son just is the essence of the Father, while the two are said to be really distinct. But how can this be?

Letting x stand for the person of the Father, y stand for the person of the Son and z stand for the divine essence, if

(23) $x = z$ and

(24) $y = z$ then

(25) necessarily, $x = y$.

And if x and y are really identical, then the problem gets worse. For according to the identity of indiscernibles,²⁵⁷ for any property P (e.g., paternity), P is true of x if and only if P is also true of y . So if the property of paternity is possessed by the person of the Father, then the property of paternity would also be possessed by the person of the Son (or would just be the Son). But this seems to traverse the bounds of orthodoxy. Either way, Leftow's Trinitarian theology faces some daunting obstacles.

Conclusion

If the goal of Trinitarian theology is to provide a completely adequate account that allows us to comprehend the mystery of the Three-in-One, then I am convinced that ST is doomed to fail (along with all other Trinitarian theologies). But if the goal is to offer a coherent doctrine that helps Christians make sense of the Scriptural witness while

²⁵⁷ $(x) (y) [(x = y) \rightarrow (P) (Px \leftrightarrow Py)]$

also being consistent with the Christian tradition, then I judge that (ST1), (ST2), (ST3) and (ST4) should not be discounted simply because they sit ill with the intuitions of some philosophers and theologians.

In this chapter I have sought to bring some clarity to the discussions surrounding “Social Trinitarianism.” I have argued that MKC does need a form of ST; I have also made a case that it needs only the more modest forms or versions of ST. Focusing on John 17, I have argued that there is reason to believe that the ST needed by MKC is grounded in a theological reading of Scripture. I have argued as well that this type of ST is found in the thought of some prominent theologians in the tradition; I have come to the conclusion that some forms of ST are not to be ruled out of the court of orthodoxy on account of the naughtiness of novelty. I have argued further that Leftow’s criticisms of ST are either founded upon questionable intuitions or can be met, and I have pointed out that some important questions remain to be answered for his doctrine of the Trinity. If Leftow is right that “remote viability” is enough,²⁵⁸ then I judge that ST’s future is bright indeed. I conclude that MKC is not guilty of polytheism due to its connection to ST doctrine.

²⁵⁸ Brian Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 248.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In this dissertation I have looked at Modified Kenotic Christology (MKC) in relation to the question of its orthodoxy. After noting in Chapter One that John Hick charges that MKC cannot be both coherent and orthodox, I set out to investigate this allegation.

In Chapter Two I offered an introduction to some of the most important issues under consideration. By reviewing some of the recent work of C. Stephen Evans, Ronald J. Feenstra and Stephen T. Davis, I have offered a summary statement of MKC. Because so much confusion results from the association of this modified model with its kenotic predecessors, I provided an outline of some of the most important areas of continuity and discontinuity of MKC with some of the earlier kenotic theories. I then highlighted what I take to be the major factors which motivate the proponents of MKC to set forth this model. Following this, I focused attention on some crucial theological and metaphysical issues, and I concluded this chapter by looking at biblical and traditional standards and criteria of orthodoxy.

Chapter Three dealt with the relation of MKC to the Christological teachings of Holy Scripture. Here I took a fairly close look at MKC's ability to account for the biblical witness to both the humanity and the divinity of Christ. I have argued that MKC not only can but also should affirm that Jesus Christ does the works of God; the person of Jesus performs divine action in creation, sustenance, providence, judgment and salvation. I have also argued that MKC can agree wholeheartedly with the biblical witness to the pre-existence of Christ, the belief that Jesus Christ is to be worshipped and the insistence that Jesus has unity and equality with the Father.

In this chapter I also made the case that MKC is able to affirm the scriptural testimony to the full humanity of Jesus Christ. MKC is able to hold to the complete physical, emotive and mental life of the person. With respect to the biblical statements which testify to the ignorance of Jesus, I suggested that MKC is perhaps better off than the two minds model – MKC is able to offer a clear and intuitively convincing picture of the humanity of Christ that coheres very well with the vivid biblical testimony. I conclude that MKC is not liable to charges that it violates the teachings of Holy Scripture regarding the full and true humanity and the full and true divinity of Christ. MKC's account of the incarnation may not be demanded by Scripture, but it does not obviously transgress the biblical description of the person of the incarnate Son.

The charge that MKC violates the homoousion because it is a version of Arianism was laid to rest in Chapter Four. I have looked at MKC's relation to Early Arianism, Homoian Arianism, Neo-Arianism and the position of the Homoiousion party. Drawing from some relevant patristic scholarship, I have examined MKC in relation to the defining and essential characteristics of each position. In each case, I have argued that MKC is not susceptible to charges that it somehow violates the homoousion on these grounds. I conclude that MKC does not cross the lines of historic orthodoxy at these points – MKC does not transgress the homoousion doctrine by virtue of any form of Arianism.

Chapter Five explored the possibility that MKC qualifies as a version of either Apollinarianism, Monophysitism or Monotheletism. Here I examined MKC in relation to these Christological options that have been judged heretical by the Christian tradition. I first explored the question of the possibility that MKC is a species of Apollinarianism,

and I concluded that it is not. MKC does not hold that the Son replaced anything essentially human in the incarnation; to the contrary, the Son took on a full and complete human nature in the incarnation. Furthermore, MKC can easily take the side of the orthodox in the dispute over the soteriological concerns that gave rise to and fueled the Christological controversy. MKC can – and, I think, does – affirm that the Son took on and redeemed all that is essential to human nature in the incarnation.

In Chapter Five I also looked at the possibility that MKC is a version of Monophysitism. Drawing on their important distinction between individual-essences and kind-essences, I argued that MKC can heartily affirm that the person of Jesus Christ has two kind-essences. I conclude that MKC is Chalcedonian rather than Monophysite. Finally, I explored the relation of MKC to Monotheletism. After noting that MKC might be a version of Monotheletism, I pointed out some ways that MKC might try to either get around or overcome this problem. I conclude that, while it should be addressed more directly, Monotheletism need not bring shipwreck to the voyage of MKC.

Chapter Six considers the charge that MKC results in tritheism (or some other form of polytheism). I identified what I take to be the central concern: MKC's relation to Social Trinitarianism (ST). After noting that the worry of MKC's critics seems to be that MKC is polytheistic simply in virtue of having (or needing) a social doctrine of the Trinity, I subjected this concern to fairly close scrutiny. In an attempt to bring greater clarity to the discussion, I pointed out that there are several distinct types (or kinds or versions) of ST. I then noted that MKC does not need and is not committed to all of these types. I then argued that there is ample reason to believe that support for ST (at least the ST needed by MKC) can be found in Scripture and tradition. Finally, I offered a

response to some recent criticisms of ST. I conclude that the objection that MKC entails polytheism is not successful – MKC is not obviously guilty of belief in more than one God. To the contrary, ST’s future may be bright indeed, and if this is true then MKC is in good theological company here. MKC should not be discounted as a coherent Christological model on grounds that it is somehow violates the homoousion of Jesus Christ either with God or with humanity.

MKC may well be criticized and perhaps even rejected on other grounds. Perhaps there are too many problems with its account of the divine attributes to be successful.

Some might worry that MKC’s revisions of the divine attributes are so radical that it becomes difficult or even impossible to identify divinity in the person of Jesus Christ. The objection might go like this: If we do not know what divinity is (at least before seeing divinity revealed in the incarnation), then we may not know enough to even *recognize* Christ as divine. In other words, MKC might be said to be so tentative about the divine attributes that it is unable to identify Christ as truly and fully divine.

The proponents of MKC could respond to this objection in a variety of ways. For instance, they could point out that according to the theory of direct reference it is often the case that we are able to name something adequately even if we do not have a full account of what that thing is (or to what kind it belongs). As Linda Zagzebski explains this theory,

The idea was that a natural kind such as *water* or *gold* or *human* should be defined as whatever is the same kind of thing or stuff as some indexically identified substance. For example, they (Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam, Keith Donnellan) proposed that gold is, roughly, whatever is the same element as *that*, water is whatever is the same element as *that*, a human is whatever is a member of the same species as *that*, and so on. In each case the demonstrative term “that” refers to an entity to which the person doing the pointing refers directly, typically by

pointing. Subsequently, the term was applied to terms other than natural kind terms...¹

Zagzebski notes that

One of the main reasons for proposing definitions like this was that Kripke and Putnam believed that often we do not know the nature of the thing we are defining, and yet we know how to construct a definition that links up with its nature. We may not know the nature of gold, and for millennia nobody knew its nature, but that did not prevent people from defining “gold”... In fact, the discovery of the nature of gold implies that modern speakers are knowledgeable about the nature of the same stuff of which the pre-modern speakers were ignorant. The theory of direct reference permits the referent of the word “gold” to remain invariant after it was discovered what makes gold what it is. If “gold” did not refer to the same thing both before and after such a discovery, it is hard to see how we could claim that there is *something* about which the discovery was made.²

If the theory of direct reference can legitimately be extended beyond natural kinds to “supernatural kinds,” then MKC might be able to employ it to avoid the criticism that it cannot provide enough of an account of what divinity is to be able to identify Jesus Christ as divine. For on the theory of direct reference, we could look at the person of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospels and say “God is like that.” We may not have a full understanding of the divine nature, but the revelation of God in the incarnation gives us additional information that adds to what we know about God prior to or without incarnation. We can point to the person of Christ and say “God” – even as we learn more about what such a statement really means.

It might be objected that MKC requires too much revision to traditional and intuitively acceptable accounts of the divine attributes. Maybe J.P. Moreland and

¹ Linda Zagzebski, “The Incarnation and Virtue Ethics” in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 319. Cf. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970) and Hilary Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

² Linda Zagzebski, “The Incarnation and Virtue Ethics,” p. 319.

William Lane Craig are right when they assert that MKC requires that the divine attributes are somehow “gerrymandered” in an unacceptable way.³ If so, then MKC will likely not be an attractive Christological option. But how much revision is “too much?” To these concerns MKC can simply respond that if the revelation of God in the incarnation leads us to conclude that our initial conceptions of the divine attributes need correction, then we should be willing to make the necessary corrections. They can agree with Thomas V. Morris that philosophical theology (although a valuable tool) needs “revelational control,”⁴ and they can argue that since Scripture teaches us that Christ is divine and (at least temporarily) not in possession of some facts (cf. Mark 13:32) then we should adjust our notion of the divine knowledge attribute accordingly.⁵

MKC might be criticized on the grounds that some divine attributes must be surrendered (rather than merely “gerrymandered”). For instance, the critic might complain that MKC leaves no room for the doctrine of divine simplicity. To this charge the defenders of MKC could reply in any of several ways. First, MKC’s advocates could attempt to show that MKC might fit well with some versions of the doctrine of divine simplicity – here they might argue that MKC coheres well with the simplicity doctrine held by Gregory of Nyssa and the other Cappadocians.⁶ Secondly, MKC’s proponents could admit that their Christology does not work well with strong doctrines of simplicity.

³ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 607.

⁴ Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), p. 25.

⁵ As does Ronald J. Feenstra (with help from such diverse figures as Alvin Plantinga, Tertullian, Karl Barth and N.T. Wright) in “Kenotic Christology and the Divine Attributes,” forthcoming.

⁶ I believe that MKC does allow for such a doctrine, but that is the subject of a different study.

But here they can simply point out that these strong doctrines do not appear to cohere with the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation generally;⁷ they can argue that such notions of divine simplicity should be surrendered rather than kenoticism. Finally, they can argue that such doctrines run aground on their own steam; because these doctrines “end up flouting the most fundamental claims of theism” on their own account they should exercise no control over Christological theories.⁸

Obviously, much work needs to be done by the proponents of MKC to avert or lay to rest these types of charges. However, it seems clear to me that MKC has the resources to make a good case. I also think that all orthodox Christology is kenotic in some sense – some sense of kenosis seems to be inescapable. We can see this in the proposed Christology of Thomas V. Morris, for (as Stephen T. Davis points out) on the two-minds model the human mind of the incarnate Logos “gives up” or “empties himself of” immediate access to the contents of the divine mind.⁹ We can also discern a kenotic element in the model offered by Moreland and Craig. After sharply criticizing MKC, they “postulate that the divine aspects of Jesus’ personality were largely subliminal during his state of humiliation.”¹⁰ What this means for the knowledge of the person of Christ is this:

In his conscious experience, Jesus grew in knowledge and wisdom, just as a human child does... In his waking consciousness, Jesus is actually ignorant of

⁷ Christopher Hughes argues forcefully that the simplicity doctrine of Thomas Aquinas, while perhaps internally coherent, does not cohere with Aquinas’ doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation, e.g. *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas’ Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), pp. 53-54.

⁹ Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” p. 12.

¹⁰ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, p. 610.

certain facts, though kept from error and often supernaturally illumined by the divine subliminal. Even though the Logos possesses all knowledge about the world from quantum mechanics to auto mechanics, there is no reason to think that Jesus of Nazareth would have been able to answer questions about such subjects, so low had he stooped in condescending to take on the human condition.¹¹

While distinct from MKC in some important respects, this seems to be a version of kenotic Christology. For if Jesus Christ is “actually ignorant of certain facts” and would not have been able to answer questions about some issues, then surely he has surrendered, given up or emptied himself of immediate access to the “divine subliminal.” What is this if not some form of kenosis?

Whether or not MKC gets the kenosis exactly right, I conclude that it should not be dismissed as heterodox. MKC is able to affirm the biblical revelation about both the humanity and the divinity of Christ. It does not fall prey to Arianism, Apollinarianism or Monophysitism. Nor does it entail polytheism. It is a departure from the tradition in some ways (it may be a form of Monotheletism), but with the right adjustments this need not make MKC depart from orthodoxy. I have no doubt that it will continue to repel those Christians who are attracted to traditional Latin formulations of the divine attributes, and it will likely face challenges from this direction. Objections from this direction, however, should not be confused with concerns that it violates biblical or creedal orthodoxy.

I have yet to see good arguments that the two-minds view of Morris is really Nestorian or truly problematic in some other way. Because it is closer to the tradition in some ways, I am inclined to stay with it. But for those who find its view of the unity of

¹¹ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, p. 611.

the person to be counter-intuitive, MKC is a viable option that should not necessarily be dismissed as somehow opposed to orthodoxy.

APPENDIX: THESES FOR SCHOLASTIC DISPUTATION

THESES RELATED TO DISSERTATION

1. Modified Kenotic Christology does not violate the teachings of Scripture with respect to either the divinity or the humanity of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it allows for an adequate understanding of the passages which testify to the ignorance of Christ.
2. Properly understood, Modified Kenotic Christology need not entail a commitment to either Arianism or the *homoiousion* position. To the contrary, it has the resources to avoid these positions.
3. Modified Kenotic Christology is not the equivalent of either Apollinarianism or Monophysitism. It should not be confused with them.
4. The proponents of Modified Kenotic Christology should pay closer attention to the issues raised by Monotheletism. With further modification, Modified Kenotic Christology need not be Monotheletic, but the issue warrants further consideration.
5. The advocates of Modified Kenotic Christology could further explore the relation of their proposed Christology to traditional notions of the divine attributes. Reflection on the divine attributes in relation to the revelation of the kenotically-incarnate Christ might be a fruitful way to proceed in theology. On the other hand, it might necessitate such drastic changes as to make this theory of the Incarnation intuitively unacceptable. In either case, such work awaits the defenders of Modified Kenotic Christology.
6. Contra John Hick, Modified Kenotic Christology may yet have the resources to be at once coherent, orthodox and religiously meaningful.

THESES RELATED TO COURSE WORK

7. Ronald Thiemann's understanding of foundationalism is fraught with ambiguity, and his dismissal of it is premature. Furthermore, the coherentism that he prefers produces problems that make it less than ideally suited for a doctrine of revelation. Although he sharply criticizes the modest foundationalism of Thomas F. Torrance, Torrance's position avoids the problems encountered by Thiemann and remains preferable for the Christian who wishes to maintain the reality and preventiveness of revelation.
8. The externalism of Reformed Epistemology produces tension for its advocates who are also committed to Alvin Plantinga's concept of "significant freedom." When tempered by virtue epistemology, however, charges of incoherence and worries of inconsistency can be turned aside.

9. Nietzsche's doctrine of the "will-to-power" is less than coherent and far from convincing. It can, however, be helpful to Christian apologists and theologians in several ways. Traditional Christian doctrines are a valuable resource for meeting Nietzschean criticisms with a positive and hopeful response.
10. It is possible to mount a strong defense of modest versions of Social Trinitarianism. The materials for Social Trinity doctrine are found in both Scripture and the Christian tradition.
11. Brian Leftow's criticisms that Social Trinitarianism "cannot be both orthodox and a version of monotheism" are either founded upon questionable intuitions or can be met. Furthermore, some important questions remain for a modalistic doctrine of the Trinity.

THESES RELATED TO PERSONAL INTEREST

12. Christian theology should be pastorally relevant as well as coherent and faithful to Scripture and creedal orthodoxy.
13. A Godly family is a reflection of God's own Triune life. It is a means of grace.

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