

The Christology of the Eastern Fathers

(Dr Paul Gregory)

The Eastern Fathers were mostly Asians or Africans. There were very few Greeks among them. It is a misconception spread by bad scholarship in the West that all the Eastern Fathers were Greek. They were as much Greek as C.S. Lewis, is ~~English~~ the Korean who writes in English, is English. The Asian and African fathers wrote in Greek or Syriac, the two international languages of the Mediterranean, like ^{our} ~~our~~ English and French these days. Occasionally ~~one~~ ^{one} finds a real Greek like Methodius of Olympus, but most of them were Asian (Ignatius, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Irenaeus, etc) or African (Cyril of Alexandria, Athanasius, etc). The ~~best~~ ^{best} Christian theology always came from Asia or Africa, not from Europe - Latin or Greek. Even most of the Latin theologians (Augustine, Tertullian, Cyprian) came from Latin-speaking North Africa.

But these Asian-African theologians who wrote in Greek were writing in particular contexts. They did not write their theologies, however, to tackle ^{the} economic and political problems of the day. The Roman and Byzantine empires were tyrannical and oppressive. It

social evils of the day like the indolence and callousness of the rich, the vanity of empresses, or the arrogance of rulers. But they did not create a lehrstology to meet these problems.

Their lehrstology was directed mainly against lehrch people who mis-interpreted lehrst. There were many such ~~mis-~~ mis-interpretations which deviated from the Apostolic testimony about lehrst. Two among these stood out, as capable of undermining the very foundations of lehrstianity. Both were products of intellectuals, who wanted to make lehrstianity acceptable and palatable to the non-lehrstians, and relevant to contemporary non-lehrstian thought.

The two serious misunderstandings of lehrst came from what we today call Gnosticism and Arianism in their various forms. The fact of the matter is that these are still the two most important errors prevailing in the lehrch today, especially among intellectuals in the west. And to clarify our own Arian understanding of lehrst over against these false teachings would be ~~the~~ ^{our} main purpose in looking at ^{samples of} the Arian-African theologians of an earlier, more classical period in the history of lehrstian thought.

The two serious misunderstandings of Christ came from what we today call Gnosticism and Arianism in their various forms. The fact of the matter is that these are still the two most important errors prevailing in the Church today, especially among intellectuals in the west. And to clarify our own Asian understanding of Christ over against these false teachings would be our main purpose in looking at samples of the Asian-African theologians of an earlier, more classical period in the history of Christian thought.

The Gnostic Danger Today and Then

Elaine Pagels has written a very enthusiastic account of The Gnostic Gospels ⁽¹⁾ picturing the way of thinking of Gnostics in the early centuries. She herself gives the impressi of an ardent Gnostic, (though she expressly denies this) who takes up the cudgels on behalf of the poor Gnostics who had been persecuted and suppressed by the early Church.

Elaine Pagels is a Harvard graduate who teaches at Barnard College (Columbia University). She studied Gnosticism in order to see "the relation between politics and religion in the origins of Christianity". She examined Gnosticism for what it was - " a powerful alternative to what we know as Orthodox Christian tradition" ⁽²⁾ She identifies the issue between Gnostics and Christian Orthodox as

"What is the source of religions authority ? For the Christian, the question takes more specific form: what is the relation between the authority of one's own experience and that claimed for the Scriptures, the ritual, and the clergy?"

For Christians today who are revolting against the authority of "the Scriptures, the ritual, and the clergy", the classical debate between Gnostics and Orthodox Christians becomes a central issue. The Gnostic vision of Christ seemed attractive to many intellectual Christians of that time, while the official Church kept on condemning it and branding it as heresy. For Elaine Pagels, Irenaeus the Asian theologian who later become Bishop of Lyons in France is the primary villain. Over against the Gnostic Christian's vision of a Christ of solitude, a Christ without the paraphernalia of Church or ritual, sacraments or dogma, clergy or creed, Irenaeus insists as a Christ with the Church, with "the canonically approved Scriptures, the ritual, and the clerical hierarchy".

The Gnostic Christian saw himself as "one out of a thousand, two out of ten thousand", a real disciple, an unusual person, one specially chosen out of many to receive the great mystery of the universe, which ordinary people can never know. The solitary path of Gnosticism has historical relations with the Asian tradition, particularly with the Hindu tradition of finding God as the true being of one's own self. As the Gospel of Thomas puts it

"If you bring forth what is within you,
what you bring forth will save you.
If you do not bring forth what is within
you, what you do not bring forth will
destroy you" (4)

The allusion here is to Jesus' teaching that the Kingdom of God is "within you" (LK 17:21). Whatever Aramaic expression Jesus used (the Syriac translation uses leqau menkoon which means - in your (plural)midst), the Greek expression entos humon does not expressly refer to the individual's inner being, but to the common existence of the community. But the Gnostics found the expression very convenient. They had this unusual capacity

- (a) to individualize the Gospel and the Kingdom;
- (b) to interiorize it;
- (c) to make salvation simply a matter of bringing out what is already within oneself;
- and (d) to make oneself the constitutive noun for existence.

As opposed to this the early Christian fathers like Ireneus affirmed:

- (a) The Gospel is addressed to human communities, and elicits a community response; the Kingdom comes not only within a person's consciousness, but also within the structures of human social existence in community;
- (b) The Kingdom is not a matter of interiority alone, but a social reality within which the inner experience of personal salvation has to be located;
- (c) Salvation comes from God, not from within oneself; but through faith God indwells human beings as persons and the church as a community and directs both by the Spirit that dwells in them;

(d) the constitutive centre of authority is Christ and the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the body of Christ, the community of faith, with its scriptures, its sacramental mysteries, its apostolic tradition and testimony, its own mind and thought.

The Gnostics of the 2nd and 3rd centuries considered the organized church as unfaithful, as teaching something else than what Christ taught, just as many Christians do today. All Christian Gnostic writings show this tendency of criticising the official church as heretical, while setting themselves up as the true Christians. They laughed at baptism, and about people who "go down into the water and come up without having received anything".

For the Gnostic, a Christian was to be known by his personal quality; for the Orthodox a Christian was identified as one who ^{was} initiated into the community of faith, and participated in the life of that community. And this meant, adherence to the authority structure of the community. As Ignatius of Antioch, the disciple of the Apostles, put it at the beginning of the second century:

"Flee from Schism as the source of mischief. You should all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father. Follow, too, the presbytery as you would the apostles; and respect the deacons as you would God's law. No one should do anything that has to do with the Church without the bishop's approval. You should regard that Eucharist as valid which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorizes. Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Church Catholic He who honours the bishop is honoured of God. He who acts without the bishop's knowledge is in the devil's service." (5)

The Gnostics could not accept this. Of course it was embarrassing to them that Ignatius was a direct disciple of the Apostles, was the most sincere and devoted Christian known at that time, a hero of holiness, who thought it a joy to lay down his life for the sake of Christ. The strong language they Gnostics usually applied to church leaders as being corrupt, power hungry, avaricious, etc. could in no way be applied to Ignatius. And if history chose to honour Ignatius rather than the Gnostics, there must be a point there.

The reason why Ignatius insisted on the bishop, the presbytery, the deacons and baptism and eucharist as the focal points of life in Christ is not difficult to understand. The Gnostic Christians wanted to be on their own, arbiters of their own faith, without church, ministry or sacraments. This would have been all right, if they could also be faithful to the Apostolic teaching. The apostolic teaching was not, however, available in the Gnostic schools. The Jesus they taught was one who was only in the heart or head of the believer, and not in the life of the community of faith. The Apostolic teaching put all emphasis on the community and on the Eucharist, and the ministry which was responsible for guarding the teaching of Christ. The Gnostics preferred individualist, interioristic, intellectualistic interpretations of Christianity and did not want to associate with ordinary Christians or with their community, with the ministry and the sacramental mysteries which constituted the life of that community. The Gnostics were anti-church, anti-clerical, anti-sacramentarian, as many Asian Christians are today.

Ignatius, the first great Asian theologian, testified to the Apostolic teaching that to be a Christian is neither to have a special experience in one's heart nor to have lofty ideas about Christ; to be a Christian, one's whole life has to be drawn into unity with Christ and with His body the Church; and one has to participate in the death and resurrection of Christ through baptism and eucharist through specific acts, through being incorporated into a specific community with its own structure as prescribed by the Apostles. Christ is flesh and Spirit, man and God - not just Spirit or God. Life in Christ must therefore have its fleshly and human elements - what western rationalists uncomprehendingly mock as 'rituals and ceremonies. The Gnostics, like many modern Christians, had no use for the Church or its life in community.

The Christology of Ignatius was the Christology of the Apostles. In this way of understanding Christ is

One healer

of flesh (Sarkikos) and of Spirit (pneumatikos)
begotten (gennetos) Yet unbegotten (agennetos)
in a human being (en anthropo) God (theos)
in and through death (en thanato) life in truth (Zoe alethine)
both from Mary (Kai ek Marias) and from God (Kai ek Theow)
first suffering (Proton pathetos) then beyond suffering
(tote apathes)
Jesus Christ our Lord. (6)

It is this Apostolic Christology, ad distinct from a Gnostic Christology of personal salvation, that all the Eastern Fathers have taught. For the latter, the Church is integrally one with Christ, as His body, and Christians could not accept Christ without the Church, his body, of which the Christian is a member. Our personal experience of Christ and our personal devotion to Him are important; but these are not what constitutes a Christian. It is participation in Christ through His Body.

Another great 'Star of Asia', Melito of Sardis (+ca 190 AD), echoed the same faith. Christ is the turning point of humanity in its passage from the 'safety' (salvation, solertia) of paradise down into the Fall of earthly existence, under the tyssanny of sin and death, back to the bosom of God. He is the new Passover which delivers humanity from the ~~captivity~~ captivity of Egypt. He become the turning point by taking a fleshly body and suffering on our behalf. It is God himself who has suffered and died. And we participate in this divine - human Christ, by partaking of his flesh and blood in the Eucharist. The flesh of Jesus is no phantasy; it is real; and participation in him is also real - material and spiritual. The corporcality of God is stressed by Melito over against the Gnostics. The very title of his homily is peri ensomatou Theou (Regarding the Embodied God)

The same anti-Gnostic, embodied understanding of Christ is continued by Ireneus of Smyrna who later become bishop of Lyons in France. This great Asian teacher of the West also saw Christ as embodied in the Church. He expressly attacks the three Christian Gnostics - Basilides, Valentinus and Marcian, all of whom sought to deny the material aspects
to spiritualize, interiorize and individualise

evil, and God cannot be linked to it. For them the sacraments of the Church are also evil, because linked to material objects. It is the hidden spark of the divine in us that matters, according to the Gnostics. Salvation, for them, is only for the soul, not for the body. Marcion, for example, condemned marriage and sexual inter-course, as well as body and matter.

The most important Christological point in Ireneus is the concept of the Economy of God, which includes Creation Redemption and final recapitulation (anakephalaiosis) The death and Resurrection of Christ are seen not merely as something for our personal salvation, but as the decisive movement in the history of the Creation itself, leading the whole cosmos from dissolution to eternal life. Christ is from the beginning the ground of the created order, for in him, by him and through him all things were created (Johannine Prologue).

The Church is the new creation, and Christ is its head. And the salvation of the old creation is to be incorporated into the new. It is the final recapitulation that will recall the glory of Christ the God-Man, for in Him all created things are to be reconciled to God. While the Gnostics denied all significance to the material world, Ireneus affirmed its participation in the redemption. The Logos hold the universe together from its beginning. But after the Fall, Christ by inseparably uniting a body to himself, incorporates the creation in a new, more intimate, more integral, way into His own body.

This is the tradition of the Apostolic Church. Christ is God who has become a human being, and remains ever divine-human in an inseparable unity between the Creator and the Creation. He was manifested in the flesh, and after His resurrection continues to manifest himself, in the fleshy, corporate body of the community of faith, through the proclamation of the word, through the sacramental mysteries, through the love that binds the community and pours itself out in love of the created order, which has now been united with Christ. It is in union with Him, through the mysteries of baptism, anointment, Eucharist and ministry, that we participate in the healing and life giving energies of the new world.

The struggle between the two different Christologies is still very active in Asia today. Too many Asian Christians have accepted a Gnostic form of Christianity, of Christ in the heart of the individual, but not in the life of the community or in the cosmos.

The Arian Temptation

If the Gnostic-Decetic temptation was the biggest problem of the infancy of the Church, overcome by such stalwart Asians as Ignatius, Melito and Ireneus, the childhood of the Church had to face the greatest of all heresies, that of Arius, Aetius and Eunonius

Arius (ca 250- ca 336) was an African, probably from Libya, who studied in Asia under Lucian of Antioch, and later became a Presbyter in the great African Church of Baucalis in Alexandria. Aetius who died around 370 A.D. was his chief disciple. A native of Asia (a craftsman of Antioch) who went to Alexandria for his philosophical studies in Aristotle, Aetius was the one who philosophically systematized Arianism. Eunonius, another Asian Rhetorician or Philosopher (from Cappadocia) also went to Alexandria and became a disciple of Aetius around 356 AD. His whole life was a campaign against the faith of the Council of Nicea which condemned the teaching of Arius.

It was the hallowed intelligence of the young deacon Athanasius (ca 296 to 373) which defeated the teaching of Arius at the Council of Nicea. Athanasius was less than 30 years old at the Council of Nicea. At 22 or 24 he wrote his first Christological treatise: the Discourse on Becoming Human (de Incarnatione or Logos Peri Tes Enanthropeseos). It has no reference to the Arian heresy or the Nicene debate. Athanasius' main attack on Arianism came in his three Orations against Gentiles. It is from the first of these that we learn what Arius taught, through his Thalia or wedding-songs. Arius' teaching was soft, smooth and sophisticated.

Arius denied that Christ was God. Christ was a created being, created by God out of nothing. Athanasius quotes from a song of Arius, which makes a clear distinction between the Godhood of the Father and the creaturehood of

"The Unoriginate (agennetos) made the Son,
an origin of things generated;
And advanced Him as a Son to Himself by adoption
He has nothing proper to God in proper subsistence
For he is not equal, no, nor one in substance
(homoousion) with him
Thus there is a Three, not in equal glories;
Not intermingling with each other are their
subsistences.
One more glorious than the other in their glories
unto immensity
Foreign from the Son in substance is the Father,
for He is unoriginate.
Understand that the One was; but the Two was not,
before it came to be
It follows at once that, though the Son was not
the Father was, God". (7)

Aetius made this poetic theology more
~~rational and logical. Eunomius set it forth as a clear~~
rational and logical. Eunomius set it forth as a clear
system. Though Arios was condemned at the Council of Nicea,
Arianism not only survived, but in fact flourished and
spread to all parts of the Church, as some contemporary
theological systems spread today. Arianism, in its philo-
sophical form given to it by Eunomius, was extremely attra-
ctive to philosophers, and in its main outline, easily under-
stood by ordinary people- It made the following affirmations:

- (a) The essential nature of God is to be unoriginate.
(agennetos)
- (b) Only God the Father is unoriginate. Therefore He
alone is God. The Son is Begotten and therefore
originate. He cannot be God.
- (c) The Son or Logos is a creature, the first of all
creatures. He was the agent of creation and all
things came to be through him.
- (d) The first of the created beings to come into being
through the Son was the Holy Spirit.
- (e) The Logos become flesh, but not a human being. He
had no human soul. The place of the soul was taken
by the Logos or word of God.
- (f) The Incarnate Christ is thus not of the same nature
as God, being gennetos; He is less than God, subordinate
to God, of a different nature; neither is he of the
same nature as us, for he had no fallen human soul,

This teaching undermines the two pillars of the faith of the Church, which are still difficult to accept for the non-believer: the Triune God and God's becoming a human person, or the Trinity and the Incarnation.

It was at that time intellectually fashionable to deny the Three-in-One-ness of God and the Man-becoming of God. Such denial fitted neatly with the prevailing philosophy in the Greek speaking world of the fourth century - neo-platonism or Middle Platonism. For them the only self-existent being was the Transcendent One, from whom everything emanated. God the Father of Christian theology filled into this niche. The second being, coming out of the One was the nous or the logos, which was the intermediary between the One and the Many. This was the niche for Christ. The third order of being, underlying all multiplicity, coming from the Logos was the psyche or soul. And this was a neat, fitting, place for the Holy Spirit - three different beings, with natures totally different from each other. The Arian Christology fitted neatly with contemporary non-Christian philosophy.

It was in opposing this fashionable Christology that the classical Christian Christology was formulated, not so much by Athanasius, but by one of his successors as Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril (+444). This African theologian struggled with the fundamental questions -

- (a) If the Father is God and the Son is also God, are there two or more Gods?
- (b) How can a single person, i.e. Jesus Christ, be both God and Man ?
- (c) Did Mary give birth to a human person, or to one who is also God ?

Cyril was helped by the struggles of other Asian African theologians before him - especially the Asians Eustathius of Antioch (+330AD), Eusebius of Caesaria (ca 260- ca 340), Diodore of Tarrus (+ca 394), Basil of Caesarea, (ca 330-379 AD) Gregory of Naziamzus (329-389AD) Gregory of Nyssa, (ca 330-ca 395) Evagrius Ponticus (346-399), Nemesius of Emesa, (fl 390 AD) John Chryostom (ca 347-407)

Theodore of Mopsuestia (+ 428 AD), and even his arch-enemy Nestorius (+ ca 451 AD), as well as many others. Among the Africans we can count Athanasius and Origen before him.

Western Scholars usually say there were two Christologies the Antiochean or Asian type and the Alexandrian or African type. This is too hastily and overly neat a bifurcation. Alexandrian Christology depended heavily on the Asian debate. It was in Asia that the great cleavage emerged - between the Apollinarian type and the Nestorian type of understanding Christ.

Both Apollinarius and Nestorius were struggling with the Middle Platonist philosophical approaches of their time. Apollinarius focussed on the noys, the second principle of the neo-platonists as the fulcrum of unity in Christ. It was the noys which united the divine being with the human being, the divine noys, pre-existent, the creator of all things taking the centre of the soul-body humanity of Jesus- for the Apollinarius. In opposing this tendency, Nestorius, anxious to affirm the full humanity of Jesus, stressed the joint nature of the full divinity and full humanity in Christ.

It was this debate that Cyril sought to settle, and despite western reluctance to accept it, settled it brilliantly, but by no means finally. The west still has difficulty in appreciating the thought of Cyril, though it is clear today that the very test of the new Christologic, that today arise in the west would be their agreement with Cyril of Alexandria, as far as Orthodox Christians are concerned .

Cyril is much maligned in western historiography. He had the perception to see that while Nestorius' heresy might appear harmless, it would have very significant consequences for the faith of the Church, as the Western Church now experiences. Keeping the divinity and the humanity linked together only by a conjunction - to say simply that Christ was both divine and human as a mere synopsis. It as Nestorius said, Mary gave birth only to a human child and the divinity was somehow attached to this child afterwards, then the two can again come apart, as they have done in western Christology today. The modern trends in the West take Christ's humanity apart, and sees him primarily as a man who mediated new socio-

religious and political values, a man who revealed God's will for the Jews of his time, and perhaps also for others of other times and places as well. As Fr. Schille becckx puts it:

"From this viewpoint the new Jesus images are purely mythical conceptions, the real, non-mythical content of which is nothing other than our own historically new religious experience (with Jesus still seen of course as exemplar and animator at the time). (8)

The characteristic of most current western Christologies is that 'upward from below' look at Christ, starting with his humanity, reserving considerations of his divinity and pre-existence until afterwards. Many of these works look for the transcendence of Jesus in history itself (e.g. H. Braun, Paul van Buren) ⁹.

A Hulsbosch puts it sharply:

The divine nature of Jesus is only of significance in the saving mystery in so far as it changes and uplifts the human nature. In so far as it does this, we have a new mode of 'being human'.... The divine nature is irrelevant except in so far as it uplifts the human nature; in so far as it does not do this, it has no significance for us; but in so far as it does, we have to do with something really human. If we say: besides being man Jesus is also God, then the 'also God' is no business of ours, because ¹⁰ it is not translated into the human reality of salvation

Nothing could be more unchristian. If what we want is only to use Christ for our salvation, then we can pick and choose within Christ, take what we want and reject what is of no use to us. This is the attitude which the west has used in its imperialist conquest of the world, and is a demonic and despicable attitude, which is the very antithesis of Christianity.

"What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" That is the question. Not "How can I use Christ for my salvation?" Who is this marvellous person, born of the Virgin, whom the shepherds adore, and who is also the saviour

If on the contrary, one starts with the question, 'what is the most economical form in which Christ can be appropriated for my purposes?', we can be satisfied with some part or aspect of Jesus Christ which we regard as significant for our salvation.

The Christian is not one who tries to use Christ for salvation, but one who has been incorporated into Jesus Christ and His body, and seeks to work out the implications of his God-given new life in Christ. It is as such a Christian that one seeks here to give a brief summary of Cyrillian Christology as the Church has come to accept it.

Cyril's Christology

Cyril himself had to grow in his Christology. At first he was quite happy to summarize the Christology of Athanasius.⁽¹¹⁾ The basic affirmations at this stage are

- (a) "The word was made man, but did not descend upon a man" (11)
- (b) It is the same Person who was fully God and fully human.
- (c) The same person suffered and performed the miracles
- (d) It is the Divine-human Christ whom we adore and worship - not a man or a creature.

Later on Cyril sets himself to a more precise formulation, of the relationship between the divine and the human natures of Christ. Cyril rejects the nestorian terms enoikesis, sunapheia and henosis schetike. This means it would be wrong to say that

- (a) the divine nature indwells the human nature, (enoikesis)
- (b) the two natures are inter-connected (sunapheia)
- (c) the two natures have a firm unity (henosis schetike)

He uses rather the expressions

- (a) henosis kata phusin (union in nature)
- (b) nria phusis tou logou sesarkomene (the one nature of the incarnate word)

The philosophical term for this kind of unity is hypostatic union, though Cyril himself did not use it. The Word of God did not cease to be the Word of God by becoming a human person. Neither did the humanity of Christ become a different kind of humanity from our own. Neither was there a mixing of the two natures, nor can there ever be a separation of the divine and human natures in Christ.

The consequences of this inseparable unmixed union are enormous. We better look at these consequences before we go on to the understanding of the expression hypostatic union.

In Jesus Christ we have a new kind of humanity. It is a humanity that died and rose again, sinless. It is the humanity that is inseparably united with God. This is the great new thing that has come into being through the Incarnation. It is in this new humanity that Christians participate by virtue of their baptism, of their anointing with the Holy Spirit, and of their participation in the body and blood of Christ. This is what really matters - the participation in this new humanity that is indivisibly and inseparably united with God. This is how I am saved, by participation in the new humanity which has overcome sin and death - not by some experience, not by my faith, ~~but~~ ~~by some experience, not by my faith,~~ but by my being taken by the Grace of God into His Son's Body to be a member thereof. It is in that Body and in that new humanity that there is eternal life.

Once this fact is grasped, it is easy to understand the teaching of the Church about this union of the divine and human in one person.

"We say that the Word of God came together with His proper flesh, in union indissoluble and unalterable". . .

"Even though He became Man, He possesses the being of God without casting it away; nor do we say that any change took place of the flesh into the Nature of the Godhead, and we hold that neither did the reverse take place, for the nature of the Word has remained what it is even when united to flesh."

Cyril of Alexandria (12)

Cyril was prepared to leave the mode of union as beyond our understanding, but insisted on the unconfused and inseparable union:

"Godhead is one thing and manhood is another, according to the mode of being in each; Yet in Christ they have come together, in a unique manner beyond our understanding, into union, without confusion or change. But the mode of union is wholly incomprehensible"

Cyril (13)

This united one divine -human nature is the one in which we participate - in the humanity of the word of God.

Cyril's position is best summarized in the twelve positions condemned by his 12 anathemata against the teachings of Nestorius. Nestorius, we should remember, was fanatically anti-Arian, and got the government to enact a law against those who say that Christ is a mere man.⁽¹⁴⁾ The main charge against Nestorius was that he refused to acknowledge that the baby that Mary bore in her womb was God. This was the meaning of the expression Theotokos, God-bearer, applied to Christ's mother. If the baby was not God, then Godhead was somehow added to Jesus after he was born a man. Nestorius' argument is that God is without a mother who would be older than God. But the logical consequence of saying that what Mary bore in her womb was only a human infant is to deny that he was God from the beginning of His incarnation, and that the divinity simply came into conjunction with a human Jesus.

Cyril's 12 anathemata therefore insist:

- (a) Immanuel born of Mary is truly God from the beginning and therefore Mary is God-bearer or Theotokos;
- (b) God the word, very God of very God, has been personally united to flesh, and it is the flesh of Christ, the Word Incarnate, the God-Man;
- (c) The person (hypostasis) of the One Christ cannot be divided into two, as if there were two Christs - one divine and one human;
- (d) One cannot assign the words and actions of Christ to two different persons; it is the same person who hungers and who raises Lazarus from the dead;

- (e) One cannot say that Christ the man was clothed with God; Christ is God by nature.
- (f) One cannot say that God the Word is the Lord of the Man Christ; for Christ the God-Man is himself Lord.
- (g) One cannot say that the glory of God was imparted to Christ the Man. Christ's glory is the one he had before the creation of the world;
- (h) One cannot say that Jesus the Man is to be co-worshipped along with God the Word, that too would be wrong.
- (i) One cannot say that Jesus Christ was glorified by the Holy Spirit, as if he had to receive his glory from another; Christ shares Lordship and glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- (j) Christ was made our High Priest and Apostle of our confession; this does not mean that a mere man was made our High Priest; it means that God the Word Incarnate as a human being was made the High Priest.
- (k) It is not only Christ's divinity that is life-giving; his flesh, which is the flesh of God the Word is life-giving.
- (l) It is not the case that the human being alone suffered; it is Christ the God-Man who actually suffered and died and rose again, to become the first-born from the dead, in whom others receive eternal life.

Some modern theologians ^{are} ~~are~~ anxious to dismiss Cyrillian Christology as merely Greek or Hellenistic philosophizing. What he has said in the twelve anathemata has nothing to do with Greek philosophy. It is simply the Gospel truth, which the Apostles taught and the Church has always believed.

What is Greek philosophy is the doctrine of "hypostatic union". This may be difficult for modern man, and so he is at liberty, since he claims to be so smart, to produce a better and more contemporary interpretation of the union of the divine and the human in Christ's person and nature. But no modern doctrine should fall into the heresy of Arius, Aetius, and Eunomius who denied that Christ was God; nor should they follow the heresy of Nestorius which held that divinity was only in conjunction with the humanity of Christ.

divinity was later added. If a contemporary philosophical interpretation can be provided by the new theologians without falling into the above heresies, that would be interesting to hear. But if some careless Christian simply says that he has no need for the divinity or pre-existence of Christ, the Church can only say to him that what he is teaching is not the faith that the Apostolic community has held since the beginning.

Hypostatic Union

The word hypostasis, as far as Christian theology is concerned, was first used in the Trinitarian context. In secular Greek thought the word has had a plethora of different meanings: hupo = under, and stasis = standing. The compound word thus means that which stands firm underneath - the foundation, the substance, the actual existence, the real nature. Hypostasis is a biblical word, in fact. In Hebrews 1:3 the word is used to mean person (charakter tes hypostaseos autou - express image of his person). The modern Greek version of the New Testament translates the word 'hypostasis' as 'ousia' or being. In Hebrews 3:14 the word hypostasis has a different meaning; translators have great difficulty here. One can translate

v 13 & 14 thus

"But appeal to each other each day,
so long as it is called 'today',
so that none of you becomes
insensitive (hardened) by the mis-
leading ability of sin. For we have
become participants in Christ,
if we hold on firmly to that initial
hypostasis ~~is~~ until the end."

Many people translate 'hypostasis' here as confidence. It could also mean the Person Christ in whom Christians believed in the beginning (archē). Scholars are reluctant to accept this interpretation for they have a preconception that the discussion about hypostasis and our participation in the hypostasis of Christ starts only much later in Christian history. This is only a conjecture on the part of the scholarly community for which there is no scientific basis.

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In Hebrews 11:1 we are told that faith is the "hypostasis of the hoped for" (elpizomenon hypostasis), where it could mean substance, reality, assurance, basis, foundation. St. Paul uses the word in ~~Hebrews~~ ^{2 Cor} 9:4 and 11:17 to mean self-assurance, but the modern Greek version translates en tei hypostasei tautē ~~to~~ tes kaucheseōs ^(9:4) as anaphorikos pros to zētēma touto tes kaucheseōs mas (in relation to the object of my boasting). In 11:17 where the RSV again translates hypostasis as 'confidence', the modern Greek uses to thēma or theme. That seems the real meaning of hypostasis, i.e. 'the underlying substance or reality'.

What is the underlying substance or reality in Christ? That is one way of putting the Christological question. A philosophical answer to that question was provided only mainly by Severus

of Antioch (ca 465-538). The west has developed a peculiar kind of myth about Severus being a Monophysite, while it was he who laid the genuine foundations for the accepted Christology of the Christian Church.

The formula of Chalcedon only repeated some phrases from earlier formulations of Cyril, Leo^{of Rome} and Ibas. The philosophical problem was sorted out by Severus, whose writings though originally in Greek, are preserved mainly in Syriac. Chalcedon did not define hypostasis (person) or physis (nature). It was not the task of a council to do so in any case. Chalcedon did not solve any theological issue but served only to split the Church in two, the ^{Asian-African} majority being against Chalcedon at that time.

Severus has been studied by an Asian theologian Dr. V.C. Samuel (15). Severus writes:

"God the Word is one hypostasis. He united to himself hypostatically one particular flesh, which was endowed with a rational and intelligent soul, and which was assumed by Mary Theotokos... The (human) child, for instance, was not formed by itself, as heretics teach. But God the Word.... from the very beginning, namely from the first moment when the flesh animated with soul and mind was formed in the womb, was united with it. Therefore, there was no

being of the flesh and its union with you
the Word. ~~(16)~~ Since the one Christ is one nature
and hypostasis of God the Word incarnate
from Godhead and manhood, it necessarily
follows that the ~~same~~ is known at once
as consubstantial with us as to manhood.
The same is the Son of God and the Son of
Man. He is not, therefore, two sons,
but is one and the same Son. (16)

The point is that the Word of God is
the second hypostasis or Person in the Triune God.
It is this hypostasis that personalised humanity
in Christ. Christ's humanity does not exist
independently of the hypostasis of the Son of God.
The attempt to take that humanity apart,
which characterises much modern western
Christology is a repudiation of the
faith of the Church. Whether theologians want
to acknowledge the deity and pre-existence
of Christ, whether they find Christ's divinity
useful or not, is irrelevant. What matters
is that the faith of the Church is that the
Word of God is the One hypostasis in
whom the ~~the~~ divine and the human have
become inseparably united. If anyone seeks to
separate that humanity from that deity,
he acts contrary to the faith of the Church.

For those who regard the Church as a voluntary organisation which one joins, and then chooses whatever view one wants to hold about Christ, such Christology may seem useful, relevant or attractive. But that is irrelevant for one who is incorporated into the One Body of Christ. There, in that Body, there is one understanding ~~and~~ of Christ: He is the Word of God who has become Man. It is the hypostasis of the Word, of the same nature as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, who has now made personal (hypostatic) the new humanity of Jesus Christ. This is what is meant by hypostatic union, the ^{inseparable} union of God and Man in the one ~~incarnate~~ hypostasis and physis of the Word of God Incarnate.

x

x

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Conclusion

There is always room ^{in the bunch} for fresh understanding and fresh appropriation of the meaning of Christ into whom we have been incorporated. That faith can be expressed in new philosophical terms, if there is a philosophy adequate for that task. At the moment no such philosophy exists, as far as the present writer, who has delved extensively into philosophy both western and Eastern, knows. What comes out as new versions of Christology are largely rehashes of the old heresies of Gnosticism, Arianism and Nestorianism.

The Christology of the Eastern Fathers does have an enduring quality and can be made extremely relevant to current issues and questions. How that can be done will require full length treatment in another paper.

Notes

1. Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels,
Vintage Books, Random House, New York, 1981
(original 1979) 214 pp
2. ibid. p. 181
3. ibid. p. 177
- (4) Gospel of Thomas 45:30-33. - Nag Hammadi
Library (New York, 1977) 126
5. Ignatius of Antioch, letter to Philadelphia 9:2
~~Magnesian 9:2~~ His letter to Ephesus 19:1 says
Smymeans 8 ~~and~~ and 9
- (6) Ignatius, ^{Ep. ad.} Ephesus 7:2
7. Athanasius: Contra Arrianum. 2:2.
Eng. Tr. Library of the Fathers of the Holy
Catholic Church, Vol VIII, Oxford, 1842, pp 95-96
- (8) Edward Schillebeeckx Jesus, An Experiment
in Christology, original Dutch, 1974, E.T., Crossroad, New York, 1981
p. 587
9. H. Braun, Jesus, Berlin, 1969.
P. van Buren The Secular Meaning of The Gospel,
New York, 1963
do Theological Explorations, New York, 1963
10. A. Hulsbosch, 'Jezus Christus, gekend als
mens, beleden als Zoon Gods' in Tijdschrift
(...) - ~~25-26~~

Modern Library of Theological Literature, London, no date, pp 216-218.

11.

Athanasius, III Discourse against
the Arians, paras ~~30~~³¹-32

"The Person who was God from everlasting,
the Sanctifier of those to whom He came, and
the great Agent of all His Father's Counsels,
was made man for our sakes... He,
although He was God, had His proper human
body, formed and organized exactly as
ours, and made for our sakes and
salvation.. And on account of this, the properties
of human nature are said to be His,
because He existed in that nature, and He
hungered, thirsted, suffered, laboured, and
was perfectly sensible of those infirmities
of which our flesh is capable. On the other
hand, those powers and operations, which were
peculiar to ~~the~~ Him as Divine, such as
raising the dead to life, restoring sight to
the blind, and giving health to the sick, are
ascribed to Him, because He did them by the
instrumentality of His own Body.... It was
on this account, that when our Lord's flesh
or human nature suffered, it was not separated
from the Divine nature, and therefore, the Word
of God is rightly said to have suffered....
Thus the same person, who performed such mighty
works, and effected our Redemption and Sanctification,
is said to be judged and condemned, to be scourged,
... ~~to~~ ^{to} a cross, to die, in

Against Nestorius 1815 1. 3.
Cyril of Alexandria, Oxford, James Parker & Co.
1881, pp 16 + 17

(13) That Christ is One, ^{HERMIAS} the dispute with
the op. cit. p. 264.

(14) Nestorius' Letter to the Monks, cited by
op. cit., Preface. pp XXI-XXIII

(15) V. C. Samuel,

(16) Severus, Contra Grammaticum, C.S.C.O
Vol III, 101, and 93, pp 148, 184 and 227.
Cited by V.C. Samuel "The Understanding of
• The Christological Definitions" in Wort und
Wahrheit (~~Annals~~ Report of the Second Ecumenical
Consultation between Theologians of the Oriental
Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church,
Sept 1973), Vienna, 1974, pp 22-23.