

THEOLOGY IN CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC CONTEXT:
A CASE OF MONOPHYSITE CHRISTOLOGY OF
SEVERUS OF ANTIOCH

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The devastating effects of the Constantinian institutionalization of the state-church is felt most acutely in the Monophysite struggle.¹ Frequent imperial interventions accompanied by the use of military force against the Monophysites, the rivalry between the Roman and Alexandrine sees, and numerous exiles of the key leaders of the Church of Egypt are factors difficult to overlook in discussing the emergence, nature, and results of the schism.² The political and ecclesial intrigues which contributed to the Monophysite schism are indeed complex and laborious to assess.

Despite such secular entanglements, the modern Coptic church claims that the leaders of the Monophysite christology undertook their opposition stance on theological grounds, not political.³ Jaroslav Pelikan substantiates that assessment when he writes that "it would be a

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¹The Edict of Valentinian III and Marcian on Confirmation of the Chalcedon Council, 442," in *Roman State and Church*, vol. 2, *A Collection of Legal Documents to A.D. 535*, ed. P. R. Coleman-Norton (London: S.P.C.K., 1966), 485. The document specifies the state's readiness to punish the heretics.

²John Meyendorff, *Greek Orthodox Review* 10 (Winter 1964-5): 16; Tadros Y. Malaty, "The Nature of God the Word Incarnate," *Coptic Church Review*, 7 (Spring 1986): 5.

³H. M. Jones, "Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?" *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 10 (October, 1959): 286. See also, Malaty, 5. Malaty argues that Leo the Great, with Marcian and Pulcheria's imperial support, falsely accused the Alexandrian theologians of Eutychianism, even though Eutychianism was denounced by the Monophysites. Aloys Grillmeier makes a similar comment in his *Christ in Tradition*, vol. 1, 2d ed., trans. John Bowden (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1975), 543. John Meyendorff, on the other hand, qualifies Malaty and Grillmeier's conclusion by suggesting that ethnic and political interests were important to the Monophysites in Egypt. John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Books, 1969), 30.

sheer reductionism to suppose . . . that there were no genuine doctrinal issues at stake" in the Monophysite schism.⁴ At the same time, although ethnic and political interests did not contribute paramountly to the destiny of the Monophysite controversy, it is important to indicate that cultural and semantic differences between the Copts and the West intensified the fifth and sixth century christological debates. Expressions such as *physis*, *hypostasis*, *prosopon* were not easily understood by the Syriac speaking Monophysites and caused irretrievable misinterpretations.⁵

The question addressed by the contemporary scholarship, therefore, involves whether or not there exists fundamental theological differences between the Chalcedonian and Monophysite christologies. Traditionally the Monophysites were mistakenly identified as the followers of Eutyches.⁶ Their doctrine that the incarnate Christ is one Person was understood as acknowledging only one divine nature in Christ over against the orthodox position which affirmed that Christ is one Person with two natures.⁷ A contemporary Coptic theologian Tadros Y. Malaty, however, claims that the term "Monophysites" itself is a gross misrepresentation of his church's position because it distorts what Cyril's followers (later designated as the "Monophysites") meant in claiming *mia physis*. He explains that "mono," meaning "simply one," is inadequate in representing the concept "mia" which means "one united nature" or a "composite nature."⁸

⁴Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrines*. vol. 2, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 37-8.

⁵Dragas, "Christology of the East in the Synod of the 5th to Early 7th Centuries: Preliminary Consideration and Materials, XII," in *Studies in Syriac Christianity: Historical, Literal, and Theological*, ed. Sebastian Brock (Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, VA: Variorum, 1992), 130.

⁶W. A. Wigram, *The Separation of the Monophysites* (London: The Faith Press, LTD., 1923), 192. F. Cayre, who traces the Monophysites to Eutyches, delineates them into several subgroups with reference to their christological positions, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*, vol. 2, 3d. and 4th. books, trans. H. Howitt (Paris: Desclès and Co., 1940), 58-60.

⁷F. H. C. Frend, "Monophysitism," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*. In fact "Monophysitism" is a modern concept. Originally they were called "hesitants" or "dissidents." See, Frend, *The Rise of Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1972), xiii.

⁸Malaty, 7. See also, Dragas, 130-1. To the supporters of Cyril's theology, "in two

The purpose of this paper is to present in its cultural linguistic context the distinctive christological paradigm developed and taught by Severus of Antioch, whose theology is considered to be compatible with that of the Chalcedonian.

ISSUES AND EVENTS SURROUNDING THE RISE OF MONOPHYSITISM

Political Background

Ironically the Chalcedonian decree, which was intended to serve as a symbol of unity and orthodoxy among the competing interpretations of the doctrine of Christ, created political and religious battles that lasted for fifteen centuries.⁹ The responses to the definition of Chalcedon were by no means unanimous. Except for Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, and European provinces of the empire, it was vehemently rejected as an innovation to the true faith of the early Fathers. In particular, the people of Alexandria and Jerusalem who firmly believed in Cyrillian teachings reacted with riots that had to be crushed by the imperial troops. This coercion did not prove to be successful, however, because the Alexandrines responded by killing Proterius upon Marcian's death and consecrated Timothy of Aelurs as their new bishop in March 16, 457 (or 458). And thus began the tumultuous schism.¹⁰

In July 28, 482 Zeno issued an imperial edict called *Henoticon* (Instrument of Unity) and brought a temporary union between the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians that lasted for thirty-five years. The document, by returning to the universally received Nicene Creed which was confirmed by the Constantinople Council (381), was designed to appease the Monophysite claims without explicitly condemning the definition of Chalcedon. It condemned Eutyches and Nestorius and inserted that Christ was incarnated "as one and not two,

natures" was an illogical insistence since it is already assumed in the *mia physis*.

⁹Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 17-8. The document did not explicitly reiterate the Twelve Anathemas of Cyril.

¹⁰Frend, "Monophysitism."

for we say that His miracles and His sufferings which He willingly underwent in the flesh are of one person."¹¹

Internally, the promulgation of the *Henoticon* had an exacerbating affect on the existing rivalry between the patriarchates Rome and Constantinople. When a Constantinople's patriarch, Acacius, reversed his denouncement of Peter Mongus and acknowledged him as patriarch of Alexandria, Pope Simplicius became enraged. This animosity between Constantinople and Rome resulted yet another period of schism that lasted until 519, during which interval the supporters and opponents of the Chalcedonian definition formulated their doctrines with enhanced perspicuity.¹² By the beginning of the sixth century, the majority of the clergy and residents of Constantinople and the European provinces of the Byzantine empire, northern Asia Minor, western Syria, and Palestine consolidated themselves under the Chalcedonian position. Egyptians, Antiochenes, eastern Syrians and Mesopotamians, Isaurians, Pamphylians in southern Asia Minor allied themselves as the anti-Chalcedonians, leaving Western Asia Minor and Ephesus divided into two.¹³

Despite the Monophysite sympathizer Anastasius' attempts to keep the unity between the two groups through the use of the *Henoticon*, his death in 518 and the succession of Justin I brought a radical change in the imperial religious policy. A convinced Chalcedonian, Justin deposed more than fifty alleged Monophysite bishops from 519 to 522. Following Justin was his successor, Justinian, who allowed the restoration of those exiled Monophysite bishops in order to reconcile the rival sees of Constantinople and Rome.¹⁴ He also promulgated the Edict of Three Chapters in 546 which anathematized Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), Theodoretus of Cyrrihus (393-457?), and Ibas of Edessa (- d. 457) in hopes of appeasing the unrest caused by growing Monophysites.¹⁵ Nevertheless, his insistence that the Severians accept the spirit of the Chalcedonian decision, though not necessarily the *Tome* of Leo, acerbated the surmounting tension between the

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Demetrios J. Constantelos, "Justinian and the Three Chapters Controversy," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 3 (Summer 1962): 75-6.

¹⁵Ibid., 79, 82-84.

Monophysites and the Chalcedonians.¹⁶ The Severians absolutely refused to acquiesce to the Chalcedonian decision. Consequently, in a synod convened in Menas in May through June of 536, Severus was condemned as a heretic, and the persecution against the Monophysites began.¹⁷ In 636 the Monophysite territories fell under the Arabs and thus ended the official communication between the Chalcedonians and the Monophysites until this century.

Theological Background

Although that which is distinctively characterized as the Monophysite christological controversy began after the Council of Chalcedon (451), its roots can be traced as early as the Council of Nicea (325).¹⁸ In reaction to the Arian controversy, the Nicea council declared that Christ is "of one substance with the Father." In the latter period of the fourth century Apollinarius, in an anti-Arian reaction, drafted his "tertium quid" doctrine of the incarnation of Christ. The next christological debates, then, ascertained how the humanity of Christ was to be understood in light of His uncompromisable consubstantiality with the Father.

According to Joseph Lebon's extensive work on Monophysitism and subsequent dialogues between the Chalcedonian and the non-

¹⁶Ibid. Justinian interpreted Cyril as firmly acknowledging the "in two natures" doctrine by implication, thus could not understand why the Monophysites would reject Chalcedon. He further accused Severus of departing from Cyrillian christology. "All these words show that. . . St. Cyril ceaselessly proclaimed the confession of the two natures in the one Christ. But this Severus who is hostile to the truth understands none of this, for while he calls the fathers 'fathers' he disavows the orthodox doctrines they have passed on to the Church. He fails to understand that Nestorius was condemned for his own impiety and not because he abrogates the teaching of the fathers." See, Justinian, "Letter to the Monks of Alexandria Against the Monophysites," in *On the Person of Christ: The Christology of Emperor Justinian*, trans. Kenneth P. Wesche (Crestwood, NY: St. Valdimir's Seminary Press, 1991), 91.

¹⁷Constantelos, 94. He concludes that "nationalism, illiteracy, and racial antagonisms and hostility against the Imperial government since earlier days contributed to the failure of Justinian's attempts to reconcile the Monophysites of Egypt, Syria, and Armenia and unite them with the established Orthodox Church. . . . The Three Chapters Edict perpetuated a superfluous and a harmful dispute which did not heal the breach, but, to the contrary, contributed to much dissatisfaction and more schisms."

¹⁸Wigram, 198.

Chalcedonian theologians, the Monophysite doctrine of incarnation, especially that which was articulated by Severus of Antioch, resembles remarkably Cyril of Alexandria's christological understanding.¹⁹ Why did, then, the Monophysites reject Chalcedon even though they fully concurred with the Chalcedonians that the Son is consubstantial with the Father in his divinity and consubstantial with the humankind in his humanity? From a theological perspective, the term *hypostasis* played a critical significance in the debate between the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians. The already existing difficulty in translating and conveying the precise meanings of Origen's "three *hypostases* in the Trinity" into Latin and of Tertullian's "substance" and "person" into Greek became crystallized in the Monophysite controversy. When *persona* was translated into *prosopon* ("person," "face," or "mask"), the East suspected the West of modalistic tendencies. In the West, when both *ousia* and *hypostasis* were translated into *substantia*, the suspicion of tritheism or subordinationism became inevitable.²⁰

In the Chalcedonian definition the Cappadocian Trinitarian language was borrowed to discuss the person of Christ.²¹ For the Chalcedonians the concept of the divine *ousia*, which was introduced by Athanasius and became identified with the term *physis* by the Cappadocians, communicated a concrete reality. *Hypostasis* referred to the individual, whereas *ousia* or *physis* signified "common" characteristics: "There is *only one* God in three hypostases."²² From the perspective of the Monophysites, the *physis* of Christ was identical with his *hypostasis*.²³ Equating *ousia* (essence) and *physis* (nature) in christology implied that all three members of the Trinity had been incarnated in Christ.²⁴ The Chalcedonian definition as interpreted by the Monophysites manifested theological liberalism and an aberration from Cyril's teaching of the incarnation as a "hypostatic union."²⁵

¹⁹Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 24.

²⁰Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1, *From the Beginning to the Council of Chalcedon*, 2d ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 258-9; Frend, "Monophysitism."

²¹Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 30.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 27-9. This point will be developed more fully in a subsequent section on the christology of Severus of Antioch.

²⁴Ibid., 30.

²⁵Ibid., 24. Meyendorff comments that the Monophysites rejected the

Therefore, the starting point of the Monophysite christology was the "identity between the pre-existent Word and the incarnate Word," with a soteriological motif as the key that explains the necessity of incarnation.²⁶ Like the Chalcedonians, the Monophysites categorically opposed the Eutychian concept of a confusion between the two natures of Christ and the "tertium quid" concept of Apollinarius. Using Cyril's formula of "the one incarnate God the Word" they advocated that the Word, eternally *consubstantial* with the Father in his divinity, took upon himself a concrete and lasting humanity.

SEVERUS OF ANTIOCH

Severus of Antioch (465?-538 and 542?) was born in the city of Sozopolis in Pisidia to a religious family. He is recognized as the best of the Monophysite theologians, who belabored to provide "a clear-cut alternative theology that justified rejection of the *Tome* and the council."²⁷ Preserved largely in the *Patrologia Orientalis* and *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, Severus' theology bears the distinctive mark of his mentor Cyril. He contributed much to steer away his followers from Eutychianism and disapproved of Dioscorus for being "contentious" and "fighting unnecessarily about words."²⁸ He also sought to keep orthodoxy and unity among fractious Monophysite groups.²⁹

Frend evaluates that Severus' theological pursuit was genuinely motivated by what he perceived as the uncompromisable orthodox doctrine.³⁰ He was a conservative theologian, not a "fanatic."³¹ His intention was not to produce an innovative interpretation but to prove

Chalcedonian terminologies because they were inept in understanding the content of the Chalcedonian definition.

²⁶Ibid., 25.

²⁷Frend., "Monophysitism." See also, Wigram, 193.

²⁸Frend, "Monophysitism."

²⁹Idem., *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1972), 202.

³⁰Idem., "Severus of Antioch and the Origins of the Monophysite Hierarchy," *The Heritage of Early the Christianity*, *Orientalia Christiana Alecta*, ed. David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin, no. 195 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 267-74.

³¹Iain R. Torrance, *Christology After Chalcedon: Severus of Antioch and Sergius the Monophysite* (Norwich, Norfolk, VA: The Canterbury Press Norwich, 1988), 13-4.

and preserve the teachings of Cyril, Dioscorus, Athanasius, and the Cappadocians.³² This led him to anathematize the Chalcedonian creed, Leo's *Tome*, and Eutyches, while recognizing the authority of the Henoticon and the decisions from the councils of Nicea, Constantinople, and Ephesus.³³

The purpose of this section is to substantiate that Severus accepted the doctrines of the perfect consubstantiality of Christ to both God and humans.³⁴ Characteristically Cyrillian Severus emphatically repudiated the use of "two natures in Christ after the union" and instead proposed "one incarnate nature of God the Word from two natures."³⁵ He tirelessly affirmed that the two natures in Christ did not imply two divided modes of reality in the being of Christ. This unity out of dual natures of Christ is the key to understanding the person and the work of Christ in Severus' christology.

Important Terms and Concepts in Severus' Christology

In order to understand Severus' christology, especially the incarnation of Christ, it is crucial to study his concept of the hypostatic union.³⁶ First, *ousia* (essence) always refers to that which is common to

³²L. R. Wickham, "Severus of Antioch on the Trinity," *Studia Patristica*, vol. XXIX, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1993), 197.

³³Torrance, 5. In fact, his three letters written to Sergius are filled with admonishment, though not irenic or personal, about Leo's *Tome*. His letters also contain repudiations of extreme Monophysites Sergius and Julian of Halicarnassus, whose expositions indicate that there is a confusion or mixture of the divine and human natures in Christ's being. See also, Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 4. (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1898), 327-8.

³⁴Wigram, 199.

³⁵Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 28. For example, see, Severus, "Letter I," in Torrance's *Christology After Chalcedon; Severus of Antioch and Sergius the Monophysite*, 151-2.

³⁶The main body of this section comes from Chesnut's work on Severus' terminology. Roberta C. Chestnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). It is also helpful to note Torrance's work on the difference among the terms "properties," "propriety," and "particularity." "Properties," used in the context of *communicatio idiomatum*, denote the properties of God or the properties of human. For each "nature" there are many properties. "Propriety" denotes that which belong to one class of being exclusively. "Laughter" is attributed to human beings only, not to animals. Lastly, the term "particularity" means a unique quality belonging to something that cannot be attributed to anything else. "Flesh is flesh, and is not stone,

all people.³⁷ Second, *physis* (nature) can designate either a specific individual or generic characteristics that a group shares.³⁸ Third, *hypostasis*, on the other hand, always designates a concrete individual. Fourth, when used in expressions such as "the natural union" or "the one nature of God the incarnate," the terms *physis* (nature) and *hypostasis* are interchangeable. That is, as long as they represent a distinct individual, the two terms are equivalent in meaning.³⁹ When *physis* and *hypostasis* are applied to Christ, they function synonymously to refer to a concrete, unique mode of existence only, for Christ is a unique being who fully participates both in the *ousia* of God and in the *ousia* of humankind. Because he was aware of the Cappadocians use of *ousia* to connote the common properties shared by the Trinity (three *hypostases*), Severus avoided saying "one *ousia*" in Christ.

Severus understood the *hypostasis* as having two meanings: "the self-subsistent" (that which exists in individual subsistence) and the "non-self-subsistent" (that which does not exist in individual subsistence).⁴⁰ Using the analogy of what makes up human beings, it can be explained that the human body refers to the non-self-subsistent hypostasis which can never exist apart from the self-subsistent hypostasis of the human soul. (What grounds the human soul as the self-subsistent quality lies, of course, in the Platonic anthropological assumption regarding the immortality of the human soul.)

Severus further differentiated the self-subsistent hypostasis into that which is simple or composite.⁴¹ The simple self-subsistent hypostasis signifies a thing that can exist from its own, whereas the

simply for the reason that it is flesh." In particular, Severus used the last term to connote that there is no confusion of natures in the union of Christ. See, Torrance, "Paradigm Change in Sixth-Century Christology: The Contribution of Gregory the Theologian to the Christology of Severus of Antioch," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36 (Fall/Winter 1991): 277-85.

³⁷Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 27.

³⁸Chestnut, 9.

³⁹Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 27.

⁴⁰Chestnut, 10; Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, *Faith, Trinity, and Incarnation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 449-50. Also, in chapter 16, sec. 2, Wolfson traces the concept of the "mixture" in incarnation from its Aristotelian and Stoic origins.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

composite self-subsistent hypostasis signifies a thing that owes its existence to the simple self-subsistent being. In this paradigm only the Father and the Holy Spirit are simple self-subsistent hypostases, and the body and soul are non-self-subsistent hypostases. "Christ [as in the case of each human being] is one self-subsistent composite hypostasis, the product of a union of a simple self-subsistent hypostasis with a non-self-subsistent hypostasis."⁴² This delineation, however, does not negate the fundamental qualitative difference between Christ and human, for in Christ a composite union occurred between His divinity (the self-subsistent hypostasis) and humanity (the non-self-subsistent hypostasis).

The term *prosopon* carries a concrete sense and is restricted to mean self-subsistent hypostasis. It is that which distinguishes one person from another. Therefore, Christ is a composite self-subsistent being of the "one nature, one hypostasis, and one prosopon of God the Word Incarnate."⁴³ For Severus prosopic union as a representation of the union between the two self-subsistent hypostases refers to a union between two unique individual persons.⁴⁴ Prosopic union can be described as "union of brotherhood," "conjunction in honor," or "union by assumption."⁴⁵

The Divine Nature of the Incarnate Word

Severus affirmed the absolute transcendence of God without manifesting mystical proclivities. The relationship of God to his creation is dynamic and salvific.⁴⁶ The Son is the wisdom and the power of the Father, "the radiance of the Father's glory, [and] the stamp of his hypostasis," whose attributions reveal his character.⁴⁷ Such names and properties of Christ are crucial in revealing his distinction from the Father and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ He is also consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit in his Godhead and is eternally generated

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 11. See, note 4.

⁴⁴Severus, Letter II, *Patrologia Orientalis*, xii, 189-90, quoted in Chestnut, 13.

⁴⁵Severus, "Letter II," in Torrance's *Christology After Chalcedon; Severus of Antioch and Sergius the Monophysite*, 175-6; Chestnut, 13.

⁴⁶Wickham, 363.

⁴⁷Ibid., 365.

⁴⁸Ibid., 371. This does not imply that Severus supported tritheism.

from the Father who is infinite and immutable.⁴⁹ The precise meaning of "begetting" and "proceeding" of the Son, however, transcends human understanding.

The Incarnation and the Human Properties in Christ

First, the incarnation of the Logos is an unfathomable mystery, which is without "mixture" or "juxtaposition."⁵⁰ Secondly, the incarnation includes the presence of the rational soul in Christ which was "assumed from the Holy Spirit and from Mary the Mother of God and perpetual Virgin."⁵¹ But Christ was without sin because his humanity and divinity are hypostatically united.⁵² At the same time, he is consubstantial with the humanity, and he shared the same physical and emotional experiences of ordinary persons while he was on earth. Christ "brought no rejection of the flesh or change or transformation of the human ousia" in incarnation.⁵³ Having human *ousia*, he really did suffer, die, and was buried and bodily resurrected. Even after the resurrection, Christ's humanity was not eclipsed by the *ousia* of his divinity.⁵⁴ Contrary to Julian of Halicarnassus' assumption, Severus had a positive view of body. He did not attribute sin to the bodily existence, nor did he believe that embodied existence is a punishment.⁵⁵ Thirdly, Severus fully acknowledged that Jesus experienced "normal" human fears and sadness when he was faced with the burden of the crucifixion. What explains the mystery of the suffering of the incarnate Word is that, just as the divine Son "voluntarily submitted himself to the laws of human nature," he also undertook the cross voluntarily.⁵⁶ Severus' works are not without docetic tendencies, nevertheless, for his

⁴⁹The immutability of the divine is crucial in his doctrine of the incarnation of Christ. Also, the Trinity is of one substance and three distinct hypostases. Severus rejected the idea of one hypostasis in the Godhead for fear of subordinationism or modalism. The Trinity ultimately is a "paradoxical" existence in singular and plurality. See, Severus, "Letters II," 176; Wickham, 363, 365, 372; Severus quoted in Wickham, 369.

⁵⁰Severus, "Letter II," 172.

⁵¹Ibid., "Letter I," 176.

⁵²Ibid., 158; Malaty, 10.

⁵³Severus, "Letter I," 159.

⁵⁴Severus, "Letter II," 184.

⁵⁵Chestnut, 23, n. 5.

⁵⁶Ibid., 29.

writings include expressions such as "it [humanity] was capable of receiving. . . torments, since the incarnate Word allowed that it should suffer this when he wished."⁵⁷ Christ's divine will operated within him and assured him of the forthcoming victory over death through the resurrection.⁵⁸ Also found in Severus is a claim that Christ suffered in the flesh while remaining impassable in his divinity and that he died without suffering from the corruption of the flesh or being abandoned to Sheol.

Lastly, in this framework the central motif in Severus' christology is soteriological, and Christ's assumption of human nature is strictly "from above to below." Christ "made the human soul his own that he might show it superior to sin, and he imparted to it the firmness and unchangeableness of his own nature."⁵⁹ In other words, by the divine nature of Christ his flesh, somehow without changing his human nature, became the flesh that was sinless and perfect, thus overcoming the power of sin for the sake of human beings.

The Incarnation as "From the Two Natures"

The incarnation of the Word cannot be understood as a single *ousia* or particularity, for to do so would deny the duality in his qualities and subsequently his consubstantiality with the humankind.⁶⁰ Rather, the biblical term "indwelling" portrays a hypostatic union, though the meaning of God's dwelling in the prophets is not the same as that of the union of the divinity and humanity in Christ.⁶¹ Specifically, the incarnation of Christ is a hypostatic or a natural union of non-self-subsistent and self-subsistent hypostases, but it is not a union of *prosopa*:⁶² "The peculiarity of the natural union is that the hypostases are in composition (*brukhabha*) and are perfect without diminution, but refuse to continue an individual existence so as to be numbered as two, and to have its own *prosopon* impressed upon each of

⁵⁷Severus, "Letter I," 158.

⁵⁸Chestnut, 27-8.

⁵⁹Severus, "Letter I," 158.

⁶⁰Ibid., "Letter II," 180-1; "Letter III," 171-202, 215; Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 27; Torrance, 30, 33.

⁶¹Torrance, 75.

⁶²Chestnut, 14. Chestnut notes that Severus preferred using hypostatic union to natural union. See, 12, n. 5.

them, which a conjunction in honor cannot possibly do."⁶³ A prosopic union denotes "a conjunction by relationship" in which the Word and the humanity would have hypostases of their own independently existing from each other.⁶⁴

In anathematizing those who professed the reality of the two natures in Christ after the union and attribute two realms of actions and "properties," Severus was not categorically opposing the idea of two natures, actions, and properties. "For if this were not so, it would be right for us not to profess Emmanuel even to be 'from two natures,' if the word 'natures' were to be shunned."⁶⁵ The expressions, "two natures in Christ," two *hypostases*, or two *prosopa* are conceivable *en theoria* to the extent that Christ shares the same *ousia* with the Father and the same *ousia* with the humankind.⁶⁶

In his search to emphasize and expound the "inexpressible union" of "particularities" in Christ, which was without confusion,⁶⁷ Severus found the clearest depiction of the incarnation embedded in the phrase "one incarnate nature of God the Word" from or out of the two natures (*ek dyo physeon*).⁶⁸ Since Severus interpreted "in two natures" as "a duality representing separation" and "from two natures" as "a composition and a union without confusion," he argued that the differences in the two phrases were not just semantic but had significant doctrinal implications.⁶⁹ For him the "in two natures after the union" (as coined by Nestorius and the Chalcedonians) conveyed that there are two self-subsistent hypostases or two persons in Christ.⁷⁰ In the reality of the hypostatic union of Christ, the two natures continue to exist together "in the particularity that belongs to [each] nature [and] are not divided or separated into two independent natures."⁷¹ This coexistence of the two natures is explained as a "composite nature" (*syntheos physis or hypostasis*) in which the dual natures of Christ (divinity and humanity) dwell in their fullest qualities in the being of

⁶³Severus, Letter XV, 210, quoted in Chestnut, 14.

⁶⁴Ibid., "Letter I," 176.

⁶⁵Ibid., 151.

⁶⁶Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 27-8; Wigram, 197.

⁶⁷Severus, "Letter I," 152.

⁶⁸Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 27-8.

⁶⁹Pelikan, 57.

⁷⁰Chestnut, 12, n. 5.

⁷¹Severus, "Letter I," 148.

Christ.⁷² But the importance lies in communicating a genuine sense of the unity of Christ from which "the division has been removed" precisely because it is absurd to conjecture that the different qualities in him exist independently.⁷³

There is also no confusion or mixture of the two natures in the being of Christ.⁷⁴ The absolute qualitative distinction between the divine and human are not reduced or mingled in the incarnation. The two natures of Christ exist permanently in a state of hypostatic union,⁷⁵ in which each retains their "difference" and "distinction" (that which stands "remote" from each other) and which is safeguarded from a confusion or mixture of the two natures:⁷⁶

But when a hypostatic union is professed, of which the fulfillment is that from two there is one Christ without confusion, one person, one hypostasis, one nature belonging to the Word incarnate, the Word is known by means of the properties of the flesh, and the properties of the humanity will become the properties of the divinity of the Word; and again the properties of the Word will be acknowledged as the properties of the flesh, and the same one will be seen by means of both (sets of properties), both touchable and not touchable, and visible and not visible, and belonging to time and from before time, we shall not attribute the properties of each nature, dividing them up.⁷⁷

Communicatio Idiomatum

The theory of *communicatio idiomatum* is crucial to comprehending Severus' assertion that there is no division or confusion in Christ's natures and actions.⁷⁸ This principle allowed Severus to claim that the Gospels teach one nature of Christ when they mention

⁷²Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 27. Meyendorff comments that Severus was the only Monophysite theologian who explicitly and consistently used the term "composition" in the single nature of Christ. See also, Chestnut, 14-5.

⁷³Severus, "Letter I," 149, 155. This point needs to be qualified in light of his understanding of the economy of Christ's will in which Severus says that Christ's divine nature overrides certain characteristics common to all people.

⁷⁴Torrance, 34.

⁷⁵Severus, "Letter I," 148; Malaty, 10.

⁷⁶Ibid., "Letter I," 149.

⁷⁷Ibid., 151.

⁷⁸Torrance, 28, 87.

that "the Word of Life was both seen and touched."⁷⁹ In other words, since Christ did not lose his divine properties by condescending to assume human nature, "the properties of the Word became properties of manhood, and those of manhood, properties of the Word. Thus one Christ and Son and Lord is understood."⁸⁰

Because Severus recognized that one can speak of Christ as having two natures in theory, it was logically deduced that both the divine and the human will are present in Christ.⁸¹ Based on his reading of Isa. 7: 15 Severus asserted that Jesus has human will because he made genuine moral choices. But Severus subjected the human will of Christ to the control of his divine will because he followed the Alexandrine concept of salvation as "divinization," in which it was soteriologically necessary for the divine nature of Christ to overcome the inadequacies of the human natures.⁸²

Also, Jesus knew good from evil even as a child precisely because his humanity and divinity are inseparably united.⁸³ Unlike ordinary human beings Jesus did not experience a process of intellectual growth because of his divine will to which his human will always acquiesced in operation:

Each of us, in effect, examined at the age of infancy, has no knowledge of good or evil. . . But as by nature Emmanuel was all God and the Good itself. . . he did not wait for the time of discernment. . . On the one hand he scorned evil and did not obey it, and on the other, he chose good.⁸⁴

Even during his earthly life, Jesus possessed a supernatural ability to foreknow the thoughts of the devil and those around him. He was tempted, but his foreknowledge of the impending trials prepared him to withstand them.⁸⁵

⁷⁹Severus, "Letter I," 148.

⁸⁰Ibid., 151; "Letter II," 176.

⁸¹Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 28.

⁸²Chestnut, 51-2. "By engrafting" his indestructible nature to human nature, Christ redeemed humanity to its original condition prior to the Fall, to the image of God, and demonstrated God's purpose for his creation.

⁸³Ibid., 25-6. Severus believed that Adam, when living in the Paradise, did not have to learn the Law, for it was written in his heart. See also, Severus, "Letter II," 178.

⁸⁴Severus, Hom. XCVIII, *P. O.* xxv, 160 quoted by Chestnut, 26; Chestnut, 27.

⁸⁵Chestnut, 26.

Regarding the actions of Christ Severus distinguished between the agent (Christ), the activity, and the works in the incarnation: the agent (*energon*), who is the incarnate Word, the activity (*energeia*), and the various works (*ta energethenta*) performed by the activity.⁸⁶ Just as the hypostatic union of the two natures did not create two distinctive beings in Christ, the divine and the human wills in Christ did not prevent him from operating as a unified being.⁸⁷ For example, while the activity of eating is a physical function, that action is attributed to the whole individual and not strictly to his/her body. Similarly, both the human actions such as weeping and the divine actions such as resurrecting the dead Lazarus are attributed to the incarnate Word as a whole, not separately to his divinity or humanity.⁸⁸

And it is not the case, that because these things which were done were of different kinds, we say that consequently these two natures which were effecting those things, for . . . a single goal the Word incarnate performed both of them. And just as no one divides the Word from the flesh, so also it is impossible to divide or separate these activities. For we also recognize a variety of utterances. . . but one Word incarnate spoke both. . . ." (1 Cor. 8: 6; Rom. 9:5)⁸⁹

In the concrete unity of "Christ's single hypostasis-nature," there was a "unity of energy" in such a way that his divine and human wills operated to produce consistent and coherent actions, and these actions corresponded genuinely to what are "naturally" attributed to the divine or human.⁹⁰ Therefore, there is one nature, one prosopon, one will, one operation of Christ in the reality of his hypostatic union.⁹¹

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the particular principle of *communicatio idiomatum*

⁸⁶Severus, quoted in Meyendorff, 28.

⁸⁷Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 29.

⁸⁸Severus, "Letter I," 153-4; Pelikan, 59; Chestnut, 12. Here Severus seems to be assuming that the miracles of Jesus are performed by His divine nature, an understanding shared by the Fathers.

⁸⁹Severus, "Letter I," 153.

⁹⁰Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 28.

⁹¹Chestnut, 31.

in Severus' christology makes sense because the human will in Christ functions as an "iconic representation" (not a mirror) of his divine will just as the human soul functions as an "iconic representation" of the body.⁹² This scheme assumes two levels of Christ (divinity and humanity) which normally remained remote from each other. The incarnate Word, then, "use[d] the strength of the human soul as the 'efficient cause' of the activities of Christ because he is operating within the created level of reality, and must express himself in terms appropriate to it."⁹³

The Platonic assumptions about the immutability of God and the Christian soteriology influenced Severus' understanding of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. His works manifest a very dynamic understanding of the incarnation in which the two natures of Christ function as one reality. However, it must be added that Severus failed to go beyond the negative definitions of the Chalcedonian statement but confined his discussions within the negative categories of "without confusion," "without separation," or "without mingling." In fact the absolute transcendence and the immutability of God and the impossibility of humanity to save itself function as safety limits within which to contemplate the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. To that extent, Wigram is correct when he evaluates that there is no "essential difference" between the definition of Chalcedon and Severus' "one incarnate nature of God the Logos."⁹⁴ Both affirm the qualitative distinctions between God and human which dwell in the being of Christ, and both reject any notion of the confusion of the two natures or a radical separation between the two. With Severus, however, the emphasis clearly lies in the unity of Christ's being, will, and actions.

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⁹²Ibid., 28.

⁹³Ibid., 34.

⁹⁴Wigram, 200.

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