TRADITION AND INCARNATION

Foundations of Christian Theology

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that face. I am always fascinated by the face of Christ just like a man fascinated by the face of his beloved.

                            Shusaku Endo, *Silence* (1966)

Suppose the Son of man had been dressed as the Son of God, recognizable, immediately identifiable, bearing on his person the insignia and the decorations—truly, he would have been misunderstood, for he would have betrayed himself, he would have been marked out too soon, on the basis of appearances: it was necessary that all should be able to hear the sound of a human voice, to see his works, so as to choose in their own hearts. When he wasn't escaping into the hills, he used to get lost in the crowds. Only once had he put it on, his garment of glory; he'd saved it for his three best friends. After the resurrection, Mary had taken him for the gardener; the apostles along the lake thought he was a fisherman. Perhaps it was certitude that tore him apart.

                            Jean Sulivan, *The Sea Remains* (1969)

Chapter VIII

Classical Christology: The Doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

Each Sunday, as part of their public worship (liturgy), many Christian churches profess their faith by saying together what is popularly known as the Nicaean Creed. The name comes from the church council which met at Nicaea in modern Turkey in A.D. 325. This council composed the creed upon which the one now in use is based. The Nicaean Creed has a threefold, or trinitarian, structure:

> We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty . . .
> in one Lord, Jesus Christ . . .
> and in the Holy Spirit . . .

The section of the creed devoted to the Son continues in part:

> the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,
> God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
> begotten, not made, one in being with the Father.
> Through him all things were made.

> For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven:
> by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin
> Mary, and became man.

The task of this chapter will be to examine this creedal confession that Jesus Christ is the incarnation (becoming human) of God, that he is truly God and truly human. We shall look briefly at the

theological controversies from which the creed developed and at the creed's interpretation by later councils at Constantinople in 381, Ephesus in 431, and Chalcedon in 451. We shall also consider how the distinctive Christian belief that Jesus Christ is truly God shapes in turn the Christian understanding of God as the Holy Trinity. Like Jews and Muslims, Christians profess belief in one God (monotheism). Unlike Jews and Muslims, Christians are trinitarian monotheists, calling upon one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Most of the issues treated in this chapter fall under the branch of systematic theology known as Christology, the study of the person and work of Christ. It is called *classical* Christology to distinguish it from various *modern* approaches which have arisen since the enlightenment's (ca. 1650–1800) radical challenge to the traditional understanding of Christ. This challenge will be considered in Chapter IX.

The emphasis of this chapter throughout is that classical Christology as exemplified in the creed is not an abstract theory. It begins from and returns to the two-sided Christian experience of salvation and worship in Christ. The early Christological controversies from which the creed emerged involve a massive complex of historical detail and theological speculation. Viewing these controversies from the perspective of their relationship to Christian living and worship necessarily oversimplifies them. But perhaps it will also convey some sense of what was at stake in these controversies, and why fourth and fifth century Christians took them so seriously. Before considering the councils and the controversies surrounding them, therefore, we shall look briefly at some of the New Testament witness to this twofold Christian experience of salvation and worship.

CHRISTIAN LIVING:
SALVATION AND THE DAILY FOLLOWING OF CHRIST

St. Paul's New Testament letters testify, both historically and religiously, to an experience of salvation in Christ that had already taken shape in the second decade after Christ's death. For Paul "life is Christ" (Phil 1:21). His sense of having been trans-

formed in Christ or created all over again comes through with clarity and power in his letters. "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me" (Gal 2:19–20). This life in Christ is a "new creation" (Gal 6:15).

In Romans 7, Paul writes evocatively of his own previous inability to do under his own power what he thought was good. He felt God's law as an unbearable yoke imposed coercively from without. In Christ, however, he came to live in a new way. The exhortations to fellow Christians in his letters clarify the nature of this new way of living. Not only do those who live in Christ avoid the various forms of immoral behavior Paul lists, but most importantly, in Christ, whom Ephesians 2:14 describes as "our peace," they live in peace and charity in their own families and communities. In Christ old divisions are abolished and we are reconciled to God and one another. "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27–28).

For Paul, putting on Christ meant especially experiencing his own present suffering in union with the sufferings and death of Christ, "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus" (2 Cor 4:10). Through faith, Paul became "conformed to his death" (Phil 3:10). Paul's own martyr's death at Rome would be his ultimate witness to his conformity to Christ. His union with Christ's death gave Paul a share in the hope for resurrection. Thus being in Christ through faith implies not only a transformation of the daily routine of the present life but also a hope for resurrection beyond death.

Paul urged his fellow Christians to imitate him (Phil 3:17). "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). The parental metaphors he uses suggest that he expected this putting on of Christ to be a long process of transformation. He addresses the Christians of Galatia as "My children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ be formed in you!" (Gal 4:19). Ephesians speaks of the need for Christians to "grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ" (4:15).

In Paul, then, we find the earliest detailed example of a conception of Christian living as an inner conformity to or an imitation of Christ through faith. We find a similar emphasis on the following of Christ in the New Testament gospels. They are at one in presenting the fourfold New Testament gospel. It presents Jesus' life and death as the model for Christian discipleship. "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mk 8:34). After the word *cross*, Luke 9:23 adds the adverb *daily*. The contemporary witness of liberation theology reminds us that disciples' identification with Christ's sufferings and death can take various cultural forms and need not entail passive resignation in the face of injustice.

CHRISTIAN PRAYER AND WORSHIP

"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:25). Paul punctuates his letters with frequent bursts of spontaneous thanksgiving and praise. The Father and the exalted Lord Jesus Christ appear side by side as when Paul greets his correspondents with the peace of "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The need to offer appropriate praise and thanksgiving for the new life in Christ led to the rather remarkable development of Christian worship, the practice of addressing prayer to Christ himself or through him to the Father.

Without going into great detail, we can highlight the centrality of Christian worship in the formation of the New Testament. Contemporary scholars emphasize the worship setting of many gospel traditions. In the Pauline letters we find traces of various forms of worship: baptismal liturgies with their professions of faith in Christ as Lord, references to the singing of psalms and hymns and actual hymns to Christ as Lord, the Lord's supper, and references to the public reading of scripture and the apostolic writings. Christian liturgical practice clearly precedes and influences the formation of the New Testament.

Paul begins the first letter to the Corinthians with a matter-of-fact reference to disciples throughout the world as "all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"

(1:2). In the Old Testament, when one calls on the name of the Lord, one adores God, the Lord. Paul identifies Christians as those who "call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is extraordinary that among these people were some who, like Paul and the twelve, were Jews, for whom strict monotheism was taken for granted. Many of Paul's converts were Gentiles, or non-Jews, but we can only assume that the experience of new life in Christ was so powerful for the Jews among them, that these strict monotheists could reconcile calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ with the first commandment and its injunction to worship God alone.

The Acts of the Apostles offers some indication that it was just such a practice that led to the persecution and partial dispersion of the first church at Jerusalem. In Acts 7–8, we find signs of a division between those in the first Jerusalem community who spoke Greek, the Hellenists or Hellenistic Jews, and those who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic. The chief spokesperson for the Greek-speakers is presented as Stephen, the deacon whom Christians honor as the first martyr, the first to witness to his Christian faith with his life. Like our profession of faith, Stephen's apostolic preaching places Jesus the Lord "at the right hand of God" (7:55-56). According to Acts, Stephen's preaching about Christ as the exalted Lord precipitated his stoning, the punishment for blasphemy. Just as Christ did from the cross, Stephen prays that his executioners will be forgiven. In what can only be described as an extraordinary development, Stephen addresses his prayer to the exalted Lord Jesus at the Father's hand.

One of the most striking New Testament examples of the calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ or worship addressed to Jesus appears in Philippians 2:6–11. This text is generally regarded as a liturgical hymn to Christ. Since it involves a profession of faith in his Lordship, some assign it a baptismal context. Paul wrote Philippians at the beginning of the first century's fifth decade, some twenty years after Christ's death. Paul's citing it indicates that the hymn had been in circulation prior to the letter's composition. This hymn offers evidence of a very early Christian belief that the same Jesus who had died on the cross "was in the form of God," presently exalted and deserving of the

honor due to God's own name. The confession "Jesus Christ is Lord" indicates that God's own name has been given to Christ. Significantly, Paul uses the hymn in the context of an exhortation to the following or imitation of Christ.

> Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in
>   Christ Jesus,
> Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality
>   with God something to be grasped.
> Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in
>   human likeness;
> and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming
>   obedient to death, even death on a cross.
> Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him
>   the name that is above every name, that at the name of
>   Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on
>   earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that
>   Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil
>   2:5–11).

We can conclude that the Christian confession of Jesus as truly God and truly human has deep connections to Christian living. To say that Jesus is truly human is to affirm that he is someone we can really imitate. To say that he is truly God is to affirm that when we call upon him and worship him, we do not dishonor God by idolatry. If Jesus is not truly human, if he did not take for his own our lot of suffering, temptation and death, then we cannot really take seriously the New Testament's injunctions to follow and imitate him. If he is not truly God, he lacks what it takes to transform us and to save us from death, and we would dishonor God by calling upon his name.

CHRISTOLOGY'S BEGINNINGS

While the scriptural witness speaks of God the Father and our Lord Jesus together, it does not clarify their relationship as clearly as we might expect. On the one hand, the gospels speak of Jesus in a way that makes clear that he was remembered as a

human being. A key fact here is his death. He is "born of a woman" (Gal 4:4). He weeps, he gets angry, he shows compassion and he is deeply distressed at the prospect of his impending death.

On the other hand, the gospels communicate the clear sense that Jesus is more than a mere man. He speaks and acts with God's authority. He claims a unique relationship with the Father. He is charged with blasphemy and eventually executed. Further, scripture never gives the impression that there is more than one Jesus, or that Jesus is divided into parts, one part who suffers and dies, the other part who forgives sins and rises from the dead.

Early on some people got the idea that Jesus would be easier to understand if he had only appeared to be a human being and had not really suffered and died. They found the memory of the Lord's suffering and death embarrassing. This effort to explain away the New Testament's clear memory of Jesus as a human being is probably the oldest and most persistent of Christian heresies. It is called *docetism*.

This belief that Jesus only appeared to be human played havoc with the experience of Christian salvation based on union in faith with Jesus' death and resurrection. If Jesus didn't truly suffer and die, then he couldn't have risen from the dead. The apostolic faith as Paul preached it would have been false. Likewise attempts to better understand Jesus by treating him as a simple human being would have jeopardized both the experience of Christian worship and the need for a power that can transform us in this life and save us from death in the next.

The familiar profession of faith in Jesus as truly God and truly human has now become part of Christian common sense. In order to appreciate it more fully, we will look briefly at the process by which it came about. This involves attention to the first four "ecumenical," or universal, councils of the undivided church before it split into east and west in A.D. 1054. Ecumenical councils are assemblies that represent the whole church and make doctrinal and disciplinary decisions. The first councils came together to settle controversies about who Christ was. They established the ways of speaking about Jesus that we now take for granted in our worship, preaching, and instruction.

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA, A.D. 325

The Council of Nicaea stands at the beginning of a process by which Christianity was transformed from an illicit, sometimes persecuted religion in the Roman empire to the empire's official or established religion. Crucial to this process was the Roman emperor Constantine (d. 337). Constantine came on the scene when the Roman empire, divided into eastern and western halves, was governed collegially by four tetrarchs, one of whom was Constantine's father. The latter's death began his son's rise to power. In 312 Constantine defeated his western rival, Maxentius, and by 324, the year prior to Nicaea, he had become undisputed emperor of a united empire embracing east and west.

Constantine's genuine fondness for Christianity grew in part from his attribution of his victory against Maxentius to the fact that his legions had fought under the sign of the cross. Tradition has it that he had seen a cross in the sky in a dream on the eve of the battle. Although he was not baptized until just before his death, he granted legal status to Christians, supported the church through massive building projects, and financed the copying of the scriptures.

Constantine dreamed of holding his vast and diverse domains together with the religious glue of Christian faith. At the time of his victory in the east, divisions that had arisen during the persecutions of the previous century continued to split the church. In the hopes of healing these divisions Constantine called the church's bishops together at Nicaea in modern-day Turkey near his capital. Constantine's new Rome, Constantinople, would not be ready for dedication until 330. Thus Constantine became the political occasion for Nicaea and its creedal statement about Christ.

Assuming the contemporary experience of separation of church and state and the purely spiritual and interior understanding of Christian faith that it fosters, contemporary readers may be offended at Constantine's involvement in religious affairs. Nevertheless, without reference to the politics of the Roman empire, and the complex of relationships among the political and mercantile centers of Alexandria, Constantinople, Antioch, and Rome, it is impossible to appreciate the cultural intensity of the fourth century Christological controversies.

Arianism

The first chapter of St. John's gospel contributed to Christian devotion and thought the two dominant Christological images of Word (*Logos*) and Son of God. Commented upon by the great Alexandrian master, Origen (d. 254), the fourth gospel occupied a special place in eastern theology, especially at Alexandria.

In the Johannine approach, however, the relationship of the Word, or Logos, to the almighty, or Pantokrator, remained in need of clarification. In John 10:30, for example, Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." A few chapters later, he says, "The Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28). In Alexandrian theology's fusion of the images of Word and Son, the relationship of the Logos to the Pantokrator, of the Son to the Father, remained somewhat fluid and open to an interpretation that subordinated the Logos/Son to the Father, as John 14:28 might suggest. In his teaching on the relationship of the Father and the Son, the Alexandrian pastor, Areios (hereafter Arius, the Latinized and more common form of his name), made this subordinationist tendency radical and explicit. As we shall see below, the Council of Nicaea responded to Arius' teaching with a strong affirmation of the Son's divine status.

Arius' teaching was the immediate occasion for the division Constantine found among Christians. But the roots of division reached back deeper into a controversy over the treatment to be accorded those who had denied the faith during the recently ended persecutions. Arius had softened his position on this question and his Christology gave his opponents an opportunity to attack him.

Near the center of the controversy stood the trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In rejecting Arius' position, the Council of Nicaea used a trinitarian baptismal creed. Arius protested to Constantine his belief in the Trinity, appealing to Matthew 28:19 (Grillmeier, 222). Arius was a well-known pastor and this controversy had to do with how the trinitarian language of the church's public worship was to be understood.

Arius' chief theological concern was to preserve strict mono-

theism. His interpretation of scripture, however, was guided by categories derived from Middle Platonism, a form of Plato's philosophy current at this time. In his *Thalia*, or *Banquet*, a popular work partly in verse, as well as in a creed he wrote around 320, Arius calls the Father the *monad*, or the one. The Word or Son becomes the *dyad*, the twofold or second. In these philosophical categories, however, the Son must necessarily be radically other than and less than the Father. In Arius' verses from the *Thalia*:

> The Father is alien in being to the Son, and he
> has no origin.
> Know that the monad was, but the dyad was not,
> before it came into being.

In the confession of faith cited previously, he made the Son's subordination explicit:

> For he [the Son] is not eternal or as eternal and uncreated
> as the Father, nor does he have identical being with the
> Father . . . thus introducing two uncreated *archai*
> [beginnings].
> Rather, as monad and *arche* of all, he [the Father] is God
> before all . . .

Any more intimate relationship of the Son with the Father would render the Father "composite and divisible and changeable and corporeal." If by definition there can be only one monad, it is left for the dyad (the Son/Logos) to be something less, a creature with a beginning, an angelic, godlike being somewhere between the divine and the human. He is "God's perfect creature, but not as one of the creatures; brought forth but not as others are brought forth" (from the confession of faith). The dyad or Son functions for Arius as an intermediary between the Father and the world. He is like the Demiurge who fashions the world in Plato's *Timaeus*. The Father is so distant that even the Son can know him only with creaturely knowledge. "He [the Father] is inexpressible (even) for the Son" (*Thalia*).

The occasion for the Arian controversy at Alexandria was probably a public disputation over the exegesis of Proverbs 8:22–31, an Old Testament passage about wisdom applied to the Son

and much commented upon at Alexandria (Pelikan, 193). The Hebrew of Proverbs 8:22 reads: "The Lord begot me, the firstborn of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago." Interpretation of the Greek (Septuagint) for *begot* is crucial for the controversy. The Nicaean Creed will offer an interpretation of it at odds with Arius'. On the basis of his Platonic understanding of monotheism, Arius interpreted this verse, along with the opening verses of John's gospel, to mean that the Logos had a beginning—even if it was before time. The main point is that the Logos is not eternal, but a special creature. As Arius put it in one of his verses: "Once God was alone, and not yet a Father, but afterwards he became a Father" (Pelikan, 195). With reference to the Son, Arius would say in his best known verses: "Before he was begotten he was not" or simply "There was when he was not."

The public dispute about the interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 made it clear that Arius did not believe the Son to be God in any true sense. For the sake of worship, the Son could be addressed as God. "He is not God truly, but by participation in grace . . . He too is called God in name only" (Kelly, 229).

Is the Son truly God or God in name only? This is the difference between Nicaea on the one hand and Arius on the other. Arius says the Son is God in name only. The creed says the Son is "true God of true God," "eternally begotten of the Father." What difference does it make? Why should Christians care?

What is at stake are the very experiences of Christian worship and Christian salvation with which we began the chapter. If the Son is a creature and not truly God, then the three centuries of Christian worship preceding Nicaea are a blasphemous fiction. If Arius is correct, Christians break the first commandment and commit idolatry every time they use God's name to call upon Jesus in prayer, every time they baptize in the name of the Son. Because they continued to address prayer and worship to Christ, and to baptize with the trinitarian formula of Matthew 28:19, Arius and his followers were accused of having fallen back into polytheism in spite of themselves. After the council, this argument would be made forcefully by Athanasius (d. 373), champion of Nicaean orthodoxy and bishop at Alexandria for nearly fifty years (Grillmeier, 271).

As for salvation, a creature who had a beginning could not save people from death and transform daily life. Only one who shared the status of the Pantokrator, the creator of all things, had the power to do this. Arius' doctrine, therefore, has the practical consequence of denying the possibility of Christian experience. Because his opponents were certain that this experience was available to them in the church, they rejected Arius' teaching. Apart from an appeal to the fundamental Christian experiences of salvation and worship, the rejection of Arius' doctrine at Nicaea is nothing but an arbitrary exercise of power, a preference for one literarily plausible reading of scripture over another.

Nicaea's Teaching

The bishops at Nicaea wanted to adhere strictly to the language of scripture. But the Arian controversy placed them in the position of having to clarify the sense in which the Logos or Son of John's prologue is "from God." They wanted to interpret "begot" of Proverbs 8:22 in such a way that Christian worship would still make sense. In composing their creed, or symbol of unity in faith, they began appropriately with a trinitarian baptismal creed from one of the local churches, perhaps that of Eusebius of Caesarea. A comparison of the creed with the prologue of John's gospel shows how closely the bishops adhered to the language of scripture. The titles ascribed to the one Lord Jesus Christ (God, light, [only] Son), reference to his role in creation, as well as to the incarnation, all appear in John 1. (See the accompanying chart.)

To this heavily scriptural language they added two clarifying expressions. The first is "only-begotten from the Father" with the clarifying phrase "from the substance of the Father." "Only-begotten" has a possible basis in a variant reading of John 1:18 that, in our present text, calls the Word "the only Son, God." The second clarifying expression is the controversial *homoousion*, translated as "one in being" or "consubstantial" with the Father. Its position after the phrase "begotten not made" indicates its role as clarifying the manner in which the Son is "begotten" or brought forth from the Father.

These two phrases are intended to emphasize against Arius that the Son was not made or created from nothing in the manner

of creatures. Nor did he come from some material and divisible "stuff," such as a physical interpretation of *substance* might suggest. He is "begotten" (Proverbs 8:22) "not made" in such a way that he can be called *homoousion*, or one in being, with the Father. He is brought forth from the Father, "from the substance of the Father," "by a process comparable to natural generation, as opposed to some process of 'making,' like that of God's created works" (Stead, 233). Our present form of the creed further clarifies the manner in which the Son is "from God" by introducing the phrase "eternally begotten."

The combined effect of the two clarifying expressions involving the word *substance* (perhaps *reality* might serve as a synonym), along with the further addition of "eternally begotten," is to lend support to the confession of the faith that the Son is truly God. The Son/Logos is not merely "God from God," as Arius would have been willing to accept, but "true God from true God." The teaching of Nicaea is that the Son is truly God.

Nicaea and the Doctrine of the Incarnation

The doctrine of the incarnation (Jn 1:14) means that God became human in Jesus Christ. The Nicaean Creed establishes the framework in which the incarnation, the Word made flesh of John 1:14, will be subsequently understood. It does this by the way in which it speaks about the "one Lord Jesus Christ." Its language has two important features. First, only *one* Lord Jesus Christ is being confessed in the creed. The second important feature is that two different kinds of things are said about him. On the one hand, he is confessed as "true God" and his role in creation is acknowledged. He is the one "through whom all things came to be." On the other hand, it is this same one Lord Jesus Christ who is said to have become human and to have suffered. Of this one Lord Jesus Christ the creed makes both divine and human claims. This simultaneous presence of unity (one Lord Jesus Christ) and difference (both human and divine activities) will require further elaboration in the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon.

The controversies leading up to Nicaea's affirmation of the divinity of Christ raged among Alexandrian Christians and involved the interpretation of the legacy of Origen, Alexandria's

John 1:1–5, 10–11, 14, 18

In the beginning was the
    Word,
    and the Word was with
    God,
    and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with
    God.
All things came to be through
    him,
    and without him nothing
    came to be.
What came to be through
    him was life,
    and this life was the light
    of the human race;
the light shines in the dark-
    ness,
    and the darkness has not
    overcome it. (1–5)

He was in the world,
    and the world came to be
    through him,
    but the world did not
    know him.
He came to what was his
    own,
    but his own people did not
    accept him. (10–11)

And the Word became flesh
    and made his dwelling
    among us,
    and we saw his glory,

*Nicaean-Constantinopolitan
Creed*

We believe in one God, the
Father, the Almighty, maker
of heaven and earth, of all
that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Je-
sus Christ the only Son of
God, eternally begotten of
the Father, God from God,
Light from Light, true God
from true God, begotten not
made, one in Being with the
Father. Through him all
things were made. For us
men and for our salvation he
came down from heaven: by
the power of the Holy Spirit
he was born of the Virgin
Mary, and became man. For
our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate; he suf-
fered, died, and was buried.
On the third day he rose
again in fulfillment of the
scriptures; he ascended into
heaven and is seated at the
right hand of the Father. He
will come again in glory to
judge the living and the
dead, and his kingdom will
have no end.

the glory as of the Father's
    only Son,
full of grace and truth.
    (14)

No one has ever seen God.
The only Son, God, who is at
the Father's side, has re-
vealed him. (18)

We believe in the Holy
Spirit, the Lord, the giver of
life, who proceeds from the
Father and the Son. With
the Father and the Son he is
worshiped and glorified. He
has spoken through the
Prophets.

We believe in one holy catho-
lic and apostolic Church. We
acknowledge one baptism for
the forgiveness of sins. We
look for the resurrection of
the dead, and the life of the
world to come. Amen.

greatest theologian. Subsequent controversies would bring into
play the diverging perspective of Christians from Antioch in Syr-
ia. Their Christological tradition had a strong sense of the human
freedom of the one Lord Jesus Christ and of his importance as a
moral model for Christians. When they talked about him, they
used terms such as *person* and *nature* differently than they were
used at Alexandria. These two terms would be at the center of
future controversies. Before looking at these developments, how-
ever, we must pause and consider the contribution of the Council
of Nicaea and its creed to the Christian understanding of God as
Trinity.

Nicaea and the Doctrine of the Trinity

The Arian controversy illustrates that one's answer to the
question of whether the Lord Jesus Christ is truly God has a
profound impact on one's understanding of God and God's rela-
tions with the world of which we are a part. To Arius' Platonic
monotheism the creed proposes an alternative of Christian trini-
tarian monotheism with its basis in the liturgical or worship life of

the church. Distinctively Christian prayer does not call upon God as an Arian monad or a deist clockmaker. It calls upon God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the traditional doxology, or prayer of praise, would have it: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

We have seen how Nicaea's response to Arianism used a canonical approach to scripture within the context of the liturgical life of the church where God is called upon in trinitarian terms, e.g. Mt 28:19. Indeed, the Nicaean Creed, in its trinitarian structure, is drawn from the liturgical life of the church. It is an excellent illustration of the relationship between prayer and doctrine. As you pray, so you believe. One of the most powerful arguments against Arius was that his doctrine (the way he believed) contradicted the way he prayed. He could not accept that the latter has a certain priority. As modern people we might be inclined to agree with him.

As you pray, so you believe. In reflecting on this theological maxim, I am reminded of something my eldest daughter said many years ago, just after she had received her first communion. I was reading Hans Küng's *Does God Exist?* (1980) and had left it on the seat of the car. One morning as we got into the car to go off to school, Thea saw the book and read aloud the title's three words. Then she looked up and said something like, "Well, of course God exists. We receive him in communion every Sunday." Though this answer might never satisfy a contemporary, secular inquirer, I remember being struck at the time by its patristic-sounding logic. Beginning from liturgical experience, it is the sort of logic used at Nicaea. When faced with the question of whether the Son was truly God, the council answered something like, "Well, of course the Son is truly God; we have always worshiped him."

Because of our political experience as religiously free people in a denominational pluralism, we tend to think that beliefs are the crucial aspect of religion. The order proposed here (prayer/liturgy precedes and founds formal doctrine) probably strikes the reader as backward. Nevertheless, on the basis of centuries of Christian experience, I make bold to urge the contrary. Formal doctrines such as the Trinity, as well as our theological reflections

on them, have an inevitably secondary or derived character. If this is true, the move from the primary level of worship to the secondary level of doctrine can best avoid drowning in a sea of theological abstraction by clinging mightily to the worship experiences where trinitarian language has its true home.

With all of this in mind, we can consider briefly Nicaea's contribution to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. The council's chief contribution turns out to be its use of the term *homoousion*. As we have seen, its primary purpose was to intensify the claim that the Son is "from God" in a completely unique way, i.e. that the Son is truly God. Having confessed that, however, we must add that the term has implications about the Son's "ontological" status. If the Son is "one in being" with the Father, he is whatever the Father is. In the secondary order of reflection, it didn't take long to become clear that the Holy Spirit had to share the same ontological status and be *homoousion* with the Father and the Son as divine.

The Nicaean Creed had ended simply with "And in the Holy Spirit." A little more than fifty years later, the Council of Constantinople in 381 added the article on the Holy Spirit to Nicaea's brief statement. We have it as preserved in the records of the Council of Chalcedon and it is part of our present "Nicaean Creed."

> We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.

This affirms the divinity of the Holy Spirit understood as "one in being" and coeternal with the Father and the Son. In the creed accepted at Constantinople in 381, the Spirit is said to proceed from the Father. Later in the west, the phrase "and the Son" (*filioque* in Latin) was added. It remains in the creed now in use among Catholics and Protestants. This addition of the *filioque* has been a source of contention between western Christians and the Greek Orthodox.

In his work *On the Trinity*, St. Augustine developed western thinking on the Trinity. He contributed three analogies comparing

the Trinity as one in three to the inner life of the human mind. In the best known of these, the Father is compared to the mind, the Son to the mind's knowledge of itself, and the Spirit to the mind's love of itself.

The insight that ultimate reality is communal rather than individualistic has far-reaching implications for our understanding of ourselves and our relations with the world and God. It offers a relational alternative to a modern view of persons as isolated individuals, separated from one another, from the world, and from the God of deism (more on this God in the next chapter). But even this is relatively abstract.

All such speculative language presupposes the originating experience of Jesus as the Father's Son who sent his Spirit so that disciples would not be orphaned. It further presupposes the witness to this experience in scripture, and its celebration and continuation in the liturgy and life of the church.

In explaining new life in Christ to his disciples in Galatia, Paul spoke in trinitarian terms of the possibility of a new relationship with God that would mean the end of slavery and fear.

> As proof that you are children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God (Gal 4:6–7; compare Rom 8:14–17).

Paul intends this as good news about salvation. Abstractions such as the formula of "three persons in one God" and our simultaneous insistence that the unity of persons is not numerical but one of nature (the doctrine does not absurdly claim that three integers are one integer) lend a small measure of coherence to our reflections about the kinds of experiences Paul describes and the divine reality that makes them possible. But apart from reference to such experiences and their celebration in worship, trinitarian language remains empty and abstract. It is simply a way of teaching that, on the basis of our experience with Jesus, the one God is, and is best spoken of as, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Perhaps the best pastoral presentation of the Trinity remains the creed itself. Recognizing its confessional or worship posture, John Calvin urged that the creed always be sung rather than spoken.

THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS, A.D. 431

Nestorianism

The controversies leading up to the Council of Ephesus had their theological roots in the diverging approaches of Alexandria and Antioch to the mystery of the union of God and the human in Christ. To oversimplify, Alexandrians after the Council of Nicaea tended to emphasize Christ's true divinity. Antiochenes tended to emphasize Christ's true humanity. Each emphasis grew out of a concern with salvation. The Alexandrian side stressed the need for a divine Savior, the Antiochene side stressed the principle that "what is not assumed [by Christ] is not saved." In Antiochene thought, Christ could function much more easily as a moral model. In this controversy, Nestorius, archbishop of Constantinople, represented the Antiochene approach. The Alexandrian approach found its spokesperson in Cyril, archbishop of Alexandria and a follower of St. Athanasius (d. 373).

The controversy's immediate occasion was Nestorius' approval of a sermon by his chaplain in Constantinople in November of 428. Nestorius refused to grant Mary the mother of Jesus the title *theotokos*, or God-bearer. For Cyril this signaled a serious breach of Nicaean orthodoxy. According to the *homoousios*, the creed affirmed that Jesus is whatever God is, one in being with the Father. If this is true, then Jesus' mother Mary must be in some sense the mother of God or *theotokos*. The alternative is some sort of deep division or duality in Christ by which Mary would be the mother of the man Jesus, the Son of David, but not of the divine Word, the Son of God.

In a series of three letters to him, Cyril criticized Nestorius' approach as implying two sons and set forth his own position on the unity of Christ. For Cyril the unity had to be there from the beginning. The human and the divine could not be set next to each other and then united. "For he was not first begotten of the holy virgin, a man like us, and then the Word descended upon him; but from the very womb of his mother he was so united and then underwent begetting according to the flesh . . ." (Cyril's Second Letter to Nestorius in Tanner, I, p. 42).

Nestorius was no match for Cyril either theologically or politi-

cally. He could not defend successfully the characteristic Antiochene concern for a free response from the man Jesus to the Christological union. In Cyril's favor, both Origen of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea had used *theotokos* of Mary. Cyril had the support of both Pope Celestine (d. 432) and most of Nestorius' fellow bishops in Asia Minor.

Nestorius was condemned at Ephesus and replaced as bishop. The council formally decided that Cyril's second letter to Nestorius was in conformity with the Nicaean creed. This meant that giving Mary the title of *theotokos* was consistent with the creed. As Cyril's letter explained of his predecessors:

> So have they dared to call the holy virgin, mother of God [theotokos], not as though the nature of the Word or his godhead received the origin of their being from the holy virgin, but because there was born from her his holy body rationally ensouled, with which the Word was hypostatically united and is said to have been begotten in the flesh (Tanner, I, p. 44).

With the *theotokos*, Ephesus made explicit the oneness of Christ implied in the language of the creed. Cyril and the Alexandrians understood this as a real or "hypostatic" (personal) union of the Logos and the humanity of Christ. The Antiochenes continued to speak of two natures. Since Alexandrians often used this term *nature* to refer to Christ's oneness, the potential for future controversy remained.

BETWEEN EPHESUS AND CHALCEDON, A.D. 431–451

In 433 Cyril and John of Antioch agreed to the "Formula of Reunion." It had been worked out by Antiochene theologians and spoke of Christ as "consubstantial with the Father in respect to his divinity and at the same time consubstantial with us in respect of his manhood. For a union of two natures has been accomplished" (Kelly, 329). Earlier we noted that, following scripture, the Nicaean Creed had spoken of *one* Lord Jesus Christ doing two different kinds of activities, those proper to God and those proper to us. The "Formula of Reunion" uses the terms

person and *nature* to make sense of the way the gospels and the creed speak about Christ. It attributes to him a "unity of person" and a "duality of natures." Alexandria and Antioch were moving closer in their uses of the terms *person* and *nature*. In many ways the "Formula of Reunion" anticipates the Christological definition of Chalcedon. In the meantime, there would be one more serious dispute between the two camps. It arose with a reassertion of Alexandrian (one nature) Christology, which, in its most radical form (monophysitism), virtually ignores the humanity of Christ.

In fifth century Egypt, the patriarch of Alexandria—after Ephesus the archbishops of Alexandria, Constantinople, Rome, and Antioch came to be known as patriarchs—had acquired a stature that has been compared to that of the ancient pharaohs. Cyril's influence attests to this. When Cyril died in 444, he was succeeded by Dioscorus, an ambitious patriarch, intent on stamping out Antiochene influence in the upstart imperial city of Constantinople. In his reassertion of Alexandria's "one nature" formula, Dioscorus found an ally at the imperial court in Eutyches, an aged monk who presided over a large monastery in Constantinople. This "aged and muddle-headed archimandrite" (Kelly, 331) represented Alexandrian Christology in its most extreme form. As a radical monophysite, Eutyches had great difficulty acknowledging the true humanity of Christ. He refused to accept the "Formula of Reunion's" confession that Christ is *homoousios* (consubstantial or one in being) with us. He is said to have compared Christ's humanity to a drop of honey in the sea of his divinity. Eutyches' virtual denial of the true humanity of Christ has come to be called *monophysitism* from the Greek *monos* (one) and *physis* (nature).

In 448 Flavian, patriarch of Constantinople and a supporter of the "Formula of Reunion," presided over a synod that condemned Eutyches' views. A confession of faith that Flavian read at the proceedings marked an important advance in the conflict between Alexandria and Antioch and helped prepare the way for the definition of Chalcedon. Flavian's confession used the *prosopon* of Antioch and the *hypostasis* of Alexandria synonymously to refer to Christ's oneness. "We acknowledge that Christ is from two natures after the incarnation, in one *hypostasis* and one person, confessing

one Christ, one Son, one Lord" (Grillmeier, 534). Eutyches succeeded in turning Flavian's formula into a monophysite slogan: "I acknowledge that the Lord was 'from two natures' before the union, but after the union I acknowledge only 'one nature' " (Grillmeier, 524).

Eutyches' appeals of his condemnation brought Pope Leo the Great, bishop of Rome, into the controversy. When Emperor Theodosius realized the extent of Eutyches' popular support, Flavian found himself out of favor. The emperor wanted a second council at Ephesus, presided over by Dioscorus, to settle this new controversy over Eutyches. Pope Leo responded to the summons to this council with his *Tome to Flavian*, a letter that defended the true humanity of Christ in "two natures" terminology as understood in the west. Using scriptural examples from the story of Jesus' raising of Lazarus in John 11, Leo illustrated how the language of two natures can clarify our understanding of the two different kinds of statements scripture makes about the one Christ. "It does not belong to the same nature," Leo argued, "to weep for a dead friend with emotions of pity and to recall the same friend from the dead with a word of power" (Frend, 767).

Leo also defended the "communication of idioms" or properties by which what belongs to the one Christ in his human nature, e.g. having a mother, can be predicated or said of the Logos and vice versa. Thus we can say that Mary is *theotokos* or mother of God. But Leo's belated intervention was not enough to prevent Flavian's banishment by this "robber council" (Leo's term) of 449 and its rehabilitation of Eutyches.

In July of the next year, Emperor Theodosius was thrown from his horse in a hunting accident and died. Under the influence of Theodosius' sister, Pulcheria, the new emperor, Marcian, was more favorable to Leo. This set the stage for the Council of Chalcedon.

THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON, A.D. 451

The new council met at Chalcedon in October and November of 451 under the emperor Marcian. The council produced a definition that has guided western Christianity's understanding of the

incarnation ever since. The four great Christian centers of Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, and Constantinople each contributed something of their Christologies to the definition. The definition uses the terms *person* and *nature* to bring together the *one* of Alexandria and the *two* of Antioch. It brought some limited conceptual and linguistic clarity to future understanding of the one Lord Jesus Christ confessed in the creed, but spoken about in two ways. The definition excludes both Nestorian and monophysite interpretations of the Christological union.

The definition's basic wording is taken from the "Formula of Reunion." This makes sense. The Formula had been composed by Antiochenes and heartily approved by Cyril of Alexandria. The "two nature" language of the Formula is echoed in the Roman contribution to the definition, Leo's *Tome to Flavian*. The definition also adopts Flavian's use of *prosopon* and *hypostasis* as synonyms, which we translate as *person*. Nestorius had used *prosopon* in a quite different way. Flavian's identification of the terms makes a significant gesture in the direction of Alexandria. Finally, since Eutyches had given a monophysite interpretation to Flavian's "from two natures," the definition speaks of the one Christ as made known "in two natures."

The definition reaffirms the faith of Nicaea and the *theotokos* of Ephesus. Chalcedon, like Ephesus before it, can be read as a commentary on the Nicaean Creed. The definition confesses "One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures." To this are added four qualifying adverbial phrases. The first two, "without confusion" and "without change," exclude the monophysitism of Eutyches, which would have swallowed up Christ's humanity in his divinity. The second two, "without division" and "without separation," exclude the kind of radical duality in Christ which Nestorius was accused of teaching. With the adverbial phrases, the excesses of Alexandria and Antioch are rejected.

The one Lord Jesus Christ is acknowledged "in two natures." One nature is divine. The other is human. The one Christ is confessed to be *homoousios* with the Father respecting his divine nature. Thus, to return to Leo's example, he could raise Lazarus from the dead. He is confessed to be *homoousios* with us, respecting his human nature. Thus he could weep for his friend with

emotions of pity. These two natures are preserved in "one Person and one subsistence [*hypostasis*] not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons."

SUMMARY

The conciliar process we have just reviewed produced an ecumenical consensus by which the one Lord Jesus Christ was confessed as divine (Nicaea), one (Ephesus), and human (Chalcedon). Arianism (the denial of Christ's true divinity), Nestorianism (the division of Christ in two), and monophysitism (the denial of Christ's true humanity) serve as types of three fundamental Christological errors.

To put it as simply as possible, we can say that in the Chalcedonian definition the term *person* or *hypostasis* answers

Council	Said	Against	Which said
Nicaea I (325)	The Word of God is one in being (*homoousios*) with the Father	Arianism	The Word is a creature; "There was when he was not"
Ephesus (431)	Jesus is one; Mary is *theotokos*	Nestorianism	Mary is the mother of the human Jesus but not of the divine Word
Chalcedon (451)	Jesus is one person in two natures, human and divine	Monophysites	Jesus had one nature only, his divine nature, into which his humanity was absorbed

the question *who?* with regard to Christ. The term *nature* answers the question *what kind of?* or simply *what?* These modest conceptual and linguistic boundaries have guided the church in its subsequent preaching, worship, and theology.

THE LIMITS OF CREED AND DOCTRINE

What, then, are we to make of these abstract-sounding creedal formulas that come to us as proclamations about God? All that has gone before suggests that, despite their sometimes abstract form, the primary return we should expect from them is religious rather than intellectual. Creeds and doctrines were not written to answer theoretical philosophical questions nor to carry the weight of the life and worship they presuppose. They were written to be proclaimed—even sung—and taught in assemblies of believers. Apart from this environment, they are like fish out of water.

This is not to deny their cognitive value but to locate it properly. The terms *person* and *nature* from Chalcedon, for example, have little or no value as independent contributions to philosophy. Rather their cognitive value arises out of a particular context and lies in their capacity to clarify the meaning of the Nicaean Creed. The latter, for its part, is intended as a faithful reflection of scripture's language.

Mindful of all of this, as well as of Calvin's insight that the creed is best proclaimed when it is sung, I offer the following four guides. They provide a perspective or context in which creedal confessions can be appropriately approached and doctrines fruitfully interpreted.

1. *Creedal confessions about Christ ought to be interpreted in the context of the experience of Christian salvation.* The Chalcedonian definition is not a theoretical explanation of the incarnation and how it is possible. It is a public confession of faith, worked out in a situation of conflict, and framed so that members of each contending group could recognize their faith in it. The formula of one person in two natures is a way of expressing the foundations in reality for the experience of Christian salvation and Christian worship described at the beginning of the chapter. Apart from this concrete historical context, the idea of an incar-

nate god is simply one among the many examples of a common pattern in the history of religions. If one is living "in Christ," difficulties with "person" in the Chalcedonian sense, however disturbing, will most likely not be enough to dislodge one from the Christian way of life.

2. ***Creedal language has an appeal that transcends the appeal to the imagination***. The Chalcedonian confession is framed in abstract-sounding language. Appreciating Cyril's Logos-centered view of Christ, for example, requires operating at a high level of abstraction that conceives the union taking place prior to Christ's human history. This is difficult in part because our images of the flesh and blood figure of Jesus from the gospels keep intruding. This is the very point of the incarnation, Jesus Christ as the *ikon* or "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15).

It is difficult to use the Chalcedonian language of one person in two natures without imagining one of three images: 1) the bright angelic effulgence of the Alexandrian Logos, 2) the bearded, dusty Palestinian Jew who bled and died on the cross, 3) these two figures somehow united, almost two people. Yet imagining Christ for many Christians is a central part of religious living, indispensable for ordinary forms of prayer and moral living. Imagine the figures of the crucified Christ you have seen, some emphasizing pain and suffering, others emphasizing peace and glory.

As Christian iconoclasts (image breakers) from patristic times to the reformation have realized, there is a certain built-in tension between imagining and the confession of one sovereign God in Christ. More precise or less paradoxical technical language is not likely to dissolve this tension. As iconoclasts have failed to grasp, such tension goes along with our being less than angels. Most contemporary reinterpretations are no less easy to imagine than the formula itself. The creeds offer some direction for our religious imaginings and help to discipline the tendency to proliferate images promiscuously. This sentence from Augustine captures the legitimate discrepancy between what we confess in the creed and what we imagine. "The image of the Trinity is one person, but the supreme Trinity Itself is three persons" (Kelly, 278).

3. ***Creedal statements such as Chalcedon's are best understood as confessional or worship language***. There comes a point in religious life when we must give up imagining and confess the ultimate

inadequacy of our images. When we reach this point, when we move from the posture of imagining or questioning to the posture of worship, creedal language comes into play. While mystery ought not to be invoked lightly or prematurely to stifle questioning, Christians must at some point simply confess their belief in the incarnation as a saving mystery of faith rather than as a technical piece of theoretical knowledge. Though we do not use the Chalcedonian confession in our liturgy or public worship, we do use the western version of the earlier Constantinople creed. Here amid the proclamation of the word and the eucharistic prayer, Nicaea's *homoousios*, however abstract, is at home in a worship context. When we are in church, our primary task is not to ask what it means but to confess it. It gives a certain tone or shape, nuanced by the liturgical context, to the profession of our faith in God.

4. ***Creedal language is to be distinguished from technical philosophical language***. From the point of view of philosophical reason, the greatest difficulty with Chalcedon comes if we assume that we already know what God is and what a human being is. We place them next to each other and then ask how they can possibly be joined in Christ as Chalcedon confesses. This is to miss the point of revelation's claim that in Christ God has made clear to us what God and human beings really are. In order to believe in the incarnation, we must allow it to reshape our ideas of what God is and what a human being is. These two sets of ideas (ours and revelation's) cannot be unrelated. On the other hand, God's good news should surprise us.

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE INCARNATION

One of the surprises implied in the "one person, two natures" formula is that the bodily condition of humanity, with all that embodiment implies, is not so base and worthless that God would not assume it. Even though we are selfish and cruel, though we suffer and die, we are salvageable. Another surprise is that God salvages us not by rescuing us from our bodily or incarnate condition but by taking it on in Christ. Our very condition of being embodied becomes the way God saves us. After the incarnation, we know that we are to look for God not in timeless glimpses of

an angelic eternity, but at particular moments in particular places with their smells and sights, even places like Golgotha.

The image of the Logos or Word from the hymn in John 1 has tended to dominate eastern Christology. Western Christology by contrast has been deeply marked by the image of Christ from the hymn in Philippians 2. Christ "empties himself," fully embracing the human condition. Death on a cross is not excluded from but drawn into this embrace, and God knows the depths of human suffering.

The birth and death of Christ, the mother and child, the crib and the crucifix, with their liturgical counterparts in Christmas and Easter, have been dominant themes in western Christian art. This art has helped to shape unawares our images of Christ. Such images, along with devotional practices such as the stations of the cross and the mysteries of the rosary, have kept alive our sense of Christ's humanity, the reality of the incarnation and all it promises. This sense of the incarnation must be a crucial part of the context for our abstract Christology of person and natures. The incarnation of God in Christ has been one of the most powerful religious symbols in human history. It is the religious center of Christianity, especially in its Catholic form. In its light, other people, our bodies, our history, and every aspect of our world, all become potential icons or manifestations of God. In the sacraments and in the scripture viewed by analogy with the incarnation, this sense is alive in a special way.

Questions for Review and Discussion

1. How is the creedal confession that Jesus Christ is truly God related to the early experience of Christian worship for which we find so much evidence in the New Testament?

2. How is the creedal confession that Jesus Christ is truly God related to the experience of Christian salvation, as we see it, for example, in St. Paul?

3. How is the creedal confession that Jesus Christ is truly human related to the experience of Christian salvation as new life in Christ (day-to-day Christian living), as we see it, for example, in St. Paul?

4. How did Arius and his followers understand the relationship between the Father and the Son/Logos? Explain.

5. Why did those who opposed Arius find his teaching (doctrine) about the relationship between the Father and the Son inconsistent with Arius' own experience of Christian worship? Do you think they were correct?

6. If Arius' theological understanding of the Son/Logos (his Christology) was correct, how would that affect Christian possibilities for new life now and salvation from death?

7. Identify what you think are the four most important words or phrases in the Nicaean Creed and explain how they provide an alternative to Arius' view of the relationship between the Father and the Son.

8. What is the chief contribution of the Council of Nicaea and its creed to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity?

9. What does the title *theotokos* mean? Why didn't Nestorius want to grant it to Mary the mother of Jesus? How was his refusal related to his understanding of Christ's role in the Christian experience of salvation?

10. Why did Nestorius' opponents think that the Nicaean Creed required that Mary be called *theotokos*?

11. Using examples, explain the difference between the approaches of Alexandrian and Antiochene Christians to the Christological union (the union of human and divine in Christ).

12. How did Eutyches understand the Christological union? Why would an Antiochene oppose his understanding? What aspect of the experience of Christian salvation did the monophysitism of Eutyches endanger?

13. What did each of the following contribute to the definition of Chalcedon: Cyril of Alexandria, "Formula of Reunion," Pope Leo the Great, Flavian of Constantinople? Explain.

14. How does the definition of Chalcedon:
    a) build on what came before it,

b) balance the advantages of both Alexandrian and Antiochene approaches,

c) remain faithful to both the experience of Christian worship and the experience of Christian salvation?

15. State in simple form the doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity.

16. If the Nicaean Creed and the definition of Chalcedon are neither theoretical philosophical positions nor appeals to the imagination, how are we to understand them? Where, when, and how are they supposed to work?

For Writing and Reflection

1. The Arian controversy was in many ways an argument about how to interpret scripture. Given Arius' understanding of the Word's (Jn 1) relationship to the Father, write an essay in which you explain how Arius would interpret John 1:1–3 and Proverbs 8:22–23, and how these same two texts would be interpreted from the perspective of the Nicaean Creed. Do you find Arius' interpretations of these passages plausible? Why did the bishops at Nicaea think Arius should accept their interpretations? What were their arguments? What do we learn from the Arian controversy about interpreting scripture at the canonical and traditional levels? (Recall Chapter VI above.)

2. Read Chapter 7 of the Old Testament (deuterocanonical) book of Wisdom. Concentrate primarily but not exclusively on verses 24–26. This was a passage frequently applied to the Son/Logos and commented upon at Alexandria, where the Septuagint version was originally produced. Identify the metaphors in this passage. Write an essay about how these metaphors could be applied to the question of the Father's relationship to the Word/Logos, and to the question of whether the Father's generation of the Word was material or non-material.

For Further Reading

Norman P. Tanner, S.J., ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Volume I. The first 103 pages of this volume contain all the

primary documents, in translation and in the original languages, of the councils discussed in this chapter.

Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Volume I of *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, translated by John Bowden (second revised edition; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975). This is an indispensable but difficult and technical work. Unless otherwise indicated, all the quotations from Arius in the chapter are from pp. 224–228 of this work.

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, Volume I of *The Christian Tradition, A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971). This initial volume of Pelikan's now complete great work is clearly written with generous citations from primary sources.

J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (revised edition; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). A book much like Pelikan's above. It is very clearly written and integrates the primary sources very well into the text.

W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). This is a history of Christianity rather than of Christian doctrine. It is very valuable for contextualizing the three councils treated in this chapter. It reads very well, and Frend is quite comfortable with the theological aspects of Christian history.

Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). This is the most technical and inaccessible of the works listed here. It is an important and thorough study of how the key term *substance* was understood and used in the centuries before Nicaea. Chapter XIII deals with the word *homoousios* and Chapter IX with the phrase "from God's substance" from the creed.

Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987). This work is included primarily because of its interesting, revisionist portrayal of Constantine as both Christian and even theologian. Compare Grillmeier's portrayal of Constantine in Chapter III.

Gerald O'Collins, *Interpreting Jesus* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1983). A clearly written survey of classical and contemporary Christology.

Terms To Identify

Christology

Arius (Arianism)

Nestorius (Nestorianism)

ecumenical council

Trinity

docetism

Constantine

Nicaean Creed

homoousios (on)

theotokos

Pantokrator

Eutyches

monophysitism

incarnation

Flavian (Constantinople)

Pope Leo the Great

"Formula of Reunion"

Tome to Flavian

Cyril of Alexandria

Dioscorus

Athanasius

Chapter IX

The Historical Jesus

MODERN SUSPICION OF CLASSICAL CHRISTOLOGY

Until the beginning of the age of reason (ca. 1650), Christology retained the classical form described in the previous chapter. Theologians interpreted scripture and conducted their discussions in the light of the creedal confessions of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. Most leaned more to the Alexandrian than to the Antiochene side. Protestant reformers correctly urged renewed stress on Christ's saving work rather than a narrow focus on abstract questions about his identity. Popular devotion kept alive a strong sense of Christ's true humanity. The modern period brought to western civilization a massive cultural and intellectual shift. It would challenge the very idea of revealed religion and subject the historical foundations of Christianity's claims to searching and often hostile scrutiny.

In this chapter, we will consider some of the cultural changes that gave rise to "critical history" in general and to the "historical criticism" of the New Testament in particular. Dramatic changes occurred almost simultaneously in the cultural areas of politics, science, philosophy, historical study, and religion. A new spirit came upon the elites of Europe. After a brief taste of that spirit, we will review the results of its application to New Testament study in what has come to be called the "quest for the historical Jesus." Finally, we will consider the difficult situation into which this quest had placed educated Christians at the beginning of the twentieth century.