

## 6.1 As with Christ, As with Us

To restate our premise in continuing to look at the struggle to understand Christ. We have the two Christological legs that we stand upon. St. Gregory the Theologian's "whatever is not assumed is not healed." And St. Athanasius the Great: 'God became man that man may become god.' ...that He became man that man may become god. That he incarnated man that man may incarnate God. So whatever we say about him we say about Him has implications to us. And the way we test that is to see how the mistakes that have been made about Him have affected us.

Florovsky sees our view of Christ and man and talks about the tendency, when either moves from the biblical/ patristic foundation towards either overemphasizing the human or the divine natures of Christ - which leads to the mistakes of anthropological maximalism or minimalism. *Maximalism* being an overemphasis of the human/physical, and *minimalism* being a de-emphasis of the human/physical, which is to say, an overemphasis on the spiritual.

It is important to note that in the same way our view and approach to the Eucharist informs and affects our view of Christ, and affects our view of the Eucharist; our view of Scripture also will have a huge impact on the way we view and approach Christ. We've seen modern examples of this in the physical-less, Eucharist-less Christian groups that have literally eliminated the physical from the faith and are utterly bodiless.

Whether they be *rational*, as with the minimalist Evangelicals (it's all in their head), or *spiritual* like the minimalist Charismatics' use of 'gifts' apart from holiness (the body just the vehicle for the gifts) ...or those minimalist Orthodox who disconnect holiness from the efficacy of Eucharist, holy oil and water, sacraments, etc. (believing they have power apart from our faith).

On the other side of that, we see the tendency of maximalism of those (primarily RC and Orthodox) who approach the Eucharist and sacraments (the physical) to the detriment of the spiritual – as an end in themselves. Which manifests itself in either just doing the right thing morally in legalism, or the right thing in worship in ritualism...again, as an end in itself.

In the same way, our view of Christ will determine our view of the Scriptures – and vice-versa – our view of Christ will be distorted if we have a wrong view of the Scriptures. Which can be seen clearest in the anthropological maximalist or minimalist struggle of the fourth century. A time of crucial formation to the understanding of who Christ is – and therefore who *we* are. I should say here, another way to look at this that I find helpful is to see it in terms of immanence or transcendence.

Immanence is God here with us in His divine energies. The impassible God dwells in passible man. Transcendence speaks to the nature of God as impassible, God separated from His creation by nature. The transcendent nature of God is experienced in the uncreated energies of His immanence.

Immanence and transcendence are available to us in Christ – now especially through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost. With God in us in our humanity (coming into our humanity) we can access the kingdom of God within us. What does that mean? It means we experience the transcendent God/eternity, in this life – in this life – in the present.

Anthropological maximalism, overly emphasizing the humanity of Christ, and therefore our humanity, blocks our experience of transcendence and we become stuck, as it were, in our humanity. Leading to an over emphasis of the physical, the morally legal, the rituals, as ends in themselves. Anthropological minimalists overly emphasize the divine nature of Christ and transcendence at the expense of the experience of His immanence...of Him being here, now with us. Which will cause us to spiritualize the physical and weaken our access to God's immanence.

In the fourth and fifth Centuries there was (already by that time) historic tension between Antioch and Alexandria. The source of the tension was their different approach to biblical interpretation. The Alexandrians emphasised the allegorical and spiritual meaning of the text, while the Antiochians emphasized the literal, historic approach. And it was causing them to form a different approach and view of Christ – and therefore themselves. As Kelly notes, *“there developed a tendency in Alexandria to emphasize the divine nature of Christ over his humanity, and in Antioch they tended to emphasize the humanity of Christ over His divine nature.”*

In other words, the Alexandrian school of biblical interpretation tended towards anthropological minimalism and transcendence at the expense of the experience in Christ of immanence. ...of His uncreated light. This would result in Gnosticism and Apollinarianism that we talked about, and Monophysitism that we will talk about.

The Antiochian school of biblical interpretation tended towards anthropological maximalism and the experience of immanence to the point of blocking the experience of transcendence. This is seen in Arianism and Nestorianism.

#### d. Nestorians

In the same way we saw the Gnostics and Apollinarians overstate the spiritual (divine nature) of Christ at the expense of His Human nature, the Nestorians will blur the *Communicatio Idiomatum* of Christ (also called ‘hypostatic union’), in distorting His humanity by attributing to Him to have two subjects (to be, as it were, two people in one person). Nestorius had several teachers before him prepare the way for this heresy, but he is the one, as the Patriarch of Constantinople who made the greatest impact – to the extent that they had to call a third Ecumenical Council in 431 (in Ephesus) to deal with it.

Nestorius was fine with his countryman Theodore of the Antiochian school of Scripture interpretation and theology teaching, *“He (Christ) struggled to overcome passions and even lust...only in death does he attain*

*'perfect unity and inalterability in thoughts.'*<sup>1</sup> And as Florovsky notes, he was likewise influenced by Theodore who saw Christ as a man who *"...in a heroic feat achieved God-man-hood with the aid of God, through good will and grace."*<sup>2</sup>

Nestorius was not the first one to question the title "Theotokos" for the mother of Christ, Theodore taught before him, *"it was not God the Logos who was born of woman but he who was formed in her by the power of the Holy Spirit."* He further states, *"it is folly to say that God was born of a virgin."*<sup>3</sup> It must be re-iterated that he was not teaching the Logos was not divine. Rather, he agreed with Theodore's teaching that the separation between Christ's humanity and divinity is such that when he speaks of Christ, he speaks of **two subjects** that can only be interpreted as **persons** rather than **natures**, existing in Christ different from that which any of the Fathers up to this time had, or ever would, teach. But again, the reason Nestorius was so strongly blamed for this teaching is because he held the (even then), almost unequaled position in the Church as the Patriarch of Constantinople, and was therefore more responsible.

I think it will be helpful at this point to look at the diagrams the various Christologies and see how these relate to on another ...and how they inform our views today.

## PATRISTIC / ORTHODOX CHRISTOLOGY

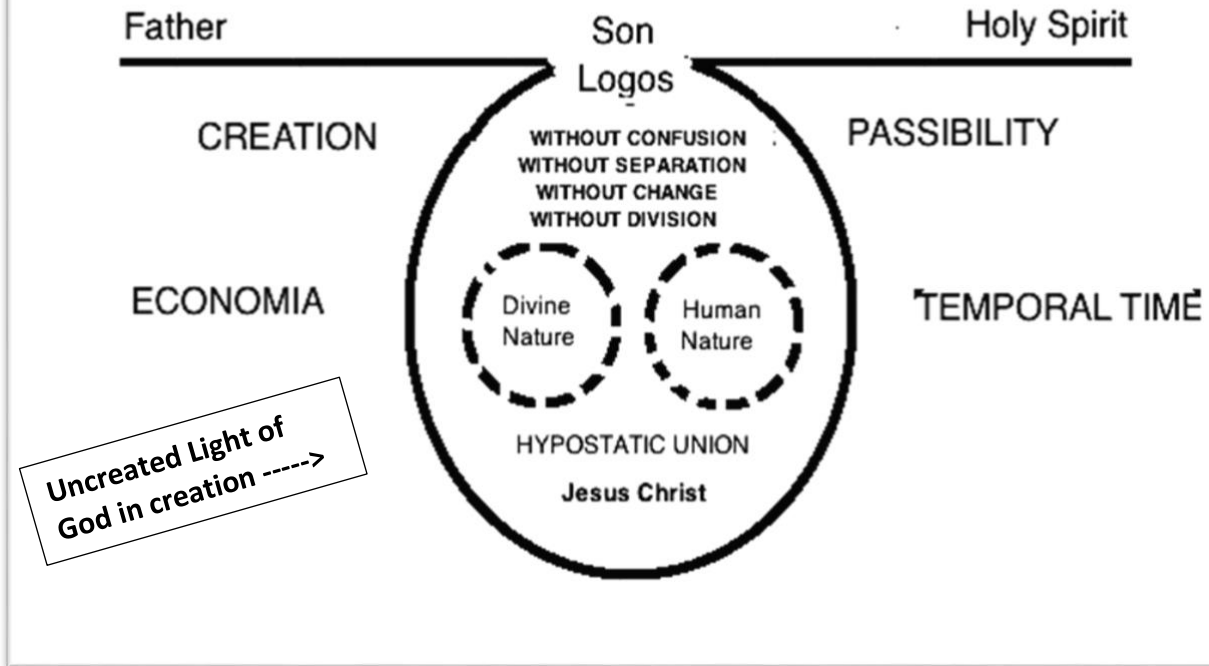
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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.* pg.139

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* pg.140

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* pg. 140

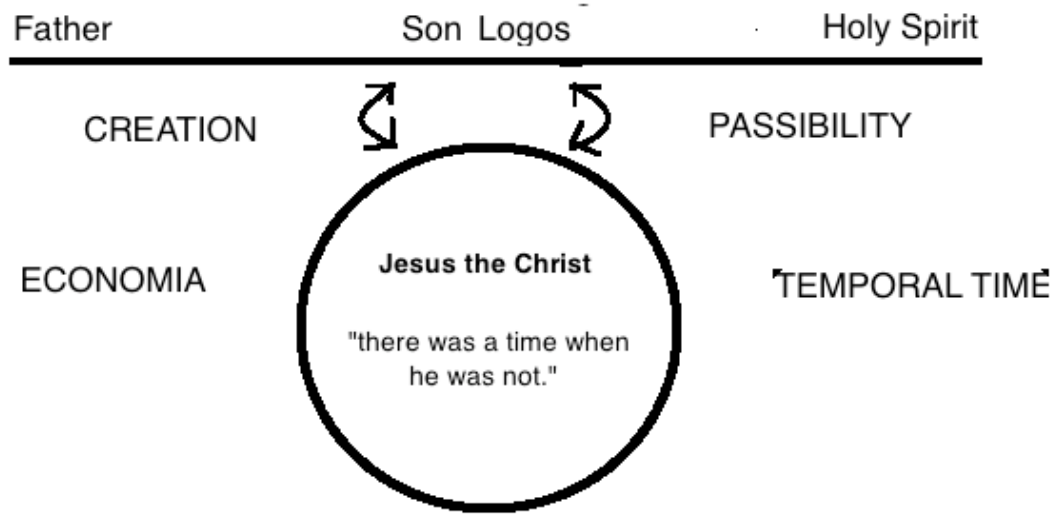
TRINITY - GOD IN HIMSELF  
(Impassible / Eternity (Theologia))



Modern day Jehovah's Witnesses are close to Arians, but they completely deny the Trinity

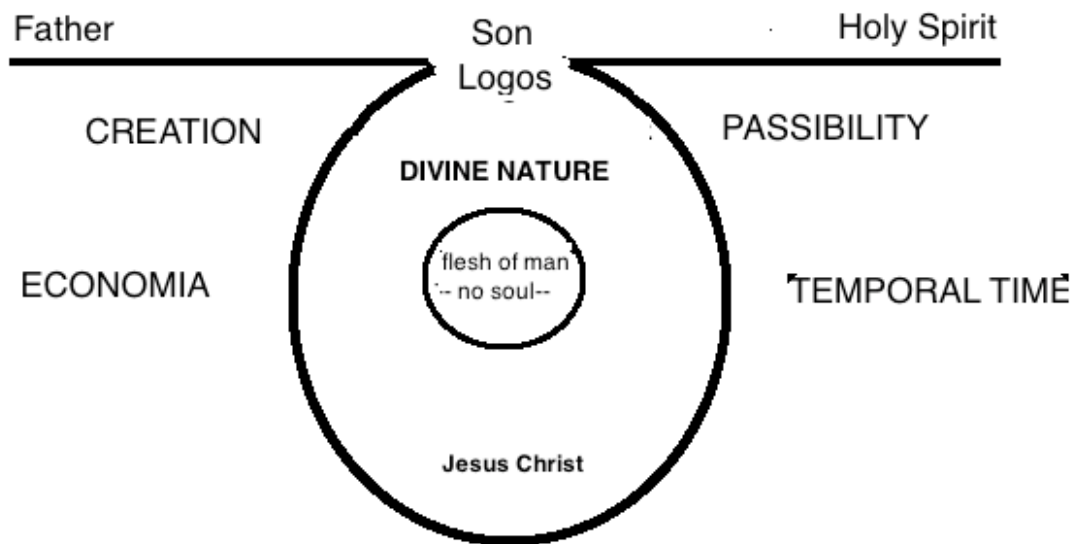
**ARIANISM**

TRINITY - GOD IN HIMSELF  
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**APOLLINARIANISM**

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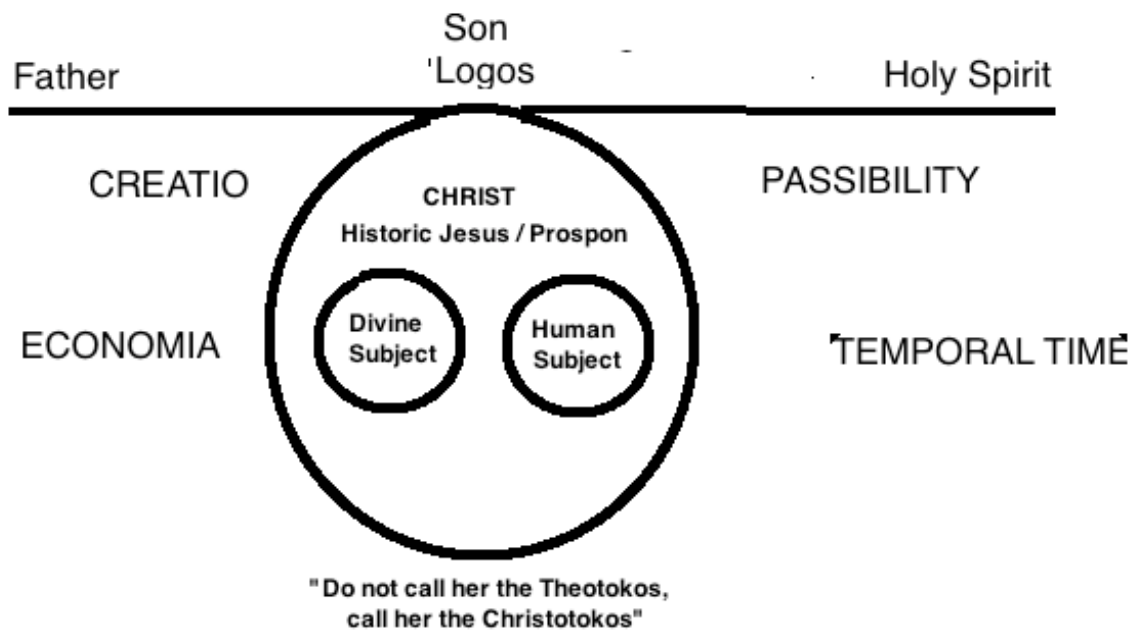


*“The Word was the sole life of the God-man, infusing vital energy and movement into Him even at the purely physical and biological levels.*

Christ's humanity in the Apollinarian schema is clearly not as ours – violating St. Gregory's foundation/revelation that 'whatever (of our humanity) is not assumed (by Christ) – is not healed.' Where John tells us 'The word became flesh' Nestorians interpret it: *as far as it "appeared"* (το δοκειν), *the Word became flesh*, for to the Apollinarians, the "Word becoming flesh" would cause the impassible nature of God to be connected to something not God – man; which his very impassibility makes impossible.

## NESTORIANISM

TRINITY - GOD IN HIMSELF  
(Impassible / Eternity (Theologia))



Nestorius took up the conviction of his teachers (Diodore and Theodore) and taught against the use of the term Theotokos based on that fact that, as the humanity of the Incarnate Logos was so stringently separated from his divinity, it was more Christologically correct in his to refer to her as the mother (or bearer) of Christ: "Christotokos." As he said: "let us employ an expression which is more guarded, I mean the expression of the Gospel "Christ is born" or the "Book of the birth of Jesus Christ"...we confess Christ to be God and man, for of the two was born Christ in the flesh...then call Mary Christotokos in the union."<sup>4</sup>

We can clearly see from his comment that Mary birthed no part of God – it was **all man**. In fact, the idea of her giving birth to God was to them absurd and offensive. It was soon after this point (about 427/8) that news of it reached St. Cyril in Alexandria and the struggle would soon begin. He would refer to this as "the scandal of the household of the Church."

<sup>4</sup> Florovsky, G. *Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*, pg.145

#### e. St. Cyril in Alexandria

St. Cyril simply referred to Christ as one person in two natures

*“...We must understand our Lord Jesus Christ in one person (προσωπον). As the Word he is divinely born before all ages and times...but in these last times was born of a woman according to the flesh. To the same one we attribute both the divine and human characteristics.”<sup>5</sup> And again he uses the term in this way: “He (Christ) is the one and only son, not one along side another son, considered in this way to be one person...”<sup>6</sup>*

Nestorius response was to dismiss Cyril as having, *“a spirit sick with the madness of Apollinaris and Arius.”<sup>7</sup>* It is very clear from the beginning that while they are taking different approaches the difference is much more than approach - they are very real – and very fundamental. Little wonder they view one another as heretical. The central issue is not the term Theotokos – that is the product of the issue. The central issue is the context and attributes of the divine and human properties of Christ.

As previously noted, Nestorius views the properties of Christ as individual, differentiated prosopa (προσωπα), “subjects” rather than natures, and he speaks of this approach as “prosopic,” and again, when combined (in Christ) they form a single prosopon (προσωπον) - person. What he is attempting to do, as noted previously, is to isolate the impassible divinity and passible humanity into a single person. But the only way he can do that without the impassible mixing with the passible is to separate them to into two subjects – which means it really is bi-personhood.

For Nestorius and the Antiochans, Christ was a man that had the divine impassible God within him, and as such he was the man *with* God, or as Cyril would say of their belief: “ανθρωπος θεοφορος, a man *chosen* by God, and not God Incarnate.” Because of the rigid separation of the two subjects, Nestorius did not say, and would not say, *the Word became flesh*, that the flesh of Christ, his humanity, experienced any aspect of divinity. In his words:

*“wherever mention is made of the Lord’s economy, the birth and the sufferings are not passed down to us as applied to the Godhead, but to the manhood,”<sup>8</sup>*

What Cyril was in fact teaching, was a clarification of the Patristic interpretation of the bible’s teaching about Christ...He says:

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<sup>5</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, pg. 133

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* pg. 83

<sup>7</sup> McGuckin. *Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy*, pg.366 (from the Second Letter of Nestorius to Cyril).

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* 366

*“Godhead is one thing, manhood quite another. So what are those things which we say have come into unification? One cannot speak of things ‘united’ when there is only one thing to start with; there must be two or more...but they are not separated...in terms of individual distinctiveness, so that they exist apart and distant from one another. On the contrary they are brought together into an indissoluble union, for as John says: ‘the Word became flesh.’”<sup>9</sup>*

The word Nestorius uses to describe the relationship of the properties of Christ is very telling: “*conjunction*,” which is in stark contrast to St. Cyril’s use of the term “*union*.” This is another very consistent and significant difference between them. For Nestorius the “*subjects*” are conjoined in the “*person*” of Christ. As it implies, they are together but rigidly separate.

For St. Cyril however, there is a union of the natures within the one person that was expressed as - a union according to hypostasis, or “Hypostatic Union” as it would come to be known.<sup>10</sup> He also employed other phrases clearly meant to convey the richness and complexity of the Hypostatic Union, such as: “*one out of two*,” and “*of two different things, of two complete things*.”<sup>11</sup> And so from this we have the “*what*” of the incarnation, of the Logos becoming flesh; the communion of properties is a hypostatic union of the natures of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ.

**St. Cyril of Alexandria:**

“The Logos suffered impassibly”

“The whole mystery of the incarnation is in the condescension and humility of Christ.”

“His humanity belongs not to itself but to the Logos.” “...And to the Logos alone can be attributed the authorship of and responsibility for, all (Christ’s) actions.”

“And, with this earthly body, which had become the body of the Logos, he was at once God and man, and combined in himself what was by nature divided and separated.”

“He who was God by nature should, in the act of self emptying, assume everything that went along with it. This is how he would be revealed as ennobling the nature of man in himself by making it participate in his own sacred and divine honors.”

“..one out of two”

“...of two different things”

“...of two essences”

<sup>9</sup> Florovsky, G. *Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*, pg.77

<sup>10</sup> Early in the debate he used Μία φύσις του Θεου Λογου σεσαρκωμενη; the one incarnate φύσις of God the Word. Much of course has been made of this axiom because Monophysites would later use it to substantiate their belief in a single divine nature of Christ. However Cyril explained the use of the term and later abandoned it for the concept he meant to convey from the beginning: one person – υποστασις

<sup>11</sup> Florovsky, G. *Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*, pg.188, 191



**“He (Cyril) starts from contemplation and not ideas. Here is where his power lies.”  
- G. Florovsky**

### St. Cyril’s Terminology

Communicatio Idiomatum	Communion of properties”
Impassible/Impassibility	The absolute “otherness” and separation of God by nature from all that is not God
Passible/passibility	The state of all creatures to be affected by conditions outside themselves
God-in-Himself	The impassible nature of God within the Holy Trinity. Used by Cyril to explain how the Trinity remained impassible while Christ as the Logos suffered and died
God-in-man	Cyril’s phrase to explain how Christ as God suffered & died
Ousia (ουσια)	The essence of God, the term was used as “nature” or “substance,” “genus.” Usually in context of the Trinity
Hypostasis (υποστασις)	Used early as “nature.” Cyril will replace physis with this as “the actual concrete reality of a thing” or existence.”
Prosopon (προσωπον)	Historically used as “face/ mask,” Nestorius uses as “the observable character,” or “defining properties” with non-ontological “mask” connotation
prosopa (προσωπα)	Nestorius’ term for the individual subjects within the prosopon - divided into “divine” and “human.”
Henosis (ενωσις)	“Union.” Cyril’s term for the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ
kenosin (κενωσιν)	“Self emptying” of the Logos to become true man while remaining God
Two Subjects	Implication of Nestorius’ teaching of two prosopa, bi-personhood of Christ
“God bearing Man”,	Condemned teaching of Nestorius to separate the divinity and humanity of Christ into separate subjects, “God in Temple”
Christotokos	

<sup>12</sup> Μια φύσις του Θεου Λόγου σεσαρκωμένη: the one incarnate φύσις of God the Word. Much of course has been made of this axiom because Monophysites would later use it to show Cyril taught a single, divine, nature in Christ. However He explained the use of the term and later abandoned it for the concept he meant to convey from the beginning: one person (υποστασις) of God the Word incarnate.

<p>Ἀνθρωποκος “bearer of man”</p>	<p>Term adapted by Nestorius to show Logos remained “Christ bearer”- ontologically separate from man</p>
<p>Hypostatic Union</p>	<p>Nestorius’ preferred term for Christ, also to avoid popular term “Theotokos “God bearer”</p> <p>Cyril’s term for the ontological union of divine and natures in human Christ, the Logos of God</p>