

7. The Calcedonian Solution

In order to appropriate the history of Christian thought and living, we 21st Century Christians have to criticize all attempts to understand the Trinity as a picture of heavenly persons. This mystical reasoning was done within what is now a strange, ancient two-story manner of thinking. Such heavenly talk has come to an end as a viable symbology for a Next Christianity. To communicate anything meaningful today, we must begin with our own human experience. Thinking in that way, the Trinity can be described as a threefold-shining-through within our temporal experience of our realization of the Eternal. This can be done in a way that will illuminate the meaning of the struggles of the second to fourth century Church with the twofold nature of Jesus Christ and with the threefold nature of the overall Godhead. Without a huge transformation in our thinking about these primal matters, the stormy Church councils of those early centuries are cryptic beyond all bounds of understanding with our current sensibilities.

Here is a shorthand version of how these triune dynamics can be seen from the perspective of our everyday human experience. Instead of imagining three persons or faces of God in a heavenly place, we can describe these three dynamics as three faces of one experience here on Earth: (1) Face one is our experience of the Awesome Ultimate Mystery, the Void out of which all things come and all things return (the Father Almighty). (2) Face two is that part of humanity who is having this Awe experience (the fleshly Offspring of the Ultimate – the Body of Christ) (3) Face three is the various states of Awe taking place within the Awed community that is beholding the Eternal Awesomeness (that is, the Holy Spirit of Trust, Love, and Freedom, also described as the courageous heart of hope, the peace beyond understanding, the joy unspeakable, and other qualities).

For three and a half centuries these dynamics were described and intensely argued about within that now obsolete mythical-heavenly fashion that was derived from both ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek origins. Finally, in 451 CE these arguments were more or less resolved in a creed that was adopted at the Fourth Ecumenical Council, held at Chalcedon, located in what is now Turkey. Below is a literal English version of that creed. Followed each section of the creed is my 21st Century translations into an experiential language appropriate for our times.

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man,

As a reality that can be experienced by us, “The Son our Lord Jesus Christ” means the community of those who manifest profound humanness. We who access our profound humanness are the Body of Christ. “Jesus Christ” means a community of human beings, not merely a first century Galilean with a big title. Jesus was an ordinary man in human history who became viewed as Christ by a community of ordinary men and women who saw themselves as the resurrected Body of Christ. They were the resurrection of Jesus, so everything they said about Jesus Christ they were saying about themselves (that is the true aspect of themselves that went along with their sin of separation from that essential humanness). They did not claim perfection in their manifestation of the Christ nature, but they did claim some experience of that perfection.

We who comprise today this community of the Christ Body (by whatever religious means or lack of one) participate with Jesus, the Christ, in this perfect humanness and perfect Eternalness. And it is through this participation that we are able to say what is

so about Jesus Christ. In our essence we are, like Jesus, a mysterious being – as mysterious as the Wholeness of Being is mysterious. In accessing our true being, we share in the true mysteriousness of that Every-thing-ness in which all things mysteriously coexist. Again, this does not mean that we manifest this profound humanness perfectly. We do not even know historically if Jesus of Nazareth manifested this profound humanness perfectly. Nevertheless, we can say that this profound humanness, to whatever extent it is manifest, is perfect in humanness and perfect in Eternalness as the Creed says.

of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood;

Experiencing our profound humanness does not do away with also experiencing the presence of our body, a mind, a consciousness, a personality, or a self image. We are not two persons. Rather these temporal dynamics coexist with our Awesome Holiness of Trust, Love, Freedom, Peace, Joy, Courage, that cannot be accounted for within the physical-biological-social scope of things. We are both a biological evolvement on this planet and a citizen of that Mysterious “Land” that is the “Source” and “Tomb” of all finite things.

in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation,

Profound humanness is without estrangement (sin), and in that sense profound humanness is perfection, a perfection that no particular human being can fully claim. The Jesus Christ image is a picture of our own humanness in its perfection. I repeat we cannot know whether or not Jesus, the individual human, ever reached such perfection or never departed from it. There can be no historical knowledge about such a topic, but “Jesus Christ” means more than a historical person. “Jesus Christ” is a symbol, a sort of fiction about profound humanness, about a mysterious dynamic of the cosmos. The earliest Christians claimed to have seen this perfection manifested in Jesus, and drew from that experience the “Jesus Christ” image of the perfection that is viewed to be the true being of every human. This perfection, so the Johannine story goes, preceded the creation of the cosmos. In that sense, profound humanness precedes our birth, precedes the evolution of our species, precedes the Big Bang. Profound humanness is an Eternal dynamic which is, nevertheless, given to us to participate in here and now. If that seems paradoxical, it is because it IS. Nevertheless, it IS the truth of Christian experience.

And this perfection is not something we individual humans need to create or achieve. This perfection is the “true me” which appears when my estrangement from the “true me” is evaporated. So Jesus, as the appearance of that perfection among us, operates as our healer (our salvation) awakening us to that perfection, establishing in us that perfection, and calling us to the task of awakening this perfection of true humanness in others. If we are going to use language like “perfection” and “true humanness” we must remain clear that this perfection is not a human accomplishment nor something to be possessed and bragged about. It is a moment-by-moment rescue from our self-inflicted estrangements by that Almighty Realty in relation to “whom” that perfection exists.

born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood;

This means that when we enter our profound humanness, we too are Virgin born of Final Reality. Profound humanness was given with our birth, our mother is also the

Mother of God. We might even add that our Father is the Father of God according to our manhood or womanhood. Such a heretical sounding statement need not contradict the deeper truth of the Virgin Birth myth that Final Reality is the Father and Mother of our Virgin birth, provided of course that we have indeed experienced a birth into our “divinely” posited profound humanness.

one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

All these many rejections of what is not true about profound humanness can be summed up in this single sentence: *When we enter our profound humanness we lose nothing of our ordinary humanness.* We do not become two persons in one body. We become our true person who is both fully ordinary and fully extraordinary at the same time. Furthermore, the “extraordinariness” is nothing more than our true ordinariness with which we are created. So we might even say that it is our fall into estrangement that is the truly “extraordinary” state – a grim addition to our created norm, or a tragic subtraction from our glorious authenticity.

These considerations are not a mere theory, (that is, one opinion as opposed to other opinions); rather the Christian claim was then and needs to continue being that we can experience this profound humanness – that it is being experienced by humans in every part of planet and within every time period of the past, present, or future. We can become now, today, both God and human, both Final Reality’s Offspring and the offspring of this historical, temporal, blood-drenched biological process that goes back to single-celled life popping into play on planet Earth.

And it is important for us to remain clear that becoming “Godly” as participants in the authentic Christ Body does not mean that our finite personhood becomes the Power that posits, sustains, limits, and ends all temporal beings. It does mean, however, that being a participant in both finitude and Eternity, we become a family member with that invincible Power that is our God. We share in the Final Truth of that Final Mysteriousness, manifested in our lives as a Final Certainty, a Final Freedom, a Final Healing that can unravel all that ails our deeply depraved state of humanity. It is this kind of truth that was at stake in the early Church Councils.

In our era of Post-Platonic, Post-Aristotelean, existential experience, we can understand anew the Christian Trinity with some astonishing simplicity – three faces of one experience. Here is a minimalist summation of what those three faces are:

FACE ONE: The Awesome as the Enigmatic Almightyness within Historical Encounter

FACE TWO: The Awed Ones as the Enigmatic Wonder of Human Historical Response

FACE THREE: The Awe Itself as the Enigmatic Spirit of Timeless Presence in Time

I will illustrate these three Faces of the Eternity experience in Chapter 13 with a thoroughgoing existential (i.e. personal) exposition. But before I do that, I will continue an overview of some key turning points in the history of Christianity. I will examine four of those turning points each associated with a key person: Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Søren Kierkegaard. These turning points were

accomplished by more than one person. There was much build up before each of these named persons lived, and there was much follow up after them. Nevertheless, these four creative persons are appropriate symbols for these turning points.

Also, we can discern dozens of other turning points in the history of Christianity, but these four are massive in nature, and they teach us important lessons for a viable future for Christian practice. Christianity is a religious tradition and practice that has undergone massive turning points before; so we need not be surprised to find ourselves in another of those massive turning points now.