

## Christ and Chalcedon: Nature, Minds, and Pluralism

On October 22, 451 A.D., the Church Fathers agreed on the orthodox teaching about Christ having two natures. It is this confession that the Christian Church has embraced throughout the centuries as that which most cogently expresses the biblical notion of the Incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. The Chalcedonian Confession is quoted here for convenience.

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance [*homoousios*] with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer [*Theotokos*] one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized IN TWO NATURES, WITHOUT CONFUSION, WITHOUT CHANGE, WITHOUT DIVISION, WITHOUT SEPARATION; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person [*prosopon*] and subsistence [*hypostasis*], not as parted or separated into two persons [*prosopa*], but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and as our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has delivered to us.<sup>1</sup>

It is this confession I will seek to defend in this paper against John Hick's non-literal view of the incarnation. Hick claims the "orthodox task is to spell out in an intelligible way the idea of someone having both a fully divine nature, i.e. having all the essential divine attributes, and at the same time a fully human nature, i.e. having all the essential human attributes."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Hick believes that the Chalcedonian formula is a "mystery rather than a clear and distinct idea," and that it is "not a divine mystery but one that was created by a group of human beings."<sup>3</sup> The fact that it was a group of human beings has no bearing upon its truthfulness (ad hominem). The points I will challenge are: 1) Chalcedon is "created" rather than a deduction from inspired apostolic teaching; and 2) Chalcedon is unintelligible as to how Jesus of Nazareth could have both human and divine attributes simultaneously. I will address this second concern first.

### *Coherence and Chalcedon*

Hick's charge against Chalcedon is that it is incoherent to maintain that one person may have all the necessary divine and human properties at the same time. Borrowing from Spinoza, Hick writes: "for to say, without explanation, that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that this circle drawn with a pencil on paper is also a square." And, Hick states that "squareness and roundness . . . cannot both characterize the same plane figure."<sup>4</sup> The doctrine of the incarnation is not, however, a matter of fitting different shapes into the same space. To say that God cannot incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth because Hick doesn't understand how this could be, is to say a great deal about both God and humans. For one thing, Hick is implicitly saying that God and humans are mutually exclusive beings. Though it is true God is ontically distinct from his creation, it is not logically impossible for

both ontologies to reside in one person. If God was indeed incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, then, regardless of human comprehension, that is what God could and did do.

However, it would appear that Hick is confusing categories, viz., numerical identity versus ontological identity. At Nicea (325 A.D.) Athanasius fought relentlessly for the notion of "consubstantiality" between the Father and the Son. That is, there is a numerical unity of substance (hence, *homo-ousious*) between God the Father and God the Son, yet the Father is not numerically identical with the Son. The seemingly logical absurdity that Hick insists upon is better understood in terms of "mystery" whereby the definitive locus for knowing God is in Jesus of Nazareth, though our understanding cannot fully comprehend it. Nevertheless, the idea of mystery is, by no means, sufficient to satisfy everyone, Loughlin reminds us that:

[mystery] does not say how God was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. But it is a non sequitur to suppose that, because one cannot say how Jesus was and is the mystery of God with us and for us, one must deny that he was and is the mystery of human redemption and salvation. Human infirmity does not render the doctrine of the incarnation meaningless.<sup>5</sup>

The doctrine of the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth would be a logical absurdity if one were to assert that Jesus both had the essential attributes of deity and, at the same time, did not have the essential attributes of deity. However, the position which upholds the Chalcedonian confession is that some of Jesus' attributes were divine and some were human. Contradictory statements are not the same as complex propositions, or sub-contrary relationships. An example of contradiction would be to assert that all of the people in the world are rich and, at the same time, claim that some of the people in the world are not rich. An example of a sub-contrary proposition would be to assert that some of the people in the world are rich and that some of the people in the world are not rich. As for the circle-square analogy, the response by Gordon Lewis merits repeating.

As a circle encompasses a square the two figures together form a more complex geometrical design. The whole complex pattern has two natures with both the attributes of the circle and the attributes of the square. We need not contradict ourselves in reference to the complex design if we affirm that some of the attributes of the complex design are those of a circle and some those of a square. The holistic unity of the design is not thereby divided. The two "natures" need not be confused. The circle remains a circle; the square within it remains a square. The one, "circle-square design" has two distinct natures. We can speak without contradicting ourselves of their essential differences as subcontraries.<sup>6</sup>

Given the biblical doctrine of the triune God (three distinct persons in one divine essence), Chalcedon affirms that Jesus of Nazareth is numerically identical with God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. It is meaningful to claim "Jesus is God" when this is intended to make an identity claim of essence, although the reciprocal statement, "God is Jesus," results in some difficulty.<sup>7</sup> No orthodox theologian who affirms Chalcedon would maintain that Jesus is numerically identical with God the Father. This is the error of Sabellianism. God the Son is, at once, numerically identical with Jesus of Nazareth and essentially identical with God the Father, because they share in the same divine substance.

Hence, Jesus of Nazareth, as God the Son, in order to be fully human and fully divine, must contiguously share in all the essential properties of both humanity and divinity. But, according to the principle of noncontradiction, it is logically impossible for any being to possess a property and its logical complement. A being cannot simultaneously be, for example, both necessary and contingent, omniscient and ignorant, omnipotent and humanly weak. But, if one person can have two ontologically or metaphysically distinct natures, then the possibility becomes greater for one being/person to possess two contradictory attributes. This raises other questions: "What are the essential and non-essential properties for being both human and divine? Is it possible that Jesus of Nazareth can have these apparently incompatible attributes simultaneously?"

### *Kenotic Christology?*

Since the nineteenth century many theologians have offered some form of a kenosis theory, whereby God the Son during the incarnation divested himself of some or all of the divine attributes incompatible with being genuinely human. In Phil. 2:7, Jesus is said to have emptied himself to become a man. Kenotic Christologies hold that divine attributes such as omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience were relinquished, or at least suspended, while God the Son was human.

Though beyond the scope of this chapter, I will offer just one difficulty with a kenotic Christology. According to Morris, it ends up being shipwrecked on the rock of divine immutability. Any being who is God cannot have begun to be God and then cease to be God. He is God immutably. For, to be God is to possess eternally and maximally the aggregate number of attributes essential to deity, the least of which are self-existence or ontological independence, immutability, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, holiness (= moral perfection). For example, if "no divine being can cease to have any attribute partly constitutive of deity, and omniscience is partly constitutive of deity, God the Son cannot have ceased to be omniscient for a period of time."<sup>8</sup>

A more recent approach to a kenotic Christology has been offered by Milliard Erickson, Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest.<sup>9</sup> Rather than a kenosis Christology having the idea of subtracting any divine attribute in order to become human, the second person of the Trinity *added* a human nature to the divine nature; it is kenosis by addition. As a result, the divine nature was only limited in the use of all the essential attributes of deity. Erickson writes, "Jesus did not give up the qualities of God, but gave up the privilege of exercising them."<sup>10</sup> Lewis and Demarest state that "the one person who came from God the Father added to himself a human nature."<sup>11</sup>

Morris offers the possibility of a kenotic Christology that may work with divine immutability. He calls for a reconceptualization of the kind-essential properties (see below) of deity. Morris claims that certain "conditions or requisites of divinity, the properties ingredient in or constitutive of deity, are not simply the divine attributes such as omniscient or omnipresence (as standardly analyzed), but rather are properties composed of these attributes qualified by kenotic limitation properties."<sup>12</sup> For example, omniscience would be qualified as the "property of being omniscient-unless-freely-and-temporarily-choosing-to-be-otherwise."<sup>13</sup> The essential properties of deity would become a compound property, rather than a property simpliciter. Morris' alternate kenotic view appears to be in accord with the kenotic by addition theory and has promising possibilities.

Despite the direction one pursues in order to develop a coherent view of Jesus' person, the metaphysical status of both humanity and deity is paramount to presenting a clear understanding of the Incarnation. If one begins with a faulty view of either the human or divine nature, then logical problems with the incarnation of Jesus ensue. Therefore, it is imperative that a plausible view of both humanity and divinity be in place before offering a sufficient defense of Jesus as the Mystery of God Incarnate. The debate seems to turn on the idea of "nature." Whatever is meant by nature will determine the strength or weakness of the position one takes regarding a divine incarnation.

Much of what follows is taken from Thomas Morris' *The Logic of God Incarnate* as well as a more recent work entitled "The Metaphysics of God Incarnate." In response to Morris' book, Hick has published an article in *Religious Studies* entitled "The Logic of God Incarnate," in addition to a fuller development in his book *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*. These works represent much of the debate in recent years regarding Jesus' divine and human natures. I will interact with them, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses, and, in the final analysis, show how Hick's views cannot withstand Morris' arguments.

### *The Nature of "Natures"*

Every nature, human or otherwise, has an essence or set of properties necessary and sufficient for membership into a genus or category. For example, the property of oxygen is necessary for the constitutional make-up of water (H<sub>2</sub>O). If a container is said to be filled with water, but that substance lacks the property of oxygen, then the claim must be rejected as false. Similarly, if Jesus of Nazareth is said to be both human and divine, then he must simultaneously have the set of properties that are necessary and sufficient for membership into the genus or category of both humanity and divinity.

After arguing for the position that Jesus of Nazareth is identical with God the Son, the second person of the triune God, Morris makes an important move to distinguish between an individual-nature and a kind-nature. An *individual-nature* consists of "the whole set of properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for being numerically identical with that individual."<sup>14</sup> This is similar if not the same as Duns Scotus' principle of individuation, or "thisness," (haecceity). Copleston explains, "a human being, for instance, is this composite being, composed of this matter and this form. The haecceitas does not confer any further qualitative determination; but it seals the being as this being."<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the individual-nature of Jesus of Nazareth would, for instance, consist of being Mary's firstborn. This is one of the properties Jesus of Nazareth had which no others shared in and without which he would not be the unique human individual that he was. Moreover, since logically there can be only one "firstborn," and Jesus was it, then no one else could possibly participate in the property of "firstborn-ness" in that family.

Morris defines a *kind-nature* as a "sharable set of properties individually necessary and collectively sufficient for membership of that kind."<sup>16</sup> The kind-nature is the way in which we categorize individual beings as part of this group, rather than that group. Humans are distinguished from all other living animals because we bear God's image ("you may kill animals but not people because they are made in the image of God," Genesis 9:1-6).<sup>17</sup> When we are told that a living individual being x shares in the properties of eating, breathing, and excreting, we recognize x could be classified as being either a person or a primate. If, however, the additional properties of discursive reasoning, moral sensitivities, and spiritual propensities are added to x, more than likely, we would classify x as a human person rather than a mere animal.

Therefore, "humanity" is a kind-nature term. So too, divinity and all that it entails would be a kind-nature term. Morris says, with respect to individual- and kind-natures that

no individual has more than one individual-nature. But of course it does not follow from this that no individual has more than one kind-nature. The conception of a kind-nature certainly does not in itself rule out by definition the possibility that there be a single individual with two such natures. And it is two natures of this sort which orthodox doctrine ascribes to Christ.<sup>18</sup>

At this point it becomes important to define what a property is. First, a property is a trait, characteristic, or attribute of something. Everything has at least one property or feature. Even the notion of "nothing" has the property of "being devoid of properties." While the property of "nothing" may be purely linguistic, having no ontic status, it is impossible for any entity that exists to have no properties. When something is predicated of a subject, for example, "this paper is x," then whatever substitutes for the variable designates a trait or property of this thesis. Likewise, persons have properties such as "big," "tall," "honest," "married," "single," etc. It is impossible that persons not have some properties.

Second, properties are either essential or nonessential. An essential property is that which cannot be absent or modified in the subject in question without that subject ceasing to be the kind of thing that it is. For example, a stone has the property of being material. It is an essential property of a stone that it retain its materiality. However, the size or weight a stone takes, large or small, heavy or light, are examples of nonessential properties.

Unlike stones, material properties of humans are part of a greater whole. There are essential immaterial or nonphysical properties that constitute the human person as well (i.e., soul, reason, spirit, etc.). Some essential immaterial properties of God would be omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, aseity, and impeccability. Without these properties, God would no longer be God, in a traditional, orthodox Christian view. So, when Chalcedon affirms that Jesus of Nazareth is identical with God, then it is also affirming that he has all those immaterial properties essential to being God in addition to the material and immaterial essential properties of humanity. And he has them simultaneously.

A further distinction in Morris' argument is between common and essential properties. He claims that confusion results when common properties are thought to be essential in humans. Essential human properties are shared by all humans and are necessary to possess in order to be considered part of the human genus or family. Common human properties are those traits that humans typically possess. For example, lacking moral perfection (sinfulness) is common to all humankind, but is not an essential property. It is logically possible that mere humans not be sinful (as in the pre-Fall condition of Adam and Eve, or a post-resurrection glorified state). More on this later.

Some properties may be universally common to all, without being essential to humanity. For example, Morris makes the bold claim that contingency (presumably he means having a causal and/or chronological beginning) is a common, though not essential property of being of the kind-essence of humanity. Limitation properties (e.g., contingency) are certainly common to humans, and, presumably, universally common to humans.

Such properties as those of being contingent, created, non-eternal, non-omnipotent, non-omniscient, and non-omnipresent are certainly common to human beings. Apart

from the case of Christ, they are even, presumably, universal human properties. But I submit that they are not kind-essential human properties. It is not true that an individual [one who is not simply human] must be a contingent being, non-eternal, and non-omnipotent in order to exemplify human nature. It is possible for an individual [one who essentially divine] to be human without being characterized by any of these limitation properties. And so it is possible for an individual who essentially lacks such properties, an individual who is properly divine, to take up at the same time a human nature.<sup>19</sup>

To be contingent is to have a limitation property and to have a limitation property is to be merely human (see below). These limitation properties are universally common to all who belong to the family of humanity, excepting Jesus of Nazareth. Of course, this would make a non-contingent individual more superhuman than simply human. And, this is precisely Morris' point regarding the Incarnation of Jesus.

That Jesus' human nature is non-contingent is a notion I find extremely difficult to reconcile with a classical view of Jesus' humanity. After all, was not the human Jesus of Nazareth born into the time-space continuum of reality (Gal. 4:4)? Morris claims, however, that to have a limitation property (contingency) is part of our creatureliness, but not part of our human-ness.<sup>20</sup> It could be Morris is saying that, while all creatures (presumably those made in the image of God) are humans, not all humans are creatures. And, there is one, and only one, unique human who is not a creature—Jesus of Nazareth. Morris qualifies this notion of Jesus' non-contingent human nature by saying that it was not a metaphysical prerequisite to the Incarnation.

For God the Son to become human, he thus had to take on a human body and a human mind, with all that entails. He [as God the Son] did not have to become a created, contingent being. He [qua God] just had to take on a created, contingent body and mind of the right sort. And so he was born of Mary the virgin and lived a human life. . . . God the Son's taking on of a created, contingent body and mind does not entail that he himself was a created, contingent being . . . his taking on of a body and mind limited in knowledge, power, and presence does not entail that he himself, in his deepest continuing mode of existence [as God the Son], was limited in knowledge, power, or presence.<sup>21</sup>

It appears, then, that Morris is saying that Jesus qua human is contingent, but Jesus qua God is non-contingent. Jesus had a human body and mind with all the limitations thereof (excepting sin). At this point, however, the major contribution of Morris' categories is that common properties are shared by most humans, whereas essential properties are shared by all humans.

One final distinction is crucial to Morris' entire argument—the difference of being merely human as opposed to being fully human. Morris states that

an individual is fully human [in any case where] that individual has all essential human properties, all the properties composing basic human nature. An individual is merely human if he has all those properties plus some additional limitation properties, as well, properties such as that of lacking omnipotence, that of lacking omniscience, and so on.<sup>22</sup>

Put simply, we have two classes of humans, those who are fully human and those who are merely human. Both classes have all the essential properties of humanity and fall into the

kind-nature of humanity, but mere humans have additional properties of limitation, i.e., lacking some property essential to deity. Against Morris, however, I submit, in accordance with Chalcedon, Jesus qua human did have limitation properties (apart from sin), whereas Jesus qua God did not. The orthodox claim regarding Jesus of Nazareth is that he was "truly human."<sup>23</sup> If to be merely human entails having limitation properties, as Morris insists, and Jesus was "like us in all respects, apart from sin," as Chalcedon insists, then Jesus shared in some limitation properties. Both Jesus and the entire category of humanity possess all the properties essential to being members in the class of humanity. And, Jesus qua human can possess our weaknesses and still be essentially God Incarnate. By "weaknesses" I mean practical, not moral. Jesus qua human hungered, thirsted, got tired, and eventually died, albeit, without moral failure.

Still, Morris states we are fully human with respect to having

all the properties constituting the kind-essence of humanity. But we are merely human as well: we have certain limitation properties in virtue of being God's creatures. Those limitations need not be ingredient in our human-ness; only in our creatureliness. Thus, God the Son, through whom all things are created, need not have taken on any of those limitation properties distinctive of our creatureliness in order to take on a human nature. He could have become fully human without being merely human.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, it is possible for some limitation properties to be ingredient in Jesus qua human without compromise of his essential deity. Note, however, Morris is saying that it is "God the Son" who did not have to change with respect to his divine person in order to take on a human nature. With this, I certainly agree. Yet, it is possible to have two classes of humans, both of which are merely human; the only distinguishing factor between them is that of sin. And all, excepting Jesus, share in this distinguishing factor. This would align Jesus more with the pre-Fall humanity of Adam, which is precisely what the biblical record seems to indicate (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:45).

*Nestorian Christology?*

According to Morris, in the case of the Chalcedonian Confession the person of Jesus constitutes not only all those essential properties of being fully human, but his essential human nature is only part of a greater whole, that of subsisting within a divine nature. Moreover, if fundamental to humanness is having the property of being numerically distinct from all other persons and fundamental to God-ness is having the property of being numerically distinct from all other persons, and if Jesus was both God and human, then do we not have two numerically distinct beings (Jesus of Nazareth and God the Son) coexisting as one person? How can this be? Isn't this the Nestorian error?

It seems the best explanation would be to point out that the incarnation is a unique situation where the human nature subsists in the divine person such that the mind and will of Jesus of Nazareth always thinks and acts in accordance with God the Son. Rather than having two numerically distinct beings coexisting as the one person, we simply have an integration of the human nature into the divine nature, yet without confusion. As such, the human Jesus of Nazareth is ontically subordinate to and metaphysically dependent upon God the Son, the second person of the triune God. This, then, is what Chalcedon refers to as the hypostatic union of the two natures (divine and human) residing in the one person of Jesus. At the incarnation the divine person of Jesus is distributed, so to speak, throughout both a divine nature and a human nature such that the two natures are conjoined, yet distinct, into the one unique God-Man.

At this juncture, it is important to show that while God the Son is a person who assumed a human nature, this is not to say that God the Son was a *human person*. The eternal Logos, as the principle pre-existent subject (Jn. 1:1), is God the Son who took on and sustained a human nature (Jn. 1:14). Still, Jesus was human, but not *only* human. He was a divine person who took possession of a fully human nature. In addition, there is some notable difference between the notions of a 'human person' and a 'person who is human.' The orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation claims that Jesus of Nazareth was a divine person who took on a human nature, not a human person who took on a divine nature. His complex ontological constitution consists of a divine person that assumed, at some point in history and now sustains, a particular human nature. And, if the divine person sustains Jesus' human nature, it is not too difficult to opt for Jesus possessing a contingent (viz., having-a-beginning-in-time) human nature.

An example from chemistry that demonstrates, though imperfectly, the uniqueness of Jesus' humanity will be helpful. The difference between a mixture and a compound is that in the former two distinct substances are joined together in the same container but are not chemically bound to one another, whereas a compound is the binding together of the substances in the same container to create a new substance (*tertium quid*). Jesus' humanity was such that the divine nature joined with a human nature to form a "mixture" of a divine-human person, not a new substance altogether. So, Chalcedon confesses that Jesus was one divine person with two distinct natures whereby "the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together" were one and the same person Jesus Christ.

"In the Incarnation God simply brings it about by a special act that a certain individual human nature [Jesus of Nazareth], exactly similar to every other in its ontological constitution and intrinsic inclinations, fails to satisfy the metaphysical conditions required for it to be a human person."<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that Jesus did not have a human nature. What is meant by "person" is different from what is meant by "nature." In fact, one way in which to avoid the Nestorian error is to posit one divine person with a human nature. "Person" is an ultimate, ontological status term, not a composition term . . . having the status of exemplifying a human body-mind composite [is] not the deepest truth about the ontological status of that individual."<sup>26</sup> So, it is perfectly valid within orthodox Christianity to say that Jesus was not a human person, but a divine person with a human nature. One condition, according to Freddoso, that marks out Jesus of Nazareth from the rest of all human persons is his inability or impotence to sustain himself as a human person. Every other human being has an integration between the human nature and the human person such that the latter necessarily sustains the former. Hence, Freddoso concludes:

Christ's assumed nature does not differ from other individual human natures in any of its natural inclinations. It differs from the others only in that it has necessarily a supernatural property which the others lack necessarily. Still if per possible that nature were to exist without being sustained by a divine person, then it would, like other human natures, be a human person with all the foibles thereof.<sup>27</sup>

Jesus of Nazareth, thus, possessed the animating principle, that "deepest continuing mode of existence," of the divine person, whereas all other humans possess the animating principle of a human person. It is as if an empty glove (= individual human nature of Jesus of Nazareth) is filled with a living Hand (= personal divine nature of God the Son) when God became Man, or the Word became flesh (John 1:14). This is not to promote any sort of docetic Christ. The glove

is real, whereas the humanity of a docetic Christ is not. The illustration merely points to the over-arching metaphysical subject who is God the Son as a divine person who possesses a human nature. Therefore, any individual, whether human or divine, consists of both a person and a nature; the former being necessary to the latter. Jesus of Nazareth, therefore, as a unique individual, is one divine person who embodies both a human and a divine nature in a hypostatic union.

While it may be true that humanity and divinity are mutually exclusive realities, they are not mutually incompatible ones any more than color is incompatible with shape. Take for instance a red square. There is nothing inconsistent about squareness and redness residing in one entity. In fact, the red square is one entity comprised of two complex metaphysical realities, color and shape. Though the notions of "redness" and "squareness" are different ideas, they certainly involve no contradiction. Likewise, the fact that "humanity" and "divinity" are different does not necessarily make one the logical complement (contradiction) of the other. Therefore, asserting that Jesus of Nazareth is both fully God and fully human does not wind up a contradictory notion, only a complex one. A more precise explanation of the relationship between the human and divine nature will follow. But first, I will offer some further objections by John Hick to the Incarnation.

Revealing his commitment to empiricism and a nonliteral view of the Scriptures, Hick tries to highlight what he believes to be the absurdity of a literal Incarnation by addressing the notion that in order to be human one must have human parents.

it is an essential characteristic [of humans] to have a certain type of genetic origin. . . . If this is a basic requirement for being human it presents difficulties for the traditional belief that Jesus had a human mother but no human father; for he would then have carried only half of the full human genetic complement.<sup>28</sup>

This would be true if God did not supply the other half of the genetic complement at the impregnation of Mary. Morris says that if "God directly produced Adam *ex nihilo* along with an entire universe to boot,"<sup>29</sup> then it is possible that humans need only share in a common genetic make-up as to our individual-nature. While it may be a common property of all humans to have two biological parents with respect to our individual-nature, it is not essential to the kind-nature of humanity that all have two biological parents. Hick admits that "if humanity began with the special creation of a fully-formed Adam and Eve we should have to amend the definition of humanity."<sup>30</sup> Yet, his nonliteral hermeneutic (he calls a literal understanding of the creation account "fundamental," a term which many in scholarly circles would find pejorative) precludes him from being able to grant this understanding of human nature.

According to Hick, a basic problem regarding the notion of Jesus of Nazareth having both a divine and human nature is that the essential properties of the natural-kind "humanity" are logically incompatible with the essential properties of the natural-kind "divinity." Since Jesus has two natures, however, it becomes possible that he possess only one of them necessarily and the other contingently. A problem would result if Jesus possessed both a human and divine nature necessarily. The second Person of the Trinity has not always been human, but he has been and always will be divine. The traditional view of the Incarnation states that Jesus of Nazareth was fully human and fully divine. Morris writes,

it is an orthodox belief that God the Son now exemplifies human nature, yet has it contingently. This follows from the conviction that there was a time before the Son began to exemplify human nature, a time at which he was not a man and yet existed. Thus, though he exemplified humanity, he did not exemplify it essentially.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, Jesus' fully human nature does not preclude his divine person existing as a necessary, or ontologically independent being. If Jesus is an ontologically complex being whereby he has more than one kind-nature, then the possibility is open for him to possess "one of them only contingently or nonessentially."<sup>32</sup> Hence, there exists in Jesus the individual a unique ontological classification whereby he possesses a fully human nature nonessentially or contingently and, at the same time, possesses his divine nature necessarily or essentially.

So, if this line of argumentation works, Jesus of Nazareth can be omnipotent with respect to his divine person and limited in power with respect to his human nature. Or, he can be omniscient with respect to his divine person and limited in knowledge with respect to his human nature. It is important to remember that it is not the divine nature *in se* (in its entirety) that became incarnate, but that God the Son, the second person of the triune God, who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. That is, he took on all the essential properties of the kind-nature of humanity in addition to possessing the kind-nature of divinity, which he shares in full with God the Father. Hence, charges of violating the immutability of God can be dropped as well as most versions of a kenotic Christology.

Though the ontological traits of God the Son were combined with the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth so as not to confuse them nor separate them, it is perfectly consistent with both biblical testimony and historical orthodoxy to say, for example, that Jesus was limited in knowledge in his human nature, but omniscient in his divine nature. Given his complex ontological status, this is a complexity and not a logical contradiction. Yet, Hick takes issue with the interaction between the divine and human natures, particularly the mind(s) of Jesus.

#### *Two-Minds Christology Reconsidered*

In order to uphold the Chalcedonian confession of two distinct natures in Jesus of Nazareth, one divine and the other human, Morris posits what he calls a two-minds view of Christ.<sup>33</sup> There are two distinct, though interrelated, ranges of consciousness in the person of Jesus. Morris writes:

the divine mind of God the Son contained, but was not contained by, his earthly mind, or range of consciousness. That is to say, there was what can be called an asymmetric accessing relation between the two minds . . . The divine mind had full and direct access to the earthly human experience resulting from the Incarnation, but the earthly consciousness did not have such a full and direct access to the content of the overarching omniscience proper to the Logos, but only such access, on occasion, as the divine mind allowed it to have. There thus was a metaphysical and personal depth to the man Jesus lacking in the case of every individual who is merely human.<sup>34</sup>

Although God has the equal and complete epistemic access to all human minds, Jesus had available to him limited access to the divine mind of God the Son. Those things present in Jesus' human mind were accessible to the divine mind, but not always vice versa. The divine mind exercised omniscience, though the human mind was limited in knowledge. As to the "metaphysical and personal depth" of Jesus of Nazareth, Morris states that "the personal

cognitive and causal powers operative in the case of Jesus' earthly mind were just none other than the cognitive and causal powers of God the Son."<sup>35</sup>

Hick's charge is that Morris endows Jesus with less than a fully human nature. Should the human will begin to act contrary to the divine will, the divine side takes over and prevents Jesus the human from committing error. The ultimate dilemma in Morris' scheme, according to Hick, turns on Jesus' impeccability. Hick explains.

A composite mind whose determining element is divine . . . would not have freedom to act wrongly. The human part might intend to sin, but the divine part, being unable to sin, would necessarily over-rule or circumvent the intention. Such a person could not be tempted as we are tempted, or become good by overcoming temptation, and accordingly could not embody our human moral ideal.<sup>36</sup>

For Hick, the fatal blow to Morris' view is the question never sufficiently answered, viz., "was Jesus free to commit sin?"<sup>37</sup> Morris avers that there is a metaphysical ownership of the divine mind over the human mind, and he admits not knowing exactly how to spell this out.<sup>38</sup> He concludes there are mysteries involved. To this I heartily agree. But, the issue of Jesus' impeccability and Hick's charges deserve more consideration. The Apostle James tells us that God cannot be tempted by evil (James 1:13). The orthodox position states that Jesus is identical with God the Son. Yet Matthew 4:1-11 and Hebrews 2:18 say that Jesus was tempted and that those temptations were very real. It appears that an inconsistency arises on a cursory reading of some traditional Christian beliefs. It seems nonsensical, not to mention potentially heretical along Nestorian lines, to posit that "Jesus as God the Son could not sin, whereas Jesus as a human could sin." Can this be reconciled?

One way in which Morris attempts to explain this dilemma is by stating that peccability (the ability to sin) is not essential to being fully human. In Morris' words "the Christian theologian can, in all epistemic propriety, just deny that being such that one possibly sins is a property essential to being fully human."<sup>39</sup> In other words, peccability (the ability to sin) may be common to all humans, excepting Jesus of Nazareth, but is not part of the kind-nature, only the individual-nature of all humans.

Hick's contention is that if at every moment Jesus' human will was superseded by the divine will, then Jesus could not have been genuinely, and hence humanly, free. Though Morris recognizes the sixth ecumenical Council of Constantinople (680-681 A.D.) condemned as the monothelite heresy the notion that Jesus did not have a human will, his position still ends up, according to Hick, embracing the view that Jesus had no human will. Morris gives credence to two wills, one humanly free, including being free to sin, but if he had in fact tried, the divine will would have intervened. Therefore, in reality, Jesus only had one will, according to Hick.<sup>40</sup>

Morris gives the analogy of someone who is placed in a room and told not to leave for two hours. Unknown to him, the door is locked so that he could not leave if he wanted. However, by his own free choice he does not try. Therefore, in one sense, he is free, yet in another sense he is not. Analogously, Jesus was free to sin, but unable to due to the governing constraints, unbeknownst to him, of the divine will.<sup>41</sup> Hick replies that it is certainly a "strange kind of freedom, depending as it does upon ignorance."<sup>42</sup>

However, this notion of freedom does not so much "depend" upon ignorance as it works in conjunction with a lack of knowledge. One could have the knowledge that the door is locked

and still freely choose to remain in the room. Knowledge, therefore, is inconsequential to human choice. It seems a non sequitur to make human choices dependent upon knowledge. Though knowledge may be involved in human choices, the relationship of cognition to behavior isn't always causal (cf., esp. Romans 7:7, 8; James 4:17). Knowledge is simply knowledge; it is not willpower. People are often incited to rebel by the very limitations put upon them. More often than not, it seems that when we are told not to do something we inevitably conclude there must be something "fun" about doing it and proceed anyway. Knowledge alone of what is virtuous is insufficient for causing one to pursue or not pursue virtue (contra Plato).

In addition, Morris alleges there are different notions that are conceptually linked with temptation. While it is epistemically possible for Jesus to sin, this does not entail its physical possibility. This is not to say that Jesus wasn't genuinely tempted; only that he did not, in reality, succumb to temptation. Morris claims that "a full accessible belief-set of a person at a time consists in all and only those beliefs which are accessible to a range of conscious thought and deliberation of that person at that time sufficient to support the initiation of action."<sup>43</sup> For example, one who has been secluded between the years of 1863 and 1866 may be compelled to lie to Abraham Lincoln in a personal letter and not know that he died in 1865. While it is epistemically possible for the act of lying to take place, it would not be physically possible. Hence,

Jesus could be tempted to sin just in case it was epistemically possible for him that he sin. If at the times of his reported temptations, the full accessible belief-set of his earthly mind did not rule out the possibility of his sinning, he could be genuinely tempted, in that range of consciousness, to sin.<sup>44</sup>

In his earthly stream of cognition, then, it was epistemically possible for Jesus to be tempted to sin, if and only if in his earthly consciousness he did not contain the notion of his absolute goodness which he shared with God the Son. Moreover, if the modal properties of Jesus qua God had no causal role in Jesus qua human resisting temptation as Hick seems to insist (though it is not necessary that they do per our view of pre-Fall humanity), then it is possible that the fully human Jesus of Nazareth freely and responsibly chose not to yield to temptation and so can and does "embody our human moral ideal."<sup>45</sup>

In the final analysis it is not impossible that God unite with humanity. Essential humanity and essential deity are not necessarily logical complements or contradictory ontological natures. The two minds and the two wills of the God-Man belong to one integrated person. The human mind and the human will of Jesus of Nazareth, though ontologically distinct from the divine mind and will, were not a set of causal and cognitive powers wholly at odds with those of God the Son's causal and cognitive powers. The point at which the divine and human minds intersect is in the one unique, though ontologically complex, integrated person who is Jesus of Nazareth, the God-Man. Having said this, I will offer some final thoughts in defense of the Chalcedonian statement.

### *The Christology of Chalcedon*

The Council of Chalcedon opposed the two extremes of Eutychianism and Nestorianism (the former failing to distinguish between the two natures of Christ, the latter failing to unite the two natures). Chalcedon is not the definitive statement that closes the door on every subsequent inquiry into the nature and person of Jesus of Nazareth. If anything, it opens doors for further reflection. It is unfortunate that Hick dismisses it. That Jesus is both human and

divine is the major contribution of the Confession. How this can be is, admittedly, not clearly defined by Chalcedon. In its own historical context as well as ours, the Chalcedonian Confession makes a substantial contribution to New Testament Christology by encapsulating what the Scriptures affirm regarding the person of Jesus.

It is true that philosophical terms were used to describe what the Chalcedonian Fathers believed New Testament witness intended concerning the person of Jesus. However, in the Greek autograph of Chalcedon (there was also a Latin translation) virtually every word can be found in a standard Koine, (common) Greek lexicon. More significantly, given the subject matter and theological expertise of the authors of Chalcedon, it is an amazingly simple document in its brevity and ordinary phrasing.

The fact that the Confession was set in common language is due to the concern for "contextualizing" the orthodox message. R. H. Fuller makes a valuable contribution along these lines.

If the church was to preserve and proclaim the gospel in the Graeco-Roman world, it had to answer in terms of an ontology which was intelligible to that world. . . . We must recognize the validity of this achievement of the church of the first five centuries within the terms in which it operated. It is sheer biblicism to maintain that the church should merely repeat "what the Bible says"—about Christology as about anything else. The church has to proclaim the gospel into the contemporary situation. And that is precisely what the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedon formula were trying to do.<sup>46</sup>

A very important concern is not whether philosophical jargon was used, but if what was ascribed to by Chalcedon accurately reflects the New Testament writer's beliefs about Jesus. It simply isn't fair of Hick to claim that Chalcedon has "no clearly spelled out meaning attached to it."<sup>47</sup> By the same line of reasoning, one could assert that Hick's entire book *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* has no clearly spelled out meaning, since it does not have an exegetical commentary and English lexicon attached to it. Yet, when one reads a book it is taken for granted that the meaning of words, sentences, and ideas don't require such explication. So it is with Chalcedon. It means what it says and says what it means. Behind each of the more important terms used in the Confession lies a particular semantic domain, yet it is left to the reader to have in place the range of meaning attached to a given word that is in keeping with the original intent. This is true of any document, regardless of its age. To say the Chalcedon Confession is without specific meaning because we are chronologically removed some 15 centuries is historically naïve and linguistically irresponsible.

Though couched in the Greek language and thought of the day, the Christology of Chalcedon is theologically and intellectually "un-Greek," in that it brought challenges to Greek culture to accept something that could not be fully comprehended. This demonstrates the Fathers' commitment to the New Testament testimony. Hence, "the Chalcedonian Fathers were accepting, and giving conciliar authority to, what had had its place in the Church's Christological thought from earliest days."<sup>48</sup> Moreover, uniting God and humanity was anathema to Greek thought, particularly with the well-developed strains of Gnosticism in 451. The material world was considered intrinsically evil and various levels of mediation were posited between God and humans. There were plenty of mediators (more specifically, emanations), none of which were thought of as being fully divine and fully human simultaneously. Though there was considerable metaphysical baggage from Greek philosophy

in the Chalcedonian Confession, the overarching concern was fidelity to the New Testament witness of Jesus of Nazareth. C. Gunton's remarks are entirely appropriate.

To say that the symbol of Chalcedon is couched in the conceptuality of its time— what other conceptuality could it have used?—is not to deny its candidature for truth, and in two senses: as an accurate summary of what the New Testament says about Jesus and as the truth about who Jesus is.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, the Chalcedon confession is a summary of the inspired, authoritative teachings of New Testament Scripture where there are no absurdities. Complexities may abound, but contradiction is entirely removed.

—ENDNOTES—

1. Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 72-73, emphasis mine.
2. John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster, 1994), 48.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 178.
5. Gerard Loughlin, "Squares and Circles: John Hick and the Doctrine of the Incarnation," in *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick*, ed. Harold Hewitt (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 36.
6. Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 349.
7. Cf., Murray J. Harris, *Jesus As God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 274-275.
8. Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 97.
9. Milliard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 548-550; 555-565. Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative*, vol. 2, 285-286.
10. Erickson, *Word*, 550.
11. Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative*, vol. 2, 343.
12. Morris, *Logic*, 99, emphasis his.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., emphasis his, 38.
15. F. C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (Garden City: Image Books, 1962), book 1, vol. 2, emphasis his, 516-517.
16. Morris, *Logic*, 39.
17. Louis McBride, *Gordon Clark's Definition of Person: An Analysis and Critique*, 7. I am indebted to him for this and many other contributions to this chapter.
18. Morris, *Logic*, 40-41.
19. Thomas V. Morris, "The Metaphysics of God Incarnate," in *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement*, ed., Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 116-117, emphasis mine.
20. Ibid., 117.
21. Ibid., 118, 121.
22. Thomas V. Morris, "Understanding God Incarnate," in *Asbury Theological Journal* 43 (1988): 66, quoted in Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 88-89.

23. See Chalcedon statement at the beginning of this paper.
24. Morris, "Metaphysics," emphasis mine, 117.
25. Alfred J. Freddoso, "Human Nature, Potency and the Incarnation," in *Faith and Philosophy* (January, 1986): 33, emphasis mine. For references of St. Thomas' teaching against Nestorianism see the aforementioned work in the Appendix.
26. Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology*, ed., C. Stephen Evans (Downers, Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 174.
27. Freddoso, "Human Nature," 45.
28. John Hick, "The Logic of God Incarnate," in *Religious Studies* 22 (December, 1989): 412.
29. Morris, *Logic*, 68.
30. John Hick, "The Logic of God Incarnate," *Religious Studies* 25 (1989): 413.
31. Morris, *Logic*, 41.
32. Morris, *Logic*, 45.
33. Morris is careful to point out that his view avoids Nestorianism by using the notion of "mind" to denote some property a person *has* rather than what a person *is*. Cf., Morris, *Logic*, 102, n. 19. Incidentally, it is unfortunate that Gordon Clark claims the Fathers of Chalcedon were talking nonsense and that his Christology and anthropology opts, instead, for the Nestorian error. See his *The Incarnation* (Jefferson: The Trinity Foundation, 1988), esp. 75.
34. Morris, *Logic*, 103.
35. *Ibid.*, 161-162.
36. Hick, *Metaphor*, 59.
37. *Ibid.*, 60.
38. Morris, "Metaphysics," 125-126. Cf., also Morris, *God*, 173-174.
39. Morris, *Logic*, 142.
40. Hick, "Logic," 422.
41. Morris, *Logic*, 151.
42. Hick, "Logic," 422.
43. Morris, *Logic*, 148.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Hick, *Metaphor*, 59.
46. Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 249-250, emphasis mine.
47. Hick, *Metaphor*, 48.
48. R. V. Sellers, *The Council of Chalcedon* (London: SPCK, 1953), 217. Also, cf., A. N. S. Lane, "Christology Beyond Chalcedon," in *Christ the Lord*, ed., H. H. Lowden (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1982), 263. Also, for a brief, but clear, defense of Chalcedonian language and culture see Erickson, *Word*, 513-516.
49. Colin Gunton, "Using and Being Used: Scripture and Systematic Theology," in *Theology Today* (1990) 47:231.