

# **The Coherence of The Chalcedonian Definition of the Incarnation<sup>1</sup>**

Richard Swinburne

[Swinburne, Richard, "The Coherence of the Chalcedonian Definition of the Incarnation" in (ed) A.Marmodoro and J.Hill, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, Oxford University Press, 2011.]

*Abstract:* The definition of the Council of Chalcedon provides the standard orthodox account of the Incarnation of Jesus. This states that the Son, the second person the Trinity, while remaining divine, acquired a perfect human nature (having a 'rational soul' and a human body). As Son, he is a spiritual being, having all the divine properties (such as omnipotence, omniscience, perfect freedom, and so perfect goodness). He could only acquire in addition to the divine nature 'a rational soul' if that is understood, not as a principle of individuation of the person, but merely as a human way of thinking and acting or (unnecessarily) as an entity which causes the latter. A person can have two separate ways of thinking and acting, the divine and the human, along the lines of a Freudian model in which the person thinking and acting in one way (the human way) is not fully aware of thinking and acting in other way (the divine way). However his 'perfect humanity' must be understood in such a way as to involve inability to sin (although compatible with an ability to do less than the best).

By the middle of the fifth century A.D. it had become a largely universal Christian belief that the second person of the Trinity (the Son), while remaining divine, became human as Jesus Christ. Christians had two main reasons for holding this belief. The first was that they thought that many New Testament passages confirmed by a tradition of Church teaching entailed it. The second was that they thought that -as Church teaching and the New Testament claimed - God had provided reparation for human sins, and that he could only have done so by God the Son becoming human and living a perfect human life. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. expressed this largely universal view by asserting that Jesus Christ was one 'hypo-stasis' (ὑποστάσις) who had two natures (φύσεις), a divine nature and a human nature, joined together, so that 'at no point was the difference between the natures taken away though the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being.'<sup>2</sup> Christ had 'a rational soul and a body', and - Chalcedon seems to be saying- his humanity consisted in his having these.

The Chalcedonian 'definition' caused two Christian groups to break away from mainstream Christianity, initiating schisms which

have remained until today. A minority group insisted that there were in Christ two hypostases, and they evolved into a small middle-Eastern church now called 'the Church of the East'. The other minority group insisted that there was in Christ only one nature, and they evolved into a number of larger monophysite 'churches' in the Middle East, such as the Egyptian Copts, the Ethiopians, and the Armenians. But there have been recent theological discussions between high-level official representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of the East, and of the Orthodox Church and the 'monophysite churches' which have revealed surprising agreements to the effect that really these groups now claim to hold the same doctrine, although using different words to express it; the 'schisms' resulted from different understandings of φύσις and ὑποστάσις. The Church of the East claimed that its insistence on two 'hypostases' was in effect an insistence on Christ being both fully human and fully divine. The 'monophysites' claimed that their insistence on 'one nature' was an insistence on the unity of the person of Christ. It is plausible to suppose that all these groups have always been deeply conscious of what they were affirming on this issue, which to a considerable extent constituted their separate identity, and so plausible to suppose that the schisms arose primarily because members of the council of Chalcedon had different understandings from each other of their technical terms and perhaps not only of ὑπόστασις and φύσις. So (given that none of the groups have changed their views since Chalcedon) it turns out that the core claim of Chalcedon was common to virtually all Christianity for the thousand years between Chalcedon and the Reformation and for the vast majority of Christians since then. But it also follows that there is no point for those of us who wish to be faithful to Church tradition by accepting the Chalcedonian definition, to try to do so by seeking to discover what the council members meant by their technical terms, for they had no common understanding of them. Rather we must ask which of the possible ways of understanding the technical terms lead to a coherent doctrine in the spirit of Chalcedon.

What all groups agreed (or to any rate now agree) is that Jesus Christ is a 'person', and that person is the second person of the Trinity. The 'Common Christological Declaration' of 1994 signed jointly by Pope John-Paul II and the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East affirmed that 'the divinity and humanity are united in the person of the same and unique Son of God and Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>3</sup> He is eternally Son of God, retaining his divinity during his early ministry; but he acquired his humanity at his human birth. If the divinity and humanity are united in a particular person, they are united in a particular individual of a certain kind (a rational kind). This is how those council members who supported the Chalcedonian definition seem to have understood 'hypostasis'; others expressed that unity in

a different way. (I will understand 'hypostasis' in the way understood by the supporters of the definition in future). But what were the divinity and the humanity which were thus united? The Chalcedonian definition described them as 'natures'. The joint statement signed by official representatives of the 'monophysite' churches and of the Orthodox Church affirmed that the Son of God united his 'divine nature' to a created 'human nature'; and accepted in all other respects the Chalcedonian formula, subject to the qualification that the natures were 'distinguished in thought alone' - presumably meaning that they are now inseparable. (This was a formula clearly designed to satisfy the 'monophysites', but one with which the Orthodox representatives were happy).<sup>4</sup> So the 'two natures' command general assent.

And what is a 'nature'? Minimally it includes a set of properties which make the individual who has them an individual of a certain kind. So the Son's divine nature, all would have agreed, included his having a set of properties which constitute being divine, such as omnipotence, omniscience, perfect freedom, perfect goodness, eternity, and necessity (although what in detail each of these properties amount to would have been, as it still is, a matter of much dispute). This divine nature was, all agreed, part of the essence of the Son (and indeed of any other being who was divine); the Son was necessarily divine. But the Son needed something further to individuate him, and thus distinguish him from the two other divine persons. It was, I think, a common view among those who considered this issue in patristic or medieval times, that the Son was the Son in virtue of a relation to something else, that is the relation of being 'begotten' from the Father, defined as that divine person who is the source of the divinity of the other persons. That distinguished him from the Spirit who 'proceeded' from the Father (and maybe also from or through the Son. While 'and the Son' (*filioque*) was favoured only by Western Fathers, 'though the Son' was favoured by some Eastern Fathers.) And what is the difference between being 'begotten' and 'proceeding'? There were two answers given. One answer, given by Gregory of Nyssa<sup>5</sup>, was that there is no difference. The Son being begotten from the Father is simply his being caused to exist by and only by the Father; whereas the Spirit proceeding from the Father is the Spirit being caused to exist by the Father either 'and the Son' or 'through the Son'. The other answer, given by Augustine<sup>6</sup>, was that it was a mystery known to God alone. (Those Orthodox who deny that the Son is involved in the 'procession' of the Spirit had to give the 'mystery' answer to this question.) This individuating property, however understood, was essential to the Son; the Son could not exist without being the Son. So analysed, the divine nature of the Son is minimally simply a set of essential properties, both kind properties and

an individuating one. I will return shortly to the issue of whether it is anything more than a set of properties.

Far more problematic is: what is human nature? This too certainly included a set of kind properties. These days we think of being human as having (actually or potentially) certain fairly limited powers of bodily control and knowledge acquisition through senses (not too much greater than those of actual humans), being to some extent rational, and belonging to the same species as the other earth-inhabitants we call 'human' as a result of a common origin or at least subsequent interbreeding. But that would be far too narrow an understanding of humanity for the members of the Council of Chalcedon. Christ's nature, they held, was an unfallen nature. Unfallen humans, such as Christ, could have, they would have considered, far greater powers than ours. Less than two centuries later Maximus the Confessor, a theologian given enormous reverence in the Orthodox tradition, claimed that we humans while remaining human could become divine, which he understood as 'becoming all that God is, except for an identity in essence';<sup>7</sup> and so presumably having the divine properties but not essentially. That might have been an extreme view of human potentiality, but even the later Western tradition claimed that Christ in his human nature could do and know a vast amount more than we do. Thus Aquinas claimed that the 'soul' of Christ, which is part of his human nature, could know all the past, present, and future; but that it could not know all the possible actions which God could do but does not do.<sup>8</sup> And so he denied that the soul of Christ was omnipotent since, 'being omnipotent is exclusive to God'<sup>9</sup> And certainly most Christians of AD451, influenced by Plato rather than Aristotle, would have affirmed that there could be humans without bodies, since there were saints in Heaven whose dead bodies were still in their graves. I do not think that they would have accepted Aquinas's apparent claim in his dictum 'my soul is not me'<sup>10</sup>, that these saints were not humans. Gregory of Nyssa claimed that it was not essential to having the same nature to have the same origin or kind of origin. He claimed that just as Son and Spirit originating in different ways from the Father does not mean that they do not have the same nature, so Adam's origin from Earth and Abel's origin by sexual generation being different from each other, and Christ's origin from Mary and the Spirit being different from the origin of other humans did not mean that they did not have the same nature.<sup>101</sup> All told, perhaps the most that the Fathers might agree with respect to what human nature consisted was that it was a rational nature limited in its powers of control and knowledge acquisition, and apt for exercising them through a human body (and perhaps necessarily doing so when first instantiated).

I pass over the question of whether for ordinary humans, their human nature is essential to them. My own answer is that it is not; a

human being is essentially an animate being (a being capable of being conscious), and so exists only as long as he is capable of being conscious, but is not essentially a human being – any human could become a crocodile, for example. But whatever the kind to which humans essentially belong, there must be some further feature which individuates, which makes a human the particular human he is. My own view is that it is not a relation or any intrinsic property (in the sense of a universal or a conjunction or disjunction of universals) which makes a human who he is, but a 'thisness'.<sup>12</sup> That is, it seems to me evident that there could have existed instead of me a different human connected to the body which is currently mine and who had exactly the same mental and physical life as I have had. Hence the difference between us cannot consist in the properties which have characterized our lives – for these would have been exactly the same. So what makes me me is a 'thisness'; my being me is not analysable further.

However no individuating human properties and no human-type thisness could have made the incarnate Son who he is. For all the Fathers thought that he existed before his incarnation, and was already who he was in virtue of his particular divine nature. He can only have acquired the human kind properties, and not the human individuating properties or (more widely so as to include 'thisness') features. But he could still have acquired a particular human nature, even if not one which individuated him. This nature – Chalcedon seems to be saying – consisted of 'a rational soul and body'. And clearly the Son acquired a particular body. But what did his acquiring a rational soul amount to? One possibility is that it consisted simply in having whatever is involved in having a human nature beyond having a body, which I've suggested amounted to limited powers of control and knowledge acquisition apt for exercising through a human body, that is a human way of acting and thinking. This would be an Aristotelian account of having a soul. Alternatively it might be a particular thing, a 'substance' in a wide sense underlying and causing those mental properties.

Ancient philosophers had some ideas on the nature of the soul wildly different from each other;<sup>13</sup> and it would be a bad mistake to suppose that the Fathers of Chalcedon had a common view about the nature of 'the soul', any more than they had about 'nature' and 'hypostasis'. But when talking about ordinary human souls in a non-Christological context, the Fathers for the most part clearly didn't think that the human soul was merely a set of properties of the kind mentioned. For almost of all them held that the soul could be separated from the body and that, if it were so separated, the human went when his soul went, although it might need the original body or some similar body in order to live again.<sup>14</sup> Origen stated as 'the Church's teaching' that 'the soul, having a substance and life of its own, will

be rewarded according to its deserts after its departure from this world.<sup>15</sup> So there seems to be a widespread view that the soul constituted the principle of individuation for an ordinary individual human. A set of properties such as those mentioned are shared by all humans and are quite insufficient to distinguish one human from another one. But, to repeat my point with respect to the 'rational' soul which I made with respect to the 'human nature' which included it, they couldn't have thought that Christ's human soul, however construed, constituted the principle of individuation for Christ whom they all thought to have existed before his incarnation. The only conclusion one can reach is that the Fathers of Chalcedon had not thought things through very thoroughly, although – as far as anything I have discussed so far is concerned – their 'difficulties' are compatible with an understanding of 'soul' which makes their definition coherent – the Aristotelian one, according to which the acquisition of a 'rational soul' consists in the acquisition of a set of properties, the possession of which was essential for ordinary humans but only contingent for Christ. This understanding does however mean that they have to understand other humans having souls in a different sense from Christ having a soul.

The medievals needed a more consistent account. Hence Aquinas's account, that ordinary humans are who they are in virtue of their individual substantial form (their soul) and the matter which it normally configures (which is forms the human's body). However in his incarnation, the divine nature of Christ, configures a human soul and its matter. This human soul of Christ does not form the principle of individuation of the person, but is a thing which would have become the principle of individuation if it had not already been configured by the divine nature of the second person of the Trinity.<sup>16</sup> This removes any overt contradiction, and allows 'soul' to play a similar role (although not the same role) in the constitution of Christ to the one it plays in the constitution of ordinary humans. We can make some sense of the resulting picture as follows. It's not unreasonable to suppose that foetus which is not yet conscious is not a particular human; only when it becomes conscious will there be a truth about whether that human is one who will suffer or enjoy life later. But maybe there is truth before that first moment of consciousness about which future human that foetus will become (barring divine intervention). And maybe that is determined by some immaterial feature possessed by the early foetus. If all that makes sense, then it makes sense to suppose that at Christ's conception the second person of the Trinity acquired both the foetal matter and the immaterial feature already individuated as that of the ordinary human whom it was destined (together with the matter) to become (barring divine intervention). But the act of the Son in assuming the foetal matter prevented that ordinary human person from ever existing; although this nature,

thus prevented, remained a composite part of Jesus Christ. This immaterial feature is the cause of the resulting person having the human mental properties interacting with a body which it has, both in ordinary humans and in Christ, but in ordinary humans is also the principle of individuation.<sup>17</sup>

But although we may be able to make sense of this medieval way<sup>18</sup> of resolving Chalcedon's problem, I see no reason at all for believing it to be true. And there is a much simpler way of resolving Chalcedon's problem, which is to interpret Christ's human soul merely as a set of properties, a human way of thinking and acting instantiated in the second persons of the Trinity and conjoined in a human body.<sup>19</sup> In contrast on the medieval account this human soul is the cause of Christ having the mental properties of human nature, the human way of thinking and acting which it has in addition to its divine properties. And so on both accounts, the issue arises as to whether the divine and human properties are compatible with each other.

I have argued in various places that all the traditional divine properties (including perfect goodness) follow from the properties of essential omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect freedom<sup>20</sup>. There is no contradiction in an omnipotent God choosing to have a set of human powers which he executes through a unique body in order to produce effects which he could also produce in a more direct way if he so chose; or an omniscient God choosing to acquire knowledge through human sense-organs and reasoning as well as in virtue of his divine nature. God's perfect freedom is the freedom to choose between alternatives uninfluenced by irrational desires, that is causes which incline him to do actions with a force out of proportion to their worth, e.g. incline to do what he believes to be a bad action or one less good than a best action. Almost all the Fathers, following New Testament texts, held that Christ was subject to normal human desires arising from our embodiment, e.g. hunger (the desire to eat), tiredness (the desire to rest) and so on. Although they could also have held that there can be a human nature not so subject (and Adam was depicted as much less subject to such desires before the Fall than all humans were after the Fall), they seem to have held that in this respect Christ was subject to the consequences of the Fall. They also held that (as the New Testament claims) he was subject to temptations (at least at the beginning and end of his ministry), that is desires to do actions which were not the best. There would still be no contradiction in supposing that Christ was perfectly free and also subject to tempting desires if one supposed that although he felt the desires they could not influence his choice. To use an imperfect analogy – like Odysseus, he could hear the Sirens' voices but was unable to respond to them. And it was an essential Christian belief that Christ never did yield to temptation to do wrong,<sup>21</sup> for if he had done so he

would not have lived the perfect life which would secure our salvation. It would seem to follow that if he had even opened himself to the possibility of doing wrong, he would have risked failure in his mission; and so it is natural to suppose that not merely did he not yield to temptation, but he could not have done so.

This seems to be the way that in these three respects many Christians picture the incarnation; but for two reasons this does not seem a very satisfactory way. It does not picture God as fully sharing the limitations involved in our actual fallen condition (even if in some sense sharing our human nature); and it does not fit well with what is said about Christ in the New Testament. We humans have very limited powers and knowledge (including false beliefs on many matters), and bad desires exercise on us an influence to which – given that we have free will (as is the majority Christian view) – we frequently yield.

St Mark reports that in a visit to his own country Christ ‘could do then no might work’,<sup>22</sup> and that Christ claimed that he, ‘the Son’ does not know something which the Father does know – ‘the hour’ at which ‘Heaven and Earth shall pass away.’<sup>23</sup> Luke reports that as he grew older, Jesus ‘increased in wisdom’,<sup>24</sup> implying that he was not totally omniscient in his earliest human years. And temptations to which one cannot yield are not such full-blooded temptations as those to which one can yield. Many of the Fathers gave these passages a meaning other than the natural meaning, but others of them saw them as telling us that Christ in one nature could do or know things which he could not do or didn’t know in his other nature.<sup>25</sup> But if Christ was not to be deceiving us in his claim of ignorance, and the inability was in any sense a real inability, we are led to a ‘two minds’ view; and to understand the separation of the two natures as implying that not merely did he do different actions but he acquired different and sometimes contradictory beliefs when acting with his divine powers than when acting with his human powers.

It was Freud, the modern founder of psychoanalysis, who helped us to see how a person can have two systems of belief to some extent independent of each other. Freud described people who sometimes, when performing some actions, act only on one system of beliefs and are not guided by beliefs of the other system; and conversely. The Freudian account of the divided mind was derived from analysis of cases of human self-deception, where a person does not consciously acknowledge either the beliefs of one belief system or the belief that he has kept its beliefs separated from his other system, and where the self-deception is a pathetic state from which that person needs to be rescued. But the Freudian account of such cases helps us to see the possibility of a person intentionally keeping a lesser belief system separate from her main belief system, and simultaneously doing dif-



ferent actions guided by different sets of beliefs, of both of which she is consciously aware – all for some very good reason. Indeed even people who do not suffer from a Freudian divided mind seem to be able sometimes to perform simultaneously two quite separate tasks (for example, having a conversation with someone and writing a letter to someone else) in directing which quite distinct beliefs are involved, which we can recognize as ‘on the way to’ a divided mind in which they have two different sets of beliefs.

Now the second person of the Trinity in assuming a human nature, could acquire the capacity to acquire beliefs by normal human routes; and some of the resulting beliefs would then be different from and contradictory to his divine beliefs. (Since it’s odd to talk of one person believing both one proposition and its negation at the same time, strictly speaking the human beliefs are best described as ‘inclinations to belief’; but having made that point, I will ignore it henceforward for the sake of simplicity of exposition.) The second person of the Trinity would then do his divine actions by his divine powers guided by his divine beliefs. He would do his human actions by his human powers guided by his human beliefs. The beliefs belonging to the human perspective would guide the public statements of the incarnate Christ, which would be honest in virtue of reflecting those beliefs of which he was conscious in his human acting. The separation of the belief systems would be a voluntary act, knowledge of which was part of God Incarnate’s divine belief system but not of his human belief system. And the separation of belief systems could go with separation of ‘minds’ also in other respects- sensations, desires, intentions, and occurrent thoughts, as later Christian tradition affirmed that it did in Christ<sup>26</sup>. We thus get a picture of a divine consciousness and a human consciousness of God Incarnate, the divine consciousness being fully aware of the human consciousness, but the human consciousness not being fully aware of the whole divine consciousness. (The human consciousness would at times need to be aware of some of the divine consciousness, in order that Christ might reveal to us truths otherwise known to God alone.)

So far, so good. But what about Christ’s temptations? All the Fathers who considered the matter claimed that not merely did Christ do no wrong, but he could not have done wrong, and so could not have yielded to a temptation to do wrong; and the synodical letter of the Council of Nicaea affirmed that the Council had anathematized those who claimed that Christ ‘by his own power is capable of evil (κακία) and goodness’.<sup>27</sup> The Fathers would have been horrified at the suggestion that there was a risk that the Incarnation might not have had its intended effect, through a failure on God’s part. But the difficulty is that it seems that if Christ couldn’t do wrong, then living a perfect life would have been so much easier for him than for us,

that it would hardly have been as perfect as the perfect life we ought to have led.

I believe that there is a way out of this dilemma if we distinguish between two kinds of good actions - those that are obligatory (or duties), and those that go beyond obligation and which we call 'supererogatory'. I am obliged (it is my duty) to pay my debts, but not to give my life to save that of a comrade - supremely, 'supererogatorily' good though it is that I should do so. To fail to fulfil an obligation is to do something objectively wrong; to fail to fulfil what the agent believes to be an obligation is to do something subjectively wrong (and that is blameworthy). Often of course actions are both objectively and subjectively wrong. A person is not however meritorious merely for fulfilling his obligations. But she is objectively meritorious for doing what is supererogatory; and she is subjectively meritorious for doing what she believes is objectively meritorious (and that is praiseworthy). Positive obligations normally arise because of benefits received (I owe my parents much because they have done much for me); or because of commitments, explicit or implicit. (I must keep my promises and pay my debts because I have explicitly committed myself to doing so. I must feed my children because by bringing them into existence I have implicitly committed myself to doing so.) Negative obligations - obligations not to do things - normally concern not damaging other people. It is wrong to steal or kill (possibly subject to some qualifications). Obligations are a limited set of good actions, and most of us can fulfil all our obligations. Although God cannot always do the best action, because sometimes there is no best action<sup>28</sup>, he can always fulfil all his obligations. As the source of the existence of all other beings, he does not owe anyone anything as a result of benefits received or for any other reason; and since there is good reason to ensure this, he will ensure that he never enters into commitments which he could not fulfil.

Now it would, I suggest, have been wrong of a perfectly good divine person to allow himself to become incarnate in such a way as to open the possibility of his doing objective or subjective wrong. For it is wrong of anyone to put themselves in a position where they are liable to do wrong to someone - intentionally allow themselves to forget their duties, or to take drugs which would lead to their being strongly tempted to do some wrong, or simply be unable to stop themselves from doing wrong. That is why it is wrong to drive a car when you have drunk too much alcohol; you put yourself in a position where you are likely to kill or injure others. It follows from God's perfect goodness that he would not put himself in a position where he could have chosen to do wrong. So in becoming incarnate God must have ensured that in his human actions he had access to such true moral beliefs as would allow him to be aware of his duties, and he must

have ensured that he would never be subject to too strong a desire to do any action which was wrong.

While it is wrong to put oneself in a position where one is liable to do wrong, there is nothing wrong in putting oneself in a position where one is liable not to do some supererogatory action. Indeed, an action which had the foreseen consequence of putting oneself in that position might itself occasionally be the (objectively and subjectively) best thing to do. A generous person might well, as a supererogatory good act, give away so much money that she would be so short of money in future that she would be much tempted not to do any more supererogatory good acts. And, the normal view is, Christ did not win our salvation merely by fulfilling his obligations. His life, culminating in allowing himself to be crucified, was one of supererogatory (subjective and objective) goodness. So in becoming incarnate God could have allowed himself to be tempted not to do such an action, and could have yielded to that temptation. And if he could have yielded to a temptation not to do a supererogatory action but didn't, his life would have been the truly perfect life which we could have led but didn't – as the Fathers claimed that it was. I illustrate the point by the three temptations to which, according to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke,<sup>29</sup> Christ was subject in the wilderness. Christ could not have yielded to the temptation to worship the Devil – for that would have been wrong, but he could – on this account – have yielded to the temptation to command a stone to be made bread, or to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple – for there would have been nothing wrong in his doing these things. But if he did these things, he would not have shown us how to live in difficult circumstances and so provided for us the heroic example which would constitute a perfect life of the kind that ordinary humans could have lived but have failed to live: life would have been too easy for him to provide much of an example for us. Yet it follows that if Christ had yielded to these temptations to do less than the best and still sought to save us by living a perfect life, he would have needed to try again.

None of the Fathers of the early centuries seem to be sensitive to the distinction between a temptation to do wrong and a temptation not to do a best act. But their description of the acts which Christ could not have done (ἁμαρτία, κακία) are clearly of acts which were wrong. I do not think that they ever considered the possibility that he might have been tempted not to do a supererogatory act. I do not think that many of them would have welcomed this suggestion, but they never ruled it out. A major reason why they would have found it unacceptable is that they would have thought that it was incompatible with the perfect goodness of God the Son to put himself in a situation where he might do less than a best action, where there was a best (or equal best) action available to him. Hence if there were supererogatory best acts available to him and such acts as allowing

himself to be crucified were such acts (as I and they assume), he would inevitably do them. But what I am suggesting is that it could be a best supererogatory act for God to allow himself to be tempted not to do the best and so not to do some supererogatory best act (in such a way that he might yield to that temptation).<sup>30</sup> If my suggestion is accepted that a perfectly good God could have put himself in such a position, then God incarnate in Jesus Christ could have been in such a position, and could by resisting temptations not to do some supererogatory acts to which he could have yielded have led a perfect human life of the kind we could have led but didn't. That life would indeed have been a perfect offering to the Father sufficiently costly to secure our salvation. But if God incarnate because of his perfect goodness could not have made it possible that he would live a less than perfect human life, then we must say that he led the nearest life he could to the perfect life which we could have led; that is, did the actions required, endured the suffering, and felt the temptations which we do not to be perfect- although he could not have yielded to them.

The point of God the Son becoming incarnate and living a perfect life was - however it is spelled out - to provide reparation for our sins, a perfect life instead of the imperfect lives we have led. Many of the Fathers and subsequent theologians agreed that God the Father could have forgiven us without demanding a reparation of the kind actually made by the life and death of Christ.<sup>31</sup> It is surely up to a wronged person to determine how much (if any) and of what kind reparation is needed before he will forgive the wrongdoer. It follows that it was up to God to determine what sort of good life would constitute adequate reparation for sins. And, if in virtue of his perfect goodness, Christ led the most perfect human life that he could lead, God the Father would surely be satisfied with Christ doing the best that he could do (even if, given his free decision to become incarnate, he could not have yielded to any temptation to do less than the best). I conclude that, even if my suggestion that Christ could have yielded to a temptation not to do some supererogatory acts is not accepted, that does not damage the coherence of the Chalcedonian account of the Incarnation.

### Notes

1. This paper incorporates much material from my book *The Christian God*, Clarendon Press, 1994, especially chapter 9, revised in a simpler form in my book *Was Jesus God?* Oxford University Press, 2008, ch. 3.
2. (ed.) N.P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Sheed and Ward, 1990, p. 86.

3. See the website of the Church of the East [www.cired.org](http://www.cired.org).
4. For the official statements resulting from the Orthodox /'monophysite' meetings, see (eds.) C. Chaillet and A. Belopolsky, *Towards Unity, Inter-Orthodox Dialogue*, 1998, The citation is from p. 63. 6.
5. 'That is the only way by which we distinguish one Person from the other, by believing, that is, that one is the cause and the other depends on the cause. Again, we recognize another distinction with regard to that which depends on the cause. There is that which depends on the first cause and that which is derived from what immediately depends on the first cause. Thus the attribute of being only-begotten without doubt remains with the Son, and we do not question that the Spirit is derived from the Father. For the mediation of the Son, while it guards his prerogative of being only-begotten, does not exclude the relation which the Spirit has by nature to the Father'- Gregory of Nyssa, 'An Answer to Ablabius: That we Should Not Think of Saying - There Are Three Gods', trans. C.C. Richardson in (ed.)E.R. Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, The Westminster Press, 1954, p. 266.
6. Thus Augustine while acknowledging that the members of the Trinity differed in respect of which one was the source of the divinity of two others, which of one other, and which of none, considered that there was a further distinction between 'being begotten' and 'proceeding'. But he wrote that he was unable to say what that distinction was. See *Contra Maximinum* 2.14. (PL 42:770)
7. Maximus, *Book of Antiquities*, 41. (PG91:1308.)
8. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3a.10.2.
9. Ibid., 3a.13.1.
10. Aquinas, *In I Cor*, 15: 1-2.
11. See the citations in Brian E. Daley, 'Nature and the "Mode of Union": 'Late Patristic Models for the Personal Unity of Christ,' in (ed.) S.T. Davis et. al., *The Incarnation*, Oxford University Press, 2002.
12. See my *The Evolution of the Soul*, revised edition, Clarendon Press, 1997, New Appendix D; and more adequately, my paper 'From Mental/Physical Identity to Substance Dualism' in (ed.) P. van Inwagen and D. Zimmerman, *Persons: Human and Divine*, Clarendon Press, 2007.
13. See Richard Sorabji, *Self*, Clarendon Press, 2006, chs 1-6.
14. See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, A and C Black, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 1977, ch. 17. All Christians believed in the General Resurrection of the dead at the 'Last Day', but there were different views about what happened to dead people before they were reunited with their bodies. However, the vast majority of Christians held that their 'souls' continued to exist and to have a conscious life during that period.
15. Origen, *On First Principles*, Book I. Preface, Latin text, tr. G.W. Butterworth, Harper and Row, 1966, p. 4.
16. See Eleanore Stump, 'Aquinas' Metaphysics of the Incarnation' in Davis et al; and Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 133-47. The theories of Duns Scotus and Ockham are similar to Aquinas's theory. (See Adams, p. 135)
17. A.F.Freddoso ('Human Nature, Potency, Incarnation', *Faith and Philosophy*, 3 (1986) 27-53), points out that none of Aquinas, Scotus, or Ockham affirms that Christ is a 'human person' which they understood as a suppositum, that is an 'independently existing ultimate subject of characteristics'. From that it

seems to follow that any human nature is only contingently the nature of a human person. Freddoso argues that Aquinas, though not Scotus and Ockham, might be inclined to deny this, and claim that any human nature is either necessarily a human person (and so presumably a particular human person) or necessarily sustained by a divine person. But that raises the question of what individuates the individual human nature which a divine person assumes. The view which I am commending that human nature is just a set of universal properties avoids all these difficulties.

- 18 Brian Leftow advocates this kind of medieval view in 'A timeless God Incarnate' in Davis op. cit. But, no doubt expressing here too the view of most medievales, he combines it with the view that the Second Person of the Trinity is timeless, yet, in acquiring a human soul, becomes also a temporal being who had a temporal life and presumably therefore also a temporal consciousness. He experienced things at particular moments of time. Starting from a view that God, although timeless, 'can have causal relations with temporal things, for example in creating and sustaining them' Leftow writes: 'I now simply pose a question: given that causal relations unite parts into substances and a timeless God can have causal relations to a temporal being, is there any good reason *a priori* to think that a timeless God's causal relations to some temporal being(s) could not be such as to form with them a single substance? I cannot think of one' (p. 288). But, even if 'a timeless God's causal relations to some temporal being' e.g. a body, could be 'such as to form with them a single substance', more is surely needed than causal relations to form a single person. If at a given time a person with one consciousness also has a second consciousness, he must be able to co-experience the experiences which occur in both consciousnesses at that time. He may of course choose choice to keep the consciousnesses separate or be prevented by some psychological obstacle from co-experiencing, but it must be a possibility that he can coexperience both sets of experiences. If it isn't, I'm lost as to what it means to say that both consciousnesses belong to one person. Further, if a person does co-experience experiences of two consciousnesses, those experiences must happen at the same time. Now consider some temporal experience of Christ at a moment of time *t* during his human life. Is the Second Person of the Trinity even able to co-experience that experience together with some experience of his divine consciousness? An answer 'Yes' is not possible since *t* is not a moment simultaneous with any moment in the timeless divine consciousness. But an answer 'No' entails that, although in his divine consciousness he may be timelessly aware of everything which happens at *t* (including his own experiences in his human consciousness at *t*) he cannot himself have an experience at *t*. But the Second Person only exists as long as he has a divine timeless consciousness; so he cannot have that experience at *t* at all.
19. I appreciate Marilyn Adams' discussion of the two ways of interpreting Christ's human nature and her acknowledgement that either my way or her preferred medieval way is sufficient to rebut the .. charge that the notion of a God-man is unintelligible' (op. cit. p. 108).
20. See for example, *The Christian God*, pp. 150-8.
21. The Letter to the Hebrews (4:15) claimed that Christ was 'one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without doing wrong' (χωρίς αμαρτίας). The latter phrase is usually translated 'without sin', but as 'sin' may be construed as 'wronging God' and as (in my view) no one can wrong himself, I prefer my translation which carries no implication about the relation of Christ to God.
22. Mark 6:5.

23. Mark 13: 31-2.
24. Luke 2:52.
25. For some differing patristic views on Christ's ignorance, see J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, vol. 2, B. Herder Book Co, 1923, pp.117-9; and C. Hovorum, *Will, Action, and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century*, Brill, 2008, pp.32-6.
26. That Christ 'suffered' (and so had human sensations) was an item of the Nicene creed. But since it was normally claimed that the Father did not suffer the same sufferings as Christ did, and since it was also normally held that the members of the Trinity in their divine nature shared a divine life, it would seem to follow that Christ did not suffer in his divine nature. The Third Council of Constantinople affirmed that there were in Christ 'two natural volitions or wills' and 'two natural principles of action' (often translated 'energies'). (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, p.128.) Two 'principles of action' merely implies in addition to the divine way a human way of thinking and acting (as discussed above) and so, as well as two sets of beliefs, two kinds of occurrent thought. Two 'wills' involves Christ in his human nature being subject to temptation (see below), which in turn requires that Christ in his human nature is subject to human desires (e.g thirst), none of which of course characterized the divine nature.
27. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, p.17.
28. This may be either because two incompatible actions open to God might be equally good actions, and better than any other incompatible actions; or because there are an infinite number of such actions open to God, each less good than some other action. For fuller discussion of this point see *The Christian God*, pp. 65-71 and 134-6.
29. Matthew 4: 1-11 and Luke 4: 1-13.
30. Allowing this possibility requires a slight alteration in the definition of God's 'perfect freedom'. As I defined it earlier, God's perfect freedom is the freedom to choose between alternatives uninfluenced by irrational desires, that is causes which incline him to do actions with a force out of proportion to their worth, e.g incline to do what he believes to be a bad action or one less good than a best action. Hence given his knowledge of the objective worth of actions (following from his omniscience) he will always do a good action and the best action or an equal best action where there is one, and never do a bad action. But to allow the above possibility, we need to understand a perfectly free person as one subject to no irrational desires except insofar as, uninfluenced by such desires, he chooses to allow himself to act while being influenced by irrational desires to do (what he believes to be) good actions which are less than the best (though not compelled to yield to them). This preserves the point of the original definition that such a person is at the highest level uninfluenced by any considerations except those of reason in determining how he will act, but allows that he may rationally choose to allow himself to do certain acts while open to the influence of irrational desires. But on this definition of perfect freedom it follows that God could be less than perfectly good, though could not do wrong.
31. Thus Augustine claimed that 'the mode by which God deigns to free us through the mediator of God and man, the man Jesus Christ, is good and suitable to the dignity of God' but denied that he needed to show that 'no other mode was possible to God to whose power all things are equally subject' but merely affirmed that there was no 'other mode more appropriate'. (Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. A.W. Hadden, T and T Clark, 1873, Book 13,

chapter 10.)