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The Ethical Domain of the Chalcedonian Christological Confession

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The Ethical Domain of the Chalcedonian Christological Confession

A graduate thesis submitted to Dr. Teresa Morgan and Dr. Volker Leppin,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree of

Master of Sacred Theology

by

Jesse Gerard Alker

May 6, 2023

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Introduction

The contemporary moment in western civilization is characterized by its ever-loudening cry for social reform.¹ In recognizing its responsibility as Christ's hands and feet on Earth, the Church has united itself in solidarity with the cause in many ways. It would seem self-evident that confessionalism would occupy a central place in the Church's modern-day mission given confessionalism's role as an essential medium of definition, expression, and identity for the Church for nearly two millennia.² To be fair, for many denominations it has. However, it is often the case that *traditional* confessionalism, by which I mean the express affirmation and ownership of those ancient Christian creedal confessions deemed orthodox and ecumenical, does not occupy a central place (or any place at all) in the Church's activity in these crucially important times and conversations. The reasons for this are simple to identify.

For one, as the focus of modern theology and Christian faith expression has shifted toward the ethical, the use for traditional confessions has waned given that such confessions mainly have historical roots in matters of orthodoxy/orthopraxy. Because the early confessions do not exude an explicit ethical character, those creeds once deemed complete and coherent in their teaching appear insufficient when viewed through the contemporary lens.³ This has inspired

¹ I am especially referring to the period beginning with the rise of justice and equality movements in the United States in wake of the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020, a movement which remains unsatisfied to this day. However, any number of examples from the mid-20th century to the present could be evoked in both secular and religious circles to substantiate this claim (e.g., The Civil Rights Movement, second and third wave feminist movements, marriage equality movements, liberation theologies, postcolonial theologies, etc.)

² The essential role Christian creedal confessions played toward defining one's orthodoxy, allegiances, and identity in the early church has been notably outlined by Todd S. Berzon in his recent study, "Between Presence and Perfection: The Protean Creed of Early Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 579-606.

³ I am here referring to the description of the Nicene confession as "complete in its teaching about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" within the transcript of Chalcedon (451). Norman P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils vol. 1* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 84.

today's theologians to "fill in the gaps" or draft new confessions entirely that better represent the demands of the present. That is not to say traditional confessionalism has always been met with harmonious acceptance until the present. The Church's first ecumenical conciliar confession (Nicaea I) took nearly two decades to gain its widespread acceptance, and even then, this was achieved only after the persistent and persuasive lobbying of Athanasius of Alexandria.⁴ Indeed, the very confession under focus in this work (that of Chalcedon, 451) was forged under the pressure of dissension caused by the doctrinal disputes of its conciliar predecessor (Ephesus I, 431). Many a theologian have joined hands throughout the centuries in considering the conciliar language lacking, or at least in need of further expansion and clarification.

As such, modern theology has shifted its focus from technical questions about the nature and substance of Christ towards considering who Jesus Christ is for us today. This is an important endeavor that is not problematic in and of itself. However, in so doing they have often left behind the wisdom offered by traditional confessionalism which I believe to be crucial towards uncovering the contemporary identity of Jesus. Implicit to this departure is a charge of deficiency in the tradition of confession to present a Jesus that is able to stand up to the present moment. This is a charge of practical deficiency (or perhaps more pressingly, *ethical* deficiency), and this work fundamentally rejects such charges. There is no document, not even the Bible, that can achieve a universal consensus regarding all matters of faith and practice, and this work certainly does not seek to ascribe an authority to the ancient confessions in such a manner. Rather, this work will attempt to show that traditional confessionalism can indeed speak to the present in a way applicable to Christians from all traditions. It is my belief that traditional

⁴ David M. Gwynn, "The Council of Chalcedon and the Definition of Christian Tradition," in *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils 400-700*, eds. Richard Price and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 10.

confessional doctrine continues to be central to the Christian faith and ought to be utilized as a rich resource as we seek to address the challenges of the present time.

Against charges that such confessions cannot speak to the modern moment, this work endeavors to reveal the inherent ethical relevancy of conciliar Christology using the Chalcedonian Christological confession as a case in point.⁵ It is my belief that ethics are an integral component of the Christian faith rightly understood. The center point of the Christian narrative is a good God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ who is intentionally engaged with many of the ethical concerns that persist to the present day and who is often viewed as an exemplar of virtue by those within the faith. If the previous premises are correct, it can be asserted that for one to be properly considered Christian, being as one made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28) and transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29), is for one to assume a like concern for the ethical. It is thus my belief that conciliar Christology possesses its own ethical domain as a consequence of its subject matter.

This is not an argument for the existence of subliminal ethical directives within the Chalcedonian definition. Chalcedon does not speak to the type of ethics that inform an agent which actions are right and which are wrong (principles), and thankfully so, for this would hardly serve as a convincing proof for its relevancy in the plural Christian landscape of the present. Rather, the kind of ethics Chalcedon reveals are in terms of what qualities define the ethical being, or in other words, what it means for one to have “goodness,” “love,” and the like. The key to establishing Chalcedon’s relevancy to the ethical challenges of contemporary society ultimately resides in locating a convincing modern theological ethic in the same vein as its own impulse. My research indicates Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of modernity’s most creative and

⁵ By “conciliar Christology” I mean the Christology of the first seven ecumenical councils, or simply the pro-Nicene position.

influential theological ethicists, to be a key interlocuter. This work will uncover the ethical locus of the Chalcedonian definition through an exposition of Bonhoeffer's Christologically grounded ethics in conversation with the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria, the single most influential figure on the form of the Chalcedonian definition of faith. The end goal is to demonstrate that Chalcedon's theological foundations are congruent with Bonhoeffer's ethical framework and conclusions.

To be clear, this is an argument that an ethical reading of the theology that informs the Chalcedonian confession is a valid reading, not necessarily an argument that Chalcedon possesses and conceals an entire coherent ethical system (though that certainly may be the case). The argument is one of implication, and Chalcedon's ethical implications can be uncovered by an exercise in historical theology that examines key Chalcedonian themes resonating in the theologies of both Cyril and Bonhoeffer. The first premise of this work posits that the implications arising from Cyril's exposition of key Christological themes can be transcribed upon the Chalcedonian confession on account of the apostolic authority the councils conferred to him. From here, it will be argued that these implications anticipate many of Bonhoeffer's key ethical concepts and show him to have been influenced by the Chalcedonian Christology. From Cyril, one receives an exposition of the trinitarian God's goodness and love in action while from Bonhoeffer one is led to see how that action naturally leads to a reciprocity of ethical care and activity in conformity with original divine intention. Most of the key themes to be discussed are bound in the doctrines of creation and the Incarnation.

The work will proceed by briefly contextualizing the Council of Chalcedon and arguing that Cyril is the lens through which one ought to interpret its definition. The works of Cyril that most influenced the Chalcedonian definition will be briefly treated before moving to Cyril's

broader corpus in order to present a fuller picture of the grounding and implications of his theology (and consequently, Chalcedon's). The picture that emerges is one of a radical commitment to the single subject of the Word of God taking on the true nature of humanity in a way that genuinely leaves the respective natures fully intact while yet allowing a legitimate communication of properties between them. The implications for humanity, that uniquely favored creature who had been created for purposes of divine fellowship yet forfeited her claim to it in the Fall, are nothing short of monumental. This section will further serve as demonstration of how Cyril's understanding of the hypostatic union (with emphasis on the implications of deification and participation in Christ) anticipates Bonhoeffer's ethical move to be treated in the following section. Moving then to Bonhoeffer, it will first be displayed that Bonhoeffer himself affirmed the Chalcedonian Christology, but also that he was influenced by the Chalcedonian tradition of interpretation in his broader theology. From there, the work will explore the Chalcedonian influence in the express context of his ethics to show a conceptual congruence between Bonhoeffer and the tradition (with Cyril representing the tradition as pro-Chalcedonian par excellence) before progressing to an analysis of Bonhoeffer's ethical system where the fundamental implications of God's having become human are expressed in terms of ethical responsibility.

In line with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thesis that ethics are grounded in the reconciliatory reality of Jesus Christ, this work will exposit various texts within the works of Cyril of Alexandria and Dietrich Bonhoeffer to show how the Chalcedonian Christology can and has been legitimately read for its ethical implications. This enables us to assert the conformity of Bonhoeffer's Christological ethics to traditional Chalcedonian Christology thereby establishing the case for the existence of a modernly relevant ethical domain within the Chalcedonian

definition of faith. Put another way, this work can be seen as an attempt to answer modernity's question of who Christ is for us today with the answer being the same Christ he has always been and has been attested to be by the orthodox tradition.

Review of Literature

This project can be seen as a continuation of a recent scholarly trend that engages with Chalcedonian relevancy in one form or another. Timothy Pawl's *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, for example, takes up the conciliar propositions and weighs them against their critics before presenting a new defense of the council's relevancy for today. The argument is rooted in a context of analytic philosophy and naturally relies on linguistics, and in this way appeals only to a minority audience. Pawl views the charge of logical inconsistency as the biggest threat to the councils and spends no time considering their supposed lack of an ethical dimension. To be fair, Pawl is neither an ethicist nor historian. However, in labeling logical inconsistency as the "fundamental problem" facing conciliar Christology,⁶ it contributes to the argument of those seeking to do away with the councils on account of their irrelevancy to the modern social landscape that is not particularly concerned with metaphysics. In failing to see the claim that conciliar confessions lack an ethical dimension poses a far greater risk to conciliar relevancy, there is still a deficiency in the scholarship that must be addressed.

Brian Daley's *God Visible* contributes a fresh outlook on the historical study of patristic theology by arguing against seeing Chalcedon as the "crown of patristic Christology" as it so often has been seen in the wake of Grillmeier's momentous *Christ and Christian Tradition*. Instead of exalting Chalcedon to the high place of honor, Daley argues one ought to view

⁶ Timothy Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 75-96.

Chalcedon as a “crucially important way station: one of several.”⁷ Daley’s emphasis is on an exposition of the Fathers themselves if one wants to uncover the true concerns of patristic theology, for the identity of Christ established at Chalcedon “cannot be intelligibly seen as separate from the theological works of the great Patristic theologians in which it was embedded.”⁸ Chalcedon may certainly be utilized as a lens through which to view the Fathers but only as frequently as one exposit their works apart from it.⁹ The picture that emerges of patristic theology is one principally concerned with questions of relations (i.e. “How does God save us?”, “How is God related to this created order?”) over metaphysics.¹⁰ Daley’s recommended method of conciliar exposition features prominently in this work.

Thomas Hughson’s work, *Connecting Jesus to Social Justice*, provides a helpful apology for a renewed appreciation of classical Christology in a modern social climate. Hughson takes up the task of Chalcedonian relevancy by identifying the divinity of Jesus as expressed in the Chalcedonian confession as “the source of an orientation to a just social order.”¹¹ Hughson is optimistic that modern theological currents actually open Chalcedon to “deepened appropriation and appreciation, and by implication, application” rather than close it.¹² On this basis he exhorts

⁷ Brian E. Daley, *God Visible: Patristic Christology Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰ See, for example, p. 195: “The point here is that one fails to do them (Cyril, Theodoret, Theodore, and Nestorius) or their long debate full justice if one sees it simply as a prolonged wrangling over concepts and terminology and formulas—over the relative value of hypostasis and prosōpon, “one nature” or “two”—let alone as a contest between more and less adequate ways of presenting the human soul of Christ and its faculties.”

¹¹ Thomas Hughson, *Connecting Jesus to Social Justice: Classical Christology and Public Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 132.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

the current generation of ethicists and public theologians to seriously consider the contemporary implications of the hypostatic union. Though commendable in many ways, the lack of engagement with patristic source material produces an air of conjecture in the work's appeal to historical Chalcedonian interpretation that is disappointing given the centrality of the topic to the argument.

The works of Ulrik Nissen (*The Polity of Christ*) and Jens Zimmerman (*Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christian Humanism*) best represent the spirit of the work at hand and will be revisited below. Nissen, in highlighting the presence of central Chalcedonian motifs in the Lutheran tradition en route to establishing the validity of a Christian social ethic between universality and specificity, demonstrates the shared presumption that ethics are indissoluble from Christianity by way of the Incarnation.¹³ The central premise of Nissen's work points to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's particular brand of pro-Chalcedonian Christological ethics as a case in point and is exemplary in its exposition of Bonhoeffer's concept of the "Christ-reality." However, similarly to Hughson, Nissen takes for granted much of the Chalcedonian tradition by excluding interaction with patristic sources. Zimmerman's work, on the other hand, shines in this regard. Zimmerman locates Bonhoeffer's Christological anthropology squarely in the patristic tradition and gives a great deal of emphasis to motifs of participation and ethical formation in the literature of both camps.¹⁴ The work contains plentiful interaction with patristic source material

¹³ For example, Nissen writes, "The question is not whether a relationship between Christ and Christian ethics exists. Rather, the question is how to determine this relationship and what the implications are." Ulrik Nissen, *The Polity of Christ: Studies on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Chalcedonian Christology and Ethics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 14.

¹⁴ To be specific, Zimmerman situates Bonhoeffer in the tradition "that runs from Irenaeus, through Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, to the Cappadocian fathers with their recapitulative Christological anthropology, image-likeness distinction, and emphases on participation and on the ethical component of Christlikeness in the new humanity." Jens Zimmerman, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christian Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 101.

and does much to establish the concept of deification as a necessary lens through which to view patristic moral formation. What is more, Zimmerman demonstrates deification to be inseparable from popular patristic understandings of the Incarnation and its implications.¹⁵ The differences between Zimmerman's work and my own are chiefly in source selection and goal, as Zimmerman is seeking to solidify Bonhoeffer as a Christian humanist while I am seeking to establish Bonhoeffer's ethics as the hermeneutical key through which the ethical implications of traditional Chalcedonian Christology may be clearly seen. Because of this focus, my work deals far more extensively with the theology most influential to the Chalcedonian formula's form (viz. that of Cyril of Alexandria) rather than its predecessors or advocates.

St. Cyril and the Foundations of Chalcedonian Christology

This section will briefly address the setting and legacy of the Council of Chalcedon before turning to an analysis of those theological currents in Cyril of Alexandria that open Chalcedon to ethical appropriation in Bonhoeffer. Of principal interest here is Cyril's exposition of the early chapters of Genesis and his robust theology of the Incarnation, for in these two loci one can find an abundance of material conducive to establishing an ethical framework that is wholly in line with the Chalcedonian emphasis on Christ as true God-true man.

The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) was the fourth ecumenical council convoked, and just like the three preceding it, its assembly was entirely forged in controversy. The Council of Ephesus I had failed to alleviate the looming threat of schism and in fact furthered the fractures while the so-called "robber synod" that took place at Ephesus in 449 all but necessitated the Chalcedonian deliberation two years later. A full account of Chalcedon's background is not

¹⁵ Ibid., 104, 107-108.

necessary nor appropriate in a work of this scope,¹⁶ thus three items germane to the present discussion will be highlighted.

First, it is essential to recognize Chalcedon within the broader tradition of orthodox Christian confession. To be sure, Emperor Marcian's chief intention for Chalcedon was to bring an end to the incessant infighting that defined the years post Ephesus I. Marcian believed that if a formula could be drafted and agreed upon that clearly expressed unity and distinction in the person of Christ (a project Ephesus I failed to accomplish), the Nestorian, Eutychian, and Monophysite temptations would be extinguished once and for all.¹⁷ However, while this may have been Chalcedon's chief political responsibility, this ought not be seen as Chalcedon's *only* responsibility. The early Church's emphasis on the continuity of her faith was already a deeply engrained convention by the time of Chalcedon meaning the council's priority was first to ensure it upheld the sanctity of the tradition entrusted to it,¹⁸ then to weigh the tradition's interpretive possibilities in order to address its present needs.¹⁹ It is for this reason those presiding over Chalcedon first affirmed the "wise and saving creed" promulgated at Nicaea (AD 325) as "inviolable" and "...complete in its teaching about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" before proceeding with their own definition of faith.²⁰

¹⁶ For a full account of Chalcedon's setting and significance, see Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition vol. 1*, trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975) 419-96; Norman P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils vol. 1* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 37-104; Richard Price and Michael Gaddis (eds.), *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon vol. 1* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 17-74; Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 241-343, among various others.

¹⁷ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 479.

¹⁸ Gwynn, "The Council of Chalcedon," 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰ Tanner, *Decrees*, 84.

Secondly, it is Cyril who ought to be seen as the primary influence on Chalcedon rather than Pope Leo I. Those writings of Cyril against Nestorius that were so influential to the doctrinal direction of Ephesus I were reaffirmed as “conciliar” and “authoritative” at Chalcedon while Cyril himself was identified by the Chalcedonian Fathers as the authoritative interpreter of the “saving creed” of Nicaea.²¹ It is also of note that Cyril’s exalted status in these proceedings was bestowed after the bishops publicly compared other patristic writings to the Nicene definition and evidently found Cyril’s to be most representative.²² Though Leo’s *Tome* was also deemed authoritative by the bishops at Chalcedon alongside Cyril’s *Second Letter to Nestorius* and “Letter of Peace,” it was judged (at least by the eastern bishops in attendance who far outnumbered the western)²³ in its conformity to Cyril.²⁴ Mark Edwards also makes note of the fact that while Cyril’s letters were readily exalted by the Chalcedonian bishops, it was only after

²¹ The transcript of the Acts of Chalcedon (V.34) reads, “And because of those who attempt to destroy the mystery of the dispensation, shamelessly blathering that he who was born of the Holy Virgin Mary is a mere human being, *the council has accepted as in keeping [with these creeds] the conciliar letters of the blessed Cyril* (emphasis added), then shepherd of the church of Alexandria, to Nestorius and to those of the Orient, for the refutation of the madness of Nestorius *and for the instruction of those who with pious zeal seek the meaning of the saving creed* (emphasis added).” Richard Price and Michael Gaddis (eds.), *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, vol. 2* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 203.

Karl-Heinz Uthemann also makes note of the authoritative status bestowed upon Cyril at Chalcedon in his chapter on the history of Christology in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*: “...the commission begins with Cyril’s second letter to Nestorius and his ‘Letter of peace’, insofar as these, as the commission says, are in agreement. It designates both as ‘the synodal letters of Cyril’, i.e., those letters on the basis of which, on the one hand, the condemnation of Nestorius in Ephesus (431), and on the other hand, the creed of Nicaea are to be interpreted, if one is to understand the statement (ennoia) intended in them.” Uthemann, “History of Christology to the Seventh Century,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Constantine to c. 600*, eds. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 488.

²² Gwynn, “The Council of Chalcedon,” 16.

²³ Newton notes, “In spite of the prominent position given the three delegates of Rome (at the council), the other six hundred bishops were all from the East...” John Thomas Newton, “The Importance of Augustine’s Use of the Neoplatonic Doctrine of Hypostatic Union for the Development of Christology,” *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971), 13.

²⁴ Price and Gaddis (eds.), *Acts of Chalcedon*, 127-128.

“sharp debate” and “on pain of anathema” that the council agreed to bestow the *Tome* with like status.²⁵

A further consideration for viewing Cyril as the chief influence on Chalcedon has more to do with Leo than Cyril. In his illuminating study of the development of Pope Leo’s soteriology, Bernard Green makes the case that Leo fundamentally misunderstood the error of Nestorius in the *Tome* (against whom, along with Eutyches, the *Tome* was written) and was still at a fledgling stage in his theological career. Therefore, the *Tome* ought to be seen as a milestone along the path toward the more robust and distinctive Christology characteristic of Leo’s post-Chalcedonian sermons and “Letter to the Palestinian Monks.”²⁶ When coupled with the likely possibility that Leo reproduced much of Augustine’s Christology in the *Tome* and the fact that he often cited both Augustine and Cyril throughout his literary career to defend the orthodoxy of both Chalcedon and the *Tome*,²⁷ it becomes clear that the *Tome*’s place of honor at Chalcedon had more to do with Leo’s political influence than his own theological acuity at the time.²⁸

Lastly, Chalcedon’s legacy is tied to its distinct formulary of the hypostatic union, Christ acknowledged as one person in two natures.²⁹ This affirmation clearly and succinctly united the

²⁵ Mark Edwards, “Synods and Councils,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Constantine to c. 600*, eds. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 387.

²⁶ Bernard Green, *The Soteriology of Leo the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 188-247.

²⁷ The charge that Leo reproduced Augustine’s Christology in the *Tome* is raised by John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy—Its History, Theology, and Texts* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 193.

²⁸ See Brian Dobell’s discussion of Leo’s citation of Augustine and Cyril in various iterations of the *testamonia*. Dobell, *Augustine’s Intellectual Conversion: The Journey from Platonism to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5-6.

²⁹ “...one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion...at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and subsistent being.” *Ibid.*, 86.

Cyrrilline emphasis on the single subjectivity of Christ present in the *Second Letter* with the two-nature emphasis characteristic of Leo's *Tome*. Despite this seeming symbiosis, the Chalcedonian Creed is only properly understood through the theological lens of Cyril.³⁰ The language of the confession shows itself to be Cyrrilline on multiple occasions, not the least of which in the dogmatic sanctioning of Cyril's use of "hypostatic union" which so prominently features in the *Second Letter* ("The Word...united to himself hypostatically (ἐνώσας ὁ λόγος ἑαυτῷ καθ' ὑπόστασιν) flesh enlivened with a rational soul...").³¹ Other examples of Cyrrilline language borrowed by the Council include the repetition of "same" and "one and the same" in the definition to assert it is the very Son of God and Second Person of the Trinity who is the subject of the Incarnation.³² The conciliar embrace of Cyril's language equates to an endorsement of his distinctive understanding of the union.³³

Examining Cyril's Christology

When Cyril's *Second Letter to Nestorius* was read aloud at the Council of Ephesus I and deemed consonant with the orthodoxy of Nicaea, it signaled two things. One, that Nestorius would be condemned as a heretic, and two, that Cyril's Christology could legitimately be considered representative of the apostolic faith. Chalcedon's reaffirmation of Cyril's authority

³⁰ "To read the Chalcedonian Creed other than through the eyes of Cyril is to misread it." Thomas G. Weinandy, "Cyril and the Mystery of the Incarnation," in *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, eds. Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel Keating (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 43.

³¹ Tanner, *Decrees*, 41.

³² Cyril recurrently utilizes this language in the *Commentary on John*. See *Ancient Christian Texts: Commentary on John, vol. 1*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, trans. David R. Maxwell (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), pp. 5, 10, 11, 12, 30, 32, 65, 108, 201, 218, 220, 228, etc.

³³ Weinandy, "Mystery of the Incarnation," 43.

warrants an examination of the *Second Letter* as a starting point to this project's larger analysis of Cyril.

The *Second Letter to Nestorius*

The *Second Letter* begins with some brief introductory pleasantries before Cyril turns to warn Nestorius to take great caution when teaching or sharing his thoughts on the faith lest he find himself laid open to the “unendurable wrath” reserved for those who scandalize the gospel.³⁴ The most effective way to ensure one is “expounding the healthy word of faith,” says Cyril, is to “zealously occupy ourselves with the words of the holy fathers, to esteem their words, to examine our words to see if we are holding to their faith as it is written, to conform our thoughts to their correct and irreproachable teaching.”³⁵ Such an exhortation is important in the context of Cyril's Christology because it demonstrates that Cyril viewed his teaching as squarely in line with the apostolic tradition and not as presenting anything new (a sentiment evidently shared by the majority of bishops at Ephesus and Chalcedon).³⁶ Cyril goes on to summarize the Nicene faith before presenting the main doctrinal thrust of the *Second Letter* which reads,

For we do not say that the nature of the Word was changed and became flesh, nor that He was turned into a whole man made of body and soul. Rather do we claim that the Word in an unspeakable, inconceivable manner *united to himself hypostatically* (emphasis added) flesh enlivened by a rational soul, and so became man and was called Son of Man, not by God's will alone or good pleasure, nor by the assumption of a person alone. Rather did two different natures come together to form a unity, and from both arose one Christ, one Son.³⁷

³⁴ Tanner, *Decrees*, 40.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

³⁶ See McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 183: “He (Cyril) frequently sums up the claim to authentic intellectual and theological pedigree by his scriptural exegeses, as well as his appeals to the creed of Nicaea (whose champion Athanasius had been) and the tradition of the 'Fathers' before him.”

³⁷ Emphasis added. Tanner, *Decrees*, 41.

Though the concept of hypostatic union was abundantly implied in the writings of former fathers,³⁸ the phrase became a characteristic mark of Cyrilline Christology. Cyril's "union according to hypostasis" formula is his most common way to articulate what happens in the act of incarnation and clearly demonstrates the acknowledgement of two natures and one subject.³⁹ As will be demonstrated below, it also represents the limit of Cyril's speculation regarding how the natures co-exist in the person of Christ.

In a section that highlights the purity of the union and Christ's single subjectivity, Cyril asserts that the man must not be adored "with" the Word as this implies there are two subjects of worship. Rather, one is to "adore him as one and the same, because the body is not other than the Word (ὅτι μὴ ἀλλότριον τοῦ λόγου τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ), and takes its seat with him beside the Father, again not as though there were two sons seated together but only one, united with his own flesh (ἀλλ' ὡς ἐνὸς καθ' ἔνωσιν μετὰ τῆς ἰδίας σαρκός)."⁴⁰ This affirmation at once corrected the mistakes of both Nestorius and the Adoptionists, for if the man were not alone worthy of adoration it would imply the human nature did not exist prior to the Word's assumption of it thereby proving the union occurred at conception.⁴¹

³⁸ Kelly comments that a twofold order of being in the person of Jesus (κατὰ σάρκα and κατὰ πνεῦμα) was common as early as the apostolic age, going so far as to affirm it as, "the foundation datum of all later Christological development." J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1978), 138.

³⁹ Against charges that Cyril's less frequent *mia physis* formula indicated he only affirmed a lone nature in the Word.

⁴⁰ Tanner, *Decrees*, 43.

⁴¹ Contra Nestorius, Mary could then properly be considered *theotokos* because "from the very womb of his mother he was so united and then underwent begetting according to the flesh, making his own the begetting of his own flesh." Ibid., 42. Cyril's correction of the adoptionist error is self-evident.

The other feature of Cyril's *Second Letter* important to note here is his appeal to the *communicatio idiomatum* (the legitimate mutual exchange of seemingly contradictory predicates between the natures). This ought to be seen as a direct rebuttal of Nestorian tendencies to underemphasize the holistic unity of the natures. Nestorius would have it that such predicates unbefitting of God (e.g. "God suffered," "God died," etc.) would be interpreted as no more than confused word play while Cyril's dialectic argued that the proper significance of such predicates are actualized in the person of Christ.⁴² It is precisely because two distinct natures are united in the person of the divine Word that one can assert that Christ suffered though God is impassible or that he died though God is eternal. For example,

In a similar way we say that he suffered and rose again, not that the Word of God suffered blows or piercing with nails or any other wounds in His own nature (for the Divine, being without a body, is incapable of suffering); but because the body which became his own suffered these things, he is said to have suffered them for us (ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὸ γεγονός αὐτοῦ ἴδιον σῶμα πέπονθεν ταῦτα, πάλιν αὐτὸς λέγεται παθεῖν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν). For he was without suffering, while his body suffered. Something similar is true of his dying.⁴³

Cyril goes on to say that "it would be sheer lunacy" to say or think that the divine had experienced death in His own nature, but one can say it and be correct in doing so in the context of the hypostatic union because it is here alone where the words "his flesh tasted death (ἡ σὰρξ αὐτοῦ ἐגעύσατο θανάτου)" are enlivened with meaning.⁴⁴

Cyril's *Second Letter to Nestorius* represents a typical example of his theological method; conservative in approach and apostolic in affiliation, though decidedly fresh in presentation. This was no easy feat at a time when originality was tantamount to heresy. Frances Young was not

⁴² McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 203.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

overemphasizing Cyril's virtuosity when he wrote, "His profound dependence on the past was married to a brilliant judgment of contemporary needs and an ability appropriately to recycle the traditional inheritance."⁴⁵ This work now turns to an examination of various Cyrilline works that frame the theology of the *Second Letter* and Chalcedon and reveal a fuller picture of the implications of the Incarnation in Cyril's thought.

Cyril's Theology of the Incarnation

The clearest link uniting Cyril's theology to Bonhoeffer's ethics lies in their shared positioning of the Incarnation as the crossroads where Christology, anthropology, ecclesiology, and soteriology meet. For Cyril in particular, the Incarnation becomes the only lens through which to properly interpret the biblical narrative of restoration, a story which commences "In the beginning..." (Gen. 1:1). Some of the characteristic marks of Cyril's Christology to be examined below include an unwavering commitment to the eternal Word as the lone subject of the Incarnation, an understanding of the Word's activity as fundamentally grounded in trinitarian relations within the Godhead, and a predominant focus on the "this life" implications of the Incarnation for humanity (though he is certainly not silent on the life to come). One ought to be able to transcribe these emphases upon the Chalcedonian Christology without much controversy on the basis of the exalted status awarded to Cyril by the council. This section will examine Cyril's account of the restoration narrative primarily (but not exclusively) using the *Commentary on John* as an exegetical basis, for the *Commentary* is an excellent example of Cyril's theological method.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 304.

⁴⁶ Both Young and Maxwell attest to the *Commentary*'s representative features. See Young, *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 310, and Cyril of Alexandria, *Ancient Christian Texts: Commentary on John*, vol. 1, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, trans. David R. Maxwell (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), xv.

Cyril is largely uninterested in cosmogeny and spends little time in any of his works trying to explain how God accomplished His creative feats. He appeals to the corrupted reason of man and the incomprehensibility of God's power in this regard and hopes to deter any who seek to go beyond the plain reading of the text.⁴⁷ Instead, Cyril's main focus in the creation account is on the creation of man, that creature recognized as "most important of the animals...made to resemble He that created him."⁴⁸ By Cyril's account, humanity was created with natural faculties that enabled her to image God (rationality, freedom, dominion) while not possessing the qualities necessarily belonging to the divine essence alone (immortality, incorruptibility, etc.).⁴⁹ However, it was God's intention for humanity to partake in this latter resemblance as well, thus God bestowed the first humans with the gift of Holy Spirit in order that "man should outrun the rationality of his own nature" (Cyril's interpretation of Gen. 2:7).⁵⁰ The Spirit not only elevates the first humans through participation in the divine essence but further functions as a seal protecting the integrity of the *imago dei*.⁵¹

As a consequence of being created in the image of an essentially good God and partaking of His Spirit, humanity was oriented toward both goodness and virtue.⁵² However, because the

⁴⁷ A surprising exhortation from an Alexandrian given the tradition's proclivity for allegorical interpretation. *Ibid.*, 152-53.

⁴⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum* 2.28-29, transcribed by Roger Pearse, retrieved from https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cyril_against_julian_02_book2.htm.

⁴⁹ Walter J. Burghardt is often credited with providing the most thorough study on the topic of the *imago dei* in Cyril. See Burghardt, *The Image of God in Man According to Cyril of Alexandria* (Woodstock, MD: Woodstock College Press, 1957), whose thesis is basically summarized here.

⁵⁰ Cyril, *Glaphyra in Genesim* 1.2, quoted in Barbara Villani, "Creation of the Universe and Creation of Man in Cyril of Alexandria's Early Works on the Pentateuch," *Journal of Ancient Christianity* 26, no. 1 (2022), 163.

⁵¹ Cyril, *Commentary on John vol. 1*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, 81.

⁵² "But since the Creator wanted him to be thus, he engraved in the living thing, in addition to imperishability, knowledge of everything good and indeed an appetite for virtue." Cyril, "Festal Letter 15," in *The Fathers of the Church: St. Cyril of Alexandria- Festal Letters 13-30*, ed. John J. O'Keefe, trans. Philip R. Amidon (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 39.

Holy Spirit's presence was not natural to human nature and she possessed the aforementioned capacities for freedom and reason, humanity was capable of forfeiting her privileged state of divine resemblance should she so choose which is exactly what occurs in the Fall. That humanity's fall from grace was entirely her own doing is essential for Cyril, similarly to how her (re)ascent to God will also require the demonstration of her own volition (to be discussed below).⁵³ Cyril's account of the Fall itself is fairly standard. Despite her orientation to the good, proximity to God, and dominion over irrational creation, humanity is tricked by the serpent to disobey the law of self-control God placed over her and is condemned to death (Gen. 2:17). This introduced corruption to humanity's intended design. The seal of the Holy Spirit that preserved and elevated the divine image is then essentially covered over by a "false stamp" of sin that deteriorates the image.⁵⁴ This consequence of Adam's sin is collectively transferred to human nature whose resemblance to God continues to diminish with every sin committed until the eventual departure of the Holy Spirit and consequent loss of those divine qualities (viz. incorruptibility, immortality, virtue) extrinsic to it. This process mars the divine image to the point of being nearly unrecognizable.⁵⁵ Cyril's framing of the creation account with the giving of the Spirit to humanity on one end and its subsequent departure on the other indicates both that Cyril operated from a strong sense of trinitarian activity in the creation and that the Spirit will play a crucial role in his account of humanity's eventual restoration.⁵⁶

⁵³ "For it was necessary, necessary indeed, that virtue should appear in us as a free choice." Ibid.

⁵⁴ Cyril, *Commentary on John* vol. 1, 81.

⁵⁵ "It became more obscure in him, so to speak, and darkened by the transgression. When the human race reached a great multitude and sin ruled over all of them, it thoroughly plundered the soul of each one, and nature was stripped of the original grace. The Spirit also departed completely, and the rational creature fell into utter irrationality, not even recognizing the creator himself." Ibid.

⁵⁶ Daniel A. Keating, *The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 26.

Interestingly, when Cyril discusses humanity's condemnation to death he mentions only the "flesh" which Barbara Villani has interpreted as Cyril's implying that "a part of him (the human being) was still destined to renewal."⁵⁷ This thesis is convincing when considering Cyril's belief that God, foreseeing the Fall, "...made provision for His own creatures, and prepared for us a second root, as it were, of a race that would uplift us to our former incorruption."⁵⁸ In this context the Fall is allowed because God recognizes from the beginning that the Incarnation, and chiefly the union of natures in the person of the Word, is the ultimate and final way in which humanity can attain to God and achieve her intended end (viz. eternal fellowship with God and one another).⁵⁹

On the topic of Incarnation, it ought first be noted that the Incarnation is ultimately an ineffable mystery for Cyril. As such, he viewed the chief error of Nestorius and other heretics as not merely their conclusions but also their misunderstanding of the question under examination. Any attempt to uncover the "process" of the Incarnation will inevitably fail because the meaningful question is not "how" but "who" (who is the subject?) and "what" (what does this phenomenon mean?).⁶⁰ While the heretics concerned themselves with the technical manner in which these seemingly conflicting natures interact in the person of Christ, Cyril argues that the study of Christology is only properly concerned with the Word and His choice to condescend to

⁵⁷ Villani, "Creation of the Universe...", 163.

⁵⁸ Cyril, *Glaphyra in Genesis*, 1.5.

⁵⁹ C.f. *Commentary on John*, vol. 1, 82, when speaking on the Incarnation: "He also decreed to transform humanity once again to the original image through the Spirit. There was no other way to make the divine imprint shine again in humanity as it did at first."

⁶⁰ Antim Constantin David, "The Logos and the Incarnation in St. Cyril of Alexandria's Commentary on John." *Romanian Journal of Artistic Creativity* 8, no. 2 (Summer 2020), 60.

the realm of flesh for the purpose of humanity's redemption.⁶¹ Just as Cyril avoided speculation about the "how" of creation and instead focused on questions of relations (viz. relations of the Trinity, relationship between God and man), he likewise located the significance of the Incarnation in the sheer fact that God had become man and committed the bulk of his inquiry to analyzing the implications of such a miraculous occurrence. It is enough to simply affirm in faith that the union occurred and marvel at this incredible demonstration of God's love for humanity; indeed, to attempt to go beyond this inevitably exceeds the parameters of the apostolic faith.⁶² Cyril's emphasis on the relational element of the Incarnation is evidence itself that conciliar Christology has been interpreted with an eye to the ethical from its very conception.

Secondly, the hypostatic union is for Cyril the chief reconciling act in the scheme of humanity's redemption. It would be inappropriate to claim that Cyril categorized the various acts of the Incarnation by redemptive significance, and he in fact had a keen awareness of the necessity of the sinless life, death, and resurrection to humanity's restoration/salvation.⁶³ However, that the union itself assumes a place of primacy in Cyril's thought is well-defined. When the divine subject united to itself the feeble human condition, a marvelous transformation

⁶¹ Steven A. McKinion, *Words, Imagery, and the Mystery of Christ: A Reconstruction of Cyril of Alexandria's Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 230. "Christology is concerned with the voluntary economy of the Word of God in which he chooses to live a human life in order to save fallen humanity."

⁶² From the Chalcedonian Definition: "Therefore this sacred and great and universal synod, now in session, in its desire to exclude all their tricks against the truth, and teaching what has been unshakable in the proclamation from the beginning decrees that the creed of the 318 fathers is, above all else, to remain inviolate... Since we have formulated these things with all possible accuracy and attention, the sacred and universal synod decreed that no one is permitted to produce, or even to write down or compose, any other creed or to think or teach otherwise." Tanner, *Decrees*, 86-87.

⁶³ E.g. "If we think rightly, we will hold that all of Christ's sufferings happened for us and in our place, and that they have the power to destroy and ward off what happened to us for good reason because we fell away from God. Just as when he who knew no death gave his own flesh for our life, that fact was sufficient to destroy death for all... Christ, then, does not bear a cross of his own deserving but one that we deserved and that hung over us as far as the condemnation of the law is concerned. Just as he died not for himself but for us, that he might become for us the author of eternal life, destroying in himself the power of death... as the psalmist says, when he who has no sin is condemned for the sin of all." Cyril, *Ancient Christian Texts: Commentary on John*, vol. 2, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, trans. David R. Maxwell (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 61, 80-81.

occurs. This is not a transformation denoting that either nature was diminished or absorbed by contact with the other, but a transformation to a state of Edenic like unity between God and man without the possibility for disbandment that once threatened it. The hypostatic union represents “the ontological reconstruction of a human nature that had fallen into existential decay as a result of its alienation from God,”⁶⁴ and is thereby of first order importance not only because it is chronologically first in the scheme of Christ’s work, but because it enables the restorative efficacy of his following works.

Cyril is adamant that both natures retain their full and proper essence in the union, and it is necessarily so for the true purpose of the Incarnation to be accomplished.⁶⁵ Perhaps recognizing the integrity of the human nature to be more susceptible to confusion or alteration, he emphasizes that Christ’s genuine humanity was necessary because God needed to “assume everything that went along with it (human nature)... and make it participate in his own sacred and divine honors.”⁶⁶ In so doing, God would be revealed as “ennobling the nature of man in himself.”⁶⁷ There is also a practical purpose of God’s assumption of a true human nature in that He is then able to provide a living demonstration of human nature flourishing as it was intended (and as it was in Eden), that being as “properly oriented toward God and in holy and righteous relationships with God, neighbor, and self.”⁶⁸ The union is here again revealed as especially

⁶⁴ McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 184.

⁶⁵ See Cyril’s rebuttal to those questioning Christ’s genuine divinity and humanity, *Commentary on John* vol. 1, 77-81.

⁶⁶ Cyril, “That the Christ is One,” quoted in McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 221.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Veronica M. Tierney, “For Us and For Our Salvation: Cyril of Alexandria’s Christological Anthropology,” PhD diss., Boston College, 2018, 99.

significant, for in his lone person Christ demonstrated the height of both divine and human relational intimacy by virtue of his simultaneous identity as the Second Person of the Trinity and as the representative man in whom all humanity was present.

Another area of emphasis for Cyril is presenting Christ as the paradigmatic man or “second Adam.” Cyril tended to see the redemption narrative in terms of creation/re-creation,⁶⁹ and one of his most common methods of explaining this theme was to appeal to Adam/Christ typology.⁷⁰ It is only fitting that the medium of God’s creating agency (viz. the Word, “the wisdom and power of God...who works all things, and brings into being things that are not”)⁷¹ would harbor the responsibility of righting Adam’s wrongs, a process Cyril describes in terms of recreation. The first Adam represents humanity’s progression from nonexistence to a favored existence but also its regression from favored existence to decay. In the second Adam, “the human race returns to a second beginning, being refashioned into newness of life and returning to its original incorruption.”⁷² How this restoration comes about is primarily explained in two ways. For one, it is a crucial feature of the second Adam that he is immutable and unchangeable.⁷³ This affirmation for Cyril is more a testament to his insistence on the Word being the single subject of the Incarnation than any sort of claim about how the respective

⁶⁹ Robert L. Wilken, “Exegesis and the History of Theology: Reflections on the Adam-Christ Typology in Cyril of Alexandria,” *Church History* 35, no. 2 (June, 1966), 142.

⁷⁰ This tendency is not unique to Cyril amongst the patristic writers. VanMaaren identifies a shift in patristic interpretation of Adam-Christ typology beginning with Methodios that moved away from relating the two in terms Adam’s sin/Christ’s death and toward a relation between Adam’s sinful life/Christ’s sinless. See John VanMaaren, “The Adam-Christ Typology in Paul and its Development in the Early Church Fathers,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 64, no. 2 (2013), 276-290.

⁷¹ Cyril, *Commentary on John* vol. 1, 31.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 310.

⁷³ Daniel Keating, “The Baptism of Jesus in Cyril of Alexandria: The Recreation of the Human Race,” *Pro Ecclesia* 8, no. 2 (1999), 207.

natures manifest in the person of Christ. It is precisely because it is the pre-existent Word that appropriates human nature to Godself that humanity is lifted from her ontological limitations. If grace were bestowed upon humanity by any other means than through one who is “by nature without variation or change,”⁷⁴ there could be no guarantee Adam’s failures would not be perpetuated given that humanity’s possession of such qualities is only possible by her choice to participate in the One who possess them by nature.

The second Adam’s immutability and impassibility reveal the second part of Cyril’s explanation of how humanity is restored in Christ, namely through the reacquisition of the Holy Spirit. He writes,

Since the first Adam did not preserve the grace given by God, God the Father planned to send us the second Adam from heaven...just as through the disobedience of the first we came under God’s wrath, so through the obedience of the second, we might escape the curse, and its evils might come to nothing. When the Word of God became human, he received the Spirit from the Father as one of us. He did not receive anything for himself personally because he himself is the supplier of the Spirit. But the one who knew no sin received the Spirit as man in order to keep the Spirit in our nature and root in us once again the grace that had left us.⁷⁵

Cyril adamantly denies that Christ’s reception of the Holy Spirit was similar to Adam’s in that it signified the addition of divine qualities extrinsic to his nature, for as fully God himself, Christ “differs in no way from the Father when it comes to being perfect.”⁷⁶ Indeed, Christ already has the Holy Spirit by nature as the Son.⁷⁷ However, the two do share a similarity of collective representation and consequence. In the same way the first Adam’s personal sin led to the

⁷⁴ Cyril, *Commentary on John* vol. 1, 82.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Cyril writes in opposition to “the heretic who loves to criticize” here. *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷⁷ “The Holy Spirit is in the Son not by participation or as something brought in from the outside but essentially and by nature.” *Ibid.*, 75.

corporate degradation of the divine image resulting in the departure of the Holy Spirit from all humanity, the second Adam's personal sinlessness diffuses corporate restoration and provides the Spirit with a temple worthy of its presence *ad infinitum*. This is the very purpose of the Incarnation for Cyril, for "the one who knew no sin became one of us so that the Spirit might become accustomed to remain in us, since the Spirit finds no reason in him for leaving or shrinking back."⁷⁸ In this way Cyril can be read as espousing a theory of the Incarnation that does not merely restore humanity to a pre-Fall state but in some sense elevates it to an "incomparably better state than that of old."⁷⁹ The Spirit now lays claim to a "secure dwelling" it did not have in the first Adam which in turn provides humanity-redeemed-in-Christ an "unshakable stability and greater dignity."⁸⁰ It is in the context of the Adam-Christ typology that Christ's reception of the Holy Spirit achieves ultimate significance for Cyril, for it is here that the One acting out redemption and the one receiving it are "one and the same" Jesus Christ.

These two elements (Christ as the second Adam and his reception of the Holy Spirit) taken together broadly define Cyril's theory of humanity's route to deification. However, to consolidate Cyril's position to the popular ancient dictum "God became man so that man may become divine" does a disservice to the distinctive ascetic features of Cyril's understanding of deification. It is first noteworthy that Cyril speaks far more in terms of participation than deification or divinization.⁸¹ In so doing he was able to accentuate the genuine role human

⁷⁸ Ibid., 82. See also p. 309: "The Only Begotten, then, does not receive the Holy Spirit for himself, since the Spirit is of him and in him and through him, as we said before. But since he became human, he had the entire nature in himself so that he might transform it to its original condition and set it all right."

⁷⁹ Cyril, "Festal Letter 16," *Festal Letters 13-30*, ed. John J. O'Keefe, 55.

⁸⁰ Keating, *Appropriation*, 201-22.

⁸¹ Cyril makes frequent use of 2 Peter 1:4: "...so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature..."

volition plays in the process of our ascent to God and repudiate any notion that deification denotes a transformation of essence.⁸² It is certainly the case that humanity is in some sense collectively “deified” when the Word takes on flesh and retrieves the Spirit on behalf of all. However, this does not negate for Cyril the necessity of procuring the Spirit at an individual level and the process of personal sanctification initiated therein. Humanity’s (re)ascent to God becomes synonymous with her moral ascent precipitated by the reception of Christ in the believer through faith and reception of the Holy Spirit through baptism. One’s faithfulness to the sanctifying work is then demonstrated through continual participation in the Eucharist, whereby those who participate in the “blessing” (Cyril’s term for the Eucharist) are transformed, “so that they will have his own good attribute.”⁸³

Cyril’s concept of participation is far more than mere imitation because Christ is far more than an exemplar. He is the eternal Word of God who has exalted human nature in his very person, bringing about in his own humanity a new and concrete human nature in which humanity is able to participate through faith and the reception of the Spirit.⁸⁴ On the other hand, his life can certainly be seen as a pattern to follow. After all, as the second Adam it was essential for him to demonstrate a holistic obedience where the first had faltered, for his very mission was to constitute in his own humanity the “source of all good for human nature..., the basis for transformation into God, the source of piety and righteousness and the road to the kingdom of

⁸² E.g. “Being something by nature is different from being something by adoption... We enjoy the good that comes by grace rather than the honors that come by nature... The Son, by his authority, gives what belongs to him alone by nature and sets it forth as a common possession... However, we will not be sons of God unchangeably like he is, but we will be sons of God in relation to him by the grace of imitation.” *Commentary on John* vol. 1, 60.

⁸³ Cyril, *Commentary on John* vol. 1, 237.

⁸⁴ Cynthia Peters Anderson, “Reclaiming God’s Vision for Human Life: Participation in the Life of God in the Thought of Cyril of Alexandria, Karl Barth, and Hans Urs von Balthasar,” PhD diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2011, 51.

heaven.”⁸⁵ This reveals a twofold order of deification in Cyril that has been illustrated by both Keating and Russell, though in slightly different ways.⁸⁶ It is helpful to view this distinction in the simple terms of what God has done for humanity (ontological restoration) compared to what is yet necessary for humanity to do for herself (moral restoration). As the former sense has been adequately treated to this point, the second sense will now be further explored.

To recall, Cyril’s account of the pre-Fall state presents Adam as a rational creature bestowed with freedom and the gift Holy Spirit Who preserves and brightens his capacity to image God. God issues a law of self-restraint to remind Adam of his subordinate state that Adam disobeys leading to his and humanity’s condemnation to death and eventual loss of the Spirit. From the beginning of Cyril’s account of salvific history there is an understanding that the Holy Spirit is “a gift that requires ethical preservation lest it be squandered.”⁸⁷ The life and work of Christ regenerates humanity to a graced state where the Spirit can once again dwell, but just as it was in Eden, there must be room for humanity to exercise her full volitional freedom if the entirety of human nature could be properly considered restored.⁸⁸ The agent must choose obedience to God’s commands as Christ had and continually progress in virtue to truly take advantage of what was accomplished in the Incarnation. It is on this basis that Russell believes

⁸⁵ Cyril, *Commentary on John* vol. 1, 76.

⁸⁶ Keating refers to the “strict” and “narrow” senses of Cyril’s doctrine of deification with the former representing the impartation of divine life by virtue of the Spirit and Eucharist and the latter representing our growth into the divine image by moral improvement (Keating, *Appropriation*, 192-93). Russell uses the terms “ontological” and “dynamic,” with the former representing our passage from non-existence to existence and the latter representing the process in which we “advance from createdness to transcendence.” There is a further twofold distinction in this latter category for Russell which he labels “corporeal” and “spiritual,” the former constituting deification via the Eucharist, the latter via the Holy Spirit. The role of moral improvement in the process of deification is seen as ancillary to these sub-distinctions. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 191.

⁸⁷ Keating, *Appropriation*, 25.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

Cyril primarily locates the divine image in the human will, meaning that when the agent chooses the good and virtuous, they are furthering their participation in (or “imaging of”) the divine.⁸⁹

Humanity is far better suited to attain to the good now than when she was in Adam because Christ has now offered himself as her guide, both internally and by the pattern of his life. The believer receives Christ internally by practicing the sacraments and therein experiences nothing short of a moral transformation, for “when Christ has come to be in us, he puts to sleep the law that rages in the members of our flesh. He kindles reverence toward God and deadens our passions, not counting against us the transgressions we are in but rather healing us as people who are ill.”⁹⁰ By receiving the Holy Spirit in baptism and the Son in the Eucharist the believer also receives the Father thus revealing restoration to be a trinitarian act just as the original creation had been,⁹¹ for one cannot have any one person of the Godhead without having the others by consequence.⁹² As noted above, reconciliation between the Father and humanity was first and foremost achieved ontologically in Christ’s incarnation meaning this second sense of deification ought not be treated in terms of reconciliation but of sanctification or growth. When the human agent grows in virtue through obedience to God’s will she demonstrates a commitment to grow in resemblance to His image and likeness (the two are synonymous for Cyril) that in turn

⁸⁹ Russell, *Deification*, 191-92.

⁹⁰ Cyril, *Commentary on John* vol. 1, 239.

⁹¹ “Though the Spirit is the one who dwells in us, we believe that through him, we also have the Father and the Son at the same time, just as John himself said again somewhere in his epistles: ‘By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.’” *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹² *C.f. Commentary on John* vol. 1, 30, “Since the Father is understood to be and is in truth the Father, and the Son is and is understood to be the Son, and the Holy Spirit clearly comes in with them, the number of the holy Trinity arrives at 138 one and the same divine nature.” See also p. 61: “But those who rise to divine sonship through faith in Christ are baptized not into anything originate but into the holy Trinity itself through the Word who is the mediator.”

produces a way of life pleasing to God, thus making this order of deification a highly practical affair. This distinctive mark of Cyril's thought constitutes a movement of the doctrine's emphasis away from the "divinizing contemplation" characteristic of the earlier Alexandrian tradition towards "the practice of the virtues and the reception of the Eucharist in the Christian synaxis."⁹³

On the topic of virtue, Cyril seems to imply that humanity's virtuous living is a responsibility she inherits when accepting Christ's redeeming work on her behalf. For example, he writes in the fourth *Festal Letter* after a summation of what Christ accomplished for us, "It is obviously necessary for us to render deepest thanks, and to offer to God, as a sort of just return for having cherished us and loved us so, holiness in our works, mutual affection, hospitality, charity, familial love, and...pity for the needy."⁹⁴ This inference has also been perceived by Hans Van Loon who noted in the conclusion of his study on the theme of virtue in the entirety of the extant *Festal Letters*, "by a life of virtue we display ourselves as God's image, we may enter into his presence, and we render thanks to Christ for what he has done for us."⁹⁵ That is not to say Christ's relationship to humanity is transactional per se, but simply that humanity's response to her restoration ought to induce action that bears regard for the magnitude of what was freely extended to her.

⁹³ Russell, *Deification*, 204.

⁹⁴ Cyril, "Festal Letter 4," in *The Fathers of the Church: St. Cyril of Alexandria- Festal Letters 1-12*, ed. John J. O'Keefe, trans. Philip R. Amidon (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 81. A similar sentiment is shared in Letter 7 where Cyril writes, "let us put on the Lord Jesus, let us assume the attitude of compassion and pity, let us practice mutual love...In a word, let us hold fast to piety toward God, practicing an entire reverence for him." *Ibid.*, 136.

⁹⁵ Hans Van Loon, "Virtue in Cyril of Alexandria's *Festal Letters*," *Studia Patristica* 96 (2017), 248.

Also important is the place of primacy Cyril ascribes to love amongst the virtues. It would seem only natural that the narrative of humanity's restoration which began on account of love would be completed in the same manner. It was on account of God's love for humanity that she was bestowed with the original blessing of grace and dignity.⁹⁶ Love inspired the Incarnation and humanity's adoption into the family of God,⁹⁷ and it is humanity's own demonstrations of love toward both God and neighbor that enable her to grow in sanctification and share in the light of the Only Begotten.⁹⁸ Keeping in mind Cyril's account of redemption is oriented around the retrieval of the Spirit which leads to the restoration of the divine image in humanity, one can essentially see love as God's cleansing agent that restores the shine of His image in humanity, a shine fully on display in the person of Christ who is *the* Image (Col. 1:15, 2:9) and can be ours to nominally reflect as the Spirit works within us to form us into his "archetypal beauty."⁹⁹ Humanity's reflection of the divine image is then a reflection of "the fruit of love" (the Son) who by nature is love Himself (1 John 4:8).¹⁰⁰ It is not just one's reciprocal love for God that properly characterizes the image bearer, but a love for the whole of humanity for whom He took on flesh

⁹⁶ "Because of his love for humanity, originate beings have the light, just as they are supplied with the power of thought which is established when they come into being... It has grace that is newly acquired, the dignity that comes from the giver's love for humanity." *Commentary on John* v. 1, 40, 43.

⁹⁷ "The Son, by his authority, gives what belongs to him alone by nature and sets it forth as a common possession, making this a sort of image of the love he has for humanity and for the world... He is the true Son existing from the Father, but we are adopted because of his love for humanity." *Ibid.*, 60 See also *Festal Letter* 9, "For in the time of his love for us, that is, *when he became man for us*, he refashioned in himself the whole of nature unto newness of life, restoring it, as God, to what it had been originally..."

⁹⁸ "The one who loves his brother remains in the light.' Love grants to originate beings what they do not have, namely, light. But the Only Begotten is light. Therefore, he is different from those in whom he comes to be through love." *Ibid.*, 48. See also *Festal Letter* 10, "For just as we say that those who love Christ are conformed to him..." *Festal Letters 1-12*, ed. John J. O'Keefe, 188.

⁹⁹ *Commentary on John* vol. 2, 485.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 389.

and died. Indeed, “he will be shown forth in our lives chiefly through love, and he engraves on us the mark of fellowship with him in virtues, which is to hold fast to love for one another.”¹⁰¹

While it is essential for the Christian to grow in all virtues, love is that which unites the rest. This point is especially emphasized in the *Festal Letters* where Cyril’s pastoral heart is on display.¹⁰² For example, Cyril makes the case in Letter 8 that one’s entire goodness is predicated on love:

For while the path that leads to the ability to accomplish virtuous deeds has many a fork, and one may arrive with difficulty “at the prize of the upward call” by way of a road that is complex, yet our entire good is nonetheless bound together in one thing: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself...For whatever it is that clearly oversteps the divine law has certainly lapsed from the circles of love.”¹⁰³

One can find similar sentiments elsewhere in the *Letters* where mutual love is affirmed as “the chief good” and that which unites the virtues in piety (Letters 2, 5, 7, 8, 11, 16, 19, 21).¹⁰⁴ Before concluding this analysis it is worth noting the special emphasis Cyril places on loving the poor that would seem to have both a literal and allegorical thrust. On the one hand, loving the poor is necessary because Scripture commands it, but this does not seem to be the sense Cyril has in mind. Rather, there is a sense in which love for the poor is the purest kind of love because it is entirely non-self-seeking. It is a demonstration of service and compassion for one who is unable to help themselves while expecting nothing in return. Perhaps, in his own words, “love of the

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² In an article on deification in the *Festal Letters*, Jonathan Morgan makes note of the fact that Cyril largely abandons his usual method of outlining deification via scriptural exegesis and instead emphasizes the role asceticism plays in the process. The exhortative thrust of the *Letters* can thereby be seen as the desire of a pastor to effect real change in the behaviors and attitudes of his congregants. See Morgan, “The Role of Asceticism in Deification in Cyril of Alexandria’s *Festal Letters*,” *The Downside Review* 135, no. 3 (2017), 144-153.

¹⁰³ Cyril, *Festal Letters 1-12*, ed. John J. O’Keefe, 139.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 128-29. As a representative example of love being what unites the virtues, see p. 154: “Achieve that virtue which is dear to God. This means practicing moderation, embracing continence, remembering the unfortunate, supporting orphans and widows..., and, in a word, holding to mutual love.”

poor is something special” because it enables one to experience the love God has for humanity and in this way enables one to better follow Christ’s pattern and be molded into his image.¹⁰⁵ By this exposition it is clear that love is not only the very summation of the virtues for Cyril, but in fact constitutes the ethical life by which humanity participates in her restoration.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis of Cyril given here demonstrates just how closely his Christology and anthropology are related, a truly befitting connection for a theologian so enamored with the union of divine and human natures in Christ. Whether it be his teaching on creation, the Fall, the Incarnation, or the responsibilities of the believer in light of these events, every stage of his doctrinal development examined herein is permeated by a concern for relations between God and man. It is certainly no happenstance that the Incarnation assumes a thematic predominance in Cyril’s corpus, as it is here where the divine and the human are intimately and irrevocably united. However, it is in Cyril’s assessment of the Incarnation’s implications that one finds the very spirit of the work at hand. As has been demonstrated, these implications are presented largely in terms of a restoration of the divine image in humankind that is first and foremost grounded in Cyril’s radical insistence on the single subjectivity of the God-man, or ontological implications. The restoration of the image connotes further implications in the form of humanity’s freedom to respond to what was freely offered to her and achieve an even higher resemblance to God by the acquisition of virtues (the chief of which being love), or moral implications. This synergistic doctrine of deification enables humanity to retain everything natural to her while providing the opportunity to obtain something more by being formed by love

¹⁰⁵ Cyril, “Festal Letter 19,” *Festal Letters 13-30*, ed. John J. O’Keefe, 94.

for God and neighbor into the image and pattern of Christ, the paradigmatic human in whom humanity's very purpose is revealed.

In closing, Cyril of Alexandria is most often remembered for his ardent defense of Nicene orthodoxy during what was perhaps the most important time for Christological development in all of church history. He was adamant that the whole of Christian teaching was available to any who sought out the apostolic faith and operated from a keen awareness of his own role in preserving and transmitting that faith for future generations of believers. Just as he did with his *Second Letter to Nestorius*, Cyril's theological career was largely dedicated to explaining the tradition while yet allowing those select doctrinal mysteries (viz. the "how" questions of the Trinity and Incarnation) to stand on the ground of God's ineffable power alone. While all important and true, this section presents a case for remembering Cyril's contribution to Christology in a more practical light. The relational depth and character of Cyril's Christology is teeming with ethical insights and implications as relevant to the Christian today as they were in the fifth century. This work will now move to an examination of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christological ethics to demonstrate how the spirit of the Cyrilline inspired Chalcedonian Christology is still very much alive in the modern ethical landscape.

The Christological Ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The previous section revealed that Cyril's Christology carries an ethical weight in its own right, and one could certainly make a case for an ethical reading of Chalcedon without going beyond the Cyrilline corpus as such. However, if the Christological center of Bonhoeffer's ethics can be convincingly presented within the vein of traditional Chalcedonianism, it will solidify the thesis of this work that Chalcedon's ethical implications are equally relevant to Christians of every time and kind. Not only does this work seek to place Bonhoeffer's ethics within

the Chalcedonian tradition of Christological interpretation, but to reveal his thought to be akin to the blossoming fruit of the ethical seeds planted by Cyril in the 5th century. Bonhoeffer's ethical thought deserves a far more exhaustive examination than what can be offered in this work. Nevertheless, the format of the forthcoming analysis is designed to provide serious engagement with various themes that recurringly appear throughout his corpus in an earnest attempt to avoid caricaturizing him as can so often happen in works of smaller scope. This section will proceed by first establishing the validity of seeing Bonhoeffer as a Chalcedonian by a reading of both primary and secondary literature on the topic. The argument will then advance by way of examining the Christological center of Bonhoeffer's thought in conversation with Cyril in order to display a conceptual congruence before progressing to an analysis of his *Ethics* to show where and how Bonhoeffer builds upon the tradition in the formation of a convincing modern ethic.

Bonhoeffer the Chalcedonian?

It is perhaps prosaic at face to claim Bonhoeffer within the Chalcedonian tradition given that his own faith tradition (German Lutheran Church) was plainly pro-Chalcedonian.¹⁰⁶ However, this is not merely an argument that Bonhoeffer was "pro-Chalcedonian" in the sense of affirming general orthodoxy, but that he was *a Chalcedonian*, by which I mean he adopted and appropriated the Chalcedonian Christology as his own. Two recent studies by Ulrik Nissen and Jens Zimmerman have respectively developed the theory of kinship between Bonhoeffer and Chalcedonianism. Zimmerman's study takes up this task by comparing Bonhoeffer to the patristic tradition. One of Zimmerman's key arguments centers on an interpretation of Bonhoeffer's Christian humanism (roughly equated to his Christological anthropology) that

¹⁰⁶ By "pro-Chalcedonian" I mean something like generally affirming of the Chalcedonian definition, or more plainly, of orthodoxy.

places him in agreement with the patristic concept of deification, a particularly contentious thesis given the tendency of scholars before Zimmerman to see Bonhoeffer at odds with the concept.¹⁰⁷ Zimmerman notes this mischaracterization is often due to a lack of recognition of the deeply anthropological heart of patristic deification. As was demonstrated in the examination of Cyril, deification in this context does not entail humanity literally becoming divine by essence (to which Bonhoeffer would rightly oppose), but rather refers to a process of participating in God enabled by the ontological rescue of the race in the person of Christ and furthered by one's acquisition of virtues.¹⁰⁸ This Bonhoeffer could certainly agree with. The link uniting Bonhoeffer to the patristic tradition is furthered by Zimmerman's antagonistic question, "Should one not wonder how in a theologian who was rather well trained in patristics, and who shared the fathers' high Christology, their *imago dei* anthropology...would come to a radically different understanding of the relation between God and humanity?"¹⁰⁹ What is more, Zimmerman believes the Christological starting point of Bonhoeffer's anthropology inevitably places his own incarnational theology in line with that of the fathers, implications and all.¹¹⁰ The resultant picture of Zimmerman's Bonhoeffer is one decidedly rooted in patristic theology.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Clifford Green, an editor for the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* series, who writes about Bonhoeffer's reversal of patristic anthropology in his introduction to Vol. 6 (*Ethics*) using the classic patristic deification dictum as a case in point: "Bonhoeffer reverses an ancient theological dictum, found in formative theologians like Athanasius and Augustine, namely, that God became human in order that humans might become divine. Rather, he argues, God became human so that human beings could become truly human, that is, recover their lost created humanity through the mediation of Christ. Human beings do not change their form and become divine; their true dignity is to be truly human—as Jesus, according to the Chalcedonian formula, was truly human." pp. 20-21.

¹⁰⁸ Zimmerman's own definition for patristic deification is similar: "Deification, in short, is moral formation into Christlikeness through participation in God by the power of the Spirit through self-disciplined cultivation of the humanity exemplified in Jesus." Zimmerman, *Bonhoeffer's Christian Humanism*, 107-108.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁰ Zimmerman is referring to cosmic and eschatological implications, but also that of Christ's collective assumption and renewal of humanity in himself. *Ibid.*

Nissen's work does many of the same things but in the context of Bonhoeffer's ethics. Nissen helpfully locates numerous instances in which Bonhoeffer refers to the Chalcedonian formula in his corpus and draws inference from these passages that some of Bonhoeffer's key Christological concepts are likely influenced by his affirmative stance on the traditional Christology.¹¹¹ This hypothesis produces some interesting hermeneutical implications. For example, if one were to read Bonhoeffer as a Chalcedonian, a concept such as the "Christ-reality" that might otherwise denote doctrinal progressivism becomes a far more orthodox affair. This idea features prominently in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and can be summarized as the fundamental unity of the spiritual and worldly realms in wake of the revelation of Jesus Christ that reorients the way humanity sees and experiences the world.¹¹² Through the lens of the hypostatic union as explicated by Cyril (see above), the constitution of the "Christ-reality" is merely a natural consequence of God's taking on flesh.

It would be helpful to analyze some of those passage Nissen cites in which Bonhoeffer himself refers to Chalcedon. If he is properly to be considered Chalcedonian as is being claimed here, it would seem one ought first look to see if he observed the distinctive features of the Chalcedonian formula, the chief of which being the hypostatic union. The "Meditation on Christmas" from December 1939, provides a convenient testing ground for such an inquiry. Herein Bonhoeffer summarizes the early church's wrestling over the "Christ question" and

¹¹¹ For example, Nissen contends for a figurative reading of Chalcedonian Christology in Bonhoeffer's concept of Christ as the center of history and reality. "Just as there is a mysterious and real presence of God in Jesus Christ and in the sacraments, Bonhoeffer's understanding of Christ as the center of history may be read as an expression of a figurative, Chalcedonian understanding of the mysterious presence of Christ within the political realm." Nissen, *Polity of Christ*, 43-44.

¹¹² "There are not two realities, but *only one reality*, and that is God's reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world. Partaking in Christ, we stand at the same time in the reality of God and in the reality of the world. The reality of Christ embraces the reality of the world in itself." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6: Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Charles C. West (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 58.

expresses how “it made reason captive to obedience to Jesus Christ and vividly testified, in stern and contradictory statements, to the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ.”¹¹³ A like sentiment is repeated shortly thereafter, thus creating a passage that is particularly revealing of his Christological allegiances. He writes,

The early church pondered the Christ question over several centuries. In so doing, it made reason captive to obedience to Jesus Christ and vividly testified, in stern and contradictory statements, to the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ...In uttering the ultimate conceptual paradoxes, it declared and glorified the mystery as mystery for all natural thinking. The early church Christology really originated at the cradle of Bethlehem, and the splendor of Christmas lies on its eroded countenance. Even today, this Christology wins the hearts of those who come to know it. So...let us take a lesson once again from the early church and try to understand devoutly what it thought and taught about the glorification and defense of the faith in Christ. The stern concepts from that age are like the flints from which one makes a spark of fire.¹¹⁴

First, it is obvious that by “stern and contradictory statements” and “ultimate conceptual paradoxes” Bonhoeffer is referring to the conciliar language, and he seems to view it favorably. Secondly, Bonhoeffer gives like recognition to the inherent authority of the early church’s Christology as well as its paltry subsistence in the modern theological landscape (a point given due attention in the introduction of this work). Lastly, to refer to the conciliar concepts as “flints from which one makes a spark of fire” implies that Bonhoeffer viewed the Christology of the early church fathers as a fundamental starting point for further Christological development and likely utilized it in this way himself.

Further down, Bonhoeffer makes implicit reference to the particular form of Chalcedon by affirming the two nature-one person distinction in Christ and even reiterates much of what

¹¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Meditation on Christmas,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 15: Theological Education Underground, 1937-1940*, ed. Victoria J. Barnett, trans. Victoria J. Barnett, Claudia D. Bergmann, Peter Frick, and Scott A. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 529.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 529-530.

can be seen in Cyril regarding the particularities of Christ's human nature. For example, Bonhoeffer stresses the Son did not take on a pre-existent, individual human being in the incarnation but rather a human nature identical to the rest of humanity. This is what allows one to speak of Christ's concrete/collective humanity, for God assumed the whole of human nature in his particular bodily existence.¹¹⁵ Bonhoeffer then speaks favorably of the "paradoxical dogmatic formula" (viz. "two natures and one person"), viewing it as a daring expression of the mystery of divine majesty.¹¹⁶ He retains both distinction of nature and unity of person as well as argues for the necessity of the fullness of both natures in the person of Christ for purposes of the atonement's efficacy.¹¹⁷ He also makes appeal to the trinitarian economy when clarifying why it is improper to claim the divine nature "took on" human nature, for this would imply the Father and Spirit took on flesh as well. Rather, one must be clear that "the Son of God, the divine person of the Logos, took on human nature."¹¹⁸ Bonhoeffer then refers to Chalcedon by name and affirms its method. He writes,

Nowhere else but in and through the person of Jesus Christ are Godhead and humankind united with each other, "[which] can never more be separated nor mixed together with each other, nor can one be transformed into the other," as stated at Chalcedon, as the utmost paradox and at the same time most reverently preserving the mystery of the person of the mediator.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ "'Human nature' is nature, being, flesh of all human beings, thus includes my nature, my flesh; human nature is the epitome of all human possibilities altogether... This taking on happened in a bodily way—and this is the unique miracle of the incarnation... in the incarnate Son of God is your flesh, all your misery, fear, temptation, even all your sin, borne, forgiven, and sanctified." Ibid., 530-31.

¹¹⁶ "In this paradoxical dogmatic formula, the early church dared to express its knowledge of Christmas. Dared, because it knew that something inexpressible had been expressed here, expressed simply because one could not be silent about it." Ibid., 531.

¹¹⁷ "Both were found and witnessed to in the manger: the humankind that was taken on in the flesh and the eternal Godhead, both joined together in the one name, Jesus Christ... If Jesus Christ is not true God, how could he *help* us? If Christ is not true human, how could he *help us*?" Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 532.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

That Chalcedon “most reverently” points to both the mystery and glory of God is reminiscent of Cyril’s own belief that the tradition has said all there is to say on the matter of the Incarnation short of falling into heretical speculation. What is more, Bonhoeffer affirms Chalcedon’s particular formula as possessing “the highest soteriological significance” on account of its insistence on the single subject of the Incarnation, for “only through the person are the natures in communion with each other...only through Jesus Christ are Godhead and humankind united.”¹²⁰

A last matter of note from the “Meditation” is Bonhoeffer’s rough approval of the *communicatio idiomatum* dialectic. This approval is “rough” because Bonhoeffer’s stance on the communication of properties is actually that of *genus majesticum*, and the two are distinct in both word and implication. Whereas the *communicatio* affirms the legitimacy of applying whatever can be said of a given nature to the person, the *genus* affirms the legitimate communication of properties between the natures themselves (whatever can be said of the divine nature applies to the human nature). That is not to say Bonhoeffer outright rejected the *communicatio*, and there is even strong reason to believe he embraced the doctrine.¹²¹

Regardless, for our purposes it is enough to assert that Bonhoeffer allows for the exchange of contradictory predicates when speaking of the union and in this way aligns closer to Cyril and Chalcedon than not. It is also helpful that Bonhoeffer’s appeal to Luther on the matter couches the *genus majesticum* in terms that could likewise apply to the *communicatio idiomatum*.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ See for example his lecture from the Summer term of 1933 where he uses “*communicatio idiomatum*” as an umbrella term for three different expressions of the doctrine (*genus idiomaticum*, *genus apostelesmaticum*, *genus majesticum*). A footnote attached to *communicatio idiomatum* further claims that Bonhoeffer noted the *communicatio* to be a “very astute speculation.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 12: Berlin, 1932 – 1933*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 344-45.

¹²² Bonhoeffer, quoting Luther in “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper”: “Wherever you can say, ‘Here is God,’ there you must also say, ‘Then Christ the man is also there.’ And if you would point out a place where God

There are various other places where Bonhoeffer invokes Chalcedon. One of his lectures on Christology from the Summer term of 1933 provides an assessment of Chalcedon's historical situation. After noting the Council's anti-heretical form and purpose, he offers an interpretation of the Chalcedonian formula as the extent of the meaningfulness of positive assertions about the Incarnation, or rather as the place where positive assertions no longer have a place. This is a space only to be entered by faith.¹²³ He goes on to make note of Chalcedon's "peculiar form" by which he means its self-limiting, almost hypocritical character that "brings the concept of substance that underlies this thinking to its high point and immediately goes beyond it by saying that from now on assertions about the substance of Jesus Christ will no longer be permitted."¹²⁴ This does not necessarily denote Chalcedon as the end of orthodox Christological development bar none,¹²⁵ but certainly so if the subject of speculation be the relationship of the natures in Christ.

Bonhoeffer presents the hypostatic union formula as a fitting representation of the paradoxical character of the Chalcedonian definition at large. He argues that in first treating the natures in isolation from each other in order to protect their respective integrities, the formula transgresses Chalcedon's own command to avoid assertions about the substance of Jesus Christ. While this would create an obvious problem for most, not so for Bonhoeffer. In fact, it is this very trespass that serves as Chalcedon's most redeeming quality. He writes, "The Chalcedonian formula is an objective, living assertion about Christ that goes beyond all conceptual forms.

is, and not the man, the person would already be divided.... No, my friend, wherever you place God for me, there you must also place the humanity for me." Ibid., 533.

¹²³ Bonhoeffer, *Berlin, 1932 – 1933*, 342.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 343.

¹²⁵ C.f. Ibid., 355-60. Bonhoeffer's treatment of "The Humiliated and Exalted One" is framed in positive terms.

Everything is encompassed in its very clear yet paradoxical agility.”¹²⁶ The real utility of the formula lies not in what it positively asserts but in showing what *cannot* be asserted and thereby moving the question away from one of “how” to one of “who.”¹²⁷ It is this refocusing as first practiced by Cyril that reveals the ethical domain of Chalcedon. To reduce the incarnation to the cognitive level alone is to ignore its true and proper significance: God has stepped into spatio-temporal history to work redemption on behalf of humanity; everything, including the nature of reality itself, has been affected as a result.¹²⁸

The final instance to be discussed here in which Bonhoeffer explicitly speaks of Chalcedon comes by way of a letter to Eberhard Bethge from May of 1944 and appears in a surprising context. Bethge had written Bonhoeffer earlier in the month asking for guidance regarding his mind’s growing preoccupation with love for his wife while his excitement over church affairs had waned.¹²⁹ In response, Bonhoeffer appeals to what he calls the “polyphony of life.” He explains the concept as follows, “What I mean is that God, the Eternal, wants to be loved with our whole heart, not to the detriment of earthly love or to diminish it, but as a sort of *cantus firmus* to which the other voices of life resound in counterpoint.”¹³⁰ With love for God as the preexistent melody underlying the polyphonic composition of life, a counterpoint (which

¹²⁶ Ibid., 343.

¹²⁷ Nissen, *Polity of Christ*, 43.

¹²⁸ C.f. Bonhoeffer, *Berlin, 1932 – 1933*, 336: “Christ was not an idea but rather an event. It is not the idea of a Redeemer that must be proclaimed, but rather Christ who must be understood as having become human. Only he can redeem real human beings. Everything depends on Jesus’s existence in history.” See also Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 193-94, who notes Bonhoeffer’s wariness regarding attempts to “go beyond” Chalcedon.

¹²⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 8: Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. De Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 369.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 394.

Bonhoeffer refers to as other types of love in the analogy) can “develop as mightily as it wants.”¹³¹ The beauty of the analogy is that both the *cantus firmus* (one’s love for God) and counterpoint (love for things other than God) are necessary if the desired sound of the composition is to be achieved, and that when properly structured around the *cantus firmus*, each can exude their own independent grandeur without diminishing that of the other. Not only does Bonhoeffer liken this to the Chalcedonian definition’s treatment of the divine and human natures in Christ (“The two are ‘undivided and yet distinct,’ as the Definition of Chalcedon says...”),¹³² but he further uses the analogy to first affirm the Chalcedonian formula as fact and from there underscores its naturally ethical character on the basis of its formative role in the Christian life (“Is that perhaps why we are so at home with polyphony in music, why it is important to us, because it is the musical image of this Christological fact and thus also our *vita christiana*?”).¹³³

This idea of non-competitive, properly ordered love as a key component of the Christian life rightly lived has a clear parallel in Augustine who, although preceding Chalcedon, is rightly considered an important figure in the tradition of Chalcedonian interpretation.¹³⁴ In his sermon on Matthew 10:37,¹³⁵ Augustine considers what Christ could have meant when he taught his followers to abandon love for “those persons whom we are quite right, indeed obliged, to

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Augustine is widely viewed as having influenced the Chalcedonian formulation and clearly anticipates what would eventually become Chalcedon’s distinctive Christological features. C.f. “The same one God who is man, the same one man who is God; not by a compounding of nature, but by unity of person. In a word, the one who as Son of God is coeternal with his begetter and always from the Father, is identical with the son of man who began to be at a particular time from the virgin.” Augustine, *Sermons, Volume 6: 184-229Z*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1993), 24. See also: Dobell, *Augustine’s Intellectual Conversion*, 75-76; Newton, “Augustine’s Use of Hypostatic Union,” 4.

¹³⁵ “Whosoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...”

love.”¹³⁶ His conclusion is that love for things other than God are not wrong *prima facie*, but deeper examination often reveals a “wrong order” in one’s love which leads to a “serious pollution of the soul.”¹³⁷ The solution is to realign one’s loves into the proper order, that being love for God as the medium through which one’s love for all else flows.¹³⁸ When rightly ordered, love for God and love for that which is not God co-exist and actually work in tandem to lead to the agent’s flourishing, or, “Love in the right order, so that you yourself may be rightly ordered.”¹³⁹

These varying examples portray Bonhoeffer’s familiarity with and fondness for the tradition quite well. A further connection can be made by examining specific doctrinal points. For example, Bonhoeffer, like Cyril, finds it senseless to speculate about the uncertainties of the creation narrative found in the early chapters of Genesis.¹⁴⁰ His focus is far more on relations between God and humanity and especially how that relationship affects interhuman relations.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Augustine, *Sermons, Volume 3: 51-94*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), 198.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ “Let us answer our fathers and mothers, when they say to us, with every right, “Love us”; let us answer, “I do love you, in Christ; I don’t love you instead of Christ. Be with me in him; I won’t be with you without him.” *Ibid.*, 200

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁴⁰ This is because it is impossible to conceive of the beginning when humanity now exists “in the middle.” The same can be said of knowledge of the end. To be “in the middle” is to know of beginning and end only through the One who was there in the beginning and whom the end belongs to. In other words, humanity knows God only through the revelation of Christ who represents humanity’s new beginning and end. See Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 3: Creation and Fall*, ed. John W. De Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 22, 35-36.

¹⁴¹ See for example Bonhoeffer’s contention that “true history” is that which is defined by the parameters of salvific history (with the Fall on one end and the consummation of a new humanity on the other). History then becomes a story about rightly and wrongly ordered relationships with Jesus Christ as the protagonist. Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 1: Sanctorum Communio*, ed. Joachim von Soosten and Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 63.

Also like Cyril, Bonhoeffer affirms the original goodness of creation as a consequence of being created by a good God.¹⁴² Other points of similarity include but are not limited to: Humanity viewed as a special or favored creature compared to the rest of creation,¹⁴³ the *imago dei* constituting a divine likeness in freedom (as well as a theory of the degradation of the image as a result of sin),¹⁴⁴ humanity understood as both concrete and collective,¹⁴⁵ a dichotomy of humanity “in Adam” and “in Christ” and a recognition of the second Adam’s superiority to the first,¹⁴⁶ an emphasis on the recapitulatory significance of the hypostatic union,¹⁴⁷ and an awareness that humanity’s ethical task is best characterized as a participatory formation into Christ rather than a mere imitation of him.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² “That God looks upon God’s work is the only thing that makes the work good. This really means, however, that the work is good only because the Creator alone is good.” *Creation and Fall*, 59.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 60-61. “The Bible expresses the essential difference between this work and all God’s previous creative activity... God does not simply call humankind forth out of nonbeing, as God called forth everything else; instead we are taken up into God’s own planning, as it were, and thereby become aware that something new, something that has not yet been, something altogether original, is about to happen.”

¹⁴⁴ It should be noted that the freedom bestowed upon humanity as image bearers is markedly different for Bonhoeffer than just the sense of volitional freedom that Cyril posits. Indeed, it is not freedom as a quality or attribute one inwardly possesses, but rather a “being-free-for-the-other,” a bond of relation that God Himself demonstrated in action by willing to create and thereby becoming responsible for others. This concept of freedom is further revealed “from the middle” where the ultimate expression of this “being free for” was demonstrated when God chose to exercise His freedom on behalf of humanity in the Incarnation. See *Creation and Fall*, 63.

¹⁴⁵ E.g., “The universal person of God does not think of people as isolated individual beings, but in a natural state of communication with other human beings... God does not desire a history of individual human beings, but the history of the human *community*. However, God does not want a community that absorbs the individual into itself, but a community of *human beings*. In God’s eyes, community and individual exist in the same moment and rest in one another.” *Sanctorum Communio*, 79-80.

¹⁴⁶ For the “in Adam/Christ” dichotomy, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 2: Act and Being*, ed. Wayne W. Floyd, trans. Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 136-61. For the superior qualities of Christ over the first Adam (which chiefly reside in Christ being the Lord of his own humanity), see *Sanctorum Communio*, 146.

¹⁴⁷ *Sanctorum Communio*, 145-46.

¹⁴⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4: Discipleship*, eds. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 281-85.

A further connection to be explored comes by way of a comment Clifford Green makes regarding Bonhoeffer's relationship to patristic deification in the "Editor's Introduction" to Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*. Green first makes note of Bonhoeffer's emphasis on Christ "becoming human" throughout the work.¹⁴⁹ This is consonant with recent studies (e.g. Zimmerman's) that seek to show how Bonhoeffer's Christian humanism provides him with the terminology to appropriately frame Christ's true humanity while simultaneously emphasizing his humanity as that which represents and restores the dignity of all humanity which was lost in the Fall.¹⁵⁰ Green then asserts this humanizing emphasis as a movement away from patristic deification (what he refers to as the "ancient theological dictum") towards a theory that is concerned with recovering the lost elements of humanity rather than elevating humanity to a state of divinity.¹⁵¹ It would seem by this critique that Green is imputing a divinizing element to the whole of patristic deification on the basis of the "ancient dictum" alone; this is certainly a mistake. In fact, by Green's own analysis, I believe Bonhoeffer's position can actually be seen as an embrace of a view similar to that of Cyril. For example, Green identifies the methodological starting point of Bonhoeffer's ethics as the reconciliation of God and world achieved in God's becoming human.¹⁵² As demonstrated above, Cyril's theory of humanity's route to deification is predicated on these exact grounds. What is more, this kind of "recapitulative Christological anthropology" has been interpreted by other scholars as being what most clearly links Bonhoeffer to the

¹⁴⁹ Clifford J. Green, "Editor's Introduction," *Ethics*, 6.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7. "Bonhoeffer reverses an ancient theological dictum...namely, that God became human in order that humans might become divine. Rather, he argues, God became human so that human beings could become truly human, that is, recover their lost created humanity through the mediation of Christ."

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 7.

patristic tradition and Cyril in particular.¹⁵³ If this were not enough to refute Green's point, Bonhoeffer elsewhere directly supports the "ancient theological dictum" Green refers to thereby affirming it as compatible with his own thought.¹⁵⁴

While one could present legitimate strands of patristic thought on deification that do not find resonance in Bonhoeffer, Cyril's account certainly does. To be sure, Bonhoeffer was overtly critical of the idea that humanity is at any point divinized by the work of Christ. Indeed, the very significance of the Incarnation for Bonhoeffer is that humanity attains to true and utter humanity by it.¹⁵⁵ It is also true that every case in which Bonhoeffer uses the word "deification" in *Ethics* is in reference to the divinization sense and is therefore treated negatively.¹⁵⁶ These reasons are precisely why Cyril proves to be the perfect interlocuter. Bonhoeffer regularly speaks in terms of "participation" and "formation" to describe the content of the ethical life in wake of Christ's work,¹⁵⁷ as does Cyril. One can also ascertain a type of dual-sense deification in *Ethics* that is strikingly similar to the ontological-moral distinction of Cyril. For Bonhoeffer, this takes the form of ontological and existential aspects of Christology with the former denoting the

¹⁵³ Zimmerman, *Bonhoeffer's Christian Humanism*, 101. "Bonhoeffer, in short, fits best into the patristic tradition that runs from Irenaeus, through Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, to the Cappadocian fathers with their recapitulative Christological anthropology, image-likeness distinction, and emphases on participation and on the ethical component of Christlikeness in the new humanity."

¹⁵⁴ "That is the unrecognized mystery of God in this world: Jesus Christ. That this Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter, was the Lord of glory in person, that was the mystery of God. A mystery, because here on earth God became poor and lowly, small and weak, out of love for humankind; *because God became a human being like us, so that we might become divine; because God came to us, so that we might come to God.*" Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 13: London 1933-35*, ed. Keith Clements, trans. Isabel Best (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 362, emphasis added.

¹⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 94.

¹⁵⁶ E.g. "All efforts to outgrow one's nature as human, all struggle to be heroic or a demigod, all fall away from a person here, because they are untrue. The real human being is the object neither of contempt nor of deification, but the object of the love of God." Ibid. See also pp. 260, 339, 401.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 50-55, 76-102.

reconciliation of God and world in Jesus Christ and the latter signifying the transformation of human beings into the form of Christ as a result of that reconciliation.¹⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer even affords a role for the Holy Spirit in this process of transformation, albeit in another work and not as centrally as Cyril.¹⁵⁹

All of this is not to imply that Bonhoeffer was influenced by Cyril's theological anthropology directly or even that the two had equivalent understandings of the doctrinal points affirmed. It is merely being demonstrated that their similar conclusions are indicative of a shared Christological starting point that is grounded in a distinct affirmation of the union of natures in Christ, and that the incarnation was a real event with real implications in the life of the Christian. How Bonhoeffer's thought develops from this starting point certainly varies from Cyril, but this is only natural given the 1500 years that divide them. What is important is that it never develops to the point where one loses sight of where he began, and in first affirming the tradition before building on it to address the needs of his own time, Bonhoeffer was only adopting the very practice of Cyril and the councils themselves.¹⁶⁰

Bonhoeffer's embrace of the Chalcedonian Christology is unique for several reasons. It is not apologetic, meaning it does not make a case for Chalcedon beyond the one Chalcedon makes for itself. It is likewise not interested in extending Chalcedon's boundaries in an attempt at further clarification or to "fill in the gaps." Rather, what this brief analysis of the primary and secondary literature has shown is an adoption of Chalcedon that receives the formula on its own terms and sees the way forward as a return to the roots. For Bonhoeffer, it is through an embrace

¹⁵⁸ Green, "Editor's Introduction," *Ethics*, 7.

¹⁵⁹ See *Sanctorum Communio*, 141-61.

¹⁶⁰ See p. 10 above on Chalcedon's responsibilities.

of the Fathers' Christology and conformity to its terms that one comes to know the real Christ, and upon discovering the "who" of the Incarnation that one can begin to contemplate the real depth of the doctrine. The following section will get into these roots, so to speak, by further examining the Chalcedonian influence on Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*.

The Christo-centricity of *Ethics* and Ethical Responsibility

Bonhoeffer's ethics are here and elsewhere characterized as "Christological" for the simple fact that Christ is both starting point and centerpiece of his system. This is also true of his anthropology. Christ is no mere theme nor waypoint in Bonhoeffer's corpus but the very hermeneutical key that enables any possible intelligibility of the Christian narrative.¹⁶¹ This section will approach Bonhoeffer's ethics with an eye toward its Christological center and seek to demonstrate that Bonhoeffer's ethics emerge from his affirmation of the Chalcedonian Christology.

From Bonhoeffer's very first work there is an inclination to see ethics as indissoluble from the revelation of Jesus Christ and therefore as indissoluble from human identity and experience.¹⁶² This inclination only grows with the maturing of Bonhoeffer's theology and culminates in his writing of *Ethics* where Christology serves as "the center [from which] he understands the relation of God and the world, the ground and arena of all ethical action and reflection."¹⁶³ The basis of *Ethics* is that the revelation of Jesus Christ has reformed the very

¹⁶¹ Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self: Christology, Ethics, and Formation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), X.

¹⁶² Referring to Bonhoeffer's treatment of the Christian concept of "person" from *Sanctorum Communio*. See pp. 47-54.

¹⁶³ For a concise treatment of how ethics permeated Bonhoeffer's theological corpus leading up to his writing of *Ethics*, see Clifford Green's "Editor's Introduction" to *Ethics*, 3-6.

structure of reality. In wake of the Incarnation, the traditional two kingdom distinction (the material and spiritual worlds) that once governed reality is rendered obsolete, for there is now but one reality of Christ in whose body these seeming opposites were united.¹⁶⁴ This constitutes a fundamental restructuring of the way one is to think about ethics and how to deal with the ethical problem, a point Bonhoeffer emphasizes from the very outset of *Ethics*. In the first paragraph of the work, he writes,

Those who wish even to focus on the problem of a Christian ethic are faced with an outrageous demand—from the outset they must give up, as inappropriate to this topic, the very two questions that led them to deal with the ethical problem: “How can I be good?” and “How can I do something good?” Instead they must ask the wholly other, completely different question: what is the will of God?¹⁶⁵

Discerning the will of God becomes the only meaningful ethical question because it is the only question rooted in the Christ-reality. To question how one can be good or do anything good in and of themselves in order to effect positive change in the world displays an ignorance to the fact that concepts of both “self” and “world” have been subsumed into the wholly other reality of God by the work of Christ. The reality of God instituted in the Incarnation moves the ethical question from conceptual to actual because it effectively makes the good indistinguishable from that which exists.¹⁶⁶ One cannot, as it were, experience the world apart from God nor vice versa. In this reality then, the question of the good is none other than “the question of participating in

¹⁶⁴ *Ethics*, 58-59.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶⁶ C.f. *Ibid.*, 53. “The divine ‘behold, it was very good’ meant the whole of creation. The good desires the whole, not only of motives but also of works; it desires whole persons along with the human companions with whom they are given to live. What could it mean anyway that only a part be named good, motives for instance, while works are bad, or vice versa? *Human beings are indivisible wholes, not only as individuals in both their person and work, but also as members of the human and created community to which they belong.* It is this indivisible whole, that is, this reality grounded and recognized in God, that the question of good has in view. ‘Creation’ is the name of this indivisible whole according to its origin.” Italics original.

God's reality revealed in Christ,"¹⁶⁷ as it is in Christ that the will of God takes shape in all that is not God. This means one's ethical concern ultimately lies in her response of "a faithful yes to God's self-witness"¹⁶⁸ (by which Bonhoeffer means participation in the Christ-reality) because "the question of the good can only find its answer in Christ."¹⁶⁹

The question remains what it means to embrace the Christ-reality in practical terms, or rather how one is to participate in it. First and foremost, this begins with the fact that humanity has been embraced by Christ and reconciled to God.¹⁷⁰ She has lived, she has died, she has been judged, and she has been redeemed all in his person, but what is more, she has been created anew.¹⁷¹ In Christ humanity is a new creation. It is "new" because it has undergone a fundamental shift in orientation. Humanity is now other-oriented (or "for the other") after the manner of Christ's sacrificial life and death, whereas humanity pre-Christ was self-oriented as a result of being "in Adam." To attain to this new humanity in the Christ-reality, to be really human, is simply to "be conformed to the One who has become human."¹⁷² To better understand the concept of a humanity "for the other," let us briefly survey Bonhoeffer's presentation of the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 48-49.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 49.

¹⁷⁰ "In the body of Jesus Christ, God is united with humankind, all humanity is accepted by God, and the world is reconciled to God." Ibid., 66-67. See also, "But to partake in this is possible only because of the fact that even I myself am already included in the fulfillment of the will of God in Christ, which means that I have been reconciled to God." Ibid., 74.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 91.

¹⁷² Ibid., 94.

divine image, a concept which he both inherits from the tradition but refines for his ethical thought.¹⁷³

According to Bonhoeffer, the image of God consists in freedom, but not in the sense of a quality or attribute one inwardly possesses such as Cyril presents. Rather, freedom is a relation, and from this relation two postures can emerge. In a refashioning of the classic image-likeness distinction, Bonhoeffer asserts humanity is either “free for others” (*imago dei*) or “free from others” (*sicut deus*). The former is the posture God intended for humanity and the posture of those who live in recognition of the Christ-reality, the latter the posture of Adam which led to humanity’s collective downfall and the posture of those who fail to recognize the Christ-reality and instead “live on the divide between good and evil”¹⁷⁴ as Adam did. Humanity was designed to be in God’s image, to be “free for others,” which means they were designed to be in relation with both God and one another. However, Adam was not satisfied with a created freedom, instead wanting to attain Creatorship itself. In so doing he “tore himself from his creatureliness,”¹⁷⁵ so to speak, and introduced a competitive posture to humanity’s natural relational orientation that fragmented the very existence of creaturehood.

To be *sicut deus* is to repeat Adam’s sin as our own, rejecting fellowship with the Creator and other created beings out of selfish desire to be like God rather than for Him. This has been the posture of humanity since that first sin in Eden. By taking on human nature in His person, God, the only being that possesses uncreated freedom (or “pure freedom”), revealed that He is

¹⁷³ Bonhoeffer primarily builds off the thought of Irenaeus, the Cappadocians, and Maximus the Confessor. For a treatment of this topic, see Jennifer L. Howell’s dissertation, “*Imago Dei* and the Earthly Life: The Theological Anthropology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” PhD diss., Baylor University, 2016.

¹⁷⁴ *Creation and Fall*, 113.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

none other than “for others” in choosing to exercise His freedom not for Himself, but for humanity and her redemption. On account of this truth, freedom can only be properly understood as a “being free for...”.¹⁷⁶ Where humanity once beheld the divine image but forfeited it out of selfish ambition leading to humanity’s progressive degradation, Jesus Christ restores the image in her again.¹⁷⁷ Not only this, but because it is *the* image that assumes human nature in the union (Col. 1:15), because God has demonstrated for all times what it is to be truly human by becoming human (viz. to be *imago dei*, “for others”), to be really human is to be conformed to Jesus Christ. This is the ontological reality of the new humanity. Indeed, “to be conformed with the one who became human means that we may be the human beings that we really are.”¹⁷⁸

While there is a sense in which the Christ-reality has an ontological existence irrespective of one’s recognition of it, to truly participate in it must be a conscious and free choice.¹⁷⁹ This is done in faith.¹⁸⁰ Faith allows one to know and have God and therefore know reality as it truly is. It is the embrace of the Christ-reality as a concrete existence that has formative implications for human life.¹⁸¹ This formation is consistently spoken of by Bonhoeffer as formation into Christ. Formation into Christ in Bonhoeffer’s case does not denote exemplar connotations; modeling oneself after Christ’s example would not be enough. Instead, it is the inward formation of Christ

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 63

¹⁷⁷ *Discipleship*, 285.

¹⁷⁸ *Ethics*, 94.

¹⁷⁹ C.f. Ibid., 96. “There is no explaining the mystery that only a part of humanity recognizes the form of its savior. The desire of the one who has become human to take form in all human beings remains to this hour unsatisfied. He who bore the form of *the* human being can only take form in a small flock; this is Christ's church.” See also Rowan Williams assessment of Christ as *pro nobis* and *pro me* in *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018), 190.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹⁸¹ Nissen, *Polity of Christ*, 53.

in those who receive him in faith, conforming our egocentric, “free from” form to his own selfless, radically “for other” form.¹⁸² It must be reemphasized that being formed into Christ’s form does not constitute for Bonhoeffer anything other than humanity being formed into its own proper image, as “human beings become human because God became human.”¹⁸³ It is because humanity recognizes “its own image and hope” in Christ, all that it can and ought to be, that it naturally acquiesces to formation.¹⁸⁴ On these bases, Bonhoeffer asserts that ethics is formation.

To understand ethics as formation into Christ is to understand ethics as concrete and thus as superior to abstract ethical ideologies that obsess over principles. As Bonhoeffer notes,

Christ was not concerned about whether ‘the maxim of an action’ could become ‘a principle of universal law,’ but whether my action now helps my neighbor to be a human being before God. God did not become an idea, a principle, a program, a universally valid belief, or a law; God became human.¹⁸⁵

Ironically, Bonhoeffer elsewhere maintains that one’s ability to do or be good is closely linked to her following the divine commandments of righteousness. However, he is clear that these commandments differ from ideological ethics in that “they (the commandments) are fulfilled in the midst of history, fulfilled as God’s love becomes real in the world,”¹⁸⁶ or in other words, fulfilled in Christ. Thus, one’s goodness is tethered to how fully they can reflect Christ in them, and the daily ethical pursuit becomes “*how Christ may take form among us today and here.*”¹⁸⁷ This is the ethical domain in which humanity now exists, a domain both concrete and

¹⁸² *Ethics*, 93. “(Formation) does not happen as we strive “to become like Jesus,” as we customarily say, but as the form of Jesus Christ himself so works on us that it molds us, conforming our form to Christ’s own.”

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 99. Italics original.

contemporaneous to whatever time in which one might live. To withdraw from the ethical domain is to fall back into *sicut deus*, into Adam; to embrace it is to live to be formed to the freedom and will of God actualized in Jesus Christ, a freedom and will that is fundamentally other-oriented. It is in this domain that “we must risk making concrete judgements and decisions,” but also here where those judgements and decisions have already been settled.¹⁸⁸ Christ has “shown us the way,” so to speak, and it is humanity’s responsibility to take up after him in all facets of our daily lives.¹⁸⁹

This now leads to the question of what humanity’s ethical responsibility consists of. Yes, to be formed to Christ’s image, yes, to exercise freedom for others, but what *exactly* does that entail? For Bonhoeffer, it is nothing other than to be governed by a sense of love.¹⁹⁰ In his own words, “The responsibility of Jesus Christ for all human beings has love as its content and freedom as its form.”¹⁹¹ Love is then the content of human ethical responsibility as well as Christ’s because love is what motivated God’s becoming human, and therefore what united the world to God.¹⁹² As “the responsible human being par excellence,” all human responsibility stems from the love of God for humanity demonstrated in Christ’s vicarious representative action (*Stellvertretung*).¹⁹³ The concept of *Stellvertretung* was initially introduced by Bonhoeffer in

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹⁸⁹ C.f. Ibid., 102. Ethics as formation, then, is the venture of speaking about the form of Christ taking form in our world neither abstractly nor casuistically, neither programmatically nor purely reflectively. Here we must risk making concrete judgments and decisions. Here decision and deed can no longer be shifted onto the individual’s personal conscience. Here concrete commandments and guidance are given, for which obedience will be demanded.”

¹⁹⁰ Ethics, 335.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 232.

¹⁹² Ibid., 233.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 232.

Sanctorum Communio where he deemed vicarious representative action as that which separated the representative significance of Christ from that of Adam.¹⁹⁴ Although the effect of Adam's actions resemble vicarious representative action, he was not acting as a vicarious representative because he was acting for himself. Christ, on the other hand, acts only for others in the scandal of the Cross meaning he alone embodies *Stellvertretung*. Vicarious representative action takes form as the ultimate expression of love and therefore as the fulfillment of ethical responsibility in relationships. It is in essence a doing for one that which they cannot do for themselves, or "standing where others cannot,"¹⁹⁵ and expecting nothing in return. It is entirely non-self-seeking. While human beings cannot replicate vicarious representative action in the sense that Christ embodies it (viz. by taking on the whole of humanity and enduring her guilt to work her redemption),¹⁹⁶ they can and must participate in their own demonstrations of selfless love in their relationships and in this way show themselves to be a "Christ to the other."¹⁹⁷

That one "must" exercise their relational responsibility does not mean God compels them to do so, but simply that to not is to live in abstraction. The one who is derelict in their ethical responsibility does not live in light of the Christ-reality where "a human being necessarily lives in encounter with other human beings, and this encounter entails being charged...with responsibility for the other human being."¹⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer appeals to the analogy of fatherhood to further clarify this point.

¹⁹⁴ *Sanctorum Communio*, 146.

¹⁹⁵ Elliston, *Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self*, 65.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁹⁷ *Sanctorum Communio*, 183.

¹⁹⁸ *Ethics*, 220.

The father of a family, for example, can no longer act as if he were merely an individual. In his own self, he incorporates the selves of those family members for whom he is responsible. Everything he does is determined by this sense of responsibility. Any attempt to act and live as if he were alone would not only abdicate his responsibility, but also deny at the same time the reality on which his responsibility is based. For he does not cease to be the father of a family; rather, instead of being a good father, he is now simply a bad one.¹⁹⁹

This is the kind of *Stellvertretung* humanity is called to embody. A father really and truly carries the burden of his family, stands in their place, “incorporates the selves of several people in his own self.”²⁰⁰ He has no concept of self that is not intertwined with and oriented toward others. In other words, to live as wholly “for the other” is to understand that ethics is only properly pursued in the context of real responsibility, and real responsibility is only revealed by the reality of world and God reconciled in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

*“In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of this world.”*²⁰¹

This lone truth serves as the driving force behind Bonhoeffer’s theology and ethics as presented in this work. I also believe it to be representative of the spirit of the ethical domain of Chalcedonian Christology. Chalcedon’s distinct formula of one person acknowledged in two-natures was no more a matter of philosophical speculation for Bonhoeffer than it was for Cyril; it was reality, the reality of God’s love made manifest in the world by His taking on of the worldly condition. This work sought to demonstrate that the Chalcedonian Christological confession possesses an implicit ethical dimension by virtue of its subject matter through an examination of

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 221.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 257-58. “A father acts on behalf of his children by working, providing, intervening, struggling, and suffering for them. In so doing, he really stands in their place. He is not an isolated individual, but incorporates the selves of several people in his own self.”

²⁰¹ Ibid., 55. Italics original.

the theology that informed the confession (viz. that of Cyril of Alexandria) as well as the theology of one who embraced and further developed it (Bonhoeffer). In both cases, it is clear that the ethical domain of Chalcedon is personified in Jesus Christ. By relocating the question of the hypostatic union from “how” to “who,” both Cyril and Bonhoeffer demonstrate that a right reading of Chalcedon is one that opens the confession to a contemplation that is otherwise prohibited by the council’s very terms. The fruit of this contemplation is a deeper understanding of both God and self in encounter with the one who is simultaneously true divine image and paradigmatic man.

As the main influence over the confession’s doctrinal form, one need look no further than Cyril to see how the Chalcedonian Christology is imbued with ethical implications. Of the many examples that could be revisited, Cyril’s dual-sense theory of humanity’s route to deification stands out as particularly illuminating. Cyril first presents the union of natures in Christ as the ontological rescue of the human race which had fallen into a state of progressively worsening corruption and decay after the sin of Adam in whom all were present. The efficacy of this rescue is wholly contingent on the fact that the constant and eternal Word is the lone subject of the incarnation, for it was necessary that the second representative man should not fail as the first had. By assuming a true human nature, God brings humanity into participation with divinity thereby “ennobling the nature of man in Himself.”²⁰² Christ then lives a life in accord with God’s intention for all humanity, that being as properly oriented toward goodness and virtue and in right relation with God and other. As representative of all humanity, he then receives the Holy Spirit so as to enable humankind to once again live in the image and likeness of God and claim the way of life he had modeled as their own. However, the human agent must choose this path

²⁰² See p. 22 above.

for themselves by acquiring virtues, the chief of which being love. Indeed, one's "entire good" is bound in love for neighbor.²⁰³

Chalcedon's ethical implications are further expounded in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christological ethics. Specific examples could also be revisited from Bonhoeffer here, but his entire ethical framework serves as an example itself. Let us instead refer to a couple of passages that seem to encapsulate the spirit of the Chalcedonian Christology's ethical implications in Bonhoeffer. They read as follows:

Action in accord with Christ does not originate in some ethical principle, but *in the very person of Jesus Christ*. This is because everything real is summed up in Christ, who, by definition, is the origin of any and all action that is in accord with reality.²⁰⁴

And,

Since Jesus Christ is the incarnate love of God for human beings, he is not the proclaimer of abstract ethical ideologies, but the one who concretely enacts God's love. Human beings are not called to realize ethical ideals, but are called into a life that is lived in God's love, and that means lived in reality.²⁰⁵

These passages are pleasantly clear and accessible in comparison to other sections of Bonhoeffer's theological works, perhaps because Bonhoeffer understood ethical implications to be a self-evident consequence of the omnibenevolent God's becoming human. Brief comment on these passages will suffice. Aristotle famously claims in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that "the end of ethics is action."²⁰⁶ For Bonhoeffer, this phrase requires readjusting. The end of ethics is only intelligible by looking to the beginning of ethics, namely the action of God to reconcile the world to Himself in Jesus Christ. All other ethical activity is defined by this act. The ethical

²⁰³ See p. 31 above.

²⁰⁴ *Ethics*, 231. Emphasis added.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

²⁰⁶ "The end of this science [ethics] is not knowledge but action." *Nicomachean Ethics* Bk. 1, 1095a.

responsibility of the Christian becomes nothing more nor less than to conform to Christ's form, that being the very form of God's love which is most clearly demonstrated in the Incarnation. This form is embodied in vicarious representative action, "which means in concrete, responsible action of love for all human beings."²⁰⁷

There is much room left in this discussion for further research. For example, this topic would benefit from a more exhaustive comparison of Cyril and Bonhoeffer on specific doctrinal affirmations. I encountered several projects that compared Bonhoeffer's doctrine to other patristic theologians while conducting my research for this work, but not one that included any extensive interaction with Cyril. I would hope the examination of the two herein at the very least demonstrates a general congruence deserving of fuller treatment elsewhere. Another area of potential development would be to introduce Augustine as an interlocuter. While Augustine's influence on the Chalcedonian confession was briefly mentioned in this work, some key Augustinian insights that escape us here could elevate the conversation. For example, Rowan Williams has noted the scarcity of reference to the Holy Spirit (and Trinitarian expression in general) in Bonhoeffer's corpus.²⁰⁸ This is surprising given that Cyril's theological anthropology features the Spirit so prominently and the two otherwise share many conclusions on that front.²⁰⁹ Thus, it would be interesting to examine if Augustine's formulation of the Spirit's procession constituting the mutual love of Father and Son that is poured out on humanity as a divine gift could find any resonance in Bonhoeffer thereby helping to resolve this disparity.²¹⁰ This line of

²⁰⁷ *Ethics*, 232.

²⁰⁸ Williams, *Heart of Incarnation*, 197.

²⁰⁹ See page 44 above.

²¹⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 15.17.29.

inquisition becomes especially interesting when considering that divine love for Augustine is a “personal, and in the case of humans a person-forming, force,”²¹¹ given Bonhoeffer’s like language in attribution to Christ.

It was claimed in the introduction of this work that the kind of ethics Chalcedon speaks to are in terms of what qualities define the ethical being, or what it means for one to have “goodness,” “love,” and the like. This certainly holds true if we are to take Bonhoeffer seriously. In light of the hypostatic union, these questions and all other ethical questions are unintelligible apart from contemplation of Jesus Christ. However, as has been demonstrated, how one focuses that contemplation is crucial. Whereas others in the annals of Church history have taken after the practice of Nestorius in focusing on the substance of Christ, Bonhoeffer takes after Cyril in focusing on the person, thus enabling him to expound on Chalcedon’s subject while remaining squarely within its confines. For Bonhoeffer, the ethical being is one and the same as the human being, or rather, “*the* human being” (Christ).²¹² Therefore, the qualities that define the ethical being are the qualities Christ exemplifies (viz. goodness, love, obedience, patience, etc.), and those qualities become ours by possession when we conform to him. Thus, to have “goodness,” “love,” and the like, is first to have Christ, then to be good as Christ is good, to love as Christ loves, and so on.

In the final analysis, it is important to remember the context in which Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived. As a German pastor and theologian at a time in Western history when ethical dilemma was perhaps as concrete and weighty as is conceivable, he did not turn to modernity for assistance, but returned to the orthodox tradition, for it is there that one encounters the Christ for

²¹¹ Matthew Drever, “Loving God in and through the Self: Trinitarian Love in St. Augustine,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 78, no. 1 (June 2017), 12.

²¹² *Ethics*, 91. Italics original.

yesterday, today, and tomorrow. As was the experience for Cyril and then for Bonhoeffer, let the present-day Christian also discover the ethical magnitude of the reality that God has become man in Jesus Christ by contemplating the “who” of traditional confessionalism.

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