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CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

There is a common biblical and creedal source for both Catholics and evangelicals on the doctrine of Christ. This christological core is found in the Athanasian and Chalcedonian creeds. Here too both orthodox Protestants and Catholics share the insights of the great troika of Christian theologians: Saints Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. The Christian tradition down through the centuries has proclaimed that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh.

The unique and altogether singular event of the incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. During the first centuries, the Church had to defend and clarify this truth of faith against the heresies that falsified it.¹

DEFINITION OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Christianity indicates by its very name the central place that Christ has in its theology. Concerning the mission of Jesus Christ: “The eternal Son of God, ‘one of the Trinity,’ became man in order to save men.”² Christ accomplished this by “recapitulating all things in himself, He re-united the whole human race with God through the mystery of His death and resurrection, and reconciled all things among themselves.”³ Martin Luther has caused Roman Catholics much heartburn, but we trust they would agree with him when he states: “I have found and noted in all histories of the whole Christian Church that all those who have maintained the central doctrine of Jesus Christ in its integrity have remained safe and sound in the true Christian faith. Although they erred and sinned

1 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 464, p. 117.

2 Neuner and Dupuis, *Christian Faith*, p. 155.

3 *Ibid.*

in other respects, yet they were finally saved. For if anyone stands firm and right on this point, that Jesus Christ is true God and true man, all the other articles of the Christian faith will fall in place for him and firmly sustain him.”⁴

The study of Christ historically has been divided into two areas of investigation: who Christ was and what Christ did. The latter subject, soteriology, we will treat in chapter 5. The former topic is called Christology and will be addressed here.

Christology also is closely connected with “anthropology”—the study of humanity. Anthropology begins with people and investigates their origin, nature, and initial contact with sin (see chap. 3). This discipline ends with a cry for divine help. Christology is the first step in the answer to that cry.

CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Catholics, like evangelicals, point to the evidence in the Old Testament concerning Christ that are made clear from Jesus’ repeated statements in the New Testament. Our Lord made this evident to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus, remaining unrecognized by the two men, questioned them about the events that had transpired concerning the crucifixion. When they indicated their misunderstanding of the nature of the messianic mission, Christ said: “ ‘Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:25–27).

Later in the same chapter Jesus said, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). Indeed, Jesus had already declared in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). To the Jews he declared, “You search the scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them; even they testify on my behalf” (John 5:39). And the writer of Hebrews cites Jesus saying, “As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God” (Heb. 10:7). The entire Old Testament speaks of Christ; so claimed our Lord on several occasions.

Information concerning Jesus in the Old Testament is both typological and prophetic in nature. That is to say, the messianic material there is anticipatory in nature and requires the further development of the New Testament. As Catholic scholars note, “The Old Testament is indispensable . . . for an understanding of the categories and terms in which both Jesus and the Apostolic Church expressed themselves.”⁵ To paraphrase Augustine, the New is in the Old concealed and the Old is in the New revealed. That is, Christ is

⁴ WA , 50.266f.; quoted in James Atkinson, *Martin Luther: Prophet to the Church Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 184.

⁵ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 7:909.

seen in the Old Testament by way of anticipation and in the New Testament by way of realization.⁶

Historically, it has become customary to refer to three offices connected to the work of Christ. These are the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. All of these designations find their origin in the Old Testament. Concerning the office of Prophet, Moses said, “A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen” (Deut. 18:15). Concerning this verse the *New American Bible* (NAB) says: “ *A prophet like me*: from the context (opposition to the pagan soothsayers) it seems that Moses is referring in general to all the true prophets who were to succeed him. But since Christ is the Great Prophet in whom the prophetic office finds its fulfillment and completion, this passage was understood in a special Messianic sense both by the Jews (John 6:14 ; 7:40) and by the Apostles (Acts 3:22 ; 7:37).”⁷

Christ also fulfills the office of Priest. In the Old Testament, a priest was one in whom authority was vested and, almost without exception, designated an ecclesiastical position. The following verse has been understood by the church as having implications concerning the ministry of Jesus: “The Lord has sworn, and he will not repent: ‘You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek’ ” (Ps. 110:4). Again, the study notes from the *New American Bible* are helpful to identify the Roman Catholic position: “ *According to the order of Melchizedek*: in the same way as Melchizedek was a priest. There are three main points of resemblance between Melchizedek, the prophetic type, and Christ who fulfilled this prophecy: both are Kings as well as priests, both offer bread and wine to God, and both have their priesthood directly from God and not through Aaron, since neither belongs to the tribe of Levi. Cf. Gen. 14:18 ; Heb. 7 .”⁸ Christ our high priest is distinguished from his Old Testament forerunners in that the sacrifice that he offered was himself. (This gets us into the crucial question concerning the atonement, which we will address; as well as Anselm’s significant contribution, in chap. 5 . The office of priesthood as it impacts the sacerdotalism of the Roman Catholic system will be discussed in chap. 14 .)

Concerning the office of King, Roman Catholics believe that Christ rules over his people as a spiritual King, a rule established in the hearts and lives of his people the church. The prophet Isaiah foresaw the “King of Kings”: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6 NIV).⁹

CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

⁶ For further discussion, see Norman L. Geisler, *To Understand the Bible, Look for Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

⁷ *New American Bible*, notes on Deut. 18:15 .

⁸ *Ibid.*, notes on Ps. 110:4 .

⁹ Many Protestants, particularly amillennialists, hold the same view. Premillennialists, however, insist that there will be a future, literal reign of Christ on earth (cf. Rev. 20:1–7).

Concerning Christ and the New Testament it has been said that “it is impossible to exaggerate the personalist character of the Christian Scriptures, whose object, in the words of the Lord at the Last Supper, is ‘everlasting life, that they may know you, the only true God and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ.’ ”¹⁰ As to the origin of Jesus, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger states, “St. John’s gospel emphasizes again and again that the real origin of Jesus is the ‘Father,’ that he comes from him more totally than any previous envoy of God’s, and in a different way.”¹¹

The early apostolic church was made up largely of Jews who were convinced that the expected Messiah had come. The facts of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection were central to their understanding. Hence, the New Testament, which is a product of the apostolic church, is replete with information about the life and ministry of Jesus.

Concerning the necessity of both faith and history in the formation of the apostolic tradition the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* notes: “Those who formulated and preserved the tradition just described were conscious of the necessity that it be based on historical occurrence. See, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:14–15 : ‘If Christ has not risen, vain is our preaching, vain too is your faith. Yes, and we are found false witnesses as to God, in that we have borne witness against God that he raised Christ.’ ”¹²

Roman Catholics draw their understanding of Christ and his mission from the pages of the New Testament. “He who is the ‘image of the invisible God’ (Col. 1:15), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare.”¹³

THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST

THE DEITY OF CHRIST

Belief in the deity of Christ has been foundational to the Christian church from the beginning (cf. Acts 2:31–36 ; Rom. 10:9 ; Heb. 1:8). It forms the framework from which springs Christian theology. It was the crucial issue that split “followers of the Way” from their Judaistic compatriots. This division is vividly illustrated in Acts 7 , which records Stephen’s speech before the Sanhedrin and his subsequent martyrdom. Concerning this incident, the *New American Bible* states: “With Stephen, who thus perceived the fuller

10 Hardon, *Catholic Catechism*, p. 111.

11 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* , trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), p. 205.

12 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 7:910.

13 Flannery, *Vatican Collection: Vatican Council II*, p. 922.

implications of the teachings of Jesus, the differences between Judaism and Christianity began to appear.”¹⁴

Less than three hundred years after the close of the Apostolic era, the church was faced with a profusion of ideas challenging the New Testament’s teaching about Christ. The first four general councils responded to these speculations and laid the groundwork for Christian orthodoxy.

At the Ecumenical Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) the church addressed the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son with the resulting condemnation of Arianism. An Alexandrian priest named Arius (d. A.D. 250) held that, since God the Father was immutable and unique, the Son had to be a created being. Thus Arius rejected the orthodox view that Jesus was of the “same substance” as the Father. Under the influence of Athanasius, the Council made it clear that Jesus was of the same, not just similar, substance as the Father: “begotten not made.” Constantinople I (A.D. 381) confirmed Nicea and stated the divinity of the Holy Spirit and his inclusion in the Godhead while further refining the doctrine of the Trinity. Ephesus (A.D. 431) concerned itself primarily with the incarnation, and Chalcedon (A.D. 451) distinguished the two natures—divine and human—in Christ. Nestorius, a priest in Antioch, is credited with the distinction of the two natures in Christ as involving also a distinction of persons. He was vigorously opposed by Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria (c. A.D. 380–440). In a letter to Nestorius, Cyril argued: “Can. 1. If anyone does not confess that God is truly Emmanuel . . . let him be anathema.” And, “Can. 5. If anyone ventures to say that Christ is a man inspired by God, and not rather that He is truly God, as a son by nature, as the Word was made flesh . . . let him be anathema.”¹⁵

The Roman Catholic dogma concerning the divinity of Christ agrees with orthodox Protestants: “Jesus Christ is True God and True Son of God (*De fide*). ”¹⁶ Furthermore, “He is God and man. He is God begotten of the substance of the Father before all ages and man born in time of the substance of His Mother. He is perfect God and perfect man.”¹⁷ Concerning the Old Testament testimony on this matter: “The Divine dignity of the Messiah is indicated by the appellations: Emmanuel = God with us (Isa. 7:14 ; 8:8). Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).”¹⁸

In the New Testament, we have the testimonies of the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:17) and his transfiguration (Mark 9:7): “At His baptism Christ is inducted by His heavenly Father into His Messianic office, and His Divine Sonship is attested by means of a

14 Study notes on Acts 7 .

15 Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 113/115, p. 50.

16 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 127.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 128.

solemn Revelation to St. John. In the transfiguration on Tabor this Divine attestation is repeated before the chief Apostles.”¹⁹

Christ is addressed as “God” in the New Testament. “The Apostle St. Paul gives further expression to his conviction of faith in the Godhead of Christ by directly calling Him God (Rom. 9:5).”²⁰ This he did also in other passages (cf. Titus 2:13). Jesus is also called *Kyrios* or “Lord.” Although this term does not always designate deity, given the context in which it is used, “to the Apostle St. Paul the designation *Kyrios* was tantamount to a confession of Christ’s Godhead.”²¹ For example, in Philippians Paul speaks of every knee bowing and confessing him as Lord (Phil. 2:10–11), and this is taken from Isaiah 45:23 which says that every knee will bow to *Yahweh*, a term that always means “God.” Indeed, Jesus often claimed to be *Yahweh*, sometimes citing the very words *Yahweh* to refer to himself. For example, Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and Omega,” that is, the First and the Last—something *Yahweh* claims in Isaiah 44:6 . Jesus also said he shared the Father’s glory with him before the foundation of the world and prayed, “Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began” (John 17:5). *Yahweh* explicitly said, “I am the LORD , this is my name; *my glory I give to no other*” (Isa. 42:8 , emphasis added). Jesus clearly claimed to be one with *Yahweh*.²²

Christ’s deity also is verified by verses that state his preexistence. John declared emphatically that “In the beginning . . . the Word [Jesus] was with God” (John 1:1). To the Jews who were determined to stone him, Christ said: “Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad.” And, Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you before Abraham came to be, *I AM*” (John 8:56–58). The apostle Paul spoke of the preexistence of Christ “Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself” by coming to earth in the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6–7). John too says “the Word [Christ] *became* flesh,” though he was God from all eternity (John 1:14 , emphasis added; cf. 1:1).

THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

That the “Eternal Word,” the second Person in the Godhead, took upon himself a real human nature has been a crucial doctrine of classic Christianity. The gulf between God and humanity has been bridged by the Son of God, who has taken our humanity and joined it to his eternal divinity. Indeed, “in the mysterious union of the incarnation, the church was led over the course of centuries to confess the full reality of Christ’s human soul, with its operations of intellect and will, and of his human body.”²³

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., p. 136.

21 Ibid., p. 137.

22 God does share his *reflective* glory (his image, Gen. 1:27) with humans (cf. Pss. 8:5–6 ; 84:11), but not his *essential* glory, spoken of here.

23 *Catechism 1994*, no. 470, p. 119.

The Incarnation. The doctrine that leads any discussion of the humanity of Christ is the incarnation. The biblical basis for this doctrine is found most clearly in the prologue of John's Gospel: "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The *kenosis* (emptying) passage (Phil. 2:5–11) addresses the deity of Christ. It also speaks to Christ's humanity when it says "he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance" (2:7). In Peter's first Epistle we read that Jesus "suffered in the flesh" (1 Pet. 4:1) and was "put to death in the flesh" (3:18). Lastly, the Johannine Epistles speak of his coming "in the flesh" (1 John 4:2 ; 2 John 7). The present and perfect tenses used here respectively indicate that Jesus came in a fleshly human nature in the past and remains in one in the present. Indeed, the creeds speak of him being raised and ascending in the same body of flesh and bones in which he died.²⁴

It is important to note that when he became man, Christ did not cease being God. To paraphrase Athanasius, in the incarnation we do not have the subtraction of deity but the addition of humanity. As to the fact of the incarnation, Pope Leo the Great, writing to Flavian of Constantinople (A.D. 449), states: "Consequently, the Son of God entered into these lowly conditions of the world, after descending from His celestial throne, and though He did not withdraw from the glory of the Father, He was generated in a new order and in a new nativity." Further, "For He who is true God, is likewise true man, and there is no falsehood in this unity."²⁵

Concerning the purpose of the incarnation, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that "the Son of God became man in order to redeem men (*De fide*)."²⁶ This understanding would in the Medieval period be expanded by Anselm in his important work *Cur Deus Homo* (*Why the God-Man*).²⁷ We will address this in chapter 5 .

The second article of the Nicene Creed emphasizes the incarnation. The purpose of these statements is to give equal balance to both the divine and human natures that made up Christ's person. Two false notions are rejected. First, the idea that Christ was a mere human being; the creed declares him to be "of one substance with the Father." Christ was *homoousious* (of the same substance), as opposed to *homoiousious* (of like substance), as the Arians held. This addresses the Marcionite and Gnostic attempts to distinguish between the God of creation and the God of redemption. "The God who becomes incarnate in Christ and through him carries out the work of redemption is no one else than the God of creation."²⁸ Second, "the Nicene confession of Christ also rejects all

24 See Norman L. Geisler, *Battle for the Resurrection* (Nashville: Nelson, 1992), chap. 4.

25 Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, no. 144, p. 58.

26 Ibid., p. 175.

27 Or, *Why God Became Man*.

28 Gustaf Aulén, *Reformation and Catholicity* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p. 105.

tendencies to regard Christ as a kind of theophany or divinity wandering around incognito on earth. The humanity of Christ is true humanity. . . .”²⁹

The early church fathers refused to separate the two natures of Christ. “Unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished. And again, unless it had been God who had freely given salvation, we could never have possessed it securely. And unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become a partaker of incorruptibility.”³⁰

Many contemporary Catholics support the early church fathers. Peter Kreeft quotes Pascal concerning Christ and the Christian believer: “Not only do we only know God through Jesus Christ, but we only know ourselves through Jesus Christ. We only know life and death through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ we cannot know the meaning of our life or our death, of God, or of ourselves.”³¹ Harold O. J. Brown observes that, “by dividing the deity and the humanity from one another, free rein is also given to the imagination to deal with Christ not as a historic, human person but rather as a cosmic spiritual or idealistic principle.”³² G. K. Chesterton, a noted lay Roman Catholic author of the early 1900s, understood the importance of the incarnation: “As compared with a Jew, a Moslem, a Buddhist, a Deist, or more obvious alternatives, a Christian means a man who believes that deity or sanctity has attached itself to matter or entered the world of the sense.”³³

The Virgin Birth. The Roman Catholic Church, in keeping with the witness of Holy Writ and the testimony of all the church fathers, attests to the virgin birth of Christ. “This dogma of the Church declares that Christ, the Son of God, was born by external generation of but one parent, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and that she being a virgin did not lose her virginity, either physical or spiritual.”³⁴ Another authority states, “The gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility (cf. Mt. 1:18–25 ; Lk. 1:26–38).”³⁵

Evangelicals typically believe only in the doctrine of the virgin *conception*.³⁶ Roman Catholics, however, believe that Mary was a virgin *before, during, and after* the birth of Jesus Christ.³⁷ We will address this more fully in chapter 15 .

29 Ibid.

30 Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* III.18.7; quoted in *ibid.*

31 Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, p. 129.

32 Brown, *Heresies: The Image of Christ*, p. 327.

33 G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas* , pp. 41–42; quoted in *Antithesis*, vol. 1, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 1990): 27.

34 Robert C. Broderick, M.A., ed., *The Catholic Concise Encyclopedia* (St. Paul: Simon and Schuster, 1956), p. 327.

35 *Catechism 1994*, no. 497, p. 126.

36 Brown, *Heresies* , p. 173.

37 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, pp. 203–7.

The Union of the Two Natures. In a discussion of the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ we must first examine the role of the Virgin Mary. “Christ was truly generated and born of a daughter of Adam, the Virgin Mary (*De fide*). The reality and integrity of Christ’s human nature is especially guaranteed by the fact that Christ was truly generated and born of a human mother. Through His descent from a daughter of Adam, He was, as to His humanity, incorporated into the posterity of Adam. He had identity of essence with man and community of race; Christ became our Brother.”³⁸

Also, Christ is one person, not two as the Nestorian heresy held. Hence, Mary was only the “Mother of Christ” not “the Mother of God.” The church, however, stated that “the Divine and human natures are united hypostatically in Christ, this is, joined to each other in one Person (*De fide*). The dogma asserts that there is in Christ a person, who is the Divine Person of the Logos, and two natures, which belong to the One Divine Person.”³⁹ Hence, Mary may be understood as being the “Mother of God,” since her Son is only one person. Protestants can affirm this also. More will be said concerning Mary’s title in chapter 15 .

The heresy of the Monophysites denied the duality of the two natures; Christ was not only one person but also one single nature. The church, however, taught that, “in the Hypostatic Union each of the two natures of Christ continues unimpaired, untransformed and unmixed with each other (*De fide*). According to the testimony of Holy Writ, Christ is true God and true Man that is, possessor of the unimpaired Divine Nature and an unimpaired human nature.”⁴⁰

The heresy of Monothelitism taught that while Christ had two natures he had but one divine will. The church responded that “Each of the two natures in Christ possesses its own natural will and its own natural mode of operation (*De fide*). In spite of the real duality of wills, a moral unity subsisted and subsists, because Christ’s human will is, in the most perfect fashion, in harmony with, and in free subordination to, the Divine Will.”⁴¹

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that “The Hypostatic Union of Christ’s human nature with the Divine Logos took place at the moment of conception (*De fide*).” Augustine said, “From the moment in which He began to be man, He is also God. (De Trin. XIII, 17, 22.)”⁴² The Church designates that point by as conception.

We must not neglect the relationship between the Hypostatic Union and the Trinity. “The Hypostatic Union was effected by the Three Divine Persons acting in common. (*De fide*.) The Creed of the Eleventh Synod of Toledo (A.D. 675) states: ‘It is to be believed

38 Ibid., p. 142.

39 Ibid., p. 144.

40 Ibid., p. 147.

41 Ibid., p. 148.

42 Ibid., p. 150.

that the Whole Trinity effected the Incarnation of the Son of God, because the works of the Trinity are indivisible.’ ”⁴³ Also, it is to be believed that “Only the Second Divine Person became Man (*De fide*). ”⁴⁴ The union occurs not in the nature, but in the person; specifically, in the Person of the second member of the Godhead, Christ.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The Roman Catholic communion holds, with all of Christendom, the reality of Christ’s resurrection. “On the third day after His death Christ rose gloriously from the dead (*De fide*). The Resurrection of Christ is a basic truth of Christianity, which is expressed in all the symbols of Faith and in all rules of Faith of the ancient Church.”⁴⁵ According to the understanding of the apostles Peter (Acts 2:24) and Paul (Acts 13:35), the Old Testament attests to the resurrection: “Because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption” (Ps. 16:10).

As it did in the Protestant churches, modernism in the early twentieth century threatened the foundations of Roman Catholic Christology. Pius X (1835–1914) condemned a number of errors concerning Christ. The effort to separate the resurrection from historical fact was firmly rejected.⁴⁶ Some liberal Catholic scholars offer theological views that appear to deny this. Edward Schillebeeckx is prominent among them. He argues that after the resurrection of Christ, “what is normally invisible [i.e., his body] was made to appear: that the invisible makes itself seen is expressed on lines of human perceiving.”⁴⁷ Certain evangelical scholars also have deviated from the historical creedal view of the Christian church⁴⁸ which from the beginning has made the apostolic confession: “I believe . . . in the resurrection of the flesh.”

The nature of the body of the risen Christ is of vital importance, since if it was not the same physical body in which he died, then God’s purposes in both creation and redemption would be thwarted. Of late, some have stressed the non-materiality of the resurrection body and have down played its connection with the pre-resurrection body of Christ.⁴⁹ This is a rebirth of a similar controversy centered in the views of Origen that plagued the early church. Official Roman Catholic theology holds that “the Body of the Risen Christ was in a state of glory as is apparent from a study of the circumstances of the appearances, and from the Risen Christ’s supremacy over the bonds of space and time. The Risen Christ retained the wounds in His transfigured body as tokens of His

43 Ibid., p. 155.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., p. 192.

46 Neuner and Dupuis, *Decree Lamentabili*, pp. 192–93.

47 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 353.

48 See Geisler, *Battle for the Resurrection*, chap. 6.

49 See Murray Harris, *From Grave to Glory*, pp. 401–6.

triumph over death.”⁵⁰ As Augustine declared: “The world has come to the belief that the *earthly body* of Christ was received up into heaven. Already both the learned and unlearned have believed in the resurrection of the *flesh* and its ascension to the heavenly places, while only a very few either of the educated or uneducated are still staggered by it.”⁵¹ With this conclusion, both creeds and councils of the Christian church have repeatedly agreed.⁵²

Finally, concerning Christ’s return to heaven, “Christ ascended body and soul into Heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father (*De fide*).”⁵³ The early church leaders stressed Christ’s return to the Father: “The Fathers give unanimous testimony of Christ’s Ascension. All the ancient rules of Faith mention it together with the Death and the Resurrection.”⁵⁴

TITLES OF CHRIST

Earlier in this chapter we discussed the manner in which Christ fulfilled the requirements of the offices of prophet, priest, and king. There are several other titles attached to the person and work of Christ: Messiah, Son of God, Son of man, Lord, and Savior.

Jesus seldom spoke directly of himself as Messiah, probably because he wanted to avoid confusion with the mistaken political notion of the Messiah that was current at the time. However, “Jesus’ reluctance to use the title was not shared by the first Christians. By the end of the Apostolic Age, the term *Christ* (the Greek translation of the Hebrew, *messiah*) had lost its character as a title and was considered part of the personal name, Jesus Christ. The early Church must have found no better title by which to present the meaning of Jesus to the Jews as the fulfillment of the destiny of Israel.”⁵⁵

Concerning Jesus as the *Son of God*, we again find Jesus shying away from applying the title to himself. The early church, however, used this title and it is found in almost all the books of the New Testament in one form or another.

Jesus’ favorite title for himself was *Son of Man*. It is used approximately eighty times in the Gospels. The title actually connotes divinity: “In Dn 7:13 . . . the term is applied to an apocalyptic figure that represents the messianic Kingdom of God, a transcendent

50 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 193. Also cf. “The Resurrection of the Body,” in *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1982), pp. 124–31.

51 Augustine, *City of God*; quoted in Geisler, *Battle for the Resurrection*, p. 57.

52 See Geisler, *Battle for the Resurrection*, chap. 4, and Geisler, *In Defense of the Resurrection* (Chico, Calif.: Witness Inc., 1993), chap. 9.

53 Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 194.

54 Ibid. Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 110, 1; 111 4, 2; Tertullian, *De praesr.* 13; *De Virg. vel I; Adv. Prax.* 2; Origen, *De princ.* 1 praef. 4.

55 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 7:915.

figure coming on the clouds of heaven surrounded by the exalted symbols of divine majesty.”⁵⁶

The title of *Lord* is closely related with the titles Christ and Son of God. “The disciples had called Jesus Lord in the secular sense of master. With the Easter experience, they saw a much deeper meaning in this term.”⁵⁷

Finally, we have the title of Jesus as *Savior*. In the Old Testament, God was often designated as Savior (cf. Isa. 43:3 , 11 , 15 ; 49:26 ; 63:8). The title was used of Jesus early on but was more popular with the later New Testament writers. “Because of the connotations the word had in the Hellenistic world, which was looking for savior gods, and especially in pagan ruler worship, this title was a rich one. . . . It may have been found more useful than the Suffering Servant concept to explain the meaning of the death of Jesus to the Gentile world.”⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

We have traced the development of Christology from the Scriptures to the present citing mainly Roman Catholic sources. Christology’s major task is to address the relationship of the divine and the human in Christ.⁵⁹ From the early church fathers through the Medieval Doctors to the Reformers, we find basic agreement concerning doctrines addressing Christ’s person and work. Modern orthodox Roman Catholic scholars agree with this assessment: “By and large, the mainstream of traditional Protestantism stemming from the Reformation agrees with Catholic teaching in basic Christology.”⁶⁰

Modern Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof, commenting on the history of the doctrines dealing with the two natures of Christ, observed that “rationalistic attacks on the doctrine were not entirely wanting, but the Church remained firm in the confession of this truth, in spite of the fact that it was once and again declared to be contrary to reason. In this confession, Roman Catholics and Protestants stand shoulder to shoulder.”⁶¹

Another Reformed scholar, writing about the Chalcedonian Christology, notes: “Shedd in his *History of Christ Doctrine*, writes, ‘Another important implication in the Chalcedon Christology is that it is the Divinity, and not the humanity, which constitutes the root and basis of Christ’s personality. The incarnation is the humanizing of deity, and

56 Ibid., p. 917.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid. Also see *Catechism 1994*, *ibid.*, Index, “Jesus: names and designations,” pp. 776–77.

59 Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 138. This is an excellent work addressing the study of Christology as well as other subjects in the early history of Christian doctrine.

60 Hardon, *Catholic Catechism*, p. 111.

61 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 315–16.

not the deification of humanity.’ Shedd continues, ‘The redemption of mankind is accomplished, not by the elevation of the finite to the infinite, but by the humiliation of the infinite to the finite.’ ”⁶²

Modern Roman Catholic popes have been mindful of the need to preserve the classical formulations concerning Christology. Paul VI declared that it was “not enough to believe that Christ is a man in whom God is fully present; the faith as formulated in the great Christological Councils implies that He is God’s eternal Son who in time became man to reveal the Father fully.”⁶³

In 1990, Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical entitled “*Redemptoris Missio*” (Mission of the Redeemer). Its purpose was to stress the importance of Christian missionary evangelization. In it the Pope rejected “any anthropocentric views of salvation and mission that would focus on humanity’s earthly needs while remaining ‘closed to the transcendent.’ ”⁶⁴ As to the centrality of Christ in this endeavor, he affirmed that “if we go back to the beginnings of the Church, we find a clear affirmation that Christ is the one savior of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God.”⁶⁵ Indeed, “for all people—Jews and gentiles alike—salvation can only come from Jesus Christ.”⁶⁶

A current evangelical work declares: “If Christ has not truly suffered, why should we? Because Christ invites us to Himself through His passion, those who will not be branches of His cross will bear no fruit—rather their fruit is deadly, and one who eats of it dies eternally.”⁶⁷

In closing, we can do no better than to reproduce a portion of the Symbol of Chalcedon (A.D. 451):

Following therefore the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same one is being (*homoousios*) with the Father as to the divinity and one in being with us as to the humanity, like unto us in all things but sin (cf. [Heb. 4:15](#)). The same was begotten from the Father before the ages as to the divinity and in the later days for us and our salvation was born as to His humanity from Mary the Virgin Mother of God.⁶⁸

62 J. Marcellus Kik, *Ecumenism and the Evangelical* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958), p. 57.

63 Neuner and Dupuis, *Declaration *Mysterium Filii Dei** (21 February 1972), p. 204.

64 “John Paul II/Encyclical on Missionary Activity,” *Origins: Catholic News Service Documentary Service*, vol. 20, no. 34, 31 January 1991.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 544.

66 *Ibid.*

67 Thomas J. Nettles, “One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church,” in John Armstrong, ed., *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 40.

68 Neuner and Dupuis, *Christian Faith* , p. 166.

We have examined here the common orthodox Catholic and evangelical Protestant view of who Christ *was*. In chapter 5 we will look at what he *did* for us.