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# “MORAL UNION” IN CHRISTOLOGY BEFORE NESTORIUS

J. M. DEWART

**I**F one were guided by the dictionary meaning of “moral”, one would understand by the term “moral union” in christology “[a union] in a metaphorical sense, relative to moral character or condition”<sup>1</sup>. Both parts of this definition demand attention. (1) “In a metaphorical sense”: certainly the term “moral union” has been used in the history of christology negatively in contradistinction to the union described as “personal” or “hypostatic”. The so-called “moral union” has been seen to rest on something less ontologically real than the “personal union”, and hence to be a looser union, one not fully satisfying the integrity of the person of Christ. The usual phrase has been “a merely moral union”. (2) “Relative to moral character or condition”: of the four theologians this paper will examine (Origen, Eustathius, Didymus and Theodore), three at least saw not only a necessary but a constitutive relationship between the moral condition of Christ and the unity of divinity and humanity he was. But these men, whose writings cover almost two centuries, would not have accepted the definition given above. They saw a union dependent (a secondary dependence, certainly, in turn dependent on the initiative of the Word) on the moral condition of the man, Jesus, but they in no way saw that union to be on that account metaphorical. The congruence, in the thought of these four, of a union dependent on the moral condition of Jesus and a “personal” union is the first point that this paper will try to make. To understand “moral union” in their christologies as a less than “personal” union represents a failure to grasp the reasons they had for describing the christological union as they did, and so a failure to appreciate the excellence and integrity of the mode of union they were describing.

Because of the misleading associations of a “linking” rather than a “true” union with the term “moral union”, I would like to replace it with a phrase I have borrowed from R. V. Sellers — “reciprocal presence”. In reference to Eustathius, Sellers says:

In describing the relationship between the Logos and the [human] soul [of Christ], he says on the one hand that the soul dwelt together (*sundiaitōménē*) authoritatively with the Logos and God [the Father], and, on the other hand,

1. Cf. Oxford English Dictionary, VI, p. 654. Oxford, 1933.

that the Logos was present together (*sunousia*) with the soul. In other words, Eustathius seems to think that the relationship was one of reciprocal presence, the soul dwelling with the Logos, and the Logos being present with the soul.<sup>2</sup>

This phrase is a good general description of the notions of the christological union held by not only Eustathius, but by Origen, Didymus and Theodore, and two points need to be made about the thinking it represents. (1) This description of the christological union was considered acceptable and, in fact, was accepted. It was not identified with the heresy of Paul of Samosata; when that identification came it was in retrospect and incorrect. The four theologians with whom this paper is concerned had themselves no apparent misgivings that their christologies were inadequate or suspect, and (with the obvious exception of Origen) they explicitly denounced Paul as heretical. They saw no affinity between his christology and theirs; nor, apparently, did anyone else. A mode of christological union "relative to moral character or condition" is not necessarily adoptionist (although, of course, it can be, and the conclusion that it always is is frequently and easily arrived at). While the union depends on the moral condition of the man, Jesus, it need not have a beginning at some point in his life. It does not necessarily imply that the man, Jesus, had an existence for a time at least independent of the Word. The theologians concerned take care to point out, with varying degrees of explicitation, that the man, Jesus, was always united to the Word. None can rightly be called adoptionist.

(2) It is the central hypothesis of this paper that the theologians who taught a christological union of reciprocal presence shared an "idea of God" (an obviously inadequate phrase, but anything more precise is too limiting) that became less and less present in theological thinking after Nicaea. I do not mean to say that exactly the same "idea of God" emerges from the writings of the four; we shall see that it does not. But their notions had in common a biblical rather than a philosophical ground, an emphasis on the actions and attributes of God rather than on the "essence" of God, distinct, at least in thought, from these actions and attributes. They made little or no use of philosophical terms and concepts, not because (as some historians have suggested) they were unable to handle them, but because they felt that these were not the terms and concepts most appropriate to God and Christ. Their attitude was that epitomized in the objections to *homoousios* as unscriptural, and, as the fourth century went on, their theology took on an old-fashioned air.

This common bias accounts, at least in part, for their christologies. It becomes clear, as we read them, that for each of the four, there is a marked and positive correlation between the notion of God and the description of the christological union. The concept of the mode of union that each advances is a direct reflection of his notion of divine being and life, and is therefore the most appropriate, most intimate and the most personal mode that could be thought of.

### *Origen*

The "reciprocal presence" that Origen attributes to the Word and, through the instrumentality of his human soul, to the man, Jesus, was that of contemplative union.

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2. R. V. SELLERS, *Eustathius of Antioch*, Cambridge, 1928, pp. 106-107.

This same contemplative union — an adhering of the mind and will in love — Origen sees as the bond between the hypostases of the Trinity. In each case the bond is most suitably described in this fashion because "knowledge" and "love" approximate most closely to Origen's idea of God.

There has been considerable controversy concerning the most important formative influences upon Origen's idea of God,<sup>3</sup> but relative agreement concerning the lineaments of that God. He is immaterial (DeFaye and others assure us that the stress Origen lays on this point was necessary), pure spirit and totally one.<sup>4</sup> He is totally transcendent, above everything, even being.<sup>5</sup> Pure intelligence,<sup>6</sup> he is nonetheless above all knowledge and wisdom, and is apprehended only by his Word.<sup>7</sup> He is goodness,<sup>8</sup> and his very goodness is his only "limitation" — he cannot do evil, cannot be what he is not.<sup>9</sup> He is love<sup>10</sup> and his love destroys his impassibility, if by impassibility is meant indifference.

The Father Himself, too, the God of the Universe, long suffering, and of great compassion, full of pity, is not He in a manner liable to affection? Are you unaware that, when He orders the affairs of men, He is subject to the affections of humanity?... The very Father is not impassible, without affection. If we pray to him, He feels pity and sympathy. He experiences an affection of love.<sup>11</sup>

He is love, and here, I think, it becomes evident that R. M. Grant was mistaken when he wrote, "The conception of God as love played little part... until we reach Augustine's famous interpretation of God."<sup>12</sup> For arising from Origen's notion of God as love is his conviction that loving is the action most characteristic of divinity; oneness in being is expressed in terms of love.

If God the Father is Charity, and the Son is Charity, the Charity, that Each One is, is one; it follows, therefore, that the Father and the Son are one and the same in every respect.<sup>13</sup>

God is love, and in love with himself, knowing himself and rejoicing in himself.

Further, I ask whether it is possible that glory belongs to God over and apart from the glory which he has in the Son, and whether that glory which he has in himself is not greater than the contemplation which he has of the Son, for

3. Cf., among many, discussions in E. DE FAYE, *Origène: sa vie, son œuvre, sa pensée*, 3 vols., Paris, 1923-1928; H. KOCH, *Pronoie und Paidensis: Studien über sein Verhältnis zum Platonismus*, Berlin, 1932; J. DANIELOU, *Origène*, Paris, 1948.

4. *De Princ.* I, 2, 6.

5. *Contra Celsum* VI, 64.

6. *Comm. in Jo.* I, 1.

7. *Contra Celsum* VII, 38; *De Princ.* I, 2, 8; *Comm. in Jo.* I, 1.

8. *Comm. in Jo.* I, 1.

9. *Contra Celsum* III, 70, V, 23.

10. "This Love, which God is." *Comm. in Cant.* prologue.

11. *Hom. in Ezech.* VI, 6. *Hom. in Num.* XXIII.

12. R. M. GRANT, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God*. Charlottesville, Va., 1966, p. 64.

13. *Comm. in Cant.* prologue.

knowing is such an [integral] part of God. He must be said to be penetrated by such ineffable delight and happiness and rejoicing, taking pleasure and rejoicing in himself.<sup>14</sup>

In summary, then, while Origen's God cannot be comprehended by man, he can be recognized in his most proper and characteristic attributes and actions, those which most intimately mirror the Invisible, i.e. knowing and loving. It follows from this, for Origen, that the sharing of this very "stuff" of divinity by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is best described as a relationship of mind and will. Speaking of the Father and the Son, he says, "They are two distinct essences, but one in mental unity, in agreement and identity of will."<sup>15</sup> It is a union of knowledge, of contemplation, a mutual glory and delight. H. Crouzel explains how this is so:

The representation which Origen advances of consubstantiality (a representation which is found in the Greeks even after Nicaea) is not the same as that of Latin theologians. The latter distinguish the question of source from that of nature, and speak of a divine nature which is the common property of the three... The Greeks, on the contrary,... do not distinguish source and nature and show the Son consequently as born of the essence of the Father... The divine nature is, therefore, the Father's chief good and he communicates it to the Son and the Holy Spirit in the very act of their generation or procession. Thus Origen is able to present the Son as constantly receiving his divinity from his contemplation of the Father, or to affirm that he is constantly nourished by the Father.<sup>16</sup>

To share knowledge and love, when the reciprocal object of that knowledge and love is the being of the other, is to contemplate mutually, and when the beings that are contemplating and being contemplated are best described as active knowing and willing, the nature becomes identical with the communication of that nature. The fact or degree of Origen's trinitarian subordinationism is not relevant to this paper, but it is clear that he sees the Son as sharing the Father's nature and his constant references are to eternal generation.<sup>17</sup> Origen is not reluctant to describe this act of generation as an act of knowledge and particularly of will on the Father's part — "the Son, whose birth from the Father is, as it were, an act of his will proceeding from the mind".<sup>18</sup> Because the divine will shares none of the deficiencies of human willing (want, desire, temporality), Origen has no hesitation in calling the Son "the Son of his will".<sup>19</sup> It is, in Origen's theology, an affirmation, rather than the denial it was later to become, of full divinity. And, just as the expansive nature of divine knowledge and love gives birth eternally to the Son, so the Son derives his being from contemplating that knowledge and love,<sup>20</sup> and he is image because he alone completely shares the will of the Father.<sup>21</sup>

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14. *Comm. in Jo.* XIII.

15. *Contra Celsum* VIII, 12. Cf. also *Comm. in Jo. passim*.

16. H. CROUZEL, "L'Image de Dieu dans la théologie d'Origène," *Texte und Untersuchungen* 64, Berlin, 1957, p. 196.

17. *De Princ.* I,2,2; I,2,4; IV,4,4.

18. *De Princ.* IV,4,1. Cf. also I,2,6.

19. *De Princ.* IV, 4, 1.

20. *Comm. in Jo.* II, 2.

21. *Comm. in Jo.* II, 2.

Because Origen sees reciprocal contemplation as best doing justice to the unity and mode of union of the three hypostases of the Trinity, it is not surprising that he sees this same mode of union as most appropriate to Christ. The text is well-known, but it may be useful to repeat it here.

That soul of which Jesus said, "No man taketh from me my soul", clinging to God from the beginning of creation and ever after in a union inseparable and indissoluble, as being the soul of the wisdom and word of God and of the truth and the true light, and receiving him wholly, and itself entering into his light and splendour, was made with him in a preeminent degree one spirit, just as the apostle promises to them whose duty it is to imitate Jesus, that "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit". This soul then acting as a medium between God and the flesh,... there is born... the God-man.

As a reward for its love, therefore, it is anointed with the "oil of gladness", that is the soul with the word of God is made Christ; for to be anointed with the oil of gladness means nothing else but to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And when he says "above thy fellows", he indicates that the grace of the Spirit was not given to it as to the prophets, but that the essential "fulness" of the Word of God himself was within it, as the apostle said, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily".<sup>22</sup>

The christological union does, in Origen's eyes, depend on the moral condition of Jesus' human soul, i.e. on its "clinging" to God, but it is in no sense a "metaphorical" union. The union is intrinsic, not extrinsic; it penetrates to the very core of Christ's being, in fact, it constitutes Christ in being ("there is born the God-man"). Origen has many phrases (some in the passage quoted here) that lend themselves, because of the notion of "reward" in them, to an impression of a "loose" union. He counters in two ways: (1) he asserts that this union has existed "since the beginning of creation"; (2) he emphasizes the totality of the reciprocal presence. The presence is of the same order as that of his "fellows", but the degree changes the kind. Talking of "those who run in the odour of his ointments", Origen compares Christ to the vase containing the ointment. "As therefore the odour of the ointment is one thing and the substance of the ointment another, so Christ is one thing and his fellows another."<sup>23</sup> The human soul of Christ and the Word are "one spirit" in the sense of partaking of the same being. The key is the totality of the reciprocal presence — a totality that moves beyond the highest point of inspiration to the sharing of the same life. As in the inner contemplation of the Trinity, the means of sharing — knowing and loving — are themselves the essence of that life. It is a *personal* union because it involves, in Origen's thought at least, those attributes and actions which are most proper and fundamental to divine and human life.

With reference to the statement made at the beginning of the paper that the positing of a christological union of reciprocal presence was theologically respectable in the fourth century, three points should be noted concerning Origen's thought. (1) The criticism that Origen's teaching evoked did not touch on his description of the christological union, but rather on his cosmology and, in particular, on his teaching on

22. *De Princ.* II, 6,3.

23. *De Princ.* II, 6,6.



the preexistence of souls.<sup>24</sup> (2) Rufinus, always so concerned for Origen's reputation, did not think it necessary to soften the christological text just quoted. We have both the Greek and the Latin for a small part of it — the part that talks of the union as the result of goodness — and the Latin is rather more forceful on this point than the Greek. The Greek is given here first.

It was on this account also that the man became Christ, for he obtained this lot by reason of his goodness, as the prophet bears witness when he says, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; wherefore God hath anointed thee, thy God with the oil of gladness above thy fellows". It was appropriate that he who had never been separated from the Only-begotten should be called by the name of the Only-begotten and glorified together with him.

To prove that it was the perfection of his love and the sincerity of his true affection which gained for him this inseparable unity with God, so that the taking up of his soul was neither accidental nor the result of personal preference, but was a privilege conferred upon it as a reward for its virtues, listen to the prophet speaking to it thus; "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, wherefore God has anointed thee, thy God with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."<sup>25</sup>

(3) Paul of Samosata was condemned not for the theory of the christological union he advanced, but for denying the divinity of Christ. It is certain that for almost two centuries after his condemnation theologians who decried Paul themselves taught a union of reciprocal presence. Paul is often accused of "rationalism", and while this accusation often had little meaning, it perhaps, as used by Origen's intellectual heirs at the Council of Antioch, pointed to a basic difference in the notion of God held by Paul and Origen. If Paul's concept of God centred less on knowledge and love, then a union of reciprocal presence of mind and will would not have been "tight" enough or "firm" enough or "intimate" enough to be called "personal". If, as later accusations add,<sup>26</sup> Paul was a Sabellian as well as an adoptionist, then his trinitarian theology, lacking distinct hypostases related to each other in knowledge and love, would not provide a coherent background to a christological union of reciprocal presence. An apersonal Word could not relate personally to the man, Jesus. If reciprocal knowing and loving is not seen as the very "stuff" of the godhead, then knowing and loving has less ontological reality, and hence, less plausibility as the basis of the christological union. The two hundred years between Origen and Nestorius saw, in fact, a lessening of this plausibility.

### *Eustathius*

There is not agreement on the theological stance of Eustathius of Antioch. Present at Nicaea, and a strong defender of its teaching, he maintained his reputation for orthodoxy despite Eusebius of Caesarea's accusation of Sabellianism and his

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24. Cf. L. B. RADFORD, *Three Teachers of Alexandria: Theognosius, Pierius and Peter. A Study in the Early History of Origenism and Anti-Origenism*. Cambridge, 1908.

25. *De Princ.* II, 6,4.

26. Cf. J. N. D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*. 2nd edition, London, 1960, p. 119.

subsequent exile in 330. Some modern historians (e.g. Loofs and Sellers)<sup>27</sup> think that the accusation of modalism was justified, and see his christology to be dualistic, teaching an inspired man. Others (Zoepfl, Spanneut)<sup>28</sup> discern, under a cloak of biblical terminology, personalities in Eustathius' Trinity. Both schools recognize his insistence (1) on the unity of Christ's person and (2) on his full humanity. (Eustathius was one of the first to see the implications vis-à-vis Arianism of a denial of Christ's soul. Spanneut says that his writings were among the most used and useful in Paulinus' fight against Apollinarianism.)<sup>29</sup> I am more convinced by the arguments for Eustathius' orthodoxy than by those against. While I am appreciative of Sellers' excellent summary of Eustathius' teachings,<sup>30</sup> I do not find that his conclusions demand agreement. Sellers (and others) are, it seems to me, reading Eustathius through later spectacles, not recognizing that here are ideas of God and, consequently, of the union of God and man in Christ that are corollaries. Eustathius' theology has a consistency of its own, and owes little to the cast of language and thought that was taking over fourth-century trinitarian and christological thinking.

Eustathius talks of God primarily in terms of his creative will and power and omnipresence.<sup>31</sup> It is a theme that is present in Origen, but is subordinated there to knowledge and love. In Eustathius, it forms the basis of his theology. The Son is begotten and shares the divine nature.<sup>32</sup> He is the Father's image and works with him.<sup>33</sup> Sellers points out that "Word", "Son", "Wisdom" and "Spirit" are used virtually synonymously by Eustathius,<sup>34</sup> and that he calls the Wisdom of God "a divine and ineffable power".<sup>35</sup> We need not conclude, however, with Sellers, that Eustathius understands "power" as an impersonal attribute.<sup>36</sup> It is, rather, that creative will and power seem to Eustathius to be "what God is all about", as knowledge and love seemed to Origen. Therefore, to Eustathius, the most appropriate way of affirming the sharing of the divine nature is the assertion of shared power and creative will.

That Eustathius understood the Son to be a distinct hypostasis, in the sense that Origen did, cannot be proven, but neither can it be disproven. Certainly, if the accusation of Eusebius was to carry any weight at all, distinction of hypostases could not have been a prominent feature of Eustathius' theology. Nevertheless, to argue that he ignored such a distinction on the grounds that he used terms of divine power and

27. F. LOOFS, *Paulus von Samosata*, Leipzig, 1924. R. V. SELLERS, *Eustathius of Antioch*, Cambridge, 1928.

28. F. ZOEPFL, "Die Trinitarischen and Christologischen Anschauungen des Bischofs Eustathius von Antiochen," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 104 (1923) 170-201. M. SPANNEUT, *Recherches sur les Ecrits d'Eustache d'Antioche*, Lille, 1948.

29. SPANNEUT, p. 16.

30. SELLERS, pp. 82-99, 100-120.

31. PG 18, 681D, 695A.

32. PG 18, 681C, 685C.

33. PG 18, 681C, 652A.

34. SELLERS, p. 84.

35. PG 18, 684B.

36. SELLERS, p. 90 and p. 93.



operation to describe the Son is to ignore the mainspring of Eustathius' theology. To repeat, for Eustathius, a sharing of power and creative will is an assertion of consubstantiality.

In parallel fashion, for Eustathius the strongest assertion of Christ's divinity was an assertion of shared power and will brought about by the reciprocal presence of the Word and the man. Like Origen before him, Eustathius, to underline the intimacy of the union, talks of it in terms that most closely reflect the reality of the Godhead itself. Because he sees no distinction between the divine nature and the divine activity, divinity can best be characterized by its operation. The mode of union he ascribes to Christ is therefore *kat'energeian*, i.e. according to action or operation.

Eustathius' account of the descent of Christ's soul into hell is informative of his notion of the mode of union, and it is particularly illuminating to compare it with Origen's explanation.<sup>37</sup> For Origen, Christ's human soul adhered to the Word in will and was not touched by the horrors of hell.<sup>38</sup> Eustathius replies that in this explanation Origen seems to speak of a mere man, that he did not appreciate Christ's divine nature, since voluntary adherence to God can be attributed to all good men.<sup>39</sup> He who speaks so inexpertly, Eustathius says of Origen, does not understand the Word to be God, who is present everywhere not so much by his will as by the strength (*aretè*) of his divinity.<sup>40</sup> The Word was present to Christ, enabling him to escape hell and save others,<sup>41</sup> and "the soul of Christ lived with God and the Word".<sup>42</sup> The reciprocal presence of Word and man is best expressed for Eustathius in terms of action. It should be noted that Eustathius is intent on strengthening the christological union, of overcoming the weakness he saw in Origen's theory.

The Word was not present to Christ merely as he is to all creation, Eustathius notes, but rather as a companion-in-being.<sup>43</sup> As a result of this "dwelling together", this "presence", the soul of Christ was confirmed in strength.<sup>44</sup> This notion of confirmation is one Eustathius shares with Origen, Didymus and Theodore. But the point to be noted here is that this constancy is not the result of shared knowledge and love (although Eustathius would certainly recognize that sharing), but of shared power and action. It is a difference of priorities reflecting different apprehensions of the divine. Predictably, Eustathius sees the exaltation of Christ resulting in a further sharing of divine power and operation.<sup>45</sup> In each theology — that of Origen and Eustathius — we find that the "primary bond" of the christological union, i.e. the constitutive bond, is expressed in terms that represent the essence or fundament of the Godhead — for Origen, knowledge and love, for Eustathius, power and operation.

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37. *Origenes de Engastrimytho*. PG 18, 613–673. Cf. E. KLOSTERMANN, *Origenes, Eustathius von Antiochen und Gregor von Nyssa über die Hexe von Endor*. Bonn, 1912.

38. PG 12, 1025A.

39. PG 18, 649CD.

40. PG 18, 652A.

41. PG 18, 651B.

42. PG 18, 652C.

43. PG 18, 652A. Cf. C. W. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexikon*. Oxford, 1961, II, 1357 "synousia".

44. PG 18, 652A.

45. PG 18, 685B.

Kelly and Wolfson,<sup>46</sup> among others, have pointed out the disinclination, which grew throughout the fourth century, to understand the unity of the Trinity in terms of will. Theologians from the time of Origen were capable of distinguishing between the generation of the Word as an *act* of the Father's will — to most a clear statement of subordination — and as the *eternal*, ongoing willing of the Father. In the latter case, "willing" is understood as either identical with the divine essence, or expressive of it. Nevertheless, the Arian use of an act of volitional generation to explain the existence of the Word made any kind of voluntary union in the Trinity suspect. While the second creed of Antioch (341) echoes Origen<sup>47</sup> in "three in subsistence, one in agreement",<sup>48</sup> Kelly terms it "frankly pre-Nicene in tone".<sup>49</sup> Only a year or two later, the document known as "the creed of Serdica", emanating from the Athanasian party, condemned the assertion that the Three were "one in harmony of will", and insisted on unity of hypostasis.<sup>50</sup>

Athanasius in 358 himself made the distinction between the will and the nature of God, denying that an act of the divine will resulted in the generation of the Word: "A man by decision builds a house, but by nature he begets a son; and what is built at will began to come into being and is external to the maker; but the son is the proper offspring of the father's substance, and is not external to him."<sup>51</sup> He associated unity of the Godhead expressed in terms of will with the Arians, and saw it as dangerously inadequate: "For they [the Arians] say, since what the Father wills, the Son wills also, and is... in all things concordant with Him, therefore it is that He and the Father are one."<sup>52</sup> The attention Athanasius gives to the question of volitional unity in the Trinity reflects the threat he saw there if the unity of God were made to rest on it, for, in his eyes, volitional unity asserts likeness in attribute and operation, not oneness in being. The threat was not imagined; the Arians had used "will" to subordinate the Son and, in the person of Eunomius, were making a distinction between the divine substance and the divine operation to the same end. Although Athanasius certainly identifies in theory the substance and the will of God, his emphasis in practice is on the divine substance as that which the Three share, because this emphasis is more in harmony with his ontological conception of God as immutable Being. "Will", on the other hand, has too many overtones of temporality and mutability.<sup>53</sup> By the middle of the fourth century, oneness in will and/or power and operation, instead of being an assertion of oneness in substance had become, to many, a denial of it.

Grillmeier draws attention to the lack of theological interest amounting to tacit, if not outright, denial of the human soul of Christ after Origen.<sup>54</sup> Such denial or. at

46. J. N. D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 3rd edition, London, 1965, pp. 242-251. H. WOLFSON, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, Cambridge, Mass., 1956, pp. 233 ff.

47. *Contra Celsum* VIII, 12.

48. J. N. D. KELLY, *Early Christian Creeds*, 2nd edition, London, 1960, p. 269.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 271.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

51. *Contra Arianos* III, 62.

52. *Ibid.* III, 10.

53. Cf. the discussion in E. P. MEIJERING, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius*, Leiden, 1974.

54. A. GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, E. T. New York, 1965, pp. 277 ff.

best, lack of emphasis, of course makes a christological union of reciprocal presence impossible. But to my mind, an equally serious impediment to such a notion was the growing lack of necessary support to be found in a parallel view of trinitarian unity. It is against this background of lack of interest in the human soul of Christ and distrust of unity of will or unity of power and operation in the Trinity that Didymus (313–398) taught, and it is this background that makes his theological position all the more surprising.

### *Didymus*

Any conclusions concerning the thought of Didymus must, of course, be tentative until many questions of authorship are settled. I am accepting, as the basis of this paper, the authenticity of the treatise *On the Trinity*, the treatises *On the Holy Spirit* and *Against the Manicheans*, Pseudo-Basil, *Against Eunomius IV and V*, Pseudo-Gregory (of Nyssa), *Against Arius and Sabellius*, Pseudo-Athanasius, *Seven Dialogues on the Trinity* and the *Commentary on Zacharias* found at Toura. Most significantly, I am following Gesché in attributing the Toura *Commentary on the Psalms* to Didymus, as well as that one which has always gone under his name.<sup>55</sup>

The treatise on the Trinity was certainly written after 379; some place it as late as the nineties. Oneness of substance and threeness of hypostasis had become, largely through the writings of Basil, widely accepted and, as Bardy remarks,<sup>56</sup> we find the formula on almost every page of Didymus. He is emphatic concerning the distinction and personality of the Three and, in the tradition of those who stress this distinction, prefers to posit the Father as the source of divine being, rather than to speak of the divine being as a substance in which the Three share. Rather than an unquestioning, if philosophically inept, follower of Athanasius (a picture Bardy paints<sup>57</sup>) Didymus strikes the reader aware of the background by the independence of his thought. Obviously instructed in the controversies of half a century earlier, Didymus explicitly denies that the Son is the offspring of an act of the Father's will. But even after Serdica's and Athanasius' insistence on speaking of the being of God in ontological terms, Didymus repeatedly expresses trinitarian unity in terms of shared power, action and will: "[Father and Son] are other in terms of hypostasis, one in divinity and agreement".<sup>58</sup> It is virtually a repetition of the second creed of Antioch, with almost half a century and the victory of *homoousios* intervening.

Didymus talks, almost indifferently, of the unity of the divine nature expressed and revealed in unity of will and operation, and of that unity of will and operation resulting from the unity of nature. Of interest is the passage (from *Seven Dialogues on the Trinity*) in which he has the anonymous questioner ask for an explanation of one deity and three hypostases. Didymus refers him to Galatians 3,28 (diverse groups "one in Christ"):

55. Cf. the discussion in E. DOUTRELEAU, *RechScRel* 45 (1957) 514–557 and A. GESCHÉ, *La Christologie du "Commentaire sur les Psaumes" découvert à Toura*, Paris, 1962.

56. G. BARDY, *Didyme l'Aveugle*, Paris, 1910, p. 74.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

58. PG 28, 1169B.

I say there are three [men] if they disagree among themselves, but if... they have been perfected in one mind and feeling, I say there is one new man... [Similarly] if you posit discord [among the hypostases of the Trinity]... you declare three gods, but if there is no dissension among them, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one.<sup>59</sup>

Didymus knew the folly of talking of the Trinity in human terms,<sup>60</sup> but insofar as the Trinity can be known, it is by scriptural characteristics that Didymus both apprehends and expresses divine oneness. The Three are one in kingship,<sup>61</sup> one in rule,<sup>62</sup> one in power,<sup>63</sup> in lordship,<sup>64</sup> in will,<sup>65</sup> in purpose of will,<sup>66</sup> and in willing.<sup>67</sup> I must again disagree with Bardy in his statement that Didymus was "too pious" to use *homoousios* of the Trinity, and so employed *homótimos* (the same in honour), *homódoxos* (the same in glory) and *sundoxazómenos* (sharing in praise).<sup>68</sup> It seems rather that Didymus was well aware of what standard usage had become, was not entirely happy with it,<sup>69</sup> and deliberately remained faithful not only to scriptural language, but to scriptural ideas about the being and oneness of God. Perhaps the most significant in terms of this paper is his characterization of the Trinity as a "society",<sup>70</sup> a "sharing", a "fellowship".<sup>71</sup>

The full recognition and prominence Didymus affords the human soul of Christ is now widely known. His treatise on the Trinity is the earliest extant anti-Apollinarian writing, but he is also explicit in rejecting the heresy of Paul of Samosata, i.e. adoptionism and its consequent denial of the divinity of Christ.<sup>72</sup> All who study Didymus tell us that he was not interested in explaining the mode of union in Christ. This may very well be true — his writings tend much more to the descriptive than to the analytical. Nevertheless, his christological writing affords unmistakable clues to the direction of his thought on this matter, and it faithfully mirrors the volitional and operational tenor of his trinitarian theology.

The human soul of Jesus was sinless and free; Didymus makes these assertions over and over again.<sup>73</sup> Jesus' soul was moved by those things that move other human souls, but never to the point of sin.<sup>74</sup> His total goodness was a unique gift of God,

59. PG 28, 1169D-1172A.

60. PG 39, 1066A.

61. PG 39, 425A, 729A.

62. PG 39, 377C, 537B, 601A.

63. PG 39, 565B.

64. PG 39, 545B.

65. PG 39, 440C, 449A.

66. PG 39, 601A.

67. PG 39, 344C, 440A.

68. Bardy, p. 91.

69. PG 39, 1066A.

70. PG 39, 1035.

71. PG 28, 1138.

72. *In Zach.* IV, 234.

73. *In Zach.* I, 287; II, 411; Toura commentary *passim*.

74. Cf. the discussion on *propatheia* in relation to the human soul of Christ, GESCHÉ, 181-188.

arising from the presence to him of the Word. We find in the *Commentary on the Psalms* the statement that Jesus' soul did not know sin because God the Word was present, a constant companion to it.<sup>75</sup> A passage from the *Toura Commentary* enlarges on this point:

That soul is therefore unique [among mankind] and different from others because it alone is always united to the Word. Nothing separates one from the other — neither mental perturbation nor trouble.<sup>76</sup>

Didymus uses *monogenes* — only-begotten, uniquely privileged — analogously of the Word and of the human soul of Jesus. Each is unique in its own order of being. The Word is the unique offspring of the Father and so, analogously, because of the Word's steadfast presence, is the soul of Christ. Of that soul, he says:

“Whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved.” (2 Peter 2, 19) Certainly, it can happen that [souls] go from the true Lord to other masters, and from one to another; that results each time in different sins...

Thus because the soul of Jesus was proven in all things [to be] in our resemblance, sin excepted (Heb. 4,15), it was never in the power of any other than the one who assumed it. That is why [God] calls it his only-begotten.<sup>77</sup>

The complete absorption of the being of the Word in the being of the Father is mirrored in the complete absorption of the human soul of Christ in the Word. This reciprocal presence of the Word and Jesus' soul is radically different, in Didymus' eyes, from the relation of other souls to God. The difference is clear: Christ's soul is *always* united to the Word: “That soul is therefore unique, different from all others, because it alone is always united to [the Word]. Nothing separated it from Him, neither reasoning nor reflection, nor trouble.”<sup>78</sup> The unique fullness of that presence becomes the source of salvation to others:

[Christ], who voluntarily ascended the cross... and, restored to life, by his own death killed death and reclaimed all men from death. [Christ], who by the exercise of his authority, strength and action brought a multitude of men with him, [and gave] hope of the resurrection to all human nature.<sup>79</sup>

This same notion of uniqueness that results in shared salvific power and operation can be found in Origen, Eustathius and Theodore.

Grillmeier remarks that with Didymus “the freedom of Christ's soul is thus referred not merely to the undergoing of moral proving in an earthly existence, but also to the preservation of the divine-human unity itself.”<sup>80</sup> I would add that in Didymus' christology not only does the soul of Christ adhere freely to the Word and so maintain its condition of sinlessness and its unique relation to the Word — a relation of union — but that the very mode of union that Didymus is here implicitly

75. PG 39, 1283C.

76. GESCHÉ, pp. 153–154.

77. GESCHÉ, p. 209.

78. GESCHÉ, p. 154.

79. PG 39, 904D.

80. GRILLMEIER, p. 275.

advancing is exactly parallel and analogous to the unity he describes in the Trinity, i.e. reciprocal presence, shared will and operation.

We have seen in Origen a christological union of reciprocal presence through contemplation, paralleling a trinitarian unity of knowledge and love. Eustathius posits a christological union of reciprocal presence in terms of shared power and operation, reflecting a theology in which power and operation express the very core of deity. Didymus has marks of both, and is less clear and consistent than either. Trinitarian unity is certainly based on harmony of will, but the scriptural expressions of the power and activity of God fill his writings. In terms of the christological union, he is perhaps closer to Origen. The constant, mutual presence of the Word and the human soul of Christ gives that soul a unique status with salvific power. Let me repeat that for all three it is a "moral union" insofar as it depends on the moral condition of the human soul of Christ, and it is emphatically not a "moral union" in the sense of "metaphorical". Each has taken what he perceives to be the fundament of the divine being, and cast the christological union in that framework.

#### *Theodore*

Theodore of Mopsuestia continues the pattern established by Origen, Eustathius and Didymus, but with new and different emphases and a greater sophistication. One reason for the latter, of course, is that the christological disputes, properly speaking, have by his time begun, and he addresses himself directly to the mode of union. His debt to Origen is striking, and their differences are consistent with basically different notions of the relationship of God to the world. Theodore explicitly refutes the Eustathian theory of union by power and operation. His own suggestion is union by good pleasure or grace — *kat'eudokian*.

Theodore (ca 350–428) is a generation or more later than Didymus, and by his time trinitarian theology in the East had passed its creative period and had hardened into formulae. Theodore seems to have been not only orthodox but unoriginal in this area. He deals with trinitarian relations in the established terms ("one nature, three *hypostases* or *prosopa*"), and asserting still against the Arians the eternal generation of the Son, and denying that the generation was an act of the Father's will.<sup>81</sup> Unlike the three earlier theologians, Theodore does not shy away from the terms "substance" and "nature", and insists on the unity of nature among the Three.

By faith, indeed, we have known that the Father has a Son, begotten of his nature, and who is God like him. By faith, we have admitted that... the Holy Spirit is of the nature of God the Father, and that he is always with the Father and the Son.<sup>82</sup>

It may be recalled that in 392 Theodore had been delegated to argue the case for the recognition of the divinity of the Holy Spirit before the Macedonians. It was, in his words, echoing Basil, from the acknowledged sanctity of the Spirit that his divinity is known: "He is holy by nature, therefore He is God."<sup>83</sup> This argument gives a clue to

81. *CH* II, 10.

82. *CH* I, 12.

83. *Cont.* 641.



Theodore's notion of the divine nature. As well, eternity, immutability and constancy are the tenor of his references to God; in this, as in all else, God is not only self-sufficient, but source to others:

Truly, therefore, he is holy who neither changes nor transforms himself in his nature, and who has received sanctity from none other, but alone can give sanctity to those to whom he wishes.<sup>84</sup>

Moral immutability will be the mark of the divine in Christ.

God's sanctity is made manifest in his benevolent, creative will. Creation is the result of divine infinity and love. In all his writings, but especially in the *Catechetical Homilies*, God as creator is stressed. The two following texts are typical:

He is author of all things which came to be and have been made, which are far separated from his substance, and were created by his will when it pleased him.<sup>85</sup>  
That which is eternal and is cause of everything, that is God. And he who is not such, is not God by nature.<sup>86</sup>

Two points should be noted in these texts: God is creative "by nature", and his creation is "far separated from his substance". This radical difference from Origen, i.e. the break that Theodore insists on in the Origenist continuum between Creator and created, is reflected in their respective notions of reciprocal presence. Rather than express it in terms of mutual contemplation, Theodore will talk of grace given and grace received, resulting in an unwavering presence to each other of the Word and the human soul of Christ.

This notion of God's grace, of his concern for and good-pleasure towards man, is but another way, in Theodore's theology, of expressing the divine holiness and creativity. A series of texts traces the history of this concern for the old and the new Israel — the triumphs of the Old Testament, the end of the persecution of the church, the defeat of heresy and, above all, the incarnation and the redeeming work of Christ.

Through my care [for them] I shall be known to them, showing them that I am really their God by the things through which I supply them with my special lasting grace.<sup>87</sup>

He came to save men, in order that he might, by an ineffable grace and mercy, vivify and liberate those who were lost and delivered over to evil.<sup>88</sup>

Immutability, sanctity, creativity, benevolence — the interrelation of the divine attributes forms a pattern from which one is tempted to infer Theodore's notion of intra-trinitarian relationships. But it could be only inference, and so a parallel cannot be established between the relationship of the persons of the Trinity and the christological mode of union. What can be plainly seen, however, is Theodore's notion of the divine nature and its reflection in the relationship of the divine and human in Christ. "Grace" is the term appropriate to both.

84. CH IX, 14.

85. CH II, 12.

86. CH I, 14.

87. PG 66, 548A.

88. CH V, 3.

Theodore did not stumble on the notion of "grace", "benevolence", "good pleasure" to signify the christological mystery. It was very thoughtfully chosen. Richard has shown how little known or used the term *hypostasis* was in the fourth and earlier centuries to describe the christological union.<sup>89</sup> Theodore does affirm the single *hypostasis* of Christ in his controversial treatise, *Against Apollinaris*,<sup>90</sup> but the word was evidently not his choice, nor the choice of his contemporaries to express the most intimately personal union. (Richard indicates that it had monophysite overtones.) The modes of union that Theodore examines and discards as unsuitable tell us a good deal about the one he adopts. The christological union is not according to substance (*kat'ousian*), he says, because such a union would imply limitation of the divine.

And to say that God indwells anything as substance is most unfitting. For it is necessary that he be somewhere to enclose his substance in those things which he is said to indwell; and he will be outside everything else. This is an absurd thing to say of an infinite nature which is everywhere and is circumscribed in no place.<sup>91</sup>

Theodore evidently understands by the "substance" of God his general creative will which causes the beginning and continuance of all being, but which does not suitably express any special relationships God has with his creation. Nor does Theodore like any better Eustathius' notion of union by power and operation:

The same can be said of operation. For either, on the one hand, it is necessary to limit his activity to those things alone in which he is said thus to dwell, and how will it then be true that God cares for and governs all things?... Or, on the other hand, it is necessary that he impart his action to all things, which is thus proper and reasonable?<sup>92</sup>

Union according to power and operation (*kat'energeian*) in no way accounts for the uniqueness of Christ. Eustathius solved this difficulty by attributing to Christ a uniquely steadfast presence of the strength of the Word. Theodore picks up this theme, which was present also in Origen and Didymus, and recasts it under the rubric of his predominant idea of God.

For he [the assumed man] was joined to God the Word according to a mode of benevolence from the womb itself... having the same will in all things with him, and the same operation. It is not possible to have a closer conjunction than this.<sup>93</sup>

Close, yes, but is it unique? Or is it, as his critics have said, a difference only of degree? Theodore, like Origen, meets the problem squarely:

Certainly in him we do not say inhabitation to have taken place [as in the just generally], for we would not be so mad, but rather as in a Son. For thus he

89. M. RICHARD, "L'Introduction du mot 'hypostase' dans la théologie de l'Incarnation", *MSR* 2 (1945) 5-32, 243-270.

90. *Theodori Mopsuestini fragmenta syriaca*. LEIPSI, 1869, p. 69. Cf. RICHARD, pp. 23-25.

91. PG 66, 972C.

92. PG 66, 972D-973A.

93. PG 66, 1013A.

inhabited, by good pleasure... By which we say that both natures are united and, following that union, one person is effected.<sup>94</sup>

"As in a Son" is the specification of uniqueness, and for Theodore it means to inhabit totally. It is not only a temporal totality, so that the man, Jesus, had no life independent of the Word's presence (although that assertion is made more than once). Theodore's explanation of "as in a Son" is one of his most often quoted passages.

But what is it to indwell as in a Son? It is, by having indwelt, on the one hand to have united completely to Himself the assumed man; on the other, to have made him a participator of all the dignity which he who inhabits possesses, being Son by nature. With the result that from union with Him he becomes a unique person [and] He causes to communicate to him all his power. So that it happens, and from which it comes, that he operates completely in him to such a degree that He even administers the universal judgement through him and his parousia.<sup>95</sup>

As the Word, the Son by nature, shares the totality of the Father's nature, so the adopted son receives the totality of his good pleasure.

An exegesis of the passage quoted is necessary to show the richness and sophistication of Theodore's thought.<sup>96</sup> In terms of the theme of reciprocal presence, I wish only to point out that the totality of the presence of the Word is met by the totality of the man's response, and that both are actions of grace — the first the benevolence of the Word, the second the grace received and responded to by the man.

We shall say this also to be just and befitting the Lord, that the Word, because indeed he knew [the man's] excellence by foreknowledge, and immediately, from the outset, at the beginning of his formation, indwelt by good pleasure and united him to Himself by the habitude of his will, and gave him a greater grace, so that afterwards, from that given to him, grace would be diffused to all men. Therefore, He preserved (to himself) an incorrupt and sincere will concerning the good.<sup>97</sup>

Theodore attributes, as do his three predecessors, the salvific work of Christ to the totality of the presence of the Word and the total adherence of Christ's human soul to the Word. He echoes all they have to say and adds a new dimension very much in keeping with his idea of God, whose act of creation is the foundation of his more particularized benevolence or grace. Alone among patristic commentators he interprets the "pleroma" of Colossians 2,9 as not only all "creatures", led by Christ to a new and excellent age, but "all creation renewed and transformed in that renewal which, in grace, he gave".<sup>98</sup>

Two points concerning Theodore can be singled out in conclusion: (1) he seems to have met the post-Nicaean tendency to talk of God and Christ in more ontologically stable terms by his stress on sanctity as immutability, whether it is the

94. PG 66, 976B, 990B.

95. PG 66, 976BC.

96. Cf. P. GALTIER, "Théodore de Mopsueste: sa vraie pensée sur l'Incarnation", *RechScRel* 45 (1957) 161-186, 338-360, and J. M. DEWART, *The Theology of Grace of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, Washington, 1971, pp. 79-81.

97. PG 66, 989D.

98. CH III, 9.

sanctity of God or the human sanctity of Christ, while retaining the biblical notions of creativity and will; (2) he has recast the notion of reciprocal presence in terms of grace (it should be remembered that Theodore is an almost exact contemporary of Augustine) so that the incarnation is the response of the man, Jesus, to that expansive benevolence which is Theodore's basic notion of God.

The examination of these four theologians has been an attempt to show a close correlation between the understanding each has of the divine nature and of the intra-trinitarian relationships and the manner of the christological union. The mode of union of the human and divine in Christ that each advances is a direct reflection of his notion of divine being and life, and, therefore, the most appropriate, intimate and personal. The constitutive bond is expressed in terms that represent the "essence" of the Godhead. (A parallel study would show, I suspect, that for these theologians the core of being human is also knowledge and will.) Because the constitutive bond of the divine and human in Christ is described in terms that represent the "essence" of the divine (and human), that union, while it depends on the moral response of Jesus, is not at all "moral" in the sense of being metaphorical.