

Learning from Patristic Christology

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✻ *CHRIST, THE ARTICLE ON Which the Church Stands or Falls*

According to Lutheran teaching the church stands or falls on the article of justification.¹ As much as I love the Pauline teaching of justification, that we are clothed with and stand in the imputed righteousness of Christ, I think a case can be made from Jesus' own lips that Christology, not justification, is the article upon which the church stands or falls. The Lord asked Peter, "But who do you say that I am?" In response to the confession of Peter, that he was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build My church" (Matt 16:15-18, NASB). The beloved disciple John also recognized that Christology was of the utmost importance, saying, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also." And later, "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1 John 2:23; 5:12, NASB). What is the place of orthodox Christology in evangelicalism today? How can patristic Christology inform our faith?

In the late twentieth century, as liberals were debating over whether the Jesus of the Gospels was the Jesus of history, evangelicalism was

1. Martin Luther, *Exposition on Psalm 130:4*: "... quia isto articulo stante stat Ecclesia, ruente ruit Ecclesia" (Anderson et al., *Justification by Faith*, 320 n. 51). See also the Lutheran *Smulcald Articles* 2.1 and *Book of Concord* 292, in which justification is called the "first and chief article" (as cited in *Joint Declaration*, 9).

experiencing its own christological debacles. Presidents of three major evangelical universities and seminaries were teaching views about Christ similar to errors condemned by the early church. One declared that Jesus was nine hundred feet tall, that the Holy Spirit is Christ in another form, and that in the crucifixion the devil destroyed Jesus' body, but "never got the real Christ."² Another president was denying the eternal Sonship of Christ.³ And still another wrote that Christ has only one will, not two, a view historically known as "monothelitism," from the Greek words meaning "one" and "will."⁴ In such a context, calls for reform included an engagement with the ancient faith of our fathers.

2. Oral Roberts, who was president of Oral Roberts University, which grants master's degrees in theology. On the 900-foot Jesus, see Muck, "God and Oral," 17; Brown, "Oral Roberts," 450-52; Brown, "Oral Tradition," 278-79. Interestingly, the Elchasaites of the early church alleged that the Son of God was 96 miles wide. Cf. Hippolytus of Rome *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.12 (ANF 5:131-32). On Roberts's confusion of the Son with the Holy Spirit, see Roberts, *How to Get Through*, 171: "He [the Father] sent Him [Jesus] back in the invisible, unlimited form of the Holy Spirit to be in us—both with us and in us. It is through the invisible, unlimited Christ, the form in which God sends the other Comforter, that the Holy Spirit fills my spirit." Also: "And God raised Him [Jesus] from the dead, giving Him a new form that is unlimited and invisible . . . Jesus has come back in the invisible, unlimited form of the Holy Spirit to be in us, as well as to be with us" (ibid., 240). Roberts, *Miracles of Christ*, 37: "Now, as I said, the Holy Spirit is Jesus' Other Self." On the devil not getting the real Christ, see Roberts, "Gifts of the Spirit," 36-37.

3. John MacArthur, the president of The Master's Seminary, in *Hebrews*, 27-28: "As was noted, Son is an incarnational title of Christ. Though His sonship was anticipated in the Old Testament (Prov 30:4), He did not become a Son until He was begotten into time. Prior to time and His incarnation He was eternal God with God. The term Son has only to do with Jesus Christ in His Incarnation . . . The Bible nowhere speaks of the eternal sonship of Christ . . . He was always God, but He became Son . . . Christ was not Son until His incarnation." Also, see the paper written by him and distributed by him, "Sonship of Christ." Works directed against his position include Zeller and Showers, *Eternal Sonship of Christ*; and Ross, *Trinity and the Eternal Sonship of Christ*. In 1999 MacArthur retracted his teaching and affirmed the eternal Sonship of Christ in a paper entitled "Re-examining the Eternal Sonship of Christ."

4. John F. Walvoord, the former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, in *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, 119-20: "The Relation of the Two Natures to the Will of Christ. In view of the complete divine and human natures in Christ, the question has been raised whether each nature had its corresponding will. The problem is occasioned by ambiguity in the word 'will.' If by will is meant desire, it is clear that there could be conflicting desires in the divine and human natures of Christ. If by will, however, is meant that resulting moral decision, one person can have only one will. In the case of Christ, this will was

Today, in the early twenty-first century, a new generation of evangelical professors has arisen. Trained not only in Scripture but also in historical theology, they have found the study of the early church a tremendous help in the attempt to promote orthodox Christology. This essay will reflect upon four ways that studying patristics helped my faith and will elaborate on two scriptural truths that the early church taught about Christ.

How the Study of Patristics Has Helped My Christian Faith

Study of early Christian theology has aided my faith in many ways. It has helped me to be more discerning of true and false interpretations of Scripture and has broadened my understanding of Scripture, especially when tackling difficult passages. Investigating early Christianity has also given me a sense of historical connectedness, and has led to the discovery of texts of which the church, for the most part, had not been previously aware.

Discernment

My first exposure to early Christianity occurred in the context of problems that were besetting our Christian fellowship on my college campus in New Jersey. Some people were telling us that we were not saved if we had been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that we needed to be re-baptized in the name of Jesus only. In response to this difficulty, our campus minister flew in his friend from Dallas to teach us classes on the Trinity, Christology, and apologetics during one of our breaks. We loved it, found it refreshing, and felt that we had some protection against those who were trying to upset our faith.

always the will of God . . . It is therefore no more proper to speak of two sovereign wills in Christ than it is of two wills in an ordinary believer who has both a sin nature and a new nature." It is unfortunate that Walvoord in this discussion did not interact with the patristic controversy on the number of wills in Christ, especially canons 10–18 of the Lateran Council of 649 against monothelitism and the statement on the wills of Christ against monothelitism issued by the Third Council of Constantinople in 681, also called the Sixth Ecumenical Council. For these statements, see Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 103–5; and Clarkson et al., *Church Teaches*, 187–88.

We learned that Oneness Pentecostalism, the religion from which those "Jesus only" beliefs had come, started about a century ago through a vision that John Scheppe had one evening tarrying in prayer, which told him that there was only one member of the Godhead, and that was Jesus.⁵ Moreover, it was our drawing back upon patristic Trinitarianism that caused us to understand that the distinctions in the Trinity are eternal, and that the modalism of the Oneness Pentecostals had been condemned some seventeen hundred years ago. Modalism (or "Sabellianism," named after one of its leading proponents) taught that God was only one person, not three, who revealed himself in three modes at different times. We looked at the Scriptures that show that the three persons in the Trinity are not simply temporal manifestations. Seeing that the early church had problems similar to ours as well as learning what the early church believed fortified my Christian faith against present dangers.

Next, we had members of our college Christian fellowship who, influenced by the "Word of Faith" teachings of Kenneth Hagin, believed that Jesus was "born again" at the resurrection.⁶ We knew it did not sound right, but through our engagement with patristic Christology we saw that such teaching had affinity with the condemned gnostic teaching of a redeemed redeemer and with the heresy of adoptionism.

Learning about past errors helped me recognize present manifestations of them, not for the purpose of "heresy hunting"—which I do not believe is a fruit of the Spirit, but more often seems to be a deed of the flesh (cf. Gal 5:20)—but for discernment and for keeping me from repeating earlier mistakes. Now when I hear a theory of the *kenosis* in Philippians 2 that conveys a Jesus that is emptied of deity, I know it is wrong. For, the church fathers debated long and hard and showed from Scripture that the incarnation did not involve a mutation from divinity to humanity, but rather an assumption of humanity by the second person of the Trinity, with all of the properties of divinity still intact.

5. Robeck, "Schaepe, John G.," 768–69; and Hollenweger, *Pentecostals*, 31–32.

6. Hagin, *Present Day Ministry of Jesus*, 7. See also Crenshaw, *Man as God*, 317–19 (directed against E. W. Kenyon and Kenneth Copeland, who also preached a born-again Jesus); Hux, "Is He 'Another Jesus'?", 16–17; Rosenblatt, "Who Do Televangelists Say That I Am?", 117–19; and McConnell, *Different Gospel*, 119–21.

Christology, as it was hammered out in the early centuries, gave me better discernment.

Help with Biblical Difficulties

As a Christian, it is my loving service to him who first loved me to understand his Word, and most of all to become a doer of it. But some things in the Bible are very difficult to understand. What did Jesus mean when he said that the Father was greater than he (cf. John 14:28)? What did Paul mean when he wrote that those who speak in tongues speak not to man but to God (1 Cor 14:2)? And when John depicted a reign of the saints for a thousand years (Rev 20:1–6), did he mean an earthly reign between the second coming and the new heaven and new earth? How should we interpret Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matt 24–25), as already fulfilled or awaiting fulfillment? In these and similar questions, I have found the writings of the early church to be extremely helpful; for they often bridge the geographical, cultural, and linguistic gaps that stand between these first-century authors and us in the twenty-first century.

Regarding the first question, both Augustine and the Eleventh Council of Toledo taught that the Son is equal to the Father by virtue of his deity, and less than the Father because of his humanity.⁷ It had nothing to do with any eternal subordination within the Godhead.

Regarding tongues, I found that many writers of the early church touched upon the subject, and all understood the miracle of tongues to be a supernatural deposit of a known human language, not a secret prayer language that only the believer and the Holy Spirit know.⁸

Concerning the thousand year reign, some in the early church held to a literal thousand-year earthly reign of the saints on earth after the second coming, while others believed the thousand years to be figurative

7. Augustine Sermon 91.3 (Hill, *Sermons* (51–94), 49): "[I]n the form of man he is less than the Father, in the form of God equal to the Father." Canons of the Eleventh Council of Toledo, in Neuner and Dupuis, *Christian Faith*, 170–71: "Similarly, by the fact that He is God, He is equal to the Father; by the fact that He is man, He is less than the Father . . ."

8. For a dossier of early Christian writers on the subject of tongues, see Gumerlock, "Tongues in the Church Fathers," 123–38. On medieval understandings of the gift of interpretation of tongues, see Gumerlock, "Interpretation of Tongues in the Middle Ages," 160–68.

of either the present reign of the saints in the church age or the reign of believing souls who are now with Christ after their death before they receive their glorified bodies at his second coming.⁹ While today we argue over the interpretation of the thousand years to the point of even excluding from teaching in our seminaries people who have a different view of Revelation 20:1–6 than ourselves, I found it interesting that the early church councils neither affirmed nor condemned chiliasm.¹⁰ The approach of both Jerome and Augustine was to construct arguments for their own position but also to be tolerant of opposing views on the matter.¹¹

While interpreting the Olivet Discourse, the church fathers pointed out that Jesus was answering several questions raised by the disciples: one about when the buildings of Jerusalem would be toppled and another about the sign of his coming and the end of the world. The early Christians overwhelmingly took a “now and not yet” approach in their interpretations of Matthew 24–25. They generally held that the prophecies of false Christs and the flight to the mountains were fulfilled in connection with the Roman siege of AD 68–70. But the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds, the gathering of the elect from the four corners of the earth, and the judgment of the sheep and goats, they saw as not having been fulfilled in their time, but as references to future events associated with the coming of Christ at the end of the world. The church fathers said other prophecies, such as the abomination of desolation, have a double reference. First, it pointed to the placing of an idol in the temple by a Roman emperor, and then an act of an end-time antichrist

9. The chiliast writers are listed and quoted in Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 233–35. The non-chiliasts are listed and quoted in a draft of my “Amillennialism in the Early Church.”

10. Although it is often said that the Second Council of Constantinople condemned chiliasm, this was not the case. See my “Millennialism and the Early Church Councils,” 83–95. See also the research of Michael J. Svigel, who countered the assertion that the Council of Ephesus condemned chiliasm, in “Phantom Heresy,” 105–12.

11. Jerome *Commentary on Jeremiah*, on Jer 19:10–11 (Alcañiz, *Ecclesia Patristica*, 212–13): “[W]e are not able to condemn them [chiliast views] because many men and martyrs of the church spoke these things. Let each person abound in his own understanding, and all things will be reserved for the judgment of the Lord”. Cf. *Augustine City of God* 20.7.1.

who will come before the consummation of all things. How does this inform evangelicals today? According to most church fathers, both the preterist approach and classical dispensational approaches to the Olivet Discourse are wrong. It was not fulfilled in its entirety, nor is the entirety of it awaiting fulfillment in the great tribulation.¹²

To summarize, when attempting to solve a biblical difficulty, I gain tremendously from the opinions of those who lived in closer temporal, geographical, and cultural proximity to the biblical authors; and I trust this is the experience of many who are currently engaged with patristic theology.

A Sense of Historical Connectedness

Christians today, especially those from non-confessional backgrounds, want to understand the relationship of the present to the past. In fact, one of the main reasons that evangelicals cite for converting to Roman Catholicism is that their new community gives them a sense of historical connectedness that they did not find in evangelicalism.¹³ Oh, we hear little tidbits in sermons from time to time about John Wycliffe or John Hus, John Wesley or Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney or Charles Spurgeon, Smith Wigglesworth or Kathryn Kuhlman. But many evangelicals do not have a big picture of how the church journeyed from the time of the Apostles to the present. But they are seeing a need for it. Why? Because they know that they are organically united in the body of Christ with the church of the previous twenty centuries. Consequently more and more evangelical seminaries are offering majors in historical theology. Much more, however, needs to be done to strengthen these departments if they want to draw the evangelicals interested in church history, many of whom currently choose non-evangelical schools for their historical training.

First, the seminaries need to invest in the historical theology sections of their libraries, purchasing the series of primary patristic works,

12. On the interpretation of the early part of the Olivet Discourse by writers of ancient and medieval Christianity in relationship to the Roman-Judean war, see my "Olivet Discourse."

13. McKnight, "Wheaton to Rome," 463–66.

not only the English translations but also the Latin and Greek editions, as well as the extensive periodical and secondary literature coming off of the presses. Secondly, seminaries need to adjust their curricula and hire appropriate professors so that students learn to read primary sources in Latin and Greek, and eventually Syriac, Coptic, and Arabic, the languages in which many patristic texts are preserved.

Those evangelicals who have turned on to church history are also rejecting the older evangelical frameworks of history that promoted a lack of connection with the thousand years of Christianity from the fourth through sixteenth centuries. Those frameworks which do a hop, skip, and a jump over the Middle Ages, from the radical Landmark position to the more moderate Constantine conspiracy view, are no longer in vogue. Landmarkism says that very shortly after the Apostles, the church by and large disappeared. But because Jesus said that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18, KJV), a remnant was saved throughout the Middle Ages. Those true remnant churches were the Novatianists and Donatists, and groups like the Paulicians, Cathari, and Albigenses.¹⁴ The problem with this approach is that most of the groups the Landmarkers portray as their forefathers were heretics. But the only other option is to admit that medieval Catholicism was the church, and to them such a thought is untenable.

Twenty-first-century evangelicals are also discarding the notion that says that the ante-Nicene fathers can be helpful, but once the emperor Constantine became a so-called Christian, the end was near; the end, that is, of anything worth learning about. They no longer buy into the tale that with the conversion of Constantine, Christianity became almost completely apostate overnight and that the marriage of church and state, baptism of infants, and rejection of premillennialism are evidences for that.¹⁵

14. The classic work for this view of church history is Carroll, *Trail of Blood*, which in 1987 was in its 59th printing and had sold almost two million copies. Other books include Everts, *Church in the Wilderness*; Stovall, *Baptist History and Succession*; and Jarrel, *Baptist Church Perpetuity*. Critical of this concept of church history are McGoldrick, *Baptist Successionism*; Ross, *Old Landmarkism and the Baptist*; and Patterson, *Baptist Successionism*.

15. Such views have been strong in various Anabaptist and Baptist traditions. Sebastian Franck, a sixteenth-century Anabaptist, said of Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and

To evangelicals today, the Dark Ages are not so dark. They want to know about the church between Constantine and Luther, and many are majoring, researching, and writing on the theology of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, and are finding a wealth of material beneficial to their faith. Interestingly, the Patristics Study Group of the Evangelical Theological Society changed its name to the Patristics and Medieval History Section in 2007.

Evangelicals are finding that studying early Christianity provides them with a sense of historical connection. And part of this has been their rediscovery of what had been lost, or rather of what had been denied them, namely, the richness of Christianity after Constantine, the faith of Jerome and Augustine, Leo the Great and Gregory the Great, Fulgentius of Ruspe and Caesarius of Arles, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril and Justinian, Chrysostom and Epiphanius, John Maxentius and John of Damascus.

New Discoveries

Finally, the study of the early church has caused me to make new discoveries that broaden my understanding of the faith once delivered unto the saints. I do not mean new in the sense of additional revelation, but rather different viewpoints on the interpretation of Scriptures that I never before heard or considered. For example, hearing patristic interpretations of the 144,000 of Revelation 7 as the first-fruits of the Jews who had believed in Christ in the first century, or as the number of Jews who fled the siege of the Romans, was fascinating.¹⁶ I never came across these viewpoints except when examining patristic texts.

Sometimes the writings of the early church have a striking affinity with or correlation to contemporary positions or answers to today's theological problems. For example, reading the commentary of the students of Cassiodorus on the Pauline Epistles was eye-opening. They interpreted the "all" in 1 Timothy 2:4 (God "desires all men to be saved and

Gregory that "not even one knew Christ, nor was sent by God to teach. But rather all were and shall remain the apostles of Antichrist." Quoted in McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 205.

16. These were the views of Ecumenius of Tricca and Andrew of Caesarea in Capadocia. See Weinrich, *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 105, 108.

to come to the knowledge of the truth," NASB) as a figure of synecdoche, a whole term placed for a part. In other words, they taught that God does not want to save absolutely everyone, but the elect from all classes and stations of humanity.¹⁷ Regardless of whether or not this interpretation is exegetically correct, it certainly has the ring of familiarity with modern Reformed interpretations that understand the passage in light of the doctrines of unconditional election and particular redemption.

When Christians argue over theistic evolution because it has death existing before the fall of Adam, they often are brought to passages in Romans that link death to sin. But patristic anthropology can add breadth to the discussion. For the Council of Carthage in 411 condemned the proposition of Celestius the Pelagian that Adam was created mortal (i.e., that Adam's death was not a result of sin but part of the natural created order).¹⁸

And when certain Calvinists, who may be called "Hyper-Calvinists," quote Isaiah 45:7 in support of the teaching that God created evil, I think of the church father nicknamed "Golden-mouth" (Chrysostom) because of his excellent preaching, who interpreted "evil" in that passage not as moral evil but as calamity, namely, the captivity and servitude that Israel was experiencing.¹⁹

Of course, these interpretations are not new to the body of Christ, but were new to me. Once in awhile, however, students of patristics have the privilege of finding truly lost treasures. That is, they come upon something about which the church by and large is unaware. The theory that J. N. Darby was the inventor of the teaching of a pre-tribulation rapture is rather common in evangelical circles. However, earlier this decade I found what looks like a rapture of the saints, occurring quite some time before the final coming of Christ in judgment, in both a patristic apocalyptic text and a fourteenth-century historical treatise.²⁰

17. Pseudo-Primasius *Commentary on the Epistles of Saint Paul* (PL 68:663).

18. Thomas M. Sennott also made the connection between contemporary theistic evolution and the Pelagian heresy in his *On Exonerating Pelagius*.

19. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom*, 38-39. Curt Daniel defined Hyper-Calvinism as "Calvinism carried to illogical conclusions." Daniel, *History and Theology of Calvinism*, 89.

20. See my "Rapture in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*"; "Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century," 349-62; "Before Darby"; and *Day and the Hour*, 80, 91-92.

Similarly, in 2002 or 2003, while researching at the Vatican Film Library at Saint Louis University, by accident I came across a fifth-century text in which the name of the emperor Nero was clearly being used to interpret the number of the beast in Revelation 13:18.²¹ This is significant because the identification of the name Nero with the number of the beast is generally thought to be a nineteenth-century theory of German theologians. This text pushes that theory back historically some 1400 years.²²

Discoveries like these make the study of patristic theology not just helpful but exciting. For the church historian, coming across “new” informative texts can be as thrilling as the creation of a new technology for an engineer, the unearthing of a new cure to the medical community, or the purchase of the ossuary (allegedly) of James “brother of Jesus” by an archeologist.

Scriptural Truths about Christ That I Learned from the Early Church

I have learned much from the early church about the deity and humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the unity of his two natures in one person. The Word was a person and not an “it” before the incarnation, contrary to what Marcellus of Ancyra in the early church thought and Kenneth Copeland teaches today.²³ There was never a time when the Son did not exist, in contrast with the Arians. Our Lord is the natural Son of God, not an adopted Son, contrary to the Adoptionists. Our Lord is one person with two natures, human and divine. He has all of the properties of each nature. Whatever can be said about one nature of Christ can be said about his person, under any title, human or divine, contrary to the Nestorians. It was not just a human who died on the cross as the later Nestorians asserted, but a member of the Trinity was crucified in the flesh, as the Council of Constantinople affirmed in 553. Among the many things I learned from patristic Christology, I would like to elaborate in

21. See also Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 770–71.

22. The text is cited and translated in my “Nero Antichrist,” 347–60.

23. On Marcellus of Ancyra’s view, see Sample, “Christology of the Council of Antioch,” 18–26 at 23. For Copeland’s view, see Copeland, *Power of the Tongue*, 4–10.

some detail on two aspects of Christology, his true humanity and his eternal Sonship.

The True Humanity of Our Lord

The incarnation, along with what theologians call his humiliation (i.e., his temptation), his earthly ministry, and his death on the cross, is the most important event in all of human history. The Word becoming flesh, the Son of God taking on humanity, means that Christ was born from the seed of a woman. He was truly the son of Mary and received his genetic makeup from her side of the family. He probably looked like his uncles and grandfather on her side. The early gnostics denied that Christ was truly flesh, because they believed that matter was synonymous with moral evil. But the Lord is truly human and not just a divine idea. The way our churches can affirm the true humanity of our Lord is by weekly readings from the Gospels, by celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently, by recitations of creeds that profess the Son becoming man "for us men and for our salvation" and being "crucified under Pontius Pilate," and by displays of crosses in our churches, something that non-confessional Protestants avert as ritualistic and "the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8).

Unfortunately, certain Anabaptists, who tended to be non-creedal, did not start out with a clear affirmation of our Lord's true humanity. Some like Menno Simons erred in saying that Christ brought his flesh down from heaven with him. Misunderstanding Hebrew 10:5, they taught that Christ received nothing from Mary, and that her womb merely acted as an incubator for the Lord. Perhaps a better understanding of patristic Christology on their part, namely, the church fathers' affirmation of the true humanity of Christ against the gnostics, would have kept these Anabaptists from repeating a similar error.

Christ's full humanity entails the insistence that he truly suffered. Scripture tells us that he experienced hunger, thirst, and weariness (Matt 4:2; 8:24; Luke 8:23; John 4:6-7; 19:28). Nevertheless, a group called the Aphthartodocetae "conceived the humanity of Christ not only as sinless but as having been completely alien to the consequences of the sin of Adam."²⁴ To them, the body of Christ was like that of Adam before the

24. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 165. The favorite passages of the

fall, not like the bodies of fallen men. Their error was in making Christ like Superman. His body was incorruptible, they said, since death and corruption were a result of sin, and Christ never sinned. The orthodox position was that the body of Christ was "passible," capable of suffering and sharing in the influences of the elements in a fallen world. These are not incompatible with Christ's moral perfection. The orthodox said that Christ's body was destructible, his death being the result of the violence of men (Rom 8:3; Heb 2:14-17; 1 Pet 2:21). Christ's incorruptibility was not manifested in the incarnation, but awaited the glorification of the resurrection, when that which was corruptible and mortal took on incorruption and immortality (Acts 2:27; 1 Cor 15:42-43, 52-53).²⁵

Affirming Christ's true humanity also entails believing that he will come again visibly in his body with the clouds. The angels said to the disciples at the ascension that Jesus would return in the same way that he left (Acts 1:11). To the church fathers this meant not only in the clouds but also bodily. Christ will not return invisibly, in spirit, or separate from his humanity. Rather, the Son of Man shall come in his majesty, sit on his throne of glory, and render judgment to everyone (Matt 25:31-32; John 5:27). Unfortunately, there are many ways that people in the evangelical tradition deny this. One is when the Seventh-Day Adventists, or at least those who belong to the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, claim that the Son of Man came with the clouds in 1844. However, the reason no one saw him is because he came to the heavenly sanctuary where he is now doing an "investigative judgment" before he returns visibly and bodily.²⁶ Another is any theory of the rapture that has Jesus returning to earth and quickly leaving with many people never seeing him, but only seeing the effects of that return such as cars without driv-

Aphthartodocetae were those which said that he voluntarily submitted to death, such as John 10:15, 18; Phil 2:8; and Acts 2:24.

25. John of Damascus *Exposition on the Orthodox Faith* 3.28 (NPNF2 9:72); Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 162. On the controversy, see Esbroeck, "Aphthartodocetic Edict of Justinian," 578-85; Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 166-67; Vaill  , "Corrupticoles"; Draguet, *Julien d'Halicarnasse*; Wigram, *Separation of the Monophysites*, 121-22, 151-55; Luce, *Monophysitism*, 76-77; and Dorner, *History of the Development*, 128-31.

26. *Seventh-Day Adventists Believe*, 321-24. I recognize that many evangelicals do not consider Seventh-Day Adventists as within the evangelical fold because of their views on soul sleep, annihilation, and Old Testament law-keeping.

ers, lawnmowers running with no one pushing them, and piles of clothes left behind on previously occupied chairs. A third way in which the true humanity of our Lord is unwittingly weakened is in the teaching that the second coming of Christ was an invisible coming that occurred in AD 70. Of course, all three of these theories have the redeeming quality of affirming that our Lord will eventually come in bodily form, in addition to returning invisibly either in AD 70,²⁷ in 1844, or seven years before his final descent.²⁸

Some of the church fathers who taught that Christ's return to earth will be both bodily and visible included Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom, and Augustine. Gregory wrote, "[H]e will come with his body—so I have learned—such as he was seen by his disciples in the mount."²⁹ Chrysostom declared, "As the lightning' ([Matt 24] ver. 27), He says, shall He come; not concealed in any corner, but shining everywhere. It requires no one to point it out, so splendid will it be, even as the lightning needs no one to point it out."³⁰ Likewise Augustine: "What's *will come in the same way* (Acts 1:11)? Will come in that same form, in order to fulfill what was written, *They will see the one whom they pierced* (Zech 12:10). That's how he will come. He will come to men, he will come, a man; but it is God who will come as a man. He will come as true man and God . . ."³¹ Furthermore, a council at Constantinople in 754 anathematized anyone who "does not confess that Christ is seated with God the Father in body and soul, and so will come to judge."³² Perhaps patristic training on the ramifications of Christ's humanity in his current session at the right hand of the Father and in his second coming can prevent any further theories of an invisible second coming

27. Partial preterists tend to believe in both a coming of Christ in AD 70 and a final bodily coming at the end of time. Full preterists reject the tenet of a future bodily coming of Christ.

28. To be fair, some of the church fathers did allow for a non-bodily "coming" of Christ into people's hearts and to receive their souls at the moment of death. See my "Olivet Discourse," 98–103.

29. Gregory of Nazianzus *Ep. ad Cled.* (NPNF2 7:440).

30. John Chrysostom *Homilies Thessalonians 1* (NPNF1 13:379).

31. Augustine *Sermon 265 on the Ascension of the Lord* (Hill, Sermons [51–94], 236).

32. "Epitome of the Definition of the Iconoclastic Conciliabulum, Held in Constantinople, A.D. 754" (NPNF2 14:545).

rather than the true visible, bodily coming of the Lord Jesus Christ who is forever the God-man.

For our Lord to be truly human also means that he had a true human soul. Unfortunately, when Apollinaris (d. 390), who was otherwise a respected teacher, tried to explain how Christ was both God and man, he erred in saying that just as a person is made up of body and soul, so Christ is made up of body and Logos. In other words, the Logos took the place of the human soul in Christ. Scripture, however, teaches that Christ had not only a human body but a human soul (Isa 53:3; Matt 11:29; Acts 2:30-31). The Council of Chalcedon affirmed this in 451, saying that Christ is truly God and truly man, with a rational soul and body.

Part of the faculty of a human soul is a human mind. Christ grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52) and learned obedience (Heb 5:8). Nevertheless, these facts do not negate Paul's teaching that "in him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 3:2, NASB). Somehow they are both true. His omniscience does not cancel out the human development of his mind and soul, nor does Christ's ignorance mean that the God-man was not all-knowing, just as his local presence did not mean that he was not omnipresent. For the incarnation was not an exchange of deity for humanity, but the one person of our Lord Jesus Christ possessed all of the properties of both humanity and divinity. The church fathers spilled much ink on the subject of the Lord's statement that he did not know the day or the hour of his coming (cf. Mark 13:32), and they interpreted it in various ways. What they agreed upon was that the Lord's omniscience was not minimized through the incarnation, contrary to the position of the "Agnostae," who denied the omniscience of our Lord Jesus Christ. And against the Nestorians, the fathers stated that the Lord's human mind did not receive divine knowledge in increments, as the prophets of old did. For if that were the case, then he was not the God-man but just a man who participated in the divinity.³³

Another faculty of a rational human soul is volition. Our Lord Jesus also possesses a true human will (Luke 22:42; John 6:38), which was always submissive to the divine will. This scriptural truth of two wills in Christ, a human will and a divine will, was affirmed against the

33. For a fuller discussion of the problem and issues, see Gumerlock, "Mark 13:32," 205-13.

Monothelites who denied that there was a human will in Christ and said that there was in him only a divine will. Monothelitism robs Christ of true humanity.

The Eternal Generation of the Son

1 John 5:18 states, "He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him" (NASB). In this passage Jesus is called "He who was born of God." The doctrine of eternal generation answers the question of whether that birth took place at some point in time or is a timeless, eternal generation. If God the Father brought forth God the Son at a specific point in time, then the Son would be a creature who had a beginning, and therefore not truly God. The truth of the matter is that the Father is God and the Son is God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit always existed. There was never a time when God was not Father and when the Son did not exist. This birth, begetting, or generation of the Son from the Father, talked about in Scripture, is therefore timeless. It is an eternal generation. The teaching is defined as "the doctrine that the Logos or Son of God is 'eternally generated' by the Father, that is, the Son is co-eternal with the Father but the Father is eternally the source of the Son."³⁴ Scriptural support for the eternal Sonship of Christ is found in Matt 14:22–33; Mark 12:1–9; John 1:14, 18; 3:16; 5:17–18; 16:28; 20:21; Rom 8:3; Gal 2:20; 4:4; Heb 1:1–3; 5:8; 7:3; 1 John 1:1–3; 4:10, 14.³⁵

In the late second and early third centuries of Christian history, some of the apologists like Justin Martyr and Tertullian did not articulate the doctrine of eternal generation. Irenaeus, however, in the late second century wrote of "the Son, eternally co-existing with the Father, from of old, yea from the beginning."³⁶ And in the early third century, Origen in a homily on Jeremiah taught the doctrine of eternal generation. He wrote:

34. Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human*, 165.

35. The best scriptural defense I have read is J. C. Philpot's *True, Proper, and Eternal Sonship*.

36. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2.30.9 (ANF 1:406). Other hints of eternal generation in Irenaeus include his statement in *Against Heresies* 2.28.6: "[I]f anyone, therefore, says to us, 'How then was the Son produced by the Father? we reply to him, that no man understands that production or generation . . . but the Father only who begat, and the Son who was begotten.' For views of certain pre-Nicene apologists like Justin Martyr and

If then I shall make clear to you that in the case of the Saviour the Father did not once beget the Son, and then His Father released Him from this relationship, but that He continually begets Him . . . He is the brightness of His glory (Heb 1:3). It is not that the brightness of His glory was once for all generated and is now generated no more, but so long as light produces brightness, so long is the brightness of God's glory generated . . . then the Saviour is continually being generated, that is the reason for His saying, "Before all the hills He begets me." It is not, "Before all the hills He has begotten me," but, "Before all the hills He begets me," and the Saviour is continually begotten of the Father.³⁷

Around 320, when a cleric in the church at Alexandria named Arius began to teach that there was a time when the Son did not exist, the church saw the danger of such statements, and the scriptural doctrine of the Son's eternal generation came to the forefront of Christian thinking. For Arius, when the Scriptures spoke of the Son being "begotten" by the Father, it meant "created" or "made" by the Father. For Arius, the Son was a creature made by the Father. According to his treatise *Thalia*, "God was not eternally a father. There was [a time] when God was all alone, and was not yet father; only later did he become a father. The Son did not always exist." The treatise went on to say that the Son came into being by the Father's will and "was born in the order of time."³⁸ In a letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, Arius said that he and his party were being persecuted because he taught that the Son had a beginning.³⁹

In opposition to Arius' teaching, Athanasius and other Christians affirmed that the Son always existed, being eternally generated from the Father. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, the orthodox stated that the Son is "begotten not made" and anathematized those who said that "There was [a time] when he was not" and "Before he was begotten, he was not." The bishops at the Council affirmed the scriptural teaching that Christ

Tertullian who did not articulate a doctrine of eternal generation, see Fortman, *Triune God*, 45-46; 110-11.

37. Origen *Homily on Jeremiah* 9.4 (Tollinton, *Selections from the Commentaries*, 23-24). In other writings, however, Origen did not escape subordinationism.

38. Arius *Thalia* (Williams, *Arius*, 100, 102). On Arius, see Böhm, "Arius", 49; Simonetti, "Arius-Arians-Arianism"; and Hanson, *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*.

39. Arius *Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia* (Nichols, *For Us*, 95).

THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH AND THE EARLY CHURCH

"is the only begotten Son who is eternally begotten and who has the same substance or essence of God."⁴⁰ However, it took decades before Arian teaching was expunged in the East, and in the West forms of Arianism captivated the Goths and Vandals well into the sixth century.⁴¹

The issue of the Son's generation was of major importance to the churches that experienced the Arian crisis. In fact, according to Robert Gregg and Dennis Groh, "There is no sharper contrast to be found between Arian and orthodox thinkers than the manner in which these parties construe language of 'begetting.'"⁴²

SELECTED CHURCH FATHERS ON ETERNAL GENERATION

The following words of prominent Christians of late antiquity from Christian communities in Alexandria, Rome, Milan, North Africa, Scythia and elsewhere illustrate the significance of the doctrine of eternal generation in their faith.

Athanasius (c. 357): "It is right to call the Son the eternal offspring of the Father. For the substance of the Father was never imperfect, so that what belonged to it might be added later. To beget in time is characteristic of man: for man's nature is incomplete; God's offspring is eternal, for his nature is always perfect."⁴³

Hilary of Poitiers (c. 360): "And so we confess that God Only-begotten was born, but born before times eternal: since we must make our confession within such limits as the express preaching of Apostles and Prophets assigns to us; though at the same time human thought cannot grasp any intelligible idea of birth out of time . . . [T]he belief that He was born before times eternal is not only the reasonable conclusion of human intelligence, but the confession of thoughtful faith."⁴⁴

40. Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human*, 53–55. See also Toon, *Yesterday, Today and Forever*, 86–87.

41. On Arianism, see Gwynn, *Eusebians*; Gregg, *Arianism*; McGuckin, "Arianism," 29–30; Williams, "Arianism"; Barnes and Williams, *Arianism After Arius*; Vaggione, *Eunomius*; and Kopecek, *History of Neo-Arianism*.

42. Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, 84.

43. Athanasius *Against the Arians* 1.14 (Bettenson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 276).

44. Hilary of Poitiers *On the Trinity* 12.26 (NPNF2 9:224–25).

Ambrose of Milan (c. 378): "The devout spirit affirms a generation that is not in time and so declares Father and Son to be co-eternal."⁴⁵

Ambrosiaster (c. 380): "Christ is the Son of God from eternity."⁴⁶

Augustine (c. 393): "He was begotten before all time, before all ages. 'Begotten before.' Before what, since there is no before with Him? Absolutely do not think of any time before that nativity of Christ whereby He was begotten of the Father . . . Do not suppose that in this nativity there was a beginning of time; do not imagine any interval or period of eternity when the Father was and the Son was not . . . The Father has always been without beginning, the Son, always without beginning."⁴⁷

Victor of Vita (c. 484): "Therefore, we acknowledge that the Father has everlastingly begotten the Son from himself in an indescribable way."⁴⁸

John Maxentius (c. 521): "If anyone does not confess two births in the one Son of God: God the Word before all ages indeed born of the Father, and in these last times the same born of a mother, let him be anathema."⁴⁹

Fulgentius of Ruspe (d. 533): "On the Birth of the Lord. Concerning the Dual Nativity of Christ, One Eternal from the Father, the Other Temporal from the Virgin . . . [This birth] is not transitory but eternal, not made but begotten from God the father, not only begotten but also only-begotten."⁵⁰

45. Ambrose of Milan *On the Christian Faith* 1.9.60 (NPNF2 10:211).

46. Ambrosiaster 127 *Questions on the Old and New Testament*, q. 54 (Souter, *Pseudo-Augustini quaestiones*, 99): "Christus dei filius ex aeterno est . . ."

47. Augustine *Creed* 3.8 (Ewald, *Treatises on Marriage*, 295).

48. Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, 66 (Moorhead, *Victor of Vita*, 48).

49. John Maxentius *Chapters against the Nestorians and Pelagians* 8 (Glorie, *Maxentii aliorumque Scytharum*, 30): "Si quis non confitetur duas natiuitates in uno filio dei: deo verbo ante saecula quidem nato de patre, in novissimis autem temporibus eodem de matre genitor, anathema sit."

50. Fulgentius of Ruspe *Sermon 2 on the Birth of the Lord* 1 (Fraipont, *Sancti Fulgentii*,

EARLY CREEDAL STATEMENTS ON ETERNAL GENERATION

Besides the words of influential Christian writers of the early church, creedal formulations are also a valuable tool for assessing the faith of their adherents. The creedal statements below, gathered from communities in the East and the West, illustrate the importance of the doctrine of the Son's eternal generation for Christians of late antiquity.

Baptismal Creed of Jerusalem (348): "... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who was begotten from the Father as true God before all ages."

Syrian Creed (4th c.): "And in our Lord Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son, the first-begotten of all creation; Who before ages was born, not created ..."

Creed of Mopsuestia (383): "And in one Lord Jesus Christ the only-begotten Son of God, the first-begotten of all creation, Who was begotten from His Father before all ages, not made, true God from true God, of one substance with His Father."

Creed of Antioch (430): "And in our Lord Jesus Christ His only-begotten Son and first-begotten of all creation, born from Him before the ages and not made."⁵¹

Athanasian Creed (5th cent.): "The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, and the Holy Spirit is eternal ... As God He was begotten of the substance of the Father before time; as man He was born in time of the substance of His mother."⁵²

Gallic Creed (500): "[T]he Father is he who begot, and the Son is he who is begotten; the Holy Spirit in truth is neither begotten nor unbegotten, neither created nor made, but proceeding from the Father and the Son, coeternal and coequal and the cooperator with the Father and the Son ... The Father begot the Son, not by

899): "IN NATALE DOMINI DE DUPLICI NATIVITATE CHRISTI UNA AETERNA EX PATRE ALTERA TEMPORALI EX VIRGINE ... non transitorium sed aeternum; non factum a Deo Patre sed genitum; nec solum genitum sed etiam unigenitum."

51. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 183–84, 186–87.

52. "Athanasian Creed" (Fortman, *Triune God*, 159).

will, nor by necessity, but by nature. The Son in the fullness of time came down from the Father to save us . . ."⁵³

Creed of Arles (503-43): "And I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten eternal Son."⁵⁴

EARLY CHURCH COUNCILS ON ETERNAL GENERATION

Statements of faith formulated by church councils are also a means by which one can ascertain the common faith of Christians. Below are statements on the subject of eternal generation issued by various councils, some regional and some ecumenical, convened in late antiquity.

Council of Constantinople (381): "We believe in . . . one Lord Jesus Christ only begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time."⁵⁵

Council of Rome (382): "Anyone who denies that the Father is always, the Son is always, and the Holy Spirit is always, is a heretic. Anyone who denies that the Son is born of the Father, that is of His divine substance, is a heretic."⁵⁶

Council of Toledo (447): "Therefore this Son of God, God, born of the Father entirely before every beginning, has sanctified the womb of the Blessed Mary Virgin, and from her has assumed true man . . ."⁵⁷

Council of Chalcedon (451): "Before time began he was begotten of the Father in respect to his deity, and now in these 'last days,' for us and on behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin . . . Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of the fathers has handed down to us."

53. The so-called *Faith of Damasus* (Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 10-11).

54. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 179: "Credo et in Iesum Christum filium eius unigenitum sempiternum."

55. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 33.

56. Neuner and Dupuis, *Christian Faith*, 100.

57. Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 13.

Second Council of Constantinople (553): "If anyone does not confess that God the Word was twice begotten, the first before all time from the Father, non-temporal and bodiless, the other in the last days when he came down from the heavens and was incarnate by the holy, glorious, *theotokos*, ever-virgin Mary, and born of her, let him be anathema."⁵⁸

Lateran Council (649): "If anyone does not, according to the holy Fathers, confess truly and properly two births of the one our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, one incorporeal and eternal from God the Father before all ages, the other, corporeal and in the last age, from holy Mary . . . let him be condemned."

Council of Toledo (675): "We also confess that the Son of God was born of the substance of the Father, before all ages, without beginning . . . However the Son is completely equal to God the Father because his birth has not begun in time and has not ceased . . . We must believe that the Son is begotten or born from the womb of the Father, that is, from his very substance. Therefore the Father is eternal and the Son is eternal. If He was always Father, He always had a Son, whose Father He was, and therefore we confess that the Son was born from the Father without beginning . . . Between the Father who generates and the Son who is generated or the Holy Spirit who proceeds, there has not been an interval of time in which the one who generates would precede the one who is generated."⁵⁹

ETERNAL GENERATION: THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

Scripture teaches that the Son is co-eternal with the Father. The Son, the brightness of the Father's glory, shared that glory with the Father before the world began. In time, the Father sent the Son into the world to save the lost. In the fourth century, Arius denied the eternality of the Son. In reaction, orthodox bishops, local creeds, regional synods, and ecumenical councils affirmed the biblical doctrine of the Son's eternal generation from the Father. Despite this testimony of so great a cloud of witnesses,

58. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 36, 46.

59. Neuner and Dupuis, *Christian Faith*, 103, 166.

some associated with evangelicalism think that the expression of the Son of God as eternally begotten is erroneous.

In the early twentieth century, the Brethren churches experienced division after some in their ranks denied the eternality of the Sonship of Christ. In the 1920s and 1930s the controversy centered on James Taylor of New York who, following the views of F. E. Raven (d. 1903), taught a "temporal Sonship" of Christ. James Taylor Jr. carried the teaching into the mid twentieth century, which among Brethren was confined mainly to those known as Taylor Exclusive Brethren. However, in the 1970s and 1980s many Brethren congregations were beset with people seeking to fellowship who had been influenced by the Taylors' teaching. This resulted in no small output of literature by Brethren publishers defending the eternal Sonship of our Lord.⁶⁰

In the 1990s the denial of Christ's eternal Sonship by John MacArthur caused a major division in the Independent Fundamental Churches of America to which he belongs.⁶¹ Several regional associations issued resolutions upholding the doctrine of eternal Sonship, a critique of McArthur's booklet "The Sonship of Christ" was presented to their National Executive Committee in 1991, and many churches left the association over it.⁶² By 1993, several evangelical authors had published books countering MacArthur's view of "incarnational Sonship" and defending our Lord's eternal Sonship.⁶³ Thankfully, in 1999, MacArthur issued a retraction of his former teaching and affirmed Christ's eternal Sonship in a paper entitled "Reexamining the Eternal Sonship of Christ."⁶⁴

More recently, in the Reformed community, Robert Reymond (an Orthodox Presbyterian pastor, author of numerous books, and professor emeritus of Knox Theological Seminary) denied the doctrine of

60. Hocking, *Son of His Love*, a reprint of his papers from the early twentieth century; Ouweneel, *What Is the Sonship of Christ?*; Huebner, *F. E. Raven's Evil Doctrines*; and Dronsfield, *Eternal Son of the Father*.

61. Now simply called the IFCA International.

62. Zeller, "Critique of John MacArthur's Booklet"; and Zeller, "Doctrinal Crisis."

63. Zeller and Showers, *Eternal Sonship of Christ*; and Ross, *Trinity and the Eternal Sonship of Christ*.

64. MacArthur, "Reexamining the Eternal Sonship of Christ."

eternal generation.⁶⁵ Several authors have written articles against this new attack.⁶⁶ The controversy is significant enough that the president of Northwest Theological Seminary in 2007 addressed the issue at the seminary's annual conference, defending the eternal Sonship of Christ from Scripture and nine different Reformed confessions.⁶⁷

While Scripture is the ultimate authority in matters of faith, church history plays a significant role in discerning orthodox from heterodox theology. Of course, the mere presence of a teaching in church history does not make it true. But examining the history of a particular interpretation of Scripture can be helpful. Does the interpretation have a time-honored history, or is it a historical novelty? What were the views of the revered doctors of the church, whom the Holy Spirit illuminated no less than he illuminates us today? Was the interpretation ever formally affirmed or condemned at a church council? These are all valid and useful questions.

While various pre-Nicene fathers of the church did not articulate the doctrine of eternal generation, Christ's eternal Sonship was the faith of the orthodox after Nicaea. It was the faith of Athanasius and Augustine, Ambrose and Hilary, Maxentius and Fulgentius. The eternal generation of the Son was part of the creedal profession of baptizands in orthodox churches all over the inhabited world. In addition, regional and ecumenical councils of bishops representing the entire Christian world affirmed it and anathematized its detractors. The doctrine of Christ's eternal Sonship is not only scriptural; it is the historic faith of our fathers.

65. Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 341: "[The] two additional propositions that the Son's essence is eternally generated by the Father and that the Spirit eternally and essentially proceeds from the Father and the Son . . . [are] beyond the deliverances of Scripture . . . these last two propositions should not be made elements of Trinitarian orthodoxy."

66. Owen, "Examination of Robert Reymond's Understanding of the Trinity," 262-81; and Bain, "Robert Reymond's Attack." For more on this most recent controversy, see "Eternal Generation of the Son."

67. Dennison, "Remarks on the Current Rejection of the Eternal Generation of the Son."

Engaging with Patristic Christology

During the first several centuries of the Christian era, God's people wrestled with understanding the God-man, our Lord Jesus Christ. When heresies twisted the Scriptures about him, the faithful devoted themselves to explication of the true teaching of Christ revealed to the apostles in Holy Writ. Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the same gift that contemporary biblical exegetes possess, they painstakingly explained and defended him who gave his life for them, against demonic counterfeits. It is my hope that an engagement by evangelicals with the Christology of the early church, especially the post-Constantinian church, will strengthen the feeble knees upon which evangelicalism of the late twentieth century was tottering with respect to its Christology.

From my conversion as a college freshman to my current teaching ministry, patristic Christology has aided my faith. It has helped me to be more discerning of Scripture truths about our Lord, has assisted me in solving biblical difficulties, has given me a sense of historical connectedness, and has stirred me with zeal when I have encountered interpretations of Scripture that are available only in patristic texts. In addition it has reaffirmed my faith in the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ. It has caused me to see the ramifications of the scriptural truth that the Word became flesh; for example, that his sufferings were real, that he will come again visibly in the body, and that like us he has a human soul with reason and volition. I am very thankful for the opportunity to study the early Christian writers, especially for the ways they have pointed me to the Lord of glory.

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