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The historical accounts of early Christian understandings of Jesus typically fall into two major approaches. The first approach is teleological. According to this approach, a particular Christological formulation, most frequently associated with the Chalcedonian Definition, is presented as anticipated by the earlier Christian theologians and elaborated by later authors. When the Chalcedonian Definition serves as the target formulation, earlier Christological proposals are interpreted and evaluated in light of how closely they approximate (or how far they depart from) the Christ who is the one person of the Logos in two natures, human and divine. An influential example of the teleological approach is Aloys Grillmeier's taxonomy of *Logos/sarx* and *Logos/anthropos* Christologies, which the German scholar deployed as a grid for interpreting all patristic accounts of Jesus, and their respective strengths and weaknesses. In this taxonomy, the *Logos/sarx* Christology captured the unity of Christ's person, sometimes at the expense of the integrity of his humanity; *Logos/anthropos* Christology captured the fullness of Christ's humanity, sometimes at the expense of the unity of his person. Foundational for Grillmeier's approach was the theological assumption of the normativity and teleological importance of the Chalcedonian Definition.

The second approach is revisionist. The proponents of this approach often jettison the normativity of the Nicene vision of God and Chalcedonian Christology and seek to recover a "historical Jesus." Such a recovery is performed by applying historical-critical methods to the biblical record, and then peeling off and discarding the layers of subsequent reflection in order to reveal the pluriform Christological vision that was unjustly forgotten or rejected, once the patristic reflection about Jesus had hardened into orthodoxy. As practiced by modern scholars, the quest for the historical Jesus was

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a search for a figure whom the early Church had lost or whose true significance the Church Fathers had misunderstood. In this sense, this second approach was a-teleological and even anti-dogmatic. It is important to underscore, however, that despite the protestations of its proponents to the contrary, this proposal was far from being theologically neutral. The Chalcedonian Definition was set aside because it allegedly compromised the Gospel by Greek philosophy or contained an outdated worldview. Yet as Albert Schweitzer famously argued in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906), conflicting historical reconstructions of the “historical Jesus” that were offered in the 19th century often revealed as much about the theological predilections and antipathies of individual scholars engaged in the quest as they did about the protagonist of the Gospels. The quest was resumed in the 20th century, preserving its anti-dogmatic thrust and its revisionist character.

In his important new study, *God Visible: Patristic Christology Reconsidered*, Brian Daley proposes a third approach, which seeks to overcome the limitations of the first two approaches. To be clear, Daley is not engaging in another revisionist search expedition for the historical Jesus whom the ancient church allegedly lost. His reconsideration of patristic Christology has nothing to do with the exercises in sensationalist revisionism that have typically characterized such searches. Daley proceeds with a conviction that important and abiding insights into the figure of the Gospels and his soteriological import are gained throughout the centuries of patristic reflection. In contrast, the “peeling off” strategy of revisionist historians is epistemologically questionable and theologically depleting.

While having nearly nothing in common with the revisionist approach, Daley also has significant reservations about the teleological approach. In its basic outline, the contours of the historical narrative charted by Daley might point toward his endorsement of the teleological approach: he begins his story with Chalcedon, then moves back in history to the Christian origins, 4th- and 5th-century developments (bypassing Chalcedon and most councils, but focusing on Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, and others), then covers the Christologies of the Byzantine Church Fathers, including not only that of Leontius of Byzantium and Maximus the Confessor but also those involved in the iconoclastic controversy. His concluding chapter then looks back at conciliar Christology, placing the Council of Chalcedon on the trajectory of the other six ecumenical councils recognized by the Orthodox East and the Catholic West. While the discussion of the Chalcedonian Definition appears at both ends of Daley’s historical narrative, his approach is not teleological. In fact, Daley criticizes Aloys Grillmeier’s approach as unnecessarily restrictive. In Daley’s own words,

The argument of this book, however, has been that Chalcedon’s formula must also not be isolated from still earlier reflections on the person of Jesus or from the wider and longer discussions that immediately prompted its formulation, let alone seen as a “final settlement” of early Christian questioning about the meaning of the person of Christ, if one is to grasp the continuing value for faith of that ancient orthodoxy. To grasp the full weight of reflection on Christ’s person during the crucial first millennium of Christian theological development, I have argued, it is important to look beyond Chalcedon, at what the most articulate voices

among those we call “Fathers of the Church” were saying about Christ: what they considered most important to emphasize about him, as well as what they were eager to reject. (p. 267)

Daley concedes that the Chalcedonian metaphysic of the two natures, divine and human, constituting one person of Christ is a significant part of the story, but this metaphysic is not and cannot be the whole story of patristic Christology. In other words, it is indeed important to understand and provide a coherent account of how two sets of seemingly contradictory properties (visible/invisible; finite/infinite; passible/impassible) could apply to the same subject (Christ); but once provided, such an account should free the student of patristic Christology to investigate the aspects of the unfathomable mystery of God in Christ that are not otherwise made explicit in such an account.

One aspect of this mystery is what Daley calls a “Christology of manifestation,” which inspired the title of the book: *God Visible*. The author gives a first systematic treatment to this Christology in chapter 3 by looking at the work of Irenaeus and Origen. This Christology is best illustrated by a quote from Irenaeus’s *Adversus Haereses*, 4.6.6, which Daley discusses on p. 74:

And through the Word himself who had been made visible and palpable, the Father was shown forth; and although all did not equally believe in him, still all did see the Father in the Son; for the Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son is the visible of the Father. And for that reason everyone called him “the Christ” while he was present [on earth], and named him “God.”

Daley ties the Christology of manifestation to Irenaeus’s anti-Gnostic polemic. For the Gnostics, Jesus is the bringer of a “world-defining *new* revelation, which had suddenly broken into human consciousness without intelligible continuity with the past” (p. 67, emphasis in the original). For Irenaeus, in contrast, the Logos has already been at work in creation and in the Old Testament revelation; the manifestation of God in Christ is the culmination of the history of salvation rather than the revelation of a previously unknown God.

As Daley notes, in patristic sources, the Christology of manifestation is often presented in paradoxical terms of the invisible God becoming visible, the impassible God suffering, and so on (p. 266). The language of paradox underscores the point that in Christ the God who transcends everything in creation becomes approachable and visible, without losing his transcendence. The divine manifestation in Christ has soteriological import, as it is also the guarantee of human nature’s transfiguration and the alignment of the natural human will with the will of God. The language of paradox captures the dynamism of both the manifestation of God and the transfiguration of humanity in Christ.

The Christology of manifestation and the language of paradox also found their important expression and development in the iconoclastic controversy, which is the last chronological marker of Daley’s historical narrative. Theologically, the defense of icons was no mere gloss on the essentially complete patristic Christology. On

Daley's reading—and this Orthodox reader would enthusiastically agree—the defense of images offered a significant positive development in the new context. The central contribution of this development was what Daley dubs, by drawing from Theodore of Studios, a “metaphysics of form” (p. 259). Theodore offered a taxonomy of different forms or images, differentiating various degrees in which those were related to and participated in the reality of the prototype (whether human or divine). Since God in Christ accepted the limitations of time, space, and a human body, he became uniquely manifest and visible in the human form, which could be conveyed in images (icons). In this respect, the metaphysics of form is an extension of the metaphysics of manifestation.

In conclusion, Daley's approach skillfully avoids the methodological limitations of the teleological approach and the theological idiosyncrasies of the revisionist approach. As Daley shows, contrary to what most Christological revisionists would have us believe, the Chalcedonian Definition does not stifle one's historical quest for the richness of the inexhaustible mystery that is Christ; on the contrary, the Chalcedonian Definition, once it is accepted, frees the mind to delve into all aspects of the mystery of God in Christ, including God's manifestation for the salvation of the world.

Author biography

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