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INCARNATION, TIMELESSNESS, AND EXALTATION

Jonathan Hill

Christian tradition holds not simply that, in Christ, God became human, but that at the end of his earthly career Christ became exalted (possessing and exercising the divine attributes such as omnipotence and omniscience), and yet remained perpetually human. In this paper I consider several models of the incarnation in the light of these requirements. In particular, I contrast models that adopt a temporalist understanding of divine eternity with those that adopt an atemporalist one. I conclude that temporalist models struggle to accommodate the doctrines of Christ's exaltation and perpetual humanity, and that the only viable atemporalist models are compositionalist ones.

I

The doctrine of incarnation is the doctrine that a divine person has become human. More specifically, the Christian doctrine of incarnation is the doctrine that Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine, and yet was a single person. Most of the philosophical literature concerning this doctrine has focused on the apparent inconsistency of holding that a single person could be both human and divine, given that humanity and divinity apparently contain properties that are not co-instantiable.

However, Christianity also traditionally teaches other doctrines about Christ. In particular, Christians have historically believed the following:

1. After his death, Jesus both was raised from the dead and subsequently ascended into heaven. After these events, he is *exalted*—i.e., he enjoys the full divine life and properties, including omniscience and omnipotence.¹

¹To say that Christ “enjoys the full divine life and properties” means that he not simply *is* omniscient and omnipotent, but that there is no self-imposed constraint upon his use of these and the other divine properties. It is usual among theologians and philosophers of religion today to suppose that, during his earthly career, Christ did not exercise his omnipotent power and was not consciously omniscient, at least in his human consciousness; kenotic theorists go further and suppose that he actually ceased to be omnipotent and omniscient at all. (On the definition of “kenotic” in this context, see note 5 below.) What (1) states is that, after his exaltation, Christ has and employs the “omni-” properties in the same way as the wholly non-incarnate Father and Holy Spirit. It makes little difference to my argument in this paper at *which* point Christ is supposed to start enjoying the full divine life and properties—at his resurrection, or his ascension, or some other point. Also, I do not distinguish here between the divine *operative attributes* (e.g., omnipotence and omniscience) and the *quiescent* ones (e.g., eternity and infinity). Some writers, such as Oliver Crisp, suppose that the exalted Christ has the former but not the latter. See Oliver Crisp, *Divinity and*



2. After his exaltation, Jesus remains fully human.

Let us call the first of these the *exaltation requirement*, and the second the *perpetual humanity requirement*.

How central are these requirements to orthodox Christianity? In the remainder of this section, I give an overview of the reasons why many writers have considered these requirements to be important, and provide one or two of my own. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess these arguments in detail. My purpose here is to indicate that these requirements have strong support and are worth taking seriously, rather than to evaluate that support. In the rest of the paper, I will take it for granted that these two requirements are important constraints upon models of the incarnation. The question will therefore be: assuming that the exaltation and perpetual humanity requirements are serious constraints upon christology, what consequences follow for the metaphysics of incarnation? To the extent that one *does* take them as serious constraints, to that extent one will be committed to accepting those consequences. Conversely, those who are unwilling to accept the consequences may consider the arguments in this paper to be good reasons *not* to take the two requirements seriously.

Let us take the exaltation requirement first. No orthodox Christian, I think, would doubt that Christ was in some way exalted after his death, a notion found throughout the New Testament. The Symbol of Nicaea states that he “went up into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead.”² The creed attributed to the first council of Constantinople adds that he will come “with glory.”³ Does this necessarily mean omniscience and omnipotence? Certainly the bulk of Christian tradition would hold that the exalted Christ is omnipotent and omniscient, since the bulk of Christian tradition holds that he never ceased to be omnipotent and omniscient even in his earthly career.⁴ The question whether the exalted Christ is omnipotent and omniscient, then, arises only for theologians who hold that, in his earthly career, Christ lacked these properties—i.e., theologians who hold kenotic theories of the incarnation. A related question is whether the exalted Christ is *functionally* omniscient and omnipotent. Again, the bulk of Christian tradition holds not merely that Christ was omnipotent and omniscient during his earthly career but that he enjoyed the full exercise of these properties, meaning that he had conscious access to his omniscient knowledge and had the conscious ability

Humanity (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15. Here, I largely focus on the operative attributes and leave it an open question whether the exaltation requirement also assigns the quiescent attributes to the exalted Christ.

²Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed & Ward; Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:5.

³Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:24.

⁴See, for example, Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 17, in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward Hardy (London: SCM, 1944), 70–71; Cyril of Alexandria, *Third Letter to Nestorius*, in Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 268, 271.

to perform any logically possible action any time he wanted to. From that point of view, there would be no question whether the same was true of the exalted Christ. But many theologians today—perhaps the majority among philosophically inclined ones—hold that in his earthly ministry Christ was omnipotent and omniscient, but deny that he enjoyed the full exercise of these properties.⁵ This would leave open the question whether his exaltation involved his exercising them once again. So to whatever degree (if at all) one supposes that, in his earthly career, Christ gave up the divine properties, to that degree, one may ask whether he regained them upon his exaltation.

While the New Testament is ambiguous regarding Christ's knowledge and power during his ministry, it never envisages any restrictions on his possession of these properties after his exaltation. Colossians 4:2–3 attributes "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" to the exalted Christ, while Ephesians 4:10 attributes omnipresence to him. In Matthew 28:18, the risen Christ states that he has been given *all* power or authority (*pasa exousia*). But C. Stephen Evans has argued that the biblical texts on which the doctrine of exaltation rests do not settle the question.⁶ In particular, he argues that 1 John 3:2 suggests that the exalted Christ is *not* omnipotent or omniscient, since it also states that believers will be like him, and "this does not mean that all followers of Jesus will be made to be omniscient and omnipotent."⁷

The Orthodox tradition, at least, might disagree with that, since the doctrine of *theosis* states that human beings will share in the divine properties though not the divine essence. Peter Forrest gives two further reasons for thinking that any kenosis involved in the incarnation must be temporary: the divine joy and love of the Trinitarian life requires divine powers, and to take on permanent kenosis would have been reckless.⁸ A critic might observe that there is nothing reckless about abandoning the divine powers if there are two other divine persons exercising those powers. But that overlooks

⁵The idea that, during his earthly ministry, Christ was omnipotent and omniscient but simply did not exercise these abilities (perhaps because he did not realise he had them, or perhaps because he just chose not to use them) is sometimes considered a form of kenotic christology. For example, Oliver Crisp calls such views "functional kenoticism," as contrasted with "ontological kenoticism," the stronger view that Christ actually lacked the properties in question during his earthly ministry. See Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 122–147. However, in this paper I follow Peter Forrest's view that the various forms of "functional kenoticism" are really only quasi-kenotic, and that a genuinely kenotic theory involves the claim that the incarnate Christ really lacked these properties, not merely behaved as if he did. See Peter Forrest, "The Incarnation: A Philosophical Case for Kenosis," *Religious Studies* 36 (2000), 128–130. However, the disagreement is primarily one of classification, and those who take Crisp's side can easily understand my comments about kenoticism to refer to ontological kenoticism only.

⁶C. Stephen Evans, "The Self-Emptying of Love: A Defense of Kenotic Christology," in *The Incarnation*, ed. S. Davis, D. Kendall and G. O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 265–266.

⁷Evans, "Self-Emptying," 266.

⁸Forrest, "The Incarnation," 129.

the fact that Christian theology has traditionally regarded the second person of the Trinity as having a special cosmological function: as the Logos, it is he who is especially associated with maintaining the order of the universe. Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:3 both attribute this function to Christ, the apparent meaning in each case being that this is the situation today, not merely something that was true before the incarnation.⁹ We might reason, moreover, that if the incarnation were to leave the Son permanently unable or unwilling to do this, then one or both of the other persons of the Trinity must step in to fill that role; in which case the incarnation does not merely change the Son, but changes the other two persons of the Trinity as well. That seems problematic.

Whether or not it is a formal requirement of orthodoxy to hold that the exalted Christ has and exercises the divine “omni-” properties, then, to deny it does not sit well with traditional Christianity.¹⁰

What of the perpetual humanity requirement? While it is hard to find formal pronouncements of this doctrine in church councils, it certainly can be found in the works of major Christian writers throughout history. We may cite, for example, such theological heavyweights as Gregory of Nazianzus,¹¹

⁹William Temple used a consideration of this kind as an argument against kenotic theories. See William Temple, *Christus Veritas* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 142–143.

¹⁰Some kenoticists are quite willing to concede that the exalted Christ has and exercises the “omni-” properties. We may distinguish between what I shall call strong kenoticism, which holds that the Son *had* to abandon these properties in order to become human, since to retain them is formally incompatible with being human, and weak kenoticism, which holds that there is no such formal incompatibility, but that the Son nevertheless *did* abandon these properties for other reasons. Weak kenoticism seems to be the favoured option of most kenoticists today. See, for example, Ronald Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, ed. R. Feenstra and C. Plantinga (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 148–149; Forrest, “The Incarnation,” 133–134; C. Stephen Evans, “Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God,” in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. S. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 200–202; and Stephen Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?” in Evans, *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 114, 121, 136–137. Gottfried Thomasius, generally regarded as the founder of kenoticism, also seems to have held a similar view—see Thomas Thompson, “Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology,” in Evans, *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, 84. David Brown, by contrast, has defended a version of strong kenoticism according to which the Son is divine before the incarnation, human during it, and divine again after it (but not human)—see David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 257, and also Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” 145. Such a move clearly involves rejecting the perpetual humanity requirement. If we accept both the exaltation requirement and the perpetual humanity requirement as serious constraints upon models of the incarnation, we might conclude that weak kenoticism is the only viable version of kenoticism, and indeed the recent authors I have just listed as weak kenoticists all articulate the position specifically to allow that Christ could be both exalted and human at the same time after his ascension. However, kenoticism presumably presupposes temporalism: if the Son really loses certain properties in becoming incarnate, then he really changes, and consequently cannot be atemporal. Since my argument in this paper is that no temporalist model of the incarnation can very plausibly accommodate the exaltation and perpetual humanity requirements, this would be a serious flaw with any form of kenoticism, weak or strong. Quasi-kenotic theories, however, would be unscathed, since I see no reason why a quasi-kenoticist should not be an atemporalist.

¹¹Letter 101, in Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 218.

Gregory of Nyssa,¹² Augustine,¹³ John of Damascus,¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas,¹⁵ Martin Luther,¹⁶ and Karl Barth.¹⁷

Despite this, the doctrine of Christ's perpetual humanity has been questioned in the literature on the philosophy of incarnation. Richard Swinburne comments that the doctrine is found only in "[s]ome lesser creeds and church pronouncements," notably the Lateran council of 649 CE.¹⁸ While he very briefly considers and argues for its possibility, he concludes: "I cannot see the permanent union as a central Christian doctrine."¹⁹ But Swinburne himself lists a number of reasons, drawn from Augustine and Aquinas, why it might be a good thing for God to be incarnate—to reflect the goodness of his creation, for example, or to show us the dignity of human nature.²⁰ If these considerations support the doctrine of incarnation over no incarnation at all, they equally support a permanent incarnation over a temporary one. For example, if God's becoming incarnate reflects the goodness of his creation, then God's becoming permanently incarnate does so even more. Again, if the Son remains human perpetually, that would demonstrate a much greater commitment to humanity than a mere temporary union would.

Peter Forrest makes the important point that denying Christ's perpetual humanity is incompatible "with traditional devotion to Jesus as mediator between the purely divine and the purely human."²¹ Ronald Feenstra also puts forward a number of considerations in favour of the doctrine of Christ's perpetual humanity: the use of the present tense in the Chalcedonian definition and other normative statements of faith when referring to Christ's humanity; the fact that it would show that glorification and humanity are compatible, allowing us the hope of future glorification ourselves; and the fact that many Christians are committed to the view that Christ retains his body after his ascension, which means he must be human.²² This last

¹²Catechetical Oration 16, in Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 293–294.

¹³*De Trinitate* I 9, in Stephen McKenna, *Saint Augustine: The Trinity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 27–28.

¹⁴"The Orthodox Faith III," chapter 6 in Frederick Chase, *John of Damascus: Writings* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 280–281.

¹⁵*Summa theologiae* 3 q. 57 a. 2; q. 57 a. 5; q. 58 a. 3, in C. Thomas Moore, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 55: *The Resurrection of the Lord* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1976), 83, 93–95, 107–109.

¹⁶*The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ against the Fanatics; Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis, MO: Concordia; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1955–1986), 36: 342 and 37: 214. See Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1999), 230–231.

¹⁷Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1936–1969), IV.2: 97–103.

¹⁸Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 236.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 247.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 218–219.

²¹Forrest, "The Incarnation," 134.

²²Feenstra, "Reconsidering Kenotic Christology," 147. On the doctrine of Christ's continued embodiment, see the citations from Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa above, notes 11 and 12, and also see the discussion below, p. 17.

consideration is perhaps weaker than the others, since it is presumably possible for Christ to retain a human body without being genuinely human—Apollinarianism was condemned, after all, on the grounds that it maintained the former without the latter.

From an Orthodox perspective, Feenstra's second consideration is especially compelling. In the well-worn words of Athanasius, God became man so that man might become God.²³ If God only became man for a while, and is no longer man, then this surely casts into doubt man's hope of becoming God; at the very least it raises the unsettling prospect that *theosis* itself might be temporary and that after enjoying it for a while the faithful might find themselves disunited from God.²⁴ Moreover, Orthodox tradition explicitly connects this hope with Christ's ascension and exaltation. Maximus the Confessor wrote:

the glorified incarnate Logos of God is Himself a harbinger of His spiritual advent, leading our souls forward by His own teachings to receive His divine and manifest advent.²⁵

This view is not limited to Orthodox theologians. The entry on the ascension in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* also links Christ's perpetual humanity to eschatology, though in a different way:

Mankind thus enters into the sphere of the Trinity once and for all in the Person of the Word incarnate as the Epistle to the Hebrews insists (Heb. 9.26; 10.10). Nothing henceforth will be able to separate from God the human nature that has entered into heaven. The Ascension of Christ, then, is the ascension of man, united to the divinity, arriving substantially at its goal, substantially served forever.²⁶

These points suggest not only that both the exaltation requirement and the perpetual humanity requirement are indeed important to orthodox Christianity, but that they are theologically closely linked to each other.

²³On the Incarnation 54, in Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 107; see also sections 8–9, pp. 62–64.

²⁴Origen apparently believed that this had already happened—that before the creation of the world, human souls had all been united to God, but that for some reason they fell away from him; see Joseph Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (London: SCM, 1985), 103–107. Origen also believed that, at the final restoration, human souls would be restored to union with God (it is uncertain whether, as usually supposed, he thought that this would be true of *all* human souls—see Henri Crouzel, *Origen* [Edinburgh: Clark, 1989], 262–266); it is unclear how, if at all, he secured against the danger of their falling away once again.

²⁵In the *Philokalia*, “Second Century on Theology,” in *The Philokalia*, ed. G. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981), II: 144 (my italics). A related idea found in other writers is that justice demands that when Christ judges humanity at the end of time, he does it as both God and man; and that when the blessed perceive him in heaven, they perceive him as both God and man. See Augustine, *De Trinitate* I 12. For more Maximus texts on this topic, see Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *The Philokalia*, II: 148–149, 287–288.

²⁶J. Murray, “Ascension of Jesus Christ (Theological),” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. B. Marthaler et al. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), I: 772.

The fact that Christ is exalted, *combined with* the fact that he remains human, is of great soteriological significance.²⁷

I conclude that even if the claim that the exalted Christ exercises full divine powers, and the claim that the exalted Christ remains fully human, are not considered to be formal requirements of orthodoxy, they are nevertheless claims that few orthodox Christians will wish to deny. As I indicated at the beginning of this section, in what follows I will assume that both the exaltation requirement and the perpetual humanity requirement are serious constraints upon models of the incarnation. Any such model must allow that both of the following claims are true:

1. It is true now that Christ has, and exercises, all the divine attributes, including omnipotence and omniscience.
2. It is true now that the Son is fully human as well as fully divine.

There is one more point to make by way of preliminaries, concerning religious language. A theologian might well suggest that claims about Christ's knowledge and power, or his ongoing humanity, are not meant to be taken literally. In particular, the "now" in both (1) and (2) above is not intended literally: it is not really the case right now that Christ is omniscient, omnipotent, and human. These are, perhaps, figurative statements about his ongoing work in the church, or the actions of the Holy Spirit. And in that case, it is not necessary for a Christian philosopher to try to explain how they can be literally true.

This may well be a theologically viable position, but to assess it would fall well outside the scope of this paper.²⁸ Nevertheless, even if we accept this position, we may still consider to what extent a Christian philosopher is forced into it. *Must* a Christian philosopher hold that statements about Christ's post-glorification status are figurative, since it is impossible to take them literally? Or is a literal meaning at least possible, even if a figurative one is preferred? In what follows, our purpose is to assess whether it is possible to hold (1) and (2) to be literally true, and if so, whether such an approach would commit a Christian philosopher to other positions. For example, is a literal interpretation of (1) and (2) inconsistent with some models of the incarnation? If so, a Christian philosopher who holds one of those models is committed to understanding (1) and (2) only figuratively (or denying them altogether), whereas someone who holds a different model may retain the options of understanding (1) and (2) either literally or figuratively.

²⁷Gerald O'Collins makes a similar defence of the importance of Christ's perpetual humanity. See Gerald O'Collins, *Incarnation* (London: Continuum, 2002), 40–41. Hans Urs Von Balthasar also insists that the permanent exaltation of humanity in Christ is essential for salvation. See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1982–1989), VII: 403–404.

²⁸However, the considerations given above in favour of taking (1) and (2) as serious constraints upon models of the incarnation seem to me to be considerations against taking (1) and (2) as merely figurative claims.

II

It is a traditional theistic belief that God is eternal, but theists have interpreted this belief in two ways. The first way, which we may call *temporalism*, holds that God exists within time, and exists at every point of time. As it is sometimes expressed, he is everlasting: there never was a time when he did not exist, and there never will be a time when he does not. The second way of interpreting the belief that God is eternal may be called *atemporalism*, and it holds that God does not exist within time at all. Time, on this view, is a feature of the created universe; God, being uncreated, exists “outside” it, just as he exists “outside” space (taking “outside” here to mean that he is non-temporal and non-spatial, not that he is literally *outside* time and space in a spatial way).

The distinction between these two interpretations of divine eternity is well established, and there are well known arguments for and against them both.²⁹ I shall not rehearse these here, but assume for our present purposes that the two interpretations are both coherent and plausible. We can accordingly divide models of the incarnation into two broad categories, depending on which version of God’s eternity they are combined with. A *temporalist* model of the incarnation is one that combines belief in the incarnation with the view of God as everlasting. On such a model, the Son, being God, exists at every point in time. It follows that the Son existed prior to the incarnation, taking “prior” here in its usual temporal sense: for any time *t* earlier than the time of the incarnation, the Son existed at time *t*, and was not incarnate at that time. The model holds, furthermore, that at a particular moment in time, the Son became incarnate and therefore changed from being non-incarnate to being incarnate.

Can a temporalist model satisfy the two requirements we have identified above? We can see what issues are involved in doing so if we distinguish between three broad categories of temporalist models.

The first category of temporalist model is what we may call “transformationalist” models. On such models, the Son becomes human by being transformed into a human being.³⁰ Transformationalist models may be subdivided further, depending on what we think a human being actually is. A physicalist, who thinks that a human being is identical with her body, will hold that the Son is transformed simply into a (living) human body. Trenton Merricks has defended just such a model.³¹ A dualist who thinks

²⁹See, for example, William Hasker, “Eternity and Providence,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology*, ed. C. Taliaferro and C. Meister (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81–85; or, for a fuller summary of the issues involved, Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 141–167.

³⁰See my “Introduction,” in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ed. A. Marmorodoro and J. Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8–10.

³¹See Trenton Merricks, “The Word Made Flesh: Dualism, Physicalism, and the Incarnation,” in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. P. Van Inwagen and D. Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), 294–299.

that a human being is identical with a combination of body and mind will hold that the Son is transformed into such a combination.³² (A third possibility is that a human being is identical with the mind alone, but I consider this below under the distinct category of Son-body models.) Either way, the Son is changed into something which is either fully or partially physical.

Such a model, however, faces severe difficulties in meeting the exaltation and perpetual humanity requirements. The former, as we have seen, stipulates that Christ should enjoy omnipotence and omniscience after his exaltation. But if Christ is identical with a human body, then a human body must be omnipotent and omniscient. Is that possible? A human body does things by moving itself and affecting the environment directly around itself, and it knows things by storing information in its brain. A human body could not directly exercise omnipotent power. And a human brain could not have the capacity to store the infinite amount of knowledge required for omniscience.³³

These problems need not be insuperable. C. Stephen Evans points out that the New Testament portrays Christ's resurrected body as "spiritual" and glorified, possessing powers beyond our own. Even though it may be impossible to exercise the divine properties in a normal human body, perhaps it is possible with a glorified body.³⁴ This may be plausible,

³²The position sketched here differs from the kind of model in which the Son is thought, in the incarnation, to acquire a part which is identical to a human body (or, perhaps, which is identical to a human body plus a human mind). This latter model conceives the relation of the Son to his human elements in a way rather analogous to my relation to a wooden leg which I acquire, at least on a reading of this situation in which the wooden leg counts as part of me. However, for the purposes of this paper, I class such a model as a Son-body model (if what is acquired is just a body) or as compositionalist (if what is acquired is a body and a soul), because on this understanding, the incarnate Christ consists of the pre-incarnate Son plus something else—just as I, after having the wooden leg fitted, now consist of pre-wooden-leg-me plus the leg. Whether we say that the incarnate Christ is identical with the pre-incarnate Son (and conceive of the incarnation as him acquiring a part) or not (and conceive of the incarnation as him becoming a part of a greater whole) makes little difference to our purposes here. The transformationalist model I refer to in this section, by contrast, would hold that the pre-incarnate Son is transformed into a body plus something else (i.e., a soul), not simply that he acquires a body (or a body and a soul) as parts. Such a model seems, on the face of it, quite implausible. Even supposing we can make sense of the idea of an incorporeal entity being transformed into a corporeal one (as a physicalist transformationalist would hold), it is harder still to make sense of the idea of any entity being transformed into two or more distinct entities, especially if one of these is corporeal and the other incorporeal. It is not clear to me whether anyone has actually defended such a model. For this reason, in what follows I take transformationalist models in general to be physicalist, holding that the incarnate Son is identical with a body, and ignore the possibility of dualist transformationalist models; but the objections which apply to physicalist transformationalist models also apply to dualist ones (in addition to others).

³³An anonymous reader for *Faith and Philosophy* suggests that quantum particles may have the capacity for storing infinite information. However, even if an infinite amount of information could be stored in a finite physical volume in this way, it would be impossible to access, let alone to manipulate it, in the way that would be necessary for that information to count as a person's knowledge. And any physical system which did somehow have the ability not only to store an infinite amount of information but to process it would hardly be a genuinely human brain.

³⁴Evans, "Kenotic Christology," 201–202.

although it does not address how Christ's body might be omnipotent and omniscient *before* his exaltation, should one wish to affirm this. A second solution which could address this might be available to non-physicalist transformationalists. If the incarnate Son is identical not simply with a body but with a body plus a soul, one could say that there are no theoretical restrictions on saying that a soul could be omnipotent and omniscient and indeed unlimited in whatever way is required for divinity. Since souls, if they exist, are pretty mysterious things, we cannot know that they are unable to exercise such powers.

A second problem facing a transformationalist model is the perpetual humanity requirement. If it is necessary for the Son to be identical with a living human body, or with a living human body plus something else, in order to be a human person, then the Son must continue to be identical with a living human body for the rest of time.³⁵ On a temporalist model, that means that Jesus's body must continue to exist for the rest of time. Where would it be? There are three possibilities, all of which have their own advantages and disadvantages.

The most straightforward possibility is that Jesus's body might be somewhere in the universe as we know it—spatially connected to us, in a remote region of the Earth, or on another planet, or in the interstellar void. This seems at least a difficult thing to accept, especially if it would mean that we could, at least in theory, travel to it. At the same time, it is not impossible; since the body is a glorified one, that would at least mean it could remain imperceptible or unrecognisable, if God wishes, as the risen Christ is sometimes represented in the Gospels.³⁶

A second possibility is suggested by Richard Swinburne (though not in the context of a model of the incarnation of this kind):

If we are to rise again with our bodies, as creeds have normally claimed explicitly, there must in another space be a place for us, which if he so chose Christ could inhabit with his human body. If he did so, God thereby would have been continuing to give content to three of the reasons for the Incarnation that I discussed earlier in the chapter—to express and show to us the goodness of human nature and to show his love for us.³⁷

The suggestion, then, is that there could be another space to which Jesus's body might be translated upon his exaltation. Although Swinburne does not explicitly say so, we are presumably to think of this space as quite

³⁵Alvin Plantinga hints at such an objection; see Alvin Plantinga, "On Heresy, Mind and Truth," *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (1999), 186. Merricks quotes the passage in Merricks, "The Word Made Flesh," 295, but does not address this part of it.

³⁶Gregory of Nazianzus dismisses such notions in his *Letter 101*, p. 218. A variant on this notion is the supposition that Christ's body exists *throughout* our universe—being omnipresent in it. Oliver Crisp rejects this claim as absurd; see Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 16–18.

³⁷Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 237. Despite what Swinburne says here, I do not see why the Christian belief in the general resurrection requires the existence of "another space" for this to happen in; it could happen in *this* space, but in the future.

distinct from the space of our own universe. It would be a kind of parallel space—a parallel universe, perhaps—one to which we could not travel by ordinary means, even in theory.

A problem with this possibility is that this parallel space would have to share the same time as our space. This is because, for the temporalist transformationalist, to say that the Son is incarnate *now* is to say that he is identical with a body *now*. That body must therefore exist *now*, which means it must exist within our timeline, not in some alternate timeline to which we are not temporally related. But the notion of a distinct space that nevertheless shares our time is hard to square with modern physics, which considers both space and time to be features of a single “space-time.” Such a view is fundamental to relativity theory, and is so central to modern physics that even the Newtonian theory of space and time is commonly expressed in the same terms for ease of comparison between the different models.³⁸ But if space and time are as intimately connected as this, there could not be two completely distinct, unconnected spaces which share the same timeline.³⁹ Any parallel space would have to have its own timeline, and events in that timeline could not meaningfully be said to be simultaneous with events in our own. If that is so, then we could not say that anything in that alternate universe is happening “now.” In which case, Jesus’s body could not exist there “now.”

A second problem with this view is that it is hard to see how a body in our space could be identical with a body in another space altogether. Presumably we are to think of Jesus’s body disappearing in our space, and reappearing an instant later in the other space. But he could not move through the intervening space between these two locations, because by hypothesis there is none. And in that case, what makes the body that appears identical with the one that disappears? How would this scenario differ from one in which Jesus’s body is annihilated and a duplicate created in a parallel space?

A third possibility for the location of Jesus’s body would be to appeal to hyperspace. In this context, the “hyperspace” theory is that there exist physical dimensions beyond the three with which we are familiar. In addition to the three axes of the familiar three spatial dimensions, there is at least one more—a fourth spatial axis which we simply cannot perceive. If so, then there could be far more to the universe than we can see, even in theory. Just as the inhabitants of Flatland—a two-dimensional world—might be amazed to discover another Flatland a centimetre above

³⁸See, for example, John Norton, “Philosophy of Space and Time,” in *Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*, ed. W. Salmon et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992), 208. Note that by referring to “spacetime” here I do not mean to endorse substantivalism, the view that spacetime is a substance; my argument requires no such assumption.

³⁹An anonymous reader for *Faith and Philosophy* suggests that spacetime could branch, allowing Christ’s body to exist in the first century in our own spacetime, and then for its timeline to branch from ours into a distinct spacetime. But even if we accept this possibility, it would still not be true that Christ’s body exists now. And if for Christ to be human now is for him to have a body now, it would not be the case that Christ is human now.

their heads, and another above that, so too it may be that there is another three-dimensional universe “above” ours, and another “above” that, and so on. This differs from the “other space” theory just discussed in that hyperspace is not a completely distinct universe from our own, spatially (and temporally) unconnected to it. Rather, it is part of our universe, but we are simply unable to get to it, just as a two-dimensional entity could not jump from one page of a closed book to the next. It is part of our own space, and the next plane along might be literally a few centimetres away (or much further), though not in any direction with which we are familiar.

This being so, I see no problem with the supposition that events in hyperspace could be simultaneous with events here. Moreover, a body could presumably move from here to there without the question of annihilation arising, because it could follow a continuous path to its new location. It’s simply that this path would be at right-angles (figuratively speaking) to all of the directions we can perceive. It would appear to us to have been annihilated, but it would not be.⁴⁰

For these reasons, the hyperspace theory seems the most attractive to someone wishing to maintain that Christ’s body exists now.⁴¹ A possible flaw with this theory is that if it is possible for one object (Christ’s body) to move “ana or kata” (i.e., along the proposed fourth spatial axis), then it would presumably be possible, in theory if not in practice, for other objects to do the same—perhaps including us. In that case, the hyperspace theory may seem really to be a more exotic version of the first theory, that Christ’s body exists in our universe, miraculously shielded from our perception or reach. Whether that would make it a less palatable theory may be a matter of taste. What matters for our purposes is that a temporalist transformationalist who accepts the perpetual humanity requirement will be committed to one of these three views. While an individual Christian philosopher may be happy to accept the possibility of hyperspace, for example, it may be less palatable to suppose that Christian doctrine requires a belief in it.

III

A temporalist model of the incarnation which grounds the identity of the pre-incarnate Son and the incarnate Son in Jesus’s human body, then, faces problems that may demand a high price in terms of philosophical commitment. What of the second class of temporalist models? We may call such models Son-body models: they hold that, in becoming incarnate,

⁴⁰Peter Forrest envisages something like this; see Forrest, “The Incarnation,” 139 n5.

⁴¹Hud Hudson argues for the plausibility of the hyperspace theory, from a Christian viewpoint, on the basis of its usefulness in explaining a number of Christian doctrines, such as heaven and hell, Eden, the location of angels and demons, and—most relevantly for our purposes—various New Testament miracles including the appearance and disappearance of the resurrected Christ. He also implies, though does not address in detail, that after the ascension Christ could be conceived of as existing in hyperspace. See Hud Hudson, *Hyperspace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 180–204.

the Son is transformed not into a body or a body plus something else, but into a human mind. He *acquires* a body, but it is distinct from him. Such a model would require a form of substance dualism in the case of normal human beings, according to which the mind or soul is a substance distinct from the body.⁴² Richard Swinburne offers such a model, according to which the Son becomes human not by being transformed into a human body but by becoming united to a human body in the same way that a human mind is normally united to its body. In fact, the Son actually becomes the human mind *of* the body.⁴³

Such a model has little difficulty with the exaltation requirement. The Son is not physical or partly physical, so there is no obvious reason why he should have any difficulties enjoying omniscience and omnipotence after his exaltation. But there are worse problems with the perpetual humanity requirement. What, on the Son-body model, is it that makes the Son human at all during the period of the incarnation? Swinburne seems to suggest two answers. The first concerns the Son's relation to a human body. Swinburne argues that to have a body, or to be embodied, means to exist in certain relations with a chunk of physical matter: in particular, to derive one's knowledge of the world through that chunk, and to act on the world via that chunk. My body is my body *because* it is through my body that I perceive the world and through that same body that I can act upon the world. During the incarnation, the Son exists in this relation to the human body of Jesus, and this is why we can legitimately say that it is *his* body.⁴⁴

But does this continue to be the case after the exaltation? Here, the Son-body model hits precisely the same problem as the transformationalist one. If to be human means to exist in a certain relation to a human body, then if the Son continues to be human for ever, his human body must exist for ever. So to be orthodox, the model requires us to suppose that Jesus's body continues to exist after the exaltation until the end of time; that at any given time, including right now, the statement "Jesus's human body exists somewhere today" is true. We have seen that this may carry a philosophical price not everyone will be willing to pay.

There are further problems. In the case of transformationalist models, the main problem is working out where the human body might be; there is at least no problem with establishing what makes the human body *the Son's body*. It is his body because it is identical with him.⁴⁵ In the case of Son-body models, however, this option is not available, since such models explicitly deny that Christ's body is identical with the Son. Rather, they hold that what makes Christ's body the Son's body is the fact that it exists

⁴²See A. Marmodoro and J. Hill, "Modeling the Metaphysics of the Incarnation," *Philosophy and Theology* 20 (2009), 115.

⁴³Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 192–200.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 194.

⁴⁵Merricks identifies this as a particular strength of the physicalist model. See Merricks, "The Word Made Flesh," 297.

in certain relations to the Son—the same relations in which my body exists in relation to me. To have a body is, minimally, to be related to a chunk of matter in such a way as to gain one’s knowledge of the world, and to act upon the world, principally (or perhaps exclusively) through it; and what makes my body *my* body is the fact that it is the chunk of matter with which I have these relations. There is, perhaps, no problem in applying these criteria to Christ during his earthly career. His body is the Son’s body during that period because it exists in these relations to the Son. But after his exaltation, serious problems arise, because of the exaltation requirement. As we have seen, that requirement states that after his exaltation, Christ enjoys the divine properties, including omniscience and omnipotence. For the temporalist, this must mean that, right now, the Son is omniscient and omnipotent. That means that, whatever relations he bears to his body, they are not the relations that Swinburne identifies as the relations that would make it *his* body. He is not using it as his principal means of gaining knowledge, because he does not gain knowledge at all, because he is omniscient. And he is not using it as his principal means of acting upon the world, because he is acting upon the world in the same way that he did before the incarnation ever happened—i.e., through the exercise of his omnipotent will.⁴⁶ So even if Jesus’ body does still exist, it is hard to see any way in which it could legitimately be called the Son’s body; it would be, at best, the body that used to be the Son’s, in which case the Son would not now be incarnate.⁴⁷

It seems, then, that the proponent of a Son-body model has even greater difficulty than the transformationalist with the notion that the Son continues to be embodied. But the Son-body theorist has a possible response to this, which is not available to the transformationalist. Swinburne suggests that there is a second reason why we can say that the Son becomes human in the incarnation, quite apart from his embodiment. This is that his mind becomes split in some sense. Where, before the incarnation, the Son had a single stream of consciousness, during the incarnation this stream splits into two. The divine stream of consciousness continues as before, but it is joined by a human stream. The divine stream remains omniscient, but the human stream is not omniscient. They exist in an asymmetrical accessing

⁴⁶An anonymous reader for *Faith and Philosophy* notes that every time we move our bodies, we affect the world only by willing to do so. So for the incarnate Christ to act on the world through his omnipotent will seems no different. But in fact we do not move our bodies *purely* by willing to do so. As Elizabeth Anscombe points out, I cannot cause a matchbox to move simply by “willing” it to do so—but I cannot cause my arm to move simply by “willing” it to do so in the same way, either. On this, see Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 51–52. If that is correct, then there is indeed a difference between accomplishing things by pure will, as a divine person would do when acting omnipotently, and accomplishing things by bodily movement.

⁴⁷These considerations also suggest that a Son-body theorist should be committed to at least the view that, in his lifetime, Christ was not actively omnipotent or omniscient—i.e., she should hold some form of “functional kenoticism.” On this, see note 5, above. Either that or the Son-body theorist needs an alternative account of what makes a certain piece of matter someone’s body.

relation: the divine stream is privy to the contents of the human stream, but not vice versa.⁴⁸

How can this help meet the perpetual humanity requirement? The Son-body theorist who accepts the divided mind theory might say that after Jesus's exaltation, he continues to be human not because he continues to have a human body but because his mind continues to contain the human stream of consciousness. It is this that makes him human, not the having of a human body.

But such a response then falters on the exaltation requirement. If the Son's mind remains split into the two streams after his exaltation, he does not enjoy his divine properties in the requisite way. The human stream, at least, remains non-omniscient, or at least not functionally omniscient (that is, aware of his knowledge of all truths). The Son-body theorist might respond that this is not a problem. The divine stream "takes over." When we pray to the Son, for example, it is the divine stream that listens and, perhaps, acts upon our prayer. But this seems very problematic. What has happened to the human stream? Does it exist in some kind of solipsistic world of its own, still unaware of what is going on in the divine stream, perhaps still unaware that it is even divine itself? Surely not.

More fundamentally, there are serious theological problems with any account of the humanity of the exalted Christ which countenances his not having a body. Such a view threatens the centrality of the resurrection to Christian faith. Part of the significance of Jesus's resurrection, according to the New Testament, is that it makes possible the resurrection of all people at the end of time. Paul states that those who are united to Christ in his death will also share in his resurrection,⁴⁹ and elsewhere expresses this idea with the image of "first fruits": Christ's resurrection is the first of many.⁵⁰ The New Testament envisages that the general resurrection will be permanent; the book of Revelation, for example, speaks of the saints ruling forever in the new Jerusalem.⁵¹ However, if the Son were to cease to be incarnate, even if he remained technically human, his resurrection would not be permanent. If that were so, then there would be no reason to suppose that anyone else's resurrection were permanent.⁵²

We may conclude, then, that a temporalist Son-body model of the incarnation faces severe difficulties in meeting the two requirements we have been considering.

There remains the third kind of temporalist model, which does not identify the Son with either Jesus's body or his mind. Such a model would

⁴⁸Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 199–204. See also O'Collins, *Incarnation*, 79–87.

⁴⁹Romans 6:5.

⁵⁰1 Corinthians 15:20.

⁵¹Revelation 22:5.

⁵²On this, see the comments by Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa cited above, notes 11 and 12. See also O'Collins, *Incarnation*, 41, where he argues that if the exalted Christ were to exist in a disembodied state this would rob the resurrection of all its point.

be a compositionalist model. It would hold that, at the moment of incarnation, the Son became united to a human body and soul (assuming dualism, but a compositionalist need not be a dualist, in which case the Son was united to a human body endowed with a human mind in the normal fashion). On this model, the Son does not change when he becomes united to the human body and soul, except to the extent that he becomes related to them in a certain way. He is not transformed into anything—neither into a human body nor into a human soul.⁵³

How would a temporalist compositionalist model address the exaltation and perpetual humanity requirements? It faces similar difficulties to the Son-body model. If the Son's being human consists in his existing in a certain relation to a human body, then we must once again either face the implausible prospect of that body's continuing to exist somewhere for as long as the Son remains human or embrace the theologically unacceptable notion of the Son's remaining human without remaining incarnate.⁵⁴ And if the Son's being human consists in his existing in a certain relation to a human soul (assuming dualism), then again we must ask what state that human soul exists in after the exaltation. Does he know about his own divinity or exaltation? And if the Son's being human consists in his existing in a certain relation to both the human body *and* the human soul—as seems most reasonable—then we have both problems at the same time.

IV

It seems, then, that all three versions of temporalist models of the incarnation struggle when faced with the exaltation problem. This is because they share a basic principle, which is the source of their difficulties. The principle concerns what we may call *human-identifying circumstances*, or HICs. *Human-identifying circumstances* are circumstances under which we may legitimately say of the Son that he is (a) human, and (b) identical with *this* human, namely Jesus. They therefore have two roles: they are

⁵³See my "Introduction," 10–11, 12–13. I do not here distinguish between the many different kinds of compositionalist models. For some of these different kinds, see Thomas Flint, "Should Concretists Part with Mereological Models of the Incarnation?" in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ed. A. Marmorodoro and J. Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 68–87.

⁵⁴One advantage that a compositionalist model has over the Son-body model, however, is that it might still be possible for Christ's body to be *the Son's* body after his exaltation. The Son-body theorist is committed to the claim that the Son's relation to Christ's body is the same in all significant respects to the relation that we all hold to our bodies, because on this model, the Son takes the place of the human mind in Christ, and what makes the Son actually *identical with* Christ's human mind (and not merely supplanting it) is his relation to the body. It is because he bears the same relation to the body that our minds bear to our bodies that he is a human mind. So if the Son's relation to his body differs in any significant respect, Christ does not have a human mind and Apollinarianism follows. The compositionalist, however, is not committed to this claim, because on compositionism, the role of Christ's human mind is not filled by the Son. On this model, Christ has a human mind in addition to his divine mind. So on a compositionalist view, it may be the case that whatever relation exists between the Son and Christ's body in virtue of which it is *the Son's* body is a quite different relation, and could still exist even when the Son is omnipotent and omniscient.

what make the Son human, and they are what make him a particular human being.⁵⁵ As we have seen, different models of the incarnation have different answers to the question what the HICs actually are. Transformationalist models hold that the HICs are that the Son be identical with a certain human body, or a certain human body and soul; Son-body models hold that the HICs are that the Son be identical with a certain human soul alone, or, to put it another way, that he exist in a certain relation with a certain human body; and compositionalist models hold that the HICs are that the Son exist in a certain relation with a certain human body and soul. What the different models have in common is that they hold that there *are* HICs of one kind or another, which it is possible for the Son to satisfy.

But *temporalist* models of the incarnation are, in addition to this, committed to a principle *about* the HICs, which we may call the *Temporalist Incarnation* principle, or TI:

TI: Whatever the HICs are in virtue of which the Son may legitimately be identified with a particular human during the time of the incarnation, these HICs must (a) not be temporally indexed, and (b) hold *at every time* when the Son may legitimately be identified with that human.

A *temporally indexed* circumstance (state of affairs, property, etc.) is one that includes within its definition a reference to a particular time. For example, the property of weighing over 50 kg on 10 January 2010 is a temporally indexed property, and anyone who did weigh over 50 kg on 10 January 2010 has that property even at times when she weighs less. By contrast, the property of weighing over 50 kg is not temporally indexed. A person has that property only when she does weigh over 50 kg; at times when she weighs less, she lacks that property.

Take for example a compositionalist model, according to which the HICs are that the Son exist in some specified relation with the human body and soul. According to TI, the Son is incarnate only at those times when he does exist in that relation with the human body and soul. At times when he does not exist in that relation, he is not incarnate. Since he does not exist in that relation before 4 BCE (assuming the incarnation to begin at this date), he is not incarnate before that date. What if we were to say that the HICs are that he exist in that relation *between 4 BCE and 30 CE*? In that case, the HICs would hold at all times, since it is true even before 4 BCE that he exists in the relevant relation after that date. But this is what the clause in TI about temporal indexing excludes. It says that the circumstances in virtue of which the Son is said to be human cannot be

⁵⁵I use the term “circumstances” here rather than “properties” for two reasons. The first is that “property” has technical connotations which I wish to avoid. The second is that, on at least some models of the incarnation, the circumstances in virtue of which the Son may be called human are not properties at all, at least not properties that the Son bears. By speaking only of “circumstances,” I want to keep the term as general as possible, so that it covers all models of the incarnation.

this kind of circumstance, appealing to a state of affairs that holds at some particular time. And the same applies to non-compositionalist temporalist models, although they will specify different HICs.

Why think this? What is wrong with HICs such as “existing in a certain relation to the human body and soul between 4 BCE and 30 CE”? An obvious problem with them is that they would make the Son incarnate *before* the period in question as well as afterwards.⁵⁶ But then it would be meaningless to say that the Son ever *became* incarnate at all; all that one could say was that he entered the period in virtue of which he is permanently incarnate.

Suppose we were to change the HICs to specify a current or past situation, such as “currently existing, or having existed, in a certain relation to the human body and soul between 4 BCE and 30 CE.” Then the Son would count as incarnate (only) from 4 BCE onwards, even if he no longer exists in the relevant relation to the human body and soul after 30 CE.

This would still be a case of temporally indexed HICs, although the indexing would be ordinal rather than cardinal (i.e., specifying that the conditions hold in the present or in the past, rather than at particular times). But can a person or thing have a non-temporally-indexed property or relation on the basis of a temporally indexed one? To illustrate, suppose that Peter and Paul are both six feet tall at time *t*, but Peter later grows. Peter has, at all times, the property of being-six-feet-tall-at-*t*; consequently he has, at all times, the property of being-the-same-height-as-Paul-at-*t*. But that relation is just as temporally indexed as the property on which it is based. Similarly, to retain the example of a compositionalist model of the incarnation, if being related to a human body and soul makes the Son human, then being-related-to-a-human-body-and-soul-at-*t* gives the Son the property of being-human-at-*t*. It doesn't give him the property of being human simpliciter.

To illustrate, my fiancée is not my wife until I marry her. I cannot truthfully say “She is my wife” until I exist in the relevant relation to her. Moreover, if we later divorce, I cannot truthfully say “She is my wife” after that date either, because I will no longer exist in the relevant relation to her. Here again, we see that even though it is true of me *at all times* that I exist in a marriage-making relation to her between such-and-such a date and such-and-such a date, that does not make it legitimate to say that I am married to her *at all times*. I am married to her only between those dates.

Some properties seem to be different. Ex-presidents of the US have the properties of being addressed as “Mr. President,” being protected by security personnel, and so on, in virtue of *having been* president.⁵⁷ Let us

⁵⁶This assumes that the future is real, and that things can have future-indexed properties. A defender of a temporalist model of the incarnation who denied this could dodge this particular objection.

⁵⁷Even more strikingly, the heir to the throne has various privileges on the basis of his *future* status as king. However, this seems to me to be a different kind of case. It is not

call properties like being addressed as “Mr. President” *perpetual properties*: they are non-temporally-indexed properties that an individual has in virtue of having other properties that *are* temporally indexed. Conversely, properties like being a wife are *non-perpetual properties*: they are non-temporally-indexed properties that an individual has in virtue of having other properties that are *not* temporally indexed, and which the individual has only *at the same time* as they have those other properties. The question is whether being human is a perpetual property or not.

Intuitions on this key question vary. But if being human is a perpetual property, then it is impossible for someone to cease being human. However, suppose a human being were to be transformed into some other animal—perhaps undergoing some dreadful gradual metamorphosis into, say, a tiger, until she were indistinguishable from a normal tiger, right down to the genetic level. Would it not be natural to say that she had ceased to be a human being and become a tiger? It would seem very odd to suppose that she were a human being who is physically indistinguishable from a tiger—or, odder still, that she had become a tiger without ceasing to be a human being.

If this is correct, then being human is a non-perpetual property. Whatever the circumstances are in virtue of which the Son may be called human, he can be called human only while those circumstances hold—and saying that they hold *at some other time*, or rephrasing them so that they refer to some other time in this way, will not do. If the Son’s humanity derives from his existing in a certain relation to a human body and soul, then he is human only while he actually exists in that relation. If this is so, then any temporalist model of the incarnation is committed to TI.

What if we reject this reasoning, and insist that being human is a perpetual property: anyone who is human remains human no matter what happens, and holders of temporalist models of the incarnation are therefore not committed to TI? Even then, a problem remains. As we have seen, any conception of Christ’s continued humanity that does not involve his continued embodiment is fraught with problems. But while it may be questionable whether a person counts as human even after losing human-making properties, whatever they may be, it is clearly false to suppose that a person could count as embodied even after losing embodied-making properties, namely, having a body. Being embodied is certainly a non-perpetual property. To have a body means to exist in a relation of some kind with a piece of matter. And one has the body only at those times when one exists in the relation (in a non-temporally-indexed way)—otherwise, we would have no concept of becoming disembodied.

This being so, we can state a modified version of TI, like this:

TI’: Whatever the circumstances are in virtue of which the Son may legitimately be said to be embodied, these circumstances must (a) not

because he *will be* king that the heir enjoys his privileges, but because he *is expected to become* king; he enjoys them even if he turns out never to become king.

be temporally indexed, and (b) hold *at every time* when the Son may legitimately be said to be human.

As we have seen, the exaltation and perpetual humanity requirements are that any orthodox model of the incarnation must allow the following statements to be true:

1. It is true now that Christ has, and exercises, all the divine attributes, including omnipotence and omniscience.
2. It is true now that the Son is fully human as well as fully divine.

Any temporalist model of the incarnation can hold these to be true only when the following claims are true:

3. It is true that Christ now has, and exercises, all the divine attributes, including omnipotence and omniscience.
4. It is true that the Son is now fully human as well as fully divine.

But by TI, (4) can be the case only if whatever circumstances make the Son human are in effect right now. It is not enough for them *to have been in effect* during Jesus's earthly lifetime. Alternatively, if we think that being human is a perpetual property and that temporalists are therefore not committed to TI, they are certainly committed to TI'—which means that, while they could maintain that the Son is now fully human, they could not maintain that he is now embodied, which is equally problematic. And the view that the Son's human-making (or embodied-making) circumstances are in effect right now is difficult to maintain no matter what model of the incarnation is being used. If this is so, it follows that no temporalist model of the incarnation can easily meet the requirements we have been considering.

V

What of atemporalist models? It should be clear what we mean by this term: an atemporalist model of the incarnation is one that combines belief in the incarnation with a view of God as atemporal. On such a view, the Son, since he is God, is atemporal.

There are two possible kinds of atemporalist models, which I will call *simple atemporalist* and *mixed atemporalist*. On the former, the Son remains "outside" time, even during the incarnation. Whatever relation exists between Jesus, who lived during an identifiable period of history, and the Son, it is a relation between something temporal and something atemporal. Brian Leftow argues for a model of this kind, in which the Son is a timeless part of a whole, the other parts being Christ's body and soul, which exist in time.⁵⁸ Thomas Torrance has also defended such a view.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Brian Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," in *The Incarnation: an Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, ed. S. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 273–299.

⁵⁹Thomas Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh, Clark: 1997), 67.

On mixed atemporalism, by contrast, the Son is atemporal, but in the incarnation he becomes temporal *as well*. Instead of imagining what relations would hold between the atemporal Son and his temporal human body (or body and mind), we suppose that the Son becomes temporal, enjoying temporal relations with his human body (or body and mind). At any given time, it is true at that time that the Son exists atemporally, because the pre-incarnate Son (taking “pre-” to indicate logical, rather than temporal, priority) exists atemporally. For any time prior to the incarnation, it is false that the Son exists at that time (although true that he exists atemporally). During the incarnation, however, it is true that the Son exists at that time (in an embodied state), and it is also true that the Son exists atemporally (in a non-embodied state). If at some point the Son ceases to be incarnate, then for any time after that point, it is once again false that the Son exists at that time (although, again, it is still true that the Son exists atemporally, and indeed that the Son did exist at an earlier time).

I do not know of any author who has articulated mixed atemporalism in a clear and unambiguous way, but suggestions of it can be found in a number of writers. Gerald O’Collins offers a suggestion which I take to be something like this, although he does not go into details.⁶⁰ Piet Schoonenberg also sketched a theory along these lines.⁶¹ A number of devotional writers, particularly in the evangelical tradition, also seem to presuppose a view of this kind.⁶²

Could an atemporal being really become temporal, with the odd consequences described above? We might ask on what grounds the temporal Son could be considered identical with the atemporal Son at all. The suggestion is that a divine person appears within time at a particular point; before that time, the statement “a divine person exists now” was false, but after that time, it was true. Why would we identify this temporal divine person with the atemporal Son—or indeed with any atemporal divine being? Why would it not be a brand new divine being, one that differs from other divine beings in being temporal?

One might attempt to base a solution upon the relations that the temporal divine person has to the other divine persons. Traditionally, the

⁶⁰O’Collins, *Incarnation*, 15.

⁶¹See Piet Schoonenberg, *The Christ: A Study of the God-Man Relationship in the Whole of Creation and in Jesus Christ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 83–87, where he suggests that the Father is eternal, and there is a distinction between the immanent Son (who exists non-personally as the Father’s Reason) and the incarnate Son (who exists personally within time, as Jesus Christ). See also Brian McDermott, *Word Become Flesh: Dimensions of Christology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1993), 181.

⁶²For example, John Stott appears to be committed to this view, given that, writing about the Trinity, he states that God “exists eternally in these three personal modes of being,” implying that the Son is timeless; but he also writes that the Son “did not remain in heaven; he came into the world. The word was not spoken from the sky; ‘the Word was made flesh,’” implying that, as incarnate, the Son is not timeless but changes and is involved in temporality. An unmixed atemporalist would agree that the Son came into the world, but not that doing so meant that he did not remain in heaven. See John Stott, *Authentic Christianity* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 19, 38.

persons of the Trinity are thought to be distinguished solely by their mutual relations. Accordingly, one might say that the temporal divine being would have the same relations to the Father and the Spirit that the atemporal Son does; consequently, the temporal divine being would be identical with the atemporal Son, since these relations are all that individuate him. But this answer would also be problematic, since it would be hard to show that the temporal divine being *does* bear the same relations to the Father and the Spirit that the atemporal Son does. For one thing, if atemporalism is true, then the relations which the Son bears to the Father and the Spirit are timeless. For example, he is not merely begotten by the Father—he is *timelessly* begotten by the Father. Could a temporal divine being bear this relation to the Father? The begetting might be timeless from the Father's point of view, but from the point of view of the temporal divine being, it would not be timeless. It would seem, then, that the relation he would bear to the Father would not be the same relation as the one that the atemporal Son bears to the Father, in which case it would follow that he could not be identical with the atemporal Son.

Such a model also raises the problematic possibility of the temporal and atemporal Sons communicating or otherwise relating to each other. If we accept, as most atemporalists do,⁶³ that an atemporal God can have relations with temporal beings—for example, hearing their prayers, or bestowing grace upon them—then it seems that the atemporal Son could have these same relations with the temporal Son. The odd image is raised of Jesus praying not simply to the Father but to the Son as well, even though he *is* the Son. That seems distinctly unpalatable.

If this is so, then the atemporalist cannot have her cake and eat it too. If the Son is to be atemporal, he must remain atemporal—he cannot be temporal as well. I conclude that mixed atemporalism is incoherent, and that the atemporalist believer in the incarnation should hold simple atemporalism.⁶⁴

VI

Armed with this conclusion, we may consider the atemporalist equivalents of the temporalist transformationalist, Son-body, and compositionalist models that we looked at earlier, taking “atemporalist” to mean strong atemporalism only.

We can dispose of the atemporalist transformationalist model quickly, since such a model would be simply incoherent. The transformationalist model states that the Son is literally transformed into a human body. But an atemporal entity cannot be transformed into anything, since to

⁶³Perhaps appealing to a notion such as that of “ET simultaneity,” as proposed by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 429–458.

⁶⁴Although they do not use this terminology or draw a clear distinction between the two theories, Stump and Kretzmann also sketch what sounds like mixed atemporalism and comment on its apparent absurdities before defending instead a version of unmixed atemporalism. See Stump and Kretzmann, “Eternity,” 451–453.

be transformed is to undergo change; it requires that the entity in question have one property or set of properties at time t_1 , and have a different property or set of properties at time t_2 . Perhaps there is a way around this. Suppose we were to say that to have a property or set of properties at time a means to have them atemporally: to have a property at time a means to exist outside time and, existing outside time, to have that property. And to have a property or set of properties at time t means to have them at some specified point within time, in the usual way. Then we might say that an entity could have one property or set of properties at time a , and another property or set of properties at time t . To say this, we would have to envisage that the entity in question exists atemporally *and* temporally—because if it did not exist temporally at all, it could not have any properties at time t .⁶⁵ But this would be mixed atemporalism, which we have already seen reason to reject.

Similar problems would beset an atemporalist Son-body model. The proponent of this model does not suppose that the Son is transformed into a human body, but she does suppose that he undergoes the rather less radical transformation into a human mind. But again this could not happen if the Son does not change, which again presupposes that the Son is temporal. More particularly, the Son-body model requires that the Son bear to his body the same relation that our minds bear to our bodies. But the sorts of things that human minds do (when embodied) surely require that they exist temporally.⁶⁶ These things include discursive thought—where one thought follows another, for example in chains of reasoning. It is hard to see how an atemporal mind could deliberate about what to do.⁶⁷

On Swinburne's model, the Son acquires a mental stream of consciousness which is phenomenologically indistinguishable from that of a "mere" human. It is this stream, for example, which experiences discursive thought. That stream, then, must be temporal. But if this stream is *part* of the divine mind, then the divine mind must be temporal as a

⁶⁵For a being that exists only outside time and not within time, it might be true at time t that it bears certain properties, but it would not be true that it bears those properties *at* time t , and it is the latter which would be required on this conception of what would be involved for an atemporal being to be transformed.

⁶⁶Note that the problem here is not simply that an atemporal Son could not act upon a temporal body, akin to the objections against the notion of atemporal divine agency addressed by Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity," 447–450. The problem, rather, is that an atemporal Son could not act upon a temporal body *in the way that we act upon ours*.

⁶⁷The character of Dr. Manhattan in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen* is effectively a temporal body with an atemporal mind, who perceives the whole of time spread before him, and accordingly cannot deliberate about his actions because he knows what happens at every time. The example is particularly relevant to our argument here, since Dr. Manhattan's atemporal omniscience is one of the factors that alienate him from humanity and make him unable to care about human affairs. A Christ who consisted of a temporal body with an atemporal mind would be similarly unsympathetic and hardly human in any meaningful sense—let alone like us in all ways other than sin, as the Chalcedonian Definition has it.

whole—for how could an atemporal mind contain a temporal stream of consciousness? Alternatively, what if the human stream is *not* part of the divine mind? Perhaps it is “hosted” by the human body (and particularly its brain); or perhaps it is distinct from both the divine mind and the human body (assuming some kind of dualism). But in both of these cases, we have departed from the Son-body model, since we are now envisaging that Christ consists of the Son plus a human body plus a human mind, and that is compositionism. It seems, then, that an atemporalist Son-body model is not viable.

There remains the atemporalist compositionist account. This is the model defended by Brian Leftow, according to which Christ is a composite of a temporal human body and soul and the atemporal Son. The Son remains atemporal, never directly experiencing temporality. His human experiences and identity are derived from the relation he bears to the human body and soul that *do* exist within time. It is rather as, in the film *Avatar*, human characters can experience life as members of the Na’vi alien race by remotely controlling Na’vi “avatars.” The link with the avatars is so close, with the humans experiencing the world through the avatars’ senses, that they can legitimately say that they have met the Na’vi and lived among them—even though the humans themselves are lying in a lab plugged into complex controllers the whole time. They remain outside the Na’vi environment even while they are exploring it. Similarly, on atemporalist compositionism, the Son remains non-temporal, but he experiences human life, including temporality, as a result of his relation to a human body and soul that are within time.

As we have already noted, a key difference between the Son-body and the compositionist models is that the former is committed to the claim that the Son bears the same relation to his human body that all human beings do to their bodies, while the latter is not.⁶⁸ Of course, the Son must bear *some* relations to the human body, in virtue of which it counts as *his* body; he must also bear some relations to the human mind, in virtue of which it counts as *his* human mind. But a crucial difference is that these need not necessitate that he is temporal. I have argued that nothing could bear the same relations to a human body that a human mind does without being temporal, and that this is a fatal flaw in any Son-body atemporalist model. But since, on a compositionist model, there is no compelling need to suppose that the Son bears these particular relations to the human body, there is also no compelling need to suppose that he would have to be temporal to bear the relations that he does bear to it.

How might an atemporalist compositionist handle the exaltation and perpetual humanity requirements? I take it that there is clearly no problem with the exaltation requirement. On atemporalism, the Son does not change, because atemporal things cannot change. If at any point in time it is true that the Son enjoys the divine properties such as omnipotence

⁶⁸See note 54 above.

and omniscience, then that is true at every point in time, including during Jesus's earthly career and afterwards.

What of the perpetual humanity requirement? Here there is a very significant difference from all the temporalist models. As we saw, any temporalist model must hold TI, the principle that states that, if the Son is to remain human after his exaltation, the state of affairs in virtue of which he was human *before* his exaltation must continue to hold. If he was human in virtue of having a body, then he must continue to have a body. If he was human in virtue of having certain mental features, then he must continue to have those features. These models all suffered the same weakness—that it was implausible to suppose that the human-making state of affairs continued to hold, no matter what that state of affairs might be. It was especially implausible to suppose that it continued to hold and yet that Jesus exercised his omnipotence and omniscience fully.

But an atemporalist model is not committed to TI. This is because, if the Son is atemporal, then it is timelessly true of him that the HICs hold—whatever they may be. On a compositionalist model, the Son is human in virtue of the fact that he exists in a certain relation to a human mind and body. On an atemporalist version of this model, he exists timelessly in that relation. The statement “the Son exists in a human-making relation to the mind and body of Jesus” is true at all times, whether before, during, or after the earthly lifetime of Jesus. As Brian Leftow remarks, “If God is timeless and is incarnate, then he just is timelessly incarnate: the whole of his timeless life is spent so.”⁶⁹

If the Son is human in virtue of existing in a certain relation to Jesus's body and soul, then because, on atemporalism, the Son exists outside time, it is true at all times that he (timelessly) exists in that relation to them. It is no more true during Jesus's lifetime than it is at any other time, including the period afterwards or even today. The Son is not human now—but on atemporalism, the Son does not exist now either. Rather, it is now true that the Son is human, just as it is now true that the Son exists.

What of the Son's relation to his body? I have argued that any temporalist model of the incarnation that seeks to respect the perpetual humanity requirement is committed to the view that Jesus's body continues to exist somewhere. But an atemporalist model is not so committed. If it is true now that the Son is human, because he (atemporally) exists in certain relations to the (temporal) human body and soul of Jesus, then it is equally true now that he has a body. It is precisely that same body during that same period; it is not necessary for that body to continue to exist within time for it to continue to be true that the Son has it. So where the temporalist has to explain where Jesus's body *went* at his exaltation, or face the prospect of the Son's no longer being human (or at least no longer being incarnate), the atemporalist does not have to suppose that it went anywhere, because

⁶⁹Leftow, “A Timeless God Incarnate,” 295.

its continued existence within time is not required for it still to be true that the Son is incarnate.

In some ways, this may seem an unsatisfactory conclusion. I have argued that the proponent of atemporalist compositionism can, if she wishes, take statements about Christ's post-glorification status literally, whereas other models of the incarnation are unable to do so—meaning that proponents of those models are committed to taking those statements only in a figurative sense, if at all. But on atemporalist compositionism, it is true (now) that the Son is human only because of what happened in the Holy Land centuries ago. Although the proponent of this model of the incarnation can legitimately say that it is true now that the Son is human and embodied, nevertheless, this is not because the Son's human body exists *now*. This view does not leave any room for saying, for example, that Christ is currently seated at the right hand of the Father, as is stated in Ephesians 1:20, Hebrews 8:1, and so on. He cannot do that if his body exists only between 4 BCE and 30 CE. Similarly, the glorified Christ does not really have a glorified body, as Revelation 1:12–16 suggests, and one cannot hope to see Christ's face in the new Jerusalem, as Revelation 22:4 promises.

The proponent of atemporalist compositionism has two possible replies. The first is that, although the existence of Jesus's body between 4 BCE and 30 CE in the Holy Land is sufficient for the statement "The Son is incarnate" to be true now, that does not preclude Jesus's body existing at other times and places as well. I argued earlier that, for a temporalist, the claim that Jesus's body still exists in a space quite distinct from our own is implausible—partly because such a space could not be part of our timeline, and partly because it is hard to see how Jesus's body could move to such a space and still be the same body. For an atemporalist, the second of these considerations is still a problem, but not the first, because as we have seen, an atemporalist is not committed to the view that, if it is true now that the Son has a body, the Son's body must exist now. An atemporalist could hold that Jesus's body exists in a wholly different spacetime (so "exists" in that statement is not in the present tense, and not atemporal either), but it is still true now that "The Son is incarnate" or "The Son has a body" for the reasons already given. In that case, the claims about the glorified Christ mentioned in the previous paragraph—including the idea that Christians might meet him in the flesh—could be true of his body in the other spacetime.

The second possible reply is to accept that Jesus's body existed only during his earthly career and was not translated to an alternative spacetime, and that the claims just mentioned cannot be taken literally. They have, perhaps, a figurative meaning. And if this is so, then the question with which we began our investigation was not quite right. It is not a question of *whether* it is possible to interpret statements about Christ's post-glorification status literally, but *which* statements could be taken literally. For any model of the incarnation other than atemporalist compositionism, *all* statements about Christ's post-glorification status must be

taken only figuratively, at best. The atemporalist compositionalist retains more options: she must take as figurative any statements that presuppose the continued existence of Christ's body, but she has the conceptual resources to take as literally true the statement that it is now true that Christ is human—a possibility not open to proponents of other models of the incarnation. To the extent to which retaining this option is considered desirable, then, compositionism is to be preferred to its rivals.

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