

October 26, 2014  
St. Demetrios the Myrrh-Streamer

### Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings A Christological Quandary

In orthodox formulations of Christology, there exists an ongoing and apparently irreducible quandary: How should we speak of the obviously “special” quality of Christ’s humanity without compromising the principle that he was “made like unto his brethren” (Hebrews 2:17)? Or, to put the question from the opposite direction, how should we express his solidarity with the human race without obscuring the fact that he is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (7:26)?

When the Church in times past— in 451 at Chalcedon, for instance, and at Constantinople in 670—was obliged to deal with a “duality” in Christ, the questions in dispute were resolved by applying the distinction between his divine and human natures.

In the theological dilemma I pose here, however, it would be misleading—even unto heresy, perhaps—to appeal to that classical distinction of conciliar Christology. The quandary to which I refer right now has nothing to do with the two natures of Christ. It pertains, rather, entirely to his humanity. Summarized as best I can, it means: How does one speak about the “special” humanity of Christ without calling into doubt its “common” quality?

I see this problem as one of language, not of concept; “how do we *speak* of it?” Not “how do we clarify the idea in our minds?” We are dealing with a Mystery here; it will never be clarified into a concept.

Concepts, after all, are necessarily general, and let us remind ourselves that there is no general concept called “Incarnation.” The complete uniqueness of the reality is the root reason it will never be expressed conceptually.

Sometimes even theologians seem to miss this point; I have lost count of the instances when some writer on Christology invoked an imaginary and utterly bogus *apriori*, a presupposition based on general principles, to make sense of what is supremely unique—as though the particular and

distinctive qualities of the Incarnation could be predetermined by a hypothetical premise: “If God *were* to become man, such-and-such would have to be the case, not this-and-that. And, because God *did* become man, we must conclude that such-and-such is the case, not this-and-that.” I wonder, when I encounter such writers, how in the world would we *know*?

The theological task to which I refer would be sufficiently difficult if we only looked at Christ “from outside,” as it were—if we examined his humanity as something objective. Clearly, we can’t address the matter this way. As we find him in the Gospels, Christ is a *subject*. His humanity and his subjectivity are indistinguishable. Hence, it is with respect to his *subjectivity* that I pose the quandary described above.

In posing it, let us recall, I deliberately summoned to my aid the Epistle to the Hebrews, because the author of that work appears to have been very conscious of the quandary I had in mind to identify. Even as he wrote of Jesus, “in the days of his flesh,” as suffering fear at the torments he was about to face (5:7), our author declared that this very Jesus, “for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame” (12:2).

However we speak of what took place in the consciousness of Jesus in the Garden and on the Cross, we must take care to qualify our assessment by calling to mind “the joy that was set before him.” Jesus *knew*, beyond any doubt and with no uncertainty, of his coming victory over sin, death, and the devil. He *knew* he would rise from the dead, and his prophecies of the Passion invariably included that detail (e.g., Luke 18:31-33).

Jesus, in his own person and at all times, was aware of being sinless (John 8:46). Consequently, at no point did he doubt his authority over the grave; he treated death like a declawed and toothless lion (Cf. Luke 7:11-17; 8:40-56; John 11:38-44). Jesus knew that “the prince of this world is coming,” but he was also quite sure that “in me he has nothing” (John 14:30).

Whatever Christ feared, then, it was not the prospect of failure. In his consciousness, the victorious outcome of the Cross was never in doubt, because he knew exactly who he was and what he was able to do. He died in order to “put to death him who held the dominion of death.” Christ was

never subject to that enslaving fear of death common to the rest of us (Hebrews 2:14-15). In this respect, his humanity is unique.

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