

Tyron L. Inbody

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All four of these essays are constructive contributions to an open theism christology. Open theism is an evangelical theology, and so Christ, not only in experience but in theology, is central. To this point open theists have simply assumed the orthodox christological creeds. But these papers share two things in common that go beyond Chalcedon. First, they recognize the tension at the heart of open theism between its relational view of God and the creedal view of Chalcedon, and second, they strive to overcome the paradox at the heart of Chalcedon. And so the question of the relation of open theism to orthodoxy cannot be avoided, and these papers attempt to advance this new agenda to develop a yet underdeveloped open theism christology.

Open theists cannot resolve the paradox at the heart of orthodox christology in the way a process theology, which is less committed to Chalcedonian language, does. The reason is that open views of God stands in conflict with the classical theistic view within which evangelical theology so far has interpreted christology. Open theists affirm a relational God, and yet it seems to me that evangelical theology, in contrast to process theism, is married to the language and metaphysics of classical theism (immutability, ousia, divine and human substance).

The problem is this: what makes these christologies open theism christologies, that is, evangelical, in contrast to modern liberal christologies? Most open theists I have read insist on many of the traditional features of classical theism, including *ex nihilo*, supernaturalism, as well as Chalcedonian understanding of divine and human natures as two different natures. If these four do not want to retain these features of classical theism, what makes them open theists developing an open theistic christology instead of a process christology? Liberal and postliberal

strategies are clear: Baillie claims a difference in degree becomes a difference in kind; Schleiermacher proposes an absoluteness of the universal God consciousness; postliberals talk about christological language as a “linguistic rule” instead of a metaphysics and dismiss metaphysical questions with an appeal to mystery and paradox. But it is not clear to me how these four resolve this tension between an open theistic God and an immutable theistic God without giving away the farm to the liberals?

Ward accepts the Chalcedonian formula as normative and seeks to make sense of the language that seems to claim of two contradictory natures in one person. He advances his agenda by redefining the idea of divine perfection to mean maximal greatness, and then by abandoning the language of nature by distinguishing between person and identity, and between identity and predicates, and finally by restricting the Chalcedonian confession of the divinity of Jesus to the identity of Jesus and not to his person. Thus Jesus’ mistakes are true of his person but not of his identity. Part of the fascination of this proposal is that Ward gets past the contradiction between the two natures of Chalcedon by temporalizing the fulness of God a la open theism and panentheism. However, I am left with two problems: First, I think Ward needs to be more explicit about the relationship between nature and identity, for his concept of identity, it seems to me, shares, in the end the key characteristics of divinity carried in the classical notion of divine nature. Second, a dualism persists, in the sense that identity, in his eschatological solution, not only persists through change but is not affected by change in the sense that maximal perfection possesses maximal knowledge which excludes lack of knowledge or error. He avoids this problem by claiming that identity does not mean identical, and so Jesus is not identical with God but rather shares divinity. But his eschatological solution implies that in what will be Jesus sheds his humanity and not only shares the divine identity but becomes identical to God. Has he finally

abandoned his open theism doctrine of a relational notion of divinity?

Although Case-Winters is not explicit about it, she, too, shares Ward's attempt to overcome the paradox of classical christology by offering a coherent relational christology. She accomplishes this by adopting an explicit panentheistic view of the God-world relationship and by a supralapsarian soteriology in which God's motive for the incarnation is not to respond to the fall but in which God always intended the incarnation independent of the fall so that apotheosis is the goal of the incarnation. The first part of her paper, then, is to explicate a panentheistic repudiation of God and the world as polar opposites. The significance of this for christology is that since God and the world are not opposites (there is a basic continuity between God and the world as internally related), Jesus is not incarnate as a supernatural ousia, but is rather "emblematic," a "sign," of what is already and always God's relation to the world. God is "manifest" in the person of Jesus, an instance of "transparency." The implications of the cosmic Christ is cosmic redemption, in which salvation is union with God (theosis). This is a clear and well wrought formulation of a panentheistic christology. The problem, however, is that it is such a strong affirmation of continuity that there is little grounds on which to talk about the uniqueness of Jesus, at least about Jesus as "uniquely unique" (Pinnock), which remains one of the most basic claims of evangelicals who adopt some form of open theism.

Michael also deals with the question of how far open theists can go in their christology toward a process christology and still retain key evangelical claims which contrast to most liberal christologies. He, too, affirms the primary features of a relational theism and explores what process christologies can offer to an open theistic christology. Acknowledging that a full process theology is unacceptable to open theists, he proposes that Suchocki's christology as most compatible with open theistic christology, primarily because it is more biblical, focuses on the

love and justice of God, and makes the cross and resurrection central to christology. While I concur that he adopts features of her christology that are compatible with open theism, I am unclear here, too, as I am with Winters', what makes this an open theistic christology, that is, an evangelical christology which reaffirms the Chalcedonian language of divine and human natures, in contrast to a process christology of continuity. His last three brief paragraphs on suffering and divine power, on eschatology, and the uniqueness of Christ hint that in his future constructive christology he wants an open christology which is closer to a process-relational christology than to an evangelical christology of nature and substance. If process christology and open theistic christology are so compatible on so many key convictions, it is hard to understand why open theists and process theists continue to claim that the methodological issues—primarily over the continuity/discontinuity conflict—are so central that open theists cannot come out of the closet and admit that they really are process theologians in conflict with the classical theistic assumptions that lie behind Chalcedonian christology.

Marit, like Anna, argues that atonement and salvation are not primarily satisfaction, substitution, forgiveness, and imputed righteousness but rather is a vision of wholeness and beauty. Agreeing with the various contemporary criticisms of the traditional models of atonement, she offers a process and a covenantal theology of infinite grace. Atonement is rooted in the nature of God, who wills to love universally. This kind of atonement is rooted in the biblical idea(s) of covenant and in a covenantal ontology (“it’s spiders all the way down”) rather than the cross alone, so there is a “continuous atonement” based on an inherent relationship between God and humanity. The early part of the paper bases her claims in a process theology in which there is no sharp distinction between creation and redemption, and the second half in a covenantal theology in which covenant is the loci from which all other theological categories

derive. This is a splendid constructive effort, especially as an effort to interpret atonement as theosis or shalom instead of sacrifice and imputed righteousness. But how compatible are these two types of theology, process and covenantal theology? In one sense, I think they are, in that both are a relational theology. But process theology is a theology of inherent continuity (mutually constitutive relationships) between God and the world, while covenant theology presupposes a fundamental discontinuity between God and the world and therefore God's free choice to be related. Can these two theological frameworks be compatible with each other as neatly as Marit proposes? Has she not proposed two quite different christologies, the first a form of liberal theology, the latter a form of evangelical theology?

The problem is this: how are these four solutions not essentially a liberal christology of continuity (namely, a panentheistic doctrine of internal relations, in which God and the world are not totally other), so that incarnation refers not to divine and human natures but to the degree of God consciousness? Does their strategy preserve the intent of Chalcedonian christology by using process categories of the divine immanence in all actual occasions rather than the substantialist categories of Chalcedon, and does it not abandon the high claims of Chalcedon in favor of Jesus as an instantiation of the universal God-world relation of interdependence?

My question, then, is to what degree an open theism christology requires Chalcedonian language and metaphysics. These essays open the Pandora's Box problem of how an open theistic christology can follow out its relational implications without become another form of a liberal christology of continuity. These authors recognize the theological/ontological issues implied in their open theism, and recognize the extent to which these theological commitments challenge an evangelical commitment to the philosophical and theological assumptions of Chalcedon. But I am unclear they in the end are not essentially liberal christologies based on the

continuity of divinity and humanity, God and the world, transcendence and immanence, which is in fundamental tension with an evangelical theology that open theists are at pains to retain. I am unclear whether this dilemma can be resolved without either keeping the Chalcedonian language of paradox and mystery, or taking the postliberal route of simply asserting Chalcedon is a linguistic rule one accepts as confessional language, or taking the liberal route of continuity and risk the inability to make the christological claims of Chalcedon. I wait to see how these evangelicals respond to my question of why they should not be identified with some form of liberal christology instead of an evangelical christology.

Tyron Inbody

AAR, Chicago

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