

Hypostatic Attention: How Jesus Attends

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ABSTRACT: In this article, I offer an answer to the question: How does Jesus Christ pay attention? By closely examining the claims of orthodox Christology—especially in the theology of the councils of Chalcedon and Constantinople III—I explore options for conceiving of Jesus’ attention in relation to conciliar claims. I propose a model of Jesus’ attention called Theandric Attention, on which Jesus’ way of attending is unique.

How does Jesus Christ pay attention? This article explores an answer to this question. But before getting to an answer to this question, we might first wonder, “Why does it matter?” At the moment, human attention is a popular topic. The interest is not merely academic. People have an intuitive sense that what we do with our attention matters, so a society overrun with distracting devices is right to be concerned about the effects on our attention. For this reason, conversations about what attention is and how we use it have garnered widespread interest not only in popular circles but also in academic fields like psychology and philosophy.¹ However, attention has received relatively little attention in Christian theology. For Christian theology, the startling claim that God became man means Jesus Christ not only shows us who God is, but also who we are—or were created to be. A distinctly Christian anthropology must be, at least in part, Christological. This is why prominent theologians in the Christian tradition, like Irenaeus, Augustine, Maximus, Bonaventure, Julian of Norwich, and Karl Barth, among others, insist that Christology is critical for anthropology (Cortez and Hill 2023). Plainly, who and what we are is defined in relation to Jesus Christ. Even if everything we can say of Jesus is not true of us, minimally we must say Jesus’ humanity is a guide for our own. In short, how Jesus attends matters because attention matters, and Jesus is a guide for how humans attend.

An initial, and enormous, challenge for saying how Jesus attends begins with the concept of attention itself. What does it mean for *anyone* to attend? William James famously said, “Everyone knows what attention is” (James 1950, 403). But recent work in philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience suggests otherwise. Even attempts at parsimonious or neutral definitions run into problems with words like “mind” or “selection,” making a non-controversial concept virtually impossible. But, to give James credit, many of us do have an intuitive concept of attention even if it is sometimes difficult to articulate what we are doing. We tend to think of attention at least as something we do (though it is sometimes involuntary), something informed or directed by the mind (though it may involve more than the mind), and something that has the effect of centering on some object(s). This relatively parsimonious and

¹ Attention is an important theme for well-known 20th century philosophers like Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil, but more recently is of interest to Christopher Mole, Wayne Wu, Sebastian Watzl, and Silvia Caprioglio Panizza, among others. While Panizza’s work is especially interested in the moral and ethical features of attention, Mole, Wu, and Watzl are especially interested in offering an account of attention engaged with contemporary psychological literature about attention. Accordingly, their books offer good overviews of the psychological literature, too, and of some of the contemporary discussions about attention. See Murdoch (2001); Weil (2016); Mole (2011); Wu (2014); Watzl (2017); Panizza (2022).

incomplete understanding of attention is enough to get us started, but more developed understandings of attention will be discussed later.

With this basic understanding of attention in mind, we might wonder whether we can helpfully speculate on how Jesus attends. Reflection on how Jesus attends is, at best, sparse in Scripture or the later theological tradition. Scripture, of course, records the kinds of things that Jesus attended to or cared about. In many gospel scenes, we can reasonably infer that Jesus was paying attention and, in some cases, even to what or whom he was paying attention. But the New Testament authors are not especially concerned with Christological metaphysics or the psychology of Jesus' identity as God and man.² They seek, instead, to faithfully record the message and stories of Christ for future generations.³ Nevertheless, later theological reflection does make the turn toward metaphysical and even psychological reflection. Early theological reflection and the ensuing councils deem important deeper reflection about the particulars of Jesus' humanity, deity, and the relationship between the two. But this was not mere idle curiosity. Such reflection was deemed critical because of its salvific implications. More so than Scripture, later theological reflection and ecumenical councils were willing to spell out—sometimes in excruciating detail—the person of Jesus in explicitly philosophical and metaphysical language. Whatever one thinks about this project, or conciliar authority for that matter, they contain much fruitful work on the person of Christ. If nothing else, these reflections and conciliar statements set an agenda for Christological reflection: even if you disagree with what they say, you must reckon with them and say why. These later conciliar statements, then, are ripe for exploring how Jesus attends. Of course, it would be anachronistic to expect the councils to define how Jesus attends according to our modern understandings of attention. But they have a lot to say that is attention-adjacent: not explicitly about attention, but plausibly relevant to it. This article should then be understood as an exploration of how Jesus attends according to orthodox, conciliar Christology.

Before embarking on this exploration, three clarifying comments are in order. First, to state it emphatically: we do not have complete access to the psychology of Jesus Christ. A phenomenology of Jesus eludes our grasp. Nevertheless, we do have some insights into the psychology of Jesus. Though his human nature was hypostatically united to divinity, Jesus was human. Further, theological reflection and conciliar Christology do comment on Jesus' psychology. Simply put, orthodox Christology does make pronouncements or draw conclusions which illuminate how Christ attends. Second, an obvious question is now lingering: What counts as orthodox Christology? Any detailed answer to this question is, of course, controversial. Hoping to avoid a hermeneutical struggle, I shall simply assume the conciliar statements about Christology from Chalcedon (451) and Constantinople III (681) are reliable statements about the person and work of Jesus.⁴ Minimally, that is, they are a guide for orthodox Christological reflection. Notice that this assumption makes no claims about the authoritative status of these councils nor the role of tradition in interpreting Scripture nor the way Scripture and tradition interact. By “reliable” I do not mean in “infallible,” but rather useful guides for our theological reflection. My own view is that the conciliar claims do carry authoritative weight, but I offer these caveats in the hope that these modest claims can find

² That is not to say, however, that Jesus' identity is not a focal point. Indeed, the Scriptural authors were very interested in who Jesus was and what it meant to call Jesus “God.” For more, see, for example, Bauckham (1999).

³ Of course, this is an oversimplification. It is not as simple as the gospel writers, especially, recording the movements of Jesus as if they were modern biographers. For more about the genre of the gospels, see the helpful conversation in Pennington (2012).

⁴ I name these two councils because they include the Christological pronouncements most relevant to the subject of this article.

wider ecumenical acceptance. Prolegomenous questions of theological authority need not distract from my primary goal of reflecting on Jesus' attention. The councils can offer helpful starting points even if one does not grant their authority.⁵

1. Will and Action: The Claims of Chalcedon and Constantinople III in Focus

At first glance, the conciliar statements seem to say little about how Jesus attends. At no point do the councils tackle this question explicitly. Nevertheless, the councils occasionally weigh in on attention-adjacent concepts. A handful of statements in particular are potentially relevant to how Jesus attends. To limit the scope of inquiry, only this handful of statements are the focus of this article. These statements are drawn from the councils of Chalcedon and Constantinople III.⁶ To proceed, I start with a brief survey of conciliar claims about attention-adjacent concepts or potentially relevant statements. The statements presented will not all be discussed at further length, but nonetheless help form the basis for theological reflection. Then, I examine some of the theological background of these claims to illuminate them further.

The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) was called by the emperor Marcian in response to fracturing views on the person and nature of Christ (Tanner 1990, 75). Included with the statement of faith is the council's commendation of the venerable "*Tome of Leo*," written by Pope Leo I on the unity of Christ. For my purposes, some of the relevant Christological claims include that Jesus Christ is

the same truly God and truly man [θεὸν ἀληθῶς καὶ ἀνθρώπου ἴτη τον αὐτὸν;
Deum vere et hominem vere eundem].

the same consubstantial [ὁμοούσιον; consubstantialem] with us as regards his
humanity; like us in all respects except for sin.

a single person and a single subsistent being [εἰς ἓν πρόσωπον καὶ μίαν
ὑπόστασιν; in unam personam atque subsistentiam].

not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten
Son. (Tanner 1990, 1:86)

To these (and other) Christological statements, Leo's *Tome* is presented as further explanation. Leo insists on the oneness of the person but adds that the very oneness "must be understood in both natures" (Tanner 1990, 1:80). This union of the two natures in one person is known

⁵ Jordan Wessling discusses this prolegomenous issue further, specifically as it relates to Constantinople III. Even if Wessling is right that Protestant theologians should see Monothelism—and thus rejecting the conclusions of Constantinople III—as a viable option, this does not change my claim that these conciliar claims should at least be considered reliable statements about Christ. In unison with Wessling's quotation from Oliver Crisp, I think theologians should have a very good theological reason for rejecting conciliar claims. But Wessling's view is helpful to bring up here to drive home the point that even if you agree with Wessling, you can follow my reflections on orthodox Christology (Wessling 2013).

⁶ References, including Greek and when possible Latin, are from Tanner (1990).

as the *hypostatic union*. The Chalcedonian settlement thus insists on holding—sometimes in tension—one person in two natures, not unlike the Trinitarian formula of one God in three persons. While the natures remain distinct (“without confusion”), they also exist in unity (“without separation”). So the catholic faith confesses, says Leo, “neither the humanity is without true divinity nor the divinity without true humanity” (Tanner 1990, 1:81).

The council of Constantinople III (681 AD) builds upon the Chalcedonian settlement. The council, called in response to the Monothelite Controversy, begins by reaffirming the statements of Nicaea and Chalcedon (Tanner 1990, 1:124). Indeed, the statement of Constantinople III itself could be seen as further theological reflection or commentary on the implications of Chalcedon. After summarizing and quoting several passages from Chalcedon, Constantinople III adds several Christological claims relevant for my purposes, especially:

we proclaim equally [i.e., with Chalcedon] two natural volitions or wills [φυσικὰς θελήσεις ἤτοι θελήματα; naturales voluntates] in him and two natural principles of action [φυσικὰς ἐνεργείας; naturales operationes] which undergo no division, no change, no partition, no confusion, in accordance with the teaching of the holy fathers [at Chalcedon].

the two natural wills not in opposition . . . but his human will following, and not resisting or struggling, rather in fact subject to his divine and all powerful will.

For in the same way that his all holy and blameless animate flesh was not destroyed in being made divine but remained in its own limit and category, so his human will as well was destroyed by being made divine.

a divine principle of action and a human principle of action, according to the godly-speaking Leo, who says most clearly: “For each form does in a communion with the other that activity which it possesses as its own, the Word working that which is the Word’s and the body accomplishing the things that are the body’s.” (Tanner 1990, 1:126–29)⁷

Constantinople, like Chalcedon, walks the tightrope between one person and two natures, but it is more specific. In saying that Jesus has two wills and natural energies, the council effectively states that wills and energies—whatever they may be—go with natures, not with persons.⁸ To put it another way, a person has a will and an energy in virtue of having a nature with a will and energy.

Although the council offers no explicit answers for how Jesus attends, it does leave breadcrumbs that may lead us to an answer. “Will” and “energy” are not the same as attention, but they are attention-adjacent. Attention is often—usually, even—voluntary. Initially, this suggests that it is an act of the will. Attention is something you do. It is directed. Initially, this

⁷ The quotation is from Leo’s *Tome* (Tanner 1990, 79).

⁸ Tanner translates φυσικὰς ἐνεργείας as “principles of action,” but I will translate it “natural energy” or just “energy.” In a personal correspondence with David Bradshaw, he argued that “principles of action” is not wrong but misleading because it suggests ἐνεργεία connotes only a faculty and capacity. While it is a faculty or capacity, it is also an activity that manifests that faculty. Bradshaw has a forthcoming paper on this very matter. Following Bradshaw, I translate ἐνεργείας as simply “energies” or the singular “energy.”

suggests it is an activity of some kind. Before hastily determining that attention follows wills and energies, however, it is worth considering what the council means by “wills” or “energies.” Constantinople III does not extrapolate on these terms. But the theological context illuminates the language and logic of each.

As the Cappadocians are to Constantinople I and Cyril of Alexandria is to Chalcedon, Maximus the Confessor is to Constantinople III. That is to say: more than any other single theologian, Maximus’s influence and thought flows in and through the conciliar statement. Against his contemporaries’ enthusiasm for monotheilism (or one-will-ism), Maximus insisted that Christ has two wills. In *Opusculum* 6, he argues the conclusion that Christ has two wills follows from Chalcedonian Christology: “With the duality of his natures there are two wills (θελήσεις) and two operations (ἐνεργείαι) respective to the two natures” (Maximus the Confessor 2003, 174). Referring to Jesus’ cry “yet not my will, but yours be done” in the garden of Gethsemane, Maximus rejects as absurd the supposition that “not my will” comes from Jesus as divine, only-begotten Son since this would separate the wills of Father and Son. Maximus’s logic is thus Trinitarian: since Father and Son are one in substance, they share one will. Jesus thus has a divine will. But since he expresses separation of will in the garden, it must also be the case that he has another, non-divine will: a human will. This makes sense, too, given the tradition from Constantinople I that Jesus is “consubstantial with us as regards humanity.” Because Jesus shares in our human nature, so, too, he has a human will.

But Maximus stops short of saying Jesus’ human will is just like our own human will. Famously, Maximus distinguished between a “natural human will [θέλημα φυσική]” and “gnomic will [γνώμη].”⁹ As the name implies, the natural human will is natural to human nature and desires what is in accordance with nature, which is created good. The natural will is the faculty that governs our activity. Maximus uses γνώμη to discuss something like self-directed or deliberative will.¹⁰ Because of the fall, humans have “free will,” but our wills are only “free” in the sense that our choices can be directed against what is in accordance with our nature. Ironically, such a choice leads to bondage. This improper use of the will is an exercise of γνώμη. That does not mean γνώμη just is sin. Indeed, for Maximus, γνώμη plays an important role in spiritual progress (Blowers 2012, 46). Paul Blowers defines it as “freedom formed and leavened by experience in the face of the consequences of the fall” (Blowers 2012, 46). But Maximus avoided ascribing the gnomic will to Jesus Christ. In the polemical context of disputing with Phyrrius, Maximus distinguishes between the natural and gnomic will and insists the gnomic will is “beset by ignorance and doubt and ‘is pulled in opposite directions’” (Beeley 2017, 9). Christ cannot will in this way. Although Jesus Christ is a man, he is no “mere man” but a man “whose human existence is liberated and divinized by the hypostatic presence of his divine being” (Beeley 2017, 9). Beeley says in denying γνώμη to Christ, Maximus makes the case “that Christ’s human willing possesses a different moral quality from ours, rooted in his holy desire and his constant ability to perceive and choose the good; he is not denying the mechanics of willing as such” (Beeley 2017, 12). Christ does have a human will, then, but not one tainted by the effects of the fall.

Similar issues are at play with Constantinople III’s use of “energies [ἐνεργείας].” Chalcedon does not explicitly weigh in on Christ’s activity, but Leo’s *Tome* does nod in the direction later

⁹ The clearest text in which Maximus discusses this distinction is his *Disputation with Phyrrius*, found in PG 91.1032–1060.

¹⁰ Blowers and Beeley recognize the semantic range of γνώμη. It is not an easy word to nail down in the first place, and the ambiguity is heightened by Maximus’s creative employment of it. For more on the word, see Blowers (2012) and Beeley (2017).

taken by Constantinople III. In a controversial passage,¹¹ Leo writes, “The activity [*agii*] of each form is what is proper to it in communion with the other; that is, the Word performs [*operante*] what belongs to the Word, and the flesh accomplishes [*exequente*] what belongs to the flesh” (Tanner 1990, 1:79). While Leo stops short of explicitly naming “two energies” in Christ, the passage is suggestive. The council uses the word “ἐνεργείας” to describe of what Jesus has two. The word and its cognates have a long history in philosophy and theology, as demonstrated by David Bradshaw.¹² He argues *energeia* originates with Aristotle, but is fertile philosophical and theological ground for speaking about God in the Greek tradition. Most notably, perhaps, the Greek Christian tradition distinguishes between God’s *ousia* (substance or nature) and *energeia* (activity or operation) (Bradshaw 2008, 1, 153). That purportedly is a way to speak about God’s unknowability and knowability: God is knowable in his activities, but unknowable in his nature. Yet, Bradshaw hastens to add that this tradition is quick to connect the activities with God’s nature (Bradshaw 2008, 169–70). God’s activities are how we know *him*, not merely a set of events.

There are terminological and theological challenges with Constantinople’s use of ἐνεργείας, however. Beginning with Aristotle, *energeia*’s earliest meaning referred to “the exercise of a capacity” (Bradshaw 2008, 3). But the *energeiai* can also refer to discrete activities or actions. Does the council mean only to ascribe a capacity to act or actions themselves to Jesus? Further, Rowan Williams notes that because Jesus’ human nature is “hypostasized” in a divine way, it suggests Christ has a single *energeia* (Williams 2018, 102). “Maximus inherits from both Cyril of Alexandria and Pseudo-Dionysius,” says Williams, “language about a single ‘theandric’ *energeia* in Jesus” (Williams 2018, 103). This theological question raises the terminological issue, too. Williams insists we must distinguish between the “moving principle” of an action and “what results from this” (Williams 2018, 103). He solves the theological challenge with this distinction, when he concludes: “In Christ we recognize a single moving principle, the divine hypostasis, who brings about activity that is divine and activity that is human” (Williams 2018, 103).

Ian A. McFarland also recognizes the dilemma raised by *energeia* (McFarland 2019, 90–91). The hypostasis, he argues, is one thing that subsists in two natures. Because of this, he concludes that “there is no human activity of Jesus that is not also divine” (McFarland 2019, 90). Nodding toward the Greek theological use of *energeia*, McFarland recognizes what Bradshaw insists: activity corresponds to nature. He gives the analogy that energies are symptoms of nature. Because of this, each nature has its own, distinct *energeia*. Since Christ has two natures, he has “two natural energies.” Like Williams, McFarland seeks to follow the conciliar tradition by walking the narrow path between Nestorianism and Eutychianism. It requires, on the one hand, the insistence that Jesus acts as one, but also that he has two ways of acting. The orthodox way to articulate what Constantinople III meant by ἐνεργείας, then, could be something like this: Jesus Christ has *two ways or means of expressing activity* (divine and human). This need not require us to say that Christ includes two actors, but it recognizes the multiplicity of action inherent in two natures.

In stating that Christ has two wills and energies, Constantinople III offers some guidance on Christ’s psychological life. Despite reaffirming Chalcedon, the council has no problems with one person having two wills or energies, even if that strays far from the norm. But can the same be same for attention?

¹¹ See Rowan Williams’s brief discussion of the passage (Williams 2018, 86).

¹² While discussing Bradshaw, I follow his pattern of transliteration (Bradshaw 2008, xi).

2. Attention, Human and Divine

How does attention fit into this picture of orthodox Christology? To answer this question well, we must say more about what it means for God and man to attend. Pointing to an older divergence between William James and F. H. Bradley, Christopher Mole distinguishes between two approaches to attention: attention as a “process-first” or “adverbial” phenomenon (Mole 2011, 26). On James’ view, attention is a process; whatever perceptual or cognitive abilities attention involves, it is a kind of process we do (process-first). Bradley complained that too many examples of attention do not involve the same, underlying process, so thinking of attention as a process is misguided. In its place, he advocated an “adverbial” understanding. Mole says the key difference is the “explanatory priority” of the questions “What is x ?” and “What is it for something to be done x -ishly?” (Mole 2011, 25–26).¹³ Following Bradley, Mole argues attention is not a singular process we direct in different ways but is a *way* of doing something that potentially makes use of several different resources and even different kinds of resources (Mole 2011, 26).

Mole develops an adverbialist view he calls “cognitive unison” (Mole 2011, 51). On Mole’s telling, attention involves cognitive resources, and we attend when those resources are in sufficient “unison” with one another. Lest he fall back into a process-first view, Mole is careful not to specify which cognitive resources are involved. Rather, the sufficient condition for attention is directing all resources necessary for that task in service of that task.¹⁴ Listening to Bach requires different cognitive resources than riding a unicycle or talking with your uncle about politics. If you have cognitive unison toward any of these tasks, it means you are not directing some cognitive resource that would be useful for the task at hand elsewhere. In short, on Mole’s view one attends when one directs a set of resources to a task and, importantly, does not direct resources useful to that task elsewhere. You cannot listen to Bach well if you are also listening to the Beatles.

We need not adopt Mole’s account in its entirety for it to direct our understanding of attention. While I have some misgivings about some specifics of Mole’s account (e.g., even if it is usually so, is attention always “cognitive?”), he is on the right track, I think. Attention is not a clear, repeatable cognitive process—which could explain why psychologists and neuroscientists find attention difficult to study—but rather a *way* certain resources are employed. Namely, it is a way of employing resources in a kind of union so that we are not applying necessary resources elsewhere. I shall adopt an adverbialist-union perspective on attention for the purposes of the paper. Synthesizing it with the base understanding from the introduction of this paper, I shall understand attention as a way of doing something (though

¹³ Mole gives the examples “combustion” and “haste.” To explain combustion, we would start with the question “What is combustion?” After providing a satisfying definition, we can then discuss what it means for something to be done “combustively.” Mole calls combustion a process-first phenomenon: we define the process before giving examples. For haste, however, the reverse is true. To do something in haste is not to ignite any particular process or specific action that holds for all examples of haste. Rather, to explain haste, the explanatory priority is with the question “What is it for something to be done hastily?” The process of doing something hastily depends entirely on the thing one does. Mole calls haste an adverbial phenomenon: we define the process through the examples.

¹⁴ More formally:

“Let α be an agent, let τ be some task that the agent is performing, and call the set of cognitive resources that α can, with understanding, bring to bear in the service to τ , τ ’s “background set.”

α ’s performance of τ displays cognitive unison if and only if the resources in τ ’s background set are not occupied with activity that does not serve τ ” (Mole 2011, 51).

it sometimes involuntary) informed or directed by the mind (though it may involve more than the mind) with the effect of centering on some object(s).

We can now return to conciliar Christology to see whether it holds the keys for unlocking how Jesus attends. The conciliar approach for concepts like “will” and “energy” was to determine whether will or energy is coupled with person or nature. On Chalcedonian Christology, a determination on whether x goes with persons or natures effectively determines how many x 's Jesus has. Constantinople III determined wills and energies go with natures, therefore concluding that Jesus has two wills and energies. We could take the same approach to determine how many attentions Jesus has. But we have more information than Constantinople III—namely, the statement of Constantinople III. Instead of sorting of how attention relates to person or nature, we could also determine how attention relates to will or energy. For example, if attention is a product of will and/or energy, then it should follow that Jesus has two attentions on orthodox Christology. Initially, this indeed seems like a good fit: attention is best categorized as a kind of activity because it is something we do and attention is typically voluntary or directed by the will. When I listen to *The Who* or read *The Hobbit*, I make intentional decisions and do something. If this is right, it implies attention is typically an act of the will or a product of my will. We could conclude, then, that Jesus Christ has two attentions because he has two wills and energies.

There are some problems with this conclusion, however. First, the formulation “Jesus has two attentions” is clunky, not least because attention is not, strictly speaking, something you “have.” On the adverbialist view, attention is a way of doing something. The claim “Jesus has two attentions” could be misleading. But the problem is easily avoided because it is semantic. We could say “Jesus has two attentions” simply means “Jesus attends in two discrete ways.” Accordingly, we can distinguish between human-attention and divine-attention. Simply, human-attention is simply a human way of attending, while divine-attention is a divine way of attending. More will be said later about this distinction, but all we need to grant it as a valid distinction is the assumption that the way humans attend is different than the way God attends, whatever that difference may be.

A second problem with the conclusion “Jesus has two attentions” is it arguably implies Jesus has two minds or two consciousnesses. We need not reduce attention to mere consciousness or restrict it to cognitive abilities to see attention is closely linked—and perhaps inseparable from—our mind or consciousness. Two distinct ways of attending at least *suggests*, if not entails, two minds or consciousnesses. Of course, this is only a “problem” if you think Jesus does *not* have two minds or consciousnesses. On this issue, there are no clear conciliar statements one way or the other. While the claim that Jesus has two wills or energies may offer evidence in the direction that Jesus has two minds, for example, the councils are also concerned with preserving unity in Christ. For his part, Rowan Williams expresses concern about “ascribing a duality of finite agencies to Christ,” specifically “whether we should ascribe two consciousnesses” to Jesus (Williams 2016).¹⁵ He doubts whether there are “any terminological equivalents to that in the early Christian period” and adds, “Patristic writers don’t think in terms of ‘consciousness’ as we do.” This is a valid concern, at least with respect to “consciousness” (perhaps less so with “mind”). Williams is surely right that the Patristic writers do not have “consciousness” in mind in the same way we think about “consciousness” today. Of course, that the Patristic writers did not have such a view in mind, or terminological equivalents, does not mean it is impermissible to talk in this way. But, to Williams’s point, it

¹⁵ Relevant and quoted portions of the lecture are between 2:30–4:30 in the lecture.

should give us pause and direct us away from saying the conciliar or Patristic claims imply two minds or consciousnesses.

Be that as it may, the two minds or consciousness approach has some advantages. Thomas V. Morris defends a “two minds” view, which he says implies “two ranges of consciousness (and, analogously, the two noetic structures encompassing them)” (Morris 2001, 102–3).¹⁶ That the Patristic writers did not speak of two minds or consciousnesses, especially in the way we typically understand them today, is true, but there is Patristic reasoning that may nonetheless point one in that direction. Apart from the conciliar claims of two wills and energies, we could point to Gregory of Nazianzus’s famous maxim “the unassumed is the unhealed” (Nazianzus 2002, 158). This maxim has proved of lasting value to Christology, seemingly taking on near-conciliar status in theological circles. The logic of the councils certainly supports the maxim, as orthodox Patristic continually insists Christ must assume *every part of human nature*. If we add the premise that a human mind is part of human nature, then we conclude Christ has a human mind. We can also run the argument in favor of divinity: if there is a divine mind (however analogously understood), then Christ has a divine mind. If we grant all this, the upshot is that Jesus has two minds: one human, one divine. On the view that Christ has two minds, it is much easier to imagine that Christ has two ways of attending: human-attention and divine-attention.¹⁷

For the time being, we can allow the worries about two attentions simmer in the background. Because we all exhibit human-attention—or a human way of attending to things or people—we can imagine what it is like for Jesus to exhibit human-attention. Since the author of Hebrews emphatically says Jesus is human “in every way” (Hebrews 2:17), we can safely assume the phenomenological experience of “attention” shares similarities with our own. But what of divine-attention? Before ascribing divine-attention to Jesus, it is worth asking *what* we are ascribing to him. The first, essential thing to note is that whatever divine-attention is, it is surely different than human-attention. One obvious reason for this is human-directed is often directed by human, physical senses (sight, smell, hearing, etc.). Apart from the incarnate Christ, God does not have those physical senses in the way humans do. Extending the point further, there is the broader theological concern of projecting human characteristics onto God. While this, too, can lead us into controversial theological waters, we should hold that God is transcendent. God is a person, but not in the same way we are persons. For this reason, we should be hesitant to ascribe to God any unrevealed, human attribute. Nonetheless, it does not seem to transgress divine transcendence to say that God attends to things or people. In Scripture, God is described as paying attention, thinking, having conversations, listening, and many other actions we would say *require* attention. So we can say that there is such a thing as divine-attention. But we must let divine-attention reflect whatever qualitative difference necessary to account for divine transcendence.

A qualitative difference between God and persons, however, does not mean there is not also a quantitative difference. For example, we should say that God’s goodness is different from our own in two ways. It is different *qualitatively*, because God’s relationship to “goodness” is not the same as any human’s relationship to “goodness.” But God’s goodness is also different *quantitatively* because God’s goodness is also greater and more expansive than our own. Analogously, while there may be a qualitative difference in divine-attention and human-

¹⁶ A defense of the “two minds view” appears throughout Morris’s book.

¹⁷ Of course, these initial ruminations on two-minds hardly settle the matter. There are other concerns with a two minds view, too, including the difficulties it raises with securing the orthodox claim that Jesus is one person. This discussion is only meant to introduce some possible implications of the view that Jesus has two attentions.

attention, there may also be a quantitative difference. What might this mean for divine-attention? One starting point is what Linda Zagzebski calls the divine attribute “omnisubjectivity” (Zagzebski 2013; 2016). As she defines it, “subjectivity is consciousness as it is experienced by the individual subject” (Zagzebski 2016, 435). For example, my experience of typing this sentence on my computer is something I experience that you cannot precisely replicate. But Zagzebski thinks classical divine attributes like omniscience and omnipresence imply what she calls “omnisubjectivity,” or “the property of consciously grasping with perfect accuracy and completeness every conscious state of every creature from that creature’s own perspective, a perspective that is unique” (Zagzebski 2016, 435). On this view, God not only knows what the experience of typing on a computer is like in general, but he also knows with precision what *my* experience of typing this sentence (and the earlier one) on my computer is like.

What might omnisubjectivity tell us about divine-attention? Although subjective experience is clearly related to attention in some way, it seems wrong to conflate the two. After all, attending to something specific is different from a mere subjective experience of it. Omnisubjectivity says God knows what my experience of attending to the computer is like, but it does not necessarily imply God attends to the computer with me. Nonetheless, it does not seem like a stretch from omnisubjectivity (and omniscience and omnipresence) to say God not only knows what my experience of attending to the computer is like, but God is also attending to my computer with me. In our typical discourse about God, anyway, we seem to assume something like this: God is attending to everything, everyone, everywhere, all the time, all at once. Following Zagzebski’s pattern for omnisubjectivity, we can call this *omniattention*: *the property of consciously attending with perfect accuracy and completeness to everything and everyone all at once*. On Mole’s adverbialist-union view, this means God can direct the necessary resources to center on all objects at the same time. The experience of omniattention is extremely difficult to imagine since our cognitive resources are limited and, generally, unable to “multitask”—or attend to even two objects at once (Chabris and Simons 2009, 7).¹⁸ But if our attention-directing resources were unlimited, then we might imagine it. Suppose, for example, humans had (like my mother) eyes in the back of our head, too. Standing in an art museum, we might look at two paintings simultaneously. Without our limitations, plausibly God can attend to all the paintings of the world (and everything else). Indeed, many Christians seem to assume something like omniattention—who among us imagines getting away with a sin while God is distracted with something else? But, minimally, omniattention gives us one plausible feature of divine-attention which is not a feature of human-attention.

3. Hypostatic Attention: Two Attentions, Too?

With some basic understandings of human-attention and divine-attention in mind, we can turn to consider what it means for Jesus Christ to attend in the hypostatic union. Because there are no clear Scriptural or conciliar statements on the matter, we are left to read between the lines on what is clear and assess available options. Accordingly, I present models that represent

¹⁸ Another benefit of an adverbialist approach is that it helps explain examples of attending to two things at once. Plausibly, I can ride my bike and listen to a podcast simultaneously because each task requires different resources. I am not directing resources necessary for one task elsewhere. Chabris and Simons are right, then, that attention is a “zero-sum game,” but only when the resources necessary for two tasks are the same (Chabris and Simons 2009, 7).

possible options for thinking about Jesus' attention. Two options emerge as a starting place: the Attentions-with-Natures Model or Attentions-with-Persons Model. After articulating what each model includes, I assess some strengths and weaknesses with each.

The Attentions-with-Natures Model says Jesus Christ exhibits two attentions: human-attention and divine-attention. Parallel with Constantinople III's declarations on wills and energies, on this model attentions go with natures (hence the name). Simply, because Jesus has two natures, it follows that Jesus exhibits both human-attention and divine-attention. Following the Chalcedonian pattern of Christ's two natures, we can add that Jesus' two attentions exist "without confusion or separation." On this model, one person simultaneously taps into two ways of attending. To see how this works, consider the story of the woman at the well (John 4) through the lens of a Two Attentions Claim:

Two Attentions Claim: according to his human nature, Jesus attends to the woman at the well and her only; according to his divine nature, Jesus attends to the woman at the well and everything else in the world simultaneously.

What should we make of the Two Attentions Claim? The strengths are that it follows conciliar logic. The claim is relatively simple and straightforward, too. But there are a few worries about the claim. First, we might have what I call the Subjective Worry: the model is so foreign to how we think about attention that we literally cannot imagine what the subjective experience is like. What is the subjective experience of one person exhibiting two attentions? What does it mean to attend, for example, to my computer *and* everything else in the universe? If we lean into this worry, then the Attentions-with-Natures model teeters on incoherence. The worry need not be a nail in the coffin of this model either, however. After all, the psychology of Jesus is impossible for us to imagine regardless of what view we hold. But the Subjective Worry perhaps especially attaches to this model. Second, we might have the Kenotic Worry. Minimally, Kenotic Christology emphasizes the way Christ "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped" and so "made himself nothing" and "humbled himself" (Philippians 2:6–8). Outside of Philippians 2, perhaps the *locus classicus* of Kenotic Christology is Jesus saying the Son does not know the hour of his return, but only the Father knows (Matthew 24:36). The implication appears to be that the incarnate Christ is not omniscient in the same way as the Father, such that Jesus either temporarily surrenders his omniscience or does not tap into it while on earth. The Kenotic Worry is that the Two Attentions Claim does not sufficiently account for this theme in Scripture. The Attentions-with-Natures Model could make the move that omniscience does and say Christ temporarily surrenders divine-attention or does not always tap into it while on earth. But this route would include rejecting the Two Attentions Claim.

A second model is the Attentions-with-Persons Model. On this model, Jesus exhibits only one attention because he is one person. There are several motivations for this model. For one, it helps preserve a psychological unity many think important to preserving one person. It aims at a subjective unity in the person of Christ. But if Jesus has only one stream of attention, a question arises: which one? Assuming we grant the distinction between human-attention and divine-attention, we admit two different ways of attending to things or people. Which way does Jesus attend? As a subset of the Attentions-with-Persons Model, let's look at two further iterations of this model: the Human-Attention-Only Model and the Divine-Attention-Only Model.

The Human-Attention-Only Model says the incarnate Christ only exhibits human-attention. In other words, the subjective experience of attending for the human Christ is

basically like our own, human experience of attending. That does not mean Jesus' way of attending is identical to our own. It could be, for example, uniquely sanctified such that it may be more accurate to call it human-attention-without-the-stain-of-sin. Nevertheless, it remains a human way of attending. Even if the subjective experience were different from our own, it could not be altogether strange for us. The main problem with this model, however, is that it is a subject of the Attention-with-Persons model, so attentions go *with persons*. Jesus Christ is, strictly speaking, a divine person who assumes a human nature and *not a human person*. If that initially sounds heretical, consider the following orthodox claims: the Trinity is one God in *three persons*; the second *person* of the Trinity (the Son) became flesh; Jesus Christ is *one person* in two natures. If we accept these three claims, the one person in Jesus Christ must be the second person of the Trinity who is a divine person. The Trinity does not add a person at the Incarnation. Orthodox Christology must accept that Jesus is a divine person. The Human-Attention-Only Model says attention goes with persons, but then says a divine person only exhibits human attention. Perhaps there are ways to save the Human-Attention-Only view, but initially this seems like a death blow.

The Divine-Attention-Only Model takes the inverse of the Human-Attention-Only Model: on this model, the incarnate Christ exhibits only divine-attention and not human-attention. That is, Christ's subjective experience of attending is basically like his experience of attending as God, incarnate or not. An advantage to this view is it preserves the claim that Jesus is one, divine person. As a divine person, he must exhibit divine-attention. While this preserves the unity of the second person of the Trinity, it carries with it the rather odd consequence that Christ's attention is wholly unchanged before or after the Incarnation. But does the incarnate Christ not see? Does he not hear words? Insofar as the human Jesus uses his human senses to attend to the woman at the well—which seems like rather intuitive and uncontroversial claim—then it will not do to say Christ's way of attending does not change at the Incarnation.

More could be said about any of these models, with more details, strengths, and weaknesses added. But the Attentions-with-Persons, in any of its forms, seems untenable given the various tenets of orthodoxy Christology. Then are we left with the Attentions-with-Natures Mode? Not necessarily. Another plausible model worth considering is the Theandric-Attention Model. The Theandric-Attention Model rejects the premise of the question of whether attentions go with natures or persons. Instead, it says Jesus has a unique way of attending: *theandric attention*. Theandric attention borrows features from human-attention and divine-attention without being identical to either. This is attention *sui generis*. Jesus' attention is clearly like human-attention in some ways, but unlike human-attention in others; likewise, Jesus' attention is like divine-attention in some ways, but unlike divine-attention in others. An initial reason to prefer the Theandric-Attention Model is it avoids the Christological problems raised by locating attention with the Attentions-with-Natures and Attentions-with-Persons models.

However, the Theandric-Attention Model raises its own worries. An initial worry is it could transgress Chalcedonian Christology. As "theandric," it implies a union without separation but *with* confusion. It implies, in other words, a "mixture"—language deemed out of bounds for orthodox Christological language on Christ's natures—in the way Jesus attends. But this is not as troubling a worry as it may initially seem. Attention is simply a way of doing something, after all, and assumes no substantive metaphysical claims about Jesus' person or natures. While Jesus' *natures* should not be confused, he eats, breaths, and lives as *both* God and man. In other words, he acts as both God and man. This assumption is very much in step with the conciliar statements. Surrounding the statements themselves, orthodox defenses of

the claims are quite comfortable to see the various aspects of Christ's life through a theandric lens. In his *Tome*, for example, Leo argues that "both the lowliness of the man and the grandeur of divinity are in mutual relation" (Tanner 1990, 1:79). Glossing this, Leo adds, "The activity [*agiti*] of each form is what is proper to it *in communion with the other*" (Tanner 1990, 1:79). Because of Christ's unity in one person, the two natures are not mixed or fused into one, but neither are they separated. As a hypostatic *union*, the one divine person in two natures displays a uniquely divine way of being human as well as a uniquely human way of being divine. In receiving the "one person, two natures" formula from Chalcedon, it is tempting to see three things: one *hypostasis*, to use precise language, and two natures. But the one person, or *hypostasis*, is not that which links the two natures or any "thing" at all apart from the natures.¹⁹ Jesus is a human, yes, but a properly divinized human.

We see the same logic extended in Maximus's claim that Jesus has two wills: two wills, yes, says Maximus, but not a *gnomic* will. Just because Jesus is human, like us in every way except for sin, does not mean we can project our experience onto him (Hebrews 4:15). Whatever it means for Jesus to be human without sin can be left aside. The point is, rather, that Jesus is a human without sin and so a different kind of human than we are. This is arguably Paul's point in Romans 5:12–21, where Paul juxtaposes Adam and Jesus. Both are "one man," but because of who they are and what they did, both represent *different ways of being human*. If Jesus were a human like us *full stop*, he would hardly be of any help. Since Jesus is a human hypostatically united to divinity, we have hope of salvation. In the Incarnation, the divine meets the human to divinize it, to paraphrase much Patristic theology.

Jesus' "way of living," however understood, is neither human-only, divine-only, nor two separate ways of living corresponding to each nature, but theandric: he is the God-man whose one life includes, fully and truly, both divinity and humanity. We might think, by adopting a thoroughgoing partitive exegesis, some things we read in the gospels are properly said only of Jesus' human nature, but we ought not deny that when Jesus acts he acts as God *and* man. Analogously, suppose we asked, "Does Jesus heal people as God or as man?" Even though we could plausibly distinguish between human-healing and divine-healing, neither is a sufficient answer to the question. Nor would it be right to insist that Jesus perform two, discrete healing acts. Rather, Jesus' miracles—like all of his life—are a product of his theandric life. Ascribing theandric attention to Jesus, then, need not transgress conciliar boundaries.

Another worry about Theandric Attention is it becomes very difficult to imagine what the experience includes.²⁰ Whereas we have a good idea of what human-attention is like (since we all use it) and some features of divine-attention (like omniattention), we have no idea what Theandric Attention is like or what it entails. Further, surely whatever model we adopt, Jesus' attention will be different than merely human-attention or divine-attention. Mole's adverbialist-union view might help us here. To say how Jesus attends on Theandric Attention, we do not need details for a specific process, but rather some plausible features of the *way* Jesus attends. Like other humans, Jesus surely uses his human senses (seeing, hearing, etc.) to attend to the world around him. For this reason alone, divine-attention is an insufficient way to think about Christ's attention. But since Jesus' attention is *theandric* and not merely human, we can add his senses are divinized in certain ways. It is difficult to say what this might mean,

¹⁹ McFarland is helpful: "It is useful to note once again that the hypostasis is not some sort of third thing that links the natures by standing above, behind, or between them. Indeed, the hypostasis is not any kind of 'thing' at all apart from the natures, but just the particular one who subsists in and as the natures, so that, in the words of John of Damascus, 'the two natures are one Christ, and the one Christ is two natures'" (McFarland 2019, 90).

²⁰ Thanks to comments from an anonymous reviewer on this point.

but we might think, for instance, Jesus' senses (not being stained with sin like our own) are more reliable or the sensory information he receives is superior to our own. Perhaps, too, Jesus can perceive more with his senses than we can, like how the movement of a face might communicate an emotion otherwise invisible to the merely human eye. Another plausible feature of Theandric Attention is that Jesus' attention is more virtuous than our own. Following a philosophical stream which seeks to demonstrate how attention is morally relevant (e.g., Murdoch 2011; Weil 2016), we can say not only that Jesus attends to what is virtuous but also that *how* he attends is virtuous. When Jesus listens to a person, he attends to them fully, not given to distractions like we are. He attends to them in humility as other and, in doing so, exemplifies a kind of self-sacrificial attention. These are only plausible examples of the experience of Theandric Attention, of which we can only imperfectly imagine. It is true that other accounts of Jesus' attention will say Jesus' attention is neither merely human-attention or divine-attention, but in my view that lends a kind of intuitive plausibility to Theandric Attention. It feels wrong to say that Jesus' attention is merely one or the other (or both), so the Theandric-Attention Model seems to make good sense of how we intuitively imagine Jesus attends. This way of attending, even if underdeveloped, is, I think, a promising start for thinking about attention well.

4. Conclusion

We began with a question: How does Jesus pay attention? The goal of this article was to explore an answer to that question. The purpose of this exploration was not mere speculation for the sake of speculation but sprouted from the supposition that how Jesus attends is relevant to how we attend. The exploration of how Jesus attends began with conciliar Christological claims, especially those of Chalcedon and Constantinople III. After surveying some potentially relevant claims for how Jesus attends, I further investigated the conciliar use of "will" and "energy." These words initially seem intricately related to attention, so they are a good place to start. From there, I considered the differences between human and divine attention. In conversation with Zagzebski's claim that God has omniattention, I argued that it is plausible that God has omniattention, too. More than an idle claim about God, omniattention illuminates an important difference between human-attention and divine-attention that could help determine whether Jesus has either human-attention, divine-attention, or both. The final section proposed different models for thinking about Jesus' attention. The Attention-with-Nature Model says, in the mold of Constantinople III's claims about will and energy, attention is the kind of thing that goes with a nature, so Jesus has two ways of attending. The Attention-with-Persons Model says attention is the kind of thing that goes with a person, so Jesus has one way of attending. But, in either the Human-Only or Divine-Only form, the Attention-with-Persons Model runs into major Christological problems. Despite some worries, this initially makes the Attentions-with-Natures Model more plausible. But I also proposed a Theandric-Attention Model on which Jesus has one attention, but a unique attention that integrates human ways of attending and divine ways of attending. This, I argued, makes better sense with both orthodox Christology and psychological claims about the nature of attention.

A final worry about Theandric Attention is it undercuts the motivation for such work in the first place. After all, if Jesus attends by Theandric Attention and his way of attending is, in fact, unique, how is it relevant to human attending after all? My conviction, however, is

Theandric Attention supports this motivation rather than undercuts it. Theandric Attention invites us to see our attention as something which is not strictly and solely *ours*. Christian believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit, after all, should exhibit a distinct way of attending. Though we certainly exhibit, at present, something like “Theandric Attention” in an incomplete and imperfect way, Theandric Attention is a promising vision for the kind of attention we should pursue—namely, one in which our human ways of attending are united with God’s ways of attending through the indwelling of God’s Spirit. But that, unfortunately, must be the subject of a later article. I hope my answer to the question of how Jesus attends is, if nothing else, an invitation to further work on how Jesus attends and why it matters.

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