Cyril, Athanasius, and Pawl on the Human Mental Life of Christ

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Abstract: Timothy Pawl has claimed that various conciliar and patristic texts attribute thinking, willing, suffering, and other human mental states to Christ's human nature. This article challenges this claim, focusing in particular on the writings of Saints Cyril and Athanasius of Alexandria. I argue that Cyril and Athanasius do not in fact attribute thinking, willing, or any other mental states to Christ's human nature. Rather, they imply that there is only one individual who thinks Christ's human thoughts, feels his human pain, speaks his human words, etc. This one individual is not Christ's human nature but Christ himself, the incarnate divine person. I conclude by highlighting the significance of this historical point for contemporary discussions of the Incarnation in analytic theology and philosophy of religion.

1. Introduction: Pawl's Claims Concerning the Human Mental Life of Christ

The doctrinal statements of the Church's first seven ecumenical councils contain a set of teachings widely accepted by Christians, both today and throughout the Church's history. A significant portion of these teachings concern the Incarnation, that is, the distinctively Christian claim that one of the three persons comprising the Divine Trinity, while retaining his essential divine nature and remaining God, contingently assumed a human nature and thereby became a human being. As the Council of Chalcedon puts it in its influential statement of faith,

> One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, [was] made known in two natures which are unconfused, unchanged, undivided, unseparated, with the difference of the natures being in no way removed on account of the union but rather what is proper to each nature is preserved and comes together in one person and one hypostasis, not parted or divided in two persons, but in one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.[1]

Various conciliar texts stipulate further that, in becoming incarnate as a human being, the Word did not just acquire various human properties; he also assumed a human body and soul, or, to use the oft-repeated words of St. Cyril of Alexandria, "flesh enlivened by a rational soul."[2] Adopting terminology first introduced by Timothy Pawl (2016, 1), let us call

[1] My translation, based on the Latin and Greek texts in Tanner (1990, 86).

[2] Cyril makes this claim—that the Word "united to himself hypostatically flesh enlivened by a rational soul"—in his *Second Letter to Nestorius*, which was read and endorsed at the Council of Ephesus (Tanner 1990, 41 and 44). Hence, it is reasonably regarded as part of the content of the teachings of Conciliar Christology. The claim that

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the conjunction of the first seven ecumenical councils' teachings concerning the Incarnation "Conciliar Christology."

In this article, I aim to explore what Conciliar Christology, and the patristic authors whose writings deeply influenced it, had to say about the human mental life of Christ. In particular, I aim to address the following question: Did the councils and/or patristic authors at issue claim or imply that Christ's assumed human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul") was itself a thing that could think, will, sense, desire, decide, and, in general, do all the things that human persons can do? If they did claim or imply this, this would be a striking fact, since they also clearly maintain that the one and only person involved in the Incarnation is the Word or Christ himself, not his human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul"). Given this, if these fathers did accept that Christ's human nature could do the above things, they would be committed to the view that something, viz., Christ's human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul"), could be a thing that can do all the things that a human person can do—think, will, sense, desire, decide, etc.—and yet not be a person.

Timothy Pawl, a leading contributor to contemporary analytic discussions of the Incarnation and one of the foremost expositors of the contents of Conciliar Christology, claims that the relevant councils and patristic authors *are* in fact committed to such a view. According to Pawl, these church fathers did not use the term "person" in a "psychological sense" when they insisted, in passages like the one from Chalcedon quoted above, that all the human and divine properties "come together in one person and one hypostasis, not parted or divided in two persons." Pawl explains,

> One might understand the psychological sense of 'person' as follows (Carlson 2012, 204): "An individual who manifests the developed traits and abilities associated with human, personal life (e.g. self-awareness, deliberate choice and action)." . . . On the view of natures I affirm in the following section [a view that Pawl claims accurately represents the teachings of Conciliar Christology], Christ's human nature counts as something that is individual and has the traits associated with human, personal life, but it fails to count as a supposit [and hence as a "person" in the sense at issue for the relevant conciliar and patristic authors]. (2016, 33)

Elsewhere, Pawl expresses the same sort of claim this way: "Suppose one defines 'person' . . . to mean 'something with the ability to perform some rational activities,' where rational activities might include acts of intellection or rational desire. In such a case, then, the definition of 'person' is apt of the (concrete) human nature of Christ, according to Conciliar Christology" (Pawl 2016, 214). In yet another place, when discussing the work of Andrew Loke, Pawl observes that Loke (2013, 596) defines a person as "a subject with various traits such as (moral) agency, reason or rationality, language or the cognitive skills language may support (such as intentionality and self-consciousness), and ability to enter into suitable relationship with other persons"; Pawl then goes on to write that, "on Conciliar Christology, the human nature of Christ . . . fulfills the definition of 'person' that Loke is employing" (Pawl 2016, 227).[3]

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the Word took on "flesh enlivened by a rational soul" is also made in passing by the Second Council of Constantinople (Tanner 1990, 115). A less clear example of the claim can also be found in the doctrinal statement of the Council of Chalcedon, which says that Christ was "truly God and truly a man, of a rational soul and body" (Tanner 1990, 127).

[3] See also Pawl (2016, 222 and 225; 2019, 22; and 2020, 7, 5, 19, and 29).

Pawl is not the only scholar to make such claims. Richard Cross, for example, makes a similar claim about what he calls "orthodox" Christology when he writes,

> Any orthodox Christology would have to accept some form of this distinction . . . such that it would be true to state that the ultimate metaphysical subject of characteristics [i.e., the hypostasis or person] cannot be simply identified with the psychological centre of rational and sensitive experience . . . to talk of a psychological centre of consciousness is, in an orthodox Christology, to talk of what pertains to nature, not to person. (Cross 1989, 250–51)[4]

In a similar vein, Patrick Toner (2014, 77 and 92) claims that the church fathers who formulated the conciliar doctrine of the Incarnation did not accept what he calls "The Personhood Intuition." In particular, according to Toner, these authors rejected the "intuition" that there is a set of mental powers such that anything which has that set of mental powers is a person. This is evident, Toner claims, from the fact the authors in question held that Christ's human nature itself had all the psychological powers of an ordinary human person and yet was not a person.

Of these three authors, Pawl provides the most extensive discussion of the textual evidence he thinks supports these assertions about the orthodox or conciliar teaching concerning the Incarnation. Pawl's most complete statement of this evidence occurs in the following passage from his 2016 book, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, which is worth quoting in full:

> I have heard more than once in conversation that the Christology I put forward here has a "hint" of Nestorianism. . . . The argument seems to go as follows. On the view I offer, the assumed concrete human nature is too robust. It has too many predicates apt of it; it is too ontologically meaty. On my view, that assumed human nature can aptly be said to hang on a cross. It can aptly be said to think, or will, or do things. But that is simply too much doing for a nature. Things that think, will, and do are *persons*, the objection continues. And so, since I claim that CHN thinks, wills, and does, I must think that it, too, is a person. But then there are two persons in my account of the incarnation, which is one too many. . . .
>
> In response, I assert of CHN no more than the conciliar texts themselves do. For they say . . . in what I called the Leonine argument for concrete natures, that the human nature hangs on the cross, and the human nature was pierced (Tanner 1990, 80). And as Leo says in the same place, "it does not belong to the same nature to say *I and the Father are one*, and to say *The Father is greater than I*." In addition . . . 3rd Constantinople claims clearly that the natures will, and that the wills are of the natures. So if claiming that a nature can will, or say, or hang, or be pierced is sufficient to be a Nestorian, then St Leo the Great was a Nestorian, along with the fathers at Chalcedon who affirmed that St Peter spoke through Leo, and all the fathers at all the later councils who reaffirmed the acceptance of the Tome. Moreover, there is good

[4] See also Cross (2002, 23, 183–84, and 220) and Cross (2019, 13–14).

> evidence for thinking that Cyril, too, took the natures to be able to be predicated by these terms. Christopher Bellitto (2002, 24) writes, presenting Cyril's thought:
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> > Jesus' human nature suffered because it is human and therefore capable of suffering; his divine nature did not suffer because it could not suffer.
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> And Relton (1917, 56) says that Cyril
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> > assign[ed] to His human nature the hunger, the thirst, the suffering, the dying: in short all those creaturely vicissitudes so characteristic of a distinctively human, so seemingly derogatory to the distinctively Divine, experience.
>
> Cyril, then, too, would be a Nestorian if merely claiming that these human predicates are apt of both the nature and the person is sufficient for being a Nestorian. (Athanasius, likewise, applies similar predicates to the human nature, as Khaled Anatolios (2004, 70–2, 140) showcases.). (Pawl 2016, 228–29)[5]

In his subsequent 2019 book, *In Defense of Extended Conciliar Christology*, Pawl repeats a similar refrain concerning these conciliar and patristic authors:

> The councils predicate what we might think of as *physical* predicates, as when Leo, in his Tome to Flavian included in the Council of Chalcedon, predicates of the human nature that it hangs and was pierced. They predicate *intellectual* predicates of the human nature, as when the same Leo says that the human nature says "the Father is greater than I." They predicate *volitional* predicates of the human nature of Christ in the Exposition of faith from the Third Council of Constantinople, which says of the human nature that it wills.
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> Such predication of physical, intellectual, or volitional predicates to the assumed human nature of Christ is common in non-conciliar writings of church fathers central to the earliest councils, for instance Athanasius (Anatolios 2004, 70–2, 140; Riches 2016, 44), Cyril of Alexandria (Bellitto 2002, 24; Relton 1917, 56; Riches 2016, 53), Pope Leo the Great (Neil 2009, 110) and Maximus the Confessor (Riches 2016, 138–9). (Pawl 2019, 28)

In a recent article (Hauser 2020), however, I have to some extent challenged these contentions. Concerning Leo's *Tome* and the doctrinal statement of the Third Council of Constantinople in particular, I argued that the passages Pawl references from these sources fail to support his contention that the authors in question attributed human mental states (e.g., thinking, willing, feeling fear or pain, etc.) to Christ's human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul"). On the contrary, both Leo and the bishops of Third Constantinople maintain that the individual who thinks Christ's human thoughts, feels his human pain,

[5] For similar claims, see Pawl (2016, 39–42, 214–15, 222, and 227) and Pawl (2020, 7, 15, 19, and 29).

speaks his human words, and so forth is "one and the same as" the individual who performs Christ's divine miracles. This individual is the incarnate divine person, Christ, the Word, second person of the Trinity; there is no other individual besides Christ (such as his assumed human nature or his "flesh enlivened by a rational soul") that shares these human mental states or performs these human actions with him.

The aim of this article is to build on this earlier work by considering the writings of two more of the other patristic authors cited by Pawl to support the contentions noted above. The authors I have in mind are Saints Cyril and Athanasius of Alexandria, two fourth- and fifth- century church fathers whose writings exerted a great deal of influence on subsequent conciliar teaching concerning the Incarnation. As the passages quoted above indicate, Pawl claims that the writings of Cyril and Athanasius support his contention that the patristic and conciliar authors behind what we think of as the orthodox, conciliar doctrine of the Incarnation were willing to attribute a wide range of things to Christ's human nature (including thinking, willing, and other human mental activities), in fact enough to make that nature a "person" in the "psychological sense" of the term (though not a "person" in the "metaphysical sense" of the term allegedly at issue for them). Against this, I shall argue here that Cyril and Athanasius do *not* claim or imply that Christ's human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul") thinks thoughts, wills things, feels pain, speaks words, or is a "person" in the "psychological sense" of the term. Rather, I show that Cyril and Athanasius each claim that the individual who thinks Christ's human thoughts, feels his human pain, speaks his human words, and so forth is one and the same as the individual who performs his divine miracles. This individual is the incarnate Divine Word, Christ, Son, second person of the Trinity. In claiming this, Cyril and Athanasius strongly imply that there is no other individual (such as Christ's assumed human nature) that thinks his human thoughts, feels his human pain, speaks his human words, or shares any of his other human mental states.

In what follows, I treat each of these patristic authors one at a time, defending my claims about Cyril in section 2 and my claims about Athanasius in section 3. In each of these discussions, I aim to do two things. First, I argue that none of the passages from these authors' writings referenced by Pawl provides good evidence that their author thought Christ's human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul") was itself an individual that thinks, wills, experiences pain, or has any other human mental states, as if in Christ there were two "persons" in the "psychological sense": Christ *and* his human nature. Second, I argue that a more extensive examination of each author's writings in fact provides strong evidence that he would reject such a view of Christ's human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul"). Finally, in section 4, I discuss the broader significance of these points for contemporary discussions of the Incarnation.

2. Cyril of Alexandria's Position on the Human Mental Life of Christ

To support his claim that Cyril attributes various kinds of mental states to Christ's human nature, Pawl refers to the following two passages, the first from Cyril's *Second Letter to Nestorius* and the second from Cyril's *Second Letter to Succensus:*

> In a similar way we say that he suffered and rose again, not that the Word of God suffered blows or piercings with nails or any other wounds in his own

> nature (for the divine, being without a body, is incapable of suffering): but because the body which became his own suffered these things, he is said to have suffered them for us. . . . The Word is said to have suffered death for us, not as if he himself had experienced death as far as his own nature was concerned (it would be sheer lunacy to say or to think that), but because, as I have just said, his flesh tasted death.[6]

> The Only-begotten Son of God did not personally experience bodily sufferings in his own nature, as he is seen to be and is God, but suffered in his earthly nature. Both points, indeed, must be maintained of the one true Son: the absence of divine suffering and the attribution to him of human suffering because his flesh did suffer.[7]

Pawl claims that the first of these passages indicates that Cyril thinks that "it is truthfully said that 'The Word suffered' and 'The Word suffered death'" and that "these things are true *because* the human nature suffered" (Pawl 2016, 23). Regarding the second passage, Pawl writes, "Here Cyril claims that it is the flesh, that is, the human nature, that suffers" (Pawl 2016, 41). To further support this, Pawl quotes from the work of Bellitto, who also interprets this passage as showing that Cyril affirms that "Jesus' human nature suffered" (Bellitto 2002, 24). Cross concurs as well, citing Pawl's discussion with approval (Cross 2019, 13).

But we need to pay close attention to *what it is* that Cyril is saying that the Word's flesh, or human nature, suffered. The first passage tells us that the Word's body, or flesh, suffered blows, piercings with nails, other wounds, and death. None of these affections are mental states. One's leg, for example, can suffer a blow, be pierced with nails, or be wounded, without any of this implying that the leg itself has mental states, as if the leg (in addition to human being whose leg it is) felt pain when it was pierced, wounded, or hit with a blow. Cyril also tells us that the Word's flesh "tasted death" and that on account of this the Word "is said to have suffered death," but again there's no reason to conclude from this that Cyril thought that the Word's flesh could (before it was killed) think, will, feel pain, lament its impending death, or engage in any other human mental activity. To say that something can die or "taste death" does not entail that one thinks it has any mental states.

For these reasons, these two passages that Pawl references from Cyril's writings do not in fact provide strong evidence that Cyril thinks that not only *physical* states but also *mental* states (such as thinking, willing, feeling pain, etc.) can be aptly attributed to Christ's human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul"). Pawl claims, "On my view, the assumed human nature can aptly be said to hang on a cross. It can aptly be said to think, or will, or do things. . . . [T]here is good evidence for thinking Cyril, too, took the natures to be able to be predicated by these terms" (2016, 228). But the passages Pawl cites as evidence of this do not in fact indicate that Cyril thought Christ's human nature can aptly be said to think, will, or engage in any other human mental activity.

I have just argued that the two passages Pawl invokes to support his interpretation of Cyril's position do not in fact provide strong support for that interpretation. I turn now to

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[6] *Second Letter to Nestorius*, c.5; translation from Tanner (1990, 42). For Pawl's claim that this passage supports his position, see Pawl (2016, 23). See also Pawl (2019, 28), where he references Riches's quotation of this passage in Riches (2016, 53). I note that nothing in Riches's discussion of this passage indicates that he would agree with Pawl's construal of the passage.

[7] *Second Letter to Succensus,* c.5; translation from Wickham (1983, 91). For Pawl's claim that this passage supports his position, see Pawl (2016, 41 and 229) and Pawl (2019, 28).

defend a more ambitious claim, which is that there are in fact other passages from Cyril's writings that provide strong evidence he would reject a position like Pawl's. More specifically, I shall now argue that various passages from Cyril's writings make it clear that his position is that the individual who thinks Christ's human thoughts, feels his human pain, speaks his human words, etc.—in short, the individual who experiences all of his human mental states and performs all of his human actions—is *one and the same as* the individual who performs his divine deeds or miracles. This *one* individual is the Incarnate Word, Christ, the Son, second person of the Trinity. In claiming this, Cyril implies that there is no other individual (such as the human nature itself) that thinks his human thoughts, feels his human pain, speaks his human words, or shares with him any of his other human mental states. In what follows, I discuss three specific passages from Cyril's writings that support this contention, examining each one at a time.

Consider first the following passage from the Cyril's *Third Letter to Nestorius*, a letter read with approval at the important, anti-Nestorian Council of Ephesus (431 AD):

> As for our Saviour's statements in the Gospels, we do not divide them between two hypostases or persons. . . . We must take the right view and maintain that the human as well as divine expressions are spoken by one speaker. When he talks of himself in terms appropriate to God: "*He who has seen me has seen the Father*" and "*The Father and I are one*," we understand his divine and inexpressible nature in virtue of which he is one with his Father by identity of substance, is image, stamp and effulgence of his Father's glory. When on the other hand he respects the limitations of humanity and tells the Jews: "*Now you are seeking to kill me, a man who has told you the truth,"* the limitations of his humanity do not make us any less conscious of him as God the Word in equality and parity with the Father . . . all the sayings contained in the Gospels must be attributed to a single person, to the one incarnate hypostasis of the Word.[8]

In this passage, Cyril doesn't just affirm that there is one hypostasis or person to whom all of Christ's statements must be attributed; he also makes it clear that he thinks there is just "one speaker" who speaks these things: "The human and divine expressions are spoken by one speaker." This is important, for if Pawl's account of Cyril's position were right, then Cyril would think that Christ's words would be attributable to *more than one* speaker: They would be words spoken by Christ *and* by Christ's human nature, and hence would be words spoken by *more than one* speaker, contrary to what Cyril says here.

Consider next the following passage from Cyril's *Letter to Acacius of Melitene*, a passage explicitly referenced during the proceedings of Chalcedon to emphasize that while Christ's divine words and deeds could be distinguished from his human words and deeds, all are the words and deeds of *one individual* and are not to be separated between two individuals:

> The point is that some of the terms are especially appropriate to God, some are especially appropriate to man, and some occupy an intermediate position, indicating the Son who is at one and the same time God and man. For when he says to Philip, "*Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? He who has seen me has*

[8] *Third Letter to Nestorius,* c.8; slightly modified version of the translation in Wickham (1983, 23–25).

> *seen the Father. I and the Father are one*"— when he says this we maintain that the language applies most fittingly to God. When, though, he rebukes the crowds of Jews, saying, "*If you were Abraham's children you would be doing the deeds of Abraham, but now you are seeking to kill me, a man who has told you the truth; this Abraham did not do*"—things like this we say are spoken humanly. Nevertheless, the divine and human words are the one Son's.[9]

Here Cyril notes that Christ, as a human being, utters (in human words) statements about himself, some of which are true of him only because he is God and others which are true of him only because he is human. Though Cyril thinks the statements in question can be categorized as human or divine, he again makes it clear that both kinds of statements are spoken by the *one* Son. For the reasons just discussed in the case of the previous passage, this emphasis on there being just *one* speaker of both kinds of statements again conflicts with Pawl's account of Cyril's position.

In fact, this very passage was one that the bishops at the Council of Chalcedon referenced to clarify a certain controversial passage from Pope St. Leo's *Letter to Flavian*.[10] Leo's *Letter* (or *Tome,* as it is sometimes called) was central to the discussions at the Council of Chalcedon and yet contained some statements that were concerning to some of the bishops present at the Council. One such statement was Leo's saying that "each form performs what is proper to it in association with the other, the Word achieving what is the Word's, while the body accomplishes what is the body's; the one shines with miracles while the other succumbed to outrage."[11] This statement could be taken to imply that each form (or nature) is a subject of the acts corresponding to it and thus that Christ's human nature *is* in fact itself something that thinks, wills, and, in general, has a human mental life. But in his discussion of the proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon, Donald Fairbairn notes that

> this most famous objectionable passage (claiming that each form performs what is proper to itself) was addressed [at the Council of Chalcedon] by reading a passage [viz., the above passage from Cyril's *Letter to Acacius*] in which he [Cyril] explained his attitude toward the Formula of Reunion. Cyril wrote: "Some of the sayings [attributed to Christ] are particularly fitting to God [*theoprepeis*], some again are particularly fitting to man [*anthropoprepeis*], while others occupy a middle position, revealing the Son of God as God and man simultaneously and at the same time." (Fairbairn 2022, 376)

As Fairbairn emphasizes, "The reading of this quotation from Cyril interprets Leo's statement not as an assertion that each form is an independent agent, but instead as an assertion that *theoprepeis* and *anthropoprepeis* things may both be said of the Son of God after the incarnation. In Cyril's statement, the subject in Christ is clearly the Logos. And very strikingly, the delegates had to read Leo's potentially ambiguous statement in light of Cyril's to find it acceptable" (Fairbairn 2022, 376). Thus, beyond noting that Cyril's writings themselves suggest he did not think Christ's human nature itself was a subject of human mental states and acts, we can add that this is also how those at Chalcedon understood Cyril's position. Moreover, it is a position that they affirmed as the correct way to understand

[9] *Letter to Acacius of Melitene,* c.16; slightly modified version of the translation in Wickham (1983, 53).
[10] See Price and Gaddis (2007, 26).
[11] Translation from Price and Gaddis (2007, 25).

the Incarnation in contrast to a way of speaking that could suggest that the human nature itself was the subject of such mental states and acts.

Finally, consider the following passage from Cyril's *Answers to Tiberius*:

> As for those who assert that . . . it was God the Word, and not the man, who raised Lazarus from the tomb and that it was not God who was weary in his journeying but the assumed man and he it was who was hungry and thirsty, who was crucified and who died—these we say utterly miss the truth and ignore the mystery of the incarnate dispensation. For we declare not that there are two Sons or two Christs, but that there is one Christ and Son. . . . So they must not waver and divide or fetch us in two Sons, but must acknowledge one and the same as God's Word made man and confess that to him belong all of the words and actions. For since the same is both God and man, he speaks both in human and divine terms and effects human and divine things alike.[12]

Here Cyril makes it clear that he holds that he who was weary, hungry, thirsty, crucified, and died (examples of various human experiences) is "one and the same as" the Word who raised Lazarus from the tomb (an example of a divine deed). There is no suggestion here of *another,* such as Christ's human nature, who was weary, hungry, thirsty, etc. and is not "one and the same" as the Word who raised Lazarus. Rather, Cyril emphasizes, "To him [i.e., the one hypostasis and person involved] belong all of the words and actions."

Now, in response to these arguments, Pawl might argue that these passages only show that Cyril thinks that the human and divine statements and actions should all be attributed to one *person*, the Incarnate Word, not that the human statements and actions cannot *also* be attributed to a second individual (though not person), such as the Word's assumed human nature or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul." However, there is little to be said for such an interpretation of Cyril's words. While it possible to understand a sentence like "all the sayings contained in the Gospels must be attributed to a single person" to imply only that all the sayings are to be attributed to a single *person*, not that they are all to be attributed to a single *individual,* this should strike us as a rather strained construal of the text; it's much more natural to understand Cyril to be saying that all the statements are spoken by just one individual, "one speaker," as he puts in the first of the three passages. Furthermore, in many cases it would make no sense for Cyril to attribute the human statements in question to the assumed human nature in addition to the Incarnate Word. To do so would attribute to Christ's human nature various false statements (and accompanying false thoughts), such as "Now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth"; according to Cyril, Christ's assumed human nature is not itself a man (the one and only man is Christ himself), and so it would be false for the human nature to speak these words of itself. Now Cyril treats the human and divine statements of Christ just as he treats Christ's human and divine actions. Thus, since for the above reasons Cyril would not wish to attribute Christ's human statements to his human nature, likewise we can presume that Cyril would not wish to attribute Christ's human actions to his human nature either. We can add here that this is an appropriate result, as it would be hopelessly ad hoc for Cyril or Pawl to suggest that when Christ speaks about himself, he alone (and not his human nature) speaks, but that when

[12] *Answers to Tiberius,* c.5; translation from Wickham (1983, 155).

Christ undergoes some other human experience or engages in some other human action, both he and his human nature undergo that experience or engage in that action.

This concludes my discussion of Cyril. I have argued both (i) that the passages Pawl cites to support his claims about Cyril's position do not in fact support those claims and (ii) that in fact there are other passages from Cyril's writings that indicate that he would reject the position Pawl attributes to him. I turn now to discuss Athanasius's position on these matters.

3. Athanasius's Position on the Human Mental Life of Christ

To support his claims about Athanasius, Pawl (2016, 228–29; 2019, 28) references four pages from Khaled Anatolios's 2004 book, *Athanasius*, and one page from Aaron Riches's 2016 book, *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ*. Though Pawl doesn't make this explicit, it seems clear that he has in mind four passages from Athanasius's writings that are discussed by Anatolios and Riches on these pages. In these passages, Athanasius appears to attribute various things to the Word's assumed "flesh" or human nature, such as suffering, hungering, eating, thirsting, and so forth. In the discussion that follows, I address all four of these passages, arguing, just as I did in the case of Cyril, both (i) that the passages in question fail to support the claim that Athanasius thought Christ's human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul") was itself an individual that thinks, wills, experiences pain, or has any other human mental states and (ii) that in fact other passages from Athanasius's writings provide strong evidence that Athanasius would reject such a view of Christ's human nature.

The first passage referenced by Pawl comes from Athanasius's *Orations Against the Arians*. Here Athanasius writes,

> Whence it was that, when the flesh suffered, the Word was not external to it; and therefore is the passion said to be his; and when He did divinely His Father's works, the flesh was not external to Him, but in the body itself did the Lord do them.[13]

Pawl doesn't make explicit how exactly he thinks that this passage supports his position. But presumably he is reasoning as follows. First, "the flesh" here refers to the Word's human nature (his "flesh enlivened by a rational soul"). Second, the flesh is here said to have "suffered." Third, if we take the relevant kind of suffering to be a mental state or experience (e.g., the Word's flesh felt pain when it was crucified), then it would follow that Athanasius here implies that the Word's flesh could (and did) have experiences (e.g., it felt pain). Moreover, since there would be no reason to suppose that the Word's human nature (or "flesh") had only some human mental capacities (e.g., the capacity to experience pain) but not all human mental capacities, one can conclude that the Word's human nature (or "flesh"), on Athanasius's view, had all the normal mental capacities of a human person. It could not only feel pain but also think, will, experience emotions, speak about itself, and so on.

[13] *Orations Against the Arians,* III.32. Apart from the cases where I indicate otherwise, all translations of Athanasius's writings are from Schaff and Wace (1994). For Pawl's claim that this passage supports his position, see Pawl (2019, 28), where he references Riches's (2016, 44) discussion of this passage. Again, I note that nothing in Riches's discussion indicates that Riches would agree with Pawl's construal of the passage.

But, as a matter of fact, a more careful consideration of what Athanasius says in the surrounding context provides good grounds for denying that such a strong conclusion should be drawn from the above passage. Consider first what Athanasius goes on to say shortly after it:

> [a] He had a body, not in appearance, but in truth; and it became the Lord, in putting on human flesh, to put it on whole with the affections proper to it; that, as we say that body was His own, so also we may say that the affections of the body were proper to Him alone, though they did not touch Him according to His Godhead. [b] If then the body had been another's, to him too had been the affections attributed; but if the flesh is the Word's (for "the Word became flesh"), of necessity the affections also of the flesh are ascribed to Him whose the flesh is . . . such affections are ascribed not to another but to the Lord.[14]

In part [a], Athanasius makes the point that "the affections of the body were proper to Him alone," implying that the one to whom the relevant affections belong is the incarnate divine person and that person "alone." This in turn suggests that there is no "other" individual (such as Christ's human nature or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul") that experiences the relevant affections. Instead, they belong to "Him," the incarnate divine person, "alone."

Likewise, in part [b] of the passage, Athanasius makes the point that the affections in question belong to "Him whose the flesh is": Just as an ordinary human person (e.g., Paul) would feel pain if his body were pierced by nails, likewise the Word feels pain when his body his pierced by nails. Athanasius adds that if there were "another" to whom the body belonged, he too would feel this pain (undergo this affection). But there is no such other, Athanasius says, for the flesh is the Word's flesh, not the flesh of any other. Ordinary human persons are not said to be in various mental states in virtue of having bodies or bodily parts in those mental states. Some part of a person's body may be *physically* affected (e.g., pierced) and the person experience something (e.g., pain) on account of his body being physically affected in that way. But the mental state in question is properly attributed to the person alone; the affected bodily part or parts do not themselves feel or experience anything (as if they too were subjects of mental states). For example, when a person's hand is pierced by a nail, the pierced hand doesn't feel pain; rather, the person or human being whose hand it is feels pain (and in fact feels it *in* his hand) on account of what has been done to his hand. Likewise, though the Word's flesh can undergo physical affections (e.g., his body can hang from a cross, be pierced by nails, etc.), we should not attribute any corresponding mental affections to the Word's flesh; the mental affections belong to "Him whose flesh it is," and Athanasius tells us that there is no other whose flesh it is besides the Lord himself.

These observations can help us see why the second of the four passages Pawl references also fails to show that Athanasius attributed mental states to Christ's human nature or "flesh." Here is the passage, drawn from Athanasius's earlier work *On the Incarnation of the Word:*

> Therefore, when the scriptural authors who speak of him say that he ate and drank and was born, you should understand that it was the body, as body, which was born and fed with appropriate nourishment. But God the Word,

[14] *Orations Against the Arians,* III.32.

> who was united to the body while ordering all things, made it known through the works which he accomplished in the body that he was not [merely] a human being, but God the Word. Yet these things were said of him because indeed the body which ate and was born and suffered was not another's but the Lord's.[15]

Once again, Pawl offers no explicit discussion of how he thinks this passage supports his position, but, presumably, what Pawl has in mind is the fact that Athanasius says here that Christ's body "was born and fed with appropriate nourishment" and "ate and was born and suffered." But, contrary to what Pawl seems to think, these predications fail to show that Athanasius thinks Christ's body itself, or whole human nature for that matter, had any mental states or inner life. On the contrary, when taken as a whole, the passage suggests just the opposite, as it indicates that the body in question "was not another's but the Lord's." Just as we speak of an ordinary person's body or flesh "suffering" various wounds or afflictions without implying thereby that the body or flesh has mental states in addition to the person whose flesh it is, likewise Athanasius speaks of Christ's flesh as "suffering" without implying thereby that the flesh itself has experiences (e.g., experiences of pain) in addition to Christ, the person whose flesh it is, having such experiences.

To be sure, throughout his writings, Athanasius often speaks of properties or affections "of the flesh" and includes among such properties and affections things like "to hunger, to thirst, to suffer, to weary, and the like, of which the flesh is capable."[16] One of these passages is the third of the four passages Pawl references to support his position: "Since he was in the flesh," Athanasius writes, "the properties of the flesh are attributed to him—such as hunger, thirst, suffering, fatigue, and so on—to which the flesh is susceptible."[17] But we must be careful when interpreting this locution (a locution Chalcedon also uses when it speaks of "what is proper to each nature"). What Athanasius has in mind are properties and affections that belong to (or can belong to) the incarnate person *on account of his having flesh* (i.e., a human nature or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul").[18] Some of these properties might characterize not just the Incarnate Word but also his flesh. For example, the Word hung from the Cross, for his flesh (his body) hung from the Cross; the Word was pierced, for his flesh (in particular, his hands, feet, and side) were pierced; and so on. But there is no evidence that Athanasius thought *all* the properties in question could be appropriately attributed to both

[15] *On the Incarnation of the Word,* §18; translation from Anatolios (2004, 70–71). Nothing in Anatolios's discussion of this passage in this book indicates that he would agree with Pawl's construal of the passage. More insight into Anatolios's own position vis-à-vis the issue at stake here can be gleaned from his earlier book *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*. Unfortunately, in this book Anatolios seems to speak in conflicting ways. On the one hand, in several places Anatolios indicates agreement with my position, saying that Athanasius thinks "the divine Word is the sole subject in Christ" (142) and "the divine Word is the sole subject of all the acts of Jesus Christ" (140). However, in other places Anatolios speaks in a way more amenable to Pawl's position, suggesting that Athanasius thinks "the human attributes belong properly to the human body" (82) but are "transferred" to the Word himself (82), since, given the Word's appropriation of the body, "whatever is said of the body may be properly applied to the Word" (83).

[16] For examples of Athanasius speaking this way in his *Orations Against the Arians*, see Schaff and Wace (1994, 410–11).

[17] *Orations Against the Arians,* III.31; translation from Anatolios (2004, 72).

[18] That Athanasius, like Cyril, held that Christ assumed not only a human body but also a rational soul is evident from passages like this one from his *Letter to the Church of Antioch*: "The Saviour had not a body without a soul, nor without sense or intelligence; for it was not possible, when the Lord had become man for us, that His body should be without intelligence: nor was the salvation effected in the Word himself a salvation of body only, but of soul also" (Schaff and Wace 1994, 485).

the Incarnate Word (the man) and his flesh construed as an individual other than the man whose flesh it is. On the contrary, when Athanasius does speak of actions or experiences that, in any ordinary case, we would attribute to a whole human person and not to any part of that person (nor to that person's body or flesh construed as an individual distinct from that person), these Athanasius attributes to "Christ in the flesh," not to the flesh itself.

To see an example of this, consider the following passage from just a few paragraphs later in Athanasius's *Orations Against the Arians:*

> [W]hen He is said to hunger and thirst and to toil and not to know, and to sleep, and to weep, and to ask, and to flee, and to be born, and to deprecate the cup, and in a word to undergo all that belongs to the flesh, let it be said, as is congruous, in each case "Christ then hungering and thirsting 'for us in the flesh'"; and "saying He did not know and being buffeted and toiling 'for us in the flesh'"; and "being exalted too, and born, and growing 'in the flesh'"; and "fearing and hiding 'in the flesh'"; and "saying 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me,' and being beaten, and receiving, 'for us in the flesh'"; and in a word all such things "for us in the flesh."[19]

In talking here of what "belongs to the flesh," Athanasius simply has in mind the sorts of actions, experiences, and affections to which the Word became subject by becoming human. There is no implication here that all these actions, experiences, and affections can be properly attributed not only to the Word "in the flesh" but also to the flesh itself construed as a second individual (or "person" in a "psychological sense") other than the Word whose flesh it is.

Indeed, in the next sentence, a sentence that begins the last of the four passages Pawl references, Athanasius adds,

> Let no one then stumble at what belongs to man, but rather let a man know that in nature the Word Himself is impassible, and yet because of that flesh which He put on, these things are ascribed to Him, since they are proper to the flesh, and the body itself is proper to the Saviour.[20]

This passage confirms that, in talking of what "belongs to the flesh" or what is "proper to the flesh," Athanasius has in mind simply "what belongs to man," that is, the various sorts of actions, experiences, and affections that can be truly attributed to the Word on account of his becoming human (i.e., "because of that flesh which He put on," as Athanasius puts it here, or because he "became flesh," as the Gospel of John famously puts it).

It is reasonable to suppose that Athanasius would agree that some of these things might be properly attributed not only to the Incarnate Word but also to his "flesh" or body in its own right (e.g., physical affections like being buffeted, being beaten, being hung from a cross, etc.). However, there is no reason to suppose that Athanasius would affirm that *all* the human properties and affections he has in mind can be properly attributed not only to Christ but also to his assumed flesh. For, his list includes first-personal thoughts like "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (see the passage quoted two paragraphs above), and, as we noted above in the case of Cyril, attributing such first-personal thoughts not only to

[19] *Orations Against the Arians,* III.34.
[20] *Orations Against the Arians,* III.34.

Christ but also his "flesh" or human nature would lead to serious problems, such as his "flesh" falsely thinking, "Now you seek to kill me, *a man*." Moreover, once we see that it would make no sense for Athanasius to attribute such thoughts to Christ's "flesh" or human nature, we can extend the same point to all Christ's human mental states. For, as I noted in my discussion of Cyril, it would be hopelessly ad hoc to claim that Christ's "flesh" or human nature shares all his human mental states except his first-personal thoughts.

In the end, strong evidence that Athanasius would reject a position like that proposed by Pawl can be found in a passage that comes shortly after all the above quoted passages from Athanasius's *Orations Against the Arians*. In what begins a concluding summary of the discussion that has come before, a discussion that includes all the above quoted passages, Athanasius writes,

> These points we have found it necessary to examine, that, when we see Him doing or saying aught divinely through the instrument of His own body, we may know that He so works, being God, and also, if we see Him speaking or suffering humanly, we may not be ignorant that He bore flesh and became man, and hence He so acts and so speaks. For if we recognize what is proper to each, and see and understand that both these things and those are done by One, we are right in our faith, and shall never stray.[21]

A view like Pawl's implies that there are *two* individuals that speak when Christ humanly speaks and *two* individuals that experience suffering when Christ suffers: the incarnate person *and* his human nature. But here Athanasius, like Cyril, very clearly maintains that the miracles done by Christ, the words spoken by Christ, the suffering that Christ undergoes, etc. are all "done by One" (i.e., by the *one* incarnate person and hypostasis who is both God and man).

Now, Pawl could attempt to make sense of Athanasius's words here by arguing that Athanasius is simply claiming that there is one individual who does and says all the things that Christ does and says, not that there is *only* one individual who does and says each of these things. But such a reading is clearly a stretch. The text is much more naturally read as implying that there is *just one* such individual: one individual who does the miracles that God alone can do, speaks as if he were God (for he is God), speaks as if he were a human being (for he is a human being), and experiences the kinds of suffering that his human nature (or "flesh") makes it possible for him to experience.

Further evidence of this can be found in a related passage from Athanasius's *Letter to the Church of Antioch*, where he writes,

> [N]or was there one that raised up Lazarus, another that asked concerning him; but the same it was that said as man "Where does Lazarus lie"; and as God raised him up; the same that as man and in the body spat, but divinely as Son of God opened the eyes of the man blind from his birth; and while, as Peter says, in the flesh He suffered, as God opened the tomb and raised the dead.[22]

[21] *Orations Against the Arians,* III.35.
[22] *Letter to the Church of Antioch,* §7.

If Pawl were right, then there *would* be one that raised Lazarus up and another that asked where his body was lain: There would be the Incarnate Word, who both raised Lazarus up and asked where his body was lain, and the Word's human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul"), an individual who asked where his body was lain but did not raise Lazarus up. But Athanasius rejects such a position here: The *one* who asks is the *one* who raises; there is not more than one who does such things. This *one* is the Incarnate Word, not his assumed "flesh" or human nature.

4. The Contemporary Significance of These Historical Results

In the preceding sections, I have argued that the passages referenced by Pawl fail to show that either Cyril or Athanasius holds that Christ's human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul") thinks, wills, feels pain, speaks words, or is a "person" in the "psychological sense" of the term. More ambitiously, I have also argued that there is substantial evidence in the case of each of these authors that they would in fact *reject* such an idea. A close examination of their writings shows that each of them maintains that the individual who thinks Christ's human thoughts, feels his human pain, speaks his human words, etc. is *one and the same* as the individual who performs his divine miracles. This individual is the incarnate Divine Word, Christ, Lord, second person of the Trinity. In claiming this, both Cyril and Athanasius imply that there is no other individual but this one who thinks his human thoughts, feels his human pain, speaks his human words, or shares any of his other human mental states.

In this concluding section, I would like to highlight the broader significance of these results for contemporary discussions of the Incarnation in analytic theology and philosophy of religion. Pawl is one of the foremost contributors to such discussions, particularly to discussions of what Pawl refers to as "the fundamental problem" facing those who wish to uphold the coherence of the conciliar/orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation. The "fundamental problem" in question, much discussed by contemporary philosophers who write on the Incarnation, concerns the alleged incoherence involved in attributing both human and divine properties (e.g., immutability and mutability, omniscience and ignorance, impassibility and suffering, etc.) to one and the same individual. A key goal of Pawl's work has been to provide a solution to this "fundamental problem" that fits with all the claims of Conciliar Christology. His solution centers on a strategy of assigning *revised truth conditions* to the apparently incompatible pairs of human and divine predications at issue, with the result that what initially appeared to be incompatible predications turn out not to be incompatible. For example, Pawl (2016, ch.7) claims that "Christ is visible" is true in virtue of his having a concrete nature (namely, a human nature) which can be seen, whereas "Christ is invisible" is true in virtue of his having a concrete nature (namely, a divine nature) which cannot be seen; "Christ is mutable" is true in virtue of his having a concrete nature (namely, a human nature) which can change, whereas "Christ is immutable" is true in virtue of his having a concrete nature (namely, a divine nature) which cannot change; etc. Crucially, Pawl (2016, 225–29) suggests that the same strategy can be used to resolve putative contradictions involving Christ's human and divine mental states (e.g., Christ being omniscient because of his divinity) and yet also ignorant of various things (because of his humanity).

However, Pawl's attempt to apply this strategy to resolve putative contradictions involving Christ's human and divine mental states gives rise to the concern that Pawl ends up

treating Christ's human nature as a second person besides Christ himself, since "things that think, will, and do are *persons*" (Pawl 2016, 228), and Pawl's strategy implies Christ's human nature is a thing that can think, will, and do. As the passages quoted in section 1 indicate, Pawl attempts to address this concern by arguing that he asserts of Christ's human nature no more than what the councils and various authoritative patristic authors assert of Christ's human nature. In particular, Pawl claims to assert of Christ's human nature no more than what Leo, the Third Council of Constantinople, Cyril, and Athanasius assert of Christ's human nature. These authors, Pawl claims, denied that Christ's human nature was a "person," yes, but not in the "psychological sense" of the term since, Pawl alleges, they were willing to attribute to that nature all the mental activities of an ordinary human person (e.g., thinking, willing, desiring, suffering, etc.)

Now, I have argued here that Pawl errs in attributing such a position to Cyril and Athanasius. Moreover, as I noted in section 1, in an earlier article (Hauser 2020, 15–22) I have argued that Pawl likewise errs in attributing such a position to Pope St. Leo and the Third Council of Constantinople. If both contentions are right, then none of the above patristic or conciliar authors cited by Pawl actually claims or implies what Pawl asserts they do, viz., that Christ's human nature itself is a thing that has human mental states (e.g., thinks human thoughts, wills things, experiences suffering, and so on). On the contrary, a closer look at these patristic authors' writings suggests just the opposite, viz., that they hold that there is just *one* individual who thinks Christ's human thoughts, speaks his human words, experiences his human suffering, and so on. This individual is "one and the same" as Christ, the incarnate second person of the Trinity, not his assumed human nature or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul." This is a serious problem for Pawl's way of addressing the aforementioned "fundamental problem."

But it is not just a problem for Pawl. It is a problem for *any* proposed solution to the aforementioned "fundamental problem" that requires us to attribute human mental states (thinking, willing, experiences of pain, etc.) to Christ's human nature. This means that the "mereological" solutions to the coherence problem defended by Stump (2002) and Hasker (2017) and attributed to Aquinas by Stump (2002; 2003, ch.14), Freddoso (1983), and Cross (2002, 195–98) are similarly problematic, as these "mereological" proposals also attempt to explain the coherence of the Incarnation in a way that requires us to accept that Christ has whatever human properties he has (including whatever human mental states he has) in virtue of having a human nature *which itself* has all those properties.[23] Another contemporary author whose work on the coherence of the Incarnation is threatened by this result is Thomas Flint. Flint also relies on the idea that whatever human properties (including human mental states) belong to Christ are had by him only in virtue of his having a human nature which itself has them. As Flint puts it, "It is entirely appropriate to see CHN [i.e., Christ's concrete human nature] as the immediate, and the Son as the ultimate, possessor of the [human] characteristics involved" (2001a, 6). This leads him to suggest that "CHN, then, was born of the Virgin Mary, walked along the Sea of Galilee, performed various miraculous cures, accepted death on a cross, and so on" (2001a, 6), all while claiming (as Pawl does) that this needn't imply CHN is a second "person" in the sense at issue for Conciliar Christology.[24]

[23] For further discussion of this problem for "mereological" attempts to explain the coherence of the Incarnation, see Hauser (2020). For two arguments that such a "mereological" solution to the coherence problem should *not* be attributed to Aquinas, see Gorman (2017, ch.6) and Hauser (2022).

[24] For Flint's repeated use of this idea in his work on the Incarnation, see Flint (2001b, 309); Flint (2004, 216–18); Flint (2011a, 201–2); and Flint (2011b, 69).

Against this, in both my earlier article (Hauser 2020) and here, I am arguing that if we take seriously the writings of the councils and patristic authors in question, if we take seriously "Conciliar Christology," we should reject any attempt to explain the coherence of the Incarnation that implies that Christ's human nature (or "flesh enlivened by a rational soul") is an individual with a human mental life, a "person" in the "psychological sense" of the term, a thing capable of thinking, willing, and experiencing all the kinds of things that ordinary human persons can think, will, and experience. Instead, we should favor an account of the coherence of the Incarnation that attributes all the human mental states at issue to the incarnate divine person alone.[25]

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[25] I note that my argument here concerns only the putative contradictions that involve the human and divine mental states of Christ (e.g., his being both omniscient because of his divinity and yet also ignorant of certain things because of his humanity). As my above discussions of Cyril's and Athanasius's writings indicate, one could think that while the relevant authoritative patristic and conciliar texts *do* rule out treating Christ's human nature as a subject of its own *mental* states, they *do not* rule out treating it as a subject of various *non-mental* states (e.g., it is visible, hangs from a cross, has a spatial location, is pierced, etc.). Given this, one could think that some or all of the putative contradictions that don't involve the human and divine mental states of Christ (e.g., the putative contradiction in Christ's being both invisible because his divinity and yet also visible because of his humanity) are best addressed in a mereological way or even in Pawl's "revised truth conditions" way. Indeed, for just such a non-uniform approach to addressing the putative contradictions involved in the Incarnation, see Hauser (2020, §5).

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