

The Mystery of the Two Natures

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Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 8, No. 2. (Spring, 1974) © World Wisdom, Inc.
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*Editor's note: The following is from an updated translation of the essay,
approved by the estate of Frithjof Schuon.*

It is a strange fact in the history of Christianity that Pope Honorius I, though an impeccable pontiff, was expelled from the Church by the Sixth Ecumenical Council for the sole reason of having hesitated concerning the question of the “two wills” of Christ. A century and a half after this pope’s death, the Seventh Ecumenical Council considered it useful or necessary to ratify the excommunication of Honorius I and to include his name in the anathema of all known heresies.

This ostracism is logically surprising when one is aware of the complexity of the issue at stake. For some, Christ has two wills since he is “true man and true God”; for others, these two wills are but one since—as Honorius himself said—Christ’s human will cannot operate in contradiction to his divine will. One could say *grosso modo* that Christ possesses two wills in principle and one in fact; or again, one could use the image of two overlapping circles and express oneself thus: if it goes without saying that Christ possesses *a priori* two distinct wills, given his two incommensurable natures, there nonetheless is a region in his person where the two wills blend, as is seen precisely in the geometric symbolism of two intersecting circles.

What can be said concerning the two wills applies above all and with all the more reason to the two natures: if it is true that Christ is at the same time both man and God, two things are then incontrovertible, namely, the duality and the unity of his nature. We are not saying that the monophysites, who admit only the unity of Christ’s nature, are right as against the Orthodox and Catholics, but neither do we say that they are intrinsically wrong from their point of view; and the same holds, as a result, for the monothelites, who simply apply the monophysite principle to a particular aspect of the nature of the God-Man. The justification of the monophysites appears,

quite paradoxically, in the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation: it seems to us that it would be appropriate to apply to the Eucharistic elements what is affirmed dogmatically of Christ, namely, that he is “true man and true God”; if this is so, one could equally admit that the Eucharist is “true bread and true Body” or “true wine and true Blood” without compromising its divinity. To say that the bread is but an appearance is to apply to the Eucharist the doctrine—judged heretical—of the monophysites, for whom Christ is, precisely, only apparently a man since he is really God; now just as the quality of “true man” in Catholic and Orthodox doctrine does not preclude Christ from being “true God”, so should the quality of “true bread” not preclude the host from being “true Body” in the minds of theologians, all the more so as both things—the created and the Uncreated—are incommensurable, which means that the physical reality of the elements does not exclude their divine content, any more than the real corporeality of Christ prevents the presence of the divine nature.

It must be said again that monophysitism and therefore also transubstantiationism are not intrinsically wrong—the opposite would in fact be astonishing—and for the following reason: to acknowledge that Christ’s humanity is a vehicle of the divine nature amounts to saying that if, in one respect, the human side is really human, it is so in a way that is nonetheless different from the humanity of ordinary men; the divine Presence transfigures or transubstantiates in a certain way, and *a priori*, the human nature; Christ’s body is already here below what heavenly bodies are, with the sole difference that it is nevertheless affected by some of the accidents of earthly life. The same is true for the Eucharist: if in one respect it is “real bread” and “real wine”, in another—which does not abolish the first—it is in fact substantially more than ordinary matter; metaphysically, this does not oblige one to pretend that this matter is “only an appearance”, but theologically, from the point of view of uni-dimensional—we might say “planimetric”—alternatives, the negation of real matter is probably the only means for a certain mentality of affirming effectively and enduringly the transcendence of the Eucharist. Nonetheless, this doctrine is bound to be a “two-edged sword”, the dangers of which can be neutralized only by esoteric truth, or “theosophy” in the ancient and true sense of the word.

Theologians seem to think that bread and wine, as natural substances, are unworthy of the divine Presence, and this sentiment brings to mind a thesis of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, which is

not irrelevant here. Hellenists¹ deemed the Incarnation to be unworthy of God owing to the frailty and impurity of earthly bodies; in his “Great Catechesis”, Saint Gregory answers that sin alone, not fleshly materiality, is unworthy of God. The Greeks might have responded that corporeal miseries, being traces of original sin and the fall, partake in the indignity of sin and unquestionably manifest it; and the Bishop of Nyssa could have retorted that a proof of the compatibility between the human body and a divine inherence is provided by the inherence of the Intellect, which is of a heavenly order and whose transcendence the Greeks are the first to acknowledge. The decisive argument is that these two orders, the created and the Uncreated, share no common measure and that nothing that is merely natural—whatever its distant cause may be—can oppose itself to the Presence of God.

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The uninformed reader who finds in the Koran that Jesus was “one of those brought nigh” (*muqarrabûn*) and “one of the righteous” (*sâlihûn*)—*Sûrah* of “The Family of Imran”: 45, 46—has the following reaction: that Christ is “one of those brought nigh” is evident from every point of view, for if the greatest Prophets are not “close” to God, who then could be? And that Christ was “one of the righteous” is evident *a fortiori* and by several orders of magnitude, mathematically speaking. In reality, both seeming pleonasms are merely ellipses meant to illustrate a doctrinal position directed against the Christian thesis of the twofold nature of Christ; generally speaking, when the Koran appears to make statements that are all too obvious, and disappointing in their context, it is engaging in implicit polemics; in other words, it is aiming at a particular opinion, which it does not enunciate and which needs to be known in order for one to understand the passage. What Islam intends to affirm, in its way and according to its perspective, is that Jesus is “true man and true God”: instead of saying “man”, the Koran says “righteous” so as to define immediately the nature of this man; and since its intention is to specify that no man is God, it suggests what in Christian terms is called the “divine nature” of Christ by using the

¹ We are referring here to the partisans of Hellenism, that is to say, of the Hellenist tradition, which we cannot term “pagan” since we are envisaging it with respect to its spiritual values, though the word “Hellenist” more often designates, on the one hand, the Hellenized Jews of antiquity and, on the other, scholars versed in Greek language and literature.

expression “brought nigh”, which denotes the most elevated station Islam can attribute to a human being.

Be that as it may, the twofold nature of Christ is sufficiently specified in the following verse: “Jesus the Messiah, son of Mary, is the Messenger of God and His Word, which He [God] placed in Mary, and [Jesus is] of His Spirit [the Spirit of God]” (*Sûrah* of “Women”: 171). In admitting the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Birth, Islam accepts in its way the divine nature of Jesus:² “in its way”, that is, with the obvious reservation that it always intends to dissociate the divine from the human, and therefore that the Christic phenomenon is for it no more than a particular marvel of Omnipotence.

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We have said above that the ostracism by the two Councils of Honorius I in particular and of the monophysites-monothelites in general is logically surprising; now to say “logically” is to imply a reservation, for it is no surprise from an exoteric point of view that a too fragmentary or in some respects inopportune formulation should be considered a crime;³ this shows that one is dealing with a domain that must be distinguished from that of pure, hence disinterested, knowledge, which admits the interplay of aspects and points of view without ever getting locked in artificial or inflammatory alternatives. It is important, however, not to confuse theological elaborations, which are fluid and productive of scissions, with dogmas themselves, which are

² According to a *hadith*, Jesus and Mary were the only human beings the devil did not touch at birth with his claw, and who therefore did not utter a cry.

³ Let it be said in passing that the anathematization of Honorius I proves, moreover, not that he was heretical, but that he was considered as such and that, as a result, the Church admits that a pope can lapse into heresy—except, of course, when promulgating a dogmatic or moral definition *ex cathedra*; one might reject this by proposing that Honorius I did no more than sin against discipline; but in that case, the anathemas heaped upon him canonically would be inexplicable. Be that as it may, there is nothing in principle to prevent a pope from ruining the Church without in the least having to make an *ex cathedra* pronouncement; the greatest theologians admit the possibility of a pope lapsing into heresy, and the whole problem for them then becomes whether the heretical pope is deposed *ipso facto* or must be deposed canonically. However, the possibility at issue here—of which Honorius I is not at all an example—can occur in so severe a degree only under utterly abnormal circumstances, which the twentieth century in fact affords; there would still be the question whether the pope who might be incriminated was a legitimate pope with regard to the conditions of his election.

fixed; such elaborations—though also providential on their level—take on the appearance of dogmatic systems in their turn, but far more contingently so than those within which they are situated as modalities; these are minor *upâyas*, if one will, that is, “saving mirages” or “spiritual means”, designed to render more accessible that major *upâya* which is religion. Now it is essential to keep in mind the idea of “lesser truth” or “relative error” contained in this Buddhist notion; it means that there is, on the part of Heaven, “tolerance through Mercy” and not “complete approbation”. For man is a form, and he needs forms; but since he also—and even above all—needs the Essence, which religion or wisdom is supposed to communicate to him, he really needs a “form of the Essence” or a “manifestation of the Void” (*shûnyamûrti*). If in one respect form is a prolongation of Essence, in another it contradicts it, which accounts on the one hand for the ambiguity of the exoteric *upâya*, and on the other hand for two aspects of esoterism, one of which extends and intensifies the dogmatic *upâya*, whereas the other is independent of it to the point of being able to contradict it. To the objection that esoterism also belongs to the formal order, one must respond that esoterism is aware of this and that it tends to transcend the accidentality of its own form, whereas exoterism is totally and heavily identified with its form.

What results from this, in an altogether self-evident way, is that the dividing line between orthodoxy and apparent, and therefore merely extrinsic, heresy depends on psychological or moral contingencies of an ethnic or cultural provenance; while the fundamental *upâya*, quite clearly, transmits total truth through its symbolism, the same cannot be said of that minor *upâya* which is theology; its relativity—with respect to total truth—is moreover proven, in the Christian sphere, by the notion of “theological progress”, which contains an admission at once candid and appalling.⁴ It is true that every theology can lead incidentally to the profoundest insights, but it cannot, in its general and official doctrine, draw the conclusions such insights entail.

It is a radical error to believe that the greatest spokesmen of theology, even if they are canonized saints, hold *ipso facto* all the keys to supreme wisdom;⁵ they are instruments of

⁴ One of two things: either there is theological progress, in which case theology is of little importance; or theology is important, in which case there can be no theological progress.

⁵ Thus the “wisdom of the saints”, which some seek to set in opposition to metaphysics, is but an abuse of language; the “wisdom” of Ecclesiasticus is not, after all, of the same order as that of the Upanishads. It should be noted in this connection that if the Semitic Scriptures, even the most fundamental, do not have the tenor of the *Vedânta*, this is because, unlike the *Vedânta*, they are not directed exclusively to an

Providence and are not called upon to go beyond certain limits; on the contrary, their role is to formulate what these limits are, according to a perspective willed directly or indirectly by Heaven. By “indirectly” we mean those cases where Heaven tolerates a limitation required—or made desirable—by a particular human predisposition, perhaps not well-defined *a priori*, but nonetheless proving to be predominant; this explains the majority of the differences or divergences—in most cases unilateral⁶—between the Western and Eastern Churches. Some of these differentiations may seem a gratuitous luxury, but they are nonetheless unavoidable and finally opportune, collective mentalities being what they are. Even so, this opportuneness has nothing absolute about it and cannot prevent a kind of poison, concealed in this or that theological particularism, from manifesting itself in the course of history, belatedly and upon contact with false ideas whose possibility theologians were unable to foresee.

In considering the most general factors of the issue, we shall say that Semitic dogmatism, as well as Hindu *darshanas* like Ramanujan Vishnuism, pertain to the chivalrous and heroic spirit,⁷ which necessarily tends toward voluntarism and individualism, and thus toward a moralizing anthropomorphism. It is in view of such a temperament, and because of it, that exclusivist⁸ dogmas are crystallized and their corresponding theologies elaborated, which clearly

intellectual elite, but have a function that obliges them to take account of possibilities found in the collective soul and to forestall the most diverse of reactions. To this it must be added that a sacred book, like the Gospel for example, which seems to speak to sinners, at least at the outset, really addresses any man insofar as he sins; this confers upon the notion of sin the widest significance possible—that of a centrifugal motion, whether compressive or dispersing—even when there is properly speaking no objective transgression. Sacred language, even if directed at first to specific men, is finally directed to man as such.

⁶ For the spirit of innovation is to be found with the Latins, a fact resulting moreover from the paradoxical coincidence between prophetism and caesarism in the papacy.

⁷ The fact that Ramanuja was a *brahman* and not a *kshatriya* is no grounds for objection, since all castes—inasmuch as they are particular predispositions—are reflected or repeated in each single caste, so that a *brahman* of a *kshatriya* type is individually equivalent to a *kshatriya* of a *brahman* type. Furthermore, every human collectivity produces a human type with no affinity for speculative thought; it is all the more paradoxical and significant that this is the type or mentality—which a Hindu would call a *shûdra* outlook—that determines all the so-called “new theology” and constitutes its sole originality and sole mystery.

⁸ Such an adjective is not a pleonasm, for a metaphysical axiom itself can also have a dogmatic character, practically speaking, but without therefore having to exclude formulations diverging from it. On the other hand, there are metaphysical axioms whose conditional character is recognized *a priori*, depending on the degree of relativity of the idea expressed: hence, archetypes contained in the creative Intellect are more real than their cosmic manifestation while being illusory with respect to the divine Essence; such and such

implies that this temperament or this manner of seeing and feeling is acceptable to God as the “raw material” of the *upâya*; nonetheless, since each religion is by definition a totality—as is proven by its imperative and unconditional character—and since God could never impose absolute limits, the religious phenomenon by definition comprises the esoteric phenomenon, which is transmitted in principle and as a matter of preference, in different degrees, by vocations that favor contemplation, including sacred art.

A certain underlying warrior or knightly mentality⁹ accounts for many theological oscillations and their ensuing disputes—the nature of Christ and the structure of the Trinity having been the notable questions at issue in the Christian world—just as it accounts for such forms of narrow-mindedness as the incomprehension and intolerance of ancient theologians toward the metaphysics and mysteries of Hellenism. It is moreover this same mentality that produced the divergence, in the very heart of the Greek tradition, between Aristotle and Plato, Plato having personified in essence the *brahmâna* spirit inherent in the Orphic and Pythagorean tradition,¹⁰ whereas the Stagirite formulated a metaphysics that was in certain respects centrifugal and perilously open to the world of phenomena, actions, experiences, and adventures.¹¹

After this parenthesis, which the general context of the case of Honorius I permits or even demands, let us return to our doctrinal subject.

Hindu Divinities are dogmatically inviolable, but they vanish before *Paramâtmâ* or, rather, are reabsorbed therein, so that it may be possible to deny without heresy their existence, provided of course that by the same token one deny all beings that are even more relative.

⁹ One cannot lose sight of the fact that, in all climates, the same causes produce the same effects—in highly diverse proportions—and that India is no exception; the quarrels of sectarian Vishnuism are a case in point.

¹⁰ It goes without saying that the classical period—with its grave intellectual and artistic deviation—and its recurrence at the time of the Renaissance are patent examples of warrior or knightly, and hence *kshatriya*, Luciferianism; however, we do not have in mind here deviations as such since, on the contrary, we are speaking of normal manifestations, which are acceptable to Heaven; otherwise there could be no question of voluntarist and emotional *upâyas*.

¹¹ But let us not make Aristotelianism responsible for the modern world, which is due to a convergence of various factors, such as the abuses—and subsequent reactions—provoked by the unrealistic idealism of Catholicism, and also by the diverging and irreconcilable demands of the Latin and Germanic mentalities, all of which lead, precisely, to scientism and the profane mentality.

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The problem of the two natures of Christ can be reduced, in the last analysis, to the relationship between the relative and the Absolute: if Christ is the Absolute entered into relativity, it follows, not only that the relative should return thereby to absoluteness, but also and above all that the relative should be prefigured in the Absolute; this is the meaning of the uncreated Word, which manifests itself in the human order, not only in the form of Christ or the *Avatâra*, but also and *a priori* in the form of the immanent Intellect, and this brings us back to the complementarity between Revelation and Intellection. The Absolute manifested in the human world is at once Truth and Presence, or one or the other of these two elements, but without being able to exclude its complement. The element “Presence” takes precedence in Christianity, hence the sacraments and the emphasis on the volitive aspect of man; in other climates, and above all in universal *gnosis*, which retains its rights everywhere, it is the element “Truth” that determines the means of the path, in diverse ways and on diverse levels.

In order to be as clear as possible, it is necessary to insist on the following principle: there is no possible relationship between the Absolute as such and relativity; for such a relationship to exist there must be something relative in the Absolute and something absolute in the relative. In other words: if one admits that the world is distinct from God, one must also admit that this distinction is prefigured in God Himself, which means that His unity of Essence—which is never in question—comprises degrees; not to admit this polarization *in divinis* is to leave the existence of the world without a cause, or it is to admit that there are two distinct realities and thus two “Gods”, namely, God and the world. For one of two things: either the world is explained starting from God, in which case there is in God prefiguration and creative act, and thus relativity; or else there is in God no relativity, in which case the world is unexplainable and is placed on a level with God. We once again emphasize that divine Relativity, the cause of the world, fulfills the role of the Absolute in relation to the world; in this sense, theologians are right to uphold in certain cases the absoluteness of all that is divine; absoluteness, for them, is thus synonymous with Divinity.

At the risk of repeating ourselves, we could express this as follows: whoever admits the presence of the Absolute in the world, in the form of Christ for example, must admit equally the

presence of the relative in God—in the form of the Word, precisely; whoever denies that there can be any relativity in God must consider the Creator, the Revealer, or the Redeemer as being situated beneath God, in the manner of the demiurge; for the Absolute as such neither creates, nor reveals, nor saves. In refusing to admit the relativity of the *hypostases*, there is an element of confusion between the absolute and the sublime: since the Divinity deserves or demands worship, there are some who want the Divinity to be “absolutely absolute” in every possible respect, if we may express ourselves, provisionally and incidentally, in such a manner. Now God is deserving of the worship of *latria*, not inasmuch as He comprises no relativity—for in this respect He is humanly inaccessible—but inasmuch as He is absolute with respect to the relativity of the world, while comprising an aspect of relativity in view of this very contact.

One might object that the thesis of reciprocity between the Absolute and the relative does not take into account the incommensurability, and hence the asymmetry, between the two terms; this is both true and false. If one wished to place emphasis on the incommensurable nature of God, one could not do so simply by denying relativity within the divine Principle; one could do so adequately only by separating the creative Principle from the intrinsic Absolute, which takes us back to the alternative between *Paramâtma* and *Mâyâ*, and then to the absorption of the second term by the first, precisely as a result of their incommensurability. This reduction of the real to the One without a second is exactly what those who deny relativity *in divinis* do not want, all the more as they hold fiercely to the unconditional and in some way massive reality of the world; in wanting an “absolutely absolute” God situated above an unconditionally real world, they seek to keep “both feet on the ground” without sacrificing anything of transcendence. In reality, however, the Universe is no more than an inward and, as it were, dreamlike dimension of God: it reflects the divine qualities in a mode that entails contrast, movement, and privation, thereby realizing the possibility for God to be other than God, a possibility contained in the divine Infinity itself.