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Chapter 6

The Mystery of the Two Natures

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> The things we are going to say seem to some of the multitude to be different from the Scriptures of our Lord. But let these know that it is by the Scriptures themselves that these things live and breathe; from them they draw their whole grounding, but from them they take only the spirit and not the language.
>
> —St Clement of Alexandria

From the very start it was clear that this was something extraordinary. As a college professor of religion, I had read fairly widely and deeply before, and had made it my aim to assimilate many of the greatest philosophical and theological works. But nothing had prepared me for my first encounter with a book by Frithjof Schuon. I vividly recall reading the opening page, and then reading it again, and then a third and fourth time, before proceeding. The words themselves were certainly not difficult, nor was the style at all complex. Indeed, compared to many a modern philosopher's work, Schuon's books are noted for their simple, and often poetic, beauty. And yet for some reason I found myself unable to move with the speed I was accustomed to. It was like running along the beach and then into the ocean. Here was a new medium, no less able to support my movement, but requiring an altogether different engagement. There would be no more running now. I would have to swim.

This initial sense that Schuon was different—that there is an intensity or depth in his message unlike any other—has since been many times confirmed, both in my continued study of his books and through a number of personal contacts which I was privileged to have with the man himself during the last decade or so of his life. It is hard for me to know quite what to say, how to convey the significance of these encounters. Others have spoken about Schuon in the most exalted terms. Comparing him to figures like Shankaracharya and Meister Eckhart, they have said that he was a paragon among religious authorities, perhaps the *qutb* or spiritual axis for our age,

whose work was of a cyclic or Eleatic importance—a *jivan-mukta*, blessed with the vision of the cosmic Intellect itself. While I have seen no reason to discount such judgments, and many good reasons to suppose them true, I myself prefer to be more circumspect. It seems to me that Schuon's books are not in need of any special praise or promotion and can be left to speak for themselves, and I heartily commend them to the attention of every serious seeker. As for our personal relationship, I shall simply say that Frithjof Schuon is one of the greatest men I have ever known, and I am profoundly grateful to have had his friendship.

What is the most important thing that Schuon taught me? This is the question I have posed to myself for the purpose of writing this chapter. As soon as I ask it, however, I am struck by the extent to which virtually everything I believe and think has been shaped by his perspective. Someone has said that it was Schuon's aim, not only to promulgate a doctrine and teach a method, but to create a civilization, and as one who has endeavored to enter into that civilization as fully as circumstances permit, I now find that it is almost impossible to recall my initial experience of its borders, or to rank my many discoveries. I can say this, though: On the doctrinal side, very few points have turned out to be more decisive or fruitful than Schuon's teachings on Christ, and it is upon these that I would like to concentrate here.

I am myself a Christian, a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and as a professor of theology at a large university in the American South, I teach mostly Christian students. It is only natural that other Christians should from time to time become aware of my sympathy for Schuon's perspective, and when they do so it is understandable that many of them should be surprised, and in some cases dismayed—especially those who learn that Schuon was a universalist and a leading exponent of the *sophia perennis*. They wonder what I could possibly be thinking. How could I compromise my allegiance to Christ and my fidelity to His Church by supposing that other religions are equally true, and by looking to Schuon as a spiritual guide? I do not here wish to go into the second part of this question, except to say that when I once asked a very high ranking and well-known hierarch of the Orthodox Church for his comments on my friendship with Schuon, he replied by referring me to a passage in *The Way of a Pilgrim* which permits the Christian, in the

absence of an Orthodox *starets*, to seek direction "even from a Saracen". There is also this to be added: In my first meeting with Schuon, almost his very first words to me were an admonition that "Christ is your master".

But what about the larger matter of other spiritual forms? How in good conscience can a traditional Christian accept the idea that there is a "transcendent unity of religions"?[1] The first thing to stress about Schuon's answer to this question is that it requires no diminution in our convictions as to the stature of Christ. Unlike certain modernist theologians, who in the interest of fostering harmony among the religions are prepared to jettison the Incarnation and to reduce Jesus to purely human and historical categories, Schuon is adamant in his defense of the traditional doctrine. "The mainspring of Christianity," he insists—borrowing as he so often does the familiar Patristic formulation—"is that 'God has become man so that man may become God.'"[2] Indeed, "the whole of Christianity hangs on these words: Christ is God."[3] As his readers know very well, he had nothing but the most withering scorn for those who would call into question this and other traditional doctrines by acting as if they had in some way been ruled out by a currently fashionable, and unreflective, materialism, and who have determined accordingly to purge the Gospels of the supernatural. "Scientific discoveries prove nothing to contradict the traditional positions of religion,"[4] Schuon writes, and many pages of his prose are dedicated to criticizing the pretensions of modern scientism and historicism, and to chastising

1. I refer here to the title of one of Schuon's earliest works, and perhaps his best known, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1984).
2. Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, trans. William Stoddart (London: Perennial Books, 1981), p. 37. "In Christianity, the Patristic formula of saving reciprocity is a priceless jewel: 'God became man that man might become God'; it is a revelation in the full sense, of the same rank as scripture, which may seem surprising, but which is a 'paracletic' possibility" (*Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, trans. Gustavo Polit [Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1986], p. 116).
3. Schuon, *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer (London: Perennial Books, 1990), p. 108. Elsewhere he writes, "A Christianity that denies the Divinity of Christ denies the reason for its own existence" (*Transcendent Unity*, p. 99).
4. Schuon, *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1984), pp. 37-38.

those who feel obliged to reduce their religions in the interest of making them relevant. As for a more recent and somewhat more nuanced suggestion that we might as good Biblical critics nonetheless allow for Christ's having been a kind of shamanistic healer—though still, of course, without His being God—there is this pointed reply: "The miracles of Christ are not 'occult powers' (*siddhis*) that can be exercised or not exercised, but Divine manifestations, therefore facts that elude all psychological evaluation, and Christ is not a man who became wise, but Wisdom become man."[5] My aim here is not to defend these assertions against the objections of the demythologizers. They have only to investigate such works of Schuon's as *Logic and Transcendence*, or perhaps the excellent chapter on "Orthodoxy and Intellectuality" in his *Stations of Wisdom*, to discover why scholarly integrity in no way necessitates a sacrifice of traditional faith. But my interlocutors for the moment are my fellow Orthodox and other conservative Christians, and my aim is to emphasize how fully traditional are this perennialist's Christological teachings.

Nor are they traditional by accident or inadvertently. As with every religion about which he wrote, Schuon made it his business to penetrate deeply into Christianity. He knew its scriptures, its liturgies, its art, its leading authorities, the lives of its saints, its denominational divergences, and its conciliar formularies. And when it came to Christian teaching on Christ, he always wrote with a full knowledge of the early Church and its historical controversies. He was well aware, for example, of the anathemas which Dyophysites, Monophysites, Aphthartodocetae, Phthartolatrae, Agnoetae, Akistetae, and Ktistolatrae hurl at one another over the question of knowing whether Christ is of an incorruptible substance or whether, on the contrary, his was like other bodies, or whether there was a part of human ignorance in the soul of Christ, or whether the body of Christ is uncreated while being at the same time visible, or whether it was created, and so on. And Schuon was able, like the Church Fathers before him, to find the essential balance between these competing extremes. He realized, in other words, that Christ, "as living form of God, had to show in His humanity supernatural prerogatives which it would be vain to seek to enumerate, but that

5. *Gnosis*, pp. 56-57.

inasmuch as He was incontestably man, He was bound to have certain limits, as is proved by the incident of the fig tree whose sterility he did not discern from afar".[6] We shall be looking more closely at certain particulars later. My immediate purpose in citing this passage is simply to show that Schuon's Christology was by no means uninformed by the classic Christian sources. On the contrary, he was fully aware of what he called in one of his most important chapters "The Mystery of the Two Natures",[7] and he was tireless in demonstrating its manifold implications.

But it is here precisely that a certain dilemma arises. If Schuon really believed that Christ is God, how could he at the same time have defended the "spiritual equivalence of the great revelations"?[8] This seems to many a sheer contradiction. If Christ is both true God and true man—if the early creeds are right that Jesus of Nazareth was the incarnate, only-begotten, and eternal Son of God—then it is surely impossible to condone those religions which ignore or dismiss His Divinity. Is it not obvious that they must be rejected as false? Or alternatively, if these other religions are true, does it not follow that in order to honor them, we should reject instead the early creeds? Must we not admit, no matter how grudgingly, that the doctrine of the two natures was a bit of pious excess, a speculative luxury conditioned by the now outmoded philosophical categories of late antiquity, and unjustified in any case by the life of the historical Jesus?

The first of these alternatives—the repudiation of other religions—has of course always been common among traditional Christians, and it may take either of two basic forms. Some will say that the non-Christian is necessarily damned, that there can be no salvation apart from a conscious, explicit, and active faith in Jesus Christ and membership in His visible Body, the Church; whereas

6. Schuon, *In the Face of the Absolute* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1989), pp. 65-66.
7. Schuon, *Christianity/Islam: Essays on Esoteric Ecumenicism*, trans. Gustavo Polit (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1985), pp. 55-66. It is important to add that Schuon's knowledge of Christianity came from more than just books. His own brother was a Trappist monk, and his many other contacts included the Orthodox Archimandrite Sophrony, a noted disciple of St Silouan of the Holy Mountain.
8. Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, trans. P. N. Townsend (London: Perennial Books, 1987), p. 121.

others will allow that the non-Christian may in certain cases be saved, but only in spite of the religion he practices and only through the mercy of a God who overlooks his ignorance in this life and permits him to submit to the lordship of Christ after death. As for the second alternative—the repudiation of the early creeds—this as we know is the more typical modern approach, an approach which presumes that believing in the Divinity of Christ necessarily goes hand in hand with religious prejudice and exclusivist bigotry. In recent conversation with a prominent member of the much-discussed Jesus Seminar, I was told that while the previous generation of scholars was doubtless wrong in imposing an Enlightenment worldview on the New Testament texts, they were nonetheless right in rejecting the claim that Jesus is God. This is required in part for various textual and historical reasons, the scholar claimed, but his admitted first concern was to avoid causing offense to those of other faiths.

But are these really the only options? Are we obliged to choose between an "exclusive dogmatism", on the one hand, which has admittedly become "untenable and dangerous in a universe where everything meets and interpenetrates", and a "blind and dissolvent ecumenism",[9] on the other, which forgets that "the religions and their orthodox developments are inalienable and irreplaceable legacies to which nothing essential can be added and from which nothing essential can be subtracted"?[10] Schuon thinks not, and a large part of his work was devoted to showing a way out of this dilemma.

The solution for him lies in an esoteric ecumenism—an ecumenism which is based upon a sacred science of symbols and which is designed to reveal the inward meaning of traditional religious doctrines and rites. "When a man seeks to escape from dogmatic narrowness," he writes, "it is essential that it be 'upwards' and not 'downwards': dogmatic form is transcended by fathoming its depths and contemplating its universal content, and not by denying it in the name of a pretentious and iconoclastic ideal of 'pure truth'".[11] A legitimate and spiritually profitable dialogue among the religions

9. Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, trans. Peter N. Townsend (London: Perennial Books, 1975), pp. 4, 5.
10. Schuon, "No Activity without Truth", *The Sword of Gnosis: Metaphysics, Cosmology, Tradition, Symbolism*, ed. Jacob Needleman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 34-35.
11. Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1995), p. 4.

is one which recognizes, paradoxical though this may seem, that the traditions are closest to each other and most alike at their centers, not along their circumferences, and it will therefore always take as its starting point those dogmas and symbols which are the most distinctive or characteristic in a given religion. Instead of apologetic and half-embarrassed dismissals, it will be noted for its serious and sympathetic engagement with each tradition's most essential and original teachings, for "that which in each religion provides the key for total or non-dualist esoterism is not some secret concept of a heterogeneous character, but is the very presiding idea of the religion."[12] In the case of Christianity, of course, no teaching is more central or presiding than the Incarnation, and it was therefore always in full view of this doctrine, understood in its own traditional terms, that Schuon wrote about the Christian faith, whether with respect to some historical or denominational question, or in connection with metaphysics and *gnosis*.[13] But what exactly does this doctrine say?

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The Christian believes that God became man in Jesus Christ. It must be understood at once, however, that the Incarnation is a considerably more subtle affair than this highly elliptical formulation suggests—however much Christian piety may have sometimes wished to simplify, and however often the modern critics have reacted to this simplification with an equal disregard for the doctrine itself. God became man, it is true. But as the Fathers of the early Church helped to clarify, it was not just any aspect of God, or God as such, who was incarnate in Jesus; nor was it some particular man, but man as such, that He became; and in becoming man He never ceased to be God. It is crucial that we not lose sight of these three

12. *Esoterism*, pp. 25-26.
13. Since "Christianity is founded on the idea and the reality of Divine Manifestation" (*Logic and Transcendence*, p. 98), and since "for the Christian, the overwhelming argument is the Divinity of Christ, and, flowing from this, the fact that there is an intermediary between God and man in the form of God made man" (*Gnosis*, p. 13), it follows that if there is to be a "Christian *gnosis*", it must find "its support a priori, and of necessity, in the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption, and thus in the Christic Phenomenon as such" (*Esoterism*, p. 26).

important distinctions. Let me restate them in the classic language of the ecumenical councils.

The tradition teaches us first that it was the Son or *Logos*, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, who was incarnate in Jesus, not the first Person of the Father. On the contrary, the Father is the *aitia* or cause of both the Son and the Spirit, whether by filiation or spiration; He is the Unity, according to St Gregory the Theologian, "from whom and to whom the order of the Persons runs its course",[14] and He remains forever, therefore—despite the Incarnation—a transcendent and inaccessible mystery. The three Persons are indeed *homoousios* or consubstantial, all of them sharing in the common essence of Divinity. But Christianity explicitly repudiates the notion that they are therefore the same or interchangeable. To suppose that they are, to confuse or confound or equate the Persons, is in fact a heresy—the heresy of modalistic monarchianism or Sabellianism.

The second distinction pertains to the human dimension of Christ. According to many early Christian authorities, especially those associated with the Alexandrian school, the Son's human nature is to be regarded as generic, not specific, for it was not the historical particularity of an individual man, but the essence of man as such, which was assumed into God when "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14). The humanity of Jesus was in this sense impersonal or "anhypostatic"—or perhaps "enhypostatic", to use the technical parlance of Leontius of Byzantium, who preferred to say that while Jesus had no uniquely human *hypostasis*, His humanity shared in the *hypostasis* of the Divine Son of God. In any case, although Christ fully participated in every aspect of our *physis* or nature, sin only excepted, He was unlike us in not having a human personality, or substantial agency, as such. What He was, was both Divine and human, but who He was, was the *Logos*—His Person being in fact none other than the eternal second Person of the Trinity, who had existed from before the foundation of the world. To suppose otherwise, to think that Divinity had been projected somehow into an independent, and otherwise unexceptional, human being named Jesus, is also a heresy—the heresy of adoptionism or dynamic monarchianism.

14. *Theological Orations*, XLII.15.

Finally a third point, equally essential to a correct understanding of the traditional doctrine, pertains to the relationship between the two natures in Christ. While the first two distinctions have to do with the parallel planes of Christ's Divinity and humanity, the third concerns the vertical junction or intersection between them, and in this case the tradition explicitly forbids all attempts to confuse or identify the Divine and the human. Because of the Incarnation, the two natures are said to be "hypostatically" or substantially linked in Christ's Person, to such a degree that each shares the other's properties in a *communicatio idiomatum*. And yet it is impermissible to think that either nature was effaced by the other in the Person of the incarnate Word. To suppose that one of the natures could have been subsumed or eclipsed, to act in particular as though the humanity of Jesus had been overwhelmed by the Divinity that was manifest in Him, is to court yet another heresy—in this case, the heresy of monophysitism.

Schuon was well aware of these technical points. In fact, he seems to have understood them much better than many traditional Christians, including even certain doctors of the Church, who in their zeal to insure our conviction as to Christ's Divinity have often risked merging or confusing the God whom "no man hath seen at any time" (Jn 1:18) with the historical particularity of Jesus of Nazareth. This remark will probably come as a surprise to some of my readers, either because they were unaware of the subtlety in the early Church's pronouncements or because they are new to the Schuonian vocabulary. Nevertheless, once one understands his terms it is clear that Schuon's teaching on Christ, while perhaps controversial in certain particulars, is well within the bounds of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Let me try to substantiate this claim.[15]

Like every aspect of his message, Schuon's Christology must be seen in light of his metaphysics, and the place to begin is with the

15. My readers will understand that I do not pretend to be complete. What follows is only a brief and somewhat elliptical sketch of essentials, touching on but a few of the many relevant passages in Schuon's work. The allusion above is to the Definition of Chalcedon, promulgated in A.D. 451 by the fourth of the Ecumenical Councils. In summing up the distinctions which were touched on above, this classic statement of faith has since been a standard for the orthodox understanding of Christ, "the only-begotten Son, who is in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, and inseparably, without the distinction of natures being taken away by the union" (*The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, ed.

principial distinction he so often makes in his work between the Absolute and the Relative, or *Âtmâ* and *Mâyâ*. On the one hand there is That which cannot not be, the necessary, but on the other hand there is also that which need not be, the contingent or possible. "All other distinctions and valuations derive from this fundamental distinction."[16] As his readers know, this is a distinction which gives rise above all to the polarity of transcendence and immanence. To know that there is an Absolute, and to understand what It is, is to know that It is the only Reality. Only the Absolute is absolute, and in Its utter transcendence It completely eclipses the Relative, which in comparison is but an illusory nothingness. And yet to know that this Absolute is the only Reality is to know also that everything else is in some fashion It, for in Its independence and freedom from limits, It is equally infinite, and by virtue of this Infinitude It cannot but give rise to the Relative, in which It is immanent. Only *Âtmâ* truly is, but *Mâyâ* is the deployment and manifestation of *Âtmâ*. Nothing truly exists except God, and yet whatever exists truly is God.

According to Schuon, a full grasp of this teaching will oblige us to recognize that Relativity actually begins within the Divine Principle Itself: hence what he calls "the key notion of *Mâyâ in divinis*".[17] This in fact is one of the most important and characteristic features of his message. The Principle is not a monolithic Reality, but comprises instead an inward or intrinsic differentiation between two distinct degrees. There is on the one hand the

Henry R. Percival, Vol. XIV of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1983], pp. 264-65). It might be added, for those familiar with the early Christian schools and major Patristic figures, that Schuon's perspective is primarily Alexandrian, not Antiochene, and that his reading of Chalcedon is largely along Cyrilian lines—in keeping, that is, with the teaching of the Patriarch St Cyril of Alexandria. I do not however mean to suggest that Schuon was operating deliberately or self-consciously in these terms. He was a metaphysician and esoterist, not a theologian, and his point of departure was the nature of things, not the exoteric doctrines of any given religion. Doctrines were of interest to him insofar as they might serve as intellectual keys or methodic supports for those who would know what is.

16. Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics*, p. 7.
17. *Survey of Metaphysics*, p. 121. This "key notion", which Schuon calls "apparently absurd but metaphysically essential", is a hallmark of his perspective. For a fuller treatment of the idea of dimensions or levels in God, see Chapter 5, "The Degrees of Reality", in my *Advice to the Serious Seeker: Meditations on the Teaching of Frithjof Schuon* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).

Absolute as such, the Supreme Reality or "pure Ipseity";[18] but there is also a second level of Divinity, wherein the pure Absolute, while transcending all determinations and categories, makes Itself known in a determinate way, thus anticipating or prefiguring the world. By virtue of this determination, metaphysically necessary, the Absolute becomes subject in that measure to *Mâyâ*; it is precisely this Divine self-subjection to Relativity which gives rise to the difference, in Hindu teaching, between *Nirguna Brahman* and *Saguna Brahman*, or in Meister Eckhart's doctrine between *Gottheit* and *Gott*. In Schuon's vocabulary it is the difference between Beyond-Being and Being, or again between the Divine Essence and the Divine Person. But whatever language we use, the distinction itself is universal and inescapable. On the one hand, there must be an Absolute, utterly independent and sovereign, conditioned by nothing, not even by Itself; and yet, given the very nature of this Absolute, which cannot but be Infinite, there must also arise a determinate, and subordinate, dimension within the Divine Principle, which, though absolute with respect to the world, is nonetheless relative with respect to Its Essence. However paradoxical the formulation may seem, there must also be a "relative Absolute".[19]

Even those with no experience in reading Schuon will quickly see the implications which these distinctions have for Christology. If one has understood the necessity of levels or dimensions in God, it should come as no surprise to discover that these dimensions are directly related, in Christian terms, to the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Nor should we be surprised to discover that for Schuon it is the First Person alone who is purely the Absolute, while the Son and the Holy Spirit—called by St Irenaeus the two "hands" of the Father—are at the level of the relative Absolute.[20] What this means, of course, is that a certain subordinationism is a necessary ingredient in any adequate understanding of Christ's Divinity. Even apart

18. This is a formulation to be found in a number of Schuon's unpublished texts.
19. Schuon, *The Play of Masks* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1992), p. 35. See also *Stations of Wisdom*, p. 16.
20. St Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 4.20.1. Schuon points out that God the Father may be pictured as a central point, the Holy Spirit as the radii projected out from this point, and the Son as the resulting circle. See *From the Divine to the Human*, trans. Gustavo Polit and Deborah Lambert (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1982), p. 40. Since my interest here is specifically in Schuon's Christology, I must set aside an investigation of his teaching on the

from His historical incarnation in Jesus, the *Logos* or Word of God must be acknowledged as precisely God's Word, His primal expression and self-determination, and as such, says Schuon, this *Logos* cannot help but partake of the metaphysically Relative. The Second Person cannot escape being the second person. Although absolute with respect to His creatures, He remains subordinate even so, from all eternity, to the First Person of "God the Father almighty" (Nicene Creed). Christ's Divinity is that of the "lesser Absolute".[21]

I realize that traditional Christians will at first be uneasy with this line of thinking, especially when they hear the word "subordinationism", which continues to this day to be associated with the much-maligned Origen. It is only natural that upon reading this exposition many will "hasten to deny Relativity *in divinis* with the intention of safeguarding the absoluteness of God"[22] and thus, they suppose, the Divinity of the Son—in spite of the fact that neither is under attack. But as Schuon often pointed out, in so doing these Christians are forgetting their own scriptures, where the subordination of the Divine Son is quite clear. It is certainly true that Jesus proclaimed His Divinity: "I and my Father are one" (Jn 10:30), and "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (Jn 14:9); and the Nicene Creed therefore obliges the Christian to affirm the consubstantiality of these Persons. Nonetheless, the Son also asserted, in no uncertain terms, that "my Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28),[23] a relationship which we readily see, a multitude of other proofs aside, in the Son's frequent prayers to the Father. Clearly there is

Trinity as such, which is considerably more subtle than I have suggested above. Here I have in mind only what he has called the "vertical perspective", which "envisages the Hypostases [or Persons] as 'descending' from Unity or from the Absolute". But there are also two "horizontal" perspectives. See Schuon, *Understanding Islam* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1994), p. 53.

21. *Face of the Absolute*, p. 40.
22. *Logic and Transcendence*, pp. 106-107.
23. It might be well to remind the reader that I am writing as an Orthodox Christian for other traditional Christians. I realize that the many quotations from St John will prove of little value to modern Biblical critics, who question the authenticity of many of Christ's sayings in this Gospel and find it the least reliable portrait of the "historical Jesus". But one cannot do everything at once, and a critique of these critics' assumptions, alluded to earlier, lies beyond the scope of this article. My specific aim in using John at this point is to accentuate the fact that even in the Gospel with the "highest" Christology, subordination remains.

One who is greater than Christ, and we must therefore conclude that there is a kind of hierarchy within God Himself.

Some traditional Christians, in hopes of protecting our faith in the Second Person from the corrosive effects of the Arian heresy, which denied His Divinity, have tried to make sense of this hierarchy by identifying any hint of subordination with Christ's human nature alone. When reference is made to the superiority of the Father, or when prayers are directed to the First Person, it is simply "Jesus the man", they contend, who is talking. But as the history of Christian doctrine makes clear, this is to risk falling prey in turn to the views of Nestorius, who divided Christ into two separate persons, assuming falsely that the Son's human "half" could act independently of His Divinity, and it is to forget what the Council at Ephesus so forcefully taught in response to this heresy: that the two natures cohere undividedly in the single Person of the *Logos*. To put the matter in less technical terms, the conciliar formulations require us to say that whatever deeds Jesus may have performed, and whatever words He spoke, were deeds done and words spoken by the eternal Son of God. When Jesus was born, it was God the Son who was born, so that the Virgin Mary may be addressed as the *Theotokos* or Mother of God. Similarly when Jesus wept and when He died, it was the Second Person who wept and died, albeit in a manner befitting Divinity and hence impassibly.

Schuon is therefore perfectly orthodox in explaining that "if Christ addresses a prayer to His Father, it is not solely by reason of His human nature; it is also by reason of the Relativity of the uncreated *Logos*".[24] He continues:

> The words of Christ announcing His subordination are often attributed to His human nature alone, but this delimitation is arbitrary and interested, for the human nature is bound by its Divine content; if it is part of the Son, it must manifest that content. The fact that this human nature exists and that its expressions manifest its subordination, and by the same token the hypostatic subordination of the Son, shows that the interpretation of the Son as the first Relativity confronting the purely Absolute Father is not contrary to Scripture and is inherently irrefutable.[25]

24. *Face of the Absolute*, p. 79.
25. *Logic and Transcendence*, pp. 98-99.

Nor is this interpretation in any way contrary to Patristic tradition, which forbids (as we have seen) any modalistic confusion of Persons, and which in so doing implicitly acknowledges that the Persons are intrinsically different—different, that is, independently of their extrinsic roles in the Divine economy. And if they are intrinsically different, they must also be hierarchically different. For unless words have no meaning it is absurd to think that the Son and Holy Spirit could be as absolute as their *cause*, or that the two *hands* could be on the same level as the person who wields them, or yet again that a *son* should be as original as the one who begat him. It is absurd in other words to suppose that the infinite simplicity of the pure Absolute could be repeated in an equally infinite and absolute duplicate. We must admit instead that Christ's Divinity is derivative, and that what one encounters in Jesus is not the Divine Essence Itself, but Its self-determination at the level of Being.

I turn now to the second and third of our Christological distinctions, which may I think be usefully treated together. Our task at this point is to examine more closely the mode of Christ's humanity and the nature of its union with the *Logos*. As explained earlier, two dogmatic points are essential to the traditional view on these questions. When God the Son became man, say the Fathers, it was not some particular man, but man as such, that He became, and in becoming man in this sense He never ceased to be God. The Divine humanity was not limited to the individual order, and yet the difference between the two natures was not eclipsed by their union. Here once more a careful reading of Schuon makes it clear that his teaching was in full accord with the Christian tradition.

Before we examine the specific terms of that tradition, however, another short metaphysical excursus is in order. I have called attention to the distinction which Schuon makes within the Divine Principle between the Absolute as such and the relative Absolute, and have explained that the Divinity of the Son corresponds to the latter. The Second Person takes second place to the First, and for this reason the *Logos* must be situated below the Divine Essence at the level of Being—a level which anticipates or prefigures the domain of creation or manifestation. For "all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1:3). A similar discrimination must now be established between two additional degrees of Reality, this time within the formal or created

universe. This is a distinction, in the Schuonian vocabulary, between the manifested Principle and manifestation as such. Even as manifestation is prefigured in the Principle, so the Principle is projected or prolonged in manifestation, and the result is "the celestial order", or simply "Heaven". Finally, beneath this heavenly level, there is a fourth and final degree, and this is the "natural" or "profane" world, or simply the "Earth".[26] According to Schuon, any metaphysically adequate understanding of the Incarnation will have to take into account both of these manifested degrees. For in entering the world of becoming as man, the Son of God became what we are, but without in any way ceasing to be what He is, and it can therefore be said that He was still in Heaven though He was present on Earth. He was at once the Principle manifest, and the manifest Principle. "It is not as man," says Schuon, "that Christ is God; but on the other hand the fact that He is man does not prevent His being really God."[27] Let us look now to see whether the tradition says the same thing.

According to the Bible "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14). But just what does this mean? It means, the Fathers say, that the Divine Son of God condescended to live the life of a real human being, becoming "consubstantial with us as to His humanity, being like us in every respect apart from sin" (Definition of Chalcedon). Whatever additional fine points we shall have to insist on, any attempt to deny this humanity must be rejected as heresy. Schuon was well aware of this point, concurring fully—as we shall see momentarily—with the Church's repudiation of docetism and heretical gnosticism. He too rejects the claim, in other words, that Christ was a pure spirit and only seemed to be man. But at the same time he was also of one mind with the Fathers in realizing that a bare admission of Christ's manhood still leaves open the important question of its mode, and it was obvious to him, as it was to the early Church, that however genuine the Son's human nature might be, it was nevertheless "of a different essence from that of the ordinary man, and this by reason of the intimate penetration of all His modalities by the Universal". For the "very substance of the individuality"—the very thing which distinguishes each of us as human

26. *Survey of Metaphysics*, p. 19.
27. *Eye of the Heart*, pp. 153-54.

egos and agents—was "transmuted by the Real Presence" of Divinity.[28]

Thinking only of these and other similar passages in Schuon's writings, some Christian readers have charged their author with ignoring the historical particularity of the Incarnation, and with focusing too exclusively on the supra-temporal *Logos* or cosmic Christ. But is this really fair? Schuon was doubtless less inclined than many contemporary Christian scholars to emphasize the "historical Jesus"—but then so were the Bible and other orthodox sources, with which he was in complete unanimity. One recalls, for example, the words which Christ spoke to Nicodemus: "No man hath ascended up to Heaven but He that came down from Heaven, even the Son of Man which is in Heaven" (Jn 3:13). However else we might wish to gloss this remarkable text, there is no escaping the fact that a celestial Man, who could be simultaneously present on two distinct planes of Reality, must have differed from the rest of us in much more than degree. Or consider Christ's miracles, especially perhaps those involving His manipulation of material substances and those effected by contact with His physical body. Here, too, it seems obvious that the human dimension of His incarnate Person, although truly human—and although subject, at some important level, to the conditions of a fallen environment—must have retained nonetheless at least some of the powers and privileges of Eden. Or yet again one thinks of the incarnate Word's ability to render Itself invisible and weightless, disappearing in the midst of crowds (Lk 4:30) and walking on water (Mt 14:25). In these and numerous other such cases, it is obvious that Christ was free from terrestrial and temporal constraints in some way—certainly to an extent we are not—and hence that the properties and powers of His manhood, genuine though it was, were ontologically affected by its union with the *Logos*.

"The Divine man is 'true God and true man.'" With this claim no orthodox Christian will wish to quarrel. But Schuon is surely right to add that "being 'God', and despite being 'man', He is not 'man' in the same way as other men are who are not 'God'".[29] No less a figure than St Athanasius concurs:

28. *Eye of the Heart*, pp. 104, 105.
29. *Eye of the Heart*, p. 106.

> A man cannot transport things from one place to another merely by thinking about them; nor can you and I move the sun and stars by sitting at home and looking at them. With the Word of God in His human nature, however, it was otherwise. His body was for Him not a limitation, but an instrument, so that He was both in it and in all things, and outside all things, resting in the Father alone. At one and the same time—this is the wonder—as man He was living a human life, and as Word He was sustaining the life of the universe.[30]

I have referred to Christ's words and mentioned His miracles, but the wonder of which the saint is here speaking can be apprehended most clearly perhaps in the Transfiguration, when "His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light" (Mt 17:2). What we see in this account, say the Orthodox Fathers, is resplendent and irrefutable evidence of what Christ always was in Himself. For the transformation on Tabor involved no change in Him whose eternal and celestial glory persisted throughout His earthly life; it was a transformation instead in the eyes of His apostles, who were now able to see His human nature as it had always been. Thus Schuon's observation:

> To recognize that the humanity of Christ is the vehicle of the Divine nature amounts to saying that if the human side is in one respect truly human, it is so in a way that is nonetheless different from the humanity of ordinary men. In a certain sense and a priori the Divine Presence transfigures, or transubstantializes, the human nature; the body of Christ is already, here below, what celestial bodies are, with the sole difference that it is nevertheless affected by some of the accidents of earthly life.[31]

God became man. But since it was God who was this man, the man cannot but have shimmered with the Divinity of His other nature, and for this reason we are obliged to affirm that even His human nature was not quite the same as our own. In becoming man, says St Gregory of Nyssa, the Word of God "took our nature within

30. *On the Incarnation*, XVII. Some may object that despite its saintly provenance, this passage comes too close to the Apollinarian heresy, which denied that Christ had a real human soul. It is clear, however, that the "body" is for St Athanasius what the "flesh" is for St Paul: the psychosomatic ensemble of the individual man as a whole.

31. *Christianity/Islam*, pp. 56-57.

Himself, so that the human should be deified by this mingling with God. The stuff of our nature was entirely sanctified by Christ."[32]

There remains, however, one final distinction. The Person of Christ's Divinity and the unique mode of His manhood having been underscored, we are still faced with the question as to the union between them. As we have just seen, the tradition insists that the Son's humanity was not of an ordinary or purely limited order. But it must now be added that the Fathers also eschew the opposite extreme: the Christian is not permitted to believe that Jesus was a man like all others, a man merely chosen and empowered by God, but neither may he deny that He was a man altogether. For even though the human nature of Christ was transmuted, transfigured, or "transubstantialized" through its union with God, that nature remained truly and recognizably human. The Son of God really lived as a man, and His willing submission to the accidents and contingencies of the terrestrial order was not an illusion—or in any case no more an illusion than that order itself.[33] This, too, Christianity affirms and requires.

What is true for the tradition is also true for Schuon. It is evident once again, from his many references to the Incarnation, that he was thoroughly steeped in the classic sources and arguments, and that he too was prepared to emphasize a real human nature in Christ. As I mentioned earlier, some Christians appear to have concluded from the fact that Schuon was an esoterist and a teacher of *gnosis* that he was a gnostic in the ancient sectarian sense, and perhaps for this reason they have been unwilling to study him closely enough to see how consistent his teaching is on this point with the Church. Jesus Christ, Schuon says unequivocally, "was incontestably man", and therefore "He was bound to have certain limits",[34] the claims of heretical docetists notwithstanding. "There is no doubt," he continues, "that the Man-God is, in a certain respect and by definition, a human individual; otherwise He would not be a man in

32. *Against Apollinarius*, II.

33. The point of this qualification is to remind us that everything below the level of the pure Absolute partakes to some extent in the illusory nature of *Mâyâ*. At the same time, however, there is no denying "the objective homogeneity of the cosmic environment" (*Spiritual Perspectives*, p. 114). "A mountain is a mountain and not a dream, or it would be in the void that ants would be crossing rocks and climbing slopes" (*Gnosis*, p. 57).

34. *Face of the Absolute*, p. 66.

any sense, and it would be impossible to speak of Him in any way." Being ourselves of a formal and individual order, an individual form is necessary to ensure us access to God. This in effect was the whole point of the Incarnation: God became man precisely "for us men and for our salvation" (Nicene Creed). Moreover, this "individuality—the presence of which, in some mode or other, is an obvious thing in every man, since the human state is an individual one—cannot but be what it is by definition", namely a condition of limitation. It is in the nature of things, says Schuon, that any human being must possess "the limitative attributes which constitute his essential definition, and failing which he would not be a human individual but something else".[35] Man is not God, to say the least; he is one kind of creature, and his distinction both from God and other creatures will necessarily exhibit itself in his human form and his manner of being. There should therefore be nothing unexpected in the fact that Jesus was limited in various ways, whether we think of His admitted ignorance in certain situations—the episode of the fig tree has been mentioned already—or the physical hardships to which His body was subject, or His real human emotions.

Nor is it strange that He should have said of Himself, speaking by virtue of His human nature, "Why callest thou Me good? There is none good save one, that is God" (Mt 19:17). "We may compare these Gospel words," Schuon observes, "with the following saying from an Upanishad: 'the essence of man is made of desire.'" Schuon's point is by no means that Christ, a celestial and sinless man, was subject to unruly passions; nevertheless He did assume a real human soul, "which, as such, necessarily comprises all the constituent elements and all the essential attributes of individuality". Since to be a man means to have a mind which can reason, a will which can choose, and emotions which are able to feel, it must be said as a consequence that Christ possessed a genuine human "psychism", which included something "analogous to what in ordinary mortals we call 'desire'". While admittedly we "cannot know the dimensions which individual facts, thanks to their transcendent quality, have for the 'human God'",[36] it is very clear from the Bible

35. *Eye of the Heart*, pp. 103, 105.

36. *Eye of the Heart*, pp. 104, 105. It is of interest to note that after more than fifteen hundred years, many Orthodox authorities have concluded that the division between them and the Copts on these very delicate points may have been strict-

that Jesus could truly think and feel as a man, being "tempted as we are, and yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Whether therefore we look at the matter as metaphysicians or simply as readers of Holy Scripture, the inadequacies of monophysitism should be obvious: Christ was truly human, or else the Incarnation is a meaningless term. In all this, once again, Schuon agreed with the Fathers.

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Schuon was of one mind with the Fathers in much more than the details, however. He was like them as well in his recognition that the Incarnation presents the human mind with a puzzle or paradox, which no discursive analysis will ever suffice to resolve. The Christian tradition has always insisted that the Reality behind its central beliefs infinitely transcends the categories and terms that have been fixed in its dogmas; and in the case of Christology in particular, the dogmatic formulas of the Councils have a largely apophatic or koanic function, telling us primarily what should *not* be taught regarding the incarnate Son. No unilateral affirmation may be fully acknowledged, for whatever is said about Christ must be at once taken back—and we are left to wonder in silence. In the words of the Orthodox Vespers for Christmas, "A marvelous wonder has this day come to pass. Nature is made new, and God becomes man. That which He was, He has remained, and that which He was not, He has taken upon Himself, while suffering neither confusion nor division."[37]

The mystery of the two natures is a wonder indeed, and it would be foolish to think that one might give it a conclusive or definitive explanation or discern the full range of its meaning. Indeed, for all his dialectical efforts, Schuon was the first to admit the impossibility of ever finding the appropriate words: "One may indeed try, in human language, to specify in what manner the Divine man is indi-

ly terminological. In recent conversation with an Orthodox monk—and reader of Schuon—the Coptic Patriarch, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, admitted for his part that the Orthodox and Oriental Christologies are "merely points of departure and are not contradictory". The Copts, long thought to be monophysite, had never meant to deny Christ's continuing humanity in its incarnate union with the *Logos*, but only to stress its Divine uniqueness.

37. *The Festal Menaion*, p. 291.

vidual and in what manner He is not"—or, we might add, in what manner He is Divine and in what manner not—"but it will always be impossible to express this adequately and completely, because the infinitely complex and apparently paradoxical realities involved transcend the bounds of simple human reason, of which language is the instrument".[38] Metaphysically, the Incarnation means that the Principle has entered manifestation in order to become what It is not. But since this Principle is on the one hand the only thing that exists, and since on the other hand whatever exists is the Principle, the boundaries to be crossed in Its apparent descent are as it were in constant movement, shifting and vanishing according to perspective and spiritual strategy. There is certainly a pattern or rhythm to this movement, and it can be discerned by the Intellect; but it can never be adequately put into words.[39]

It therefore goes without saying that my aim in this chapter is by no means to fathom the full depth of the doctrine, nor is it even to present a complete picture of the Schuonian teachings on Christ. Not the least of the matters that must remain unexamined are the far-reaching implications of Christology for the spiritual life. We get just a taste of these in Schuon's observation that "the function of the historical Christ is to awaken and actualize the inward Christ, the Heart-Intellect", which itself is "true man and

38. *Eye of the Heart*, p. 106. For those with the need to know and the ears to hear, there is an important lesson here *mutatis mutandis* when it comes to assessing the precise stature of any great saint or sage. Since "every spiritual master, by his knowledge and his function and by the graces attaching to them, is mysteriously assimilated to his prototypes and, both through them and independently of them, to the primordial Prototype, the founding *Avatâra*" (*Logic and Transcendence*, p. 227), it is to be expected that the genuine master, whether Christian or otherwise, should participate at some level in the antinomic or paradoxical qualities resulting from that "union without confusion" which is the mystery of the two natures. We should never be surprised at finding in such a figure certain puzzling or even scandalous features, and we should realize that it will never be an easy task to determine whether in any given instance these are a part of the foolishness with which the Divine Wisdom must appear in the world, or the result instead of the inevitable limitations which are marks of the human condition. In a sense this entire article is meant to underscore this lesson.

39. "'God became man in order that man might become God': the Absolute became Relativity in order that the relative might become absolute. This paraphrase of the Patristic formula suggests, with no more and no less felicity than the formula itself, a metaphysical situation which it would be difficult to express in a few words" (*Logic and Transcendence*, p. 104n).

true God",[40] and that "the Son, Second Person of the Trinity, is man universalized" while "Jesus Christ is God individualized",[41] or again that "man's problem is that he is at one and the same time accident and Substance and that he needs to know exactly in what respect he is the one or the other, and how he must turn this double nature to account".[42] The mystery of the two natures is a mystery inherent in our own deepest selves, and Christology is a matter finally of esoteric anthropology. Here however, in the concluding section of this chapter, I would like to direct our attention, not to the spiritual path as such, but to the multiplicity of spiritual forms—not to Christ and the Self, but to Christ and the non-Christian religions.

As I explained at the outset, my fellow Orthodox and other traditional Christians are often surprised when they learn that I share the Schuonian perspective. How can a Christian accept the idea that other religious traditions are true while at the same time remaining faithful to Jesus? Many are convinced, without even reading his books, that Schuon—in typical modernist fashion—must have somehow ignored or distorted their tradition, and that the doctrine of the Incarnation in particular has been misrepresented or misunderstood. Do the Fathers not tell us that Jesus is "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all ages" (Nicene Creed)? And did not He Himself say that "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (Jn 14:6)? Surely, many Christians would argue, this is decisive proof that no other path to salvation is possible.

It is with such objections and protests in mind that I have devoted the largest part of this discussion to a detailed treatment of Schuon's teaching on Christ, and I hope it is clear by now that whatever else one might say about his message in general, it is absurd to think that his Christology came from neglect or misinformation. By moving back and forth between his own words and those of the Church, one can see very clearly that his understanding of the two natures, based upon a close acquaintance with the traditional sources, was perfectly orthodox in all the dogmatic essentials, even

40. *Esoterism*, pp. 38-39.
41. *Transcendent Unity*, p. 109.
42. *Logic and Transcendence*, p. 84.

judging the matter according to strictly exoteric criteria. This of course is precisely what we would expect of the genuine esoterist, who knows that the "truth does not deny forms from the outside, but transcends them from within".[43] However he may assist us in deepening or interiorizing our comprehension of a given spiritual world, or a given traditional doctrine, his message will be distinguished by its orthodoxy, and hence by its fidelity to the central and presiding ideas of that world.

But if all this is true—if the Christological teachings of Schuon are essentially orthodox—one begins to wonder, in view of his explicit and distinctive universalism, why so many Christians have nonetheless thought that a traditional faith in Christ obliges them to repudiate the possibility of other saving religions; and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they themselves must have failed to understand the actual terms of the doctrine. In fact, although Schuon never put it this way, one is inclined to go further yet: not only have such Christians failed to comprehend the deepest significance of their most important dogma; the understanding they *do* claim to have—however shocking it may sound for me to level this charge—is itself heretical. It is the result in fact of three heresies all wrapped into one.

Consider what the Christian exclusivist says. Salvation is impossible, he asserts, apart from a conscious, explicit, and active faith in Jesus Christ, for Jesus is the only man in history who at the same time was God, and it therefore follows that He alone can rescue men from sin and death. This reasoning can be expressed in the form of a syllogism: God alone can save; Jesus is God; therefore,

43. *Spiritual Perspectives*, p. 118. In emphasizing that Schuon's Christology is in accord with the letter of the Patristic formulas, I do not wish to imply that he accepted all the opinions of the Church Fathers, nor all the more that most of them would have approved of his universalism. Even allowing for the fact that the Fathers knew very little *de facto* about other authentic traditions apart from Judaism, we must admit in most cases that a *de jure* exclusivism marks their writing. The words of St Justin the Philosopher are by no means unique, but like those of St Nikolai Velimirovich in our own time (see note 61 below), they are exceptional. According to Justin, "We have been taught that Christ is the First-begotten of God, the *Logos* of which every race of man partakes. Those who lived in accordance with the *Logos* are Christians, even though they were called godless, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus. . . . Those who lived by the *Logos*, and those who so live now, are Christians, fearless and unperturbed" (*First Apology*, 46).

only Jesus can save. Now certainly the Schuonian will not object to the first proposition, for it is undeniably true that there is no possibility of salvation apart from Divine grace and the initiative of Heaven. The problem arises with the exclusivist's understanding of the second claim, the minor premise of the syllogism. Jesus Christ *is* certainly God, but the exclusivist takes the further step of supposing that the verbal copula functions like the sign of identity in a mathematical equation, and hence that the nouns in the minor premise can be reversed: not only is Jesus God, but God is also Jesus. As a result, the unique and eternal nature of the Son's Divinity is transposed onto the plane of history; the one-and-only quality of Him who was incarnate, "the only begotten Son of God", is confused with the temporal and spatial particularity of His incarnation in Jesus, and His singularity *in divinis* is conflated with an event of a strictly factual or historical order.[44] Now of course, to affirm that God is fully present in Christ is by no means false, and there is no question as to the formula's great rhetorical power. But the homiletic or kerygmatic value of this expression should not blind us to its dialectical weakness, for as an ellipsis it risks identifying the Beyond-Being of the pure Absolute with the individuality of a particular human being.

Such an identification is the consequence of three very serious errors, each the result of collapsing an important distinction, and all strongly condemned—as we have seen—by the Christian tradition. To use Schuon's terms, those who thus reason have confused the relative Absolute with Its principial Essence, they have failed to distinguish between the Principle and manifestation, and they have forgotten that the manifest Principle is not the same as manifestation as such. They have not understood, in other words, that orthodox Christology is a "combination of three polarities—man and God, terrestrial man and Divine man, hypostatic God and essential God".[45] Or again, in the language of the early Church, they have identified the First and Second Persons of the Holy Trinity, they have

44. The truth is that "only the Divine manifestation 'is the Self', to the exclusion of every human counterfeit". But this is reduced to meaning: "only such and such a Divine manifestation—to the exclusion of all others—is the Self" (*Gnosis*, p. 68). This of course is not to deny a certain symbolic resonance between the historical singularity of Jesus's life and the eternal uniqueness of the *Logos*.

45. *Face of the Absolute*, p. 74.

failed to discriminate between Christ's Divinity and His humanity, and they have forgotten that Jesus was no ordinary man. Reverting to the technical vocabulary used by historians of doctrine, we must conclude that the exclusivist's point of view is the product of three major heresies: modalistic monarchianism, monophysitism, and dynamic monarchianism. Ironically enough, it is only because he is three times a heretic that he believes himself to be so orthodox!

Now I realize that this is quite a bold allegation, and I must confess at once that I have somewhat overstated my case. In truth I am very far from supposing that, at the level of pious practice, there is anything wrong with an exclusive fidelity to Jesus as the "only Son", and I am in no way proposing that the tenets of the *sophia perennis* should be adopted as *de fide* dogmas. I recall in this regard a very serious and pious priest who once told me that if he did not believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the only way to be saved, he could not believe in Jesus at all. Whether or not we are metaphysicians, there is clearly no point in disparaging such a faith, or in deliberately distracting such a person from the "one thing needful" (Luke 10:42) by suggesting that he should concern himself with philosophical and theological subtleties. Schuon always said that the whole point of his books and other writings was the salvation of souls, and he would never have countenanced that pseudo-intellectual one-upmanship which presumes to tell people what they have no need of knowing; he would also have been adamant in reminding the *jñâni* or intellectual that "intelligence and metaphysical certainty alone do not save, and do not of themselves prevent titanic falls".[46]

Furthermore, in asserting that the exclusivists have misunderstood the Incarnation, I do not mean to suggest that the whole of the Christian tradition can be reduced to this single doctrine, central and indispensable though it is. A religion is much more than any one, or even all, of its dogmatic beliefs; as Schuon often observed, religions are like planets or worlds, each bearing the imprint of a Divine archetype and each serving to mold, not just the arts and sciences of a given civilization, but the very souls of those who inhabit it. Much of his work was devoted to explaining the vari-

46. *Spiritual Perspectives*, p. 145. Elsewhere he writes, "Even if our writings had on the average no other result than the restitution for some of the saving barque that is prayer, we would owe it to God to consider ourselves profoundly satisfied" (*Play of Masks*, p. vii).

eties of religious partisanship which inevitably result from this fact, especially in the climate of the Abrahamic traditions, and he was always the first to allow for the existence of a "human margin",[47] where the believer has a certain right to his ego and hence to certain sentimental predispositions and individual preferences. Schuon taught, moreover, that what is true of the human beings in a given traditional collectivity must be true in a sense of that tradition itself. In the interest of saving as many men as possible, religions take on something of the individuality of their adherents, and therefore "every religion by definition wants to be the best, and 'must want' to be the best".[48] There is thus considerably more to the exclusivist's attitude toward other faiths than any given believer's comprehension (or not) of traditional Christology, and it is in no way surprising that a majority of Christians, like their counterparts in other religions, should wish to cling to the notion that they alone have the keys of the Kingdom.

Indeed, this is all the more understandable, according to Schuon, when one considers the esoteric and initiatic nature of the central Christian mysteries, and when one measures them against the capacity and expectations of the average believer, who needs to see things in terms of clear-cut choices between God and the world. The "simultaneity of antinomic aspects"[49] in any adequate formulation of Christ's two natures must unavoidably elude such a person, and for this reason, in order to appeal to "a mentality more volitive than contemplative", the Christian theologian has in most cases settled for "a logic that is dogmatically coagulative and piously unilateral"[50]—one that accentuates "the most important truth to the detriment of essential metaphysical shades of meaning".[51] Of course,

47. *Face of the Absolute*, pp. 65-105.
48. *Christianity/Islam*, p. 151.
49. *Logic and Transcendence*, p. 106.
50. *Logic and Transcendence*, p. 96.
51. *Face of the Absolute*, p. 75. That the two natures are indivisibly but unconfusedly united in the one Person of Christ (see note 15 above) is a quintessentially dialectical formula, in the very saying of which one must conflate complementary opposites, neither of which is true on its own. In order to approach the doctrine discursively, the theologian is therefore obliged, in any given rhetorical moment, to stress either the unity or the diversity, giving the appearance of a competition between the two truths, and traditionally a kind of victory has always been accorded to the relatively more important half-truth of unity. "'The Father is greater than I', but 'I and the Father are one'. Theology does not draw

if Christianity "were not a religion but a sapiential doctrine, it might rest content with describing why and how the Absolute manifests Itself. But being a religion," Schuon observes, "it must enclose everything within its fundamental idea of manifestation".[52] And so it is that the Absolute in Itself becomes reduced to the level of historical fact: Jesus is God, and therefore God is Jesus—completely, uniquely, and irrevocably. From this point, of course, it is but a very small step to the claim that a conscious and sacramental connection with this particular fact is the condition *sine qua non* for salvation.

Nevertheless, having conceded the rights of the Christian faithful to their simplifications, and thus their exoteric exclusivism, I must at the same time continue to insist that the conciliar formulas of the early Church by no means require the Christian to adopt an exclusivist stance. Truth has its rights, greater indeed than those of any man, and the truth in this case means calling the bluff on those theologians and other Christian believers who would presume to criticize Schuon for neglecting or misinterpreting their tradition. Other justifications and explanations aside, it means facing up to the fact that there is simply no good Christological reason for thinking that Christianity is the only means of salvation.[53] Charity cer-

all of the consequences implied by the former, and it draws too many from the latter" (*Divine to the Human*, p. 40n).

52. *Logic and Transcendence*, p. 98. According to Schuon, there has always been a kind of tension between "the eminently esoteric character of primitive Christianity" and the fact that it was providentially destined to be a world religion, and therefore open to all men. "The essentially initiatory character of Christianity is apparent from certain features of the first importance, such as the Doctrine of the Trinity, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and more particularly, the use of wine in this rite, or again from the use of purely esoteric expressions such as 'Son of God' and especially 'Mother of God'. If exoterism is 'something that is at the same time indispensable and accessible to all' [René Guénon], Christianity cannot be exoteric in the usual sense of the word, since it is in reality by no means accessible to everyone, although in fact, by virtue of its outward application, it is binding upon everyone" (*Transcendent Unity*, pp. 137, 132).

53. The exclusivist will perhaps respond that there are other scriptural and traditional reasons for arguing that a rejection is called for, and this I concede, though I cannot even begin addressing them here. I can only briefly mention Schuon's comments on two frequently cited Biblical texts. When it is written (says Schuon) that there is "none other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), either the phrase "under Heaven" is meant to indicate the "providential sphere of expansion and life of the Christian civilization", or else the name *Jesus* must be regarded as "a symbolic

tainly demands that we be indulgent toward a simple piety, but when the admitted virtues of simplicity become the pretext for a pretentious fideism, the esoterist has every right to object. For nowhere do the Ecumenical Councils require us to think that the uniqueness of the Word in His eternal relation with the Father is to be attributed to the temporal or spatial facticity of His incarnation in Jesus, and nowhere therefore does the traditional understanding of Christ's Person and natures require the repudiation of other spiritual worlds. If anything, the implications are just the reverse. As preposterous as this may sound to many of my fellow Christians, what a truly orthodox Christology "requires"—if such a word is permissible in this context—is a full acknowledgment of the transcendent unity of all orthodox religions.

I have gone to considerable lengths to demonstrate that Schuon's teachings on Christ are compatible with those of the early Church, and that his universalism is therefore—at the very least—a legitimate Orthodox *theologoumenon* or theological opinion. But in the final analysis it is not a question of compatibility alone; it is not just the case, in other words, that the doctrine of the double nature can be conveniently reconciled with the perennialist perspective through some sort of artificial or Procrustean adaptation. On the contrary, the mystery of Christ is at the very heart of that perspective, serving in a sense as a key to Schuon's entire approach to the world's religions. God has become man in order that man might become God; the Absolute has become relative in order that the relative might become Absolute; the Self has become ego in order that the ego might become the Self; *Nirvâna* has become *samsâra* in order that *samsâra* might become *Nirvâna*. As his readers know, we

designation of the Word Itself, which would imply that in the world there is one name only, the Word, by which men can be saved, whatever the Divine manifestation designated by this name in any particular case, be it 'Jesus', 'Buddha', or any other". One must of course remember that the scriptural term "name" signifies primarily authority and is not to be confused in such contexts with the proper name of a given individual. As for Christ's words that "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come" (Mt 24:14), Schuon points out that this saying relates to "cyclic conditions in which separating barriers between the different traditional worlds will have disappeared", and that from this point of view "'Christ', who for the Hindus will be the Kalki *Avatâra* and for the Buddhists the Bodhisattva *Maitreya*, will restore the Primordial Tradition" (*Transcendent Unity*, pp. 80, 85).

have here a continuing theme that runs throughout this author's teaching. For wherever one looks, "Reality has entered into nothingness so that nothingness might become Real",[54] and "the Essence has become form in order that the form may become Essence; all Revelation is a humanization of the Divine for the sake of the deification of the human".[55]

What we thus find are repeated reminders of the decisive and universal significance of the Incarnation. My fellow Christians have sometimes told me that the real meaning of this dogma is distorted in the work of Schuon and other perennial philosophers, and that in spite of all their protestations to the contrary, they end up ignoring the real importance of Christ. But I have never understood how one could possibly take this criticism seriously. Far from being constricted or reduced in its scope, Christ's significance is so far expanded in the Schuonian vision that one might well have wondered instead, apart from a careful reading of his books, what role is left for the other religions. If anything, it is their adherents who might ostensibly have had better cause to complain. For Schuon leaves no doubts on this score: "All genuine religions are Christian";[56] or again, "every truth is necessarily manifested in terms of Christ and on His model",[57] for "there is no truth nor wisdom that does not come from Christ".[58] Now of course what he means is that "the other religions are 'Christian' inasmuch as they have the universal Christ, who is the Word that inspires all Revelation".[59] Schuon is not saying, in other words, that in order to be a true Muslim or Hindu, one must identify the man Jesus with God; but then, as we have seen, neither should the discerning Christian acquiesce in so simple an equation. God and man have been united in Jesus Christ, but unless we choose to be heretics, the Christian tradition forbids us to think that the manhood in question

54. *Stations of Wisdom*, p. 133.
55. *Face of the Absolute*, pp. 71-72. Taking just the Abrahamic religions, for example, and considering "the revelation on Sinai, the Messianic redemption, [and] the descent of the Koran", in every case what one sees are "so many examples of the 'Subjectivizing objectivation'" by virtue of which "*Âtmâ* is 'incarnated' in *Mâyâ*, and *Mâyâ* expresses *Âtmâ*" (*Spiritual Perspectives*, p. 107). See also *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, pp. 140-41.
56. *Gnosis*, p. 67.
57. *Stations of Wisdom*, p. 49.
58. *Gnosis*, p. 105.
59. *Transcendent Unity*, p. 81.

was merely that of a historical individual, or that the Divinity was that of the pure Absolute. Rather we ourselves are that man in our essential humanity, and the God who assumed us into Himself was the Divine *Logos* or Word, in and through whom the inaccessible Essence makes Itself known to all.

As I have noted so often, Schuon was a master not only of *gnosis* but of the Bible and other traditional sources, and he knew in this case that Christ is "the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (Jn 1:9)—that He who "in the beginning" was "with God" and "was God" (John 1:1), and who therefore *is* "before Abraham was" (John 8:58), must also be the One "from whom arise all the ancient wisdoms".[60] Schuon knew, in other words, that it is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity through whom are revealed "the invisible things" of the Divine Principle, "even His eternal power and Godhead" (Rom 1:20), and that it is therefore He alone who accounts for the truth in any given tradition. It follows, however—if we have understood the subtleties of the doctrine—that every orthodox religion must be regarded as a kind of Incarnation and as possessing "two natures". For in each of the world's orthodox traditions, the Divinity of the *Logos* is indivisibly but unconfusedly manifest in an individual form, becoming fully present on earth, but without compromise to either Its principial or Its celestial integrity.

The terrestrial modalities will naturally differ, of course, and in the case of religions with central human supports, the names will vary: Jesus, Gautama, Muhammad, and so on. In each of these traditions, writes Schuon, the proper name "indicates the limited and relative aspect of the manifestation", whereas the traditional titles of these several figures refer to their corresponding celestial prototypes. Thus the term "'Christ'—like 'Buddha' and '*Rasûl Allâh*'—indicates the universal Reality of this same manifestation, that is to say, the Word as such".[61] In an alternative formulation, Schuon points out elsewhere that even the term *Logos* or "Word" is a kind of

60. *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, p. 70.

61. *Transcendent Unity*, p. 92. It is in this light that St Nikolai Velimirovich (see note 43) could speak of the Divine Word as revealing "precious gifts in the East". He writes: "Glory be the memory of Lao-Tse, the teacher and prophet of his people! Glory be the memory of Krishna, the teacher and prophet of his people! Blessed be the memory of Buddha, the royal son and inexorable teacher of his

name, colored by a specific religious world; it is a name—to use again his technical metaphysical terminology—for the "relative" or "lesser" Absolute, and thus it refers to a level of Reality which, while subordinate to the Absolute as such, is nonetheless independent, not only from the particularities of certain historical forms, but even from Its own universal prolongations at the level of Heaven—just as Christ's degree of Divinity remains unconfused with His celestial humanity. Thus "in Itself," says Schuon, "the *Logos* is neither 'Word' nor 'Son' nor 'Book' nor 'Buddha', but appears as one of these according to Its mode of earthly manifestation".[62] In this way It anticipates the distinctive role of Jesus for Christians or of Muhammad for Muslims or of Gautama for Buddhists. The most important point to notice, however, is that in each of these religions, whether Christianity or Islam or Buddhism, the essential metaphysical discriminations are precisely the same: there remain in each case the same sets of distinctions and the same pattern of "union without confusion"—whether between the Absolute and the Relative, or between the Principle and manifestation, or between the manifest Principle and manifestation as such. Wherever we look we see the mystery of the two natures of Christ, expressed anew in many dialects.

The Christian may feel the need to raise a final objection. Far too great an emphasis has been placed, he may say, on "the principial, non-human, and non-historical *Logos*",[63] and there is thus a risk of ignoring the actual, concrete facts of salvation. What about the baby born in Bethlehem, the Baptism in the Jordan, the healing of the man born blind, and all the many other specific events in Jesus's life? Most importantly, what about "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2)? As I have already stressed, however, Schuon had no intention of denying the reality of Christ's individual manhood, and unlike the demythologizers and other Biblical reductionists of our day, he never supposed that the miraculous details of the Gospels were anything but literally true. On the other hand, he would have been quick to remind his exclusivist critics that, according to the teaching of the Christian tradition itself, the eternal *Logos*

people!" (*Prayers by the Lake* [Grayslake, Illinois: Free Serbian Orthodox Diocese of the United States and Canada, n.d.], XLVIII, XLIX).

62. *Spiritual Perspectives*, p. 65.

63. *Esoterism*, p. 36.

is the one and only *hypostasis* of Christ's Divine humanity; in placing his own emphasis upon that *Logos*, Schuon is simply following the lead of the ancient Church, modern historical and psychological sensibilities notwithstanding. There is no doubt, certainly, that Jesus was truly human, that He truly spoke to other men, and that He truly acted in and upon this world; but we are not to forget that the underlying subject of all His words and actions, however temporal their mode of manifestation, remained the eternal Son of God. The exclusivist wishes to cling to "Jesus the man" as the only means of salvation. But Schuon is surely right that "in naming Himself the way, the truth, and the life in an absolute or principial sense", there is no reason to think that Christ was "trying to limit the universal manifestation of the Word" to a particular earthly form or to a specific series of historical actions. On the contrary, He was "affirming His own essential identity with the *Logos*, the cosmic manifestation of which He Himself was living in subjective mode".[64] It remains true, of course, that "no man cometh unto the Father" (Jn 14:6) except by way of His Word; but what this means metaphysically is that there is no entry into the Divine Essence except through the Divine Person—however or wherever that Person may have chosen to be present on Earth.

The Schuonian perspective thus provides us with a way of understanding the Son's earthly deeds which fully honors their saving importance, but without restricting their operation or "efficient causality" to any given temporal or spatial context. We are asked, like every Christian, to admit the historical reality of the great redemptive events of Christ's Passion and Resurrection: Jesus really died—in a particular way, in a particular place, and at a particular moment—and He really rose from the dead in His body. But at the same time, while remaining perfectly faithful to the conciliar dogmas, Schuon assists us in seeing that these actions, if they are to have the salvific power that Christians claim, could not have been those of some isolated human individual, nor could their cosmic effect have come from a purely temporal cause. On the contrary, the only reason that Good Friday and Easter are of lasting significance is that they are the reverberations in time of eternity. For He who died on the cross was not some specially chosen man, but the Divine Son of

64. *Transcendent Unity*, pp. 27-28.

God, and if that Son, who is eternal, can be truly said to have died—as the Christian tradition explicitly teaches—then His death must have been eternal as well: the Lamb of God must have been "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8), and not only on Golgotha. And if that same Son really rose from the dead, then His rising, too, must be eternal: if He came forth from the Tomb at a particular moment of time, it is only because His is a light that has always shone "in the darkness", though "the darkness comprehended it not" (Jn 1:5). Thus Schuon writes

> The Divine Redemption is always present; it pre-exists all terrestrial alchemy and is its celestial model, so that it is always thanks to this eternal Redemption—whatever may be its vehicle on earth—that man is freed from the weight of his vagaries and even, *Deo volente*, from that of his separative existence; if "my Words shall not pass away", it is because they have always been.

"A consciousness of this," Schuon concludes—that is, a perception of the true dimensions of the Son's saving work—"far from diminishing a participation in the treasures of the historical redemption, confers on them a compass that touches the very roots of existence."[65]

Far from diminishing our full participation in Christ, prayerful reflection on the mystery of His two natures cannot but do Him great honor, for whatever a man's traditional path toward salvation might be, it is one and the same *Logos* that is the true Savior of all. His scope is unlimited, extending far beyond the boundaries of the Christian religion to "other sheep which are not of this fold" (Jn 10:16), and His treasures are bequeathed to us all.

65. *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, p. 70. Schuon adds elsewhere, "The Redemption is an eternal act which cannot be situated in either time or space, and the sacrifice of Christ is a particular manifestation or realization of it on the human plane" (*Transcendent Unity*, 21). Schuon was under no illusions, of course—no matter the scriptural and other classic proofs—that his perspective would be acceptable to all traditional Christians. "Within the framework of Christianity, the idea that the Redemption is a priori the timeless work of the principial, non-human, and non-historical *Logos*, that it can and must be manifested in different ways, at diverse times and places, and that the historical Christ manifests this *Logos* in a given providential world, without its being either necessary or possible to define this world in an exact manner, is an idea that is esoteric in relation to Christian dogmatics, and it would be absurd to demand it from theology" (*Esoterism*, p. 36).

The Mystery of the Two Natures by James S. Cutsinger

Features in

Every Branch in Me: Essay on the Meaning of Man
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