

## THE DOCTRINE OF ANALOGY AND CHRIST'S HUMAN NATURE

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**Abstract:** *In the incarnation, God the Son assumed a human nature. The term “nature,” however, is ambiguous between a particular thing and a set of essential properties. Either Christ assumed a particular body-soul composite, or he assumed the essential properties that constitute humanity, e.g., having-a-body and having-a-soul. Whether one considers the incarnation in a primarily concrete or abstract sense contributes significantly to one’s Christological model. But the motivation to affirm either concretism or abstractism may originate in theological method rather than Christology. How one understands language about God may drive one either to concretism or abstractism. I argue that concretism’s success may originate in the doctrine of analogy, whereas abstractism’s failure may originate in univocal language about God. First, I provide a taxonomy of abstract and concrete models and show why concretism is superior to abstractism; abstract models tend to suffer from monothelism, the Word-flesh paradigm, and kenoticism. Second, I demonstrate that language about God affects our understanding of the incarnation. Univocity tends in the direction of abstractism, and analogy tends in the direction of concretism.*

**Key words:** *Christology, incarnation, human nature, concretism, abstractism, doctrine of analogy, kenosis, monothelism, dyothelism, Creator-creature*

In the incarnation, God the Son assumed a human nature. The term “nature,” however, is ambiguous between a particular thing and a set of essential properties.<sup>1</sup> On the former reading, “my human nature is distinct from your human nature.” Call this view “concretism.” On the latter reading, “my human nature is identical with your human nature.”<sup>2</sup> Call this view “abstractism.” For Christ to assume a concrete human nature is for him to assume a particular human body and soul. For Christ to assume an abstract human nature is for him to assume the essential properties that constitute humanity. Whether one considers the incarnation in a primarily concrete or abstract sense contributes significantly to one’s Christological model.<sup>3</sup> But the

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Hill, introduction to *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11. Indeed, the matter is complicated even more by competing views of particulars, properties, universals, etc.; see Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 34–71.

<sup>2</sup> Hill, introduction to *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Concretists do affirm that Christ’s humanity includes a set of essential properties. Likewise, abstractists affirm that Jesus Christ is a concrete individual. The question, however, is whether we ought to think of the incarnation as an addition of properties to one property-bearing substance (the hypostasis

motivation to affirm either concretism or abstractism may originate in theological method rather than in Christology. How one understands language about God may drive one either to concretism or abstractism.

I argue that concretism's success may originate in the doctrine of analogy, whereas abstractism's failure may originate in univocal language about God. First, I provide a taxonomy of abstract and concrete models and show why concretism is superior to abstractism; abstract models tend to suffer from monotheism, the Word-flesh paradigm, and kenoticism. Second, I demonstrate that language about God affects our understanding of the incarnation. Univocity tends in the direction of abstractism, and analogy tends in the direction of concretism.

## I. CONCRETISM, ABSTRACTISM, AND CHRISTOLOGICAL MODELS

How we understand Christ's human nature significantly influences how we construct our Christological models. Although theologians have reflected on Christ's humanity for millennia, Alvin Plantinga brought new attention to the distinction between concretism and abstractism in the contemporary literature.<sup>4</sup> He distinguishes between two senses of the term "human nature":

In the first sense, the term "human nature" denotes a *property* (or, if you like, group of properties); the property P which is such that necessarily, every human being has P, and necessarily, whatever has P is a human being. In the second sense the term "human nature" denotes a *concrete human being* rather than a property. In this second sense, the thing denoted by "human nature" and that gets assumed is a human being, a concrete object, not an abstract object like a property.<sup>5</sup>

Timothy Pawl provides the truth conditions of abstract and concrete natures:

*Abstract Nature*  $x$  is an abstract nature of some type,  $y$ , if and only if  $x$  is a property or complex of properties the instantiation of which by a thing is necessary and sufficient for that thing's being (a)  $y$ .

*Concrete Nature*  $x$  is a concrete nature of some type,  $y$ , if and only if  $x$  is an individual instance of  $y$ , and  $y$  is an infima species.<sup>6</sup>

of the Son) or as an addition of another property-bearing substance (an individual human nature) to the hypostasis of the Son.

<sup>4</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "On Heresy, Mind, and Truth," in *Faith and Philosophy* 16.2 (1999). For a helpful discussion and list of theologians who espoused either position, see Timothy Pawl, *In Defense of Extended Conciliar Christology: A Philosophical Essay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 22–28.

<sup>5</sup> Plantinga, "On Heresy, Mind, and Truth," 184.

<sup>6</sup> Pawl, *Extended Conciliar Christology*, 23. In n. 25 of the same page, Pawl explains that "an infima species is the lowest level kind type under which a thing falls.... One needn't refer to infima species to define a concrete nature. I do it in order to ensure that Christ has two natures, and not more. For were, say, mammal, to count as a nature which Christ has, and were infima not required, then Christ would have three natures—divine, human, mammalian. To rule out having too many natures in the God-man, I preclude higher-level nature types from counting as proper substitution instances for  $y$  in this definition."

Concretism is superior to abstractism—not because abstractism is itself heretical. Neither concretism nor abstractism is heretical intrinsically or by entailment. Rather, concretism is superior because all of the available abstract models suffer from one or more of the following features: monothelism, the Word-flesh paradigm, and kenoticism. And the only available concrete model does not suffer from these features. By “available,” I mean those models which a theologian could espouse without explicitly denying Scripture or the Chalcedonian Creed, and without explicitly affirming an ancient heresy.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I provide a taxonomy of seven dualist Christological models, beginning with abstract models and ending with the concrete classical model.<sup>8</sup>

1. *Abstract models.* Abstractism tends in the direction of transformational models of the incarnation.<sup>9</sup> These models view the Logos as undergoing change in order to become human.<sup>10</sup> Because human natures are a composite of body and soul, persons are identical either with that soul or with the body-soul composite.<sup>11</sup> Thus, for the person, the Logos, to become human is for him to be transformed into a human soul or body-soul composite. Here, I consider six abstract models. The first three are attempts to relate the Logos to his human body without affirming Apollinarianism.<sup>12</sup> The subsequent three concern the relation of Christ's humanity to his divine attributes.

a. *The Alvinized abstract-nature view.* The Alvinized abstract-nature view is named after Alvin Plantinga who writes, “The Logos became a human being, acquiring the property necessary and sufficient for being human.”<sup>13</sup> Crisp explains the view:

The Word assumes the property of being a human soul. That is, at the virginal conception of Christ, when the Word assumes human nature, the Word becomes a human soul. In assuming human nature he assumes whatever property

<sup>7</sup> For example, Apollinarianism, adoptionism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism.

<sup>8</sup> This article considers only dualist models of the incarnation. Note that physicalist models appear in both abstract and concrete variations—each of which have their own strengths and weaknesses.

<sup>9</sup> Hill, introduction to *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 8–15.

<sup>10</sup> I use “Logos” and “Word” interchangeably to refer to the Son according to his divinity and conceptually distinct from his humanity. I use “Christ” more broadly either as synonymous with “Logos” or to refer to the whole person, not conceptually distinct from his humanity.

<sup>11</sup> For this article, I treat “mind,” “soul,” and “spirit” as synonymous.

<sup>12</sup> Apollinarius believed that a human person is a synthesis of body and soul. According to Aloys Grillmeier, for Apollinarius, “the incarnation of Christ means that the Logos joins himself to a human, fleshly nature to form a substantial unity and through this union constitutes a human being, i.e., a being of body and soul.” *Christ in Christian Tradition, Volume 1: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden, 2nd ed. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1975), 331. J. N. D. Kelly explains that “on his interpretation the Word was both the directive, intelligent principle in Jesus Christ, and also the vivifying principle of His flesh” (*Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. [New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978], 292). In other words, in the incarnation, the divine Logos took the place of the human soul and gave life to the human body. Thus, Jesus has no *human* soul. Apollinarianism is a one-nature (monophysitism) Christology that was flatly condemned at the Council of Chalcedon (451). Chalcedonian Christology maintains that Christ is “truly man, the same of a rational soul and body ... consubstantial with us in manhood” (Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 339).

<sup>13</sup> Plantinga, “On Heresy, Mind, and Truth,” 186.

or properties are necessary and sufficient for the Word to become the human soul that exists in the body of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

The Alvinized view sees the divine Son becoming a human soul by the addition of a property or properties. The Son does not cease to be a divine person, but he becomes human.

b. *The Reaified abstract-nature view.* Crisp credits Michael Rea for this abstract-nature view.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the Alvinized view, the Reaified view denies a distinction between kinds of souls. There are no human souls; there are just souls *simpliciter*. So, the Word did not become a *human* soul. Rather, “all that is required for a soul to be counted as a ‘human soul’ is for that soul to be in a certain relationship of attachment to a certain body for a certain period during which the body in question is alive.”<sup>16</sup> Because the divine Son was in the right relation to a human body, he satisfied the requirements of being called a ‘human soul,’ albeit colloquially.

c. *Neo-Apollinarianism.* Neo-Apollinarianism is the view espoused by J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig. On this view, the Logos already had all the properties of human personhood (e.g., rationality, volition, freedom) prior to his incarnation.

The result was that in assuming a hominid body the Logos brought to Christ’s animal nature just those properties that would serve to make it a complete human nature. Thus the human nature of Christ was complete precisely in virtue of the union of his flesh with the Logos. As a result of the union Christ did, indeed, possess a complete, individual human nature comprised of body and soul; for that nature was made complete by the union of the flesh with the Logos, the archetype of humanity.<sup>17</sup>

Moreland and Craig explain that “the Logos is both the *hypostasis* which serves as the subsistent property-bearer for each abstract kind-nature and the person who is the self-conscious ego of both individual natures.”<sup>18</sup>

One weakness for these abstract models is their adherence to monothelism (the notion that Christ has one [faculty of] will). A full critique of monothelism is beyond the scope of this article. But the central complaint is that, for the Alvinized, Reaified, and Neo-Apollinarianism views, the will is a property of the Logos, and when the Logos becomes human, he does not acquire a distinctly human will. Crisp clarifies the problem: “Possession of a will is constitutive of being either a human or a divine entity. So, if Christ is fully human, he must have a distinct human will. And if he is fully divine, he must have a distinct divine will. Yet on these two [in this case, three] abstract-nature views, it seems that Christ has only a distinct divine

<sup>14</sup> Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 50.

<sup>15</sup> Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 54.

<sup>16</sup> Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 54.

<sup>17</sup> J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 608.

<sup>18</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 609.

will. In which case, Christ is not fully human."<sup>19</sup> Dyothelitism (two wills in Christ), however, is traditionally affirmed by Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches.

A second weakness with these models is that each are instances of Word-flesh Christologies. The Word-flesh paradigm denies that Christ's human soul is distinct from the Logos, and likewise denies that Christ's human soul is created. Echoing the critique of monothelitism, if Christ does not have a distinct, created, human soul, then it seems he is not fully human. Indeed, these two weaknesses are closely related. Monothelitism implies that Christ has one center of consciousness, whereas dyothelitism implies that Christ has two centers of consciousness (one according to each nature).<sup>20</sup>

The next abstract models focus on the relation between Christ's humanity and his divine attributes. These models should not be seen, necessarily, as competing with the preceding ones. Rather, the following models are possible complements to the previous models.

d. *Ontological kenoticism*. Ontological kenotic Christology claims that, when the Logos became human, he abdicated certain (or all) of his divine attributes, such as omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, at least for the duration of his earthly ministry.<sup>21</sup>

Kenoticism, itself, is the third weakness of abstractism. Kenotic models of the incarnation are invariably monothelitic. By starting with the assumption that personhood is tantamount to a center of consciousness, intellect, will, and experience, kenotic theologians maintain that the one person, Jesus, had no conscious experience outside his human faculties (at least during his earthly ministry). Therefore, the only way to understand Jesus in light of the Gospels is to admit that he gave up certain (or all) divine attributes. In other words, monothelitism and the Word-flesh paradigm are starting points rather than conclusions of kenoticism.

A full critique of kenoticism is beyond the scope of this article, but the central concern has to do with its implications on the doctrine of God. Ontological kenoticism makes a distinction between God's essential and accidental attributes (or properties). Certain attributes (e.g., omniscience) are not essential to divinity. Christ may lose his omniscience and remain God, for example. So, kenoticism entails a denial of divine simplicity, immutability, impassibility, and timelessness (at least the

<sup>19</sup> Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 59. Moreover, endorsement of monothelitism is a rejection of Constantinople III (AD 680), which reads, "And we proclaim equally two natural volitions or wills in him and two natural principles of action which undergo no division, no change, no partition, no confusion, in accordance with the teaching of the holy fathers. And the two natural wills not in opposition, as the impious heretics said, far from it, but his human will following, and not resisting or struggling, rather in fact subject to his divine and all powerful will. For the will of the flesh had to be moved, and yet to be subjected to the divine will, according to the most wise Athanasius?" (Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 128).

<sup>20</sup> These implications arise on account of the (at least, human) will being a complex mental faculty. It is fitting, then, to associate all mental faculties and processes with either *person* or *nature*, including intellection, volition, and consciousness.

<sup>21</sup> As far as I know, Crisp was the first to distinguish terminologically between ontological and functional kenoticism. See *Divinity and Humanity*, 118–153.

traditional versions of these attributes).<sup>22</sup> For many theologians, the denial of these attributes is untenable.

e. *Functional kenoticism*. Proponents of functional kenoticism are typically uneasy with the bold proposal of ontological kenoticism. Rather than Christ emptying himself of divine powers, the functional version merely sees him refusing to exercise certain attributes, e.g., omnipotence and omniscience. Although he never ceased to be omnipotent and omniscient, during his earthly ministry, Jesus limited (or limited his access to) his divine power and knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

f. *The abstract two-minds view*. Thomas V. Morris argues that “in the case of God Incarnate, we must recognize something like two distinct ranges of consciousness.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, Jesus has two minds: two sets of will, knowledge, and consciousness.<sup>25</sup> He explains:

The divine mind of God the Son contained, but was not contained by, his earthly mind, or range of consciousness. That is to say, there was what can be called an asymmetric accessing relation between the two minds.... The divine mind had full and direct access to the earthly, human experience resulting from the Incarnation, but the earthly consciousness did not have such full and direct access to the content of the overarching omniscience proper to the Logos, but only such access, on occasion, as the divine mind allowed it to have.<sup>26</sup>

For Morris, the “asymmetric accessing relation” between the divine mind and the human mind is necessary but not sufficient for the two minds of Christ to be united, for God has the same accessing relation to all minds. Rather, what makes the human mind of Christ *the Son’s* mind is that “the earthly mind is contained in the divine mind in a distinctive way.”<sup>27</sup> He continues:

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Stephen C. Evans, “Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God,” in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 190–217.

<sup>23</sup> Despite their rejection of “any form of kenotic Christology which suggests that in the Incarnation the Logos surrendered various attributes belonging to the divine nature,” Moreland and Craig’s Neo-Apollinarianism seems to fit this description of *functional* kenoticism. They write, “Thus Jesus possessed a normal human conscious experience. But the human consciousness of Jesus was underlain, as it were, by a divine subconsciousness.... In the Incarnation—at least during his state of humiliation—the Logos allowed only those facets of his person to be part of Christ’s waking consciousness which were compatible with typical human experience, while the bulk of his knowledge and other cognitive perfections ... lay submerged in his subconscious” (*Philosophical Foundations*, 606, 610–11).

<sup>24</sup> Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 102.

<sup>25</sup> Although most abstract models are monotheistic, this dyotheistic account is certainly an abstract model. Morris explains: “To repeat: the kind-nature exemplified distinctively by all human beings is that of humanity. To be a human being is to exemplify human nature.... Jesus was fully human without being merely human. He had all the properties constitutive of human nature, but had higher properties which, from an Anselmian perspective, form the upper bound of our scale” (*Logic of God Incarnate*, 66). Morris may have softened his abstractism when he writes, “The Incarnation involved not just a duality of abstract natures, but a duality of consciousness or mentality, which was introduced in the divine life of God the Son” (*Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* [Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1991], 169).

<sup>26</sup> Morris, *Logic of God Incarnate*, 103.

<sup>27</sup> Morris, 161.

Jesus was a being who was fully human, but he was not a created human being. He was not a being endowed with a set of personal cognitive and causal powers distinct from the cognitive and causal powers of God the Son. For Jesus was the same person as God the Son. Thus, the personal cognitive and causal powers operative in the case of Jesus' earthly mind were just none other than the cognitive and causal powers of God the Son. The results of their operation through the human body, under the constraints proper to the conditions of a fully human existence, were just such as to give rise to a human mind, an earthly noetic structure distinct from the properly noetic structure involved with the unconstrained exercise of divine powers. Thus there came to be two minds, the earthly mind of God Incarnate and his distinctively divine mind, but two minds of one person, one center of causal and cognitive powers.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, the unity of the two minds is found in the one person which is a center of causal and cognitive powers.<sup>29</sup>

2. *Concrete models.* Concretism tends toward relational models of the incarnation. Whereas transformational models claim that the Logos transformed into a human soul or body-soul composite (i.e., the Logos *became* a human person), relational models claim that the Logos entered into a certain relationship with a particular soul or body-soul composite (e.g., the Logos *has* a human nature).<sup>30</sup> Relational models are either prophetic or compositional.<sup>31</sup> Adoptionism is an example of a prophetic model.<sup>32</sup> Compositional models include both Nestorianism and concrete classical Christology.<sup>33</sup> Because adoptionism and Nestorianism are unavailable

<sup>28</sup> Morris, 161–62.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Swinburne also has a dyothelitic abstract-nature view. For Swinburne, God the Son is a divine individual, a soul, who took on a human body, and thus, a human way of thinking and acting while retaining his divinity and divine way of thinking and acting. The Son's mind is a divided mind—two knowledge-systems, two wills, two consciousnesses—the human contained within the divine. See Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 192–215.

<sup>30</sup> Recall that we are considering only dualist models in this article. Physicalist variations are possible for both transformational and relational models of the incarnation, including both prophetic and compositional versions.

<sup>31</sup> See Hill, introduction to *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 10–14. To be “compositional” allows for, but does not entail, a real, metaphysical mereology—as though Christ were a complex object with mereological parts. “Compositional” may refer, merely, to the fact that Christ has a number of constituents: Logos plus human body, or Logos plus human body plus human soul.

<sup>32</sup> Adoptionism is the view that Jesus Christ is not God; rather he is a human person with whom the divine Logos is specially related. This view is incompatible with biblical and historical orthodoxy. In fact, it is not actually a model of the incarnation because the Logos is not *really* incarnated.

<sup>33</sup> Nestorianism is the view that Christ is not two natures united in one person; rather, he is two persons morally united. In *Divinity and Humanity*, Crisp describes Nestorianism as the belief that “(a) at the Incarnation, the Word assumes an already existing human being, and (b) the hypostatic union brought about by the Incarnation is a union of two distinct persons” (61). Nestorianism is ruled out by the Chalcedonian Definition:

... one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature being preserved and coalescing in one *prosopon* and one *hypostasis*—not divided into two *prosopa*.... (Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 340).

to theologians seeking to affirm Scripture and Chalcedon, concrete classical Christology is the only concrete option available.<sup>34</sup>

The concrete classical view is a Word-man Christology rather than a Word-flesh one. The Word-man paradigm sees the divine Logos assuming a human nature which itself is a particular body-soul composite. A Word-flesh paradigm, recall, has the Logos uniting himself to a human body alone (e.g., Apollinarianism). The concrete classical view is dyothelitic, but unlike in the abstract two-minds view, the Logos does not acquire a set of human properties and thus branch a distinct range of consciousness and will from the mind of the Logos. Rather, the Logos acquires a particular human nature with its own distinct mind (consciousness and will).<sup>35</sup> And, unlike Nestorianism, the concrete classical view maintains that the Logos is the very subject of that distinct, human mind.

Concrete classical Christology is able to preserve classical theism and classical Trinitarianism (though it entails neither).<sup>36</sup> It also maintains the *extra calvinisticum* which “states that while the second person of the Trinity was incarnate in the person of Christ, he was simultaneously providentially sustaining the cosmos.”<sup>37</sup>

## II. THE DOCTRINE OF ANALOGY AND CHRIST

One may be driven to affirm either concretism or abstractism based on strictly Christological arguments. Monothelitism, kenoticism, and the Word-man paradigm are, by themselves, reason to reject the abstract approach. But I contend that the motivation to affirm either concretism or abstractism may also originate in theological method, and, more specifically, in how we understand language about God. I argue that concretism’s success may originate in the doctrine of analogy, whereas abstractism’s failure may originate in univocal language about God. In this section, first, I rehearse the various ways we might conceive of language about God and provide reasons to affirm the doctrine of analogy. Second, I show that univocal language about God can lead to abstractism and its problematic features. Third, I

Whether Nestorius is guilty of his namesake heresy is debatable. See Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 443–87; cf. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 310–17.

<sup>34</sup> What I call “concrete classical Christology” is really a family of models that share the basic features outlined here. See, for example, Crisp, “Compositional Christology without Nestorianism,” *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 45–66. Cf. Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> There was never a time at which the human nature of Christ existed and yet was unassumed by the Logos. See discussions of the anhypostasia/enhypostasia in Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 72–89; and Stephen Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 313–24.

<sup>36</sup> Classical theism holds that God is simple, immutable, impassible, timeless, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent in the traditional senses. Classical Trinitarianism states that the Trinity is the God of classical theism, and the Persons of the Godhead are subsisting relations differentiated only by those relations.

<sup>37</sup> Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 142. He continues, “In fact, one of the main reasons for formulating the *extra calvinisticum* was to express the idea that these attributes had to be exercised by the Word in order that the second person of the Trinity (a) remain divine and (b) retain his divine role of upholding the cosmos in being while incarnate.” See Colossians 1:15–17 and Hebrews 1:3.



show how analogical language about God can lead to concretism that avoids monothelism, kenoticism, and the Word-flesh paradigm.

1. *Predication about God.* Language about God belongs to one of three modes: univocity, equivocation, or analogy.<sup>38</sup> Proponents of univocal language claim that our predication bears the same meaning whether it is attributed to creatures or to the Creator. For example, to say, “Peter is good,” and “God is good,” predicates exactly the same quality to Peter as it does to God. Peter’s goodness is just like God’s goodness. Advocates of equivocation, however, claim that our predication about creation bears no similarity to our predication about God. The attribution “is good” in “Peter is good” and “God is good” expresses completely different meanings in their respective utterances. Peter’s goodness is nothing like God’s goodness. Analogical predication is the *via media* between univocal and equivocal language. To assert that both Peter and God are good is to say there is an analogy between Peter’s goodness and God’s goodness: Peter’s goodness is *similar* to God’s goodness, but it is not the *same* as God’s goodness. There is both similarity and difference in analogical language.

Here, I endorse analogical language about God (i.e., the doctrine of analogy) against univocal and equivocal language.<sup>39</sup> My purpose is not to provide a comprehensive defense of the doctrine of analogy, but, rather, to describe and motivate the doctrine, as well as to give reasons to reject its competitors.<sup>40</sup> First, I note the greatest weaknesses of univocity and equivocation. Then I provide one reason to affirm the doctrine of analogy.

a. *Equivocation.* Equivocation’s greatest weaknesses is that it leaves us agnostic about God.<sup>41</sup> Nothing we say about God is like anything we say about creation. God’s goodness is nothing like the goodness we find in creation. Thus, we have no way of expressing anything meaningful about God, and worse, we have no idea what God is like. Even to say, “God exists,” tells us nothing intelligible about God. We must reject equivocation because it does not fit with the Bible’s witness. God created the human race in his image and with the ability to know him (Gen 1–2). God has revealed himself in and by his creation (Ps 19; Rom 1). God has spoken to us with his own words (2 Tim 3:16) and even through his Son (John 1; Heb 1). And God reveals himself so that we might know him (Deut 4:35; 2 Cor 4:6). “For finite

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<sup>38</sup> Although I am couching this discussion in terms of language and predication, this subject is as much about our knowledge of God as it is our words about God.

<sup>39</sup> There are, in fact, several ways of understanding the doctrine of analogy. Steven Duby is helpful here; see his *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 232–91. I have in mind what Duby, recalling Aquinas, calls “analogy of attribution,” and, more specifically, the *unum ad alterum* (one to another) version of the analogy of attribution.

<sup>40</sup> For an extensive discussion of language about God, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a. 13.5–7.

<sup>41</sup> Michael S. Horton writes, “Equivocal approaches, such as those adopted in some forms of mysticism and in the wake of Kant, denying any certainty about the truth of our predications, tend toward skepticism under the guise of God’s mysterious incomprehensibility” (“Hellenistic or Hebrew? Open Theism and Reformed Theological Method,” *JETS* 45 [2002]: 324).

creatures who believe God has spoken truthfully and clearly, equivocal knowledge is not an option.<sup>42</sup>

b. *Univocity*. Univocity's greatest weakness is a tendency to undermine both God's aseity and the Creator-creature distinction.<sup>43</sup> God's goodness is just like Peter's goodness, thus making Peter and God share in the same property *goodness* to some degree, or, at worst, making God no better (i.e., no more good) than Peter. But if Creator and creature may participate in or instantiate the same property, then that property exists on both sides of the Creator-creature divide, thus minimizing the distinction.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the ontological status of that property comes into question. Goodness, on this scheme, cannot be *created* by God because that would imply that God created some aspect of his deity, which is absurd. Neither can God be *identical* to goodness because that would imply that he is also identical to his other properties (e.g., justice, wisdom, power). And if God is identical to goodness and to wisdom, for example, then, by transitivity, goodness and wisdom are identical, which is also absurd.<sup>45</sup> The univocist is left affirming that goodness and other properties are neither God himself nor created by God, but, rather, they are abstract objects upon which God somehow depends. Because he is not absolutely independent, in this sense, God's aseity is undermined.

c. *Analogy*. The doctrine of analogy is not merely a way to avoid the pitfalls of univocity and equivocation.<sup>46</sup> There are positive biblical and theological arguments for analogical language about God.<sup>47</sup> Space permits me to provide only one motivation: the doctrine of creation.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 33.

<sup>43</sup> In *God in Himself*, Duby cautions against an overgeneralization here: "Univocity by itself arguably does not entail an eradication of the Creator-creature distinction. [For example,] Scotus's account of univocity is focused on semantic and epistemological concerns, not so much the ontological relationship between God and creatures" (261–62). For this reason, I maintain that the undermining of God's aseity and the Creator-creature distinction is a *tendency* of univocal language and not an *entailment*.

<sup>44</sup> Horton writes, "The univocal approach to such language almost always tends toward rationalism and the suspicion of the mystery inherent in the Creator-creature distinction" ("Hellenistic or Hebrew?," 324).

<sup>45</sup> Plantinga uses this argument against the doctrine of divine simplicity in *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 26–61. See James E. Dolezal's response in *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 144–53.

<sup>46</sup> Horton writes, "Calvin and the Reformed do not use analogy as a fall-back strategy when they find something that does not fit their system. Rather, it is the warp and woof of their covenantal approach, a necessary implication of the Creator-creature relationship as they understand it. *All* of God's self-revelation is analogical, not just some of it" ("Hellenistic or Hebrew?," 324).

<sup>47</sup> For example, the conjunction of God's incomprehensibility and apprehensibility motivate a doctrine of analogy. To say that God is incomprehensible is to affirm that God cannot be fully grasped by finite creatures. Indeed, no aspect of God can be understood in its entirety. We cannot know God comprehensively for a number of reasons. First, God is transcendent, infinite, and eternal. There is no end to knowing God. Second, all knowledge of God is revelation. The only knowledge of God available to creatures is revealed knowledge. We cannot know what God has not revealed. Third, we are finite creatures with limitations in both quantity and quality of understanding. Fourth, indwelling sin negatively affects the way we perceive God's revelation.

Although God is incomprehensible, he is also apprehensible, i.e., knowable. God has revealed himself in creation, by his word, and in his Son, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1–2). And divine revelation leads to real

God created the world *ex nihilo* (Gen 1; Isa 42:5; Col 1:16; Rev 4:11). All things were created by him (John 1:3). He did not create out of existing material or with the help of some other being. Furthermore, we should not think that God's creative act is limited to the beginning of time and space. Rather, God's creative act is the same act that sustains the universe (Col 1:15–17; Heb 1:3). The answer to the question of why this very moment exists is answered not merely by appealing to God's work "in the beginning" but to his creative and sustaining power now at work.

One implication of the doctrine of creation is the Creator-creature distinction. The Creator-creature distinction establishes two things.<sup>48</sup> First, the Creator-creature distinction forbids any mixture or overlap between the Creator and his creation. God is neither part of creation nor is creation part of God. Second, the Creator-creature distinction affirms an asymmetrical relationship between God and the world. God is absolutely independent of creation (Job 38–41), whereas creation is absolutely dependent upon God (Rom 11:36).

knowledge of God (John 1:18; 17:3). These two affirmations—the incomprehensibility and apprehensibility of God—and the need for revelation to achieve knowledge of God motivate us to affirm a doctrine of analogy. Herman Bavinck, in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004–2008), 2:110, shows the connection between these points and the doctrine of analogy:

"1. All our knowledge of God is from and through God, grounded in his revelation, that is, in objective reason.

2. In order to convey the knowledge of him to his creatures, God has to come down to the level of his creatures and accommodate himself to their powers of comprehension.

3. The possibility of this condescension cannot be denied since it is given with creation, that is, with the existence of finite being.

4. Our knowledge of God is always only analogical in character, that is, ... having as its object not God himself in his knowable essence, but God in his revelation to us, in the things that pertain to his nature, in his habitual disposition to his creatures. Accordingly, this knowledge is only a finite image, a faint likeness and creaturely impression of the perfect knowledge that God has of himself.

5. Finally, our knowledge of God is nevertheless true, pure, and trustworthy because it has for its foundation God's self-consciousness, its archetype, and his self-revelation in the cosmos."

<sup>48</sup> The Creator-creature distinction also helps to establish classical theism and, especially, God's incommunicable attributes: aseity, absoluteness, simplicity, immutability, impassibility, eternity, etc. God's incommunicable attributes, likewise, support the doctrine of analogy. God's simplicity, in particular, tells us that God is not composed of parts or distinct properties. Rather, all of God's attributes are identical with God and identical with each other. For this reason (divine simplicity), we must affirm a doctrine of analogy. Peter may have the distinct property *goodness*, but God cannot. Rather, God's goodness is God himself. Peter's goodness, however, is a property of Peter and an image of the simple God refracted in creation. For more on divine simplicity, see Dolezal, *God without Parts*; see also Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017).

The analogy (no pun intended) of refracted light is especially helpful in elucidating the relation between God's perfections and created properties. According to this analogy, God is the simple, white light. Creation is that white light refracted into the entire color spectrum. Blue light, for example, is a real but incomplete image of the white light. Blue light is brought forth by the white light; the white light is the ground and cause of the blue light. It would be true, by analogy, to say that the white light has blue-lightness. For in the white light are all the colors—but not as distinct lights. Likewise, human goodness, for example, is a real but incomplete image of God. Human goodness is grounded in and caused by God. In God are all the perfections, but they are not distinct perfections.

The doctrine of creation and the Creator-creature distinction motivate a doctrine of analogy.<sup>49</sup> Because God transcends—and is the very cause of—creation, nothing in creation can adequately explain him. God determines the meaning of creation, not vice versa. Therefore, univocity seems deficient. But God’s creation is a revelation of himself, redounding to his glory. Indeed, mankind is made in God’s own image. Creation transmits true knowledge of God. So, equivocation is also deficient. The doctrine of analogy fits with the doctrine of creation and the Creator-creature distinction. And the Creator-creature distinction entails that *all* knowledge of God is analogical. Ardel Caneday writes:

Analogy is intrinsic to God’s creation, for God has left his fingerprints on everything he has made (Rom. 1:20ff). Analogy is inherent to God’s design for us, creatures he made in his own image and likeness. All our thoughts about God are properly birthed with self-referential awareness that conceives of God analogically. Properly conceived, our thoughts about God openly confess that the analogical relationship between God and us does not begin with us and move to God, but begins with God and moves to us. God is not like us. We are like God. Therefore, right thinking about God begins with candid acknowledgment that we are God’s reflection. As the image in a pond depends entirely upon the object casting the image, so we depend completely upon God who casts the image we are. Likewise, as the glory of the image in the pond is but a shadow of the object’s glory, so whatever glory we bear as the image, only derives from the glory of God who cast the image. Thus, right thinking about God necessarily acknowledges that the analogical relationship between Creator and creature entails both similarities and differences. For the fact that the analogy runs from Creator to creature obligates us to acknowledge this with candor.<sup>50</sup>

The things of creation are *like* God—to some degree or other—but nothing in creation *is* God, *is the same as* God, or *is shared by* God.

A common criticism of the doctrine of analogy is that analogies are helpful only if we fully understand both terms of the analogy. For example, if I were to say, “A fox is like a terrier,” because the listener fully comprehends both “fox” and “terrier,” the listener understands in which ways a fox is similar and dissimilar to a terrier. But God is transcendent and inscrutable—we do not fully comprehend him. Thus, we do not fully comprehend both terms of the analogy. Therefore, the doctrine of analogy does not help us understand God. “The assumption seems to be

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<sup>49</sup> Horton argues that “we reach the doctrine of analogy from the Creator-creature relationship by way of four other sub-categories.” Those sub-categories are (1) “transcendence and immanence,” (2) “the ‘hidden-revealed’ distinction,” (3) “the distinction between the eternal decree and its temporal (redemptive-historical) execution,” and (4) “the ‘archetypal-ectypal’ distinction, the *epistemological* corollary of the *ontological* Creator-creature distinction” (“Hellenistic or Hebrew?,” 321–23).

<sup>50</sup> Ardel Caneday, “Veiled Glory: God’s Self-Revelation in Human Likeness—a Biblical Theology of God’s Anthropomorphic Self-Disclosure,” in *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 197–98.

that unless one can stand outside of the analogy and its referent, one cannot compare the analogy for its success."<sup>51</sup> Horton responds to this criticism:

Because Scripture is God's own speech in human language, the analogies that God selects are appropriate whether we know the exact fit or not. We do not need that which we cannot possibly have—namely, archetypal knowledge. Because creaturely knowledge is inherently ectypal, it is essentially analogical. Univocal knowledge is reserved for the Creator and his archetypal theology. But if God authorizes the analogies, they must be accurate descriptions even though they do not provide univocal access to God's being.<sup>52</sup>

We can have confidence that our thoughts and predications about God are meaningful because God himself has told us how to think and speak of him.

2. *Univocity and Abstractism.* Univocity tends toward abstractism. Univocal language about God leads to viewing Christ's human nature in a primarily abstract sense because it focuses on properties shared by Creator and creatures. Univocity maintains that God has properties in common with humans (i.e., creatures). God's goodness, for example, is the same property as Peter's goodness. For God to be able to share properties with creatures is to deny divine simplicity. Consider the following: Peter has the property *existence* and the property *goodness*; Peter is good, and he exists. Peter's goodness is not identical to his existence. If univocity is true, then Peter's goodness is the same property as God's goodness; and "Peter exists" and "God exists" posit the same reality to both God and Peter. The fact that Peter's existence and goodness are not identical to each other entails that God's existence and goodness are not identical to each other either. Rather, God's properties are *really* distinct, just as human properties are *really* distinct. And if God has distinct properties, then he is complex, not simple.

In the incarnation, the Logos becomes man. According to univocity, the Logos, before the incarnation, already has many distinct properties in common with mankind, for example, existence, rationality, capacity-to-love, and volition. Therefore, the Logos acquires only those properties he did not already have; for he cannot have two of the same property. Indeed, nothing can have more than one of the same property (e.g., redness, fragility, existence), for if two properties were the same, then they would just be one, numerically identical property.<sup>53</sup>

Now it is clear how univocity and abstractism lead to the problematic Christological features: monothelism, the Word-flesh paradigm, and kenoticism. In the incarnation, the Logos does not acquire a distinct human will because he already has a will; the property *having-a-will* is the same property for God as it is man. Christ cannot have two of the same property. Thus, abstractism embraces monothelism: Christ has one will. The property *having-a-will* is essential for both humanity and divinity, so abstractists believe their view is consistent with Chalcedon: fully human and fully divine. For abstractists, dyothelism would imply either that Christ has

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<sup>51</sup> Horton, "Hellenistic or Hebrew?," 325.

<sup>52</sup> Horton, 325.

<sup>53</sup> Similarly, a set cannot have the same member twice.

two of the same property (which is absurd) or that Christ is two persons (which is heresy).

Monothelitism is common to all but one of the abstract models outlined above. Monothelitism is problematic because it is contrary to conciliar orthodoxy, and, more importantly, it seems to make Jesus less than fully human because he does not have a distinct, human will. Even the one exception—the abstract two-minds model—is ambiguous in its affirmation of one center of causal and cognitive power. On the one hand, dyothelitism is consistent with Morris's view if he means "one subject of two causal and cognitive powers," but, on the other hand, if Morris means "one causal and cognitive power operating in two modes," he seems to be affirming monothelitism, not conciliar dyothelitism.<sup>54</sup>

Closely related to abstractism's affirmation of monothelitism is its embrace of the Word-flesh paradigm. Not only does the Logos have a will in common with humanity before the incarnation, he has *all* the mental faculties essential to humanity. Therefore, the Logos acquires (merely) a human body and becomes human, but he remains one center of consciousness, knowledge, and volition. Again, for abstractists, if Christ were to have a human soul in addition to his divine mind, he would end up with duplicates of the same property (which is absurd) or he would be two persons (which is heresy).

Neo-Apollinarianism, the Alvinized view, and the Reaified view are attempts to avoid Apollinarianism while affirming Jesus's true humanity. But because each has the divine consciousness and will of the Logos becoming the consciousness and will of the man Jesus, they struggle to portray Jesus as a true creature, i.e., as "fully man." Unlike the Word-flesh paradigm, a Word-man Christology can easily secure Christ's full humanity.

Finally, in order to make sense of Jesus's human life, in light of the fact that his mind and will are preexistent and divine, abstractism often affirms some variation of kenoticism. The Gospels picture Jesus as weak and ignorant at times, but monothelitism and the Word-flesh paradigm claim that he is one center of consciousness—the very same center of consciousness that is infinite in wisdom and power. So, Christ needs to empty himself (really or practically) of his omnipotence, omniscience, etc. In this way, kenoticism relieves the tension between Christ's divine and human attributes.<sup>55</sup>

Christological kenosis, however, is incompatible with even a moderately classical theism, and it rejects the *extra calvinisticum*. God the Son undergoes a real change in which he ceases to function as the one who actively and consciously upholds the universe.

<sup>54</sup> For fuller discussions of this and similar critiques of Morris's view, see John Hick, "The Logic of God Incarnate," *ReLS* 25.4 (1989): 409–23; cf. Tim Bayne, "The Inclusion Model of the Incarnation: Problems and Prospects," *ReLS* 37.2 (2001): 125–41; Thomas Senor, "Drawing on Many Traditions: An Ecumenical Kenotic Christology," in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 88–114; and Richard Sturch, "Inclusion and Incarnation: A Response to Bayne," *ReLS* 39.1 (2003): 103–6.

<sup>55</sup> That is, kenosis is a way to make sense of Jesus's life in light of the fact that he is also God; but kenosis is also an attempt to solve the logical problem of Jesus's having incompatible (contradictory) properties such as omniscience and ignorance.

The alternative to kenoticism for advocates of abstractism is the abstract two-minds view. Christ did not give up his divine attributes, but, rather, he added certain essential human properties, which gave rise to a human existence and experience; the consciousness of that human existence was cordoned off from his divine range of consciousness which limited his access to divine knowledge and power.<sup>56</sup> But the abstract two-minds view seems still to be a Word-flesh model. There is only one center of cognitive and causal powers in the person of Christ—the human mind is just a subset of the divine mind. Moreover, the abstract two-minds view explicitly denies that Christ is a created human being.<sup>57</sup> And the abstract two-minds model fails to uphold the Creator-creature distinction sufficiently.<sup>58</sup>

3. *Analogy and concretism.* The doctrine of analogy tends toward concretism. Analogical language maintains that God's goodness is like but importantly different than our goodness: they are not the same property. God's essence, neither in part nor in full, is in creation or shared by creatures. There is no overlap between God's essence and created essences. There is no overlap between divinity and humanity. For this reason, the doctrine of analogy tends toward viewing Christ's human nature in a primarily concrete sense. Christ's human nature is a concrete particular. The Logos cannot *become* human, in the sense of being transformed into a human being. He cannot simply add more properties to his divinity, for that would bring creation into the sphere of Creator. Rather, the Logos acquires an individual, concrete human nature—a human body-soul composite—on the side of creation. He is related to his created human nature by the hypostatic union, i.e., his divine and human natures are united in his person. The Logos is the subject of both his divine and human natures.

The doctrine of analogy, itself, does not entail divine simplicity, but it does entail that Creator and creature do not have properties in common. Peter's goodness is something like God's goodness, but only as a reflection, refraction, or image. The human will is only *analogous* to the divine will. Human mental capacities and

<sup>56</sup> Morris explains, "The two-minds view seems to me, further, to be a clear improvement over kenoticism. When he became man, God the Son did not give up anything of deity; he merely took on the nature and condition of humanity.... His humbling consisted rather in his rendering himself vulnerable to the pains, sufferings, aggravations, and agonies which became his as a man but which, in his exclusively divine form of existence, could not have touched him this way" (*Logic of God Incarnate*, 104).

<sup>57</sup> Recall that Morris writes, "Jesus was a being who was fully human, but he was not a created human being. He was not a being endowed with a set of cognitive and causal powers distinct from the cognitive and causal powers of God the Son" (*Logic of God Incarnate*, 161). On the other hand, he writes, "Just as we saw that God the Son's taking on of a created, contingent body and mind does not entail that he himself was a created, contingent being, so, on the two-minds view, his taking on of a body and mind limited in knowledge, power, and presence does not entail that he himself, in his deepest continuing mode of existence, was limited in knowledge, power, or presence" (*Our Idea of God*, 169).

<sup>58</sup> That is, the Creator-creature distinction is violated by following the Word-flesh paradigm. This violation is also implied (probably unintentionally) by the analogies Morris and others use to illustrate the two minds of Christ: abnormal psychology, levels of mentality, telepathy, artificial intelligence, and dreams. Each of these (perhaps with the exception of the dream analogy) views the two minds as either ontologically on a par or in a hierarchical relationship, but none shows a clear, inviolable Creator-creature distinction. See Morris, *Logic of God Incarnate*, 104–107; cf., Morris, *Our Idea of God*, 169–74. See also Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 201–203.

consciousness are only *analogous* to the divine mind and consciousness. For this reason, the doctrine of analogy requires dyothelitism and the Word-man paradigm.

Dyothelitism maintains that Christ has two wills: one human will and, analogously, one divine will, i.e., the divine will must be distinct from his human will because the divine will is a will *only by analogy*. Dyothelitism is not a case of one substance having the same property twice; rather, it is a case of one person having two concrete natures, each of which has a will.

The Word-man paradigm claims that the Logos is united with a human body *and* soul. God is a soul (or mind) only by analogy; the Logos cannot become the soul of Jesus's human nature. The Word-man paradigm preserves the Creator-creature distinction by keeping the divine nature of Christ out of his human nature; there is no mixture or overlap between his divinity and humanity.

Concretism, then, has no need for kenoticism. Christ has two distinct, concrete natures with their own properties or attributes. No contradiction arises when predicating divine and human qualities to Christ. For example, Christ is omnipotent *qua* divinity and weak *qua* humanity.<sup>59</sup> Christ enjoys a fully human life on earth, and, simultaneously and eternally, sustains the universe by his divine power. Thus, concretism preserves the *extra calvinisticum*; and the *extra* requires that Christ have *two* centers of cognitive and causal powers—two principles of operation—not one. So, the concrete classical model is a two-minds model, but it recognizes that Christ's divine mind is a mind by analogy.

### III. CONCLUSION

The incarnation is the act by which the Logos took on human nature. Concretism claims that Christ's human nature is a concrete object. Abstractism maintains that Christ's human nature is a set of essential properties. I have demonstrated that concretism is superior to abstractism because abstract models tend to suffer from monothelitism, the Word-flesh paradigm, and kenoticism, whereas concretism does not. Then, I argued that concretism's success may originate in the doctrine of analogy, and abstractism's failure may originate in univocal language about God. Univocal language undermines God's aseity and the Creator-creature distinction, but analogical language preserves them.

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<sup>59</sup> Qualifying the Son's attributes according to each nature (the "*qua*" move) is known as "reduplication." Reduplication itself is merely a linguistic strategy. Hill in the introduction to *Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 6, explains, "[Reduplication] does not tell us *how* or *why* Christ avoids having inconsistent properties, or how this is compatible with his being fully divine and fully human. To do that, the defender of the reduplicative strategy must go beyond mere reduplication and into metaphysics, to show why the use of this language is legitimate." The reduplicative strategy is legitimate in this case because the incompatible attributes are predicated of distinct, concrete natures; i.e., these properties do not adhere in the same substance. The defender of abstractism, however, has a metaphysic that is incompatible with reduplication because the incompatible properties predicated of Christ adhere in the same substance.