

Flint's 'Molinism and the Incarnation' is Still Too Radical — A Rejoinder to Flint

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I greatly appreciate Thomas Flint's reply to my paper, "Flint's 'Molinism and the Incarnation' is too Radical."¹ In my original paper, I argue that the Christology and eschatology of Flint's paper "Molinism and the Incarnation" is too radical to be considered orthodox. I consider it an honor that a senior scholar, such as Flint, would concern himself with my work in the first place. In this response to Flint's reply I will explain why I still find Flint's Christology and eschatology to be too radical. Below I shall attempt to address various issues raised by Flint in his reply.

My Many Alleged Misrepresentations

Flint claims that I have misrepresented his views in many instances. In two extensive footnotes, Flint offers several examples of the many and various ways that I have misrepresented him (footnotes 2 and 3). I believe that I can easily explain how I came to my interpretation, and suggest that I have not in fact misrepresented Flint's views on these points. My initial focus on these footnotes stems from a concern that the footnote is an instance of hand waving, attempting to brush aside the whole of my argument with the phantom strength of a seemingly uncharitable reading of my paper. By shining a light here, I will show that the arguments of my original paper are not so easily dismissed.

First, Flint claims that "*Pace* Mullins, I nowhere have said that a human nature 'consists of a concrete soul and body.'" True, Flint never uses this exact phrase, but he seems to endorse something quite close. In all of his previously published papers on the incarnation he suggests that a complete human nature is a concrete body/soul composite. One will recall that it is part of the story of Christ's human nature (CHN) that Flint tells. So how have I misrepresented Flint? Perhaps he objects to my usage of 'consists' as a term loaded with metaphysical baggage that he does not endorse. If so, I claim that my usage of 'consists' is metaphysically neutral. Or perhaps he is worried that 'a concrete soul and body' implies some version of substance dualism that he does not wish to endorse. I'm really not certain. If so, I again claim that I was not intending to import metaphysical baggage into this phrase.

I do know this much. In his reply, he claims that most in the tradition say that a human nature is a body/soul composite (181). However, in footnote 5, he says that

¹ Thomas P. Flint, "Orthodoxy and Incarnation: A Reply to Mullins," *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016). All parenthetical page numbers in the main body of the text refer to this article.

he is not in fact saying that a human nature is a body/soul composite. He is only assuming this for the purposes of his essay. In Flint's previous papers he occasionally makes this qualification as well. I fail to see what difference this makes. In my original paper, I was laying out the account of the incarnation that Flint entertains. In the account that Flint entertains, he is explicit that a human nature is a body/soul composite. So, it is not clear how I have misrepresented Flint's entertained account of the incarnation.

Second, Flint says "I never claim that 'the doctrine of the incarnation needs to hold to The Metaphysical Presupposition' (2) – indeed, how a *doctrine* could hold to a proposition is puzzling; I never 'propose' (if by 'propose' we mean something akin to 'explicitly endorse') the '6 Radical Theses' regarding the Incarnation (3)." (181) There are several things here that need to be unpacked. For instance, it seems to me that Flint is being overly nit-picky. I highly doubt that Flint is puzzled over the meaning of 'hold' in my sentence. My guess is that most English speakers can easily figure out the meaning. The same is true of 'propose'. Perhaps I could have said, "Flint puts forth" or "Flint offers" or "Flint entertains without endorsing" instead. Regardless, I'm not sure what this really changes. It is still the case that Flint has taken great pains to articulate and defend these 6 Radical Theses. He is the only one doing this in print that I am aware of. I think that it is safe to say, 'Flint is the only one proposing these 6 Radical Theses for our consideration.' If he does not wish to explicitly endorse them, that is fine. It is still the case that he thinks they are worth repeatedly articulating and defending. And it is still the case that I think they face serious difficulties. None of this seems to me to amount to a "misrepresentation" of Flint's view.

Third, Flint says "I never even hint that "all human persons . . . will one day be assumed by God the Son" (4)." Flint has here misrepresented me. In the paragraph to which Flint refers, I explicitly state Flint's recognition that some human persons could end up in hell. He even discusses my acknowledgement of this in the main body of his reply. In my original paper, I develop an argument against Flint's eschatology: all human persons will either cease to exist, or end up in hell. (This argument will be picked up below.) Flint responds to this argument, so he is clearly aware that I know he is not a universalist. If I thought that Flint were a universalist, it would make no sense for me to argue against him based on his doctrine of hell. So, I am genuinely puzzled by Flint's complaint.

Fourth, Flint says, "my notion of assumability can apply to individuals even in worlds where the individual in question *does* sin." That seems fine to me, and I never deny that this is the case. I can imagine how this notion of assumption could apply to such worlds, but that is not the focus of Flint's application of assumption. His account of assumption, in his previously published papers, explicitly focuses on identifying individuals in possible worlds (not actual worlds) that never sin. Hence, why I focus on the assumption of individuals in possible worlds (not actual worlds) that never sin. I have no idea how I have misrepresented Flint on this point.

Again, I'm not sure where I have misrepresented Flint on these issues. If I have, I'm open to correction. As it stands, I find Flint's accusation of misrepresentation to be weak at best.

Wild Implausibility and Personhood

In my original paper, I claim that the fate of humanity looks bleak on Flint's eschatology. As I argue, it is an implication of Flint's view that all human persons will cease to exist or end up in hell. I find this to be an implausible eschatological position that rests on an implausible view of personhood. Flint notes that this is an entertaining argument. I'm glad he found this entertaining because it greatly tickled me. However, Flint doubts the cogency of the argument. He runs a parody argument about assistant professors (183-184). I shall not rehash that argument here in detail, but I shall give a few quick comments. In short, the parody argument says that there is nothing bleak about an assistant professor getting a promotion, and becoming an associate professor. If a person ceases to be an assistant professor because of such a promotion, she does not have a bleak future. I gather this is intended to show that Flint's entertained eschatology is not bleak, nor implausible, either.

I am unpersuaded by this parody because I think it fails to parody for precisely the reasons that Flint points out in his reply. I deny that *being an assistant professor* is an essential property of an individual, whereas I believe that *being a person* is an essential property of an individual. This is where Flint and I disagree. Flint claims that *personhood* is not an essential property, whereas I claim that it is. As I see it, there is nothing implausible about the claim that a person ceases to be an assistant professor when she becomes an associate professor. This is because *being an assistant professor* is obviously not an essential property of an individual.

I do, however, think that there is something absurd about the notion that I cease to be a person in the eschaton when God the Son assumes me. This is because I find it obvious that I am essentially a person. Recall that on Flint's entertained eschatology, the redeemed will cease to be persons due to being assumed by the Son. A redeemed individual will, according to Flint, continue to think, feel, act, refer to herself in the first-person, and so on. She will, however, not be a person. I maintain that there is something implausible about the claim that I will continue to be a thinking thing with free will, a subject with a first-person perspective, a thing able to refer to myself as "I", and yet, I will not be a person. This just sounds odd, to say the least.

As Flint explicitly notes, his claim that *personhood* is not an essential property is "odd." William Lane Craig and Alfred Freddoso have already critiqued Flint on the oddity of this issue.² Flint gestures towards the fact that he has responded to this charge of oddity from Freddoso in previous papers. Further, Flint rightly notes that I have not attempted to grapple with his previous discussion. There is a reason why I did not grapple with this issue in my previous paper: I have nothing of substance to add to this debate. I can only express that I am unpersuaded by Flint's reply to Freddoso.

² William Lane Craig, "Flint's Radical Molinist Christology is Not Radical Enough," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006). Alfred J. Freddoso, "Human Nature, Potency and the Incarnation," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986).

I can, however, offer this much. I would find it very helpful if Flint would explain his own views on personhood. What is a person? Like many today and in the early church, I hold that a person is essentially the sort of thing that has the capacity to think, feel, and act.³ A person is a center of consciousness with free will. A person is able to be self-aware, and have a first-person perspective. To be sure, there are different views on the nature of personhood, and disagreements abound. But what I would like to know is what *Flint* thinks about personhood. The claim that I am contingently a person seems uninformative as to what a person is. He does not clearly say what a person is, so I find myself at a loss as to how to assess his position.

It must be stressed that defining *person* is quite crucial to theology. It stands at the center of Trinitarian and Christological theology. Without a proper definition of *person*, one cannot distinguish Nestorianism from Orthodoxy. Sure, you might be thinking, "It is easy to distinguish Nestorianism from Orthodoxy. It is simply a matter of getting our theological grammar straight. Nestorians believe that there are two persons in Christ, and Orthodoxy says that there is only one person." I reply that matters are not as simple as this. To start, anyone who seriously utters this statement would be assuming some grasp of what it means to be a person. Otherwise, there is no substantive difference between Nestorianism and Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is not about uttering the right sort of phrases, but is concerned with deeper, underlying metaphysical issues. The importance of this is reflected in the proceedings of the early Christological debates surrounding questions like 'what is a *person*?'

This point is raised by the emperor Justinian in his defense of Chalcedon. He notes that Nestorians can and do affirm that there are 'two natures and one person in Christ' as Chalcedon claims. In fact, *many* Nestorians in the early church affirmed this. But what Justinian argues is that the content and meaning of their theology does not in fact support this claim. Instead, he argues that the way they use these terms entails that there are in fact two persons in Christ. This, says Justinian, is heresy.⁴

My point is that without defining *person*, Orthodoxy is cheap. All one has to do is pay lip service to the right slogans without needing to offer anything of substance. That is certainly against the intention of the early church fathers. Orthodoxy is not simply about getting our theological grammar straight, though that is important. Orthodoxy is about the underlying metaphysics that our grammar refers to. As John of Damascus points out, true orthodoxy does not consist in uttering the right sounds, words and phrases, but consists in facts. One cannot figure this out by looking at the terms themselves, but by considering the meaning of the terms being used.⁵ Without explaining the meaning of terms like *person*, it is impossible to say what is orthodoxy and what is heresy.

³ Garrett J. DeWeese, "One Person, Two Natures: Two Metaphysical Models of the Incarnation," in eds. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler, *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 137. Cf. Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 153ff.

⁴ Richard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553 with Related Texts on the Three Chapters Controversy*, Volume 1, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 149.

⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, Volume 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 89-90.

I have a similar worry with the Christology that Flint is entertaining. Without offering a definition of personhood, I cannot find Flint's account plausible. He rejects a concept of personhood that I find plausible, but without replacing it. So not only do I see no good reason to reject the view of personhood that Flint denies, Flint has offered no viable alternative. So how can I find Flint's view plausible? As it stands, Flint has not offered a definition of personhood. Without this, I cannot fully assess his position, nor find it plausible.

The Communicatio Idiomatum and Kicking Jesus Christ

In my original paper, I offer another reason why I find Flint's eschatology and Christology implausible. Given the *communicatio idiomatum*, the properties of the assumed human nature belong to God the Son. Say that the Son assumes you and me. The properties of our human natures will belong to the Son. According to Flint, you and I will each continue to have our own thoughts and feelings, and each of us will be able to freely perform our own actions. We will also be able to refer to ourselves in the first-person. We will, however, cease to be persons due to the fact that the Son has assumed us. Now say that I kick you. Given the *communicatio*, it is true to say that the Son has kicked you. Since you are also assumed by the Son, it will also be true to say that the Son has been kicked. Further, it will also be true to say that the Son has kicked the Son. This, so say I, sounds implausible. To further add to the implausibility, say that as I am kicking you, I say, "Hey God the Son, stop kicking yourself, stop kicking yourself." Given the *communicatio*, it will be the case that the Son is repeatedly kicking Himself, and further, that the Son will be taunting Himself. Again, this is implausible.⁶

In Flint's attempt to address this argument, he accuses me of having an "unsophisticated," "naïve," and "careless" view of the *communicatio idiomatum*. (184-185) As he notes, it cannot be the case that just any property from the human nature can be ascribed to God the Son. For instance, *being a created human nature* is not applicable to the Son, and yet it is surely a property of Christ's human nature. (184) Flint is surely right to point out that the *communicatio* does not demand that all properties of the human nature apply without qualification to the Son. I am in full agreement with this.

As Flint knows well, there are various debates in the early church as to the extent and application of the *communicatio idiomatum*. As readers of this journal may be aware, there are rather sophisticated debates with regard to what is called the "reduplicative strategy" or the "qua-move." I will not bore readers with this discussion as I have done so elsewhere.⁷ I will simply note that while there are many views on the extent of the *communicatio*, there does seem to be wide agreement that the *actions* of Christ's human nature are identical to the actions of the Son on pain of

⁶ One might object that the kicking example is metaphysically impossible because the redeemed in heaven will be solidified in virtue. Perhaps one will say that it is impossible for virtuous people to behave in such ways. I reply that this misses the point. The story could be changed quite easily to a loving pat on the back.

⁷ See my, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), chapter 7.

Nestorianism or adoptionism. For example, the neo-Chalcedonian theology of emperor Justinian claims that the Son is the sole personal subject of all the things attributed to Christ. In particular, the Son is the one who endured the passions, and acted to bring about our salvation.⁸ One could easily note the same claims being made by Athanasius or Cyril. Even the dyothelite, Maximus the Confessor, will agree that the Son is the ultimate subject of the wills. Through the incarnation, God the Son possesses a single theandric activity regardless of how many wills He has.⁹

The *communicatio idiomatum* is put in place to capture the gospel claim that the Son Himself has come to us, and is actively saving us. The acts of Jesus Christ are the same acts as God the Son because they are the same person. This is one of the reasons why Origenism, Nestorianism, and adoptionism are declared heresies. Each entails that the *acts* of Jesus are not identical to the *acts* of the Son. Some other person or agent is performing the acts. The early church fathers see this as going against the gospel itself.

What is the take away for this discussion? One can, and should, offer various qualifications as to which properties are ascribable to the Son. However, on pain of Nestorianism, one must say that the acts of the Son's human nature are the acts of the Son Himself. What this means is that my kicking illustration is not unsophisticated or naïve. It is actually a straightforward entailment from all Orthodox versions of the *communicatio* that I am aware of. What Flint needs to do is offer an account of the *communicatio*, and explain how his account does not have this entailment. Further, he must explain how his account does so without entailing Nestorianism or adoptionism.

My Questionable Use of Secondary Scholarship, or Flint's Dismissal of Secondary Scholarship?

Analytic philosophy of religion is often accused of being ahistorical. The charge leveled against analytic philosophy of religion is that it fails to pay attention to the nuances of historical theology, and does not engage with the best cutting-edge historical scholarship of the day. Analytic philosophers of religion, it is said, develop views in logical space, and ignore the views that theologians have actually offered. I believe that this charge is sometimes unfair. What is often ignored is that developing views in logical space is not a bad thing *per se*. In fact, many of the early Christological advances are examples of entertaining views in logical space. This approach can become a problem, however, when an analytic philosopher of religion claims to be entertaining views that are based upon, and in conformity with, the Christian tradition, and yet has failed to pay attention to the nuances of historical theology.

My worry is that Flint is subject to this charge of being ahistorical. In his previous papers on the incarnation, he claims that his speculative Christology is based upon, and is consistent with, the Catholic tradition. However, several of his statements look more like they are based on views in logical space than views that

⁸ Price, Volume 1, 127-31. Volume 2, 74, 90-92.

⁹ Christopher Beeley, *The Unity of Christ: Continuity and Conflict in Patristic Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 299.

are actually held by historical theologians. Hence, the claim in my original paper that Flint's Christology is not actually based upon, nor consistent with, the Catholic tradition. By way of example, consider Flint's stance towards the status of the anathemas against Origenism in his reply. He is completely dismissive of Richard Price's summary of the contemporary consensus about the status of the anathemas against Origenism at the Fifth Ecumenical Council. Instead, Flint relies on older scholarship that has been criticized in recent years by church historians. (More on that below.)

One such historical nuance that Flint dismisses is the *an/enhypostasia* distinction. In my original paper, I claim that this distinction entails that the human nature of Christ could not have been a human person apart from the incarnation. Further, the human nature of Christ would not have even existed without the incarnation. In support of this, I reference multiple secondary sources which Flint ignores. Instead, Flint just declares that my use of these secondary sources is questionable (186). As evidence of my questionable use of secondary sources, Flint focuses on my use of David Brown. He accuses me of mishandling Brown. The quote from Brown in question is as follows:

So, for example, in its [Chalcedon's] immediate aftermath further exploration of the role of Christ's human nature was attempted, which led to the conclusion that the human nature could not possibly constitute a separate subject, since otherwise the inevitable result would be two persons rather than one.¹⁰

I take this to mean that the human nature of Christ could not possibly constitute a human person apart from the incarnation since that would entail two persons. Flint disagrees.

Flint says, "One can easily read Brown as affirming merely the necessity of the conditional 'If there is only one person in the Incarnation, then the human nature is not a separate subject or person'." (186) I find his interpretation of David Brown to be a stretch at best. In fact, Flint comments in footnote 13 that Brown may very well agree with in my interpretation of Brown's statement. Regardless, Flint's interpretation of Brown is implausible. What Flint seems to be overlooking at the moment is the historical context to which Brown is referring. During the early Christological debates, there was a common argument offered against any view that looked remotely like Adoptionism: the two sons argument. Understanding this argument will help one see why Flint's interpretation is a stretch. Flint's interpretation simply does not capture the concerns of the early church to which Brown is referring.

The two sons argument was an incredibly popular argument in the early church, and it comes in several forms. One form of the argument goes as follows: A human person is a soul and a body. If the Son assumed a human soul and a body, the

¹⁰ David Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis and the Construction of a Christian Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 24.

Son assumed a human person. So, there are two sons (two persons) in the incarnation.¹¹ That is heresy.

The deep concern to avoid saying that there were two sons, or two persons, in the incarnation is one issue that led to the development of the *an/enhypostasia* distinction. Recall that the Fifth Ecumenical Council took place because of the controversy over Adoptionism, Nestorianism, and Origenism—views that many at the time believed entailed two sons. The possibility of the human nature of Christ being a separate person naturally falls under the 'two sons' worry. The claim generated by this worry is that the human nature of Christ cannot have a *hypostasis* of its own; it is *anhypostasis*, thus avoiding the two sons worry.¹² The hypostasis of the Son is brought to the assumed human nature thus giving the human nature a hypostatic and personal reality.¹³

Christologies formed around the *an/enhypostasia* distinction contain a very important difference from Flint's Christology. The *an/enhypostasia* Christologies say that the Son brings personhood to a human nature that does not, and cannot, have personhood on its own accord. In other words, this distinction teaches that if the Son had not assumed the human nature that He in fact did assume, that human nature would not have been a person. (Indeed, that human nature would not even exist.) Flint's Christology says that the Son's assumption of the human nature prevents the human nature from being a person in its own right. The difference is subtle, but important. Flint seems to gloss over this subtlety. Or perhaps Flint does not acknowledge that this subtlety exists. I suspect that this is more likely. Allow me to explain why.

What I noticed is that Flint ignores the many other secondary sources that I discuss. Instead, he focuses on Brown. He comments that Brown offers scant support for my claim that The Metaphysical Presupposition (TMP) is inconsistent with the Christology formed around the *an/enhypostasia* distinction. What I find unfortunate is that Flint completely ignores all of the other sources that I bring forth to support this claim. For instance, in my original paper I note that Fred Sanders agrees with my interpretation of the *an/enhypostasia* distinction. Sanders claims that endorsing this distinction is the explicit accomplishment of the Fifth Ecumenical Council. Flint completely ignores Sanders. Why? I'm not really sure, but it might be due to the fact that Sanders' statements cannot be easily interpreted in some stretched sense as Brown's. The same is true of T.F. Torrance's discussion of the *an/enhypostasia* distinction, which Flint also ignores. Flint also completely ignores my references to William Lane Craig and Christopher Beeley. Indeed, on multiple occasions, Flint declares that I have offered no evidence at all for my claims, which, as one can see, is simply not the case. His lack of engagement with these theologians is a bit surprising.

Most surprising is that Flint skips over my reference to Richard Price, who says that the Council endorsed the *anhypostasia* theology as the proper interpretation of

¹¹ Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extent Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 155-57. Beeley, *Unity of Christ*, 176-82.

¹² Demetrios Barthellos, *Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 34-35.

¹³ Pelikan, Volume 2, 84-85, 88-89.

Chalcedonian Christology. Price takes great pains to explain the theological developments leading up to the Fifth Ecumenical Council. In particular, he explains what patristic scholars call the neo-Chalcedonian Christology of people like the emperor Justinian. The neo-Chalcedonians give us the clear distinction in Christology between nature and person/hypostasis.¹⁴ The claim from Justinian is that “the human nature of Christ...did not possess its own hypostasis or person, but received the beginning of existence in the hypostasis of the Word.” There is one hypostasis/person—God the Son. He brings His personhood to the human nature. This neo-Chalcedonian theology, says Price, is endorsed by the canons of the Fifth Ecumenical Council.¹⁵

Price sides with the neo-Chalcedonians as offering the proper interpretation and clarification of the intent of Chalcedon. He explains that Chalcedon ought not to be understood as saying that the one hypostasis/person is the product of the union of the two natures in Christ. That is how the Nestorians sought to interpret Chalcedon. The neo-Chalcedonians rejected this view. Instead, according to Price and the emperor Justinian, Chalcedon ought to be understood as saying that God the Son, the one person/hypostasis, *is* the subject of the union.¹⁶ A hypostasis/person is an individual like Peter or Paul. Natures are universals that inhere in individuals. God the Son is eternally a person. According to neo-Chalcedonian theology, this divine person assumes a generic, or universal, human nature. Universals of this sort only exist in a hypostasis. A universal human nature is not a hypostasis/person in its own right. A universal human nature cannot even have concrete existence without being attached to an individual person.¹⁷

Again, here is the difference between the theology of someone like Justinian, and the Christology entertained by Flint. On the neo-Chalcedonian theology endorsed by the Fifth Ecumenical Council, the Son adopts a universal human nature. This generic human nature simply is not the sort of thing that could be a self-subsistent individual or a person in its own right on pain of Nestorianism.¹⁸ Nor could this human nature exist without the incarnation taking place. Wolfhart Pannenberg explains the *enhypostasia* theology of the neo-Chalcedonian theology as follows. “By itself Jesus’ humanity would not only be impersonal in the modern sense of lacking self-conscious personality, but taken by itself Jesus’ human being would be non-existent.”¹⁹ This point is crucial for the neo-Chalcedonian stance against the Nestorians. For as they see it, Nestorianism claims that the human nature could exist apart from its union with the Son. This, according to neo-Chalcedonians, reveals that the Nestorians hold to a false hypostatic union—it is a union in name only.

On Flint’s Christology, this is not the case. Instead, given Molinism, God is selecting individual essences, and not a universal nature. This individual essence could be actualized without the incarnation. Further, this individual essence would

¹⁴ Barthellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 35ff.

¹⁵ Price, Volume 1, 73.

¹⁶ Price, Volume 1, 126-7. Cf. Donald Fairburn, “The One Person Who is Christ: The Patristic Perspective,” in Sanders and Issler, *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective*.

¹⁷ Price, Volume 1, 130-141.

¹⁸ Price, Volume 1, 145.

¹⁹ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), 338.

be a person without the incarnation. Neo-Chalcedonian theology would reject this. Once again, this is a subtle, yet important difference, between Flint and the ecumenical Christological deposit. I am not persuaded that Flint has adequately engaged with this theology.

In fact, Flint is downright dismissive of the entire *an/enhypostasia* distinction. There is a great deal of literature in theology on this distinction, and, as Edward T. Oakes proclaims, the consensus is that it is part of the Christological deposit that is binding on Catholic doctrine.²⁰ In a footnote in Craig's original critique of Flint, Craig dismisses Flint's entire Christology as obviously standing in violation of the *anhypostasia* doctrine.²¹ I don't find it quite as obvious as Craig does, which is why I have developed my arguments in this and my previous paper. However, I point out this assumption from Craig because it raises a conundrum for me. Why is it that scholars like Craig, Beeley, Oakes, Pannenberg, Price, Sanders, Torrance, etc. think that this is the obvious teaching of the Fifth Ecumenical Council and the orthodox Christological deposit, whereas Flint does not?²²

It is disappointing that Flint dismisses this Orthodox distinction. Consider the following statement from Flint:

Though obvious, one point here needs to be stressed: what Brown and other contemporary scholars say about the implications of the *anhypostasia* thesis is really a sideshow. For Mullins's charge is that TMP is at odds *with the Fifth Ecumenical Council*, not that it is at odds with current theological thought about concepts circulating at the time of the Council. And, as I noted above, Mullins offers us no evidence whatsoever that embracing the Council commits one to rejecting TMP. His charge, then, is without merit. (187)

I find this overly dismissive. The current theological thought about concepts circulating at the time of the Council is not a sideshow. It is essential to the proper interpretation of the Council as historical scholars like Price and Beeley seek to demonstrate. It is essential to understanding the theological background of the Council, and Flint ignores this. It is dismissive statements like this that give merit to the claim that analytic philosophy of religion is ahistorical.²³ I should only hope that the future of analytic theology will not be subject to such a charge.

²⁰ Edward T. Oakes, *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 158-159

²¹ Craig, footnote 16.

²² At the recent American Academy of Religions conference, I asked the historical theologian, Stephen Holmes, if the Fifth Ecumenical Council endorsed the *an/enhypostasia* doctrine. He said, "That is absolutely right!" As further evidence that this is how the Council has been received, he launched into a discussion about the role the *an/enhypostasia* doctrine played in certain Christological debates during the Reformation.

²³ Thomas H. McCall, *An Invitation to Analytic Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 27-29.

No Evidence Against Flint's Christology?

As I have mentioned before, Flint continually claims that I offer no evidence for my claims. Flint completely dismisses the indirect evidence in the creeds and anathemas that I offer, as well as the evidence offered by other scholars of historical dogma. What Flint demands is an explicit reference from the Council that goes directly against TMP (185). I understand this desire, and it is a common one amongst analytic philosophers of religion. The problem is that is not exactly how any of the creeds work. This approach does not fully take into account the fact that the creeds have a historical, theological, and political context. The creeds cannot be properly understood without paying careful attention to this context.

By way of example, consider the statement in the Creed of Constantinople I which says that Christ's "kingdom shall have no end." This might seem rather innocuous at first, but the meaning is far richer than a surface reading would lend itself to. As Christopher Beeley explains, this line was a standard phrase used to condemn the theology of Marcellus of Ancyra who claims that Christ ceases to be incarnate at the ascension.²⁴ Marcellus seems to hold to a version of Sabellianism. According to Marcellus, at the final consummation of all things, the Son will hand the kingdom back over to the Father. The Son will do this by ceasing to be human, and return back into the very being of the Father. This is something that Eusebius, and many others, reject.²⁵ The declaration that Christ's kingdom shall have no end, thus, has various entailments and assumptions entangled with it. First, it is a declaration that the Son is distinct from the Father in a way that Sabellianism cannot affirm. Second, it assumes a tight connection between Christ's incarnate state and His kingdom such that Christ continues to be incarnate after the ascension. It is only by knowing the theological background at play during this time period that one can see this. Otherwise, one will completely miss the meaning of this statement. This is the sort of indirect evidence to which analytic philosophers of religion need to pay attention.

I choose this example for a reason. In a relatively recent paper by Jonathan Hill, Hill claims that there is no ecumenical statement that Christ retains his body at the ascension. Hill rightly notes that the majority view amongst the Church fathers is that Christ does in fact retain his body at the ascension. However, he says that there is no ecumenical statement on the matter. I think that Hill's approach to the ecumenical creeds in *this* instance is similar to Flint's.²⁶ Hill has overlooked some of the theological background that is pertinent to interpreting the creed. He has not carefully considered the different background debates, and the key phrases used to indicate certain types of claims. This is understandable. The debates in the early church are many, and the task of sorting through them is daunting. However, I think

²⁴ Beeley, 198.

²⁵ Beeley, 83.

²⁶ Jonathan Hill, "Incarnation, Timelessness, and Exaltation" *Faith and Philosophy* 29 (2012). I must emphasize "in this instance" because this is not true of Hill in general. Hill's overall work on the incarnation is filled with historical nuance.

that digging through these debates will be a fruitful enterprise for the future of analytic theology. We must do the work of the historical theologian.

These debates are not the only thing that need to be considered. Analytic *theologians* also need to offer a closer consideration of the documents that accompany the creeds. What I have noticed about many Christological discussions among analytic philosophers of religion is a continual lack of engagement with the documents associated with the creeds. (This lack of engagement is also present in Flint's reply.)

It was customary for creed makers in the early church to attach a series of documents to the creeds. These *tomes* were longer explanations of the formal creed, and were taken to be authoritative. Unfortunately, we no longer have the *tomes* that accompanied the Council of Constantinople I (381).²⁷ Readers may be familiar with *The Tome* of Leo that accompanies the formula of Chalcedon. These documents are intended to explain the proper way to interpret the creeds. We know that the early fathers took these documents to be authoritative by the way that they used these documents in theological debates.²⁸ In fact, one of the things that made the Council of Chalcedon so controversial was Leo's *Tome*. Leo introduces it to the Council as an authoritative document that the members of the Council must sign off on, and not everyone was willing to do so.²⁹ Various delegates at the Council had to be convinced that Leo was not a Nestorian. After the Council of Chalcedon, many in the East remained unconvinced that there was a clear difference between the defenders of Chalcedon and the Nestorians.³⁰ Hence, the need for the Fifth Ecumenical Council.

Again, I raise this issue because the documents that are associated with the creeds are seen by the creedal makers and early Christians as having an authoritative status. I maintain that these documents help us properly interpret the creeds as they were intended. So, in my original paper, I rely on these sorts of documents to offer an interpretation of the Fifth Ecumenical Council—an interpretation, as I have continually pointed out, that lines up with interpretations offered by various historical scholars. These are the sorts of evidences that Flint outright dismisses.

This marks another area of disagreement between Flint and myself. Flint does not seem interested in the authoritative status of these documents. At times, it seems to me that he offers interpretations of creedal statements that are completely at odds with the way the creedal makers wished to be interpreted. (Recall the discussion above noting the differences between Neo-Chalcedonian theology and Flint.)

Flint's discussion does raise an important point related to issues I raise in my original paper. What authoritative status should contemporary analytic theologians give to these attached documents? Should we give them the same status that the creed makers intended? Should we feel free to interpret the creeds without them? If analytic theology is going to thrive, it must reflect on these questions, and develop thoughtful answers.

²⁷ Beeley, *Unity of Christ*, 195.

²⁸ Cf. Pelikan, Volume 2, chapter 1.

²⁹ Beeley, *Unity of Christ*, 279.

³⁰ See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam and Charles Black Limited, 1958), 340-2.

The Anathemas Against Origenism

Overall, I find Flint's handling of the Fifth Ecumenical Council to lack nuance, and his engagement with my arguments on such matters to be somewhat dismissive. In both cases he often glosses over the details, and instead simply declares that there is nothing to see here. For instance, Flint refuses to engage with the point that I raise about Origenism and his entertained eschatology—the Council condemns the claim that all things will be united into the hypostasis of the Son. The documents of the Council say this sort of thing several times, and in several different ways as I indicate on page 9 of my original paper. Flint has not properly engaged with this.

Another example is his dismissal of the 14th Anathema against Origen as “non-canonical.” Flint relies on older scholarship which holds that the anathemas did not come from the Council. This runs contrary to the evidence from the immediate aftermath of the Council produced by Price. Flint attempts to reconcile these things by noting that the condemnation of Origenism took place before the Council formally began. Thus, according to Flint, they do not have the same authoritative status as the rest of the proceedings of the Council (188).

Flint offers an incomplete quotation from Richard Price (188). He quotes Price as saying that the bishops of the Council met before the Council officially started to assemble the anathemas against Origenism. What Flint omits is the context of this quotation. As Price goes on to explain, the formal opening of the Council was delayed due to ongoing negotiations with the Pope. The emperor Justinian had already ordered the bishops to investigate and condemn Origenism. So, whilst the bishops waited for the Council to officially begin, they filled their time by condemning Origenism. It was the agreed upon intention of the Council to condemn Origenism. There was nothing to debate on this issue. Origenism is a heresy in their view, so the bishops can easily write up a list of anathemas to keep them occupied. So yes, this did take place before the Council officially started. However, the bishops were taking care of official business. As Price points out, during the fifth session of the Council, the bishops reference the anathemas, and later add Origen's name to the list of heretics.³¹ So the bishops themselves see these anathemas as official Council business that one can easily refer back to. Further, Price shows that, in the immediate aftermath of the Council, the anathemas were received as official Council business.³² He even makes disparaging remarks against those who try to assert that the anathemas against Origenism were not formally approved in the West. Price thinks that any such assertion simply ignores the historical evidence.³³ So, to be clear, the anathemas against Origenism are official Council business. That official business goes against Flint's entertained Christology. That should signal the end of this Christology.

But say one doesn't accept this. Perhaps one might say that since the anathemas were written before the Council officially began, it technically can't be an authoritative document. Flint clearly is inclined to make this claim (188). What

³¹ Price, Volume 2, 271.

³² Price, Volume 2, 270-272. Price, Volume 1, 100-101.

³³ Price, Volume 2, 280. Price, Volume 1, 100-101.

exactly would this do for Flint's entertained Christology? I cannot see how it will genuinely help.

Say one only accepts the claim that the bishops of the Council met a few days beforehand to develop a list of anathemas against Origenism. Ignore the fact that they refer back to, and rely upon, the anathemas during the official Council proceedings. Imagine that the bishops never got around to making an official statement about the anathemas during the official proceedings of the Council. How would this help Flint's entertained Christology? I suppose the situation would be this: 'Flint's entertained Christology escapes heresy on a technicality.' Alternatively, I suppose one could say that, 'this Christology escapes heresy by a matter of minutes.' One could say that, 'The proponent of this Christology can be thankful that these bishops were impatient, and couldn't wait for the emperor to arrive when they made up the anathemas. If those bishops had patiently waited a few days, this Christology would be in trouble. Fortunately for this proponent, the bishops did not wait, so this Christology is condemnation-free.'

Is it really plausible to say that the orthodoxy of Flint's entertained Christology rests on the matter of when exactly the Council officially started? This sort of 'Orthodoxy by the clock' is a funny thing isn't it? I should think that this would be troubling nonetheless, and Flint admits this in footnote 15. No matter the timing, it is still the case that the emperor and the bishops of the Council clearly intended to condemn Origenism. Their intent is so clear that they compiled a list of documents, edicts, and anathemas with the official Council proceedings in order to get this point across to the rest of Christendom. Again, we see the issue of the associated documents coming into play. As noted before, Christians in the early church treat these associated documents as coming from the Councils, and as having the same authority. This marks another subtle, but important, difference between Flint and the early church.

Heresy by Conjunction?

Flint entertains another possible way to avoid the anathemas against Origenism. In footnote 16, Flint asserts that it is the conjunction of the Origenist claims that are being condemned in the Council's 14th anathema, and not the individual claims themselves. I find this idea to be so far divorced from the actual historical development of dogma, that I honestly don't know how to reply. On page 10 of my original paper, I offer some reasons why I find this implausible. Flint engages with this a bit in his reply. He admits that, "To see the TFA as escaping the anathema because it doesn't commit one to endorsing *every* member of the conjunction, though, is at least potentially to harbor a warped view of the actual situation. The fact of the matter is that virtually no advocate of the TFA would endorse *any* member of the conjunction." (Footnote 16)

As I argued in my original paper, it seems to me that an advocate of the TFA does endorse several members of the conjunction. In my original paper, I point out that Justinian condemns anyone who claims that all human beings will become hypostatically united to the Logos. Flint attempts to get around this condemnation in

two ways. First, by noting that he is not a universalist (11). Second, by pointing out differences between humanity and Christ. Allow me to take each in turn.

As already discussed, Flint is not a universalist. Though Flint does not state an argument, I gather his explicit rejection of universalism is supposed to imply something like this. 'The Council condemns the view that *all human persons will become hypostatically united to Christ*. The view that I am entertaining only says that *some* human persons will become hypostatically united to Christ. So, the Council is not condemning my view.' Fair enough I suppose, but surely this is too close for comfort. As I have said before, this looks like Origenism 2.0, though Flint doesn't think closeness of this sort is obviously a problem (footnote 19.) Again, he doesn't really state an argument. He just claims that it is difficult to see how the 14th anathema condemns the view that *only* the redeemed will be hypostatically united to the Son (189-190). I think Flint is playing hard to get. It is not difficult to see how the 14th anathema condemns this view once one understands the *reason* for the anathema.

I think this Origenism 2.0 is worrisome since it runs against the underlying complaint that motivates the anathema. As I discuss in my original paper, Justinian thinks that the uniqueness of Christ is on the line. I think it is incredibly plausible to say that he would be troubled by the view that Flint is entertaining. The general tenor of Justinian's theology makes it clear that he is troubled by the claim that *anyone* would be hypostatically united to Christ because that would gut the uniqueness of the incarnation. Which brings us to Flint's second move.

Flint tries to escape Justinian's worry by pointing out differences between Christ and the rest of redeemed humanity. As Flint explains, God the Son is hypostatically united to CHN at the very moment that CHN begins to exist. The rest of us, however, only attain the hypostatic union after a long and arduous journey of independent existence. Further, Flint explains that Christ will forever remain our savior, so we can never truly claim to be equal with Him. (190)

I do not think that this escapes Justinian's worry. Once again, I think that Flint is being far too dismissive, and is not properly engaging with the argument. I should think it fairly obvious that Justinian is aware of the differences that Flint points out because those differences are included in the Origenist story. The Origenist is claiming that redeemed humanity will be hypostatically united to Christ at the end of time, and that humanity will attain this because of Christ's salvific work. It does not seem that Justinian thinks these sorts of differences between us and Christ matter. Justinian points out that in the eschatological state there will be no difference between us and Christ with regard to substance, power, knowledge, or operation. This, says Justinian, guts the uniqueness of Christ. It seems to me that the eschatology that Flint is entertaining entails that there is no difference between us and Christ with regard to substance, power, knowledge, or operation since redeemed humanity will be fully assumed by the Son. After all, the exact same assumption relation between the Son and CHN is supposed to hold between the Son and redeemed humanity. It would seem that Flint's entertained eschatology runs up against Justinian's complaint here.

But allow me to return to the claim that the Fifth Ecumenical Council is not condemning individual ideas, but the conjunction of a set of ideas. I can only note several reasons for why I find this implausible. First, Flint offers no argumentation

for this claim. Like much of his reply, it is just an assertion. Second, the documents of the Council condemn many different kinds of claims in various places and in various ways to cover the different versions of Origenism that existed at the time. Price's discussion of the different schools of Origenist thought is instructive here. There is a whole host of individual claims that the Council wishes to refute. For instance, the individuals involved at the Council explicitly wish to get rid of any view that affirms the pre-existence of souls since they condemn this in multiple statements. Surely these theologians would not find it convincing to say, "Well, yes, I do affirm the pre-existence of souls, but not in conjunction with the rest of Origenism. So, my affirmation of the pre-existence of souls is not heresy."³⁴ Surely the bishops of the council would have enough foresight to block this kind of move. After all, the Fifth Council is taking place because heretics found clever ways to interpret previous councils in order to avoid charges of heresy. I can't help but think that this "they are only condemning the conjunction" is another such clever interpretation.

Third, this whole approach ignores the historical context and the way that theological debates take place in the early church. It is often the case that certain ideas are pin-pointed and declared as heresy in conjunction with, and apart from, their original theological systems. For example, once again consider the two sons worry. This charge was brought against many different and diverse theological thinkers. It cannot be the case that an individual thinker's entire theological system is being rejected because these thinkers often have many claims in common with Orthodoxy. This is but one example of many relative to how heresies were debated and condemned in the early church. Heretical ideas are often boiled down to a slogan, and anyone who affirms the slogan is condemned.³⁵ Here are two classic examples "There was a time when the Son was not," against Arianism. "He received his flesh from heaven," against Apollinarianism. It makes sense that dogmatic debates would unfold in this way because orthodox and heretical ideas evolved over time. It is easier to pinpoint a 'big idea' as heretical instead of a conjunction of claims.

Concluding Remarks

Flint offers other complaints that I cannot address in this short reply.³⁶ In fact, it seems difficult to maintain that my reply is short. All I can do at this point is

³⁴ Consider some alternative examples. "Why yes, I do affirm that there was a time when the Son was not, but not in conjunction with the rest of Arianism. So, my view is not a heresy." "Why yes, I do affirm that there are two persons in Christ, but not in conjunction with the rest of Nestorianism. So, my view is not a heresy." No early church father would find this convincing, nor should we.

³⁵ Cf. Michele Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, eds, *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

³⁶ For instance, there is a dispute over the second core assumption of Flint's entertained account. The assumption is this: 'The Son elects to be united to a person who is free from sin.' I found Flint's reply to this section rather odd. Flint says that God would not need to look at worlds where CHN is unassumed in order to discern which worlds CHN would not sin in. I can't understand this claim. Flint makes it really clear in his previous papers that the Son uses His middle knowledge to

respectfully ask that individuals reread my original paper, and try to engage with the arguments. I maintain that the arguments I have produced here and in my original paper show that, at the very least, Flint's entertained Christology and eschatology are too radical to be considered orthodox.³⁷

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find a candidate for assumption—an individual who does not sin. How could God do that without looking at worlds where CHN is unassumed?

³⁷ I would like to thank JT Turner and Trent Dougherty for helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

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